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Who Were Propagating Prophets, and What Was Their Guidance and Propagation Method?

From Prophethood to Imamate: The Mechanics of Divine Guidance

Divine prophets are divided into two categories: law-giving prophets and propagating prophets. Although the messengers in both categories shared a common goal, the circumstances and methods of their missions differed. Law-giving prophets were very few and brought an independent religious law (*Sharia*). Each had a specific religion and a dedicated heavenly book. Even though the appointment of each new prophet perfected the previous religion, all divine religions are essentially one unified faith. They do not contradict each other in essence, and their fundamental principles are identical because God sent them all with a unified mission.

Every religious law brought by an arch-prophet (*Ulu al-Azm*) completed the one before it. Prophet Abraham, Prophet Noah, Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus, and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them) were law-giving prophets, also referred to as *Ulu al-Azm* prophets.

Approximately 124,000 prophets were sent to guide humanity, yet only five were law-giving prophets with a new religious law and book. The remaining messengers did not bring an independent religious law; instead, they promoted the law of the preceding prophet. These messengers, who taught the existing religion, clarified its ambiguities, corrected distortions, and expanded its reach, are called propagating prophets.

These propagating prophets were sent during eras when human intellect and scientific understanding could not yet adequately analyze or propagate the religious law. This limitation

caused the heavenly books of earlier prophets to be lost or distorted over time. Consequently, God sent propagating prophets sequentially—and sometimes simultaneously—to preserve religious laws and teachings during the intervals between the missions of the *Ulu al-Azm* prophets. Their presence ensured that people were never deprived of divine guidance or left to go astray.

With the appointment of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family), both law-giving and propagating prophethood concluded, and God sent no further prophets after him. He became the seal of the prophets, and Islam was proclaimed as the most perfect religion, finalizing all previous faiths. However, this era marked the beginning of the role of the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them), who assumed the responsibility of guiding the global Muslim community. This transition raises several questions. Answering them helps clarify our understanding of the role of propagating prophets and the reasons behind the cessation of prophethood:

- Why did prophethood end after the advent of Islam and the coming of the Noble Messenger?
- With the end of both law-giving and propagating prophethood, what would become of the people without a leader and guide?
- What was the difference between propagating prophets and the infallible Imams, and were their status and duties identical?
- What method of guidance and preaching did propagating prophets use, and did all of them function similarly in their propagation and guidance?

The Seal of Law-Giving and Propagating Prophethood

With the divine commission of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family), not only law-giving prophethood but also propagating prophethood came to an end. Islam provided the most complete divine law. Every religion and prophet before him pointed to this truth, sharing the good news that Islam would be the final religion and Prophet Muhammad the last messenger. With his arrival, the long line of prophets came to an end, and the door to new revelations was closed forever. There are several key reasons why prophethood ended with him, and the most important ones are explained below:

-The Completion of the Law and the Final Revelation of Religious Rulings and Teachings

The most significant reason for the end of prophethood was that everything humanity needed regarding religious knowledge, alongside individual and social rulings, had been revealed to the Prophet. The religious law had reached absolute perfection. In previous religious laws, by contrast, not all rulings and knowledge were revealed to the law-giving prophets; some were instead entrusted to propagating prophets.

-The Presence of the Infallible Imams and Their Disciples

Previous nations were like children unable to protect their books, ruining them after a short time; the Muslim community, however, was different. Historically, a major reason for sending a new prophet was the need to explain the religious law and maintain the people's connection with the Proof of God (Hujjat Allah). In Islam, the presence of the Prophet and the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them) fulfilled this requirement. Under the training and guidance of the infallible Imams, the *Ummah* of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family) reached a higher level of scientific and intellectual growth than previous nations. Because they possessed the best

alternative to propagating prophets, there was no longer any need for propagating prophets in this era.

The infallible Imams (Peace be upon them) were expert educators in human affairs, highly skilled in the divine upbringing of individuals, and explicitly endorsed by the Prophet. Their mastery over guiding and educating the people was so profound that, once the Prophet appointed his successor at the event of Ghadir Khumm, he had no anxiety regarding the guidance of the community after his passing, possessing complete peace of mind that the faith would be faithfully taught and preserved in his absence. Furthermore, the Infallible Imams trained a generation of exceptional scholars who, drawing upon this inherited wisdom, could accurately interpret and convey the true teachings of Islam.

-The Intellectual Maturity of Human Beings

After Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family), humanity was able to preserve his teachings and book to a relatively high standard. Previous nations had not reached the maturity required to protect their spiritual heritage, causing their laws and books to be gradually distorted or forgotten, which necessitated the appointment of propagating prophets. With the advent of Islam, people were trained under the Prophet. After his passing, despite the immense suffering and marginalization of the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them), the people continued to benefit from their teachings and explanations. This opportunity fostered an intellectual maturity that surpassed earlier nations, eliminating the need for propagating prophets.

The Difference Between an Infallible Imam and a Propagating Prophet

As previously mentioned, one of the most vital reasons for the cessation of propagating prophethood was the existence of the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them). If the infallible Imams did not exist, humanity would still require prophets and preachers to answer their questions, resolve ambiguities, and save them from misguidance. One might ask: What is the difference between an infallible Imam and a propagating prophet? Imamate and propagating prophethood share significant similarities, such as serving as a religious authority, teaching and clarifying the religion, connecting with the *Unseen* Realm, and executing divine commands. However, the most critical differences between these two stations fall into the following categories:

-The Superiority of Imamate Over Propagation

The rank of Imamate is above prophethood and is attained by only select messengers. Even Prophet Abraham, an *Ulu al-Azm* prophet, achieved this station only late in life, following a lifetime of profound trials.¹

-The Formation of Government

The Imam is the successor of the Prophet and carries the authority and mission to establish a divine government. Even if he cannot formally establish one, he strives to revive the religion to the best of his ability. In contrast, a propagating prophet is not the direct successor of the previous prophet and holds no inherent responsibility to establish a government. The Imam is the Proof of God, possessing full authority to resolve disputes and quell seditions.

-Existential Guidance

One of the most profound differences between these two stations is that propagating prophets merely present the path of guidance. The Imam, however, offers legislative guidance while also possessing existential guidance (*Hidayat Takwini*). This means he holds spiritual influence over human hearts, guiding individuals through a spiritual impact—a power that a propagating prophet lacks.

-Comprehensive Leadership

The station of Imamate is a form of leadership that encompasses the management of all material, spiritual, physical, apparent, and hidden aspects of the people. However, the scope and duties of a propagating prophet are more limited.

-The Completion of Religion

The Imam and the Imamate are essential for the religion's perfection. The Imams' presence after the Prophet was the primary reason for Islam's finality and completion, a truth affirmed in the Quran's Verse of Perfection (*Ayat al-Ikmal*). The Imam is an integral part of the religion itself, with duties fundamentally different from those of a propagating prophet.

-Political, Social, and Spiritual Guidance

Another major distinction is that the infallible Imam executes divine commands, whereas propagating prophets are strictly commissioned to deliver, clarify, interpret, and preach. The Imam holds a managerial and executive role within the nation, a position a propagating prophet does not hold.²

-The Guardian of Religion

The Imam is the protector of the religion and its guardian against distortion and deviation, whereas a propagating prophet acts strictly as its preacher.

The Guidance Method of Propagating Prophets

Typically, when parents want to compel their children to do something—like studying—they use specific methods. They constantly highlight the benefits of education, future career prospects, financial security, and the joys of school and university to stimulate the child, spark an interest in learning, and motivate them to strive. This method, where we draw a person toward growth and progress by promising a brighter future and stimulating their desire for excellence, is called giving glad tidings (*Tabshir*). Conversely, parents sometimes warn the child about the consequences of not attending school, the fate of remaining illiterate, and the resulting lack of wealth and social standing. This causes the child to fear neglecting their studies and take refuge in learning. This method, where we push a person forward by frightening them about negative consequences, is called warning (*Indhar*).

Generally, both warning and giving good news pursue the exact same goal, but their approaches differ. In many instances, both must be used in educational matters. Science and experience have proven that relying absolutely on glad tidings or exclusively on warnings is insufficient. It is exactly like a table with a broken leg: Its balance is disrupted, and it overturns.

The Quran consistently offers promises and glad tidings on one hand, while giving warnings and sounding alarms on the other, with both appearing at a relatively equal frequency in the text. Warning and giving glad tidings are two fundamental pillars of propagation that the prophets employed according to the specific conditions, circumstances, and situations of every individual and nation. Since God has granted human beings the free will to choose their own destiny, it is important to note that warning and giving glad tidings do not mean the prophet personally enforces a reward or punishment upon an individual. Rather, they simply express these truths by

warning of bitter consequences or promising pleasant outcomes. Ultimately, everything relies on the conscious choice of the human being.

By utilizing this dual motivation—creating constructive fear in individuals, instilling hope and motivation, establishing mental and educational balance, influencing various social strata, emulating God’s educational method, and fostering a sense of responsibility—propagating prophets used the methods of warning and giving glad tidings to guide the people, preach, and clarify the religion.

In this article, we introduced propagating prophets, listed their characteristics, and explained their differences from law-giving prophets and the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them). We also examined the reasons for the end of propagating prophethood and clarified how the people were guided and educated in the absence of both law-giving and propagating prophets.

References

¹. Quran 2:124

². Murtadha Mutahhari. *Man and Universe*. Translated by Mustajab Ahmad Ansari, Islamic Seminary Publications, 1990, p. 392.