CHAPTER 19

Maryam: Mary

(Revealed at Makkah: 6 sections; 98 verses)

The controversy with Christianity is continued in this chapter, and the title is taken from the name of Jesus’ mother, Mary. The circumstances connected with her having given birth to Jesus are narrated here. But while the last chapter deals at greater length with the history of Christianity than with its doctrines, this aims at proving the falsity of the Christian religious dogmas, which it shows to be absolute innovations and quite foreign to the teachings of all the prophets.

The first two sections deal with the last representatives of prophecy in the house of Israel, viz., John and Jesus. The false doctrines that grew up round the name of the latter are clearly denounced at the end of the second section. The history of Abraham in the third, and that of some other prophets in the fourth, are referred to as showing that God always sent men as His prophets to reform the world. Towards the close of the fourth section it is stated that mere faith unattended with good deeds is nothing, and that faith cannot benefit a people except when it is translated into practice. The fifth section deals with the opponents of the prophets generally, while the sixth brings to a close the discussion of the Christian religion by outspokenly denouncing the false doctrine of the sonship of Jesus.

It is quite certain that the most important portion of this chapter, viz., that relating to the history of Mary and Jesus, was revealed early at Makkah, most probably about the fifth year of the Holy Prophet’s mission, because this portion was recited by Ja’far, head of the first batch of the Muslim immigrants in Ethiopia, before the Christian king of that country, when a deputation of the Quraish urged the king to expel the Muslim refugees from his country (Ah. vol. I, p. 203). The emigration took place in the fifth year, and this chapter, therefore, must have been revealed before that.
SECTION 1: Zacharias and John

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 Sufficient, Guide, Blessed, Knowing, Truthful God.

2 A mention of the mercy of thy Lord to His servant Zacharias —

3 When he called upon his Lord, crying in secret.

4 He said: My Lord, my bones are weakened, and my head flares with hoariness, and I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to Thee, my Lord.

5 And I fear my kinsfolk after me, and my wife is barren, so grant me from Thyself an heir who should inherit me and inherit of the Children of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, acceptable (to Thee).

6 Who should inherit me and inherit of the Children of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, acceptable (to Thee).

7 O Zacharias, We give thee good news of a boy, whose name is John: We have not made before anyone his equal.

---

1a. كَفُّ stands for كَفِّ-ِن, Sufficient, hā for Hād-ِن, Guide, yā for Yāmin, Blessed, ‘اَيَن for ‘A‘īm, Knowing, and ِنَد for ِSā‘īn, Truthful. ِنَد has also been interpreted as being a letter of interjection, meaning O, but according to JA, ِنَد stands for Yāmin, One possessing yūm or blessings.

5a. His fear was due to their not leading righteous lives, and he feared there would be none to lead people into the ways of righteousness after him.

6a. The inheritance of the Children of Jacob is the inheritance of the Divine blessing of prophethood, which had been promised to Jacob's children.

7a. سَمَّى means a competitor, or contender for superiority in eminence or glory; hence also an equal, or a like. The word occurs again in this chapter in v. 65 and bears the same meaning, not namesake, because there it is spoken about Allāh. It is not, of course, meant that one like John or equal to him was never before created in the world. According to the Gospels: “Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11: 11). The meaning is that one like him was not born in Zacharias' family, because in the previous verse it is his own relatives about whom Zacharias says that he feared, and therefore an assurance was now given to him.
8 He said: My Lord, how shall I have a son, and my wife is barren, and I have reached extreme old age?

9 He said: So (it will be). Thy Lord says: It is easy to Me, and indeed I created thee before, when thou wast nothing.

10 He said: My Lord, give me a sign. He said: Thy sign is that thou speak not to people three nights, being in sound health.

11 So he went forth to his people from the sanctuary and proclaimed to them: Glorify (Allâh) morning and evening.

12 O John, take hold of the Book with strength. And We granted him wisdom when a child,

13 And kind-heartedness from Us and purity. And he was dutiful,

14 And kindly to his parents, and he was not insolent, disobedient.

15 And peace on him the day he was born and the day he died, and the day he is raised to life!

that the promised son would not be like the other members of his family whom he feared. Or the meaning may be, that one like him had not appeared in that age.

10a. The word lail, i.e., night, is interpreted as including the day, as yaum, or day, includes the night. Moreover, in 3:41 the words are three days, thus showing that three days and three nights are meant. It should also be noted that the Qur'ân does not support the idea that Zacharias was struck dumb, because it speaks of him as being in sound health. The object of assuming silence was to be engaged solely in prayer to the Divine Being, and hence Zacharias told his people also to glorify God; see also 3:41a.

14a. The various aspects of the character of John deserve to be noted. He was pure and sinless and never disobeyed God. In fact, what is said of one prophet is equally true of all. They are all pure from birth, and never disobey God.
SECTION 2: Mary and Jesus

16 And mention Mary in the Book. When she drew aside from her family to an eastern place;
17 So she screened herself from them. Then We sent to her Our spirit and it appeared to her as a well-made man.\(^a\)

18 She said: I flee for refuge from thee to the Beneficent, if thou art one guarding against evil.
19 He said: I am only bearer of a message of thy Lord: That I will give thee a pure boy.\(^a\)
20 She said: How can I have a son and no mortal has yet touched me, nor have I been unchaste?
21 He said: So (it will be). Thy Lord says: It is easy to Me; and that We may make him a sign to men and a mercy from Us.\(^a\) And it is a matter decreed.\(^b\)
22 Then she conceived him; and withdrew with him to a remote place.
23 And the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-

---

17a. This shows that it was in a vision that the spirit came, and the conversation that follows also took place in a vision. The word *tamaththala* ("it appeared") used here lends support to this, for the word signifies *assuming the likeness of another thing*, and this happens only in a vision. Further the spirit or angel of God appears to His chosen ones only in a vision, and angels are not seen by the physical eye.

19a. The words *I will give thee a pure boy* are the words of the message. The Spirit, in fact, only conveyed the Divine message, as it always does. Every word of the Holy Qur’an is the word of God, but every word was delivered to the Prophet by the angel.

21a. Jesus was a *sign* to men, in the sense that he was made a prophet, and every prophet is a sign, because the Divine revelation which is granted to him affords a clear proof of the existence of the Divine Being. Or, he was a sign to the Israelites in particular, because with him prophethood came to an end among the Israelites.

21b. She conceived him in the ordinary way in which women conceive children; see 3:44a.
So a voice came to her from beneath her: Grieve not, surely thy Lord has provided a stream beneath thee.

And shake towards thee the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on thee fresh ripe dates. 

So eat and drink and cool the eye. Then if thou seest any mortal, say: Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent, so I will not speak to any man today.

Then she came to her people with him, carrying him. They said:

23a. This shows that Mary gave birth to Jesus while on a journey; hence the reference to water and food in vv. 24 and 25, such as one can only find in a journey. That she was going to a distant place is shown by v. 22. She may have had recourse to the trunk of a palm-tree to find a support in the throes of childbirth.

23b. Mary gave birth to Jesus under the ordinary circumstances which women experience in giving birth to children. The throes of childbirth were too severe for her to bear, and hence she gave utterance to such words. The reference to the throes of childbirth clearly shows that an ordinary human child was coming into the world. Or, there may be a reference to Gen. 3:16, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.

25a. The Qur’ân does not accept that Jesus was born on 25th December. It was the time when fresh ripe dates are found on palm-trees. It is now a recognized fact that the 25th of December was not Jesus’ birthday. Bishop Barnes says in the Rise of Christianity: “There is, moreover, no authority for the belief that December 25 was the actual birthday of Jesus. If we can give any credence to the birth-story of Luke, with the shepherds keeping watch by night in the fields near Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus did not take place in winter, when the night temperature is so low in the hill country of Judaea that snow is not uncommon. After much argument our Christmas day seems to have been accepted about A.D. 300” (p. 79). Bishop Barnes then goes on to relate that the 25th of December was taken from the Persian cult, Mithra being the God of the invincible sun: “And his festal day was suitably that on which, after the winter solstice, the sun again began clearly to show his strength”.

26a. It was really a kind of fast. Zacharias, as we have already seen, was told not to speak to people for three days.

27a. The conversation that is related to have taken place in the verses that follow is alone sufficient to make it clear that the coming of Mary to her people with her son, as
O Mary, thou hast indeed brought a strange thing!

28 O sister of Aaron, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother an unchaste woman!

29 But she pointed to him. They said: How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?

27b. The reference in Mary's bringing a strange thing may be to her having given birth to a son who claimed greater authority than the elders of Israel, with a deeper hint to the calumny against her, for which see 4:156a. But the word fari also signifies a forg-er of lies. It is remarkable that in his reply Jesus does not make a single reference to the circumstances of his birth. Hence the inference is quite reasonable that the question, whichever significance of the words may be taken, was directed against the mission of Jesus and not against the circumstances relating to his birth.

28a. As shown in 3:35a, Mary belonged to the priestly class, as Wherry also admits, “because she was of the Levitical race, as by her being related to Elizabeth it would seem she was,” and therefore she is rightly called ukh̄t Harîn, or sister of Aaron, the word ukh̄t being by no means limited to the close blood-relationship like its equivalent in English; see 3:35a for further explanation. If relates the following incident: Sahiyah (the Prophet’s wife) came to the Messenger of Allah (may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him!) and said: “The women say to me, a Jewess, daughter of two Jews”. He said to her: “Why didst thou not say: Surely my father is Aaron and my uncle is Moses and my husband is Muhammad?”

29a. Old and learned Jews would no doubt speak of a young man who was born and brought up before their eyes as a child in the cradle, as if disdaining to address one so young. See what follows, vv. 30, 31, wherein it is made quite clear that the incident mentioned here relates to a time when Jesus was a grown-up man.
30 He said: I am indeed a servant of Allāh. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet.  
31 And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live:  
32 And to be kind to my mother; and He has not made me insolent, unblessed.  
33 And peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised to life.  
34 Such is Jesus son of Mary — a statement of truth about which they dispute.  
35 It beseems not Allāh that He should take to Himself a son. Glory be to Him! when He decrees a matter He only says to it, Be, and it is.  
36 And surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him. This is the right path.  

30a. It is clear that this conversation did not take place when Jesus was an infant in the cradle, but when he had actually been made a prophet.  
31a. It is absurd to suppose that prayers and alms were enjoined on Jesus while he was only a day old and that he really observed these injunctions at that age. In fact, Jesus’ answer clearly shows that he was addressing his people after he had been entrusted with the mission of prophethood.  
32a. Here only the mother is spoken of, whereas in a similar case in v. 14 John is spoken of as being kind to both parents. This may be due to the fact that Joseph may not have been living at the time when Jesus spoke these words. Joseph was already an old man when he married Mary, and by the time that the ministry of Jesus begins we find no mention of him even in the Gospels, the mother and brothers being the only relations mentioned. Or, the mother alone is mentioned because the Gospels relate an incident showing that Jesus was rude to his mother (Matt. 12:48), and this verse disproves the statement, it being one of the objects of the Qur’ān to clear Jesus of all false charges.  
36a. According to Mathew, when Jesus was tempted of the devil, who asked him to worship him, Jesus’ reply was: “For it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10).
But parties from among them differed; so woe to those who disbelieve, because of their presence on a grievous day!

How clearly will they hear and see on the day when they come to Us; but the wrongdoers are today in manifest error.

And warn them of the day of Regret, when the matter is decided. And they are (now) in negligence and they believe not.

Surely We inherit the earth and those thereon, and to Us they are returned.

SECTION 3: Abraham

And mention Abraham in the Book. Surely he was a truthful man, a prophet.

When he said to his sire: O my sire, why worshippest thou that which hears not, nor sees, nor can it avail thee aught?

O my sire, to me indeed has come the knowledge which has not come to thee; so follow me, I will guide thee on a right path.

O my sire, serve not the devil. Surely the devil is disobedient to the Beneficent.

O my sire, surely I fear lest a punishment from the Beneficent should afflict thee, so that thou become a friend of the devil.

39a. The day of Judgment is here called the day of Regret, because man will then regret that he wasted the opportunity given to him to work for his own good.
46 He said: Dislikest thou my gods, O Abraham? If thou desist not, I will certainly drive thee away. And leave me for a time.

47 He said: Peace be to thee! I shall pray my Lord to forgive thee. Surely He is ever Kind to me.

48 And I withdraw from you and that which you call on besides Allâh, and I call upon my Lord. Maybe I shall not remain unblessed in calling upon my Lord.

49 So, when he withdrew from them and that which they worshipped besides Allâh, We gave him Isaac and Jacob. And each (of them) We made a prophet.

50 And We gave them of Our mercy, and We granted them a truthful mention of eminence.

SECTION 4: Other Prophets are raised

51 And mention Moses in the Book. Surely he was one purified, and was a messenger, a prophet. 

49a. It is elsewhere made clear that Jacob was his grandson (11:71; 21:72). Nor should it be supposed that giving signifies only the giving of a son, for of Moses it is said a few verses further on, We gave him his brother Aaron, a prophet, though Aaron was older than Moses.

50a. The literal significance is, We made for them the tongue of truth to be lofty. As the tongue is the vehicle of expression, therefore lisâna ṣid-q-in stands for a truthful mention. However humble a life a prophet may lead, he is granted an eminence among later generations, but the distinguishing characteristic of a prophet is that his record of eminence is a truthful one.

51a. Rasûl, or messenger, means one who is sent with a message for the regeneration of men, while nabi, or prophet, is one who has the gift of prophecy, i.e., who receives a naba’ or information from on high. The elect who are chosen for the regeneration of man are called prophets as receiving knowledge from Allâh, and messengers as delivering to humanity the messages they receive.
52 And We called to him from the blessed side of the mountain, and We made him draw nigh in communion.

53 And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron, a prophet.

54 And mention Ishmael in the Book. Surely he was truthful in promise, and he was a messenger, a prophet.a

55 And he enjoined on his people prayer and almsgiving, and was one in whom his Lord was well pleased.

56 And mention Idriss in the Book. Surely he was a truthful man, a prophet,

57 And We raised him to an elevated state.a

58 These are they on whom Allâh bestowed favours, from among the prophets, of the seed of Adam, and of those whom We carried with Noah, and of the seed of Abraham and Israel, and of those whom We guided and chose. When the messages of the Beneficent were recited to them, they fell down in submission, weeping.a

---

54a. Ishmael was a prophet. When Abraham prayed to the Lord “that Ishmael might live before Thee” (Gen. 17:18), the reply was: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee” (Gen. 17:20), which shows that Ishmael was made a prophet; see 2:124a, 125c. In the Holy Qur’ân Ishmael is mentioned by name on the following occasions as one of the prophets: 2:125, 127–129, 133, 136, 140; 6:86; 19:54, 55; 21:85; 38:48; while he is referred to in 37:101–107.

57a. Idriss is the same as Enoch. The word raf', which is used of Jesus, is also used of Enoch, and some commentators therefore misinterpret the words as indicating that Enoch was taken up to heaven alive. But the same mistake is made in both cases, for raf' signifies raising to high dignity; see 3:55b. The mistake seems to have arisen from what is said of Enoch in the Bible. Thus, in Gen. 5:24: “And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him”. The New Testament is plainer yet: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him” (Heb. 11:5). Only once again is he mentioned in the Holy Qur’ân, viz., in 21:85.

58a. Here the reciter prostrates himself; see 7:206a.
But there came after them an evil generation, who wasted prayers and followed lusts, so they will meet perdition,

Except those who repent and believe and do good — such will enter the Garden, and they will not be wronged in aught:

Gardens of perpetuity which the Beneficent has promised to His servants in the Unseen. Surely His promise ever comes to pass.

They will hear therein no vain discourse, but only, Peace! And they have their sustenance therein, morning and evening.

This is the Garden which We cause those of Our servants to inherit who keep their duty.

And we descend not but by the command of thy Lord. To Him belongs what is before us and what is behind us and what is between these, and thy Lord is never forgetful.

62a. This description of the Hereafter is really to show that the Muslim in this world talks of nothing but peace. Islam is really peace, and it is by making peace here with the Creator and His creatures that one can find peace hereafter. This is the great truth underlying the Islamic idea of paradise, for of paradise it is frequently stated in the Holy Qur'an that there will be nothing but peace therein.

63a. The state of perfect peace spoken of in the previous verse is here called the Garden which the righteous will inherit.

64a. The words, we descend not, are generally understood to refer to the coming of angels with Divine revelation. There is no doubt that the reference here is to the revelation of the Holy Prophet, the significance being that, as the angels brought revelation to previous prophets, so they now bring revelation, by the command of the Lord, to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The concluding words of the verse, thy Lord is never forgetful, signify that the promises and prophecies made by God through His prophets could not be forgotten. Thus an account of the previous prophets is concluded with a reference to the revelation of the Holy Prophet, and this is the subject dealt with in the remaining sections of the chapter.

Some, however, think that these are the words of the faithful, which they will speak when they enter paradise (Rz).
Lord of the heavens and the earth
and what is between them, so serve
Him and be patient in His service.
Knowest thou any one equal to Him?

SECTION 5: How the Opponents were Dealt with

And says man: When I am dead,
shall I truly be brought forth alive?

Does not man remember that
We created him before, when he was
nothing?

So by thy Lord! We shall cer-
tainly gather them together and the
devils, then shall We bring them
around hell on their knees.\(^a\)

Then We shall draw forth from
every sect those most rebellious
against the Beneficent.

Again, We certainly know best
those who deserve most to be burned
therein.

And there is not one of you but
shall come to it. This is an unavoi-
dable decree of thy Lord.\(^a\)

And We shall deliver those who
guard against evil,\(^a\) and leave the
wrongdoers therein on their knees.\(^b\)

---

68a. The devils here are clearly those who lead others to evil.

71a. The wicked only are spoken of, as the context shows clearly. That the right-
eous will not go to hell is made clear further on: “The day when We gather the dutiful to
the Beneficent to receive honours, and drive the guilty to hell, as thirsty beasts” (vv. 85,
86). According to 21:102, the righteous will not hear the faintest sound of hell.

72a. For the meaning of thumma, the first word of v. 72, see 2:29a. It is wrong to
suppose that the righteous will be first cast into hell and then delivered; see 71a.

72b. Compare v. 68, where it is said that the guilty will be brought to hell on their
knees.
And when Our clear messages are recited to them, those who disbelieve say to those who believe:

Which of the two parties is better in position and better in assembly?\(^a\)

And how many a generation have We destroyed before them, who had better possessions and appearance!

Say: As for him who is in error, the Beneficent will prolong his length of days; until they see what they were threatened with, either the punishment or the Hour.\(^a\) Then they will know who is worse in position and weaker in forces.\(^b\)

And Allâh increases in guidance those who go aright. And deeds that endure, the good deeds, are, with thy Lord, better in recompense and yield better return.

Hast thou seen him who disbelieves in Our messages and says: I shall certainly be given wealth and children?\(^a\)

Has he gained knowledge of the unseen, or made a covenant with the Beneficent?

By no means! We write down what he says, and We shall lengthen to him the length of the chastisement,

\(^a\) That is, they are proud of their great wealth and numerous forces.

\(^a\) The _Hour_ signifies the _hour of doom_, the time of destruction, when their power will be utterly destroyed. The _'adhâb_, in comparison with the doom, signifies a lighter punishment.

\(^b\) In these words it is clearly indicated that the time will come when they will find themselves in an evil condition, and their forces weaker than the forces of Truth.

\(^a\) They have no eye for the higher values of life; all they want is wealth and children.
And We shall inherit from him what he says, and he will come to Us alone.\(^a\)

And they have taken gods besides Allâh, that they should be to them a source of strength —

By no means! They will soon deny their worshipping them, and be their adversaries.

SECTION 6: False Doctrine of Sonship

Seest thou not that We send the devils against the disbelievers, inciting them incitingly?

So make no haste against them. We only number out to them a number (of days).\(^a\)

The day when We gather the dutiful to the Beneficent to receive honours,\(^a\)

And drive the guilty to hell, as thirsty beasts.\(^a\)

They have no power of intercession, save him who has made a covenant with the Beneficent.

And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son.

Certainly you make an abominable assertion!

---

80a. The reference is to his saying in v. 77: “I shall certainly be given wealth and children”. God’s inheriting thus means that their wealth and children will be taken away from them and ultimately be a source of strength to Islåm.

84a. Because their doom is already decreed.

85a. Wafâl is a party coming to a king to receive honours (R, LA).

86a. Wird signifies coming to or arriving at water (LL); hence it signifies thirsty, because thirsty beasts are driven to water.
The heavens may almost be rent thereat, and the earth cleave asunder, and the mountains fall down in pieces,

That they ascribe a son to the Beneficent!

And it is not worthy of the Beneficent that He should take to Himself a son.

There is none in the heavens and the earth but comes to the Beneficent as a servant.

Certainly He comprehends them, and has numbered them all.

And everyone of them will come to Him on the day of Resurrection, alone.

Those who believe and do good deeds, for them the Beneficent will surely bring about love.

The five verses 89–93 contain a most emphatic and clear condemnation of the Christian doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus Christ. It may be noted that this chapter belongs to about the fifth year of the Holy Prophet’s mission, as portions of it were read out before the Negus by Ja’far, who was the head of the Muslim immigrants to Abyssinia. Thus Islâm had set before itself from the very first the grand object of the reformation of Christianity. The particular point on which stress is laid in this chapter, as against the fundamental errors of the Christian religion, Sonship and Atonement, is that God is Raḥmān (Beneficent), and does not require any compensation to forgive sinners. It is for this reason that the name Raḥmān, in preference to all other names of the Divine Being, is mentioned over and over again in this chapter, and the key to the whole position is contained in v. 92 in the words: It is not worthy of the Beneficent that He should take to Himself a son. In fact, the doctrine of Atonement is contradicted by Christ’s own words in the Lord’s prayer: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). A man is said to forgive his debtor when he remits the debt and does not exact any compensation. Even thus does God forgive the sinners; He needs no compensation.

Allāh’s bringing about love for the righteous means that He loves them Himself and inspires love for them in the hearts of other people, while they also love Allāh as well as their fellow-beings. The righteous servants of God are opposed at first, but gradually their goodness prevails and they are loved and admired. There is a prophetic reference here to the great love with which the hearts of the enemies of the Prophet were to be inspired in the near future, and even today the hearts of men are being inspired with greater and greater love for him as the world witnesses the good which he did to humanity.
97 So We have made it easy in thy tongue only that thou shouldst give good news thereby to those who guard against evil, and shouldst warn thereby a contentious people.

98 And how many a generation before them have We destroyed! Canst thou see anyone of them or hear a sound of them?