SAMPLE

Zakariya: The Father in Old Age and

the Gift of Yahya The Story of Prophet Zakariya (زكريا) in the Quran and Islamic Tradition

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This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

Zakariya (عليه السلام —) Zachariah — is the prophet of patient prayer. He served Allah for decades in the temple, guiding his people, maintaining the worship, and growing old. He had no child, and his wife was barren, and the prospect of his line ending was a grief he carried in silence. Then, in the solitude of the temple, in a moment of private supplication, he prayed — not loudly, not publicly, but in a whisper so quiet that only Allah could hear. And Allah answered. The answer was Yahya — John — a son given to an old man and a barren woman, a gift that defied biology and confirmed the power of the One who answers prayer.

The Quran tells Zakariya's story primarily in Surah Al Imran (3:35-41) and Surah Maryam (19:1-15), with additional references in Surah Al-Anbiya (21:89-90) and the prophetic lists. The narrative is intertwined with the story of Maryam (Mary), the mother of Isa. Zakariya was Maryam's guardian — the priest responsible for her care in the temple. His prayer for a child was inspired, in part, by his observation of Maryam: he saw that Allah provided for her out of season, and he thought — if Allah provides for her, can He not provide for me?

The Quran's account of Zakariya is a story of supplication and response. It begins with a prayer, continues with a sign, and ends with a sign of silence. Zakariya asked for a sign — a sign that the promise would be fulfilled — and the sign was that he would not speak to people for three days except by gesture. The silence was not a punishment; it was a sign — the sign that the word of Allah was being fulfilled, and the human voice should be still while the divine word was being enacted.

Zakariya is the prophet who bridges the old world and the new. He was a priest of the old temple, serving in the tradition of the Israelite prophets. But his son, Yahya, would be the forerunner of Isa, and his ward, Maryam, would be the mother of Isa. The three — Zakariya, Yahya, and Isa — form a sequence: the old priest, the young prophet, and the Messiah. Zakariya is the beginning of the sequence, the link between the ancient prophetic tradition and the new.

This book traces Zakariya's story through the Quran: his guardianship of Maryam, his inspired prayer, the divine response, the sign of silence, the birth of Yahya, the qualities of the son, and the lessons for every person who prays and waits. It is the twenty-second light in the NurOne - The Prophets series — the light that prayed in a whisper, the light that was answered beyond expectation, the light that showed that Allah hears the prayer that no one else hears.

The Quran's treatment of Zakariya is remarkable for its intimacy. Unlike the narratives of Nuh, Ibrahim, or Musa — which cover lifetimes of public confrontation — the story of Zakariya is the story of a private moment: an old man, alone in a temple, whispering a prayer. The Quran does not narrate a public ministry, a confrontation with a tyrant, or a miraculous escape. It narrates a supplication and a response. The scale is small — one man, one prayer, one answer — but the significance is vast. The small story contains the big truth: Allah hears the prayer that no one else hears.

The privacy of the prayer is the key to its power. The Quran specifies that Zakariya called to his Lord nida' khafiyya — with a private call (19:3). The word khafiyya means hidden, secret, not known to others. The prayer was not offered in public worship, not in the assembly, not before the community. It was offered in the heart of an old man, in the solitude of the temple, in the silence that only Allah can penetrate. And it was this — the privacy, the secrecy, the intimacy — that made the prayer the one that was answered.

The story of Zakariya is also the story of the connection between prayer and provision. The prayer was inspired by provision — the provision that Zakariya found with Maryam. And the prayer was answered with provision — the provision of a son. The circle — provision inspiring prayer, prayer producing provision — is the Quran's pattern of the relationship between the servant and Allah. The servant sees the provision and prays; Allah hears the prayer and provides. The cycle is continuous, and each cycle strengthens the relationship.

The Quran shows Zakariya as an old man who turned to Allah with a request that seemed impossible. In Surah Al Imran, Allah says: "And the angels called to him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber: Allah gives you glad tidings of John, confirming a word from Allah, and honorable, chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous" (3:39). The verse captures the moment when the prayer was answered — not with a gradual process but with a direct announcement from the angels while Zakariya stood in prayer. The Quran describes Zakariya's reaction not as celebration but as astonishment: "He said: My Lord, how will I have a boy when I have reached extreme old age and my wife is barren?

The angel said: Thus Allah does what He wills" (3:40). The question is not doubt. It is wonder — the wonder of a man who knows that what he is asking for is beyond the natural order, and who receives the answer that the natural order is not a limit on the One who made it.

The Quran adds Zakariya's prayer in detail: "My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has flared with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy. Indeed, I fear the successors after me,

and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir" (19:4-5). The prayer begins with weakness — old bones, white hair — and moves to hope — the request for an heir. The example of Zakariya reveals that the believer turns to Allah in both states: in the recognition of limitation and in the hope for what only Allah can give. The prayer is also honest about fear — the fear of what comes after. Zakariya does not hide his concern for the future of his people. He brings it to Allah and asks for a solution. The answer comes in the form of Yahya — a son given for a purpose, a prophet raised to carry a mission forward.

The Quran elsewhere records the moment of Yahya's birth and Zakariya's response. In Surah Maryam, Allah says: "So Zakariya came out to his people from the chamber and said to them: Exalt Allah in the morning and the evening. And he said: O Yahya, take the Scripture with determination" (19:11-12). The verse shows Zakariya emerging from his prayer chamber with a command: exalt Allah. He does not announce the miracle. He does not tell the story of the angels. He simply says: praise your Lord, morning and evening. Then he turns to his son Yahya, still a child, and says: take the Scripture with determination. The Quran introduces this as a life's work compressed into two commands — praise Allah, and hold fast to the Book. Zakariya's story ends with the beginning of Yahya's, a torch passed from father to son, from one prophet to the next, in a family where the impossible had become real.

The Quran mentions Zakariya one final time in Surah Al-An'am, placing him among the righteous: "And Ismail, Alyasa, Yunus, and Lut — and all We preferred over the worlds" (6:86). And in Surah Al-Anbiya: "And We admitted them into Our mercy. Indeed, they were of the righteous" (21:86). Zakariya is included in these collective references, his name carrying the same weight as those with longer narratives. The example of his inclusion reveals that the length of a prophetic story is not the measure of its importance. What matters is the faithfulness of the messenger and the truth of the message. Zakariya prayed for a son and was answered. The son became a prophet. The father's prayer became a link in the chain of revelation. That is his legacy, and the Quran considers it sufficient for us to know.

The Quran places Zakariya in a unique position in the prophetic narrative: he is the bridge between the old world of temple worship and the new era of prophethood that includes Yahya and Isa. His story is told in Surah Al Imran alongside Maryam, connecting his prayer for a son to her extraordinary pregnancy. The Quran weaves these stories together because they are threads of the same pattern: Allah giving children in circumstances that defy the natural order. Ibrahim and Sarah were old. Zakariya and his wife were old.

Maryam was a virgin. In each case, the Quran uses the birth to demonstrate that the natural order is not a limit on divine will.

Zakariya's story establishes that the believer never stops asking, even when the answer seems impossible, and that the answer, when it comes, comes from the One who is not bound by what He created. The Quran's record of Zakariya closes with the image of an old man in a prayer chamber, and an angel announcing life, and a silence that became the sign. The simplicity of the story is its power. No drama. No conflict. No war. Just a prayer, an answer, and a son who became a prophet.

Chapter 1: Zakariya in the Quran

Zakariya (عليه السلام) appears in multiple passages:

Surah Al Imran (3:35-41) — The most detailed narrative. Covers Maryam's birth and dedication to the temple, Zakariya's guardianship of her, his inspired prayer, the angelic response, the request for a sign, the sign of silence, and the instruction to remember Allah.

Surah Maryam (19:1-15) — A parallel account. Covers the mention of Allah's mercy on Zakariya, the private prayer, the call from the angels, the confirmation of the son's name (Yahya), the old man's astonishment, and the qualities of Yahya.

Surah Al-Anbiya (21:89-90) — A brief reference: "And [mention] Zakariya, when he called to his Lord: My Lord, do not leave me alone, with no heir. And You are the best of inheritors. So We responded to him and gave him Yahya and amended for him his wife."

Surah Al-An'am (6:85) — Zakariya in the prophetic list: "And Zakariya and Yahya and Isa and Ilyas — each was of the righteous."

The name Zakariya — Zachariah — is derived from the Hebrew root zakar — to remember. The name means "Allah has remembered" or "the one who remembers." The name is prophetic in both directions: Zakariya remembered Allah (in his prayer), and Allah remembered Zakariya (in the response). The name is the theology of the story in miniature: the servant remembers, and the Master remembers. The prayer is the remembering; the answer is the being remembered.

The Quran places Zakariya in a list alongside Yahya, Isa, and Ilyas, and describes them all as "of the righteous" — min al-salihin (6:85). The description connects four prophets across generations: the father (Zakariya), the son (Yahya), the Messiah (Isa), and the earlier prophet (Ilyas). All are righteous. The righteousness is the quality that unites them across time.

The Quran introduces Zakariya in the context of Maryam's guardianship:

"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).

Maryam — Mary — was dedicated to the temple by her mother before her birth. When she was born, her mother presented her to the temple, and the priests disputed over who would care for her. Zakariya was given the guardianship — the responsibility to raise her, protect her, and oversee her

education in the worship of Allah.

The guardianship is significant because it is the context of Zakariya's prayer. As Maryam's guardian, Zakariya had access to the mihrab — the private chamber in the temple where Maryam worshipped. Each time he entered, he found provision — food that was out of season, sustenance that appeared without human means. The Quran says:

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

The provision inspired the prayer. If Allah could provide for Maryam out of season, could He not provide for Zakariya a child out of season? The connection is the theology: whoever witnesses the mercy of Allah in someone else's life is inspired to ask for mercy in their own. The provision of Maryam was not just for Maryam; it was for Zakariya — a sign that opened his heart to the possibility of his own miracle.

Zakariya was a prophet and a priest. He served in the temple — the same temple that Sulayman had built, the center of Israelite worship. By Zakariya's time, the temple was ancient, and the Israelite nation was under Roman occupation. The political power of the Israelite kingdom was gone; the spiritual authority remained in the temple.

Zakariya's prophethood was exercised in the context of the temple — he was a prophet of the institution, not a prophet of the wilderness. Unlike Ilyas, who stood outside the political system, Zakariya served within it. His mission was to maintain the worship, guide the people, and preserve the tradition. The temple was his pulpit, and the worship was his message.

The contrast with the prophets before him is instructive. Dawud and Sulayman ruled the temple; Ilyas and Alyasa stood outside it. Zakariya served it. He was neither king nor outsider; he was the priest — the one who maintained the worship when the kingdom was gone and the political power was lost. The priest-prophet is the Quran's model of the one who serves in the institutional role — not ruling, not opposing, but maintaining.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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