

The Arab nations in prophetic light

*Good use is made of the book 'Arabs in the shadow of Israel' by Tony Malouf
(2003)*

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This topic is *fundamental* from the very first moment of its existence and increasingly *topical*.

The main thought is that the Arab peoples should not be viewed from Islam, but from their national identity, their roots. And they are in the tent of Abraham. That's why we will consider the prophetic line in the Holy Scriptures concerning the Arabs from a bird's-eye view. [1] Also some help will be offered, based on data in the Bible, to further a humble and loving encounter with the Arabs.[2] Finally, we will see, that prophecy absolutely casts a different light on Israel and the nations. And how thoroughly our attitude on this issue probably has to change. [3]

Chapter 1: prophetic light on the Arab nations

Chapter 2: a helping hand for a loving encounter with the Arabs

Chapter 3: Israel and the Arabs in the Messianic Kingdom

Chapter 1

Prophetic light on the Arab peoples

The way in which we consider Israel and Judah in connection with other nations, has to be the same concerning the Arab nations. We must start at the source: the book of Genesis!

Genesis as starting point

Mainly the Arab peoples are descendants of the twelve sons of Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-18), and the six sons of Keturah (Genesis 25:1-5). All these descendants are the natural offspring of Abraham. Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arab peoples, was the son of Abraham and Hagar, and Keturah became Abraham's wife after Sarah had died. Their mutual offspring are the mainstream of the Arab peoples, among which Ishmael and his sons are the most important.

The original title of the very fundamental and instructive book by Jenö Sebök 'Vrouwen van Abraham' (Wives of Abraham)¹ shows exactly from what point of view we have to consider the situation in The Middle East. The mental conflict that plays a role is absolutely inexplicable and incomprehensible if we do not understand the mental conflict between Ishmael and Isaac.

The revelation of the 'Angel of the LORD' to Hagar

Considering the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael, the accent is often placed on the jealousy of Ishmael and his being expelled, with his mother, from the tent of Abraham, after the pressure of Sarah (against Abraham's will) and ultimately of God Himself! Words like "*he shall be as a wild-ass among men, his hand shall be against everyman*" negatively influenced the words that follow "*and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*".

We need to remember a few things. First of all: Hagar received a revelation of the 'Angel of the Lord' twice. He was none other than the Son of God himself! The Son, who centuries later became flesh (man), descending from the tribe of Judah, revealed Himself to the mother of Ishmael (later the father of twelve sons and tribes). Twenty-four centuries later Mohammed claims that he received revelations from the Angel Gabriel. The Son of God is twenty-four centuries ahead of Mohammed and the latter will never catch up!

The ‘Angel of the LORD’ and ‘the Angel of God’

Not just the impressive fact that the ‘Angel of the LORD’ revealed Himself in person to Hagar, but also the content of the revelation is very fundamental. God addresses Hagar in her position as the ‘slave’ (servant) of Sarah. Not recognizing the position God gave to Sarah and not submitting to it, caused that a different spirit of submission was put on the Arab peoples, by fire and sword, and to millions of others. It would take ages from the time of Abraham before this would occur. What happened during these twenty-four centuries? Are the words of God false? Has he not spoken to Hagar, during her flight while pregnant, as well as after her definite expulsion from Abraham’s tent? Well, it seems that there is a small difference between the first and second speaking of the Son of God to Hagar. Four times He is called ‘The Angel of the LORD’ (Malach Jahwe) (Gen. 16:7,9,10,11). That is the Covenant name! Ishmael and Hagar, in fact all the slaves purchased on the market in Haran, were included in the Covenant of God with Abraham. All men were also circumcised, Ishmael too. But as soon as Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from the tent of Abraham, it says that ‘The Angel of God’ (Malach Elohiem) spoke to Hagar (Gen. 21:17). She then stands outside the Covenant and therefore it is not ‘The Angel of the LORD’ but ‘The Angel of God’ that speaks to Hagar prophetically. That contrast is reflected in a very strong way when we read Genesis 21 verse 17 in addition to Genesis 22:11. In the first case ‘The Angel of God’ speaks from heaven to Hagar and in the second case ‘The Angel of the LORD’ speaks from heaven to Abraham, on Mount Moriah. Obviously He is the same person, the Son of God, Who speaks directly from heaven to Hagar and to Abraham!

God’s compassion with Hagar and Ishmael

The content of the revelation of the Son of God to Hagar is largely positive. That Ishmael is a wild-ass among men, relates to the fact that the Arab peoples will survive in the desert for centuries. After thousands of years, they largely still live in the same place of their origin! He will stand up against neighbouring peoples, who attack him and are also living in the desert. As well as Jacob, Ishmael developed into twelve sons and twelve nations. It is as if God confronts the Arabs with brother Isaac and his progeny for centuries. Not to humiliate him by Isaac, but to be blessed in Isaac. That’s why the descendants of Ishmael always stayed in the desert around Israel. ‘Towards their brothers’ has a much more positive meaning than it seems!

The second time God speaks to Hagar after her departure from Abraham's tent and reveals an equally great love to Hagar and her offspring. He comforts her, He heard *"the voice of the lad where he is"*, and opens her eyes for a well of water. The passionate prayer of Abraham *"Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!"* (Gen. 17:18) is certainly answered here. *"God was with the lad"* (Gen. 21:20). And living in the immediate vicinity of Israel, both brothers will be a blessing to each other many times!

Ishmael raised in the fear of the LORD

When we realize that there are twenty-four centuries between Abraham and Mohammed, this question arises: it cannot be true that the influence of the God-fearing upbringing, that Ishmael enjoyed in the tent of Abraham, stopped when leaving! Searching for an answer, I came across the magisterial book by Tony Malouf 'Arabs in the shadow of Israel', published in 2003. I have used this rejoicing and comforting book gratefully. Important things Jenö Sebök suggests in his book, find a broader elaboration here. Let us mention the most important examples

Job, an Arab Sheik

It is remarkable that, when the Gospel also reached many among the Arab peoples, at that time the book of Job appeared in various translations in Arabic. At least, various versions are known. The book of Job is very old. The Jewish scholar Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra believed "that Moses wrote the book of Job. It seems to me that it is a translated book and as such, it is difficult to explain, as each translated book".² Several scholars consider Job an Arab Sheik. This is evident from his residential area. He was a semi-nomad. On the one hand he had very large herds, which could stand the heat in the desert (camels), but when it comes to sheep, cattle and goats, they certainly needed meadows. In addition he also possessed much farming land. This is also an indication for Job's hometown on the border of the Arab desert and the fields of Edom. As a matter of fact, his friends came from Edom too.

Is it not hugely impressive, if we realize what deep love and awe for God were present in Job's house? And if we think further: however Job did not belong to Israel, he did belong to Abraham's descendants. The descendants of Hagar and Keturah had not deviated from the fear of the LORD. How faithfully and passionately did Job watch over the mental well-being of his seven sons and three daughters. The weekly sacrifice of reconciliation that he made for them

after their common banquet, organized by his the sons in turns, is mentioned emphatically at the beginning of the book of Job. It underlined the testimony of his life, that he was *'perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil'*. How many Christians in The Netherlands could endure gloriously such a tough challenge as Job did? Without saying goodbye to respecting and loving God? Isn't it great to think, that the testimony of a non-Israelite did not get a second-rate place, but has received a worthwhile place in the whole of the Scriptures?

Solomon and the oriental world

Solomon's time was the 'Realm of Peace' in miniature. Solomon, but also his kingdom had the features of the Messiah. Solomon was familiar with many oriental scholars, from Egypt, Edom, as well from the Arab world. It is certainly not necessary, to picture the bride from the Song of songs as an Arab woman. This was suggested, inter alia, because of the comparison at the beginning. *"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon"*. But even though the comparison with 'the tents of Kedar' (Kedar was one of Ishmael's sons) does not hint at her Arab origin, it sounds at least friendly to the Arab world to let 'Kedar' comparatively enter the scene. As a matter of fact, many Hebrew words from Song of songs almost sound alike. That shouldn't really surprise us, for Hebrew is six of one and half a dozen of Arabic. Bearing in mind that Ishmael was raised in the tent of Abraham and spoke the same language, it makes sense that later the language of the Arabs differs no more from Hebrew than German does from Dutch.³

Are Proverbs 30 and 31 of Arab origin?

In the 19th century the thought occurred that the Hebrew word 'massa', mentioned in the first verse of Proverbs 30 and 31, should not be translated as 'oracle', but as a proper name. The name of a northern Arab tribe, named after one of the sons of Ishmael, Massa (Gen. 25:14). The translation of Proverbs 30 verse 1 then becomes: *"the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, of the tribe (the country) of Massa"*. If this other translation of 'massa' is correct, this means that words of Arab scholars are included in the Scriptures. That signifies the relationship of loving brotherhood between Isaac and Ishmael in Solomon's time. It also means a recognition of the fact that these Arab scholars recognized and served the God of Israel. Later we will come back on the content of the first part of proverbs 30 and 31. Anyhow, the main thought of Tony Malouf, that the

sons of Ishmael “dwelt in the presence of all their brethren” is convincing. In times of prosperity and great spiritual blessing of Israel they took part in that blessing! Even more so when they recognized their brother Isaac as their superior. Then the promise ‘I will bless those who bless you’ was realized. This promise applies to all the families of the earth, but certainly to Israel’s fraternal peoples. Charity begins at home!

Arab tribes during Israel’s decay

It is obvious that during the time of Israel’s spiritual decay, the relationship between Israel and the Arabs, did not radiate the blissful brotherhood as it did in Solomon’s time. This was Israel’s big responsibility for the nations from the beginning! Neglecting the message of Israel’s prophets would have very serious consequences. One of them was, that now room was made for the false prophet. Hosea seems to aim at this in chapter 9 verse 6-9. None other than the Jewish, medieval scholar Maimonides pointed out the meaning of these verses in his ‘letter to Teman’. He saw in these verses an announcement of Mohammed.⁴ That makes an accurate reading of these verses highly interesting. Let us read carefully what it says:

“The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it; the prophet is a fool, the man that hath the spirit is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and because the enmity is great. Ephraim was a watchman with my God: as for the prophet, a fowler’s snare is in all his ways, and enmity in the house of his God, They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeath: he will visit their sins”.

The days are come - foretells Hosea - that Ephraim will be punished for his sins. The ‘times of retribution’ are come. What is Ephraim’s biggest sin? That they have disregarded the voice of the prophets, and therefore of God himself. They went their own way and served pagan idols. Therefore, the penalty is extremely educational. When Ephraim despises the voice of prophecy, “*then they shall*” - Amos foretold - “*wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it*” (Amos 8:12). When they were very privileged, when God sent many prophets with a message to Israel time and again, they ignored it. Now they are in exile and miss the voice of prophecy, they go looking for God’s Word...and do not find it. Hosea goes one step further. Not only will they not find a true prophet, but even worse.... God will send them a foolish and insane prophet.

Ephraim has only himself to thank for the fact, that snares were laid on the ways of the prophet God gave to Ephraim, and he met nothing but enmity in the House of God. Neglecting the real prophets creates space for the false prophet. Ephraim (like Judah) is to blame for the rise of Islam! Islam is the poisonous plant that has grown on the refuse dump of Judaism and Christianity. Neglecting the prophets, and in particular Israel's greatest Prophet, Jesus, created a vacuum in which the false prophet could flourish.

This then was the prophetic light that the Scriptures spread over the draw-back of Israel and thus over the Arab peoples. But the bright sides will absolutely win. We urge ourselves to mention also something about the time when Israel will rejoice in the light of the Gospel.

The Arabs in the light of the Gospel

What is the consequence for the Arab peoples, when the Sun of righteousness will rise over Israel? We keep the masterly things Isaiah foretells about the participation of Arabs in the kingdom of priest that will be restored in Israel, till our last point. But also in the time of the first coming of the Messiah, the Arabs amply enter the scene. Starting with the birth of Jesus. I understand that Steve Collins in his book 'The "lost" ten tribes of Israel...Found', connects the Wise Men from the East and the lost ten tribes, paying special attention to the Parthians. Tony Malouf intercedes for the Arabs in this history and it is my opinion that he has convincing arguments. Firstly, the expression '*from the East*' in the Scriptures always points to the Arab desert, east of Israel. The peoples from Babylonia or Assyria are never mentioned in connection with the East, but always with the North. Abram chases the nations that attacked Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities, until Damascus and beyond, in a northerly direction. These peoples are not pointed out as coming from the East. But when Keturah and her offspring are sent away by Abraham, we read that this happened "*eastward unto the eastcountry*" (Gen. 25:5). The nations that destroyed the field crop on Israel's fields, seven consecutive years long, were "*Midian, Amalek, and the tribes of the East*" (Judges 6:3). Firstly they are referred to as 'Midian', later as Ishmaelites (Judges 8:24). For the Arab origin of Job pleads that he is called: Job 'the richest of all the inhabitants of the East' (Job 1:3).

In the second place: the gifts that the Wise Men brought with them are *gold, frankincense and myrrh*.⁵ The Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt carry as

merchandise balm serin to Egypt. Already five centuries BC Herodotus wrote: “Arabia is the most southern of all inhabited countries and it is the only country where frankincense, myrrh, kassia, cinnamon and balsam resin come from. All these products, except myrrh are hard to get for the Arabs”. The geographer Strabo divides the country of Arabia in five sections, two are myrrh producing and incense producing regions”. South Arabia was the spices producing country par excellence. “Two of the three gifts, which the astronomers offered to Christ, therefore formed a primary source for the economic power and wealth of Arabia for a long period of time”.⁶ Arabia was also known for the third product that the astronomers gave to Jesus, gold. The queen of Sheba, offered hundred and twenty talents of gold, very many spices and gems to Solomon (I Kings 10:10). David already prophesied of Solomon’s reign: “The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts” (Psalms 72:10,15).

The third clue, to make us think of the Wise Men as Arab princes, we find in Isaiah 60:6,7. Although this concerns especially gold and incense, offered by the sons of Ishmael and Keturah - the Arabs - in Jerusalem and the temple during the Messianic Kingdom, we may surely think of the sacrifices of the Magi as a fore fulfilment of this prophecy.

Arabs during the highlights of Israel’s history

Finally, Tony Malouf points to the remarkable fact that it still is the Arabs, who play a role on the intersections of Israel’s history.⁷ Joseph is sent ahead to Egypt to later save the seed of Jacob and the whole oriental world from starvation. The Ishmaelitish merchants are the link in this story and they bring Joseph to Egypt. When Moses runs for his life, he finds a safe haven for many years at the home of a Midianitish priest, Jethro. He even marries his daughter, Zipporah. Moses had an Arab wife!

The visit of the Queen of Sheba - a South Arabian country - is certainly the highlight in the international influence that Solomon spread. Because of “the call related to the name of the LORD”, she makes the long journey to Israel.

When Joseph and Mary with the child Jesus must flee to Egypt for their safety, are the Arab tribe princes the ones who make the voyage to, stay in and return from Egypt financially possible by their bountiful gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Chapter 2

A helping hand for a loving encounter with the Arabs

When we let all these data from the Scriptures soak in, the question arises: what does understanding this prophetic meaning of the Arabs in the Scriptures mean for us and our eventual meeting with Arabs? Briefly we give a helping hand with a few practical guidelines.

1. Do not go to meet the Arabs with your biased knowledge about them, but from God's revelation to Hagar.
2. From God's speaking to Hagar you can learn to look at them with love, expectation and respect. Do not judge them by how they have become by Islam, but how they are designed from God's revelation and plan.
3. Pray that God gives you love and understanding from his Word when meeting with Arabs. Let them know how deep God's mercy was for their mother Hagar and the cries of her son Ishmael.
4. Tell them that the book of Job in the Bible is a thick book. And that Job, although of Arab origin, has been given an honourable place in Israel's bible.
5. The biblical Job struggles with God as with a friend! There is a great development in the book of Job. It contains no rigid image of God. The rigid theology of the friends becomes invalid. Wouldn't it be great, if the Arabs discovered how close God is. At first Job screams out: *"for he [God] is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him: that we should come together in judgement. There is no daysman betwixt us [i.e. between God and me], that might lay his hand upon us both....."* (Job 9:32,33). Some chapters later he has, struggling, found that referee. He says: *"Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven. And he that voucheth for me is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eyes poureth out tears unto God, that he would maintain the right of a man with God, and of a son of man with his neighbour!"* (Job 16:19-21). This is God, the Son, who advocates for Job by God, the Father. Here too, the Son of God appears as Mediator! A little further Job exclaims: *"but I know that my Redeemer liveth....."*. A redeemer was a relative. The son of God becomes man. Therein lies the solution!

6. The revelation of the Son runs like a golden thread through it all. In Proverbs 30 verse 1-4 an Arab prince of the tribe of Massa takes up a very humble position. He admits to be ignorant. As a matter of fact he asks Israel for wisdom: *“Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou knowest?”* Isn’t it marvellous, as we can read in a part of the book of wisdom, the Proverbs, that an Arab tribal prince, asks Israel for an explanation about Him, Who created all things and about the One by Whom, the Son, He created all things?
7. Should the joy and deep wonder about God’s plan with Israel and the nations, in which the Arab peoples are closest to Israel, not encourage us to pray for revelation, in order to look at the Arabs with the eyes of Jesus?
8. Did we ever notice, that in the list of languages in which the Galilean followers of Jesus testified of God’s great deeds, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jews and Arabs are mentioned close to each other? (Acts 2:11). Is that a coincidence?

Chapter 3

Israel and the Arabs in the Messianic Kingdom

In Isaiah 60 we read how at the same time that darkness will cover the earth, a great light will be seen over Israel. Words, curiously proclaimed a few years ago by different foreign God-fearing men about the Netherlands! Nations will rejoice in Israel’s radiant rise. The nations will contribute to seeing Israel home. Mind, when God restores his people, he sees home all the tribes and collects all the displaced persons of Israel and Judah. This doesn’t mean, that the current situation in the land of Israel in the Middle east is no harbinger of that time. It is not yet the complete fulfilment, but an earlier fulfilment. For example, the fact that in the Messianic Congregation in Haifa, on Mount Carmel, Jews and Arabs are fraternally together in one congregation, is of some significance! The followers of Jesus in Israel set a good example. They are the first fruits and pull the chestnuts out of the fire. Let us not ask too quickly: ‘can they prove their descent from one of the tribes of Israel?’ Because that smells of pride. And besides: ‘can you prove your descent from Israel with documents?’ There is a lot

going on. And the return of a number of descendants from Israel, mixed with proselytes, is at least a sign of hope. Jerusalem is solid as a rock, freed from the Turks by the British in 1917. God does not do things by halves. In for a penny, in for a pound!

But there is a lot more on the stocks. Isaiah continues in chapter 60:5, and following verses, that the *'wealth of the nations'* will come to Israel. The Arab peoples have a lot of oil resources. And they are specifically mentioned. *"The multitude of camels will cover thee"*. The camel is characteristic for the Arab desert peoples. *"dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; they shall come from Sheba: "they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD"*. Midian was the son of Abraham and Keturah, Efa was a son of Midian. They represent, just as Sheba, one branch of the Arab peoples. *"All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee"*. Kedar was the second son, and Nebaioth the firstborn son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:14). The other and most extensive branch of the Arab peoples. *"They shall - says Isaiah - come up with acceptance on mine altar and I will glorify the house of my glory"* (Is. 60:7)

Going through these prophecies, in connection with other biblical prophecies, we understand that in the Messianic Kingdom the Arabs will stand side by side with Israel. They will invest their wealth in worshipping the one and only God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

What impact does this prophetic insight on the Arab peoples have on us?

It is always possible that people examine this insight on Israel and the Arab peoples and yet are not really changed by it. Why is that? Well, getting rid of your own insights and stepping down from your own height to stand next to the other, requires repentance, a radical turnaround and removing everything that is of the flesh. Only when we ask the question of the Jewish listeners after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "Brethren, what shall we do?", will we be prepared to lay down our pride and conceit and follow Jesus. Only then will we come closer to the heart of anyone, certainly that of Arabs,

In the Hebrew translation of Philippians 2 verse 5 it is written so beautifully: *"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"*. If that happens, love

will flow from us. For Jew and Greek, for Israel and Judah, and for all peoples. The Arab peoples first! We are no longer intimidated by Islam. We no longer look at our Muslim compatriots as invaders, like :”what are they doing here?”. Don’t we have a great command: “*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations....?*” That nations are among us. Whether our government acted wisely or not in the past, they are here. Maybe deeply hidden shame for our past, played a role to tackle our immigration policy so liberally for years. But there’s no sense in sulking. Where is the confession of guilt, the humiliation? Are we afraid of Islam? What then do we do with the word of John: “*greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world*” (I John 4:4). Isn’t Jesus greater than Mohammed? Is Islam more powerful than the Gospel? Is Jihad, the ‘holy war’ of Islam more powerful than ‘the wars of the Lord?’ Has a Muslim more to say than a faithful Christian? Many so-called Christian comments sound pathetic, cast a slur on God’s name, don’t give credit to Jesus’ victory by the cross and resurrection, misjudge the living hope of the prophets and miss the love that we, from God’s revelation, may have for any people or any fellow man.

We need to change our attitude. Not look at the Arabs from an angle of rejection, fear or knowledge of Islam, but from the Gospel. It’s amazing how many Muslims, in many so-called closed countries, are coming to faith in Jesus? If need be, the Saviour can do it without us. There are also many Muslims who come to faith by direct revelation. But it pleases God, for example, to powerfully use the work of Trans World Radio and Open Doors, the Arab World Ministries etc. Let our prayers, our hearts and our voices join in the choir of believers that proclaims the victory of Jesus and the coming of his Kingdom!

¹ New title after reprint: ‘Wat drijft de Islamisten?’ (What drives the Islamists?). Not available in the English language.

² Tony Malouf, ‘Arabs in the shadow of Israel’, chapter 6, not. 43, page 274

³ In the 19th century a language scholar, Dr. J.G. Wetzstein, made a comparison of the book Song of songs with an Arab love song, in which the lovers also chant each other. Although Song of songs is way out in front, yet it offers good comparisons anyway. The article of Wetzstein is included as an appendix behind the comment by F. Delitzsch on the Book Song of songs, Comm. On the Old Testament by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, part. VI, ed. William B. Eerdmans, Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted in 1978, pages 162-176

⁴ Yair Davidy, Ephraim, pages 28-31, ed. Brit-Am, Russel-Davis Publishers, Shiloh/Jerusalem/Susia, 1995

⁵ As early as in Genesis 2 is spoken of the land Havila as: “*And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone*” (Gen. 2:11-13).

⁶ Tony Malouf, a.w. pages 108,109

⁷ a.w. pages 214-217