

The Children of Abraham

**Introduction
to the Sacred Stories
of Judaism and Islam**

**Sunday, March 4, 2007
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.**

Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

Judaism

Judaism

Prologue

- God created the heavens and earth
- God created the first man and woman, who then disobey God.
 - God expels them from Paradise
- God scattered humanity after it seeks to glorify itself by building the Tower of Babel.
- In the Great Flood, God destroyed most of humanity. Humankind restarts through Noah and his family
- **2000 BC:** God called Abraham
 - Abraham's people lived as semi-nomadic herders, a Semite people, in ancient Mesopotamia

Judaism

Prologue

- God's **Covenant** with Abraham:
 - Now the LORD said to Abraham, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you."
(Genesis 12:1-3 TNK)

Judaism

Prologue

- God tests Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice his son **Isaac**
- The Covenant then passed to Abraham's son Isaac, then to his grandson **Jacob**
- Jacob wrestled with God one night until God gave him God's blessing
 - "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28)

Judaism

Prologue

- Jacob's (= Israel's) descendants were called Hebrews or **Israelites**
 - Israelites: the people of God who struggle with God
 - The descendants of Jacob's twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel

Judaism

Exodus

- Israelites then became enslaved in Egypt
- God hears the cries of God's people and calls upon Moses to lead God's people from their bondage in Egypt.
- God also reveals to **Moses** God's name: **YHWH** (“I will be what I want to be,” “I am who I am,” “I am he that causes to be.”)
 - The name of God “YHWH” is too sacred to speak. In texts, Adonai or LORD, is substituted

Judaism

Exodus

- God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you:’ This is my name forever and this my title for all generations.” (Exodus 3:15)

Judaism

Exodus

- God brings plagues upon the Egyptians, culminating in the tenth, the death of the all firstborns, before the Pharaoh relents and frees the Israelites
- **“Night of Watching”** (Exodus 12) the night of the tenth plague, commemorated in the *Pesach* festival (Passover)
- Each Israelite family had to:
 - slaughter an unblemished lamb; paint their doorstep with its blood
 - roast and eat it in a posture of haste, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs

Judaism

Torah and the Covenant at Mt. Sinai

- On Mt. Sinai in the desert, the greatest miracle in history took place:
 - the revelation of the Torah,
 - the making of a covenant between YHWH and the people of Israel:
 - God: would be their God and protect them
 - Israelites: would be God's holy people, serving only God, obeying the commandments: "You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy." (Leviticus 19:2 TNK)

Judaism

The Promised Land and Kingdom

- **About 1200 BC:** The Israelites became established in the promised land
- **1200-1000 BC:** Led an agricultural life. Tribal leaders (Judges) rose up to lead the people to fight off invasions as needed

Judaism

The Promised Land and Kingdom

- Then Israelites began to desire "...a king to govern us, like other nations." (1 Sam. 8:5).
- **Samuel** warns the Israelites that the LORD is their king.
- But God hears God's people and allows them to have a king, who becomes:
 - the adopted son of YHWH,
 - the "anointed one" (= the Messiah)to rule as a symbol of YHWH over God's people

Judaism

The Promised Land and Kingdom

- **1000 to 960 BC: King David** consolidated all the tribes into the **United Kingdom of Israel**
- **Jerusalem** established as the royal city, the “City of David,” and David took up residence on **Mount Zion**
 - Ark of the Covenant placed in a tent sanctuary on Mount Zion
- David’s son, **King Solomon**, built a great temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, and “the Presence of the LORD filled the House of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:11 TNK)

Judaism

The Promised Land and Kingdom

- At the dedication of the temple:
 - "... Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of the whole community of Israel; he spread the palms of his hands toward heaven and said, 'O LORD God of Israel, in the heavens above and on the earth below there is no god like You, who keep Your gracious covenant with Your servants when they walk before You in wholehearted devotion...'” (1 Kings 8:22-23, TNK)

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- King Solomon loved women (700 wives, 300 concubines), and begin to worship the Gods of some of his foreign women.
- In punishment, God split the United Kingdom:
 - **Northern Kingdom of Israel** (10 tribes)
 - **Southern Kingdom of Judah** (Judah & Benjamin)
- However, the majority in both Kingdoms continued to break their covenantal promises, oppressing the poor, worshiping other gods.

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- Prophets arose to preach the covenant obligations of the people of God, warning of God's wrath if they do not live up to their obligations. The prophet Amos spoke:
 - "Hear this word, O people of Israel, That the LORD has spoken concerning you, Concerning the whole family that I brought up from the land of Egypt: You alone have I singled out Of all the families of the earth -- That is why I will call you to account For all your iniquities." (Amos 3:1-2 TNK)
 - "Spare Me the sound of your hymns, And let Me not hear the music of your lutes. But let justice well up like water, Righteousness like an unfailing stream." (Amos 5:23-24 TNK)

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- **721 BC: Assyrian Empire** decimates (= 1 out of 10 killed) and then scatters the remaining population of the Northern Kingdom of Israel over the Assyrian empire (the “ten lost tribes”)
- **597 BC:** the **Neo-Babylonian Empire** conquers the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and exile the leaders and the elite of society to Babylon.
- **586 BC:** the Temple (and Ark of the Covenant) are destroyed. Remaining Judean population exiled en masse to Babylon

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- The prophet Jeremiah wrote that Babylon conquered Judea by the will of God:
 - “It is I [God] who made the earth, and the men and beasts who are on the earth, by My great might and My outstretched arm; and I give it to whomever I deem proper. I herewith deliver all these lands to My servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; I even give him the wild beasts to serve him.” (Jeremiah 27:5-6 TNK)

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- The Psalmist sang from Babylon:
 - ‘By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. There on the poplars we hung up our lyres, for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.’ (Psalm 137:1-6 TNK)

Judaism

The Kingdom Declines. The Prophets

- However God does not give up on God's chosen people in exile:
 - Jeremiah: "... thus said the LORD, the God of Israel "... I will gather them from all the lands to which I have banished them in My anger and wrath, and in great rage; and I will bring them back to this place and let them dwell secure. They shall be My people, and I will be their God. I will give them a single heart and a single nature to revere Me for all time, and it shall be well with them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them and that I will treat them graciously; and I will put into their hearts reverence for Me, so that they do not turn away from Me. I will delight in treating them graciously, and I will plant them in this land faithfully, with all My heart and soul." (Jeremiah 32:36-41 TNK)

Judaism

Return from Exile

- **539 BC: Persian Empire** conquered the Babylonians
- **King Cyrus II** allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Judea (now a province of the Persian empire called **Yehud**)
 - about 10% of the exiled Israelites returned
 - Jew in Hebrew = *Yehudi*

Judaism

Return from Exile

- Under the leadership of **Ezra** and then **Nehemiah**, they began to rebuild Jerusalem (it would take about 150 years)
- The temple was rebuilt (the “second temple”) and dedicated in **516 BC** (70 years after the first temple had been destroyed)

Judaism

Return from Exile

- The character of Judaism changed during the exile and on the return from exile:
 - **Torah** study became the center of daily Jewish life
 - The rabbis later wrote: Whenever two or more gather together to study the Torah, there will be the Divine Presence, The **Shekhinah**
 - **Scribes** who read, interpreted, applied the Torah grew in importance. Teachers of Torah appeared, later called **Rabbis**
 - The institution of the **synagogue** (= space of assembly or worship; where the community met to study Torah) arose

Judaism

Maccabean Revolt

- **Alexander the Great** (356 – 323 BC) conquered the Persian empire
- Greek (= “Hellenistic”) culture, philosophy, literature, language brought to the land of the Jews
- After Alexander’s death, his empire splintered into three smaller kingdoms ruled by former generals

Judaism

Maccabean Revolt

- **Antiochus IV** (king of the Syrian Seleucid empire, one of the fragments of Alexander's empire) aggressively tried to Hellenize the Jews
- In **167 BC** Antiochus IV set up an altar to Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem
- **165 BC**: Jewish fighters led by the **Hasmoneans** or **Maccabees** (= "hammer" in Hebrew) drove out the Seleucids and cleansed the temple (celebrated at **Hanukkah**)
- **165 — 63 BC**: Jews again an independent nation
 - Last time until formation of nation of Israel after WWII

Judaism

Roman Domination

- **63 BC: Roman Empire** took over Judea after being “invited in” by one of two Hasmonean brothers who were at odds with each other over the throne
- Roman client king **Herod the Great** (37 BC to 4 BC) remodeled the temple in marble splendor

Judaism

The Great Revolt

- **66 to 70 AD:** Jews rebelled against Rome. Started by Jewish zealots after Roman governor Gessius Florus took gold from the temple treasury
- Roman **Emperor Vespasian**, succeeding **Emperor Nero**, ordered his son Titus to subdue the Jews
- **70 AD:** Jerusalem razed, the Second Temple destroyed, and its residents slaughtered. Jewish captives were executed in mass crucifixions.
- Booty from the destroyed temple was paraded through Rome by the victorious troops

Judaism

The Great Revolt

- **Sadducees** (Jewish priests) came to an end with the temple destruction
- Community of the **Essenes** (associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls) were killed by the Romans
- **Zealots** held out on the mountain fortresses **Massada** until **74 AD**, when they committed mass suicide after the Romans succeeded in breaching the walls
- But the **Pharisees** scattered to the world (Great Diaspora) with their Torah scrolls and founded **Rabbinic Judaism**

Judaism

Rabbinic Judaism

- The temple is gone. How can you:
 - Find God?
 - Atonement for sins?
- The rabbis taught you can find God in:
 - Torah study, and
 - The worship of the heart (as opposed to sacrificial worship) (*avodah*)
- The rabbis taught you can find atonement for sins through:
 - Repentance (*teshuvah*)
 - Deeds of Loving Kindness

Judaism

Rabbinic Judaism

- Once as Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai was coming from Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed after him and beheld the Temple in ruins. “Woe unto us!” Rabbi Joshua cried, “that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!” “My son,” Rabban Johanan said to him, “be not grieved: we have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving-kindness, as it is said, ‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ (Avot de Rabbi Natan, chapter 6)

Judaism

Oral Torah and the Making of the Talmud

- The rabbis taught that at Mount Sinai, God gave God's people the wisdom of the whole Torah:
 - **Written Torah** (part written down by Moses)
 - **Oral Torah** (all the interpretations of the Torah by rabbis throughout all the ages, past, present, and future)
- The **Oral Torah** remains open – rabbis to this day continue to participate with God in the giving of the Torah
- The **Oral Torah** is just as sacred as written Torah

Judaism

Oral Torah and the Making of the Talmud

- The Oral Torah of almost 150 rabbis were collected by the Rabbinic School of Galilee as the **Mishnah** (Hebrew for “Learning / study”), completed about 220 AD
- Commentaries on the Mishnah called the **Gemara** (Aramaic for “Learning / study”) was collected by the Rabbinic Schools in Galilee and Babylonia:
 - **Mishnah + Gemara = Talmud**
 - School in Galilee produced the **Palestinian** or **Jerusalem Talmud**, about 425 AD
 - School in Babylon produced the **Babylonian Talmud**, about 500 AD, about three times the size of the Palestinian Talmud

Islam

Islam

Prologue

- God created the world, Adam and Eve, and from them, all humanity
- God sent prophets: Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, to guide humankind
- Abraham was the father of:
 - **Ishmael** (mother Hagar), first born
 - **Isaac** (mother Sarah), second born
- God tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice **Ishmael**

Islam

Prologue

- Abraham obeyed, became the first **Muslim** (“one who submits to God”). Abraham practiced true **Islam** (islam = “submission to God”)
- Islam claims to be the original, pristine, uncorrupted monotheistic faith intended by God and first practiced by Abraham
 - The religions revealed by Moses (Judaism) and Jesus (Christianity) were originally true Islam. but later Jews and Christians distorted and corrupted the teachings

Islam

Prologue

- Sarah forced Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham sent them to Mecca
- In Mecca Hagar and Ishmael found themselves dying of thirst in the desert; God saved them by providing the **well of Zamzam** (today a place of pilgrimage)
- Abraham later visited Ishmael in Mecca. They submitted to God and rebuilt God's house in Mecca, the **Ka'bah** (the first one had been destroyed in the flood)
 - A **Black Stone** was given to Abraham by the Angel Gabriel, sign of God's pleasure. Abraham built it into the Ka'bah
 - Became a place of pilgrimage

Islam

Prologue

- Then came the **Time of Ignorance** (*jahiliyyah*). Humanity became steeped in ignorance, superstition, pagan beliefs
- The descendants of Abraham and Ishmael in Arabia were also ignorant, worshiping multiple gods such as:
 - Al-Lah (the God, the high God and creator)
 - Al-Lat (mother goddess associated with the moon)
 - Al'Uzza (goddess of planet Venus)
 - Manat (goddess of fate)
- God decided to raise up among them a *final* prophet, **Muhammad**

Islam

Muhammad

- **Muhammad** born in Mecca in 570 AD, of the clan of Hashim, tribe of the Quraysh (group that controlled the Ka'bah)
 - father died before he was born
 - mother died when he was 6
 - as an orphan, he had no chance for formal education and was illiterate
 - was raised by his uncle Abu-Talib, chief of the Hashim clan
 - worked and traveled with caravans; married a wealthy widow Khadija (age 40) when he was 25

Islam

Night of Power and Excellence

- Troubled by the religious practices of his people, Muhammad began to go a cave in the Mountain of Hira to meditate
- **610 AD:** one night (the **Night of Power and Excellence**, the night worth a thousand months, Qur'an 97:1-5) in the month of Ramadan, he had a vision of a glorious being, an angel, standing near the horizon, who moved towards him, saying "O Muhammad, you are the messenger of God!"

Islam

Night of Power and Excellence

- This was the **Angel Gabriel**, who commanded:
 - Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created, created Man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by [means of] the pen, taught Man what he knew not (Qur'an 96:1-5)

Islam

The Night Journey or Ascension

- Associated with the Night of Power and Excellence, or on another night, was the **Night Journey** or **Ascension**:
 - Gabriel came to him and Muhammad mounted the winged mare **Buraq** and magically flew to Jerusalem, praying at the “farthest mosque” (believed by Muslims to refer to the temple). Gabriel then led Muhammad through the seven heavens into the presence of God
- Jerusalem is thus the third holiest city in Islam, after Mecca and Medina

Islam

Muhammad, Final Prophet

- From **610 AD** to his death in **632 AD**, Muhammad received revelations from God at frequent intervals
 - Inspiration came like the painful sounding of bell
 - His forehead covered with sweat
- He memorized the divine messages and taught them to his companions
 - They were later collected (in the 650's AD) as the **Holy Qur'an** (*qur'an* = recitation). Considered to be the infallible, *exact* dictated words of God
 - not simply the work of God-inspired human beings, as Jews and Christians describe the Hebrew scriptures and New Testament.
 - In Arabic, the language of the angels

Islam

Muhammad, Final Prophet

- The message of the Prophet:
 - A radical monotheism: there was but one God, known as **Allah** by his own people (known by different names in other religions)
 - Muhammad was chosen by God as the *last* of God's prophets, bearing God's *complete and final* revelation

Islam

Muhammad, Final Prophet

- Muhammad's wife Khadija was the first to submit to the new revelations and became a Muslim.
- After 3 years of revelations, Muhammad was commanded to preach openly to all Meccans
 - He was initially mocked and ridiculed, gaining few converts
 - His uncle Abu Talib protected him as a member of the clan, although his uncle and most of the Hashimite clan refused to become Muslims
- **619 AD:** uncle Abu Talib and his wife Khadija died; Muhammad lost protection of the clan

Islam

Hijra and the Ummah

- **620 AD:** oasis city of **Yathrib** (275 miles north of Mecca; later renamed **Medina**) asked Muhammad to mediate a dispute among its two dominant Arabic clans
 - There were several Jewish clans also in Yathrib; some of whom thought Muhammad might be the Messiah
- Muhammad agreed to come when it was promised he could be political leader and judge for the city (the Medina Accords)

Islam

Hijra and the Ummah

- **622 AD:** Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib (Medina) = **The Hijra**
- There he established the community of Islam, the **Ummah**
 - From the beginning, the Ummah was both a religious as well as a political organization
- The first worship service held in Muhammad's house, which thus became the first **mosque** (*masjid*)
- **622 AD** is year 1 in the Islamic calendar (1 AH; anno hegirae)

Islam

Hijra and the Ummah

- Basic rituals and duties of Muslims began to be established (**Five Pillars of Islam**):
 - 1. confessing the oneness of God and Muhammad as God's prophet or messenger (*shahada*)
 - 2. ritual prayer five times a day
 - 3. alms giving (*zakat*)
 - 4. fasting
 - 5. pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*)

Islam

Hijra and the Ummah

- Muhammad married many wives after Khadija's death (many of them widows killed in battles with the Meccans); they were to help spread the faith, and are collectively called the "Mothers of the Believers"

Islam

The Submission of Mecca

- To gain income for the city, Muhammad ordered raids on Meccan caravan parties
- The Meccans unsuccessfully assaulted the Medinans three times
- An uneasy 10 year truce was arranged

Islam

The Submission of Mecca

- Originally Muslims faced Jerusalem in prayer and even observed a Yom Kippur* fast
 - *Muslims fasted on Ashura or “the tenth, presumably the atonement fast of Yom Kippur in Leviticus 16:29
- However, at Medina, the Jewish clans, while accepting Muhammad as a political leader, rejected him as a prophet
- Revelations in the Qu’ran became less favorable to the Jews, and there were other changes:
 - **About 623 AD:** the position for prayer was changed to face the Ka’bah in Mecca (Qur’an 2:142-150)
 - Fasting was changed to the month of Ramadan

Islam

The Submission of Mecca

- There was also a significant political component in the relationship with the Jewish clans, for some of the Jewish clans began to support the Meccans
 - Muhammad considered them traitors. One Jewish clan was banished, another enslaved, and a third executed

Islam

The Submission of Mecca

- **630 AD:** Meccans again became hostile, Muhammed headed to Mecca with an army of 10,000.
- Meccans met them a days journey away and agreed to submit to Islam.
- Muhammad granted a general clemency to Mecca, personally entered the Ka'bah and destroyed 360 idols, proclaiming "God is great! Truth has come. Falsehood has vanished."
- Henceforth, the Ka'bah was a shrine dedicated to the one God (= Allah in Arabic), where only Muslims could worship

Islam

The Death of Muhammad

- In **June 632 AD**, Muhammad died in the arms of his young wife Aisha
- Although Muhammad was only a mortal prophet or messenger God, his life is looked upon as model for lives of all Muslims
- His words and actions were recorded by his companions in the **Hadiths** (“traditions”)
 - The Qur’an and the Hadiths are the primary sources for discerning how to live as a good Muslim

Islam

The Four Rightly Guided Caliphs

- Muhammad left no clearly designated successor
- In his role as political leader, he was succeeded by the **“four rightly guided caliphs”** under whom Islam expanded to become a religion extending far beyond Arabia

Islam

The Four Rightly Guided Caliphs

- (1) **Abu Bakr** (632-634)
 - spread Islam among Arabic tribes who had not yet submitted (Riddah wars)
- (2) **Umar** (634-644) and (3) **Uthman** (644-656)
 - in 20 years, led holy wars for Allah, expanding Islam into Syria, Persia, Asia Minor, Egypt and North Africa
 - Uthman's reign marked by dissension in his Umayyad family, and he was assassinated

Islam

The Four Rightly Guided Caliphs

- (4) **Ali** (656-661)
 - Muhammad's cousin, married to Muhammed's daughter Fatima
 - Mu'awiya, leader of the Umayyads challenged his leadership; Ali was assassinated by fanatics
 - Mu'awiya then founded the "**Umayyad Caliphate**" which ruled the Islamic Empire for the next century from **Damascus**
- The majority of Muslims (the **Sunnites**) hold that the **Four Rightly Guided Caliphs** were the rightful successors to Muhammad

Islam

The Twelve Imams

- One faction of Muslims felt that Ali, (Muhammad's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima) and his descendants were the rightful successors of the prophet: shi'at 'Ali (faction of Ali) or **Shi'ites**
 - Shi'a movement now about 15% of world's Muslim population
- Most Shi'ites trace **Twelve Imams** starting with the first Imam Ali:
 - each imam possessed the "light of Muhammad," and was, like Muhammad, sinless and perfect, unable to err in interpreting God's revelation

Islam

The Twelve Imams. The Hidden Imam

- The **12th Imam**, named Muhammad, disappeared and went into a state of hiding/occultation (*ghaybah*) =
The Hidden Imam
 - He will return one day to establish a perfect age of Islam
 - In the meantime, the Hidden Imam guides religious scholars (*mujtahids*) today as they interpret the Qur'an and establish law for Muslims
- Shi'ite Believers dominant in Iran; large numbers in Iraq

Islam

Empire and God's Favor

- The rapid spread, and the religious and political success of Islam was seen as a sign of God's favor by Muslims:
 - **Umayyad Empire** (661 to 750 AD)
 - **Abbasid Empire** (750 to 1258 AD)
 - Three imperial sultanates:
 - 1. **Turkish Ottoman Empire** (1281-1924)
 - 2. **Persian Safavid Empire** (1501-1722)
 - 3. **Indian Mughal Empire** (1520-1857)

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