

## **Background article: Beliefs, A long line of Prophets**

### **The key importance of Abraham**

Abraham is a key figure for the three faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He was neither a Jew nor a Christian, according to the Qur'an, but a *hanif*, a believer in pure monotheism [Q. 3:65, 67-68; 4:125]. He has great importance in both the Bible and the Qur'an [Q. 2:136; 2:127-129; 6:75-83; 14:35-41; 16:123; 37:83-113], therefore he links the three faiths together. We often hear used the terms "Abrahamic faiths", or "Cousins in the faith of Abraham", or "three faiths that have a particular place for Abraham in their systems". The Arabic form of the name Abraham is Ibrahim.

Abraham, according to both Bible [Genesis 16, 17 and 21] and Qur'an, was married to Sarah (Arabic: Sara), but she was unable to have children. Abraham took a second wife, Hagar (Arabic: Hajar), an Egyptian, and together they had a son, Ishmael [Arabic: Isma'il]. Later, Sarah was also blessed with a son in her old age, Isaac (Arabic: Ishaq). According to the Bible, Sarah wanted Hagar and Ishmael sent away and Abraham finally agreed to do this after receiving a message from God, which said that God would protect them and raise up a mighty nation from Ishmael. God miraculously supplied them with water in the desert and "God was with the boy" [Genesis 21:15-20].

The Bible says no more about Hagar and Ishmael, except to say that both sons were present at the burial of Abraham [Genesis 25:9] and that Ishmael's descendants settled in the lands between Egypt and Syria [see also the Book of Jubilees 20:12]. According to Islam, Abraham led them to the valley where Makka now stands [Q. 14:37]. Adam and Eve are said to have worshipped there and it was there in time that Abraham and Ishmael would re-build the Ka'ba [Q. 2:125-127].

The descendants of Ishmael are seen as the second part of the Abrahamic family tree. Through Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, we trace the descent of Moses and thus the Jews. Jesus was, of course, a Jew and so Judaism and Christianity are linked. Through Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael we trace the descent of the Arabs or Ishmaelites, as the Bible calls them. It's interesting to note that the Christians called early Muslims Ishmaelites, Hagarites or Saracens (which comes from the name Sarah). The Qur'an reinforces this link by speaking of five "resolute Prophets", who were sent with a *shari'a* or way of life: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad [Q. 42:13, 33:7].