

What is the Criteria for a True Prophet?

Rays from the Same Lamp

A natural question to ask someone who believes in any prophet is: 'What are the criteria for your belief in him?' Reasonable criteria would be:

- (i) **evidence** for his claim.
- (ii) **consistency** in his teachings (about God, afterlife, and similar issues of belief)
- (iii) **similarity** to the teachings of earlier prophets.
- (iv) **integrity**: he must be a man of high morals.

The Bible lends support to our criteria. The Old Testament says of a false prophet:

1. Pretends to be sent by God.^[1]
2. Described as covetous,^[2] drunken,^[3] immoral and profane,^[4] influenced by evil spirits.^[5]
3. Prophesizes falsely,^[6] lies in the name of the Lord,^[7] out of his own heart,^[8] in the name of false gods.^[9]
4. Often practices divination and witchcraft.^[10]
5. Leads people into error,^[11] makes to forget God's name,^[12] teaches profaneness and sin,^[13] and oppresses.^[14]

The New Testament says of Jesus' criteria to identify false prophets:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”^[15]

We learn the following:

- (i) prophecy will continue after Jesus.
- (ii) beware of false prophets.
- (iii) the criteria to identify a false prophet is his fruits, that is his works or deeds.^[16]

As stated earlier, Muhammad claimed unequivocally, 'I am God's Messenger.' If a person evaluates his claim on the above criteria, he will find it meets the criteria completely.

In Islamic doctrine, all prophets constitute a spiritual fraternity of brothers with a single ‘father,’ but different ‘mothers.’ The ‘father’ is prophethood and unity of God, the ‘mothers’ are the different Laws they brought. Emphasizing the spiritual fraternity of all prophets, Prophet Muhammad said:

“I am the closest of all people to the son of Mary (Jesus). The prophets are paternal brothers, their mothers are different, but their religion is one.”
(*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

All prophets are ‘rays’ from the same ‘Lamp’: the central message of all prophets throughout ages was to dedicate worship to God only. That’s why Islam views denying a single prophet as equivalent to denying them all. The Quran states:

“Indeed, those who deny God and His messengers, and wish to separate God from His messengers, saying: ‘We believe in some but reject others’ and want to pursue a path in-between - it is they, they who are truly denying the truth: and for those who deny the truth We have readied shameful suffering. But as for those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them - unto them, in time, will He grant their rewards [in full]. And God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” (Quran 4:150-152)

Denying the prophethood of Muhammad is tantamount to denying all prophets. The prophethood of Muhammad is known just like the prophethood of Moses and Jesus is known: the numerous reports of their miracles that have reached us. The Book brought by Muhammad (the Quran) is fully preserved, and His Law is complete and applicable to today’s world. Moses brought the Law and justice, Jesus brought grace and flexibility. Muhammad combined between the Law of Moses and the grace of Jesus.

If someone were to say, ‘ he was an imposter,’ others are more fit to be charged with this accusation. Hence, denying Muhammad is denying one’s own prophets. If a reasonable person looks at two bright stars, he must acknowledge both are stars, he cannot say to one, ‘Yes, this one is a bright star,’ but deny the other! Doing so would be denying reality and a lie.

Make a table of all the prophets you believe in. Start from the first one to the last one you believe in. Answer the following questions:

What is the evidence I believe he was a true prophet?

What was the mission of the prophet in his own words?

Did he bring a Law? Is his Law applicable today?

What scripture did he bring? How is its content and meaning?

Is the scripture preserved in the original language it was revealed in? Is it considered a literary authority, free of internal inconsistencies?

What do you know of his morals and integrity?

Compare all the prophets you have listed and then answer the same questions about Muhammad. Then ask yourself, 'Can I honestly take Muhammad out of my list because he does not meet the criteria as other prophets?' It will not take too much effort to discover that the evidence for Muhammad's prophethood is stronger and more convincing.

A skeptic need consider what is so unusual about Muhammad's claim to be a prophet? When did God declare an end to prophecy before him? Who decided that there would not be any more divine communication with human beings? With no evidence to block divine revelation, it is natural to accept a continuity of revelation:

“Indeed, We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a Warner: for there never was any community but a Warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst.” (Quran 35:24)

“And We sent forth Our messengers, one after another: [and] every time their messenger came to a community, they gave him the lie: and so We caused them to follow one another [into the grave], and let them become [mere] tales: and so - away with the folk who would not believe!” (Quran 23:44)

This is true especially when the truth was perverted by Jews and Christians, the Christians claiming Jesus was the son of God and Jews calling him an illegitimate son of Joseph the Carpenter. Muhammad brought the truth: Jesus was God's noble prophet born of a miraculous virgin birth. As a result, Muslims believe in Jesus and love him, neither going to the extreme like the Christians, nor disparaging him like the Jews.

Footnotes:

[1] Jer 23:17,18,31

[2] Mic 3:11

[3] Isa 28:7

[4] Jer 23:11,14

[5] 1Ki 22:21,22

[6] Jer 5:31

[7] Jer 14:14

[8] Jer 23:16,26; Eze 13:2

[9] Jer 2:8

[10] Jer 14:14; Eze 22:28; Act 13:6

[11] Jer 23:13; Mic 3:5

[12] Jer 23:27

[13] Jer 23:14,15

[14] Eze 22:25

[15] Matthew 7:15-17 (King James Version)

[16] According to 'Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.'