

The Difference Between Prophets and Messengers, Peace Be Upon Them

To: Om Qutibah Odah

(Translated)

Question:

Assalam Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh

In the book, *The Islamic Personality*, the first part of the chapter of the Prophets and Messengers, page 130, it states:

“Thus, Musa (as) was a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari’ah and a Messenger because this Shari’ah was for his mission. On the other hand, although Aaron [Harun] (as) was also a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari’ah, he was not a Messenger because the Shari’ah, which was revealed to him was not for his mission, rather it was for the mission of Musa (as)”.

How can we link between what was mentioned in the book, *The Islamic Personality*, and what is established in the Book (Qur’an) when Allah (swt) says: ﴿فَاتَّبِعْهُ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ﴾ “**So go to him and say, 'Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord'**” [Ta-Ha: 47] ﴿فَاتَّبِعَا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ “**Go to Pharaoh and say, 'We are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds,'**” [Ash-Shu’ara: 16] In all the interpretations he is a Messenger and a Prophet.

Answer:

Wa Alaikum Assalam Wa Rahmatullah Wa Barakatuh

First: There has been a disagreement among the scholars regarding the difference between the Prophet and the Messenger on several sayings, including:

1- The Prophet is the one to whom an assignment (takleef) is revealed and he is not commanded to convey it. If he is commanded to convey it, then he is a Messenger. It is stated in Fath Al-Bari by Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani:

[Fath Al-Bari by Ibn Hajar (11/112)]

The term ‘Prophethood’ and ‘the Message’ are different in origin. Prophethood is from *naba’* (inform), which is news. **The Prophet in common customs is the one given the information by Allah by an order that necessitates an assignment, but if he is commanded to communicate it to others, then he is a Messenger; otherwise, he is a Prophet not a Messenger.** And based on this, every Messenger is a Prophet but not the opposite. The Prophet and the Messenger share a general matter, which is the information (*naba’*), and they are separated in the message, so if you say so-and-so is a Messenger, you imply that he is a Prophet and a Messenger. If you say so-and-so is a Prophet, it does not necessarily mean he is a Messenger...]

2- The Messenger is the one who was sent to convey the revelation and with him is a Book, and the Prophet is the one who was sent to convey the revelation in general. Al-Ainy mentioned the following in “Al-Banaya Sharh Al-Hidaya”: [Al-Banaya Sharh Al-Hidaya (1/116)]

[...Then the difference between the Messenger and the Prophet: **The Messenger: is one who was sent to convey the revelation and with him a Book, and the Prophet: is**

one who was sent to convey the revelation generally, whether it was with a Book or without a Book, such as Joshua, peace be upon him, so the Prophet is more general than the Messenger. This is what Sheikh Qawam al-Din al-Atrazi said in his “Sharh”, and in that he followed the author of “Al-Nihaayah” where he said: The Messenger: is the Prophet who has a Book with him, like Musa (as), and the Prophet: is the one who informs about Allah, even if he does not have a Book, such as Joshua, peace be upon him. The Prophet (saw) said: «عُلَمَاءُ أُمَّتِي كَأَنْبِيَاءِ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ» **“The scholars of my Ummah are like the Prophets of the children of Isra’eil,”** and he did not say: **“the Messengers of the children of Isra’eil.”** Sheikh Akmal al-Din, may Allah have mercy on him, followed them and differentiated between them like this].

3- (The Messenger is the one to whom the Shariah is revealed and he is commanded to convey it, while the Prophet is the one to whom the Shariah of other Messengers is revealed to and he is commanded to convey it. The Messenger is the one who is commanded to convey the Shariah revealed to him, and the Prophet is the one who is commanded to convey the Shariah of others), and this is the opinion that we chose and clarified in the book “The Islamic Personality”, volume I, page 35-38 Word file:

[**The Prophets and Messengers:** Prophet’ (nabi) and ‘Messenger’ (rasul) are two contrastive terms but they share in the respect that a Shari’ah is revealed to both of them. The difference between the Messenger and the prophet is that the former is inspired with a Shari’ah which he is commanded to propagate, whereas the latter, i.e. the Prophet, is also inspired, but commanded to propagate the Shari’ah of the Messengers. In other words, the Messenger is commanded to propagate the Shari’ah himself, whilst the Prophet propagates the Shari’ah of the Messengers. Qadi al-Baydawi in commentary of the saying of Allah (swt), ﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ﴾ **“Never did we send an apostle or a prophet before you,”** [TMQ Hajj: 52]; ‘The Messenger is sent by Allah (swt) with a revived or a new Shari’ah which he calls people to, whereas the Prophet is sent by Allah (swt) to affirm the former Shari’ah.’ Thus, Musa (as) was a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari’ah and a Messenger because this Shari’ah was for his mission. On the other hand, although Aaron (as) was also a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari’ah, he was not a Messenger because the Shari’ah, which was revealed to him, was not for his mission; rather, it was for the mission of Musa (as). By the same token, Muhammad (saw) was a Prophet and a Messenger because he was inspired with a Shari’ah, which was for his mission]. **End quote.**

This opinion is the most accurate of sayings and the most likely correct. the Hadiths of the Prophet (saw) explains the reality of the Prophet and the difference between it and the Messenger. For example, the Hadith agreed upon on the authority of Abu Hazim, he said: I sat with Abu Hurairah five years, so I heard him saying that the Prophet said «كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ تَسُوسُهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ كُلَّمَا هَلَكَ نَبِيٌّ خَلَفَهُ نَبِيٌّ، وَإِنَّهُ لَا نَبِيَّ بَعْدِي، وَسَيَكُونُ خُلَفَاءُ فَيَكْتُمُونَ. قَالُوا: فَمَا تَأْمُرُنَا؟ قَالَ: فُوا بِبَيْعَةِ الْأَوَّلِ» **“The children of Isra’il were governed by the Prophets, as often as one died another taking his place. There will be no Prophet after me, but there will be numerous caliphs.”** He was asked what command he had to give and replied, **“Fulfil the oath of allegiance to each and give them their due for Allah will question them about what He asked them to guard.”** It is clear from this Hadith that the Prophets of the Children of Isra’il used to govern them, and that was according to the Shariah of Musa (as) as it is known and as indicated by the Hadith itself, as it likened the nature of the work of the caliphs to the work of the Prophets of the children of Isra’eil, that is, in terms of governing of the subjects. Just as the Prophets of the Children of Isra’eil used to govern the people according to the Shariah of Musa (as), so is the caliphs; they also govern the Muslims according to the Shariah of Muhammad (saw). This means that the Prophets of the children of Isra’eil did not come up with a new Shariah, but they followed the Shariah of Musa (as). This Hadith indicates that the Prophet is the one who receives revelations and informs people of it, but he does not inform them of a new Shariah; rather, he conveys the Shariah of a Messenger who preceded him. And from that it is also understood that the Messenger is the one who brings a new Shariah that the Prophets who follow him can follow, as is the case with the Prophets of the Children of Isra’eil with regard to Musa (as). The

Hadith referred to above is evidence of the reality of the difference between the Prophet and the Messenger.

Second: The reality of our Master Haroon (as):

1- As we mentioned in the text quoted above from the book, *The Islamic Personality*, we said: [Thus, Musa (as) was a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari'ah and a Messenger because this Shari'ah was for his mission. On the other hand, although Aaron (as) was also a Prophet because he was inspired with a Shari'ah, he was not a Messenger because the Shari'ah, which was revealed to him, was not for his mission; rather, it was for the mission of Musa (as)]. So based on the most likely correct definition to us of the Messenger and the Prophet, we have decided that Haroon (as), is a Prophet and not a Messenger in this sense, because Haroon (as), was following Musa (as) in the Shariah, and the Shariah texts testify to that as shown below.

2- With regard to the two noble verses that you mentioned in the question, let us look at their tafseer (interpretation) briefly from some of the books of tafseer:

a- [Tafsir al-Nasafi (2/ 297, numbered automatically by al-Shamilah)

﴿فَاتِيَاهُ﴾ **“So go to him”** that is, to Pharaoh, ﴿إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ﴾ **“so say, we are Messengers of your Lord”** to you. So, they went to him and conveyed the Message and told him what they were commanded to do. ﴿قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يَا مُوسَى﴾ **“He said, “Who is your (you both) Lord, O Musa?”** He addressed them, then called out one of them, because Musa is the origin of the prophecy, and Haroon followed him...].

It also came in [Tafsir al-Nasafi (2/ 464, numbered automatically by al-Shamilah)

﴿فَاتِيَا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ **“Go to Pharaoh and say, 'We are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds”** The Messenger was not used for two as in the verse: ﴿إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ﴾ **“Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord”** Because the Messenger can mean of the one sent and it can mean the Message, so sometimes it is in the meaning of the one being sent, so there is no need to make them in *tathniya* format (dual). Here it is in the meaning of the Message; therefore, it is equal in description of one, dual or plural. Or because they are united and agreed on one Shariah as if they are one Messenger. Or I want each one of us ﴿أَنْ أُرْسِلَ﴾ **“to send”** meaning to send, so that the Messenger includes the meaning of sending and it has the meaning of the saying ﴿مَعَنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ﴾ **“With us are the children of Isra'eil”**. He means to let them go with us to Palestine and it was their dwelling. So they came to his door, the permission was not granted for a year, until the gatekeeper said: There is a man here who claims to be the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds. He said: Permit him, so that we may laugh at him. So, they gave him the Message, and Pharaoh knew Musa...]

b- [Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (13/93

Allah's (swt) saying: ﴿فَاتِيَا فِرْعَوْنَ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ **“Go to Pharaoh and say, 'We are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds”** Abu Ubaidah said: Messenger in the sense of a Message and appreciation for this. We have the message of the Lord of the worlds. Abu Ubaidah said: the Messenger can be in both meaning the dual and plural meaning. The Arabs say: This is my messenger and my support, and these two are my messengers and my support, and these are my messengers and my support. Among this is Allah's (swt) saying: ﴿فَاتَهُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِي﴾ **“For they are an enemy to me”**. And it was said: It means that each one of us is a messenger of the Lord of the Worlds].

c- By examining these two verses and other verses in which Haroon (as) was mentioned with the word al-irsal (being sent) and al-Risala (message), it becomes clear that mentioning him with the word al-irsal was always with Musa (as), i.e., by following him, for example Allah's saying: ﴿ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَى وَأَخَاهُ هَارُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ﴾ **“Then We sent Moses and his**

﴿وَأَخِي هَارُونُ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ﴾ [Al-Mu'minun: 45] **brother Aaron with Our signs and a clear authority"** **“And my brother Aaron is more fluent than me in tongue, so send him with me as support, verifying me. Indeed, I fear that they will deny me.”** [Al-Qasas: 34] ﴿وَإِذْ نَادَى رَبُّكَ مُوسَىٰ أَنِ انتَبِ الظَّالِمِينَ * قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَلا يَتَفَقَهُونَ * قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَن يُكَذِّبُونِ﴾ **أَخَافُ أَن يُكَذِّبُونِ * وَيَضِيقُ صَدْرِي وَلَا يَنْطَلِقُ لِسَانِي فَأَرْسِلْ إِلَىٰ هَارُونَ * وَلَهُمْ عَلَيَّ ذَنْبٌ فَأَخَافُ أَن يَقْتُلُونِ** * قَالَ كَلَّا فَادْهَبَا **“And [mention] when your Lord called Moses, [saying], "Go to the wrongdoing people * The people of Pharaoh. Will they not fear Allah?" * He said, "My Lord, indeed I fear that they will deny me * And that my breast will tighten and my tongue will not be fluent, so send for Aaron * And they have upon me a [claim due to] sin, so I fear that they will kill me." * [Allah] said, "No. Go both of you with Our signs; indeed, We are with you, listening * Go to Pharaoh and say, 'We are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds * [Commanded to say], "Send with us the Children of Isra'eil." [Ash-Shu'ara: 10-17] اذْهَبْ** **أَنْتَ وَأَخُوكَ بِآيَاتِي وَلَا تَنَبِّأ فِي ذِكْرِي * اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ * فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لِّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ * قَالَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا نَخَافُ أَن يُفْرِطَ عَلَيْنَا أَوْ أَن يَطْغَىٰ * قَالَ لَا تَخَافَا إِنِّي مَعَكُمَا أَسْمِعُ وَأَرَىٰ * فَاذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ كَذَبٌ وَسَوَاءٌ يُعَذِّبُهُمْ قَدْ جَنَّكَ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَىٰ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَىٰ * إِنَّا قَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْنَا أَنَّ الْعَذَابَ عَلَىٰ مَنْ كَذَبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ﴾ **Go, you and your brother, with My signs and do not slacken in My remembrance * Go, both of you, to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed * And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear [Allah]."** * They said, "Our Lord, indeed we are afraid that he will hasten [punishment] against us or that he will transgress." * [Allah] said, "Fear not. Indeed, I am with you both; I hear and I see * So go to him and say, 'Indeed, we are messengers of your Lord, so send with us the Children of Isra'il and do not torment them. We have come to you with a sign from your Lord. And peace will be upon he who follows the guidance * Indeed, it has been revealed to us that the punishment will be upon whoever denies and turns away.'" [Ta-Ha: 42-48]. It is clear from all these texts that Haroon (as) was not alone in the description of the Message; rather, the description was about Musa and about him together, peace be upon them both, meaning that Haroon (as), was not independent and unique in the description the Message.**

d- But when Haroon (as) is mentioned in the noble Qur'an alone and independent in description, he was called a Prophet and not a Messenger, and this is at the time when the Qur'an confirmed to Musa (as) the description of the Messenger and the Prophet together, Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مُوسَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مُخْلَصًا وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَّبِيًّا * وَنَادَيْنَاهُ مِنْ جَانِبِ الطُّورِ الْأَيْمَنِ وَقَرَّبْنَاهُ نَجِيًّا﴾ **“And mention in the Book, Moses. Indeed, he was chosen, and he was a messenger and a prophet * And We called him from the side of the Mount at [his] right and brought him near, confiding [to him] * And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet”** [Maryam: 51-53] He said about Musa (as) that he was: ﴿رَسُولًا نَّبِيًّا﴾ **“And he was a messenger and a prophet”** [Maryam: 51] As for Haroon (as), immediately after that, the Qur'an did not prove the description of the Message, but it was sufficient to describe him with prophethood: ﴿أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ نَبِيًّا﴾ **“His brother Aaron as a prophet.”** [Maryam: 53]. This supports our understanding that Musa (as) is the Messenger and Prophet, because the new Shariah was sent to him and he was commanded to convey it. As for Haroon (as) he is a Prophet and not a Messenger because he followed Musa (as) and was commanded to convey the Message of Musa (as), and his Shariah without having an independent new Shariah. The following was stated in the tafseer of these verses in Ibn Katheer:

[Tafsir Ibn Katheer (5/237)

...When the Allah (swt) mentioned Ibrahim Al-Khalil and praised him, He mentioned Al-Kaleem, and said: ﴿وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مُوسَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مُخْلَصًا﴾ **“And mention in the Book, Moses. Indeed, he was chosen”** [Maryam: 51].

﴿وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَّبِيًّا﴾ **“and he was a messenger and a prophet”** [Maryam: 51] The two

descriptions were combined for him, because he was among the great five determined Messengers (Uli Al-Azam), and they are: Noah, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa, and Muhammad, may Allah's prayers and peace be upon them and upon all the rest of the Prophets... And his saying: ﴿وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ نَبِيًّا﴾ **“And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet”** [Maryam: 53]. Meaning: We answered his question and his intercession for his brother, **so we made him a Prophet**, as he said in the other verse ﴿وَإِخِي هَارُونَ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ مِنِّي لِسَانًا فَأَرْسَلْهُ مَعِيَ رِدْءًا يُصَدِّقُنِي إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يُكَذِّبُون﴾ **“And my brother Aaron is more fluent than me in tongue, so send him with me as support, verifying me. Indeed, I fear that they will deny me”** [Al-Qasas: 34]. Allah (swt) says: ﴿قَدْ أُوتِيتَ سُؤْلَكَ يَا مُوسَى﴾ **“[Allah] said, “You have been granted your request, O Moses”** [Ta-Ha: 36]” Allah (swt) says: ﴿فَأَرْسِلْ إِلَىٰ هَارُونَ * وَلَهُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَنْبٍ فَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَقْتُلُون﴾ **“so send for Aaron * And they have upon me a [claim due to] sin, so I fear that they will kill me.”** [Ash-Shu'ara: 13-14]. That is why some of the predecessors said: No one was given intercession in this world greater than the intercession of Musa for Haroon, **that he be a Prophet**. Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ نَبِيًّا﴾ **“And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet”** [Maryam: 53] Ibn Jarir said: Ya`qub told us, Ibn Aliyah told us, on the authority of Dawood, on the authority of Ikrimah, he said: Ibn Abbas said: His saying ﴿وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ مِنْ رَحْمَتِنَا أَخَاهُ هَارُونَ نَبِيًّا﴾ **“And We gave him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron as a prophet”** [Maryam: 53] He said: Haroon was older than Musa, but he wanted **to grant him his prophethood**].

3- From what was mentioned above, it becomes clear that according to the definition that we adopt for the Prophet and the Messenger, Musa (as), is a Prophet because a Shariah was revealed to him to convey it, and a Messenger because a specific Shariah was revealed to him. As for Haroon (as) is a Prophet because a Shariah was revealed to him, but he is not a Messenger because the Shariah that was revealed to him to convey was not specific to him; rather, it was the Shariah specific to his brother Musa (as).

This is what we see is the correct opinion in this matter, and it is our adopted opinion, and Allah (swt) is All-Knowing and Most Wise.

Your Brother,

Ata Bin Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah

12 Shawwal 1444 AH

2/5/2023 CE

The link to the answer from the Ameer's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=791737942513577&set=a.469598088060899>