SAMPLE

The Honored Ones

The Stories of the Honored Ones in the Quran

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Introduction

Introduction

Maryam (Mary) — the mother of Isa (Jesus) — is the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran. Her name appears thirty-four times. She has a surah named after her (Surah 19, Maryam). She is described as "chosen above the women of the worlds" (3:42). She is the recipient of angelic communication. She is the model of purity, trust, and submission.

This book — the first in this collection — is devoted entirely to Maryam. This collection covers the other figures honored by the Quran — the men and women who are not prophets but who are chosen, tested, and exalted by Allah. Maryam is the first and greatest of these honored ones.

Maryam's story in the Quran spans several surahs: Al Imran (3), Maryam (19), Al-Anbiya (21), Al-Mu'minun (23), At-Tahrim (66), and others. She is mentioned in the context of her birth (3:35-37), her guardianship by Zakariya (3:37), the annunciation of Isa (3:42-47, 19:16-21), the birth under the palm tree (19:22-26), the return to her people and the vindication by Isa's cradle speech (19:27-33), and her pairing with Asiya as an example for all believers (66:11-12).

The question of whether Maryam was a prophet is debated among scholars. The majority position is that she was not a prophet but was given a special divine gift (karamah) — angelic communication and the miraculous birth. A minority position argues that she was a prophet, citing the direct communication she received and the word wahy used in reference to her. This book presents both positions without taking a definitive stance.

Maryam's story is not just a biography — it is a theological statement. Her purity, her trust, her submission, and her suffering are the model for every believer. The woman who was chosen above all women is the model for all people — male and female, in every time, in every place. The book traces her story through the Quran, explores her qualities and her lessons, and presents her as the first light in this collection — the light of the chosen woman, the light of Maryam.

Chapter 1: The Lineage of Maryam

1.1 The Family of Imran

The Quran introduces Maryam through her family — the family of Imran:

"Indeed, Allah chose Adam and Nuh and the family of Ibrahim and the family of Imran over the worlds — descendants, some of them from others. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing" (3:33-34).

The verse places the family of Imran alongside Adam, Nuh, and Ibrahim — the greatest prophetic families. Maryam is not an isolated figure; she comes from a lineage chosen by Allah. The family of Imran is the family of prophethood and righteousness — the family that produced Maryam, who produced Isa, the Messiah.

1.2 The Mother of Maryam

The Quran tells the story of Maryam's mother — a woman whose name is not given in the Quran (tradition identifies her as Hannah or Anna):

"[Mention, O Muhammad], when the wife of Imran said: My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, dedicated [to Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing" (3:35).

The mother of Maryam pledged her unborn child to the service of Allah — a vow of dedication. She expected a boy (who would serve in the temple). When she gave birth to a girl, she said:

"But when she delivered her, she said: My Lord, I have delivered a female. And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered. And the male is not like the female. And I have named her Maryam, and I seek refuge for her in You and for her descendants from Satan, the expelled" (3:36).

The naming is significant: "Maryam" — a name that means "one who worships" or "one who serves." The mother sought refuge for her daughter from Satan — a prayer that, according to Hadith, was answered: "No child is born except that Satan touches it, except Maryam and her son" (Bukhari).

1.3 The Acceptance by Allah

The Quran says:

"So her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zakariya" (3:37).

The acceptance is the divine response to the mother's vow. Allah accepted the girl — the girl who was not the boy her mother expected — and caused her to grow in a good manner. The growth is the divine nurture: Allah raised Maryam. The girl who was dedicated to Allah was raised by Allah.

1.4 The Care of Zakariya

Maryam was placed in the care of Zakariya — the prophet who would later pray for his own son, Yahya. The placement is significant: Maryam, the girl dedicated to Allah, is raised by a prophet. The prophet becomes her guardian, her teacher, and her protector.

The Quran records a remarkable detail about Maryam's childhood:

"Every time Zakariya entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said: O Maryam, from where is this [coming] to you? She said: It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account" (3:37).

The provision — food that appeared without explanation — is the first miracle associated with Maryam. She is a girl who receives divine provision in the prayer chamber. The provision is the sign: the girl who was dedicated to Allah is sustained

by Allah. Zakariya, the prophet, sees the sign and is moved — the next verse (3:38) records his prayer for a son, inspired by the miracle he witnessed in Maryam's chamber.

1.5 The Significance of the Lineage

The lineage of Maryam — from the family of Imran, through a mother who vowed, to a prophet who guarded — establishes her as a figure of divine election from before birth. She was not an ordinary woman who happened to be chosen; she was chosen before she was born, dedicated before she was named, and nurtured by Allah before she could speak. The lineage is the foundation: the woman who was chosen above all women was prepared for the choosing from the womb.

1.6 The Prayer Chamber — The Mihrab

The Quran mentions that Maryam was placed in a prayer chamber (mihrab) — a private space for worship. The prayer chamber is the symbol of Maryam's life: a woman who lived in the presence of Allah, secluded for devotion, sustained by divine provision. The mihrab is not a punishment or a prison; it is a sanctuary — the place where Maryam worshiped, where the provision came, and where Zakariya witnessed the miracle.

The prayer chamber is also the place of preparation. The woman who would bear the Messiah was prepared in the mihrab — the place of seclusion, devotion, and divine intimacy. The preparation is the pattern: the person who is chosen for a great task is first prepared in solitude. Maryam's years in the mihrab were the years that made her ready for the annunciation, the birth, and the vindication. The solitude was not loneliness; the solitude was the school.

1.7 The Drawing of Lots

The Quran mentions that Maryam's guardianship was determined by drawing lots:

"And you were not with them when they cast their pens to decide who would take care of Maryam, nor were you with them when they disputed" (3:44).

The lots — the casting of pens — was the method of determining who would have the honor of caring for Maryam. The dispute was real: the righteous men of the community wanted the honor, and they cast lots to decide. The lot fell to Zakariya — the prophet who was already her guardian by family connection.

The mention of the lots teaches a lesson: the honor of caring for the chosen is itself an honor. The men of the community disputed not over wealth or power but over who would have the privilege of raising Maryam. The person who serves the honored ones is the person who is honored by the service. The caretaker of Maryam was Zakariya — and Zakariya's own prayer for a son (3:38) was inspired by what he witnessed in Maryam's chamber.

Chapter 2: The Annunciation

2.1 The Choosing

The Quran describes the moment of Maryam's choosing:

"And [mention] when the angels said: O Maryam, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds" (3:42).

The verse contains three actions: chosen (istafaki), purified (tahharaki), and chosen above (istafaki — repeated with a different scope). The first choosing is the selection — Allah selected Maryam. The purification is the cleansing — Allah purified her from spiritual and moral impurity. The second choosing — "above the women of the worlds" — is the elevation: Maryam is not just chosen; she is chosen above all women, in all times, in all places.

The choosing is the honor. No other woman in the Quran is described with this language. The women of the Quran — Asiya, Hajar, Bilqis, Khadijah — are honored, but Maryam is chosen above them all. The choosing is not because Maryam earned it; the choosing is because Allah willed it. The grace is the grace of the Giver, not the merit of the receiver. Maryam is chosen because Allah chose her — and the choosing is the mercy.

2.2 The Command to Devotion

The angels continue:

"O Maryam, devoutly submit to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow" (3:43).

The command is the response to the choosing: the woman who is chosen above all women is called to devotion — to submit, to prostrate, to bow. The command is not a condition of the choosing but a consequence of it. The chosen one is called to live the choosing: to worship the One who chose her.

The forms of worship — submission (qanuti), prostration (sujud), and bowing (ruku') — are the physical expressions of the inner devotion. Maryam is not just inwardly devoted; she is outwardly worshipful. The body and the soul are both engaged — the woman who prays with her body and her heart is the model of holistic worship.

2.3 The Annunciation of Isa

The angels then deliver the news:

"O Maryam, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Isa, son of Maryam — distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah]. He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity and is of the righteous" (3:45-46).

The announcement is extraordinary: Maryam, a virgin, will bear a son — not just any son, but the Messiah, the word from Allah, the one who will speak from the cradle. The son is described with four qualities: distinguished in this world, distinguished in the Hereafter, among those brought near to Allah, and righteous. The son is no ordinary child; the son is the Messiah.

Maryam's response is the response of the pure:

"She said: My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me? [The angel] said: Such is Allah; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it: Be, and it is" (3:47).

The question is not doubt — it is inquiry. Maryam does not say "I cannot have a child"; she says "How will I have a child?" She is asking about the means, not questioning the power. The angel's answer bypasses the means entirely: "Such is Allah." The means is not the point; the will of Allah is the point. When Allah decrees, the decree is the means. The word "Be" (kun) is the mechanism — the command that creates without intermediary.

2.4 The Annunciation in Surah Maryam

The annunciation is also narrated in Surah Maryam (19:16-21), with different details:

"And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book Maryam, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east. And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man."

Maryam withdraws — to the east, behind a screen, in seclusion. The withdrawal is the privacy of devotion: the woman who worships in private is visited by the angel in private. The angel appears as a man — not as a radiant being or a terrifying apparition, but as "a well-proportioned man." Maryam's response is the response of the cautious:

"She said: Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah" (19:18).

The seeking of refuge is the first instinct of the pure: the woman alone with a strange man seeks protection in Allah. The instinct is the character — Maryam does not assess the situation rationally; she seeks refuge immediately. The angel responds:

"He said: I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you a pure boy" (19:19).

Maryam asks the same question:

"She said: How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?" (19:20)

The angel answers:

"He said: Thus [it will be]; your Lord says: It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter already decreed" (19:21).

The two accounts — Surah Al Imran and Surah Maryam — complement each other. Al Imran emphasizes the choosing and the theological significance. Maryam emphasizes the human experience — the withdrawal, the fear, the seeking of refuge, the question. Together, the two accounts give a full picture: the theological (she was chosen) and the personal (she was afraid).

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