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We have decided to archive the papers in this series after undergoing substantive revisions which can now be found in our newly published e-book *The Final Prophet: Proofs for the Prophethood of Muhammad*. We will also make webpage versions of the articles available in the near future and will include links when available.

Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

An Ethical and Historical Necessity: The Proofs of Prophethood Series

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This is the first of several essays in the Proofs of Prophethood series. It demonstrates that the coming of the final Prophet was inevitable considering every generation's need for it, the world conditions of his age, and the biblical prophecies surrounding his ministry. The next paper will illustrate the character of the Prophet ﷺ, followed by the brilliance of his message, the fruits of his teachings, and finally an essay on his miracles.

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Grantor of Mercy

Prelude: A Parched Modern World

A person awakens at the table of an unprecedented feud. The “open mind” is trying to mature past its phase of vengeance against its oppressors, attempting to forgive and forget, but while scrambling to compensate for the centuries it was forced underground and branded a heretic. It finds itself amidst a vicious battle between logic and loathing, trying to mitigate between the rationality it values and the revenge it deserves. As the dust begins to settle, the mind squints to discern whether it succeeded in securing its right to think critically and skeptically, or whether its bloodlust has driven it over the edge, chaining it anew—this time to paranoia and thinking cynically. Solemn moments whisper to the mind that intellectuality and progress have finally arrived, but humanity and compassion have apparently been trampled beneath their feet.

In this hostile atmosphere, which scorches the collective modern mind, people are left parched for fulfillment and some semblance of balanced direction, and there is nothing that can soothe their wounds like the coolness of conviction. Only when the sunrise of certitude is witnessed with one's own eyes can a person be quenched by faith and sheltered by an impregnable inner peace. This particular essay will highlight humanity's undying need for prophethood, and both the historical and biblical accounts that made the final prophethood inevitable.

Though the Quran and Hadith are the primary sources for *dalâ'il an-nubuwwa* (signs of prophethood), independent works particular to this topic were authored as early as the late 8th or early 9th century CE. Imam as-Subki reports from Abu Mansur al-Baghdâdi (d. 429H) who said,

*Imam Shâfi'i (d. 204/820) compiled a book on proving prophethood in response to the Brahmins who were stock deniers of all prophethood. Everyone who [later] wrote about prophethood was dependent on this, for they all followed his style.*¹

There are over ninety works on *dalâ'il* whose titles are known until today, the most famous of them being *Dalâ'il an-Nubuwwa* by Imam al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066). The objective of these authors was clear: to increase the believers in conviction, dispel any doubts regarding the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ's authenticity, and concentrate this in one readily accessible location for anyone inquiring about the truth of his prophethood.

Since the purpose behind such authoring was to reach the seekers of conviction, and in light of devout readers becoming scarce in our age of distractions and stimulation-addictions, we will now leap into our study while attempting to be concise enough to retain the interest of the contemporary mind. Essentially, this is in large part a transcription of *He was the Final Prophet*, a presentation delivered by Dr. Hatem al-Haj.²

The Ethical Need to Believe in God's Messengers

In Islam, believing in all the messengers is required to validate one's faith, and Muhammad ﷺ is certainly no exception to that rule.

¹ *Tabaqât ash-Shâfi'iyya*: 5/146.

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Muhammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and [the] last of the prophets. And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing. [al-Ahzâb (33): 40]

1. Here, Allah (the Exalted) establishes that whoever believes in His words must believe that Muhammad ﷺ was His messenger, and conversely, whoever rejects Muhammad as the messenger has belied the One who declared him a messenger.
2. This verse also establishes that Muhammad ﷺ was the last of the prophets, which entails that rejecting this is tantamount to disbelieving in the One who stated it.

Accepting the ministry of the final messenger ﷺ provides another benefit as well. It offers a rational explanation for why a person cannot “just be a good person,” while disregarding faith. Certainly, humanistic virtues such as compassion and justice are independently praiseworthy, and can reap divine blessings in this life. However, in the grander scheme of things, in terms of salvific eligibility in the hereafter, accepting God’s message (upon discovering it) is necessary for validating one’s goodness before God. The basic tools required to be good are one’s existence, good will, and the various faculties (limbs, wealth, etc.) needed to enact the good one recognizes. Since all these are endowed by God, rejecting God disqualifies this goodness from a person, for it would then be—in essence—plagiarized goodness. We as people, and rightfully so, view the most impressive research with awe and admiration, but that sentiment quickly transforms into disgust upon realizing it was actually the work of another, one whose contribution this fraudulent person deliberately hid. People do not just see plagiarism as disgraceful, but rather as condemnable, and even prosecutable.

There is yet another reason why believing in the messengers is an inherent facet of “being a good person,” namely that only the messengers can thoroughly define good, through the inspiration they receive from God. At times, people—even with good intentions—govern their lives with principles that are fatally flawed and, like cancer, the damage they cause can sometimes be hidden until it is irreparable. Such

people may have genuinely sought “being good,” and “not hurting anyone,” while oblivious to the evil and hardship they committed against themselves and society. For this reason, Allah (the Exalted) sent His messenger ﷺ to define goodness—protecting humanity from both its shortsightedness and its occasionally perverted perceptions.

And know that among you is the Messenger of Allah. If he were to obey you in much of the matter, you would be in difficulty, but Allah has endeared to you the faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts and has made hateful to you disbelief, defiance, and disobedience. Those are the [rightly] guided.
[al-Hujurât (49): 7]

Finally, it remains to be said that *tawhid* (monotheism), which is to single God out in everything unique to Him, is the ultimate supreme good, and would be impossible without the messengers. Humanity cannot know God, nor know His beauty and grandeur, nor know His desire, nor know His promises and threats, nor embody His legislative will which He lovingly ordained for the betterment of His creation, without the prophets and messengers. Consider the dismal state of the world before God sent Noah, or the darkness that smothered humanity before Muhammad ﷺ, to ascertain humanity’s need for prophethood.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once said,

Indeed, Allah looked towards the people of the world and resented the Arabs and non-Arabs alike, except for some remnants from the People of the Book. And He said, ‘I have sent you [O Muhammad] in order to test you and test [others] through you. And I sent down to you a Book which cannot be washed away with water...’³

Wherever a person turned, darkness prevailed. In Roman coliseums, crowds cheering a lion as it mauled a screaming prisoner or as gladiators gruesomely hacked away at one another, was completely normal. In Persia, even the imperial

³ Collected by Muslim (2865): Book 53, Hadith 76.

family practiced incest, the right to private ownership was threatened by Mazdakite ethics,⁴ and plagues ravaged the people in successive waves. In India, those at the bottom of their class system were equivalent, if not inferior to, rodents and vermin. In Arabia, finding a stony heart that could stomach burying his infant daughter alive was no challenge. In Christianity, mystery triumphed regarding the identity of Jesus Christ, many claiming he was God incarnate, while other faith groups alleged he was an imposter preacher born out of wedlock. In the eastern religions, people worshipped fire, water, weapons, and genitalia. In societies everywhere, a woman either had no soul to begin with, or was given a lesser spirit to serve man, even if that meant pawning her over a recreational gamble with his friends, or burning herself alive in solidarity with him at his funeral. Few people would survive birth, and even fewer would see adulthood. Those born into slavery were doomed for life, and in the major civilizations of that historical period, this sometimes exceeded 75% of the population.⁵

With this being the condition of the world, how could Allah not offer a glimpse of hope for the people of this planet? It is unfathomable that an All-Merciful, Almighty God, leave the situation without any intervention. In reality, the Most Merciful would not abandon them, but obligated Himself with reaching out to the world and clarifying once more,

...so that those who perished [through disbelief] would perish upon evidence and those who lived [in faith] would live upon evidence. [al-Anfâl (8): 42]

By sending the final Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, God did not fail them, even if some choose thereafter to fail themselves: those who decide after clarification to decline his message.

⁴ Robert C. Solomon, Kathleen M. Higgins, *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy* (p. 157). Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, (2003).

⁵ See: *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* (p. 115), by Niall McKeown, Bristol Classical Press (2007)

The Multitude, Variety, & Clarity of the Proofs

Since prophethood is necessary for prosperity and salvation, the proofs for it were beyond enumeration. Allah (the Exalted) equipped Moses with nine signs; some of them were designed to stump the sorcerers in their own forte, while others exposed the tyrant's claim to supreme power. Allah (the Exalted) equipped Jesus with the capacity to cure the incurable, for those around him took great pride in their "expert medicine" and proficiency in healing the sick. It is from the mercy of Allah that He sent with each messenger signs that were relevant to his context, and thus He surrounded Muhammad ﷺ with a multitude of proofs, for he was Allah's mercy to all the worlds, and hence had to be relevant to all at his time and for all time to come.

The variety of proofs are what make them relatable to every time, place, culture, and mindset. During the Prophet's lifetime, some accepted his ministry after one glance at his face: 'Abdullâh b. Salâm (rA) said, "I immediately knew that this was not the face of a liar."⁶ Another was brought to a firm conviction after hearing from him ﷺ a few short statements espousing the values of Islam: Tufayl b. 'Amr (rA) said, "I have never heard anything superior or more balanced than this."⁷ Others confirmed his prophethood on the basis of his reputation for being truthful: Quraysh said after living 40 years with him, "We have never experienced a lie from you."⁸ Others believed after witnessing miracles, understanding that nothing ordinary could have explained these astonishing occurrences. By this variety, a nomadic shepherd in the Himalayas and a neuroscientist in his or her laboratory can follow any number of pathways to certainty, as can the ivory tower philosopher and the pragmatic altruist, as can the buzzing hordes under the skyscrapers of New York City and Shanghai, as can the banana workers in the Amazon rainforest.

Allah (the Exalted) also made the proofs verifying the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ crystal clear, so that any honest seeker can find them. As for those obsessing

⁶ Collected by at-Tirmidhi (2/79), Ibn Mâjah (1334, 3251), and Ahmad (5/451)

⁷ Collected in *Seerat Ibn Hishâm* (1/382-383)

⁸ Collected by al-Bukhâri (4770)

over their material indulgences, or those who sanctify their social relationships over their Supreme Maker, or those whose self-conceit has blinded them to the flaws of their arguments, they will only find clouded judgment. In many of these cases, their flawed justifications may go unnoticed even by themselves, for people have forever been able to lock themselves in echo chambers, where only their views reverberate around them, and they can successfully silence their consciences and sedate the guilt of denying the undeniable. As the Most High said,

And [even] if We opened to them a gate from the heaven and they continued therein to ascend, they would say, ‘Our eyes have only been dazzled. Rather, we are a people affected by magic.’ [Hijr (15): 14-15]

The Historical Necessity for Prophethood

Anyone versed in biblical scripture, and anyone who has studied the condition of the world before the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, would conclude that Almighty God had to send a messenger. This was for two reasons: people were waiting for the final prophesied messenger, and an All-Compassionate God could not let the atrocities of the world continue much longer.

Biblical Prophecy

And has it not been a sign to them that it is recognized by the scholars of the Children of Israel? [ash-Shu‘arâ’ (26): 197]

Though some contemporaries of the last prophet rejected him out of animosity and prejudice, and others simply hadn’t yet been guided, some of the biblically versed—like ‘Abdullâh b. Salâm (rA)—quickly accepted Islam, and that was of the proofs Allah cited against Quraysh, since most of the Arabs were illiterate, did not ascribe to any scripture, and held that the Jews were superior to them for being People of the Book.

These People of the Book knew God's promise to bless Ishmael; and to make from him, in particular, a great nation. They did not believe that being born of a slave-woman detracted from his legitimacy, and knew that the first-born son of Abraham was most entitled to the covenant (had it been meant to be only for one of the two sons, which is not the case here, as we Muslims believe). Despite adulteration, there still remained—until today, even—clear indicators of the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ in the Judeo-Christian tradition, of which we will mention a select few.

A Great Nation

And also of the son of the bondwoman I will make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water; and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as if it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. [Genesis: 21/13-18, KJV]

A “great nation” in biblical terminology can never be a nation of polytheists or idolaters. Therefore, when did the progeny of Ishmael become a great nation worshipping the one true God? This did not happen at anyone's hand before Muhammad ﷺ. Some claim that this took place in Sinai, but this is sheer absurdity because it was a given that the Arabs were a people who forever maintained knowledge of their lineage, which they traced back to Ishmael. Nobody ever denied this history, while on the opposite end, nobody has ever documented a great Ishmaelite nation in Sinai. It is a staggering proposition that the Ishmaelite

Arabs were somehow all mistaken about their ancestry that converges at Ishmael, and that a great Ishmaelite nation rose and then vanished in Sinai without anyone ever knowing. Couple these historical facts with the biblical description of Paran—where Abraham left Ishmael—being a wilderness south of Jerusalem, making it even clearer that Paran must be Mecca. Hence, both the historical facts and biblical texts concur that the Meccans were the descendants of Ishmael, and that his mother brought him a wife from Egypt, not that his offspring took residence in Sinai, Egypt.

Zamzam and the Flourishing City

Then God opened her (Hagar's) eyes and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt. [Genesis: 21/19-21]

In Mecca, there exists the well of Zamzam—the oldest spring of water the world has ever known. Put the two millennia before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ aside, and merely consider the multitudinous millions of pilgrims visiting for Hajj and 'umrah over the past 1,500 years. They all return home with immeasurable gallons of Zamzam water. Alongside this, an endless round-the-clock supply of this water is transported to Qubâ' and the Prophetic Mosque in Madinah, while residents of Mecca have tanks installed in their homes for standardized Zamzam delivery. Hence, this was certainly a blessed well which Hagar and Ishmael received, and a clear first brick set by God for this city to flourish.

Shining from Paran

And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said, 'The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he

came with ten thousands of saints. From his right hand went a fiery law for them. [Deuteronomy: 33/1-2]

Sinai (Egypt) is a clear reference to Moses (peace be upon him) and the Torah, and Seir (Palestine) is an allusion to Jesus and the Evangel. If we refuse to accept that the third reference is to Muhammad ﷺ and the Quran, we will be stranded for another momentous event suitable for mention alongside Sinai and Jerusalem. At the climax of his ministry, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ returned to Paran (Mecca), marching with 10,000 of his Companions, and reinstating in that land the worship of the one true God alone. Polytheism and idolatry were ousted from around the House built by Abraham, and the glory of God shone anew.

Where Kedar Lives

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.⁹ ... Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants therefore. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.[Isaiah: 42/1-13]

This servant in Isaiah cannot be Jesus (peace be upon him) because Christianity and Islam agree he rose without bringing justice to the nations, as his handful of

⁹ In *Sahih al-Bukhâri* (2125), it is authentically transmitted that ‘Amr b. al-‘Âs (rA)—a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ—said that among what was foretold in the Torah about the Prophet ﷺ was,

You are My slave and My messenger; your name is al-Mutawakkil (the Reliant upon God). He is neither harsh nor aggressive, and he does not yell in the marketplace. He does not repay evil with evil, but rather overlooks and forgives. Allah will not take him (in death) until He has straightened a crooked nation through him, having them say there is no god but Allah, and [not before] he has opened hard hearts, deaf ears, and blind eyes.

disciples did not possess the strength required to enforce justice. This servant cannot be Moses (peace be on him) who died in the wilderness of Sinai, exasperated by the resistance of his own people. Interestingly, the Bible identifies Kedar as the firstborn of Ishmael.¹⁰ The Bible also asserts that the first son is most entitled to the covenant. These combined truths become painfully problematic for someone wishing to conceal that where Kedar settled fits nothing but Mecca, and that Ishmael's descendant who gained enough power to enjoin "God's justice" fits nobody but Muhammad ﷺ. It was because of these glaring facts that they kept hidden that Allah (the Exalted) said,

Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].
[al-Baqarah (2): 146]

John and the Prophet

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And then they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No.[John: 1/19-21]

Who is "that prophet" who is neither the Christ nor Elijah? Who is "that prophet" whose name apparently does not even need stating, as if his identity was common knowledge and his promised coming was awaited by all? This passage insinuates—at the very least—that people were not just awaiting another prophet, but rather something unique. Indeed, they were awaiting the greatest prophet and the finality of prophethood; one who would illuminate for humanity the path to God one last time—permanently. But where would he come from?

¹⁰ "And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam." [Genesis: 25/13] Also see: [1 Chronicles: 1/29]

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. [Deuteronomy: 18/18]

The prophet they asked John about was not from among them (the Israelites), but rather from among their brethren (the Ishmaelites). The New International Version added “*Israelite brethren*,” but this is a very recent change—as if concealing the message is a perpetual work in progress, or that a committee steps in to improvise every time they feel something is going to be correctly interpreted. Secondly, nobody from the Ishmaelites—or from humanity, even—had a greater semblance to Moses than the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Thirdly, only Muhammad¹¹ ﷺ tirelessly taught his followers that not a single word that left his lips should be credited back to him.

By the star when it descends, Your companion (Muhammad) has not strayed, nor has he erred, nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is but a revelation revealed. [an-Najm (53): 1-4]

Jesus and the Comforter

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you?” ... “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. [John: 16/7-13]

Jesus (peace be upon him) could not be implying the Holy Spirit here, calling him the Comforter that cannot arrive until Jesus departs, since the Holy Spirit was always with Jesus. Jesus could not be implying Paul or the papacy, since they did

¹¹ Both Moses and Muhammad were prophets born of two parents, both married and had children, both came with a new comprehensive law, both faced persecution and thus emigrated from their homelands, both returned to defeat their oppressors, and both had a natural death and burial.

away with laws instead of perfecting them, and have not shown us proof that they communicate with the heavens. Only the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ revived the honor of Jesus without burying his legacy of worshipping the Creator alone. Muhammad ﷺ taught his followers that he would only speak that which he would hear, and he would precisely foretell future events.¹² He brought definitive guidance on all truths, perfecting it the Divine code of law for humanity. In one splendid metaphor, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ describes prophethood as a magnificent structure that people observed in awe, short of a single missing brick that needed to be placed in its structure to fill the gap and perfect its glory. He ﷺ then commented, “I am that brick; I am the seal of the prophets.”¹³

Construction of the Ka‘ba

Scriptures aside, simply consider the religious paradigm in Arabia. Among the Arabs, Abraham was recognized as the ultimate patriarch, and due to the esteem they held him in, all paid homage to him – by visiting the House he built in Mecca (the Ka‘ba). Despite the fact that they were idolaters, the polytheists affirmed that Mecca was a special sanctuary whose veneration was desired by God. They saw themselves as the heirs of that heritage, and thus they felt compelled to honor this Ka‘ba that Abraham had erected. Why else would God command Abraham to just leave Hagar and his firstborn infant in a particular place, and a barren wilderness at that? For an Arab whose worldview stems from that paradigm, it is inconceivable that Allah sent Abraham to construct the Ka‘ba, sprung a blessed well beneath it, gave rise to a great nation because of it, and protected it from invasions—just so it would be surrounded by idols and become a venue for depravity. It is no surprise, then, why people at that time were dead sure that something was about to happen, something momentous that would change the entire scene in that part of the world and soon far beyond.

¹² A separate study in this Proofs of Prophethood series will highlight the prophecies and miracles.

¹³ Collected by al-Bukhâri and Muslim.

In the next paper, we will examine how the personality of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a vivid indication of his prophethood, noticed by those who met him, and those who later studied his life.

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