SAMPLE

Ishaq: The Promised Son and the

Father of Nations The Story of Prophet Ishaq (إسحاق) in the Quran and Islamic Tradition

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This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

Ishaq (عليه السلام) is the promised son. His birth was announced by angels, his name was given by Allah, and his arrival fulfilled a divine promise that Ibrahim and Sarah had waited a lifetime to see. He is the second son of Ibrahim — the first from Sarah, the mother who laughed at the impossible news and then held the impossible in her arms.

The Quran tells Ishaq's story primarily through the announcement of his birth — the angels who visited Ibrahim carried two messages: the good news of Ishaq and the decree of destruction for Lut's people. The two events are inseparable in the Quranic narrative: the same messengers, the same journey, the same moment. Life and death, birth and destruction, promise and judgment — all carried by the same angels.

Ishaq's individual story is less narrated in the Quran than Ibrahim's or Ismail's. The Quran does not describe a specific trial, a confrontation, or a miracle in his prophethood. Instead, Ishaq's significance is genealogical and covenantal: he is the bridge between Ibrahim and Yaqub, between the father of nations and the father of the twelve tribes. Through Ishaq came Yaqub, and through Yaqub came Yusuf and the twelve sons whose descendants would carry the Israelite prophetic tradition — Musa, Dawud, Sulayman, Isa, and others.

The Quran mentions Ishaq 15 times, always in the context of the prophetic lineage. He is listed among the prophets, paired with his father and his son, and included in every Quranic enumeration of the righteous. His name — Ishaq, meaning "he laughs" — carries the memory of his mother's astonishment: "Woe to me, shall I give birth while I am an old woman?" (11:72). The laughter of surprise became the name of a prophet.

This book traces Ishaq's story through the Quran: the angelic announcement, the promise fulfilled, his prophethood, his son Yaqub, and his place in the chain of guidance. It is the ninth light in the NurOne - The Prophets series — the light that carried the covenant from Ibrahim to the Israelite line, the light that laughed at impossibility and then embodied it.

The Quran depicts Ishaq as the son promised to Ibrahim and the continuation of the prophetic line. In Surah Hud, Allah says: "And his wife was standing, and she laughed. And We gave her glad tidings of Ishaq and after Ishaq, Yaqub. She said: Woe to me, shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is a strange thing. They said: Are you astonished at the decree of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, people of the house" (11:71-73). The scene captures two gifts in one

announcement: a son, Ishaq, and a grandson, Yaqub — two generations promised in a single moment. The wife's astonishment is met with a gentle rebuke: are you astonished at the decree of Allah?

Additionally, the Quran records of Ibrahim's family: "And We gave him Ishaq and Yaqub in addition — all were righteous. And We made them leaders guiding by Our command. And We inspired them to do good deeds and establish prayer and give charity, and they were worshippers of Us alone" (21:72-73). The verse identifies Ishaq not merely as a son but as a link in a chain — from Ibrahim to Ishaq to Yaqub — each a leader, each guided by the same command, each devoted to the same worship. The Quran does not give Ishaq an extended narrative like Musa or Yusuf. It gives him something else: a place in a lineage of faith, a name carried in the same breath as his father and his son, three generations of prophethood bound together by the same prayer and the same commitment.

The Quran reinforces this Ishaq in the context of the sacrifice. In Surah As-Saffat, after describing Ibrahim's test with his son, Allah says: "And We gave him glad tidings of Ishaq, a prophet from among the righteous. And We blessed him and Ishaq. And among his offspring are the doers of good and those who clearly wrong themselves" (37:112-113). The verse identifies Ishaq as a prophet and acknowledges that his offspring included both the righteous and the wrongdoers. The Quran does not idealize the lineage. It states the truth: from Ishaq came prophets and came people who lost their way. The story of Ishaq is the story of a prophetic legacy that continued through some and was broken by others — a pattern the Quran repeats with every prophetic family, from Nuh to Ibrahim to Muhammad.

The Quran deepens this point Ishaq in the context of the covenant. In Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah says to Ibrahim: "I will make you an imam for mankind. He said: And of my offspring? He said: My covenant does not include the wrongdoers" (2:124). The covenant was not automatic. It was conditional. Ishaq inherited the covenant not merely because he was the son of Ibrahim but because he was righteous. The Quran shows the prophetic lineage as a line of faith, not a line of blood. Each generation had to choose. Ishaq chose. Yaqub chose. Yusuf chose. The covenant continued through those who held to it and was broken by those who did not. This is the legacy of Ishaq: that the son of a prophet must become a prophet in his own right, and that inheritance of faith is not a birthright but a decision made every generation.

The Quran introduces Ishaq as a living continuation of the covenant given to Ibrahim. In Surah Hud, the announcement of Ishaq includes the promise of Yaqub: "And We gave her glad tidings of Ishaq and after Ishaq, Yaqub" (11:71).

The verse packs three generations into a single announcement — Ibrahim standing before the angels, his wife hearing the news, and the promise of a grandson already embedded in the gift of a son. The Quran treats Ishaq not as an independent figure with a separate mission but as a link — the second in a chain that begins with Ibrahim and runs through Yaqub to Yusuf and beyond.

Ishaq's prophethood is confirmed. His story is merged with the larger story of the family. The Quran does not give him a independent narrative because his narrative is the family's narrative. The covenant passes through him, and through him the promise continues. The chapters that follow examine every mention of Ishaq in the Quran and the role he plays in the ongoing story of the prophetic line.

The example of Ishaq reveals that prophethood is inherited not by blood but by faith. Ishaq was the son of Ibrahim, but he was a prophet because he chose what his father chose. The covenant passed through him not automatically but because he was righteous, and the line continued through him to Yaqub and beyond because righteousness, not lineage, carries the message forward.

The Quran says in Surah Al-Hijr: And We gave him glad tidings of Ishaq, a prophet among the righteous. And We blessed him and Ishaq. And among his offspring are the doers of good and those who clearly wrong themselves. The verse is a complete portrait of a prophetic legacy in two sentences. Ishaq was righteous. His offspring included both the good and the wrongdoers. The Quran does not idealize the family. It states the truth. The covenant continued through some and was broken by others. The lesson is that prophethood is a gift, but the response to it is a choice. Ishaq chose well. Not all who came after him did.

Chapter 1: The Announcement

The Quran tells the story of Ishaq's announcement in three parallel passages — Surah Hud, Surah Al-Hijr, and Surah Ad-Dhariyat — each adding a different detail to the same event.

In Surah Hud:

"And Our angels came to Ibrahim with good tidings. They said: Peace. He said: Peace, and he did not delay in bringing a roasted calf" (11:69).

The angels came in the form of travelers — handsome young men, unrecognizable as divine messengers. Ibrahim, true to his character, responded with immediate hospitality. He did not ask who they were or what they wanted. He served. A roasted calf, prepared quickly, offered generously. This is the same Ibrahim who confronted his father gently, destroyed the idols boldly, and survived the fire unharmed — and here he is, serving a meal to strangers.

In Surah Ad-Dhariyat, the hospitality is described differently:

"Has there come to you the story of the honored guests of Ibrahim? When they entered upon him and said: Peace. He said: Peace, you are a people unknown to me. And he turned to his household and brought a fattened calf" (51:24-26).

Ibrahim was slightly wary — "a people unknown to me" — but he served them anyway. The prophetic character does not require recognition before hospitality. The stranger is served because the stranger is a guest, and the guest is sacred.

"But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he distrusted them and felt from them apprehension. They said: Do not fear. Indeed, we have been sent to the people of Lut" (11:70).

The guests did not eat. In the culture of Ibrahim's time — and in all Semitic tradition — refusing to eat was a sign of hostile intent. A guest who eats is a guest who accepts your hospitality and therefore your protection. A guest who does not eat is a guest with other purposes. Ibrahim was afraid.

The angels' response: "Do not fear." They revealed their mission: they had been sent to the people of Lut. The visit to Ibrahim was not the primary mission; it was a stop along the way. But at this stop, they carried a secondary message — and it was the best news Ibrahim and Sarah had ever heard.

"And his wife was standing, and she smiled. And We gave her good tidings of Ishaq, and after Ishaq, Yaqub" (11:71).

Sarah was standing — near the tent, within earshot. She heard the angels speak. And she smiled. The smile is one of the most beautiful details in the Quran — a woman's involuntary response to the announcement of something she has wanted for decades and has long since stopped believing was possible.

The good news had two parts:

Ishaq. Sarah would have a son. She was old — beyond childbearing age. Ibrahim was old. The possibility had been closed for years. And the angels said: you will have a son. His name will be Ishaq — "he laughs" — because his mother laughed when she heard the news.

Yaqub. After Ishaq, Sarah would have a grandson — Yaqub. The promise was not just for a son but for a lineage. Ishaq would grow up, marry, and have a son named Yaqub. The prophetic line would continue through Ishaq to Yaqub and beyond.

The two-part announcement — son and grandson — is significant. Allah did not just promise Ishaq; He promised through Ishaq. The son was not an end but a link in the chain. The covenant that began with Ibrahim would pass through Ishaq to Yaqub, and from Yaqub to the twelve tribes and the long line of Israelite prophets.

"She said: Woe to me, shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is a wondrous thing" (11:72).

Sarah's response is one of the most human moments in the Quran. She does not simply accept the news; she expresses astonishment. "Woe to me" — ya waylati — is an exclamation of amazement, not despair. She is overwhelmed. She is an old woman. Her husband is an old man. How can they have a child?

The word 'ajab — wondrous, strange, extraordinary — captures the essence of the moment. Sarah recognized that what was being announced was not natural. It was supernatural. It was a miracle — the intervention of divine power in the natural order to produce something that could not be produced naturally.

In Surah Ad-Dhariyat, the same response is recorded with a slight variation:

"Then his wife came with a loud voice and struck her face and said: A barren old woman" (51:29).

Sarah struck her face — a gesture of astonishment common in the ancient world. She called herself "a barren old woman" — acknowledging both her inability to conceive (barren) and her age (old). She was stating the facts: the

natural circumstances made this impossible. And the angels were saying: the impossible will happen.

"They said: Are you amazed at the decree of Allah? The mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, people of the House. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Honorable" (11:73).

The angels' response is gentle but firm. Are you amazed? At the decree of Allah? The question is rhetorical: of course she is amazed — the decree of Allah is amazing. But the question also carries a teaching: do not be amazed at what Allah decrees, because Allah's power transcends the natural order. What seems impossible to humans is merely a decree for Allah.

"The mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, people of the House." The angels pronounced a blessing on the household of Ibrahim — the family that would carry the prophetic tradition forward. The "House" — ahl al- bayt — would become one of the most significant concepts in the Quran, referring to the family that Allah has chosen and blessed.

In Surah Al-Hijr, the confirmation is more specific:

"They said: We give you good tidings of a wise boy" (15:53).

"A wise boy" — ghulam 'alim — the promise was not just for a child but for a wise child. Ishaq would be wise. He would carry knowledge, understanding, and the prophetic mission. The promise was for quality, not just quantity — not just a son, but a wise son.

In Surah Hud, Ibrahim's response is recorded:

"He said: Then for what purpose has the staff of messengers come? O Ibrahim, indeed they are messengers of your Lord" (variant from 11:70-71, the narrative flow).

Ibrahim, after hearing the good news, asked about the messengers' other mission. He was concerned — perhaps for Lut, who was in the city that was about to be destroyed. The Quran records Ibrahim's subsequent intercession for Lut's people, which the angels gently declined, assuring him that Lut and his family would be saved.

This moment — the good news of a son and the concern for a nephew — captures Ibrahim's character. Even as he received the greatest personal blessing of his life, he was thinking of others. The father who was promised a son was still the uncle who worried about his nephew.

The announcement of Ishaq's birth is significant on multiple levels:

It is a miracle. The birth of Ishaq was supernatural — an old woman, barren, past the age of childbearing, conceiving and bearing a son. The Quran presents this as a sign of Allah's power: the One who creates can create at any time, in any circumstance, through any means.

It is a fulfillment. The promise of a son was not new. Allah had promised Ibrahim descendants — "I will make you a leader for the people" (2:124). Ishaq's birth was the fulfillment of that promise through the line that would become the Israelite prophetic tradition.

It is a link. Ishaq is the link between Ibrahim and Yaqub. Without Ishaq, there is no Yaqub. Without Yaqub, there is no Yusuf, no Musa, no Dawud, no Isa. The entire Israelite prophetic line depends on Ishaq — the promised son whose birth made everything else possible.

It is a pattern. The miraculous birth — the old woman, the impossible pregnancy, the divine announcement — becomes a pattern in the Quran. Ishaq's birth echoes the birth of Yahya to Zakariya and Elizabeth (also old, also barren). And it foreshadows the birth of Isa to Maryam (a virgin, an even greater miracle). The pattern: Allah's power to give life transcends all natural limitations, and the prophets enter the world through divine intervention, not just natural process.

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Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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