

Nabi Zakariyah and Nabi Yahya (John the Baptist)*AS

*We must always say Alayhis Salaam when we mention the name of a Prophet. It means, "May ALLAH - Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala's blessing and mercy be on him")

Story Number

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Dear Children

In this issue you are going to read about Nabi Zakariyah and his son Nabi Yahya (alayhis salaam). Nabi Zakariyah (alayhis salaam) who lived in one of the towns of Palestine with his wife Elizabeth were very honest and pious. They were involved in all the good deeds towards other people. They had no children. He used to go to the temple daily and deliver a sermon reminding the people to believe only in the One God and to do righteous deeds. He was a carpenter and earned his livelihood from making furniture, doors and windows.

WISHED FOR A SON

When he reached his nineties and became weaker and old (19:4) he became concerned that there was no one to carry on with his duties as a Prophet (19:6). He feared that the people would move away from the teachings of God and change the holy laws to suit their own needs. He had often wished that he had a son or mawali (inheritor) to carry on with this noble work.

LOOKING AFTER MARIAM (MARY) AND PRAYING

He had also taken on the responsibility to look after Mariam (Mary) the mother of Nabi Esa (Jesus - Alayhis Salaam –may peace be on him). Soon after Mariam was born her mother left her in the care of Nabi Zakariyah (alayhis salaam) as she wanted to dedicate her child to the service of the Lord (3:35). A special room was built at the temple for the protection of Mariam (3:36) with a staircase that could be lifted and lowered by Mariam. The only person who visited her was Nabi Zakariyah (alayhis salaam).

On one of his visits to Mariam he found an answer to his problem of not having a strong leader to carry on with his work. When he entered the room of Mariam he was surprised to find that she was supplied with sustenance even some lovely fresh out-of-season fruit in her room (3:37). On enquiring about the presence of the food Mariam told him, "It has come from Allah, for Allah provides sustenance to whom HE pleases without measure," (3:37). This incident jolted his memory as he realised that he too could ask the Creator to provide him with a son even if his wife was old and past the child bearing stage as nothing was impossible for the Gracious Lord. He knelt down and prayed, "O my dear Lord, grant to me from YOU a progeny (son) that is pure, for YOU are HE that answers prayers."

THE ARRIVAL OF YAHYA

At home when he stood up in his daily prayer the Angels visited him and announced to him, "Allah has given you glad tidings of Yahya (a son) confirming the truth of a word from Allah and he will be noble, chaste and a Prophet. He will also be in the company of the Prophets" (3:39). He accepted this message by asking for a sign to satisfy his heart and promised the Lord that he will continue reminding the people to worship the One God.

YAHYA'S HABITS

When Yahya was born he was graced with wisdom (19:12). The boy grew up under the influence of his father who guided and trained him. He was not arrogant or rebellious and very dutiful and kind to his parents (19:14). He never argued with them and he always had a very kind word for them. He showed great compassion towards his parents and the elders. He refrained from disobeying them in speech, actions, commands and prohibitions. He did not play with the village children, as he was devoted to the cause of the Lord. He was merciful to the animals and always fed them and treated them with kindness and loving care. He loved reading and understanding the scriptures. The Creator guided him to read the book of jurisprudence - Taurah (19:12). He became knowledgeable and very wise in matters of the community. He became an expert at passing judgement on peoples' affairs, interpreting the religion, guiding the people to the right path and warning them against the wrong ways.

He devoted himself completely to the will of the Creator. Nabi Yahya (alayhis salaam) found great comfort to be outside in the presence of nature and never cared much about food. He lived in utmost simplicity. Dressed in a robe made of coarse camel hair, he ate leaves, herbs and sometimes locusts. He slept anywhere in the mountains or in holes in the ground. He sometimes would find a lion or a bear as he entered a cave and would not be afraid of them. The beast recognised Nabi Yahya (alayhis salaam) as a prophet who cared for all animals and they would lower their heads and leave the cave for him. He was very conscious (taqwa) of the Creator and he would often cry in fear of God. He would spend most of the night in praises of his Creator.

CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO ONE GOD

At the age of 35 he called his people to worship ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) he made them cry out to the love of submission and he also infused their hearts with the truthfulness of HIS words and HIS mercy. His preaching aroused wide and deep interest with all the people of Palestine. He became very popular in the Jordan valley and large crowds of people attended his inspiring lectures and talks. People flocked from all over to listen to his lectures and he became very popular. His preaching included repentance and right living among the people.

KING HEROD ANTIPAS

At that time the ruler of Palestine was Herod Antipas who was a tyrant who bullied and oppressed the people. He ruled as a dictator and persecuted the people. King Herod fell in love with Salome, his brother's daughter. The mother of Salome encouraged this match and it was also approved by some elders in the community either out of fear or to gain some favours from King Herod. However when news reached the people that he was planning to marry Salome, Nabi Yahya (alayhis salaam) immediately objected to this match as it was against Gods laws to marry your brother's daughter. This pronouncement spread throughout the land like wild fire and people started talking about the evil ways of the king and his plans of marrying Salome. When it reached Salome ears she became very angry with Nabi Yahya (alayhis salaam) as it prevented her plans to rule the kingdom of Palestine with her Uncle.

SALOME ASK FOR YAHYA'S HEAD

Salome's mother was just as unhappy with this pronouncement by the Prophet as she planned this wonderful opportunity of getting her daughter to be the queen. One day she dressed her daughter very attractively and sent her to the king's chamber to dance very seductively in front of the King. She managed to capture the Kings attention and also arouse his lust for her. When she avoided his advances his desire grew to such an extent that he offered to fulfil whatever she desired in return for marrying her. She at once seized this opportunity and smilingly requested, "I would love to have the head of Yahya, because he has defiled your honour and mine throughout this land. If you grant me this wish I will marry you and become your queen."

YAHYA IS KILLED

Bewitched by her charm he at once conceded to her request. Yahya (alayhis salaam) was captured and imprisoned in the Kings jail. During a function the king ordered his soldiers to behead Yahya. His head was brought on a tray to the special banquet in honour of Salome. She was delighted when it was presented to her and her mother also gloated with delight that nothing would now stop her daughter becoming the queen of this land. Although he was beheaded he was blessed by ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala), "And salaam be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he will be raised up to life again," (19:15).

This arrangement did not last very long as the death of the Prophet of ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) was avenged as they were severely punished by the invading armies that killed all the people as well as destroyed the entire kingdom.

We also note that his father Nabi Zakariyah (alayhis salaam) was killed by the people after a few people spread ugly lies about him. When Mariam (Mary) became pregnant with the grace of the Lord (3:45) the people spread a nasty rumour accusing Nabi Zakariyah for this happening. This rumour spread throughout this village and soon the people wanted to kill him. The Lord guided Nabi Zakariyah away from the danger of getting killed by him by taking refuge in the trunk of a huge tree. Eventually when they discovered his hideout they ordered that the tree be cut down. Nabi Zakariyah died in the process, in silence without a murmur.

CONCLUSION

This beautiful lesson from the Glorious Qur'an is full of good examples of the blessings of ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) for us in our life today:

We are commanded by ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) to be dutiful to our parents. He obeyed his parents and spoke to them in a well-mannered way, followed all their wishes and even listened to them when they stopped him from carrying out certain actions that they disapproved of.

When a child listens to their parents he will be blessed. This is important for all of us to develop this obedience to parents, as it will provide us with the safety and security. It will remove the loneliness that we will be facing when we die and also on the day of Judgement when we will have to account for our deeds and actions.

Please read Surah Maryam chapter 19 verses 1 to 15 to get an idea of how the Glorious Qur'an mentions the story of Zakariyah and Yahya (alayhis salaam).