# Sura 19 - *Maryam*

# مريم

## Introduction

This sura contains six sections. The first four describe Biblical prophets while the last two contain a polemic confirming revelation. The first two sections retell a story from the New Testament, namely the Gospel of Luke, regarding the parents of John the Baptist and Jesus respectively. The middle two sections refer to prophets from the Torah, especially Abraham.

## Zechariah and Mary

The first two sections of the sura concern Zechariah (father of John the Baptist) and Mary (mother of Jesus) respectively. It is a retelling of the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It relates the account of two miraculous conceptions. In the first, Zechariah’s wife is barren. This recalls the barrenness of Abra(ha)m’s wife Sarah (*cf.* Genesis 15:3 and Sura 51:29-30) as well as many other such stories from the Hebrew tradition (Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and so on). In the second, Mary is but a virgin (v. 20, *cf.* Luke 1:34). In the Christian tradition, this is interpreted as fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah (7:14, \_cf. \_Matt 1:22) though a more accurate translation of Isaiah is not “virgin” but “young woman”. Nonetheless, the virgin birth of Jesus is of great significance to Christians and Muslims alike.

This section ends with an admonition not to mistake the nature of Jesus, either as God (as the Christians do) or as a false prophet (as the Jews do). Ghazali considers these two verses to be pearls:[[1]](#footnote-1)

39: And warn them of the Day of Wistfulness (the Day of Sighing),  
When the matter will be decided.  
But they are in a stupor,  
And they do not believe.

40: Verily, We shall inherit the earth  
And what is upon it,  
And they shall be returned to Us.

## Abraham and other Prophets

The middle of the sura—verses 41-65—contains accounts of prophets knowns from the [Torah](file:////torah.md). The first part (vv. 41-50) describes Abraham’s relationship with his father. This, along with the polemic at the end against the Christian belief that Jesus is the literal son of God (v. 89) has been identified by Asma Barlas (2002) as “necessarily a conflict between monotheism and patriarchy (in its traditional sense).”[[2]](#footnote-2) In other words, the relationship between the child and the father is emphatically *not* like the relationship between a Muslim and God. This is quite distinct from the Judeo-Christian metaphor of God-as-Father which occurs in both Hebrew and Christian scripture.

The second part (vv. 51-65) describes other prophets from the Torah. Verses 56 and 57 refer to a prophet named Idris. Asad (2003)[[3]](#footnote-3) has this to say about this prophet:

The majority of the classical commentators identify the Prophet Idris . . . with the Biblical Enoch (Genesis v. 18-19 and 21-24), withouth, however, being able to adduce any authority for this purely conjectural identification. Some modern Aur’an-commentators suggest that the name Idris may be the Arabacized form of Osiris . . . but this assumption is too far-fetched to deserve any serious consideration. Finally, some of the earliest Qur’an-commentators [assert] that “Idris” is but another name for Ilyas, the Biblical Elijah.

Towards the end of the section are the pearls that Neuwirth describes the “reward of the pious”:[[4]](#footnote-4)

58: These are among the Prophets from the progeny of Adam  
Upon whom Allah bestowed His benevolence;  
(They were) from those We carried with Noah,  
And (they were) from the children of Abraham and Israel,  
And (they were) among those We guided and selected;  
When the Signs of the All Compassionate were revealed to them,  
They would fall down in prostration and cry.

59: There came inheritors after them who inherited (the legacies),  
They forgot the prayers and followed their base desires.  
Soon shall they meet up with their destiny;

60: Except such as those who repent,  
And have certainty of faith,  
And engage in righteous deeds;  
In that case, they shall enter the Garden,  
And, not the least excess shall they be subjected to.

## Revelation Confirmation

This last third of the sura is focused largely on confirming the revelation contained in the Qur’an. The fifth section includes this pearl:

76: And Allah increases the guidance for those who have received guidance,  
And the righteous deeds that endure  
Are better in the sight of your Rabb,  
Worthy of recompense,  
And better for reaching your goal (of Divine pleasure).

The sixth and final section ends with these jewels and pearls:

93: There is nothing in the heavens and the earth  
That does not approach the All Compassionate  
Except as a votary (and a servant).

94: Truly, He has surrounded them,  
And has counted them, (with precise) counting.

95: And all of them  
Shall appear before Him  
On the Day of Judgment,  
Alone.

96: Indeed, for those who have certainty of faith,  
And engage in righteous deeds,  
For them, the All-Compassionate  
Will bring forth love (on the Day of Judgment).

97: It is for this reason that  
We have made it (the Qur’an) easy for you, in your own tongue,  
So that you give glad tidings to those who have certainty of faith,  
And warn with it a people who are belligerent.

98: And how many settlements (civilizations) have We destroyed before them?  
Do you (now) see any of them?  
Or, do you (even) hear their whisper?

1. Quasem, Muhammad Abul. (1977). The Jewels of the Qur’an: Al-Ghazali’s Theory (p. 189). University of Malaysia Press. Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Asma Barlas. “Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran (Kindle Location 1484). Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Asad, Muhammad. (2003). The Message of the Qur’an (p. 517). Oriental Press. Dubai. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Neuwirth, Angelika. 2007.Studien Zur Komposition Der Mekkanischen Suren. (p. 269) Berlin: de Gruyter. (translation by [Google Translate](https://translate.google.com/#de/en/Lohn%20der%20Frommen)) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)