

Introduction

No event in history has divided Islam more profoundly and durably than the succession to Muḥammad. The right to occupy the Prophet's place at the head of the Muslim community after his death became a question of great religious weight which has separated Sunnites and Shi'ites until the present. The issue of right and wrong in the matter has long since been settled in their minds. For Sunnites, the first caliph, Abū Bakr, was the only rightful successor since he was the most excellent of men after the Prophet. Although Muḥammad had not explicitly appointed him as his successor, his preference for him was indicated by his order for Abū Bakr to lead the Muslims in the prayers during his final illness. The consensus reached by the Muslims in favour of Abū Bakr merely confirmed what was ultimately God's choice. For Shi'ites it was Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī who, on account of his early merits in Islam as well as his close kinship, had been appointed by the Prophet as his successor. His rightful position was then usurped by Abū Bakr with the backing of the majority of Muḥammad's Companions.

In spite of the fundamental importance of this conflict for the history of Islam, modern historians have devoted relatively little effort to the study of the background and circumstances surrounding the succession. This general lack of interest is evidently grounded in the view that the conflict between Sunna and Shī'a, although revolving around the question of the succession, in reality arose only in a later age. Such a view is well supported by early Sunnite tendentious historiography, represented most blatantly by Sayf b. 'Umar (d. 180/796). According to his account, 'Alī, on being informed of Abū Bakr's election, was in such a hurry to offer his pledge of allegiance that he arrived dressed merely in his shirt and had to send for his clothes.¹ Perfect concord then prevailed among the Muslims until 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', a converted Jew from Ṣan'ā', began to agitate against the third caliph, 'Uthmān, and, after the murder

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden, 1879–1901; henceforth Ṭabarī), I, 1825.

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of the latter, spread extremist views about 'Alī having been the *waṣī*, the legatee or the executor of the will, of Muḥammad.² Ibn Saba' thus became the founder of the Shī'a who retrospectively turned 'Alī into the legitimate successor of Muḥammad.

While few if any modern historians would accept Sayf's legend of Ibn Saba', the underlying view that the succession of Abū Bakr to Muḥammad was in itself – aside from the abortive attempt of the Medinan Anṣār to seize the caliphate – unproblematic and that the conflict about it was artificially created by the Shī'a after the death of 'Alī and against his own lifelong attitude is widely taken for granted. It is fully reflected in the most recent discussions of the origins of the 'Alid and the 'Abbasid, or Hashimite, Shī'a by M. Sharon. According to Sharon, the very concept of the 'Family of the Prophet', later expressed in the terms of *ahl al-bayt*, Āl Muḥammad, *āl al-nabī* and Banū Hāshim, did not exist in the time of Muḥammad and under the early caliphs. Although the term *bayt* had sometimes been used in pre-Islamic Arabia for the noble families of famous chiefs and prominent men, this was not the case with respect to Muḥammad. In Islam the term *ahl al-bayt* first came to be applied to the families of the caliphs. The Shi'ite supporters of 'Alī, according to Sharon, then developed the idea of the *ahl al-bayt* of the Prophet and of Āl Muḥammad in order to establish hereditary rights of their man and his descendants to the caliphate. In the later Umayyad age the 'Abbasids appropriated the idea and still later, from the caliphate of al-Mahdī, propagated the concept of the Banū Hāshim as the Family of the Prophet to bolster their own claim to legitimate succession.³ Yet 'Alī himself had still accepted the caliphate on the terms laid down by Abū Bakr and 'Umar without pretence to any special title based on his personal blood relationship with Muḥammad.⁴

If concord prevailed among the Muslims until the caliphate of 'Uthmān and the controversy between Sunna and Shī'a arose only after the caliphate of 'Alī, there is obviously not much incentive to study in depth the circumstances of the succession and the establishment of the caliphate. Abū Bakr's and 'Umar's success during their reigns was decisive and spectacular, and recent historical research has tended to concentrate mostly on their activity in suppressing the dangerous movement of the Apostasy (*ridḍa*) of the Arab tribes and initiating the great Muslim conquests outside Arabia.

² *Ibid.*, 2941–2.

³ M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East* (Jerusalem, 1983), 75–85; M. Sharon, 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 8 (1986), 169–84; M. Sharon, 'The Umayyads as Ahl al-Bayt', *JSAI*, 14 (1992), 115–52, esp. 134–49.

⁴ M. Sharon, 'Notes on the Question of Legitimacy of Government in Islam', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 10 (1980), 116–23, at 121.

The few earlier studies dealing specifically with the succession as such, however, suggest that it was certainly not as unproblematic as implied in the prevalent view of the origins of the schism between Sunna and Shī'a. In 1910 H. Lammens published his article on the 'Triumvirate of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and Abū 'Ubayda' in which he argued that it was the common purpose and close co-operation of these three men, initiated in the lifetime of Muḥammad, that enabled them to found the successive caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. The latter would have appointed Abū 'Ubayda as his successor if Abū 'Ubayda had not died during his caliphate.⁵ Although Lammens did not speak of a conspiracy to seize the succession, his presentation of the activity of the triumvirate suggests this term. In particular through Abū Bakr's and 'Umar's daughters 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa, who kept their fathers informed about every move and secret thought of their husband Muḥammad, these two men came to exert great influence on the Prophet's actions and thus prepared the stage for their seizure of power. This conspirational aspect of Lammens' theory has probably provoked the common warnings of more recent western scholars that his study is unreliable.⁶ Lammens noted that the purpose of the triumvirate was to exclude the Hashimites, in particular 'Alī, as the kin of Muḥammad from the succession, although 'Alī, in Lammens' view, was hardly a serious rival for them. Dull-witted, incapable, and married to the pitiful figure of the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, who was easily outmanoeuvred by the clever and headstrong daughter of Abū Bakr in their competition for Muḥammad's favour, 'Alī could not have been an attractive choice for Muḥammad as his successor. Having experienced mostly disappointment in respect of his blood relations, the Prophet naturally turned away from them. His *ahl al-bayt*, Lammens affirmed with reference to Qur'ān XXXIII 33, consisted exclusively of his wives.⁷

The only comprehensive and thorough investigation of the establishment, nature and development of the caliphate until 'Alī's reign has been offered by L. Caetani in his monumental *Annali dell' Islam*. In his initial discussion, Caetani noted the gravity of the conflict between Abū Bakr and the Banū Hāshim following his surprise claim to the succession during the assembly of the Anṣār in the Hall (*saqīfa*) of the Banū Sā'ida

⁵ H. Lammens, 'Le triumvirat Abou Bakr, 'Omar et Abou 'Obaida', *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale de l'Université St Joseph de Beyrouth*, 4 (1910), 113–44.

⁶ See, for instance, J. Sauvaget and C. Cahen, *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, CA and London, 1965), 126.

⁷ H. Lammens, *Fāṭima et les Filles de Mahomet* (Rome, 1912), 99. Lammens' portrayal of Fāṭima was taken up by L. Caetani, who suggested that Muḥammad married off Fāṭima to 'Alī because she, of suspect legitimacy and lacking any physical and moral attractions, was not desired by anyone, and the union was for him a means to liberate himself from the annoyance of a daughter for whom he did not feel any sympathy (*Annali dell' Islam* (Milan, 1905–25; henceforth *Annali*), X, 470).

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just hours after the death of Muḥammad. The Banū Hāshim refused to recognize Abū Bakr and buried their illustrious kinsman privately, depriving the new caliph and ‘Ā’isha of the honour of attendance. Caetani indirectly acknowledged the potential seriousness of ‘Alī’s claim to the succession by rejecting the common accounts that Abū Bakr based his claim before the assembly of Anṣār on the prior rights of Quraysh as Muḥammad’s tribe, since this argument would have strengthened the case of ‘Alī as the closest relative of the Prophet.⁸ Rather, Caetani suggested, Abū Bakr argued the need to elect a successor to Muḥammad who would most closely follow in his footsteps, propagate his teachings and maintain the unity of the Muslim Community. He was chosen solely for his superior qualities as a statesman and his personal merits.⁹ In view of these merits, Caetani judged the opposition of the Hashimites and other Companions to Abū Bakr to be motivated merely by personal ambition and rancour.¹⁰ If Muḥammad had been able to choose his successor, he would presumably have preferred Abū Bakr to anyone else.¹¹

In a later volume of the *Annali*, however, Caetani opted for Lammens’ theory of the triumvirate of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and Abū ‘Ubayda¹² as the most likely explanation for the origins of the caliphate. The inspirer of their joint action had been ‘Umar, ‘the greatest statesman after the Prophet and in some respects even greater than the master himself’.¹³ ‘Umar had the practical and political intelligence to foresee the demise of Muḥammad and to prepare the agreements for resolving the problem of the succession with energy and in the best way possible, thus saving the Muslim Community from disaster.¹⁴ The true founder of the caliphate thus was ‘Umar who merely put forward Abū Bakr as the first caliph in recognition of his righteousness and his high standing with the Prophet.

As a result of the reaction of later scholars against the conspiracy theory, Caetani’s earlier view that Muḥammad, had he made a choice, would most likely have preferred Abū Bakr as his successor and that, in any case, Abū Bakr was the natural choice for the Muslims on account of his merits in Islam has become the prevalent opinion among non-Muslim

⁸ *Annali*, II/1, 516. It is to be noted here that in Caetani’s view Muḥammad was not in fact a Hashimite or even a Qurayshite, but rather an orphan of unknown origin who had been taken into the family of Abū Ṭālib b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. The fake genealogy making him a descendant of Hāshim and Quṣayy (Hāshim’s grandfather) was invented by ‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās and Hishām b. al-Kalbī. (See in particular *Annali*, I, 58–75). On this basis Caetani referred to ‘Alī as ‘the (alleged) nephew of Muḥammad’ (*Annali*, VII, 15) and to al-‘Abbās as ‘the alleged uncle of the Prophet’ (*Annali*, II/1, 407).

⁹ *Annali*, II/1, 523, 528. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 542. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹² The third volume of Caetani’s work in which he discussed the theory of Lammens was published in 1910, the same year as Lammens’ monograph. Caetani was, however, informed by personal letters from Lammens about the latter’s views.

¹³ *Ibid.*, III, 123. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, V, 477–81.

historians of Islam. It is expressed, for instance, by W. M. Watt in his standard biography of Muḥammad in the words: ‘Certainly before Muḥammad left Mecca for Medina Abū Bakr had established himself as his chief lieutenant and adviser; and this position he maintained to Muḥammad’s death, so that he was the obvious choice for successor.’¹⁵ Yet the critical observer may well question here whether the choice was really so obvious. It is true that in modern life the choice of a chief lieutenant and adviser to succeed, for instance, the head of a corporation or the leader of a political party must seem reasonable enough. But the succession to a ruler or king in traditional society was normally based on dynastic kinship and inheritance, and the succession of a lieutenant and adviser, however close to the ruler, would have been considered highly irregular. It has, of course, often been argued that the succession to tribal leadership among the Arabs was not based on heredity, and Lammens went so far as to assert that hereditary power and the dynastic principle were among the concepts most repugnant to the Arab mind.¹⁶ This assertion has, however, rightly been challenged by E. Tyan, who pointed out that hereditary succession was not unknown among the Arab tribes, as was consistent with the importance of noble lineage, *nasab*, among them and that among the Quraysh in particular hereditary succession was the rule.¹⁷ It may be countered that the succession to Muḥammad cannot be compared to that of a ruler or king and that the classical Sunnite theory of the caliphate indeed sharply distinguishes between it and kingship, *mulk*, which it condemns in part for its principle of hereditary succession. But the classical theory is obviously posterior to the succession and its opposition to *mulk* and the principle of heredity presumably reflects in part its essential purpose of justifying the early historical caliphate.

There is thus *prima facie* good reason to suspect that the common view of western scholars of Islam about the succession to Muḥammad may not be entirely sound and to propose a fresh look at the sources for a proper reassessment. The starting point for establishing what Muḥammad may have thought in general about his succession and what his contemporary

¹⁵ W. M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford, 1961), 35–6.

¹⁶ H. Lammens, *Le Berceau de l’Islam: l’Arabie occidentale à la veille de l’Hégire* (Rome, 1914), 314.

¹⁷ E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public Musulman* (Paris, 1954–6), I, 97–9, 114–16. In his *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 1968), W. M. Watt likewise affirms that it was Arab practice to select the chief of a tribe from a certain family. He suggests that, had Muḥammad’s adoptive son Zayd b. Hāritha been alive at the time of the Prophet’s death, he might have succeeded without difficulty (although Qur’ān XXXIII 40 had expressly denied that Muḥammad was a father in relation to Zayd). ‘Alī, though extolled by the Shi’ites, must have been unacceptable to many Muslims (p. 31). Watt praises the restoration of dynastic rule by the Umayyads as an achievement in accordance with Arab tribal practice (p. 39).

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followers could have seen as basic guidelines after his death must certainly be a study of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān, as is well known, does not make any provisions for, or even allude to, the succession of Muḥammad, and for this reason non-Muslim historians have virtually ignored it in this regard. It contains, however, specific instructions about the maintenance of kinship ties and inheritance as well as stories and statements about the succession of the past prophets and their families, matters which could not be irrelevant to the succession to Muḥammad.

The obligations of kinship and the families of the prophets in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān places great emphasis on the duty of all Muslims to maintain the bonds of blood relationship. In numerous passages the faithful are enjoined to act kindly (*iḥsān*) towards their close kin, to assist them, and to provide for their sustenance: 'Surely, God commands justice, doing of good, and providing for the close kin (*itā' dhi l-qurbā*), and forbids the abominable, the reprehensible, and transgression' (XVI 90). Most often the relatives are mentioned in this context together with the orphans, the poor and the wayfarer (*ibn al-sabīl*) as those entitled to the generosity of the faithful. The fact, however, that they are regularly enumerated in the first place seems to indicate their primary right before any other beneficiaries: 'And give to the close kin his due, to the indigent, and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the Countenance of God and they will be the prosperous' (XVII 26). Righteousness (*birr*) consists, among other things, in giving money for the love of God to the kin (*dhawī l-qurbā*), the orphans, the poor, the wayfarer, those begging, and for the manumission of slaves (II 177). When the faithful ask Muḥammad what they should spend (in charity), he is charged to tell them: 'Whatever good you spend, it is for the parents (*wālidayn*) and for the close relatives (*aqrabīn*), the orphans, the poor, and the wayfarer. Whatever good you do, God has knowledge of it' (II 215).

In a wider sense, it is obligatory to treat relatives kindly: 'And remember, We took the covenant of the Banū Isrā'īl: Do not worship anyone but God, treat with kindness (*iḥsān*) parents, kin, orphans, and the poor, speak gently to the people, perform the prayer, and give alms' (II 83). The Muslims are likewise ordered: 'Worship God and do not join partners with Him, treat with kindness parents, kin, orphans, the needy, the client who is a relative (*jār dhi l-qurbā*), the client who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer, and your slaves' (IV 36). Relatives, orphans and the poor are also entitled to be provided for and to be received with kindness when they present themselves at the time of the

division of the inheritance of a deceased person (IV 7–8). It is evidently relatives without a right to a share of the inheritance who are meant here.

Kindness to relatives and material support of them are thus recognized as a cardinal religious obligation in the Qur'ān. This obligation, however, is not unconditional. It applies only to kin who have become Muslims. In the Sūra of Repentance the faithful are warned: 'O you who believe, do not take your fathers and your brothers as friends (*awliyā'*) if they prefer infidelity to the faith. Those of you who take them as friends, they are the wrongdoers. If your fathers, your sons, your spouses, your clan (*'ashīra*), [if] riches you have acquired, or a trade whose decline you fear, and dwellings which please you, are dearer to you than God, His Messenger, and striving in His path, then wait until God will bring about His order. God does not guide the people who offend' (IX 23–4). It is not even permitted to pray for forgiveness for relatives who have failed to join Islam: 'It is not proper for the Prophet and for those who believe to pray for forgiveness for those who set up partners with God, even though they be of close kin, after it has become clear to them that they are inmates of the hell-fire. And Abraham prayed for his father's forgiveness only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he dissociated himself from him' (IX 113–14). Furthermore, the faithful must not deviate from honesty and fairness even if it were for the benefit of parents or close kin: 'O you who believe, stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it be against yourselves, your parents, or close kin, whether rich or poor, for God is closest to them both. Do not follow passion in place of justice' (IV 135). Quite in general the faithful are admonished: 'And whenever you speak, be just, even though it concern a close relative' (VI 152).

Within these limitations, however, the right of the kindred to kindness, care and material support is absolute and clearly takes precedence over any voluntary ties of friendship and alliance: 'Blood relations (*ulu l-arḥām*) have closer ties (*awlā'*) to each other in the Book of God than believers and Emigrants (*muhājirūn*). You may, however, do kindness to your [unrelated] friends (*awliyā'ikum*). That is recorded in the Book' (XXXIII 6). It is known that after their emigration to Medina many Muslims, in the 'brothering' (*mu'ākhāt*) arranged by Muḥammad, established formal alliances with Medinan and other foreign Muslims in order to compensate for the absence of their blood relations who still remained polytheists. The Qur'ān states in that regard: 'Surely, those who believed and have emigrated and have fought with their property and their persons in the path of God, and those who sheltered and aided [them], they are the allies (*awliyā'*) of each other. As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you have no ties of alliance whatsoever

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with them until they emigrate; but if they ask for your aid in religion, it is your duty to aid them, except against a people with whom you have a compact. And God sees whatever you do. The infidels are allies of each other. Unless you do this [aid other Muslims], there would be temptation [to apostatize] on earth and much corruption. Those who believed and have emigrated and fought in the path of God and those who sheltered and aided [them], they are the faithful truly. For them, there will be forgiveness and generous sustenance' (VIII 72–4). These verses established a close solidarity among the Muslims, Mekkan Emigrants and Medinan Helpers (*anṣār*) assembled in the Community at Medina. Yet verse 75, which follows the passage and was evidently added later, modified the meaning in favour of the blood relations even if they joined the Medinan Community at a later date: 'Those who believed afterwards and emigrated and fought together with you, they are of you. And blood relations have closer ties with each other in the Book of God.' The latter sentence, according to the commentators of the Qur'ān, specifically restored the right of inheritance of the relatives in disregard of the alliances earlier concluded with strangers.¹⁸

The obligation to provide for the needy kin must not be suspended because of personal grudges: 'Let not those among you who are [materially] favoured and have ample means commit themselves by oath not to help their kin (*ulī l-qurbā*) and the needy and the Emigrants in the path of God. Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not desire that God shall forgive you? And God is forgiving, merciful' (XXIV 22). According to the commentators, this verse referred to Abū Bakr and his nephew Miṣṭaḥ. The latter had been among those who cast doubt on the fidelity of 'Ā'isha during the affair of her absence from the camp of the Muslims. Abū Bakr, deeply offended by the conduct of his nephew, vowed that he would no longer provide for him as he had done in the past, even after Miṣṭaḥ formally repented of his mistake. The Qur'ān, however, commanded him not to neglect his duty towards his needy nephew and to pardon him.¹⁹

In the story of the past prophets, as it is related in the Qur'ān, their families play a prominent role. The families generally provide vital

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ḍjāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1373–88/1955–69), XIV, 89.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ḍjāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1321/1903), XVIII, 72–3. Miṣṭaḥ is 'Awf b. Uthātha b. 'Abbād b. al-Muṭṭalib (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyiz al-Ṣaḥāba* (Cairo, 1323–5/[1905–7]), VI, 88; al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo, 1953), 95). As a Muttalibid he was also entitled to support from the Prophet's fifth of booty and *fay*'. He is mentioned among the recipients of the produce from Muḥammad's share of Khaybar (see W. Madelung, 'The Hāshimiyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shi'ism', *Studia Islamica*, 70 (1989), 5–26, at 12 and n. 36).

assistance to the prophets against the adversaries among their people. After the death of the prophets, their descendants become their spiritual and material heirs. The prophets ask God to grant them the help of members of their family and they pray for divine favour for their kin and their offspring. The prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl were in fact all descendants of a single family from Adam and Noah down to Jesus: 'Truly, God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imrān above all the worlds, as off-spring one of the other' (III 33–4). After narrating the story of Moses, Ishmael and Idrīs, the Qur'ān adds: 'Those were the prophets on whom God bestowed his blessings of the off-spring of Adam and of those whom We carried [in the ark] with Noah, and of the off-spring of Abraham and Israel, of those whom We guided and chose' (XIX 58).

The chain of the prophets and their families is described with more detail in the following verses: 'And We gave him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob, all of whom We guided. And before him We guided Noah, and of his off-spring, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron. Thus We recompense those who do good. And Zachariah, and John, and Jesus, and Elias, all of them among the righteous, and Ishmael, and Elisha, Jonah, and Lot: Each of them We preferred above the worlds, and [some] of their fathers, their descendants, and their brothers: We chose them and We guided them to the straight path. That is the guidance of God with which He guides whomever He wishes of His worshippers. But if they had set up partners [with Him], whatever they have been doing would have been in vain for them. They are the ones to whom We have given the Book, the rule (*ḥukm*) and prophethood' (VI 84–9).

Noah was saved together with his family while the rest, or the great majority, of his people were drowned in the Flood because of their sins: 'And [remember] Noah when he implored [Us] in former time, and We responded to him and rescued him and his family from the great disaster. We aided him against the people who treated Our signs as lies. They were an evil people, so We drowned them all together' (XXI 76–7). 'We rescued him and his family from the great disaster and made his descendants the survivors' (XXXVII 76–7). God commanded Noah: 'Place in it [the ark] pairs of every [species] and your family (*ahl*) except for those of them against whom the sentence has already gone forth. Do not address Me concerning those who were unjust. They shall be drowned' (XXIII 27; see also XI 40). The wife and one of the sons of Noah were in fact excluded from the rescue, even though Noah pleaded for his son: 'And Noah called to his Lord and said: O my Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Your promise is the truth, and You are the justest of judges. [God] said: O Noah, he is not of your family. Surely, it is not

righteous action. Do not ask of Me that of which you have no knowledge' (XI 45–6).

Likewise, the family of the prophet Lot was saved together with him while the remainder of the people of his town were annihilated: 'The people of Lot treated the warnings as lies. We sent against them a shower of stones, except for the family of Lot. We rescued them at dawn, as a favour from Us. Thus We recompense those who give thanks' (LIV 33–5). The family of Lot had acquired a state of purity which distinguished them from the ordinary people. When Lot reproached his people for having surrendered to turpitude, 'the only answer of his people was to say: Expel the family of Lot from your town. They are indeed people who purify themselves (*yataṭahharūn*). But We saved him and his family, except his wife. We desired that she be of those who stayed behind' (XXVII 56–7). Lot's wife, like Noah's, was punished because of her betrayal of her husband. 'God has set as an example for the unbelievers the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were married to two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them. Thus they were of no avail at all for them before God, and they were told: Enter the fire together with those who will enter it' (LXVI 10).

Abraham was the patriarch of the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl. All later prophets and transmitters of the scripture among them were of his descendants: 'And We sent Noah and Abraham and placed among their off-spring prophethood and the Book' (LVII 26). The father of Abraham, however, was an obstinate idolater and a persecutor of the confessors of the unity of God. As mentioned above, Abraham at first prayed for him, on account of a promise made to him, but later dissociated himself from him. When God chose Abraham as imam for his people, Abraham prayed to his Lord that He grant this honour also to his descendants: 'And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commandments which he fulfilled, [God] said: I shall make you an imam for the people. He said: And also of my off-spring? [God] said: My compact will not comprise the evil-doers' (II 124). God's compact thus covered the just among the descendants of Abraham. God gave him his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob who became prophets: 'When [Abraham] had turned away from them [the idolaters of his people] and from what they worshipped besides God, We granted him Isaac and Jacob, and each one We made a prophet. We bestowed of Our mercy on them, and We accorded them a high truthful repute' (XIX 49–50). 'And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and placed among his progeny prophethood and the Book. We gave him his reward in this world and surely he will be of the righteous in the hereafter' (XXIX 27).

When the angels announced to Abraham the imminence of the birth of