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Muslim Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham

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MUSLIM TRADITIONS ABOUT THE EARLY LIFE OF ABRAHAM

SECTION 4



EXTRACTS FROM THE QUR'AN

The Noble Qur'an (al-Qur'ān al-Karīm), as it is called by the Muslims, is the sacred book of Islam. It is called the Qur'an (recitation) because it contains 114 revelations that were recited (*'iqrā*) to the Prophet Muḥammad (ca. A.D. 570–632) in Arabic by the angel Gabriel. For the Muslim, the Qur'an goes beyond other books of scripture in significance. It is a faithful reproduction of the original scripture in heaven, in the heavenly language of Arabic. Therefore, the Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be untranslatable. The Arabic Qur'an most likely reached its present form under the auspices of the third caliph, 'Uthmān, as early as the middle of the seventh century A.D., within two decades of the death of Muḥammad. In 1143 Robertus Retenensis introduced the Qur'an, in Latin, to the Western world. Andre du Ryer published a French version of the Latin in 1647. Two years later an English version of this appeared. Unfortunately, these earlier versions and those based on them were replete with errors and misunderstandings inspired by hostility. The first reliable English rendition from the original Arabic was made by George Sale in 1734. Sale's rendition was not a literal translation: in relevant sections, he included lore that an educated Arab might know even though this information is not contained in the Arabic text. Sale's rendition dominated the West till the end of the nineteenth century. Since then, numerous English renditions have appeared. John A. Tvedtnes produced the rendition of the Arabic text in the passages below. Selected passages and notes from Sale's rendition have been included in our notes.

Surah 2

258. Hast thou not noted he who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God gave him kingship? Then said Abraham, "My Lord is He who makes alive and causes death."¹ He said, "I give life and death." Abraham said, "But God brings the sun from the east, so thou bring it from the west." Then he who was an unbeliever was confounded.²

Surah 6

74. Then Abraham said to his father Āzar,³ "Takest thou idols for gods?⁴ For I see that thee and thy kinsfolk are in clear error."

75. And thus We⁵ showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth⁶ so he might be among those having certitude.

76. When the night covered him, he saw a star. He said, "This is my Lord." When it set, he said, "I love not those that set."

77. Then he saw the moon rising in splendor. He said, "This is my Lord." When it set, he said, "Except my Lord guide me, I shall be among the errant people."

78. When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said, "This is my Lord. This is the greatest." When it set, he said, "O my people, I am guiltless of idolatrous worship.⁷

79. I have directed my face as a true believer to him who created the heavens and the earth, and I shall not be of the idolators."

80. Then his people disputed with him. He said, "Do ye dispute with me about God Who has guided me? I do not fear what ye associate with Him, only what my Lord indeed wills. My Lord comprehends everything by His knowledge. Will ye not be reminded?

81. How should I fear what ye associate [with Him], and ye do not fear what ye associate with God, although He has not sent down authority upon you? Which of the two parties has more right to safety? If ye know [tell me].

82. Those who believe and do not mix their beliefs with wrong have safety, and they are guided."

83. And this was Our argument We gave Abraham against his people.

1. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

2. Most Muslim traditions identify this unbeliever as Nimrod.

3. Biblical Terah.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

5. The Qurʾan uses the royal plural (we, our, us) when God speaks.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3. Sale notes: "That is, we gave him a right apprehension of the government of the world, and of the heavenly bodies, that he might know them all to be ruled by GOD," George Sale, trans., *The Koran* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1836), 1:140 n. 76.

7. Literally, "guiltless of the ones who associate," referring to those who place anything on an equal level with God. This is the expression used in Arabic to denote idolators and idolatry or any kind of polytheism, which is the most grievous sin in Islam.

Surah 9

114. Abraham prayed for forgiveness for his father only because he had made him a promise. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy to God, he dissociated himself from him, for Abraham was empathetic and patient.

Surah 14

35. And Abraham said, "My Lord, make this city⁸ [one of] safety and keep me and my children from serving idols.

36. My Lord, they have surely led astray many of the people. And whoever follows me is truly of me,⁹ and whoever disobeys me, yet Thou art forgiving [and] merciful."

Surah 19

41. Remember Abraham in the book,¹⁰ for he was a righteous one [and] a prophet.

42. He said to his father, "O father, why worshipest thou that which does not hear and does not see and does not do anything for thee?"¹¹

43. O father, truly there has come to me knowledge that thou hast not received, so follow me. I shall guide thee [in] a straight path.

44. O father, do not worship Satan, for Satan was a rebel to the Most Gracious One.

45. O father, truly I fear that punishment shall befall thee from the Gracious One so that thou shalt become a friend to Satan."¹²

46. He said, "Dost thou detest my gods, Abraham? If thou ceasest not, I shall stone thee.¹³ Keep away from me for a long while."

47. He said, "Peace be on thee. I shall seek pardon for thee, for He is kind to me.

48. And I shall turn away from all of you and from those ye invoke besides God. And I shall call on my Lord, if I shall not be unblessed in praying to my Lord."

49. When he had turned from them and from those they worshiped besides God, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each of them We made a prophet.

Surah 21

51. And We had already given Abraham his rectitude and We were acquainted with him.¹⁴

52. He said to his father and his people, "What are these images to which ye are devoted?"

53. They said, "We found our fathers worshiping them."¹⁵

54. He said, "Then ye and your fathers have been in manifest error."

55. They said, "Hast thou brought us the truth, or art thou among the jokers?"

8. Referring to Mecca.

9. Cf. Abraham 2:10, 15.

10. I.e., the Qur'an.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:16-17, 27.

12. I.e., that he will go to Satan's abode in hell.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 30.

14. This line does not mean that God learned about Abraham; rather, it refers to a personal relationship with the patriarch.

15. Cf. Abraham 1:5-6.

56. He said, "No, your Lord is Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who created them, and I am among the witnesses thereof.
57. And, by God, I shall plot against your idols after ye turn [your] backs."
58. So he broke them to pieces,¹⁶ except the largest of them, that they might turn to it [to address it].¹⁷
59. They said, "Who did this to our gods? Surely he is among the evildoers."
60. They said, "We heard a youth speak of them, one called Abraham."
61. They said, "Then bring him before the people that they may testify."
62. They said, "Art thou the one who did this to our gods, O Abraham?"
63. He said, "No, the biggest of them did this. So ask them if they can speak."
64. They turned to themselves and they said, "Surely ye are the evildoers."
65. Then they turned their heads to say, "Thou knowest that these [idols] do not speak."
66. He said, "Then do ye worship besides God what does not do anything for you and does not harm?"
67. Fie on you and what ye worship instead of God. Can ye not reason?—Have ye no sense?"
68. They said, "Burn him and help your gods if ye do [anything]."
69. We said, "O fire, be cold and [a means of] safety for Abraham."¹⁸

16. Cf. Abraham 1:20. Sale adds a tradition to his translation here that is not found in the Arabic of the Qur'an. Sale's translation of this verse reads: "And in the people's absence he went into the temple where the idols stood, and he brake them all in pieces, except the biggest of them," *The Koran*, 2:135. Commenting on this verse, Sale notes, "Abraham took his opportunity to do this while the Chaldeans were abroad in the fields, celebrating a great festival: and some say he hid himself in the temple: and when he had accomplished his design, that he might the more evidently convince them of their folly in worshipping them, he hung the axe with which he had hewn and broken down the images on the neck of the chief idol, named by some writers, Baal; as if he had been the author of all the mischief. For this story, which, though it be false, is not ill invented, Mohammed stands indebted to the Jews, who tell it with a little variation: for they say Abraham performed this exploit in his father's shop, during his absence; that Terah, on his return, demanding the occasion of the disorder, his son told him that the idols had quarrelled, and fallen together by the ears, about an offering of fine flour, which had been brought them by an old woman; and that the father, finding he could not insist on the impossibility of what Abraham pretended, without confessing the impotence of his gods, fell into a violent passion, and carried him to Nimrod, that he might be exemplarily punished for his insolence," *ibid.*, 2:135 n. 59.

17. The people would have to ask the largest idol how the destruction had happened.

18. Sale adds traditional material not found in the Arabic text of this verse: "And when Abraham was cast into the burning pile, we said, O fire, be thou cold, and a preservation unto Abraham," *The Koran*, 2:136. Sale notes: "The commentators relate that, by Nimrod's order, a large space was enclosed at Cutha, and filled with a vast quantity of wood, which, being set on fire, burned so fiercely, that none dared to venture near it: then they bound Abraham, and putting him into an engine (which some suppose to have been of the devil's invention), shot him into the midst of the fire, from which he was preserved by the angel Gabriel, who was sent to his assistance; the fire burning only the cords with which he was bound," *ibid.*, 2:136 n. 69.

70. So they sought a plot against him, but We made them the greater losers.
 71. And We delivered him and Lot to the land that We blessed for the nations.

Surah 26

69. And recite to them the story of Abraham.
 70. When he said to his father and his people, "What do ye worship?"
 71. They said, "We worship idols and persevere in devotion thereto."
 72. He said, "Do they hear you when ye call,
 73. Or do you good or harm?"
 74. They said, "No, we found our fathers did so."
 75. He said, "Do ye then see what ye have been worshipping,
 76. Ye and your earliest fathers?¹⁹
 77. For they are hostile to me except the Lord of the universe
 78. Who created me, for it is He Who guides me,
 79. And it is He Who feeds me and gives me drink,
 80. And when I am ill, it is He Who heals me
 81. And Who shall cause me to die then resurrect me,²⁰
 82. And Who I hope will forgive me my sins [in] the Day of Judgment.
 83. My Lord, give me wisdom and unite me with the righteous,
 84. And give me a good mention²¹ among the latest.
 85. Place me among the heirs of the garden of comfort,
 86. And forgive my father for being among those who stray.²²
 87. And do not shame me on the day they will resurrect,
 88. The day property and sons will not be useful,
 89. Only one approaching God with a perfect heart.
 90. And the garden will be brought near to the righteous,
 91. And hellfire will appear to the errant.
 92. And it shall be said to them, 'Where are the ones ye used to worship
 93. Instead of God? Can they help you or help themselves?'
 94. Then shall they be toppled into it [the fire], they and the errant,
 95. And the assembled hosts of Iblis²³ [Lucifer].
 96. While they are in it, they will dispute,
 97. 'By God, surely we were in clear error
 98. When we made you equal to the Lord of the universe.
 99. And those who misled us were alone the guilty ones,

19. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

20. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

21. I.e., a good declaration.

22. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27, 30; 2:7.

23. Iblis, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

100. So that we have none to plead for us
101. Nor a best friend as a defender.
102. If only we had a second chance, we would be among the believers.'
103. Surely in this is a sign, but most of them are not believers,
104. And truly thy Lord is the powerful, the merciful."

Surah 37

83. And surely among his [Noah's] followers was Abraham,²⁴
84. For he came to his Lord with a perfect heart.
85. Then he said to his father and his kindred, "What is it ye worship?
86. Is it falsehood, gods inferior to God you want?
87. So what is your opinion of the Lord of the universe?"
88. Then he looked upon the stars
89. And he said, "I am really ill."
90. So they turned from him, leaving.
91. Then he turned to their gods and said, "Will ye not eat?
92. What is wrong with you [that] ye do not speak?"
93. So he turned on them, hitting [the idols] with the right hand.
94. Then they came to him; they hurried.
95. He said, "Do ye worship what ye have hewn,
96. While it is God who has created you and what ye have made?"
97. They said, "Build for him a building,²⁵ then throw him into the inferno."²⁶
98. Thus they sought an artifice against him, but We made them the most humiliated.²⁷

Surah 60

4. There was a fine example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their kindred, "We are free of you and from what you worship other than God. We have renounced you and enmity has appeared between us and you and a perpetual rift, until you believe in God as unique." But Abraham said to his father, "I shall seek pardon for you, but I have not the least authority for you from God.²⁸ Our Lord, in Thee we trust and to Thee we turn [repentantly] and destiny is Thine.

5. Our Lord, do not make us a trial for those who disbelieve, and forgive us, our Lord, for it is thou who art the powerful, the wise."

24. Noah was the topic just before this verse. Cf. Abraham 1:19; Facsimile 2, figure 3.

25. Sale's translation reads: "They said, Build a pile for him, and cast him into the glowing fire," *The Koran*, 2:267. The Arabic reads "building."

26. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:15–20, 29.

28. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 30; 2:5.

6. There was for you in them a fine example for those who have been awaiting God and the last day, but for those who turn away, surely God is wealthy, praiseworthy.²⁹

Surah 87

19. This is found on the first leaves [i.e., earlier books],
20. The leaves of Abraham and Moses.³⁰

29. Yusuf Ali's translation reads, "But if any turn away, / Truly Allah is Free of all / Wants, Worthy of all Praise." Ali notes that "if any one rejects Allah's Message or Law, the loss is his own. It is not Allah Who needs him or his worship." Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex, 1992), 1731 n. 5419.

30. Cf. Abraham 1:31. Sale's translation reads: "Verily this is written in the ancient books, the books of Abraham and Moses," *The Koran*, 2:427.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM OUR FATHER
ATTRIBUTED TO
KA'ĀB AL-AĤBĀR

Ka'āb al-Aĥbār (d. ca. A.H. 32/A.D. 652) was an early Yemenite Jewish convert to Islam. He came to Medina during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and was a confidant of the caliph 'Uthmān. He is considered the oldest authority on Judeo-Islamic traditions. Although no writings by him exist, many traditions were attributed to him, and later writers, some of whose writings are included in this volume, frequently cite him. This text derives from an Arabic manuscript written in Hebrew script and published in Constantinople in 1718; Bernard Chapira published his French translation of this Arabic text in Bernard Chapira, "Légendes bibliques attribuées à Ka'āb el-Aĥbar," *Revue des Études Juives* 69 (1919): 86–107 and 70 (1920): 37–43. Unfortunately, the Arabic text is incomplete, with several lacunae (as noted by the bracketed ellipsis points). This previously unpublished English translation of the French is by John A. Tvedtnes, who compared the French with the Arabic. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs.

[The manuscript begins in the middle of Abraham's and an old woman's discussion of the sale of an idol.]

1. [Abraham said, "I see no use] either in the large or the small [idol], nor how they can help either themselves or others. And the large idol that you bought yesterday from my brother," asked Abraham, "what has happened to it?" "Thieves came during the night and stole it from me while I was in the bath." "If so," Abraham told her, "why do you serve an idol that doesn't know how to save itself from the hand of thieves and that would know less how to save others from their evil? Go away, old fool! How can you maintain that the idol that you serve is a god? If so, why was it unable to save itself from the hand of the thieves? The truth is that it is an idol that can hardly be useful, neither for itself nor for others."

2. "If what you say is true, Abraham," the old woman asked, "what then must we serve?" Abraham answered her, "Serve the God of gods and Lord of lords, the God of Nimrod and of Terah, the God of the east and of the west, blessed be He, and blessed be His name. As for this dog, Nimrod, who is he that he passes himself for a god and that men worship him?" At this, the old woman declared, "From henceforth, I shall no longer worship a god other than yours, Abraham, but what shall doing so benefit me?" Abraham

replied, "Everything that the thieves have taken from you will be given you and, in addition, you will have saved your soul from hell." The old woman asked, "What must one say to escape hell?" Abraham responded, "Say, 'God the One Who is in the heavens above and on the earth below; He is unique and without equal.'"¹ The old woman said, "Henceforth, I shall repeat your words, and I shall testify that God is true, that His name is true, and that you, Abraham, are His true and faithful servant."

3. The storyteller said that the old woman repented of having served idols and that the thieves returned to her all that they had taken from her. He added that the old woman took the idol and broke it against a stone, saying, "Curse you and he who worships you, for you are of no use, neither for yourself nor for others." And the old woman went out of her house and walked about in the streets and places, proclaiming with a loud voice and saying, "Whoever wants to be saved from hell has only to worship the God of Abraham."

4. The storyteller said that she continued thus each day and that many people converted. But the king, learning of it, sent for the old woman and told her, "What is wrong with you, old woman? You have become mad." [. . .]

5. [. . .] at the moment when he worships the idols.

6. Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, Nimrod followed his advice and ordered his troops to place themselves ready. He distributed arms and munitions to them and commanded them to stand ready. Then he sent them after Abraham. When Abraham saw them coming toward him, he began to weep and to call upon the Eternal, saying, "O You Who deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor and Who defend the weak against the strong, save me from this impious people." And the all-powerful and great God heard his cries and looked upon him with a compassionate eye. He sent to him Gabriel, and Gabriel told him, "What mean these cries and this fear, Abraham? Don't you know that to God belongs this world and the future world, the heavens and all they encompass, the earth and all it contains? Therefore, fear not, for God is with you, in whatever place you find yourself. It is He who sustains you and will make you triumph over all your enemies."

7. Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, And the all-powerful and great God commanded Gabriel to place a veil between them and Abraham, and when the troops advanced and the soldiers and their chiefs saw this veil, they were frightened and returned to Nimrod, saying, "He retreated at our approach and became master of the situation; we hardly have power over him and despair of being able to seize him." Nimrod asked, "Then what shall we do and what method shall we use?" They replied, "Let us go hence to another land." And Nimrod said, "I shall go."

8. So he prepared for the trip, supplied himself with food and ample provisions for the road, distributed money to his soldiers, his troops, his commanders, and his captains, and gave them the signal to leave. And Nimrod, accompanied by his lieutenants, his

1. This statement reflects the creed of Islam: "There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is his prophet." Sincere recitation of this statement makes one a Muslim.

troops, and his commanders, went to the region of Iraq, taking with them their goods, their families, and their children.

9. Then the powerful and great God sent Gabriel to Abraham. [And the angel said to him, "God, your Master and the Master of the east and of the west, commands you to go rejoin Nimrod, your enemy, in the land of Iraq." Then Abraham asked Gabriel, "O my friend Gabriel, how shall I follow then, having neither provision for the road, nor mounts, nor army, nor chiefs, nor munitions, while they have troops, armies, munitions, provisions, and mounts?" And Gabriel answered him, "O Abraham, have no fear. You have no need of [provisions], nor of mounts, nor of troops, nor of armies. Sit on my back and I shall bring you to them." Upon [hearing] this, Abraham sat [on the back] of Gabriel.

10. In less than the blink of an eye, Gabriel, having placed him on [his back, transported him] to Iraq, saying to him, "Enter [into the city] and say, 'Repeat after me: [There is no other God] except God, Who is in the upper heavens and the lowest earth. He is one, unique, eternal, Who has neither father nor son, nor replacement, nor minister, nor similarity, nor equal. He is the Master of all the universe and the master of Nimrod, and I, Abraham, am the servant of God, His friend, His prophet.'" [While roaming] the streets, Abraham found his father Terah and his brother Haran. And Gabriel told him, "O Abraham, tell your father and your brother: 'Testify and confess that there [is no other God except God, alone without associates [. . .]'" So Abraham approached [his father and his brother and told them], "O my father and my brother, [you worship] a created god [. . .]"²

11. [Ka'b al-Aḥbār said:] Nimrod the accursed commanded that he be cast into the fire.³ Then his mother came to him, pressed him against her breast, and kissed him, saying, "O my son, obey Nimrod in order to escape the punishment of his fire." Abraham said, "O my mother, know that the fire of Nimrod is extinguished, covered, and its flame burns out, while the fire of my Lord never diminishes in intensity, and its flame is never veiled. Those who are worthy of it, when they are alive, will not die of it and, after their death, they have no fear of its punishment." Having heard his words, his mother asked, "Do you mean to say by this that God hears and sees and that it is He Who will save you from the fire of Nimrod?" Abraham told her, "Yes, my mother. My God hears and sees, and it is He Who will save me from the fire of Nimrod." Then she let go of him with her own hands and went away.

12. At this, Abraham was carried and placed in the flat part of the catapult. Seeing this, the angels cried to the powerful and great God, glorifying, magnifying, sanctifying, praising, and exalting the Master of the heavens and the earth. And they said, "O our God and Lord, don't You see Your friend, Your prophet, and Your servant Abraham?" Then the powerful and great God appeared to the angels and said to them, "O my angels, I know and I see all, and I am the merciful among the merciful."

2. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

3. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

13. Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, "When Abraham was placed in the flat part of the catapult and the men had launched him, he left like the arrow of an archer. The angels retrieved him, and Gabriel appeared to him⁴ and said, "O Abraham, do you have a request to make?" Abraham responded, "O Gabriel, my request I will address only to the Master of the Universe; He it is who fills needs, hears those who call on Him, dissipates sadness, and lifts up the fallen."

14. And the powerful and great God understood his intentions and said to the fire, "*Become cold and beneficial for my servant Abraham.*"⁵ And the fire, said Ka'b al-Aḥbār, was extinguished, and the wood became covered with leaves and began to flower as trees flower, and each piece of wood gave forth fruits, and each branch produced as much as in the past. Then Nimrod the accursed saw the fire and saw angels who seemed to draw from the river of life and extinguish the fire. Each branch became what it had been, and each twig returned to its original state, and the trees separated themselves and became covered with leaves, each tree producing fruits of its species. The fire became like a garden among the gardens of paradise. When Nimrod the accursed saw this, he cried, "O Abraham, truly this is a fine bit of magic." Then some of his viziers said to him, "O king, this is not magic, but a manifestation of the power of the Master of the Universe, the God of Abraham, of high station and of magisterial reign. We testify that there is no other God except God alone, without associate in His reign, and that Abraham is His servant, His prophet, and friend." And the viziers believed in the powerful and magnificent God and in Abraham.

15. A crowd of people converged at the same time as them, which greatly bothered Nimrod the accursed. He therefore had Abraham come and said to him, "O Abraham, you have enchanted the fire, which is converted into a verdant garden." And Abraham replied to him, "Woe to you from God, O you who deny the powerful and great God and who do not believe in His signs, in His prophets, and in His messengers. This is only a result of the grace of my Master. Certainly my Master knows what is hidden and what is manifest. There is no other God but He; to Him belong magnificent attributes. He is the great Creator."

16. Then Nimrod the accursed asked, "And what does your master do, O Abraham?" Abraham replied, "*My master gives life and decrees death.*"⁶ Upon this, Nimrod the accursed cried, "I also make alive and make die." And he made come two men from the prison and commanded that one be killed and the other be freed. "Behold," he said, "that I have given life and that I have given death." Abraham said to him again, "My Master makes the sun rise in the east and set in the west." Then Nimrod the accursed, the unbeliever, was left confounded. And Abraham added, "Indeed, God does not conduct perverse

4. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

5. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

6. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

people on the path of His obedience." And Nimrod the accursed remained perplexed, not knowing what to do with Abraham.

17. As they were seated, Iblīs⁷ the accursed presented himself before [Nimrod] and said, "O king, I have come to you as a counselor, a bearer of good tidings. I shall show you a way by which you can kill the God of Abraham in the heaven where He resides." And Nimrod the accursed asked, "How shall I go to Him, since He is in the heaven and I am on the earth?" At this, Iblīs the accursed responded, "I advise you to construct a nacelle⁸ of wood. You shall then take two great eagles that you shall starve for three days, and you shall attach the nacelle to the back of the eagles. You and your vizier shall enter into the nacelle, and you shall be careful to bring with you two lances, on the ends of which you shall place meat to show to the eagles. And when the eagles shall have seen the meat on the top of the lances, you will direct them always higher, and the eagles will ascend thence. You shall thus hold the lances above the back of the eagles until you arrive in the heavens. Then, launch arrows from your bow, and when one of them shall have reached God and returns, you shall direct the lances below; the eagles will see them and will descend to earth." Nimrod heard the words of Iblīs the accursed and made . . . [The manuscript breaks off here.]

7. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

8. In modern usage the term *nacelle* can be the enclosed part of an airplane, dirigible, or balloon in which passengers, crew, or cargo is carried. Here it is likely a box of some sort in which to carry people.

EXTRACTS FROM IBN ISHAQ

Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq ibn Yasār ibn Khiyār ibn Iṣḥāq (A.H. 85–150/A.D. 704–67) was born in Medina but later lived in Baghdad. He collected *ʾaḥādīth* (the sayings and acts of Muḥammad) both from the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and his own father and grandfather. His grandfather was originally Jewish, the first slave imported from Babylon under the first caliph, Abū Bakr. Ibn Iṣḥāq studied under several transmitters of traditions who are mentioned in lines of transmission found elsewhere in this volume (including Ibn Qatāda and Ibn Dinār). He also frequented the *warrāqs*: papermakers and book publishers who sold Qurʾans, Jewish and Christian scriptures, and apocryphal works and commentaries passed off as scripture. Ibn Iṣḥāq is most noted for writing the earliest biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, later abbreviated by Ibn Hishām (A.D. 834). The first part of his *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Book of the Biography of the Messenger of God), or *Sīra*, the *Kitāb al-mubtadaʿ* (Book of the Beginnings), recorded history from the creation to the prehistory of Islam. Ibn Iṣḥāq used Christian and Jewish sources in this first part. By about a generation after Ibn Iṣḥāq, however, using such materials was no longer acceptable. It was at this time that Ibn Hishām deleted the Jewish and Christian materials in the *Kitāb al-mubtadaʿ*, and for the most part, the first part of Ibn Iṣḥāq’s book was lost. For this reason only abbreviated versions of his *Sīra* survive, and they do not contain the *Kitāb al-mubtadaʿ*. What we use here is Gordon D. Newby’s translation and reconstruction from sources that quote Ibn Iṣḥāq extensively: Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 67–72. Some of these sources are used in this volume as well, most notably al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, and al-Maḥdī. For reference purposes we have numbered the paragraphs.

1. Abraham was the son of Azar, that is, Tarikh, the son of Nahur, the son of Sarugh, the son of Arghu, the son of Faligh, the son of ʿAbir, the son of Shalikh,¹ the son of Qaynan,²

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1. For this same genealogy in the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Genesis 11:15–25: Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu (Arghu), Peleg (Faligh), Eber, Salah.
 2. Qaynan, or Cainan, who is missing from the Hebrew (and KJV) text of Genesis 10:24 (and from 1 Chronicles 1:18, which is dependent on the Genesis passage). His name is, however, included in the genealogical listing in the Septuagint and the Samaritan, Syriac, and other Bibles and is also found in the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:36. A number of early church fathers referred to Cainan’s absence from the Hebrew record as evidence that the Jews had tampered with the Bible text.

the son of Arfakhshad,³ the son of Shem, the son of Noah. Muhammad b.⁴ Ishaq told me that Azar came from the district of Kutha in the district of Kufah, which was, at that time, the eastern kingdom of Nimrod, who was called al-Hasir. According to what has been alleged, his kingdom encompassed the eastern and western portions of the earth while he lived in Babylon. His kingdom and his people were in the east before the time of the Persians. It is said that no king united the whole earth, and no people made the earth into one kingdom, except three kings: Nimrod the son of Arghu, Dhu-l-Qarnayn,⁵ and Solomon the son of David.

2. When God wished to send Abraham, the Friend of God, as evidence to his people and as a messenger to his servants (there were no prophets between Noah and Abraham except Hud and Salih)⁶ and when the time for Abraham approached, Nimrod's astrologers came to him and said: Know that by our science we have found that a youth will be born in such-and-such a month and such-and-such a year in this city of yours who will be called Abraham. He will cast your religion asunder and break your idols.⁷ So when the year came which the astrologers had described, Nimrod sent for all pregnant women in his city and imprisoned them, except the mother of Abraham, the wife of Azar. Azar did not know of her pregnancy, because she did not talk about it.

3. So it happened that every boy born to a woman in that month in that year was ordered to be slaughtered.⁸ When the mother of Abraham was parturient, she went out at night to a nearby cave and bore Abraham in it. Then she set everything in order for the newborn, blocked up the cave, and returned to her house. She went back to the cave to inspect him, and she found him alive, being suckled by wild beasts. It is alleged, and God knows best, that God provided for his suckling. According to what they assert, Azar asked Abraham's mother what happened to her pregnancy. She said, I bore a youth which died, and he believed her and kept quiet.

4. According to a report, a day for Abraham in his infancy was like a month and a month like a year. Abraham did not stay in the cave more than fifteen months until he said to his mother, Take me out so I can look around. So she took him out in the evening, and he looked and thought about the creation of the heavens and the earth⁹ and said, He is my Lord who created me and provided for me and fed me and gave me drink; what would I be without Him?

5. He looked at heaven, saw a star, and said, This is my Lord. Then he followed it with his gaze until it set. When it set, he said, I do not like things which set. Then the

3. Biblical Arphaxad.

4. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read "son of."

5. "He of the two horns," the usual Arabic designation for Alexander the Great. Arabic traditions attribute to both Nimrod and Alexander the feat of having used eagles to bear them aloft in a box or basket.

6. Hūd and Šāliḥ are two pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. For a discussion of Hūd as Lehi and of Šāliḥ, see William J. Hamblin, "Pre-Islamic Prophets," in *Mormons and Muslims*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983): 85–104.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

9. Cf. Abraham 4–5.

moon rose. He saw it coming out, and he said, This is my Lord. Then he followed it with his gaze until it set. When it set, he said, If my Lord does not guide me, I will become one of the people of error. When day came, and the sun rose, he saw the power of the sun, and he saw something with stronger light than anything he had seen before, so he said, "This is my Lord; this is the greatest. And when it set, he said, O people, I am free from your polytheism; I have set my face toward the One who created the heavens and the earth,¹⁰ as a monotheist, and I am not one of the polytheists."¹¹

6. Then Abraham returned to his father, Azar. His direction remained true, and he knew his Lord.¹² He was free from the religion of his people but he did not extirpate them for that belief. He told his father that he was his son, and Abraham's mother told Azar that he was his son, and she told him what she had done. Azar was happy at that and rejoiced greatly.

7. Now Azar used to make the idols his people would worship.¹³ Then he would give them to Abraham to sell, and Abraham would go out with them and, according to what they assert, would say to him who bought one that it would not hurt him or help him. So no one would buy from him. When this activity proved unprofitable to him, he went to the river with the idols and immersed their heads in it.¹⁴ He said, Drink, mocking his people and their error so that his shaming them and mocking them spread among his people and the rest of the people of the city until it reached Nimrod, the king. When it became clear to Abraham that he should declare his break with his people openly and declare his situation with God and his prayers to Him, he saw a vision in the stars,¹⁵ and he said, "I am sick; so they turned their backs on him."¹⁶ (His statement, I am sick, means stricken with sickness.) They went away from him when they heard him. Abraham wanted them to go away so he could do what he wanted with their idols. When they left him, he went to the idols which they worshiped instead of God and brought food to them. Then he said, reviling them for their condition and mocking them, "Do you not eat? What is the matter with you that you do not speak?"¹⁷ Then he came up to them, as God said, striking them with his right hand, and began breaking them with an ax which was in his hand until only the largest idol remained.¹⁸ Then he fastened the ax to its hand and left.

8. When the people returned, they saw what had been done to their idols. It frightened them, and they were amazed by it. They said, Who did this to our gods; he is one of the sinners. Then they remembered and said, We heard a youth called Abraham finding fault with them and mocking them, and we have not heard anyone say that except him.

10. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

11. Citing Qur'an 6:78–79. Note that in this translation, all statements from the Qur'an are in quotes.

12. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

14. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

15. Cf. Abraham 3:1–18.

16. Citing Qur'an 37:89–90.

17. Citing Qur'an 37:91–92.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

He is the one whom we think did that. The affair came to the attention of Nimrod and the nobles of his people, and they said, Bring Abraham before the leaders of the people that perhaps they will bear witness about what we should do with him. When he was brought and his people were gathered against him before their king, Nimrod, they said, "Did you do this to our gods, Abraham? He said, Nay, their chief did this; so ask them, if they can speak."¹⁹ He became angry that you worship these small ones along with him. He is bigger than they; so he shattered them.

9. Keeping an eye on him, they gathered apart from him to discuss the breaking, and they said, We have wronged him, and we do not see that it is other than as he said. Then knowing that the idols neither harmed nor helped and could not strike, they said, "You know that these do not speak,"²⁰ that is, they do not talk; so tell us who did this with them and why you struck them, and we will believe you. At that, when the proof came to them by their words, You know that these do not speak, Abraham said, "Do you worship what will not help you or harm you instead of God? Fie on you and what you worship instead of God. Do you not have any sense?"²¹ And with that, his people disputed with him about God, and they argued with him to show that their gods were better than what he worshiped. So he said, "Do you dispute with me about God when he has guided me . . . up to his statement . . . Which of the two factions has more right to safety, if you know,"²² offering them parables and fending off interpretations to teach them that it is more right to fear and worship God than what they worshiped.

10. It was told us, and God knows best, that Nimrod said to Abraham, What is this God of yours whom you worship, invite to His worship, and tell of His might, which you assert is greater than anything else. Abraham said, My Lord who gives life and death.²³ Nimrod said, But I give life and death. And Abraham said, How do you give life and death? He said, I take two men worthy of killing in my judgment, and I kill one of them, and I have given death to him. I forgive the other and release him, and I have given him life. Abraham said to that, "Show me how you give life to the dead. He said, Do you not believe? He said, Yes, but I ask in order that my heart be at ease"²⁴ from any doubt in God or His power. He wished to know that, and his heart yearned for it. "He said, take four birds and bring them to you. Then place a part of each on each mountain. Then call them. They will come to you quickly. Know that God is Mighty and Wise."²⁵

11. The People of the Book said that he took four birds, a peacock, a cock, a raven, and a dove. He cut each bird into four pieces, and went to four mountains, placing a quarter of each bird on each mountain,²⁶ so there was on each mountain a quarter of the peacock, a quarter of the cock, a quarter of the raven, and a quarter of the dove. Then he called to

19. Citing Qur'an 21:62–63.

20. Citing Qur'an 21:65.

21. Citing Qur'an 21:66–67.

22. Citing Qur'an 6:80–81. Both sets of ellipsis points are part of the translation.

23. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

24. Citing Qur'an 2:260.

25. Ibid.

26. Cf. Genesis 15:9–11.

them and said, Come, with the permission of God, as you were. Each quarter joined with its mate until they were reassembled, and each bird was as it was before it had been cut. Then they came to him quickly, just as God had said. It was said, O Abraham, thus God gathers His servants and gives life to the dead in the resurrection of the East and the West and the North and the South. So God showed him the quickening of the dead by His power, so that he would know that instead of what Nimrod said in lying and error. And Abraham said to them, "Indeed, God is the one who raises the sun from the East, so you bring it from the West,"²⁷ so that I will know if it is as you say. Nimrod was abashed at this and did not respond, and he knew that he could not do that. In the words of the Most High, "The sinner was abashed,"²⁸ meaning the proof fell on him, Nimrod, "and God does not guide a sinful people."²⁹

12. Then Nimrod and his people gathered around Abraham and said, "Burn him and stick by your gods if you are men of action."³⁰ Ibn Hamid told me on the authority of Salamah, who got it from Muhammad b. Ishaq, who got it from al-Hasan b. Dinar, that Layth b. Abu Sulaym, who got it from Mujahid, said, I recited this verse to 'Abdullah b. 'Umar, and he said, Do you know, O Mujahid, who ordered the burning of Abraham by the fire? I said, No. He said, A man from the Arabs of the Persians. I said, O Abu 'Abd-ar-Rahman, do the Persians have Arabs? He said, Yes, the Kurds; they are the Arabs of the Persians, and one of them was the one who ordered the burning of Abraham in the fire.

13. Nimrod commanded that they bring him firewood, so they made a cross of all sorts of firewood.³¹ There was a woman from Abraham's town who had vowed because of her religion that if she came across Abraham, she would gather the firewood for the fire in which he would be burned. When they wished to throw him in, they brought him and kindled the wood which they had gathered on all sides. When the fire ignited, and they gathered to throw him in it, heaven and earth and all the creatures in it except men and Jinn³² cried out to God with one cry: Our Lord, there is no one in your land who worships you except Abraham, and he is being burned by fire. Give us permission to save him. They mention, and God knows best, that when they said that, God said, If he asks for rain from you or prays for it, it will save him. I have given permission to him for that, if he does not pray to anyone but me, for I am his protector. So leave the affair between me and him. I will protect him. So when they threw him in it,³³ He said, "O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham."³⁴ So it was as God said, and God sent the Angel of Shade in the image of Abraham, and he sat by his side³⁵ amusing him.

27. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Citing Qur'an 21:68.

31. The author may have known a Christian tradition that explained the cross as a type of Christ to come.

32. Jinn are spirit beings, created from fire (unlike man, who is created from the earth). They can be good but are mostly mischievous or evil. They will also be judged at the last day.

33. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

34. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

35. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

14. Now Nimrod waited a few days, not doubting that the fire had consumed Abraham and was finished with him. Then he rode out and passed by where the fire was burning all the firewood that they had gathered, and he looked at it. He saw Abraham sitting in it with a man like him at his side. So Nimrod came back from his ride and said to his people, I have just seen Abraham alive in the fire, but this seems doubtful to me. Build me a tower that will take me up over the fire so that I can be certain. So they built him a tower, and he climbed up it over the fire, and he saw Abraham sitting in the fire, and he saw the angel sitting at his side³⁶ in his image. Nimrod called out to him, O Abraham, great is your God whose power and might reaches to the extent I see so that you are not harmed. O Abraham, are you able to come out of there? He said, Yes. Nimrod said, Are you afraid that if I leave you in the fire you will be harmed? He said, No. Nimrod said, Rise and come out. So Abraham got up and walked in the fire until he came out. When he came out to Nimrod, Nimrod said, O Abraham, who was the man in your image I saw with you, sitting at your side? He said, That was the Angel of Shade which my Lord sent to be with me and to amuse me. He placed coolness and peace over me. So Nimrod said, according to what I was told, O Abraham, I am going to sacrifice to your God because of what I have seen of His might and power, and because of what He did for you when you insisted on His worship and His unity. I will sacrifice four thousand cows for Him. Abraham said to him, God will not accept a sacrifice from you because of your religion unless you break with it. He said, O Abraham, I am not able to abandon my kingdom, but I will sacrifice them to Him. So Nimrod sacrificed them, and he kept away from Abraham. Thus God guarded Abraham from the torment.³⁷

15. From Ibn Hamid, who got it from Salamah, who got it from Muhammad b. Ishaq, who got it from ‘Abd-ar-Rahman b. Abu az-Zanad, who got it from his father, who got it from ‘Abd-ar-Rahman al-A‘raj, Abu Hurayrah said, I heard the Messenger of God say, Abraham never said anything that was not true except three times: his saying that he was ill when he was not; his saying that the chief of the idols did that, so ask them, if they are able to talk; and his saying to Pharaoh, My sister, when Pharaoh asked him about Sarah, Who is this woman? Abraham never said anything that was not so except those. On the authority of Sa‘id b. Yahya, who got it from Ubayy, who got it from Muhammad b. Ishaq, who got it from Abu az-Zanad, who got it from ‘Abd-ar-Rahman al-A‘raj, Abu Hurayrah said, The Messenger of God said that Abraham never lied except thrice; then he narrated something like the above.

16. Abraham set out on a Hijrah³⁸ for his Lord, and Lot went with him. He married Sarah, the daughter of his paternal uncle, and left, fleeing, until, because of his religion, he settled in Harran, seeking safety in the worship of his Lord. He remained there as long

36. Ibid.

37. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

38. The word means “emigration.” The *Hijrah* refers to Muḥammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622, marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

as God wished, and then he went to Egypt. On the authority of Muhammad b. Ishaq, who got it from ‘Abdullah b. Ka‘b, who got it from Malik al-Ansari, the Messenger of God said, When you conquer Egypt, treat its people well, for they have protection and mercy. So I asked az-Zuhri what the mercy was which the Messenger of God mentioned, and he said, Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, whom Abraham took from Egypt to Syria was from there. Then Abraham left Egypt for Syria.

EXTRACTS FROM
ISHAQ IBN BISHR

Ishāq Abū Ḥudhayfa ibn Bishr al-Qurashī was a famous historian in his time. He authored several books, including the one we use here, the *Mubtadaʾ al-dunyā wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (The Beginning of the World and the Stories of the Prophets). He died in A.H. 205/A.D. 821. Al-Ṭarafī, who appears later in this volume, apparently drew heavily from Ibn Bishr for his own *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*; al-Thaʿlabī also used him. Ibn Bishr’s *Mubtadaʾ* depends upon Ibn Ishāq (among others), who is also included in this collection. Unfortunately, we do not have further information either on Ibn Bishr’s life or his writings. This work has never been published, and we include the original text of the portions translated as an appendix to the volume. The English translation, by Brian M. Hauglid, appears here for the first time. The text of the *Mubtadaʾ* is from MS Huntington 388, fols. 160B–170B, held in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. We are grateful to the Bodleian for providing photocopies of the manuscript, portions of which present difficulties in reading. The paragraphs are numbered according to the line numbers in the manuscript.

Folio 160B

6. The Character of Ibrahīm [Abraham]¹ and His Story
7. From the story of Ibrahīm and Nimrūd.² After Nimrūd³
8. had strengthened those of his kingdom and established the people, they invoked a blessing upon him as they were accustomed to do.
9. Nimrūd was informed he would have born in “your kingdom a child
10. who will contend with you in kingship; for there will be a wresting of kingship by his hand.” It is said [Nimrūd] called forth
11. six groups of the best of his people. He did not leave out any leaders and great ones and [honorable ones?],
12. except that he chose the best of them. So there were six [groups],⁴ and [among] the sixth was [the father?] of Ibrahīm,

1. Biblical Abraham is rendered in Arabic as Ibrahīm and sometimes as Ibrāhīm. This transliteration, as well as Arabic transliterations of other names, is often used by translators throughout the remainder of the Islamic portion of this volume.

2. Biblical Nimrod.

3. We have eliminated the dittograph *after Nimrūd* here.

4. The implication here seems to be that the six groups are each responsible for a group of people.

13. and he was Tārah.⁵ There was not a ruler over them
14. according to the [traditions] which were established [by] his kingdom [in order to] rule
15. over them and those included with them. But [Tārah? Nimrūd?] was obliged to take control over them so that they obeyed or
16. [fulfilled or changed?]. [Nimrūd] said: "O people! You are the best of

Folio 161A

1. my people and are their leaders and their great ones. Indeed I have remained since I established the order of
2. my kingdom and the people of my kingdom. I am concerned about what you are concerned about. You are the dearest and the choicest, and I
3. will look into your affairs. [illegible]
4. And this prompted me to ask you for advice and get help from you.
5. I have built for you a kingdom and the people according to seven traits [traditions?],
6. and I gave each one of you a trait from those traits."
7. The groups did not rule over the women nor rule over their families. So they left
8. and drew lots for the women. [illegible]
9. So one was [appointed] her guardian and the guardian of her family. He held him responsible for her and her family's needs and furnishings.⁶ [illegible]
10. The king commanded and he assigned the people, [saying], "There is still no worship but that of my gods
11. and no establishment except of my custom, and there is not one more deserving, in himself and [in] his possessions, than I.
12. There is no one more to be feared among them [the people] than I. There is no one more [worthy] to obey among them than I.
13. So they separated one against their enemy, and they made my servants more wise among them
14. to observe and love me. Afterwards there will be born at this time a child
15. who will outdo me and renounce me; he will frighten my religious community; he will [seek to] defeat me and overpower me. I
16. pledge to you concerning this peculiarity. I [illegible] each household of my kingdom
17. as a single [person?] in their search [to] fight him and destroy him. The one who gains victory over him

Folio 161B

1. is my servant who will not judge arbitrarily nor [illegible]." So they departed and cast lots among each other. Then they informed me
2. what took place in the lots of each one among them in order to know him by his name and know what happened

5. Biblical Terah.

6. To avoid any woman becoming pregnant, the women were guarded.

3. to him. When they cast lots it fell upon [his father's?] goddess⁷ that the
4. people worshiped. But no one among the people worshiped an idol; not the king or any others, unless an
5. idol had [the name of] Āzar,⁸ the father of Ibrahīm, stamped upon it. He was proficient [in] that and power was upon him. He became
6. their authorized representative in their desire concerning that [i.e., idol worship]. They [the people] were not equal to him, nor were they covetous of him.
7. They did not see him and feared him dying. It is said, that [position] was a kindness from God [upon]
8. His friend, Ibrahīm. When his mother conceived him,
9. she was called Amīla. She said to his father, Āzar, "I should like to give birth to
10. what is in my belly. It will be a child. You and I will bear fruit in spite of the king.
11. And he will be seen [live?]. You and I must sleep together. So
12. we have taken it upon ourselves to bring him forth. [illegible]
13. [illegible] If the king found out about that [pregnancy], his charity towards us and his trust in us and his honor and kindness to us would be removed. When he did not see you doing that concerning his arrival
14. his opinion rang out loudly, affectionately, and within proximity. And [God] sent down upon him His nobility and His opinion
15. and His protection. And [God] gave us glorification." And that was from the mother of Ibrahīm [illegible].
16. A trick and ruse and [illegible] by her husband. When she hoped
17. of him to herself of Ibrahīm, and she trusted him. Then

Folio 162A

1. she gave birth to him and hid him. Āzar believed her and trusted her. He supposed that the matter was according to
2. what she had said. When her month in which he would be born arrived, she said to her husband, "I
3. greatly fear my pregnancy. I did not fear any pregnancy that was before him.
4. I was afraid that there would be in him my fate of death. I had reconciled myself to death.
5. I began to wait for him, and it was not made known to me when he would come to me. I desire
6. you to [illegible] make true my companion and [illegible]. You boast of your truth so that you hurry to
7. the great god which the king and the majority of his people worship. You should plead

7. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6, 27.

8. Āzar is the more common of the names given to Abraham's father by the Muslims and is the name by which he is known in the Qur'an.

8. for me with integrity and [provide] food to safeguard him. You should cover him until he lets you know [otherwise]. Indeed, I have
9. been unharmed and saved [rescued]. The Messenger [Ibrahīm] is more worthy than you and I in your correctness [self-righteousness]
10. and the correctness of your wife and companion to depart." [After] the mother of Ibrahīm
11. had [expressed] her desire, her husband left to protect [Ibrahīm]. They dug a tunnel for him under
12. the earth, which hid him. [Then] she left him. When her husband returned from his prayers, she reported that [Ibrahīm]
13. had died and was buried. But Amīna⁹ had truly been with him because of her great worrying.
14. The man [Ibrahīm] was moved where his mother could busy herself
15. for forty nights. Ibrahīm was born at a time when his father was absent. So she covered him,
16. put him in order, and provided for him for forty nights [illegible]. She greatly desired from God
17. kindness, generosity, and safety for [Ibrahīm], and [to] keep from him

Folio 162B

1. enemies, deception, and hostility. The Messenger came out from his mother to his father
2. when she experienced pain and labor until she was done with what she desired. Then
3. her husband turned his attention to her. She informed him that she had given birth to a boy and that she had severe physical hardship,
4. so he died. She felt ashamed that the people would find out about him. So she hid him for that
5. reason, until she [could] bury him. Her husband believed her. But she began to visit Ibrahīm frequently.
6. She provided him with subsistence, but most of what kept him alive was milk. Because there was not a male infant born who wasn't killed.¹⁰
7. The woman provided milk for him,
8. [illegible] and [air?]. She found that [even if] she desired not to give him milk.
9. Because of that, he lived a good life, and it [milk] improved him fivefold. When he reached maturity
10. she weaned him from the milk. Isma'īl b.¹¹ 'Asā informed us on the authority of
11. Ishaq [who] said, Ibn Ḥarij reported—Mujāhid—Ibn 'Abbās,
12. God's mercy be upon him, [said] that Ibrahīm grew in a day as if it were a week, in a week as if it were a month,

9. Abraham's mother's name is spelled two different ways in this text.

10. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

11. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read "son of."

13. in a month as if it were a year. It is related that Isma‘il b. ‘Asā said Ishāq said
14. Ḥuwari reported on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Muqātil b. Sulaymān—Sa‘īd b. al-Jubayr—
15. Ibn ‘Abbās in which he said that when the mother of Ibrahīm was late [in visiting him],
16. Ibrahīm was sucking his thumb to get milk. It [the thumb] was a means of [providing?] milk
17. and honey. God would sustain him with that.

Folio 163A

1. One who was there said the boy sucked his thumb day to day. And Ibrahīm’s
2. youthfulness was quickened as God desired. When he was thirteen
3. years old, while in the cave, his mother brought him out of it [or] carried him out. His father did not know about him
4. until he saw him sitting [in front of him?]. When he saw [Ibrahīm], he asked his wife, “Who is this
5. boy whom the slaughterer has missed? I know that [he] was born after the king’s order to
6. slaughter newborn children.¹² How has the place of this boy been hidden to his [Nimrūd’s] search and his anger,
7. so that he has come of age?” He [Āzar] was at the point of attacking him. His wife said to him, “By your Messenger!
8. He lives to tell you. Let him tell you that he knows he is your son whom you fathered [that] night. I withdrew
9. and concealed him from you in a tunnel under the earth until he reached maturity.”
10. Her husband said to her, “What possessed you to betray me and yourself
11. and to betray the king? You have brought misfortune upon us. There is no surety for us in him after [our] well-being
12. and honor, and after our status has been elevated over all of our people.” She said, “Don’t worry about that.
13. I have a way out of this. I guarantee you will get back your
14. nobility, status, trustworthiness, and faultlessness in the eyes of the kings. I did what I did
15. for me, you, your son, and the general public to the extent that I kept it secret to myself.
16. One day I hid this boy, and I said I will hide him until he becomes a man, for if he was
17. an enemy to the king. [I suspected? (that) he was the one (the king) was looking for. He was raised (in stature and position) so that you disparaged him?]

12. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

Folio 163B

1. because of his influence. Then we spoke of your religion, O king, as your enemy! God has placed you
2. with him. He has prohibited you from [being] covetous and mournful. He has mercy on the people in [terms of] their children.
3. [But] your servants and the people of your kingdom will end. The king and [Ibrahīm's] enemies could not lead [Ibrahīm] astray.
4. I could not sacrifice my son as the other newborns were slaughtered." [Ibrahīm's] father said to her, "I did not
5. think of you except as being truthful. The idea to have children delighted us, but don't we know he is an enemy
6. of the king? and others?" She said, "We confine[d Ibrahīm] and hid him, and we suggest[ed] to him the religion of the king
7. and his religious community. If [Ibrahīm had] complied with us accordingly, then he [would be] a man like the rest of the people. And [then] there [would be] no need to kill him.
8. But [Ibrahīm] disobeyed us, and he did not join our religious community. We know his attitude, and we will hand him over to be killed."¹³
9. When she said this to him, he agreed with it, and he saw that this [was] the right way. God put [upon Ibrahīm's father]
10. mercy and affection for Ibrahīm. And [God] made Ibrahīm beautiful in his father's eyes.
11. [God] did not make any of His children equal to [Ibrahīm]. If it was mentioned that [Ibrahīm] would be killed,
12. he [Ibrahīm's father] was more intense in his emotions on behalf of [Ibrahīm]. And [Ibrahīm's father] would weep from his compassion. The mother of Ibrahīm was certain
13. that if he was an enemy of the people, there was not any of the people of the earth who could [outdo?] or kill him. She saw that when he triumphed over them, her deliverance would be in that,
15. and his deliverance [also] from each of those Ibrahīm argued [with]. He supported her in what they hoped for [concerning] Ibrahīm,
16. whom God assisted against the conflict of Nimrūd and his religion
17. and his disobedience. Therefore, the power [of Ibrahīm] was itself stronger. Nimrūd had informed

Folio 164A

1. the people before[hand] of the birth of Ibrahīm, that a prophet would be coming
2. to vanquish and conquer him and frighten him away from his religion, to remove his religion and his authority.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 30.

3. Therefore, this is the reason for Ibrahīm. O this [is why the mother of Ibrahīm] was pursued from the conflict of Nimrūd

4. and the people of his religion concerning Ibrahīm. His father was one who, because of the intensity of his mercy,

5. made every effort to keep it secret. And he would advise [Ibrahīm's] mother to do the same. He said to her,

6. "Defend concerning your son and do not expose him to anything concerning the order of the king this day.

7. Indeed, he is a young boy. [illegible]

8. When [Ibrahīm] matured, I desired you. He [illegible] from his religion. Therefore,

9. you waited for him, and he requested that he speak" [illegible]. There was for Ibrahīm an end or a way out

10. when his father became angry with him because of the love, mercy, [illegible], and beauty which God had

11. [favored?] in a divine secret. Then Ibrahīm was granted all of that, and he [illegible] in God

12. in the same manner. He did not observe anything, and he did not [notice?] it in God, His indulgence. He was not encompassed by God's

13. censure. [Ibrahīm] spoke about the sun, moon, and the stars.¹⁴ What he spoke [of]

14. happening Isma'īl said, Iṣḥāq reported to us who said Ḥuwayr on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk

15. informed me [that] 'Uthmān b. 'Aṭā al-Ḥarāsānī and Muqātil b. Sulaymān informed me

16. on the authority of Ḥuwayr—al-Ḍaḥḥāk. Each mentioned the matter of Ibrahīm

17. as he spoke of the stars, moon, and sun, and such.¹⁵ God said:

Folio 164B

1. *So also did We show [Ibrahīm] the kingdom of the heavens and the earth*

2. *that he might have certitude. When the night covered him, and so forth.*¹⁶

3. The stars and [God's] power in them were seen by [Ibrahīm]. This is before he had been shown the kingdom

4. of the heavens.¹⁷ They said that when the night covered Ibrahīm, he

5. said one day, "O mother! who created you?" She said, "My father." He asked, "Who created me?" She said,

6. "Your father." He said, "Who created my father?" She said, "The king." He asked, "Who created the king?" She exclaimed,

14. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

15. Ibid.

16. Citing Qur'an 6:75–76.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

7. "Be silent, my son!" [Ibrāhīm] asked, "Who is more admirable, I or my father?" She said, "You are." He said,

8. "Which is more excellent, the face of my father or the king?" She said, "Your father." He said, "O mother, if the king were

9. able to create a man, why did he create a man that is better than him?" So his mother hid him and didn't inform his father.

10. It is said, when the night covered [Ibrāhīm] and Venus ascended, it [was] at the end of the

11. month of June as the Byzantines reported it. He could not see a brighter star than it.

12. He said, "O mother, is this my Lord?" She silenced him. [Ibrāhīm] wanted that because it was mocking his mother.

13. When it [Venus] set, he said, "I do not like those who set. Because it set, this shows that there is a God

14. above it who controls it in accordance with His command." When it was later in the evening,

15. the moon ascended. [Ibrāhīm] watched it outside shining its light. He said, "O mother, this is brighter!

16. This is my Lord!" He was still watching it when it set, meaning it disappeared. He said,

17. "*Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.*"¹⁸ When the sun ascended

Folio 165A

1. and broke forth, [Ibrāhīm] mockingly said, "This is my Lord! This is the greatest!" When it vanished he said,

2. *I am innocent of what you are associating [with God].*¹⁹ [Ibrāhīm entered] Islam²⁰ and was about to utter a revelation.

3. God gave a parable of this in the Qurʾān to his Prophet [Muḥammad].

4. God said: *God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable*

5. *of His light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass, the glass as it were a brilliant star,*

6. *lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east, nor of the west.*²¹

7. God applies this parable to Ibrāhīm, Muḥammad, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and ʿAbd

8. Allāh Abū Muḥammad. God said: *God is the light of the heavens and the earth.*

9. This means: [God] guides the people of the heavens and the earth. His guidance is as if it were a niche,

18. Citing Qurʾan 6:77.

19. Citing Qurʾan 6:78. In the Qurʾan, the verb *associate* refers to placing anything on a level equal with God. Doing so is an act tantamount to polytheism and is the most grievous sin in Islam.

20. I.e., submission (to God).

21. Citing Qurʾan 24:35.

10. and the niche is a small window in the language of the [Abyssinians?]. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib linked [the parable of the niche] to a small window

11. with a lamp in [the niche] and [the lamp in the glass]. ‘Abd Allāh linked [the parable of the niche] to the lamp which is [in]

12. the glass. Muḥammad is the lamp who shines between both of their frames

13. as if he were a brilliant star. This [term *brilliant*] means shining. And [the star] is Jupiter lit from a blessed tree.

14. This means [God’s] appointing prophethood upon Ibrahīm

15. is the blessed tree, meaning he submits to God, meaning the true religion is not

16. of the east, nor of the west, meaning it is not Jews or Christians. Its oil is at the point of

17. shining. Ibrahīm is at the point of speaking by revelation prior to a revelation given to him.

Folio 165B

1. *Though fire scarce touched it: light upon light.*²² [So] what is this [that] God has blessed and

2. exalted Ibrahīm with? It is the light of his prophethood in the light of

3. the prophethood of Muḥammad. If he did know of his prophethood, his light

4. would have lit with the light of the prophets on the day of judgment. When Ibrahīm said that,

5. it did not reach king [Nimrūd], but the saying of Ibrahīm spread and became clear.

6. Isma‘īl b. ‘Asā reported that Iṣḥāq reported Huwayr informed me on the authority of

7. al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās that Āzar used to make idols which

8. his people worshiped.²³ Then he would give them to his children, among them Ibrahīm, and they would sell them. [The people] would sell them. Ibrahīm would take

9. [the idols] and say, “Who would buy what harms and is of no use?”

10. So no one would buy from him. It is said, when it was futile for him, he took them to

11. a river near him. He [cut off?] their heads.²⁴ Then he said to [the idols], “Drink!”

He was mocking

12. his people and mocking their misled beliefs as he mocked them in the matter of the sun

13. and the moon, so that his fault-finding concerning [the idols] spread abroad, and [the people] mocked him concerning [the idols] among his people and the people

14. of his villages. However, that [news] did reach Nimrūd, the king of his people.

Then it became apparent

15. to Ibrahīm that he had to [argue?] with his people about that which they believed.

Isma‘īl reported that

22. Ibid.

23. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

24. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

16. Ishaq reported on the authority of Ibn Kharij—Mujāhid and Muqātil who said
17. [The people] held a yearly feast. They made it large, and they carved the idols for

Folio 166A

1. their houses. And they offered to them the thank offering.²⁵ They placed food and drink between their hands,
2. then they left to their feast. They did not leave anyone behind in
3. their city. The king, men, and boys left. They used to observe [the sky]
4. until they saw the planet Venus. They would say, “Whoever sees it would get the plague.”
5. When they left it was at night. They said to Ibrahīm, “Depart with us.”
6. So he looked at the sky! He clenched his fist. They said, “What is the matter with you?” He said, “I saw
7. Venus and I got the plague.” [It is the first of the lies? and that is Ibrahīm’s] saying. He glanced
8. at the stars and he said, “I am sick! or plague-stricken!” They were watching
9. and fearing that he would be contagious, so they turned their backs and they left him alone. When
10. they left, [Ibrahīm] entered the house of their idols, and he had an ax with him. He said,
11. eat what is between your hands, what has been brought to you! You don’t eat what you have! So he turned
12. against them, hitting them with his right hand. [This is] according to God’s saying: *And by Allah, I will certainly plan against your idols*
13. *after ye go away and turn your backs.*²⁶ It is said he struck [them] with his right hand. It is said he cut off their hands,
14. their feet, and their ears. [This is] according to God’s saying: *So he broke them to pieces, (all)*
15. *but the biggest of them, that they might turn (and address themselves) to it.*²⁷ [Ibrahīm] placed the ax in its hand and he left it alone.
16. It is said when the people returned, they saw what had happened to their god; they tore out their hair, and
17. they rent their clothes. They said, “*Who has done this to our gods?*”²⁸ We know there is

Folio 166B

1. no one who would do this but Ibrahīm. Indeed we have heard him speaking evil about them.” They said,

25. Cf. Abraham 1:10.

26. Citing Qur’an 21:57.

27. Citing Qur’an 21:58.

28. Citing Qur’an 21:59. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

2. "Then bring him before the eyes of the people that they may bear witness²⁹ that he did it." It is said
3. some of them witnessed of the punishment that belonged to [Ibrahīm]. The people made it evident
4. in this manner. It is said [when] that [news] reached the king, he sent for Ibrahīm. And he brought
5. his father and his mother with him. [The king] said to both of them, "What possessed you to hide him [as a]
6. young boy until reaching this maturity. You are of the family of the prophet.³⁰ I [had] trust in
7. you. I had faith in you. I did not fear to [confide in you]. I felt that you [were] the most
8. intelligent of people and the easiest [best?] to destroy
9. my enemies."³¹ Āzar said to him, "On the contrary, we considered the best for you and the people of
10. your kingdom. Indeed, you have certainly committed a great matter [crime] among them to slaughter
11. the children these past forty years.³² When we felt sorry for the destruction, we related the [misfortune?]
12. to you and the people of your kingdom. I [illegible] to you [because of] the order to [slaughter] our child. We said
13. that his enemy and [illegible] his place among him according to the knowledge of his death while he knew him
14. and he was saved from him, but he [freed?] the people of his kingdom from the [country?]. If he wasn't
15. the one he was looking for, then he would have to decide whether he wanted [Ibrahīm's] life and death. Your religion is
16. your enemy. You defeated him and you [illegible]. Who is the most excellent among you

Folio 167A

1. save [besides] the king? Are you greater than he? We have been with you in searching for your enemy
2. these past forty years. [illegible] did not grow in him. Nor did his power against you grow. [illegible]
3. But he harmed your property and the people of your kingdom. I labored to

29. Citing Qur'an 21:61.

30. It is unclear which prophet is meant here, but since Nimrod was also a descendant of Noah, one suspects that the passage refers to one of Abraham's other postdiluvian ancestors, such as Shem or Eber, who are considered prophets in Jewish tradition.

31. In a number of early traditions, Abraham's father is commander of Nimrod's army.

32. Cf. Abraham 1:7-8, 10-11.

4. [cease them?], and he became more harsh against you and them concerning that. He was sought for, and she [Ibrahīm's mother] kept all of those [things?] from us.
5. [illegible] and the excellency of you and your people."
6. The king said, "If you had killed him while he was young, he would not have challenged us, and
7. it would have been a comfort." Āzar said, "Indeed, this opinion did not occur to us. But,
8. tell us, O king, if we had killed him while he was young, would you have stopped
9. the slaughter of the newborns?³³ Or would you have known at the time of killing that he is your enemy
10. who was being searched [for]?" The king said to him, "I would not have known
11. whether he was my enemy or not." Āzar and his wife said, "Then what we did was more merciful and better."
12. The king told them to leave, but he watched them closely. The people were glad of those
13. among their children who were healthy. So they all began to sympathize with Āzar and his wife. They said,
14. "O king, do you not know that any upon the face of the earth [in your opinion?] who loves you or
15. who is greater than you is foolish? There is nothing more proper than your command, nor the excellence of control
16. over them. He will [recompense?] you on everything he has taken from your father. That will fall in

Folio 167B

1. his opinion." They said, "Burn Ibrahīm!" Isma'īl said Ishaq reported
2. on the authority of Ibn Jarīḥ—Mujāhid [who] said: [They said,] "Build Ibrahīm a building." It is said
3. they built a very tall fenced-in enclosure for him. Its wall reached sixty cubits into the heavens and to the foot of a high mountain.
4. The mountain was very difficult, [so] there was no way to climb it. They lined the wall which they had built
5. for the enclosure. Nothing of the [illegible] touched him. The muezzin³⁴ of the king called forth the people, saying, "O people,
6. gather firewood for Ibrahīm's fire." No one failed to appear and gather wood, not male, female, servant,
7. noble, common, stubborn animals, and the gentle animals.
8. Whoever would not come would be cast into that fire. They gathered firewood for forty

33. Ibid.

34. I.e., the page or summoner. In Islam, the term refers to the one who summons the people to prayer.

9. nights, until the women among the people of his kingdom would swear by their god [saying], "Perhaps

10. I will attain unto such and such in regard to gathering firewood for Ibrahīm's fire until the firewood is almost

11. equal to the top of the wall." They barricaded the doors of the enclosure with copper.

12. Isma'īl related that Ishaq reported on the authority of Jūbayr—al-Ḍaḥāl—

13. Muqātil—Barīd b. Abī Ḥabīb and Faḥd b. Ishaq—Abū Allāh b. Abī Sajḥ—

14. Mujāhid, who said: When they said to Ibrahīm,

15. "Are you the one who did this to our gods," Ibrahīm said, "No, the biggest one did

16. this." And it was an untruth. [Ibrahīm] said, "Ask them, if they can speak." It is said: So they turned to themselves and said, "Surely you are among the wrong ones. Did you not

Folio 168A

1. return the ax to the hand of the biggest?" God said: *Then were they confounded with shame; [they said],*

2. "You know well that these [idols] do not speak. How do we ask one who does not speak?" So Ibrahīm revealed [the truth]

3. and he was invested with authority. He said, "Do you worship

4. besides God things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm if you didn't worship it?"

5. "Fie upon you!" This means "Fire upon you!" "And upon the things that ye worship besides God. Have you no sense?"³⁵

6. They said, "We will hasten you to the fire." Thus they said, "Burn him!"³⁶

7. Isma'īl related that Ishaq on the authority of Sa'īd and Muqātil b. Sulaymān said:

8. They said the firewood was upon the mules, and as for the rest of the animals, they (all of them) did not carry a

9. load. They left it to the mules. God stopped their progeny [i.e., they couldn't give birth anymore]. They ignited the firewood,

10. and its heat and flame intensified until it was impossible to get near it.

11. So they constructed a building and they made a catapult, the first one Nimrūd had made.

12. Indeed, Iblīs³⁷ brought [it] forth to them when they were not able to get near the fire. [Iblīs] said,

13. "I will guide you to make the catapult." He brought forth Ibrahīm, and

14. they pulled off his clothes. They fastened his shackles.³⁸ He was placed on the catapult.

35. The italics from fols. 167B, line 15 to 168A, line 5 are citing Qur'an 21:62–67.

36. Citing Qur'an 21:68.

37. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

38. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

15. The heavens, the earth, the mountains, the sun, the moon, the throne,
 16. the clouds, and the wind, and the angels lamented, saying, “O Lord! Ibrahīm is your servant!

17. He is being burned by the fire.³⁹ Allow us to help him.” So the fire spoke and lamented itself [i.e., the fire]:

Folio 168B

1. “O Lord, you made me for the son of Adam, and your servant is being burned by me.” God revealed

2. that “My servant is with Me in a friendly [illegible].” [God said], “If he will call Me, I will answer him.

3. If he asks you for assistance, then help him.” When he was thrown, Jibrīl⁴⁰ came before him between

4. the catapult and the fire.⁴¹ He said to Ibrahīm, “I am Jibrīl. Are you in need of anything?”

5. [Ibrahīm] said, “As far as you are concerned, no! My need belongs to God.” When he was propelled into

6. the fire, Isrāfil⁴² went before him. The fire had power [i.e., could burn] over [only] his shackles.⁴³ God said,

7. “O fire, be cool and safe upon Ibrahīm.”⁴⁴ If He had not guarded with peace,

8. [it would have been cold?]. Jibrīl entered,⁴⁵ and God built from the

9. cold around him a green garden. In the middle, [Ibrahīm] had a carpet from [illegible] paradise. A garment was brought

10. from the clothing of paradise, the garden of Eden.⁴⁶ Isn’t it so that [God] bestowed upon [Ibrahīm] nourishment morning and night?

11. Isrāfil was on his right and Jibrīl on his left⁴⁷ until the king and

12. the people saw the sight. [This] increased the saying concerning [Ibrahīm]. Isma‘il reported that Ishaq said

13. Idrīs b. Wahb b. Munabiḥ said:

14. Ibrahīm stayed in the fire three days. Isma‘il reported the report of

15. Ishaq and Jūbayr on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās [who] said: The

16. mother of Ibrahīm saw a vision. Ibrahīm was sitting in the fire, and a

17. green garden was around him. She said to her husband while in her dream, “Don’t you see how God made Ibrahīm’s claim right?”

39. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

40. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

41. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

42. The name Isrāfil is from Hebrew and means “fire of God.”

43. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

44. Citing Qur’an 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

45. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

46. In both Jewish and Muslim tradition, God sent an angel to deliver a garment from paradise to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

47. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

Folio 169A

1. The fire did not harm him." When she awakened, she informed her husband.
2. Isma'īl reported [that] Iṣḥāq related on the authority of Ibn Dāūd al-Malī—his father—Abū Sa'īd
3. al-Khadarī [who] said: The king saw [that] Ibrahīm was coming out of the fire with a green garment upon him.
4. The king bowed before him. When his secret became clear that he lived, one
5. searched for him. So he ordered him to bring out the great Ibrahīm from the fire. There was no doubt
6. that the fire would burn him. Then he [?] saw a vision that he lived. He knew Ibrahīm as
7. [he] saw him to be. Then it became clear. He approached a tower and ascended it. Then the fire broke forth,
8. and he watched it. So it happened. When he saw Ibrahīm, he could not restrain himself from bowing
9. to him, believing in his vision. Then he sent for [Ibrahīm's] parents to ask for [Ibrahīm] so that [Ibrahīm] would allow them
10. to take him out. They asked for that, and he allowed them. When the door of the enclosure opened,
11. Jibrīl approached, and Ibrahīm after him. And he went on to say, "Who is looking for him
12. in the fire? Its end is here." He said, "Someone else is here." But his place was obscured to them.
13. [Ibrahīm] went out until he went past a [illegible], and he married Sāra⁴⁸ daughter of Qarhar b. Nākhūr according to [that?].
14. And according to what occurred [when] God destroyed the king. His command was to banish [Ibrahīm] from his country. His command [was]
15. to go to the Holy Land.
16. The day he was married, he left for the Holy Land, and he was eighty years old.⁴⁹ Hārūn, his brother, and Lūt,⁵⁰
17. the son of Hārūn, and he is the son of his brother, all went with him.⁵¹ And that is according to the saying of God: *But Lūt believed him:*

Folio 169B

1. *He said: "I will leave home for the sake of my Lord."*⁵² So he departed with Ibrahīm. [Ibrahīm] was married to Sāra,

48. Biblical Sarah.

49. This is at variance with both Genesis 12:4 and Abraham 2:14.

50. These two men are biblical Haran and Lot.

51. This is at variance with Genesis 11:28 and Abraham 2:1, in which Abraham's brother Haran dies before Abraham leaves Haran.

52. Citing Qur'an 29:26.

2. but he would not show her to others. She was among the most beautiful women in the world.

3. Isma'īl related [that] Ishaq reported—Muqātil b. Sulaymān—al-Ḍaḥḥāk—

4. Ibn 'Abbās [who] said: God distributed beauty in ten parts. He put three

5. parts into Ḥawā,⁵³ three parts into Sāra, three parts into Yūsuf,⁵⁴ and one part

6. into the rest of the creation. Sāra was the most beautiful of the people of the earth, and she was the

7. most well endowed of their women, and so forth. So Ibrahīm left with

8. [Sāra], Hārūn, and Lūt. They travelled, the four of them, until they got to Egypt.

9. And a pharaoh from among the first pharaohs ruled over Egypt, and he was an obstinate tyrant. Ṣādūq b. Ṣādūq said:

10. Sāra was in her loveliness and her beauty

11. with all [God] had given her. Sāra did not disobey Ibrahīm in anything. Therefore,

12. God honored her. She was described to pharaoh, so the king sent for Ibrahīm.

13. He said, Who is this woman with you? [Ibrahīm] said, "She is my sister," and this is the third lie.

14. Ibrahīm feared for himself. If he had said, "She is my wife," [pharaoh] would have killed him.

15. He sent for Ibrahīm and told him to make her beautiful for him. Then he sent for her.

16. Ibrahīm talked to Sāra and asked her what she thought "if the king asked [about] me.

17. If you go to him say, 'I am the sister of Ibrahīm,' and God

Folio 170A

1. will protect you from [pharaoh's] evil."⁵⁵ So she stood and got dressed, and she was certain that

2. God would not destroy her. It is said: When Sāra went in unto the pharaoh, he looked

3. at her beauty and loveliness and had never seen anything like her beauty, and he was alone with her.

4. God opened for Ibrahīm the doors, and he separated the wall and dropped

5. the veil between [Ibrahīm] and [Sāra] so that he saw them both. When the king stood up for Sāra, God

6. blinded his eyes, and he withered his hands and feet. God sent

7. the angel in charge of pain to him to strike all of his veins.

8. He was struck like a slaughtered bird. He said, "O woman! Ask

9. your Lord to dispel what is in me and free me from this situation. I will give you half my money.

10. Leave from my country." It is said: She called upon the Lord, and God revealed what was happening to him.

53. Biblical Eve.

54. Biblical Joseph.

55. Abraham could make this promise to Sarah only if God had told him that she would be safe. Cf. Abraham 2:22–25.

11. So he gave her payment and that was Hajār, the mother of Ismaʿīl. Ismaʿīl reported that

12. Iṣḥāq said on the authority of Muqātil b. Sulaymān who said Abū Hurayrah used to say,

13. That is your mother, O community. We are the [captives?]. This means the Arabs.

14. Ismaʿīl reported on the authority of Iṣḥāq—Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq who said he heard it from my report—ʿArwa

15. b. al-Zabīr that the payment [Hajār] was his slave from [Jurham?]. So she [illegible] and she fell down in the presence

16. of the pharaoh of Egypt. Who is this? Abū Hurayra said: That is your mother, O my sons of [illegible].

17. His slave had curly black hair, [beautiful gap-teeth?].

Folio 170B

1. He gave her one thousand sheep [and] one hundred cows

2. with their herdsmen. He also gave her fifty camels and fifty donkeys. It is said: Sāra came

3. to Ibrahīm and said, “I rejoice, for God has favored you!”

EXTRACTS FROM AL-BUKHARI

Second only to the Qurʾan in authority among the Muslims are the *ḥadīth* (singular, *ḥadīth*) or “sayings” attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. The *ḥadīth* were passed down by word of mouth along with their chain of transmitters (*isnād*), and several Arab writers made collections of them, most of which relate to Muslim religious beliefs. Though incomplete, perhaps the largest such collection was made by Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīra ibn Bardizbah Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Juʿfī al-Bukhārī (A.H. 194–256 / A.D. 810–70). He was born in Bukhara near Jed-Samarkande in present-day Uzbekistan and traveled widely from Khurasan and Iran to Egypt, spending time in the Hijāz (western Arabia). He had a remarkable memory and collected *ḥadīth* from a thousand sheikhs over a sixteen-year period. Of the resulting 300,000 traditions, he distinguished between those whose chain of transmission (*isnād*) was verifiable or authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and those that were not. His book, the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, contains some 7,397 *ḥadīth* with full *isnāds* (2,762 if repetitions are omitted) arranged by topic. What makes al-Bukhārī’s writings important to our present study is that, in addition to religious precepts, he includes a section called “The Prophets” (section 55), with information on Abraham and other early prophets. Al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* became one of the foremost collections used by Muslims and as such has been well preserved. However, the first translation into a Western language did not come until 1862, into French. The English version used here is from Muhammad M. Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3rd ed., rev. (Chicago: Publications, 1979), 4:365–66, 368–69. The number at the beginning of each extract designates the *ḥadīth*.

569

Narrated Abū Huraira:

The Prophet said, “On the Day of Resurrection Abraham will meet his father Āzar whose face will be dark and covered with dust. (The Prophet) Abraham will say (to him)—: ‘Didn’t I tell you not to disobey me?’ His father will reply: ‘Today I will not disobey you.’ Abraham will say: ‘O Lord! You promised me not to disgrace me on the Day of Resurrection; and what will be more disgraceful to me than cursing and dishonouring my father?’

Then Allāh will say (to him): ‘I have forbidden Paradise for the disbelievers.’ Then he will be addressed, ‘O Abraham! Look! What is underneath your feet?’ He will look and

there he will see a Dhabḥ (an animal,) blood-stained, which will be caught by the legs and thrown in the (Hell) Fire.”¹

570

Narrated Ibn ‘Abbās:

The Prophet entered the Ka‘ba² and found in it the pictures of (Prophet) Abraham and Mary. On that he said “What is the matter with them (i.e. Quraish)?³ They have already heard that angels do not enter a house in which there are pictures; yet this is the picture of Abraham. And why is he depicted as practising divination by arrows?”⁴

571

Narrated Ibn ‘Abbās:

When the Prophet saw pictures in the Ka‘ba, he did not enter it till he ordered them to be erased. When he saw (the pictures of) Abraham and Ishmael carrying the arrows of divination, he said, “May Allāh curse them (i.e. the Quraish)! By Allāh, neither Abraham nor Ishmael practised divination by arrows.”

578

Narrated Abū Huraira:

Abraham did not tell a lie except on three occasions. Twice for the Sake of Allāh when he said, “I am sick,” and he said, “(I have not done this but) the big idol has done it.” The (third was) that while Abraham and Sārah (his wife) were going (on a journey) they passed by (the territory of) a tyrant. Someone said to the tyrant, “This man (i.e. Abraham) is accompanied by a very charming lady.” So, he sent for Abraham and asked him about Sārah saying, “Who is this lady?” Abraham said, “She is my sister.” Abraham went to Sārah and said, “O Sārah! There are no believers on the surface of the earth except you and I. This man asked me about you and I have told him that you are my sister, so don’t contradict my statement.” The tyrant then called Sārah and when she went to him, he tried to take hold of her with his hand, but (his hand got stiff and) he was confounded. He asked Sārah, “Pray to Allāh for me, and I shall not harm you.” So Sārah asked Allāh to cure him and he got cured. He tried to take hold of her for the second time, but (his hand got as stiff as or stiffer than before and) was more confounded. He again requested Sārah, “Pray to Allāh for me, and I will not harm you.” Sārah asked Allāh again and he

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1. Muslims interpret this to mean that Abraham’s father will be transformed into an animal and thrown into the Fire.
 2. The sacred shrine at Mecca, toward which Muslims throughout the world pray. Muslim tradition indicates that it was first constructed in the days of Adam, then reconstructed by Abraham and his son Ishmael.
 3. The Quraish were Muḥammad’s tribe; they lived in and around the city of Mecca.
 4. For a discussion of arrow-divination among the Arabs, see Hugh W. Nibley, “The Liahona’s Cousins,” *Improvement Era* 64 (February 1961): 87–89, 104, 106, 108–11. See also Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed., (Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1988), 255–63.

became alright. He then called one of his guards (who had brought her) and said, "You have not brought me a human being but have brought me a devil." The tyrant then gave Hājar⁵ as a girl-servant to Sārah. Sārah came back (to Abraham) while he was praying. Abraham, gesturing with his hand, asked, "What has happened?" She replied, "Allāh has spoiled the evil plot of the infidel (or immoral person) and gave me Hājar for service."

579

Narrated Um Sharik:

Allāh's Apostle ordered that the salamander should be killed and said, "It (i.e. the salamander) blew (the fire) on Abraham."⁶

5. Biblical Hagar.

6. The translator adds the following footnote (p. 370): "When Abraham was thrown into the fire, it is said, all the animals tried to put the fire out except the salamander which blew it up." Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-YA‘QUBI

Aḥmad ibn Abī Ya‘qūb ibn Ja‘far ibn Wahb ibn Waḍiḥ al-‘Abbāsī, known as al-Ya‘qūbī (d. A.H. 284/A.D. 897), was a Shī‘a Arab historian and geographer, born in Armenia. His *Ta‘rīkh al-Ya‘qūbī* (History of al-Ya‘qūbī) provides an important contrast to al-Ṭabarī, upon whose monumental work the Arab historiographic tradition mostly relies. Unfortunately, al-Ya‘qūbī rarely mentions his sources, and only two manuscripts are now known of his history. M. Th. Houtsma used one of these manuscripts to create an edited text in 1883. This English translation by Brian M. Hauglid is based on al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta‘rīkh al-Ya‘qūbī* (Beirut: Dār Sadr, A.H. 1379 [A.D. 1960]), 24. We have numbered the paragraphs for reference purposes.

1. Ibrāhīm [Abraham] lived during the time of Nimrūd the tyrant. When [Ibrāhīm] came out of the cave in which he was staying, he looked up into the heavens. He noticed Venus, perceiving it a luminous star. He said, “This is my Lord. Truly, it is high and exalted.” Then the star set. He said, “Verily, my Lord does not set.” He observed the moon as it ascended and said, “This is my Lord.” But it did not take long before the moon set. Then [Ibrāhīm] said, “Unless my Lord guide me, I shall certainly be among those who go astray.” When daylight approached, the sun arose. So he said, “This is my Lord; this is lighter, brighter!” When the sun set he said, “The sun set, but my Lord does not set!”¹ This is just as God related in his report and command.²

2. When [Ibrāhīm] became older, he began to be astonished, seeing his people worshipping idols. He asked, “You worship what you have made?” They said, “Your father taught us this.”³ He said, “Indeed, my father is among those who strayed.” So [Ibrāhīm’s] declaration was made known to his people, and they talked about it. And God sent him forth as a prophet. God sent Jibrīl⁴ to him, and he [the angel] taught him his religion. So [Ibrāhīm] began to speak to his people. “Indeed, I am free from your associating partners to God.”⁵

1. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

2. I.e., in the Qur’an. See Qur’an 6:76–78.

3. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

4. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

5. Citing Qur’an 6:78. In the Qur’an, the verb *associate* refers to placing anything on a level equal with God. Doing so is an act tantamount to polytheism and is the most grievous sin in Islam.

3. News of him reached Nimrūd, so [Nimrūd] sent for him. Thereupon Ibrāhīm began smashing their [Nimrūd's people's] idols and saying, "Defend yourselves to your idols."⁶ So Nimrūd ignited a fire and placed Ibrāhīm on a catapult and propelled him into the fire.⁷ But God told the fire to *be cold and calm upon Ibrāhīm*.⁸ Thus [Ibrāhīm] sat in the midst of the fire, which did not harm him. Nimrūd said, "Whoever adopts a god, let him adopt a god like the God of Ibrāhīm."

6. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

8. Citing Qurʾan 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-ṬABARĪ

The Arab historian Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (A.H. 225–310 / A.D. 840–923), from Amul in Tabaristan in Persia, traveled to Baghdad, Basra, and Kufa as well as Spain, Egypt, and Syria (where Abraham was born, according to Muslim tradition), studying *ʾahādīth* (the sayings and acts of Muḥammad). He was a precocious child who had the Qurʾan memorized by the age of seven and became one of the most productive scholars of Islamic studies. In his younger years he researched Arab and Muslim traditions, and in later years he mostly taught. He dealt with history, *fiqh* (Islamic law), and the recitation and exegesis of the Qurʾan. He covers, in his *Taʾrīkh al-rusūl wa-al-mulūk* (History of the Messengers and the Kings), the history of the world from the early prophets through July A.D. 915, and he includes stories about Abraham mostly gleaned from other Arab writers (like Ibn Ishāq, who relied heavily on Jewish sources). Al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* proved to be the standard work in Arabic historiography and so has been preserved in many copies, not only in its original Arabic, but also in Turkish and Persian translations. It was first translated into Latin in 1554 and into French in 1867. The excerpts here are part of a multivolume English translation that used the Leiden 1879–1901 Arabic critical text as its base: William M. Brinner, trans., *Prophets and Patriarchs* (Albany: SUNY, 1987). The references at the beginning of each entry refer to the page in the critical text, and the numbers at the end refer to the pages in the translation. Each tradition begins with the line of transmission by which al-Ṭabarī received it. For the longer passages, we have numbered the paragraphs for indexing purposes.

204–5

1. According to Hishām b.¹ Muḥammad: Al-Ḍaḥḥāk reportedly reigned for one thousand years after Jam—but God knows better. Settling in the Sawād in a town called Nars² near the Kūfah Road, he ruled over all the earth, displaying tyranny and oppression. He killed excessively and was the first to enact (the punishments of) crucifixion and mutilation. He was also the first to levy tithes and to mint dirhams, and the first to sing and

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. Translator's note: “Nars, on the canal of the same name, which took its name from the Sassanian king Narses who came to the throne in A.D. 292 . . . to the east of al-Kūfah.”

be sung to. It is said that there were two ganglia growing out of his shoulders, which caused pain to him. The pain became so intense for him that he would anoint them with the brains of human beings. For this purpose he killed two men each day³ and anointed his ganglia with their brains. When he did this, the pain would abate.

2. A man of the common people of Babylon rebelled against him; he set up a banner and many people rallied to him. When al-Ḍaḥḥāk learned of this he was alarmed and sent (the following message) to him, “What is the matter? What do you want?” The man replied, “Do you not claim that you are the ruler of the world, and that the world belongs to you?” Al-Ḍaḥḥāk replied, “Certainly.” Whereupon the rebellious man said, “Then let your thirst be for all the world and not only for us, for you kill us alone of all the people.” Al-Ḍaḥḥāk agreed with him about this and ordered that the two men whom he would slay each day should be divided among all the people and should not be taken specifically from one place rather than another. . . .

3. Hishām continued: We have been told that al-Ḍaḥḥāk was Nimrod and that Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful, was born during his era, and that al-Ḍaḥḥāk was Abraham’s master who wanted to burn him. (3–4)

206

The Persians claim that rule will belong only to the clan from which Awshhanj, Jam, and Ṭahmurat came, and that al-Ḍaḥḥāk had been a rebel who had seized the people of the land with witchcraft and deceit and had completely terrified them with the two serpents which had been on his shoulders. They also said that he had built a city in the land of Babylon⁴ and named it Ḥawb, and that he made the Nabateans his companions and courtiers. The people were subjected to every kind of pressure by him, and he slew the young boys.⁵ (6)

213, 215

Others besides Ibn Ishāq have said that Noah . . . prayed that Ham’s color would be changed and that his descendants would be slaves to the children of Shem and Japheth. . . . He also prayed for some of his children’s children—for Cush b. Ham.⁶ (14)

216

From the descendants of Arpachshad came the prophets and apostles and the Best of Mankind⁷ and all the Arabs and the Pharaohs of Egypt.⁸ (14)

3. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

4. According to Genesis 11:8–11, it was Nimrod who began building cities in the land of Babel (Babylon), thus strengthening the identification of Nimrod with the legendary al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

5. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

7. The translator notes that the Muslims denote Muḥammad by the epithet “Best of Mankind.”

8. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27; 3:21–24.

218, 219

According to al-Hārith b. Muḥammad—Muḥammad b. Saʿd—Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Saʿib—his father: . . .

. . . Nimrod was the son of Cush b. Canaan b. Ham b. Noah. He was the lord of Babylon and of Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful. (17, 18)

220

All of them were of Islam⁹ while they lived in Babylon, until Nimrod b. Cush b. Canaan b. Ham b. Noah ruled over them and called on them to worship idols, which they did.¹⁰ Whereas one evening their speech was Syriac, the next morning God had confused their tongues, and thus they became unable to understand each other. (18)

223

It is related by Ḍamrah b. Rabīʿah—Ibn ʿAṭāʾ—his father: Ham begat all those who are black and curly-haired, while Japheth begat all those who are full-faced with small eyes, and Shem begat everyone who is handsome of face with beautiful hair. Noah prayed that the hair of Ham’s descendants would not grow beyond their ears, and that wherever his descendants met the children of Shem, the latter would enslave them. (21)

224–25

[Continuing the account Ḍamrah b. Rabīʿah—Ibn ʿAṭāʾ—his father:]

Terah, the father of Abraham, was born to Nahor. This name was the one Terah’s father had given him, but when Terah became Nimrod’s custodian of the treasury of his gods,¹¹ he named him Āzar. It has been said that Āzar was not the name of Abraham’s father, but was rather the name of an idol; this latter tradition is related on the authority of Mujāhid. It has also been said that the word *āzar* means “crooked” and that he disgraced him with it. This was after twenty-seven years of Nahor’s life had passed. Nahor lived two hundred and forty-eight years in all. Abraham was born to Terah. (22)

226

According to Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sāʿib [regarding Afarīdhūn, who defeated al-Ḍaḥḥāk or Nimrod]:¹² . . . It is said that he was the first to name the food-animals, and the first to concern himself with medicine and with the stars. (23, 24)

252–70

1. There is a disagreement about where he [Abraham]¹³ came from and where he was born. Some say his birthplace was al-Sūs in the province of al-Ahwāz, while others say it was Babylon in the land of the Sawād, while still others say it was in the Sawād but in

9. I.e., submission (to God).

10. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6, 27.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

12. This is our insertion.

13. Ibid.

the region of Kūthā. Others say that his birthplace was in al-Warkā¹⁴ in the region of al-Zawābī on the borders of Kaskar and that after his birth his father took him to where Nimrod lived in the region of Kūthā. Others say that he was born in Ḥarrān but that his father took him to the land of Babylon. Most of the earlier sages have said that Abraham was born during the era of Nimrod b. Cush, while most historians say that Nimrod was an official of al-Azdahāq. . . .

2. According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq: According to what has been said to us—and God knows best—there was an inhabitant of Kūthā named Āzar from a town in the Sawād, in the environs of al-Kūfah. At that time Nimrod the Sinner was the ruler of the East. He was called the Lion, and it is said that his rule encompassed the East and West of the earth, and that his capital was Babylon. His domain and that of his people was in the East before the rule of the Persians. It is said that there were only three kings (in all of history) who ruled over the entire earth and all its people: Nimrod b. Arghu, Dhū al-Qarnayn, and Solomon b. David.

3. One source claims that Nimrod was al-Ḍaḥḥāk himself.

4. Hishām b. Muḥammad said: We have been told—though God knows best—that al-Ḍaḥḥāk was Nimrod, that Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful, was born during his days, and that Nimrod was his master who wanted to burn him.¹⁵

5. According to Mūsā b. Hārūn—ʿAmr b. Ḥammād—Asbāṭ—al-Suddī—Abū Ṣāliḥ and Abū-Mālik—Ibn ʿAbbās and Murrah al-Hamdānī—Ibn Masʿūd and some of the companions of the Prophet: The first king who ruled over all the earth, east and west, was Nimrod b. Canaan b. Cush b. Shem¹⁶ b. Noah. There were four such kings who ruled all the earth: Nimrod, Solomon b. David, Dhū al-Qarnayn,¹⁷ and Nebuchadnezzar—two believers and two infidels.

6. According to Ibn Ishāq—Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Ibn Ishāq: God desired to send Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful, as an argument against his people and as a messenger to His worshippers, since there had been no such messengers between Noah and Abraham¹⁸ except Hūd and Ṣāliḥ.¹⁹ As the time when God desired to do this drew near, the astrologers came to Nimrod and said to him, “Know that we have learned from our lore that a boy will be born in this city of yours who will be called Abraham. He will abandon your religion and break your idols²⁰ in such and such a month of such and such a year.” When the year which the astrologers described to Nimrod began, Nimrod had

14. Biblical Erech, ancient Uruk.

15. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

16. Shem is an error; Cush was the son of Shem’s brother Ham. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

17. “He of the two horns,” a title of Alexander the Great.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:19; Facsimile 2, figure 3. Though Abraham’s other ancestors were idolators (Abraham 1:5–6), the patriarch notes that he was heir to the priesthood from the fathers (Abraham 1:2–3, 8; cf. 1:2; 2:9, 11; Facsimile 2, figure 3; Facsimile 3, figure 1).

19. Hūd and Ṣāliḥ are two pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Qur’an. For a discussion of Hūd as Lehi and of Ṣāliḥ, see William J. Hamblin, “Pre-Islamic Prophets,” in *Mormons and Muslims*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983): 85–104.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

every pregnant woman in his city imprisoned except for Āzar's wife, the mother of Abraham, for he did not know she was pregnant. That was because she was a young maiden and her pregnancy was not very visible. During that month of the year, whenever a woman bore a boy, Nimrod commanded that he be killed. When the mother of Abraham found that she was in labor, she went out by night to a cave near her home and bore Abraham there. She took care of his needs as one does for a newborn, then shut the cave up on him and returned home. Later she went to look at him in the cave to see what he would do and found him alive, sucking his thumb. It is said—and God knows best—that God had placed Abraham's sustenance in it, and that is what came to him from his sucking.

7. According to the story, Āzar asked Abraham's mother what had happened with her pregnancy and she said, "I gave birth to a boy and he died." He believed her and remained silent about it.

8. For Abraham, one day of growing up was like a month, and a month was like a year. Abraham had been in the cave for only fifteen months when he said to his mother, "Take me out that I may look around." So she took him out one evening and he looked about and thought about the creation of the heavens and the earth and said, "Verily the One who created me and sustained me, who fed me and gave me drink, is my Lord—I have no god but Him." He looked out at the sky and saw a star, and said, "This is my Lord." Then he followed it with his eyes, watching it until it disappeared. When it had set he said, "I do not like things that set." Then he saw the moon rising and said, "This is my Lord." And he followed it with his eyes until it disappeared, and when it had set, he said, "If my Lord did not guide me, verily I would be one of those who go astray."

9. When day came upon him and the sun rose, he saw the greatness of the sun and saw that here was something with more light than he had ever seen before. He said, "This is my Lord! This is greater!" And when it, too, set he exclaimed, "O my people! I am free from all the things which ye associate (with Him). I have turned my face toward Him that created the heavens and the earth, as one upright by nature; I am not an idolator."²¹

10. Then Abraham returned to his father Āzar, having seen the right course. He had recognized his Lord and he was free of the religion of his people,²² but he did not tell them that. He informed Āzar that he was his son, and the mother of Abraham agreed that it was true and told Āzar what she had done when Abraham was born. Āzar was happy about that and rejoiced greatly.

11. Āzar made his living by making the idols which his people worshipped,²³ and he employed Abraham to sell them. It is said that Abraham would take them and would call out to people, "Who will buy what will harm him and be of no use to him?" So no one would buy them from him, and when they became unsellable, he would take them

21. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

22. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

23. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

to the river and point their heads at it and say, "Drink!" mocking his people and their erroneous ways. At length his disrespect for them and his mocking of them spread about among his people and the inhabitants of his town, although Nimrod the king did not hear of it. Then, when the time seemed right to Abraham to reveal to his people the error of what they were doing, and to tell them of God's command and of how to pray to Him, he glanced up at the stars, and said, "I feel sick!" God said, "And they turned their backs on him and left him."

12. His saying "I am sick" meant he was attacked by illness. They fled from him when they heard it, but Abraham had only said it to make them go away so that he could do what he wanted with their idols. When they left him he went to the idols whom they worshipped instead of God, and he brought them food. He said, "Will you not eat? What is the matter? Why do you not speak?" reproaching their falsely elevated position and mocking them.

13. On this same subject, scholars other than Ibn Ishāq quoted Mūsā b. Hārūn—ʿAmr b. Ḥammād—Asbāṭ—al-Suddī—Abū Ṣāliḥ and Abū Mālik—Ibn ʿAbbās and Murrah al-Hamdānī—Ibn Masʿūd and some of the companions of the Prophet: Another story about Abraham is that a star arose over Nimrod so bright that it blotted out the light of the sun and the moon. He became very frightened about this and called upon the magicians and soothsayers, the prognosticators and physiognomists, to ask them about it. They said, "A man will arise in your domain whose destiny is to destroy you and your rule." At this time Nimrod lived in Babylon near al-Kūfah. He left his town and moved to another town, forcing all the men to leave with him but leaving the women. He ordered that any male child who was born should be slain, and he slew their children.

14. Then, however, some task in Babylon came up for which he could trust only Āzar, the father of Abraham. He called Āzar and sent him to do the job, saying, "See that you do not have intercourse with your wife." Āzar said to him, "I am too tenacious in my religion for that." But when he entered Babylon he visited his wife and could not control himself; he had intercourse with her and fled with her to a town called Ur between al-Kūfah and al-Baṣrah. He placed her in a cavern there, promising to bring her food and drink and whatever else she needed.

15. As for the king, after a long time went by and nothing happened he decided the astrologers had been wrong and told everyone, "It was the speech of lying magicians; return to your lands!" So they returned. Soon Abraham was born. He grew so fast that each day that passed was like a week, and each week like a month, and each month like a year. Meanwhile the king had forgotten the whole incident. Abraham grew up without ever seeing that there was anyone in creation besides him, his father, and his mother. Abraham's father said to his companions, "I have a son whom I have hidden. Do you fear the king on his account if I bring him out?" They said, "No, bring him!" So he went and brought him forth. When the boy came forth from the cavern, he looked at the beasts and cattle and creatures and began asking his father what they were. So his father told him that "this is a camel," "this is a cow," and "this is a horse," and "this is a sheep." Then Abraham said, "These creatures must have a master."

16. When he came out of the cavern it was after sundown. He raised his head toward the sky and saw a star—it was Jupiter—and he said, “This is my Lord!” But presently it disappeared, and he said, “I do not like things that set.” That is to say, “I do not like a lord who disappears.”

17. According to Ibn ‘Abbās: He went forth from the cavern at the end of the month and for that reason he did not see the moon before he saw the stars. But when it was the end of the night he saw the moon rising and he said, “This is my Lord!” But when it set—he (Ibn ‘Abbās) says “disappeared”—he said, “If my Lord does not guide me, I shall indeed be one of those who go astray.” When dawn came and he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my Lord! This is greater!” But when it too disappeared, God said, “Surrender yourself!” And Abraham replied, “I have already surrendered myself to the Lord of the Worlds!”²⁴ He went to his people and called out to them, saying, “O my people! I am free of all the false partners which you associate with Him. I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one upright by nature”—he (Ibn ‘Abbās) says “one who is sincere.” And he began to preach to his people and to warn them.

18. His father made his living by making idols,²⁵ and he gave them to his sons to sell them. He would give them to Abraham, but when selling them Abraham would call out, “Who will buy that which will harm him and will not benefit him?” His brothers would come back having sold all their idols, while Abraham would come back with all of his still unsold. Then he called upon his father, saying, “O my father! Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, nor can in any way help you?” His father said, “Do you reject my gods, O Abraham? If you do not cease this, I shall surely stone you. Leave me for a long while”—he (Ibn ‘Abbās) said, “forever.”

19. His father told him, “Abraham, we have a festival. If you go to it with us, you would learn to like our religion.” The day of the festival came, and they went to it. Abraham also went along with them, but on the way he threw himself down and said, “I am sick”—he (Ibn ‘Abbās) says, “My foot is in pain.” They sat down by his feet while he was lying down. When they went away he called at the last of them—for two of the people had remained—“By God, I shall deal with your idols after you have gone away and turned your backs.” They heard him say it. Then Abraham went back to the house of the gods, which was in a great hall. Opposite the entrance to the hall was a great idol, and at his side a smaller one, and next to him a smaller one, and so on down to the entrance to the hall. The people had prepared food and placed it before the gods, saying, “When we come back the gods will have blessed our food, and we will eat.” When Abraham saw them with the food in front of them, he said, “Will you not eat?” And when they did not answer him, he said, “What ails you that you do not speak?” Then he attacked them, striking them with his right hand. He took a piece of iron and cut off each idol’s extremities,²⁶ then suspended the axe from the neck of the largest idol and went out. When

24. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

26. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

the people came to get their food and saw their gods in this state, they said, "Who has done this to our gods? It must be some evildoer." Those who had overheard Abraham's earlier remark said, "We heard a youth make mention of them, one called Abraham."

20. Abū Ja'far gives Ibn Ishāq's version of the story as follows: Abraham approached them, "striking with his right hand," as God described it. Then he began breaking them up with an axe.²⁷ When only the largest of the idols remained, he tied the axe to that idol's hand and left them. When his people returned they saw what he had done to their idols, and it frightened and distressed them. They said, "Who has done this to our gods? Surely it must be some evildoer." Then they remembered and said, "We heard a youth make mention of them, one called Abraham." They meant a youth who reviled, dishonored, and mocked them. "We have never heard anyone else say that, and we think he must be the one who did this to them."

21. Word of this reached Nimrod and the nobles of his people, and they said, "Then bring him before the people so that they may testify"—that is, testify about what should be done to him.

22. Some interpreters of the text, among them Qatādah and al-Suddī, give this (phrase) as follows: That they may testify against him, for he was the one who had done it, and they (Nimrod and the nobles) said that they did not want to seize him without proof.

23. Returning to Ibn Ishāq's account: When he was brought in with his people before their king Nimrod, they said, "Are you the one who did this to our gods, O Abraham?" He said, "But it was this one, their chief—that is, the biggest idol—who did it. So question them, if they can speak. He became angry because you worshipped these little ones together with him while he is greater than they are, so he broke them." Then they left him alone and stopped telling each other that he had broken them. They said, "We have wronged him. We think it happened as he said." But then, knowing that the idols really could neither cause harm nor cause benefit nor commit physical violence, they demanded, "You know well that these do not speak"—meaning, they do not utter sounds—"so tell us who did this to them, for they do not strike with the hands. Then we will believe you."

24. Almighty God said, "Then they were utterly confounded [and they said], 'You know well that these do not speak.'" The fact is that they exposed the wrongness of their own belief in these idols when they said these words against Abraham. And when the proof appeared against them in the form of their statement that the idols could not speak, Abraham said, "Then why do you worship things which can bring you no profit at all, nor harm you, instead of worshipping God? Fie on you and all that you worship instead of God! Have you no sense?"

25. His people then argued with him about God, asking him to describe Him and telling him that their gods were better than what he worshipped. He said, "Do you dispute with me concerning God when He has guided me?" He used in his argument God's own words, "Which of the two factions has more right to safety? If you have knowledge, answer the question." He told them proverbs and provided examples to make them see

27. Ibid.

that God had more right to be feared and worshipped than anything else that they worshipped besides Him.

26. According to Abū Jaʿfar: Then Nimrod said to Abraham, “Have you seen this God Whom you worship and to Whose worship you call others, and of Whose power you speak and Whom you glorify above any other? Who is He?” Abraham replied to him, “My Lord, Who gives life and causes death.”²⁸ And Nimrod said, “I, too, give life and cause death.” Abraham asked, “How do you give life and death?” He replied, “I shall take two men—two were condemned to death by my order—and I’ll kill one of them, so I will have caused him to die, and I’ll pardon the other and free him, so I will have made him live.” But upon hearing that, Abraham said to him, “God causes the sun to rise in the East, so can you make it rise in the West?” Knowing that it was as Abraham said, “Thus was . . .”²⁹ [Nimrod] abashed,” and he gave no answer; he knew that he was not able to do that. God said, “Thus was the unbeliever abashed”—that is to say, the proof was against him. Then Nimrod and his people joined against Abraham saying, “Burn him and stand by your gods, if you will be doing.”

27. According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār—Layth b. Abī Sulaym—Mujāhid: I recited this verse before ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar, and he said, “Do you know, O Mujāhid, who it was that advised burning Abraham in fire?”³⁰ I answered, “No.” He said, “One of the nomads of Persia.” I said, “O ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, do the Persians have nomads?” He answered, “Yes, the Kurds are the nomads of Persia, and it was one of them who advised burning Abraham in fire.”

28. According to Yaʿqūb—Ibn ‘Ulayyah—Layth—Mujāhid: Regarding the order “Burn him and stand by your gods,”³¹ it was a man from the nomads of Persia, meaning the Kurds, who gave it.

29. According to al-Qāsim—al-Ḥusayn—Ḥajjāj—Ibn Jurayj—Wahb b. Sulaymān—Shuʿayb al-Jabāʿī: The name of the man who said “burn him”³² was Hayzan, and God caused the earth to swallow him up.³³ He will be tossed around therein until the Day of Resurrection.

30. Returning to Ibn Ishāq’s account: Then Nimrod gave orders, and wood was gathered for him. They gathered hard wood of various kinds of trees, and it is said that whenever a woman from Abraham’s town was determined to get something done, she would vow that if she got her way she would help gather wood for the fire of Abraham in repayment of her debt. When they wanted to cast him into the fire, they brought him and lit every corner of the heap of wood which they had gathered for him, until the fire flared up. And they assembled to push him into it.³⁴ Then heaven and earth and all the

28. Citing Qur’an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

29. The ellipsis points are part of the translation.

30. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

34. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

creatures therein except humans and jinns³⁵ shouted to God, “Our Lord! Abraham, the only one on Your earth who worships you, is being burned in fire for Your sake. Permit us to help him!” It is said—and God knows best—that when they said that, God answered, “If he should ask for help from any of you, then you may help him, for I have given permission for that. But if he calls on no one but Me, I am his Friend; leave it between Me and him. I will protect him.” When they cast Abraham into the fire, God said, “O fire! Be coolness and peace for Abraham,” and the fire did as God ordered.

31. According to Mūsā b. Hārūn—ʿAmr b. Ḥammād—Asbāṭ—al-Suddī: They said, “Imprison him in a building and cast him into Hell.” They imprisoned him in a house and went to gather wood for him. The job became so all-important that if a woman became ill, she would say, “If God heals me, I will gather wood for Abraham.” When they had gathered it for him, and had got so much that a bird passing over it would have been burned by the force of its heat, they brought Abraham and set him on top of the pyre. Then Abraham raised his head to heaven,³⁶ and heaven and earth and the mountains and the angels all said, “Our Lord, Abraham is burning for Your sake.” And He said, “I am most knowledgeable about him. If he calls on you, help him.” When he raised his head to heaven, Abraham said, “O God! You are alone in heaven and I am alone on earth—there is no one besides me who worships You. God is sufficient for me, and how goodly is He in Whom I trust.” When they pushed Abraham into the fire,³⁷ God called out to it saying, “O fire! Be coolness and peace for Abraham,” and it was Gabriel who called out.³⁸

32. Ibn ʿAbbās said: “If its cold had not been followed by peace, Abraham would have died of the cold. Every fire on earth that day went out, thinking that it was the one that was meant.”

33. When the fire was extinguished, they looked at Abraham and saw that there was another man with him, with Abraham’s head in his lap. He was wiping the sweat from his face. It is mentioned that that man was the angel of shade.³⁹ God himself had sent down fire to mankind, which had benefitted from it (in general). They brought forth Abraham and took him to the king, though he had never previously come before him.

34. Returning to the story according to Ibn Ishāq: God sent the angel of shade in the form of Abraham and he sat at his side in that form, comforting him. For days Nimrod continued to believe that the fire had consumed Abraham and had finished him. Then one day he rode past it while it was burning all the wood that had been gathered for it, and he looked at it and saw Abraham sitting in it with a man resembling him at his side. Nimrod returned from that ride and said to his people, “I have seen Abraham alive in the fire, but perhaps it was only his image that appeared to me. Build me a tall structure from which I may look down upon the fire so that I can be sure.” So they built him a tall

35. Jinn are spirit beings, created from fire (unlike man, who is created from the earth). They can be good but are mostly mischievous or evil. They will also be judged at the last day.

36. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

37. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

38. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

39. Ibid.

structure from which he looked down into the fire. He saw Abraham sitting in it and saw the angel sitting by his side⁴⁰ in a form similar to his. Nimrod called out to him, saying, "O Abraham! Great is your God Whose might and power even allow Him to prevent what I see from harming you. Will you be able to come out of it?" Abraham answered, "Yes!" Nimrod said, "Are you afraid that if you remain in it, it will harm you?" Abraham answered, "No." Then Nimrod said, "Arise, then, and come out of it!" So Abraham got up and walked through the fire until he had come out of it. When he came out to him, Nimrod said, "O Abraham! Who was the man whom I saw with you, like you in appearance, sitting at your side?" Abraham said, "That was the angel of shade⁴¹ whom my Lord sent to me to be with me in the fire, to comfort me. For me He made the fire coolness and peace." Then Nimrod said, "O Abraham! I shall offer a sacrifice to your God because of His glory and power which I have seen, and because of what He did for you when you refused to worship or ascribe unity to any but Him. I shall offer up to Him four thousand cattle." Thereupon Abraham said to him, "God will not accept anything from you as long as you keep any vestige of this old religion of yours. You must leave it for my religion." Nimrod answered, "O Abraham! I cannot abandon my kingship, but I will slaughter the cattle for Him." And he slaughtered them. Then he left Abraham alone, and God held him back from him.

35. According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Jarīr—Mughīrah—al-Ḥārith—Abū Zur‘ah—Abū Hurayrah: The best thing he said to Abraham was when he lifted up the cover from him when he was in the fire alone, his brow covered with sweat. And he said, "How excellent is the Lord, your Lord, O Abraham!"

36. According to al-Qāsim—al-Ḥusayn—Mu‘tamir b. Sulaymān al-Taymī—some of his [Muḥammad’s]⁴² companions: Gabriel came down to Abraham while he was being tied up and shackled to be thrown into the fire,⁴³ and he said, "O Abraham! Do you need anything?" Abraham replied, "From you, no!"

37. According to Aḥmad b. al-Miqdām—al-Mu‘tamir—his father—Qatādah—Abū Sulaymān: The fire burned nothing on Abraham except his fetters.

38. Abū Ja‘far said the account returns to that of Ibn Ishāq.

39. Some of Abraham’s people became his followers when they saw what God did for him, though they were still afraid of Nimrod and of their community. Lot, the son of his brother, believed in him. He was Lot b. Haran b. Terah. Haran was Abraham’s brother, and they had a third brother who was called Nahor b. Terah. Haran was the father of Lot, and Nahor was the father of Bethuel. Bethuel was the father of Laban. Rebecca, Bethuel’s daughter, was the wife of Isaac b. Abraham and the mother of Jacob. Jacob’s wives Leah and Rachel were both daughters of Laban. Sarah, the daughter of Abraham’s paternal uncle, believed in him. Her father was Haran the Elder, Abraham’s paternal uncle. She had a sister named Milcah, who was Nahor’s wife.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Our insertion.

43. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figures 1–3.

40. Some claim that Sarah was the daughter of the king of Ḥarrān.

41. According to Mūsā b. Hārūn—ʿAmr b. Ḥammād—Asbāṭ—al-Suddī: Abraham and Lot set out for Syria. On the way Abraham met Sarah, who was the daughter of the king of Ḥarrān. She had criticized her people about their religion, so he married her, since he would thus be able to have a believing wife without having to convert her. Abraham called on his father Āzar to join his religion, saying to him, “O my father! Why do you worship that which cannot hear nor see, and which you do not need at all?”⁴⁴ His father, however, refused to respond to his call,⁴⁵ whereupon Abraham and his companions who followed his command⁴⁶ decided to leave their people. They said, “We are free from you and from those things other than God which you worship. We disbelieve in you, O you [idols] who are worshipped beside God! And eternal enmity and hatred have arisen between us, O worshippers [of them], until you believe in God alone!”⁴⁷

42. Then Abraham went forth, a fugitive for the sake of his Lord, and Lot went with him. Abraham married Sarah, the daughter of his paternal uncle, and took her out with him when he fled for the sake of being able to practice his religion and worship his Lord in safety. He settled in Ḥarrān and stayed as long as God willed him to stay. Then he left as a fugitive and traveled to Egypt, which was then under the rule of one of the earliest Pharaohs.⁴⁸

43. It is said that Sarah was one of the best human beings that ever existed. She would not disobey Abraham in any way, for which God honored her. When her goodness and beauty were described to Pharaoh, he sent a message to Abraham asking, “Who is this woman who is with you?” He replied, “She is my sister.” He feared that if Pharaoh learned that Sarah was his wife, he would kill him to possess her. Pharaoh said to Abraham, “Adorn her and send her to me so that I may look at her.” Abraham went back to Sarah and ordered her to prepare herself, then sent her to Pharaoh. She went in and approached him. When she sat next to him, he reached out to her with his hand, but his arm suddenly became stiff all the way up to his chest. When he saw that, he looked at her with awe and said, “Pray to God to release me! By God, I shall not cast suspicion on you. I shall indeed be good to you.” So she said, “My God, if he is being truthful, release his hand.” And God released his hand and he sent her back to Abraham. Pharaoh also gave her Hagar, a Coptic⁴⁹ slave-girl of his.

44. According to Abū Kurayb—Abū Usāmah—Hishām—Muḥammad—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of God [the prophet Muḥammad]:⁵⁰ Abraham told only three lies in his life. Two of them were about God—his saying “I feel sick” and his saying “But this,

44. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

45. Cf. Abraham 2:5.

46. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

47. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

48. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

49. The term *Coptic* means “Egyptian” and, in fact, *Copt* derives from the same Egyptian name for the land as the Greek form *Egypt*. Today, the terms *Copt* and *Coptic* refer to the Christian church of Egypt.

50. Our insertion.

their chief, is the one who did it." While he was traveling through the land of a certain tyrant,⁵¹ he stopped at a place, and a man went to the tyrant, saying: "There is in your land"—or "There is here—a man with a wife who is one of the most beautiful of mankind." So the tyrant sent for Abraham, and when he came, he asked him, "What [relation] is this woman to you?" Abraham replied, "She is my sister." The tyrant said, "Go and send her to me." Abraham went back to Sarah and said, "This tyrant asked me about you, and I told him that you are my sister. So do not give me the lie when you see him. You are my sister in God, for in all this land there are no Muslims⁵² except ourselves."

45. Abraham took her to the tyrant and stood up to pray. When she came into the tyrant's presence, he bent forward to touch her, but was suddenly seized by a powerful paralysis. He said, "Pray to God and I will not harm you." So she prayed for him, and he was set free. Then he reached out for her again, and again, he was seized by the paralysis. And he said, "Pray to God and I will not harm you." So she prayed for him and he was released. Then he did the same thing yet again, and again he was seized. And he asked Sarah to pray for him and was released. He called the lowest of his chamberlains and said, "You did not bring me a human being, you brought me a devil. Take her away and give Hagar to her." She was taken out and given Hagar, and she went away with her. When Abraham saw her coming back, he interrupted his prayer and said, "What is the matter?" She answered, "God has protected me from the unbelieving libertine and has given me Hagar as a servant."

46. According to Muḥammad b. Sīrīn: When Abū Hurayrah related this account, he would say, "This is your mother, O Arabs!"⁵³

47. According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī al-Zinād—his father—Abd al-Raḥmān al-Aʿraj—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of God: Abraham said only three things that were not true. He said, "I am sick," when there was no sickness in him; he said, "But this, their chief, is the one who did it, so question them if they can speak"; and when Pharaoh asked him about Sarah, "Who is this woman with you?" he answered, "My sister." Abraham never said anything untrue except these things.

48. According to Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā al-Umawī—his father—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Abū al-Zinād—Abd al-Raḥmān al-Aʿraj—Abū Hurayrah: The Messenger of God said, "Abraham never lied except about three things." Then he mentioned the same.

49. According to Abū Kurayb—Abū Usāmah—Hishām—Muḥammad—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of God: Abraham lied only three times, twice about God—his saying, "I feel sick";⁵⁴ his saying, "But this, their chief, is the one who did it";⁵⁵ and his saying about Sarah, "She is my sister."

51. The two tyrants to whom Abraham said that Sarah was his sister were the king of Egypt (Genesis 12:14–20) and the Philistine king Abimelech (Genesis 20:1–18).

52. I.e., those who submit (to God).

53. The translator's note indicates that the original reads "O sons of the water of heaven" instead of "Arabs."

54. Citing Qurʾan 37:89.

55. Citing Qurʾan 21:63.

50. According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Jarīr—Mughīrah—al-Musayyib b. Rāfiʿ—Abū Hurayrah: Abraham told only three lies—his saying, “I feel sick”; his saying, “But this, their chief, is the one who did it,” but this second lie was only by way of admonition; and his saying, “She is my sister,” when the king asked him about his wife Sarah.

51. According to Yaʿqūb—Ibn ʿUlayyah—Ayyūb—Muḥammad: Abraham told only three lies, two about God and one about himself. The first two were his saying, “I feel sick,” and his saying, “But this, their chief, is the one who did it”; the other was his tale about Sarah. And Muḥammad related the story of her and the king. (48–65)

316–17

[Regarding the commands with which Abraham was tested:]

1. Others have said that the commands were six tests: the star, the moon, the sun,⁵⁶ the fire,⁵⁷ emigration,⁵⁸ and circumcision, and that Abraham was tested with all of them and remained steadfast in faith through all of them.

2. According to Yaʿqūb b. Ibrāhīm—Ibn ʿUlayyah—Abū Rajāʾ: I asked al-Ḥasan about the quote, “And when his Lord tried Abraham with commands and he fulfilled them.” Al-Ḥasan said, “He tested him with the star and was satisfied with him; He tested him with the moon and was satisfied with him; He tested him with the sun and was satisfied with him;⁵⁹ He tested him with fire⁶⁰ and was satisfied with him; He tested him with emigration; and He tested him with circumcision.”

3. According to Bishr—Yazīd b. Zurayʿ—Saʿīd—Qatādah—al-Ḥasan: When God tested Abraham with a command, he was steadfast in obeying it. He tested him with the star, the sun, and the moon, and he did well with those and knew that his Lord is eternal and He will not cease. Then he turned his face to the One Who created the heavens and the earth,⁶¹ as one upright by nature; he was not one of those who attributed partners to God. Then He tested him with emigration, and he left his land and took his people to Syria, journeying to God. Before the emigration He tested him with fire and he was steadfast, and He tested him with the sacrifice of his son and with circumcision, and he was steadfast.

4. According to al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā—ʿAbd al-Razzāq—Maʿmar—someone—al-Ḥasan: His word, “And when his Lord tried Abraham with commands,” means He tested him with the star, the sun, and the moon.⁶²

5. According to Ibn Bashshār—Salm b. Qutaybah—Abū Hilāl—al-Ḥasan: The quote “And when his Lord tried Abraham with commands,” means He tested him with the star, the sun, and the moon,⁶³ and found him steadfast. (103–4)

56. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

57. This refers to the sacrificial fire. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

58. See Genesis 12:1–5. Emigration is particularly significant for Muslims because Muḥammad, too, had to flee his hometown of Mecca and go to Medina in A.D. 622, in what has come to be known as the *Hijrah*, “emigration.” Indeed, the Muslim calendar is based on this event, hence A.H., “after *Hijrah*.”

59. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

60. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

61. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

318–24

1. Let us now return to the account of the enemy of God and of Abraham, who refused to believe in what Abraham had brought from God and who rejected Abraham's counsel out of ignorance and error about God's indulgences with him.

2. Nimrod b. Cush b. Canaan b. Ham b. Noah, and what happened to him in this world when he rebelled against his Lord, even though God was forbearing with him and did not make haste to punish him for his unbelief in Him and for his attempt to burn His friend Abraham⁶⁴ for calling upon him (Nimrod) to believe only in God and to abandon his gods and idols. Nimrod's arrogance and rebelliousness against his Lord went on for a long time—some say for four hundred years—in spite of God's forbearance with him. The proofs of Himself which God advanced to Nimrod and the examples which He showed him only made Nimrod persist in his transgression. As some have mentioned, God punished him in this world. This punishment, which extended over a span of time as long as that during which God had been forbearing with him, was carried out by means of the weakest of His creatures—a gnat to which God gave dominion over Nimrod.

3. Accounts which have reached us about him concerning what I have mentioned about his ignorance and the vengeance which God set in motion against him, according to al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā—ʿAbd al-Razzāq—Maʿmar—Zayd b. Aslam: The first tyrant on earth was Nimrod. People used to go to him seeking provisions of food. When they came to him he would ask them, "Who is your lord?" They would say, "You." When Abraham came to him, he asked him, "Who is your lord?" Abraham answered, "My Lord is He Who gives life and causes death."⁶⁵ Nimrod told him, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "God brings the sun from the East; so cause it to rise in the West." "Thus was the disbeliever abashed."⁶⁶ So he sent Abraham away without food.

4. Abraham went back to his family. On the way he passed a dust-colored sand dune and said to himself, "Let me take some of this and bring it to my family, to make them feel better when I come to them." So he took some of it to bring to his family. He put his baggage down and slept. His wife arose, went to his baggage and opened it, and found there the best food anyone had ever seen. So she prepared some of it and presented it to him. To his knowledge the family had no food, so he asked, "From where did this come?" She answered, "From the food which you brought." So he knew that God had supplied it to him, and he praised God.

5. Then God sent an angel to the tyrant, saying, "Believe in Me and I will leave you in your realm." Nimrod said, "Is there any lord besides me?" The angel came a second time and said the same, and again Nimrod refused. And he came a third time, and yet again Nimrod refused. So the angel said to him, "Gather your assembly in three days." The tyrant gathered his assembly, and God gave a command to the angel and he unleashed upon them a swarm of gnats. The sun was blotted out by their numbers. God

64. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

65. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

66. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

sent the gnats against them, and they ate their flesh and drank their blood, and nothing but their bones was left.

6. The king was as before, however; none of that befell him. But God sent to him a single gnat which entered his nostril and went on beating the inside of his head with hammers for four hundred years. The most merciful to him of his friends was he who bunched up his hands and beat Nimrod's head with them. He had been a tyrant for four hundred years and God punished him for four hundred years—just as long as he had reigned—and then He caused him to die. He was the one who built a tower to heaven, only to have God strike at its foundations—it was about this that God said, "So God struck at the foundations of their building."⁶⁷

7. According to Mūsā b. Hārūn—ʿAmr b. Ḥammad—Asbāṭ—al-Suddī—Abū Mālik and Abū Sālih—Ibn ʿAbbās and—Murrah—Ibn Masʿūd and—some of the companions of the Prophet [Muḥammad]:⁶⁸ The one who argued with Abraham about his Lord gave orders that Abraham be sent out of the city, and he was sent out. He met Lot, the son of his brother, at the gate and called upon him, and he believed in him. Abraham said, "I am a fugitive unto my Lord."⁶⁹

8. Nimrod had vowed to seek out Abraham's God. He took four eagle fledgelings and nurtured them on meat and wine so that they grew up tough and strong. Then he tied them to a chest and sat in that chest. He suspended a piece of meat over them, and they flew up trying to reach it. When they had risen high in the sky, Nimrod looked down and beheld the earth. He saw the mountains crawling below like creeping ants. When they had risen still higher he looked down again and saw the earth with a sea surrounding it, as though it were a sphere in water. After climbing still higher for a long time, he came into a region of darkness and could not see what was above him, nor what was below him. He became frightened and threw the meat down, and the eagles followed it, darting downwards. When the mountains saw them coming near, darting down, and heard their noise, they became afraid and almost moved from their places, but did not do so. As God says, "Verily they have plotted their plot, and their plot is with God, even if their plot were one whereby the mountains should be moved."⁷⁰ The reading of Ibn Masʿūd has it, "though their plot were almost one." They took off from Jerusalem and they fell down in the Mountain of Smoke.

9. When Nimrod saw that this method would accomplish nothing, he began building the tower. He built it taller and taller until, when it reached heaven, he went up to the top to look, in his pride, at the God of Abraham. Then he voided excrement though he had not done so. God seized his building by its foundations and the roof fell down upon them, "and doom came upon them whence they knew not"⁷¹—from their place of safety.

67. Citing Qur'an 16:26, in reference to the Tower of Babel. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

68. Our insertion.

69. Citing Qur'an 29:26.

70. Citing Qur'an 14:46.

71. Citing Qur'an 16:26.

And He took them from the foundations of the building, and it was demolished.⁷² Then it fell, and on that day the languages of mankind became confused from fright, and mankind came to speak seventy-three languages. Before that the only language had been Syriac. It was thus called Babel.

10. According to Ibn Wakī—Abū Dawūd al-Ḥafarī—Ya‘qūb—Ḥafṣ b. Ḥumayd or Ja‘far—Sa‘īd b. Jubayr: “Even if their plot were one whereby the mountains should be moved.”⁷³ Nimrod, master of the eagles, ordered a chest brought. He was placed in it, and placed another man in it with him. Then he commanded the eagles and they carried them aloft. When they had risen to a great height, Nimrod asked his companion, “What do you see?” He answered, “I see the water and the island”—meaning the world. After they had climbed higher, he again asked his companion, “What do you see?” He answered, “We are only growing farther from heaven.” And Nimrod said, “Descend!”

11. Someone else has said: A voice proclaimed, “O tyrant, where do you want to go?” The mountains heard the rustling of the eagles and thought it was something from heaven, and would have moved, for that is His Word, “Even if their plot were one whereby the mountains should be moved.”⁷⁴

12. According to al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad—Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Adī—Shu‘bah—Abū Ishāq—‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Dāniyal—‘Alī [nephew of the prophet Muḥammad]:⁷⁵ Regarding the verse “even if their plot were one whereby the mountains should be moved,”⁷⁶ the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord took two small eagles and raised them until they became tough, strong, and mature. Then he tied a foot of each one of them to a chest by a string. He starved them, and sat in the chest with another man. Then he raised a staff in the chest, with meat at its top end, and the eagles ascended. Nimrod began saying to his companion, “Look! What do you see?” He described what he saw, finally saying, “I see the world as though it were insects.” Then he said “Aim!” And he aimed it and they descended. And this is His word, “even if their plot were one whereby the mountains should be moved.” Abū Ishāq said: Thus in the reading of ‘Abd-allāh, it is, “Though their plot were almost. . . .”⁷⁷

13. This is what is mentioned of the story of Nimrod b. Cush b. Canaan.

14. Some say that this Nimrod b. Cush b. Canaan was the king of the entire earth, east and west. This is a statement which scholars familiar with the biographies of kings and with the accounts of the past reject. This is because they accept the fact that Abraham was born during the era of al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Andarmāsb, (concerning whom we have given some accounts above), and that at that time this al-Ḍaḥḥāk was the king of all the earth. One of those who knew about the era of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, who was uncertain about the extent

72. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

73. Citing Qur’an 14:46.

74. Ibid.

75. Bracketed material is our clarification.

76. Citing Qur’an 14:46.

77. The ellipsis points are in the translation.

of Nimrod's power, said that he did not know the truth of the matter even though certain accounts had been related to him on the subject. These accounts said that there were four kings who ruled the whole world, two unbelievers and two believers. The unbelievers were Nimrod and Nechuchadnezzar, while the believers were Solomon b. David and Alexander. Those chroniclers who speak of the matter say that it was al-Ḍaḥḥāk who was king of the earth, east and west, during Abraham's time, and that Nimrod and al-Ḍaḥḥāk were the same person. Scholars expert in the accounts of the forebears and in knowledge of the affairs of the peoples of ancient times have a different view, because according to them it is well known that Nimrod was of Nabatean origin, whereas al-Ḍaḥḥāk was of Persian origin. (105–9)

325–26

1. We will now return to the story of the events which took place during Abraham's days, including the story of Lot b. Haran b. Terah, son of Abraham's brother, and his people—the people of Sodom. It is said that Lot traveled from the land of Babylon with his paternal uncle Abraham, the Friend of the Merciful, believing in him and following his religion. They went to Syria as fugitives, and with them went Sarah bt.⁷⁸ Nahor, who some say was Sarah bt. Hanāl bt. Nahor. It is said that Abraham's father Terah went with them, still opposing Abraham's religion and remaining an unbeliever.⁷⁹ When they reached Ḥarrān Terah died, still an unbeliever. Abraham, Lot, and Sarah went to Syria and then to Egypt, which was then ruled by a Pharaoh. It is mentioned that this Pharaoh was Sinān b. ʿAlwān b. ʿUbayd b. ʿUwayj b. ʿImlāq b. Lud b. Shem b. Noah.⁸⁰ It is also said that he was a brother of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, who had appointed him governor of Egypt. I have already given some of the story of what happened between him and Abraham above.

2. After this, Abraham, Lot, and Sarah went back to Syria. It is said that Abraham settled in Palestine and settled his nephew Lot in Jordan, and that God sent Lot to the people of Sodom. (111–12)

346–47

1. According to al-Ḥārith—Muḥammad b. Saʿd—Hishām b. Muḥammad—his father: The river of Kūthā was dug by Karītā, Abraham's grandfather on his mother's side. His father was in charge of King Nimrod's idols.⁸¹ Abraham was born in Hurmuzjird, then moved to Kūthā in the land of Babylon. When Abraham grew up he rejected his people's beliefs and called upon them to worship God. This reached King Nimrod, who imprisoned him for seven years. Then he built for Abraham an enclosure of plaster, and kindled thick firewood therein, and threw Abraham into it.⁸² Abraham said, "God suffices me; how excellent is He in Whom I trust." And he left the fire safe and unurt.

78. Abbreviation for *bint*, meaning "daughter of."

79. Cf. Abraham 2:5.

80. Contrast this with Abraham 1:21–27.

81. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

82. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

2. According to al-Ḥārith—Muḥammad b. Saʿd—Hishām b. Muḥammad—his father—Abū Ṣāliḥ—Ibn ʿAbbās: When Abraham fled from Kūthā and came out of the fire,⁸³ his language was Syriac. But when he crossed the Euphrates from Ḥarrān, God changed his language and it was called Hebrew (*ʿIbrānī*) because he had crossed (*ʿabara*) the Euphrates.⁸⁴ Nimrod sent men to look for him, telling them, “If you find anyone who speaks Syriac, do not leave him, but bring him to me.” They met Abraham, but left him because he spoke Hebrew and they did not understand his language.

3. According to al-Ḥārith—Ibn Saʿd—Hishām—his father: Abraham migrated from Babylon to Syria, and Sarah came to him and offered herself to him, so he married her and took her with him. At that time he was thirty-seven years old, and he came to Ḥarrān and stayed there for a while. Then he came to Jordan and stayed there for a while. Then he went to Egypt and stayed there for a while; then went back to Syria and settled in the land of Beersheba between ʿIliyā⁸⁵ and Palestine. (128)

350

It is said that the leaves which God revealed to Abraham were ten in number. I heard this from Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Wahb—his paternal uncle ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb—al-Māḍī b. Muḥammad—Abū Sulaymān—al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad—Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī—Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī: I asked, “O Messenger of God! How many books did God reveal?” He said, “One hundred and four books. To Adam He revealed ten leaves, to Seth fifty leaves, and to Enoch thirty leaves. To Abraham he revealed ten leaves⁸⁶ and also the Torah,⁸⁷ the Injīl,⁸⁸ the Zabūr,⁸⁹ and the Furqān.”⁹⁰ I said, “O Messenger of God! What were the leaves of Abraham?” He answered, “They were all proverbs, such as, ‘O dominated, afflicted, and deceived king! I did not send you to collect all the world, one part to another.’” (130)

83. I.e., Ur, the sacrificial fire. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

84. The Hebrew word for *Hebrew* is cognate to the Arabic term given here and derives from a verb root meaning “to cross,” indicating that Abraham crossed the Euphrates to find a new home.

85. ʿIliyā probably refers to Jerusalem, which Hadrian renamed Aelia Capitolina in the first part of the second century A.D.

86. The Arabic term refers to written records. For records possessed by Abraham, see Abraham 1:28, 31.

87. The Torah or “law” denotes the five books attributed to Moses, i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy.

88. The term *Injīl* is from Greek *euangelion*, “good news” or “gospel,” and denotes the New Testament.

89. The Arabic name for the biblical book of Psalms.

90. An Arabic word meaning “the proof,” a title given to the Qurʾan.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-MASʿUDI

Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusain al-Masʿūdī (d. A.H. 345/A.D. 956) of Baghdad, well traveled and well educated, possessed an immense intellectual curiosity. He was a prolific writer who dealt with a wide variety of historical and geographical topics. He was acquainted with the works of several Christian writers and may have personally known al-Ṭabarī. He also refers to Plato, Aristotle, and Ptolemy in his works. He was strongly sympathetic to Imāmī Shīʿism; therefore, his works were somewhat ignored, and most have not survived. Here, we draw from two of his published works. The first is the *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawāhir*, written in A.H. 332/A.D. 943 and revised twice; al-Masʿūdī owes his reputation to this work. The first part of this work covers sacred history before Muḥammad. The text of the original through the first version has survived well, and in 1841 Aloys Sprenger made the first English translation, which we use here: Aloys Sprenger, trans., *El Masʿūdī's Historical Encyclopædia, Entitled "Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems"* (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1841), 1:80–86. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs. Sprenger used diacritics, but we have removed them since they do not fit any current style. The second work, *Akhbār al-zamān* (The News of the Ages), was probably al-Masʿūdī's largest, but information on it is scarce, other than that it apparently contained the same, but more detailed, information as that in the *Murūj*. Brian M. Hauglid translated the extracts from this second work using al-Masʿūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān* (Beirut: n.p., A.H. 1386 [A.D. 1966]), 103.

Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems

Chapter 3

[Speaking of Nahor:]

1. He lived one hundred and forty-six years and was succeeded by his son Tarah;¹ this is the name for Azar, the father of Ibrahim.² In his days Nimrud Ben Kanʿan³ rose. Under

1. Biblical Terah.

2. Biblical Abraham.

3. I.e., "Nimrod, son of Canaan." According to Genesis 10:8, Nimrod was the son of Cush, not Canaan. Note that Cush and Canaan are both sons of Ham and that the Egyptians descend from Mizraim, another of his sons (Genesis 10:6). Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

en-Nimrud⁴ the practice of worshipping fire and light⁵ came first in use, and he introduced certain (holy) orders in their cultus. There were great troubles and wars in this age in the world. New empires and provinces were formed in the east and west. It was at this time when the stars and their predictions began to be an object of study. The heavens were divided into regions, and astronomical instruments were invented. Man began to understand the meaning of all these things. The astrologers observed the aspect of the heaven for the coming year, and its prediction, and told en-Nimrud that a child would be born, who would expose the folly of their dreams, and do away with their worship. En-Nimrud ordered the child to be killed;⁶ but Ibrahim was concealed. Tarah, who is the same person as Azer,⁷ died at the age of two hundred and sixty years.

Chapter 4

1. When Ibrahim was grown up, he went out from the cavern where he had been concealed, contemplated the phenomena of nature, and reflected on their meaning. Looking at the planet Venus, and observing how it rose, he said: "This is my Lord!" When the moon rose, and he saw that it was much brighter, he exclaimed: "*This* is my Lord!" But when the sun displayed its splendour, he cried out full of astonishment, "*This* is my Lord!"⁸ The commentators do not agree in the meaning of the words of Ibrahim "This is my Lord." Some believe this to be related by the way of induction and parable; whilst others are of [the]⁹ opinion that it happened before he had come to the knowledge of truth, when he was still striving. Gabriel came now to him, and taught him his religion, and God chose him as his prophet and friend. (I have to observe against this explanation that) Ibrahim had received the strength of God; and he who is strengthened by God will be kept pure from sin and fall, and from any worship besides the One the Eternal.¹⁰

2. Ibrahim blamed his people for their idolatry.¹¹ When they were annoyed by the disdain with which Ibrahim scorned their gods, and which had attracted public notice, en-Nimrud threw him into the fire:¹² but God converted the fire into coolness, and he was preserved.¹³ The fire did not flame anywhere on earth on that day.

3. After Ibrahim had passed the eighty-sixth or ninetieth year of his age, Isma'il was born to him by Hajir¹⁴ who was a slave-woman to Sarah. Sarah was the first person who

4. The name given here means, literally, "the Nimrod," the prefix *en-* being the definite article.

5. The translator's note reads: "the Moon was considered as the concentration of light, whilst the Sun is the centre of fire. (Tradition of Wahb Ben Monabbih.)" But according to other accounts cited in this collection, Nimrod had a vision of fire that caused him to establish the worship of fire.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

7. This name is spelled two different ways in this text; we do not know if the different spellings are intentional or not.

8. Citing Qur'an 6:76–78.

9. Our insertion.

10. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

12. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 11–12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

13. Citing Qur'an 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

14. Biblical Ishmael and Hagar.

believed on Ibrahim. She was the daughter of Batuwil, the son of Nahur,¹⁵ and uncle of Ibrahim. This, however, is controverted, as we shall mention hereafter.

4. Lut,¹⁶ the son of Haran Ben¹⁷ Tarikh¹⁸ Ben Nahur, was Ibrahim's nephew, and one of those who believed on him. . . .

5. . . . Ibrahim died in Syria, one hundred and seventy years of age: God revealed to him ten sacred books.¹⁹

The News of the Ages

An Account of Ibrāhīm

1. Concerning Ibrāhīm, our master Ismā'īl was born to him, whose mother is [Hājar], the Egyptian.²⁰ And Iṣḥaq was born to him, and his mother was Sāra, the daughter of Harūn. [Harūn] is from the people of Ḥarrān. The life of Ibrāhīm was 175 years. The king of Bābal in the time of [Ibrāhīm] was Nimrūdh, who was the son of Kūsh b.²¹ Ḥām. After Ibrāhīm had performed his pilgrimage, he smashed the idols.²² The king ignited a large fire for him and threw him into it.²³ God made the fire upon [Ibrāhīm] cold and safe.²⁴ A wind came and blew the fire into the faces of the onlookers with the king.²⁵

2. [Ibrāhīm] left for Ḥarrān. The son of his sister, Lūṭ, and Sāra, the daughter of his uncle, believed him. He was thirty-seven years old when he departed.²⁶ He married Sāra by virtue of a revelation that came to him. He took with him three books [leaves, journals] written in the Hebrew language,²⁷ but his language was Syriac. There were in the books proverbs, glorifications of God, rejoicings, and praises. [Ibrāhīm] was commanded to move, so he crossed the Euphrates and moved on to Egypt.

15. I.e., biblical Bethuel, son of Nahor, who, in Genesis 24:15, is the father of Sarah's daughter-in-law, Rebekah. Nahor was Abraham's brother (Genesis 11:26).

16. Biblical Lot.

17. The word means "son of."

18. Biblical Terah.

19. Cf. Abraham 1:28, 31.

20. The text here uses the term *Coptic*, rather than the usual Arabic word for "Egyptian."

21. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read "son of."

22. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

23. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

24. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

26. Cf. Abraham 2:14.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:28, 31.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-MAQDISI

A relatively unknown scholar, al-Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (fl. A.H. 355/A.D. 966), who lived in what is now southern Afghanistan, nevertheless displays a good knowledge of cultures other than his own and much originality of thought in his encyclopedia *Kitāb al-badʿ wa-al-taʾrīkh* (Book of the Beginning and the History). This originality is perhaps why the book fell into oblivion in the Muslim world; all extant manuscripts are located in Istanbul, and not even Western Orientalists have explored the possibilities of the work. The encyclopedia is similar to al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*. A French translation together with the Arabic text was first published by Cl. Huart, in al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-badʿ wa-al-taʾrīkh* (1899–1919; reprint, Baghdad: Dar al-Kutūb al-Haditha, 1960), 45–56. Brian M. Hauglid used this publication to prepare this translation from the Arabic. The numbers preceding the paragraphs refer to the page numbers of the Arabic.

45–46. The story of Ibrahīm [Abraham]. It is found in the report that those kings who ruled all the earth were four persons: two believers and two unbelievers. He who will rule this generation is a fifth. The first [of the unbelievers] is Nimrūdh¹ b.² Kanʿān³ b. Kūsh⁴ b. Ḥām b. Nūḥ.⁵ It is [also] said Nimrūdh was the son of Kūsh b. Saḥyārib⁶ b. Kanʿān b. Sām⁷ b. Nūḥ; God knows best. The second is Athdahāq, master of the two snakes, three mouths, and six eyes. The Arabs call him al-Ḍaḥḥāk. He is the same person as Nimrūdh, but he was called al-Ḍaḥḥāk because he laughed⁸ just as he dropped from the womb of his mother. She placed him in a desert, and a tiger was caught for him. The tiger breast-fed him when he desired it. [It is also said] that the breast of his mother was cut off so she would breast-feed him with tiger milk. So Nimrūdh was called by that

1. Biblical Nimrod.

2. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

3. Biblical Canaan.

4. Biblical Cush.

5. Biblical Noah.

6. Unknown from the biblical genealogy, which makes Cush the son of Ham and brother of Canaan.

7. Biblical Shem.

8. The Arabic name derives from the verb meaning “to laugh” and is cognate to the Hebrew root from which comes the name Isaac.

name. It is said the second was Bukhtanaṣr.⁹ The people of Yemen claim that the second was Tubbaʿa b. Malkīrab. As for the two believers, one of them is Sulaymān b. Dāūd.¹⁰ The Persians claim that he was Jam Shādh. The other is Dhū al-Qarnayn.¹¹ The [scholars] differ concerning Dhū al-Qarnayn. Is he the Roman¹² Alexander or some other? Concerning these the poet says:

They ruled all of the east and the west; they made sure that they did not leave behind a command in vain. . . .

47. People of this knowledge relate that Ibrahīm is the son of Tāraḥ b. Nāḥūr b. Sārūkh b. Argū b. Fāllaj b. ʿĀbir b. Shāllaḥ b. Arfakhshadh b. Sām b. Nūḥ.¹³ When the time of his appearance approached, the priestly astrologers informed Nimrūdh that “a child will be born in this year. Your kingdom will be destroyed by his hand.” . . .

48. The king ordered the killing of all [male] children.¹⁴ Fearing that what was said would truly take place, Anīla, the mother of Ibrahīm, being with child, hid her pregnancy until her delivery came near. Then she gave birth to him and concealed him in a cave. She began to go to him secretly to breast-feed him, and she took care of him until she weaned him, and he grew to a fifteen-year-old adolescent. His body grew, and because of his handsomeness and the speed of his growth, it was uncertain whether his birth occurred at the time of the slaughter of the boys.

53–54. Different people relate in this story, brought out in some accounts, that when his mother hid Ibrahīm in a cave, Jibrīl¹⁵ came to him and made him suck his forefinger and his thumb. [Ibrahīm] began to drink milk from one of them and honey from the other. It is related on the authority of Nūf al-Kālī that a gazelle took hold of him and fed him, when his mother was slow in visiting him. Some have commented that God’s saying *So also did We show Ibrahīm the kingdom of the heavens and earth*¹⁶ [means] that [Ibrahīm] was lifted above the heavens so that he saw what was in them and what belonged to them.¹⁷ They mention the characteristics of the fire [i.e., of Ibrahīm] and [its?] building, the gathering of the firewood for the fire for years, according to what God knows best.¹⁸ . . . The fire was ignited and it flared up, . . . [and] it burned the birds of the heavens. The

9. Biblical Nebuchadnezzar.

10. Biblical Solomon, son of David.

11. Meaning “he of the two horns,” an epithet of Alexander the Great.

12. Alexander was not Roman, but Macedonian, i.e., Greek.

13. See Genesis 11:10–25 for this same genealogy in the Judeo-Christian tradition: biblical Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu (Argū), Peleg (Fāllaj), Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, Shem, and Noah.

14. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

15. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

16. Citing Qurʾan 6:75.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

18. Arabic idiomatic expression.

animals and predatory beasts fled. Iblīs¹⁹ came among them and taught them to build a catapult. So they did evil and threw Ibrāhīm into the fire.²⁰ But God said: *O fire, be cool and safe upon Ibrāhīm.*²¹

19. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

21. Citing Qurʾān 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-THAʿLABI

A theologian and Qurʿan exegete, Abū Ishāq Aḡmad ibn Muḡammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī died in A.H. 427/A.D. 1036. His commentary on the Qurʿan, although popular for some time, has since fallen into disuse. A more enduring text is his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʿ* (Stories of the Prophets), which has been printed many times. Although popularity has ensured its survival, the text has not always been treated with care: at least one manuscript has incorporated al-Thaʿlabī’s tales into those of al-Kisāʿī. As far as we know, no English translation of this work has yet become available. The following was translated by Brian M. Hauglid from the Arabic text in al-Thaʿlabī, *Kitāb ʿarāʿis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʿ* (Cairo: Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, A.H. 1340 [A.D. 1921]), 51–56, and was prepared especially for this collection. The words in parentheses are those added by the editors of the Arabic text, and the words in brackets are the translator’s. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs.

Ibrāhīm [Abraham] is the son of Tārakh b.¹ Nakhūr b. Sārugh b. Arghū b. Fāllag b. ʿĀbir b. Shālah b. Finān b. Arphakhshadh b. Sām b. Nūḡ.² Tārakh was the name of Ibrāhīm’s father, for Ibrāhīm is the one who called him by that name. But when Tārakh and Nimrūd³ created the public treasury for his goddesses, he was named Āzar. Muḡāhid said that Āzar is not the name of Ibrāhīm’s father but the name of an idol. Ibn Ishāq said: His name is not the name of an idol but rather a surname that denotes a defect in the father of Ibrāhīm and means bowed or stooping. It is said the father of Ibrāhīm was the old Nabaṭīya sheik. He was born to Nakhūr as Tārakh and left [home] when he was twenty-seven years old. This collection contains the [pertinent] chapters, and God knows best.

Chapter 1: The childhood of Ibrāhīm.

1. The learned people differ as to the place in which Ibrāhīm was born. Some of them say his birthplace was in Sūs [Susa?] in the land of al-Ahwāz.⁴ Some of them say his

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. See Genesis 11:10–25 for this same genealogy in the Judeo-Christian tradition: Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Salah, Arphaxad, Shem, and Noah. Note that Finān is not found in the biblical record.

3. Biblical Nimrod.

4. Some of these place-names mentioned refer to places in ancient times. One would need to consult old geographical texts to ascertain their modern equivalents.

birthplace was in Bābal in the land of al-Sawād [rural area of Iraq]. Kūthā has also been mentioned. Some of them say his birthplace was in Warkā,⁵ a region on the borders of Kaskar [and that] his father moved him to the place where Nimrūdh was in the region of Kūthā.⁶ Some of them say his birthplace was Ḥarrān, but his father moved him to the land of Bābal.⁷ The earliest generations of the people of learning said that Ibrāhīm was born in the time of Nimrūdh b. Kanʿān.⁸ Between the flood and the birth of Ibrāhīm were 1,263 years. The flood was after the creation of Ādam in the year 3337.⁹ And Nimrūdh, in whose kingdom Ibrāhīm was born, is Nimrūdh b. Kanʿān b. Sanjārīb b. Kūrash¹⁰ b. Ḥām b. Nūḥ.¹¹ (According to the *ḥadīth*),¹² there are four kings who have ruled the earth: two believers and two unbelievers. As for the believers, there were Sulaymān b. Dāūd¹³ and Dhū al-Qarnayn;¹⁴ as for the unbelievers, there were Nimrūdh and Bukhtanaṣr.¹⁵

2. Nimrūdh was the first of these rulers to place the crown upon his head, and he showed himself a tyrant upon the earth. He prevailed upon the people to worship him. He had in his company priests and astrologers. They informed him that “in this year a boy who will change the religion of the people of the land will be born in your country. He will destroy you, and your kingdom will come to an end by his hand.” It was said that they found this [prophecy] in the books of the prophets.¹⁶ (Al-Suddī said) that Nimrūdh saw in his sleep a star as if it were rising. The star took away the light of the sun and the moon until no light remained in either of them.¹⁷ He was struck with a powerful fear from that dream and summoned the sorcerers, priests, the able prognosticators, all who are the ones upon the earth who engage in writing. He asked them about the dream. They said, “The star represents a newborn baby who will be born in your area this year. He will destroy you and destroy the kinfolk of your house by his hand.” It is said that Nimrūdh commanded the slaughter of every boy born in the area that year.¹⁸ He commanded that the men be segregated from the women. He placed over each ten [women] a reliable male guardian. When a woman menstruated, [one] could have intercourse with her, if he was trusted. But when she became clean, the man would be separated

5. Probably biblical Erech and ancient Uruk.

6. Cush is the ancient Mesopotamian city of Kish, but cf. Cush the father of Nimrod in Genesis 10:8.

7. Biblical Babel and Babylon.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27. Kanʿān is biblical Canaan.

9. This would place Abraham’s birth in 2074 B.C.

10. Sanjārīb and Kūrash are not known from the Bible, in which Canaan is the son of Ham.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

12. For an explanation of this term, see the account of al-Bukhārī, in this collection.

13. Solomon, son of David.

14. “The two-horned”; this has reference to Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.).

15. The name Bukhtanaṣr refers to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (604–561 B.C.).

16. Cf. Abraham 1:28, 31.

17. Cf. the star and the light that signaled Christ’s birth in Helaman 14:3–6 and 3 Nephi 1:15–21.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

from her. But Āzar, the father of Ibrāhīm, returned, and he found his wife. She had been cleansed from the menstruation. So [Ibrāhīm's father] knew her in her cleanliness, and she became pregnant with Ibrāhīm.

3. It is said, according to Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq, that Nimrūdh called forth each pregnant woman in his village, and he would keep them with him. However, this was not so with the mother of Ibrāhīm because [Nimrūdh] did not know of her pregnancy. And that was because she was a very young slave girl, and she did not know of the pregnancy, for her abdomen did not show. (Al-Suddī said) that Nimrūdh had sent the men to the army, removing them from the women out of fear the infant would be born. He remained thus as long as God willed. Then a need pertaining to the city arose. [Nimrūdh] did not trust any of his people except Āzar, so he summoned him and said to him, "I have a need. I wish to entrust you with it. I did not call you forth except to place my confidence with you. So I decree that you do not go near your family and you do not have intercourse with your wife." Āzar said, "I am too zealous for my religion to do that." So [Nimrūdh] entrusted him with his matter. Then [Nimrūdh] sent him out, and [Āzar] entered the city and accomplished [Nimrūdh's] business. Then [Āzar] said, "If I could go to my family, then I could see them." But when he saw the mother of Ibrāhīm, he could not refrain from knowing her, and she became pregnant with Ibrāhīm. (Ibn ʿAbbās said) that when the mother of Ibrāhīm was pregnant, the priests said to Nimrūdh that "the boy, whom we informed you about, was conceived of his mother this very night." So Nimrūdh ordered the slaughter of all boys.¹⁹ When the time of birth approached, the labor pains began for the mother of Ibrāhīm, and she fled, a fugitive, fearing that [Nimrūdh] would find her and kill her child. So [after the birth], she placed him in a dried-out river, then wrapped him in rags and put him in alfalfa, and she returned. She told her husband of her son and that she had given birth, but that the child was in a [certain] place, so his father left and took him from that place and dug for him a subterranean place [cave] near a river. His father then concealed him and barricaded his door with a rock, fearing the preying beast. His mother would visit him frequently and breast-feed him.

4. (Al-Suddī said) that when the abdomen of the mother of Ibrāhīm became large, Āzar feared that [Ibrāhīm] would be slaughtered, so he set out with her to a land between Kūfa and Baṣra. It was called Warkā. So [Āzar] took her down into a cave, and he placed [there] what would help her and took care of her. He concealed this from his companions. She gave birth to Ibrāhīm in this hidden place, and he became a young man. When he was a year old, it was as if he were three years old. He grew into a young man in a condition [or place] that kept him away from [Nimrūdh's] edict of slaughter. Then Āzar reported to his friends that he had an older son, and [Ibrāhīm] was taken to them.

5. (Ibn Iṣḥāq said) that when the mother of Ibrāhīm went into labor, she left at night to a cave that was nearby, and she gave birth [in the cave] to Ibrāhīm. She did what was necessary for an infant, barricaded the cave for him, and returned to her house. As she

19. Ibid.

would inspect him in the cave, she would find him alive, sucking his thumb. Abū Zarīq said that whenever the mother of Ibrāhīm came to see Ibrāhīm, she found him sucking his thumb. She said, “One day I will look at his fingers,” and she found him sucking water from one finger and milk from another, honey from one finger and butter from another.

6. (Ibn Ishāq said): Āzar had asked the mother of Ibrāhīm what had happened with her pregnancy. She said she gave birth to a boy, but he died. He believed her and kept silent about it. One day [of growth] for Ibrāhīm was for the boy as a month, and a month was as a year. Ibrāhīm remained in the cave for fifteen days until he came to his father, Āzar. [Ibrāhīm] informed him that he was his son, and his wife informed him concerning what she had done with respect to [Ibrāhīm]. So Āzar was delighted and rejoiced greatly.

Chapter 2: Ibrāhīm’s departure from his secret place and his return to his family. His argument with them concerning religion, their casting him into the fire, and what took place pertaining to that.

1. (The historians, people of knowledge concerning the way of the past) said that when Ibrāhīm grew up while in the secret place, he asked his mother, “Who is my Lord?” She said, “I am.” He said, “But who is your Lord?” She replied, “Your father.” He said, “But who is the Lord of my father?” She answered, “Nimrūdh is his Lord.” He asked, “But who is the Lord of Nimrūdh?” She said to him, “Be silent!” So [Ibrāhīm] was silent. Then she returned to her husband. She said, “I saw the boy who speaks of changing the religion of the people of the land, and he is your son.” Then she informed him of what [Ibrāhīm] had told her. So his father, Āzar, came to him. Ibrāhīm asked him, “Who is my Lord?” [Āzar] answered, “Your mother.” [Ibrāhīm] said, “But who is the Lord of my mother?” [His father] said, “I am.” [Ibrāhīm] asked, “But who is your Lord?” He answered, “Nimrūdh.” [Ibrāhīm] said, “But who is the Lord of Nimrūdh?” Then [Āzar] slapped him hard and said, “Be silent!” And because of that, God said about [Ibrāhīm]: *We²⁰ gave Ibrāhīm aforetime his rectitude—for We knew him.*²¹ Then [Ibrāhīm] said to his parents, “Take me out!” So they took him out of the secret place and traveled until the sun went down, and Ibrāhīm looked at the camels, the cattle, the sheep, and the horses resting with them. He asked his father, “What are these?” [Āzar] said, “camels, horses, cattle, and sheep.” [Ibrāhīm] said, “There must be a Lord Creator for them!” Then he looked [at the heavens] and pondered the creation of the heavens and the earth.²² He said, “Indeed, the One who created me, my subsistence, my meals, my drink, my property, and so forth, is my Lord.

20. The Qur’an uses the royal plural (we, us, our) when God is speaking.

21. Citing Qur’an 21:51. The translation used here is from A. J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 2:21. As with most Islamic texts of this kind, the Qur’an is usually cited quite frequently. There are, however, many English translations of the Qur’an available. All of them vary in their interpretations to one degree or another. Because of the complexities inevitably encountered in this type of text, I will use whatever translation (mostly my own) I think best fits the flow of the text. I will cite the translations that are not mine.

22. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3–5.

There is not for me a God other than He." Then he watched as Jupiter ascended, and it is [also] said [it was] Venus. That night was towards the end of the month. And he saw the star before the moon, so he said "This is my Lord!" This is what God has said:

2. *When the night descended upon [Ibrāhīm], he saw a star and exclaimed, "This is my Lord!" When the star had set, [Ibrāhīm] said, "I love not those that set." But when he saw the moon shining, he exclaimed, "This is my Lord!" But when it set he said, "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall be as those who have gone astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he exclaimed, "This is my Lord! This is the greatest of them!" But when it set he said, "O people I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to God. I turn my face to the One who created the heavens and the earth. And never shall I give partners to God."*²³

3. They [the historians] said: his father used to make idols.²⁴ When Ibrāhīm started working with his father, his father made the idols and started giving them to Ibrāhīm to sell them. Ibrāhīm took them and called out, "Who buys what injures and is not beneficial?" So they would not buy any from him. When he didn't sell them, [Ibrāhīm] took the idols to a river and smashed their heads²⁵ and mocked them, saying, "Drink! You are useless!" deriding the people and their ignorance and waywardness, until his finding fault with the idols and his mocking them became widely known among his people and countrymen. His people argued with him concerning his religion, so [Ibrāhīm] said to them, "Do you argue with me concerning God, when he has guided me?"²⁶ . . . God says: *That was the reasoning about us, which We gave to [Ibrāhīm] (to use) against his people. We raise whom We will, degree after degree: for the Lord is full of wisdom and knowledge,*²⁷ so that God defeats and conquers them with the argument. Then [Ibrāhīm] summoned Āzar to his religion. He said, "O my father, why do you worship what cannot hear, nor see, nor can profit you anything?"²⁸ etc., according to the story. But his father refused to answer [Ibrāhīm's] invitation to him.²⁹ So Ibrāhīm declared to his people openly and in guiltlessness what they were worshiping and manifested his religion. [Ibrāhīm] said, "I am amazed at what you and your fathers are worshiping. Indeed, they [referring to the previous argument with the people] would have hindered me if not for the Lord Omnipotent." They asked, "Who do you worship?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "The Lord Omnipotent!" They asked, "Does that mean Nimrūdh?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "No! It is the One who created me, it is He Who guides!" etc. [Ibrāhīm] circulated this message among the people until it reached Nimrūdh the tyrant.

23. Citing Qur'an 6:76–79. The translation used here is from Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex, 1992), and has been modified in some places by the translator of al-Thaʿlabi (Brian M. Hauglid). Because of the modifications and the use of other translations, Ali's versification of the Qur'an has been dropped. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

24. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

26. Citing Qur'an 6:80.

27. Citing Qur'an 6:83, translation by Yusuf Ali (modified).

28. Citing Qur'an 19:42.

29. Cf. Abraham 2:5.

4. So [Nimrūdh] summoned [Ibrāhīm] and said to him, “O Ibrāhīm, have you seen the God that sent you and that you invite to worship; that you speak of His power with which you exalt him over what is other than he?” Ibrāhīm said, “My Lord is the One Who causes life and death.”³⁰ Nimrūdh said, “I cause life and death.” Ibrāhīm asked, “How do you cause life and death?” [Nimrūdh] answered, “I take two men who are worthy of death in my wisdom. I kill one of them; thus, I have put him to death. Then I forgive the other and leave him; therefore, I have given him life.” At that moment, as Ibrāhīm spoke to him, God brought forth the sun from the east and then he brought it forth from the west. Nimrūdh was so amazed, he did not counter [Ibrāhīm] with anything because of the evidence which attended him. As God says: *He who was amazed was an apostate.*³¹

5. Indeed, Ibrāhīm desired that his people see the weakness of their idols, which they were worshipping besides God, and the powerlessness of the idols forced the proof upon them. [Ibrāhīm] began, therefore, to seize the opportunity and made his effort until a feast for them had arrived. (Al-Suddī said): There was a feast for them each year which they made public and at which they would assemble. When they went to their feast, they would call upon the idols and they would bow down to them. Then they would return to their homes. When it was the time of the feast, Ibrāhīm’s father said, “O Ibrāhīm, if you depart with us to our feast, our religion will amaze you!” So Ibrāhīm left with them. When he had gone some of the way, he threw himself down saying, “I am sick! My leg suffers!” The people turned from him as he fell. When they had departed, [Ibrāhīm] shouted to those at the rear [the weaker of the people had remained], “By God, I will certainly plan against your idols.”³² They heard it from him.

6. (Mujāhid said), and Qatāda related that, Ibrāhīm had said, this [account] is a secret among his people [meaning, the leg story was not heard]. However, no one heard this but one man, and he is the one who revealed this story to him [Qatāda]. These reporters said: Ibrāhīm then returned from the road to the House of the Gods [al-Ālaha].³³ Within this house was a great hallway, and the front part of the door of the hallway had a great idol that was next to a smaller idol, and there were idols lined up side by side to the first two, each one of which was next to a smaller idol, and thus was the door of the hallway.³⁴ When the people produced food, they placed it in the presence of these gods. They would say, “When it is time for our return, the gods will have blessed our food for our eating.” When Ibrāhīm looked at the idols and at the food they had, he said to these idols by way

30. Citing Qur’an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

31. Citing Qur’an 2:258.

32. Citing Qur’an 21:57.

33. Referring to the Ka’ba in Mecca, from which Muḥammad later removed pagan idols in order to establish the worship of Allah.

34. This is an extremely difficult passage. In Tha’labī’s text, the phrase is فاذا فى البيت نهر مستقبل باب النهر صنم . عظيم يليه اصغر الى باب النهر . The باب النهر (*bāb al-nahr*, i.e., door of the river) was very confusing. Baiḍāwī uses باب البهو (*bāb al-bahw*, i.e., door of the hallway), which makes more sense. See al-Baiḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl* (n.p., 1899–1902), 4:254.

of ridicule, “Why don’t you eat?” When they did not answer, [Ibrāhīm] said, “Why don’t you speak?” So he quickly hit them with the right hand and began shattering them with an ax in his hand until only the largest remained.³⁵ He put the ax on it and left. Thus has God said: *So he broke them into fragments, all but a great one they had, for haply they would return to it.*³⁶ When the people returned from their feast to the house of their gods, they saw them in that condition. They asked, “Who has done this to our gods? He must indeed be some man of impiety.” They said, “We heard a youth talk of them: he is called [Ibrāhīm].”³⁷ He is the one we think did this dirty trick. So this [news] reached Nimrūdh, the tyrant, and the exalted of his people. They said, “Then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may bear witness³⁸ of this, that he is the one who did this.” They were loathe to take him without any evidence, according to Qatāda and al-Suddī.

7. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk says they would bear witness to what we [God? the people?] are going to do with [Ibrāhīm]—our punishment of him. When they came to him they said, “Are you the one that did this with our gods, O Ibrāhīm?” Ibrāhīm said, “No! The biggest of them did it. This one became angry that you worshiped these smaller gods. And the biggest one shattered them. Ask them, if [since] they can talk.”³⁹

8. The Prophet said that Ibrāhīm told only three lies according to God: [Ibrāhīm] says (1) “I am sick,” (2) “No! The biggest one did this,” and (3) he said to the king, “O one who deals with Sarah, she is my sister.” When Ibrāhīm had said that to them, they turned to themselves and said, “Surely you have wronged this man in your questioning of him when these gods of yours with whom he has done what he has done are here [with us]. So ask them.” This is what Ibrāhīm had said: “Ask the gods if they have the ability to speak,” but his people said, “We did not see it,” just as [Ibrāhīm] had said. (It is said): “Surely you are in error with your worship of the small idols with this big one.” Then they bowed their heads, confused by Ibrāhīm’s command, for they knew that these gods did not speak nor hit.⁴⁰ They said, “You know these two [small and big gods] could not speak.” When Ibrāhīm’s argument confronted them, he said to them, “You worship to the exclusion of God what cannot benefit you at all and cannot harm you. Shame upon you and what you worship besides God; have you no sense?”⁴¹ When the argument compelled them they were unable to answer. They said, “Burn him and protect your gods, if you do (anything at all.)”⁴²

35. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

36. Citing Qurʾan 21:58, translation by A. J. Arberry.

37. Citing Qurʾan 21:59–60, translation by Yusuf Ali (modified). Ali comments, “Different groups of people are speaking. Those who were not present at Abraham’s speech in verse 57 [And by Allah, I have a plan for your idols—after ye go away and turn your backs], ask ‘Who has done this?’” Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur-ān*, 932 n. 2719.

38. Citing Qurʾan 21:61, translation by Yusuf Ali.

39. Citing Qurʾan 21:62–63.

40. See Qurʾan 21:65.

41. Citing Qurʾan 21:66–67.

42. Citing Qurʾan 21:68, translation by Yusuf Ali.

9. ‘Abd al-Allāh b. ‘Umar said that the one who advised them to burn Ibrāhīm with fire was a man from the Akrād. Sha‘īb al-Jabā’ī said his name was Haynūn. God swallowed him up in the earth, and there he will continue to reverberate until the Day of the Resurrection. When Nimrūdh and his people gathered to burn Ibrāhīm, they confined him at home. They built him a structure, like a fence; thus God says, “They built a structure for him and threw him in the fire.”⁴³ They gathered the firmest firewood and all kinds of wood for him. If a woman became ill, she would say, “If God will restore me, surely I will gather wood for Ibrāhīm.” Some women would make vows to search [for wood] out of a desire to achieve their goal. Then they would gather the firewood and place it in the fire in which Ibrāhīm was to be burned, seeking a reward in their religion.

10. Ibn Ishaq said: They gathered wood for a month until they had gathered much of it. When they had gathered what they desired, they ignited each piece of wood with fire.⁴⁴ As the fire ignited [it rose] until the birds flying over were consumed from the intensity of its heat. They approached Ibrāhīm and raised him to the top of the structure and they bound him. They made a catapult, according to the instruction of Iblīs,⁴⁵ since they were not able to propel him into the fire because of the intensity of the heat. They made the catapult and placed [Ibrāhīm] in it, chained and fettered.⁴⁶ The heavens, the earth, the mountains, and those upon it, and those angels and all creation except men and jinn⁴⁷ raised a hue and a cry together. They said, “By our Lord, There is none in your land who worships you except Ibrāhīm. He is burning in the fire. Permit us to rescue him.” God said to them, “Indeed, if he seeks help from you in any way or by any summons, then rescue him. I permit [you] to do that. Indeed, even if he summons [someone] other than Me, I will teach him and be near him. I know how to deal with him.” When they desired to throw him into the fire, the angel of water came to [Ibrāhīm].⁴⁸ He said, “Indeed, if you desire, I will smother the fire. Indeed, the water stores and the rains are under my power.” The keeper of the wind came to him and said, “If you wish, I will blow out the fire.” Ibrāhīm said, “I do not need you.” Then he raised his head to the heavens and said to them, “You are the only One in the heavens and the earth, and there is not anyone on the earth besides me who worships you,” etc.⁴⁹ Mu‘atamir on the authority of Abū b. Ka‘b—Arqām reported that when they tied him up to throw him into the fire, Ibrāhīm said, “There is no other God but You, praise be to You, the Lord Omniscient, praise be to You, dominion be to You, You who have no partner.” Then they hurled him with the cata-

43. Not in the Qur’an.

44. Tha‘labī’s text is unclear here; again Baiḍāwī’s version is used. See Baiḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl*, 4:258.

45. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, “accuser,” from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

46. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

47. Jinn are spirit beings, created from fire (unlike man, who is created from the earth). They can be good but are mostly mischievous or evil. They will also be judged at the last day.

48. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

49. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:12.

pult into a large place in the fire.⁵⁰ Then Jibrīl⁵¹ met him and said, “O Ibrāhīm, are you in need?” “From you, no!”⁵² Jibrīl said to [Ibrāhīm], “Ask your Lord.” But Ibrāhīm said, “I am content with His knowledge of my situation. God can protect me, for He is an excellent Trustee.” In the report, Ibrāhīm was rescued [from the fire] by his saying, “God can protect me for He is an excellent Trustee.” God said, “O fire! Be thou cool, and safe upon Ibrāhīm!”⁵³ Al-Suddī said: Jibrīl is the one who declared it by the command of God.

11. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ibn ʿAbbās said: If Jibrīl did not say “be safe,” Ibrāhīm would have died from the coldness of the fire. But at that moment, the fire did not remain in the earth, meaning only that it was considered to be extinguished. Kaʿb al-Aḥbār said that Qatāda and Zahrī related that no one used fire that day, for the fire did not burn anything that day except the fetters of Ibrāhīm.⁵⁴ Everybody joined to put out the fire for [Ibrāhīm] except the lizard. So the Prophet commanded to kill it and renamed it Fawīsqā. Al-Suddī said: The angels took Ibrāhīm and sat him upon the earth. Suddenly there appeared a spring of water, red flowers, and a narcissus flower. They say Ibrāhīm stayed in the fire for seven days. Al-Minhāl b. ʿUmar said: Ibrāhīm, the friend of God, said, “There were no more pleasurable days than the days I lived in the fire.” Ibn Ishāq and others said: God sent the angel of shade in the form of Ibrāhīm, and he remained in the fire next to Ibrāhīm and kept him company.⁵⁵ Jibrīl came to [Ibrāhīm] with a garment of silk. He said to him, “O Ibrāhīm, indeed your Lord says, ‘Do you not know that the fire will not injure my beloved ones?’” And Jibrīl put the garment on [Ibrāhīm].⁵⁶ Then Nimrūdh lamented as he looked down from a palace at [Ibrāhīm]. Nimrūdh considered that there was no doubt that [Ibrāhīm] had died. But he saw [Ibrāhīm] sitting in a garden. And Nimrūdh saw the angel seated at [Ibrāhīm]’s side,⁵⁷ and although fire was burning all around him, only the firewood that had been gathered was being burned. Nimrūdh called to him, “O Ibrāhīm, your God is the One Who has brought His power that is placed between you and the fire so that you are not harmed. O Ibrāhīm, are you able to leave from the fire?” [Ibrāhīm] said, “Yes.” [Nimrūdh] said, “Are you afraid to rise from it lest you be hurt?” [Ibrāhīm] answered, “No.” Nimrūdh said, “Arise!” And so [Ibrāhīm] left from the fire. Ibrāhīm walked around in the fire and left from it. And when he walked out to him, [Nimrūdh] asked, “O Ibrāhīm, who is the man whom I saw with you in the likeness of your form, who stayed at your side?” [Ibrāhīm] replied, “The angel of shade. My Lord sent him to keep me company in the fire.” Nimrūdh said, “O Ibrāhīm, I was very close to your God when I saw His power and determination in the fire and when

50. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

51. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

52. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

53. Citing Qurʾan 21:69.

54. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

55. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

56. The tradition that Gabriel brought Abraham a garment from paradise has been noted in other texts.

57. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

you refused all worship except Him and His unification. I will sacrifice four thousand cows for God." Ibrāhīm said to him, "God will not accept anything from you as long as you remain in your religion. You should leave your religion and come to my religion." [Nimrūdh] said, "I am not able to give up my kingdom, but I will sacrifice [the cows] for Him." He was close to sacrificing them, but the sacrifice was prevented by the authority of Ibrāhīm. Then, indeed, [Nimrūdh] said to Ibrāhīm, "The best Lord is your Lord, O Ibrāhīm!"

12. (Al-Shaʿbī said): Ibrāhīm was thrown into the fire⁵⁸ when he was sixteen years old; he sacrificed Iṣḥāq⁵⁹ when [Iṣḥāq] was seven years old, and Sāra gave birth to [Iṣḥāq] when she was ninety years old. [Ibrāhīm] sacrificed [Iṣḥāq] in Jerusalem upon a [mound?]. When Sāra learned of what God willed concerning Iṣḥāq, she remained for two days and she died on the third day. (Ibn Iṣḥāq said): To comply with the request of Ibrāhīm, some of his people, when they saw what God had done in the way of cooling the fire for him and giving safety, [became fearful of Nimrūdh and their religion]. Lūṭ believed [Ibrāhīm]. He was the son of [Ibrāhīm's] brother. Lūṭ is the son of Hārān b. Tārakh [Terah]. Hārān is the brother of Ibrāhīm, and they have a third brother and he is called Nāḥūr b. Tārakh. Hārān is the father of Lūṭ,⁶⁰ Nāḥūr is the father of Tanwīl, Tanwīl is the father of Lābān, and Rifqā⁶¹ is the daughter of Tanwīl [and] the wife of Iṣḥāq, son of Ibrāhīm, and mother of Yaʿqūb. Liyā⁶² and Rāḥīl⁶³ are the wives of Yaʿqūb, and they are the daughters of Lābān. Sāra also believed [Ibrāhīm], and she is the daughter of [Ibrāhīm's] uncle. Sāra is the daughter of Hārān. However, Ibrāhīm is greater than [Hārān]. Al-Suddī said: Sāra was the daughter of the King of Ḥarrān, and Ibrāhīm and Lūṭ departed in the direction of Syria. She had spoken evil against their people concerning their religion. Ibrāhīm married her, but he did not force her [to marry him].

13. (Ibn Iṣḥāq said): Ibrāhīm left from Kūthā in the land of Iraq; he left home for the sake of his Lord, and Lūṭ and Sāra left with him just as God had said: *Lūṭ had faith in him, he said, "I will leave home for the sake of my Lord."*⁶⁴ They traveled until they reached Ḥarrān. [Ibrāhīm] lived with them there as long as God, the Exalted, willed him to stay. Then he moved from there until he arrived at Egypt. He then left Egypt for Syria. He camped at al-Sabʿa in Palestine, and it is a desert area of Syria. Lūṭ camped in al-Muʿtafiqa, and it is in the area of al-Sabʿa, a day and a night's journey. God sent forth [Ibrāhīm] as a prophet, therefore God says: *We delivered him, and Lūṭ, unto the Land that We had blessed for all beings,*⁶⁵ which means Syria. The blessing of the land is that God sent forth from there many of

58. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

59. Biblical Isaac.

60. Biblical Lot.

61. Biblical Rebecca; the text reflects the Hebrew name Ribqāh (Rivka in modern Hebrew), which the King James Version spells Rebekah (e.g., Genesis 24:58–61).

62. Biblical Leah.

63. Biblical Rachel.

64. Citing Qurʾan 29:26, translation by Yusuf Ali (modified).

65. Citing Qurʾan 21:71, translation by A. J. Arberry.

the prophets, and so it is a holy land. ʿĪsā [Jesus], the son of Mary, lived in it, and the false messiah perished in it at the gate of Ad. It is a land fertile with trees, rivers, and fruits. Life for the rich and the poor is pleasing in this land. (Abū b. Kaʿb said): There is nothing but sweet water with its source springing from under the Dome of the Rock,⁶⁶ which then divides in the earth, and God knows best.

Chapter 3: The birth of Ismāʿīl⁶⁷ and Ishaq. Ismaʿīl and his mother Hājar embark on a pilgrimage to the Holy Place. The story of the well of Zamzam.

1. (The historians say): When God, the Exalted, delivered His friend, Ibrāhīm had faith in God. Those who believed followed him, separating from their people and demonstrating freedom from them.⁶⁸ They said, “We are free from you and from what you worship besides God; we disbelieve you, O worshipers of that which is besides God; hostility and hatred have begun between us. O worship until you believe in the One God.” Then Ibrāhīm left his home for the sake of his Lord and Lūṭ went with him. Ibrāhīm married the daughter of his uncle, Sāra. [Ibrāhīm] left with them, seeking to take flight in his religion, seeking the safety to worship his Lord,⁶⁹ until he reached Ḥarrān. [Ibrāhīm] stayed there as long as God willed, then he moved from his home there to live in Egypt wherein was the pharaoh who was of the first pharaohs.⁷⁰ Sāra was the most lovely and beautiful of women. She did not disobey Ibrāhīm in anything, and therefore God, the Exalted, honored her. A man reported to the tyrant [pharaoh] that, “in this place is a man, and with him is a woman who is the most lovely of women,” and he described her loveliness and beauty to him. The tyrant sent for Ibrāhīm and he came. [The pharaoh] asked [Ibrāhīm], “Who is this woman with you?” [Ibrāhīm] answered, “She is my sister.” Ibrāhīm feared to say “she is my wife” because the pharaoh would kill him. [The pharaoh] said to [Ibrāhīm], “have her adorned and bring her so that I may see her.” So Ibrāhīm returned to Sāra and said to her, “This tyrant has asked me about you; I told him that you are my sister. Don’t contradict that when you are with him in front of God. You are my sister. Indeed there is not in this land a Muslim⁷¹ excepting you and me.” Then Sāra left to meet the tyrant and Ibrāhīm performed prayer. When she entered into the presence of [the pharaoh] and he saw her, he reached out to her, taking her by the hand. She caused his hand to wither up to his chest. When [the pharaoh] saw that her command was greater, he said to her, “Ask your Lord to free my hand; I don’t want to harm you.” Sarah said, “O God, if he is truthful, release his hand for him.” So God released his hand.

66. The Dome of the Rock is the shrine that sits atop the site formerly occupied by the temple in Jerusalem. For the water that is to flow in the last days from beneath the altar of the temple (which some believe to have been atop the bedrock inside the shrine), see Ezekiel 47:1–12 and Zechariah 14:8.

67. Biblical Ishmael. The name is spelled two different ways by Thaʿlabī.

68. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

69. Ibid.

70. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

71. I.e., one who submits (to God).

2. (In some of the supporting reports), [the pharaoh] did that three times, wanting to touch her, but his hand withered. When he saw that, he returned her to Ibrāhīm, and [the pharaoh] had granted her Hājar, and she was an Egyptian⁷² slave. When Ibrāhīm heard Sāra he turned from his prayer and said, “*Mahīm* [What is the report?]”⁷³ She said, “God stopped the deceit of the shameless [pharaoh]; he has given me the slave-girl, Hājar.”⁷⁴ Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said: Abū Hurayra had discussed this on the authority of the Prophet. According to him, Sāra said, “This is your bondwoman, O Prophet of the Highest!” (According to some reports), God lifted the veil between Ibrāhīm and Sāra so that he could see her from the time she left [Ibrāhīm’s] presence until her departure [from the pharaoh] to him. [Sāra’s] nobility and purity belonged to the heart of Ibrāhīm. These sources say that Hājar was a slave girl with beauty and that Sāra gave her to Ibrāhīm. She said, “See her, a pure woman. Perhaps God will bless you with a son from her.” Sāra could not have a son because she was advanced in age. So Ibrāhīm knew Hājar and she conceived Isma‘īl for him. (It is related): Muḥammad b. Isḥāq on the authority of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Allāh b. Ka‘b b. Mālīk al-Ansārī said that the Prophet said: When you conquer Egypt, treat its people well, for protection and kinship belong to them. Ibn Isḥāq said: al-Zahrī asked, “What is the kinship which the Prophet mentioned?” The Prophet answered, “It is Hājar the mother of Isma‘īl.” The sources say that Ibrāhīm then left Egypt and returned to Syria.

72. The text here uses the term *Coptic*, rather than the usual Arabic word for Egyptian.

73. This word is not listed in any dictionary accessible to this translator, but fortunately, Ibn Kathīr explains the meaning of *mahīm* (مَاهِيم) in his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*. See Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Cairo: Dār al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyya, 1998), 161.

74. Biblical Hagar.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-BIRUNI

The Persian historian Abū al-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, sometimes called al-Khwārizmī (A.H. 362–ca. 442 / A.D. 973–ca. 1050), was one of the greatest medieval Islamic scholars known, deserving his title *al-Ustādh*, or “the master,” as about 180 works are attributed to him. He used Arabic for his scientific writings, although other writings may have been in Persian or both Persian and Arabic. C. Edward Sachau made an English translation of the *Athār al-bākiya al-Bīrūnī* and published it under the title *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (1879; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1969), from which we take the following selection (pp. 186–87). We have removed Sachau’s diacritics because they are inconsistent with modern usage.

1. The remnants of those Sabians are living in Harran, their name (*i.e.* *Alharraniyya*) being derived from their place. Others derive it from Haran b.¹ Terah, the brother of Abraham, saying that he among their chiefs was the most deeply imbued with their religion and its most tenacious adherent. *Ibn Sankila* (Syncellus),² the Christian, relates in his book which he, intending to refute their creed, stuffed with lies and futile stories, that Abraham left their community simply because leprosy appeared on his foreskin, and that everybody who suffered from this disease was considered impure, and excluded from all society. Therefore he cut off his foreskin, *i.e.* he circumcised himself. In this state he entered one of their idol-temples, when he heard a voice speaking to him: “O Abraham, you went away from us with one sin, and you return to us with two sins. Go away, and do not again come to us.”

2. Thereupon Abraham, seized by wrath, broke the idols in pieces,³ and left their community. But, after having done it, he repented and wished to sacrifice his son to the planet Saturn, it being their custom to sacrifice their children,⁴ as that author maintains. Saturn, however, on seeing him truly repentant, let him go free with the sacrifice of a ram.

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. Syncellus’s account is included in the Christian section of this work.

3. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-TARAFI

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muṭarrif al-Kinānī, known by the *nisba* (nickname) al-Ṭarafī (A.H. 387–457 / A.D. 997–1065), also known as al-Qurṭubī, was another of the Arab chronographers who wrote a book entitled *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Stories of the Prophets). He was heavily involved in Qur’anic exegesis, and that is reflected in his many Qur’anic quotations. Born perhaps in Cordoba on the Iberian peninsula, al-Ṭarafī was well read and well taught. He based his *Qiṣaṣ* on many earlier scholars, among them four that we include in this volume: Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Bishr, al-Ṭabarī, and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. The Arabic text has not yet been published, but an Italian translation was made by Roberto Tottoli in his book *Al-Tarafi: Storie dei profeti* (Genoa, Italy: il Nuovo Melangolo, n.d.), 72–75, 82–96. The English translation used here was made from the Italian by Aaron Christensen. We have numbered the paragraphs for indexing purposes.

1. The history of Abraham: of the controversy he had with Nimrod; of when he was thrown into the fire; of the word he said to his father Āzar and of the reproaches of his people because they worshiped idols, the stars, the sun, and the moon;¹ and others of his stories. His name was Abraham (Ibrāhīm) b.² Tāraḥ b. Nāḥūr b. Asru‘ b. Arghuw b. Fāligh b. ‘Ā’ir b. Shālikh b. Arfakhshad b. Sām b. Nūḥ b. Lamk b. Matūshalakh b. Akhnūkh b. Bāradh b. Mahlābil b. Anūsh b. Qaynān b. Shīth b. Ādam,³ and he lived 175 years or 195 years.⁴

2. His father Tāraḥ lived 250 years, when Abraham was circumcised with a hatchet at the age of 80 years. His mother was Nūnāniyya, of the descendants of Arfakhshad, and the great and powerful God said:

1. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

2. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

3. For the equivalent genealogy in the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Genesis 5; 11:10–25: Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu (Arghuw), Peleg (Fāligh), Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, Shem, Ham, Noah, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Mahaleel, Enos, Cainan, Seth, and Adam. Note that the usual Arabic equivalents for Serug and Eber are missing, with Asru‘ and ‘Ā’ir listed instead. The names for Jared (Bāradh) and Mahaleel (Mahlābil) have been corrupted, and finally, the order for Cainan and Enos has been reversed (see Genesis 5:9–13).

4. According to Genesis 25:7, Abraham lived 175 years.

3. "Haven't you seen him who disputed about his Lord with Abraham because God had given him supreme power?"⁵

4. Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī and some experts on tradition reported that the first tyrant on the earth was Nimrod b. Kin'ān⁶ b. Kūsh⁷ b. Sām⁸ b. Nūḥ; it was he who built the tower [of Babel]. The people came to him to receive food, and once even Abraham came to procure food with the others. When they arrived before him, Nimrod asked,

5. "Who is your Lord?" and they responded,

6. "You!"

7. When Abraham then approached him, he asked,

8. "Who is your Lord?" and Abraham answered,

9. "He is my Lord who gives life and gives death!"⁹

10. "It is I," the other replied, "who give life and give death. I leave [him] alive whom I wish to slay when I don't slay [him], and in this way I give life, while when I slay another, I give him death." Abraham answered him,

11. "God surely makes the sun rise from the east. You therefore make it rise from the west, if you are truthful when you say that you are a god!"

12. Thus said the great and powerful God in the Qur'an: *Thus the infidel remained ashamed*, which means he was quieted and that which he claimed was revealed as false. After this dispute, Nimrod sent him away without food. Abraham returned to his family, and on the way back he crossed a colored sand dune and said to himself,

13. "Why not take some of this sand and carry it to my family, to delude them and at least make them feel better when I arrive with it?" Thus it was that he took some of it and came to his family, put down the full baggage, and went to sleep. His wife arose and took the baggage, opened it, and found there the best food that anyone had ever seen. She cooked some of it and brought it to Abraham, who asked her,

14. "Where did this come from?"

15. "From the food you brought," she answered.

16. Thus Abraham knew that it was the great and powerful God who had provided the food, and he praised Him for this. Then God sent an angel to the tyrant with this message:

17. "Believe in me, and I will leave you in your reign."

18. "Is there then another Lord besides me?" answered Nimrod.

19. The angel came a second time, saying the same thing, but Nimrod refused. He came a third time, but again Nimrod refused. Then the angel told him,

20. "Gather your assembly in three days." The tyrant gathered his assembly, and God sent the angel, and he threw against all present so many mosquitoes that the sun arose

5. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

6. Biblical Canaan. According to the Bible, Nimrod's father was Cush (Genesis 10:8), while Canaan was his uncle (Genesis 10:6). Cf. Abraham 1:21-22.

7. Biblical Cush.

8. Biblical Shem.

9. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7. These and all italics through paragraph 12 are citing Qur'an 2:258.

without being seen. The mosquitoes that God had sent against them devoured their flesh and drank their blood until nothing remained but their bones. King Nimrod was nevertheless untouched, as at the first. None of all this happened to him. But for him, God sent a single mosquito that entered one nostril and remained [there] to hit the inside of his head with hammers for four hundred years. The most compassionate with him were those who clenched [their] hands and struck him on the head. Nimrod had been a tyrant for four hundred years, and for four hundred years God punished him, exactly as long as he had reigned; then God made him die.¹⁰

21. This is he who constructed a tower to heaven, *but God struck their building to the foundations, and the roof collapsed on them from above, and they reaped their punishment from where they least expected it.*¹¹

22. Nimrod was also he who took two small eagles, and he raised them until they grew, and they became great and large. Then he tied the legs of the two of them to a box, starved them, and sat down, together with another man, in the box. When he raised from the box a stick with a piece of meat at the top, [the eagles] took flight, and Nimrod said to his companion,

23. "Look, what do you see?" and he responded,

24. "I see this and that." Then he said, "I see the earth as if it were a fly!"

25. "Turn the stick," Nimrod then ordered. The man turned and they descended.

26. The mountains became [so] afraid, because they thought the hour of judgment was come, that they were almost moved [out of their places]. In fact God, great is His praise, said: *Even if their plots were such to shake the hills.*¹² . . .

[Construction of the Kaʿba by Abraham and Isaac]

27. Another Qurʾanic passage reports: *And remember when Abraham said to his father Āzar,*

28. *"Shall you take idols for gods?"*¹³

29. Al-Suddī holds that Āzar was the name of the father of Abraham, a man of the people of Kawthā [Cutha], from a village in Sawād, the district of Kūfa, and it is told that he had a double name, Āzar Tāraḥ, like Israel Jacob. According to other interpretations, Āzar was instead an epithet that meant "the false one who distorts religion," and it was the harshest word that Abraham directed at him. In fact, the word Āzar is also read with the ending of the nominative of the interjection, as though it were written, when Abraham said to his father, "O you who distort religion, O false one, *shall you take idols for gods?*"¹⁴

10. This story, often repeated in the Arabic texts, may derive from the Talmudic account of the gnat that entered the nose of Titus and picked at his brain for seven years following his desecration of the temple in Jerusalem (Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 56b).

11. Citing Qurʾan 16:26.

12. Citing Qurʾan 14:46.

13. Citing Qurʾan 6:74. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

14. *Ibid.*

30. Then said the great and powerful God in the Qur'an: *And thus We¹⁵ showed to Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth so that he might be one of those who are firmly convinced.*¹⁶

31. Mujāhid holds that this verse means, "I showed him the signs of the heavens and of the earth"; indeed, the seven heavens gaped open before him even to the throne, and he contemplated them, and the seven earths were opened before him, and he contemplated them.¹⁷

32. Al-Suddī holds that Abraham was lifted up on a stone, and the heavens opened wide, and he saw the grandeur of God in them. He saw his place in paradise,¹⁸ and the lands were opened to him even until he could see the ends of the earth; for this intent are the words of the Qur'an, *and We gave him his reward in the world,*¹⁹ which means: I showed him his place in paradise. According to various opinions, "his reward in the world" means "the beautiful praise." . . .

33. *And when the darkness of night enwrapped him, Abraham saw a star, and said,*

34. *"This is my Lord."*²⁰

35. It is passed down by Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq that the reason Abraham saw the star was that Āzar was a man of the city in the district of Kūfa. At that time Nimrod b. Kin'ān²¹ reigned over the east. God wanted to send Abraham as a witness against his people, since in the period of time between Noah and Abraham there had been no prophet, with the exception of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ.²² When the time approached that God had established for Abraham, the astrologers went to Nimrod and told him,

36. "Know that we have discovered by our knowledge that a boy by the name of Abraham will be born in this your city. This man will abandon your religion and will destroy your idols in such a month of such a year."

37. When that year began, Nimrod sent to seek all the pregnant women in his city and held them prisoner near himself, except the mother of Abraham, the wife of Āzar, because he didn't know she was pregnant, because she was a young woman and didn't know how to recognize that she had conceived in her own womb. When the imprisoned women gave birth that year, Nimrod ordered the killing of each male born. But when the labor pains began, the mother of Abraham went out by night into a nearby cave, and there she bore Abraham. She prepared for him everything that would be necessary, as one does for every newborn, and then she closed up the cave with him inside. It is said,

15. The Qur'an always uses the royal plural (we, our, us) when God is speaking.

16. Citing Qur'an 6:75.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1-18; Facsimiles 2 and 3. See also Moses 1:27-29.

18. Cf. Abraham 3:21-24.

19. Citing Qur'an 29:27.

20. Citing Qur'an 6:76.

21. Biblical Canaan. Cf. Abraham 1:21-22.

22. Hūd and Ṣāliḥ are two pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. For a discussion of Hūd as Lehi and of Ṣāliḥ, see William J. Hamblin, "Pre-Islamic Prophets," in *Mormons and Muslims*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983): 85-104.

according to another version, that the mother gave birth to him, then wrapped him in blankets and put him in a narrow place in the bed of a dried-up river.

38. The mother, after the birth, came to the cave to check on his condition and what he was doing; she found him living by sucking his thumb and [receiving] his sustenance from God. It is said that Āzar asked the mother of Abraham about the state of her pregnancy, and she responded,

39. "I gave birth to a boy, but he died." Āzar believed her and said nothing of it.

40. For Abraham, as he grew, every day was like a month and every month was like a year, and he had not been in the cave but fifteen days when he said to his mother,

41. "Let me go out to look around." His mother carried him outside by night. Abraham looked around, considered the creation of the heavens and the earth, and said, "Truly, He who created me, sustained me, and nourished me is my Lord. I have no other God but He."

42. Then Abraham looked toward the sky, saw a star, and said,

43. "*This is my Lord!*"²³ It is said that this star was Venus. Abraham followed it with his eyes until it disappeared,²⁴ and when the star set he said,

44. "*I do not like that which sets.*"²⁵ I do not like that which, by its condition, rises and moves in a manner by which it is evident that it is a created thing, which moves from one place to another just like all things that, you agree with me, are not God." Then Abraham saw the sun and said that which God has said in His Book.²⁶

45. It is said that his mother visited him periodically in that secret place, nursing him until he arrived at the age of weaning, and she weaned him, taking care of him until Abraham was capable of reasoning. One day he asked his mother,

46. "Who is my lord?"

47. "I am," responded his mother. Abraham asked again,

48. "And who is your lord?"

49. "Your father."

50. "Who is the lord of my father?" Abraham responded.

51. "Be still!" responded his mother, and then she returned to his father and recounted to him what had happened, adding, "This is he of whom we were warned who will change the religion of men."

52. Then Abraham looked to the heavens²⁷ and said,

53. "My Lord is He who has created these things";²⁸ then he went among his people and discovered that they were devoted to some of their idols.²⁹ He said to them,

23. Citing Qur'an 6:76.

24. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

25. Citing Qur'an 6:76.

26. I.e., in the Qur'an; see 6:78.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

28. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 4–5.

29. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

54. "O my people! I am innocent of your idolatry! I turn my face towards Him who has created the heavens and the earth,³⁰ preferring Islam,³¹ without second thoughts; He is God to whom I will never associate anything."³²

55. Abraham, may peace be upon him, did not cease to proclaim the uniqueness of God and to break the idols of his people, debating with them and denying [the gods'] divinity continually. In fact, the great and powerful God has said in the Qur'an: *And even from the beginning We gave unto Abraham rectitude, because We knew him well;*³³ We knew he had conviction, faith in God and in His uniqueness. And again the Qur'anic passage "when (Abraham) said to his father and to his people, 'what are these imitations to which you are devoted?'"³⁴ refers to the idols that they adored.³⁵

56. And again, as attested in the Qur'an, Abraham said,

57. "I swear by God that I will plan an ambush for your idols when you are gone away, your backs turned."³⁶

58. It is reported in the Qur'anic commentary (of Ṭabarī) that Abraham made this oath in secret and in hiding from his people, and that no one heard it save he who declared it when the people said,

59. "Who has done this to our gods? Surely it must be an impious man." Others responded,

60. "We have heard a youth who spoke evil of them: they call him Abraham."³⁷ The Qur'anic verse "and he broke them all to pieces"³⁸ means that that Abraham broke their idols to pieces and shreds.³⁹

61. The reason Abraham did this to the gods of his people:

62. It is said in the Qur'anic commentary (of Ṭabarī) that the people of Abraham said to him,

63. "O Abraham, we have a feast; if you go to it with us, you will like our religion."

64. When it was the day of the feast, they went up to it, and with them also went Abraham, may God bless him, but at a certain place in the road, he threw himself to the earth and said,

65. "I am sick;⁴⁰ my foot hurts." They had stomped on his feet while he was lying down. It is also said that he bandaged his head and his body hurt him, and he remained, without

30. Citing Qur'an 6:78–79. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 4–5.

31. The Muslims believe that Islam (which means "submission," i.e., to God's will) was the religion of the ancient patriarchs.

32. In the Qur'an, the verb *associate* refers to placing anything on a level equal with God. Doing so is an act tantamount to polytheism and is the most grievous sin in Islam.

33. Citing Qur'an 21:51.

34. Citing Qur'an 21:52.

35. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

36. Citing Qur'an 21:57.

37. Citing Qur'an 21:59–60.

38. Citing Qur'an 21:58.

39. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

40. Citing Qur'an 37:89.

again leaving the house of the gods. When they were gone, he cried to the last of them, since the weakest of them had stayed,

66. *"I swear, by God, that I will plot an ambush against your idols when you are gone away, your backs turned."*⁴¹

67. Then Abraham returned to the house of the gods. He found himself in a large hall, and in front of the door of the hall there was a large idol with a smaller one at its side; the idols were all side by side, and every idol had near it a smaller one, even to the door of the hall. The people had already brought food and had left it in front of the gods, saying,

68. *"When it is time to return, our gods shall have blessed our food and we will eat it." When Abraham saw [the idols] and saw the food they had before them, he said,*

69. *"Aren't you going to eat?"⁴² and when he received no answer he said again: "Why do you not speak?" and he fell on them, striking them with his right hand.*⁴³

70. He took a piece of iron and cut off the extremities of each idol,⁴⁴ then hung the axe on the neck of the largest idol and went away. When the people came back to get the food, they saw the gods and said,

71. *"Who has done this to our gods? Assuredly it must be an impious man!"⁴⁵*

72. Some of the weak ones who had remained behind, who had heard his oath, said,

73. *"We have heard a young man who spoke evil of them: they call him Abraham." Then others cried,*

74. *"Bring him here before the presence of all, that they might testify against him!"⁴⁶*

75. The commentators hold that the people were loathe to take him without clear proof.

76. According to some opinions, the meaning of this verse is *"that they testify [of]⁴⁷ our punishment concerning him";* or rather the meaning is *"that they stop";* or rather Abraham did this so that they would learn and know that if the idols had no defense against what Abraham had done to them, it was even more improbable that they could get away from someone else who intended to ensnare them. He did this, therefore, so that the people would cease to worship the idols, to the end of embracing that which he professed: his religion and belief in the uniqueness of the great and powerful God. *But they asked,*

77. *"Is it you that have done this to our gods, O Abraham?"*

78. *"No," he responded, "the one who has done this is he who is the greatest of them. Ask him therefore, if these idols can speak!"⁴⁸*

79. Concerning the words of the great and powerful God in the Qur'an, they said unto [Abraham], before the king Nimrod:

41. Citing Qur'an 21:57.

42. Citing Qur'an 37:91.

43. Citing Qur'an 37:92-93.

44. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

45. Citing Qur'an 21:59.

46. Citing Qur'an 21:60-61.

47. Citing Qur'an 21:61.

48. Citing Qur'an 21:62-63.

80. "Is it you who have done this to our gods?⁴⁹ Is it you who have broken them?"

81. "No," Abraham answered them, "the one who has committed this is he who is the greatest of them⁵⁰ and the most important. Ask the gods who has done this to them and has broken them, if they can speak and explain it." Then they spoke amongst themselves and exclaimed,

82. "Verily, you are the guilty ones!"⁵¹ This means that they thought of the words of Abraham in their hearts; they meditated on them, looking at one another, and they said, "You are a group of fools, for that which you have asked and for your words 'who has done this to our gods,⁵² O Abraham,' for these your gods to whom this was done are here with you, and therefore ask them, if they really can speak and are intelligent and aware, and they shall give the report of who destroyed and demolished them without any doubt." But then they again fell into the ancient error,⁵³ even that on which Abraham had confuted them, when he had contested against them until the arguments against them had become clear. In fact, they said to him,

83. "You know well that they do not speak!"⁵⁴

84. Thus they admitted the inability of that which they worshiped to speak. Qatāda maintains that an evil confusion overcame them.

85. And they cried,

86. "Burn him, and thus appease your gods, if you want to do something."⁵⁵

87. It is reported in the Qur'anic commentary (of Ṭabarī) that the one who said these last words was a Kurd by the name of Habzar. God caused him to fall into the earth, and he shall sink there until the day of the resurrection.

88. It is reported again in the Qur'anic commentary (of Ṭabarī) that the people of Abraham, may God bless him and grant him salvation, when they wanted to burn him, erected a building to that purpose. They closed him inside it, and they gathered wood.⁵⁶ It got to the point that, if a woman took ill, she said,

89. "If God will make me whole, I will collect wood for Abraham."

90. When they had collected for such a purpose, and there was much wood, they put fire to it such that the birds that passed over it burned from the intensity of the flame and of the heat. Then they took Abraham and raised him up to the top of the pyre.⁵⁷ Abraham raised his head to heaven,⁵⁸ but the heaven, the earth, and the mountains said,

91. "Our Lord, Abraham, your friend, is about to be burned for You in the fire."

49. Citing Qur'an 21:62.

50. Citing Qur'an 21:63.

51. Citing Qur'an 21:64.

52. Citing Qur'an 21:59.

53. Citing Qur'an 21:65.

54. Citing Qur'an 21:65.

55. Citing Qur'an 21:68.

56. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

57. Ibid.

58. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

92. "I know more about the situation. If he does invoke your help, aid him," responded God. Then said Abraham, when he raised his head to heaven,

93. "O God! You are alone in heaven, and I am alone on the earth because there is no other on the earth who worships you other than me; God is all that I need, and what an infallible support He is!"⁵⁹ Then they pushed him in the fire,⁶⁰ but Gabriel cried, by order of God,⁶¹

94. "*O fire! Be cool and pleasant for Abraham!*"⁶²

95. Ibn 'Abbās reports that if after the cool the "pleasant" had not been added, Abraham would have died from the cold. That day there was not a single fire on the earth that did not extinguish itself, thinking to be that to which God referred.

96. When the fire went out, the people looked upon Abraham and saw that there was a man together with him, and Abraham rested his head in the other's bosom, [and the other] was wiping the sweat from [Abraham's] face. It is said that this person was the angel of shade.⁶³ God Himself had sent fire, and men had profited therefrom. The people pulled Abraham from the fire, and they took him before the presence of King Nimrod, something they had never before done.

97. It is said that when the people saw him again, after having left him in the flames for seven days, they found he was oozing a white liquid that the fire had not even singed. Then the father of Lot said to them,

98. "The fire will not burn him because you worship it and because he has bewitched it. Rather, put him on top of something and light a fire under him so that he will be killed by the smoke."

99. Thus it was that they put him on top of something that lifted him up, and they kindled the fire under him, but a spark flew up, fell on the beard of the father of Lot, and burned him.⁶⁴ He was the most wicked of all regarding Abraham.

100. According to other traditions, they covered him again, with the fire under him, and then they uncovered him, but they did not find [him] where they had put him because God had ordered him to go to the Holy Land. Nimrod left on his trail and began searching for Abraham; he cautioned the frontier lookouts, telling them,

101. "Whoever happens upon you who speaks Syriac, hold him!"

102. Nevertheless, God changed the language spoken by Abraham to Hebrew, and he came to Lot, the son of his uncle, and together with him they went to his people in Ḥar-rān; these are His words in the Qur'an:

103. "*They wanted to ensnare him, but I made of them the greatest of losers. And I saved him*

59. Ibid.

60. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

61. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

62. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

63. Tottoli's note: "In the text *al-zill*, which means shade, is also, in the second place, protection."

64. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

and Lot, bringing them to the land blessed by me for all creatures,"⁶⁵ which I have blessed with water, plants, fruits, and palms; and it is a holy land, Palestine and Jordan.

104. It is said that this land extended from Syria to Iraq. Some commentators hold that Abraham said instead, when the people were at the point of throwing him into the fire,

105. "There is no God but Thee, be Thou praised, Lord of creations, Thine is the kingdom, Thine is the praise, and no one is Thine equal," and the fire became *cool and pleasant*.⁶⁶

106. Al-Ḥasan recounts that Abraham, when he was thrown into the fire, was not harmed by its heat, and the people said,

107. "He has bewitched it, and for this he feels not the heat." Then Abraham said unto them,

108. "Try with one of your own!" They threw a man into the fire, and he was devoured by it.

109. It has been passed down by Ka'b al-Aḥbār⁶⁷ that no one, from west to east, realized a profit that day, and that the fire burned nothing but the rope with which they bound [Abraham].⁶⁸

110. When the people wanted to throw Abraham into the fire, according to 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd, the creatures said,

111. "O Lord, Your friend is thrown into the fire; give us permission to help him." The great and powerful One answered them,

112. "He is My friend; I have no friends other than him, and I am his God, and he has no gods other than me; if he asks you for help, succor him." And the great and powerful God said, "O fire! Be cool and pleasant to Abraham!"⁶⁹

113. That day the fire burned not even a leg of mutton. Qatāda holds that no animals came that day that did not extinguish the fire around Abraham save the gecko. In fact, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri⁷⁰ reports that the Prophet Muḥammad ordered that the gecko be killed, and he nicknamed it "little pest."

114. It is passed down that Abraham was thrown into the fire at the age of sixteen years, while Sarah gave birth at the age of ninety years.

115. On the other hand, according to the Prophet Muḥammad, Abraham did not lie but three times, all about God, or rather his words "The greatest of these has committed this,"⁷¹ his words "I am sick!"⁷² and his words concerning Sarah, "She is my sister." These

65. Citing Qur'an 21:70–71.

66. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

67. Tottoli's note: "A Jew converted to Islam and transmitter of numerous traditions of the prophets, he died around [A.D.] 654."

68. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

69. Citing Qur'an 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

70. Tottoli's note: "Refers to the famous traditionalist Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri, who died in [A.D.] 742."

71. Citing Qur'an 21:63.

72. Citing Qur'an 37:89.

three expressions have an interpretation that explains the truth of them. Sarah was in fact his sister in religion.⁷³

116. Regarding his words "*I am sick!*"⁷⁴ they have more interpretations, and according to one of these, Abraham would have meant to say,

117. "I am prostrated because of your error to the point of being for this reason as a sick man." There was in fact a possibility that a disease infected him, but God knows more about it, seeing that it is reported in a passage from the Qur'anic commentary (of Ṭabarī) that with his words "*I am sick!*"⁷⁵ he meant "I am infected [with a plague]," because his people fled at hearing the mention of the plague.

118. Regarding instead his words about Sarah, that she was his sister, they were said because of a tyrant who threatened to hurt Abraham. In fact it was said to the tyrant:

119. "There is in the area a man with the most beautiful of women." The tyrant sent to search for [Abraham], and then he asked him of her,

120. "Who is she?"

121. "My sister," responded Abraham; then he returned to Sarah and said to her, "O Sarah, there is not on the face of the earth a believer, other than me and you; that man asked me about you, and I said that you are my sister; do not belie me."

122. The tyrant sent [his people] to search for Sarah, and when she had entered into his presence, he sought to take her by the hand, but he was paralyzed, and he told her,

123. "Call upon God for me, and we will not hurt you!" Sarah prayed to Him, and [the tyrant] was restored. [He] then called one of his chamberlains, to whom he said, "That is not a human being that you have brought me but a demon!"

124. The tyrant therefore gave her Hagar as a slave, and Sarah returned to Abraham while he was praying. He made a gesture to her with his hand and she said,

125. "God has driven back the plans of the unbeliever and fornicator and has given me Hagar as a slave."

126. When God had him outwit his people and freed him from their designs, *Abraham said,*

127. "*Now I will go to the Lord!*"⁷⁶ "I will emerge from the land of my people to God"—meaning to the Holy Land—"and I shall separate myself from them."

73. Cf. Abraham 2:22–25.

74. Citing Qur'an 37:89.

75. Ibid.

76. Citing Qur'an 37:99.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-KISA'I

This *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets) is attributed to an al-Kisā'i about whom nothing else is known. Some have tried to link the work to the famous eighth-century philologist and grammarian Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Hamza ibn al-Kisā'i (A.D. 737–805), though others argue that no mention is made of this philologist making any collection of stories of the prophets. Because the oldest known manuscript dates to A.H. 617/A.D. 1220, the text can have been written no later than the early thirteenth century. The manuscripts vary considerably in size and content because stories have been added and deleted. Al-Kisā'i popularized the genre of the stories of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*). The first full edition of the Arabic text was published in 1922. We use the first English translation: W. W. M. Thackston Jr., trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 2:131–50. The pages from which the stories are drawn are noted after each entry. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs. Thackston has placed asterisks at various intervals in his translation; however, he does not explain their function to his reader (they do not seem to indicate omissions in the text). Hence, we have removed them.

[After speaking of Nimrod's conquests:]

1. Upon his return to Cuthah-rabba, he summoned the master-carpenter and architect, Terah son of Nahor, and ordered him to build a magnificent house. Terah constructed for him a square palace, a thousand cubits in length and breadth. The walls he made of pearl and the floor of silver, the roof of sandal-wood and the gates of ivory. Inside he caused rivers of milk and honey, wine and water to flow, and trees of silver and gold were planted along the borders. He put many assembly-halls in it, in each of which was a portrait of Nimrod. When he had finished, Nimrod was so pleased with it that he made Terah one of his boon-companions and his grand vizier.

2. Nimrod became so haughty and tyrannical that he claimed godship. In addition he wanted to learn star-gazing, the science that God had given to Idris.¹ When Idris was

1. Idris is the Arabic name for Enoch.

translated into heaven,² this science was taken by his successor, a devout man named Hermes;³ and the faithful had continued to learn it until Nimrod's time.

3. One day, while walking in one of his pleasure-parks, Nimrod found a group of ascetics, clad in wool and hair shirts,⁴ and asked them who they were.

4. "We are what remains of Idris's people, and we worship God in this place," they told him.

5. Nimrod ordered them into his palace, where he said to them, "You have two choices: either enter into my religion or teach me knowledge of the stars."

6. "We will teach you what we know," they answered.

7. When he had learned something from them, Iblis⁵ appeared to him in the guise of an old man and said, "You have occupied yourself with learning about the stars, but I know something more than they do."

8. "What is that?" asked Nimrod.

9. "Sorcery and soothsaying," said Iblis; and he taught him those sciences. Then he said, "The kings of old had their own gods to worship and other idols for the people. As you are the greatest and noblest of them, you should build an idol for yourself apart from those of your people." Therefore Nimrod summoned Terah and ordered him to construct seventy idols of gold in his own image.⁶ Then he ordered his people to build idols for themselves; and everyone constructed an idol in his own likeness. Terah also built for Nimrod a golden idol, seven cubits high and two cubits broad, with ruby eyes and an emerald nose. On its head he placed a golden crown studded with pearls and called it Dilun. Then he built for it a throne of ivory⁷ and aloe-wood.

10. Nimrod ordered sacrifices to be made to the idol, and the people worshipped idols until they knew nothing else.

11. One day when Nimrod mounted his throne, he heard a voice say, "Wretched be he who is ungrateful to Abraham's God!"

12. To Terah, who was standing beside him, he said, "Terah, who is Abraham?"

13. "I do not know," he answered.

14. Some time later, while Nimrod was contemplating the beauty of his palace, he heard a voice say, "O Nimrod, be not deceived by this palace of yours! Where shall you flee from Abraham and his God?" And Nimrod was vexed.

2. Cf. Moses 7:18–23.

3. Hermes derives from the hermetic tradition, in which he was considered the teacher of secrets to Moses. The Hermes Trismegistes (thrice great) of the hermetic tradition derives originally from the Egyptian god of writing and knowledge, Thoth (the twice great, thrice great, and five times great), whom the Greeks called Hermes. Some Jewish and Christian traditions identify Hermes with Enoch.

4. This seems to be a reference to the Sufis, who are so named because they used to wear woolen garments (*şūf*). Sufism is a mystical trend that emerged in early Islam.

5. Iblis, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

7. Cf. 2 Chronicles 9:17.

15. Then one day he went out hunting. When he was all alone, there came a voice, which said, "O Nimrod, do not be deceived by the lions, elephants and weapons you have collected, for they will be the first to be avenged of you." Nimrod returned anxiously to his palace and went to his idol Dilun. Bowing down, he asked about Abraham. The idol said, "Despair, O Nimrod! for Abraham will wrench your kingdom from you, unless you believe in him and his Lord." Nimrod sacrificed seven hundred bulls, sheep and cows to the idol.

16. One day, while Nimrod was in the courtyard of his palace, two white birds descended from the air and hovered before him. One of them said, "You and your kingdom are doomed! I am a bird of the East, and this is a bird of the West. We bring you tidings that Abraham's God will destroy you by Abraham's hand." Then they flew away.

17. Nimrod summoned Terah, who, upon hearing the story, said, "Sire, I think these were no more than rebellious genii who covet your position." But that night Nimrod had a terrifying dream. When he awoke, he summoned the astrologers and said, "I dreamed of a man from whose eyes came forth a light as bright as the sun. He wore two white garments and in his hand was a black stalk. He kicked me with his foot and said, 'O Nimrod, which would you prefer: to believe in Abraham's Lord or to have me shatter your crown?' Then he plucked out my right eye, and I began to cry for help; but no one would come to my assistance. Then the man said, 'Be you blind in eye and in heart!' Then he left me. This is what I saw."

18. The dream-interpreters said to him, "Sire, such terrifying dreams may be produced by various foods. Do not let it trouble you." But when they had gone away they said to each other, "This dream indicates the passing of his kingdom and his own destruction."

19. One day while he was seated on his throne, an angel came to him in the guise of a man carrying a white vial in his right hand and a black vial in his left.⁸

20. "Who let you into my house?" asked Nimrod.

21. "The Lord of the House let me in," he replied. "These two vials are a parable for you: this is Paradise, and this is Hell. Choose whichever one you desire." As the angel was departing, he struck the two vials together and said, "Your kingdom is doomed."

22. That night Nimrod had another dream and, summoning Terah, said, "Terah, in my dream I saw the moon rise from your loins and cast its light between heaven and earth. Then I heard a voice saying, '*The truth is come and falsehood is vanished.*'"⁹ And I looked at the idols and saw that they were trembling."

23. "Sire," said Terah, "on earth I am like unto the rising moon because of my great devotion to the idols."

24. Then, while Nimrod was asleep seated on his throne, he had another dream, from which he awoke in fright. Summoning the people of his realm, he said, "I see miracles from Terah. Were he not one of the élite of my realm, I would say that he is my enemy, for I saw growing from his loins a green branch covered with clusters of grapes. Then

8. Cf. Revelation 15:7–17:1; 21:9.

9. Citing Qur'an 17:81.

twigs sprouted from the branch and twined around the east and the west and the heavens, and not one of my subjects was left who did not bow down before that branch—even my own palace and throne and all that is in my palace.”

25. Afterwards Nimrod went to sleep and dreamed of a man standing with the sun in his right hand, the moon in his left, and all the stars between his hands. Then the man said, “Worship the Lord of heaven and earth!” whereupon the throne convulsed and threw him down.

26. Then Nimrod went to sleep again and had another terrifying dream. When he awoke he sent for the soothsayers and dream-interpreters and said to them, “I had a horrible dream. If you conceal its true meaning from me, I will have you tortured and thrown to the lions.”

27. “What did you see, sire?” they asked.

28. “I saw a beam of light more brilliant than the sun and the moon. In this beam I saw a nation descending from and ascending into heaven.¹⁰ Then a man, among the most beautiful of that nation, stood in the light, and the people were saying to him, ‘May God grant you victory, and through you may He revive the earth.’ This was my dream.”

29. “Give us a day and a night,” they said; and he granted their request. But when they were with Terah, they said, “The king’s dream indicates a child, born of those closest to him, who will inherit all the earth and whose name will be revered to the skies from east to west.” Terah accompanied them to give the king their interpretation of the dream, which was, “He will come to you with neither weapons nor army.”

30. Nimrod smiled and said, “If the matter be thus, then it will be simple.”

31. “The child will come from the lineage of those closest to you,” said the interpreters.

32. “There is no one closer to me than my son Cush, and there is no one I honor more than my vizier Terah,” said Nimrod, who thereupon ordered his son Cush’s throat cut and every woman with child watched, so that all male children born were to be killed, while the females were to be left alone. Thus it was until, in the course of seven years, he had slaughtered one hundred thousand babes.¹¹ Then he called the astrologers and told them to see if his enemy had been killed or not.

33. “Sire,” they said, “his mother has not yet conceived him.” Confident in this knowledge, he had the slaughter ceased for a time, but later resumed; and he had so many babes slain in their mothers’ arms that all creatures set up a great clamor to God.

34. Then God informed the angels of the birth of Abraham, the Friend of God, and they heralded it with great glorification.

Chapter 50. The Story of Abraham

35. Now Terah went to his wife and informed her of what had happened.

36. “I will tell you of something stranger still,” she said, “for I ceased to be fertile a long time ago, but today I menstruated and do not know what is wrong.”

10. Cf. Abraham 3:21–24.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

37. "Keep this matter concealed," he said, "and do not let news of it reach the king!" And she remained thus until she had again become pure.

38. Then Terah heard a voice saying, "Your wife's youth has been restored to her that she may produce the brilliant light which is in your seed." Thereupon an angel appeared and said, "O Terah, return and give up the trust which is in your seed." He returned to his house but dared not approach his wife. The next morning, however, there was a dazzling light shining from his face.

39. "Do you not see this light?" he asked his wife.

40. "Yes," she said, "and I, who was a barren old woman, have become a fertile girl."

41. Terah made sacrifices of animals, food and drink to the idols,¹² thinking that they ate and drank. During the night devils came to devour the food, but they were frightened away by angels. The next day Terah was grieved to find the food still there and thought the idols were angry with him. Standing before the idols, he worshipped them to placate them. As he was slow in returning home, his wife came to the temple to find him. Overcome with desire, he lay with her in the temple itself, and she conceived Abraham. Thereupon the Kaaba¹³ fell down prostrate and spoke, saying, "There is no god but God alone who hath no partner." The idols were all toppled¹⁴ and the beasts beat the ground with their tails at the conception of Abraham; and his star rose over the extremities of the earth and shone like the sun and the moon together. Nimrod, seeing the star, asked the astrologers about it; and they said, "Sire, this star indicates that the child at whose hand will come your destruction has been conceived by its mother." Thereupon Nimrod had so many children killed that their number cannot be reckoned;¹⁵ but Abraham continued to increase in beauty and light in his mother's womb until four months had passed, when his mother had a vision of a fire reaching from beneath her skirt to the heights of heaven and spreading throughout the world.

42. When nine months had passed with Abraham in his mother's womb, Nimrod had a terrifying dream and awoke in fright. Calling for his astrologers, he said, "Last night I saw a smokeless fire descend from heaven, approach the door of my palace and say, 'Nimrod, say with me, "There is no god but God; Abraham is the apostle of God!"'¹⁶ Otherwise I will burn you up.' Then it came near me and scorched me."¹⁷

12. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

13. The Ka'ba is the sacred shrine at Mecca, which Muḥammad converted to the worship of Allāh. According to Muslim tradition, the structure was first built by Adam, under divine guidance, and then rebuilt by Abraham and his son Ishmael. By Muḥammad's time, a number of idols were worshiped there, which the Prophet removed.

14. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

15. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

16. This is a variation on the *Shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith, "There is no god but God (Allāh) and Muḥammad is the apostle of God."

17. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

43. "This dream indicates a boy at whose hand will come your destruction," said the astrologers. "Make certain you slay him the moment he is born." Therefore Nimrod and the people of his realm strove to seek out all children and kill them.¹⁸

44. When they came to Terah's house they asked his wife, "Have you conceived a child?"

45. "I have not been with child at all," she answered. God blinded them to Abraham, who would move to the other side of his mother whenever they touched her. As it was not apparent to them that she was with child, they left her.

46. When her birth pains commenced, an angel came and said, "Come with me to the Cave of Light, where Idris and Noah were born."¹⁹ There she found carpets, pillows and birthing implements, and God eased her pain.

47. She gave birth to Abraham on Friday night,²⁰ the tenth of the month of Muharram. When Abraham was delivered, he stood erect and cried out at the top of his voice, "There is no god but God alone who hath no partner!" And his voice carried to the East and the West. Then Gabriel cut the umbilical cord, immersed him in the waters of the rivers of al-Ridwan and clothed him in a white garment.²¹ When he rubbed his mother's breast it flowed with milk and honey. When he sucked his fingers, his thumb flowed with honey, his index finger with wine, his middle finger with milk, his ring finger with cream and his little finger with water.

48. Abraham's mother returned home, her mind at ease concerning her child. On the third day she left her house in secret, headed for the cave. When she saw lions and wild beasts at the entrance to the cave, she became anxious and thought her child had surely perished. Entering the cave, however, she found him on a silk-brocade carpet and his eyes painted with kohl. Realizing that he was protected by his Lord, she returned home. Subsequently she visited him once every three days.

49. When four years had passed, Gabriel brought him a garment from Paradise²² and gave him the Nectar of Unity to drink so that he would never associate anything with God.

50. "Now go forth from the cave, victorious," said Gabriel, who preceded him with a golden staff.

51. God hath said: *And thus did we show unto Abraham the kingdom of heaven and the earth,*²³ *that he might become one of those who firmly believe. And when the night overshadowed him, he saw a star, and said, This is my Lord; but when it set, he said, I like not gods which set.*

18. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

19. Cf. Abraham 1:19; Facsimile 2, figure 3.

20. Friday is the Muslim holy day, when all males are expected to assemble at the mosque for prayer. According to tradition, Adam was also born on Friday in the month of Muḥarram.

21. The purification by water and dressing in a white robe are part of the Muslim Hajj, or pilgrimage to the sacred Ka'ba at Mecca. Al-Ridwān is the name of the angel who stands guard at the gate of paradise.

22. In Jewish and Muslim tradition, it was Gabriel who brought a garment from paradise to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

23. Cf. Abraham 3:1–18.

And when he saw the moon rising, he said, *This is my Lord; but when he saw it set, he said, Verily if my Lord direct me not, I shall become one of the people who go astray. And when he saw the sun rising, he said, This is my Lord, this is the greatest; but when it set, he said, O my people, verily I am clear of that which ye associate²⁴ with God: I direct my face unto him who hath created the heavens and the earth;²⁵ I am orthodox, and am not one of the idolators.²⁶* Then he began to repeat over his heart, his tongue, and all parts of his body the Profession of Sincerity, which is, "There is no god but God alone who hath no partner." And God commanded the wind to bear the Great Profession to the ears of all creatures, which were thereby occasioned bewilderment and fright; and Nimrod was terrified.

52. God then caused an angel to descend to Abraham²⁷ and say, "Rise up, O Abraham, and go to your father and mother. Fear not! and remember your Lord morning and evening!"

53. Gabriel and Abraham stood together before the door of a house, and Gabriel said, "Abraham, this is your parents' house. Enter therein and greet them." So saying, Gabriel left and ascended into heaven.

54. Abraham sought permission to enter and was invited in by his father. When he entered, Terah saw his beauty; and Usha came and embraced him, saying, "By the might of Nimrod, it is my son!"

55. "Mother," said Abraham, "do not swear by the might of Nimrod, for might and majesty belong to God, who created me, shaped me, raised me, preserved me and guided me aright."

56. Terah was thunderstruck by his words and exclaimed, "My son, have you a lord other than Nimrod, who possesses the kingdom of the earth in its breadth and length?"

57. "Father," said Abraham, "my Lord, who created heaven and earth, has no partner!"

58. News of Abraham reached Terah's relatives, who began to argue against him and threaten him with Nimrod's punishment; but he vied with them and made mention of the greatness of his Lord.

59. "Mother," Abraham asked one day, "am I more handsome or is Nimrod?"

60. "You are," my son. "He is black, cross-eyed and flat-nosed."²⁸

61. "If he were the creator, then he would not look like that, would he?" asked Abraham.

62. "Abraham," said his father, "do not speak ill of our king and god, for it is he who created you and me."

63. Abraham grew angry and exclaimed, "May you be wretched, old man!"

64. Terah rose and went to Nimrod, bowed before him and said, "Sire, the child you feared is my son—my son, that is, inasmuch as he was born in my house, and quite without

24. In the Qur'an, the verb *associate* refers to placing anything on a level equal with God. Doing so is an act tantamount to polytheism and is the most grievous sin in Islam.

25. Cf. Abraham 2:12; 4–5.

26. Citing Qur'an 6:75–79. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13.

28. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

my knowledge. Now he has come to me as a youth, but he claims to have a lord other than you."²⁹

65. Nimrod, trembling with fear, asked, "How long has he been with you?"

66. "For three months," said Terah.

67. "Bring him to me!" said Nimrod to his aides, who seized Abraham and brought him before Nimrod.

68. Nimrod had decorated his palace and assembly halls in a marvelous manner, and Abraham turned to the left and to the right and said, "O God, make me victorious over them!" Then, turning to the people, he said, "My people, *what do ye worship* other than God?"

69. *They answered, "We worship idols."*

70. "Do they hear you, when ye invoke them?" asked Abraham. "Or do they either profit you, or hurt you?"

71. *They answered, "But we found our fathers do the same."*³⁰

72. Abraham described God and, turning to his father, said, "And forgive my father, for that he hath been one of those who go astray."³¹

73. Then Nimrod approached him and said, "Abraham, follow my religion and worship me, for it is I who created you and have given you substance."

74. "You lie!" said Abraham. "My creator and my sustainer is God, other than whom there is no god!"

75. The people were speechless, but slowly a liking for Abraham crept into their hearts.

76. Nimrod said to Terah, "This child of yours is young and does not know what he is saying. Take him and show him kindness. Perhaps he will recover his senses."

77. So Terah took him by the hand and said, "My son, since you are in my debt, I want you to vend idols as your brother does."

78. "But how can I sell what I despise?" asked Abraham. Nonetheless he was given a large and a small idol to sell. He would go out with two boys to carry the idols and would say, "Who will buy that which neither harms nor benefits?" And no one would take them from him. Then he would immerse the idols in water and say, "Drink!" and pull the ropes attached to their legs to draw them out of the water. The people would stare, but no one dared to say anything to him.

79. When an old man came asking him to sell one of the idols to him, Abraham said, "Old man, I have been sitting here scoffing at them. They are not to be worshipped." So the old man went to his brother Aaron,³² from whom he bought an idol. As he was carrying it on his back, it fell and broke; so he came back to Aaron and said, "You sold me a broken god."

29. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 30.

30. Citing Qur'an 26:70–74. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

31. Citing Qur'an 26:86. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27; 2:5.

32. The Arabic name Harūn corresponds to the biblical Aaron (Hebrew 'Ahārōn), but in this case clearly represents the name of Abraham's brother Haran. It would have been better to translate it as Haran.

80. "What are you going to do with the broken god?" asked Abraham. They went to Terah, who said, "Take it and worship it. I give you permission to do so."

81. Then an old woman came to Abraham and asked him to sell her an idol. He took out the two idols for her and said, "Take the big one. There is more of it for firewood and kindling."

82. "I don't want it for kindling," she said. "I want it to worship. I had a god, but it was stolen in a bundle of clothing."

83. "A god cannot be stolen," said Abraham. "Were it really a god, it would have protected itself and your clothing too. If, however, you worship the Lord of heaven and earth, He will restore your clothing."

84. "When I see my bundle I will believe," she said. So Abraham prayed to his Lord, and suddenly the bundle, brought by Gabriel, appeared before him.

85. "Here is your bundle," Abraham told her, "and inside is your idol." The old woman took the bundle, broke the idol with a stone and believed in Abraham's God.³³ After this she went about the city of Cuthah-rabba saying, "O people, worship God, who created you and has given you substance."

86. When news of the old woman reached Nimrod, he ordered her hands and feet to be cut off.³⁴ When it was done, Abraham prayed her to be patient; and God sent down the angels to her with a green tabernacle. "Woman," said the angels, "rise and enter this tabernacle." They gave her a draught from Paradise to drink, and God restored her hands and feet and also her youth and beauty. Then she entered the tabernacle and rose into the air until she stood above Nimrod and said, "I am she to whom you did what you did. Woe unto you, Nimrod! My lot is Paradise, but yours is Hell!"

87. Then more than a thousand of the people of Cuthah-rabba believed in Abraham. Nimrod ordered them to be rounded up and thrown to the lions, but none were eaten. Then they were thrown to the dogs, but they would not devour the people either.³⁵

88. When Abraham had completed his fortieth year, Gabriel descended to him³⁶ and said, "Your Lord has sent you to Nimrod the Accursed. Fight him and fear him not, for I shall protect you and shall give you victory over him."

89. Abraham stood at Nimrod's gate and shouted at the top of his voice, "O people! Say that there is no god but God and that I, Abraham, am God's apostle." Nimrod was terrified and, trembling with fright, called for his viziers and patriarchs, whom he seated in the assembly halls; he also summoned his army with their weapons and instruments of war and drew up his lions and elephants in ranks on his right and left. Then Abraham mentioned God, and the lions, elephants, beasts and dogs became humble and submissive before him. Again he cried out, "O people! Confess that there is no god but God, creator of every thing!"

33. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

34. Cf. Abraham 1:10–11.

35. Cf. Abraham 1:11.

36. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13.

90. When one of the viziers asked him who he was, he said, "I am Abraham, son of Terah, apostle of the Lord of the Universe. I call you to worship Him."

91. "Who is your Lord?" they asked.

92. "He who created all people."

93. "My kingdom is greater than His!" said Nimrod.

94. "You lie!" said Abraham. "All kingdoms and dominion belong to the Lord of the Universe."

95. With that, Nimrod's throne shook and said, "You do lie, Nimrod, enemy of God. It is God who has created all creation."

96. There was in Nimrod's palace a cock that now approached and said, "Nimrod, Abraham is the apostle of the Lord of the Universe, and what he says is the truth." And it too followed Abraham.

97. Next came a cow of great beauty that said, "Enemy of God, were I given leave by my Lord, I would gore you so that afterwards you would never be able to eat again!" Nimrod ordered the cow to be slain, but God restored it to life and caused two wings to grow from it; and the cow flew into the air.

98. Abraham turned and saw a slave-girl in the palace. She was nursing Nimrod's small daughter. Suddenly the girl leapt from her mother's lap, faced Nimrod and said, "Father, this is God's prophet Abraham." And Nimrod ordered her cut to pieces.

99. "One of my tokens of prophecy," said Abraham, "is the power to call these lions, elephants and dogs and to have dominion over them. I can command your throne to topple you. I can command your crown to fly from your head, and I can command your palace to fall in on top of you. Verily God is not incapable of anything; He is capable of all things."

100. "What do you know of His power?" asked Nimrod.

101. "My Lord is he who giveth life, and killeth,"³⁷ said Abraham.

102. "I give life and I kill," said Nimrod.³⁸

103. "How can you do that?" asked Abraham.

104. "I set free from prison men sentenced to death, and I kill men not sentenced to die."

105. "My Lord does not give life or cause death thus," said Abraham. "He quickens the dead and He causes death to the living yet kills them not. But, O Nimrod, *God bringeth the sun from the east, now do thou bring it from the west.*" Whereupon Nimrod was confounded. Then Abraham called upon his Lord and said, "O Lord, show me how thou wilt raise the dead."

106. God said, "Dost thou not yet believe?"

107. He answered, "Yea, but I ask that my heart may rest at ease."

108. God said, "Take therefore four birds."³⁹

37. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

38. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

39. Citing Qur'an 2:260.

109. Abraham took a white cock, a black raven, a green dove and a peacock, killed them, cut off their heads, mixed up the blood and feathers and scattered their flesh on four mountain tops.⁴⁰ He then called them, and the heads went out of his hands, each to its own body, saying, "There is no god but God; Abraham is God's apostle to Nimrod and his people."

110. Nimrod then ordered Abraham to be bound and thrown into prison deep beneath the earth, and the guards put him in the remotest place. The angels, however, brought him food and drink from Paradise, and when he rose for prayer at night the light that encompassed him shone up to the heavens.

111. Abraham told the prisoners the story of Paradise and Hell. Once a man came and said, "Abraham, I am an Arab and the son of a king. We were four brothers, but the king grew angry with us and imprisoned me here and my brothers in the east, in the west and in the Yemen. Can your Lord reunite us?" Abraham performed the ablutions, rose and prayed two *rakʿas*⁴¹ and called upon God. Suddenly the two brothers from the east and west fell from the air in front of their brother, whereupon everyone in the prison marveled. When the news reached Nimrod, he called for the brothers and asked, "Who brought you together with your brother and loosened your chains?"

112. "Our God did this through the prayer of Abraham," they answered.

113. Nimrod called for his sorcerers and said, "I want you to bring the other brother from the Yemen."

114. "Sire," they said, "we are not capable of such a task."

115. Then Nimrod said to Abraham, "Bring me the brother who is in the Yemen the same way you brought these two." Abraham prayed to his Lord, but God told him that the brother had died and now lay in his grave. When Abraham told them, they did not believe him.

116. "Pray to your Lord to bring us his grave!" said Nimrod.

117. Abraham prayed, and God commanded the angel entrusted with the earth to cleave the ground before Abraham, and the grave opened beneath their feet.

118. "This is the grave of your brother," he said to them.

119. "If what you say be true," they said, "pray your Lord to bring him back to life so that we can see him and speak to him." Abraham prayed, and suddenly the grave was split open and the man stepped forth, blazing in flame, and said, "This is the retribution of him who worshiped idols and was ungrateful to his Lord." . . .

120. Then God took away the rain from them, and Nimrod was left in dire straits. He had all the available grain and food gathered up and stored in underground warehouses, estimating that he had enough for his people.⁴²

121. Abraham went outside the city to a sand dune and called his Lord to turn the sand into food for the faithful.⁴³ God granted his prayer and made it food of Paradise,

40. Cf. Genesis 15:9–11.

41. The term refers to prostrations or bowings in prayer.

42. Cf. Abraham 1:29–30; 2:1, 5.

43. Cf. Abraham 2:17.

from which the believers took as much as they wanted; and the infidels took from Nimrod until his supply was exhausted, whereupon the people began to incline to Abraham.⁴⁴

122. One day, while Nimrod was standing at the gate of his palace, Abraham came near carrying a bag of wheat he had brought from the sand dune.

123. "Abraham," called Nimrod, "what have you there?"

124. "Food," answered Abraham. "My Lord has provided sustenance for me and for all who believe in Him and in me." Nimrod ordered him to open the bag; and, putting in his hand, he drew out red sand. Then Abraham put in his hand and drew out grains of wheat the size of pistachio nuts. On each grain was written, "A gift from the Magnificent to Abraham the Friend."

125. "You have corrupted my people," said Nimrod. "Go from my land!"

126. "I have more right to this city than you," said Abraham, "for it has been the land of my fathers and forefathers from all time. Your father Canaan came and settled here by force." And Abraham departed to his house.

127. Each year the people of Cuthah-rabba had a festival during which they went far out of the city and worshipped for several days. Afterwards they would return, and Nimrod would parade with the lords of the realm in magnificent array. When that festival approached and they were about to leave the city, they said to Abraham, "Are you not coming with us to the festival?"

128. "*Verily I shall be sick,*" said Abraham (meaning because of their idolatry). *And they turned their backs and departed from him*⁴⁵ to their festival so only the infirm and children were left in the city. Abraham entered the idol-temple, where the people had put tables of food before the idols.

129. "Why don't you eat, see or speak?" Abraham asked the idols. Then, taking an axe, *he turned upon them, and struck them with his right hand,*⁴⁶ breaking the arm of one, the leg of another, the head of yet another—until he had shattered them into pieces, as God hath said: *He brake them all in pieces, except the biggest of them*⁴⁷ around the neck of which he hung the axe, mashed its face into the food that was before it and returned home.

130. When the festival was over and the people returned, they entered the temple and saw what Abraham had done to their idols. *They said, "Who hath done this to our gods? He is certainly an impious person."* And certain of them answered, "We heard a young man speak reproachfully of them: he is named Abraham."

131. *They said, "Bring him therefore before the people, that they may bear witness against him."* When he was brought before the assembly, they said unto him, "Hast thou done this to our gods, O Abraham?"

132. *He answered, "Nay, that biggest of them hath done it: but ask them, if they can speak."*

133. *And they said, "Verily thou knowest that these speak not."*

44. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

45. Citing Qur'an 37:89–90.

46. Citing Qur'an 37:93.

47. Citing Qur'an 21:58. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

134. Abraham answered, "Do ye therefore worship, besides God, that which cannot profit you at all, neither can it hurt you? Fie on you: and upon that which ye worship beside God!"⁴⁸

135. The people said, "O king, burn him as he has burned our hearts." Now Nimrod had an iron furnace;⁴⁹ and, whenever he grew angry at any of his subjects, he would order it to be lit, and the subject would be cast into it alive to be melted like lead. He ordered this furnace to be lit, and Abraham was thrown in.⁵⁰ As the fire did him no harm, he was taken out again. Then Nimrod ordered a great pit dug, and so much wood brought in by beasts that the animals themselves refused to carry the wood, all except the mule (as punishment for which God caused it to be sterile).

136. Wood was gathered for four years by men, women, children and slaves. Then they set torch to it. The flames lept up, and the smoke rose to a height of four hundred cubits so that when even a bird flew over it, it was burnt and fell dead. However, they could discover no device whereby they could get Abraham into the fire. Iblis appeared to them in the guise of an old man and asked, "Why are you so perplexed?" They told him why, and he said to them, "Construct a catapult," which he taught them how to do. When it was ready, they put Abraham naked into the pan of the catapult, whereupon the sky and the earth and the angels set up a great noise, saying, "Our God, here is thy servant and apostle about to be cast into the fire!"

137. "If he calls upon you for aid," said God, "then do you help him. If he calls upon me, verily I am the succorer of those who seek aid."

138. Abraham prayed to his Lord to give him victory over his enemy,⁵¹ and the angels encompassed the pan of the catapult so that when they tried to lift him they could not.⁵²

139. "If you want him to rise up," said Iblis to them, "then bring ten women, strip them naked and expose their private parts." This they did, and the angels left the catapult,⁵³ whereupon they hurled him forty cubits into the air, where Gabriel met him⁵⁴ and said, "Abraham, have you any request?"

140. "From you, no," said Abraham. "God is my keeper: how excellent is his guardianship!"

141. Then God said, "*O fire, be thou cold, and a preservation unto Abraham*"⁵⁵ (Ibn Abbas said this means "cold" from the heat of the fire and "preservation" from the cold).

48. Citing Qur'an 21:59–63, 65–67.

49. A furnace made of iron seems unlikely. A smelter or kiln made of bricks or at least lined with bricks may be meant. Abraham lived long before the Iron Age, and bricks withstand much higher temperatures than iron.

50. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15.

51. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

52. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

53. Iblis gives this counsel in order to disperse the morally sensitive angels, who are preventing the use of the catapult. Cf. Al-Rabghūzī, p. 155 par. 35.

54. Ibid.

55. Citing Qur'an 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

142. The fire therefore became cool and its heat vanished. Gabriel brought a golden throne and clothed Abraham with garments from Paradise.⁵⁶

143. Nimrod saw in the midst of the fire a man seated on a throne and clad in green clothes, and on his right and left two men of extreme beauty and around about him a great multitude. "How many have you cast into the fire?" asked Nimrod. "One or a hundred thousand?"

144. "Only Abraham," they replied.

145. "Then who are those people around him?" asked Nimrod, and they were astonished.

146. "Go to him," said Nimrod, "and make him swear to you by God that he will come out to you." They made him swear, and he came out, wading through the fire, which did not burn him at all.

147. "Your magic is indeed marvelous," said Nimrod.

148. "It is not magic," replied Abraham. "It is the might of God!"

149. "Then I will go up into the heavens and kill this God of yours," said Nimrod, who then ordered a cube-shaped ark built, with two doors, one opening to the sky and the other to the earth. He also ordered four eagles to be starved for three days. He took two iron rods and nailed them to the sides of the ark; on the end of each rod he hung a piece of meat and fastened the eagles by their middles to the rods. Taking a bow and a quiver of arrows, he climbed into the ark and closed the doors. When the eagles raised their heads, saw the meat and realized what it was, they flew upwards, carrying the ark with them, and rose high, high into the air. Then Nimrod told his vizier to open the door and see how the earth appeared. Opening it, he said, "I see it as though it were but a village." Then he opened the door that gave to the sky and cried, "It looks just as it did when we were on the ground." He closed the door, and the eagles rose higher and higher until they grew tired and were about to drop with the ark, at which point an angel in the sky met the ark and said, "Woe unto you, Nimrod! Whither do you think you are going?"

150. "My destination is Abraham's God, with whom I am going to do battle. How much distance remains between Him and me?"

151. "Between the earth and the heaven of the world the distance takes five hundred years to traverse, and the canopy of heaven is of a like distance. There are seven heavens, and the height of each is like the height of the heaven of the world." When the vizier heard that, he fell down to the earth in a swoon, and Nimrod was left by himself in the ark. Then he took the bow and, placing an arrow in it, said, "If I cannot reach you, O God of Abraham, this arrow will!" And he shot the arrow into the air (and it is said that it returned to him smeared with blood), whereupon he exclaimed, "I have killed the God of Abraham!"

152. Now Gabriel struck the ark with one of his wings and cast it into the sea, from which the waves churned it up and left it on the shore. Nimrod emerged from the ark and found that his beard and hair had turned white.

56. We have noted earlier the tradition that Gabriel brought Abraham a garment from paradise and other similar traditions that have the angel bringing such a garment to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

153. From there he wandered from town to town until he came to Cuthah-rabba, which he entered by night. The next morning the people came to him but did not recognize him at first because of his white hair.

154. When the news of Nimrod's return reached Abraham, he went to Nimrod and said, "How did you find the might of my Lord?"

155. "I killed your Lord," said Nimrod.

156. "My Lord is too magnificent for you even to engage in battle with Him," said Abraham, "but do you think it is within your power to fight me tomorrow?" Nimrod assented and gathered his armies, while Abraham went out into the desert with seventy of his companions. Then God sent gnats down on Nimrod's army and the whole world was filled with them. They caused the death of so many people that the rest went into their houses, lit fires and locked their doors, all of which they did to no avail.

157. A gnat fell on Nimrod and came to rest on his beard. He was about to kill it when it entered one of his nostrils and crawled up to his brain and began to gnaw at his flesh, marrow and blood, praising God. Forty days passed during which Nimrod could not sleep, eat or drink, so he had an iron bar made with which he ordered his aides to strike his head, for every time they struck him the gnat would be still.

158. Those who struck his head were of only the highest rank; but, after forty more days had passed, one of the viziers, a man of enormous strength, struck his head so hard that his skull split in two, and the gnat emerged like a chick from an egg, saying, "There is no god but God; Abraham is the apostle of God and His Friend."

159. Nimrod died in a most horrible manner; and God visited earthquakes upon his people, and their city was pulled down around them.⁵⁷ God hastened their souls to Hell and made their everlasting abode miserable.

Chapter 51. Abraham's Migration to the Sacred Land

160. Kaab al-Ahbar said: Then Abraham gathered together those of his companions who had believed in him and set out for Syria.⁵⁸ He traveled until he came to the city of Harran, where he dwelt for a time. There reigned a king named Harran, who believed in Abraham and gave him his daughter Sarah in marriage.

161. From there he went to Jordan, where there was a king named Zadok,⁵⁹ who summoned Abraham and asked who he was.

162. "I am Abraham, Friend of God," he said. Then the king asked who the woman was.

163. "This is my sister," said Abraham.

164. "Marry her to me!" commanded the king.

165. "She is forbidden to marry an infidel," he said, "for she is a believer."

57. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

58. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

59. I.e., Melchizedek, where *melchi* means "king" and *zedek* means "righteousness." Here, the Muslim tradition has confused the story of the righteous priest-king Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20) with that of the pharaoh (Genesis 12:14–20) or Abimelech (Genesis 20:2–18), who wanted to take Sarah to wife.

166. "If you do not give her to me in marriage," said the king, "I shall take her from you by force!" And he ordered Sarah brought to him. Abraham prayed to God, and when the king stretched out his hand toward her it withered and stuck to his neck.

167. "This is your just retribution," said Sarah, "because you were wrathful toward the Friend of God and his wife."

168. "Are you his wife?" asked Zadok.

169. "Yes," she answered.

170. "Then I am sorry for what I have done," he said, "and am repentful. Ask Abraham to pray to his Lord to forgive me." Abraham prayed to his Lord and was told that the king would not be set free unless he submit his kingdom to Abraham and depart. When told this, the king agreed and gave his land to Abraham.⁶⁰

60. The story explains how Abraham inherited the land of Canaan, where Melchizedek lived. In attributing to Melchizedek actions that the Bible and the Book of Abraham attribute to the pharaoh, this story may reflect the scene in Facsimile 3 (see fig. 1), in which Abraham is allowed to sit on the throne of Egypt.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-NISABURI

Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Manṣūr ibn Khalaf al-Nisābūrī (5th century A.H./11th century A.D.) authored a book entitled *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Stories of the Prophets) in Persian, patterned after Arabic books of the same title. While the text was written in Persian, quotes from the Qurʾan were in Arabic out of respect for the sacred book. The English translation used here was specially prepared for this volume by Glen M. Cooper from al-Nisābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Tehran: n.p., 1961), 43–62. Passages translated from Arabic have been italicized. We have numbered the paragraphs for reference purposes.

Fourteenth Story: Ibrāhīm [Abraham], on him may there be peace

1. The word of Him, may He be exalted: *“Mention Ibrāhīm in the Book. Verily, he was a prophet who spoke the Truth.”*¹ And the father of Ibrāhīm was Āzar² the son of Nākhur, who was among the posterity of Sām the son of Nūh.³ He was an idol-maker by profession, and he was in charge of the Shrine of the Idols,⁴ and he was esteemed among those close to Nemrūd.⁵

2. His story was [as follows]: there was a prophecy about Nemrūd to the effect that within two or three years, a child who would be weaned from its mother⁶ would be instrumental in the downfall of the king. Nemrūd commanded that every child who was weaned from its mother should be killed.⁷ For three years he did thus.

3. When Ibrāhīm was weaned from his mother, his mother approached Āzar, saying: *“A child has been born to us.”* He replied: *“If he is a child, send him to the place of the tiger,⁸ and destroy him, since pleasing Nemrūd is more important to me than this child.”* His mother took [Ibrāhīm] to the mountain, and she sought a place that was narrow and

1. Citing Qurʾan 19:41.

2. Biblical Terah.

3. Nākhur, Sām, and Nūh are biblical Nahor, Shem, and Noah.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

5. Biblical Nimrod.

6. Meaning that the child was at the age of weaning. Therefore, not all children were slain, but only those at this age.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11. Cf. also the stories of Moses and Jesus in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

8. “Place of the tiger” probably means the jungle or forest. This is a euphemism for abandoning the child.

dark, and she washed him and gave him milk and placed him there. He said, "O Lord, if she leaves, I will not see." Then she left. The King⁹ [God], may He be exalted, appointed someone to come several times a day and to give him milk until he was satisfied and then leave. The King, may He be exalted, nourished him in that cave and cared for him with His own power.

4. When one month passed, his mother secretly entered the cave in order to see how he was. When she saw him refreshed and cleaned, she was filled with joy, and she took him away and gave him milk and put him in the open, and she was powerless with astonishment. She kept this event a secret until Ibrāhīm became three years old. And the King, may He be exalted, daily nurtured him in that cave. Every month, and every few days his mother would come and see [him], until he was ten years old, when that [previous] situation, and that era, and the time of killing children had passed. Then his mother came and took Ibrāhīm away and brought him to the city, and she informed his father of his condition.

5. According to other traditions, he remained thus in the cave until he reached eighteen years [of age]. The King, may He be exalted, nourished him, and up to that time he did not know that he must come out of the cave. Then [one day] when he was outside at the time of evening prayer, he saw a star. And a story has come down with a report that when he became twelve years old, his mother approached him. Ibrāhīm asked, "O Mother, who is my Lord?" She replied, "I am." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is your Lord?" She replied, "Your father." Ibrāhīm asked, "My father?" She replied, "Yes." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is my father's Lord?" She replied, "Nemrūd." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is Nemrūd's Lord?" She replied, "He has no Lord because he is Lord of lords." Ibrāhīm said, "O Mother, I have found you to be among the ignorant. How is this possible?"

6. Then his mother came and reported to his father and said, "I have hidden our son for some years," and she described his situation. His father went and saw Ibrāhīm, rejoiced, and wanted to bring him to his city. Just as he had asked his mother, Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is my Lord?" His father replied, "Your mother." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is my mother's Lord?" His father replied, "I am." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is your Lord?" His father replied, "Nemrūd." Ibrāhīm asked, "Who is Nemrūd's Lord?" His father replied in hushed tones, "He is the Lord of everyone." Ibrāhīm said, "I do not accept this."

7. Āzar said to Ibrāhīm's mother, "Leave this child in this place, since if he comes to our city, we will be thrown into serious trouble." They left him and went away, and he remained a few more years in the cave.

8. At length one day he pondered, "What am I doing here? Let me go and seek God Himself, and be occupied with His service, since He did not create me for idle talk and nonsense." He came out of the cave, and he saw the world and the condition of the sky, and he saw the earth. He said, "This is marvelous! And without a doubt there is a Creator Who has created me likewise."

9. This text refers to God by many titles that might be easily confused with other characters in the story. When God is referred to, he is always given praise such as "may He be exalted." In other words, in this instance the "the King" is God.

9. Then as he sought and pondered until the afternoon prayer, he saw a star,¹⁰ a light that came up over him. He prostrated himself and said, "It may be that this is my Creator." *The word of Him, may He be exalted: "And when the night covered him, he saw a star."*¹¹ When he saw that it revolved, he said, "I do not want that which has revolved. It seems to me that whatever causes the revolution must not itself revolve. I do not think this is the Lord."¹² He saw the moon, a brighter light, and likewise he said, "*And when he saw the moon rising,*"¹³ he said, "This is He." When it revolved, he said, "No. If my Lord has not revealed a way, then I am among those who wander astray."

10. And in some accounts it has come down that when he saw the moon,¹⁴ he prostrated himself until daylight. When he saw the light of day and it made the light of the moon vanish, he said, "This reveals a Lord." When he saw the sun which emerged, he said, "It may be that this is that which is greater." *The word of Him, may He be exalted: "This is the greatest."*¹⁵ Then he prostrated himself until the time of its setting, and when the setting occurred, and the shadows fell, Ibrāhīm said, "This also revolves—I do not want this." Likewise he gave a report: "*Yea, I am free from what you are associating with God.*"¹⁶ "He who created the heaven and the earth,¹⁷ I consider to be beyond that. I am a pure Muslim,¹⁸ and I am disgusted with polytheists."

In this place there is a question.

11. The first question is: Why did Ibrāhīm say that the stars and the moon and the sun were the Lord?

12. Answer: There is one report that the Truth, may He be exalted, gives in speculative theology itself, and it is not [a question of] how and why. On the other hand, while Ibrāhīm was seeking, he did not say it with belief, and while seeking, it was permissible to say anything and to return to God. Rational demonstration of the appearance [of the

10. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

11. Citing Qur'an 6:76.

12. The remarks and descriptions in the above passage presuppose a geocentric worldview as well as the influence of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology. According to this view, the stars, moon, sun, and the other planets move around the earth with uniform motion, carried by transparent, concentric orbs. These motions formed a hierarchy that ascended from the moon through the planets to the outermost sphere of the fixed stars and beyond, to the sphere of the Prime Mover. Each higher sphere was thought to convey motion to the lower spheres. The planets were thought to be divinities, and their modern names (Jupiter, Mars, Venus, etc.) preserve, via Graeco-Roman mythology, a distant memory of this ancient belief. Abraham, however, could not accept any of these heavenly bodies as God, who, properly speaking, must be the cause of all these motions, the Prime Mover, and not among the things that are moved.

13. Citing Qur'an 6:77.

14. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

15. Citing Qur'an 6:78.

16. Ibid. In the Qur'an, the verb *associate* refers to placing anything on a level equal with God. Doing so is an act tantamount to polytheism and is the most grievous sin in Islam.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 4–5.

18. I.e., one who submits (to God).

created thing] was necessary, so that he found [the Creator]. Do you not see that when he knew the impropriety of calling created things a Lord, he repented and said: “*I have turned my face as a true believer to Him who brought forth the heavens and the earth*”?¹⁹

13. And another report states that when Ibrāhīm said this, he knew that there was one God, and in that epoch some of the people worshiped the stars, and some worshiped the moon, and some worshiped the sun.²⁰ Ibrāhīm was this one who spoke while on the path of denial; he spoke not while on the path of confession; he produced proofs for them that these things rotated from a cause, and who is worthy to be the cause of all, but God? Those things which have rotated, He has caused to rotate. Everything which rotates is subordinate [to the Cause of the action], and God does not deserve to be called weak.²¹

14. And on the path [of seeking Islam] an indicator and the signs of [the Creator] are that the Creator put evidence in the created, which Ibrāhīm thus said: “*That which was created is like this my Lord.*” The conclusive evidence for this is that the [word] *sun* is feminine, and if you say this is God, then you say that this feminine thing is my Lord.²² This [above event] was a sign [that pointed] Ibrāhīm toward the Lord, may He be exalted, and [this was] evidence of His handiwork. Do you not see that he said: “*I turned my face*”?²³ And he also said: “*Verily, I am free from what you are associating with God.*”²⁴ Then he became assured that the chain of signs constituted an indicator that pointed toward the Lord, may He be exalted.

Fifteenth Story: Ibrāhīm, upon him be peace, comes to the city

1. At that time, after he became seventeen years old, he arose and came with his mother to the city, and he entered a house, and he continued on good terms with his father. His father also commanded him that he should take the idols to the marketplace and sell them. Ibrāhīm took the idols to the marketplace and did the opposite, and he would say, “Is there no advantage in suffering a small loss? They [the people] always do what is unseemly, and so many among them are so stupid that they do not know that something which they sell cannot properly be God.”

2. And according to another tradition which has come down, Ibrāhīm brought the idols to the marketplace and sold them, and also his father had made a shrine for the idol among the idols.²⁵ And he was in that place, and whenever anyone came to worship, Ibrāhīm asked, “Why do you worship this which is unworthy of worship?”

19. Citing Qur’an 6:79.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

21. These passages have affinities with the philosophy of Ibn Ṭufayl, as depicted in his treatise *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. Very little is known about Ibn Ṭufayl, but he was born ca. A.H. 494–504 (the first decade of the twelfth century A.D.), and thus lived after al-Nisābūrī.

22. I.e., it is improper to identify the created thing strictly with the Creator because created things have accidental particulars such as gender, but God does not.

23. Citing Qur’an 6:79.

24. Citing Qur’an 6:78.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

3. And some reports have come down that he appeared there for seven years. People came and said to his father, "Your son despises the idols, and he says they are unworthy of worship, and you are inviting everyone to this belief." His father came and said, "O Ibrāhīm, what is this thing which is said that you are saying, and why do you despise the idols, and how can you say this?" Ibrāhīm argued with his father, "You say this is the Truth; it is not." Thus the Truth, may He be exalted, said: "*Why do you worship what neither hears nor sees, nor which benefits you at all? O my father, knowledge has come to me which has not come to you.*"²⁶ He said to his father, "I have knowledge which has not reached you. Obey the command which states that you are to find the correct path." He said further: "*Do not serve the devil.*"²⁷ "O father, do not obey the command of the demon who is in rebellion against God." "O my father, I fear lest a punishment befall you."²⁸ "O my father, I fear lest a torment befall you, because you are a companion of the demon."²⁹

4. His father said: "O Son, you despise these our gods. If you say that this is the reason you do not return [to serving them], I will stone you, or by our command they will stone you."³⁰ Oh, you are far from yourself!" The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*Are you avoiding my gods?*"³¹ Ibrāhīm said: "O Father, may peace be on you, and in peace farewell, which is from God, may He be exalted. I will forgive you because he brought about the situation between me and you." "*And I will forsake you all, and what you pray to instead of God.*"³² He said: "I am disgusted because of you and your idols. I do not want them in place of God. And I know no god except One, and I do not want to worship that which I consider wretched." Ibrāhīm argued much with his own father.

Sixteenth Story: Ibrāhīm decides to depart from his own father

1. Then Ibrāhīm arose and went out from the midst of them and went to the mountain. And he spent seven years in the mountains of Pars,³³ so that then his mother and father found it difficult to bear, and [his father] said, "You have made my child a wanderer." And his father sent someone to search for him, so that he would be brought home again.

2. Three years passed. In the same manner, in every place that he reached he would defame the idols, until his father died; and he remained in the care of his father's brother, whose name was Hāzar,³⁴ who was the father of Lūṭ.³⁵

26. Citing Qur'an 19:42–43.

27. Citing Qur'an 19:44.

28. Citing Qur'an 19:45.

29. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

30. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 30.

31. Citing Qur'an 19:46.

32. Citing Qur'an 19:48.

33. Pars is Persia.

34. In Arabic script, the names Hāzar and Hāran are very similar. An original Hāran was probably misread as Hāzar.

35. Biblical Lot (whose father is called Haran in the Bible).

3. Ibrāhīm reflected in his heart: "What shall I do to provoke the idols to anger, so that these people would know that these idols do nothing? And they do nothing which is appropriate." Thus the Truth, may He be exalted, said: "*By God, I will strategize against your idols.*"³⁶ Ibrāhīm said: "I worked a trick with your idols while you were detained at the festival."

4. They would conduct the festival from year to year, when they would bring out the idols to the field, and they would make offerings to them and worship them. And they would bring out many things to the idols. This was done in the time of the ancestors of Ibrāhīm³⁷ and of his contemporaries. At that time his father's brother Hāzar had custody of him.³⁸

Seventeenth Story: The breaking of the idols

1. Then Ibrāhīm decided upon the day when the people celebrated the festival out of doors. Ibrāhīm pretended to be sick on the way and, fastening something on his forehead, he returned to the road again and said, "I am sick." The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*And he said: 'Verily, I am ill.'*"³⁹

2. Then Ibrāhīm returned and entered the Shrine of the Idols, and no one prevented him. He took a large ax and chopped to pieces every one of the idols,⁴⁰ except for the biggest idol, so that they would return from that religion [to the true God], and he put the ax with the big idol, and he himself went outside.

3. When the people returned from the festival, they entered the Shrine of the Idols, and they saw that the idols were broken. They said, "What is this thing which has been done to our gods?" The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*Who did this to our gods?*"⁴¹ It was reported in the city, and the people gathered, and the leaders went to the palace of Nemrūd, where they reported the situation to be thus. Nemrūd commanded, "Seek the one who did it." The man who was accompanying Ibrāhīm at the time when he said, "I am unwell," that man said, "I saw the one who returned again from the road." They said that it was so. They said it was a youth, Ibrāhīm, whom they wanted. The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*They said, 'We heard a youth, who is called Ibrāhīm, mentioning them.'*"⁴² The Truth, may He be exalted, gave a report about them that they said: "We heard that this youth never worshiped our idols." Nemrūd commanded, "Bring him!" The word of

36. Citing Qur'an 21:57.

37. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

38. The traditions have apparently become confused here. In 16:2, al-Nisābūrī names Hāzar as the father of Lūṭ, biblical Lot. In the Bible, Lot is the son of Abraham's brother Haran, and a number of nonbiblical traditions included in this volume make Haran the keeper of the shrine. This is the only text we have encountered that makes Terah's brother the keeper of the shrine and the father of Lot.

39. Citing Qur'an 37:89.

40. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

41. Citing Qur'an 21:59.

42. Citing Qur'an 21:60.

Him, may He be exalted: *“Bring him before the eyes of the people.”*⁴³ He said, *“Bring him before the eyes of the people, so that they might see him give testimony until he is forced to confess.”*

4. Nemrūd was judge,⁴⁴ although he was a rejector of Truth, and he remained judge over that kingdom for a very long time. *And it was said, “The king continues to be just with the unbelievers, and unjust with the believers.”* Do you not see that he said, *“I will show no anger nor render punishment unless he confess or he offer witnesses. Then I will condemn him.”* One person came and gave testimony. He said, *“I will not condemn him by the testimony of one person.”*

5. Then they asked Ibrāhīm, *“Did you do this?”* *“Did you do this to our gods, O Ibrāhīm?”* He said, *“No, the big one did this.”*⁴⁵ Ibrāhīm said, *“No, the biggest of [the idols] did it. Ask him to tell you.”*

6. Question: Ibrāhīm was a prophet; why was it permissible for him to speak the contrary of what the prophets have said?⁴⁶

7. Answer: Ibrāhīm said he was not at the time on the true path; he said he was on the path of disputation and of being called to Islam.⁴⁷ Do you not see that he said, *“Ask it to speak”?* And with regard to that, he wanted them to know that the idols do nothing at all, and none of them is either beneficial or harmful. Do you not see that they remained completely in the depths? Thus he said, the words of Him, may He be exalted: *“Then they were confounded.”*⁴⁸ They returned to themselves and put their heads down and said, *“You know that they do not speak.”*

8. The report has come down that when Ibrāhīm said this, more people thought in their hearts that he was speaking the truth, and he spoke thus, *“And they returned to themselves.”*⁴⁹ They returned to themselves and they spoke with one another, *“You are the oppressors of yourselves, who want an idol for a god.”* Then Ibrāhīm said, *“Do you serve someone other than God, who is neither useful to you nor harms you? Curse you!”*⁵⁰ He said, *“You worship in place of God that which is neither of benefit nor of harm. A curse on you and on what you worship!”* Because of his words in this sentence we know that he was on the path of argument and proof. He said, *“I have not done a greater [deed] than they did.”*

9. In a report it has come down that when Ibrāhīm had said this, more people converted. When Nemrūd saw that, he was afraid of them, that the people would turn to

43. Citing Qurʾan 21:61.

44. I.e., he sat in judgment over the people as their ruler.

45. Citing Qurʾan 21:62–63.

46. I.e., to lie.

47. I.e., submission (to God).

48. Citing Qurʾan 21:65. The literal translation of this expression is *“Then they turned upside down on their heads.”*

49. Citing Qurʾan 21:64.

50. Citing Qurʾan 21:66–67.

Ibrāhīm. He said in one speech, “Did he say, ‘turn from your own religion?’ Burn him so that you know that he has no power and that his God is no help.” Thus the Truth, may He be exalted, has given a report: “*They said: ‘Burn him!’*”⁵¹ He said, “Burn him, and render help to your gods if you are [practicing] this religion.”

Eighteenth Story: The casting of Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, into the fire

1. According to a report that has come down, Nemrūd commanded, “Go and bring wood to burn Ibrāhīm, whom I want to make suffer the pain of the fire because he has cut your gods to pieces.” And they said, “It was to kindle fire for that purpose, that Ibrāhīm had said to Nemrūd that the ‘punishment of my God is with the fire.’” Nemrūd said, “Will I also make you suffer in the fire, so that it will come about that He helps you?”

2. Then they went and brought wood, and they stacked it up, and they put oil on it. And they were saying thus: “Four months’ worth of wood have been made into a pile,” and Ibrāhīm was confined. Then they brought him out from the prison to throw him into the fire, but they were unable to go near the fire on account of its heat, since the heat of the fire extended to three *farsangs*.⁵² They were powerless. Iblīs,⁵³ who had brought enmity to mankind, taught them how to build the catapult. They built a catapult and bound Ibrāhīm head to knee,⁵⁴ placed him on the catapult, and hurled him into the fire.⁵⁵

3. When he was securely in the midst of the fire, the King, may He be exalted, made the fire cool for him.⁵⁶ *The word of Him, may He be exalted: “O fire, be cool and be a haven for Ibrāhīm.”*⁵⁷ “O fire, be cool for Ibrāhīm, be cool as a refuge.” And if it was thus, you could not say that Ibrāhīm had no endurance for the cold.

4. Then in the midst of the fire He prepared a visible couch, so that Ibrāhīm could sit there. He prepared a visible pool of water before him and spread narcissus and flowers all around his couch and caused priestly robes of Heaven⁵⁸ to be brought in order to clothe him.⁵⁹ No one was able to go there for three days.

5. Nemrūd said to his counselors, “Has the youth Ibrāhīm expired? I fear that he remains alive.” The counselors replied, “If he were a mountain, he would have been annihilated in that fire.” Nemrūd said, “I want to see him so that I can be sure.”

6. Then they built a high place, which had the appearance of a mountain. Nemrūd ascended that place and looked, and he saw Ibrāhīm in the midst of the fire sitting on a

51. Citing Qur’an 21:68.

52. One *farsang* = 30 *stades*; 1 *stadion* = 606.75 feet, so 3 *farsangs* = 54,607.5 feet, or about 10 ½ miles.

53. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, “accuser,” from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

54. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

55. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

56. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

57. Citing Qur’an 21:69.

58. Cf. Abraham 1:2; 2:9, 11; Facsimile 2, figure 3; Facsimile 3, figure 1.

59. In both Jewish and Islamic tradition, God sent an angel to deliver a garment from paradise to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

couch on the bank of a stream, and narcissus was growing all around a pool, and he was clothed in robes. Nemrūd said, "O Ibrāhīm, how did you bring this about, that this fire has not burned you?" Ibrāhīm said, "God, may He be exalted, watched over me, and all of this He did by His favors." He said, "*How wonderful is the Lord, your Lord!*" Oh, the goodness of God, who is your Lord! If I convert, will He accept me?" Ibrāhīm replied, "Yes. And He will increase your kingdom and lengthen your life." Nemrūd said, "When you come out, I will convert to your Lord, who thus retaliated against the gods they serve, and I will hold you dear."

7. Then Ibrāhīm came out of the midst of the fire to safety, and the couch and pool of water became invisible and went to their own place in Heaven.

8. When Nemrūd returned to his counselors and viziers, he said, "Ibrāhīm desires that I treat [him] kindly and that I join with his Lord, whom I saw thus take revenge, and convert." And the viziers and counselors were afraid that when Ibrāhīm approached Nemrūd, Nemrūd would do his bidding, and they would be out of work. They said to Nemrūd, "You have been lord for some years. Are you going to be a slave now?" They held him back from following Ibrāhīm and said, "This was because of a moment of weakness."

9. It was the bad vizier who did thus, who killed the kings to hell, and he had no fear.⁶⁰

10. He spoke thus: "Did I see what I was doing?" They said, "This is sorcery which he has done." Ibrāhīm's uncle said, "Know that our ancestors divined from the fire, and if veneration of it was among our family, then the fire could not consume him. It was because of this that it did not consume Ibrāhīm, not on account of some sorcery."

Nineteenth Story: Ibrāhīm with his paternal uncle Hāzar

1. Nemrūd said, "O Hāzar, how do I destroy him? I fear that this kingdom is ruined for us." Hāzar replied, "Let his treatment be my responsibility. Know that we have never worshiped smoke, which we consider repugnant, and it is our enemy. We shall destroy him by the smoke." Nemrūd said, "Everything must be from what belongs to them, and that thing must be done."

2. Hāzar was the father of the prophet Lūṭ, and Lūṭ was fourteen years old at that time. Hāzar commanded that a big hole be dug, and in that place they kindled a fire. Hāzar filled the hole with straw and bound Ibrāhīm,⁶¹ and they threw him into that place, and they lit the fire in the straw.⁶² The Truth, may He be exalted, sent a wind to carry away the fire by bits, and it cast fire in Hāzar's beard, and Hāzar's beard was completely consumed,⁶³ and people were heard to argue, "O Hāzar, your family worshiped the fire, how is it that the fire burned you?" After he was thus consumed and the people waited, a wind came in and carried away those ashes and cast them in the eyes of the people. Everyone who had brought wood became blind by the power of the Truth, may

60. This sentence does not seem to make much sense. The literal translation is given here.

61. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

62. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

63. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

He be exalted. And Ibrāhīm found refuge from the smoke of the fire. The people were all defeated.

3. And it is said that at that time, Sārah approached Ibrāhīm, and Sārah was the daughter of Nemrūd's vizier. In that era no one was more beautiful than she. She said, "O Ibrāhīm, this your Lord does mighty work, and it is my wish to convert to Him. Will He accept me?" He said, "Yes." She became a Muslim and said, "I will become a Muslim under this condition, that you marry me, since I want no one else." But her father, Nemrūd's vizier, had died. Ibrāhīm said, "It is fitting that the first person to become a Muslim should be Sārah."

4. Question: What was the point of the Truth, may He be exalted, saying to the fire, "Be cold!" without a mediating cause?

5. Answer: The point of that is that when Ibrāhīm removed the mediating cause between himself and the Truth, the King, may He be exalted, also removed the mediating cause, neither commanding the wind to be cold, nor the water, nor the couch, so that the people would know that everyone whom Ibrāhīm favored, the Truth would also favor.

6. At that time the Truth, may He be exalted, commanded, "Let the call to Islam be obvious. Call Nemrūd to me, and if he does not hearken, I will send punishment."

Twentieth Story: Ibrāhīm calls Nemrūd to Islam

1. Then Ibrāhīm, upon whom may there be peace, approached Nemrūd and said, "Believe, and say, 'God is One.'" Nemrūd replied, "I do not believe. Who is your god, and what does he do, and what power does he have?" Ibrāhīm answered, "My God is He who makes the dead live and the living dead."⁶⁴ Nemrūd said, "I also am able to do this." The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*Hast thou not considered him who argued with Ibrāhīm about his Lord?*"⁶⁵ Do you not see, O Muḥammad, that Ibrāhīm disputed, and he produced proof: "My God makes the dead live, and the living He causes to die"?

2. Nemrūd answered: "I will do that also." In an account it has come down thus, that Ibrāhīm said to Nemrūd, "Demonstrate how you make the dead live and cause the living to die." Nemrūd commanded that two persons be brought out from the prison: he killed one and set the other free.⁶⁶

3. Ibrāhīm offered another proof. He said, "My Lord has made the sun to rise from the east many years. Make it rise just once from the west." Nemrūd issued the command. He knew he could not do it. The word of Him, may He be exalted: "*Then the rejector of Truth was speechless.*"⁶⁷

4. The scholars have said that Ibrāhīm was the one who said to Nemrūd to make the dead live, that it was not thus: "If you are able, make this slain person live." But he was

64. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

65. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

66. Nemrūd brought both men out of prison, a living death, and then killed one and freed the other.

67. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

compelled to dispute with the ignorant ones. Thus [the Truth, may He be exalted], said, *“And when the ignorant address them, they say: ‘Peace.’”*⁶⁸

5. When Nemrūd commanded, he said, “I have disputed with you many times; I wanted to punish you. You brought out punishment on yourself. I am not equal with you,⁶⁹ but I will fight against your God, and vice versa. If you say that He is the god of the sky, I am the god of the earth, and the army is mine, and the earth is mine. And the inhabitants of the earth are mightier. I myself shall go to battle against your God.” Ibrāhīm arose and went out and said, “I found you exceptionally ignorant.”

6. Then Nemrūd commanded that a chest be made with four corners, its clasps out of gold, and the house of its creator out of pearl. Then he commanded that four strong vultures be brought, and for seven nights and days they were starved. Then he commanded that four delectable animal carcasses be hung underneath the four corners, and long planks were erected, and these four vultures were fastened under the four corners so that they could look at the meat, and they chased the scent of the meat.⁷⁰ The chest lifted off, and Nemrūd sat in the chest with the vizier with an arrow and a bow.

7. When the chest was airborne and the vultures had flown so high that the world appeared to their eyes as a clod of dirt, Nemrūd said, “He has waited to fight until I arrived at this place.” When they had gone further he said, “Look! What do you see?” The vizier said, “I see the world as if it were covered with smoke; [I see] neither stone nor river.” Nemrūd said, “Now we have reached the place where we are in control, so that the God of Ibrāhīm cannot deceive us.” He put the arrow in the bow and shot it. After an hour the arrow returned and fell into the chest.

8. In this place there are two traditions. Kalbī reports that the Truth, may He be exalted, sent [the angel] Jibrīl⁷¹ to carry that arrow to the sea, and he struck a fish⁷² in the belly so that the arrow became covered with blood, then he threw it into the chest. The Truth, may He be exalted, knows that [Nemrūd] was lost, and in a lost state. And it is said that with his own strength [Nemrūd] covered it with blood, and it fell into his chest. The fish was not guilty because the arrow of an unbeliever had been shot into its belly without guilt. And it has been said about this that he covered the arrow with fish blood so that killing a fish has become forbidden, and for that reason a knife is removed from a fish. And some have said that the arrow returned and entered Nemrūd’s head. He concealed it and did not reveal it. When he returned he found the people in another frame of mind. He said, “I have slain the god of the sky.”

9. And in an account it has come down thus: that a group of 500,000 people had had a change of heart and had been converted to Ibrāhīm because of Nemrūd’s [deed]. When

68. Citing Qur’an 25:63.

69. I.e., “you are not my equal” is the English idiom.

70. The vultures flew after the meat and thus carried the whole contraption into the air.

71. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

72. The Persian may have a pun here. “Fish” is *māhī*, and “moon” is *māh*. In some ancient cultures the moon was thought to be the god of the night sky.

Nemrūd said, "I have slain the god of the sky," and the arrow covered with blood appeared, they thought that he spoke the truth, and they all became rejectors of Truth.

10. Then Ibrāhīm approached Nemrūd and said, "Become a Muslim, because you know that in saying and doing that thing, you are lying." He replied, "If I am lying, I was not before his army, and I did not slay him, and he did not bring an army out before me, then say, 'Send it!'" Ibrāhīm counseled him and said, "Believe! You do not believe." The angel Jibrīl came and said, "O Ibrāhīm, say to Nemrūd, 'Assemble an army because my Lord will send an army.'"

11. Ibrāhīm spoke to Nemrūd. Nemrūd said, "If He sends every kind He wants, they will be mine." Jibrīl came and said, "O Ibrāhīm, say: 'He will send the weakest army, and that is a mosquito.'" Nemrūd said, "Is his army a mosquito?" He said, "Come!" He said, "It is a weak army; I have no fear. Now, by our command, whatever mosquito there is should be killed." In forty days it happened that the Truth, may He be glorified and exalted, sent the mosquito so that Nemrūd with his army would be all destroyed.

Twenty-first Story: Nemrūd is destroyed, may he be cursed

1. Then Nemrūd commanded the army and the people to kill three thousand mosquitoes every day. The more they killed, however, the more they multiplied until they became so numerous that no one was able to eat and sleep, and on every one of them a thousand mosquitoes had come. Everyone was surprised and helpless, and they were destroyed. Nemrūd also was helpless. He commanded that a house of copper be built and that a door be built, which had no hole large enough for a person to pass through, from its base to its top. At that time the Truth, may He be exalted, commanded a mosquito to enter into that hole. In one jump, because of the narrowness of the gap, it came, and you could see it sitting on the head of Nemrūd. Nemrūd wanted to strike it so that it would leave. "Look, a mosquito is going into him!" Nemrūd wanted to make it go out, but it entered his brain. The Truth, may He be exalted, kept the mosquito alive in his brain so that it ate his brain for thirteen nights and days. Then Nemrūd became weak. He said, "What am I going to do?" He commanded that bugles be made, and they were sounded at his head so that their sound would enter into his head, and the mosquito would stop eating for one hour on account of the noise of the bugles, so that he would be stable for one hour.

2. The first person in the world who used the bugle was Nemrūd. For this reason we remember that his soothing was by means of it. Then when forty days had passed and the mosquito became larger and the suffering of Nemrūd became greater, he commanded that a club be made and that his head be struck ten more days. Then the limit of his strength was reached.

3. When he was helpless and no remedy was found, he commanded a servant and his retinue, "Come to my assistance, and strike my head with a whip, so that it will soothe me." They did thus until his pains lessened, so that sometimes when he was less stable, he commanded his officers, his retinue, and his own servants to wail at him and to slap him until he found rest.

4. And the point of that was that the Truth, may He be exalted, showed contempt for him, so that those who bowed before him were all struck, in order that the people would know that to worship the creature⁷³ was despicable, and also so that they would know that the Lord was truly mighty and powerful.

5. Forty more days passed, and the mosquito in his brain became bigger. After that, he commanded his officer to strike him on the head with a mace, and Nemrūd himself positioned his head so that he would receive no harm from the wound.

6. Several times this happened. The people were all helpless because of his misfortune. They said, "What can we do to be delivered from him?" The people said to his general, who was strong, "Deliver us from him, for we are helpless." He said, "What will we do?" After a day passed, the general struck his head with the mace, and his head broke into pieces, and several mosquitoes emerged, flying like doves. In that hour Nemrūd died.⁷⁴

7. It is said that his entire army was destroyed by the same cause and that their agony was the same as his. And it is said that when Ibrāhīm and his people departed from those regions, the mosquitoes diminished in number, and it is said that thousands [of people] went with him. This was the destruction of Nemrūd.

8. After Ibrāhīm had left that city, and they had escaped from the group that had been helpless, they went from place to place, and Ibrāhīm and his people stopped in the open, so that Muslims were established there.

9. After that another king from the family of Nemrūd reigned, in another city of the province of Pars.⁷⁵ This king was a youth, and he avoided Nemrūd's rejection of the Truth, but he desired women. In every place where he had heard a report about a beautiful-faced woman, he had her brought to him. Ibrāhīm perceived that he was famous on account of his wife and children; in particular, Sārah was fair of face.

10. According to a report that has come down, the Truth, may He be glorified and exalted, created beauty in 1,000 parts, 999 of which He gave to Ḥawā,⁷⁶ and 1 to the rest of mankind, which he made into another 1,000 parts, 999 of which He gave to Sārah, and 1 to the rest of mankind. Then that one part He made into [another] 1,000 parts, 999 of which He gave to Yusūf,⁷⁷ and 1 to the rest of mankind.

11. For this reason Ibrāhīm was afraid for Sārah, who was fair of face. He said, "It is uncalled-for that the king should be so unjust to desire Sārah, since no one gainsays kings." He made the call to Islām; he said, "By God, I am afraid of this king." The Truth, may He

73. I.e., to worship the creature instead of the Creator.

74. The story, often repeated in the Arabic texts, may derive from the Talmudic account of the gnat that entered the nose of the Roman emperor Titus and picked at his brain for seven years, following his desecration of the temple at Jerusalem (Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 56b).

75. The province of Fars (Pars) was the ruling province of the ancient Persian Empire, and its dialect (Farsi) became the national language of Iran.

76. Biblical Eve.

77. Biblical Joseph. In Islamic tradition, he is known for his great beauty. See Qur'an 12 for one Islamic version of his story.

be exalted, commanded, "O Ibrāhīm, if you are afraid, then emigrate." Ibrāhīm prepared to depart; accordingly, the Truth, may He be exalted, gave the report: *And he said: "Verily, I am an emigrant for the sake of my Lord."*⁷⁸ I desire to depart to the service of my own Lord."

Twenty-second Story: Ibrāhīm leaves for Syria and what happens to him on the way

1. Then Ibrāhīm arose and went out of that country, and he brought Sārah. And it is said that he built a chest and put Sārah in it. Then he locked the chest and departed with the multitude of Muslims who were with him,⁷⁹ and a multitude of his kinfolk were also with him.

2. They were gone on the road for three days and reached the border. There were road watchmen of that kingdom on the way, who said to him, "What is in this chest?" Ibrāhīm said, "May the Truth bless you, and let us pass." They said, "Because we don't know what you have in this chest, we will not let you pass, nor those with you." Such was the practice of the road watchmen, to be obdurate and offensive. Although Ibrāhīm said, "It is of no value," nevertheless they opened the lid of the chest and saw Sārah with perfect beauty, the like of which they had never before seen. They said, "Our king seeks such people in the world whom you possess and have concealed."

3. The point of this was that the Truth, may He be glorified and exalted, had determined that Hājar⁸⁰ was to be the mother of Ismā'īl,⁸¹ who was to come from the Chosen One [Ibrāhīm], on whom may there be peace. And the Truth, may He be exalted, also had sustained all the prophets and saints in their trials.

4. Then they grabbed Sārah and took her away. And a group of people was appointed over them. The Truth, may He be glorified and exalted, for the sake of his Friend [Ibrāhīm], caused him to know every mountain, desert, tree, and wall for a three-day journey. Whatever there was, he revealed it to Ibrāhīm so that Ibrāhīm, upon whom may there be peace, saw Sārah without a veil so that her going away and returning and speaking to him [the king], all of this, would be known to him.

5. Ibrāhīm was restrained. When Sārah was brought before the king, the king was astonished at the sight of her and said, "Never in the world have I beheld such beauty." From that moment he desired Sārah and wanted to lay his hands on her. Sārah said, "Stay away from me. You will not touch me." At that moment, the king's member shriveled, and he became afraid and apologized, and he said, "Pray so that I will be potent." She prayed that it would become functional again. On another occasion, Iblīs tempted him, and he desired Sārah again. So it happened that his member withered as it had the first time. The king was regretful. Three times it was thus. Finally he truly repented and said, "Your situation is known. I pardon you." And he gave his blessings, and he also said,

78. Citing Qur'an 29:26. In the Qur'an, these are Lūṭ's words. Ibrāhīm's emigration is here a foreshadowing of the *Hijrah* (emigration) from Mecca to Medina by Muhammad in 632 A.D.

79. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

80. Biblical Hagar.

81. Biblical Ishmael.

“Who is my female slave with such beauty, who whenever I desire her I am thus, in this condition? I suspect that it is for the sake of your posterity. Now that I excuse you, you pardon me.”

6. Then Hājar was brought before the king, and he gave her to Sārah. And Hājar was among the descendants of a pious prophet, upon whom may there be peace.

7. After all this, they arose and went toward Syria. When Sārah came out, she wanted to tell her story. Ibrāhīm said to Sārah, “Whatever you wish.” He said, “I saw and also heard you speak.” Then Sārah said, “O Ibrāhīm, I give you Hājar, who belongs to me and who has suffered much sorrow. May you beget from her what is not from me.”

8. Then Ibrāhīm, upon whom may there be peace, went in to her. And Hājar was very fair of face, and Ibrāhīm was with Hājar, who thereafter conceived Ismā‘il, upon whom may there be peace.

EXTRACTS FROM
AL-ZAMAKHSHARI

Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (A.H. 467–538/A.D. 1075–1144) was born in Khwarizm in Persia, but he insisted on writing and teaching in Arabic. This theologian, philologist, and scholar produced a commentary on the Qurʾān, *Al-Kashshāf ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl*. A number of manuscripts of his commentary are extant: it remained popular among scholars, although his views were not considered mainstream among later Muslims. Baiḍāwī tried to replace Zamakhsharī’s work with his own orthodox commentary more than a century later. In the *Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī concentrates on lexicographical information, pulling in many examples from old poetry. The Arabic text was first published in Calcutta, in A.D. 1856. It has never before been translated into English. Brian M. Hauglid made the translation here from Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966–68), 2:576, 578. Page references follow the sections translated.

It is related that Āzar¹ left with [Nimrūdh² and the people] the day of their feast. They began at the house of the idols. They entered it and bowed down before them and placed food there and left it with them [the idols]. They said, “May the Gods bless our food.” Then they left. But Ibrāhīm remained [behind], observing the idols. There were seventy chosen idols. A large idol was facing the door, and it was [made of] gold. In its two eyes were two gems, which illuminated the night. [Ibrāhīm] smashed all of them with an ax in his hand until none remained except the largest.³ He attached the ax to its neck. Qatāda said that [Ibrāhīm] kept this concealed from his people. However, it is related that one man heard him. (2:576)

[After Ibrāhīm is found out:]

It is related that they [the people] planned to burn [Ibrāhīm’s] body. So they built a structure like the enclosure in Kūthā. They gathered the most well-known kinds of hard timber until the women would get sick. But they would say, “If god will heal me, then we can gather wood for Ibrāhīm.” Then they ignited such a huge fire that the birds would be burned in the air from its fire. Then they placed [Ibrāhīm] on a catapult, fettered and

1. Biblical Terah.

2. Biblical Nimrod.

3. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

shackled,⁴ and they propelled him into the fire.⁵ Jibrīl⁶ proclaimed, "O fire! Be thou cool and safe." It is related: Nothing of him was burned except his fetters. Jibrīl asked [Ibrāhīm] as he was thrown into [the fire], "Are you in need of anything?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "As far as you are concerned, no!" [Jibrīl] said, "Ask your Lord. . . ." Nimrūdh was looking down upon him from the palace. Suddenly, [Ibrāhīm] was in a garden and angels were there with him, keeping him company.⁷ [Nimrūdh] said, "I am close to your God!" So he sacrificed four thousand cattle and stayed away from Ibrāhīm. Ibrāhīm was sixteen years old at the time. (2:578)

4. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

5. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

6. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

EXTRACTS FROM RAWANDI

The Persian Qutub al-Dīn Sa‘yud ibn Hibat Allāh Rāwandī died in A.H. 573/A.D. 1177. He was an Imāmī¹ scholar, Qur’an exegete, and theologian, and he also studied law. He used the works of Abū ‘Alī Ṭabarsī in his writings as well as those of Imad al-Dīn Ṭabarī and ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Baghḍaḍī. Rāwandī wrote a *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Stories of the Prophets). Brian M. Hauglid translated these selections from what appears to be the first publication of the *Qiṣaṣ: Rāwandī, Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Beirut: Mu‘asaset al-Mu‘fid, A.H. 1409 [A.D. 1989]), 103–7. We have numbered the paragraphs for reference purposes.

Regarding the Prophethood of Ibrāhīm

1. Al-Sa‘īd Abū al-Barakāt Muḥammad b.² Ismā‘īl informed us on the authority of ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Sa‘d al-Nīshāburī—al-Sa‘īd Abū al-Barakāt al-Ḥūrī—Abū Ja‘far b. Bābwih—‘Abd Allāh—Ya‘qūb b. Yazīd—Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Amīr—Hishām b. Sālam—Abū Baṣīr—Abū ‘Abd Allāh said: Āzar, the uncle³ of Ibrāhīm [Abraham], was an astrologer for Nimrūd.⁴ And [Nimrūd] did not act except on his advice. [Nimrūd] said, “I saw in my night [dream?] a wonder.” [Nimrūd] asked, “What was it?” So [Āzar] said, “Indeed a child will be born in our land this [year], by whose hands will be our destruction.” So the men were separated from the women. Tārakh⁵ had [already] known the mother of Ibrāhīm, so she had become pregnant. [Nimrūd] sent midwives to watch over the women, so that there would not be anything in the womb without them knowing about it. They watched over the mother of Ibrāhīm. But God had mandated that what was in the womb would appear. They said, “We cannot see anything in her” [i.e., she did not show]. When labor began she went into one of the caves. She placed [Ibrāhīm] in it and breast-fed him. She placed a stone at the opening of the cave. And God put

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1. An Imāmī recognizes the “twelve holy imāms,” religious leaders whose teachings are considered infallible in the “Twelver” branch of Shī‘ism.
 2. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”
 3. Here Rāwandī uses the word ‘*amm*, meaning paternal uncle, instead of ‘*ab*, father. This is likely a corruption of the manuscript or a typographical error. Later in the text, Rāwandī does refer to Āzar as the father (‘*ab*) of Abraham.
 4. Biblical Nimrod.
 5. Biblical Terah.

his sustenance in [Ibrāhīm's] thumb. So he began sucking it and milk flowed. [Ibrāhīm] began to grow in a day as if he grew in a week. And he grew in a week as if he grew in a month. [Ibrāhīm] lived as God willed him to live.

2. Then Ibrāhīm left the cave. He saw the planet Venus [*al-Zuhara*] and people worshipping it. He said, "Is this"—by way of denial—"my Lord?" It did not take long before the moon ascended and people also worshiped it. [Ibrāhīm] also said—by way of denial—"Is this my Lord?" That is an argument against them that would be an attestation of monotheism [*tawḥīd*]. The comparison [i.e., of God to Venus or the moon] was refuted.⁶ God said: *That was our argument we gave to Ibrāhīm [to use] against his people.*⁷

3. On the authority of Ibn Awrama—al-Ḥusain b. 'Alī reported to us—'Umar—Abān—Ḥajar—Abū 'Abd Allāh said: Ibrāhīm took issue and objected to their gods. He was eventually brought to Nimrūd and argued with him. Ibrāhīm said, "My Lord is the One Who causes to live and die."⁸ During one of their feasts, [Ibrāhīm] went to see their gods. They said, "No one has ventured against them (i.e., the gods) except the young man who doesn't believe in them or recognize them." They could not find a punishment for him greater than the fire. So they told Nimrūd, and he had firewood gathered for [Ibrāhīm] and ignited it. Then he had [Ibrāhīm] placed in the catapult to throw him into the fire.⁹ Truly, Iblīs¹⁰ directed the making of the catapult for Ibrāhīm.

4. On the authority of Ibn Bābwih—his father—Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh—Ya'qūb b. Yazīd reported to us—Ibn Abī Amīr—Abān b. 'Uthmān—Abū 'Abd Allāh said: My father informed me—my grandfather—the Prophet—Jibrīl¹¹ said: "When Nimrūd took Ibrāhīm to cast him into the fire, I said, 'O God! [Ibrāhīm] worships You and he is Your friend. There is not anyone in Your land who worships You except him.' God said, '[Ibrāhīm] is My servant. I will take him when I wish.'" When Ibrāhīm was thrown into the fire, Jibrīl met him in the air while [Ibrāhīm] was falling into the fire.¹² Jibrīl asked, "O Ibrāhīm! Do you need anything?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "Not from you!" [Ibrāhīm] exclaimed, "O God! O the One God! O the Everlasting God! *Thou Who art neither begotten nor begetteth. There is not an equal to Him!*¹³ Save me from the fire with Thy compassion."¹⁴ So God directed the fire, "*Be cool and safe upon Ibrāhīm!*"¹⁵

6. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

7. Citing Qur'an 6:83.

8. The text makes reference here to the Qur'an. Although a verse is not identified, this phrase does bear resemblance to 2:260 where Abraham says, "My Lord! Show me how thou givest life to the dead." Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

9. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

10. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, "accuser," from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

11. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

12. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

13. Citing Qur'an 112:3–4.

14. Cf. Abraham 1:15. Citing Qur'an 112:3–4.

15. Citing Qur'an 21:69. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

5. On the authority of Ibn Bābwih—Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Mājilwih informed us—his uncle, Muḥammad b. Abī-al-Qāsim—Aḥmad b. Abī ‘Abd Allāh—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr—Abān b. ‘Uthmān—Muḥammad b. Marwān—Abū Ja‘far said: Ibrāhīm was called at the time (he said) “O God! O the One God! O the Everlasting God! *Thou Who art neither begotten nor begettest. There is not an equal to Him!*”¹⁶ Then [Ibrāhīm] said, “I place my trust in God. You have done your duty.”

6. [Abū Ja‘far] said: When God said to the fire, “be thou cool and safe upon Ibrāhīm,” at that time fire could not be made upon the face of the earth. No one used fire for three days. [Abū Ja‘far] said: Jibrīl came down to talk with [Ibrāhīm] in the midst of the fire.¹⁷ Nimrūd said: “Anyone who adopts a god, let him adopt the likes of the God of Ibrāhīm.” A great one among their mighty said, “I demanded of the fire not to burn him.” [Abū Ja‘far] said: A flame of the fire came out and burned him. Nimrūd was on a balcony overlooking the fire.¹⁸

7. After three days Nimrūd said to Āzar, “Come up with us and see!” So Āzar went up. Ibrāhīm was in a green garden, and a sheikh was with him conversing with him. Nimrūd turned to Āzar and said, “Your son, at this time, bestows honor upon God.” The Arabs call the uncle [i.e., Āzar] a “father” [to Ibrāhīm]. God said in the story of Ya‘qūb: *They worship your God and the God of your fathers Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl, and Ishaq.*¹⁹ Ismā‘īl was the uncle of Ya‘qūb and he [i.e., Ismā‘īl] called him [i.e., Ya‘qūb] “father” in this verse.

8. Al-Ustādh Abū al-Qāsim b. Kamaḥ informed us on the authority of the Sheikh Ja‘far al-Dūrīstī—Sheikh al-Mafīd—Abū Ja‘far b. Bābwih—Muḥammad b. Bukrān al-Nikāsh informed us—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sa‘d al-Kūfī—‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Fadāl—his father—Al-Ridā said: When Nūḥ was about to drown, God took pity on us and saved him. So God drove the flood back from Nūḥ. When Ibrāhīm was thrown into the fire,²⁰ God took pity on us and saved him and made the fire cool and safe [upon Ibrāhīm].²¹ Indeed when Mūsā²² parted the sea, God took pity on us and made it dry. Indeed, when the Jews wanted to kill ‘Isā,²³ God took pity on us and saved him, and ‘Isā ascended to God.

9. On the authority of Ibn Bābwih—Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Mutawakkil—‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥamīrī—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad—al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb—Ibrāhīm b. Abī Ribāb al-Kurḥī—Abū ‘Abd Allāh [who] said: Ibrāhīm was born in Kūthā and he was of their people. The mother of Ibrāhīm and the mother of Lūṭ were sisters. [Ibrāhīm] married Sāra, the daughter to Lāḥij. [Sāra] is the daughter of [Ibrāhīm’s] aunt. [Sāra] owned much cattle and was well off. She gave all that she owned to Ibrāhīm, who looked after

16. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

19. Citing Qur’an 2:133.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

21. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

22. Biblical Moses.

23. Biblical Jesus.

it and expanded it. He increased the livestock and crops until there was not in the land of Kūthā a man in a more splendid condition than himself.

10. When Ibrāhīm smashed the idols of Nimrūd,²⁴ [Nimrūd] ordered him to be bound²⁵ and he made an enclosure for Abraham in which was firewood, and Nimrūd ignited a fire. Then he had Abraham thrown [into the fire] to burn him.²⁶ They withdrew from the fire for three days until it abated. When they looked down upon the enclosure, they found Ibrāhīm unharmed and untied from his shackles.²⁷ They informed Nimrūd and he ordered them to banish Ibrāhīm from his country. Indeed [they said], "If he remained in your country, he would corrupt your religion and harm your gods." So they expelled Ibrāhīm and Lūṭ²⁸ to Syria.

11. Ibrāhīm left with Lūṭ and Sāra. He said: "*I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me!*"²⁹ [i.e., to Jerusalem]. Ibrāhīm carried his livestock and his property with him. He made a coffer for Sāra and carried her in it. He progressed until he had gotten out of the jurisdiction of Nimrūd, and he arrived at the domain of a Coptic [Egyptian] man who would allow passage with a tithe. He obstructed Abraham and said to him: "Open this coffer so that you can give me its tithe!" He insisted that [Ibrāhīm] open it. So Ibrāhīm opened it. When Sāra appeared, and she was known for her beauty, he asked, "Who is she?" Ibrāhīm answered, "My wife, the daughter of my aunt." He asked, "Who told you to confine her in this coffer?" Ibrāhīm answered, "My jealousy should anyone see her."

12. Messengers were sent to the king informing him of the report of Ibrāhīm. The king sent out for [Ibrāhīm] and the coffer. When Ibrāhīm entered into the king, the king said to him, "Open the coffer so that I may look into it." [Ibrāhīm] said, "Truly, my wife, the daughter of my aunt is in it, and I refuse to open it with all that is with me!" But the king insisted that he open it. So [Ibrāhīm] opened it. When the king saw Sāra, he did not contain his sexual foolishness and extended his hand to her. Ibrāhīm exclaimed, "O God! Restrain his hand from my wife!" His hand did not reach her and did not come back to him. The king asked, "Is your God the One Who did this?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "Yes! Indeed my God is jealous, He detests that which is forbidden! He is the One who intervened between you and her!" The king said, "Call your Lord to return my hand to me! Indeed, if He responds, I will not object to your having her." Ibrāhīm said: "O God! Return his hand to him. Let it be restrained from my wife!" Then God returned his hand to him.

[The king tries again but is thwarted again and recognizes the greatness of Ibrāhīm and his God].

24. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

26. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

28. Biblical Lot.

29. Citing Qur'an 37:99.

EXTRACTS FROM IBN AL-JAWZI

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad Abū al-Farash ibn al-Jawzī (ca. A.H. 510–597/ A.D. 1126–1200) lived in Baghdad. He was a preacher and was very active politically, one of the most influential and successful Hanbalis (followers of Hanbalism, a school of thought that claimed to recognize only the Qurʾān and the sayings and actions of the Prophet as authoritative). He may have written over one thousand works, including the *Zād al-masīr fī-‘ilm al-tafsīr* (The Commencement of Progression in the Science of [Qurʾānic] Exegesis). Brian M. Hauglid translated these extracts from the Arabic: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī-‘ilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994), 3:55–56 and 5:269–70. We have added paragraph numbers for reference purposes.

Points concerning the beginning of the story of Ibrāhīm

1. Abū Šallaḥ related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās who said: Ibrāhīm [Abraham] was born in the time of Nimrūdh.¹ Nimrūdh had priests who said to him, “There will be born this year a child who will defile the god of the people of the land. He will summon the people to turn away from their religion, and he will destroy the people of your house by his hand.” So [Nimrūdh] separated the women from the men. But Āzar entered into his house and knew his wife, and she conceived. The priests said to Nimrūdh, “Indeed, the boy was conceived this night.” [Nimrūdh] declared, “Each one born a boy should be killed.”² When labor pains began for the mother of Ibrāhīm, she fled, a fugitive. Then she placed [Ibrāhīm] in a dried-out riverbed, and she wrapped him in a rag. Then she placed him in alfalfa weeds, and she told his father. He came to [Ibrāhīm] and dug a hole for him and barricaded it with a stone. [Ibrāhīm’s] mother would visit frequently and breast-feed him until [Ibrāhīm] became a young man and could speak. [Ibrāhīm] said to his mother, “Who is my Lord?” She responded, “I am.” He said, “Who is your Lord?” She said, “Your father.” [Ibrāhīm] asked, “Who is my father’s Lord?” She said, “Be silent!” So [Ibrāhīm] was silent. She returned to her husband and said, “Indeed, the boy who we have talked about changing the religion of the people of the land is your son!” So [Ibrāhīm’s] father went to him and they had the same conversation [he had had with his

1. Biblical Nimrod.

2. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

mother]. When the night descended upon [Ibrāhīm] he drew close to the opening of the cave. He looked, and he saw a star³ [Qur'an 6:75–79 discussed in commentary]. (3:55–56)

Points related to the story [of Ibrāhīm]

2. Qur'anic commentators relate that the people imprisoned Ibrāhīm in a house. They built for themselves a fence around its wall, measuring sixty cubits to the foot of a high mountain. The king shouted, "Gather firewood for Ibrāhīm! Do not allow the young nor the old to fail to show up. Those who fail to appear will be thrown into the fire!" So they gathered firewood for forty nights until the women would say, "If I succeed in this, I will gather wood for Ibrāhīm's fire" and until the firewood was almost equal with the wall blocking the doors of the garden. They dropped the fire into the wood. Its flames arose until the birds passing over it would be burned by the intensity of its heat. Then they built a high building and built a catapult over it. Then they raised Ibrāhīm to the top of the building. Ibrāhīm lifted up his head to the heavens and said, "O God! You are One in the heavens and I am one on the earth. There is not anyone on the earth who worships You except me. God has considered me and He is the excellent Trustee!"⁴ Then the heavens, the earth, the mountains, and the angels said, "Our Lord, Ibrāhīm burns in You. Allow us to rescue him." God said, "I know. If [Ibrāhīm] calls upon you, send rain upon him." The people cast [Ibrāhīm] into the fire when he was sixteen years old.⁵ Others say he was twenty-six years old. [Ibrāhīm] said, "God has considered me, and He is the excellent Trustee!" Then Jibrīl⁶ met [Ibrāhīm] and said to him, O Ibrāhīm, are you in need?" Ibrāhīm replied, "Not from you!" Jibrīl said, "Ask your Lord." [Ibrāhīm] said, "God has considered my asking; He knows my condition." Then God said, "O Fire! Be thou cool and safe upon Ibrāhīm."⁷ All fire was extinguished, and [all fire] obeyed upon the face of the earth and no longer remained, thinking that God meant it to be cool and safe. Al-Suddī claimed that Jibrīl is the one who summoned the fire to be cool and safe. Ibn 'Abbās said: If the coldness of the fire had not remained safe upon Ibrāhīm, he would have died of the cold. Al-Suddī said: The angels took hold of the arms of Ibrāhīm and they sat him upon the earth, and then a spring of fresh water appeared and real flowers and certain types of flowers [also appeared]. Ka'b and Wahb said: The fire did not burn Ibrāhīm but only his fetters. [Ibrāhīm] stayed on that spot for seven days. Others say forty or fifty days. Then Jibrīl descended with a garment from heaven and a velvetlike carpet from heaven. Jibrīl placed the garment upon [Ibrāhīm]⁸ and sat him upon the carpet, and [Jibrīl] sat talking with him. And Āzar came to Nimrūdh and said: "Allow me

3. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

4. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

5. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

6. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

7. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

8. In both Jewish and Muslim tradition, God sent an angel to deliver a garment from paradise to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

to bury the bones of Ibrāhīm." So [Āzar] left with the people. [Nimrūdh or Āzar] ordered that the wall be breached. But Ibrāhīm was in the garden, [mocking], and his clothes were moist. The garment was on him, the carpet was under him, and the angel was beside him. Nimrūdh called to him, "O Ibrāhīm! Your God is the One Who has imparted his great power. Are you able to leave?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "Yes." So Ibrāhīm stood up and walked until he had left. Nimrūdh asked, "Who is the one I saw with you?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "An angel whom my Lord sent me to keep me company."⁹ Nimrūdh said, "I am closer to your God when I see His power." [Ibrāhīm] said, "God will not receive you [as long as you are] of your religion." Nimrūdh said, "O Ibrāhīm! I am not able to leave my kingdom. But I will make a sacrifice for Him." Then [Nimrūdh] killed a sacrifice and stayed away from Ibrāhīm. (5:269–70)

9. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

EXTRACTS FROM IBN AL-ATHIR

The historian ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn al-Athīr (A.H. 555–630/A.D. 1160–1233) was born into an illustrious family near present-day Mosul in Iraq; his brothers are noted for their literary criticism and lexicography. He was a historian and often visited Baghdad for study, as an envoy, or on pilgrimage. He served as a soldier under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin) during the Crusades. At the end of his life, he lived at Aleppo. His *Al-Kāmil fī-al-taʾrīkh* (A Complete History), a history of the world from the creation to the year A.H. 628 (A.D. 1231), is the best of Arabic annalistic historiography. Because of his well-balanced selection, clear presentation, and flashes of insight, his works were much loved and therefore well preserved, although he often omitted his sources. Brian M. Hauglid translated these selections from Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī-al-taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Bayrūt, A.H. 1385 [A.D. 1965]), 1:94–100. The paragraphs have been numbered for reference purposes.

An account of Ibrāhīm the Friend and those who were in his time from the kingdoms of the non-Arabs.

1. Ibrāhīm [Abraham] is the son of Tārakh b.¹ Nākhūr b. Sārūg b. Argū b. Fāllag b. Gābir b. Shāllakh b. Qīnān b. Arphakshadh b. Sām² b. Nūḥ. It has been disputed as to where [Ibrāhīm] was born and lived. Some say he had been born in Sūs in the land of al-Ahwāz. Others say he was born in Bābal. Some say in Kūthā and others say in Ḥar-rān, but his father moved him. The people of knowledge generally say that his birth was in the time of Nimrūd³ b. Kūsh. The people of information say that Nimrūd was a governor of Lāzdahāq; there are those who assert that Nūḥ sent him [there]. As far as a

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. See Genesis 11:10–26 for the Judeo-Christian version of this genealogy: Abraham, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu (Argū), Peleg (Fāllag), Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, and Shem. Note that Canaan (Cainan) is missing from the Hebrew (and KJV) text of Genesis 10:24 (and from 1 Chronicles 1:18, which is dependent on the Genesis passage). His name is, however, included in the genealogical listing in the Septuagint and the Samaritan, Syriac, and other Bibles and is also found in the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:36. A number of early church fathers referred to Cainan’s absence from the Hebrew record as evidence that the Jews had tampered with the Bible text.

3. Biblical Nimrod.

majority of the predecessors of the *ʿulamāʾ*⁴ are concerned, they say that he [Nimrūd] was a king himself.

2. Ibn Ishāq said: His kingdom comprised the east and west of Bābal. [Ibn Ishāq] said: It is said: There were only three kings of the earth: Nimrūd, Dhū al-Qarnayn,⁵ and Sulaymān b. Dāūd. Others add to the list Bukhtanaṣr [Nebuchadnezzar], but we don't believe this saying.

3. When God desired to send Ibrāhīm as an argument against his people and a messenger to his servants, there had been no prophets between [Ibrāhīm] and Nūḥ excepting Hūd and Ṣāliḥ.⁶ When the time of Ibrāhīm approached, the astrologers of Nimrūd came to him and said, "Truly, we have found a boy who will be born in your city. It is maintained that he is Ibrāhīm who will become separated from your religion and smash your idols⁷ in a certain month and a certain year." When the year in which the astrologers mentioned had come, Nimrūd kept [all] the pregnant [women] near him except the mother of Ibrāhīm. Indeed, he did not know of her pregnancy because she did not show. So [Nimrūd] slaughtered each boy who had been born in that time.⁸ When labor began for the mother of Ibrāhīm, she went out at night to a nearby cave. She gave birth to Ibrāhīm and she put his affairs in order [what would be right for the newborn], then she blocked the cave and quickly returned to her home. She inspected him to see what he was doing, and he had grown in a day what other [children] would take a month [to grow]. She found him alive, sucking his fingers, into which God had put his nourishment.

4. Āzar⁹ had asked the mother of Ibrāhīm about her pregnancy. She answered, "I gave birth to a boy, but he died." So he believed her. [Others] say: Rather, Āzar knew of the birth of Ibrāhīm, and he concealed him until the king forgot to mention the matter. Āzar said, "Indeed I have a son! I have hidden him. Would you all fear for him from the king if I brought him out?" They [said], "No!" So he left, and he brought him out of the cave. When [Ibrāhīm] saw the animals and the creatures (before that he had seen only his father and mother) he began to ask his father about what he was looking at. His father said, "This is a camel, or a cow," etc. [Ibrāhīm] asked, "These creatures must have a God!" [Ibrāhīm] went out after the setting of the sun, and he raised his head to the heavens. All of a sudden there was a star, and it was Jupiter. He said, "This is my Lord." It did not take long before it set. [Ibrāhīm] said, "I love not those that set." He had gone outside at the end of the month, and that is why he saw the stars before the moon.¹⁰

4. The sages.

5. Literally "he of the two horns," referring to the depiction on some Greek coins of Alexander the Great with horns.

6. Hūd and Ṣāliḥ are two pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān. For a discussion of Hūd as Lehi and of Ṣāliḥ, see William J. Hamblin, "Pre-Islamic Prophets," in *Mormons and Muslims*, ed. Spencer J. Palmer (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1983), 85–104.

7. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

9. Biblical Terah.

10. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3. Abraham sees the stars before he sees the new moon.

5. It is said: It has been speculated that [Ibrāhīm] was fifteen months [years] old. Ibrāhīm said to his mother, "Let me out to see." So she went out with him at evening, and he saw the stars and he reflected on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and Ibrāhīm spoke concerning the star that approached. *When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, he said: "Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray."*¹¹ When daylight came and the sun arose, [Ibrāhīm] saw a light greater than all of what he had seen and said, *"This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)."* *But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allāh."*¹² Then Ibrāhīm returned to his father, knowing his Lord, and was free from the religion of his people but did not summon them at that time. [Ibrāhīm's] mother informed [Āzar] that she had kept [Ibrāhīm's] situation secret, so [Āzar] was happy about that.

6. Āzar used to make the idols that the people would worship,¹³ and he gave them to Ibrāhīm to sell. Ibrāhīm would say, "Who would buy what does not harm or benefit?" Therefore, the people would not buy any from him. [Ibrāhīm] would take the idols and set off to a river and point their heads towards it and say, "Drink!" [Ibrāhīm] would mock his people until this mockery would spread among his people. But the news of him didn't reach Nimrūd. When Ibrāhīm began to call his people to leave [their religion], he commanded them to worship God the Highest, calling [also] his father to monotheism, but he would not face [the truth]. While [Ibrāhīm] called upon his people they asked, "Whom do you worship?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "The Lord Omniscient." They said, "Nimrūd?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "On the contrary, I worship the One Who created me." Then [Ibrāhīm's] instruction [meaning] was clear. Nimrūd was informed that Ibrāhīm wanted his people to discern the weakness of the idols that they worshiped, for them to show him proof, and [Ibrāhīm] persisted in the argument. [Ibrāhīm] began to anticipate an opportunity in which he could renounce, in order to do something with their idols. [Ibrāhīm] looked at the stars and said, "I am sick!" in order to force the people to flee from him when they heard it. Indeed, Ibrāhīm wanted them to leave in order to seize their idols. They had a feast that all of them would attend. When they left, according to this writing, [Ibrāhīm] did not go with them to the feast, but he went to their idols. As he was saying, *"By God, I will plan against your idols!"*¹⁴ the people who were behind the crowd heard him. But [Ibrāhīm] returned to the idols. The idols were in a great hall in which each of them was next to the other, with each idol being smaller than the next until they reached the door of the hall. When the people would place food between the hands of their gods, they would say, "We will leave the gods so when we return, the food will be eaten." When Ibrāhīm saw the food between their hands, he asked, *"Will you not*

11. Citing Qur'an 6:77, translation by Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex, 1992).

12. Citing Qur'an 6:78, translation by Yusuf Ali. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1-18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:5-6.

14. Citing Qur'an 21:57.

eat?" When no one answered him he asked, "What is the matter with you that you don't speak?" Then [Ibrāhīm] turned upon them, striking them with his right hand.¹⁵ He shattered them with an ax in his hand until only the largest of them remained.¹⁶ [Ibrāhīm] placed the ax between his [the largest idol's] hands and left.

7. When [Ibrāhīm's] people returned and saw what had happened to their idols, they were frightened because of it, and they were very distressed and asked, "Who has done this to our gods? He must be one of the unjust." They [others] said, "We heard a youth speak of them. He is said to be [Ibrāhīm]."¹⁷ [Ibrāhīm] addressed them, reviling and denouncing them. "We did not hear that from anyone other than him, so we think he is the one who did this." This information reached Nimrūd and the noble among his people and they said, "Bring [Ibrāhīm] before the eyes of the people.¹⁸ Perhaps they will witness what we do with him." It is said: They witnessed against [Ibrāhīm]. They hated to take hold of him without evidence. When [Ibrāhīm] was brought forth and the people had assembled at the place of their king, Nimrūd, they said, "Are you the one who did this with our gods, O [Ibrāhīm]?" He said, "No! the biggest of the idols did this; ask them, if they are able to speak."¹⁹ He [the biggest idol] became angry that they [the people] worshiped the smallest while he is the biggest, so he smashed them." The people desisted and turned from [Ibrāhīm] while among themselves they accused [Ibrāhīm] of smashing the idols. But they said, "We indeed treated [Ibrāhīm] unjustly. We saw only what [Ibrāhīm] had said." Then they said, "We knew that the idols could not harm or benefit or hit: *Thou knowest full well that these idols do not speak,*²⁰ that is, cannot speak. We have inquired of the maker of this idol concerning the fact that it cannot hit, and we speak the truth." God has said: *Then were they confounded with shame,*²¹ concerning the argument Ibrāhīm had brought against them. So Ibrāhīm said to them concerning their statement "these idols do not speak": "Do you then worship other than Allāh, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Shame upon you, and upon the things that you worship other than Allāh! Have you no sense?"²²

8. Then Nimrūd said to Ibrāhīm, "Tell me of the God whom you worship and call [others] to worship. Who is He?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "My Lord is He who gives life and death."²³ Nimrūd said, "I give life and death." Ibrāhīm said, "How is that?" [Nimrūd] said, "I can take two men, both of them worthy of death. I sentence one to die, and it is done. I forgive the other and he lives." Ibrāhīm said, "It is Allāh that causes the sun to rise from the east, do you then cause it to rise from the west."²⁴ At that, Nimrūd did not answer [Ibrāhīm].

15. Citing Qur'an 37:91–93.

16. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

17. Citing Qur'an 21:59–60.

18. Citing Qur'an 21:61.

19. Citing Qur'an 21:62–63.

20. Citing Qur'an 21:65.

21. Ibid.

22. Citing Qur'an 21:66–67.

23. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

24. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

Then [Nimrūd] and his companions resolved to kill Ibrāhīm. They said, “Burn [Ibrāhīm] and protect your gods.”²⁵

9. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar said: An Arab man from Persia suggested that [Ibrāhīm] be burned. It was asked him: Do Persians have Arabs? He said: Yes, the Kurds are Arabs. It is said: His name was Hayzan. He will be denounced because of it [i.e., the suggestion]. And it will reverberate until the day of judgment.

10. Nimrūd commanded the gathering of firewood from the wooded areas, inciting the women to vow to acquire the required amount of firewood for Ibrāhīm’s fire. Then they desired to throw [Ibrāhīm] into [the fire] to offer him up. So they ignited the fire in such a way that the birds that would fly over it would be burned from its intense heat. When they assembled to cast [Ibrāhīm] into the fire,²⁶ the heavens and the earth and all that is in them [i.e., the creations], excepting the humans and jinn,²⁷ cried to God in one voice, “Our Lord! Ibrāhīm, who is the only one on Your earth who worships You, will be burned. Permit us to help him!” God the Highest said, “If [Ibrāhīm] asks of help from you, then you may assist him. If he calls only upon Me, then We²⁸ will help him.” When they raised [Ibrāhīm] to the top of the building, he lifted his head to the heavens and said, “O God! You are One in the heavens and You are One in the earth. God can protect me for He is an excellent Trustee.” Then Jabrāʾīl²⁹ appeared to [Ibrāhīm] as he put forth faith and said, “Do you need anything, O Ibrāhīm?” [Ibrāhīm] said, “Not from you!” Then they cast him into the fire, and God called to the fire, saying, “O fire! Be cool and safe upon Ibrāhīm.”³⁰ It is said: Jabrāʾīl called to the fire. If the coldness of the fire were not followed by safety, Ibrāhīm would have died from the intensity of the cold. At that time fire [i.e., other fires] was extinguished, thinking God meant it [i.e., them]. God sent the angel of shade in the form of Ibrāhīm to sit in the fire next to [Ibrāhīm] to keep him company.³¹

11. Nimrūd remained for a few days not doubting that the fire had consumed Ibrāhīm. So he looked as if he watched the fire while it was burning furiously, and Ibrāhīm was sitting next to a man in his likeness. Nimrūd said to his people, “I saw Ibrāhīm alive and I thought I saw a likeness of him. Build me a lofty edifice so I can look down over the fire.” So they built it, and he looked from it and saw Ibrāhīm sitting next to a man in the form of [Ibrāhīm]. Nimrūd called to him, “O Ibrāhīm! Indeed your God is great, the One Who has imparted His power and His glory to intervene between you and what I see. Are you able to come out of the fire?” [Ibrāhīm] said, “Yes.” [Nimrūd] said, “Do you

25. Citing Qurʾan 21:68.

26. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

27. Jinn are spirit beings, created from fire (unlike man, who is created from the earth). They can be good but are mostly mischievous or evil. They will also be judged at the last day.

28. The Qurʾan always uses the royal plural (we, our, us) when God is speaking. Although this is not a quote from the Qurʾan, the author has followed the same convention.

29. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition. The spelling here differs from that found in other Arabic texts included in this volume.

30. Citing Qurʾan 21:69.

31. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

fear that if you rise it will harm you?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "No." Ibrāhīm rose up and left the fire. When he had come out, [Nimrūd] said to him, "O Ibrāhīm! Who was the man I saw with you in your likeness?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "That was the angel of shade whom God sent to me to keep me company."³² Nimrūd said, "I was very close to your God when I saw His power and glory and what He had done for you when you refused any worship except Him."

12. Ibrāhīm said, "God will not accept anything from you as long as you maintain anything from your religion." [Nimrūd] said, "O Ibrāhīm! I cannot leave my kingdom." [Nimrūd] sacrificed four thousand cattle and stayed away from Ibrāhīm, and God kept him away from [Ibrāhīm]. Some of the leading personalities among [Nimrūd's] people believed Ibrāhīm when they saw what God had done with [Ibrāhīm] but feared Nimrūd and his followers. Lūṭ, the son of Hārān, believed [Ibrāhīm]. He is the son of the brother of Ibrāhīm. There was also a third brother called Nākhūr son of Tārakh. He is the father of Batwīl,³³ and Batwīl is the father of Lāban, and he is the father of Rabaqā, the wife of Ishāq, son of Ibrāhīm; [Rabaqā] is the mother of Ya'qūb.³⁴ Lāban is the father of Liyā and Rāhīl,³⁵ the wives of Ya'qūb. Sāra also believed Ibrāhīm. She is the daughter of [Ibrāhīm's] uncle. Sāra is the daughter of Hārān, the [great?] uncle of Ibrāhīm. It is said: the daughter of the king of Ḥarrān believed in God with Ibrāhīm.

32. Ibid.

33. Biblical Bethuel.

34. Biblical Rebekah and Jacob.

35. Biblical Leah and Rachel.

AN EXTRACT FROM AL-BAIDAWI

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Abū al-Khayr Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Baiḍāwī (d. A.H. 685 or 692/A.D. 1286 or 1293) was the *qāḍī* (judge) of Shiraz (in Iran); he followed the Shafi‘i school of Islamic law. He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, although he based his work almost entirely on other authors. His book, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl* (The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation), largely a condensed and amended version of Zamakhsharī’s *Kashshāf*, contains an account of Abraham which expands on that of Zamakhsharī. The book has been very popular in the Muslim world and so has been preserved in many editions; possibly the earliest European edition of the Arabic text is H. O. Fleischer’s edition of 1846–48. This English translation, by Brian M. Hauglid, is published here for the first time; it is translated from al-Baiḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl* (n.p., 1899–1902), 2:432–35, 4:258–59. We have numbered the paragraphs for reference purposes.

From volume 2

1. The people of Qurʾānic commentary, historiography, and biography say that Ibrāhīm [Abraham] was born in the time of Nimrūd, the son of Kanʾān, the king.¹ Nimrūd was the first to place the crown upon his [own] head. And he called upon the people to worship him.

2. He had priests and astrologers who said to him, “There will be born in your land this year a boy who will change the religion of the people of the earth. Your destruction and the end of your kingdom will be by his hand.” It is said that they [the priests and astrologers] found this [prophecy] in the books of the prophets.

3. Al-Suddī said: Nimrūd had seen in his dream a star. It ascended and became brighter than the sun and the moon until there was no light left in either of them. [Nimrūd] was very terrified of this dream, so he called the priests and asked them about the dream. They said, “It [the star] represents a young boy who will be born in your

1. According to Genesis 10:6–8, Nimrod was the son of Cush, brother of Canaan and son of Ham. Note also the Canaanite ancestry of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in Abraham 1:21–22, despite the fact that the Egyptians descended from another of Ham’s sons, Mizraim, whose name is the Hebrew name for Egypt.

domain this year. Your ruin and the end of your kingdom and the destruction of the people of your religion will be by his hand.”

4. So [Nimrūd] commanded the slaughter of each boy born in that year in his domain.² He commanded that the women be separated from the men, and he placed over ten women one man to guard them. When the women menstruated, [Nimrūd] freed them to be among the other women and among their husbands because they could not have intercourse during the monthly period. When they were clean of their menstruation, they were prevented from being among them.

5. They say Āzar returned to find his wife. She was clean of her menstruation. So he knew her, and she became pregnant with Ibrāhīm. Muḥammad b.³ Iṣḥāq said: Nimrūd called forth each pregnant woman in the village and kept them near him except for the mother of Ibrāhīm. [Nimrūd] did not know of her pregnancy because she was a young girl. He did not know of the conception in her womb.

6. Al-Suddī said: Nimrūd brought the men out to battle to separate them [the troops] from the women, fearing the birth of that child. He remained there for however long God intended; then a need became evident to him concerning the city. But he did not trust any of his people [to be] over [the need] except Āzar. So [Nimrūd] sent for him. [Āzar] approached him, and [Nimrūd] said, “I have a need for you [and it is] more preferable that I entrust you with it. I do not send you forth without trusting you. So I decree that you do not go near your family.” Āzar said, “I will religiously obey the command.”

7. So [Nimrūd] entrusted him with the task. [Āzar] entered the city and took care of the king’s need. Then [Āzar] said, “If I went into my family, then I could see them.” Whereupon he went into the mother of Ibrāhīm and looked at her and could not restrain [himself], so he knew her, and she became pregnant immediately with Ibrāhīm.

8. Ibn ‘Abbās said: When the mother of Ibrāhīm became pregnant the priests said to Nimrūd that “the young boy whom we informed you about was conceived tonight.” So Nimrūd ordered the slaughter of the boys.⁴

9. When the mother of Ibrāhīm came close to the time of delivery, the labor pains began. So she fled, fearing that [Nimrūd] would suddenly overtake her and kill her child. They say she placed him in a dried-out riverbed. Then she wrapped him in cloth and placed him in alfalfa. Then she went back home and informed her husband that she had given birth and that the child was in a place, etc. So [Ibrāhīm’s] father went to him and took him from that place and dug a hole in the ground for him in the riverbed. Then [Ibrāhīm’s father] hid him in it and barricaded it with a stone, fearing predatory animals. [Ibrāhīm’s] mother would visit frequently and breast-feed him.

10. Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq said: When the mother of Ibrāhīm suffered labor pains, she went at night into a cave which was close by. And so she gave birth to Ibrāhīm in the cave. She put [Ibrāhīm’s] affairs in order, what would be suitable for an infant, and she

2. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

3. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

4. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

barricaded the door of the cave. She returned home, but she visited [Ibrāhīm] frequently in order to see how he was doing, and she would find him alive, sucking his thumb.

11. Abū Rūqa said: The mother of Ibrāhīm said, "I went to inspect his fingers and found him sucking water out of one finger, milk from another, butter from another, honey from another, and dates from another."

12. Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq said: Āzar asked the mother of Ibrāhīm what had happened with her pregnancy, and she said she gave birth to a boy but he died. [Āzar] believed her and was silent about it.

13. Ibrāhīm grew in one day as if it were a month and one month as if it were a year. He remained in the cave for fifteen months until he said, "Let me out!" So [Ibrāhīm's mother] brought him out at night, and [Ibrāhīm] observed and pondered on the creation of the heavens and the earth.⁵ He said, "The One Who created me, blessed me, fed me, and gave me drink is my Lord; He is the only One Who is God."

14. [Ibrāhīm] looked up to the heavens and saw a star. He said, "This is my Lord!" Then he followed it, watching it closely until it set. When it set [Ibrāhīm] said, "I do not like what sets." When he saw the moon shine, he said, "This is my Lord!" He followed it, watching it closely until it set. Then he saw the sun ascend, and [Ibrāhīm] said thus and thus, etc.⁶

15. [Ibrāhīm's mother] returned with [Ibrāhīm] to his father Āzar; she stood up and faced [Āzar?], and [Ibrāhīm] learned of his Lord and was freed from the religion of his people. But [he] did not yet preach to them. When [Ibrāhīm's] mother returned with him, she informed [Āzar] that [Ibrāhīm] was his son. She also told [Āzar] what she had done with [Ibrāhīm]. [Āzar] rejoiced exceedingly, and it is said [Ibrāhīm] remained in the cave seven years; others say thirteen years, and still others say seventeen years.

16. They say: When Ibrāhīm became a young man while in the cave, he asked his mother, "Who is my Lord?" She replied, "I am!" [Ibrāhīm] asked, "Who is your Lord?" His mother answered, "Your father!" [Ibrāhīm] inquired, "Who is my father's Lord?" She exclaimed, "Be silent!"

17. Then [Ibrāhīm's mother] returned to her husband. She said, "I have seen the boy, of whom we have [heard] related, who will change the religion of the world. Indeed he is your son!" She told [Āzar] what [Ibrāhīm] had said. So [Ibrāhīm's] father, Āzar, went to him. Upon his arrival, [Ibrāhīm] asked, "Who is my Lord?" [Āzar] said, "Your mother!" [Ibrāhīm] said, "Who is the Lord of my mother?" [Āzar] answered, "I am!" [Ibrāhīm] asked, "Who is your Lord?" [Āzar] said, "Nimrūd!" [Ibrāhīm] said, "Who is Nimrūd's Lord?" [Āzar] slapped [Ibrāhīm] very hard and said, "Be silent!"

18. When the night descended upon [Ibrāhīm], he approached the opening of the cave. He looked through a gap in the stone [i.e., between the stone and the wall of the opening of the cave], and he saw a star.⁷ He said, "This is my Lord!"

5. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; 4–5; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

7. Ibid.

19. It is said: [Ibrāhīm] exclaimed to his parents, “Let me out!” So they took [Ibrāhīm] out of the cave at sunset. Ibrāhīm looked at the camels, horses, and sheep. [Ibrāhīm] asked his father, “What are these?” [Āzar] answered, “camels, horses, and sheep.” Ibrāhīm said, “It is inevitable that these belong to a God who is my Lord, for He created them.”

20. When Jupiter had ascended, and some say that it was Venus, it was the last night of the month. Therefore the moon was late in rising. [Ibrāhīm] saw the star before the moon.⁸ The saying of God, *when the night descended upon [Ibrāhīm]*,⁹ means [God] veiled [Ibrāhīm] with darkness. [Ibrāhīm] saw a star and declared, “This is my Lord!”

21. The *ʿulamā* [sages] differ concerning the time of this revelation and the time of the event. Had [Ibrāhīm] reached majority before or after the event? One of the opinions say this event took place before [Ibrāhīm] matured, the proof being that he hadn’t yet received his call [been anointed as a prophet]. Whatever he had said at this time, he cannot be held responsible for. He cannot be judged for it, as that can only be done after reaching majority. It is said that Ibrāhīm did not leave the cave while he was young. And he saw wondrous things concerning the heavens. He saw wondrous things concerning the earth.¹⁰

From volume 4

1. When Nimrūd and his people gathered to burn Abraham, they imprisoned him in a house.¹¹ They built a building like the enclosure in a village called Kūʿī. So they gathered [hard?]wood for [Ibrāhīm]. All types of wood were gathered for a month. When a man would get sick, he would say, “I will not be restored to health if I do not gather firewood for Abraham.”

2. Women would make a wish and say that if the wish came true [they] would gather wood for the fire of Ibrāhīm. Women would spin yarn and buy the firewood with their yarn, crediting their belief. The men would be ordered to purchase the firewood for Ibrāhīm with their money.

3. When they gathered together what they desired, they ignited a flame on each part of the firewood. The fire grew and grew so that birds passing over it were burned from the intensity of its heat. The people burned it most intensely for seven days.

4. When they wanted to throw Ibrāhīm [into it], they did not know how to throw him. It is said that Iblīs¹² came and taught them how to construct a catapult. So they constructed it. Then they returned to Ibrāhīm and bound him and hoisted the catapult on top of the building and placed him upon it, bound and shackled.¹³

8. Ibid.

9. Citing Qurʾan 6:76.

10. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

12. Iblīs, or Lucifer, is one of the most common Arabic names for the devil. This Arabic word is probably ultimately derived from Greek *diabolos*, “accuser,” from which come our words *devil* and *diabolical*.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

5. The heavens and the earth cried out. And those who are in both the heavens and the earth, such as the angels and all the creatures, excepting the humans and jinn,¹⁴ unitedly cried out, saying, “O Lord! Ibrāhīm is Thy friend. He has been thrown into the fire. There is not one on Thine earth who worships Thee other than he. Permit us to rescue him!” God said, “He is My friend! I have no other friend than he. I am [Ibrāhīm’s] God, and he does not have any other God but Me. If he seeks aid from any of you, or summons you, then help him. I have allowed him to do that. And if he [does] not call anyone but Me, I know him best, and I am his Lord, so don’t interfere between us.”

6. When they desired to throw [Ibrāhīm] into the fire, the keeper of the water came to him, saying, “If you wish, I will put out the fire.” Then the keeper of the wind came to him, saying, “If you wish, I can extinguish the fire with wind.” Ibrāhīm said, “I do not need your help. May God be my keeper, and I could not ask for a better one.”

7. Abū b. Kaʿb related that when they fastened¹⁵ Ibrāhīm to throw him into the fire, he said, “There is no God but Thee, glory to Thee. Thou hast all praise! Thou art the Ruler, there is no partner with Thee!”¹⁶

8. Then they propelled the catapult towards the fire, and Jibrīl¹⁷ met him,¹⁸ saying, “Oh Ibrāhīm, do you need anything?” [Ibrāhīm] said, “Not from you!” Jibrīl said, “So ask your Lord!” Then Ibrāhīm said, “I need not ask Him for anything as I am content with what He knows.” . . .

9. Indeed, God said: “O fire! Be thou cold and safe upon Ibrāhīm.”¹⁹ Ibn ʿAbbās said that if he had not said “safety,” Ibrāhīm would have died from the coldness of it. And some of the traditions [say] that at that time no fire remained on the earth; they were all extinguished. There was no use of fire that day in all the world. And if he had not said “upon Ibrāhīm,” the cold would have remained forever. The angels perceived the burning of Ibrāhīm, and they restrained the fire upon the earth.

10. Then sweet water was set down, and an [*ajar*, plant?] and narcissus plant appeared. Kaʿb said the fire did not burn Ibrāhīm except his shackles. They say Ibrāhīm was in that place for seven days. Al-Minhāl b. ʿUmarū reported that Ibrāhīm said, “There were never happier days for me than the days I was in the fire.”

11. God sent the angel of shade in the form of Ibrāhīm, and he sat next to Ibrāhīm, keeping him company. They say God sent Jibrīl with a garment from the silken wares of heaven and a velvetlike carpet.²⁰ [Jibrīl] clothed [Ibrāhīm] with the garment,²¹ and he sat

14. Jinn are spirit beings, created from fire (unlike man, who is created from the earth). They can be good but are mostly mischievous or evil. They will also be judged at the last day.

15. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

16. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

17. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

19. Citing Qurʾan 21:69.

20. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

21. In both Jewish and Muslim tradition, God sent an angel to deliver a garment from paradise to Joseph when he was sold into Egypt.

him upon the carpet, and [Jibrīl] sat down and talked with [Ibrāhīm]. Jibrīl said, "O Ibrāhīm! Don't you know that the fire will not injure my dearest [one]?"

12. Then Nimrūd looked down from the tower he had and saw Ibrāhīm sitting in a garden. And the angel sat next to him, and around [Ibrāhīm] a fire was burning the firewood. [Nimrūd] called out to him, "O great Ibrāhīm! Your God is the One Who imparts His power that is around you and the fire. O Ibrāhīm! Are you able to leave the fire?" [Ibrāhīm] said, "Yes." [Nimrūd] asked, "Do you fear that if you rise, the fire will hurt you?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "No!" So he said, "Then get up and leave." Then Ibrāhīm arose and walked around until he left the fire.

13. When Nimrūd came to him, he said, "O Ibrāhīm! Who was the man I saw with you, like you in form, sitting next to you?" [Ibrāhīm] answered, "That was the angel of shade, which my Lord had sent me to keep me company in the fire."²² Nimrūd said, "O Ibrāhīm! I was very close to your God when I saw His power and glory with what He did for you when you refused neither His worship nor His unity. I will sacrifice four thousand cattle." Ibrāhīm said, "God will not accept what you give while you are still in your religion, until you leave it and come to my religion." [Nimrūd] said, "I am not able to leave my kingdom. But I will sacrifice them to Him." So Nimrūd sacrificed them. And [Nimrūd] stayed away from Ibrāhīm, but God kept him from [Ibrāhīm].

22. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

EXTRACTS FROM ABU AL-FIDA

Abū al-Fidā Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAlī ibn Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar ibn Shāhanshāh ibn Ayyūb al-Mālik al-Muʿayyad ʿImād al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, commonly referred to as Abulfeda (A.H. 672–732/A.D. 1273–1331), was a Syrian prince, historian, and geographer who took an active part in the campaigns against the Crusaders. He traveled extensively in Syria and Egypt and made a pilgrimage to Mecca. His history, *Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī-akhbār al-bashar* (An Abridged History of Mankind, also known as *Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh al-bashar*), was very popular during his time. Eighteenth-century European orientalists used this work extensively, but although they translated parts of another work by Abulfeda, they did not do the same with this one. The early part of the text (that including the story of Abraham) is based mostly on Ibn al-Athīr’s work, which is also included in this collection. The complete Arabic text was first published in Istanbul in 1869–70. Brian M. Hauglid prepared the English translation of these extracts from Abū al-Fidā, *Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī-akhbār al-bashar* (Dār al-Bahār and Dār al-Fakhr, A.H. 1375 [A.D. 1956]), 1:22–23. We have numbered the paragraphs to facilitate indexing.

1. Ibrāhīm [Abraham] is the son of Tārah, who is Āzar b.¹ Naḥūr b. Sārūg b. Raʿū b. Fāllig b. ʿĀbir b. Shāllaḥ b. Arphakhshad b. Sām b. Nūḥ.² Qīnān b. Arphakhshad was eliminated from the list [column] of kingship. The reason is said to be that he was a sorcerer, so they eliminated it [his name] from the account.³ They said Shāllaḥ b. Arphakhshad is in fact Shāllaḥ b. Qīnān b. Arphakhshad. Be advised of this.

2. Ibrāhīm was born in al-Ahwāz, it is said, in Bābal,⁴ which is in Iraq. Āzar, the father of Ibrāhīm, was manufacturing idols,⁵ and Ibrāhīm was given them to sell. Ibrāhīm would

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. For this genealogy in the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Genesis 11:10–25: biblical Abraham, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, and Shem (and Noah).

3. This Qīnān is Cainan, who is missing from the Hebrew (and KJV) text of Genesis 10:24 (and from 1 Chronicles 1:18, which is dependent on the Genesis passage). His name is, however, included in the genealogical listing in the Septuagint and the Samaritan, Syriac, and other Bibles and is also found in the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:36. A number of early church fathers referred to Cainan’s absence from the Hebrew record as evidence that the Jews had tampered with the Bible text.

4. Biblical Babel or Babylon.

5. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6, 16–17, 27.

say, “Who will buy what does not harm nor benefit?” Then God, the Highest, commanded Ibrāhīm to call his people to monotheism [*tawhīd*]; he [first] called his father, but he did not answer the call,⁶ so he called his people. When his [Ibrāhīm’s] news became widespread, it reached Nimrūd b. Lūsh [Cūsh?],⁷ who was the king of that country. Nimrūd was a governor over the land of Iraq and that which is attached to it, according to al-Ḍaḥḥāk. But it is said that Nimrūd was a separate, independent king. Nimrūd took Ibrāhīm and threw him into a large fire,⁸ but the fire was cold and safe upon him.⁹ Ibrāhīm left the fire after a few days. Thereupon men from among [Ibrāhīm’s] people believed him, despite the fear of Nimrūd. Sāra, his wife, believed in him, and she is the daughter of his uncle Hārān.

3. Then Ibrāhīm, and those who believed with him,¹⁰ and his father, despite his apostasy, separated from their people, and they emigrated to Ḥarrān and resided there for a time. Ibrāhīm traveled to Egypt, and the pharaoh was the ruler. It is related his name was Sinān b. ‘Alwān, but others say it was Ṭūlis.¹¹ The beauty of Sāra was mentioned to the pharaoh. He brought Sāra to him, and he asked Ibrāhīm about her, and he said, “This is my sister,” meaning in the context of Islam.¹² The aforementioned pharaoh took an interest in her, and God paralyzed his hands and his feet. When he withdrew from her, God, the Exalted, released him. Then he [again] took an interest in her, but the same thing happened to him. So he let Sāra go, and he said, “It does not appear to me that [Sāra] should serve herself.” So he gave Hājar the Egyptian¹³ to her. [Sāra] took [Hājar], and she returned to Ibrāhīm. Then Ibrāhīm traveled from Egypt to Syria.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:27; 2:5.

7. The Arabic text has what appears to be a printing error of Lūsh (لوش) for Cūsh (كوش).

8. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

9. Cf. Qur’an 21:69.

10. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

11. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

12. I.e., submission (to God).

13. The text here uses the term *Coptic*, rather than the usual Arabic word for Egyptian.

EXTRACTS FROM AL-RABGHUZI

Naşir al-Dīn ibn Burhān al-Dīn al-Rabghūzī was a Turkish judge who lived in Khwarizm in western Turkistan. At the instigation of a young Mongol prince converted to Islam, he compiled his version of a *Qiṣaṣ al-anbīyāʾ* (Stories of the Prophets), commonly called the *Qiṣaṣ-i Rabghūzī*, completing it in A.H. 710/A.D. 1310. The book was popular during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries A.D. and was revived in the eighteenth century. The oldest manuscripts date to the end of the fifteenth century. The first publication of the text was a facsimile edition printed in Copenhagen in 1948, and the English translation used here is taken from manuscript folios 37–47 of the Turkish text, found in H. E. Boeschoten, J. O’Kane, and M. Vandamme, trans., *Al-Rabghūzī: The Stories of the Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:92–116. For reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs. We have also eliminated the original italics, except where they are used to cite the Qur’an.

The story of Abraham the Friend of God, peace be upon him, and of Nimrod, the cursed¹

1. He is the one who was afflicted by the calamity of Nimrod the rejected; who tasted the poison of: “*Burn him and help your gods*”;² who prayed: “*God’s knowing my situation exempts me from asking*”; who renounced his wealth, his sons and his daughters, saying: “*I have submitted to the Lord of all men*”;³ who was praised with: “*God chose Abraham to be His friend*”;⁴ who was honoured by: “*Fire, be cool for Abraham and keep him safe*”;⁵ the prophet Abraham—*peace be upon him!*

2. Abraham, who was born in a house, sucked his finger and dwelled in the mountains. Abraham, who understood the stars,⁶ wondered at the moon and rejected the sun.⁷

3. One day he spoke: “Oh mother, tell me who is my god?” “It’s me,” she replied. And Abraham asked: “Then who is your god?” “Your father there,” she said. He asked: “Who is my father’s god?” “Nimrod,” she replied. And Abraham asked: “And who is his god?”

1. We have removed the small capitals and italics used in this and subsequent headings in this extract.

2. Citing Qur’an 21:68.

3. Citing Qur’an 2:131.

4. Citing Qur’an 4:125.

5. Citing Qur’an 21:69.

6. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

7. Paragraphs 2 through 6 were in verse; we have printed them as prose.

4. Our Lord removed the veils from the seven spheres of heaven and earth for him. So Abraham saw everything from the dust on earth to the high Throne of heaven.⁸

5. For the people Abraham established, until the Day of Judgement, the custom of entertaining guests, slaughtering oxen, camels and sheep. When about to sacrifice his son, Abraham received on earth the substitute ram from Gabriel, which had been fattened by grazing in heaven.

6. Abraham heaved the axe and hewed the idol⁹ on which the fox had urinated. Though hungry himself, he offered a meal of meat; he made himself a name and extinguished the fire.

7. Abraham b.¹⁰ Tārakh b. Nākhūr b. Sārūgh b. Arghū b. Fāligh b. ʿĀbir b. Shālikh b. Canaan b. Arfakhshad b. Shem b. Noah¹¹—*peace be upon him!*

8. Ibrāhīm or Abrahām or Ibrāhām, all these [variants in different] languages are correct. That is, if we cry out: “*Ab raḥīm!*”, it means “compassionate father.”¹²

9. Abraham lived in the time of Nimrod b. Kūsh b. Qainān¹³ b. Ham b. Noah. And Nimrod held sway over the entire world.

10. It has been related: There have been four persons who ruled the entire world, two of them true believers and two unbelievers. The true believers were the prophet Solomon and Alexander (Dhū l-Qarnain);¹⁴ the unbelievers were Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar.

11. Nimrod had a dream: A ram came, butted the throne and overturned it. The next morning Nimrod assembled the soothsayers, astrologers and seers and asked them for an interpretation. They told him: “During this year a boy will be born. Your empire will go to ruin at his hands.” After hearing this, Nimrod watched over the pregnant women, and every time a woman gave birth to a boy, Nimrod had the boy put to death.¹⁵ If a girl was born he spared her.

8. Cf. Abraham 3:1–18.

9. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

10. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read as “son of.”

11. For the Judeo-Christian version of this genealogy, see Genesis 11:10–25: Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, and Shem (and Noah). Note that Canaan (Cainan) is missing from the Hebrew (and KJV) text of Genesis 10:24 (and from 1 Chronicles 1:18, which is dependent on the Genesis passage). His name is, however, included in the genealogical listing in the Septuagint and the Samaritan, Syriac, and other Bibles, and is also found in the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:36. A number of early church fathers referred to Cainan’s absence from the Hebrew record as evidence that the Jews had tampered with the Bible text.

12. The Hebrew name means “father of a multitude.” The author’s mistake derives from his confusion of the Arabic letters *h* and *ḥ*. The former is the one used in the name Abraham, the latter in the word meaning “compassionate.”

13. According to Genesis 10:6, Cush was the son of Ham. Apparently, the author has followed some of the Muslim traditions that make Cush the son of Canaan the son of Ham. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27.

14. This is the usual title applied to Alexander the Great. It means “he of the two horns,” perhaps based on the fact that Alexander’s kingdom, Greece, was represented in Daniel’s vision as a goat with a single horn that defeated a ram (Persia) with two long horns (see Daniel 8:2–8).

15. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

12. Nimrod had a favourite, a sculptor of idols called Āzar. His real name was Tārakh, but because he worshipped the idols so much,¹⁶ they called him Āzar.¹⁷ When Āzar's wife had conceived Abraham, Āzar kept her hidden from the people. When the appointed month and day arrived, she went to a lonely place and gave birth in secret. She named the child Abraham. Out of fear of Nimrod, she carried the child away, hid him in a mountain cave and nourished him with milk. She thought: "Instead of Nimrod killing him before my eyes, let the wild beasts devour him without me seeing it." The Lord Almighty sent Gabriel, who came and placed Abraham's finger in his mouth. In the finger God created milk, and Abraham sucked this. In one day Abraham grew as much as other boys grow in a month. On certain days Abraham's mother would come and give him milk.

13. When Abraham was seven years old, his father came and brought him home. One day Abraham asked his mother: "I did not exist, but then I came into being. Who is my god?" His mother replied: "It is I." Again he asked: "And who is your god?", and she replied: "Your father, because if you ask why, he is better than I am." Again Abraham asked: "Who is my father's god?" She said: "Nimrod; because if you ask why, he is a better man than your father." Again he asked: "Who is the god of Nimrod?" His mother replied in a loud voice: "Hush! Do not talk like this. Nimrod is the god of us all." His mother related this conversation to his father. His father said: "Take him away from here and leave him in the same mountains, lest he should bring calamity upon us." His mother brought him to the same cave and left him there. Abraham pondered: "Certainly the God Who created me did not create me like this without a Lord to worship. But I do not know whom to worship or how." When he had spent the day pondering this thought, evening descended. Abraham came out of the cave and beheld Venus, which was very bright. He thought: "Could my God be like this, could that be Him?" *In His words, He is exalted: "When night drew its shadow over him, he saw a star. 'That,' he said, 'is surely my God.'"*¹⁸ In other words: He said jokingly: "Is such a thing my Lord?"

14. When the star Venus had set, he thought: "Whatever rises and then sets, whatever changes, is not worthy to be God. Any such [gods] I do not like." *In His words, He is exalted: "I will not worship gods that fade."*¹⁹ Then the moon rose and was bigger than that star. Abraham thought: "Could this be my God?" *In His words, He is exalted: "When he beheld the rising moon, he said: 'That is my God.'"*²⁰ But when the moon set, he thought: "Apparently this as well rises and sets. If my God doesn't send me down the right road, I will be one of those who are lost." *In His words, He is exalted: "He said: 'If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely go astray.'"*²¹

15. He spent that night pondering this thought. At the crack of dawn the darkness departed and the world became bright. Then the sun rose, which was bigger than the star

16. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

17. Translators' note: "I.e. a pseudo-etymology based on *azr*, 'to go astray.'"

18. Citing Qur'an 6:76.

19. Ibid.

20. Citing Qur'an 6:77.

21. Ibid.

and the moon. He thought: "Could God be like this? This one is bigger." *In His words, He is exalted: "Then when he beheld the shining sun, he said: 'That must be my God: it is larger than the other two.'"*²² Until midday he was engaged in this thought. After the sun had reached its zenith, it started downwards.

16. It has been related: He saw the worshippers of the sun. He said: "I shall stay far from them." *In His words, He is exalted: "I deny the gods you serve besides Him."*²³ They said: "If you do not worship these, whom do you worship?" He replied: "I have turned my face to that lofty Person Who has created the seven layers of the earth and the seven spheres of heaven.²⁴ I am a believer who follows the right road. I am not one of those who says He has partners." *In His words, He is exalted: "I will turn my face to Him Who has created the heavens and the earth, and live a righteous life."²⁵ I am no idolater."²⁶*

17. When Abraham reached eight years of age, he came to the town of his father. He entered his father's house. His father was carving an idol.²⁷ He told Abraham: "Bring this idol to the market and sell it." Abraham took the idol from his father and fastened a rope around its neck. He threw it into the water and smeared it with mud. He brought it into the market and said: "Who will buy this? It cannot see, it cannot hear, nor can it give advantage to anyone."

18. It has been related: One day, while carrying an idol, he felt the need to ease himself. He put down the idol and went off. When he came back, it appeared that a fox had defiled the idol by urinating abundantly on top of its head. Seeing this, Abraham was pleased and he recited in a loud voice:

19. Is he a god on whose head foxes urinate?²⁸ Surely he on whom foxes have urinated is contemptible. I dissociate myself from idols and all idolatry and I believe in God Who is victorious. Can it be that a fox urinates on a god's head? Just think of it! His eyes don't see, he is blind; and dumb is his tongue. I'm far from all these others; I'm a servant of the Lord God. I have put on the belt of obedience and follow His orders completely.

20. His father made Abraham, peace be upon him, a guardian over the idols for seven years. Abraham asked the worshippers: "Why do you worship these?" They reported these words to his father. His father rebuked him. Abraham said to his father: "Why do you worship this thing which cannot see and cannot hear?"²⁹ And again he said: "Oh father, knowledge thereof was granted to me, not to you. Listen to what I say; I will guide you on the right road." *In His words, He is exalted: "Father, the truth has been revealed to me about many mysteries: therefore follow me, that I may guide you along an even path."³⁰ Abraham*

22. Citing Qur'an 6:78.

23. Ibid.

24. Cf. Abraham 3:1-18.

25. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

26. Citing Qur'an 6:79.

27. Cf. Abraham 1:16-17, 27.

28. Again, paragraph 19 was in verse.

29. Cf. Abraham 1:16-17, 27.

30. Citing Qur'an 19:43.

said: "Oh father, do not serve Satan. Satan has committed many sins against the Merciful One." *In His words, He is exalted: "Father, do not worship Satan: for he has rebelled against the Lord of Mercy."*³¹ His father replied: "Oh Abraham, do you not acknowledge my gods? If you do not refrain from these actions, I will stone you to death. Go away to a place some distance from me." *In His words, He is exalted: "Desist from this folly or you shall be stoned to death. Be gone from my house this instant!"*³² Abraham said: "Goodbye, father. In a short time after I have gone, I will ask the Lord to pardon you because the Lord knows the situation I am in." *In His words, He is exalted: "'Peace be with you,' said Abraham, 'I shall implore my Lord to forgive you: for to me He has been gracious.'"*³³

21. Abraham left the town and went into the wilderness. He served the Lord Almighty. Abraham's father died and the idols devolved upon Hārān, his father's brother, and Hārān was the father of the prophet Lot.³⁴ Meanwhile, Abraham was forever saying: "In some way or other, I will play a trick on these idols." *In His words, He is exalted: "I will overthrow your idols as soon as you have turned your backs."*³⁵ When the date drew near on which their holiday occurred, they would slaughter animals, prepare a meal from the meat, and bringing it to their false idols, set it down in front of them. Then they would go to the place where the festival took place and stay there until noon. Upon returning they would pick up the meat, carry it away and eat it together with their sons and daughters, thinking: "The blessing of our idols has alighted on this food."

22. Now when their holiday arrived, they said to Abraham: "Let us go together." Abraham replied: "I have had recourse to astrology. It looks as if difficulties lie ahead of me. I cannot go outside." At that time astrology was prevalent and people held it in high esteem. They left Abraham and went their way. Abraham took an axe and entered the house of the idols. He cut off the head and arms of the idols and chopped them up and crushed them.³⁶ There was a big idol; Abraham lifted up the axe and laid it over this idol's shoulder. To the other idols he said mockingly: "Why don't you eat the food in front of you?" And again he asked: "Why don't you speak?" *In His words, He is exalted: "He said: 'Will you not eat your offerings? Why do you not speak?'"*³⁷ When it was noon, the unbelievers returned. They saw that the arms and legs of the idols were smashed and their heads chopped off. Nimrod and his clan entered the house of the idols. He asked: "Who has done this to our gods?" *In His words, He is exalted, which inform us of this: "'Who has done this to our deities?', they asked. 'He must surely be a wicked man.'"*³⁸ They said: "There is a young man called Abraham who may have done this." *In His words, He is exalted:*

31. Citing Qur'an 19:44.

32. Citing Qur'an 19:46.

33. Citing Qur'an 19:47.

34. Haran, the father of Lot, was the son of Terah, not his brother (Genesis 11:31). Since Haran died before his father (Genesis 11:28; Abraham 2:1), the chronology presented here is not possible.

35. Citing Qur'an 21:57.

36. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

37. Citing Qur'an 37:91-92.

38. Citing Qur'an 21:59.

*"Others replied: 'We have heard a youth called Abraham speak of them.'"*³⁹ Nimrod replied: "Bring him here and have the people testify before his sight." *In His words, He is exalted: "Bring him here in sight of all the people, that they may act as witnesses."*⁴⁰

23. Lesson: Even though he was an unbeliever, Nimrod did not pass judgement upon Abraham on the strength of rumours, and so his reign did not come to an end.

24. Religious scholars have related: The authority of an unbeliever who practices justice will persist; the authority of a true believer who perpetrates injustice will not. As has been said: "Power remains when justice is combined with unbelief, but it does not persist when injustice is combined with belief."

25. A point of instruction: Although he was an unbeliever, Nimrod did not listen to rumours. He said: "Let the people assemble; if they give evidence, we will arrest him." Today if a person passes judgement upon someone on the basis of lies, that person is a worse man than Nimrod.

26. They brought Abraham, and asked him: "Have you done this to our gods?" *In His words, He is exalted: "Abraham, was it you who did this to our deities?"*⁴¹ Abraham said: "This one has done it; he is the greatest of them. Ask him! Let him say who has done it, if he can talk."

27. Religious scholars have related: [Read]: "No, [the Lord] has done it," then pause and start [again] with the words: "He is the greatest of them."⁴² Abraham did not pause and hid the true meaning of his words from them. They did not understand the meaning and thought he was saying the biggest of them had done it. Abraham said: "Ask him; if he can talk, he will tell you." *In His words, He is exalted: "Ask them, if they can speak."*⁴³ They said: "These idols do not speak; how are we to ask him?" Abraham said: "So they cannot speak? Why do you worship useless objects?" *In His words, He is exalted, which inform us about them and Abraham: "Would you then worship, instead of God, that which can neither help nor harm you?"*⁴⁴

28. Thus they knew that none other than Abraham had done this. They discussed how to punish Abraham. But Abraham revealed his prophethood and said: "Believe in the One God and do not worship idols. Recognize me as the messenger of God." They said: "Would you turn us away from the faith of our fathers and introduce us to another religion?" Abraham replied: "Your ancestors all adhered to a vain faith. I am summoning you to the right path."⁴⁵

39. Citing Qur'an 21:60.

40. Citing Qur'an 21:61.

41. Citing Qur'an 21:62.

42. Citing Qur'an 21:63. The translators' note reads: "The usual interpretation of this verse would be: 'No! The biggest/greatest one of them has done it.' The interpretation presented exempts Abraham from having lied."

43. Citing Qur'an 21:63.

44. Citing Qur'an 21:66.

45. Cf. Abraham 1:5-6.

29. It has been related: At that time there was famine in all the countries. There was no food to be found.⁴⁶ Nimrod was selling food to all peoples. One day Abraham came to Nimrod to buy food. Nimrod said: "Prostrate yourself before me, then I will give you food." Abraham said: "I prostrate myself before the God Who brings the dead to life, and causes the living to die."⁴⁷ *In His words, He is exalted, which inform us about him: "Abraham said: 'My Lord is He Who has power to give life and to cause death.'"*⁴⁸ Nimrod said: "I, too, can bring the dead to life and make the living die." *In His words, He is exalted: "He said: 'I, too, have power to give life and to cause death.'"*⁴⁹ Abraham asked: "How do you bring them to life?" Nimrod had two evildoers brought from the dungeon. One of them he had killed, the other one he freed. He said: "There, I have brought the dead to life and killed the living." Abraham understood that unbelievers are stupid. He said: "To set free an evildoer does not amount to bringing him to life. You would have to bring to life the very one you have killed." But he did not wish to dispute with a stupid unbeliever. Thinking: "Let me silence him with one remark," he said: "My God is the One Who every day causes the sun to rise in the east. Just for one day make it rise in the west." *In His words, He is exalted: "God brings up the sun from the east. Bring it up yourself from the west."*⁵⁰ Upon hearing these words, Nimrod was dumbfounded. *In His words, He is exalted: "The unbeliever was confounded."*⁵¹ The miracle Abraham was referring to is this: Until God, He is mighty and glorious, has caused the sun to rise from the west at the end of time, the Day of Judgement will not arrive.

30. They heard these words from Abraham; and many unbelievers took them to heart, saying: "These idols are futile; they are good for nothing. Abraham speaks the truth; we are not on the right path."⁵² *In His words, He is exalted: "Thereupon they turned their thoughts to their own folly and said to each other: 'Verily, you are wrongdoers.'"*⁵³ When Nimrod, may he be damned, came to know what his people were thinking, he feared that they would break away from him and turn to Abraham. He declared: "Seize him and throw him into the fire. Give your gods assistance." *In His words, He is exalted: "They cried: 'Burn him and avenge your gods, if you must punish him!'"*⁵⁴ They decided to throw Abraham into the fire.

31. Nimrod said: "According to Abraham, his god possesses a Hell. He will scorch my skin with fire. Today I will burn Abraham with fire."⁵⁵ Let me see who is going to save

46. Cf. Abraham 1:29–30; 2:1, 5.

47. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

48. Citing Qur'an 2:258.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

53. Citing Qur'an 21:64.

54. Citing Qur'an 21:68.

55. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

him." He had his entire army collect firewood for four months. Whatever pack-animal they loaded it on would not carry it. They loaded it on a camel; it would not get up. Neither an ass nor a horse would accept it. They loaded the wood on a mule which did accept it. Abraham beheld this and cursed the mule. It is said that for this reason they produce no offspring. Today, if we put a load on a mule, it will not stand still if we do not beat it and curse it. At night they did not let the old widows sleep, but ordered them to turn their spinning-wheels; during the day they sold the products and [bought and] piled up firewood in order that Nimrod should be pleased with them.

32. It has been related: They heaped up firewood on the ground over a distance of one parasang,⁵⁶ and closed its circumference with a wall of morocco leather which they smeared with mineral oil and sulphur. Then they lit the fire.

33. Two years before they had bound Abraham with heavy fetters,⁵⁷ and they had been keeping him in his house. The fire burned for ten days and gathered strength. They said: "Throw Abraham into the fire now." Measured in their cubits the height of the fire was twenty cubits. The one who brought fire and lit the heap of firewood was Abraham's uncle Hārān. The prophet Lot was his son. Now a swallow brought water in its beak and poured it on the fire. Abraham exclaimed: "Oh swallow, how can the water in your beak affect the fire?"⁵⁸ Abraham blessed the swallow. A lizard came and blew on the fire. Abraham cursed the lizard.

34. The fire burned for forty days and forty nights. No one could come any nearer to it than four parasangs. Whenever a bird flew over it in the air, its wings were burnt and it fell down. Nimrod erected a tower out of iron and copper and mounted it. They said: "How are we going to throw Abraham into the fire?" Satan came and taught them how to construct a catapult. Before this a catapult had not existed in the world. They chained Abraham's hands and feet with seventy *batman* of iron⁵⁹ and put him in the catapult. They said: "Oh Abraham, aren't you afraid?" Abraham replied: "How should one in whose heart the fire of God resides be afraid of the fire of men!" He said: "How will he who has the fire of the Lord inside him fear the fire of creation?" They said: "People have lit a big fire and smeared the walls around it with mineral oil and sulphur." Abraham said: "The fire in my heart is stronger than your fire because in my heart is the fire of the Lord, while your fire is just the fire of this world." He said: "The fire inside me is hotter than your fire because my fire is a fire from the Lord, while yours is a fire of this world." Again they said: "Ask your god to save you." Abraham said: "What part of me is He supposed to save?" They said: "Your self." Abraham said: "The self is a wicked thing pursuing evil. It is perfectly appropriate for the wicked fire." They said: "Ask for your soul (*jān*) [to be rescued]." He replied: "The soul is a loan; a loan must return to its owner." They

56. One *farsang* = 30 *stades*; 1 *stadion* = 606.75 feet, so 3 *farsangs* = 54,607.5 feet, or about 10 ½ miles.

57. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

58. The translators note an addition in MS C: "The swallow replied: 'If the water which I brought doesn't affect it, the intensity of my faith will.'"

59. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

said: "Ask for your heart to be rescued." Abraham answered: "The heart belongs to God. He will do with it whatever He pleases."

35. Thereupon they placed him in the catapult. No matter how many people assembled, they were not able to draw it back because angels had come who were holding the catapult down.⁶⁰ The unbelievers asked him mockingly: "Oh Abraham, whither are you going?" He answered: "To my Lord Who has created me; He will show me the road." *In His words, He is exalted: "I will take refuge with my Lord; He will guide me."*⁶¹ Satan knew that the angels were holding down the catapult. He came in the appearance of a nice, clean man and told the unbelievers: "You do not know how to draw it back. However, there is a trick to this. Fetch women of bad morals. If the men fornicate with them, then the catapult will go off." Indeed when they did this, the angels dispersed. Thereupon they drew back the catapult and shot Abraham into the air.

36. Question: How did Satan know how to construct a catapult? Answer: Satan had seen the catapult in Hell. In Hell they throw the sinners into a pit of fire; the torments of that pit are seventy times worse than the torments of Hell.

37. It has come down in tradition: The Prophet, peace be upon him, has said: "From my community six kinds of persons will be thrown into that pit in Hell on the Day of Judgement. First, those who say in front of rulers: 'This man⁶² is so virtuous'; second, those who confiscate a young orphan's wealth and consume it; third, those who execute the business of oppressors; fourth, those who speak to their parents with a bad tongue;⁶³ fifth, the homosexuals who commit unclean acts; sixth, those who earn money in a manner which pleases God, but who spend the money in a bad way. God save us from that!"

38. When they had catapulted Abraham into the air, he said: "God is sufficient unto me; what an excellent Protector He is, what an excellent Lord and what an excellent Helper!" The angels of the seven spheres of heaven all cried out, saying: "Oh God, these days the only person on earth who professes Your existence and Your Oneness is Abraham. And him You throw in the fire. O Lord, is this how You treat Your friends?" The Word came: "Oh angels, continue to look on! In this matter I have a hidden mystery. You do not know about it." That moment Gabriel arrived⁶⁴ and hovering in the air level with the fire, he said: "Oh Abraham, do you want something?" "Are you in need of anything?"

39. The lesson: If Abraham had said: "I have no wish," this would have meant: "I am without a wish"; but a human being cannot be without a wish. If he had said: "I have a wish," this would have meant: "I have a wish to express to Gabriel." The answer which Abraham gave was: "As for you, I have none." "To you, at least, I have none to express." Gabriel said: "If you do not have a request to make to me, you must have one to make

60. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

61. Citing Qur'an 37:99.

62. Translators' note: "I.e. the ruler."

63. Translators' note: "Ms.B: '. . . fourth, the step-fathers and step-mothers . . .'; ms.C: '. . . the step-mothers . . .' (!)"

64. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

to the Lord. Ask Him!" Abraham said: "God's knowing my situation exempts me from asking." "Oh Gabriel, it is certain that He already knows what I want. What need is there to ask?"⁶⁵ When Abraham had attached his heart to the Lord, He is honoured and glorified, the words came: "Oh fire, become cool; keep Abraham safe." *In His words, He is exalted: "We⁶⁶ said: 'Fire, be cool to Abraham and keep him safe.'*"⁶⁷

40. Religious scholars have related, God's mercy be upon them: If He had only said "cool" and had not added the word "safe," the fire would have destroyed Abraham with its cold, and no one would have seen food cooked over fire up until the Day of Judgment. The meaning is this: "Cool off and stay like that where Abraham is; this will ensure that fire is of benefit to others."

41. It has been related: In Abraham's breast there was the fire of his love for the Lord. That moment the fire of love came into action in order to burn down the fire of Nimrod. The fire of love was told: "Become cool and keep Abraham safe." If God had not said this, the fire of Abraham's love would not have spared Nimrod, nor would it have burned down Nimrod's fire entirely.

42. Then it was ordained: "Oh Gabriel, catch my slave!" Gabriel arrived bearing a prayer-rug from Paradise and spread it out in the middle of the fire.⁶⁸ Abraham sat down on that rug, and the fire burned away Abraham's fetters.⁶⁹ Then Abraham stood up to perform ritual prayer on the rug.

43. It has been related: Nimrod said to Imkân: "Ascend this tower and see to what extent Abraham is burned and has turned to ashes." Imkân said: "Oh king, if all the mountains of the world were in this fire, they would burn. How could Abraham be spared?" Then Imkân ascended the tower and spoke again: "Oh king, there are three persons sitting before him. Twenty beds of spring flowers are blossoming around him and springs are streaming and a date-palm has sprouted." After he came down from the tower Imkân told Nimrod of this. Nimrod was astonished and ascended the tower himself. He saw that it was just as Imkân had reported and he said: "Oh Abraham, you were alone; who are these persons?" At the command of the Lord, He is mighty and glorious, the fire was able to speak, declaring: "Oh Nimrod, one of the persons is me. I have changed my countenance, and I am apologizing to Abraham for your stupidity." The fire said: "Oh Abraham, what harm can Nimrod possibly do to someone whom the Lord, He is mighty and glorious, protects?" Nimrod heard this and was very frightened and grieved. For seven days and nights the earth trembled; it was an earthquake.⁷⁰ Nimrod assembled the wise men and doctors, and asked: "What kind of earthquake is this?" They said: "The earth is trembling because the fire is so hot." Nimrod said: "Extinguish

65. Contrast Abraham 1:15.

66. The Qur'an always uses the royal plural (we, our, us) when God is speaking.

67. Citing Qur'an 21:69.

68. In parallel Muslim accounts, Gabriel brings a garment from paradise.

69. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figures 1 and 3.

70. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

it." They began transporting water and throwing it on the fire. Many people came to see Abraham. At the Lord's command a wind blew the ashes into their faces and all these people went away. When it was night, Abraham came out of the fire and went home.

44. It has been related: Nimrod had twelve thousand storehouses; four thousand of them were completely full of flour to be sold in case it should become scarce. Abraham prayed; the valleys and caves in those lands filled with flour. Abraham had it announced: "Come and take flour." Throughout all the lands hunger was stilled and no one cared for Nimrod's grain.⁷¹

45. One day Abraham went to Nimrod and said: "Oh Nimrod, I ask you to become a true believer; repeat: 'There is no god but God and you are Abraham, the messenger of God.'" Nimrod replied: "Give me time to take counsel." Abraham gave him time. Nimrod took counsel: "I am going to make peace with Abraham. What do you say?" His companions and lords thought: "If he makes peace with Abraham, Abraham will wield power over him, and our glory and standing will cease; we will be the servants of Abraham." They told Nimrod: "For so many years you have said: 'I am a god.' Are you now going to say: 'I am a servant.'? Will you be Abraham's servant? Are you going to make us his servants?" Nimrod said: "I have beheld great works come forth from him. We have to make peace with his god." Hārān said: "Don't you know why the fire didn't burn him? It was because our fathers worshipped fire. And he, too, is from our stock. Fire does not burn us, or those of our stock."

46. This story contains lessons; the lesson is this: The mule carried firewood; its capacity to reproduce ceased. The sparrow transported twigs; therefore all boys catch it, pluck out its feathers, roast it in the fire and eat it. The lizard blew on the fire; therefore it is killed wherever it is found. The swallow carried water and thus found mercy. What they contributed to Nimrod's fire did not make it bigger, but they made manifest their enmity. Likewise, the swallow's water did not extinguish the fire, but [the gesture] made manifest the swallow's friendship. Until the Day of Judgement its good name shall endure. Virtue brought with it profit.

47. Again Nimrod went to Hārān and asked: "How can we get rid of Abraham?" Hārān assembled the people and spoke thus: "Exert yourselves to the outmost and let us dig a pit. In the pit we will produce smoke and smoke will kill a man." Nimrod said: "Here is money. Take whatever you need and finish this job." Hārān assembled the people, and where the fire had been they dug a pit with a wide opening and a narrow lower part. He filled the pit with straw and dried dung. The whole people looked on. Hārān brought fire and cast it upon the straw. At the Lord's command a wind arose and snatching up flames from the fire, flung them down on Hārān's head. Hārān caught fire and started to burn. The people exclaimed: "Oh Hārān, did you not say: 'Fire cannot burn us.'?" Hārān was unable to say anything; that very instant he burned to ashes.⁷² Again a wind came and lifted up ashes from the fire Nimrod had lit. And it scattered the

71. Cf. Abraham 2:17.

72. Cf. Abraham 2:1.

ashes into the eyes of the people who had brought firewood; they all went blind. Abraham remained safe.⁷³ Those who were left ran away.

48. Then Sarah, God be pleased with her, came before Abraham. Sarah was Hārān's daughter. Some have related: She was the daughter of a great lord from among Nimrod's retainers. Sarah said: "Oh Abraham, your God is very powerful. Will He receive me?" Abraham replied: "He will set you on the right path and make Paradise your abode." Sarah was extremely beautiful; she said: "Oh Abraham, I will become a true believer on the one condition that you will take me for your wife." Abraham replied: "I do not possess the wealth to offer you a marriage portion." Sarah said: "My marriage gift will be this: In all matters concerning the Holy Law you will do whatever I say." Abraham agreed to what Sarah requested.

49. It has come down in another tradition: Nimrod saw Abraham from the tower. In the fire flowers were blossoming; the fire had become red flowers in the midst of green and yellow plants. A spring had appeared and a palm-tree had sprung up. Nimrod asked: "Oh Abraham, does the fire not burn you?" Abraham replied: "No." Again Nimrod asked: "Who has made the fire cool where you are?" He answered: "The One Who has put me in the fire." Nimrod said: "Why, your god is a good god,"⁷⁴ and he felt inclined to convert to the true faith. But those in his presence did not agree. After that they began to talk about how they were going to destroy Abraham with smoke. Lot, peace be upon him, came and informed Abraham. They fled from the city in darkness at night. Nimrod had put guards on the road and told them: "If you come upon anyone who speaks Hebrew, arrest him." That night, through God's omnipotence, all languages were confounded and the languages changed.

50. It has been related: "And that night all languages were mixed up. And therefore it was called Babel."⁷⁵ Seventy-two different languages came into existence. Eighteen languages were taken up by the progeny of Ham, the Indians. Eighteen languages were adopted by the progeny of Shem, the Arabs and Persians. And thirty-six languages went to the progeny of Japheth, the Turks. As Abraham and Lot walked past the guards, the latter asked them: "Who are you?" They answered: "We two are Abraham and Lot." The guards were annoyed and said: "We are on the look-out for them, and you are making fun of us by saying you are Abraham and Lot." The Lord Almighty protected them both from these guards. And so they went to another country and settled down there.

51. When Nimrod's wrath had subsided, a command came from the Lord, He is mighty and glorious: "Oh Abraham, go and invite Nimrod to the faith." Abraham went to Nimrod and said: "Oh Nimrod, do not worship idols. Convert! Say there is only one God and recognize me as his messenger." Thereupon Nimrod said: "Is there another god besides me?" Abraham replied: "Indeed there is! The One Who has created you and has

73. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

74. Cf. Abraham 1:16; 3:20.

75. Paraphrase of Qur'an 2:102.

given you your empire. He is the God of heaven and earth." Nimrod said: "Before now I didn't know this, or I would have engaged in combat with him."

52. And he began preparing himself to do battle with the "God of heaven and earth."⁷⁶

On Nimrod's ascension to heaven

53. They fed young eagles. When the eagles were fully grown, Nimrod had a box made with two doors, one door on top and one underneath. And the box had eight legs, four on top and four below. Nimrod had the eagles chained to the legs on top.⁷⁷ Then he took his breastplate and his helmet, his bow and arrow, and he entered the box with a companion. When the birds saw the meat above them, they tried to catch it and flew off raising the box into the air. They traveled for one day and one night. Nimrod said: "Open the door on top. What do you see?" The companion opened it and said: "It looks as it usually does." Nimrod said: "Open the door below. What do you see?" He said: "I see the earth in one piece." Again they traveled for one day and one night. Nimrod said: "Open the door on top. What do you see?" He opened it and said: "The sky looks exactly as it does from earth." Nimrod said: "We must go further," and they traveled for one more day and night. When Nimrod had the door on top opened and asked: "What is there to see?" The companion said: "All that can be seen is fog. There is nothing else in sight." He had him open the door below and asked: "What is there to see?" "Just fog," was the companion's reply. Nimrod said: "Now we have arrived." And he took his arrow and shot it. Gabriel received the command: "Take his arrow, plunge it into a fish and smear it with the fish's blood. Then throw it back into the box." That is why fish are not killed by having their throat cut.

54. It has also been related: And there was a bird in the air. Gabriel immediately smeared the arrow with its blood and then he threw it back in the box.

55. Some have related: The arrow came down and hit Nimrod on the head. Nimrod was smeared with blood, but hid what had happened from his comrade.

56. Nimrod said: "I have killed the god of heaven," and he took the pieces of meat from above and fastened them underneath. On the way down a wind blew into the box and made a terrific howl. All people were afraid of that howl, as the Lord has declared *in His words, He is exalted: "They have plotted, but their plot is in God's hands."*⁷⁸ They landed and said: "We have killed the god of heaven."

57. It has been related: A hundred thousand men from amongst the people of Nimrod had turned away from him and were well-disposed to Abraham. When Nimrod arrived and, showing the bloody arrow, said: "I have killed the god of heaven," they took this to be the truth and became unbelievers once again. *In His words, He is exalted: "But He leaves*

76. Translators' note: "Ms.C: '. . . had I known before now, I would have engaged in combat with him. I am the god of the earth; I will fight with the god of heaven.' And he began preparing himself."

77. Translator's note: "ILM is more explicit here: 'Nimrod fastened meat on the poles on top and chained the eagles underneath the poles.'"

78. Citing Qur'an 14:46.

in error whom He will and He gives guidance to whom He pleases.”⁷⁹ Abraham received the command: “Go and tell Nimrod: ‘If you are willing to fight, organize an army.’” Abraham went to convey God’s message. Nimrod sent agents to his lands. An army assembled, too great to be counted or measured. From head to foot they were covered with steel. A command of the Lord, He is mighty and glorious, was issued to the army of mosquitoes. All mosquitoes came forward; there were so many of them that they hid the face of the sun. They clung to Nimrod’s soldiers and ate their armour, their clothes, their horses and their spears utterly and completely. They tore them to pieces.

58. Nimrod, the cursed, fled and went into his palace. The height of the palace was five hundred cubits; the circumference of its walls was three thousand five hundred cubits. He went inside, bolted the gates and filled up the windows. He left one hole for his breath to escape through. The Lord, He is exalted, inspired a weak and lame mosquito with one leg, one wing and one eye; it entered through the hole and settled on Nimrod’s cheek. The mosquito sucked on his cheek, flew close to his mouth and entered his nose. It reached his brain and began to eat it. It fed for forty days and nights.⁸⁰

59. According to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār: The Lord, He is exalted, granted Nimrod, the cursed, a reign of four hundred years. Thereafter the mosquito entered his nose. It stayed there for another four hundred years. When someone came in to see him, Nimrod would cry out for help and make the person hit him. If this didn’t make Nimrod quiet, he had himself beaten with fists. And if he still didn’t stay quiet, they started slapping him on the back of the neck.

60. The divine wisdom: Nimrod was afflicted with these tortures because he claimed to be a god and for four hundred years made the people prostrate before him. To make it clear to people that a person who received so many blows on the back of his neck was clearly not fit to be a god, Nimrod’s pains did not end with this; they began to beat him with maces. He grew weak and his pains increased. Meanwhile, his people endured suffering. When it was the turn of one of Nimrod’s important companions to beat him with the mace, the man thought: “I will go tomorrow and deliver all the people.” He arrived the next day, and when he went to wield the mace, he raised his hand very high and then struck a mighty blow. Nimrod’s head was split asunder. The mosquito had by now become the size of a dove; it flew away. Gabriel, peace be upon him, lifted up the palace with his wings and cast it down to the earth. The palace was turned upside down. *In His words, He is exalted: “But God smote their edifice at its foundations and its roof fell down upon their heads.”*⁸¹ Nimrod died and went to Hell.⁸² Then a person named Dhū l-ʿArsh⁸³ ascended the throne as king.

79. Citing Qurʾan 16:93.

80. The story, often repeated in the Muslim texts, may derive from the Talmudic account of the gnat that entered the nose of Titus and picked at his brain for seven years, following his desecration of the temple in Jerusalem (Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 56b).

81. Citing Qurʾan 16:26.

82. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

83. Dhū al-ʿArsh means “possessor of the throne.”

The story of Abraham, peace be upon him, and king Dhū l-ʿArsh

61. Abraham, peace be upon him, gave all Nimrod’s goods, his gold and silver, his cattle and livestock, to the poor as pious gifts. Then they departed from that land, that is, Abraham and Lot, together with Sarah and two true believers.⁸⁴ Abraham, peace be upon him, prayed and asked: “My God, how far am I to go?” It was ordained: “Go wherever you wish.”

62. King Dhū l-ʿArsh was a young man and very taken with women; wherever a beautiful woman was to be found, he would have her brought to him. This Dhū l-ʿArsh b. Ṣarūq al-Ḥimyarī also stationed guards at the roads to collect the tithe. Fifteen men encountered Abraham and they demanded the tithe from him. Abraham said: “We do not have enough wealth for you to demand the tithe. But we have children; take as many as you want.” They counted his children. It appeared that there were nine of them. They said: “If there were ten, we would take one of them. From these nine nothing is due to us. But let us see what is inside this chest.” Sarah was inside the chest.

63. The following has come down as a tradition from the Prophet, peace be upon him: “The watcher in ambush is the worst thing created by God on earth.” This means: “Among the things created by God, He is mighty and glorious, nothing is worse than those who guard the roads and confiscate goods.”

64. As much as Abraham and Lot tried, it was of no avail. The guards opened the chest and saw Sarah. She was very beautiful. The guards said: “Our king likes women such as this one. Where are you abducting her?” They brought Abraham to the town and made him dismount. Then they went to the king and told him of this. Without having seen her, he fell in love with Sarah—on the basis of hearsay. He told the chamberlain: “Quick, bring this man before me!” The chamberlain brought Abraham to the king. The king looked at Abraham; he was good-looking and handsome. The king honoured Abraham and seated him at his side.⁸⁵ The king asked: “What is your name?” Abraham said: “My name is ʿAbdallāh.”⁸⁶ The king said: “What is in the chest?” Abraham was afraid, thinking: “If I say she is my wife, they will kill me because he desires her.” He said: “She is my sister.” He said this in the sense that a true believer is a brother or sister to a fellow true believer. *In His words, He is exalted: “The believers are a band of brothers.”*⁸⁷ The king said: “Oh ʿAbdallāh, today I am king of Egypt; my wealth is enormous. If you give me your sister,” he said, “I will share my dominion with you.”⁸⁸ Abraham grew sad and lowered his head. The king said: “Oh ʿAbdallāh, why do you not speak?” Abraham replied: “My sister is of age; you must ask her consent.” The king said: “You go and ask her consent.”

84. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

85. Cf. Abraham Facsimile 3, figure 1.

86. Translators’ note: “This common name literally means ‘servant of God,’ i.e. Abraham is not really lying in giving this as his name.”

87. Citing Qurʾan 49:10.

88. Cf. Abraham Facsimile 3, figure 1.

65. Abraham rose and went to Sarah, filled with sorrow. Sarah asked: "What has happened to you to make you sad?" He told her all that had been said. Sarah began to weep, saying: "Oh Abraham, why did you not tell the truth? What a distressing situation you have put yourself in, as well as me!" While they were conversing thus, the king grew impatient and dispatched two hundred men together with the chamberlain, saying: "Go and bring me that man along with his sister." They brought Abraham and Sarah. Sarah entered, her head covered with a linen veil. The king seated Abraham on a throne,⁸⁹ and Sarah sat down close to him. The king said: "Oh 'Abdallāh, my wealth and my possessions are boundless. I will grant you half of them. Give me your sister." Abraham replied: "My sister is sitting over there. Let her speak." The king said to Sarah: "I have a thousand female slaves; they are of princely lineage. All of them I will give to you; let them serve your brother. But you become mine." Sarah wept and did not utter a word. The king became angry and said: "Oh Abraham, she does not speak because she feels ashamed in front of you." He took Abraham by the hand and removed him. Abraham was told to sit down at the foot of a wall.

66. The prophet Abraham was very jealous. While his mind was occupied with Sarah, Gabriel came and covered the space between Abraham and Sarah with his wings. Abraham saw Sarah and his heart was at rest. As much as the king spoke to Sarah, she would not answer. She covered her face with her hands and wept. The king lost patience. He rose to his feet, approached Sarah and became impertinent, uncovering her face. Abraham said: "My God, show your power to this unbeliever." The king's two arms withered all the way up to his neck. The king said: "Oh Sarah, pray that my arms be cured. I will grant you permission to leave." Sarah prayed and his two arms were cured. He tried once again; his two arms withered. When Sarah prayed once again, they were cured again. They withered a third time. The earth shook; an earthquake took place.⁹⁰

67. The king said: "What kind of calamity is this that you have brought down on me?" Sarah said: "It doesn't come from me: This is because you are an unbeliever, and because you have used force." The king said: "I have not used force on you." Sarah said: "You have not used force on me, but you have done so against the Lord's messenger." The king asked: "Against which messenger have I used force?" Sarah answered: "You have used force against the prophet Abraham, the one at whose hands Nimrod was destroyed." The king said: "I have not once seen Abraham. How have I used force against him?" Sarah said: "Abraham is my husband and you have separated me from him. That is why this calamity and distress have befallen you." The king said: "This distress has befallen you and me because he said you are his sister. If he had told me you're his wife, I wouldn't have had anything to do with you." Sarah replied: "Since you are tyrannical, powerful and an unbeliever, he was unable to say so. If he had said: 'She is my wife,' you would have killed him." The king said: "I have never taken anything from anybody by force." He told the chamberlain: "Go and bring that man." When Abraham was brought,

89. Ibid.

90. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

the king rose and threw himself at Abraham's feet. The king asked: "Are you that Abraham at whose hands Nimrod was destroyed?" Abraham replied: "Yes, I am."

68. The king said: "Describe your god." Abraham replied: "My God is the One Who has created the seven spheres of heaven and the seven layers of earth. His magnificence extends higher than any outer limit and He wields power beneath the earth. He has always existed and He will always exist. He has no comrade, no companion, no equal, no peer and no partner. He was not born from anyone; no one has been born from Him. He does not resemble created beings. He has done as He pleased, and He will do as He pleases. He causes the living to die and brings the dead to life.⁹¹ He Himself will never die. Everything is in His power; He is the Lord of all things." *"He gives life and takes life; He is living, he never dies. What is good comes by His hand; and He has power over everything."*⁹² Dhū l-ʿArsh said: "For seventy years I have been worshipping the star of Venus. All that time I have been thinking: Who is keeping this huge sky in its place without pillars? Who is keeping the brown earth in place above the waters? Who causes the stars to rise and to set? Who brings forth the day; who brings the night? Apparently all these works are executed by your god. My arms and my neck are paralyzed; what am I to do?" Gabriel arrived and delivered the message: "Tell Dhū l-ʿArsh if he gives you all his wealth and possessions, all his gold and silver, I will cure his arms and his neck." Abraham, peace be upon him, passed on the Lord's command. Now Dhū l-ʿArsh had a slave-girl named Hagar. She was a daughter of the king of the Maghreb, a descendant of the prophet Salih. Dhū l-ʿArsh had killed her father and carried her off in captivity. He had made her the mistress of all the female slaves. She knew everything about his wealth and possessions. The king told Hagar: "Give the keys of my treasury to Abraham." She handed over all the keys. Abraham prayed and the king's arms and his neck once again became healthy. Dhū l-ʿArsh converted there and then.⁹³ Uttering the words: "There is no god but God, and I bear witness that you are Abraham, the messenger of God," he became a true believer. Abraham said: "Oh king, I have accepted this wealth you have given me. But I bestow it upon you once again." Hagar took all of it back.

69. Abraham stayed for one week in the country of the king of Ḥarrān and there he taught the faith and true religion.⁹⁴ On the eightieth [*sic*] day Gabriel arrived bearing the message: "Oh Abraham, the Lord has declared: 'This country is not yours; depart hence!'" Abraham informed the king that such a command had reached him. The king said: "Stay with me, and I will grant you the kingship over Egypt;⁹⁵ I will be your servant." Abraham replied: "I have no need of worldly possessions." The king told Hagar: "From the treasury bring a crown, a golden belt and a hundred thousand gold-pieces." Hagar brought these things and placed them in front of Abraham, saying: "Accept this!" Gabriel came

91. Citing Qur'an 2:258. Cf. Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:7.

92. Paraphrase of Qur'an 2:260, 3:27, and 67:1.

93. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

94. Ibid.

95. Cf. Abraham Facsimile 3, figure 1.

and told him to accept them. The king also gave Abraham one hundred thousand female camels, a hundred thousand horses, a hundred thousand oxen, one hundred thousand cows, a hundred thousand sheep and four hundred slave-girls, all adorned with gold. The king said: "Oh Sarah, this crown represents seven years' taxes from Egypt. It is worthy of you." Gabriel came and told Abraham: "Tell Sarah to accept this." The king said: "These four hundred slave-girls are all daughters of kings. I give them to you; accept them!" Sarah said: "I myself am a weak slave of the Lord, He is mighty and glorious. Why then should I need slave-girls? However, just give me Hagar." The king issued an order: They brought ten thousand pieces of gold and a thousand sheep, two hundred camels and two hundred oxen. He offered it all to Sarah, along with Hagar. Gabriel came and said: "Oh Abraham, tell Sarah to accept this." Sarah accepted.

70. Thereupon Abraham, peace be upon him, took the cattle and camels and went to the land of Ḥarrān. Wherever they arrived, the land was covered for a distance of one parasang by cattle and livestock. Abraham came to Jordan and saw six thousand households of tents; all of them had cattle and livestock with them. Abraham told Lot: "Dismount here." He dismounted and pitched the tents. Abraham had a pit dug; from it sweet water welled up. The people said: "This man is going to spoil our pasture with a lot of cattle and livestock. Let us send him away so that this well will be for us."

71. While they were talking thus, Dhū l-ʿArsh, on his way to Egypt, happened to arrive at that place with his army. Three men came and brought Abraham to the king. But when the king saw Abraham from afar, he stood up. As he was stepping down from his throne to go and meet Abraham, Abraham gestured to him with his hand to sit down. Those other men bowed and said to the king: "This man comes day and night with his cattle and livestock spoiling our pasture and our watering-place. Make him go away from here." The king said: "What have you to say?" Abraham said: "I am a stranger; if they tell me to go away, I will go." The king said: "Is it alright if I give a ruling on your dispute?" They said: "Yes, it is." The king said: "You bring ten sheep and cook them; we will eat them. And let Abraham, too, bring ten sheep and cook them; we will eat those as well. Let us see which one from among you will present food that renders us satiated. Moreover, bring the sheep which have been eaten back to life. This place along with its water will belong to whoever brings the sheep back to life!" These people were distressed by what the king said. They brought ten emaciated sheep and slaughtered them. They cooked a meal and brought it into the tent; the king and his soldiers ate it. Each one of them received a piece of mutton. Then Abraham brought his meal. Three thousand men partook of it; all were satiated. But the stew made from those sheep remained undiminished. Abraham then got up and threw the hides of the sheep over the remains. He prayed, and all the sheep came back to life. The king bestowed the region on Abraham. Then the king excused himself and mounted his horse.

EXCERPTS FROM IBN KATHIR

Born in Bosra, ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr (A.H. 700?–774/A.D. 1300?–1373) was a Syrian *‘ālim* (a learned religious authority) who died in Damascus. His father-in-law, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī, was one of Syria’s most famous collectors of Muslim traditions. Ibn Kathīr wrote many books, including a catalogue of the first collectors of Muslim traditions, a collection of *ḥadīth* arranged alphabetically by name of the original Companion (of the Prophet Muḥammad) who transmitted them, and a commentary on the *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, extracts of which also appear in this collection. For his history of Islam, he drew on other authors included in this volume: Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Athīr, and al-Ṭabarī. The selections included here come from his *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Stories of the Prophets). Brian M. Hauglid translated these extracts from the original Arabic of Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Cairo: Dār al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyya, A.H. 1418 [A.D. 1998]), 139–51. We have numbered the paragraphs for ease of reference. We have also elided many of the long quotes from the Qur’an that Ibn Kathir intersperses with his narrative.

1. Ibrāhīm [Abraham] is the son of Tārakh b.¹ Nāḥūr b. Sārūg b. Rāgū b. Fāllagh b. ‘Ābir b. Shāllah b. Arphakhshadh b. Sām b. Nūḥ.²

2. This is a version of the People of the Book [i.e., Jews] from their book [i.e., Torah]. I learned about their lives by their Indian names just as they recorded it. We have already transmitted the words according to the [oath] of Nūḥ. I have no need to repeat it [i.e., the story].

3. The Ḥāfiẓ³ b. ‘Asākir related in a biography of Ibrāhīm the Friend from his history on the authority of Ishaq b. Bishr al-Kāhalī, author of the *Kitāb al-Mubtadā’* [Book of the Beginning], that the mother of Ibrāhīm is called Amīla.⁴ A long report of her delivery of Ibrāhīm is mentioned. Al-Kalbī said: She is called Būnā bt.⁵ Karbitā b. Karthī b. Arphakhshadh

1. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

2. For the Judeo-Christian version of this genealogy, See Genesis 11:10–26: Abraham, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, Salah, Arphaxad, Shem, and Noah.

3. An Arabic title referring to one who has memorized the Qur’an.

4. See Ibn Bishr, fol. 161B, line 9, in this volume.

5. Abbreviation for *bint*, meaning “daughter of.”

b. Sām b. Nūḥ. Ibn ʿAsākir, who incorrectly bases his authority on ʿIkrima, said: Ibrāhīm was surnamed Abū al-Ḍifān.⁶

4. They say: When Tārakh was seventy-five years old Ibrāhīm was born to him. Nāḥūr and Hārān (were also born to him). Lūṭ⁷ was born to Hārān.

5. In their opinion Ibrāhīm is the middle [son]. Hārān died during the life of Tārakh in the land in which he was born, the land of the al-Kaldāniyīn,⁸ meaning the land of Bābal.⁹

6. This is the well-known truth according to the people of biography, history, and of reports (*ḥadīth*). And according to the truth of the Ḥāfiẓ Ibn ʿAsākir, who adheres to what was related on the authority of Ṭarīq Hishām b. ʿUmāra—al-Walīd—Saʿīd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz—Makḥūl—Ibn ʿAbbās who said: Ibrāhīm was born in al-Ghūta of Dimashq,¹⁰ in a village Ibn ʿAbbās calls Burza, and in a mountain called Qāsyūn. Moreover he said: The truth is that Ibrāhīm was born in Bābal. This place was related to him because he prayed in it when he came together with Lūṭ.

7. They say: Ibrāhīm married Sāra the niece of Hārān; that is, the daughter of Hārān’s brother.

8. They say: Sāra was infertile, not able to give birth.

9. They say: Tārakh departed with a daughter of Ibrāhīm and Ibrāhīm’s wife, Sāra, and the son of Ibrāhīm’s brother, Lūṭ the son of Hārān. Tārakh left with them from the land of the al-Kaldāniyīn to the land of al-Kanʿāniyīn.¹¹ They camped at Ḥarrān, and Tārakh died there at 250 years old. This indicates that Ibrāhīm was not born in Ḥarrān. Rather, his birth was in the land of the al-Kaldāniyīn, meaning the land of Bābal and lands under its control.

10. They departed, intending for the land of al-Kaldāniyīn, meaning the country of Bait al-Muqaddas.¹² They settled in Ḥarrān, called the land of al-Kushdāniyīn at that time. It is also the land of Jazīra¹³ and al-Shām [Syria]. They [i.e., the people of this land] worshiped the seven stars. Those who lived in the city of Dimashq were of this religion. They faced the North Pole and worshiped the seven stars with all kinds of performances and sayings. For this reason, there was at each gate of the seven ancient gates of Dimashq a temple to each star. They performed festivals and sacrifices to them.

6. I.e., father of the guest. This title likely refers to Abraham’s entertaining an angelic guest in Qurʾan 11:69–76, 15:51–56, and 51:24–30.

7. Biblical Lot.

8. Biblical Chaldees.

9. Babel, which the KJV generally renders Babylon.

10. The fertile oasis on the south side of Damascus (Dimashq).

11. Biblical Canaan.

12. Jerusalem. The Arabic term means “holy house.”

13. The Arabic term *jazīra* generally means “island” but is also used of any land encircled by rivers. According to the Bible, Abraham was born in a land of this description.

11. Therefore, the people of Ḥarrān worshiped the stars and the idols.¹⁴ Each one who was on the face of the earth was an apostate, except Ibrāhīm, his wife, and the son of his brother, Lūṭ.

12. Ibrāhīm, the Friend, is the one for whom God removed the evils and thwarted the error. Indeed, God bestowed His integrity (upon Ibrāhīm) in his youth and sent him as a messenger, and chose him as a friend in his old age. God said: *We¹⁵ bestowed aforesaid / On Abraham his rectitude / Of conduct, and well were We / Acquainted with him.*¹⁶ This means Ibrāhīm was worthy of that [i.e., God's favor]. . . .¹⁷ Then God recorded Ibrāhīm's debate with his father and with his people, just as we will recount it, if God wills.

13. First: Ibrāhīm's call to his father. His father was one who worshiped idols¹⁸ because he was more deserving of the people in sincere devotion to the idols. . . .¹⁹

14. God has related the discussions and dispute that took place between Ibrāhīm and his father and how Ibrāhīm called his father to the truth in a kind manner and [with] most beautiful counsel. Ibrāhīm made known to his father the wrongs of worshiping idols that cannot hear the prayer of [their] worshipers nor see at all. So how can it [idol worship] take the place of anything or do any good in the way of blessing and assisting? Then Ibrāhīm spoke to him, showing that God had given him guidance and beneficial knowledge even though he was younger in age than his father. . . .²⁰

15. Bukhārī said: . . . Ibrāhīm will meet his father Āzar on the day of judgment and upon his face there will be dust, and so Ibrāhīm will say to him, "Didn't I tell you not to disobey me?" His father will say to him, "Today I will not disobey you!" But Ibrāhīm will say, "O God! Indeed, you promised me that you would not disgrace me on the day of judgment. Is my shame of greater extent than my father's?" God will say, "I have forbidden paradise to the unbelievers." Then He will say, "O Ibrāhīm, what is under your legs?" He will look [and] he [Āzar] will be a defiled [sacrificial] lamb. He will be taken by his feet and thrown into the fire. . . .

16. God said: *Lo! Abraham said / To his father Āzar: / "Takest thou idols for gods?" / For I see thee / And thy people / In manifest error.*²¹ This [verse] points out that the name of the father of Ibrāhīm is Āzar, [according to] the [collectors] of lineage of the people. And among

14. Cf. Abraham 1:5–6.

15. The Qur'an always uses the royal plural (we, our, us) when God is speaking.

16. Citing Qur'an 21:51, translation by Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex, 1992). All citations of the Qur'an in this text will be from Ali's translation; we have therefore preserved his versification of the text.

17. Ibn Kathir cites Qur'an 29:16–27 here.

18. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

19. Ibn Kathir cites Qur'an 19:41–48 here.

20. A rather lengthy argument takes place here between Abraham and his father. Several Qur'anic verses dealing with Terah are cited as well as a *hadīth* report from Bukhārī indicating that Abraham's father would be cast into hell.

21. Citing Qur'an 6:74.

them is Ibn ʿAbbās, [who] points out that the name of his father is Tārah. The People of the Book say Tārakh [is spelled] with the *khaf*. It is said: [His name] is surnamed after an idol that he used to worship, [and] its name was Āzar.²² . . .

17. As for the people of Bābal,²³ they would worship idols. These are the ones whom [Abraham] observed worshiping them [idols],²⁴ so he broke them [the idols] in front of them [the people], and he treated them [the idols] with contempt and exposed their uselessness. . . .²⁵

18. [The people of Babel] held a feast once each year on the outskirts of the country. His father invited him to go with him, but [Abraham] said, "I am sick!" Just as God said: *Then did he cast / A glance at the Stars, / And he said "I am indeed sick! . . ."*²⁶

19. When they left for their feast, [Abraham] remained in their country. *Then he did turn to their gods,*²⁷ meaning he went to them hurriedly in disguise. He found the idols in a great hall. They [the people] had placed between their hands all types of food and drink. So he said to them in a manner of mockery and scorn, *"Will ye not eat / (Of the offerings before you)? / What is the matter / With you that ye / Speak not?" / Then did he turn / Upon them, striking (them) / With the right hand.*²⁸ But they were stronger and more powerful, so he smashed them with a carpenter's ax in his hand just as God said: *So he broke them to pieces,*²⁹ meaning fragments; he smashed all of them³⁰ *but the biggest of them, / That they might turn / (And address themselves) to it.*³¹ It is said he placed the carpenter's ax in the hand of the big one, indicating that [the big one] was jealous that the small [idols] were being worshiped with him!

20. When they returned from their feast, they found what had become of their idol[s]. *They said: "Who has / Done this to our gods? / He must indeed be / One of the unjust ones."*³² . . .

21. When they gathered and came to him just as they [the storytellers] mentioned, [they said], *"Art thou / The one that did this / With our gods, O Abraham?" / He said: "Nay, this / Was done by this / The biggest one!"*³³ . . .

22. They refrained from the argument and the dispute when they were stopped and defeated. No argument remained for them to utilize their power and authority in order to help what they had against him except from their foolishness and their terrorizing. So God outwitted them. His word, religion, and proof are highest. So God said: *They [the*

22. Cf. Abraham 1:16–17, 27.

23. Biblical Babel and Babylon.

24. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

25. Several more suras of the Qurʾan related to Abraham's dispute about the idols are cited here.

26. Citing Qurʾan 37:88–89.

27. Citing Qurʾan 37:91.

28. Citing Qurʾan 37:91–93.

29. Citing Qurʾan 21:58.

30. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

31. Citing Qurʾan 21:58.

32. Citing Qurʾan 21:59.

33. Citing Qurʾan 21:62–63.

people] said, "Burn him / And protect your gods / If ye do (anything at all)!" / We said, "O Fire! / Be thou cool, / And (a means of) safety / For Abraham!" / Then they planned / Against him: but We / Made them the Greater losers.³⁴ . . .

23. They began to gather firewood from all the places they could. They spent time gathering [wood] for him up to the point that if a woman got sick, she would vow [that] if she would get well, she would carry wood to burn Ibrāhīm. Then they set out for a large hole and put the firewood into it, and they ignited the fire. It flared up, and a flame arose the likes of which had never been seen.

24. Then they placed Ibrāhīm in a catapult, which a Kurdish man named Hayzan made for them. He was the first to build catapults. So God made the ground swallow him up. The reverberating of it will last up to the day of judgment.

25. Then they began to shackle him and tie his hands³⁵ while he was saying, "There is no God but You (Lord of the World); to you belongs the praise and the dominion. You have no partners."

26. When they placed him, shackled, in the catapult, they threw him into the fire.³⁶ He said, "God protect me! He is excellent in trust!" Bukhārī has related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās that [Abraham] said: "God protect me! He is excellent in trust!" Ibrāhīm said it when he was thrown into the fire. . . . Abū Yaʿlī said: Abū Hishām al-Rifāʿī—Ishaq b. Prophet (Muḥammad) said: When Ibrāhīm was thrown into the fire he said, "O God! You are One in the heavens, and I am One in the earth—Your servant!"³⁷

27. Some of the predecessors have reported that Jibrīl³⁸ appeared to him [Ibrāhīm]³⁹ in the air. He said, "(O Ibrāhīm!) are you in need?" He said, "As far as you are concerned, no!"

28. It is related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās and Saʿīd b. Jubayr that he [Ibrāhīm] said, "The angel of the rain asked: 'When can I be commanded to send the rain?' But God's will was quicker." . . .

29. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: It is related that Jibrīl was with [Ibrāhīm], wiping the sweat from his face; nothing of it lasted except [Ibrāhīm].

30. Al-Suddī said: The angel of shade was also with him. Ibrāhīm ended up in an incline of the hole, and it was in a green garden. The people watching had no power to come [to him], and [Ibrāhīm] could not come out to them. . . .

31. Al-Minhāl b. ʿUmarū said: I was told that Ibrāhīm remained there for forty or fifty days and that he [Ibrāhīm] said, "I never had better days and nights than when I was in [the fire]. I desire that all my living and life could be like when I was in [the fire]."

34. Citing Qurʾan 21:68–70.

35. Cf. Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2.

36. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.

37. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

38. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

39. Cf. Abraham 1:15; 2:13; Facsimile 1, figure 1.

OTHER MUSLIM TRADITIONS ABOUT THE PROPHET ABRAHAM

These traditions are included because they vary from some of the other Muslim stories about Abraham given earlier or provide additional information. They are drawn from Jan Knappert, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), a book that records many current oral traditions and other stories that are not part of the received canon. Page numbers from Knappert's book are indicated in parentheses, and for reference purposes, we have numbered the paragraphs.

A Turkish Story about Noah

1. The first ruler of Egypt after the Great Flood was called Mişraim, the name which the Children of Israel later used for the kingdom of Egypt. Mişraim was the son of Baisar, son of Ham¹ the youngest son of Noah, the one who was destined to become the father of all Africans. Noah, the prophet of God, ruled with great wisdom and lived to see his great-great-grandchildren. He married Mişraim to Filemon's daughter. Filemon² was the upper-priest or supreme pontiff of Egypt, and his daughter gave birth to a prince whom she called Filemon after her father. The learned priest Filemon taught Mişraim to read the script of the ancient Egyptians and revealed to him the whereabouts of the immense treasures in the ruined monuments of the kings who lived before them. Noah appointed Mişraim king of Egypt,³ and the new king built a new capital where the old city had been destroyed by the flood. The new capital was to be called Menfi or Manfeh, which in the Greek language is known as Memphis.⁴ . . . (44–45)

2. When the king died, golden statues were placed near each of the doors leading to the chamber where the dead king was entombed, and protective curses were written on the front of every statue, so they guarded the entrances against evildoers. The king reposed in a sarcophagus covered with emeralds, with an inscription reading: "Here lies

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1. According to Genesis 10:6, Mizraim was the son of Ham, not his grandson. The Bible mentions no Baisar as a son of Ham. Mizraim is also the Hebrew name for Egypt.
 2. In form, the name is identical to Philemon of the New Testament.
 3. Cf. Abraham 1:26.
 4. Cf. Abraham 1:21–27. The Egyptians believed that the mound inside the temple at Memphis was the first piece of land to appear out of the floodwaters, for which see Abraham 1:24–25.

Miṣraim, son of Baiṣar, son of Ham, king of Egypt who never worshipped idols,⁵ never knew illness and lived healthily till his end.” . . . Miṣraim became the first king for whom a pyramid was built.

3. He was succeeded by his son Koftim who lived during the days of the building of the great tower of Babel, when the Lord confounded the language of humanity. So it was in king Koftim’s time that the people of Egypt began to speak Koptic.⁶ (46)

[Regarding the time of Koftim’s grandson Budasheer:]

4. In the same period the crows multiplied in Egypt to an alarming extent. There were crows everywhere: in the gardens, in the stables and sheds, in the courtyards and even in the houses. Where there are many crows, there it is that people throw away edible food because they have more than enough to eat. Crows eat our leftovers so their numbers are a measure of human prosperity.⁷ (50)

[Budasheer’s son was Adim]

5. King Adim was succeeded by his son Sheddāt who was the inventor of the sciences. He first ordered his scribes to write down all the names of the kings of Egypt, with the years of their reigns. To this end he studied the course of the stars and had maps of their orbits drawn so that their times of appearance could be calculated.⁸ (52)

The Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim)⁹

1. Many centuries ago there lived in Mesopotamia a mighty king, who was so pleased with himself that he ordered all his subjects to worship him. He believed that he was god himself and so he made the people come and stand before him, bow down, throw themselves on the floor in deep subjection, and pray to him for his favours.

2. Of course this foolish behaviour displeased God who decided that this king, whom the Bible calls Nimrod and the Koran Namrūd, must fall.

3. God always warns the sinners that their punishment is imminent, so that those who are wise enough to understand, will repent in time. One night king Namrūd had a

5. The fact that Noah blessed the first pharaoh (Abraham 1:26) may suggest that, unlike his successors, he was not an idolator.

6. The term *Coptic* means “Egyptian,” and *Copt* derives from the same Egyptian name for the land as the Greek form *Egypt*. Coptic is the latest form of the Egyptian language, written in the borrowed Greek alphabet with a few Egyptian demotic symbols added for sounds not used in Greek. It remains today the liturgical language of the Christian church of Egypt, known as the Coptic Church.

7. We have included the story of the crows in Egypt because crows also play a role in the Abraham story in *Jubilees* 11:19–24, cited earlier. In the *Jubilees* account, the crows are responsible for the famine in Ur of the Chaldees—a famine noted in Abraham 1:29; 2:1, 17—while in the Muslim tradition crows are a sign of plenty in Egypt.

8. Cf. Abraham 1:31; 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2 and 3.

9. Note that the spelling of Abraham’s name is somewhat inconsistent in this text. At first Knappert uses the Arabic spelling but then reverts to the English version.

dream in which he saw himself as the sun shining over the entire world until it set and a star rose whose splendour outshone the sun. The next morning the king called his dream-readers and diviners who interpreted this vision thus: "One day soon a boy will be born in your kingdom who will rob you of the faith and respect of your people." The enraged king at once commanded his soldiers to kill all the boys that would be born in the country from that day on.¹⁰ Of course the king's rage was caused by fear, and fear is a bad counsellor. No kingdom can survive without boys to take over the work from their fathers in due course of time, nor would it help the king to avert God's decree that he would die.

4. Death cannot be avoided any more than birth. The star that would rob king Namrūd of his glory was to be the Prophet Abraham whom the Koran calls Nabii Ibrāhīm.¹¹ While his mother was pregnant of him, she remained as slim as she had always been; this was the way in which God hid His future prophet from the eyes of the king's officers. When she felt that her labours were beginning she fled to the mountains where she found refuge in a cave. There, the angel Jibrīl¹² found her and delivered her of a son, whom he called Ibrāhīm as God wished. In daytime, his mother had to leave him in that cave to go and find food for herself, visiting him only at night to give him the breast. But he did not really need her feeding since the five fingers of his right hand contained delicious liquids, a different one each: milk, honey, ghee, sugar-water and date juice, which he could suck at will.

5. Young Ibrāhīm soon grew up to become an eloquent speaker. One day in a small town he entered the temple and kicked the statue in it, so that it fell over and broke into a thousand fragments.¹³ The people were dumb with fright and awe, but nothing happened to young Ibrāhīm since the statue was no god, it had no power. Of course the king heard of this sacrilege from his spies, so he decided to invite the young rascal to his palace. When the handsome youngster arrived, all the courtiers were much surprised by his eloquence. "Do you not worship any gods?" asked the king, whereupon the Prophet Abraham answered: "Sire, I saw some ignorant people worshipping fire, until the rain extinguished it. Some tribes worship the rain, others the clouds that bring the rain, others again the wind that carries the clouds, or the stars, the moon or the sun. I worship only the One God who made the sun, the earth, the waters and the stars, the moon and the fire."¹⁴ "Very well," spoke the king, "If your God has such great power, can you bring my father back to life?" When Abraham said that his God could do anything, the king led the way to the royal cemetery. Here, Abraham knelt down in prayer and lo . . .¹⁵ the tomb opened and there rose up the old king, sand still clinging to his shroud but his eyes

10. Cf. Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11.

11. Meaning "the prophet Abraham."

12. The angel Gabriel in Judeo-Christian tradition.

13. Cf. Abraham 1:20.

14. Cf. Abraham 2:12.

15. The ellipsis points are part of the translation.

looking fiercely at his son, whom he addressed in a hollow but recognizable voice: "Peace be upon you; listen to this young man and follow his advice for he is the chosen prophet of the One God. Do not heed the priests and their useless idols¹⁶ and do not worship yourself." After these words, the old king quietly lay down in his tomb again, whereupon the lid closed over his head by itself, in spite of its weight. The king and his court could only stare, their faces white with fright. But men forget unpleasant lessons easily, and soon the king said he wanted to see another sign. Without speaking, Abraham took four birds from the king's aviary, cut them in pieces and kept only the four heads in his hand. Then he called each bird by its name: "Cock! Raven! Dove! Peacock!" At once every bone, every piece of flesh, every feather flew up from the ground where they all lay in a heap, and found its place in the body of the birds that were forming again in Abraham's hand, and not a feather was in the wrong place. Soon the birds jumped out of Abraham's hand and resumed pecking their food. Again, Abraham preached to the king and his court about the power of the One God, but they would not listen. Namrūd decided that Abraham's presence would be a menace to his throne, since Abraham challenged the power of the people's gods, and the king wanted to be one of the people's gods. If there is only one God, then the kings owe their power to him, and have to worship him together with the people.

6. A huge pile of firewood was erected on the city square, and Abraham was tied to a pole in the middle. Then the wood was lit and soon the whole pyre was a blazing sea of flames. The king ordered that it must be kept burning for a week. An angel descended from Heaven with a sharp knife and quickly cut the ropes that tied Abraham,¹⁷ but he would not go away. "My Lord placed me here, He will take me away." "Shall I bring the rain, and extinguish the fire?" proposed the angel, but Abraham answered: "There is no need for that either. The fire harms only those whom God wishes to punish." That was true, of course. The angel vanished, he had been sent by God to test Abraham's faith.

7. Then the angel of the winds appeared, offering to blow the fire away, but Abraham said there was no need for his kindly offered services. Jibril appeared subsequently, asking if he could deliver a message to God? "No need for that," replied Abraham, "He knows my condition." That was true too, so Jibril flew away to report that Abraham had passed the test. When Abraham's robe caught fire, God commanded: "Fire, be cold." At once, Abraham shivered, so the fire became a little warmer and was quite pleasant to feel. God commanded the branches and logs around Abraham to sprout, grow twigs, leaves, flowers and fruits, so that Abraham was soon sitting in a shaded bower where colourful flowers spread cool fragrance and sweet fruits offered themselves to the thirsty prisoner. Many years later, when he was an old man, Abraham used to say: "Those seven days in the midst of the fire were the finest of my life." God created a well in the middle of the fire which bubbled fresh water from Paradise. The heavenly fragrance reached the princess, the king Namrūd's daughter, whose name was Sarah. She asked her father if

16. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

17. Cf. Abraham 1:15.

she could go and look at Abraham in the fire, but the king could see no benefit in looking at someone who had long since turned into ashes. However, Sarah was used to getting her way, so she went up to the fire and peered through the flames. What did she see? There was Abraham sitting comfortably in the middle of an orchard! "Does the fire not hurt you?" she asked him. "No, because the fire is hot only if God wants it to be." "Can I come in there and sit with you?" "Yes, if you trust in God, He will protect you. Just repeat after me: 'Whoever has God's name in his heart and on his tongue will be unhurt.'" She repeated these words, and found that she could walk through the fire. Inside, she sat down with him, eating the sweet fruits, drinking the fresh water from Abraham's own well, and listening to his wise words. At the end of the day she went back to the palace and told her father of her wonderful experiences. For the first time in her life the king was angry with her, so much, that he ordered his executioner to torture her in the dungeon.¹⁸ Of course, God, who had already decided that she should become Abraham's wife, sent an angel to rescue her. The angel lifted her up, and flew away with her through the thick walls of the dungeon, as if they did not exist, and out over the city in the clear night sky towards the mountains. There stood a lonely house where the angel put her down on her own feet. Who should come out of the house to greet her but the Prophet Abraham? His seven days in the fire had passed peacefully and the angel had flown with him to his house before the king had time to think of any further trials. The angel joined Abraham and Sarah in marriage.

8. Soon, however, king Namrūd heard of the treacherous behaviour of his daughter and sent an army so numerous that from his house Abraham could see nothing but armed men, as far as the eye could reach. The angel Jibrīl reappeared and asked Abraham: "What is the smallest creature?" Abraham answered: "The mosquito." "Very well," said the angel, "God will send an army of mosquitoes to help you."

9. He did. Jibrīl was sent to the mosquito king to give him the necessary instructions. The mosquito king summoned all his midges and mosquitoes and told them where to attack. They swooped down on the army in thick clouds, so that the ranks broke and the soldiers ran. They were stung even in their eyes so that they could not see where they were going, so they all perished, as they ran into rivers and swamps. One very large mosquito penetrated into king Namrūd's private bedroom, though doors and windows were locked. It crept up the king's nose and into his brain where it sucked all his blood so that he died.¹⁹

10. The mosquito emerged from the king's head, full of his blood, as big as a bean, and flew away, saying: "God makes the small overcome the big."²⁰ Forgotten by his people,

18. Cf. Abraham 1:10–11.

19. Cf. Abraham 1:20, 29.

20. The story, often repeated in the Muslim texts, may derive from the Talmudic account of the gnat that entered the nose of Titus and picked at his brain for seven years, following his desecration of the temple in Jerusalem (Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 56b).

king Namrūd lay dead in his castle, which fell to ruin in the course of the passing centuries. Still today, the local people point out the Burj-e-Namrūd, the “Tower of Namrūd.”

11. When Mesopotamia, or Chaldea as it was sometimes called, was won for Islām,²¹ Abraham received an order from God to go and convert the people of Palestine.²² Abraham packed his luggage, but because his wife was so beautiful, he feared she might be stolen, so he put her also in a suitcase, a very large one. Unfortunately, the customs officer at the frontier insisted on opening this heavy piece of luggage, even when Abraham offered him its weight in pure gold, or perhaps because of this suspect generosity. When he saw Sarah, the officer decided to report this to the king, hoping perhaps for promotion. Indeed, the king ought to have rewarded such rare honesty. Instead, he took her into his inner room. When Abraham arrived, he looked doubtfully at the solid walls of the royal castle, until God suddenly made the heavy stones into pure glass. Abraham saw that the king was sitting on his sofa with Sarah at his side, and that he drew her close to him. Alas! The king’s hand withered and the king enquired whether any of his men knew of a doctor who could cure his hand, and at that moment Abraham called at the gate, saying that he was a physician, that he knew what ailed the king and that he could heal the hand. He was immediately admitted to the king’s inner room, where he insisted that his fee should be the woman whom the king had just received from the customs officer. Seeing that Abraham knew things that other people did not know, the king agreed, and Abraham cured his hand. The king was so pleased that he gave Abraham not only Sarah but also Hagar, a slave girl. Hagar bore Abraham a son whom the Arabs call Isma‘il and who became the father of all the Arabs. He had the luminous disc of divine light on his forehead, for God had decreed that he would be the first prophet of the Arabian nation. So, He commanded Abraham to take his second wife Hagar and her son south into the desert of Arabia. (72–78)

The Legend of Yusuf, or Joseph

This comes from a Swahili poem that was possibly written by Muhammad b.²³ Abu Bakari Kijuma, who died ca. 1945 (abridgment of the Swahili version).

[Regarding when Joseph was cast into the well by his brothers:]

Gabriel was sent from heaven with a new *kanzu*,²⁴ the same that was worn by Abraham when he was put in the oven.²⁵ (89)

21. The Muslims believe that Islam (which means “submission,” i.e., to God’s will) was the religion of the ancient patriarchs.

22. Cf. Abraham 2:15.

23. Abbreviation for Arabic *ibn* or *bin*, to be read “son of.”

24. I.e., garment.

25. Cf. Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3.