

Transcript: Beliefs, A long line of Prophets

A long line of Prophets

Ever since the first human beings, God has been sending us revelation. However books of revelation are not enough. We men and women need other human beings on whom we can model our lives; who can put the teaching into practice and lead others along the same path. These are the Prophets. They receive revelation from God and pass it on to other people. They live out that revelation in every aspect of their own lives. Finally, they lead a community to live according to that message.

All the peoples of the earth received a Prophet at some point in their history [Q. **10:47**, 16:36].¹ They all had essentially the same message - guidance for human beings on how to live a life perfectly in tune with the will of the Creator, that is *islam*.

The majority of Muslims see Prophets as being free from all sin throughout their lives through the power of God – for example, through the gift of knowledge. All Muslims hold that all Prophets are free from all major sins. A minority of Muslims are prepared to accept that Prophets might commit minor sins; and then they are corrected by God and repent immediately [Q. **4:105-106**, 40:55].² This sinlessness does not rob them of their humanity. They are one hundred percent human, and that means capable of sin. However, they hold that if they did sin sometimes and other times not, then we'd never know when to believe them. So the argument goes that we need them to be sinless to be a perfect example. For the minority group, their immediate repentance is an example in itself.

So, according to Islam, who were the Prophets? The first was Adam, the first human being. After him, there came at least one to all the peoples of the earth. The Qur'an does not give us the exact number [Q. **40:78**].³ The Qur'an names twenty-five Prophets, twenty-one of whom are Biblical figures, but this is not an exclusive list. There are many other Prophets not mentioned by name in the Qur'an.

¹ Q. **10:47** There is a Messenger for every community; so when their Messenger comes, judgement is made between them with justice, and they are not wronged.

² Q. **4:105-106** Indeed We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, so that you may judge between the people by what God has shown you; do not be an advocate for the traitors, and ask God for forgiveness; indeed God is All-forgiving, All-merciful.

³ Q. **40:78** Certainly We have sent Messengers before you. Of them are those we have recounted to you, and of them are some we have not recounted to you. A Messenger may not bring any sign except by God's permission. Hence when God's command comes, judgment is made with justice, and it is then that those who speak falsely become losers.

Prophets named in the Qur'an

Name in the Qur'an	Name in the Bible
Adam	Adam
Idris	Enoch
Nuh	Noah
Hud	
Salih	
Ibrahim	Abraham
Isma'il	Ishmael
Ishaq	Isaac
Lut	Lot
Ya'qub	Jacob
Yusuf	Joseph
Shu'ayb	
Ayyub	Job
Musa	Moses
Harun	Aaron
Dhu 'l-Kifl	Ezekiel
Dawud	David
Sulayman	Solomon
Ilyas	Elijah
Alyasa'	Elisha
Yunus	Jonah
Zakariyya	Zachariah
Yahya	John the Baptist
'Isa	Jesus
Muhammad	

The Qur'an says that Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad [Q. **61:6**],⁴ although there is no obvious reference in the Bible as it has been handed down. The other three non-biblical Prophets: Hud, Salih and Shu'ayb were earlier Prophets sent to the Arabs.

For a person to be a Prophet is the highest dignity that can be given to a human being. Muslims are not allowed to discriminate between Prophets [Q. **2:285**, 2:136, 3:84, 4:152].⁵ They are required to believe that they were all the Prophets of God. Thus Muslims believe in Abraham, Moses and Jesus as Prophets. However they are in no sense divine but human beings [Q. **21:7-8**, 6:8-9].⁶

Muhammad is the Last and the Seal of the Prophets. The Qur'an makes clear that there will be no more Prophets after him. He is the Seal, in that he confirmed and validated all that had gone before him; he is the universal Prophet and for all time.

Professor Michot speaks about Prophets named only in the Qur'an

In the Arabian Peninsula, the Qur'an tells us that there were Prophets: Hud, Salih and others, who were sent to Arab communities as they had been sent to other human communities. The important point, I think, is to tell us that the *Ahl al-Kitab*, the Christians and the Jews, haven't got a monopoly on prophethood. We have to realise that there were Prophets everywhere during human history in every human community. And the Qur'an tells us in particular about those Arabian Prophets, as there were Prophets elsewhere in other times as well. There is more about prophethood than just what we hear in the Bible.

Maulana Raza speaks of Muhammad as the perfect human being

Prophet [Muhammad] has been termed as *al-insan al-kamil*, which is the perfect human being, and by that I understand that he is at the peak of excellences in every sphere of human life and at the same time he offers the best possible example of living a very good human life.

⁴ Q. **61:6** And when Jesus son of Mary said, "O children of Israel! Indeed I am the Messenger of God to you, confirming what is before me of the *Taurat* [Torah], and giving the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad." Yet when he brought them manifest proofs, they said, "This is plain magic."

⁵ Q. **2:285** The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the believers. Each one [of them] believes in God, his Angels, his Books, and his Messengers. [They say] "We make no distinction between one and another of his Messengers." And they say, "We hear, and we obey, [we seek] your forgiveness, our Lord, and towards you is the journey."

⁶ Q. **21:7-8** We did not send [any Messengers] before you except as men, to whom We revealed. Ask the People of the Reminder [those who have received a revelation] if you do not know. We did not make them bodies that did not eat food, and they were not immortal.

The key importance of Abraham (Ibrahim)

Abraham is a key figure for the three faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He has great importance in both the Bible and the Qur'an [Q. **2:136**, 2:127-129, 6:75-83, 14:35-41, 16: 123, 37:83-113].⁷ Therefore he links the three faiths together.

Both Books agree that Abraham and his wife Sarah were elderly and childless and so Sarah suggested to Abraham that he take her Egyptian handmaid Hagar as a second wife. Abraham and Hagar had a son called Isma'il (Ishmael). Then, following a message from God, Sarah had a child with Abraham, his second son, Isaac. According to the Bible, Sarah wanted Abraham to send away Hagar and Isma'il, as she now had a son of her own.

The Bible says that a message came from God to say that Abraham, who was reluctant to do this, should send them away as God would protect them. Moreover, God would raise a great nation from Isma'il. The Bible says no more about Hagar and Isma'il, except to say that both sons were present at the burial of Abraham and that Isma'il's descendants settled in the lands between Egypt and Syria. According to Islam, Abraham led them to the valley where Makka now stands [Q. **14:37**].⁸ It was here in time that Abraham and Isma'il would re-build the Ka'ba [Q. **2:125-127**]⁹ and Adam and Eve are said to have worshipped here. The Ka'ba, often called "the House of God", is a cuboid building about 11 metres long, 12 metres wide and 15 metres high, held to be the first building on earth built for the worship of God.

The descendants of Isma'il, the Arabs according to the Bible, are seen as the second part of the Abrahamic family tree. Through Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, we trace the descent of Moses and thus the Jews. Jesus was of course a Jew and so Judaism and Christianity are linked. Through Abraham, Hagar and Isma'il we trace the descent of the Arabs or Ishmaelites, as the Bible calls them. It's interesting to note that the

⁷ Q. **2:136** Say: "We believe in God, and what was sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to the Prophets from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another of them, and to God we are submitting."

⁸ Q. **14:37** Our Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish the prayer. So make the hearts of a group of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.

⁹ Q. **2:125-127** And when We made the House [the Ka'ba] a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and you should take the station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and Isma'il, that they should purify my House for those who go around it [in prayer], or use it as a retreat, or bow or prostrate themselves [there]. And when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a safe city, and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in God and the Last Day." He said, "And such as reject faith, for a while I will grant them their pleasure, but soon I will drive them to the torment of fire, an evil destination!" And when Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House [with this prayer], "Our Lord! Accept this from us, for you are the All-hearing, the All-knowing".

Christians called early Muslims Ishmaelites, Hagarites or Saracens (which comes from the name Sarah). The Qur'an reinforces this link by speaking of five “resolute Prophets”, who were sent with a Shari'a or Way of Life: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad [Q. **42:13**, 33:7].¹⁰

¹⁰ Q. **42:13** He has prescribed for you as religion that which he had enjoined upon Noah and which we have [also] revealed to you, and which we had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus: “Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.” Hard on those who give God partners is that to which you invite them. God chooses for it whomever he wants and he guides to it whoever returns penitently.