

Ahl al-Bayt (as) as the True and Exclusive Exegetes of Holy Qur'an in Understanding *Mutashābih* Verses

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Abstract

Considering the important and fundamental position of Qur'an, which has the role of guiding all people to eternity, in order to achieve this goal, the Exalted One has assigned the explanation and exegesis of the Qur'an among the duties of Holy Prophet (pbuh) so that the content of the Qur'anic messages and teachings be clarified for everyone, and the Messenger of God (pbuh) delegated his mission in explaining and interpreting Holy Qur'an to his Ahl al-Bayt (as). In this article, based on the documentation of verses and narrations and through applying the descriptive and analytical method, it will be explained that in Shia logic, understanding the teachings of Holy Qur'an as the most important source of knowledge and religious thinking and a source of removing ambiguity from *Mutashābih* verses as well as interpreting ambiguous verses and achieving understanding the appearance and interior of the Qur'an could not be made without referring to Ahl al-Bayt (as), since, otherwise, it would lead to gross errors and exegeses. The study suggests that the exegesis of the verses of Holy Qur'an is the prerogative of Muhammad (pbuh) and his family, that is, Ahl al-Bayt or the infallible imams (as).

Keywords: The Qur'an, Ahl al-Bayt (as), Exegesis, Exegetes, *Mutashābih* Verses, Prohibition of Subjective Exegesis.

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Introduction

Field of Tafsīr (exegesis), ta'wil (commentary) and expression of the meanings and concepts of the Qur'an has a special prominence due to their connection to the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him and his noble family, and the connection of the teachings of this family with revelation. The exegesis of the infallibles, peace be upon them, is unique to them due to the breadth and depth of unmatched meanings, plenty of insights and hints and selection of the best method to reach the intended message and truth of the Qur'an. Since taking advantage of the Qur'an at any time depends on its correct exegesis and explanation, it is necessary to examine the exegesis heritage of Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them. In order to know the teachings of the Qur'an and its correct exegesis, one should only refer to Ahl al-Bayt (as), for their precious interpretative heritage provides the basis for taking advantage of the Qur'an in all areas of life and guides people in reaching perfection and happiness.

Problem statement

Current research emphasizes that the interpretation of the Qur'an is exclusive to Ahl al-Bayt, and it aims to answer the following questions: To what extent is the special knowledge of Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) regarding the Qur'an? What levels of understanding and exegesis of the Qur'an are exclusive to them? Is the human intellect sufficient to understand the purposes and meanings of the Qur'anic verses? In other words, is understanding the teachings, Mutashābihat (ambiguities) and ibhamat (indistinctness) in some verses of the Qur'an possible for anyone? Can the Qur'anic commentator or scholar having a complete mastery over Arabic literature and some other preliminary knowledge such as the knowledge of meanings and expression achieve the understanding of the concepts, meanings and teachings of the Qur'an without needing any other source, and benefit greatly from the guidance of this divine book? And in short, is it possible to interpret the Qur'an from the Qur'an itself, and is it not possible to say that, for example, the understanding of some verses of the Qur'an, such as Mutashābihat and their commentaries, requires the expression and exegesis of the infallibles (as)? Can it not be said that only Ahl al-Bayt (as) are the ones

who have knowledge of all dimensions and angles of the Qur'anic teachings, including *zahir* (exterior; external), *batin* (interior; internal), *muhkam* (clear), *Mutashābih* (ambiguous), *nasikh* (abolisher), *mansoukh* (abolished), *'am* (general), *khas* (special), etc.? Do people need to refer to Ahl al-Bayt (as) due to reaching a comprehensive understanding which is simultaneously free from any sort of ambiguity? And the last but not the least, should people rely solely on their own understanding?

1. Investigating the reasons for *Mutashābih* verses in the Qur'an

1.1. Differences of opinion in similar verses

In many Qur'anic verses, the purpose of God is not clear for us, and thus, the commentators have discrepancy of ideas in the exegesis of the verses, and each of them has tried to understand the meanings by referring to the *muhkam* verses and has reached a conclusion while others reach other conclusions with the same method, and each one claims that actually he is the one who has reached the truth and thus makes others wrong. In these cases, why is not the dispute resolved with deliberation and consideration? Is not the difference in opinions a sign of concealment of the truth? Should the Qur'an's guidance and light lead to invitation to quarrels and disputes? Should we consider all the thinkers who have meditated on the verses with reason and wisdom - in spite of differences - right? Or, should we inevitably accept it as a fact that Almighty God has set a reference for understanding *Mutashābih* verses? As a result, the disagreement among the exegetes is the best proof that they have not found the true meaning of the Almighty making us understand that although the Qur'an expresses and explains everything, but this explanation is recognized and realized through the guardian of the Qur'an, not by the Qur'an itself.

Some more questions may now come to mind as follows: Why did Almighty Allah not reveal all the verses in the same way? Why did He put some verses in His book that people are incapable of understanding? And finally, what is the secret of the existence of *Mutashābih* verses in the Qur'an? In response, it should be said that different opinions have been presented in this regard, but what has reached us from Ahl al-Bayt

(as) indicates that God's purpose in doing this was to force the people to ask Ma'soumin (the Infallible Imams) to understand these verses. In a hadith, Imam Sadiq (as) states that God's purpose of placing Mutashābih verses in the Qur'an is that people reach the door of the House of God and the path He has determined, and on the path of worshiping and accepting His word obey the guardians of the Qur'an, who speak according to the God's commands and refer to those guardians in their needs [at the time of the existence of ambiguities], and not to rely on their own in inferring the God's purpose(s) (Barqi, 1992; Majlesi, 1980).

1.2. Verses on the reasons for the exclusivity of exegesis by Ma'soumin

Theory of the exegesis of the Qur'an by Ma'soumin and the need for the clarification and explanation of the Qur'an by the infallible (as) can be proven by the following evidence:

A: The Qur'an itself has spoken about the necessity of an interpreter, a teacher, and an exegete in several verses:

1. "And We sent down to you the Remembrance [the Qur'an] so that you can make clear to people what has been sent down to them, in order that they reflect' (Nahl: 44)¹.
2. "We have not revealed to you (Prophet Muhammad) the Book except that you may clarify for them that upon which they differ, and as guidance and mercy to a nation who believe" (Nahl: 64)².
3. "And when We have recited it, follow its recitation. Then, its exposition [also] lies with Us" (Qiyāmah: 18 & 19)³.
4. "It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical. As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is metaphorical in it, courting temptation, and seeking its interpretation. But no one knows its interpretation except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they say,

١ «الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ»
 ٢ «وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ»
 ٣ «فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قِرَاءَتَهُ» ثُمَّ أَنْ عَلَيْنَا بَيِّنَاتَهُ»

‘We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord.’ And none takes admonition except those who possess intellect” (Al-e Imran: 7).¹

It has been narrated from Barid bin Muawiya that he said he had heard from one of the two imams, al-Baqir (as) or al-Sadiq (as), that in the exegesis of the verse “And none takes admonition except those who possess intellect” (Al-e Imran/ 7), the imam said: “The Messenger of Allah is the best of the steadfast in knowledge. God Almighty has taught him all the exegeses and revelations that He has revealed to him, and it has never happened that God revealed something to him and did not teach him the exegesis of it, and the successors after him also know all of it”² (Al-Kulayni, 1966, p. 270).

5. “It is He who has raised among the illiterate (Arabs), a Messenger from themselves, to recite to them His verses, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though before that they were in clear error ...”³ (Jom‘ah: 2).
6. “And before thee (Prophet Muhammad) also the messengers We sent were but men [and not angels], to whom We granted inspiration: if ye realise this not, ask of those who possess the Message” (Nahl: 43)⁴.

From the above verses, we clearly understand that the Qur’an needs an expositor, a teacher, and an exegete, and this teacher and interpreter is none other than Holy Prophet (pbuh) and his progeny (as) who are the bearers of his knowledge. Therefore, if the Qur’an has called itself light and clear and “illuminating of everything”⁵ (Nahl: 82), according to the above verses and even according to the exegesis of the Qur’an through the Qur’an, we must interpret them in such a way that the Qur’an is light and clear and the expression of everything along with the

١ «هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ»

٢ «فَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ أَفْضَلُ الرَّاسِخِينَ فِي الْعِلْمِ قَدْ عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ — عَزَّ وَجَلَّ — جَمِيعَ مَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ التَّنْزِيلِ وَالتَّوِيلِ وَ مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ شَيْئًا لَمْ يَعْلَمْهُ تَأْوِيلَهُ وَ اَوْصِيَائِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ يَعْلَمُونَهُ»

٣ «هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ»

٤ «وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوحِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ»

٥ «تَبَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ»

expression, explanation, exegesis and teaching of the Prophet (pbuh) and Ahl al-Bayt (as) and not without the need to them.

2. The need for the infallible imams' exegesis in comprehending the Qur'an

2.1. Ahl al-Bayt (as), the true scholars of the Qur'an and firm in knowledge [those who possess intellect]

Ahl al-Bayt (as) forbade people from commenting on the verses of the Qur'an without knowledge, by stipulating that common people should refrain from delving into the Qur'an, arguing about its verses, and speaking about them without knowledge. Sometimes a person falls into a deep abyss with reference to a verse, the depth of which is greater than the distance between the sky and the earth. Whoever makes a mistake in the exegesis of the Qur'an not only has destroyed himself but also has led others to destruction and misguidance. Indubitably, in understanding the Qur'an, we need the statement (and explanation) of the Prophet (pbuh), as it is stated in the Qur'an and some related verses like Al-Qayamah: 19, and Nahl: 44 & 64 were referred to earlier in this study. In other word, understanding the purpose of God from the Qur'anic verses will be possible when the the Great Lord states it for the Prophet (pbuh) and then the Prophet narrates it to us. This type of narration and interpretation is true for the infallible imams as well. According to Ṣadūq (1998) "The Qur'an and the Imam [referring to each of the twelve imams] express each other and agree with each other. The imam guides people to the Qur'an, and the Qur'an guides them to the Imam" (p. 132). Saffar (1995) emphasizes that "The Imam is the interpreter of the God's purpose from what He has stated in Qur'an" (p.412); "And each one is attached to the other and will not be separated until they appear in the court of Divine Justice on the Day of Resurrection, and God will judge between them and the people" (Tabari, 1997, p. 30).

Regarding the sacred verse "Indeed, it is [present as] manifest signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge,..."¹ (Ankaboot: 49), Imam Baqir (as) states: "I swear by God that the Exalted God did

«بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ»

not state that the clear verses are between the two sides (covers) of the Mushaf (the Qur'an), but He stated within the breasts of the pople of knowledge". The narrator [of this hadith] says: "I said: May I be thy ransom! Who are they"? Imam Baqir (as) said: "Can it ever be possible that there is anyone but us?! How is it possible that the meaning [reference] of this verse is someone other than us, when we are 'rasikhoon' [those firmly grounded in knowledge; the most learned] in knowledge"?!'" (Kulayni, 1966, p. 213). Consequently, the purpose of the verse 44 of the surah Ankabout from 'those who have been given knowledge' is the infallible imams. Moreover, in the explanation of the noble verse: "We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge" (Ankabout: 43)¹ it is said that by the word 'alemun' meaning literally those who have knowledge, Ahl al-Bayt (as) are meant by God (Majlesi, 1980).

According to the statements of Shaykh Tusi, Shaykh Tabarsi and other great Shia scholars, based on the ahadith (narrations) from the Prophet (pbuh) and the infallible imams (as) as the true leaders of guidance, it is proven that the exegesis of the Qur'an is only allowed and acceptable if it is according to whether the explicit text of Holy Qur'an, or the authentic hadith (Tusi, 2010). Some of the Muslims asked the Commander of the Faithful, Amir al-Mu'mineen Ali (as), "What should we do with what God said in the Qur'an?": 'Ask the scholars of Al-e Muhammad (Muhammad's progeny)", he answered (Saffar, 1995, p. 196). Then, Imam Ali (as) continued: "The knowledge of God's book - that contains everything - is with us Ahl al-Bayt. God has given us knowledge that no one but us is aware of. Right after, addressing the person who claimed to know the interpretation of the Qur'an, he asked: Do you have a correct knowledge of the Book of God?! Do you know the nasikh and mansoukh verses?! You have made a huge scientific claim, woe betide you! God has placed this knowledge only with the people of the Qur'an - to whom He revealed His book - and not with others. Woe to you! This knowledge is with a special [limited] number of the descendants of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon them" (Şadūq, 2013, p. 89).



One of the underscored teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (as) is allocating the comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an to the Prophet (pbuh) and the infallible imams (as). They have introduced and verified the complete mastery over [the knowledge of] the Qur'an, the knowledge of commentary, the secrets, and the inner worlds of the Qur'an as their specialty, so that no one is able to definitively understand all the Qur'an's muhkamat (muhkam verses), Mutashābihat (Mutashābih verses) and ta'wilat (commentaries), except by referring to the texts received from the Prophet (pbuh) and the infallible imams.

2.2. Special knowledge of Ahl al-Bayt (as) in the field of the exegesis of the Qur'an

One of the meanings of ta'wil is equivalent to Tafsīr and it means discovering the meaning of God (Khoei, 1973; Ragheb Esfahani, 1981). The category of ta'wil is not exclusive to Ahl al-Bayt (as), and it is not beyond the reach of all people, and anyone can reach it by making efforts and acquiring the required knowledge. But no one can claim that what he has understood is surely God's intention. Ahl al-Bayt (as) due to attaining the truth of the Qur'an, possess definite knowledge of the divine purpose and the meanings of the verses, and they know the main purpose and meaning of God from each and every verse. Therefore, it will be undeniable that they possess a unique, complete and definite understanding of all the verses of the Qur'an. A narration from Imam Baqir (as) specifies this uniqueness and exclusiveness: "No one can claim to have memorized and compiled the Qur'an as it was revealed and intended by God except a liar; because, this cannot be made by anyone except Ali bin Abi Talib and the imams after him."¹ (Al-Kulayni, 1966, p. 228).

Moreover, considering this knowledge of the Qur'an as a divine gift, Imam Sadiq (as) states: "We are aware of the God's Book, and the God's Book reflects various meanings, and God has given us [imams] knowledge that others are unaware of" (Majlesi, 1980, p.69). It has been mentioned in many narrations that interpretation of the Qur'an is the

¹ «ما ادعى أحد من الناس أنه جمع القرآن كله كما أنزل إلا كذاب و ما جمعه و حفظه كما نزله الله تعالى إلا على بن أبي طالب و الأئمة من بعده»

farthest thing from human intellect (Qomi, 1981; Al-Ayashi, 1986; Barqi, 1992). The content of these narrations demonstrates that all the meanings and teachings of the Qur'an, its zahir and batin, cannot be interpreted by human reason. Reasonably, in order to understand many parts of the Qur'an, the explanation of the Prophet (pbuh) and that of his precious offsprings is needed, and those parts cannot be understood without their help since they have received their interpretation knowledge from God. As Imam Reza (as) in response to a person who said to him, "You are interpreting something from God's book that has not been heard before", said: "The Qur'an had been revealed to us before it was revealed to people, and it had been interpreted for us before it was interpreted for people. We know what is halal and haram, nasikh and mansoukh in the Qur'an"¹ (Saffar, 1995, p. 198).

Since Ahl al-Bayt (as) in all their words and actions are manifestations of the attributes of Almighty God and the mirror of the teachings of the Qur'an, then the root of their words and deeds can be sought in the Qur'an; Just as Amir al-Mu'mineen Ali (as) declares: "When I inform you about something, ask me where it is in the Qur'an" (Barqi, 1992, p. 269; Majlesi, 1980, p. 446). This narration depicts the deep connection of the all-round knowledge of the Imam with the Qur'an.

According to a narration from Imam Sadiq (as), after explaining the different types of sciences and knowledge of the Qur'an, he considers the knowledge of all those sciences to be special and unique to Ahl al-Bayt (as) (Al-Hurr al-Amili, 1990; Majlesi, 1980). But other than Ahl al-Bayt (as), others are also not deprived of understanding the zahir or appearance of the Qur'an. Knowledge of the zahir of the Qur'an is not exclusive to a specific person or group, it is available to everyone if certain conditions are met; However, according to the hadith of the Thaqalayn², any correct understanding [of the Qur'an] occurs in the

«علينا نزل قبل الناس و لنا فسر قبل أن يفسر في الناس؛ فنحن نعرف حاله و حرامه و ناسخه و منسوخه و في أى ليلة نزلت كم من آية و فيمن نزلت و فيما نزلت»

2. The hadith of the thaqalayn (saying of the two treasures) refers to a statement, attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad, that introduces the Quran, the principal religious text in Islam, and his progeny as the only two sources of divine guidance after his demise. Widely reported by both Shia and Sunni authorities, the hadith of the thaqalayn is of particular significance in Twelver Shia, where their Twelve Imams are viewed as the spiritual and political successors of Muhammad. The translation of text of hadith from

shadow of loyalty and adherence and resort to the family of Muhammad (pbuh), who are the gates of the city of knowledge, and it is not possible to enter such a city except through its gate.

2.3. The special knowledge of Ahl al-Bayt (as) in the interpretation of Mutashābih verses

There is no doubt that according to the Qur'an and many hadiths, there are some Mutashābihat among the luminous verses of the Qur'an. In some cases, after acquiring the skills obtained in the shadow of riwayat (pl. of riwayat; traditions, narrations), the problem of understanding Mutashābihat is solved by referring to muhkamat. Understanding these verses should not be considered absolutely impossible, but due to their difficulty, interpreting such verses is too difficult, chiefly because most of them are in the field of God's beliefs and attributes. In many cases, it may not be possible to solve the problem of understanding Mutashābihat by referring to muhkamat, for which it is necessary to refer to Ahl al-Bayt's (as) hadiths. They are the best in this field due to their complete coverage of and mastery over all aspects of the Qur'an. Only are Ahl al-Bayt (as) the ones who know God's definitive meaning of each verse and can translate and interpret the words of the Qur'an to the intended real meaning. This level of understanding, which is the ultimate level of the Qur'an, is unique to them and no one is allowed to do so. According to a narration from both Imam Bāqir (as) and Imam Riḍā (as) regarding the exegesis of the verse 49¹ of the Surah Ankabout, they said: "They are Imams from the offspring of Muhammad"² (Majlisi, 1980, p.189; Al-Kulayni, 1966, p. 214; Atarodi, 1983, p. 365). This means that, the verses of holy Qur'an are manifested and present in their hearts of the Imams who are from the family of Muhammad.

original Arabic text is as follows "I [Muhammad] left among you two treasures which, if you cling to them, you shall not be led into error after me: The book of God (Quran), which is a rope stretched from Heaven to Earth, and [the second one is] my progeny, my Ahl al-Bayt. These two shall not be parted until they return to the pool [of abundance in paradise, kawthar]" (Saffar, 1995).

١ «بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ»
٢ «هُمْ الْأَيْمَةُ مِنْ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ»

Understanding Mutashābihat requires scrutinization in science. Accordingly, those who are in the highest level of firmness in knowledge, know all Mutashābihat with all their levels and degrees. The Qur'an states: "No one knows its exegesis except God and rasikhoon in knowledge" (Al-e Imran: 7). Lexically, the word 'rasikhoon' is derived from 'rasikh' which means firm and stable. Therefore, *rāsikh* in science means someone who is firm and stable in all his and does not waver or change his opinion (Tabataba'i, 1995); And, this is if true when all his knowledge is in accordance with reality, understanding the truth as it is, and thus he is firmly established in knowledge in absolute terms. It is clear that except Holy Prophet (pbuh) and the infallible imams (as) whose knowledge originates directly or indirectly from the source of revelation, no one has absolute penetration and stability in their knowledge. That is why there has never been a change in their opinion. So Rasikhoon in science is unique to these people as in the hadiths, the verse has been interpreted in this way.

Ali (as) has pointed out the stability in knowledge for *Ulul Amr*¹ as an exclusive feature, while others do not possess such a complete, solid and deep knowledge, and thus except *olel-amr* no one can understand the deepest layer of the word of God; That is, Umm al-Kitab²: "People are incapable of interpreting the Qur'an, and only those who have authority can infer it; Because they are firm in knowledge and a place [source] of confidence in the interpretation of the Qur'an, and about them the Qur'an has stated that no one knows the interpretation of the Qur'an but God and those who are firm in knowledge... and God Almighty has also stated that the Qur'anic verses are clear verses in the hearts of the people of knowledge"³ (Majlesi, 1980, p.74). Therefore, access to this level of interpretation is specific to Ahl al-Bayt (as) who are the owners of *ta'wil*. They are superior and leading scholars in all levels, and complete access [to the word of God and its exegesis] is

1. In Arabic writing, "أولى الامر": Those in authority; this term refers to the infallible imams (A) from the family of holy prophet Muhammad (SAAS) who possess the position of infallibility like the holy prophet Muhammad (SAAS). The term 'أولى الامر' is in the verse 59 of the surah Nisa.

2. The Quran

3 «و عجز كل أحد من الناس عن معرفة تأويل كتابه غيرهم لأنهم هم الراسخون في العلم المأمونون على تأويل التنزيل قال الله تعالى و ما يعلم تأويله إلا الله و الراسخون في العلم ... و قال سبحانه بل هو آيات بينات في صدور الذين أوتوا العلم»

exclusive to them. It is reemphasized here that the verses and hadiths also indicate that the science of batin and exegesis of the Qur'an is exclusively for the infallible imams (Rajabi, 1385). Moreover, as it was mentioned earlier Imam Sadiq (as) states that God's purpose of placing Mutashābih verses in the Qur'an is that people reach the door of the House of God and the path He has determined, and on the path of worshipping and accepting His word obey the guardians of the Qur'an, who speak according to the God's commands and refer to those guardians in their needs [at the time of the existence of ambiguities], and not to rely on their own in inferring the God's purpose(s) (Barqi, 1992; Majlesi, 1980).

3. Harms, prohibitions, and the duties of people in facing Mutashābih verses

3.1. Abuse of Mutashābih verses

Many deviant sects and false schools and religions have misused Mutashābih verses to mislead people and thereby spread their false teachings and ideas. The Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as) says: "There exist many misleading points having been adorned with the verses of the Qur'an, as if a counterfeit coin had been covered with silver!" (Tamimi, 1989, p. 95). When Ali (as) sent Ibn Abbas to debate with the Kharijites (Khawarij), he said to him: "Do not argue with them using the verses of the Qur'an, because there are various possibilities in the verses, so none of you can make the other convinced, then argue with them using Sunnah, so that they have no choice but to accept it" (Nahj al-Balagha, p. 465).

Therefore, even though the Qur'an is light and guidance, it does not increase knowledge and insight for some groups of people, and quite the reverse, it increases ignorance, losses, harms, and idiocy; "...; and it increases the wrongdoers only in loss" ¹(Isra': 82). And for them, it is 'blindness' (ignorance, straying and perdition); "... and this book is for them the cause of blindness ..."² (Fossilat, 44) and not guidance. Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him, has clearly stated that

١ «وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا»
٢ «وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمَى»

the preservation of the Qur'an from such distortions – known as spiritual distortion– can only be achieved through Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them); “Allah nullifies the distortions of the extremists and exaggerators in the revelation of the Book of God [the Qur'an] and He invalidates the misplaced reports of the people of falsehood and the interpretation of those who mislead the people through my successors [the infallible imams]” (Şadūq, 2016, p. 281).

The leaders of the Saqifa were not unaware of this point, and therefore from the beginning, they raised a false cry of “the Book of God suffices us”¹ (Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, 2014) against the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who brought them the Qur'an, and after taking office, they stopped the people from compiling the Sunnah [of the prophet Muhammad] and retelling the traditions of Muhammad (pbuh) under the pretext that the Qur'an should not be merged with something else for people will fall into error. Therefore, they were satisfied only with the teaching and learning of the Qur'an. After them, other usurpers abused their position and authority and clearly prevented the interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an through the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) and Ahl al-Bayt (as) (Siyuti, 1992). Later, the followers of the school of the caliphs and people like Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathir, etc., following the method of their predecessors, theorized that the best way to interpret the Qur'an is to interpret them with the verses of the Qur'an (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1991). This theory later became known among the scholars of the field as the Qur'an's Independence Theory which is not discussed in this study and due to its controversial nature and plenty of arguments about it can be a subject of research in other studies.

3.2. Denotative versus connotative meaning of the Qur'an

We know that the appearance of some verses of the Qur'an has not been the intention of God Almighty, and in some other verses, we assume that something other than its appearance is meant. The issue of these cases has been mentioned in many hadiths. Concerning the



existence of such possibilities, is it possible to say with certainty what God's intention for each case was?!

In a narration from Imam Sadiq (as) and Imam Ali (as) it has been stated that in some verses, the singular word is used but has a plural meaning, or vice versa, the word is plural but has a singular meaning. Sometimes the sentence is past tense, but it has a future meaning. Sometimes the interpretation of a verse is bound to the exact time of its revelation [simultaneity of an event with revelation of the related verse], while in some other cases, the interpretation of the verse is bound to an event before or after its revelation. Sometimes the remaining [point] of some verses is found in another surah. In some verses, half of it is abolished by a new abolishing verse revealed by God, while the other half is left as it is. There exist some verses that are different in wording but the same in meaning, whereas there exist some other verses that are the same in wording but different or even opposite in meaning. In some of the verses, the addressee is not the real target, sometimes a verse is addressed to the Prophet (pbuh) but the real target or addressee is the Ummah. Sometimes the word is specific but the meaning is general. After dividing the verses into many types, which exceeded a hundred categories, he stipulated that the existence of various types of the Qur'anic verses is an obvious proof that the words of the Almighty God are not similar to those of humans, just like His deeds which are different from human's deeds. Because of this reason - and the like - no one can access the true exegesis of God's Book except the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his successors, that is, the infallible imams (peace be upon them) (Majlesi, 1980).

Ishaq Kandy, who was considered a philosopher of his time, was busy writing a book on the contradictions of the verses in the Qur'an. Imam Hassan Askari (as) told one of his students to ask him in a good and appropriate manner and with kindness: "Don't you think that Allah's intention in His words may be different from what you have thought?! How do you know that God may have wished a meaning while you have had a different comprehension?!" Upon hearing this, Kandy thought, accepted the Imam's message, and then burned everything he had written (Ibn Shahrashub, 2000, p.434). It is stated in many hadiths that there is nothing further from human thought than the



interpretation of the Qur'an; And, in some hadiths, the reason for this has been stated that since regarding many verses, the beginning of the verse has been revealed about something, the middle of it has been revealed about something else, and the end is about something else (Al-Ayashi, 1986).

3.3. Prohibition of interpreting the Qur'an without knowledge

Ahl al-Bayt (as) forbade people from commenting on the verses of the Qur'an without knowledge and according to the narrations from them, they have stated as follows: "Refrain from delving into the Qur'an (and plunging into it), and do not argue about its verses, and avoid discussing it without knowledge" (Sadooq, 2020, p. 90). "Sometimes, by misunderstanding a verse, a person falls into a deep abyss, the depth of which is greater than the distance between the sky and the earth" (Al-Ayashi, 1986, p. 17). "Whoever speaks in the verses of the Qur'an without knowledge or according to his own opinion, has prepared a place for himself in the fire, and on the Day of Judgment he will enter the Mahshar desert¹ with a fiery bridle" (Al-Hurr al-Amili, 2007, p. 204). "Whoever makes a mistake in the exegesis of the Qur'an has not only destroyed himself but also have led others to destruction and misguidance" (Al-Astarabadi, 1977, p. 462).

In another group of hadiths, mixing verses with one another has been forbidden. In this regard, there exist some hadiths from Ahl al-Bayt (as): "Whosoever mixes verses with each other has become a disbeliever (Al-Kulayni, 1996, p. 262). Additionally, concerning the verse 13 of the surah Ma'idah: "...they pervert words from their meanings, and have forgotten a part of what they were reminded. You will not cease to learn of some of their treachery,..."², Ahl al-Bayt (as) said: "Because they replaced some verses with others, the mansoukh vesrse with the nasikh verses, and the Mutashābih verses with the muhkam ones, and the specific verses with the general ones, and then argued and protested with it, while they did not know the causes of

1. The desert where people's deeds are judged by God on the Day of Resurrection

٢ «يُخْرِقُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَتَسْوَأُوا حُطًّا مِمَّا ذُكِرُوا بِهِ وَلَا تَرَالُ تَطْلُعُ عَلَى خَائِنَةٍ مِنْهُمْ»

revelation, because they had not learned the Qur'an from the people of Qur'an [the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Ahl al-Bayt (as), so they led both themselves and others astray" (Al-Hurr al-Amili, 2007, p. 200).

Some other hadiths from Ahl al-Bayt (as) have forbidden the arbitrary interpretation of the Qur'anic verses: "The annihilation of the people is due to commenting on the Mutashābih verses, because they are unaware of their meaning and do not know their reality; yet, they interpret them with their own opinions and ideas, and consider themselves needless of referring to and asking the infallible imams (peace be upon them), and in this way, they have ignored the words of the Prophet(peace and blessings of God be upon him and his family) and left them behind" (Majlesi, 1980, p. 90). "A person who subjectively interprets and speaks with his own opinion about the verses of the Qur'an, even if he is right, he has made a mistake" (Deylami, 2009, p. 79). "...and there is no reward for him, and if he makes a mistake, he will fall into a chasm bigger than the sky. In case of a mistake, his guilt is his own responsibility (and his pretext that 'I did not do it on purpose' is not accepted, because he had no right to do such a thing). Man prepares his place in the [hell] fire with subjective interpretation, and thus by maligning to God, he destroys himself and leads others to destruction. Such a person is cursed, even more, he changes to a disbeliever" (Al-Ayashi, 1986, p. 18). According to a narration from the Messenger of God, Muhammad (pbuh), God Almighty states: "He who interprets my words with his opinion, does not believe in me" (Tabarsi, 1980, p. 410).

3.4. Sufficiency of a general faith in the Mutashābih verses

Regarding the Mutashābih verses, the only duty we have is to have an honest and general faith and in them unless their explanation has reached us with a valid reason from the infallible imams (as) so that, it is necessary to adhere to it whether in belief and whether in practice. Nonetheless, the idea that it is permissible or necessary for us to try to remove the curtain from the Mutashābih verses and reach the meaning of it, or to seek help from the rest of the verses, is a misplaced illusion.

The beloved Prophet of Islam, peace and blessings of God be upon him, states: "One of the things that I am worried about the Ummah, after my departure from this world, is that they interpret the Qur'an wrongly". Then he explains the way to escape from this problem as follows: "Follow the muhkamat of the Qur'an [and obey their instructions] but in facing Mutashābihat, just believe them [as the word of God]" (Şadūq, 1991, p. 164). In the Farewell Pilgrimage¹, The Prophet (pbuh) said: "O people! I leave among you something that you will not go astray [if you follow it and go after it]; that is, the Book of God; So, consider what the Qur'an declares halal (permissible) as halal and what it declares haram (prohibited) as haram; Act according to the muhkamat [of the Qur'an] and have faith in the Mutashābihat [of the Qur'an]; And say: We accept what God has revealed to us from the Qur'an and we believe in it" (Tabarsi, 1980, p. 273). Moreover, Muhammad (pbuh) states: "Learn the Qur'an... The Qur'an has five aspects: halal, haram, muhkam, Mutashābih and exempla. Do what is halal and leave what is haram; Act according to the mukamate and leave the Mutashābihat; And, Learn from the exempla" (Tusi, 1996, p. 357). Similarly, Imam Sadiq (as) states: "The verses of the Qur'an are of two types: muhkam and Mutashābih. Our duty towards muhkamat is to both believe in it and act on its content; however, in the Mutashābihat, we only believe in it but do not act on it" (Qomi, 1981, p. 451).

In the letter of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as) to Muawiyah, it is stated: "Every verse of the Qur'an has an external and an internal aspect. There exists no word of the Qur'an unless it has an interpretation that no one knows except God and rasikhoon in knowledge who are us, Ahl al-Bayt. God has ordered the rest of the ummah to say: "We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord" ²(Al-e Imran: 7); and [the rest of the ummah/ the people should] accept and obey whatever we, Ahl al-Bayt, say to them in this regard, and thus they should leave the things [the knowledge of the Qur'an's verse], which they do not know, to us, as He says: "...but had they referred it to the



1. In Arabic, Hijjatul Wada' : The Hajj pilgrimage that Muhammad (SAAS) performed in the Islamic year 10 AH, following the Conquest of Mecca, as his last pilgrimage to Mecca.

۲ «أَمَّنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا»

Apostle or to those vested with authority among them, those of them who investigate would have ascertained it..."¹ (Nisa: 83). I swear by my soul that if people had referred to our family and followed us after the demise of the Prophet (pbuh) and had left their affairs to us, they would have received the blessings of the earth and the sky" (Salim, 2001, p. 769).

Similar narrations are also found in popular books. Al-Suyuti (1992) has narrated from some famous figures that the Prophet of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, saw a group arguing about the verses of the Qur'an, and while he was angry, he addressed them: "The past nations also did the same. They went astray because they differed on (what they had heard from) the Prophets (as), and they confused the contents of the holy books". Then he added: "The Qur'an has not been revealed in a way that its verses deny each other, but it has been revealed in a way that the verses confirm one another. You should do and act upon whatever you know about it, and in what you suspected [Mutashābih verses] about it, having a faith to it is enough" (p. 6). Besides, according to Hanbal (1993) in another narration it is stated: "Say whatever you know about the Qur'an and whatever you do not know, leave its knowledge to the scholar" (p. 512).



« وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ »

Conclusion

Interpretation and correct understanding of Qur'anic verses as the most important source of thought and guidance, especially understanding the meaning of Mutashābih verses of this divine book, has always been of interest to scholars of the field. Many verses and narrations clarify this issue that Ahl al-Bayt (as) are the exclusive exegetes of the Qur'an and everyone should refer to them for a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an, the commentary of the Mutashābih verses and a comprehension of the real meaning of the verses, otherwise, grasping the concepts, meanings and purposes of the Qur'an will be impossible in many verses. Due to the breadth and depth of the meanings of the Qur'anic verse and the connection of the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (as) with the revelation, the exegesis of the infallible imams (as) is special to them, in such a way that others do not have such abilities to understand and interpret and are unable to enter this territory. Holy Qur'an possesses an exterior, an interior, an interpretation and a revelation. The knowledge of the interior and exegesis of Holy Qur'an is at the disposal of the infallible imams (as), and they have a complete understanding [and mastery] of all aspects of the Qur'an. In this study, while enumerating some Qur'anic evidences regarding the necessity of interpretation of Mutashābih verses by rasikhoon in science, who are Ahl al-Bayt; that is, the infallible imams (as), some examples of their hadiths were mentioned to enlighten and explain the issue. Therefore, the verses and traditions make it clear that the science of the exegesis of Mutashābih verses is prerogative of Muhammad (pbuh) and Ahl al-Bayt of Muhammad- the infallible imams, and they are the leaders, pioneers, and best of the scholars in all levels of it, and the complete understanding of the divine meaning of Mutashābih verses is unique to them.



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