



PEOPLE • EVERYWHERE • ALL • CREATED • EQUAL

## “Children of Abraham”

### “The Children of God”

We hold this truth to be self-evident... “All Created Equal.” During the summer of 1776... this truth changed the course of history. When half of humanity was not treated with essential dignity, this truth opened the door of possibility to all women. When segregation stained the face of the one-of-a-kind nation of the United States, this truth insisted that all of God’s children must be free at last! It seems so simple; and yet, nothing has been more evasive around the world than this still self-evident truth.

For a land and a people wounded and weary, there remains a healing balm: “All Created Equal.” When callousness, animas, bitterness and envy yield endless war upon even the innocent, can we try a new approach? Can we begin to consider answers from the essential starting point of “People Everywhere... “All Created Equal.” Regardless of what steps happen next, may we begin with conversation and compassion... and may reasoned wisdom prevail. In all subsequent actions, let us build upon this strong and sure foundation.

The three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are known as “Abrahamic Faiths,” as each considers Abraham a vital figure. Upon such common ground, enduring peace between these religious traditions could have been assumed; and yet, this has clearly not been the case. For hundreds of years, there has been a perpetual tear in the family of God... resulting in bitter animus and even brutal violence between the “Children of Abraham.” Today, we might ask whether such great faiths are being rightly understood and practiced. Is genuine faith to be judged by what is built or by what is destroyed?

Abraham flourished over four thousand years ago, as the first of the Hebrew patriarchs. When he was 100 years old, God granted him a son (Isaac) through his elderly wife, Sarah. This son would become the progeny of many prophets, including Moses, David and Jesus. In the Torah, God blesses Isaac, “*I will make your descendants as numerous as stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations will be blessed.*” -Genesis 26:4.

In an epic story of obedience, Jews believe Abraham went to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice Isaac, as an atonement for sins. In this account, Isaac is unaware that he is to be the sacrifice until Abraham binds him and puts him upon an altar of wood. Just before Abraham’s knife comes down upon his son, an angel of the Lord intervenes... and a ram is sacrificed in his place. Isaac becomes the father of Jacob and is given the name “Israel,”... and his 12 sons become the 12 tribes of Israel.



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In Islam, Abraham is known as “the Father of Prophets.” Known as Ibrahim in the Quran, he is honored for his obedience and submission to Allah. As one of the most frequently named persons in the entire Quran, Ibrahim is called a friend of God and an example for all mankind. He was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave him his first son (Ishmael). The story in the Quran is unique when compared to the Biblical account, as Abraham intends to sacrifice Ishmael (who is aware of the plan and agrees with it).

And thus, Ishmael has become a glorious example of surrendering to God’s Will (the vital quality in Islam). Even in the Torah, God blesses Ishmael, *“I will surely bless Ishmael; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of 12 rulers, and I will make them into a great nation.”* -Genesis 17:20. According to the Quran, Ishmael is the fulfillment of God’s promise... with the Prophet Muhammad being his descendant.

For Christians, Abraham is seen as the “Father of the Faith” and is honored for his faithfulness. *“All nations will be blessed through you. So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* -Galatians 3:7-9. In Christianity, the genealogy of Jesus is traced from Isaac; and most significantly, Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac is seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

In this understanding, Christians meld together the Old Covenant between God and Abraham with a New Covenant provided through Jesus Christ: God offering the Perfect Sacrifice for all of mankind. Jesus once told a parable that could be most useful here: *“There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will go, sir,’ but he did not. Which son did what the father desired?”* -Matthew 21:28-31

All three Abrahamic Faiths believe that God intervened to spare Abraham’s son; the “near-sacrifice” had been a matter of developing Abraham’s faithfulness. Moreover, all three faiths acknowledge God as the Creator of the universe. All three believe that humans are created in the image of God. All three teach believers to be kind to the stranger. All three preach humility and to fill one’s life with good works. Amidst so much commonality, we might step back and ask a simple question, “Are the comparatively minor differences worthy of the endless suffering that is continually affecting the most innocent?” If and when the conflict is more political in nature than religious, shouldn’t people of genuine faith stand up and shout the Eternal Truth?



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Perhaps every Jew should search the faces of Moslem children. Perhaps every Moslem should search the faces of Jewish children. Christians might consider how Jesus portrays the assumed righteous (the priest and the Levite) up against the perceived lowly (the Samaritan). Prior to telling “the good Samaritan” parable, Jesus offers two commandments which He says summate the Law: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.”* -Luke 10:25-37

In the realms of humanity, differences are always easily apparent and they can forever be the focus of attention. Still, each of us is free to focus on the things we share... like the love for our families. In a time and place so dominated by the dark forces of atheism and secularism, genuine faith in God has so much to offer this weary world. On this new day, may the *“Children of Abraham”* reason together: Is it not exceedingly manifest that Abraham loved both of his sons... and God’s blessings extended to both of them?

Jews, Moslems and Christians may never agree about who Abraham intended to sacrifice; however, is this worth the never-ending animas and subsequent suffering? When the Torah, the Quran and the Bible speak so loudly and continually about performing good works, surely the voluminous presence of such teachings rise above the partisan differences. How many innocent children will die before professing believers answer to the everlasting commands of their respective faiths?

At this point, some readers may think this writer is advocating for all religious traditions to ignore the core particularities of their respective faiths. This would be convenient, but also most inaccurate. This writer is simply asking that believers demonstrate their faith’s core demands such that God is honored and His children are blessed. In this, let everyone openly and honestly consider the fruits born of the respective faith traditions. Herein, let a skeptical world behold the manifest good that can arise from seeking to serve the One who is the Creator of all.

Lastly, readers may be pondering the possible bias of this writer; this is a fair concern. However, does my personal faith really have anything to do with the ideas I have just presented? Truth is God’s; it is not contingent upon any human speaker. This being said, I believe the Eternal Truth is best revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Christ offered himself as the Perfect Sacrifice... and more, He triumphed over death itself. On this new day, Christ is risen! In Him is the Everlasting Light of the world... shining freely to all. And so, if and when there is an either/or, I lean upon Jesus as being *“the Truth, the Life and the Way.”*



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I have read the Torah and the Quran and find them to be captivating and inspiring on many levels. And so, I ask that everyone take a few moments to consider the parables of Jesus that are captured within the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Additionally, I ask that everyone consider the three short chapters of Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Upon reading these excerpts, core questions will naturally arise: How did such transcendent texts come into being? How did Jesus so perfectly know the human condition? How are His teachings forever timeless?

Beyond these considerations, every person is free to make their own determinations and decisions. In all of Creation, is it not self-evident that God's first gift is Liberty? Though He gives everything freely, God does not force or coerce anyone. He calls; He directs; He yearns... He offers Eternal Life to all who surrender their own will to His. The "*God of Abraham*" desires that we would choose to reach back to Him, so that He can give us ever more! Let us all seek the prerequisite humility... "*for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" -Luke 14:11

Today, we can all grow wiser in appreciating the ancient proverb, "*If you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans.*" For God has plans of His own: He is preparing a great banquet for all of His children. May we someday gather at His table to and eat and drink as His children... forever! "*From every Mountainside, Let Freedom Ring!*"

Until then, let us remember the vision of Isaiah: "*God will be the judge between different nations. When they argue, he will decide who is right. They will take their swords and make them into ploughs. Their spears will become knives for cutting vines. Nations will no longer need weapons to attack each other. They will not prepare for war anymore.*" -Isaiah 2:4

May the *Children of Abraham* think anew this day, "*Are we doing what is pleasing to God?*" May believers in America's Founding Principles consider the full meaning of this sacred creed. May "*All Created Equal*" be operative in both personal and national decision making. And lastly, may we pause to consider the parable that reveals precisely where God is in these matters: "*Truly I tell you, whatever you did unto the least of these children of Mine, you did unto Me.*"

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."* -Matthew 5:9