

A Prophet or a Messenger: How Bona Fide a Qur'anic Concept?*

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Abstract

This paper probes specific questions in the Qur'an on various prophetic phenomenon (e.g., the purpose of revelation to prophets/messengers, the question of sending them, and the meaning of book/scripture) in order to ascertain whether or not the popular theories on their essence have valid Qur'anic support. It hypothesizes that the major conclusions on this subject have no solid Qur'anic evidence, that prophets and messengers are one and the same person, and that the Qur'an uses both terms interchangeably. Specific treatments of the questions (heavily dependent on the Qur'an) are preceded by their simple depiction in a diagram. Fresh attempts are made to redefine the terms *prophet* and *messenger*.

I begin by reviewing the conclusions of al-Mawardi, al-Qadi 'Iyad, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri, all of whom have, in what came to be extremely popular concepts, distinguished between prophets and messengers. Following suit, the ideas of some leading western scholars on this subject (e.g., A. J. Winsinck, Joseph Horovitz, and Willem A. Bijlefeld) are also reviewed and assessed.

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Introduction

The existence of the prophetic phenomenon among different generations has more to do with the nature of human beings than with the interaction of cultures and civilizations. For diverse reasons, people seek superior beings as objects of worship and dedication, an undertaking that necessitates the existence of intermediaries (viz., prophets, elders, or seers). Muslim scholars use the Qur'anic story of Abraham and his quest for a superior being (*rabb* [lord]) to worship prior to his becoming a prophet (6:74-79) to substantiate this natural human propensity.

Abdul-Hamid Siddique, in his *Prophethood in Islam*, contends that Immanuel Kant's (d. 1804) remark about metaphysics – that “it is an instinct which we cannot destroy, however much its successful achievement may be denied” – also pertains to religion and prophecy.¹ The poet William Blake (d. 1827) is even more emphatic and revealing concerning the need for religious faith:

Man must have and will have some religion; if he has not the religion of Jesus, he will have the religion of Satan, and will erect the synagogue of Satan, calling the Prince of this World, God, and destroying all who do not worship Satan under the name of God.²

Although Blake's statements may be considered controversial and polemical, or may even be construed as “anti-Semitic,” it goes without saying that if the orientation from the “religion of Jesus” to the “religion of Satan” that he infers is to be averted, then communication between human beings and supernatural beings (God or deities) is essential. This communication takes place in several ways. Since God or the deities are perceived as supernatural being(s), communication is usually channelled through intermediaries (prophets or messengers).

Muslim and western scholars have discussed this prophetic phenomenon using various methodological approaches, among them defining prophethood and messengership, deliberating on its necessity, and elaborating upon prophethood's proofs and signs.³ Significantly, in what came to be an extremely popular undertaking, they tried to distinguish between prophets and messengers while reserving superiority for the messengers who, to the exclusion of the prophets, were also given scriptures.

Now, why should readers be interested in a study that seeks to elaborate upon whether or not the popular distinction between *prophet* and *messenger* has any Qur'anic support? First of all, this distinction has been so popular not only among Muslims and experts in Islam, but is also even familiar, as

an Islamic concept, to some non-experts in Islamic studies. Everybody, therefore, needs to be disabused of this notion and its possible consequences. Second, the debate about prophets and messengers is an intimate part of Islamic theology, an area that has always been seen as rooted in the Qur'an for its subject matters. So, ascertaining whether or not a theological issue is sanctioned by the Qur'an must be a legitimate priority.

Third, the fact that the idea of distinction came to represent (almost unchallenged) the Qur'anic point of view must be corrected. Finally, as a practical matter, this idea has affected certain theories in Islamic theology. For instance, Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), the Andalusian-born Muslim theologian, argued very passionately that there were female prophets but never female messengers. The only reason he insisted upon the latter point is because he differentiated between prophets and messengers, an idea that he strongly believed had Qur'anic support.⁴ However, it must be mentioned that although a few notable scholars have mentioned female prophets, this view is unpopular among general Muslims scholars.

With specific questions (e.g., the purpose of revelation to prophets and messengers, the question of both being sent, the problem of book/scripture), I will demonstrate that since this idea has no Qur'anic support, prophets and messengers are one and the same group of people and that the Qur'an uses both terms interchangeably. Before I articulate my theses with an exhaustive analysis of the Qur'anic content, I intend to review, without specific preference, the opinions of some classical and modern Muslim theologians (viz., al-Mawardi, al-Qadi `Iyad, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri) and analyze, with equal intellectual appreciation, the works of some leading western scholars (viz., A. J. Winsinck, Joseph Horovitz, and Willem A. Bijlefeld). I will also use classical and modern Qur'an exegesis extensively (viz., al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Alusi).

After a careful review of the current debate's content, the questions are identified such that important concerns are given their due analysis: the purpose of revelation to prophets and messengers as well as the question of one group, rather than the other, being "sent" are suggested quite often, but never systematically traced in the Qur'an. The problem of book/scripture is thoroughly studied, and the conclusions are hardly, nor satisfactorily, reflective of Qur'anic content. From this consideration, while one may or may not agree with my conclusions, these questions remain compelling and viable criteria for which relevant answers may be provided. Furthermore, they are compelling because any serious research must attempt to answer them. By no means exhaustive, the scholars are also carefully cho-

sen based upon their clearer and unique perspectives and, at the same time, for their potential to represent and reflect a broader scope of their peers.

Prophethood and Messengership

Although the idea of understanding the Qur'anic concepts of prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and messengership (*risalah*) is not usually pursued per se, various opinions regarding the relationship between them have been expressed. I am, however, mindful of Willem A. Bijlefeld's prudent warning to be "extremely careful with a definition of 'the Qur'anic doctrine' on any point."⁵

Certainly, it would be incorrect to "approach the Qur'anic data on prophets and apostles with a theory or doctrine of prophethood derived from other sources."⁶ The statement that Muhammad is not "a systematic thinker, but [-] an enthusiastic preacher-prophet," however, is also perfectly correct.⁷ Moreover, the Qur'an is not a systematic-philosophical book, but rather a concise scripture. Hence many concepts, including those of prophethood and messengership, are found but are never clearly discussed in it. As a researcher, the best thing to do is to follow as closely as possible, and to investigate as thoroughly as possible, the verses on a particular subject. This is what is intended here with regard to prophethood and messengership.

Muslim scholars have tacitly felt that their opinions are rooted in the Qur'an, even though the Qur'an is far from defining the exact relationship between prophets and messengers in clear terms. As a result, Muslims "did not agree on the relationship between [the terms] prophet and messenger."⁸ And western scholars of Islam followed suit. There seems to be no "deliberate" attempt on the part of Muslim scholars, however, to conduct "comprehensive" surveys on all of the relevant verses containing these two terms.

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328)⁹ will be used to illustrate this latter observation. One of his most original contributions is that both prophets and messengers are "sent" to people. In addition, he insists that prophets are sent to a believing audience, while messengers are sent to a disobedient and non-believing one.¹⁰ This assertion, in my opinion, leaves much to be desired. Numerous verses seem to indicate that an antagonistic and disobedient audience is not exclusive to messengers. In fact, the Qur'an states that prophets were also disobeyed.¹¹ Had Ibn Taymiyyah carried out an exhaustive survey and juxtaposed the Qur'anic verses containing these terms, surely he would have reconsidered his statements.¹² This example is intended only to show that the Muslim scholars consulted did not, for some reason, "deliberately"

embark upon a “systematic investigation” of the “Qur’anic concept” of prophecy and messengership.

The fourth chapter of al-Mawardi’s (d.1058) *A`lam al-Nubuwwah*¹³ is entitled “Affirming (the Existence of) Prophecies” (*Ithbat al-Nubuwwat*). Unlike many scholars on this subject, he is particularly concise and yet highly contentious. His polemical orientation was probably due to his affiliation with the Mu`tazilah.¹⁴ Al-Mawardi’s contention that prophets are the chosen intermediaries between God and human beings inherently emphasizes the delivery of messages. It therefore undermines any idea that they are not specifically sent to people and calls into question his own statement, which seems to suggest that they are different from messengers due to the latter’s delivery of messages.¹⁵

Even though prophets are needed to convey messages from God, the intellect necessarily infers the essential aspects of a prophet’s message. Al-Mawardi believed that it was vital to point this out, since, according to him, some argued that prophethood is not necessary, as the essentials of a given message must necessarily be proven by the intellect.¹⁶ In regard to the process by which prophethood can be ascertained, two essential channels are identified, through one of which the prophet divines his message: he either has to hear a voice informing him about his mission or to receive his message through the intervention of an angel. Prophethood has three conditions, without which it cannot be considered true: a person claiming to be a prophet must possess qualities that will make him suitable for the ensuing task,¹⁷ be able to perform a miracle to substantiate his prophethood, and the miracle must be accompanied by an authentic claim to be a prophet.

Almost all scholars who discuss the function of prophethood in Islam have touched upon the question of the difference between prophets and messengers. Al-Mawardi, for his part, writes: “As for the difference between prophets and messengers, the Qur’an has used them both, together and separately.”¹⁸ This does not make his position clear, especially when he begins to present the opinions of scholars who are sharply divided over whether or not *prophets* and *messengers* are synonymous terms. It is safe to say that all definitions are confined to the following, albeit differently expressed: (1) “A messenger is someone to whom an Angel came with inspiration [concerning messengership]. And a prophet is someone who received inspiration through his sleep”; (2) “A messenger is someone who is sent to [a nation of] people, and a prophet is a transmitter who is not sent to the people;” and (3) “A messenger is someone who comes as a beginner in laying down laws and rules [from God]. And a prophet is someone who maintains the laws of other [messengers].”¹⁹

Al-Qadi `Iyad's (d. 1149)²⁰ *Al-Shifa'* is unique in pointing out that God may impart knowledge about Himself and His obligations to people directly, thereby undermining the popular argument that prophets are particularly necessary channels between God and human beings.²¹ And yet he still believes in the necessity of prophethood. Not only has his definition of a messenger proved to be insightful, but it is also creative.²² One opinion, deemed by many scholars to be the best, is that "every messenger is a prophet, but not every prophet is a messenger."²³ Although this is more a conclusion than a definition, it nonetheless identifies scholars with those who distinguish between prophets and messengers.

In his *Kitab al-Nubuwat*, Ibn Taymiyyah does not even consider that there is a need to prove prophethood's necessity. He establishes it by way of discussing the prophets' miracles in a rather unique and radical fashion:

A prophet is someone who is informed by God, and who [in turn] informs [others] about what God has informed him. But if he is sent, in addition to that, to [people] who disobeyed God's command, in order to deliver [to them] a message from God, then he is a messenger.²⁴

In this definition, the fact that both a prophet and a messenger are being sent is highly creative. For the first time, therefore, a scholar is able to distinguish between a prophet and a messenger while simultaneously asserting that they are both "sent" to deliver messages. In contradistinction to others who are unable to account for their respective differentiations, this admission allows Ibn Taymiyyah to account perfectly for Qur'an 22:52's use of the verb "sent" for both prophets and messengers.

The actual difference between prophets and messengers, according to this definition, one would surmise, relates specifically to the audience, for in the case of the message, a prophet must be conveying, reminding, and reinforcing a prior message that the people already know to be true. Here, a prophet generally acts like a scholar. Messengers, on the contrary, are sent to deliver special messages that may or may not be new. Although Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the Shari`ah's lack of originality in relation to the prophets, he does not believe that messengers should necessarily come with a new Shari`ah either.²⁵ This statement, therefore, makes the message (the Shari`ah) superfluous, considered as a difference. Consequently, one can readily identify the significance attached to the audience as the crucial difference. Thus, the prophet directs his message to a believing audience, while a messenger is sent to a disobedient and non-believing audience.

Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes that there is enough evidence in the Qur'an to demonstrate that messengers are invariably disobeyed.²⁶ Although origi-

nal, this opinion is far from being perfectly substantiated, since the Qur'an also relates how certain prophets are disobeyed.²⁷ Finally, he tries to de-emphasize the significance of the Qur'an's use of "sent" for both prophets and messengers by showing how it is also used to refer to angels, wind, Satan, and fire.

As a modern scholar and al-Azhar graduate from Nigeria, Adam `Abd Allah al-Aluri (Ilori) has something to add.²⁸ Al-Aluri attempts to construct new definitions for both prophet and messenger, striving to find ones with roots embedded in the Qur'an or the hadith. Although his new definitions are based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the evidence is still circumstantial, since the verses are not actually definitions and his method of arriving at the definitions is unclear. On what grounds, for instance, could 42:51 be used to define a prophet rather than a messenger, when it does not even mention the term *prophet*? Yet his definitions are innovative and merit attention.

The Qur'an states:

It is not given to any human being that Allah should speak to him unless by revelation, or from behind a veil, or He sends a messenger (*rasul*) to reveal what He wills by His leave. Verily, He is Most High, Most Wise. (42:51)

Also, according to one hadith, Abu Dharr asked Prophet Muhammad: "Was Adam a prophet (*nabiy*)?" and received the answer: "Yes, God spoke to him."²⁹ From this, al-Aluri concludes that any human being to whom God spoke through inspiration is a prophet. Moreover, based on this verse and together with the hadith, he defines a prophet as "a human being to whom God spoke clearly or from behind a veil, or sent an angel who will reveal to him what God wishes by His leave."³⁰ His definition for a messenger is drawn from verses suggesting that God sent messengers to people to deliver messages³¹: "a prophet whom God sends as a preacher in His course, who conveys God's message, and who is a giver of glad tidings and a warner."³²

Among the scholars consulted here, Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri is the only one who emphasized the male factor in his definitions³³:

A prophet is a male person whom God inspired with a command. If he is commanded to deliver it to the people, then he is a prophet and a messenger. But if he is not ordered to deliver it, then he is only a prophet and not a messenger.³⁴

Also unique to al-Jaza'iri are his specific examples for both prophets and messengers. For him, Yusha' ibn Nun (Joshua), who, according to the Qur'an, was Moses' young companion at his rendezvous with Khidr,³⁵ was

a prophet but not a messenger, simply for assuming responsibility for the Israelites after Moses [and Aaron]. Al-Jaza'iri cites Muhammad as the perfect example of both a prophet and a messenger.³⁶

Western scholars on Islam have been no more successful than Muslims in agreeing on the relationship between prophets and messengers. One of the leading western experts on the subject is A. J. Wensinck (d. 1939). Not only is he of the opinion that the Qur'an makes a distinction between prophets and messengers, reserving superiority for the latter, but he also holds that the famous definition (conclusion) that "every apostle is as such also a prophet; but not every prophet is at the same time an apostle" can be traced to the Qur'an.³⁷ Although this is clearly his position, he astutely admits that the Qur'an is not always clear with regard to this doctrine.³⁸ Still, in J. W. Fiegenbaum's own words: "Wensinck's position is not very convincing because his use of the Qur'an is exceedingly limited, and the lines of investigation which he chose to follow have not been thoroughly researched."³⁹

Locating which individuals are designated in the Qur'an as prophets or messengers may still not be helpful in ascertaining the doctrine of prophethood and messengership, for the Qur'an itself has no method of identifying them. This makes such efforts unreliable or even futile. For instance, if a messenger is assumed to be superior to a prophet, as many have suggested, why does the Qur'an fail to identify Abraham as a *rasul*, when it is apparent that he is of a sufficiently high stature? Once again, Fiegenbaum suspects that Wensinck did not undertake a careful analysis of the Qur'an due to its implied lack of originality.⁴⁰ Although this suspicion is supported by the attitudes of some earlier western scholars of Islam, one is still left to wonder if it is really true in Wensinck's case.

According to Joseph Horowitz (d 1931), another famous scholar on the subject, *nabiy*, a word that he and other scholars believe was borrowed from Hebrew or Aramaic,⁴¹ is distinguished from *rasul* by the Qur'an. Horowitz considers prophets to be exclusively from the Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book: Jews and Christians), while messengers were sent to other people.⁴² It seems that Horowitz, who also draws up a list of prophets and messengers, is more thorough than Wensinck in paying attention to the Qur'anic content. Consequently, the former rejects the idea of the messengers' superiority over the prophets,⁴³ especially when Prophet Hud and others are identified as messengers, while Abraham is only described as a prophet. Considering Abraham as only a prophet ignores the Qur'an's other statements about him.

Mention must be made of Willem A. Bijlefeld and his "A Prophet and More than a Prophet," a meticulously researched article on the use of the cat-

egories of prophet and messenger. First, his work must be appreciated for its rejection of

the practice of placing the Qur'anic material at the very outset of the investigation in the light of non-Muslim concepts and to interpret the Qur'anic data on the basis and the context of these "alien" notions.⁴⁴

He adds, "this is particularly harmful and confusing when the non-Muslim concept becomes a normative value-judgement."⁴⁵ In contradistinction, what Bijlefeld claims to do in his article is to trace what *prophet* and *apostle* actually mean in the Qur'anic context and precisely what they meant to Muhammad.⁴⁶ But whether he lived up to this claim, Fiegenbaum does not think he did.⁴⁷

Second, Bijlefeld's review of earlier works on the subject is remarkably exhaustive. Significantly however, his statistical data led him to conclude that not only are *prophet* and *apostle* non-interchangeable, but also that the question of comparing them is "illegitimate," for "the words have such different and distinctive connotations that one cannot be expressed in terms of being more and greater than the other."⁴⁸ This explanation is only partially correct, because while there is no indication anywhere in the Qur'an that one is greater than the other, both terms have, on many occasions, been used simultaneously to refer to the same person.

Perhaps one of the best modern non-Arabic works on prophethood in Islam is Fiegenbaum's Ph.D. dissertation (McGill, 1973), entitled "Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'an." His main thesis is that "*nabiy* and *rasul* are used interchangeably in the Qur'an,"⁴⁹ and his methodology may be identified from his statement that "the task of clarifying the Qur'anic perspective on prophethood essentially entails relating the function of prophetic office to Divine rule, especially to God's lordship over the human community."⁵⁰ As a result, he embarked upon the task of delineating the Qur'anic doctrine of prophethood, but only through "prophetic mission." Unlike others, who emphasize the idea of a physical scripture or the lack thereof as a sign of prophethood, he sees the prophet simply as "the bearer of Divine word/deed."⁵¹

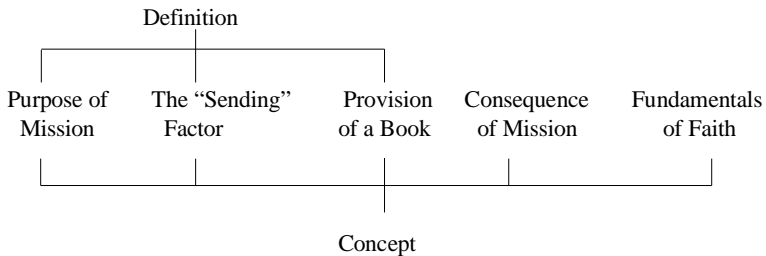
Compared to others, Fiegenbaum's methodology may be the safest and most transparent one available. My method, however, which seeks to juxtapose the Qur'anic verses in which *prophet* and *messenger* are mentioned, is demonstrably more effective, particularly in pointing out how their respective contents, contexts, and consequences remain essentially the same. The latter method will show – rather than merely tell – the reader how the Qur'an simply does not differentiate or recognize any difference, in essence, between

prophets and messengers (notwithstanding its stated preference for some prophets over others [17: 55] or its description of some specific messengers as “those of resolve” [46:35]). Furthermore, the use of several compelling questions in this study makes it significant and more effective. Finally, this study uses the Qur’an more extensively than Fiegenbaum’s, an approach that enhances its intellectual integrity and viability.

Prophethood and Messengership in the Qur’an

Although the scholars presented above have enhanced the general understanding of the subject and their conclusions have dominated the field for generations, they have not successfully discerned the concepts of prophethood and messengership in the Qur’an. In challenging their conclusions I prefer to work closely with the Qur’an, as it directly concerns itself with prophets and messengers. I propose to do this by examining specific questions depicted in the figure below, such as the purpose of revelation to prophets and messengers, the question of both being sent, the issue of book/scripture, and others. The diagram provides the basic components of the arguments from which both the concept and the definition of prophethood/messengership are drawn. Below it are specific and detailed explanations structured according to *prophet* and *messenger*.

Fig. 1: Components for the Concept and Definition of Prophet/Messenger.



The Purpose of the Missions of the Prophets and the Messengers

The Qur’an insists that God sent prophets to relate glad tidings and warnings⁵²: “Humanity was one community, and Allah sent prophets (*nabiyin*) with glad tidings and warnings, and with them He sent down the scripture/book in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed” (2:213).⁵³

Al-Tabari (d. 923), in his interpretation of this verse, states:

He sent [al-Tabari changes *prophets* to *messengers*] messengers⁵⁴ in order to convey glad tidings to those who follow God, in the form of abundant rewards and respectable abode [Paradise]; and to warn those who disobey God and disbelieve, of painful punishment, unpleasant reckoning and permanence in hellfire.⁵⁵

In other words, when God finds it necessary to reveal His guidance (glad tidings and warnings), the sending of prophets who, individually, were as human as the rest of the people, was inevitable. Therefore, prophets are sent to deliver a divine message of glad tidings and warnings to people. Qur'an 33:45-46 explains the purpose of Muhammad's mission, although it is rather more significant here for its elaboration of the purpose than its description of Muhammad as a prophet.

On messengers, the Qur'an states:

And We send not the messengers (*mursalin*) but as givers of glad tidings and as warners. So whosoever believes and does righteous good deeds, upon such shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve. (6:48)

The first segment of these verses, wherein the purpose of sending messengers is established, is repeated verbatim in 18:56. Here, the purpose of sending messengers is categorical; namely, to give glad tidings and to warn. Rhetorically speaking, one of the best styles of emphasis is employed. In normal expression, the negative clause (*mā*) and the exceptional clause (*illa*) need not be stated and would, simply put, become: "We send messengers as givers of glad tidings and as warners." In its efforts to emphasize the purpose of the messengers' mission, the Qur'an used *mā* to negate any reason for the sending only to emphasize it with the exceptional clause *illa*.

Mahmud al-Alusi (d. 1854), in his *Ruh al-Ma`ani*, has astutely observed that grammatically, the terms "givers of glad tidings" and "warners" are set in circumstantial expressions (*hal*) to underscore the reasons. Thus: "We do not send the messengers except for the reason that they convey to their people the glad tidings of reward for their obedience and to warn them of punishment for disobedience."⁵⁶

As mentioned above, this is duplicated in 18:56. But 4:165 is even more telling, for it mentions *messengers* specifically and is, in fact, a third one of the verses, of which the previous two talk about *prophets* and *messengers*, respectively.⁵⁷ In fact, 4:163-65 collectively may be the best indicators that

the Qur'an does not differentiate between these two terms, but uses them interchangeably.

Al-Razi identifies "the original objective" (*al-maqṣud al-aṣli*: purpose) of sending prophets/messengers:

What this means is that the aim of sending [here he replaces *messengers* with *prophets*] prophets is for them to give glad tidings to people for worshipping God and to warn them against ignoring His worship.⁵⁸

The "Sending" Factor

Some Muslims came to identify God's "sending" in the sense of charging only messengers with delivering His message. There is no support in the Qur'an for this identification.⁵⁹ On the contrary, it contains enough evidence that both prophets and messengers were sent and that they were sent to deliver messages to people. The Qur'an expresses the concept of God's "sending" directly: *arsala* and *ba`atha* (to send).

As for prophets, the Qur'an declares: "How many a prophet (*nabiy*) have We sent among the people of old. Never came there a prophet (*nabiy*) to them but they used to mock him" (43:6-7). Earlier, it was pointed out that Ibn Taymiyyah had aptly recognized that, according to the Qur'an, both prophets and messengers are sent by God. However, he erred by theorizing that prophets, as opposed to messengers, are sent to a believing audience. The verse here shows that prophets were also sent but met resistance from the people, since mockery entails non-belief and resistance.

Again, 2:213 was used earlier to reveal the purpose of the prophets, and the discussion of sending them was deliberately postponed. Here, it serves to highlight "and Allah sent prophets (*nabiyin*)." The Qur'an puts it in no uncertain terms, making superfluous the argument that prophets are not sent. It argues that prophets were sent to deliver messages of glad tidings to people and that the scriptures were revealed to them.⁶⁰ This entire verse may be used to dispel all arguments that seek to restrict prophethood to the mere reception of revelation.⁶¹

There is a further rational dimension to consider: conventional wisdom will not accept the position that God reveals to a certain prophet what the former considers vital for the latter's salvation or enlightenment and then asks him to keep it for his own use, without, at the very least, requiring him to convey what has been revealed.⁶² This is gainsaid still further by Muslims through the consideration that any Muslim who possesses knowledge is urged, and in the case of inquiry is obliged, to share it with the ignorant.⁶³

Regarding messengers, the Qur'an says:

And indeed We did send messengers (*rusul*) before you to their own people. They came to them with clear proofs, that We took vengeance on those who committed crimes, and it was incumbent upon Us to help the believers. (30:47)

Messengers are so called because they have been sent. The Qur'an, however, has used *sent* for those who are not prophets and messengers, which prompted Ibn Taymiyyah to observe:

Sending is a general appellation that is used with angels, winds, devils, and fire.⁶⁴ But whenever the word is identified with the chosen ones among angels and human beings, it assumes specific meaning; namely, messengers of God. The Qur'an says: "Allah chooses messengers from angels and from men. Verily, Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer." (22:75)

"Messengers of God," Ibn Taymiyyah adds, "who convey His imperatives and proscriptions [to people] on His behalf, are His absolute messengers."⁶⁵

In addition, 16:36 not only testifies to messengers being sent, but also summarizes the content of their mission and explicates, though briefly, the purpose.⁶⁶ This leaves the distinction between *prophets* and *messengers*, on the basis of one rather than the other being sent, without any Qur'anic support.

Provision of a Book

Scholars have used the reception of books or lack thereof to distinguish between prophets and messengers. As in the previous section, this particular tactic is not substantiated by the Qur'an. Regarding prophets, the Qur'an says:

Humanity was one community, and Allah sent prophets with glad tidings and warnings. And with them He sent down the book/scripture in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed. (2:213)

In the preceding two sections, this verse was used to dispel the opinions regarding the existence of any distinction between prophets and messengers. Here, it is used to highlight how the Qur'an insists that God sent down books with the prophets.⁶⁷

Fiengenbaum has pressed his thesis that the idea of scripture in the Qur'an should not necessarily assume the exclusively literal form of all that

has come to be written down. He explores this idea by looking into the Qur'anic usage of the root “*k-t-b*.”⁶⁸ A positive attitude toward this theory has already been expressed, not for all what he really says, but for what the verse simply implies: “and Allah sent prophets ... and with them He sent down the scripture” (2:213).

The Qur'an mentions the Torah (3:3 and 5:44), the Gospel (5:46 and 3:3), the Psalms (4:163 and 21:105), the Qur'an (9:111, 12:2, and 76:23) and certain *suhuf* of Abraham and Moses (87:19) as scriptures. Supplementing the number of these scriptures by what the hadith provides (if accepted) does not bring one any closer to matching the number of prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. This situation, vis-à-vis 2:213 and other verses, compels one to see how the general term *kitab*, except for when it means the Qur'an (e.g., 2:2, 4:105, and 14:1) or the Torah (2:87), may not be construed as a physical entity. So, the idea of *kitab* in 2:213 must be understood as “the contents of the revelation.” This understanding is supported, in part, by the verse's explanation that the book/scripture (*kitab*) is to be used to judge between people in matters wherein they differed.

The verse points out that the differences observable in people necessitate the sending of prophets who came as givers of glad tidings and of those who came to warn, and of those who are also given scriptures that are to be used to judge between people. This judgment is therefore just as important as the sending of prophets, since both are necessary due to the apparent differences between people. And since the physical evidence of all of the scriptures is visibly lacking, the literal understanding of them (as physical books) becomes correspondingly weak. This, in the end, justifies the understanding of book/scripture as “the content of the revelation” – revelation that every prophet claimed, as the Qur'an insists, to have received.

In a case where “the content of the revelation” is committed to writing (as in the Torah or the Qur'an), a physical understanding of *kitab* is exonerated. But if it remains unwritten, the verse's meaning is neither slighted nor betrayed on the basis of the thesis we are advancing here. However, taking the verse literally confronts one with an unfathomable dilemma, namely, making the available books/scriptures correspond to the number of prophets/messengers.

There is one more observation concerning the understanding of *kitab* as the “contents of revelation.” Numerous verses identify the Qur'an as *kitab*,⁶⁹ and it is a well-established fact that the entire Qur'an – including those very verses – was not written down as a “physical” book until after some time. A key question should be whether or not the Qur'an is to be considered as

scripture before it was written down and later canonized. This question is valid only at the level of ordinary human understanding; it is unnecessary in the eyes of the Qur'an's original author, since He has already described it as *kitab*. To Him, the issue as to how to construe *kitab* before or after it was written down makes no difference, while to others, who should base themselves on the Qur'an, the answer can be expressed as follows: the Qur'an was a scripture before and after its canonization. This simply means that, whether or not it was written down Muslims would have perceived Muhammad (as the Qur'an already portrayed him) as having received *kitab*. This is true of all the other prophets whose revelations, as it turned out, were not actually written down, and may also explain the lack of physical evidence of all of the scriptures mentioned in 2:213.⁷⁰

In relation to sending books to messengers, the Qur'an relates that "indeed We have sent Our messengers (*rusulana*) with clear proofs and revealed with them the book (*kitab*) and the balance (justice) that humanity may keep up justice" (57:25). Attention here is drawn to the fact that, as in the case of the prophets, books were sent to the messengers. Similarly, the purpose of these books is to maintain justice.⁷¹

Consequence of Mission

After demonstrating the purpose of prophets and messengers, how they are all sent and how they all came with books, I will now show that both parties suffered the same consequences: death or mockery. Here, only the verses will be cited in order to make it easy to decipher what the Qur'an intends to say.

According to the Qur'an, one of the consequences endured by both prophets and messengers is death.

Verily, those who do not believe in the signs of Allah and kill the prophets (*nabiyin*) without right, and kill those men who order just dealings, then announce to them a painful torment. (3:21)

And when it is said to them: "Believe in what Allah has sent down," they say: "We believe in what was sent down to us, and we do not believe in that which came after it, while it is the truth confirming what is with them." Ask: "Why, then, have you killed the prophets (*anbiya'*) of Allah aforetime, if you indeed have been believers?" (2:91)

Indignity is put over them wherever they may be, except under a covenant from Allah and from men. They have drawn on themselves the wrath of Allah, and destruction is put over them. This is because they did not believe in the signs of Allah and killed the prophets (*anbiya'*) without

right. This because they disobeyed and used to transgress beyond bounds. (3:112)

Although the majority of these and other verses⁷² sharply point to some of the ancient Children of Israel, the fact that some prophets faced death at the hands of their people is crystal clear.

On messengers, the Qur'an says:

Verily, We took the covenant of the Children of Israel and sent messengers (*rusul*) to them. Whenever they came to them a messenger (*rasul*) with what they themselves desired not, a group of them (the messengers) they called liars, and others among them they killed. (5:70)

And indeed, We gave Musa the Book and followed him up with succession of messengers (*rusul*) and We gave `Isa, the son of Maryam, clear signs and supported him with the *Ruh al-Qudus* (Gabriel). Is it that whenever they came to you a messenger (*rasul*) with what you yourselves desired not, you grew arrogant? Some you did not believe, and some you killed. (2:87)

Those who said: "Verily, Allah has taken our promise not to believe in any messenger (*rasul*) unless he brings to us an offering which the fire shall devour." Ask: "Verily, there came to you messengers (*rusul*) before me with clear signs and even with what you speak of. Why, then, did you kill them, if you are truthful? (3:183)

In view of the fact that these verses, as well as the previous ones, speak of prophets and messengers being killed by their people, it may be concluded, quite fairly, that the Qur'an indicates that prophets and messengers are one and the same group of people.⁷³

Prophets and messengers also suffer mockery. About prophets, the Qur'an says: "How many a prophet (*nabiy*) have We sent among the people of old. Never came there a prophet to them but they used to mock him" (43:6-7). It also states about messengers that: "Indeed, We sent (*arsalna*: messengers) before you among the sects of old, and never came a messenger to them but they did mock him" (15:10-11) and: "Alas for humanity! There never came a messenger (*rasul*) to them but they used to mock him" (36:30). Although killing and mockery were not the only adversities that the prophets and messengers faced from the non-believers, such passages suffice to prove my point. Thus, *prophet* and *messenger* are used interchangeably in the Qur'an, and the punishment meted out to both indiscriminately proves that there is no distinction between them.

Fundamentals of Faith

There is a further observation, compelling enough to warrant inclusion in the scenarios to be explored. The verses below, which invoke the belief – among other things – in prophets and messengers, clearly refer to the same people.

It is not *al-birr* (piety and righteousness) that you turn your faces toward east and (or) west, but *al-birr* is (the quality of) the one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets (*nabiyin*). (2:177)

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. Each one believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers (*rusul*). They say: “We make no distinction between one another of His messengers (*rusul*)” and they say: “We hear and we obey.” (We seek) your forgiveness our Lord, and to you is return. (2:285)

O you who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the book He has sent down to His Messenger, and the scripture He sent down before (him). Whoever does not believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers (*rusul*) and the Last Day, indeed, he has stayed far away. (4:136)

These verses, together with the famous hadith in which the Angel Gabriel is believed to have come to teach the Companions their “religion” by asking the Prophet to explain *iman*, *islam*, *ihsan*, and so on,⁷⁴ are construed as identifying the fundamental articles of the Islamic faith. Significantly, whatever their designation or intended purpose, the prophets and messengers cited therein – believers whom the Qur’an extols and non-believers whom it deprecates – are meant to refer to one and the same group. Considered to be the explication of the Qur’an, the hadith in *Sahih Muslim* used *messengers* (*rusul*), as did the one in *Sahih al-Bukhari*.⁷⁵ But in explaining al-Bukhari’s version, Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani (d. 1448) remarks: “But in the hadith of Anas and Ibn `Abbas, [the word] *prophet* occurred. And both terms [*messengers* and *prophets*] are in the Qur’an in chapter two.”⁷⁶

I construe Ibn Hajar’s remarks to mean that the hadith does not distinguish between the two terms, but rather uses them interchangeably. It should thus come as no surprise when such Muslim scholars as al-Tabari and al-Razi explain the meaning of either term by using them interchangeably. This is simply because the Qur’an itself, and therefore most scholars, considers them to be one and the same. Hence, I define both *prophet* and *messenger* as “someone sent by God with a revelation to deliver a message of glad tidings and warnings to people.”

Conclusion

For somebody who thinks otherwise, it would be hard to provide a satisfactory answer as to why a popular distinction between a prophet and a messenger emerged. What is viable, though, is to show how the idea came to be popular.⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, there was no “deliberate” attempt by medieval Muslim scholars to embark upon an “exhaustive” inquiry into the “Qur’anic concept” of prophethood and messengership. Moreover, to the scholars, all of their theological treatments of the subject may be considered Qur’anic, due, on the one hand, to the fact that Muslim theology is a reflection and extension of the Qur’anic content and, on the other, to the fact that some Qur’anic verses are cited – sometimes sporadically and may even be taken out of context – during their discussions. Considering the latter situation to be especially common, the terms *deliberate* and *exhaustive* are highlighted when commenting on Muslim scholars’ endeavors on this subject. The results of the earlier theological treatments have become popular through selective uses of the Qur’an and the hadith.

The Qur’an

One of the Qur’anic verses advanced by the proponents of distinction is:

We have never sent any messenger (*rasul*) or prophet (*nabiy*) before you [Muhammad] into whose wishes [message] Satan did not insinuate something. But God removes what Satan insinuates, and then God affirms His message. God is all Knowing and Wise. (22:52)

In his interpretation of this verse, al-Alusi points out that repeating *prophet* right after *messenger* indicates an identifiable difference between them.⁷⁸ Strangely enough, al-Qadi `Iyad, while presenting various scholars’ opinions, demonstrates how those who oppose the distinction also advance the same verse in support of their position. They, however, adduce the fact of God’s sending both prophets and messengers as their explanation. Still, as far as Ibn Taymiyyah is concerned, this does not truly advance their argument. To him, God sent both, and yet they are perceived to be distinct.

Al-Alusi’s observation brings up the age-old debate among scholars as to whether or not the Qur’an employs synonyms. The majority of exegetes subscribe to the opinion that it does not⁷⁹ because each and every word has its particular meaning, which is precisely accorded to it.⁸⁰ In his *Furuq al-Lughawiyah wa Atharaha fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*, al-Shayi’ lists those scholars who contend that there are no synonyms, including al-Tabari, al-

Raghib al-Isfahani, and al-Zamakhshari (d.1144). That Bint al-Shati' (d. 1998)⁸¹ is the most adamant and articulate scholar on behalf of this cause in modern times is evident in her works. With her *Al-Tafsir al-Bayan li al-Qur'an al-Karim* and *Al-I'jaz al-Bayan li al-Qur'an wa Masa'il Ibn al-Azraq*, she concludes that every word in the Qur'an is unique and conveys a precise meaning that no other word can.⁸²

Based on this opinion, *nabiy* is different from *rasul* – an opinion to which I have no objection. But what I seek to establish is that even though *nabiy* is originally and visibly distinct from *rasul*, the Qur'an uses both words interchangeably to designate one and the same group of people. In other words, when it uses one of these words, it intends the other as well. Therefore, the question of synonyms does not apply here, since there is no claim that *nabiy* literally means *rasul* in the way it is claimed that *hamd* (thanks/praise) means *shukr* (thanks/appreciation) – a claim that is rejected by such scholars as Ibn `Atiya.⁸³

The problem as to why both terms are repeated in one verse may be resolved by noting the occurrence in the Qur'an of similar expressions. Before providing a few examples, I should note that even words considered by the Qur'an itself to be different have been used to qualify one and the same group, let alone those it did not consider different. It seems that the relationship between *muslim* and *mu'min* is analogous to that of *nabiy* and *rasul* in terms of the Muslim perception of them as interchangeable. However, the Qur'an is quite clear when it states:

The Bedouins say: "We believe" (*amanna*). Say: "You do not believe. You should only say: 'We have surrendered (in Islam: *aslanna*),' for faith (*iman*) has not yet entered your hearts." (49:14)

As the Qur'an distinguishes here between *iman* and *islam*, and, therefore, between *mu'min* and *muslim*, it also, at the same time, refers both words to one semantic group (the household of Prophet Lot) elsewhere in the next two chapters. It says: "So we brought out from therein the believers (*al-mu'minin*). But We have found not but one household of Muslims (*al-muslimin*)" (51:35-36).⁸⁴

Here, one is confronted with a salient fact: the literal meaning alone may not be sufficient to accurately portray what the Qur'an means by certain words, let alone to accurately formulate their definitions. Thorough investigations have to be made into the relationships operative in the entire content before the intended meanings can be adequately assigned.

Now, verses in which repetitions occur in reference to the same essence include “those who follow the messenger (*rasul*), the prophet (*nabiy*), who can neither read nor write, whom they find written with them in Torah” (7:157).⁸⁵ Also, “so believe in Allah and His messenger (*rasul*), the Prophet (*nabiy*), who can neither read nor write, who believes in Allah and His words” (7:158). Why does the Qur’an repeat *prophet* after *messenger*, even though they both refer to Muhammad? Besides the rhetorical implications of such an emphasis and highlighting (*ta’kid*), this syntactic structure is not unacceptable in Arabic, and it is certainly not uncommon, as shown above, in the Qur’an.

Therefore, al-Alusi’s conclusion that repetition in 22:52 must mean difference is disproved by 7:157-58. Furthermore, the Qur’an states that “whoever is an enemy of Allah, His angels, His messengers, Gabriel and Michael, then verily, Allah is an enemy to the non-believers” (2:98). Gabriel and Michael are angels, and their names are repeated after the angels have been mentioned. From this analysis, it must be concluded that repetition does not necessarily indicate difference.

Hadith

In addition to 22:52, the proponents of distinction have depended heavily upon the hadith believed to be narrated by Abu Dharr, who says:

I asked: “O Messenger of God, how many were the prophets?” He said: “124,000.” I asked: “O Messenger of God, how many of them were messengers?” He said: “313 people.” I asked: “O Messenger of God, who was the first?” He said: “Adam.” I asked: “O Messenger of God, was he a prophet and a messenger?” He said: “Yes, God created him with His hand, then breathed into him the soul (created by God), and then fashioned him.” Then he [the Prophet] said: “O Abu Dharr, four were Syrians: Adam, Shith, Nuh, and Akhnukh (Enoch), that is Idris, the first person to write with a pen. And four were Arabs: Hud, Salih, Shu’ayb, and your Prophet, O Abu Dharr. The first prophet of the Children of Israel is Musa, and the last is `Isa. The first prophet is Adam, and their last is your Prophet.” I asked: “O Messenger of God, how many books has God sent down?” He said: “104 books. He gave 50 scriptures to Shith, 30 to Akhnukh, 10 to Ibrahim, and 10 to Musa before al-Tawrat. He sent al-Injil [to `Isa], al-Zabur [to Dawud], and al-Furqan [the Qur’an to Muhammad].”⁸⁶

The argument for distinction between prophets and messengers finds its fullest and unfettered support in this hadith. It is precise, categorical, and elaborate. Yet according to Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201), it does not meet even the

minimum requirement of a dependable hadith: that is, it is not a weak hadith but rather a fabricated hadith, one that he listed among the spurious hadith. But other scholars, such as Ibn Hibban al-Busti (d. 965), considered it to be sound. Al-Alusi, for his part, used it to substantiate his opinion in favor of distinction and remarked that: "Ibn al-Jawzi's claim that this tradition was fabricated is totally incorrect. Although it may be weak, it is strengthened by other renditions."⁸⁷ But Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) has adduced the other renditions only to qualify their transmitters as "weak."⁸⁸

Whenever the authenticity of a hadith is questioned, the problem may lie either in its chain of transmitters (*sanad, isnad*) or its text (*matn, nass*). Bulayq, in his *Nubuwwat Adam*, has painstakingly scrutinized this hadith's transmitters and revealed what scholars such as al-Dhahabi (d. 1348)⁸⁹ had to say about all of its individual transmitters. The conclusion is that they are either weak or are liars.⁹⁰

The text of this hadith has also been subjected to considerable scrutiny, which has led to its rejection as a fabrication. For instance, four Arab prophets are mentioned, but Isma'il, who is seen as the father of the Arabs, is not. "Did Muhammad not consider him an Arab prophet, or did he simply forget about him?" Moreover, the text also refers to Moses as the first prophet of the Children of Israel. Once again, Joseph, the son of Jacob, is bypassed. Lastly, as a conclusive evidence that this hadith is fictitious, there is no good reason for Idris, so-called in the Qur'an (19:56 and 21:85) to be referred to here by his Old Testament name of "Akhnuh" (Enoch).⁹¹

The relevance of a disputed hadith like this for those using it is clear. For them, being disputed does not necessarily mean that it is fabricated, and it certainly does not lead to its total discarding, as seen from al-Alusi's statements above. Practically speaking, it remains relevant to them, for they use it to argue for their position. However, objectively and intellectually speaking, any hadith in this situation with such a compelling case against its authenticity must be inadmissible. Therefore, it is imperative that one neither adopt a theological belief nor draw an intellectual conclusion on the basis of such a disputed hadith.

Finally, it is obvious that as popular as the idea of distinction between a *prophet* and a *messenger* is, it lacks any solid Qur'anic support. The evidence in support of a lack of distinction between these two terms is both overwhelming and compelling, especially when it can be conclusively demonstrated that the Qur'an uses them interchangeably, as it talks about them in the same scenarios.

Endnotes

1. A. H. Siddique, *Prophethood in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1968), 1.
2. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, ed. William R. Hughes (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), 38.
3. Jala al-Haqq, "Epistemology of Prophethood in Islam," *Al-Tawhid* 4, no. 2 (1986-87): 54.
4. For more on Ibn Hazm's line of reasoning and other arguments, see Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm's *Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1985), 5:119; *Al-Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'adah, 1926), 1:40; and *Al-Muhallah bi al-Athar* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 1:26.
5. Willem A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More Than a Prophet?" *The Muslim World*, no. 59 (1969): 9.
6. *Ibid.*, 8.
7. *Ibid.*, 9.
8. J. W. Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'an" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1973), 55.
9. Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyyah. Due to his uncompromising attitude toward what he considered innovations in Islam, he was imprisoned several times in Egypt and Damascus. He is believed to have written nearly 300 books, among them *Al-Fatawa*, *Al-Jam' bayn al-Naql wa al-'Aql*, and *Al-Siyasat al-Shar'iyah*. Al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-Huffadh* (Hyderabad al-Dakkan: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyyah, 1955), 4:1496-98; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement 2, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937-42), 119; and Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, *Al-A'lam* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1980), 1:144.
10. See 22:52, 41:43, and 12:109.
11. See 43:7, 6:12, and 25:31.
12. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab al-Nubuwa't* (Cairo: Al-Taba'at al-Muniriyyah, 1346 AH), 172-73.
13. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi. He was one of the best scholars of his time. Leaning toward the Mu'tazilah, he authored many books besides the one under study, which include *Adab al-Dunya wa al-Din*, *Ahkam al-Sultaniyah*, and *Nasihat al-Muluk*. Yaqut ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hamawi, *Irshad al-Arib ila Ma'rifat al-Adib* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif, 1999), 5:366-68; Taj al-Din 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shaff'iyah al-Kubra* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Husayniyyah al-Misriyyah, 1906) 3:303-14; Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement 1, 2d ed. 668; and al-Zirikli, *Al-A'lam*, 4:327.
14. The Mu'tazilah were an early theological school. 'Ali al-Mawardi, *A'lam al-Nubuwa'h* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyyah, 1971), 4.
15. *Ibid.*, 38. Note his use of *messengers* here (and henceforth) in explaining prophethood.

16. Later in this chapter, al-Mawardi counters this argument with two contentions: First, the fact that the intellect may possibly prove something cannot prevent messengers from treating the issue as a matter of obligation. Even if the intellect's discoveries were, in fact, binding, it would not be impermissible for messengers to bring up these issues in order to emphasize or confirm them. Since the intellectual proofs for God's oneness or for a particular truth might well vary, nevertheless, the existence of certain things does not prevent the existence of others. Second, "intellectual issues do not dispense with the coming of messengers." This is elaborated in two ways: (a) intellectual issues may differ according to their proofs, and thus, with messengers, such differences could be settled, and (b) the intellect plays no part in identifying God's promise of Paradise and His threat of Hell, nor can it ascertain the rituals that the messenger has come to describe. Hence, the role of messengership is indispensable. *Ibid.*, 23.
17. Such as being true to his word, gracious, kind, and perfect in his behavior.
18. That *prophets* are *synonymous* with messengers. Thus, a prophet is a messenger and vice versa. As *rasul* (messenger) is derived from his function of carrying the *risalah* (message), *nabiy* (prophet), on the other hand, has two roots: (a) *naba'* (news), and therefore, a prophet is so called because he delivers news from God, and (b) the word is rooted in *nabwah* (elevation and raising, as in high ground). Here, *nabiy* assumes the sense of someone elevated over others. Prophet Muhammad has used it in both senses. Second, a *prophet* is different from a *messenger* and, being distinct terms, they must refer to different people. In the meantime, the most popular sentiment, one easily shared by most scholars in this debate, is that messengership is higher than prophethood. Thus its elaboration is not strange here; rather, what is truly unique is the conclusion: "That is why angels are called messengers rather than prophets." *Ibid.*, 38.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Abu al-Fadl `Iyad ibn Musa (d. 1149) was appointed as a judge in Sabtat and later in Granada. Besides *Al-Shifa'*, he authored several books, including *Tartib al-Masalik fi Ma`rifat A`lam Madhhab al-Imam Malik*, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, and *Mashariq al-Anwar*. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A`yan wa Anba' Abna' al-Zaman* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1977) 3:483-85; Al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-Huffadh*, 4:1304-07; Brockelmann, *GAL*, S1, 630; and al-Zirikli, *Al-A`lam*, 5:99.
21. Al-Qadi `Iyad, *Al-Shifa' bi Ta`rif Huquq al-Mustafa* (Amman: Maktabat al-Farabi, 1986), 1:486.
22. "Rasul (messenger) is someone who is sent. And being sent means that God commanded him to convey a message to the people. It is derived from 'succession,' as in 'people going to a place following one after the other.'" In this sense, a *rasul* is so called due to the fact that repetition in conveying the message is made incumbent on him, or because people are obliged to follow him, for at least two dimensions that most scholars have never even considered have been revealed here. *Ibid.*, 487-88.

23. Ibid., 488-99.
24. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab*, 172.
25. Ibid., 172-73.
26. See 41:43 and 12:109; Ibid., 173.
27. See 33:7, 6:12, and 25:31.
28. Adam `Abd Allah al-Aluri, a Nigerian scholar from Ilorin (Kwara State), studied at al-Azhar. When he wrote the book under review, he had difficulties getting it approved and published. Apparently, al-Azhar's authorities disagreed with some of his conclusions, which resulted in a series of letters designed to clarify his position. Some of his theses include the existence of certain black prophets and that the Qur'an acknowledges more prophets than those in whom the traditional scholars want the people to believe. He included all of this correspondence in his *Falsafat al-Nubuwwah wa al-Anbiya' fi Daw' al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1983), Introduction.
29. Ibid., 95-96.
30. Ibid.
31. Such as 16:36, 4:165, 5:99,67, and 33:45-46.
32. Al-Aluri, *Falsafat al-Nubuwwah*, 96.
33. Ibn Hazm is also famous for his emphasis on gender in defining prophecy. In fact, he believes that there have been female prophets. See his *Al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal*.
34. Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri, *Aqidat al-Mu'min* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Salafiyyah, 1985), 259.
35. See 18:60-66.
36. Al-Jaza'iri, *Aqidat*, 259.
37. A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: F. Cass, 1965), 204.
38. A.J. Wensinck, "Rasul" *E.I.*, (1913 ed.), 3:469.
39. Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood," 57.
40. Ibid., 58.
41. Joseph Horovitz, "Nabi," *E.I.*, (1913 ed.), 3:802; Bijlefeld, "A Prophet," 10.
42. Horovitz, "Nabi," 802.
43. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet," 17.
44. Ibid., 9.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood," 84.
48. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet," 26.
49. Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood," iii, 104, 105, and 194.
50. Ibid., 195.
51. Ibid., iii.
52. These are general expressions under which comes the entire message of prophethood.

53. From now on, I strongly suggest that readers consult the verses in the original Arabic, since doing so will bring out the points clearly.
54. This may not be considered a deliberate act on his part to replace the term *prophets*; rather, it should be seen as part of the Muslims' common attitude to consider prophets and messengers as interchangeable in both their minds and vocabulary. I will highlight this attitude each time it occurs.
55. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami` al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma`rifah, 1986), 2:196.
56. Mahmud al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma`ani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, 1980), 7:154.
57. The first one states: "Verily, We have sent the revelation to you as We sent the revelation to Nuh and the prophets after him. And We also sent the revelation to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya`qub, and al-Asbat, `Isa, Ayyub, Yunus, Harun, and Sulayman. To Dawud, We gave the Zabur" (4:163). Particularly pertinent here is the following verse, which characterizes the above-mentioned prophets as messengers: "And messengers, We have mentioned to you before, and messengers We have not mentioned to you. And to Musa, Allah spoke directly" (4:164). Then comes our verse 4:165.
58. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb (al-Tafsir al-Kabir)* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-`Arabi, 1980), 11:110.
59. `Izz al-Din Bulayq, *Nubuwwat Adam wa Risalatuh bayn al-Dhann wa al-Yaqin* (Beirut: Dar al-Fath, 1990), 79.
60. Fiegenbaum has observed that this scripture need not necessarily be textual/physical in nature. I am inclined to share his view, especially as this verse indicates that God sent scriptures to all prophets. The Qur'an only mentions a few of them, however, and the number provided by the hadith (if accepted) does not tally with the number of prophets and messengers. This situation makes his observation a compelling one indeed.
61. For example, as I have emphasized "sent" in the verse to prove my point, such scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah have presented verses indicating that it is equally used for other things, such as wind (7:57), fire (55:35), angels (35:1), and devils (19:83). See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab*, 174. Verse 2:213 goes on to prove that prophets are not just sent, but that they are sent with scriptures in order to deliver messages.
62. An exception would be the encounter between Khidr and Moses (18:65-82). However, Moses' reaction as a prophet/messenger makes even a compelling case in favor of this conventional wisdom.
63. Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud* (Beirut: Dar al-Janan, 1988), 2:345.
64. Angels: "All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Originator of the heavens and Earth, Who made the angels messengers with wings" (34:1); Wind: "It is He Who sends the wind as heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy (rain), and We send down pure water from the sky." (25:48); devils: "See you not that We have sent the *shayatin* (devils) against the non-believers to push them to

- the evil?” (19:83); and Fire: “There will be sent against you both, smokeless flames of fire and (molten) brass, and you will not be able to defend yourselves” (55:35).
65. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitab*, 174.
 66. Other verses include 4:64, 13:38, 21:25, 23:44, 40:78, and 57:25.
 67. It may be argued that not all of them received books, which would be to miss the point, while nonetheless supporting our assertion, for that same argument is an admission that some of them did, in fact, receive books.
 68. Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood,” 135-41.
 69. Such as 2:2, 4:105, 14:1, 15:1, 16:89, 27:1, and 41:3.
 70. Another verse is 3:81. For more on scripture and what it is supposed to mean, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
 71. Other verses include 35:25 and 3:184.
 72. Such as 2:61, 3:181, and 4:155.
 73. The fact that these verses concentrate almost exclusively on the Children of Israel may be taken to minimize their ability to support a compelling argument. But precisely the opposite is, in fact, the case, for when the Qur’an uses different words – *prophets* or *messengers* – to describe people whose fate is the same in a particular “tribe,” then it must be talking about one and the same group of people.
 74. Yahya al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1987), 1-2:268-74.
 75. Ahmad ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma`arif, 1980), 1:114.
 76. Although I quote Ibn Hajar here to clarify the point, he in fact opts for the idea of distinction. *Ibid.*, 118.
 77. It is not easy to pinpoint who first speculated on this. `Izz al-Din Bulayq states that, according to Al Mahmud, al-Nawawi was the first scholar to deliberate on such a distinction. Bulayq, *Nubuwwat Adam*, 79. I am inclined to reject this hypothesis, however, for the idea existed long before al-Nawawi’s time; he died in 1277. Without going farther back in time, the discussion is found in al-Qadi `Iyad’s *Al-Shifa`*, a work compiled nearly a century before al-Nawawi’s birth in 1233. But to go a little farther in time, al-Mawardi’s *A`lam al-Nubuwwah* was written nearly two centuries before al-Nawawi.
 78. Al-Alusi, *Ruh*, 17:172-73.
 79. Muhammad `Abd al-Rahman al-Shayi`, *Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyah wa Athar-uha fi Tafsir al-Qur`an al-Karim* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-`Ubaykan, 1993), 177.
 80. `A`ishah `Abd al-Rahman bint al-Shati`, *I`jaz al-Bayani li al-Qur`an al-Karim wa Masa`il Ibn al-Azraq* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma`arif, 1987), 508; See also Issa J. Boullata, “Modern Qur’an Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shati’s Method,” *The Muslim World* 64, no. 2 (1974); Al-Shayi`, *Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyah*, 209.

81. Bint al-Shati', a pseudonym for `A'ishah `Abd al-Rahman, was an Egyptian scholar and professor of Arabic language and Qur'anic studies. A graduate of the University of Cairo, she authored several books on Arabic literature, the early Muslim community (particularly, the Prophet's family), and a literary analysis of the Qur'an. She was married to her teacher Amin al-Khuli, whose concepts she developed and became well-known. "Abd al-Rahman, A'isha," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 1 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
82. Bint al-Shati', *I'jaz al-Bayani*, 508; Al-Shayi', *Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyah*, 208-09. For more examples of words proved to possess different meanings which scholars otherwise believed to be synonymous, see al-Shayi', *Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyah*, 215-99.
83. Al-Shayi', *Al-Furuq al-Lughawiyah*, 215-16.
84. Both *al-mu'minin* (believers) and *al-muslimin* (Muslims) refer to the household of Prophet Lot.
85. Although this translation of *ummi* is the most popular one among Muslim exegetes, most western studies conclude otherwise. For more on *ummi* and its meaning as "illiterate," see Sebastian Gunther, "Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet: An Islamic Creed in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 1-26.
86. Bulayq, *Nubuwwat Adam*, 315-16.
87. Al-Alusi, *Ruh*, 17:172-73.
88. Isma'il ibn `Umar ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-`A'im* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994) 2:450-51, and Bulayq, *Nubuwwat Adam*, 316.
89. In his *Mizan al-Itidal fi Naqd al-Rijal* (Cairo: `Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1963), 1:72-73.
90. Bulayq, *Nubuwwat Adam*, 315-16.
91. *Ibid.*, 317.