# How many Prophets were there? Were they all from Arabia?

Prophets were raised and sent to their people in different lands and at different times. One hadith puts the number of Prophets at 124,000; another mentions 224,000. Both versions, however, should be evaluated critically according to the science of hadith. The exact number is not important; rather, we should realize that no people has ever been deprived of its own Prophet: There never was a people without a Warner having lived among them (35:24) and:

*We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (17:15).*

To punish a people before warning them that what they are doing is wrong is contrary to His Glory and Grace. The warning precedes responsibility, which may be followed by reward or punishment: Anyone who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it (99:7–8). If a Prophet has not been sent, people cannot know what is right and wrong and so cannot be punished. However, since every individual will be called to account for his or her good and evil deeds, we may infer that a Prophet has been sent to every people:

*We sent among every people a messenger with (the command): “Serve God and avoid evil” (16:36).*

The Prophets were not raised only in Arabia. In fact, we do not even know all of the Prophets who were raised there, let alone elsewhere. We know only 28 of them by name (from Adam to Muhammad), and the Prophethood of three of them is uncertain. [[1]](#footnote-1)We do not know exactly from where they emerged. Supposedly, Adam's tomb and the place of his reunion with Eve is Jidda, but this information is uncertain. We know that Abraham spent some time in Anatolia, Syria, and Babylon. Lot was associated with Sodom and Gomorrah, around the Dead Sea; Shu'ayb with Madyan; Moses with Egypt; and Yahya and Zakariyya with the Mediterranean countries—they may have crossed to Anatolia, since Christians link Mary (Mayam ibn 'Isa) and Jesus with Ephesus. But these associations remain suppositions at best.

We know the names of some Prophets sent to the Israelites, but not the names of any others or where they appeared. Moreover, because their teachings have been distorted and lost over time, we cannot say anything about who they were and where they were sent.

Take the case of Christianity. Following the Council of Nicea (325 CE), the original doctrine of God's Oneness was dropped in favor of the human-made doctrine of the Trinity. For the Catholic Church, Jesus became the “son” of God, while his mother Mary became the “mother” of God. Some believed, rather vaguely, that God was immanent or present in things. Thus, Christianity came to resemble the idolatrous beliefs and practices of ancient Greece, and its followers began to associate other things and people with God, a major sin in Islam.

Throughout history, deviations and corruption of the Truth started and increased in this way. If the Qur'an had not informed us of the Prophethood of Jesus and of the purity and greatness of Mary, we would have difficulty in distinguishing the cults of and rites of Jupiter (Zeus) and Jesus, Venus (Aphrodite) and Mary.

This same process may have happened to other religions. As such, we cannot say definitely that their founders or teachers were Prophets or that they taught in a specific location. We only can speculate that Confucius, Buddha, or even Socrates were Prophets. We cannot give a definite answer because we do not have enough information about them and their original teachings. However, we know that the teachings of Confucius and Buddha influenced great numbers of their contemporaries and continue to do so.

Some say that Socrates was a philosopher influenced by Judaism, but they offer no proof. Words attributed to him by Plato imply that Socrates was “inspired” from a very early age to “instruct” people in true understanding and belief. But it is not clear if these words are attributed correctly or exactly what his people understood them to mean. Only this much is reliable: Socrates taught in an environment and manner that supports the use of reason.

Professor Mahmud Mustafa's observations of two primitive African tribes confirm what has been said above. He remarks that the Maw-Maws believe in God and call him Mucay. This God is one and only, acts alone, does not beget or is begotten, and has no associate or partner. He is not seen or sensed, but known only through His works. He dwells in the heavens, from where he ordains everything. That is why the Maw-Maws raise their hands when praying. Another tribe, the Neyam-Neyam, expresses similar themes. There is one God who decrees and ordains everything, and what he says is absolute. He makes everything in the forest move according to His will, and sends thunderbolts against those with whom he is angry.

These ideas are compatible with what is said by the Qur'an. The Maw-Maws's belief is very close to what we find in the Qur'an's Surat al-Ikhlas. How could these primitive tribes, so far removed from civilization and the known Prophets, have so pure and sound a concept of God? This reminds us of the Qur'anic verse: For every people there is a messenger. When their messenger comes, the matter is judged between them with justice, and they are not wronged (10:47).

Professor Adil of Kirkuk, Iraq, was working as a mathematician at Riyadh University when I met him in 1968. He told me that he had met many Native American Indians while earning his Ph.D. in the United States. He had been struck by how many of them believe in One God who does not eat or sleep or find himself constrained by time. He rules and governs all of creation, which is under His sovereignty and dependent on His will. They also referred to some of God's attributes: the lack of a partner, for such would surely give rise to conflict.

How does one reconcile the alleged primitiveness of such peoples with such loftiness in their concept of God? It seems that true Messengers conveyed these truths to them, some soundness of which can still be found in their present-day beliefs.

Some people wonder why there were no female Prophets. The overwhelming consensus of Sunni scholars of the Law and Tradition is that no woman has been sent as Prophet. Except for a questionable and even unreliable tradition that Mary and Pharaoh's wife were sincere believers, there is no Qur'anic authority or hadith that a woman was sent to her people as a Prophet.

God the All-Mighty created all entities in pairs. Humanity was created to be the steward of creation, and thus is fitted to it. The pairs of male and female are characterized by complex relation of mutual attraction and repulsion. Women incline toward softness, weakness, and compassion; men incline toward strength, force, and competitive toughness. When they come together, such characteristics allow them to establish a harmonious family unit.

Today, the issue of gender has reached the point where some people refuse to recognize the very real differences between men and women and claim that they are alike and equal in all respects. Implementing these views has resulted in the “modern” lifestyle of women working outside the home, trying to “become men,” and thus losing their own identity. Family life has eroded, for children are sent to daycare centers or boarding schools as parents are too busy, as “individuals,” to take proper care of them. This violence against nature and culture has destroyed the home as a place of balance between authority and love, as a focus of security and peace.

God the Wise ordained some principles and laws in the universe, and created human beings therein with an excellent and lofty nature. Men are physically stronger and more capable than women, and plainly constituted to strive and compete without needing to withdraw from the struggle. It is different with women, because of their menstrual period, their necessary confinement before and after childbirth, and their consequent inability to observe all the prayers and fasts. Nor can women be available continually for public duties. How could a mother with a baby in her lap lead and administer armies, make life and death decisions, and sustain and prosecute a difficult strategy against an enemy?

A Prophet must lead humanity in every aspect of its social and religious life without a break. That is why Prophethood is impossible for women. If men could have children, they could not be Prophets either. Prophet Muhammad points to this fact when he describes women as *“those who cannot fulfil the religious obligations totally and cannot realize some of them.”*[[2]](#footnote-2)

A Prophet is an exemplar, a model for conducting every aspect of human life, so that people cannot claim that they were asked to do things that they could not do. Exclusively female matters are communicated to other women by the women in the Prophet's household.

1. Luqman (31:12), Uzayr (9:30), and Zul-qarnain (18:83-98). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bukhari, Hayd, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)