

## Stories of a Blessed Family

### (part 1 of 2): Prophet Zachary



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This is the story of a feeble old man who loved and feared God; an elderly man, named Zachary (also called Zachariah), who had spent his life gaining knowledge and teaching others, purely for God's pleasure. The Quran tells his story in Chapters 3 and 19, and it is similar to the story told in the Christian Gospel of Luke<sup>[1]</sup>. However, we will concentrate on what the Quran has to say about this blessed man because Muslim's believe the Quran has remained unchanged since its revelation, whereas the previous messages have been lost, changed or distorted.

**“This is a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His slave Zachary; Remember when he called out to his Lord (God) a call in secret, saying: ‘My Lord! Indeed my bones have grown feeble, and grey hair has spread on my head, And I have never been unblest in my invocation to You, O my Lord!’” (Quran 19:4)**

Prophet Zachary was a member of the family of Imran, a blessed family whose members also included Jesus and his mother Mary. When the young Mary went into the House of Prayer in Jerusalem, God, by His wisdom and grace appointed Zachary her guardian. Each day he would visit Mary to be certain that all her needs were met. Mary's devotion to God impressed Zachary and he was amazed by the provisions he would find in her room. It is said that she would have the fruits of winter in the summer and the fruits of summer in the winter.<sup>[2]</sup> When Zachary inquired about how Mary obtained the fruits she replied that God, the Sustainer, was indeed the One who had provided her sustenance. Mary said:

**“It is from God. Verily, God provides sustenance to whom He wills without limit.” (Quran 3:37)**

When Zachary observed Mary’s total submission to God and her unwavering faith in Him as the Provider, it opened his eyes to a new concept.<sup>[3]</sup> No matter how overwhelming, or alternatively, insignificant our needs may feel to us, God is always there to listen and to respond. This is a very important idea to contemplate. *God will give to His righteous slaves without limit.* Mary had received fruits out of season; Zachary made supplication for something that according to human standards was not possible, for he and his wife were very old and the time for them to conceive a child had passed. The bounties of God are not constrained by worldly limitations, however, and anything is possible. Zachary learned this important lesson from his ward Mary.

So Zachary called out to his Lord in secret, saying that he was old, his hair was grey and his wife was also old and barren; yet he desired an heir who was pleasing to God. Zachary asked for a son to inherit from him; he was not thinking in terms of wealth, for he was a poor man. He desired a son to continue the Prophethood and to spread the knowledge that Zachary had acquired over his life time. God responded immediately, and said:

**“Then the angels called him, while he was standing in prayer in a praying place, saying: God gives you glad tidings of John (Yahya), confirming the Word from God, noble, celibate,<sup>[4]</sup> a Prophet from among the righteous.” (Quran 3:39)**

In this verse from Quran the “Word of God” has a specific meaning: Jesus, because he was created by a word from God - “Be” (and he was). Zachary’s son, John, was to be amongst those who believed in and followed the Message of Jesus.

When Zachary received this astounding news he was standing in prayer. He responded by asking how this could possibly happen, considering his old age and the barrenness of his wife. God then confirmed the lesson Mary had understood. **“Thus God does what He wills.” (Quran 3:40).**

Zachary asked for a sign, wondering how he would know that this miracle was really happening to him, and to his wife. God replied that he (Zachary) would lose the power of speech and not be able to communicate, except with signals. Zachary was instructed to spend time remembering and glorifying God, and he emerged from his praying place unable to speak.

The Quran tells us that Prophet Zachary and his wife performed good deeds, called on God with fear and with hope, and were humble, so God rewarded them, in their old age, with a son.

**“So We answered his call, and We bestowed upon him John, and cured his wife’s barrenness for him. Verily, they used to**

**hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us.” (Quran 21:90)**

This was no ordinary child. John was granted wisdom while still a child and was instructed by God to hold fast to the Torah. He was sympathetic and able to display compassion and mercy towards mankind. God created John, righteous, and free from sin.

**“O John! Hold fast the Scripture.’ And We gave him wisdom while yet a child, and made him sympathetic to men, as a mercy from Us, and pure from sins; and he was righteous.” (Quran 19:12)**

The sincere supplication of an old man and his barren wife was accepted by God, and a valuable lesson was taught to all of mankind. The bounties of God are limitless. He is the Provider, The Sustainer, The One!

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#### **Footnotes:**

[1] Luke 1:5-80

[2] Based on the work of Al Imam ibn Katheer. *The Stories of the Prophets*.

[3] Ibn Katheer.

[4] Ibn Katheer mentions in his commentary that the word used may not mean complete celibacy, for that would preclude children, but immunity from illegal relations outside marriage. Its literal meaning is “exclusive” and “restrained” (Al Mawrid al Waseet Arabic English Dictionary), and God knows best.

## **(part 2 of 2): Prophet John**

Jesus, Mary, Zachary and his son John are all members of the same family, the family of Imran, who are descendents from the family of David. We learn from God’s own words, in the Quran, that they were righteous, and worshipped God with true submission.

**“And Zachary and John and Jesus ..., each one of them was of the righteous.” (Quran 6:85)**

**“... and remember Our slave David, endued with power. Verily, he was oft-returning toward God in all matters and in repentance.” (Quran 38:17)**

**“And Mary was a truthful one; she believed in the words of God and His books ...” (Quran 5:75)**

John is the Prophet known by Christians as “John the Baptist.” However, neither the Quran nor the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad speak of John as either baptising or being baptised. John’s mission was to remind the Children of Israel that they had entered into a covenant with God. He spoke the same words as all of the Prophets of God – worship One God with full submission.

## A miracle child

In their old age, when all hope of having a child was gone, God provided Prophet Zachary and his wife with a miracle child. A son, the first child in the world named John. God, Himself, chose John’s name.

**“God gives you glad tidings of John, confirming the Word from God, noble, celibate, a Prophet from among the righteous.” (Quran 3:39)**

We know from the Quran that Prophet John was given wisdom as a child, and Islamic sources speak of him as being a quiet, gentle child, who loved learning and being outside amongst the animals.<sup>[1]</sup> John grew into a devout and noble man. It is said that he lived a simple life in the wilderness or desert, spending his time praying and remembering God. He was filled with compassion and mercy for those around him and all of mankind. The scholars of Islam have said that John wept out of fear and love for God, and that his tears left marks on his cheeks.

## John and Jesus

John was given strength and fortitude by God and was strong enough to control his worldly desires. He worked tirelessly, calling the people back to the laws of the Torah and endorsing the mission of his cousin, Jesus, Messenger of God. Part of John’s mission was to believe in and support the message of Jesus; **“...confirming the Word from God ...” (Quran 3:39)**. John refers to his cousin Jesus as the “Spirit of God“ and does so to place emphasis on the miraculous creation of Prophet Jesus.

In the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad (such as in *Saheeh Ahmad, Tirmidi* and others) there are stories relating to Prophets John and Jesus meeting and discussing their mission to guide the Children of Israel back to the straight path. Prophet Muhammad tells us that John gathered the Children of Israel together, and beseeched them to follow the commandments of God. To worship none but God; to pray; to fast; to give charity and to spend time remembering God.

God bestowed a special blessing upon his Prophet John. **“And peace be on him, the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he will be raised up to life again!”** This is the greatest blessing that can be bestowed upon a human

being. Peace – safety, security, contentment. This is the inevitable result of following the guidance sent to us from God.

The Quran and the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad do not reveal the details of John's death. We do know, however, that he was reviled and persecuted because of his strong insistence on following the law of God as revealed in the Torah, and that this eventually led to his death. John's life was one of struggle and striving, but he held tightly to the religion of God (to worship One God Alone) and died for his beliefs.

The family of Imran is a guiding light for mankind. Their devotion to God was unparalleled and their way of dealing with each other serves as a reminder to us. Each parent is concerned with their child's hereafter rather than the delights of this world. Each child respects and deals with their elders and parents with the affection and dedication commanded by God. The members of this blessed family served God with true devotion, and put His laws above all others. And God said:

**“So, as for those who believed (in the Oneness of God) and did deeds of righteousness, He will give their due rewards, and more, out of His Bounty. But as for those who refuse His worship and were proud, He will punish them with a painful torment. And they will not find for themselves, besides, God any protector or helper.” (Quran 4:173)**

Mary was one of the Truthful, Jesus was the word of God, John was neither arrogant nor disobedient and Zachary glorified his Lord. Together these descents of Prophet David are the blessed family of Imran, and they are an example to mankind. If we struggle as they struggled, if we believe with certainty, as they believed, and if we serve God with full submission, just as they served God, on the Day of Judgement, by the Grace of God, we may be counted amongst the righteous.

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#### Footnotes:

[1] Ibn Katheer.