89814 - What Is the Status of Prophets in Islam?

the question

What is the status of the noble Prophets of Allah: Shu`ayb, Yusuf, Ayyub, Yunus, Musa, Ilyas, Al-Yasa`, Dhul-Kifl, Dawud, Sulayman, Zakariyya, Yahya, `Isa and Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon them) in the Quran?

Summary of answer

Allah the Almighty has told us that He has granted excellence to some of the Prophets over the others. The Ummah unanimously agreed that the Messengers are superior to the Prophets, and the Messengers vary in status. The best of the Messengers and Prophets are five: Muhammad, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and `Isa (blessings and peace of Allah be upon all of them).

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Superiority of some Prophets over others:

Allah, may He be Blessed and Exalted, has told us that He has made some of the Prophets exceed others . He, may He be Glorified and Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And your Lord is most knowing of whoever is in the heavens and the earth. And We have granted excellence to some Prophets over the others, and to David We gave the book [of Psalms].} [Al-Isra’ 17:55]

Are Messengers superior to the Prophets?

The Ummah unanimously agreed that the Messengers are superior to the Prophets, and the Messengers vary in status, as Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Those messengers - some of them We caused to exceed others. Among them were those to whom Allah spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave `Isa, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Pure Spirit. If Allah had willed, those [generations] succeeding them would not have fought each other after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed, and some of them believed and some of them disbelieved. And if Allah had willed, they would not have fought each other, but Allah does what He intends.} [Al-Baqarah 2:253]

For the difference between a Messenger and a Prophet, please see the answers to questions no. 5455 and 11725 .

The best of Messengers:

The best of the Messengers and Prophets are five:

Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and `Isa (blessings and peace of Allah be upon all of them).

These are “those of determination among the messengers.” Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{So be patient, [O Muhammad], as were those of determination among the messengers and do not be impatient for them.} [Al-Ahqaf 46:35]

They are named in two places in the Quran:

- {And [mention, O Muhammad], when We took from the Prophets their covenant and from you and from Nuh and Ibrahim and Musa and `Isa, the son of Mary; and We took from them a solemn covenant.} [Al-Ahzab 33:7]
- {He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Nuh and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Musa and `Isa - to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to

Himself whoever turns back [to Him].} [Ash-Shura 42:13]

Allah, may He be Exalted, singled out some of them for His favour by granting them gifts by virtue of which they became superior.

Al-Qurtubi said in his Tafsir (3/249):

“Saying that some of them were favoured over others is only because of what was granted to them of virtues and support.”

- Thus He caused Nuh to exceed by making him the first of the messengers to the people of earth, and calling him a thankful slave.
- He caused Ibrahim to exceed by taking him as an intimate friend (Khalil):

{And Allah took Ibrahim as an intimate friend.} [An-Nisa’ 4:125]; and by making him a leader for the people:

{[Allah] said, “Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people.”} [Al-Baqarah 2:124]

- He caused Musa to exceed by speaking directly to him:

{[Allah] said, “O Musa, I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My words [to you] So take what I have given you and be among the grateful.”} [Al-A`raf 7:144]

And He chose him for Himself, as He says:

{I have chosen you for Myself [to convey My message.]} [Ta-Ha 20:41]

And He caused him to be raised under His watchful Eye:

{so that you might be raised under My watchful Eye.} [Ta-Ha 20:39]

- He caused `Isa to exceed by making him a Messenger of Allah and His word, which He bestowed upon Maryam, and a soul created by Him, and he spoke to the people from the cradle.

The Prophets also exceed one another in other ways:

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmu` Al-Fatawa (35/34):

“As a matter of fact, in some cases prophethood was based on sovereignty or dominion. So a Prophet may be of three types:

1. Either he was rejected and was not followed or obeyed, so he was a prophet who was not given sovereignty or dominion.
2. Or he was obeyed, which is itself a kind of sovereignty or dominion, but if he only enjoined what was enjoined on him, then he is a slave-messenger who did not have any sovereignty.
3. However, if it was permissible for him to enjoin whatever he wanted, that is the status of a sovereign or a king, as it was said to Sulayman:

{This is Our gift, so grant or withhold without account.} [Sad 38:39]

He was a prophet-king:

The king or sovereign here is the opposite of the slave-messenger, as it was said to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): “Choose [to be] either a slave-messenger or a prophet-king.” In the case of our Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), he was a slave-messenger who was supported by Allah, and was obeyed and followed. He was granted the benefit of being obeyed and followed so that he would have a reward like that of those who followed him, and so that people would benefit from him, and they would be granted mercy through him and he would be granted mercy through them. He did not choose to be a king or sovereign, so that that – because of what there is of pleasure in leadership and wealth – would not detract from his share in the hereafter. The slave-messenger is of a higher status before Allah than the prophet-king, hence the status of Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and ‘Isa ibn Maryam is higher than that of Dawud, Sulayman and Yusuf.”

The status of Prophets in Islam:

Thus we can describe the status of the Prophets before Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted. The most noble of them in status before Him are “those of determination among the messengers,” and the noblest of those of determination is our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “I will be the leader of the children of Adam on the Day of Resurrection, the first one for whom the grave is opened, the first one to intercede and the first one whose intercession will be accepted.” (Narrated by Muslim, 4223)

With regard to any other differentiation in virtue, there is no evidence in the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Messenger to list them in order, and the Muslim has no need to try to find out about that. For that reason, no scholar has mentioned that in their books on `Aqidah (creed) and Usul As-Sunnah.

And Allah knows best.