

The Chain Of Prophets

Speaking of the prophets chosen by God, the Quran emphasizes their “central” position in the whole Creation (“the worlds”):

Verily, Allah has chosen Adam and Nuh (Noah) and the House of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the House of `Imran (Amram) over the worlds Some of them being a progeny of the others... (3, 33—34)

Here the string of the messengers is not without reason opened by Adam — “the crown” of creation and its “centre”. For whose sake the earthly world was created. The Quran addresses the following words to the humanity — “to the sons of Adam” on the whole:

He (Allah) is the One Who created everything in the earth for you. (2, 29)

According to an ancient Jewish tradition, this point of view being supported by the Quran, Adam was the first prophet to say that he received his inspiration and knowledge from the Holy Spirit:

... I ... had a spirit of My Own breathed into him... (15, 29)

And, similarly to Adam, subsequent prophets occupy the most significant, “middle”, position in the created world: their lives partially implement God’s plan for man, which was ruined because of the original sin. It is known that the latter led to the man’s being “sent forth” from the face of God, his expulsion from Paradise. Since the communication with God is restored exactly in the souls of prophets, they not only become heirs of Adam’s prophetic rank, but also inherit his spiritual status of the “central”, “main” creation of God.

It is significant that in ayat 3, 33 the name of Adam is followed by those prophets, who were also destined to become “the fathers” of the upcoming generation: as we know, Noah literally became the forefather of all people after the Flood, and Abraham — “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4, 11), i.e. an example of complete devotion to God. As far as Amram is concerned, his sons were Moses — “the father of prophets” (according to a well-known Jewish definition), and Aharon — the patriarch of the Israeli priesthood (see Exodus 6, 20); that is why, Amram is also numbered among the spiritual forefathers of the believing part of the humankind, and the Quran mentions the chosen “house of Imran (Amram)” more than once...

Right for the reason that sin and evil on the Earth began with man’s revolt against God’s will and contrariness, the road to overcoming evil lies through the obedience to God’s will — “Islam” (in translation from Arabic — “submission”, “reconciliation [with God]”). For this reason the first (and common for all prophets) calling on the

humankind is an appeal for submission to the voice of God transmitted through the prophetic mouth.

Besides, submission definitely precedes the true faith (or, according to the New Testament definition, “the conviction of things not seen” — Hebrews 11, 1):

“Some of the nomadic Arabs say, “We believe.” Say, “O Prophet, “You have not believed. But say, ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts. (49, 14)

In accordance with what has been said about the mission of prophets, we can better understand the fact that Jesus — one of the greatest messengers, according to the Quran — is named “the word from God”:

Remember when the angels proclaimed, “O Mary! Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him, his name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary...” (3, 45)

Obviously, this definition of Jesus as “the Word from God” does not match the one inherent in the worldview of historic Christianity, for the Quran does not accept the teaching of the triune God and in no way considers “the Word from God” as the second person of the Trinity, i.e. the Son.

In the given ayat Jesus is named “the Word from God” due to his great mission — to contain the Word from above, to be messenger of revelation. Here it is not about the Divine Person of Jesus, as it is in the traditional Christianity, but about his earthly mission, for further it goes on to say:

*“...he will be one of those nearest to Allah...
...and will be one of the righteous.” (3, 45—46)*

Such expression is impossible to refer to the Divine Person. According to the Quran, God Himself “teaches” Jesus “Writing and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel” (3, 48), whereas the all-perfect Divine Person does not need teaching, being all-knowing in its definition!

It is also interesting in what progression God teaches Jesus: the knowledge of the Gospel (i.e. he receives his direct mission — evangelism) is sent to him only after he “learns” the Writing (probably, the Heavenly Book is meant here — the archetype of all future prophetic writings), then wisdom (or the intuitive perception of the truth) and finally, the Tora of Moses, which, according to the word of Jesus himself, is an incommutable foundation of evangelic teaching:

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Law [the Torah] until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5,18)

It is important that the Quran, speaking of God's "teaching" Jesus, develops the New Testament theme: it is said there that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Hebrews 5, 8), after what "having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5, 9).

The given words enclose the same idea, which is pursued further in the Quran: being a great prophet, Jesus did not become obedient to God and perfect immediately, but only after going a definite spiritual way; believers do not come to salvation only through faith in Jesus, but exactly through obedience to him as to God's messenger.

The Quran provides the confession of faith of Jesus himself:

"...Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord. So worship Him 'alone'. This is the Straight Path." (3, 51)

It should be noted that such confession totally matches Jesus's admittance of God's full power over himself as well as over the other people, which is mentioned in the Gospel:

... I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.
(John 20, 17)

Similar words of Jesus are given in The Revelation of John:

If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God... I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God... that comes down from my God... (Revelation 3, 12)

Thus, each prophet, including Jesus — the greatest messenger preceding Muhammad — is considered to be a channel of God's impact on people, and no message from above can be brought upon the Earth without them; in this context, prophets act as "helpers of Allah" in the field of the enlightenment of the mankind.

For instance, the Quran speaks such words of the closest disciples of Jesus:

...The disciples said: "We are helpers of Allah..." (3, 52)

The direct connection between the prophet and the Creator, which is not determined by any human regulations or earthly hierarchy, guides the messenger beyond all social and religious definitions, puts them beyond a narrow confessional identity:

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God... (3, 67)

It is obvious that forefather Abraham, who lived 400 years earlier than the Torah was given (Genesis 15, 13; Exodus 12, 40), could in no way be defined as a Jew (for patriarch Judah — whose name gives origin to the Judaic tribe, and further religion — was Abraham's great grandson), or more than that, a christian (there is a period of more than 2000 years between the epochs of Abraham and Jesus).

But the most significant thing that the Quran emphasises — Abraham was “upright and devoted to God” (a more exact translation would be “a devoted [to Allah] hanīf”). Consequently, one can please God, become a truly righteous person both before and beyond existing confessions: righteousness is defined by the vertical dimension of human spirituality, not by the plane of one's religious or social identity...

Since the aim of all prophets is the same — to lead the human race to obedience to God and to restore the dialogue between God and each soul interrupted back in the Paradise — the mission of each prophet is completed by the following messengers and is not full without them. Especially, it is related to the mission of Muhammad, whose upcoming appearance had been foreseen by the great founders of the preceding teachings:

‘Remember’ when Allah made a covenant with the prophets, ‘saying,’ “Now that I have given you the Book and wisdom, if there comes to you a messenger confirming what you have, you must believe in him and support him.”... (3, 81)

“You” in the quoted ayat is definitely addressed to the followers of the prophets in question, but not the prophets themselves, for, firstly, the latter lived epochs earlier than Muhammad; secondly, true messengers of the Lord do not need to be “convinced” to believe in an upcoming prophet.

Three monotheistic branches

Now we can see that both in the Torah and in the Gospel there are predictions concerning Muhammad. Exegetes usually refer to the prophecy of Moses:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. (Deuteronomy 18, 18—19)

Prophet Muhammad can be recognized in these verses by the following tokens. It is he who comes from a line of Ishmael, the blood brother of Isaac, the forefather of Israelites (“from among their brethren”); it was he, just like Moses (“like unto thee”), who created a new religious community, became its leader, gave it a law in a holy

scripture (the Quran) on behalf of God; lastly, it was he, who gave his people an integral teaching covering — just like the Torah does it — all sides of the life of each human and the society (“he shall speak unto them all”).

Besides the given prophecy Muslim commentators quote one more extract from the Torah, predicting the future spread of Islam. The last blessing of Moses addressed to Israel contains the following words:

*The Lord came from Sinai,
and dawned from Seir upon us;
He shone forth from Mount Paran.
With Him were myriads of holy ones;
at His right, a host of His own.*

Indeed, O favourite among peoples... (Deuteronomy 33, 2—3)

This description of the three appearances of God include the prophecy of the three great monotheistic religions through which the Creator will reveal Himself to the human kind: Judaism (which is symbolized by the Mount Sinai and the granting of the Torah, which it is related to); Christianity (Seir, the land of Edom, symbolizing Rome, whose state religion has become Christianity; compare with the genealogy of Edom in Genesis 36, verses 1, 30, 43, where “Iram”, according to ancient expositors, corresponds with Rome; and finally, Islam, symbolically represented by a mountainous desert land of Paran located between Palestine and Egypt, primarily inhabited by the descendants of Ishmael (see Genesis 21, 20—21).

There are some other Old Testament predictions of the spread of Islam. Such are the words of prophet Habakkuk:

*God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of His praise. (Habakkuk 3, 3)*

“Teman” (Old Hebrew “Teiman”, i.e. “the southern country”) is a Biblical name of Yemen and Arabia on the whole, and as to “Mount Paran”, the place of origin of Ishmael’s descendants, we have mentioned it already. Thus, prophet Habakkuk predicts the spreading of the message of God’s praise from Arabia all over the world (“the earth was full of his praise”).

Further in the same prophecy we come across the description of upcoming military expansion of Islam on land and sea.

In fury you trod the earth,

in anger you trampled nations.

<...>

*You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the mighty waters. (Habakkuk 3, 12—15)*

The Book of prophet Isaiah includes a prophecy of greatest spiritual victories of prophet Muhammad mentioned by Muslim commentators:

*When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs,
riders on donkeys, riders on camels... (Isaiah 21, 7)*

The Hebrew original speaks of the two riders “in pairs”, one of whom is on a donkey, the other is on a camel. Jesus can be recognised in the first, for he arrives in Jerusalem on a donkey, whereas the other is Muhammad bestriding a camel. Their riding in a pair indicates a common mission — the spread of monotheism among the nations of the world. The ninth verse of the same chapter of the Book of Isaiah repeats the description of “the horsemen in pairs”, followed by such prediction:

*Then he responded,
'Fallen, fallen is Babylon;
and all the images of her gods
lie shattered on the ground.'* (Isaiah, 21, 9)

Babylon denotes idolatry in the biblical symbolic system — paganism as it is, which has been suffering a deathly strike from common effort of Christianity and Islam for ages. And it was exactly the Muslim wars of conquest, which defeated Mesopotamia within 10 years after the death of Muhammad (by 642 AD, during the rule of Caliph Umar), bringing paganism (“all the images of her gods”) to an end on the territory of historic Babylon.

The evidence that among the population of Arabia (“Yemen”) great moral changes will take place, which may be caused only by the spread of monotheism with its humane regulations concerning “love for distant ones” (the help for strangers in need) can be found in the Book of Isaiah, the same chapter:

*The burden upon Arabia...
The inhabitants of the land of Tema [i.e. of Yemen]! brought water to him that was
thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.
For they fled from the swords... (Isaiah 21, 13—15)*

It is common knowledge that before the emergence of Islam the population of Arabia had been notorious for constant intertribal conflicts, and it was only the muslim faith that united and fraternized all muslims regardless of their ethnic descent, teaching them pure altruism:

...they prevented with their bread him that fled... (Isaiah 21, 14)

Concerning the New Testament predictions about prophet Muhammad, one of them is seen by muslim exegetes in the words of Apostle Peter addressed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

... When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear... (Acts 3, 19—22)

According to a number of Islamic exegetes, the context of this preaching implies that among upcoming events preceding the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, the coming of “a prophet ... of your brethren” similar to Moses is foreseen. We have already spoken of the reference of this prophecy of the Torah to Muhammad. Moreover, the advent of Jesus Christ to the earth (“...And he shall send Jesus Christ... — Acts 3, 20) will take place after the appearance of this “prophet ... of your brethren”.

Thus, “whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you” (3, 81) is a prediction that Muslim commentators really find in the books of the Bible.

Much to our regret, the mediums of monotheistic truths — Jews and Christians — did not accept the calling “to believe and support” the messenger of God — Muhammad. Obviously, in case all monotheistic believers of that time had united, supporting one another in faith and virtue, the history of mankind would have taken quite a different direction, for religious discord is still shaking the earth, and most of military conflicts are in this or that way related to ideological opposition (which in their essence are religious, explicitly or implicitly).

Remember that the first fratricide on earth was committed on religious grounds: Abel’s offering was received by the Lord, whereas Cain’s was rejected (see Genesis 4, 3—8)...

One of prophet Muhammad’s missions, besides the foundation of Islam on earth, is also the support of the followers of other monotheistic religions in their devotion:

...And We sent down to you the Scripture with truth, confirming whatever scripture that preceded it and an overseer over it... (5, 48)

And further it goes like this:

...For each of you We have assigned a legislation and a method... (5, 48)

The structure of life in an ummah — a community in Islam, Muslims' firm standing in faith and virtue are meant to be a good example for the followers of other confessions and thus "oversee over" their holy texts ("an overseer over it [the Scripture]").

Coexistence of different branches of monotheism — all three Abrahamic religions and their offshoots — has a deep meaning and is predestined by God Himself:

... If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given 'each of' you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you 'of the truth' regarding your differences. (5, 48)

This seems to be the clearest and most understandable way to express the idea of the Lord's equal acceptance of all branches of monotheism. They exist in their plurality according to His will and for the reason of a competitive spirit ("...compete with one another in doing good..."). It is exactly the abundance of good deeds that indicate the advantage of this or that direction of the Abrahamic tradition; since the advancement of doing good is a perpetual process, it remains open to all religious communities — they all follow their various ways to one and the same goal.

This ayat — which is vitally important in the context of the inter-religious dialogue — prevents all attempts to justify fanaticism, religious hatred, persecution of the representatives of other faiths on the basis of the Quran. This once again emphasises the continuity of the great "chain of prophets" — from Adam to Mahammad.

Even those contemporaries of Muhammad who mistrusted his mission paid attention to the fact that the Quran contains much and frequent narration of the previous prophets and called such narration "fables":

...The disbelievers would 'even' come to argue with you, saying, "This 'Quran' is nothing but ancient fables!" (6, 25)

Disbelievers have no idea that the prophet feels a blood and spiritual relationship to his predecessors forming with them one seamless whole and that "the fables" of their deeds and sufferings are reflected as if in a mirror in contemporary events, which Mohammad himself experiences. That is why the prophet's disbelieving contemporaries are unwilling and more than that — unable to recognise themselves

in the sinners of preceding epochs and to repent of rebelling against the messenger of God...

A message handed down to each prophet is full of extraordinary power; accepting it sincerely could change a person, draw their spiritual development to the road of goodness:

...So, those who believe and correct themselves, there will be no fear for them, nor shall they grieve...(6, 48)

“To correct oneself” seems to be beyond man’s power — such a transformation in man’s heart can be done only by the Spirit of God. Together with kindness and love the heart is visited by the presence of God Himself, which casts out all fear and inner suffering. The same principle is written about in the New Testament text:

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. (1 John 4, 18)

The spiritual law, according to which the bonding of entities in the spiritual world is only due to the sameness of their qualities, appears quite vividly to be in power in this case. The fear is cast out from the heart exactly because the heart becomes full of the presence of God Himself, Who “is love”. And He dwells only in the souls of those who love Him and of their neighbours:

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. (1 John, 4, 16)

Achieving the love of God is exactly the goal of the prophet’s mission on the whole, which is proven by the Quran:

...Do good, for God loves those who do good. (2, 195)

How Should the True Messenger Be Recognised?

Since the prophet can witness not only the mysteries of the spiritual world, but also the laws of the earthly life, which are concealed from the eyes and minds of other people (including upcoming events, the relation of the earthly and heavenly worlds, the purpose of life, and the cause and effect connection between the state of people and their destiny), they can definitely be called the seeng among the blind:

... “I only follow what is revealed to me.” Say, “Are the blind and the seeing alike?”...(6, 50)

Pointing exactly at the lack of the gift of prophecy among the leaders of Sadducees and Pharisees of his time, Jesus calls them “blind guides” (Matthew 23, 24) and warns them:

...Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? (Luke 6, 39)

Religious leaders without a direct inspiration from above (the gift of foreseeing) bring their people to a catastrophe, just as it happened twice in the history of ancient Israel and Judea (the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and of the Second — in 70 ADE). That is why Isaiah had warned his people not to follow the “prophets who teach lies”, bringing confusion and death (Isaiah 9, 15–16), whereas Jesus called false prophets “ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7, 15).

Biblical texts provide multiple examples of the enormous good that a true prophet does to the society, as well as of harmful impact on it of a false prophet. The question of a true prophetic inspiration is put in the Quran quite sharply.

Who does more wrong than the one who fabricates lies against Allah or claims, “I have received revelations!”—although nothing was revealed to them...? (6, 93)

But how should a true prophet be told from a false one, what are the features of a veritable messenger? Due to the primary importance of this issue, we can find such regulations back in the Torah — right after the prediction of “a prophet from among their own people”:

21 You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?’

22 If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it. (Deuteronomy 18, 21–22)

Thus, there are two most important characteristics of a veritable prophet: firstly, he must speak in the Name of one God — for other gods do not exist, and the one who speaks in their name (remember the notorious “prophets of Baal and Asherah”— see 1 Kings 18, 19) is either a liar and charlatan or is possessed by evil spirits (see Deuteronomy 32, 16–17; 1 Kings 22, 21–22). And secondly, the one who speaks in the name of one God (“speaks in the name of the Lord”) must support his being a messenger by predicting events which are to come in the nearest future in front of a large number of witnesses.

Thus, for instance, Isaiah had foreseen the fact that the Syrian and Israeli kingdoms would be defeated by Assyria (see Isaiah 7, 1–9), and Amos predicted an earthquake, which took place two years after he started his prophecy (Amos 1, 1–2).

It is common knowledge that there are predictions embracing essential events of the world's history withing hundreds and thousands years' periods ahead. Such are for example the prophecy of Moses covering the scattering of the Israeli people "among all peoples" and its subsequent gathering in the Holy Land (see Deuteronomy 28, 64—67; 30, 1—8), the prophecy of Daniel of the four world empires — Babylon, The Achaemenid Empire, Greece and Rome (see Daniel 7), and of the coming of Jesus Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem (Daniel 9, 24—27), as well as many other predictions of God's messengers. (See more information in "Introduction to the Old Testament" by Dmitriy Shchedrovitskiy; "The Prophecy Of the Book Of Daniel About the Past and Future of Humanity" by Dmitriy Shchedrovitskiy).

In fact, the prophetic gift of Muhammad himself was questioned not only by pagan Arabs, who denied any direct revelation of the true God, but also by the representatives of monotheistic teachings, who constantly demanded the evidence of Muhammad's being a prophet.

What predictions did Muhammad utter in order to make those who hesitated in their faith believe and bring disbelievers to faith?