

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

MARY - SISTER OF AARON (pbuh)

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This article does not attempt to address a misconception of Muslim thought per se. Rather, its purpose is to address an assertion usually put forward by some non-Muslims and some Christian missionaries to challenge the veracity of the Quran.

The assertion made is with reference to verses 19:27-28 and 66:12, which is claimed to represent an error in the Quran, or more specifically, an 'anachronism'. It is asserted that the Quran confuses Mary, the mother of Prophet Jesus, (pbuh) (Hebrew: Miriam or Maryam) with 'Miriam', the sister of Prophets Aaron and Moses (pbuh) and the daughter of Amram (Arabic: Imran) who existed numerous centuries earlier.

019.027-28

"Then she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: O Mary! surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron! **(Arabic: Yaukh'ta haruna)** Your father was not a wicked man nor was your mother unchaste"

066:012

"And Mary, the daughter of Imran **(Arabic: ib'nata imrana)**, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His books, and she was of, the obedient ones"

HOLY BIBLE

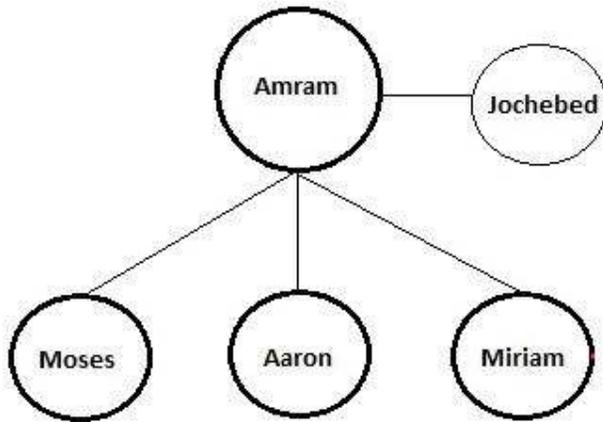


Illustration - Joseph Islam

From the diagram above which represents the Biblical perspective, the assertion is made that Mary is referred to in the Quran as the 'sister of Aaron' (19:27-28) and also the daughter of Imran (assumed to be Amram - 66.12) and therefore, the Quran confuses the two Marys which existed over a millennia apart.

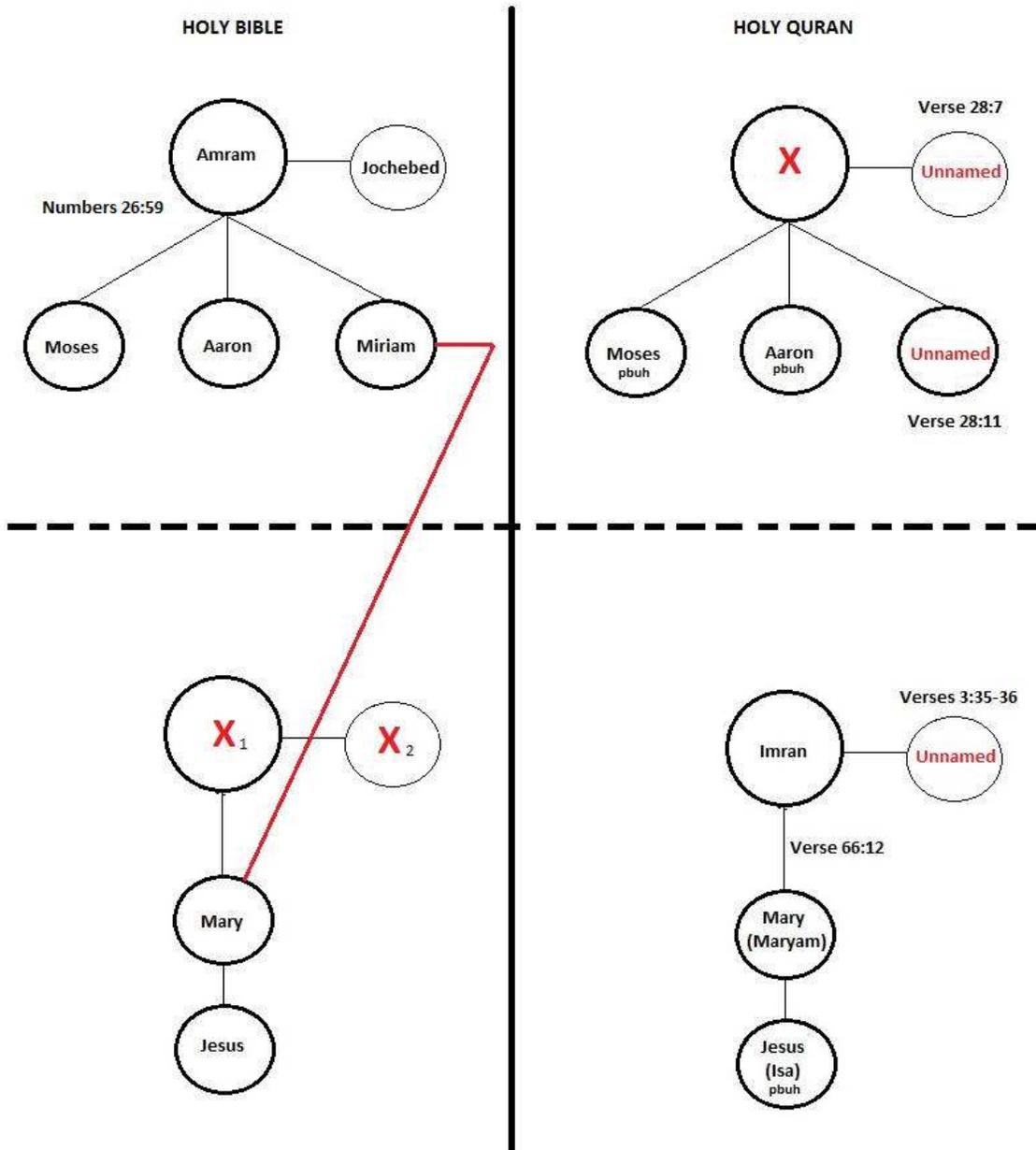
It should be appreciated that naming descendants on the basis of past revered personalities has always been common practice and is often enshrined in tradition. Whether this be Mary, Moses, Aaron, John, Mark, Matthew, Luke, Paul, or Muhammad, Ayesha, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali (etc). There is no reason why Mary could not have a father by the name of Imran or why Mary's name was not kept because of the reverence for the sister of Prophet Moses. ^(pbuh) Similarly two individuals who bear the same name each having a brother and a father with the same name does not imply that they are therefore, the same individuals.

However, it is observed that to avoid any confusion the Quran is **very particular** not to confuse Mary (mother of Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh)) with the sister of Prophet Aaron. ^(pbuh) Mary is mentioned numerous times throughout the Quran, but she is **never** referred to as the sister of Prophet Moses, ^(pbuh) which would be expected if she was a literal sister of Prophet Aaron. ^(pbuh) It was Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) who received the direct revelations from God and his reverence as a mighty Prophet of God is fully accepted by all scriptures. The fact that Mary escapes mention as the sister of Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) is clear evidence that the Quran is fully conversant with the personalities it is dealing with.

In fact, the Quran appears to go out of its way to avoid the confusion by **not naming** the real sister of Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) so as not to confuse her with the mother of Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) who may bear the same name. Furthermore, the father of Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) is **not named** by the Quran as 'Imran' so as not to confuse him with the father of Mary (Imran).

Therefore, the Quran is absolutely clear that Mary (mother of Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh)) is not synonymous with the sister of Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) as a person, albeit they may have the same name.

Let us note a comparative diagram.



X No explicit mention

X₁ Joachim as per Church traditions (Not Gospels)

X₂ Anne (St Anne, Hannah, Ann or Anna) as per Church traditions (Not Gospels)

Illustration - Joseph Islam

WHY DOES THE QURAN REFER TO MARY AS THE SISTER OF AARON?

019.027-28

"Then she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: O Mary! surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Aaron! **(Arabic: Yaukh'ta haruna)** Your father was not a wicked man nor was your mother unchaste"

The Arabic term 'ukh'ta' (sister) in verse 19:28 means

- (a) A sister by blood relationship from the same parent
- (b) Figuratively a female in faith, sisterhood, relationship by tribe.

Foremost, it should be appreciated that the Quran contains numerous dialogues from many previous tribes, clans and individuals throughout human history. It even contains dialogues from different creations of God. None of these dialogues were spoken in Arabic. Instead, the Quran in the voice of God translates these dialogues in an expression and language which the specific audience of the Arabs could clearly understand and one which would best represent what was said at the time the dialogue took place.

Furthermore, it is imperative that one understands the context of the narrative with a view to appreciate why certain words may have been used. In 19:27-28, Mary was clearly being reminded of her association with great patriarchs such as Prophet Aaron ^(pbuh) who according to Jewish sources, was considered the first High Priest of the Israelites and through whom the priestly decendancy of his tribe, the Levites continued.

Mary had been under the guardianship of Prophet Zacharriya ^(pbuh) in a sanctuary (3:37) and had dedicated herself to her Lord. According to Biblical sources, Prophet Zacharriya ^(pbuh) was a priest from the decendancy of Prophet Aaron ^(pbuh) and hence of Levitical Priesthood if the Biblical position is to be accepted. However, according to these sources, it also appears that Mary was not herself a Levite but rather from the house of David, a Judah (Matthew 1:1; Hebrews 7:14) which would disqualify her from being referenced as 'descendant' of the tribe of Levi.

Mary's own people would clearly have known that she was not a descendant of the Levite tribe nor of the Levitical Priesthood and hence would not have referred to her as 'daughter of Aaron' which would have been expected if she was being referenced as a descendant of Prophet Aaron's ^(pbuh) tribe. In the Bible we note Mary's cousin, Elisabeth being clearly referenced as a 'daughter of Aaron' as she was indeed a Levite of Prophet Aaron's ^(pbuh) tribe.

Luke 1:5

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the **daughters of Aaron (Greek: Thugater), and her name was Elisabeth"**

Therefore, Mary's people **would not** have used the epithet 'daughter of Aaron', but rather, one which bound her spiritually to the priestly tribe of Prophet Aaron ^(pbuh) as she had remained under Prophet Zacharriya's ^(pbuh) auspices. Mary was clearly reminded of her 'noble associations' with Prophet Aaron's ^(pbuh) noble descendants when the charge of being unchaste was levied against her. In this manner, she would have been referred to Prophet Aaron ^(pbuh) as connected to him by faith (as a sister) and not in lineage.

The Quran is familiar with sibling epithets to denote spiritual and social relationships between members of tribes. For example:

Noah is referred to as a 'brother' of his tribe:

026:106

"Behold, their brother **(Arabic: akhuhum)** Noah said to them: "Will you not fear (God)?"

We find similar references for Hud ^(pbuh) (7:65; 11:50; 26:124), Saleh ^(pbuh) (7:73; 11:61; 26:142; 27:45), Lot ^(pbuh) (26:161) and Shoaib ^(pbuh) (7:85; 11:84; 29:36)

011:050

"And to Ad (We sent) their brother Hud. He said: O my people! serve God, you have no god other than He; you are nothing but forgers (of lies)"

Even the Bible is familiar with elective spiritual relationships.

Mark 3:35

"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Lastly, the family of Imran is referenced separately by the Quran. There is a whole Surah that usually bears the name (Surah Imran - Chapter 3). It is clear that this family bears no direct connection with the Amram from the Bible, who is the father of both Prophets Moses and Aaron. ^(pbut)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Naming descendants on the basis of past revered personalities has always been common ancient practice. Two individuals who bear the same name each having a brother and a father with the same name does not imply that they are therefore, the same individuals.

The Quran appears to go out of its way to avoid any confusion by not naming the real sister of Prophet Moses, ^(pbuh) so as not to confuse her with the mother of Prophet Jesus. ^(pbuh) Furthermore, the father of Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) (and his sister) is also not named by the Quran as 'Imran', so as not to confuse him with the father of Mary (Imran).

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