

# Prophethood in Islam and it's Distinction from Judeo-Christian Narratives

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## Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive exploration of the concept of prophethood in Islam, distinguishing it from the perspectives presented in Judeo-Christian traditions. It delves into the Islamic view of prophethood as a divine institution, where human prophets are seen as messengers of God, tasked with guiding humanity through their teachings. The article examines the characteristics of prophets in Islamic theology, emphasizing their infallibility and the universal nature of their messages. It also presents a comparative analysis of shared prophetic figures in Abrahamic faiths, highlighting the unique portrayal of these individuals in the Islamic narrative. The discussion extends to the authenticity and preservation of prophetic teachings in Islam, their impact on Islamic law, theology, societal norms, and the broader Muslim worldview. The article explains that the Islamic explanation of prophethood, marked by historical consistency and logical coherence, presents a distinct and sensible understanding of this pivotal religious concept.

*Keywords – Prophethood in Islam, Islamic Theology, Comparative Religion, Quranic Studies, Islamic Law, and Ethics*

## Introduction

The concept of prophethood in Islam, demarcated by the divine communication to humankind, presents a distinctive framework that is both reflective and prescriptive of the Islamic ethos. In Islamic theology, prophets are entrusted with the dissemination of Allah's guidance, serving as human exemplars of virtue and obedience to the divine will. This stands in stark contrast to certain Judeo-Christian conceptions where prophetic figures may assume a more interventional or even semi-divine status.

From Prophet Adam (عليه السلام), acknowledged as the first of the human race and the inaugural prophet, to Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), the final messenger, there is a clear line of continuity and consistency in the message of

Tawheed (the Oneness of God). The Islamic narrative underscores the infallibility ('Ismah) of prophets, asserting their immunity from sins, thus ensuring the unadulterated preservation of the divine message.

In the Islamic tradition, prophets such as Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام), Prophet Musa (عليه السلام), and Prophet 'Isa (عليه السلام) are revered not just for their historical roles but for their unwavering commitment to upholding monotheism against the backdrop of their respective societies' challenges.

Their biographies in Islamic scripture and tradition highlight the differences in their roles and messages when compared to the Judeo-Christian texts.

The prophetic mission finds its culmination in the life of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), the 'Seal of the Prophets', whose advent is prophesied in earlier scriptures and whose message is universally applicable to all of humanity for all times. The Quran, revered as the verbatim word of God, encapsulates this final message, and alongside the Hadith, provides a comprehensive guide for the Muslim *ummah* (community).

This article seeks to delineate the scholarly examination of prophethood as conceptualized in Islamic theology, articulating its unique features in contrast to Judeo-Christian prophetic narratives. It will underscore the importance of understanding the particularities of these distinctions, which are not merely theological nuances but foundational to the Islamic worldview and its interpretation of history and spirituality.

## The concept of Prophethood in Islam

In Islamic theology, prophethood (nubuwwah) is a sacred institution, delineating the human individuals chosen by Allah to serve as His emissaries.

### Definition and Characteristics of Prophethood

Prophethood in Islam is defined as a divine favor, bestowed upon select individuals known as prophets or messengers (rusul), who are charged with delivering Allah's guidance to mankind. These individuals are characterized by their exceptional integrity, wisdom, and steadfastness.

Unlike the narratives of some Judeo-Christian traditions, where prophetic figures may be ascribed supernatural or semi-divine qualities, Islamic tradition strictly maintains the human essence of prophets.

Prophets are viewed as servants of Allah, distinguished from the rest of humanity only by their divine mission and revelation (wahy).

### The Principle of Infallibility ('Ismah) in Islamic Theology

Central to the Islamic understanding of prophethood is the concept of *'Ismah*, or infallibility. This principle posits that prophets are protected by Allah from committing sins and from any error in delivering the divine message.

This protection is considered necessary to ensure the authenticity and purity of the guidance they convey. The infallibility of the prophets is a key differentiator from certain Judeo-Christian perspectives, which may recount prophets as fallible and subject to human weaknesses.

### The Universality of the Prophetic Message in Islam

In contrast to the notion of prophets serving particular communities or periods as seen in Judeo-Christian contexts, the Islamic perspective emphasizes the universality of the prophetic message.

Every prophet, from Prophet Adam (عليه السلام) to Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), came with a consistent core message: the call to worship Allah alone (Tawheed) and to follow His commandments as a path to salvation.

While each prophet was sent to a specific people, the teachings of oneness of God they brought are considered universally applicable, transcending time and place. This universality is most embodied in the message of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), who is regarded not merely as a prophet to the Arabs but as the final messenger to all of humanity.

## A Comparative Analysis of the Shared Figures in Abrahamic Religions

The narrative of prophethood in Islam encompasses figures that are also central to Judeo-Christian scriptures. However, the portrayal of these prophets in Islamic theology exhibits marked distinctions that are not merely anecdotal but foundational to the faith's doctrinal essence.

### Prophets Common to Abrahamic Faiths

There are many Prophetic and Angelic Figures in Islam that have been shared in various forms of anecdotal depictions across the Judeo-Christian traditions.

Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام), Prophet Musa (عليه السلام), and Prophet 'Isa (عليه السلام) are as revered in Islam as they are in Judaism and Christianity. Their stories serve as a bridge between the faiths, yet Islam offers a unique perspective on their lives and missions.

For instance, Prophet Ibrahim (عليه السلام) is celebrated as a patriarch in Judeo-Christian traditions, but in Islam, he is particularly recognized for his staunch monotheism and his role in establishing the Kaaba in Mecca as a center of monotheistic worship.

### Islamic Perspective on Prophetic Missions

While acknowledging the shared heritage, Islamic texts critically reinterpret the missions of these prophets. In the Quran, their stories are

often recast to emphasize their unwavering submission to the will of Allah and to correct what are seen as misinterpretations or alterations in previous scriptures.

The mission of Prophet Musa (عليه السلام) against Pharaoh, for instance, is paralleled with his commitment to Tawheed, distancing him from the notion of a vengeful or nationalistic figure as may be inferred from other texts.

### Finality of Prophethood with Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم)

The Islamic tradition posits Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as the final prophet, a concept known as Khatam an-Nabiyyin. This belief does not merely serve as a chronological marker but as a theological closure to the institution of prophethood. Prophet Muhammad's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) message, encapsulated in the Quran, is considered by Muslims as the culmination of the divine narrative, rendering previous scriptures as preparatory and his message as the definitive guide for all of humanity.

### Distinctions in Roles and Messages of Prophets in Islam

The roles and messages of prophets as conveyed in Islamic teachings present a distinct divergence from the Judeo-Christian narratives.

These distinctions underscore the Islamic emphasis on prophetic missions as vehicles for reaffirming the principle of Tawheed (the Oneness of God) and elucidating the path towards ethical monotheism.

### Monotheism and the Rejection of Original Sin

A fundamental distinction in Islamic theology is the concept of original sin, or rather, its absence.

Islam posits that humans are born in a state of purity, with the innate disposition towards Tawheed. Prophets in Islam are sent to remind people of this intrinsic truth, not to atone for an inherited sin. Prophet 'Isa (عليه السلام), known in Christianity as Jesus, is a poignant example. In Islam, he is a revered messenger who preached

monotheism and was not crucified, thus refuting the Christian doctrine of atonement. His role, as with all prophets in Islam, is to guide and not to redeem humanity from original sin.

### Prophetic Missions and Sociopolitical Contexts

Prophetic narratives within the Quran often highlight the moral and social reformations that prophets were sent to initiate. Prophet Shu'ayb (عليه السلام), for example, is depicted as an advocate against economic exploitation, while Prophet Loot (عليه السلام) is shown as a voice against social transgressions. These missions are portrayed not as localized historical events but as universal lessons in justice and morality.

### Human Authority and Divine Sovereignty

Islamic narratives also firmly establish that prophets do not possess any divine qualities or partake in God's sovereignty. They are humans chosen by Allah to convey His message.

This clear demarcation addresses any conflation of divine and human attributes, which is occasionally observed in other religious texts where prophets may be ascribed semi-divine status or supernatural powers.

### Prophethood as a Continuation of Divine Guidance

Prophets in Islam are seen as links in a chain of divine guidance, each reinforcing the message of their predecessors while tailored to their respective communities' needs.

Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), in this context, is not a founder of a new faith but the final prophet who consolidates the monotheistic teachings that began with Prophet Adam (عليه السلام). The Quran's revelation to Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) is thus perceived as the final testament in a long line of divine communications.

The role of prophets in Islam, therefore, is characterized by a mission to revive the original monotheistic faith and to lead by example. Their messages are timeless and serve as a blueprint

for individual and societal conduct. The distinctions in their roles and messages as presented in Islamic sources are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic worldview and its approach to history, morality, and spirituality.

## The Nature of Prophetic Teachings in Islam

The teachings of the prophets, as articulated in Islamic theology, not only offer guidance for moral and spiritual conduct but also establish a comprehensive framework for social and legal norms.

### Authenticity and Preservation of Prophetic Teachings

A distinguishing feature of prophetic teachings in Islam is the emphasis on their preservation and authenticity.

The Quran, regarded as the direct word of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), stands as the primary source of Islamic teachings.

Unlike other religious texts that may have undergone various translations and interpretations over time, the Quran's text remains unchanged since its revelation, serving as a constant and unaltered guide for Muslims.

Furthermore, the Hadith literature, encompassing the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), complements the Quran.

These narrations are meticulously authenticated through chains of transmission, ensuring their reliability as secondary sources of Islamic law and ethics.

### Role of the Quran in Islamic Narrative

The Quran's role extends beyond a religious scripture; it is a codex for life, encompassing jurisprudence, theology, and morality. Its verses address a wide array of subjects, from individual conduct to societal laws, making it a comprehensive guide for Muslims. The Quran's teachings are considered timeless, applicable to

every era and society, and are central to the Islamic way of life.

### Interpretation of Prophetic Teachings

Islamic scholarship has developed rigorous methodologies for interpreting the Quran and Hadith. This includes the science of exegesis (tafsir) for the Quran and principles of jurisprudence (fiqh) for deriving legal rulings.

These interpretations, while rooted in the primary texts, also consider contextual factors, allowing for adaptability within the framework of Islamic principles.

The interpretation and application of prophetic teachings have led to the development of diverse schools of thought within Islam, each with its nuances but all unified in their adherence to the core tenets of the faith.

### Impact on Societal and Cultural Norms

The teachings of the prophets, particularly those of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), have profoundly influenced Islamic civilization.

From legal systems and ethical standards to art and architecture, the imprint of these teachings is evident in various aspects of Muslim societies.

They have also shaped the collective consciousness of the Muslim community, fostering a sense of unity and identity anchored in shared beliefs and values.

## The Impact of Islamic Prophetic Teachings on Worldviews

The teachings of prophets, as elucidated in Islamic theology, exert a profound influence on the worldview of its adherents. This impact manifests not only in religious practices but also in shaping the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of Muslim societies.

### Influence on Islamic Law and Theology

The primary impact of prophetic teachings in Islam is evident in the formation of Islamic law (Shariah) and theology (Aqidah). Shariah, derived from the Quran and Hadith, governs all

aspects of a Muslim's life, ranging from personal rituals to social contracts and state governance.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), in particular, provide detailed guidance on legal and ethical matters, offering a holistic approach that balances individual rights with societal responsibilities.

Theological concepts in Islam, like the nature of God, the purpose of creation, and the afterlife, are deeply rooted in the Quranic revelations and the teachings of the prophets. These concepts shape the Muslim understanding of existence, purpose, and morality, offering a comprehensive worldview.

### Societal and Cultural Impact

The teachings of the prophets have also significantly influenced the social and cultural fabric of Muslim communities. They promote values such as justice, compassion, and community service, which have been integral to Islamic societies throughout history.

The emphasis on education, pursuit of knowledge, and respect for diversity can also be traced back to the prophetic teachings, which encourage intellectual growth and social harmony.

In terms of cultural expression, these teachings have inspired a rich heritage of art, literature, and architecture. Islamic art, for instance, often reflects the emphasis on non-figurative representation and the beauty of calligraphy, both of which are rooted in the Islamic reverence for the Quran and the Arabic language.

### Role in Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding

Prophetic teachings in Islam also play a crucial role in interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding.

The respect and acknowledgement of previous prophets, shared with Judaism and Christianity, provide a common ground for dialogue.

The Quran's emphasis on respectful engagement and the recognition of shared ethical values

fosters a conducive environment for interfaith conversations.

In contemporary times, the relevance of prophetic teachings in addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental crises is increasingly recognized. These teachings offer a framework for ethical solutions and collaborative actions grounded in shared human values.

### Conclusion

This exploration of the concept of prophethood in Islam, as juxtaposed with Judeo-Christian narratives, reveals the distinct and coherent framework that Islamic theology presents.

The prophetic tradition in Islam, spanning from Prophet Adam (عليه السلام) to Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), is characterized by an unwavering message of monotheism, a commitment to moral and ethical uprightness, and a universal call to righteousness.

These aspects, when viewed collectively, underscore a historical consistency and logical sensibility unique to the Islamic portrayal of prophethood.

The Islamic narrative, with its emphasis on the infallibility ('Ismah) of prophets and their role as human yet divinely guided messengers, provides a consistent theological approach that preserves the authenticity and purity of the divine message.

This contrasts with Judeo-Christian interpretations where prophets may be seen as fallible or bearing semi-divine attributes.

The Islamic perspective thus maintains a clear demarcation between the divine and the human, reinforcing the transcendence of God and the human role in submission to His will.

The universality of the prophetic message in Islam, exemplified by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, offering guidance relevant to all eras and societies.



This universality is anchored in the Quran, which stands as a timeless and unaltered testament, further solidifying the consistency and reliability of the Islamic account of prophethood.

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Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi,

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