158044 - Why Were There No Female Prophets or Messengers?

the question

Why were all the Prophets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam men? Why were there no women Prophets? Why did they have to be male?

Summary of answer

Allah chose all the Messengers whom He sent from among men. He did not send any female prophets or messengers. The Messengers were males and not females for reasons which were dictated by the nature of their task. For more, see the detailed answer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Belief in the wisdom of Allah

The Muslim does not hesitate to believe in the great wisdom of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, in all that He does. One of His names is al-Hakeem (the Most Wise) and one of His attributes is Hikmah (wisdom).

Allah, may He be exalted, has decreed that one of the attributes of the messengers is masculinity. Some of the scholars stated that there was consensus on this point. And there is the greatest wisdom behind that.

Why there were no female messengers

Shaykh ‘Umar al-Ashqar (may Allah preserve him) said:

“Another aspect of the perfection that Allah granted is that He chose all the messengers whom He

sent from among men. He did not send any messenger from among women. This exclusivity is indicated by the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): **“And We sent not before you (O Muhammad) but men to whom We inspired.”** [al-Anbiya 21:7]

The messengers were men and not women for reasons which were dictated by the nature of their task. For example:

1. The role of messenger requires a great many tasks to be performed: addressing men and women, meeting people in secret and openly, moving throughout the land, confronting liars and establishing proof against them and debating with them, preparing and leading armies, and going through the sufferings of war. All of that is suitable for men but not for women.

2. The role of the messenger demands that the messenger should be in charge of those who follow him, so he issues commands and prohibitions to his followers, and he rules and judges among them. If a woman were entrusted with such tasks, she would not be able to do them properly, and there would be people who would refuse to follow and obey her.

3. Women have to cope with things that prevent them from doing many tasks, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and nifas (bleeding following childbirth), which is accompanied by psychological stresses and pains, in addition to the care that is required by the child. All of that prevents her from being able to fulfil the role of messenger and carrying out its duties.” (From *ar-Rusul wal-Risalat*, pp. 84-85)

Were there female prophets?

With regard to prophethood, some of the scholars – such as Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash‘ari, al-Qurtubi and Ibn Hazm – were of the view that there were some female prophets! including Maryam bint ‘Imran . Their evidence is the verses in which it says that Allah, may He be exalted, sent revelation to the mother of Musa, for example, and what it says about the angels speaking to Maryam (peace be upon her), and also what it says about Allah, may He be exalted, having chosen her above the women of the world.

What they said does not seem to be correct.

Refuting the view that there were female prophets

Shaykh ‘Umar al-Ashqar (may Allah preserve him) said:

“What they say cannot be taken as proof of the prophethood of women. Their view may be refuted from several angles:

1. We do not accept their view that the prophet is not commanded to convey the message, to teach and to mix with people. Our view is that there is no difference between a prophet and the messenger in this regard; and the difference is that a Prophet is sent with the laws of the messenger who came before him.

If this is the case, then the reasons why a woman messenger cannot be sent apply also to the sending of a woman prophet. There are many reasons why women are incapable of playing the role of the prophet.

2. The revelation sent by Allah to these women, the mother of Musa and Asiyah , happened in the form of dreams. We know that dreams may form a part of revelation, and that this may happen to people other than the prophets.

3. We do not accept their view that everyone who is addressed by the Angels is a prophet. In the hadith it says that Allah sent an angel to a man who was visiting one of his brothers in faith in another town. He asked him why he was visiting him, and when he said that he loved him for the sake of Allah, he (the angel) told him that Allah had sent him to tell him that He loved him. And the story of the bald man, the leper and the blind man is well known. Jibril (Gabriel) came to teach the Sahabah (the Companions of the Prophet) about their religion by questioning the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and the Sahabah witnessed and heard that.

4. They cannot quote as evidence the texts which say that Allah chose Maryam, for Allah clearly states that He has chosen people other than the prophets:

“Then We gave the Book (the Quran) for inheritance to such of Our slaves whom We chose (the followers of Muhammad). Then of them are some who wrong their own selves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by Allah's Leave, foremost in good deeds…” [Fatir 35:32]

He chose the family of Ibraheem and the family of ‘Imran over mankind and the jinn, and among their families are undoubtedly people who are not prophets:

“Allah chose Adam, Nuh (Noah), the family of Ibrahim (Abraham) and the family of ‘Imran above the ‘Alameen (mankind and jinns) (of their times).” [Al ‘Imran 3:33]

5. The word perfection mentioned in the hadith, which they used as evidence, does not necessarily imply prophethood, because it may be applied to the perfection of completion of anything and reaching the highest level in some respect. What is meant is women who attained perfection in all the virtues that apply to women: hence perfection here is not the perfection of the prophets.

6. In some hadiths it is clearly stated that Khadijah was one of the perfect women. This clearly shows that perfection here is not the perfection of prophethood.

7. In some hadiths it is clearly stated that Fatimah will be the leader of the women of the people of paradise, apart from Maryam the daughter of ‘Imran. This rules out the prophethood of women other than Maryam, such as the mother of Musa and Asiyah, because Fatimah was definitely not a prophet. This hadith clearly states that she is superior to other women, and if the mother of Musa and Asiyah were prophets they would be superior to Fatimah.

8. Maryam is described as being a siddiqah (truthful) in the context of raising her and describing her virtues. Allah, may He be exalted, says:

“The Messiah (‘Isa (Jesus)), son of Maryam (Mary), was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother (Maryam (Mary)) was a Siddiqah (i.e. she believed in the words of Allah and His Books). They both used to eat food (as any other human being, while Allah does not eat)…” [al-Maidah 5:75]

If there were any higher description, it would have been mentioned, but there is no mention in the Quran or in the sahih hadiths of the Prophet that any women were prophets.

Al-Qadi ‘Iyad narrated from a group of scholars that Maryam was not the prophet. An-Nawawi said in al-Adhkar that Imam al-Haramayn narrated that there was consensus on the point that Maryam was not a prophet. In Sharh al-Muhadhdhab it was attributed to a group of scholars, and al-Hasan al-Basri was quoted as saying that there are no prophets among women or the jinn.” (From *ar-Rusul wa’r-Risalat*, pp. 87-89 [available in English under the title: The Messengers and the Messages in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah, by ‘Umar S. al-Ashqar]

And Allah knows best.