

Analytical Study of the Concept of Imamate in Verse 124 of Surah Bagharah

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Abstract

Using the analytical method in library-based research, this article examines 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, after "the words" of Allah were fulfilled about Ibrahim, he was raised as an Imam. Understanding the context of this verse is very helpful in finding out the proper meaning of Imamate which has been the most controversial issue in the history of Islam. The findings of this article show that Imamate is something precious granted to Ibrahim and it is higher than being a prophet. Thus, interpretations suggested by Sunni scholars to define the "Imam" as a political leader, a role model in general, a role model for all men, or a prophet, is not acceptable. Ṭabātabāī has suggested "a special guidance" for Imamate. Even though we do not limit Imamate to it, it can be one distinctive edge of it.

Keywords: Ibrahim, Abraham, Imamate, Imam, Verse 124 Surah Bagharah, Infallibility, The words.



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1. Introduction

According to verse 124 of the second chapter, Al-baqarah Allah tested Ibrahim (Abraham) with certain words, and after he fulfilled them, He appointed him as an Imam of mankind. This is a library-based article applying analytical methods to discuss the question of what the position of Imamate is. There are different views for the Sunni and Shia scholars that will be studied to achieve a reasonable understanding of this term.

1.2. Problem statement

As Al-Sharistani correctly declares; the greatest dispute among the Muslims has been the dispute over Imamate, since no sword has been drawn in Islam on a religious basis like it has been drawn over the Imamate in every era (Al-Sharistani, n.d., vol.1: 22). Thus, it is of vital importance to define the proper meaning of the term “Imam” based on its Qur’anic usage. The application of the term in the Qur’an clarifies the extent of the position of Imamate and whether it can be achieved by others or it is only a gift to be granted by Allah to some chosen individuals from among His servants. Hence, clarification of the conditions and qualifications of a person to be an Imam, as well as his duties and rights, depend on a proper definition derived from the Qur’anic application of the term. Here, before getting to study different views concerning the concept of Imamate, we need to clarify some other terms and phrases mentioned in the verse that can work as indicators and clues for a better understanding of the concept of Imamate:

1.3. Some key indicators in the verse

1.3.1. The words

“The words” referred to in the verse are difficult tests that Ibrahim went through and the completion of the tests was at the old age of Ibrahim. He held the position of being a prophet before the fulfillment of the tests so the Imamate was a new gift to be bestowed on him. This claim was already discussed in the previous article I published. It was elaborated that “the words” were difficult tests Ibrahim went through. It was established that the completion of the tests was at the old age of Ibrahim. It was shown that Ibrahim was gifted Imamate at old age; after he was a prophet already (Agha Mohammadi, 2023).



1.3.2. “From among my descendants”

Some have suggested that “And from among my descendants?” is a prayer for his descendants to follow in his footsteps. This interpretation is not compatible with the appearance of the verse because this phrase comes after his appointment to Imamate and it appears that Ibrahim asked this position of Imamate for his descendants. (Al-Tabarī, 2000, vol.2: 19); (Al-Khatīb al-Sharabyīnī, 1868, vol.1: 90) The phrase “And from among my descendants?” is the answer to the question that may come to the listener's mind that is what did Ibrahim do when such good news was given to him? The answer is that he asked for the position of Imamate to be amongst his descendants. His request was “from among my descendants?” not "my descendants" because he knew according to the divine wisdom all his generation could not be qualified to be Imams (Sayyid Tantāwī, 1997, vol.1: 266); (Al-Samīn Al-Halabī, n.d., vol.2: 100). Hence when he reached the position of Imamate, he wanted this position to be granted to his descendants as well.

1.3.3. The divine pledge (covenant)

Some have suggested that “And from among my descendants?” is a prayer for his descendants to follow in his footsteps. This interpretation is not compatible with the appearance of the verse because this phrase comes after his appointment to Imamate and it appears that Ibrahim asked this position of Imamate for his descendants. (Al-Tabarī, 2000, vol.2: 19); (Al-Khatīb al-Sharabyīnī, 1868, vol.1: 90) The phrase “And from among my descendants?” is the answer to the question that may come to the listener's mind that is what did Ibrahim do when such good news was given to him? The answer is that he asked for the position of Imamate to be amongst his descendants. His request was “from among my descendants?” not "my descendants" because he knew according to the divine wisdom all his generation could not be qualified to be Imams (Sayyid Tantāwī, 1997, vol.1: 266); (al-Samīn Al-Halabī, *ibid*). Hence when he reached the position of Imamate, he wanted this position to be granted to his descendants as well.

1.3.3. The divine pledge (covenant) although the verse is sufficiently apparent about the meaning of the “pledge” (covenant), Sunni scholars still hold different views about it: First, it means the covenant of a believer with others. According to some narrations al-Ṭabarī quotes from Ibn Abbas, the verse means that man should not make a

covenant with oppressors and if he made such a covenant, then he does not have to fulfill it. (Al-Tabarī, *ibid*: 22) Second, the covenant means "safety" and the meaning of the verse is that the oppressors will not be subject to divine protection and will be punished in the Hereafter. (*ibid*) Third, the covenant refers to the "religion of Allah." (*ibid*: 23) Fourth, Wāṣil ibn Sā'ib says that I asked 'Aṭa about it. He replied that the covenant of Allah means His mercy which only the believers will reach in Paradise while His mercy in this world includes everyone. (Al-Rāzī Ibn Abī Hātam, 1419, vol.1: 223) Fifth, the covenant is prophethood (Al-Rāzī Ibn Abī Hātam, *ibid*: 223; Ibn Kathīr, 1998, vol.1: 289). Sixth, it means that the enemies of Allah cannot obey him, and obedience towards Allah is limited to the servants of Him. (Al-Rāzī Ibn Abī Hātam, *ibid*) According to this view, the covenant means carrying out Allah's commands and obeying Him. Seventh, the meaning is that one should only obey others in good deeds, and if a person is ordered to do evil, he should not accept it. (Ibn Kathīr, *ibid*) By paying attention to the context of the verse and its appearance, none of these views suit the verse. Allah mentioned Imamate as the reward for Ibrahim. Then Ibrahim requested this position for some of his decedents. However, this request was followed by the response: "My pledge does not extend to the unjust (the oppressors)." Thus, logically, Allah should answer the very request of Ibrahim. Thus, the pledge and the covenant mentioned here is the very Imamate. According to Qurṭubī, Ibrahim requested the Imamate for his descendants, and Allah replied that from his descendants the unjust and the oppressors do not have such authority (Al-Qurtubī, 1946, vol.1: 107). Al-Rāzī says: Regarding the covenant, there are some views however, the best concept is Imamate, because "And from among my descendants?" was the request for Imamate, and the answer must be commensurate with this request (Al-Rāzī, 1999, vol.4: 37). Al-Tantāwī says: "My pledge does not extend to the unjust" is a positive response of Allah to the request of Ibrahim meaning that Imamate will be given to some of his descendants, provided that they are not unjust (Sayyid Tantāwī, *ibid*). Imamate, which is a divine covenant, does not reach the oppressors who have wronged themselves, because the Imam rises up to protect the religion and the people of religion and to abandon oppression from them, and if he oppresses himself, he can no longer repel oppression (Al-Hijāzī, 1413, vol.1: 74).



1.3.4. Incompetence of the unjust for Imamate

It became clear that the Imamate does not reach the unjust. Now we have to see what injustice means in the verse. Ibn Kathīr has narrated from Sa'īd ibn Jubayr that what is meant by unjust is polytheist (Mushrik) so, a polytheist cannot be an Imam (Ibn Kathīr, *ibid*: 288). But Ṭabarī considers any type of disobedience to be oppression and to make one incompetent for Imamate. Rashīd Ridhā also considers the view of those who have limited injustice to polytheism to be a baseless claim (Rashīd Ridhā, 1990, vol.1: 374-375). According to Sayyid Qutb, oppression has various types, including oppression against one's soul with polytheism and oppression against people with rebellion, etc. On the other hand, there are different types of Imamate, and all types of Imamate, including prophethood, caliphate, Imam of prayer, etc., are forbidden to oppressors (Sayyid Qutb, 1991, vol.1: 112.).

Whoever commits any kind of oppression, whether oppression against himself or others, hidden or overt, whether minor or major, will be an example of an unjust and according to the declaration of the verse cannot be an Imam, because the title "unjust" would be true about him. Therefore, if oppression is universal and includes all sins, then one can be an Imam who is free from all kinds of oppression and sin. Therefore, such a person must have the status of infallibility (‘Ismah). This in itself is proof that, firstly, the one who is not infallible does not have the authority of Imamate, and secondly, it is Allah who can discern the one who is so pure and free from any oppression, because people are not aware of the hidden and secret acts of others and it is only Allah who can choose Imams, not people.

2. Meaning of Imamate

About the meaning of Imamate which Prophet Ibrahim was rewarded, several opinions have been expressed by Sunni scholars:

2.1. A role model

Many Sunni commentators believe that the term Imam is used in the same literal sense of it that is someone who is followed by others and is considered as their role model. Thus, Imam is the role model of others in good deeds (Al-Zujāj, 1988, vol.1: 205); (Ibn ‘Āshūr Al-Tūnesī, 1984, vol.1: 701); (Sayyid Tantāwī, *ibid*: 266, Al-zamakhsharī, 1986, vol.1: 184); (Al-Samīn al-Halabī, *ibid*, al-Qurtubī, *ibid*) Al-Māwardī after preferring this universal concept, has considered the Imamate of Salat (leading

prayers) as an example of this Imamate (Al-Māwardī, n.d, vol.1: 185). Sayed Qutb considers Imamate in a universal sense, which includes prophethood, caliphate, Imam of the prayers, and other matters (Sayyid Qutb, *ibid*). Al-‘Uthaymīn has also said that Imam means role model, whether in good deeds or in evil, but undoubtedly in the case of Ibrahim, Imamate in good deeds is meant (Al-‘Uthaymīn, 2002, vol.2: 42).

Analysis

Ṭabātabāī believes that this kind of interpretation is because the terms used in the Qur’an have become cheap and worthless in the eyes of people. Since these terms have been used a lot over time, they thought that they knew the meaning of them, and that thought has caused them to ignore the true concept of the Qur’anic terms. If Imamate means that a person is a role model for others, then it does not make sense to raise a Prophet who already enjoys being a role model, to the position of being a role model again. Hence, it is meaningless for a man who is a role model and is obeyed due to him being a prophet, to tell him that he is going to be chosen as a role model (Tabātabāī, 1995, vol.1: 409-410).

As it is clear, being a role model and an exemplar is one of the popular characteristics of prophets; this meaning has been realized about all the prophets. Allah said in this regard: “We did not send any apostle but to be obeyed by Allah's leave.” (Qur’an 4: 64) Thus, Ibrahim was also included in the universal concept of this verse in being obeyed and being a role model so he did not need to get it by ascending to Imamate (Javādī Amulī, 2022, vol.6: 442).

It has been said before that according to the available pieces of evidence, Prophet Ibrahim was raised to Imamate in old age, and before that, he was a prophet. Now, how is it possible that someone who is sent as a prophet to people not to be their role model in good deeds? Therefore, it is not reasonable for Imamate to simply be considered in its literal meaning because in this case nothing more has been given to Ibrahim and it is against the appearance of the verse that Allah is narrating a special dignified gift to be bestowed to Ibrahim.

In addition, to be a role model, one does not need to be a prophet, non-prophets can be role models in good deeds. As Allah said about Ibrahim and his companions:



“There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Ibrahim and those who were with him” (Qur’an 60: 4) According to this verse, not only Ibrahim but even his companions are role models, and it is clear that the companions of Ibrahim were not necessarily prophets. Allah also mentions two women as examples for all believers:

“Allah draws another example for those who have faith: the wife of Pharaoh ... And Mary, daughter of Imran” (Qur’an 66: 11-12)

The wife of Pharaoh and Mary mother of Jesus are examples and role models for believers while they were not prophets and they were not introduced as Imams. Therefore, the Imamate, which was the reward of the struggles of prophet Ibrahim, cannot be reduced to being a mere role model and an exemplar.

2.2. A prophet

Some of them have considered being a messenger or prophet as the best example of Imamate (Al-Māturīdī, 2005, vol.1: 555); (Ibn ‘Āshūr Al-Tūnesī, *ibid*). Being a messenger is the perfect form of Imamate because they are the role models for people in the moral virtues. Hence, asking Imamate for his progeny is another way of requesting prophethood for them (Sayyid Tantāwī, *ibid*) as he did in another place calling:

“Our Lord, raise amongst them an apostle from among them, who should recite to them Your signs, and teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed, You are the All-mighty, the All-wise.” (The Qur’an 2: 129), (Al-Makkī al-Nāserī, 1985, vol.1: 82) According to al-Rāzī, there exist several proofs for the term Imam to be the same as a prophet:

First: “Imam of mankind” means that Allah has made him Imam for all people, and such a person must be a Messenger who brings a new Sharia, otherwise if he follows the Sharia of another prophet, he will be the follower of that prophet, not his Imam, and in this case, the universality of his Imamate will be negated.

Second: An Imam is a role model in everything and such a person must be a prophet.

Third: Prophets are considered Imams because they are leaders and it is obligatory for people to follow them. As verse 73 of chapter 21 reads: “We made them Imams, guiding by Our command.” (Al-Rāzī, *ibid*: 36)



Analysis

The first drawback of the statement made by al-Rāzī is equating Imamate with being a prophet or a messenger while, it is contrary to linguistic principles; That is, every term and title is coined to convey its own meaning. Therefore, to use the term “Imam” and to intend a prophet or a messenger is against the appearance of the verse and such a claim cannot be made unless with an acceptable proof. al-Rāzī’s first proof for this claim is the universal meaning of Imamate; namely, Ibrahim is the Imam of all mankind. Hence, if he follows the Sharia of another prophet, he will be a follower of him, and this is contrary to being an Imam for everyone.

Actually, this statement is the same as the claim and not a proof to support the claim; That is, he believes that Imam means a messenger of a new sharia. Now he is asked; what is the proof for this claim? His answer is that if Ibrahim was not a messenger of Sharia, then he would be a follower and not an Imam who is followed. Pondering upon this argument indicates that this proof is the same as the claim, because as it will be mentioned, the term “Imam” may have a meaning other than a messenger of a sharia, which at the same time does not require Ibrahim to be a follower of others. In other words, the only option for Ibrahim not to be a follower of others and to be an Imam is not to be a messenger of a Sharia. Thus, it makes sense to imagine that Ibrahim, as a prophet, was a messenger of a Sharia as well and did not follow any other prophet in his Sharia, but at the same time, in addition to being a prophet, he was appointed to Imamate a position different from prophethood, as the verse declares. So, for him not to be a follower of anyone else, the only way is not to be a prophet or a messenger. Now, if someone wants to confine Imam to a messenger, he needs proof for it. Besides, there is basically no problem for Ibrahim to be a follower of someone else in reference to his past life. However, at the same time, he can be the Imam of the people of his time and people who will come after him, as Allah introduces him as one of the Shia and followers of Noah: “Indeed Ibrahim was among his (Noah) followers.” (The Qur’an 37: 83).

Moreover, this claim of al-Rāzī is refuted by the Imamate of prophets such as Isaac, and Jacob, who, according to the Qur’an, were Imams but were not messengers of their own Sharia, they followed the Sharia of

Ibrahim; “And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, and each of them We made righteous. We made them Imams, guiding by Our command,” (The Qur’an 21: 72-73). Therefore, the term “Imam” cannot have the same meaning as prophet and messenger.

In his second argument, al-Rāzī said that Ibrahim is an Imam in all matters and such a person should be a prophet. There is no proof for this claim either; because there might be a meaning for the term “Imamate” that it does not require being a prophet. Therefore, his claim is nothing but mere speculation. In other words, a prophet can be an Imam as well but one cannot claim that any Imam must be a prophet.

The third argument of al-Rāzī was appealing to the literal meaning of Imam, which means “leader”, and naturally the prophets are also leaders, so they are Imams in this regard.

Ṭabātabāī has argued that if Imam means a prophet or a messenger, then it will not make sense that after a lifetime of struggle and after being a prophet and messenger for many years, to be granted the good news of rising to the very position again. Ibrahim was a messenger when he was tested: “And mention in the Book Ibrahim. Indeed, he was a truthful one, a prophet. When he said to his father, “Father! Why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and is of no avail to you in any way?” (The Qur’an 19: 41-42). This story is related to the time when Ibrahim was a youth and at that time he was a prophet according to the verse. Thus, he certainly could not have reached prophethood again in his old age. As mentioned before, the Imamate of Ibrahim was after completing the difficult tests, hence he was certainly a prophet and messenger at that time, and it does not make sense for him to be chosen as a prophet or a messenger again.

Ṭabātabāī has highlighted a literary point in “إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا” (I am appointing you as Imam of mankind). The word “Imam” is the second object of the active participle (جَاعِلُكَ) and it can only have two objects when it is used in either the present or the future tense, not in the past. According to this rule, the phrase “I am appointing you as Imam of mankind” is a promise to Ibrahim to make him an Imam in the future, not narrating his being chosen in the past (Al-Tabarī, *ibid*, vol.1: 409). Consequently, if the term “Imam” means a prophet, the meaning of the phrase is that “I will make you a prophet now or in the future”, and the meaning that will be

insinuated is that Ibrahim was not a prophet before; while this revelatory conversation is a sign of his prophethood. So Imam cannot mean a prophet (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 441). In addition, this promise was communicated to Ibrahim through revelation, so it turns out that before this promise reached him, he was a Prophet who received this revelation. Hence, the Imamate that was given to him was not the prophethood that he already had at a prior time.

2.3. A role model for other prophets and people

Al-Ṭabarī considers the term “Imam” to mean a role model not only for people at his time; Ibrahim was and is Imam, meaning one who is followed in good deeds, and this Imamate is universal and eternal because Allah did not send any prophet after him unless he must follow Ibrahim. This point is understood from the command of Allah to the prophet of Islam “Follow the creed of Ibrahim, a Hanif” (The Qur’an 16: 123) Just as Lot, although he was a prophet, he believed in Ibrahim at the same time and followed him; “Thereupon Lot believed in him” (The Qur’an 29: 26) ; (Al-Ṭabarī, *ibid*, vol.2: 18)

Tantāwī says; Instead of saying, “I am appointing you as a messenger to mankind” Allah said, “I am appointing you as Imam of mankind” to indicate that his message is useful to the nation he was sent to as a prophet and to other nations as well. Ibrahim traveled to various places in the lands of Chaldea, Iraq, Syria, Hejaz, and Egypt, and in all of those lands, he was a model of goodness for others (Sayyid Tantāwī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Wasīt lel-Qur’an Al-Karīm*, vol.1, p.266). Al-Marāghī interpreted the Imam as a messenger who is a role model till the Day of Judgment i.e. Ibrahim invited people to Hanafiism which is monotheism and having faith in one God. (Al-Marāghī, 1946, vol.1: 209-210)

Analysis

Criticizing this view, Javādī Āmolī says: Prophet Ibrahim asked for the same position of Imamate to be bestowed on his descendants saying “And from among my descendants?”; And Allah responded positively to this request by making Imamate possible for some of his descendants who are not unjust; While such an aspect, i.e. Imamate over all the prophets, is not conceivable and correct about those descendants of Ibrahim (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 443). It should also be noted about “اتبع ملة إبراهيم حنيفاً” (Qur’an 16: 123) (Follow the creed of Ibrahim, who Was Upright) that the Holy Prophet

of Islam and the infallible Imams after him were not followers of any of the previous prophets; meaning that man is sometimes a follower of a prophet and sometimes a follower of his religion, and Allah Almighty commanded the Holy Prophet to follow the nation and religion of Ibrahim, not to follow Ibrahim himself; as in a more comprehensive statement, Allah commanded his last prophet to follow common guidance that has reached all the prophets “أولئك الذين هدى الله فبهم اقتده” (They are the ones whom Allah has guided. So follow their guidance) (The Qur’an 6: 90). In this verse, Allah has commanded to follow the guidance of the prophets, not to follow themselves. Hence, the verse does not talk about being a follower of Ibrahim, but it is about following a religion that has been common to all prophets (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 446).

In addition, it can be said that there are good examples in the lives of all divine prophets and righteous people, and that is why the Qur’an has mentioned the stories of the prophets and the righteous servants for us to follow the example of their good deeds. The purpose of telling the story of their lives was not merely for the sake of telling stories. Moreover, as it was mentioned, Allah said about the companions of Prophet Ibrahim: “There is certainly a good exemplar for you in them for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day” (Qur’an 60: 6)

Thus, the companions of Prophet Ibrahim are role models for us as well and were not just role models for the people of their time, while they were not necessarily Prophets or Imams. Allah says about Ibrahim: “And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and guided each of them. And Noah We had guided before, and from his offspring, David and Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron thus do We reward the virtuous. And Zechariah, John, Jesus, and Ilyas, each of them among the righteous. And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot each We graced over all the nations.” (The Qur’an 6: 84-86) After these prophets are mentioned, Allah instructs the Prophet that “They are the ones whom Allah has guided. So follow their guidance.” (Qur’an 6: 90). The Prophet should follow their guidance, while it is not known that all of them were Imams, although they were all prophets. So being a role model for others, even at other times, does not necessarily mean that the person must have reached Imamate. Hence, to interpret the Imam as a role model for all people is not accurate either.

2.4. A political leader

Al-Zamakhsharī defines Imamate as being a role model. Then, in explaining it, he applies it to religious and political leadership and goes further to say that this Imamate does not reach oppressors. He asks how can an oppressor be an Imam (in the political sense) when the ruling and bearing witness of an oppressor as well as his reports are not accepted and there is no obligation to obey them. For this reason, Abu Hanifa secretly encouraged people to help Zaid ibn Ali and he financially supported him against Umayyad thieves who claimed Imamate (Al-zamakhsharī, *ibid*). Qurtūbī says; that some scholars by appealing to this verse have argued to reject the leadership of oppressors, and for this reason, Husain Ibn Ali (A.S) and Abdullah bin Zubayr went out against Yazīd (Al-Qurtubī, *ibid*: 109).

Analysis

If these scholars consider the term “Imam” to mean a role model and later on, they observe political leadership to be an example and an application of it, then we already reviewed this claim. However, if they argue that the term “Imam” means a political leader, then there are some loopholes in it. The first drawback of this interpretation is that the prophets like other people can be political leaders one can even claim that the prophets generally have priority in achieving such a position as it is mentioned about them in verse 25 of surah 57: “Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice; and We sent down iron, in which there is great might and uses for mankind, and so that Allah may know those who help Him and His apostles in their absence. Indeed, Allah is all-strong, all-mighty.” According to Javādī Āmolī, in this verse, Allah explains the common attributes of the prophets are among other things, He has equipped the prophets with cultural and military forces: one is a book, to invite people to justice, and the other is iron, to prevent chaos and to deal with aggressors. Iron which was in the hands of some prophets in the form of a sword and in the hands of others such as Ibrahim in the form of an axe, is to support that book. The fact that “helping the religion of Allah and His messengers” came along with the expression of “We sent down iron”, is proof that this iron is meant as a means of defense and war. Of course, iron also has many industrial benefits (منافع للناس) for people; but its “great might” (باس شديد) that the verse declares, appears in the face of defending

the essence of religion and repelling the invaders (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 448). So, it is not conceivable that Ibrahim did not have the right to lead the ummah in the past and then it was given to him.

Second, If Ibrahim was appointed as a political leader in his old age, then Allah should have quoted signs of his rule and leadership to be followed by others as a practical example; as it was in the case of David beside the statements like “We made his kingdom firm” (Qur’an 38: 20), Allah quotes his way of judgment (The Qur’an 38: 22). However, no trace of the rule of Ibrahim at his old age over territory has been mentioned in the Qur’an (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 454). Thus, if Imamate is political leadership, we should ask the question of which land and region was Ibrahim sent to lead? While there is no mention of such a place.

If it is said that Allah gave him the legitimacy of political leadership without him having the opportunity to rule, then what kind of grace would be in such an Imamate that is not actualized, while this was achieved for David and Solomon even though they were not given such a promise to be raised as Imams and they were not subjected to difficult tests like Ibrahim? Third, political leadership has no higher value than prophethood, to assume that he was given such a position after being a prophet, it does not make sense to consider Ibrahim to be so surprised by that political position to the extent that he requested it for his children as well. The divine prophets were not fascinated by power and the political responsibility was only a heavy burden on them.

Fourth, Allah speaks about the Imamate of prophets such as Isaac and Jacob and emphasizes on their guiding role (Qur’an 21: 72-73), but He does not express their rule and political leadership, and in history, there is nothing that confirms their political rule. So if Imamate meant political leadership, these prophets should have had well-known kingdoms like David.

Fifth, Javādī Āmolī adds: “I am making you Imam of mankind” indicates that appointing an Imam is only by Allah. Therefore, if we accept that Imamate in that verse refers to political leadership, then according to “I am appointing you Imam of mankind” and “My pledge” the installation of the Imam is the duty and the right of Allah, and people do not have the right to choose a political leader, and the political caliphate of a person who has not been chosen by Allah will not be permissible (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*:

439). Then what will the Sunni scholars say about the legitimacy of the caliphs after the Prophet? The caliphs did not attribute their political leadership to Allah and never claimed to be appointed by Allah, but on the contrary, they claimed that the messenger of Allah did not introduce anyone on behalf of Allah to succeed him and he left it to the ummah. As Sahih Bukhari narrates from Ibn Abbas that some people said; “paying allegiance to Abu Bakr was a sudden and heedless act without consulting the people’s opinion and without reckoning.” ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattāb replied to them, “Yes, it is true that this allegiance was sudden and unaccounted for, but in any case, Allah protected us from its evil.” (Al-Bukhārī, 1422, vol.8:168)

What emphasizes the necessity of appointing an Imam by Allah is the issue of the infallibility of the Imam, and this is expressed by the phrase “My pledge does not extend to the unjust” in the verse. Imamate reaches only those whose souls are free from the harm of any temptation and the bite of any sin. Infallibility is required in Imamate, and infallibility is an unknown secret to anyone but Allah. Such a position cannot be proved without a divine command and it is never available for any ordinary individual and it is not up to society to elect someone for this position. The Qur’an has separated the boundary between the positions that are through appointment by Allah and the ones in the realm of people’s choice. Imamate is the covenant of Allah (My pledge), not the covenant of people, so people cannot choose Imam. However, in other cases which are left to people they can choose as the famous verse declares “and their affairs are by counsel among themselves” (Qur’an 42: 38) Thus, the covenant of Allah is different from that of the people and the covenant of Allah is proved only by a valid text from Him.

Sixth, another proof of the fact that Imamate must be gifted by Allah and it is not through people’s choice, is the popular recitation of the term “الظالمين” (the oppressors) instead of “الظالمون” that is a rare recitation of the verse. According to the popular recitation, “عهدي” (My pledge) is the subject of the verb “لا ينال” (does not extend), and “الظالمين” (the oppressors) is its object. Then, the sentence means “the divine covenant must reach just man, not that man can acquire it”. Hence, how can this Imamate be reduced to a political leadership that is due to people’s choice? Therefore, although political leadership can be one of the duties and rights of the Imam, Imamate is not limited to it.

Seventh, Javādī Āmolī refers to another literal point in the verse, that instead of saying “علي الناس اماما” the verse said “للناس اماما”. Mentioning Imamate with the letter “ل” indicates closeness, intimacy, and priority (Wilayah) that Imam has over people, rather than using “على” that could imply superiority and sovereignty that is for a Sultan and a political leader. In other terms, Imam is “for” people not “over” people and this implies that Imamate is something beyond political leadership. Hence, Imamate in that verse is of the same nature as Wilayah, not political leadership (Javādī Āmolī, *ibid*: 469).

2.5. A special guidance

This definition has been proposed for the Imam by Ṭabātabāī. Before expressing his view, it should be known that guidance is of three types: First, the general creational guidance (Al-Hidāyah Al-Takwīnīyah). According to the Qur’an, “He who gave everything its creation and then guided it” (Qur’an 20: 50), Allah has created everything and set an end for it to move in its path.

Second, the instructional guidance (Al-Hidāyah Al-Tashrīīyah) is by showing the way to people so if they choose to take and follow the right way they might reach the destination. It is as if someone is given an address that leads towards a destination if he moves according to that address. The guidance delivered by the divine prophets is of this type if people obey their commands, they will be successful, but if they disobey the teachings of the prophets, they will go astray.

Third, delivering to the destination (Al-īṣāl ela al-Maṭlūb), which is creational and developmental guidance. In this type of guidance, the instructor does not give the address of the destination but he takes the hand of the guided man and accompanies him to the desired destination. According to Ṭabātabāī, one should first of all know that whenever the Holy Qur’an mentions Imamate, continues by referring to the issue of guidance, as if it (guidance) comes to interpret Imamate. For instance, in the story of Ibrahim, it says:

“And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, and each of them We made righteous. We made them imams, guiding by Our command.” (Qur’an 21: 72-73). He also says: “And amongst them, We appointed Imams to guide the people by Our command when they had been patient and had conviction in Our signs.” (Qur’an 32: 24)

According to the above two verses Imam is a guide. On the other hand, Allah has bound this guidance to “Our command”, and with this condition, he has made it clear that Imamate is not in the absolute sense of guidance, but it is a guidance that is done by the command of Allah, and this command is what has been described as: “All His command when He wills something, is to say to it “Be,” and it is. So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things and to whom you shall be brought back.” (Qur’an 36: 82-83). And also said: “And Our command is but a single (word), like the twinkling of an eye.” (Qur’an 54: 50)

The divine command, which the first verse also called “the kingdom”, is another aspect of creation with which the Imams face Allah Almighty. It is a pure creation free from the constraints of time and place, and free from change and transformation. The command is what is meant by the word “Be” (كن) and it is nothing but the objective existence of things. “The command” versus “creation” (خلق) is one of the two aspects of everything. The creation is the aspect of everything subject to change, quantization, and the laws of motion and time, but the command of the same thing is not subject to these rulings (Al-Tabarī, *ibid*, vol.19: 143-143). In the realm of creation, a camel can be born after a couple mates and the mother carries the semen in her womb for a specific period waiting for different stages of development to come one after the other, but in the realm of command, in less than a blink of an eye, a camel with its baby come out of a mountain for the people of prophet Salih.

Therefore, the nature of “to guide the people by Our command” is a creational guidance, not an instructive one, and the guidance of the Imams that is by the divine command is the manifestation of the name of Allah; “Muqallib Al-Qulūb” (the reformer of hearts/the mover of hearts). Just as the Imam has a worldly position to take care of the worldly affairs of the people, he also has a heavenly position to guide the hearts of the people with “كن فيكون” (Be! and it is) and by connection with the souls. Hence, if such a position is proven for a prophet, it is through his Imamate not his prophethood (Javādī Amulī, *ibid*: 463).

Contrary to it, is the guidance of the prophets that is just through good advice and preaching: “We did not send any apostle except with the language of his people so that he might make] Our messages [clear to them. Then Allah leads astray whomever He wishes, and He guides whomsoever

He wishes, and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.” (Qur’an 14: 4). The prophets just taught people the book but Imams guide by a special creational impact on the hearts and they do it for those who believed and acted in accordance with their faith, so this is a divine reward for them. To whatever spiritual degree man reaches, he needs a guide to go to a higher level and he needs a guide to hold his hand and lift him up. This means being a mediator of grace, and this is the position the descendants of Ibrahim as Imams were given. Thus, even if Imam is absent he has this influence on others.

Conclusion

All in all, from the aforementioned discussion a few points become vividly clear that Imamate was given to Ibrahim 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. The Imam can enjoy these authorities as well, that is, he can be the people’s role model in religious, political, and worldly affairs, he can teach them the divine rules, he can be the Imam of the congregation, etc. But since all these qualities also exist in Prophets and raising to the position of Imamate for Prophet Ibrahim must be a different privilege and gift it would be reasonable for Allah to grant such a reward to Prophet Ibrahim. According to the verse, although the Imam is not necessarily a prophet, it 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 in his old age after difficult trials and tests. Imamate is a divine pledge and covenant, and whoever is the Imam must be chosen by Allah, and the 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. The verse indicates that a person who is unjust in any sense of injustice is not qualified to be an Imam, and this is proof of the Imam's infallibility, this makes it clear that the Imamate does not mean political Leadership that is merely leading the society in political affairs.

On the other hand, Allah did not limit the Imamate to a specific time, and the Imam can be present at any time. In addition, being a prophet is not a condition in Imamate, and the person who is an Imam doesn't need to be a prophet, Allah did not make the Imamate of the descendants of Ibrahim

conditional on them being prophets, but conditioned it on infallibility and avoidance of injustice. Therefore, the infallible from the descendants of Ibrahim can have the Imamate at any time, and there is no reason that there will be no Imam after the last Prophet. However, the first Imam must be introduced by the divine command through the Prophet as for the others the previous Imam can introduce them.

According to the reliable hadiths in Shia and Sunni sources, no one except Ali ibn Abī Tālib has been introduced as Imam after the Prophet, and none of the caliphs other than him claimed to have been appointed to Imamate by the Prophet. As it is stated in Sahīh Bukhari ‘Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb himself confirmed it about allegiance to Abu Bakr. In this narration, which is from Ibn Abbas, it is narrated that some people said that allegiance to Abu Bakr was “Faltah”, meaning sudden and without consulting the people’s opinion and without reckoning. ‘Umar replied, “Yes, it is true that this allegiance was sudden and unaccounted for, but in any case, Allah protected us from its evil.” (Al-Bukhārī, *ibid*) Thus, according to ‘Umar the appointment of Abu Bakr happened in haste by people, and it was not from Allah and His Messenger. They considered themselves merely caliphs in political and worldly affairs. However, the prophet on different occasions like the event of Ghadīr Khum introduced Imam Ali as his successor and as Imam and guardian after him (Ibn Abī Shaybah, 1988, vol.2: 682 & vol.6: 368); (Ibn Hanbal, 1983, vol.2: 610 & 682); (Ibn Mājah, n.d., vol.1: 43.); (Abu Ya'lā, 1952, vol.1: 428 & vol.11:307); (Ibn Hibbān, 1993, vol.15: 375).

Thus, if one rejects the Imamate of Ali after the prophet, then he has to believe that there is no one after the prophet to be considered an Imam in its Qur’anic sense.



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