

“Tony Maalouf has presented to the Christian world a masterful piece of scholarship on a much neglected topic. The place Ishmael and his descendants have in sacred Scripture has long been overlooked. This book can inform and enlighten both scholars and lay readers on a critical topic in our day. Although [*Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel*] brings to bear an impressive range of scholarship and deals extensively with original sources, it is highly readable. The Arab background to the book of Job, along with Proverbs 30–31, is convincingly presented. Fresh options for new, legitimate translations of key verses are presented with care and sensitivity. Any Christian trying to sort out the Scriptures and the troubled Middle East of past and present must, by all means, read this book with care.”

—KENNETH E. BAILEY

Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern New Testament Studies  
The Ecumenical Institute (Tantur), Jerusalem

“Some Christians who believe God’s promises to Israel can tend to have a rejectionist’s derogatory attitude toward Arabs. Dr. Tony Maalouf, an evangelical Arab Christian scholar, opens our eyes to scriptural teaching about Arabs, much of which is usually overlooked. To bless the Jews does not mean we have to curse the Arabs.

*Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel* is an excellent study for any believer interested in the Middle East and the Arab world.”

—PATRICK CATE

President of Christer

“Most Western Christians believe the children of Israel are God’s chosen people, but are unsure how to view the sons of Ishmael. They rejoice to hear of Jews acknowledging Jesus as messiah, but know little about Arab believers. [This] highly trained Arab believer’s book will help clarify issues, answer questions, and create a concern for all Abraham’s children.”

—STUART BRISCOE

Minister-at-Large, Elmbrook Church

“Dr. Tony Maalouf tackles the often contentious subject of Arab-Jewish relations with *insight*, *kindness*, and *clarity*. His *insight* comes from his personal background and years of experience in the Middle East. His *kindness* comes from a heart that loves both God and those created in the image of God—including both Arabs and Jews. And his *clarity* comes from his deep knowledge and skillful handling of God’s Word. In tackling a topic that generates more heat than light, Tony seeks to turn down the thermostat and pull back the curtains. Here is a coherent presentation of God’s plan for Abraham’s ‘other son.’”

—CHARLES H. DYER

Senior Vice President and Provost  
Moody Bible Institute

"I am delighted to recommend with enthusiasm *Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel*, written by my good friend Tony Maalouf. His insistence that the children of Ishmael are loved by God and play a distinctive role in the salvific destiny of those who place their faith in Christ is long overdue. My reading of Tony's fine treatment has expanded my appreciation of Paul's seminal statement that Jew and Gentile are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). *Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel* is a must-read for every student of current affairs in the Middle East."

—RONALD YOUNGBLOOD

Professor of Old Testament

International College and Graduate School, Honolulu, Hawaii

"Dr. Maalouf's work is a much needed clarification of pertinent passages and promises concerning the relationship between the Arabs and the Jews. A native Lebanese who received his higher education in both France and America, Dr. Maalouf is uniquely qualified to assess both the ancient and contemporary situation. With his expertise in biblical languages he shows the reader in convincing detail that God's original intent was for the sons of Ishmael to be a blessing for the sons of Abraham, not a threat. They were to live side by side in harmony and protection. And when God took the light to the Gentiles, the sons of Ishmael were the first Gentiles to receive the message. Hopefully, this enlightened understanding of God's original intent will help us here in the West to better understand God's intent for Israel today and in the future."

—DAVID R. ANDERSON, PH.D.

"A fascinating study, which gently debunks many of the myths of the Arab peoples. Of particular interest is the defense of the Arab Christian, who stands in the crosshairs of culture, politics, and upbringing. [*Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel*] offers fresh insight into an age-old conflict and will engender much dialogue."

—ERGUN MEHMET CANER

Coauthor of *Unveiling Islam*

Associate Professor of Theology and Church History  
Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

ISHMAEL  
IN THE  
SHADOW  
ISRAEL



# ISHMAEL IN THE SHADOW ISRAEL

God's Prophetic Plan for Abraham's Firstborn

TONY MAALOUF

Foreword by Eugene H. Merrill



KREGEL  
MINISTRY

*Ishmael in the Shadow of Israel: God's Prophetic Plan for  
Abraham's Firstborn*

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*To my dear wife and children  
for their steadfast encouragement  
and support of this book project*







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## FOREWORD

ONE OF THE MOST INTRACTABLE CULTURAL and political issues of modern times has been the stormy relationship between the State of Israel and its near and more distant Arab neighbors. Despite repeated wars interspersed with troubled and uneasy times of peace, there appears to be no human solution to the profound distrust and even bitter hatred that characterizes the mutual interaction of these children of Abraham.

In recent years the rise of militant Islamic fundamentalism has added a new dimension to what has been up until now a political problem for the most part. The visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount, also the site of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, sacred to Muslims, triggered a violent reaction from Palestinian Arabs, one that has resulted in the death of thousands of Israelis and Arabs alike. For every action by one side there has been an opposite reaction from the other, inevitably of a more violent and horrendous nature. There is thus in place a spiraling of animosity, one that threatens to destroy both peoples if left unresolved. And all in the name of religion.

No people are more torn by the ravages of the Middle Eastern conflict than believers in Jesus Christ, especially those whose eschatology teaches that God has an ongoing role for the Jew to play in the unfolding of the kingdom to come. The “messianic” Jew finds himself at odds

with his own culture for having abandoned his ancient Jewish traditions and he also stands in jeopardy from Arab terrorism that hardly distinguishes among Israelis of any kind. Even more to be pitied, perhaps, is the Arab Christian, particularly the Palestinian, for he is more likely than not to be linked by his fellow Arabs with Jewish and Christian Zionism and by Israelis as “just another Arab” whose hostilities toward them may be taken for granted. What, if anything, can be done to resolve the impasse, especially as it relates to brothers and sisters in Christ on both sides of the cultural and political fault line?

What has been needed is a well-informed, dispassionate, and articulate response by Arab and Jewish spokespersons who share a common faith in Jesus the Messiah. The present volume makes giant strides toward accomplishing that objective, at least from the Arab Christian perspective. His Lebanese roots and upbringing, his impeccable academic credentials as a biblical scholar, and his years of ministry in the Middle East qualify Dr. Tony Maalouf, with unparalleled insight and sensitivity, to address the complex issues that confront God’s people in this vortex of terror and hopelessness.

The great burden of this endeavor is to trace the history of the Arab people back to its biblical roots, back to Abraham and his son Ishmael, recognized by both the Bible and the Qur’an as the ancestor of the millions of people who call themselves Arab. Reading the biblical text in fresh ways—ways possible, perhaps, only to an Arab—Maalouf displays profound exegetical and theological skills that enable his readers also to view Ishmael and his descendants in a new light. He does not gloss over the sins and shortcomings of his people, nor does he take sides in the struggles between Jew and Arab in the modern world. He does, however, make clear the profoundly important role that the Arab has played in biblical times and since, and he displays his burden, like that of Paul, that his own Arab people might be saved. One can only hope that this effort might be met by one from the pen of a Jewish believer. Between the two could come a message of reconciliation in line with the ministry of our Lord himself who came to make us all one in him.

—EUGENE H. MERRILL



## ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR	<i>Annual of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.
AOAT	<i>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</i>
ARAB	<i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i>
ARNA	<i>Ancient Records from North Arabia</i> . Edited by F. V. Winnett and W. L. Reed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>

BDB	<i>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>Bib Sac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CEV	Contemporary English Version
EI	<i>The Encyclopedia of Islam.</i> New ed., 11 vols. Edited by E. van Donzel et al. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979–2002.
EJ	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica.</i> 16 vols. Jerusalem: Encyclopedia Judaica; New York: Macmillan, 1971–72.
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
FEI	<i>E. J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam, 1913–1936.</i> 9 vols. Edited by M. Th. Houtsma et al. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987.
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.</i> Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Rev. ed. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88.
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOR	<i>Journal for the Study of Oriental Research</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KB	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. <i>The Hebrew</i>

	<i>and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited by M.E.J. Richardson. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996.
KJV	King James Version
LB	Living Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAV	New American Version
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i> (NS)
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . 11 vols. Edited by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by David E. Green and others. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2001.
TOTC	The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>TSF Bulletin</i>	<i>Theological Student's Fellowship Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>







## INTRODUCTION

# ARABS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

ONE OF THE BLESSINGS SOMETIMES taken for granted in the United States is the availability of good Christian radio stations, which broadcast challenging messages of life and death, giving people something to think about while pursuing their daily routine. Several years ago I used to turn to one of these stations every morning on my commute to the seminary. I was constantly blessed and challenged with the Word that many times impacted me for the rest of the day. Yet, one morning, a famous preacher from the West Coast preached a message that deeply disturbed me, causing me to turn the radio off and start thinking.

I do not remember the various details of the message, but I still recall that somehow the subject turned to Abraham and Hagar. “If Abraham was not so impatient,” said the speaker, “we would have been spared much headache in the Middle East today.” Implied was that Abraham’s impatience before God—compared to *our* great patience, obviously—led to Ishmael’s birth and sustained enmity and struggle between the line of Ishmael and the line of Isaac until today. Though it was not the first time I had heard similar claims about Abraham’s role in the birth of Ishmael, it was the first time I stopped to ponder the reasons behind and the consequences of such criticism. What

increased my interest in the subject was an earlier discovery of a veiled truth regarding Ishmael.

Over the past few years, I have come to conclude that negative comments like that of the West Coast preacher betray three crucial facts related to the line of the slave woman. First, they show how narrow our view of God's sovereignty is. The same God who planned a redemptive role for the line of Isaac (Gen. 17:19) designed a major historical role for the line of Ishmael as well (16:10; 17:20). God planned to save thousands of those guilty of crucifying Christ through the same death they were culpable for (Acts 2–3). Second, they reveal how much current events in the Middle East influence our interpretation of the biblical text. Finally, they disclose our ignorance of many details in biblical and secular history, for we assume that history supports our theology in the matter of Ishmael's enmity to Isaac, when it does not.

Had Abraham not been so impatient, we might have been spared the headache of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East today. Yet replacing Arabs with another ethnic group might have only changed the name of the conflict and unfortunately kept the headache. On the other hand, removing Hagar's descendants from the picture would affect many details we tend to ignore in God's design of world history and human redemption. First, it removes large sections of secular history important to the fulfillment of God's purpose. Most important, it removes a multitude of names written in the book of life throughout salvation history. Finally, it removes several inspired portions of the biblical text related to this specific ethnic line.

The West Coast preacher may not have intended his casual comment to cause such damage. It was most likely a passing remark, and not premeditated. It may also have been said as an irony in order to magnify human guilt and vindicate God in his ways. Yet, this passing statement is only one among many signals that betray a negative stereotype concerning the slave woman and her line, common in many Christian circles today. The confusion can only be overcome by an in-depth study of the Word of God and an objective pursuit of the truth. However, the negative image of Ishmael in Christian circles in the West

may be related, among other things, to deeply rooted biases against Arabs in general in broader Western societies.

## THE STATUS QUO

In a forum held in Oxford on June 7, 1998, "The Arab Image in the West," participants summarized the current feelings toward Arabs common in the West.

These negative perceptions are seen daily in the Western media, in books, in statements by politicians, in Hollywood films, and in the behaviour and views of members of the public. The results of opinion polls and other surveys, particularly in the U.S.A., confirm these negative images.<sup>1</sup>

The report on the forum goes on to say,

An analysis of six opinion polls and surveys carried out in the U.S.A. between 1981 and 1996 indicates how perceptions of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S.A. evolved during that period. . . . The analysis shows that security concerns other than historical or cultural factors are the dominant variables influencing the perception and images of Arabs. . . . The Arab image in the U.S.A. can be drastically affected by the latest headlines on violence and terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

After any likelihood of Arab involvement in the Oklahoma City bombing had been disproved, the polls showed a slight improvement in people's disposition toward Arabs.<sup>3</sup> However, since that forum, additional events took place that only caused the picture to go downhill. The worst that could happen to the Arab image came about with the hideous terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City and Washington. As a reaction against these events, a global war against terrorism was started under the leadership of the United States. As this book goes to press, we are still watching the different phases of

this war unfolding. Amid this disorder, attempts to adjust the picture of the Arabian descendants of Abraham became more needed, though all the more difficult to achieve.

The problem of ethnic partiality has deeper roots than casual preferences. It is caused by several of the sociopolitical factors already mentioned above. But most important for the present study is that it signals a chronic misunderstanding of portions of Scripture that will occupy us in the remainder of this book. However, before this is attempted, it is necessary to sketch the background needed for the upcoming discussion, which will clarify our path and help answer a few subconscious questions.

## ARABS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Who are the Arabs, and where did they come from? A brief survey of the postbiblical history of Arabs follows, bypassing their legacy in biblical times since this will be developed more fully in the upcoming chapters.

Arab peoples today are native citizens of twenty-two countries belonging to the League of Arab States, where classical Arabic is the mother tongue and the official language of the people. These nations number in total no less than 250 million individuals. Although Islam is the religion of the majority of them, Arab countries include religious minorities of variable sizes, encompassing several Christian denominations, as well as a handful of Jewish groups. These nations today extend over the whole of the Middle East and North Africa in addition to the Arabian Peninsula.

However, in biblical times, Arabs were geographically restricted to the Arabian Peninsula and some of its outskirts. The term *Arab* originated from a mostly nomadic lifestyle. Genealogically, scholars generally agree that Arabs show up in three biblical lists. These are the descendants of Joktan (Gen. 10:25–30), accounting for the south Arabian stock; the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn (25:12–18), accounting for the north Arabian tribes; and the descendants of Abraham through Keturah (25:1–6), which mostly populated central

Arabia.<sup>4</sup> A fourth line of genealogy through Cush, son of Ham, is sometimes suggested (10:7).<sup>5</sup> The obvious thing, however, is that by the end of the first millennium B.C., Ishmael and his line had become the dominant representatives of north and central Arabia.<sup>6</sup> Having started in the north, they managed over time to have most parts of the peninsula gradually identify with them, regardless of various ethnic bloodlines. What concerns us more in this introduction is how these Arabs—a population of nomads living in Arabia—spread geographically and became what they are now.

### PRE-ISLAMIC ARABS

Islam as a religion did not appear in Arabia until the seventh century A.D. Until then, Arabs were under the influence of various political, economic, and religious trends.<sup>7</sup> Though the period is conventionally referred to by Arab Muslim historians as the “period of ignorance” (*Jahiliyyah*), this could not at all have meant that Arabs before Islam were ignorant.<sup>8</sup> Outstanding poets existed among Arabs during the period; many of them belonged to the Christian tradition. Analysis of their poetry yields evidence of tremendous wisdom literature and sophisticated metering as well as mature art and literary styles.<sup>9</sup>

Politically speaking, north and south in the peninsula, there were impressive monarchies in pre-Islamic times. The Sabaean kingdom of south Arabia displayed an elaborate civilization in the vicinity of today’s Yemen. These people monopolized the production and distribution of frankincense and myrrh along with trading in other exotic goods for centuries before the rise of Islam. Living in secluded areas, they enjoyed long periods of peace, which helped them concentrate on trading and civic life. According to the historian Diodorus of Sicily (first century B.C.), the kingdom of Sheba in south Arabia surpassed “not only the neighboring Arabs but all other men in wealth and in their several extravagancies besides.”<sup>10</sup> The Sabaean rule in the south was replaced by the Himyarite dynasty (115 B.C.) and continued until the early sixth century A.D., when the Ethiopians succeeded in taking

control of their land.<sup>11</sup> However, the Ethiopian presence in south Arabia did not last long before the Sassanid Persians led a successful conquest aimed at controlling the crucial seaports of the southern part of the peninsula in A.D. 575.<sup>12</sup> Jewish presence, whether by conversion or from the diaspora, was significant in central and south Arabia by the sixth century A.D.

With the dawn of the Christian era, the remarkable Nabataean kingdom with its renowned capital of Petra established itself as the primary Arab power in the northern Arabian Desert. The Nabataeans' rise to political and economic glory started in the fourth century B.C., when they successfully defended themselves against the Greek leader Antigonos the One-Eyed, one of the commanders of Alexander the Great. Diodorus reports how Antigonos launched two attacks against the Nabataeans in 312 B.C.; both campaigns failed to subdue these nomads.<sup>13</sup> Having begun as a nomadic power, which replaced the Edomites over Mount Seir (Jer. 49:7–22; Ezek. 25:8–14; Mal. 1:2–5), they managed quickly to dominate major sections of the Arabian Peninsula for over four centuries. The Nabataeans reached the apex of their glory during the days of King Aretas IV (9 B.C.–A.D. 40), when New Testament events took place. The Romans had always had their eyes on the Arabian Peninsula, mostly to control the seaports that linked the south to India, until then monopolized by the Sabaeans.<sup>14</sup> The famous Roman expedition against Arabia under the leader Aelius Gallus (24–25 B.C.), which was somehow assisted by the Nabataeans, proved to be a total failure. Consequently, Rome changed its strategy to overcome the commercial monopoly of Arabia. Having replaced the Ptolemies over Egypt, the Romans revived the access to the Red Sea, and hence to Indian resources via the Nile.<sup>15</sup> Thus the trade monopoly of south Arabia was broken. This weakened the internal south-north trade system and affected all the states benefiting from south Arabian trade. The Nabataean economy gradually was destabilized as a result of that Roman breach.<sup>16</sup> The weakened Nabataean rule ended and their capital fell before the Syrian governor Cornelius Palma and was annexed to Rome in A.D. 106.<sup>17</sup> The magnificent city of Petra, lying in today's country of Jordan, became hidden for many centuries

until its discovery by the Swiss explorer John L. Burckhardt on August 22, 1812.<sup>18</sup>

Other small kingdoms flourished in north Arabia in pre-Islamic Christian times. First among these were the Palmyrenes with their famous caravan city Palmyra to the northeast of Damascus. These Arabs were famous for their beautiful queen Zenobia, who dared to defy the Roman emperor by claiming to be “Queen of the East” and declaring her son Caesar Augustus.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, Zenobia’s claim was seriously challenged by Rome, when Emperor Aurelian sacked Palmyra, destroyed the city, and led its queen captive in golden chains to Rome in A.D. 272.<sup>20</sup> That the Palmyrenes were Arabs is evident from their Arab names, though, like the Nabataeans, they used Aramaic in their official communications.<sup>21</sup> During the Palmyrene period an Arabian leader by the name of Philip, from the city of Shahba south of Damascus, rose to power and became emperor of Rome. “Philip the Arab,” as he was conventionally called, ruled the Roman world from A.D. 244 to 249. There is impressive evidence that this Philip became the first Roman emperor to adopt Christianity, preceeding even Constantine, who is widely thought to bear that distinction.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, two later kingdoms are worth mentioning here: the kingdom of the Ghassānids, which was centered in the neighborhood of Damascus, and the Lakhmid kingdom, which was centered in Hira, southwest of the Euphrates. Both of these were vassal states, the first to Byzantium in the West, and the second to Persia in the East. Both peoples adopted Christianity as a state religion, though the first followed Monophysitism<sup>23</sup> and the second adopted Nestorianism.<sup>24</sup> The Ghassānids claim to have descended from a south Arabian tribe that converted to Christianity in pre-Islamic times. According to tradition, their ancestral tribe migrated to the north and populated Hauran south of Damascus in the early centuries A.D. Though these kingdoms yielded powerful kings, which were often rivals, both the Ghassānid and the Lakhmid kingdoms were weakened by mistreatments from suzerains Byzantium and Persia. At the eve of Islam, these kingdoms were ready for a shift of loyalty, especially if it came from Arabia.<sup>25</sup>