

live side by side with the corrupt and idolatrous communities of their time. This not only resulted very soon in their adopting all the moral evils of Amorites, Jebusites, and Canaanites, etc., but also in their being driven out from a major part of Palestine by the incessant attacks of the unconquered nations, especially the Philistines.

At last the Israelites felt the need to preserve their independence and regain their unity. A delegation of elders from each tribe gathered and requested their prophet -- Samuel -- to appoint for them a ruler, who chose Saul (or *Taloot*) as the king of Israelites. This episode of Jewish history is also mentioned in the Holy Qur'an (2:243-248), and took place around 1020 BC. Saul was later succeeded by Prophets David (or *Dawood*) and Solomon (or *Suleman*), and under the rule of these three great kings, the Israelites were able to transform themselves from a small group of quarreling tribes into the most powerful kingdom between the Nile and Euphrates. During the years 1020 BC and 922 BC, Israel reached the zenith of its territorial size and political power, enjoying an era of peace and affluence. Culture, trade, and industry flourished, especially during the reign of Prophet Solomon. The famous Temple was also built for the first time in Jerusalem.

(To be continued)

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ڈاکٹر اسرار احمد کی مقبول عام تالیف

مسلمانوں کی

قرآن مجید کے حقوق

خود پڑھیے اور دوستوں اور عزیزوں کو تحفہ پیش کیجیے۔

will suffer." They said: "O Moses, in that land live a people who are formidable; we shall never go there until they leave. We shall enter when they go away." Then two of the men who feared (God), and to whom God was gracious (i.e., Joshua and Caleb) said to them: "Charged and rush the gate. If you enter, you will surely be victorious. And place your trust in God if you truly believe." They said: "O Moses, we shall never enter as long as they are there. Go you and your Lord to fight them; we stay here." Said (Moses), "O Lord, I have control over none but myself and my brother; so draw a dividing line between us and these, the wicked people." (And God) Said: "Then verily this Land is forbidden them for forty years, and they shall wander perplexed over the earth. So do not grieve for these, the wicked people." (5:21-26)

Israel's Golden Age

The men who had set out from Egypt under Prophet Moses were utterly devoid of any sense of honor or self-respect, and they lacked the necessary courage and fortitude to face their enemies in battle. The reason for their low morale was obviously the centuries of slavery and persecution in Egypt. During their forty years wandering, however, the older generation perished and was replaced by a new generation that has grown up in an environment of total freedom. As a result, this generation had a strong enough character to invade the Holy Land under the leadership of Joshua, successor of Prophet Moses. The Israelites were thus able to conquer most of the cities, despite the fact that their enemies had fortified towns, advanced weapons, and swift chariots.

The conquest of the Promised Land, however, remained incomplete. Instead of destroying the numerous nations inhabiting Palestine, as they were told to do, the Israelites fell victim to tribal parochialism. They failed to establish a single unified kingdom of their own, and divided the Land among themselves. Thus, losing their political and military strength, the Israelites were forced to

Moses and his people then went about a hundred and fifty miles north of Mount Sinai, into the wilderness of Paran, at the Southern border of what was then called Canaan. According to the Old Testament, God said to Moses, 'Send men out to explore Canaan, the land which I am going to give to the Israelites.' (Numbers 13:2).

Twelve spies were sent, one from each tribe, and they returned after forty days to report that the Promised land was flowing with milk and honey. However, except for two of them -- Joshua and Caleb -- they weren't willing to go to war, saying that the towns were fortified, their inhabitants formidable and of gigantic stature. Hearing such discouraging reports, the Israelites simply refused to fight, although their God-fearing leaders -- Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb -- all tried to persuade and convince them. The Bible vividly portrays the scene of their refusal:

The whole Israelite community cried out in dismay and the people wept all night long. Everyone complained against Moses and Aaron: "If only we had died in Egypt or in the wilderness!" they said, "why should the Lord bring us to this land, to die in battle and leave our wives and our dependents to become the spoils of war? It would be better for us to go back to Egypt." And they spoke of choosing someone to lead them back there. (Numbers 14:1-4)

As a result of their cowardliness and lack of faith, the Promised Land was withheld from the Israelites for a period of forty years. Almighty Allah (SWT) condemned the Israelites to wander in the wilderness of Sinai for a full generation. The Holy Qur'an narrates this whole incidence as follows:

(Moses said) "Enter, O my people, the Holy Land that God has ordained for you, and do not turn back, or you

invited his father and his eleven brothers and their families -- 70 strong -- to Egypt, and helped them settle in a hospitable and congenial country. This most probably happened during the period of Hyksos kings.

The Israelites continued to grow during the next 400 year, and developed their famous 'twelve tribes'. Initially they enjoyed a life of prosperity and were respected by the locals. However, after the decline of the Semitic 'Shepherd' kings in about 1550 BC, they were increasingly seen as aliens in Egypt and therefore despised by the nationalist Pharaohs of the nineteenth dynasty as a security risk. As a result, the rulers started to abuse and exploit them as slaves, and even adopted a policy of ethnic cleansing towards them.

Their miseries continued until Prophet Moses (Peace be upon him) rose as a charismatic leader of the Israelites, and, after a long struggle with the Pharaoh, freed them from bondage. The migration of the Israelites from Egypt, called the 'Exodus', most probably took place around 1350 BC. The Holy Qur'an reminds them of God's mercy thus:

Remember, We saved you from the Pharaoh's people who wronged and oppressed you and slew your sons but spared your women. In this was a great trial from your Lord. Remember, We parted the sea and saved you, and drowned the men of Pharaoh before your very eyes.
(2:49,50)

Prophet Moses led the Israelites into the Sinai peninsula, at the Northern tip of which lays Mount Sinai -- or *Jebel Musa* -- the present day site of St. Catherine's Monastery. It was here that Almighty God gave him the guidance for his people, the Torah. The famous Covenant of Almighty God with Israelites also took place, when they promised to obey His commands and, in return, they were promised constant care, prosperity, and victory over their enemies.

against them, and strengthened you with wealth and children, and increased your numbers (and said): "If you do good, you will do so for your own good; if you do evil, you will do it for your own loss." So when the time of the second prediction came, (We roused against you another people) to ravage you, and to enter the Temple as they had done the first time, and to destroy what they conquered utterly. Your Lord may haply be merciful to you. But if you repeat (the crime), We shall repeat the (punishment). (17:4-9)

In order to comprehend these events, and appreciate their significance, we must go back in time.

As mentioned before, Jews are the descendants of Prophet Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham. Prophet Abraham had migrated, nearly 4000 years ago, from the city of Ur in the Euphrates Valley (now Iraq) to Cannan (now divided between Jordan and Israel), along with his wife Sarah and nephew Lot (or *Loot*). Abraham acquired a second wife, Hagar (or *Hajra*), who bore him Ishmael, when he was 86 years old. Then, at the ripe old age of 100, Sarah gave birth to his second son, Isaac. Prophet Abraham founded two centers for the spread of God's word, one in Makkah where he settled Hagar and her son Ishmael, and the other in Palestine where he settled Sarah and Isaac. This gave rise to the birth of two great nations, *Banu Ismael* and *Banu Israel*, as promised by Almighty God. According to the Old Testament:

God said to Abraham: "Look up at the sky, and count the stars, if you can. So many will your descendants be."
(Genesis 15:5)

Early Jewish History

Prophet Joseph -- the grandson of Isaac -- was able to rise to the top in the kingdom of Egypt, after being sold there as a slave because of a malevolent sibling rivalry. Joseph (or *Yousuf*) then

follow in their footsteps then we would deserve, in the sight of Almighty Allah (SWT), a chastisement much more severe than what they received.

Similarly, the most prominent part of the Muslim Ummah, that is the Arabs, also enjoy a sort of supremacy among other Muslims, because Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was one of them, and also because God's final Message was revealed in their own language. It follows that the main impact and the hardest of any Divine punishment, that might befall the Muslims, will have to be endured by the Arabs.

A Backward Glance

We now turn to the history of Jews, in the hope that we Muslims might learn something from their ups and down.

By the time when the Qur'an was being revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the Jews had already passed through two phases of rise and two phases of decline. In general, they enjoyed prosperity and political domination as long as they acted righteously, and suffered from misery and slavery and persecution whenever they tried to rebel against the Divine commands. The Jews were invited, through the Qur'an -- and that invitation is still open -- to accept Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as the last Messenger of God and to repent for their collective sins. They were clearly warned that rejecting Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the Qur'an would mean that their humiliation will continue. The Qur'an proclaims:

We announced to the Children of Israel in the Book: "You will surely create disorder twice in the land, and become exceedingly arrogant." So, when the time of the first prediction came, We sent against you Our creatures full of martial might, who ransacked your cities; and the prediction was fulfilled. Then We gave you a chance

lives, to preach God's Message worldwide and in every generation till the end of the world, and to struggle tirelessly with the objective of making Islam dominant as a socio-political order. The previous Muslim ummah, in contrast, was never required to perform all these duties.

The second point of difference between the Jews and the Muslims is that, in contrast to the former who were a uniraical community, being composed of only the 'Children of Israel' or the descendants of Prophet Jacob (or *Yaqaob*), the present Muslim Ummah is a multiracial and multinational community. The Jews themselves, or any other nation for that matter, can join the Muslim Ummah anytime they want -- by accepting Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as the final Messenger of God; their race, color, language, or previous creed notwithstanding.

The Muslim Ummah is basically a diverse group of people belonging to all kinds of different national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In general, however, the Muslim Ummah can be seen as being composed of two distinct components: the descendants of Prophet Ishmael, referred to in the Qur'an as *ummiyeen* (the unlettered people), as well as all other peoples and nations, referred to in the Qur'an as *aakhereen* (those of later time).

In other words, the Muslim Ummah is made up of a nucleus or a core of Arabs, surrounded by non-Arab nations, whether they be Kurds or Turks, Persians or Indian, Afghans or Muhgals, Black of African origin or Whites of European descent. The common element or the binding force that brings all of them together and keeps them united -- at least in theory -- is obviously their faith and ideology, that is, Islam.

It is rather gratifying to learn that we Muslims enjoy a two-fold superiority over the Jews. But it doesn't take a genius to realize that being superior also means that we have to fulfill a whole lot of extra responsibilities and obligations. The Jews were repeatedly punished for their collective crimes, but if we were to

The Difference Between Us and Them

There are two important features which not only distinguish Muslims from the Jews but also prove the former's clear superiority over the latter. The first is related to the fact that the present Muslim Ummah is collectively responsible to preach and spread the Message of God, and to try her utmost for establishing the domination of Islam over the entire globe. This stupendous duty is, in fact, a logical corollary of the culmination of Prophethood.

The most outstanding characteristic of the advent of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is that, with him, the institution of Prophethood has reached its acme of perfection. Since the ultimate echelon of prophetic evolution has been reached, there shall be no more prophets. But the world has not yet ended, and the humanity is still thirsty for the knowledge of the Real and still yearning for a just social system. It follows that now the Muslim Ummah is responsible, as a whole, to continue the work of the prophets.

The Qur'an proclaims that the purpose behind the advent of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is the establishment of the ascendancy and domination of Islam over all aspects of life, all over the world. The following words appear thrice in the Holy Qur'an, defining the manifesto for a global Islamic Revolution:

It is He who sent His Messenger with The Guidance (*Al-Qur'an*) and the true way of life (*Deen-ul-Haq*), in order to make it prevail over the entire system of living. (9:33; 48:24; & 61:9)

Unlike previous messengers of God, the advent of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was not just for his own nation, the people of Arabia, but it was also directed towards all mankind in general, for all times to come. Again, unlike the Jews, who were asked only to act in accordance with the Mosaic law, the Muslims have a much extensive and arduous task before them, that is, they are obliged to guide and lead the entire humanity. Muslims are required to obey the commands of God in their own

the change of *qibla* from Jerusalem to Makkah symbolically announced the birth of a new ummah.

The Jews were relegated from their rank because of their attitude of transgression. The Qur'an severely criticizes and upbraids them for their long record of ingratitude and repeated violations of Divine injunctions, and declares them a condemned people. These reprimands are because of the continued failure, on the part of the Jews, to carry out their responsibilities as custodians of the Divine Revelation. From the Second year of Hijra onwards, the followers of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) were appointed as guardians of the Message of God, as well as His representative among all nations. Thus, this supreme blessing of God, i.e., His revealed guidance in the form of a Book, is something common to both the Jews and the Muslims; though the Hebrew scriptures are no longer in their pure and unadulterated state. In this context the following verse appears twice in the Qur'an:

Remember, O Children of Israel, the favors I bestowed on you and made you exalted among the nations of the world. (2:47 & 122)

Another point of convergence between the Jews and the Muslims is the prominent personality of Prophet Abraham (Peace be upon him), the patriarch who is equally revered by the followers of both faiths. The Jews, of course, are the descendants of Prophet Isaac (or *Ishaq*), younger son of Abraham. Similarly, the earliest Muslims were Arabs -- the descendants of Abraham's elder son Ishmael (or *Ismael*) -- and they constitute today the nucleus of the Muslim Ummah. More than that, the whole of the Muslim Ummah has an attitude of veneration and high regard for Prophet Abraham, as they consider him to be their spiritual father.

such a community is always preceded by -- and is the direct result of -- a *Shariah* being given to a Messenger and through him to his followers. Since there had been only two versions of the Divine Law that we can be sure about, i.e., the Mosaic Law and the *Shariah* of Prophet Muhammad, it follows that there had been only two Muslim ummahs -- the Israelites or the Jews who were the previous ummah, and the community of the followers of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), which constitutes the current and final Ummah.

Next, we shall discuss the common features and distinguishing characteristics of these two ummahs, along with a brief review of their history and the present state of their affairs. The relevance of this topic is based upon the fact that, according to the predictions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the Muslims and the Jews of the world -- as custodians of Divine Revelations -- are going to act as two key players with regard to the ultimate destiny of mankind.

Certain pointers of the Qur'an and detailed prophesies in the Hadith literature predict the events that would happen before the end of the world, or about the final acts of the global drama. It is vital to comprehend these predictions with reference to their proper background, not only to clear our minds of any distrust or doubt, but also to prevent a sense of astonishment when that which has been promised does take place.

Another reason for discussing the previous ummah, as will be elucidated shortly, is the stunning resemblance between the history of Jews and that of Muslims, a fact that was also foretold by Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Common Denominators

The Jews remained the sole custodians of the Divine Message and His Book for almost two millennia -- from about 1350 BC, when Prophet Moses was given Torah and the Covenant with the Israelites took place at Sinai, to 624 CE, when

LESSONS FROM HISTORY-II

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The Muslim Ummah: Current & Previous

The word "Islam" stands for submission before the sovereignty of Almighty God, as proclaimed by His prophets throughout human history. The number of these holy men, as mentioned earlier, is reported to be 124 thousand. However, irrespective of the exact figure, it is generally accepted by scholars of the Qur'an that five of them are the most prominent and most notable. These include Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (God's peace and mercy be upon all of them).

Out of these, Prophet Noah (or *Nuh*) was probably not endowed with any Divine Scripture. Prophet Abraham (or *Ibrahim*) did received some sort of scriptures, but there was no formal law or *Shariah* in them. Similarly, the Psalms of David (or *Dawood*) and the Gospel of Jesus (or *Isa*) contained nothing that can be described as law; instead, they were composed respectively of hymns and exhortations. It follows that, among the known Divine Revelations, only two can be described as "Books", in the sense that they contained *Shariah*, -- the Torah and the Qur'an. The former is the name given to the "Five Books of Moses", also called the "Pentateuch", which are included in the beginning of the Old Testament. The latter, i.e., the Holy Qur'an, is the final and ultimate Book as revealed to Prophet Muhammad. (God's peace and mercy be upon all of His prophets).

It is significant to note that the Torah was revealed to Prophet Moses (or *Musa*) as a guidance only for the Israelites, whereas the Qur'an -- being the last of Revelations -- describes itself as "The Guidance" for the whole humanity.

The main conclusion of the above discussion, however, is that there had been only two Muslim "ummahs" during the entire period of known human history. This is because the genesis of