

# Prophet Yāhūa John the Baptist

**Yāhūa ibn Zakariyyā** (Arabic: يَحْيَى ابْنُ زَكَرِيَّا, 'John, son of Zechariah'), identified Biblically as **John the Baptist**, is considered in Islam a prophet of God who was sent to guide the Children of Israel. He was the maternal cousin of Isa (Jesus) and believed by Muslims to have been a witness to the word of God, heralding the coming of Isa Al-Masih (literally Jesus the Messiah).

Yahya is mentioned five times in the Qur'an. Yahya is also honoured highly in Sufism as well as Islamic mysticism, primarily because of the Qur'an's description of Yāhūa's chastity and kindness.<sup>2</sup> Sufis have frequently applied commentaries on the passages on Yāhūa in the Qur'an, primarily concerning the God-given gift of wisdom which he acquired in youth as well as his parallels with Isa. Although several phrases used to describe Yahya and Isa are virtually identical in the Qur'an, the manner in which they are expressed is different

## Birth

The Qur'an frequently mentions Zakariya's continuous praying for the birth of a son. Zakariya's wife was barren and therefore the birth of a child seemed impossible. As a gift from God, Zakariya was given a son by the name of Yāhūa, a name specially chosen for this child alone. In accordance with Zakariya's prayer, God made Yahya and Isa, who according to [tafsir](#) (exegesis) was born six months later, to renew the message of God, which had been corrupted and distorted by the Israelites.

Yahya and Isa were maternal cousins, although it is contested whether Isha', Yahya's mother, was Maryam's aunt or sister.

The Qur'an says that Yāhūa was the first to receive this name (Quran 19:7-10) but since the name Yohanan occurs many times before Yāhūa, this verse refers either to Islamic scholar consensus that "Yahyā" is not the same name as "Yohanan" or to the Biblical account of the miraculous naming of John, which accounted that he was almost named "Zacharias" (Greek: Ζαχαρίας) after his father, as no one in the lineage of his father Zacharias (Zechariah) had been named "John" ("Yohanan" or "Yoannes") before him. The Qur'an says:

"The angels announced, 'O Zachariah! Indeed, We give you the good news of 'the birth of' a son, whose name will be Yāhūa—a name We have not given to anyone before.'

He wondered, "My Lord! How can I have a son when my wife is barren, and I have become extremely old?"

An angel replied, "So will it be! Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, just as I created you before, when you were nothing!'"

Zachariah said, "My Lord! Grant me a sign." He responded, "Your sign is that you will not 'be able to' speak to people for three nights, despite being healthy."

So he came out to his people from the sanctuary, signalling to them to glorify 'Allah' morning and evening.

"It was later said, 'O Yāhūa! Hold firmly to the Scriptures.' And We granted him wisdom while 'he was still' a child, as well as purity and compassion from Us. And he was God-fearing, and kind to his parents. He was neither arrogant nor disobedient.

## **Prophethood**

Yahya was exhorted to hold fast to the scripture and was given wisdom by God while still a child. He was pure and devout, and walked well in the presence of God. He was dutiful towards his parents and he was not arrogant or rebellious. Yahya's reading and understanding of the scriptures, when only a child, surpassed even that of the greatest scholars of the time. Islamic tafsir narrates that Isa sent Yahya out with twelve disciples, who preached the message before Jesus called his own disciples. The Qur'an says:

'It was later said, ' "O John! Hold firmly to the Scriptures [Torah]." And We granted him wisdom while 'he was still' a child,

—Surah Maryam 19:12

Yahya was a classical prophet, who was exalted high by God for his bold denouncing of all things sinful. Furthermore, the Qur'an speaks of Yahya's gentle piety and love, as well as his humble attitude towards life.

According to Islamic tradition, Yahya used to go to the Al Haram Ash-Sharif (Temple Mount) to deliver his sermons.

## **Assassination**

During the prophethood of Yahya, a conflict occurred between him and Herod Antipas, who wanted to divorce his wife and marry his niece. Yahya informed that the marriage would be abominably incestuous, and did not approve. After hearing this, Herod Antipas had Yahya imprisoned, then decapitated. Yahya's head is believed to be inside the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.