

## A Comparative Study of “The Words” the Prophet Ibrahim Was Tested with

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### Abstract

Using analytical method, this article examines the verse 124 of the second chapter of the Qur'an regarding the issue of the prophet Ibrahim being raised to the position of Imamate. According to the verse, it was after “the words” of Allah were fulfilled about Ibrahim. Understanding the true concept of “the words” has a crucial impact in finding out the proper meaning of Imamate which has been the most controversial issue in the history of Islam. Findings of this article establish the point that the tests were difficult tasks Ibrahim was tested with. This is while, he was already a prophet at the time of these tests. Another point is that the Imamate was the prize of success in those tests. As a result, Imamate is something precious granted to a prophet and it should be a position higher than prophethood as well as what is in the jurisdiction of a prophet.

**Keywords:** Ibrahim, Abraham, Imamate, Imam, the Verse of Test, Infallibility.



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## 1. Introduction

Verse 124 of the second chapter, Al-baqarah reads:

﴿وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

“And when his Lord tested Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, then he fulfilled them, He said, I am making you (appointing you as) Imam of mankind. He said, and from among my descendants?" He said, My pledge does not extend to the unjust (the oppressors).”

Verse states that after Ibrahim was tested with various words and when he fulfilled them all successfully, Allah provided him with a great reward that was Imamate. This article tries to provide a correct explanation of the meaning of Imamate by carefully examining the meaning and structure of each word and phrase in the divine verse. Of course, the clarification of the concept of Imamate needs another article, but the findings of this article will establish the foundation of it. In other words, in order to clarify the meaning of Imamate and the characteristics of an Imam, it is necessary to specify the meaning of the phrases “testing with certain words”, “he fulfilled them”, “I am making you”, “of mankind”, “Imam”, “from among my descendants”, “My pledge” and “the unjust” in the verse. To study each of these points, the views of some Sunni and Shia commentators will be presented, and they will be scientifically evaluated later.

## 2. Problem statement

To define the proper meaning of the term “Imam” which has been the most controversial topic among Muslims from the day first, it is of decisive importance to establish a reasonable understanding of the Words Ibrahim was tested with. This is because there are two main approaches among Muslims concerning the position of Imamate. According to Sunni understanding, Imam in the verse, means a role model or a political leader and consequently, there is not any unique specific qualification needed to meet such a position. Therefore, Imamate can be a position to be given to anyone. They also interpret the Imam as a prophet, so that the Imamate could be a common position among all prophets. The other opinion belongs to Shia who consider



Imamate to be a specific position that not all prophets can achieve and only some from among them were ascended to such a position.

Studying the Words Ibrahim was tested with sheds light on this issue. It is because if these Words and tests are the ones Ibrahim went through at the time he was a prophet, then it does not make sense to claim that he was appointed to Imamate meaning prophethood after already being a prophet. As it is unlikely to say Imamate means leadership and being a role model and Ibrahim while he was a prophet was not a leader or a role model and he was granted the position later. Thus, there must be another definition for Imamate that was granted to Ibrahim after being a prophet, a leader and a role model. However, if the Words deal with the time before his prophethood, then it is acceptable to claim some of those definitions for the concept of Imamate. Thus, as it is visible, clarification of the concept of "Imam" is directly related to the definition of the Words.

### 3. Testing with certain words

There are different views about what is meant by "words" (كلمات). Since explaining the meaning of "Testing with certain words" has an impact on the correct understanding of the verse, we will express and examine these phrases:

#### 3.1. First view:

The term "words" refers to the commanded deeds mentioned in the above cited verse as well as the following verses up to the verse 131. Mujāhid bin Jabr has narrated a hadith through 'Abd Al-Rahmān from Ibrahim from Adam from Warqā' from Ibn Abi Najih from 'Ikrimah from Ibn Abbās that Allah told Ibrahim: "I am going to test you with a task. (Guess) what is that?" Ibrahim said: "are you making me Imam for people?" Allah replied: "indeed." Ibrahim asked: "are you making the House a place of reward for mankind?" Allah answered: "sure" Ibrahim continued: "and a sanctuary?" Allah answered: "yes" Ibrahim asked: "are you making us submissive to You?" Allah replied: "of course". Ibrahim asked: "and are you raising from our progeny a nation submissive to You?" Allah replied: "indeed" Ibrahim asked: "are you going to show us our rites of worship?" Allah said: "yes" Ibrahim asked:



“and are you turning to us clemently?” Allah replied: “sure” “Are you making this a secure town?” asked Ibrahim. Allah replied: “sure and as for him who is faithless, I will provide sustenance for him too and I will provide sustenance for them in this world as you requested it for those who have faith in Allah, then the faithless will be taken to the hell.” (Mujāhid, 1989: 213) this hadith surprisingly has reversed the verses of the Qur’an i.e. whatever according to the Qur’an has been mentioned by Allah to Ibrahim, is recounted by Ibrahim in this hadith as if Ibrahim had the knowledge of unseen and he was making decisions and suggestions and Allah was confirming what Ibrahim was recommending. What makes one more doubtful about this hadith is the presence of ‘Ikrimah in the chain of its narration.<sup>1</sup>

According to this theory, the deeds include Imamate, purification of the house, raising the foundations of the house, being in full submission to Allah and praying for the coming of Prophet Mohammad. They believe that the Imamate which is one of the difficult tasks of Ibrahim in this verse is nothing other than Prophethood. According to them, Prophethood which is also Imamate has many difficulties, because the Prophet must endure many hardships in the way of propagating the religion even if it costs his life. Construction of the house and its purification, also contained severity and hardship, due to the quality which has been mentioned in the narrations. In addition to this, it also included performing rituals, and Allah tested him with the devil in performing Ramy (Stoning the Devil) and other things. Praying for the selection of the Prophet Muhammad also required a lot of sincerity and avoidance of jealousy, and this is also a difficult matter (Al-Rāzī, 1999, vol.4: 34). Al-Zamakhsharī quoted this view from Muqātil bin Sulayman (Al-zamakhsharī, 1986, vol.1: 184).

1 - Jarīr bin Abd al-Hamīd narrates from Yazīd bin Abi Zīyad that one day I went to visit Ali bin Abdullah bin Abbas and I saw ‘Ikrimah tied at the door of the grove, I asked: Why did you tie grove? He said: because he is ascribing lies to my father (Ibn Hajar Al-‘Asqalānī, n.d, vol.7: 268). The story of ‘Ikrimah's lying about Ibn Abbas was famous among the elites to the point that it became a proverb. Yahya Ibn Buka says, I heard from Ibn ‘Umar that he said to Nafi’: “Fear Allah and do not ascribe lies to me as ‘Ikrimah did about Ibn Abbas (ibid) It has been said that ‘Ikrimah held the opinions of the Khawarij, that is why Imam Malik and imam Muslim did not narrate a hadith from him (Al-Zahabī, 1998 vol.1: 74).

According to this interpretation the sentence “I am making you an Imam” is considered as one of the “words” not a reward for fulfilling them (Al-Tabarī, 2000, vol.2: 12; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, vol.1: 286).

### Analysis

Apparent drawback of this view is that it has imagined Imamate itself as one of the “testing words”, while the verse apparently states that Imamate was the reward of success in the divine tests and not one of them. However, the other examples can be assumed to be from the “words”. Fakhr al-Din Al-Rāzī narrates that Qazi (Qazi Adhud Al- Din Iji) objected the above-mentioned view saying that if this were the case, first the phrase “I am making you Imam” (انى جاعلك) should have come and then “he fulfilled them” (فاتمهن) should have been mentioned after, however it is vice versa (Al-Rāzī, ibid). All the tests should be mentioned first and then the phrase, “Ibrahim fulfilled all of them” at the end. Thus, if Imamate was also among the tests it had to be mentioned before “he fulfilled them”. Hence, it turns out that first there were tests and examinations, and after their fulfilment, Allah said, “I am making you Imam for people”. As a result, the phrase “I am making you Imam” is not a test but it is a reward for the fulfilment of those tests.

Al-Rāzī after narrating this statement of Qazi, goes on to justify the first view by claiming that the tests are not only Imamate but beside Imamate, raising the foundations and purification of the house, and prayer for the coming of the final Prophet are altogether the tests that are first stated briefly by the term “words” and then mentioned in detail (Ibid). With this statement of Al-Rāzī, the problem still remains unsolved since according to the appearance of the other statements in the verse that Imamate was not an example of the words and tests, but it was a reward for completing those tests so that Ibrahim was requesting it for his progeny as well.

Moreover, Javādī Āmolī, well-known contemporary Shia exegete of the Qur’an rejects this view because on one hand, Sunni scholars including Al-Rāzī believe that Imamate in this verse is prophethood and on the other hand, the divine tests for the prophets are typically through revelation and so were the tests Ibrahim went through. Thus, he had



attained the position of prophethood before these tests because the tests came through revelations and how could he receive them if he was not a prophet? Therefore, if Imamate means to be a prophet, then, he was already a prophet before the tests (because he received revelation and the tests were delivered to him through revelation), it does not make sense to consider his prophethood as a test to come later. Thus, Imamate has to be different from being a prophet (Javādī Amulī, 2022, vol.6: 430-431). If we assume Imamate to be different from prophethood, the claim of Al-Rāzī will fail.

More so, the other examples Al-Rāzī has mentioned for the tests like building the house of Allah are not hard tests to suit the level of Ibrahim. This is something that ordinary believers can also do as it can be seen that they build mosques everywhere they are. To make a building does not require a strong faith that is admired by Allah. The other example Al-Rāzī mentioned as not feeling jealous of Prophet Muhammad also does not seem suiting because a person at the level of Ibrahim was beyond feeling jealous of a prophet from his progeny. He was so caring for his progeny that in different places-such as the verse being discussed- when he found his prayer likely to be answered by Allah, he immediately included his children in his prayer too.

### 3.2. Second view

The “words” in the verse are divine commands and prohibitions. Testing Ibrahim by the “words” is to address him by commands and prohibitions to make him deserve the position of Imamate (Al-Zuhaylī, 1997, vol.1: 301; Al-Qurtubī, 1946, vol.1: 98; Al-Tabarī, 2000, vol.2: 12; Al-Busaylī, n.d, vol.1: 273). Those who believe in this view have differed in what the commands and prohibitions were:

2.2.1. It is narrated from Ibn Abbas that the “words” are the natural disposition/Fitrah acts (Khisal al-fitrah), which include Making Mazmaza (rinsing out the mouth), Istinshaq (snuffing water into nostrils and blowing it out), brushing with tooth-stick, clipping the mustache, opening the hair, shortening the nails, removing the armpit hair and shaving the pubes, circumcision and cleaning one's private parts with water (Al-Tha'labī, 2002, vol.1: 268; Al-Zuhaylī, *ibid*: 302; Al-



zamaksharī, *ibid*; Al-Tabarī, *ibid*: 9; Al-Qurtubī, *ibid*; Al-Suyūtī, n.d, vol.1: 273).

2.2.2. Again it is narrated from Ibn Abbas that the “words” are the rituals of Hajj (Al-Tabarī, *ibid*: 12; Al-Busaylī, *ibid*; Al-zamaksharī, *ibid*; Al-Qurtubī, *ibid*).

2.2.3. the third view also quoted from Ibn Abbas is that Ibrahim was examined with thirty things, ten of which are mentioned in Surah Al- Tawbah<sup>1</sup>, ten in Al-Ahzab<sup>2</sup> and the last ten are in Surah Al-Mu'minun (verses 1-10) and Surah Al-Ma'arij (verses 1-33). (Al-zamaksharī, *ibid*; Al-Tabarī, *ibid*: 8; Al-Khatīb Al-Sharabyīnī, 1868, vol.1: 90; Al-Rāzī, *ibid*: 34-35)

2.2.4. The “words” are, being tested by worshiping the moon and the stars and the sun, circumcision, being thrown into fire, leaving his wife and emigrating, and the command to slaughter his son (Al-zamaksharī, *ibid*; Al-Tabarī, *ibid*).

2.2.5. The “words” are the life, the wealth and the son of Ibrahim, so that he presented his property to the guests, offered his life to the fire and he was ready to sacrifice his son, so that he emptied his heart for the Merciful, and Allah honored him to be His Khalil (very close friend). (Al-Tha'labī, *ibid*)

2.2.6. Al-Suyūtī quotes Ibn Abbas as saying that the “words” are the separation from the relatives and the migration, quarreling with Nimrod and patience in being thrown into fire while being aware of the

1 - Al-Suyūtī in the page 273 of the very book says; these ten qualities are mentioned in verse 112 of surah Al-tawbah:

(النَّائِبُونَ الْعَابِدُونَ الْحَامِدُونَ السَّائِحُونَ الرَّاكِعُونَ السَّاجِدُونَ الْآمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَ النََّاهُونَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ الْحَافِظُونَ

لِخُدُودِ اللَّهِ وَ بَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ)

(The faithful are) penitent, devout, celebrators of Allah's praise, wayfarers, who bow and [prostrate] in prayer, bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and keep Allah's bounds and give good news to the faithful.

2 - they are in the verse 35 of this Surah (Al-Suyūtī, *ibid*: 274):

(إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَ

الصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ

وَ الذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَ الذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا)

Indeed the Muslim men and the Muslim women, the faithful men and the faithful women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, the men who remember Allah greatly and the women who remember] Allah greatly [Allah holds in store for them forgiveness and a great reward.

dangers of all these acts, and the next migration again after that and obedience in slaughtering his son (Al-Suyūṭī, *ibid*: 273).

2.2.7. Allah tested him with seven things: worshipping the sun, the moon, the stars, circumcision at old age, fire, the slaughter of son, and migration (Al-Rāzī, *ibid*: 35).

### Analysis

Ascribing the tests to Allah (And when his Lord tested Ibrahim) indicates that the purpose of testing was to train Ibrahim and strengthen his will so that he could rise to do difficult things. About the first interpretation of the second view which recounts “the words” as Fitrah acts (Khisal al-fitrah), it must be said that these examples are not compatible with the concept of testing a high rank person and then rewarding him Imamate for his success in them. The tone of the verse indicates fulfilment of difficult tests. The well-known Sunni commentator Al-Māturīdī realizing this point declares that there is no significant wisdom in considering Fitrah acts to be the tests of Ibrahim, because these are things that anyone can do, but the “words” must be patience to be thrown into fire, the settlement of his family in a dry desert, the migration to Syria and slaughtering his son, such hard things that the other prophets were not tested with. In this case, the test and the reward are due to wisdom (Al-Māturīdī, 2005, vol.1: 554-555). Contemporary Sunni commentator Rashīd Redha says: “I have no doubt that this is one of the distortions and additions the Jews have made to our religion. Otherwise, what is more ridiculous than saying that these cases were the tests of Prophet Ibrahim and then Allah praised him for his success in these matters and made it the prelude to the Imamate of Ibrahim. These are things that a child can also do.” (Rashīd Ridhā, 1990, vol.1: 373-374)

Therefore, first of all, it is very unlikely that Fitrah acts are meant in the verse. Secondly, it should be noted that the test by Fitrah acts had to be after sending revelation to Ibrahim from Allah commanding him to do these things, and this means that Ibrahim at that time was at a state of receiving revelations to clearly clarify for him what he was supposed to do. Hence, he was already a prophet and later after fulfilling the tests he was raised to Imamate.





The second interpretation of the second view considering "the words" to be worshipping the moon, the stars, and the sun is not acceptable either. Rashīd Ridhā criticizes the proponents of this interpretation for they insinuate that Prophet Ibrahim believed the sun, the moon, and the star to be his God, and later he was successful to acknowledge the invalidity of that belief, while this is not the case. The fact that Ibrahim said "this is my Lord" was a prelude to arguing the invalidity of the belief in the divinity of these things. That is why Allah said, "This was Our argument that We gave to Ibrahim against his people." (Rashīd Ridhā, *ibid*: 373)

Concerning the third interpretation, "the words" were the thirty qualities mentioned in the chapters of Al-Tawbah, Al-Ahzab, Al-Mu'minun and Al-Ma'arij, which are repentance, worshipping, praising, traveling, bowing in Ruku', prostration (Al-Sajdah), enjoining the good, forbidding the evil, observance of divine limits, faith, Islam, qunut, truthfulness, patience, humbleness, paying charity, fasting, chastity, remembrance, avoiding vain talk, paying zakat, keeping covenants, observance of trust, maintaining prayers and the like. Beside suffering from repetition and also being less than the mentioned number, these attributes cannot be considered the "words"; because, firstly, these characteristics are among the general characteristics of the believers and everyone is tested with such qualities. Second, there is no defining argument to prove that the mentioned attributes are "the words" Ibrahim was tested with. Thirdly, the "words" were the commands of Allah Almighty which were communicated to the prophet through revelation and if the meaning of "Imam" in the verse is "Prophet" (as they believe), it is not acceptable to ascribe those attributes to Ibrahim before he reached that high position (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 430) because before prophethood he could not receive revelation to learn about these attributes and as a result he could not practice them in his life, and consequently he could not reach to Imamate. Henceforth, to accept this view, one cannot interpret Imamate as prophethood, but it must be a different and a higher position that a prophet could achieve after being tested. However, as already mentioned by the above-named commentator, these thirty attributes are not that hard and special to make a person to reach to Imamate. Even if we consider Imamate to be

the same as prophethood, there are many people who can practice these qualities in their lives and turn themselves into icons of these qualities without being a prophet. Thus, the tests Ibrahim went through must be harder than these things.

According to Ibn Jarir said that in expressing the meaning of the words, there are certain facts whose authenticity is to be considered, and for this reason, the best way is to say that the meaning of the words was the commands and decrees of God, which Abraham (pbuh) performed in the best way. They came out proud. "Faa" on the head of "Faalmahhun" indicates his urgency and compliance, which is a sign of his determination and strength of certainty. And the poems themselves have this description that those words that Abraham (pbuh) was tested with were things that required firm determination and determination.

Famous Egyptian commentator, Al-Sha'rāwī has stated that "the words" must be tests that are appropriate to suit the dignity of Ibrahim the father of Prophets, that is, they must be great trials (Al-Sha'rāwī, 1997, vol.1: 570). So Allah assigned Ibrahim with some tasks including falling into fire and slaughtering his son and he succeeded in all (Al-Sha'rāwī, ibid: 572). After that, Allah made him the Imam of mankind. Allah knew that Ibrahim would succeed in these tests, but he tested him so that the ordinary and general human beings would know how Allah chooses those near to Him and how they reach the Imamate. So Ibrahim reached the Imamate through his deeds (ibid: 573).

Al-'Uthaymīn also believes "the words" to be things that require patience and endurance, and also every command of Allah being addressed to Ibrahim is counted in those words, including the slaughter of his son and patience when thrown into the fire (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2002, vol.2: 40).

Javādī Āmolī, stating that Tanvin (ـِ) in "كلماتٍ" (the words) is for glorification, points out that using the term "the words" is not because the commands and prohibitions of Allah are conveyed in words. There are many tests and commands that have been mentioned in the form of words in the Qur'an, but none of them have been referred to as "words". The term "word", which has its own application in significant matters of Divine unity, creation and resurrection, indicates the importance of



the test materials; as in the case of Adam's repentance, the term "words" (فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ) (Qur'an 2: 37) is applied (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 432).

From what has been said, it appears that the tests were hard enough to be on the scale of a great man like Ibrahim Al-Khalil, such as being thrown in fire, the abandonment of his son and wife in a dry desert, and the command to slaughter his son. Even if we assume other things to be of the tests, certainly these hard tasks cannot be ignored.

As mentioned in the critique of the views in the interpretation of "words", the appearance and tone of the verse indicate that fulfilling the tests preceded Imamate; "Then he fulfilled them". So, the story of being thrown in the fire, emigration, leaving the family in the desert and the command to slaughter his son must have happened before Imamate, and if so, then Ibrahim must have been a prophet and even a messenger at this time, therefore it can no longer be said that Imam means a prophet or a messenger, otherwise nothing has been added to Ibrahim with his Imamate.

For more clarity, here we will quote one of the Shia commentators who paid attention to an important point in the verse that has been overlooked by all Sunni commentators. Ṭabātabāī believes that Allah gave Ibrahim the position of Imamate at the end of his life, that is, after the birth of Ishmael and Isaac and after he transferred Ishmael and his mother from the land of Palestine to the land of Mecca. It is because after the sentence: "I am making you Imam of mankind" it is narrated from Ibrahim asking the position of Imamate to be passed down to his progeny: "And from among my descendants?" If the story of the Imamate was before the good news of the angels on the birth of Ishmael and Isaac, Ibrahim at that time did not know or even guess that he would have children and grandchildren, and it did not make sense for him to request Imamate for his progeny, because he did not have a child until old age, and even after the good news of the angels about granting children to him, he could not believe it, and in his response to the angels, there was a kind of despair of having children:

"And inform them about the guests of Ibrahim, when they entered into his presence and said, "Peace!" He said, "We are indeed afraid of you." They said, "Do not be afraid. Indeed, we give you the good news of a wise son." He said, "Do you give me good news though old age has



befallen me? What is the good news that you bring me?" They said, "We bring you good news in truth; so do not be among the despondent." (Qur'an 15: 51-55)

Also, as the Qur'an narrates, his wife did not hope to have a child: "His wife, standing by, laughed as We gave her the good news of] the birth of [Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac. She said, " Oh, my! Shall I, an old woman, bear children, and while [this husband of mine is an old man?! That is indeed an odd thing!" They said, " Are you amazed at Allah's dispensation? That is Allah's mercy and His blessings upon you, members of the household. Indeed, He is all-laudable, all-glorious." (Qur'an 11: 71-73)

It can be seen that there was despair all over the words of Ibrahim and his wife, therefore the angels on the other side gave them glad tidings to comfort them and make them happy. Thus, Ibrahim and his wife did not know that they will have children soon.

Now we see Ibrahim, after hearing the good news that Allah will raise him to the position of Imamate, asks Him to grant this position to some of his descendants as well. Consequently, this request should be at a time he had children, because this speech can be uttered by someone with children. If someone has the least knowledge of the utmost decorum and politeness of a prophet like Ibrahim Al-Khalil in addressing his glorious Lord, would know that he would have never allowed himself to speak like that, if he did not have a child. Moreover, if we make such a statement possible from that esteemed person, he should have said: "O Allah, from my descendants, if you bestow me any child", so it turns out that his request was at the old age and after having children. Moreover, the sentence "And when his Lord tested Ibrahim with the words, then he fulfilled them, He said, I am making you (appointing you as) Imam of mankind." indicates that this Imamate that Allah gave him was after the completion of the divine tests, and it is clear that these tests were the same type of calamities that befell him in life, and Holy Qur'an clarified them that the hardest of those trials was the story of slaughtering his son, and this happened after being a prophet as it is recounted in the verse 39 of chapter 14 (Tabātabāi, 1995, vol.1: 404-406.).



Explaining the meaning of “then he fulfilled them”, Ṭabātabāī says: If the pronoun “he” goes back to Ibrahim, it means that Ibrahim fulfilled those "words" i.e. tests, that is, he obeyed what Allah commanded him to do. But if “he” refers to Allah Almighty, as it appears to be, then it means that Allah fulfilled those words and gave the chance to Ibrahim to follow divine instructions and to obey what Allah wanted from him (Ibid: 408). As a result, it is understood that the Imamate was bestowed to him after the fulfillment of those words and certainly, this was at his old age and it was after being a prophet and a messenger.

#### 4. Granting Imamate

After expressing Ibrahim's success in the tests, Allah addressed him with the phrase, “انى جاعلك للناس اماما” (I am making you Imam of mankind.) Ibn Kathīr says: After Ibrahim successfully completed the tests, he was granted the reward of Imamate (Al-Tabarī, ibid: 12; Ibn Kathīr, ibid: .283-284). Tantāwī also believes that the phrase is to express the divine grace in granting Ibrahim a high position in exchange for his endurance in the difficult matters that were cast upon him (Sayyid Tantāwī, 1997, vol.1: 266). Sayyid Quṭb also considers granting Imamate to be a reward for Ibrahim's success in difficult tests (Sayyid Quṭb, 1991, vol.1: 112). Al-‘Uthaymīn, one of the Salafī commentators, has also considered the Imamate as Ibrahim's reward for completing the divine words and tests (Al-‘Uthaymīn, ibid).

Javādī Āmolī, refers to another subtle point in the verse: The term used by Allah is not “we are making you”, but it is “I am making you” with the form of a single speaker; that when something is very close to the almighty, the single form will be used, showing the glory of it. Hence, instead of obedience the term “fulfilment” (فاتمهن) was used, and it was expressed with the letter "Fa" (ف) which is a sign of full submission and immediate completion to show the spiritual health and soundness of the heart of Ibrahim (Javādī Amulī, ibid: 432).

As it was clarified, the fulfilment of the divine tests was at the old age of Ibrahim, and he certainly had the status of prophethood and being a messenger at that time, and after the fulfilment of those tests, he reached the position of Imamate. Rewarding the position of Imamate to



him after prophethood shows the significance and loftiness of this position.

Allah expresses Imamate as “my covenant” so Imamate is a divine covenant, and like prophethood, it is given to whomever Allah wills, and it is not that anyone who succeeds in the tests of life and gained purity of soul can necessarily reach the position of Imamate. For this reason, the phrase “I am making you” was used, meaning that Imamate is by the appointment from Allah, not only through acquisition and effort of human beings. Man’s purity and success in the tests is required but it is not enough. Unlike many positions and degrees such as ijihad, piety, justice, which are by acquisition, as the way to achieve them has been stated, Imamate is a divine covenant and a gifted position; as Allah said about it: “My pledge does not extend to the unjust.” The status of prophethood as well as Imamate are divine gifts and are distributed according to Allah Almighty “Allah knows best where to place His apostleship” (Qur’ an 6: 124) Therefore, one cannot say; since the Imamate does not extend to the unjust, then whoever was not unjust can achieve the Imamate (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 438).

### Conclusion

All in all, from the aforementioned discussions it becomes clear that “the words” referred to in the verse 124 of chapter Al-Baqarah were difficult tests that Ibrahim went through. It was also established that the completion of the tests was at the old age of Ibrahim. More so, it was shown that Ibrahim held the position of being a prophet and a messenger before the fulfilment of the tests. The fourth point was his being gifted Imamate at this stage of life i.e. being of the old age; after he was a prophet already. Therefore, Imamate cannot mean leadership in worldly or religious affairs, because these are some of the duties fixed for the Prophets and Ibrahim already had such authorities as a prophet especially, being one of the five prophets of determination (Ulul-azm). Fifth, according to what appears from the verse, Imamate is a higher authority than the position of prophethood and unlike the prophethood that was given to Ibrahim years ago, the Imamate was given to him at his old age after difficult trials and tests. There are also other verses indicating that some of the prophets were raised to the position of

Imamate not all of them; like the verse 24 of the chapter 32 "And from amongst them We appointed imams to guide by Our command". As a result, Imamate is a divine pledge and covenant, and whoever is the Imam must be chosen by Allah, and appointment of the Imam is not assigned to people. For this reason, the verse declared that the Imamate does not reach the unjust people to state that the Imamate cannot be obtained, but it is a position that must come to the Imam from Allah, and for that reason Allah called it his own pledge and covenant. Now, it is time to discuss the other question as what the position of Imamate is. There are different views for the Sunni and Shia scholars that will be studied in another article.

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