

Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.5 **Nubuwwa: The Purpose of Prophethood in Islam**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to our Channel. In our previous lesson, we overviewed the concept of ‘adāla in Islam. As you may recall, ‘adāla referred to Allah’s Divine Justice. Divine Justice, put simply, is Allah’s fair treatment of His creation.

We know that God created humankind and that one day (the Day of Judgment) He will resurrect and hold all of humanity accountable for their deeds. For God to be fair, He needs to warn us about this Day and give us the proper guidance in order that we be successful . In Islam, the means through which God does this is called nubuwwa, or Prophethood.

In this lesson, we will overview the meaning, basics and purpose of Prophethood in Islam.

BODY OF TEXT

Nubuwwa is an Arabic term that is often translated as Prophethood. On the same scale, the term nabī is usually translated as Prophet. This translation can, however, be problematic at times. In the English language, the word “prophet” is usually understood as someone who has a connection with God, is a teacher inspired by God, or someone

who proclaims God's will on earth.

Although these definitions are true for the Islamic term nabī, not all people who have a connection with God and are inspired by Him or proclaim His will on earth are considered nabīs in Islam. For this reason, we need to be careful when we use the word Prophet.

We need to make sure that our understanding of the term is in accordance with how it is understood in Islam and not other religions or its conventional use in the English language.

In Islam, a nabī is a person who receives inspiration from God, like dreams, visions, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. This kind of unmediated inspiration is called ilhām in Islam. Nabīs, however, also receive something that is called wahī. Wahī is a special kind of direct revelation that Allah reveals to nabīs through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel or Jibrā'īl in Arabic. Those who are not Nabīs may receive inspiration, but only nabīs receive revelation through the angel Gabriel (as).

When God reveals (through wahī) a new system of laws to a nabī, this nabī also assumes the rank of a rasūl, which literally translates as "Messenger." Someone who is a nabī can also introduce a new law, but this is usually in the form of a specific law that complements a previous system of laws that was revealed via a Messenger.

For example, the Prophet Shu'ayb (as) was tasked by Allah to propagate a law prohibiting cheating in business, but this law only complemented the larger system of laws that was set in place by the Prophet Abraham (as). In this sense, you may think of a rasūl as bringing a new constitution, and a nabī as making amendments to that constitution (i.e. adding, slightly changing and so on).

As such, all rasūls are nabīs in Islam, but not all nabīs are rasūls!

Understanding basic Prophethood in Islam is critical. Prophets reveal to mankind the correct way to live in order to attain salvation. They bring

the “manual” of how to live a life that is pleasing to God and teach it so that people may find spiritual and material success both in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

As teachers, Prophets also play the critical role of being role models for us. Prophets are therefore liaisons who bring the message of guidance from Allah to humans. They live it themselves in front of us so that we may learn by their example on how to implement theory into practice.

In other words, they bring us the message, explain it and demonstrate it to us via their actions. Their actions are what we call sunnah in Islam, which literally means their “tradition,” “practice” or “culture.” In the case of the Prophet Muhammad (s), his sunnah is preserved in a oral tradition called the ḥadīth, which refer to his sayings or maxims or describe some of his practices as described by his contemporaries.

In Islam, we believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s), as a nabī and a rasūl, was the final Prophet sent by God to mankind. This is because Islam is considered as the final and perfect religion. It contains all solutions for mankind’s spiritual problems. It contains everything we need to know in order to attain salvation in God. Since the religion of Islam is perfect and complete and is meant for all of mankind in all places and all times, there is no more need for any new revelation from Allah.

The veracity of a Prophet is established through miracles which no one else can perform or repeat. The Prophet Muhammad’s greatest miracle, among other miracles, was the Qur’an whose eloquence not even the most eloquent of Arabs could mimic.

The Qur’an, the Divine Scripture of the Prophet, was not a miracle solely based on its eloquence, but it was also based on the power of its messages in the form of true stories, allegories and clear arguments. When the Qur’an challenged the doubters to bring a single verse like it, the Arabs could not do so and had to opt for a decade long war instead.

Although the content of its message could not be challenged, its interpretation could be distorted. For this reason, Allah chose Imāms

from the Ahl al-Bayt, that is, the Holy Household of the Prophet, to protect the interpretation of the Qur'an after him.

We believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s) was the most knowledgeable of all Prophets and that He was the best of all role models. Each Prophet had a special form of knowledge that was unique to him, and each Prophet had specific manners and ways of being that was special to him.

The Prophet Muhammad contained within him the knowledge of all of the divinely revealed Prophets and more. Furthermore, we believe that he was the best of all role models and displayed the most perfect moral character.

There has been a total of 124, 000 Prophets sent by God according to Islam. Some of these major Prophets were Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. They brought with them Divine Scriptures, such as the Torah of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus. Adam is considered to be the first of these Prophets. Jesus was also a Prophet but unlike Christianity, Islam does not believe that he was God nor was he the son of God.

Historically speaking, nabī in Islam were dispatched by God for specific regions only. With the exception of the Prophet Abraham (as), the Prophet Muhammad (s) was the only universal Prophet for he was the Prophet of the end of times. As religion was always evolving, Islam became the peak of that evolution.

It doesn't matter whether you live in Africa, East Asia or North America, the divine message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, as well as his moral and spiritual example, are meant for all peoples in all places and in all times.

When the basic shahāda is recited, it is always good to testify that the Prophet Muhammad "is the seal of all Prophets" in addition to "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." This means that he is the last and final messenger and prophet.