

# *Are there female Prophets in Islam?*

## **Women who spoke to an angel**

In the Islamic sources we are informed of some females who met an angel. Among them is Hajar Umm Ismâ'îl when she was left alone with her son Ismâ'îl in the desert, ran out of water and rushed between the hills as-Safâ and al-Marwah seven times in search for people. She heard the voice of Angel Jibrîl and found the well of *zamzam* at the feet of her son Ismâ'îl<sup>1</sup>. Another example is the well-known example of Maryam Umm 'Îsâ who was informed by Angel Jibrîl that she is expecting a son. However, only the latter of them is mentioned in the Qur'ân to have spoken to an angel. One of the incidents of Maryam speaking to Angel Jibrîl is mentioned in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur'ân, in the verses 16 to 25:

واذكر في الكتاب مريم اذ انتبذت من اهلها مكانا شرقيا

فاتخذت من دونهم حجابا فارسلنا اليها روحنا فتمثل لها بشرا

سويا

قالت اني اعوذ بالرحمن منك ان كنت تقيا

<sup>1</sup> Sahîh al-Bukhârî No. 3365

قال انما انا رسول ربك لاهب لك غلاما زكيا  
قالت انى يكون لي غلام ولم يمسنني بشر ولم اك بغيا  
قال كذلك قال ربك هو علي هين ولنجعله اية للناس ورحمة  
منا وكان امرا مقضيا  
فحملته فانتبذت به مكانا قصيا  
فاجاءها المخاض الى جذع النخلة قالت يا ليتني مت قبل هذا  
وكنت نسيا منسيا  
فناداها من تحتها الا تحزني قد جعل ربك تحتك سريا  
وهزي اليك بجذع النخلة تساقط عليك رطبا جنيا

***And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east.***

***And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man.***

***She said, "Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah ."***

***He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy."***

***She said, "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?"***

**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.' "**

**So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place.**

**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."**

**But he called her from below her, "Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream.**

**And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates."**

### **Does speaking to an angel make these women prophetesses?**

In fact, there were a number of scholars who claimed that the women having spoken to angels were prophetesses. Among these scholars Abul-Hasan al-Ash'arî (873/4 – 935 CE), al-Qurtubî (1214 – 1272 CE) and ibn Hazm al-Andalûsî (994 – 1064 CE)<sup>2 3</sup>. They are respected scholars of the Islamic tradition and had quiet strong appearing evidences to defend their view. Among the evidences that were used was that Allâh's *wahî* (revelation) was sent to Umm Mûsâ in the 28<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Qur'ân, verse 7:

واوحينا الى ام موسى ان ارضعيه فاذا خفت عليه فالقيه في  
اليم ولا تخافي ولا تحزني انا رادوه اليك وجاعلوه من  
المرسلين

2 <http://islamqa.info/en/158044>

3 [http://globalwebpost.com/farooqm/study\\_res/islam/gender/women\\_prophethood.html](http://globalwebpost.com/farooqm/study_res/islam/gender/women_prophethood.html)

***And We inspired (أوحينا) to the mother of Moses, "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers."***

However, these evidences are not strong enough to defend this view and there are several evidences from the Qur'ân, the Sunnah and *qiyâs* refuting this claim.

Regarding the fact that Angel Jibrîl showed himself to Maryam Umm 'Îsâ, which was used as an evidence to claim that she in fact was a prophetess, we can say that this really does not make her a prophetess. If it had been the case that anyone who sees an angel is a prophet, then we would have had to say that e.g. the *sahabah* who witnessed Angel Jibrîl coming to the Prophet and teaching the *dîn*<sup>4</sup> were all prophets. There are several incidents mentioned in the Sunnah that angels showed themselves to humans but this did not make them prophets.

Regarding the fact that some women received *wahî* does not make them Prophetesses as well, as this *wahî* was not the type of *wahî* which is sent to the Messengers. There are different types of *wahî*, of which one type is the *wahî* to the bees, which is mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Qur'ân, verse 68. If any *wahî* had made any being, who received, a prophet, every bee would have been a prophet – and we surely agree that they are not. The type of *wahî*, which was directed to Umm Mûsâ, was that of “*natural human instincts that Allah has placed in humans*”<sup>5</sup> and “*Allah's inspiration to humans to do actions which are not instinctive*”<sup>6</sup>.

Prophets are superior than any other humans so it is natural that they will be the leaders of the believers in this world and the next. However, there are some *ahâdîth* that mention that Fâtimah bint Muhammad will be the leader of the believing women in Paradise<sup>7</sup>. If any woman had been a prophetess, Fâtimah could not have been mentioned to be the leader of the women in Paradise as the prophetesses would be superior to Fâtimah (unless Fâtimah herself was a Prophetess which is definitely not

4 Sahîh al-Bukhârî No. 50

5 Usool at-Tafseer, Dr. Bilal Philips, p. 115-116

6 Usool at-Tafseer, Dr. Bilal Philips, p. 115-116

7 Sahîh al-Bukhârî No. 6285, 6286

the case).

Furthermore we can find a verse in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Qur'ân, verse 7, which states:

وما ارسلنا قبلك الا رجالا نوحى اليهم فاسالوا اهل الذكر ان  
كنتم لا تعلمون

***And We sent not before you, [O Muhammad], except men to whom We revealed [the message], so ask the people of the message if you do not know.***

Here, Allâh indicates that He sent only prophets from among the men and no prophetesses from among the women.

#### **What is the status of Maryam Umm 'Îsâ?**

We can find the answer for this question in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Qur'ân, verse 75:

ما المسيح ابن مريم الا رسول قد خلت من قبله الرسل وامه  
صديقة

***The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth (صديقة).***

Allâh informs us of the status of Maryam Umm 'Îsâ being the status of a *sadîqah*. If she had been of a higher status, there would have been any reference to it, which is neither found in the Qur'ân nor the authentic Sunnah.

Therefore, the claim that there are prophetesses in Islam is false.

## **References**

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