

Sūrah 19: Maryam

Period of Revelation

It was revealed before the Migration to Abassinyah. We learn from authentic hadith that Ja'afar recited v. 1-40 of this Sūrah in the court of Negus when he called the migrants to his court.

Historical Background

We have already briefly referred to the conditions of that period in the introduction to Sūrah al-Kahf. Here we shall give rather fuller details of the same conditions which will be helpful in grasping the meaning of this Sūrah and the other Sūrahs of the period. When the chiefs of the Quraysh felt that they had failed to suppress the Islāmic movement by ridicule and sarcasm, by holding out promises and threats and by making false accusations they resorted to persecution, beating and economic pressure. They would catch hold of the new Muslims of their clans and persecute them, starve them and would even inflict physical torture on them in order to coerce them to give up Islām. The most pitiful victims of their persecution were the poor people and the slaves and the proteges of the Quraysh. They were beaten black and blue, were imprisoned and kept thirsty and hungry and were dragged on the burning sands of Makkah.

When the conditions became unbearable the Prophet in the month of Rajab of the fifth year of Prophethood gave advice to his Companions to this effect: *"You may well migrate to Abassinyah for there is a king who does not allow any kind of injustice to anyone and there is good in his land. You should remain there till the time that God provides a remedy for your affliction."*

Accordingly at first, eleven men and four women left for Abassinyah. The Quraysh pursued them up to the coast but fortunately they got a timely boat for Abassinyah at the sea-port of Shu'aibah and they escaped attest. Then after a few months other people migrated to Abassinyah and their number rose to eighty-three men and eleven women of the Quraysh and seven non-Quraysh. After this only forty persons were left with the Prophet at Makkah.

There was a great hue and cry in Makkah after this Migration for every family of the Quraysh was adversely affected by this. There was hardly a family of the Quraysh which did not lose a son, a son-in-law, a daughter, a brother or a sister. For instance there were among the Migrants the near relatives of Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan and other chiefs of the Quraysh who were notorious for their persecution of the Muslims. After the migration, the Quraysh held consultations, and decided to send Abdullah bin Abi Rabi'ah, half brother of Abu Jahl, and Amr bin As to Abassinyah with precious gifts so as to persuade Negus to send the migrants back to Makkah. Umm Salmah (a wife of the Prophet), who was among the migrants, has related this part of the story in detail. She says,

"When these two clever statesmen of the Quraysh reached Abassinyah, they distributed the gifts among the courtiers of the King and persuaded them to recommend strongly to him to send the migrants back. Then they saw Negus himself and, presenting rich gifts to him, said, 'Some headstrong brats of our city have come to your land and our chiefs have sent us to you with the request that you may kindly send them back. These brats have forsaken our faith and have not embraced your faith either, but have invented a new faith'. As soon as they had finished their speech, all the courtiers recommended their case, saying, 'We should send such people back to their city for their people know them better. It is not proper for us to keep them here'. At this the King was annoyed and said, 'I am not going to give them back without proper inquiry. As these people have put their trust in my country rather than in any other country and have come here to take shelter, I will not betray them. At first I will send for them and investigate into the allegations these people have made against them. Then I will make my final decision'. Accordingly, the King sent for the Companions of the Prophet and asked them to come to his court.

When the migrants received the message of the King, they assembled and held consultations as to what they should say to the King. At last they came to this unanimous decision: *"We will present before the King the teachings of the Holy Prophet without adding anything to or withholding anything from them and leave it to him whether he lets us remain here or turns us out of his country"*. When they came to the court, the King put this problem abruptly before them: *"I understand that you have given up the faith of your own people and have neither embraced my faith nor any other existing faith. I would like to know what your new faith is."* At this, Jafar bin Abi Talib, on behalf of the migrants, made an extempore speech to this effect: *"O King! We were sunk deep in ignorance and had become very corrupt; then Muhammad (God's peace be upon him) came to us as a Messenger of God, and did his best to reform us. But the Quraysh began to persecute his followers, so we have come to your country in the hope that here we will be free from persecution"*. After his speech, the King said, *"Please recite a piece of the Revelation which has been sent down by God to your Prophet"*. In response, Jafar recited that portion of Sūrah Maryam which relates the story of Prophet's John the Baptist and Jesus (God's peace be upon them). The King listened to it and wept, so much so that his beard became wet with tears. When Jafar finished the recital, he said: *"Most surely this Revelation and the Message of Jesus have come from the same source. By God I will not give you up into the hands of these people"*.

Next day Amr bin As went to Negus and said, *"Please send for them again and ask them concerning the creed they hold about Jesus, the son of Mary, for they say a horrible thing about him"*. The King again sent for the migrants, who had already learnt about the scheme of Amr. They again sat together and held consultations in regard to the answer they should give to the King, if he asked about the belief they held about Prophet Jesus. Though this was a very critical situation and all of them were uneasy about it, they decided that they would say the same thing that God and His Messenger had taught them. Accordingly, when they went to the court, the King put them the question that had been suggested by Amr bin As. So Jafar bin Abi Talib stood up and answered without the least hesitation: *"He was a Servant of God and His Messenger. He was a Spirit and a Word of God which had been sent to virgin Mary."* At this the King picked up a straw from the ground and said, *"By God, Jesus was not worth this straw more than what you have said about him."* After this the King returned the gifts sent by the Quraysh, saying, *"I do not take any bribe"*. Then he said to the migrants, *"You are allowed to stay here in perfect peace."*

Theme and Subject

Keeping in view this historical background it becomes quite obvious that this Sūrah was sent down to serve the migrants as a provision for their journey to Abassinyah, as if to say though you are leaving your country as persecuted emigrants to a Christian country you should not in the least hide anything from the teachings you have received. Therefore you should plainly say to the Christians that Prophet Jesus was not the son of God.

After relating the story of Prophet's John and Jesus in v. 1-40 the story of Prophet Abraham has been related (v. 41-50) also for the benefit of the Migrants for he also had been forced like them to leave his country by the persecution of his father, his family and his country men. On the one hand this meant to console the Emigrants that they were following the footsteps of Prophet Abraham and would attain the same good end as that Prophet did. On the other hand it meant to warn the disbeliever of Makkah that they should note it well that they were in the position of the cruel people who had persecuted their forefather and leader Abraham while the Muslim Emigrants were in the position of Prophet Abraham himself.

Then the mention of the other Prophets has been made in v. 51-65 with a view to impress that Prophet Muhammad had brought the same way of Life that had been brought by the former Prophets but their followers had become corrupt and adopted wrong ways.

In the concluding passage (v. 66-98) a strong criticism has been made of the evil ways of the disbelievers of Makkah while the Believers have been given the good news that they would come out successful and become the beloved of the people in spite of the worst efforts of the enemies of the Truth.

Sūrah 19: Maryam⁷⁴⁶

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Kāf, Hā, Yā, ‘Ayn, Sād.⁷⁴⁷
2. [This is] a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zechariah
3. When he called to his Lord a private call [i.e., supplication].
4. He said, “My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled⁷⁴⁸ with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy [i.e., disappointed].
5. And indeed, I fear the successors⁷⁴⁹ after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir
6. Who will inherit me⁷⁵⁰ and inherit from the family of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You].”
7. [He was told],⁷⁵¹ “O Zechariah, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be John. We have not assigned to any before [this] name.”
8. He said, “My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife has been barren and I have reached extreme old age?”
9. [An angel] said, “Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me, for I created you before, while you were nothing.’”
10. [Zechariah] said, “My Lord, make for me a sign.” He said, “Your sign is that you will not speak to the people for three nights, [being] sound.”⁷⁵²
11. So he came out to his people from the prayer chamber and signaled to them to exalt [God] in the morning and afternoon.
12. [God said], “O John, take the Scripture [i.e., adhere to it] with determination.” And We gave him judgement [while yet] a boy
13. And affection from Us and purity, and he was fearing of God
14. And dutiful to his parents, and he was not a disobedient tyrant.
15. And peace be upon him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he is raised alive.
16. And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east.
17. And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel [i.e., Gabriel], and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man.
18. She said, “Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of God.”

⁷⁴⁶ *Maryam*: Mary (the mother of Prophet Jesus).

⁷⁴⁷ See footnote to 2:1.

⁷⁴⁸ Literally, “ignited.” The spread of white hair throughout the head is likened to that of fire in the bush.

⁷⁴⁹ Those relatives from the father’s side who would inherit religious authority.

⁷⁵⁰ Inherit from me religious knowledge and prophethood.

⁷⁵¹ By God through the angels.

⁷⁵² i.e., without illness or defect.

19. He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy [i.e., son]."
20. She said, "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?"
21. 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.'"
22. So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place.
23. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said, "Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten."
24. But he⁷⁵³ called her from below her, "Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream.
25. And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates.
26. So eat and drink and be contented. And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, 'Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man.'"
27. Then she brought him to her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary, you have certainly done a thing unprecedented.
28. O sister of Aaron, your father was not a man of evil, nor was your mother unchaste."
29. So she pointed to him. They said, "How can we speak to one who is in the cradle a child?"
30. [Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet.
31. And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakāh as long as I remain alive
32. And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant.
33. And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive."
34. That is Jesus, the son of Mary - the word of truth about which they are in dispute.
35. It is not [befitting] for God to take a son; exalted is He!⁷⁵⁴ When He decrees an affair, He only says to it, "Be," and it is.
36. [Jesus said], "And indeed, God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path."
37. Then the factions differed [concerning Jesus] from among them, so woe to those who disbelieved - from the scene of a tremendous Day.
38. How [clearly] they will hear and see the Day they come to Us, but the wrongdoers today are in clear error.

⁷⁵³ There is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether "he" refers to the baby or to the angel.

⁷⁵⁴ i.e., far removed is He from any such need.

39. And warn them, [O Muhammad], of the Day of Regret, when the matter will be concluded;⁷⁵⁵ and [yet], they are in [a state of] heedlessness, and they do not believe.
40. Indeed, it is We who will inherit the earth and whoever is on it, and to Us they will be returned.
41. And mention in the Book [the story of] Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet.
42. [Mention] when he said to his father, “O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all?”
43. O my father, indeed there has come to me of knowledge that which has not come to you, so follow me; I will guide you to an even path.
44. O my father, do not worship [i.e., obey] Satan. Indeed Satan has ever been, to the Most Merciful, disobedient.
45. O my father, indeed I fear that there will touch you a punishment from the Most Merciful so you would be to Satan a companion [in Hellfire].”
46. [His father] said, “Have you no desire for my gods, O Abraham? If you do not desist, I will surely stone you, so avoid me a prolonged time.”
47. [Abraham] said, “Peace [i.e., safety] will be upon you.⁷⁵⁶ I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Indeed, He is ever gracious to me.
48. And I will leave you and those you invoke other than God and will invoke my Lord. I expect that I will not be in invocation to my Lord unhappy [i.e., disappointed].”
49. So when he had left them and those they worshipped other than God, We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each [of them] We made a prophet.
50. And We gave them of Our mercy, and We made for them a mention [i.e., reputation] of high honour.
51. And mention in the Book, Moses. Indeed, he was chosen, and he was a messenger and a prophet.⁷⁵⁷
52. And We called him from the side of the mount⁷⁵⁸ at [his] right and brought him near, confiding [to him].
53. And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet.
54. And mention in the Book, Ishmael. Indeed, he was true to his promise, and he was a messenger and a prophet.
55. And he used to enjoin on his people prayer and zakāh and was to his Lord pleasing [i.e., accepted by Him].
56. And mention in the Book, Idrees. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet.
57. And We raised him to a high station.
58. Those were the ones upon whom God bestowed favor from among the

⁷⁵⁵ i.e., “judged” or “accomplished.”

⁷⁵⁶ Meaning “You are secure” or “I will not harm you.”

⁷⁵⁷ A messenger (*rasūl*) is one who was charged by God to reform society. A prophet (*nabi*) is one who received revelation from God, the latter being more numerous than the former.

⁷⁵⁸ Mount Sinai.

- prophets of the descendants of Adam and of those We carried [in the ship] with Noah, and of the descendants of Abraham and Israel [i.e., Jacob], and of those whom We guided and chose. When the verses of the Most Merciful were recited to them, they fell in prostration and weeping.
59. But there came after them successors [i.e., later generations] who neglected prayer and pursued desires; so they are going to meet evil ⁷⁵⁹ -
60. Except those who repent, believe and do righteousness; for those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged at all.
61. [Therein are] gardens of perpetual residence which the Most Merciful has promised His servants in the unseen. Indeed, His promise has ever been coming.⁷⁶⁰
62. They will not hear therein any ill speech - only [greetings of] peace - and they will have their provision therein, morning and afternoon.
63. That is Paradise, which We give as inheritance to those of Our servants who were fearing of God.
64. [Gabriel said],⁷⁶¹ “And we [angels] descend not except by the order of your Lord. To Him belongs that before us and that behind us and what is in between. And never is your Lord forgetful -
65. Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them - so worship Him and have patience for His worship. Do you know of any similarity to Him?”
66. And man [i.e., the disbeliever] says, “When I have died, am I going to be brought forth alive?”
67. Does man not remember that We created him before, while he was nothing?
68. So by your Lord, We will surely gather them and the devils; then We will bring them to be present around Hell upon their knees.⁷⁶²
69. Then We will surely extract from every sect those of them who were worst against the Most Merciful in insolence.
70. Then, surely it is We who are most knowing of those most worthy of burning therein.
71. And there is none of you except he will come to it.⁷⁶³ This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed.
72. Then We will save those who feared God and leave the wrongdoers within it, on their knees.
73. And when Our verses are recited to them as clear evidences, those who disbelieve say to those who believe, “Which of [our] two parties is best in position and best in association?”⁷⁶⁴
74. And how many a generation have We destroyed before them who were better

⁷⁵⁹ Described as a valley in Hell or may be rendered “the consequence of error.”

⁷⁶⁰ Literally, “that to which all will come.”

⁷⁶¹ In answer to the Prophet’s wish that Gabriel would visit him more often.

⁷⁶² i.e., fallen on their knees from terror or dragged there unwillingly on their knees.

⁷⁶³ i.e., be exposed to it. However, the people of Paradise will not be harmed thereby.

⁷⁶⁴ In regard to worldly interests.

- in possessions and [outward] appearance?
75. Say, "Whoever is in error - let the Most Merciful extend for him an extension [in wealth and time] until, when they see that which they were promised - either punishment [in this world] or the Hour [of resurrection] - they will come to know who is worst in position and weaker in soldiers."
76. And God increases those who were guided, in guidance, and the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord⁷⁶⁵ for reward and better for recourse.
77. Then, have you seen he who disbelieved in Our verses and said, "I will surely be given wealth and children [in the next life]?"
78. Has he looked into the unseen, or has he taken from the Most Merciful a promise?
79. No! We will record what he says and extend [i.e., increase] for him from the punishment extensively.
80. And We will inherit him [in] what he mentions,⁷⁶⁶ and he will come to Us alone.
81. And they have taken besides God [false] deities that they would be for them [a source of] honour.
82. No! They [i.e., those "gods"] will deny their worship of them and will be against them opponents [on the Day of Judgement].
83. Do you not see that We have sent the devils upon the disbelievers, inciting them [to evil] with [constant] incitement?
84. So be not impatient over them. We only count out [i.e., allow] to them a [limited] number.⁷⁶⁷
85. On the Day We will gather the righteous to the Most Merciful as a delegation
86. And will drive the criminals to Hell in thirst
87. None will have [power of] intercession except he who had taken from the Most Merciful a covenant.⁷⁶⁸
88. And they say, "The Most Merciful has taken [for Himself] a son."
89. You have done an atrocious thing.
90. The heavens almost rupture therefrom and the earth splits open and the mountains collapse in devastation
91. That they attribute to the Most Merciful a son.
92. And it is not appropriate for the Most Merciful that He should take a son.
93. There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a servant.
94. He has enumerated them and counted them a [full] counting.
95. And all of them are coming to Him on the Day of Resurrection alone.

⁷⁶⁵ i.e., in the sight or evaluation of God.

⁷⁶⁶ Instead of giving him wealth and children in the Hereafter, God will take from him those he had in worldly life at time of his death.

⁷⁶⁷ Of breaths, of days, or of evil deeds.

⁷⁶⁸ Not to worship other than Him.

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96. Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds - the Most Merciful will appoint for them affection.⁷⁶⁹
97. So, [O Muhammad], We have only made it [i.e., the Qur'ān] easy in your tongue [i.e., the Arabic language] that you may give good tidings thereby to the righteous and warn thereby a hostile people.
98. And how many have We destroyed before them of generations? Do you perceive of them anyone or hear from them a sound?

⁷⁶⁹ From Himself and from among each other.