Errors and lack of clarity pointed out above may appear trivial and a matter of semantics at the first glance, but that is not so. Revision and correction should be carried out before a second edition is considered.

All this notwithstanding, the reviewer would like to express his admiration for the achievements of the translator as well as the reviewers of the volumes. They have done a superb job of translating an important text relating to *sirah* which is admittedly a tedious and toilsome task and demands expertise in both languages, English and Arabic. While serious scholars of Islam will still consult the work in its original Arabic, the value of this translated work lies in the fact that for the first time Ibn Kathir’s original Arabic work has been made accessible to the general English readership, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization deserves our gratitude and congratulations for embarking successfully on this monumental project.

Syed Salman Nadvi

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Both the Bible and the Qur’an have narrated the event of Abraham [Ibrāhīm] offering his son for sacrifice to God. There are, however, several significant differences in the two narratives. While the Qur’an does not mention the name of the son who was offered for sacrifice, the Bible claims that it was Isaac [Ishāq]. It has been the predominant view of the Muslim scholars that in fact it was Ishmael [Ismā’il] who was offered for sacrifice and that the word “Isaac” was later interpolated in the original narrative of the Bible. The famous Indian scholar of the twentieth century, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāḥī (d. 1349/1930), who was also the founder of a new school of *tafsīr*, wrote a valuable book on this issue entitled *al-Ra’y al-Šāhib fi man huwa al-Dhabīh.*

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1 It was translated into Urdu by Amin Aḥsan Islahi, *Dhabīh Kaun Hay?* (Lahore: Khuddām al-Qur’ān, 1975).
Following in his footsteps, Abdus Sattar Ghauri has accumulated a host of arguments to further strengthen this thesis. He, however, differs with Farāḥi on some issues while at times, it seems, he altogether misses Farāḥi’s line of argument. For instance, an important question is why did Abraham offer the sacrifice of his son? Ghauri gives the evidence of the tradition prevalent in the ancient Near East about the offering of the first-fruit and the first-born (p. 27). But why was Abraham following the “prevalent tradition”? Was Yahweh like other deities of the age demanding human sacrifice? Ghauri considers it a temptation (p. 37). But why was God testing Abraham’s faith in this way? “Abraham had proved himself worthy of becoming the father of a mighty nation, which would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the sea-shore... Yet to modern ears, this is a horrible story: it depicts God as a despotic and capricious sadist and it is not surprising that many people today who have heard this tale as children reject such a deity.”

The lack of an adequate answer to this question makes Ghauri’s work more of a historical research than a theological quest. Farāḥi has a different approach. Relying on the Qur’anic narrative (37: 102), he opines that God did not command Abraham to offer his son for sacrifice; rather, it was a dream, and dreams always need interpretation. The most suitable interpretation could be that Abraham should ‘sanctify’ his first-born son for serving the Lord’s house. He also showed that in the ancient Hebrew religion there were similar rules for sacrificial animals and sanctified persons. Instead of interpreting the dream figuratively, Abraham decided to offer his son for actual sacrifice after taking him into confidence. At the last moment when both had shown willingness of absolute surrender to God, He intervened and stopped them from doing so.

There is also the issue of methodology for critically analyzing the Biblical narratives. Ghauri has basically relied on the ‘source analysis’ theory, although he seems selective in applying it to different passages of the Bible. Thus, he does not apply it to the 84th Psalm and instead presumes that David was its author (p. 125). This theory considers the Old Testament to have been written by different persons at different times and places and to have been derived from different sources. The authorship and dating of the different Biblical passages are ascertained on the basis of different assumptions. For instance, the verses in the Torah that give an anthropomorphic description of God are ascribed to an older source ‘J,’ while those that depict Him as a Transcendent Being are ascribed to a relatively later source ‘E.’ Similarly, the verses that

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explain the acts of the patriarchs in moral terms are ascribed to another later
source ‘P.’

Although this theory has settled some problems relating to the exegesis of
the Bible, it still has its inherent defects, such as its inadequacy to
accommodate the oral traditions. For Muslim scholars this theory poses some
serious questions, the most important of which is: how can we relate the
events as mentioned in the Qur’an or/and the Hadith to those mentioned in
the Bible if this theory is accepted? For instance, the event of sacrifice in the
Bible is ascribed to ‘E.’ The Qur’anic narrative is different from this and, as
noted above, solves an important ethical problem. If it were mentioned in the
Bible, the exponents of the ‘source analysis’ theory would have readily
ascribed it to ‘P.’ Similarly, according to the ‘J’ verses God “appeared” to
Hagar, while the ‘E’ verses say that it was the “angel of God” Who appeared to
her. Ghauri has quoted a tradition from al-Jāmi’ al-Šāhiḥ of Imām Muḥammad
b. Ismā’il al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869) that endorses the latter narrative (p. 177).
The problem is further aggravated when an event mentioned in the Qur’an or
the Hadith is found in the oral traditions of the Jewish people (such as the
event of Abraham being thrown to fire by the orders of Nimrod). What
should be the position of Muslims in this regard? Indeed, it is incumbent upon
Muslim scholars to develop a theory (or theories) of their own for critically
analyzing the Biblical accounts.

Ghauri is of the opinion that the sacrifice story of Genesis cannot be
accepted in toto; rather, each statement must be examined and accepted on its
merits. He elaborates the meaning and importance of the title “the only son”
and concludes that it could only be applied to Ishmael because he remained
“Yacheed” (cf. Arabic “wahid” meaning the only one) of Abraham for more
than thirteen years (pp. 15–26). He also provides evidence of the tradition of
offering of the “first-fruit” and the “first-born.” Farāḥi suggested that there
should have been the word “bikr” (meaning first-born) in the original
narrative. Ghauri quotes the Book of Jubilees (18: 11–15) to substantiate this
claim. Another title of the son offered for sacrifice was that he was the
“beloved son” of Abraham (Genesis 22: 2). So, Ghauri tries to ascertain who
was entitled to this title. In fact, there was no need to mention “the weaknesses
of Isaac” (p. 42), especially when Ghauri has asserted that both Isaac and
Ishmael were prophets and as such both should be equally revered (p. 5).
Similarly, there was no need to deny Abraham’s love for Isaac as well, as his
presumption is that Isaac was not born at the time of the offering of Ishmael
for sacrifice.

Ghauri also discusses the location of the site of sacrifice — Moriah. He
does not think Hebron, Mount Cavalry or Mount Gerizim worthy of serious
consideration (pp. 49–53). He, however, understandably refutes the claim about the site of the Jerusalem Temple in some detail. In his opinion, it was a “theological invention” on the part of the Chronicler to name the site of the Temple as Moriah (p. 55). He also links it to the rivalry between the Israelites and the Samaritans. Relying on the “source analysis” theory, he asserts that the Book of Chronicles was written some seven centuries after the building of the Temple. Here he gives a detailed note on the authenticity of the Book of Chronicles, although it did not seem necessary. It could well be placed in an appendix. In his opinion, Moriah is the same as al-Marwah in Makkah (pp. 85–86). Along with linguistic arguments he also gives “circumstantial evidence” of the traditions relating to the great sacrifice, which were prevalent among the Arabs even before the revelation of the Qur’an. Relying on some traditions, he also asserts that the horns of the ram sacrificed in place of Ishmael remained in Makkah for a long time. Several Muslim scholars including Farahi, however, do not consider these traditions to be authentic. Even more surprising is Ghauri’s claim that the Qur’an records that Ishmael was ransomed with a ram (p. 84). What the Qur’an has stated is simply that he was “ransomed with a great sacrifice” (37: 107).

Ghauri, then, makes the case for Makkah as the house of the progeny of Ishmael (pp. 99-105). He also provides very strong evidence to show that the prophesy in Isaiah LX about the offering of sacrifices in the Temple relates to the Ka’bah and not to the Second Temple (pp. 107–23). He suggests that David took refuge near Makkah during Saul’s campaign against him. This leads him to attempt to locate the Valley of “Bukā’” mentioned in the 84th Psalm. He suggests that the word has not been pronounced correctly because the earlier manuscripts did not have vowel signs. The correct word could well be “Bakkah,” the ancient name of Makkah, as mentioned in the Qur’an (3: 96). He then quotes several authorities on the Arabic lexicon to ascertain the meaning of the word “Bakkah” in Arabic. But surprisingly enough, he does not mention the viewpoint of Farahi. In Farahi’s opinion, the root “BKK” in ancient Middle Eastern languages denoted a city or dwelling place. Thus, the name “Ba’llbakk” meant “the City of Ba’l” (the ancient Middle Eastern deity). Moreover, the word “Bakk” was also pronounced as “Bagh,” which in Persian language means a “garden.” This word is still found in the name of the great city of Baghdad. The same word Bakkah was later pronounced as Makkah. The Biblical scholars, whether intentionally or otherwise, changed the pronunciation of the word and converted it into “Bukā’,” which means “weeping!”

Ghauri ends his work with three Appendices and a comprehensive Index. In the first Appendix, he attempts to locate Beersheba. In this regard, he also criticizes the story of the Weaning Feast (Genesis 21: 8–21). In his opinion, Abraham did not expel Hagar and Ishmael from home. “It was rather the design of the Lord to plant a center and a mission of monotheism in the heart of Arabia” (p. 158). Again, relying on the ‘source analysis’ theory, he concludes that there are three different versions interwoven with each other. After separating them he claims to have discovered the Well of Zamzam in the Bible:

The word “Beersheba” has been used at 34 places in the Bible. It is only once in the whole of the Bible that it is preceded by the qualifying word “wilderness” (Gen: xxi: 14) and Abraham had settled Hagar and her son Ishmael in it. It is for the first time that the word “Beersheba” has been introduced in the Bible. At the same time it is the sole place in the whole of the Bible where the word “Beersheba” is related to Hagar and Ishmael both. The “Beersheba” related to the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech is quite a different place, hundreds of miles away from it, and having nothing to do with it (p. 166).

In the relevant passage, the word used for “wilderness” is midbar, which “signifies a mountainous, sandy, desolate, inarable place” (p. 169). In his opinion, Beersheba meant the “Well of Seven” named after the seven rounds of Hagar between al-Šafā and al-Marwah in search of water for the lad; in other words, it was the well of Zamzam. The other Beersheba meant the “Well of Oath” named so after the covenant between Abimelech and Abraham or Isaac. The latter cannot be termed as “wilderness” or “desert” because it was a suitable pasture (pp. 172–73). According to Ghauri, Abraham spent most of his time at this latter Beersheba, although he permanently settled in Hebron (pp. 173–74). Farāḥi, on the other hand, believed that there was only one Beersheba and that Abraham settled permanently there so that he could see both of his sons at convenience. He believed that the “wilderness of Beersheba” was so termed because it was an uninhabited land. In fact, Ghauri also attests this usage of the word (p. 166). Farāḥi thought that the ritual of sa’y in Hajj commemorates the earnestness of Abraham and Ishmael to offer sacrifice to the Almighty. He also believed that the area was so called because Abraham dug seven wells there (Genesis 26: 18–33). Furthermore, the Biblical narrative of Hagar’s plight apparently suggests that Beersheba already existed there at that time, and that at the end another well was shown to her (Genesis 21: 19). Hence, the discovery of Zamzam in the Bible needs further and stronger evidence. Although after his attempts to locate al-Marwah, Makkah
and Zamzam in the Bible it seemed quite natural that Ghauri would also try to locate al-Šafā, yet he did not do so.4

In the Second Appendix, Ghauri gives heaps of evidence about the different types of intentional and unintentional corruption in the text of both the Old and the New Testaments. This is followed by a brief account of the history of the Temple of Solomon in the Third Appendix. These appendices have added to the value of this scholarly work.

However, some passages have been written in a polemic style. (See, for instance, pp. 20–25). The argument provided for such “aggressive referencing” (p. 1) does not seem convincing. At times, there seems unnecessary repetition (pp. 76–80, 110–111). Moreover, the text has not been composed in one font. The name of Ishmael has been written differently at different places (such as Ishmael, Isham’el, Isma’il). Apart from the passages quoted from other sources, the text should have been written in one uniform manner. While quoting big paragraphs Ghauri uses explanatory notes within the body text. Although he uses square brackets for this purpose, yet this practice should not be encouraged, especially when such explanatory notes are quite lengthy (see pp. 65 and 115). Similarly, while quoting verses from the Bible, Ghauri also gives remarks in the footnotes. Sometimes it becomes quite difficult to distinguish between the verse number and the footnote number (see pp. 108–114). On the whole, however, the book has been written in a scholarly manner and the author attempts to accumulate irrefutable arguments in support of his views.

Muhammad Mushtaq Ahmad

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This last book to be published during his residence on earth has a distinctive mediaeval aura — a time in which Martin Lings (d. 2005) wished to have lived. The thirteen Sufis whose poems have been included in this slim volume are

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4 Some other scholars have worked on this. See, for instance, ‘Abdul Ahad Dawud, Muhammad in the Bible (Dawhah, Qatar: Presidency of Shariyah Courts and Religious Affairs, 1991), 37–49.