

5.9 Hajj: History

Host: What does Hajj or pilgrimage mean?

Jamal Badawi: Hajj is one of the five basic pillars of Islam. The other four being the testimony of faith, performance of the five daily prayers, payment of poor's due, fasting and then Hajj is the fifth and last in the series of Pillars in Islam.

Technically speaking Hajj means to make pilgrimage Mecca and the surrounding area and to participate in certain rites and acts of worship both in Mecca and nearby places. It is like prayers or act of worship where the soul mind and body all participate in worship. It is an incumbent duty on every Muslim who is able to perform the pilgrimage both financially and physically to do so at least once in his or her lifetime. Of course a person may wish to make the pilgrimage more than once but the requirement is fulfilled by making it once.

When we say financially able it doesn't mean that one has to be rich in order to make the pilgrimage. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicated that if a person has enough food and the means of transportation to go to the pilgrimage and enough to leave for the provision of his family that are not going with him then he should not wait. In fact he recommended against delays in performing the pilgrimage as no one knows what will happen to them as a person may die or get too old or sick may die before fulfilling this basic requirement of faith.

The importance of Hajj has been emphasized in the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). An example of this is found in (3:97) Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah,- those who can afford the journey; but if any deny faith, Allah stands not in need of any of His creatures. A similar statement is found in (2:196). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicated that whomever fulfills the duty of pilgrimage without committing any indecent acts in words, deeds or devious actions would come back from the pilgrimage free from his sins as the day his mother gave birth to him (Islam believes a child is born sinless and pure) which is reported by both Bukhari and Muslim. In that sense the pilgrimage is a multifaceted type of relationship.

Host: Some non-Muslims say that it is pilgrimage to visit the grave of Prophet Muhammad is that true?

Jamal Badawi: No this is totally untrue. It is one of the very common but unfortunately widely circulated misinformation about Islam that is found in lots of references. Indeed the Islamic pilgrimage is not a pilgrimage to visit the grave or tomb of any hero or prophet (including Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)). There is no single verse in the entire Quran that mentions the visiting of the grave of the Prophet or any other person as part of the pilgrimage. In his own teachings Prophet Muhammad never taught Muslims that visiting his grave is part of the rites of the pilgrimage. Indeed it suffices to say that all rites of the pilgrimage are all fulfilled in Mecca and the immediate surrounding within fifteen miles; where as Medina, where the grave of the Prophet is located, is about 300 miles north of Mecca.

This doesn't mean that a Muslim may not visit the grave of the Prophet or any other righteous person's grave but this is totally different from saying than saying that the purpose of Hajj is to visit the grave of the Prophet. The pilgrimage is meant to glorify God not an individual.

Host: What is the purpose of Hajj? Is it just to visit sacred places?

Jamal Badawi: It involves but not limited to the visiting of sacred places. Its significance extends beyond visitation, as some people take it as a tourist type of attraction which is not the case. Pilgrimage in Islam has a lot to do with historical significance as it not only goes back to Prophet Muhammad but it goes back to Prophet Abraham and according to some sources it goes back to Adam. There are some who believe that when Adam and Eve came to earth they came to

Mount Arafat which is where the major part of the pilgrimage rites are performed.

Like any other act of worship in Islam, Hajj has many facets to it. In a way it is an act of worship and training to fully submit and be obedient to God, a reminder to the person doing the pilgrimage of the purpose of their creation, it is a reminder of death and the limited period that they will stay on earth and it reminds us of resurrection and accountability before God. It has socio-political aspects as it allows Muslims from all over the world to practice true brotherhood when they all meet from all over the world in large numbers, equally dressed without any symbols of status or race. It has aspects of mutual benefit and exchange (it is one of the earliest international conferences).

Host: What is the historical background surrounding Hajj? What is the historical significance of Hajj with Abraham and the relationship between Abraham and Muslims?

Jamal Badawi: According to the Quran Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was one of the prophets of God. In fact he was one of the five major prophets of God (the other four being Noah, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad (PBUT)). According to the Quran, God promised to bless people through Abraham and to give him a great lineage of prophets through his descendents. The first son of Prophet Abraham was Prophet Ishmael who dwelled in Arabia and from his descendents came the last of all prophets, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The second son of Prophet Abraham was Isaac (PBUH) who dwelled in Palestine and in his descendents came all of the Israelite prophets ending with Jesus (PBUH). In that sense it is quite obvious from the Islamic point of view that Abraham, who was not the first prophet to teach monotheism as all prophets did, but whom played a very significant role in religious history. In a way Abraham can be regarded as the father of pure monotheism which is the worship of one universal God of all humanity and through his descendents three of the world's major religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) came.

Host: How does the story of Abraham compare to what is found in the Bible?

Jamal Badawi: The stories seem to be quite comparable. As for the family Abraham had a first wife (according to the Bible in the book of Genesis chapter 16) called Sarah who happened to be barren. In chapter 12 in the book of Genesis we are told that God promised to make Abraham a great nation and to bless all the families on earth through his descendents and this was before the birth of either Ishmael or Isaac. According to the Book of Genesis chapter 16 that Sarah gave Abraham Hagar, a bond woman who lived with them, to be his wife. Hagar bore Abraham his first son Ishmael. After the birth of Ishmael and before the birth of Isaac (Genesis chapter 17) again the promise is repeated that God would bless Abraham and make a great nation through his descendents. Later on (Genesis chapter 21) we read that Sarah who was barren in fact gave birth miraculously to the second son of Abraham Isaac (PBUH). From Isaac's side descended all the Israelite prophets from Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon all the way down to Jesus (PBUT). The last of the Israelite prophets was Prophet Jesus (PBUH). The Bible also tells us that after Ishmael dwelled in Arabia he had 12 sons. The only thing the Bible does not mention is that out of the descendents of Prophet Ishmael came, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last prophet. After all, both the Old and New testaments of the Bible were written prior to the advent of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The promise of God made to Abraham about his descendents was already fulfilled through both the Israelite and Ishmaelite branch.

It is very important to note that up to this point there seems to be a general agreement between the Biblical version and the Islamic version of the story of Prophet Abraham and his two children. After this the Bible is relatively silent as to what happens to the

Ishmaelite branch of Abraham's household. There is very faint mention of Ishmael and Hagar, his mother, in the Bible. It mentions that they dwelled in the wilderness Paran, which is actually Mecca, and where they lived in Arabia. His mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt and that he died in this land.

There are many statements that are made against Ishmael which are bias towards Isaac or the Israelite side of Abraham's children. These statements are either mistranslations of the Bible or misinterpretations of some of some of the verses in the Bible. Above all they are based on arguments that are a reflection on ethnic or racial bias which contrary to the will of God. The most famous claims that Ishmael was the bad guy and that Isaac was the good guy. They were both children of the same prophet and they were both prophets. Why should Ishmael, be regarded as a bad person when in Genesis 21 verses 13 and 18 God he is promised a great nation. Some claim that because Ishmael's mom was a bond woman his status is less than that of Isaac. Again does God subscribe to human perception of racial or ethnic superiority?

This reminds me of what one finds in the New Testament itself in Paul's letter to Galatians particularly in (3:28) when he says There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Then it continues in (3:29) And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Paul carries the message further that not only should we have equal respect and remove the bias and prejudice because of the mother of Ishmael but he also considered all the descendents of Abraham seeds in accordance to the promise of God to bless the nations of earth through Abraham's descendents.

Host: What were the circumstances behind Ishmael going into Arabia (Paran)?

Jamal Badawi:

In Islamic tradition it says that when Ishmael was a small boy, the only son (at the time), God gave Abraham the command to take his only son and his mother Hagar and take them to the wilderness of Paran (Mecca). At that time Paran was a desolate place with no plantation, people or settlements. Of course this may sound strange to us to us as in our human judgment we may consider it to be cruel or harsh but if we really look at God's wisdom as manifested later in history we will see it in a different light. The mention of this appears in the Quran (14:37). As narrated in Bukhari (a collection of Hadith) that when Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael to Paran she asked him where are you leaving us in this desolate place, with no body or companion? She repeated this question many times and he did not reply. Then she asked him Abraham did God ordain you to do this? he said yes. She replied in all faith and submission to God if God ordained this then He will never get us lost.

Then the story continues that Hagar ran out of water and she was very worried about her baby dying of thirst as he was crying. So she started running between two hills called Safa and Marwa which still exist in Mecca in search for water or for someone passing by who might have water that will help save the baby. Every once in a while she would go check on the baby. Miraculously when she checked she found that while he was crying and kicking the ground with his heels a fountain or spring of water gushed from under his feet. That well is still in existence till this moment which means it is over 3000 years old. It is called the well of Zamzam. Once water was available in the desert people began to settle around it and thus grew the holy city of Mecca.

Host: How does that story compare with the Biblical story?

Jamal Badawi:

The only area of full agreement is that Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael away from Palestine. There are major differences as to the reason behind this, the place they were taken too and the time when this took place. For example in the Bible in the

Book of Genesis (21:10 onward) it is told as if Sarah was dictating her will not only to Abraham but to God, because when Abraham was very sad upon the request made by Sarah for him to take the bond woman and her child away. ♦ It says in the Bible that God told Abraham to listen to Sarah as if she is imposing her will on everybody including God. ♦ Furthermore it says in the Bible that he took Hagar to the wilderness of Beersheba in southern Palestine rather than Mecca where the historical reality shows that Ishmael settled. ♦ According to the book of Genesis it says that this happened after Isaac was born. ♦ It says that this happened when Isaac was weaned which means that Ishmael was about fifteen years or more. </p> <p>♦</p> <p>It is interesting to note that if the Bible is read carefully and reflected upon, the stories would probably be identical if one realizes that perhaps there was some confusion about the sequence of events. ♦ I checked The Interpreter's Bible and the editors there say that apparently there is confusion regarding the sequence in this particular story. ♦ The reason being is that when one reads Genesis 21 it give the impression that Ishmael was a baby. ♦ It says that Abraham put the child on her shoulder and that when the water finished she was very worried to sit and watch her baby die in front of her so she cast him under the shrub. ♦ Then an angel came to Hagar and told her to lift up the lad and she did and the angel showed her water that she could give to her baby. ♦ The impression is very clear that to cast and lift the lad is talking about a baby. ♦ But then the Bible says that this happened after Isaac was born which means that Ishmael was over 15 years old. ♦ How can a mother carry a fifteen year old boy on her shoulder or cast him under the tree or lift him up?</p>