

Prophethood

Allah created Adam and Eve to dwell on the Earth along with their descendants, the human race, and were given dominion over the Earth and all that it contains.

He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. (I, 29)

But a condition was laid upon them to exercise their authority in accordance with Allah's laws. If people adhere to the laws, peace and harmony will exist on Earth and Allah will reward the law abiding ones with Paradise in the Hereafter. If people violate these laws, then chaos, bloodshed, and corruption will become prevalent, disrupting the system according to which His universe must run (I, 30). Those who do such things will be punished with the Hell fire. (I, 39)

We said: Go forth from this (state) all; so surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (I, 38)

But in order for people to abide by Allah's laws they must first know what they are and must avoid any misinterpretation and misapplication of these laws. If the expectation was to obey these laws without knowing what they are or without a guarantee they are being correctly interpreted, then this would be unjust -- which is against the very nature of Allah. (VI, 91)

The main premise behind the concept of Prophethood in Islam is the justice of Allah. The creation is essentially divided into categories of choice. Creatures belonging to the first category do not have choice in anything that governs their lives or destinies. This would include all objects, plants, and animals. A tree has no choice where it grows, or what kind of tree it is, and when and how it will become no more. Therefore, it is said that a tree has no choice or control over its destiny.

People, on the other hand, are given control over choosing between right and wrong. Right is defined as that which Allah declares as His law. Because Allah is just, He sends messages to people outlining what His laws are and gives examples of how to apply them. These messages must not contain any errors, and must be interpreted correctly as stated above. Otherwise, how can Allah fairly judge people if errors are contained in the messages or their interpretations?

And (know) that this is My path, the right one therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will lead you away from His way; this He has enjoined you with that you may guard (against evil). (VI, 153)

Indeed, there is for you a good example in Ibrahim and those with him. (LX, 4)

When (Jesus) the son of Mary is held up as an example. (XLIII, 57)

Because Allah's messages cannot contain any errors, those who interpret them must have full knowledge of everything they contain, and must possess perfect knowledge of how to interpret and apply these messages. But since people in general lack that perfect knowledge, Allah must choose those who will deliver and interpret these messages. Allah does this by sending infallible angels to those who He chooses from among people to be His messengers, in order to ensure these messengers themselves have full knowledge and understanding of these messages and will apply them flawlessly. These messengers of

Allah must, therefore, be infallible. Further, since everything that people do in their exercise of dominion over the Earth affects Allah's system, these messengers must not err at all. In other words, the messengers must be infallible as relates to every action. The messages must be understood and made clear by these messengers. Because Allah's messengers must receive direct communications through His angels, these messengers must be prophets. People who spoke directly to Allah, as in the case of Moses, or received revelations delivered to them by angels, like Ibrahim, Jesus, and Muhammad, are called Prophets according to Islamic beliefs. As a general rule, those prophets who received scriptures to deliver are called messengers, while prophets who came to reestablish the messages of previous messengers, are not called messengers.

Further, We sent a long line of prophets for your instruction (XXIII)

Recognizing the Messengers

History tells us, since the days Adam and Eve first walked the Earth, many people falsely claimed to be Allah's messengers. To avoid following false messengers, Allah defined certain characteristics of His messengers. Some of these are:

1. Each messenger must be given miracles by Allah which others cannot duplicate (III, 183-184).
2. Such miracles must challenge the prevalent issue facing the people to whom the specific message the messenger was sent to deliver and interpret. For example magic was the prevailing issue of Moses' time, so Allah gave Moses the power to turn his staff into a real snake that engulfed the staffs of the magicians. He also parted the sea to save the children of Israel from the Pharaoh's wrath (XX, 63-78).

When Jesus was sent to the Children of Israel, diseases were rampant and medicine men were considered to be among the elite. So Allah gave Jesus the power to cure any disease and to bring back to life those who perished because of those diseases. Muhammad was sent to a people who lived by the rules of poetry and mastery of language. These people worshiped idols which believed controlled the universe. Therefore, Allah gave Muhammad the Quran which is a lingual miracle, and supported him by such miracles as a cloud that covered him from the heat of the sun wherever he went. Muhammad once asked the Meccans if he could bring them a sign that would convince them he was a messenger. They asked him to have a tree speak to him and said that if he did so they would believe in his message. When Prophet Muhammad ordered the tree to come to him, it did and then bowed to him. Some of the Meccans believed Muhammad, while others claimed he had performed magic on the tree.

3. All messengers of Allah must deliver a consistent message of obedience to Allah's law. If the messengers delivered messages that differed from one another, then one could conclude the source of the messages was not the same. But since the messages all came from the one Allah, they must contain the same law. It is for this reason that all Divine religions teach the importance of the Ten Commandments and other canons. Muslims believe that the differences which came to exist between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were caused by human forgeries of the original messages delivered to us by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

4. People must equally believe in all of Allah's messages, and revere all of His prophets without distinction. The Holy Quran states:

Say (O Muslims), we believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac and Jacob, and their children, and that which Moses and Jesus received and that the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and unto Him we have surrendered. (II, 36)

Differences of opinion

There are different opinions among Muslim sects regarding the infallibility of the prophets. Shias in general believe that since every action we take affects Allah's universe, we are responsible for the outcome of these actions. It is inconceivable that we can do or say anything without it being part of the universe we live in. Since Allah sent these prophets as messengers to explain and act out the scriptures, every action they take is an example for us to follow. If they utter a word in error or do anything, no matter how small, that violates Allah's system, people can claim that utterance or action as a legitimate example to follow. But since Allah is just, He would not send fallible prophets as examples for us to follow lest we would be requested to follow them in their errors and deserve Allah's wrath for committing errors against His system.

Sunni Muslims however believe that prophets are only infallible when it comes to delivering Allah's messages. They believe that prophets can and do err if they are dealing with personal matters or in cases that do not relate to their messages. Some Sufis take the view of Shia Muslims as relates to the infallibility of the prophets.

However, all Muslims agree that prophets are only sent as good examples for us to follow. The view that prophets can act as both good and bad examples for us to follow is not held by any Muslim sect.