

Belief in His Messengers



In the Name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate

HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IS LIMITED IN SCOPE, and cannot provide comprehensive information about the universe and man's role in it. Therefore, Allāh, in His wisdom and mercy sent us messengers to direct us to what is beneficial. These messengers were men at various times and in various communities whom Allāh inspired with guidance for their people. The Muslim who wishes to draw nearer to Allāh should therefore follow the prophets and those who emulate their way. The Final Messenger, Muḥammad (ﷺ), in particular, is a role model for us. "Indeed, there is an excellent example for you in the Messenger of Allāh, for anyone whose hope is in Allāh and the Last day, and who remembers Allāh much." Qur'ān [(33) Al-Ahzāb, 21] And, in general, all the messengers are examples for us to follow, as long as what they did has not been prohibited in the law of the Final Prophet. "They (the prophets) are those whom Allāh has guided, so follow their guidance." Qur'ān [(6) Al-An'ām, 91]

Difference between a nabiyy and a rasūl

The favoured opinion is that a **nabiyy** (prophet) is man who has received inspiration from Allāh. "And We have not sent before you (any) but men to whom We gave inspiration." Qur'ān [(21) Al-Anbiyā', 7] He is, in addition, a **rasūl** (messenger) if he received at least one ruling which was different from the Shari'ah (law) of the prophet before him. "(Jesus (ﷺ) said,) (I have come to you) confirming that which came before me of the Torah, and in order to make lawful for you some of that which was forbidden for you." Qur'ān [(3) Āl-Imrān, 50] Thus, Jesus (ﷺ) was a **rasūl** as well as a **nabiyy**.

Distinction in belief

All the prophets and messengers were supported by signs and miracles from Allāh, and it is a requirement of faith to accept every one of them, and to believe that they were following the clear truth. This is the meaning of saying that we make no

distinction between the prophets, i.e. we make no distinction in believing in them, unlike the Jews, Christians and others who accept some and reject others. So, anyone who rejects, for example, Adam, or Noah, or Moses, or Jesus, or Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them all), is a disbeliever, though he may claim to believe in the other prophets. "Verily, those who disbelieve in Allāh and His Messengers, seeking to make a distinction between (believing in) Allāh and (believing in) His Messengers, saying, 'We believe in some and reject others,' seeking to take a path between (belief and rejection) - they are truly disbelievers. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a disgraceful punishment." Qur'ān [(4) An-Nisā', 150-151]

Distinction in rank

However, making no distinction between belief in the prophets does not mean that they are all equal in rank, and the Qur'ān itself is clear about this. "Those are the messengers, We have caused some of them to excel over others. Among them are those to whom Allāh spoke, and He raised some of them by ranks. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear proofs, and supported him with the Holy Spirit." Qur'ān [(2) Al-Baqarah, 253] "And indeed, We have caused some prophets to excel over others, and We gave David the Zabūr." Qur'ān [(17) Al-Isrā, 54]

The most distinguished of all the prophets and messengers is the Final Prophet, Muḥammad (ﷺ). He has said, "I am the master of the Children of Adam on the Day of Resurrection, and (I say this) without pride." (Related by Tirmidhi, Ibn Mājah and Aḥmad). Next are Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Noah *'alayhimus-salām*. These five prophets are known as "The Resolute Ones" (**Ulul-'Azm**). Although distinctions exist between the ranks of the prophets, we should not single out any two prophets to say that one is better than the other. Although that may in fact be the case, it is disrespectful to the prophet of lower rank.

How many prophets?

Some scholars are of the view that there were a total of 124,000 prophets, but others have regarded the hadīth which states this to be weak. The safer position is therefore to refrain from fixing their exact number with certainty. The Qur'ān is quite clear that there were "messengers whom We have mentioned to you before, and messengers whom We have not mentioned to you." Qur'ān [(4) An-Nisā', 164]

It is obligatory, however, to believe in those prophets who are mentioned by name in the Qur'ān, and whom the scholars unanimously agree were prophets. The following names appear in the Qur'ān :

1. Adam (ﷺ), 2. Idrīs (ﷺ), 3. Nūḥ (Noah) (ﷺ), 4. Hūd (ﷺ), 5. Ṣāliḥ (ﷺ), 6. Ibrāhīm (Abraham) (ﷺ), 7. Lūṭ, (Lot) (ﷺ), 8. Ismā'il (Ishmael) (ﷺ), 9.

Ishāq (Isaac) (ﷺ), **10.** Ya'qūb/Isrā'il (Jacob/Israel) (ﷺ), **11.** Yūsuf, (Joseph) (ﷺ), **12.** Ayyūb (Job) (ﷺ), **13.** Shu'ayb (ﷺ), **14.** Mūsā (Moses) (ﷺ), **15.** Hārūn (Aaron) (ﷺ), **16.** Dawūd (David) (ﷺ), **17.** Sulaymān (Solomon) (ﷺ), **18.** Ilyās (Elias) (ﷺ), **19.** Alyasā (ﷺ) **20.** Yūnus/(Jonah) (ﷺ), **21.** Dhul-Kifl (Ezeikel) (ﷺ), **22.** Zakariyyā (Zacharias) (ﷺ), **23.** Yaḥyā (John) (ﷺ), **24.** al-Masīḥ/ʿĪsā (the Messiah, Jesus) (ﷺ), **25.** Muḥammad (ﷺ).

There are four individuals about whom scholars have differed as to whether they were prophets or just pious men; they are 'Uzayr, Luqmān, Dhul Qarnayn and Khidir (the companion of Moses in Surah al-Kahf, whose name is mentioned in the hadīth, but not in the Qur'ān.)

Characteristics of the Prophets

All prophets of Allāh share the following attributes:

1. **Ṣidq** (Loyalty)

Prophets always tell the truth. They never lie, because this would make them unreliable as transmitters of a message. As for the ahādith informing us Prophet Abraham (ﷺ) told *three lies*, these must be understood in their proper context.

The **first** '*lie*' was when his people asked him to come with them to their festival of idol-worship, and he refused. "He took a glance at the stars, and then said, 'I am sick.'" Qur'ān [(37) As-Sāffāt, 88-89] This was not strictly a lie; rather it was a half-truth. He meant, 'I am sick at your worshipping inanimate, useless stones, rather than the Creator of these magnificent heavens.'

The **second** '*lie*' was after he smashed all of his people's idols except the biggest of them, whereupon his people asked him, "'Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?' He said, 'In fact, this, the biggest of them has done it.'" Again, this is a clever use of words. The biggest idol was responsible for the smashing of the others because it had infuriated Abraham `alayhis-salam, and by these words, he led his people to reflect over the folly and worthlessness of their religion.

The **third** '*lie*' is mentioned in a hadīth, and it is that Abraham (ﷺ) was asked by the king about his wife, Sārah, and he replied that she is his sister, meaning 'his sister in faith.' So, the '*lies*' uttered by Abraham (ﷺ) were not real lies, but half-truths uttered in very specific circumstances, and this is permissible, although it is disliked if there is no real reason for it.

2. **Amānah** (Truthfulness)

None of the Messengers of Allāh ever betrayed the Trust which Allāh

Subḥānahū wa Ta'ālā put on them. They conveyed all the Messages / Revelations they received to the people truthfully without changing anything from them..

3. **Iṣmah** (Impeccability / Sinlessness / Infallibility)

Prophets are impeccable, meaning that they never commit sins. This is only rational, for Allāh has ordered us to follow their example. "They are those whom Allāh has guided, so follow their guidance." Qur'ān [(6) Al-An'ām, 91] Thus, if it were conceivable for them to sin, it would be permissible for us, also, to sin, which is clearly absurd. "Say, 'Allāh does not command shameful things.'" Qur'ān [(7) Al- A'rāf, 28] So, those incidents which, on the surface may seem to suggest that some of the prophets sinned, must be interpreted in relative terms. Something which is praiseworthy for a wicked sinner might be blameworthy for a very pious person, because they are at different levels. Thus, although the prophets did not sin, they may have done something which, although permissible, was not the most optimal deed for the situation.

Misconception #1 : Adam (ﷺ) and Eve were expelled from the Garden for their sin. First of all, they did not sin. Adam (ﷺ) merely forgot about Allāh's warning to keep away from the Forbidden Tree. "And, verily, We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot." Qur'ān [(20) Tā Hā, 115] Forgetting, although it is not the best thing to do, is not a sin, for it is involuntary. Mention of this incident is actually a mark of honour for Adam (ﷺ), for it shows us that he usually did not forget, such that when he forgot this one time, it was noteworthy. Then, this Allāh forgave Adam (ﷺ) for this lapse. "Then, his Lord chose him, and forgave him and guided him." Qur'ān [(20) Tā Hā, 122] The real reason why Adam (ﷺ) and Eve were sent into the world is that this was the purpose of their creation. "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels : I am going to place a viceroy upon the earth." Qur'ān [(2) Al-Baqarah, 30]

Misconception #2 : The Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) sinned by turning away from the blind man. Once, the Prophet (ﷺ) was busy discussing Islām with some of the chiefs of Quraysh. It was clearly a crucial situation, for if they were to embrace Islām, it would pave the way for wholesale acceptance of Islām by the common people. During this important dialogue, a blind Ṣaḥābah named 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (رضي الله عنه) came to ask the Prophet (ﷺ) a question. As is quite natural, the Prophet (ﷺ) was annoyed at being disturbed from such critical business, and so he frowned and turned away from 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (رضي الله عنه). It is worth noting that since 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (رضي الله عنه) was blind, he did not realize that this was the Prophet (ﷺ)'s reaction. Yet, Allāh made mention of this incident in the Qur'ān [ʿAbasa (80)] to show us that, when resources are limited, it

is preferable to concentrate one's propagation efforts on those who are more receptive to the message, even if they are insignificant, lowly people. However, it is not sinful to try to win over the important dignitaries.

Thus, everything which prophets did was either obligatory, recommended, or neutrally permissible. In reality, though, they only did obligatory and recommended deeds, because when they did neutrally permissible deeds, it was to show their permissibility to the Ummah, and so they were thereby fulfilling an obligation. Similarly, we can also make all of our neutrally permissible deeds into sources of reward. For example, if we eat with the intention of strengthening our bodies for the worship of Allāh, we will be rewarded for eating. If we sleep with the intention of resting ourselves in order to be able to worship Allāh better, this will also count to our credit. So, we should always be mindful, even of seemingly small things, for we do not know what sins of ours may cancel out our good deeds, or which little good deed may prove sufficient to tip the scales in our favour on the Day of Judgement. Those people who engage in neutrally permissible deeds without any intention, like mere animals, are clearly losing out on a great deal.

4. **Tabligh** (Conveyance of the message)

All the prophets conveyed the message of Allāh to their people, as they were commanded. "O Messenger! Convey that which has been revealed to you from your Lord. And, if you do not do that, then you have not conveyed His message." Qur'ān [(5) Al-Mā'idah, 67] "Those who convey the messages of Allāh, and fear Him and fear none but Allāh. And Allāh suffices as a reckoner." Qur'ān [(33) Al-Ahzāb, 39] They did not hide anything, nor keep any of the message secret for only a selected, private group. In the Farewell Sermon, the Prophet (ﷺ) called to Allāh to bear witness that he had conveyed the message.

5. **Faṭānah** (Intellect).

All of the prophets were very intelligent, intellectual people, for they had to debate with the disbelievers. They had to convince others of the truth, and could not be defeated. We see, for example, the incident which occurred between Prophet Abraham (عليه السلام) and Nimrod, a king in Palestine. "[Abraham] said, 'My Lord is the One Who gives life and death.'" Qur'ān [(2) Al-Baqarah, 258] Nimrod, in his arrogance, summoned two prisoners, then ordered one of them to be killed and the other to be set free. "He said, 'I give life and death.'" When Prophet Abraham (عليه السلام) saw Nimrod's obstinacy, he presented a more potent argument which could not possibly be argued. "Abraham said, 'Indeed, Allāh brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west.' Thus, the disbeliever was confounded." Qur'ān [(2) Al-Baqarah, 258]

Consider also the exchange between Moses (ﷺ) and Pharaoh. Pharaoh asked Moses, "Who, then, is the lord of you two, O Moses?" Moses (ﷺ) replied, "Our Lord is He Who gave everything its nature and then guided [it]." This drove home the reality that Pharaoh could not create anything, and it is therefore understandable that Pharaoh should try to change the subject. "He said, 'What, then, is the fate of the former generations?'" Moses (ﷺ) very cleverly answers this question, but at the same time steers the conversation back to the main point, namely: **Tawhīd**. "[Moses] said : Knowledge of them is with my Lord in a record. My Lord neither errs nor forgets. [He is] the One Who has made the earth a cradle for you, and threaded roads for you therein, and sent down rain from the sky." Qur'ān [(20) Tā Hā, 49-53] This incident contains a valuable lesson for us, which is that we should be careful not to be sidetracked into peripheral issues, such as polygamy, slavery or *hijāb*, when we are making *da'wah*. These side-issues should not be the focus of our *da'wah*, and we should therefore not lose sight of the focus, which is **Tawhīd**.

Having familiarized ourselves with the attributes of prophets, it should be evident that the **opposites of these attributes** : lying, sinning, concealment of the message and stupidity, can never be attributed to them. Similarly, it is not possible for them to be afflicted with any repulsive or contagious disease which would cause dispersion of people from around them, since this would not allow them to convey the message. However, any other mortal attributes which do not diminish from respectability or accessibility, such as hunger, thirst and non-repulsive diseases, are plausible for them.

The final Messenger

Allāh's final Prophet and Messenger was Muḥammad (ﷺ), son of 'Abdullāh, son of 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib, son of Hāshim, son on 'Abdu- Manāf, of the Arab tribe of Quraysh, of the descendants of Ishmael (عليه السلام), of the progeny of Abraham (عليه السلام). His message is for all of mankind upto the Day of Judgement.

It is no longer permissible to follow any previous prophet.

Allāh took a covenant from every prophet such that if he were to encounter Muḥammad (ﷺ), he would believe in him and follow him. Qur'ān [(3) Āl-'Imrān, 81]

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "There is no Jew, nor any Christian, who hears about me, and then does not believe in me and that which I have brought, except that Allāh must enter him into the Fire." [Muslim.]

He also said, "By Allāh! Even if Moses were alive, in your midst, it would not be lawful for him [to do anything] save to follow me." [Abū Ya'lā]

The evidence for the finality of his prophethood is :

- 1 - from the Qur'ān :
 " . . . but he is the Messenger of Allāh and the Last of the Prophets." Qur'ān[(33) Al- Ahzab, 40]
- 2 - from the authentic, **mutawātir** Ḥadīths.
 These are authentic ahādith so numerous and conclusive that anyone denying them falls outside the pale of Islām. e.g. "My likeness, with regard to the prophets, is that of a man who built a house, and then perfected it and beautified it, except for the place of a brick, so that whoever used to enter [the house] and look at it said, 'How fine it is, except the position of this brick!' So, I am the position of the brick; the prophets - blessings and peace be upon them - were brought to an end by me." [Bukhari and Muslim]
- 3 - the consensus (**ijmā'**) of the Companions in fighting against Musaylimah, the Liar, who laid claim to prophethood.

Miracles

A miracle (**mu'jizah**) is a violation of the laws of nature, showing up at the hands of a claimant to prophethood, in a way which supports his claim, as a challenge to the disbelievers, in a manner they cannot match. Miracles are a proof from Allāh of the veracity of His prophets. Muḥammad (ﷺ) had numerous miracles, and the greatest of them is the enduring miracle of the Qur'ān. Among the miraculous aspects of the Qur'ān are :

- its eloquence, unmatched by any mortal despite its perpetual challenge
- repetitive listening does not cause boredom
- ease of memorization
- contains scientific facts that were unknown at the time
- contains historical facts about previous nations

Sinlessness of the Prophets

By Imām Fakhra'd-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ar-Rāzī.

[• It is textually inconceivable for prophets to sin, for we have been ordered to follow them ("They are those whom Allāh has guided, so follow their guidance," "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) is an excellent role-model"), and if they were to sin, that would be tantamount to licensing the Ummah to sin. "Allāh does not command indecency. Do you speak without knowledge about Allāh?" Their sinning is also rationally inadmissible, for it would cause them to lose respectability and trustworthiness in the eyes of their people, which would hinder their propagation of the message and thereby negate the purpose for which they were sent. Those who wish to read further evidences may peruse the following tract.

As for the incidents in the lives of some prophets which seem to be sins on their part, these are merely a departure from optimal and best course of action, and so one who follows them in such deeds will not be sinful either.•]

There is consensus (**ijmā'**) on the fact that the prophets are free from disbelief (**kufr**) and innovation (**bid'ah**). We say that they were also free, during their prophethood, from major sins and from intentional commission of minor sins. As for forgetfulness, it is conceivable that it should arise with them. The following are **evidences of their infallibility**:

1. If they committed sins, they would be deserving of unending criticism, and of short-term retribution, more so than (those who are known as) sinful Muslims. This is erroneous, and so it is incorrect to ascribe sin to them. This is because the greatest favour that Allāh can bestow on one of His servants is prophethood and messengership. It is well-known and intuitive that whoever is in receipt of more bounties from Allāh has correspondingly fewer sins, and this idea is corroborated by three pieces of textual evidence: **i)** Allāh says (meaning), "Oh Wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other of the women", and also, "Oh Wives of the Prophet! Whoever among you brings forth clear obscenity, the punishment shall be increased to double for her." **ii)** That the married adulterer is stoned, whereas the unmarried fornicator is only whipped. **iii)** That the punishment for a slave is half that for freeman. Thus, what we have mentioned establishes that if the prophets committed sins, they would be more deserving of eternal condemnation and definite retribution than the sinful people of the Ummah; but this is

invalid by consensus. In fact, nobody would say that the prophets are at the highest condition before Allāh, but in the worst position, and this in turn demonstrates that they do not commit sins.

2. If they committed sins, their testimony would not be acceptable, because Allāh says, (meaning) "Oh believers! If a sinful person brings you some news, verify it." This is a command to authenticate information, and to stop short of accepting testimony from a sinner. But the proposition the testimony of prophets is unacceptable is absurd, for how can the testimony of somebody, whose evidence is unacceptable for worldly matters, become allowed for the rest of religion upto the Day of Judgement. Also, Allāh has affirmed that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is to be a witness over all on the Day of Arising. "How then, will it be, when we bring forth a witness from every community (**Ummah**), and we bring you forth as a witness over these (witnesses)?" . How can somebody who is a witness over all the Messengers on the Day of Resurrection be in such a condition that his testimony is not even accepted in this world?!
3. If vice were to emanate from Muḥammad (ﷺ), we would have been commanded either: to follow him, which not admissible, because Allāh says, "Say, Allāh does not command indecency; do you speak without knowledge about Allāh?" or not to follow him, which is also invalid, because Allāh says, (meaning), "Say, 'If you love Allāh then follow me that Allāh might love you", and also, "so follow him (the Prophet (ﷺ))". Since the implication of the Prophets committing sins is one of two unsound cases, it is not possible that they commit sins.
4. If sins were to be committed by the Prophets (on them be peace and blessings), it would be necessary that be promised the punishment of Allāh, and the punishment of Hell, because Allāh says, (meaning), "And whoever disobeys Allāh and His Messenger, and exceeds His limits, He will enter him into a Fire, in which he shall abide, and his shall be a disgraceful punishment", and they would be accursed, because Allāh says, (meaning), "Is not the curse of Allāh upon the wrongdoers?", and by consensus of the Ummah, this is invalid, so it is also invalid that sins should be committed by them.
5. They used to order obedience (to Allāh), and the forsaking of transgression, and if they abandoned obedience and committed transgression, they would come under the category of people mentioned in the verses, (meaning), "Oh believers, why do you say that which you do not practise? It is very hateful to Allāh that you say that which you do not practise", and "Do you command people towards righteousness, and forget your own selves?", and in fact it is well-known that this is the utmost in shamefulness. Also, Allāh has told us about His Messenger Shu'ayb (on whom be peace), that

he absolved himself of that, saying, (meaning), "Nor do I want to diverge from you in that which I prohibit you from."

6. Allāh tells us about the attribute of Abraham (عليه السلام), Isaac (عليه السلام) and Jacob (عليه السلام), (meaning) that "they used to vie in the good". The use of the definite article here indicates universality, and included in "the good" is the doing of every suitable thing and avoiding the inappropriate, which indicates that they used to practise every form of obedience, and used to avoid every misdemeanour.
7. Allāh says, (meaning), "And they are, before Us, from among the admirable, chosen ones." The words "**admirable**" and "**chosen**" imply obedience and abstinence from sin, because in Arabic it is said, "So-and-so is of the admirable, chosen ones except in such-and-such matter", where the exception alludes to the character of the admirable, chosen ones. This verse therefore indicates that they (prophets) were of the admirable, chosen ones in every matter, which excludes the possibility of their committing sins. And similar are the verses (meaning), "Allāh chooses messengers from among the angels, and from among mankind."