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**Defining the Ahl al-Bayt (as): Qur'anic, Prophetic, and Scholarly Perspectives on the Household of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)**

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**Abstract**

This article employs comparative analysis to explore the theological debate surrounding the definition of Prophet Mohammad's Ahl al-Bayt (People of the Prophet's purified Household). Drawing on classical and modern sources, it investigates both literal and technical meanings in the Qur'an, early Islamic reports, and later scholarship. Focusing on key narrations, especially about Zayd ibn Arqam, and the Verse of Purification (Qur'an 33:33), the study contrasts Sunni and Shi'a interpretations, including the influence of the Hadith al-Kisā'. Through linguistic, exegetical, and historical analysis, the article argues that while a broad definition includes the Prophet's wives, children, and relatives, the Qur'anic and hadith contexts emphasize a narrower group linked to purification and spiritual authority. It concludes that the term "Ahl al-Bayt" is contextually defined, affecting understandings of Islamic theology and religious authority.

**Keywords:** Ahl al-Bayt (as), Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), Verse of Purification, *Hadith al-Kisā'*, Islamic Exegesis.




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## I. Introduction

Prophet Mohammad identified his Ahl al-Bayt (People of the Household) on multiple occasions; however, the precise composition of this group remains contested. A notable discussion occurred when a delegation of Tabi'īn, led by Yazid b. Hayyan, consulted the companion Zayd ibn Arqam. During their exchange, a man named Husein asked whether the Prophet's wives were considered part of his Ahl al-Bayt. Zayd responded that while the wives are generally part of the household, the specific Ahl al-Bayt referenced in the context of *Hadith al-Thaqalayn* which he recounted to them are those family members for whom zakat is prohibited (Muslim, 2007, p. 267-268).

Two narrations preserve this dialogue with apparent contradictions, affirming and denying the wives' inclusion, but these are complementary rather than conflicting. Zayd distinguished between the Prophet's broader household, which includes wives and blood relatives, and the spiritually distinct Ahl al-Bayt emphasized in the *Hadith al-Thaqalayn*. This nuanced distinction underscores the longstanding theological debate on the precise identity of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt.

### Literature Review

This article examines the enduring debate over the identity of Prophet Mohammad's Ahl al-Bayt (People of the Prophet's purified household) as mentioned in the Verse of Purification (Qur'ān 33:33), highlighting divergent views among early companions, classical Sunni scholars like al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Qurtubi, and Shi'a authorities such as al-Tusi and al-Tabataba'i. While Sunni interpretations often include the Prophet's wives alongside his daughter Fatimah, his cousin Ali, and grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, Shi'a scholars argue for a restricted definition excluding the wives, based primarily on the *Hadith al-Kisā'* (Tradition of the Cloak) and linguistic analysis indicating a divine declaration of infallibility (*'iṣma*) for this specific group. Al-Tabari (d. 923 CE/31) acknowledge this in his exegesis, and he writes:

"The scholars of interpretation differed regarding those intended by the phrase "Ahl al-Bayt" (the people of the household). Some said it refers to the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn—may God be pleased with them. Others said it refers to the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him)." (Tabari, 2014, p. 150, 160)

### The Argument and Structure of the Article

The article structures its analysis to: introduce the debate; explore literal and theological meanings of "Ahl al-Bayt;" review Qur'anic references to prophetic families; compare exegeses of the Verse of Purification; analyze the *Hadith al-Kisā'* and its authenticity; and discuss theological



implications. It argues that although the Prophet's wives are generally considered part of his household, the strict Qur'anic context and prophetic tradition exclude them from the spiritually purified Ahl al-Bayt. This nuanced, contextual definition has significant consequences for Islamic theology and religious authority, reconciling varying Sunni and Shi'a perspectives while emphasizing the exclusive spiritual status of Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn within the Prophet's true Ahl al-Bayt.

## II. Meaning of "Ahl al-Bayt"

### Literal Meaning

The phrase "Ahl al-Bayt" (People of the House) appears twice in the Qur'an: first regarding Prophet Ibrahim and his family, including his wife (Qur'an 11:73), and second concerning Prophet Mohammad and his family (Qur'an 33:33). Linguistically, "Ahl al-Bayt" literally means the "people or family of the house." Classical Arab linguist Ibn Manẓūr defines "Ahl" as the inhabitants or close relatives living in the same household, indicating familial ties based on kinship or residence (Ibn Manzur, 1955, p. 28). Similarly, Al-Zabīdī explains that "Ahl" refers to kin or those closely connected by blood, marriage, or household relations, emphasizing intimate family membership (Al-Zabīdī, 1965, p. 316). Both sources highlight the term's connotation of close familial association within a shared dwelling.

### Technical Meaning

Majority of the Sunni scholars are of the opinion that the wives of Prophet Mohammad were of his Ahl al-Bayt in every situation and circumstance. On the contrary, the Shi'a are of the view that the wives of Prophet Mohammad though were part of his Ahl al-Bayt in entirety, however, they were excluded in at least three (3) occasions namely:

The Qur'anic Verse of purification (*āyāt at-Taḥīr*)

The Qur'anic Verse of Malediction (*āyāt Mubahala*)

Hadith of the two weighty things (*Al-Thaqalayn*)

## III. The Ahl al-bayt in the Qur'an

The term Ahl al-Bayt (أهل البيت) appears both directly and indirectly in the Qur'an in reference to the families of several prophets, notably Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and Nūh (Noah).

### A. Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and His Ahl al-Bayt

Historically, Prophet Ibrāhīm had two wives who bore him two children - one from each. These two children later went on to establish an extended family tree which Qur'an called "Āli Ibrāhīm (family of Ibrāhīm)." However, prior to the birth of one of the two children of Prophet Ibrāhīm, the angels announce to Ibrāhīm and his wife who were both very old and (the wife) barren, the birth of a son, and say:

“Do you wonder at the Decree of Allah? The Mercy of Allah and His Blessings be on you, O people of the house. Surely, He (Allah) is All-Praiseworthy, All-Glorious.” (Qur’ān 11: 73)

On the term "Ahl al-Bayt" used in this verse, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī writes:

“As for His saying: ‘Ahl al-Bayt’ (People of the Household), it is a form of praise for them; thus, it is in the accusative either as a vocative or as an expression of specification (*ikhtiṣāṣ*). Then this [praise] is reinforced by His statement: "Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious." The Praiseworthy (*Ḥamīd*) is the One whose actions are praised, and Glorious (*Majīd*) is the noble and generous—the One possessed of honor and magnanimity. Among the praiseworthy actions is leading the obedient servant to his desire and aspiration, and among the kinds of grace and generosity is that the seeker is not withheld from his aim. So, if it is known that He, exalted is He, is capable of all things, and that He is Praiseworthy and Glorious, then how can astonishment still remain in the reality of the matter? Thus, it is established that the purpose of mentioning these words is to remove any astonishment.” (Al-Razi, n.d, p. 213)

Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr says:

"The mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O People of the Household. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious." — That is: He is praiseworthy in all His actions and words, one who is praised and exalted in His attributes and essence. For this reason, it is confirmed in the two Ṣaḥīḥs [al-Bukhārī and Muslim] that they said: "We know how to send peace upon you, but how do we send blessings upon you, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: Say: 'O Allah, send blessings upon Moḥammad and upon the family of Moḥammad, just as You sent blessings upon Abraham and upon the family of Abraham, and bless Moḥammad and the family of Moḥammad, just as You blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.'" (Ibn Kathīr, 2000, p. 492)

This imply that from the Qur'an usage of the term "Ahl al-Bayt", wife(s) is naturally inclusive in it enjoying the praises, glorification and blessings on the condition as Rāzī notes, that: Among the praiseworthy actions is leading the obedient servant to his desire and aspiration, and among the kinds of grace and generosity is that the seeker is not withheld from his aim. Likewise, it is understood from the hadīth cited (above) by Ibn Kathīr that he perfectly agrees.

### **B. The *Dhuriyyah* of Ibrāhīm**

The Qur'an uses the term *dhuriyyah* (ذُرِّيَّةً) to refer to the descendants of Prophet Ibrāhīm, explicitly excluding his wife(s) in this context. For example, Qur'ān 2:124 records: “And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words... ‘Surely I will make you an Imam of men.’ Ibrahim said:



‘And of my offspring?’ My covenant does not include the unjust, said He.” Linguistically, "Dhuriyyah" denotes offspring or progeny, derived from the root "ذَرَأَ" (*dhara'a*), meaning "to create" or "bring forth" (Ibn Manzur, 1955, p. 80; al-Fayruzabadi, 2005, p. 642). Both *Lisan al-‘Arab* and *Al-Qamus al-Muhit* emphasize its reference to lineage and descendants.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī adds a grammatical and theological dimension, explaining that "and from my offspring" is linked to the preceding divine promise of leadership, indicating Ibrahim’s request for some descendants to be appointed as leaders, fulfilled by prophets including Mohammad (al-Rāzī, n.d, p. 213). This demonstrates that divine leadership excludes unjust members regardless of lineage.

Thus, while “Ahl al-Bayt” generally includes wives, children, and descendants, the Qur’anic context—exemplified by Ibrahim’s narrative—highlights the exclusion of corrupt family members from divine leadership, as underscored by the covenant excluding the unjust (Qur’ān 2:124).

### **C. Nūh (Noah), His Ahl al-Bayt, Renegade Wife and Son**

Qur’an gives a concise story of Prophet Nūh, his family and people with regards to the flood.

"(Remember) Noah, when he cried (to Us) aforetime: We listened to his (prayer) and delivered him and his family from great distress" (Qur’ān 21:76)

However, Nūh's son was excommunicated from his family for rejecting the truth, and was destroyed. Quran continues:

"So, he said: 'Embark ye on the Ark in the name of Allah, whether it move or be at rest... So the Ark floated with them on the waves (towering) like mountains, and Noah called out to his son, who had separated himself (from the rest):

"O my son (Noah said)! Embark with us, and be not with the unbelievers!" The son replied: "I will betake myself to some mountain: it will save me from the water."

Noah said: "This day nothing can save, from the command of Allah, any but those on whom He hath mercy!" And the waves came between them, and the son was among those overwhelmed in the Flood." (Qur’ān 11: 41-44)

Finally, Nūh's understanding of his son as a member of his family whom Allah has promised to protect from the great disaster is redefined. Qur’ān reveals:

“And Noah called upon His Lord, and said: "O my Lord! Surely My son is of my family! And Thy promise is true... He said: "O Noah! He is not of thy family for his conduct is unrighteous. So ask not of Me that of which thou hast no knowledge..." (Qur’ān 11: 45-46)

This verse (and the previous verse with respect to Ibrāhīm) exclusively reveals that true membership of a family (especially that of the Prophets) is on the condition of faith and righteousness, otherwise, unbelievers, sinners and unrighteous individuals are not qualified to be part of the "Ahl (family)" of the Prophets.

Also, in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān 66: 10), there is a reference to the wives of Nūh and Lūt as examples of disbelievers among the families of prophets, indicating that mere marital bond or blood relation does not guarantee inclusion in the blessed "Ahl al-Bayt."

‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī writes:

His saying: “We said, ‘Load upon it [the Ark] of every kind, two [mates]’” — that is, We commanded Noah (peace be upon him) to carry aboard the Ark a pair from every species of animals, namely a male and a female.

His saying: “and your family — except those for whom the word [of punishment] has already preceded” — that is, carry aboard your family, meaning those closely associated with him such as his wife, children, the wives of his children, and their children — except those for whom Our word had already gone forth and Our prior decree had been issued that they would perish. The one excluded here was his treacherous wife, mentioned by God the Exalted in His saying: “God sets forth an example for those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants, but they betrayed them” (Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2020, p. 37-38)

And with regards to the son of Nūh, Ṭabāṭabā’ī continues: God’s saying: “He said, ‘O Noah, indeed he is not of your family. Indeed, he is [one whose] conduct was not righteous, so do not ask Me about that of which you have no knowledge,’” etc. — God clarified for Noah (peace be upon him) the correct perspective concerning what he had mentioned in his plea: “My Lord, indeed my son is of my family, and indeed Your promise is true,” — by which he sought the salvation of his son. So, God said: “Indeed, he is not of your family,” thereby invalidating the basis of Noah’s argument. The meaning of “he is not of your family” — and God knows best — is that he is not among those members of your family whom God had promised to save. For the intended meaning of “your family” in His saying “and your family — except those for whom the word has already preceded” is the righteous among his family. [Noah’s son] was not righteous, even though he was technically his son and thus a member of his family in the sense of personal association. Therefore, the statement “he is not of your family” is explained by His saying: “Indeed, he is [one whose] conduct was not righteous.” (ibid, p. 43-45)



### D. Comparison of Commentaries by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Allamah Tabatabai

Both scholars agree that Ahl al-Bayt includes close family members but insist that faith and righteousness are essential criteria for inclusion. Tabatabai places more emphasis on the spiritual and purified nature of the Ahl al-Bayt, while Razi focuses on the obedience and divine favor as signs of their status.

Aspect	Fakhr al-Din al-Razi	Allamah Tabatabai
Definition of Ahl al-Bayt	Primarily the immediate family of the prophet, emphasizing faith and obedience.	Emphasizes both blood relation and spiritual purification; Ahl al-Bayt are divinely chosen and purified.
On the family of Ibrahim	Focus on obedience and divine blessing as markers of Ahl al-Bayt status.	Views Ibrahim's family as a prototype for Ahl al-Bayt, highlighting spiritual purity.
On the family of Nūh	Stresses the exclusion of disbelievers even if kin by blood, highlighting faith as essential.	Differentiates between biological and spiritual kinship; only the faithful are true Ahl al-Bayt.
Overall approach	Rational and theological, focusing on obedience and divine favor.	Mystical and theological, emphasizing purification and divine selection.

## IV. PROPHET MOHAMMAD'S AHL AL-BAYT IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'anic reference to the family of Prophet Muhammad in relation to "Ahl al-Bayt" is debated between Sunni and Shi'a perspectives, particularly in Qur'an 33:33.

### A. Sunni Perspective

Sunni exegetes generally interpret the preceding and following verses as addressing the Prophet's wives. However, the verse containing "Ahl al-Bayt" uses a masculine plural pronoun, prompting varied explanations. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Al-Rāzī, 1981, p. 225-226) posits that this shift broadens the addressees to include the Prophet's children, Hasan, Husayn, and Ali, alongside the wives, drawing on hadith sources. Conversely, Ibn

‘Āshūr argues the verse addresses the wives exclusively, and the masculine pronoun reflects the Prophet’s role as household head, maintaining the feminine pronoun in surrounding verses for the wives. (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984, p. 270) The grammatical shift suggests either a new group or an inclusive form, though interpretations differ on the addressees’ scope.

### **B. Shi‘a Perspective**

Shi‘a scholars unanimously hold that the verse’s masculine plural pronoun, exclusivity particle (*innamā*), and emphasis (*tathīran*) indicate a distinct, exclusive group separate from the wives. Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī emphasizes that the pronoun ‘ankum (you, masculine plural) cannot refer exclusively to the wives, who would require the feminine plural ‘ankunna, thereby supporting an interpretation that includes males beyond the wives. (Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2020, p. 131-135) This group corresponds to the spiritually purified Ahl al-Bayt, distinct from the general household. While Shi‘a views align partly with al-Rāzī’s notion of a new, exclusive group, they reject Ibn ‘Āshūr’s restriction to the wives alone.

Thus, the pronoun shift within the verse serves as a linguistic marker distinguishing the exclusive, purified Ahl al-Bayt from the general reference to the Prophet’s wives, shaping divergent theological interpretations within Sunni and Shi‘a traditions.

### **C. The *Hadīth* (Narration) Perspective**

The Qur’ān generally employs broad terms to guide humanity, with specific details provided through the Prophet Muhammad’s explanations. Regarding the verse “And Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the house, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying” (33:33), both Sunni and Shi‘a traditions agree that Prophet Muhammad specified its addressees.

Al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 H) records a narration from Umar bin Abi Salamah, in which the Prophet gathered Fatimah, Hasan, Husayn, and Ali under a cloak, praying for their purification and identifying them as his Ahl al-Bayt, excluding his wife Umm Salamah, who was acknowledged as good but not part of this group (Al-Tirmidhī, 2007, p. 435-436). This narration is authenticated by scholars such as Al-Albani, Al-Dhahabi, and Al-Hākim. Al-Hākim further documents a variant in which Umm Salamah asks about her inclusion, and the Prophet distinguishes between his (specific) Ahl al-Bayt and his broader family (Al-Hākim, 1990, p. 158).

Ibn Kathīr, in his Tafsīr, records a similar narration through ‘Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, confirming the same identification of Ahl al-Bayt; and another narration from Abu Sa’īd Al-Khudri limiting the number to only five persons as at the time (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, p. 411-412). Additionally, Muslim Ibn Hajjaj’s Sahih and Shi‘a hadith sources such as Al-Kulayni



reference this “Hadith al-Kisa” (The Cloak), aligning on the purification and designation of Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn as the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt (Muslim, 2007, p. 284; Al-Kulayni, 2007, p. 172).

In summary, the hadith establish two key points: first, the verse (33:33) was independently revealed; second, Prophet Mohammad explicitly excluded his wives from the Ahl al-Bayt mentioned in this verse, naming only Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn as its referents.

### **1. A Precise Explanation of Ibn Asakir Shafi’iy**

Ibn Asakir (d. 1176 CE/571 A. H) also documents the hadith of Umm Salamah in yet another version:

From Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) who said: This verse was revealed in my house (“And Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the house, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying”). She said: O Messenger of Allah, aren't I from Ahl al-bayt? He (Prophet) said: You are upon good, you are from the wives of Messenger of Allah, Peace be upon him.

She said: And the Ahl al-Bayt: Messenger of Allah, are ‘Alī, Fātimah, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, May Allah be please with them all.

Ibn Asakir comments: “This report is authentic...”

After discussing the chain of transmission and various version of the hadith, Ibn Asakir then comments:

“And her saying: [And the Ahl al-Bayt] are those whom she mentioned referring to those who were found in the house at that time [i.e the Prophet, ‘Alī, Fātimah, al-Hasan and al-Husayn], otherwise the entire family of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and all of them, are the people of his house (the Ahl al-Bayt), but the verse was revealed specifically over those mentioned. God knows.” (Ibn Asakir, n.d, p. 105-106)

In summary, Sunni and Shi’a scholars differ on the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt in relation to the verse “And Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the house, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying,” presenting three main views:

a) The verse exclusively refers to the Prophet’s wives, as argued by Ibn ‘Āshūr and supported by Ikrimah (the freed slave of Ibn ‘Abbas), who challenged dissenters to a Mubahala (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, p. 411-412). This view is widely rejected due to the masculine plural pronoun used, the verse’s independent revelation, and the Prophet’s own clarification excluding his wives.

b) The verse includes the Prophet’s wives along with others, explaining the shift between feminine and masculine plural pronouns. This position, favored by Ar-Rāzi and common among Sunni scholars, aligns with the

larger textual context addressing the wives. However, it is weakened by the consistent hadith specifying the Ahl al-Bayt without including the wives.

c) A minority of Sunni scholars and the entire Shi'a Imami School hold that the verse refers solely to five individuals: the Prophet, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn, explicitly excluding the Prophet's wives.

## 2. The Verse of Malediction and The hadith of Two Weighty Things

The Qur'an uses the phrase "Ahl al-Bayt" to denote Prophet Mohammad's special family; however, the verse of malediction (Mubahala, Qur'an 3:61) does not explicitly use this phrase but identifies individual members clearly.

In this verse, Allah commands calling upon sons, women, and near relatives for a mutual invocation of God's curse on liars, between the Muslim community and the Christian community of Najran. Muslim bin al-Hajjaj records that upon its revelation, the Prophet summoned 'Alī, Fātimah, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn, referring to them as his Ahl (family). (Muslim, 2007, p. 267-269) Despite the plural "Nisā-anā'" (our women), authentic narrations and historical context exclude the wives of the Prophet from this group.

Ibn Kathīr's Tafsīr clarifies: Jabir ibn Abdullah stated that "ourselves" refer to the Prophet and 'Ali; "our sons" to al-Hasan and al-Husayn; and "our women" specifically to Fātimah (Ibn Kathīr, 1971, p. 47). This further emphasizes that the special family mentioned excludes the Prophet's wives, aligning the members of the Mubahala with the core Ahl al-Bayt.

Hadīth Al-Thaqalayn, recorded by Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj, presents Prophet Mohammad's identification of two "weighty things" he leaves for guidance: the Book of Allah (Qur'an) and his Ahl al-Bayt (Muslim, 2007, p. 267-269). During a sermon at Ghadir al-Khumm, the Prophet urged adherence to both. When asked about the identity of his Ahl al-Bayt, Zaid ibn Arqam distinguished between the Prophet's wives and the specific family members for whom zakat is forbidden—naming 'Ali, his descendants, as well as the descendants of 'Aqil, Ja'far, and 'Abbas.

This hadīth emphasizes the Prophet's legacy as encompassing both the Qur'an and his family, expanding the Ahl al-Bayt to include extended relatives, although the wives were excluded in this context. While the literal meaning of Ahl al-Bayt may include this broader group, theologically and regarding post-Prophetic guidance, the focus is on a streamlined core group consistent with earlier traditions.

Al-Tirmidhi further affirms this in similar narrations where adherence to the Book and the Prophet's "itrah" or Ahl al-Bayt is necessary to avoid misguidance, and these groups will remain united until the afterlife (Al-Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 435-436). Jabir ibn Abdullah also confirms the



connection between the Ahl al-Bayt and the Prophet's "itrah" in his last Hajj sermon (ibid). These reports clarify that the Ahl al-Bayt in Hadith al-Thaqalayn refers broadly to the Prophet's spiritual lineage or itrah.

### 1. Meaning of 'Itrah

The term *'itrah* linguistically denotes a man's closest descendants and blood relatives. Ibn Manẓūr explains that the *'itrah* includes near kin from offspring and other relatives, with scholars offering nuanced interpretations. Abū 'Ubaydah and others define it as a man's nearest blood relations, while Ibn al-'Athīr describes it as the most special blood relations. Ibn al-'Arābī specifies it as descendants and progeny, particularly designating the Prophet's *'itrah* as the descendants of Fatimah. Abu Sa'īd uses a metaphor, likening the *'itrah* to the trunk of a tree that includes 'Abd al-Mutalib and his descendants. Another interpretation confines the Prophet's *'itrah* to his closest family, namely his children, 'Alī, and 'Alī's offspring (Ibn Manẓūr, 1955, p. 538).

In relation to Hadīth al-Thaqalayn, the statement "I have left among you, that which if you hold fast to it, you will never go astray" emphasizes the guidance left for the Muslim community after the Prophet's death, namely the Qur'ān and his Ahl al-Bayt. The hadith scholar Al-Nawawi interprets the term *thaqalayn* as denoting the significance and grandeur of these two legacies and stresses that both must be followed (Al-Nawawi, 1986, p. 180).

Therefore, considering the meaning of Hadīth al-Thaqalayn and the Prophet's specific use of the term *itratīy* (my offspring), the inclusion of extended relatives such as 'Aqil, Ja'far, and 'Abbas and their progeny within the Ahl al-Bayt is seen as inappropriate from the standpoint of guiding the Ummah after the Prophet's demise.

## V. MERIT OF MOHAMMAD'S AHL AL-BAYT

### A. Purpose of Qur'ān 33:33 - Verse of Purification

Whether the verse of purification is understood as addressing the entire family of Prophet Mohammad due to contextual and grammatical considerations, or as restricted to a specific group based on hadith evidence, its fundamental purpose remains the same: to declare Allah's spiritual purification of the Ahl al-Bayt from *al-Rijs* (the uncleanness).

The Qur'ān states: "And Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the house, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying" (33:33). Two key terms in this verse: *Al-Rijs* (uncleanness) and *At-Tahara* (purification), carry significant meaning when examined in the Qur'anic context. Their exploration reveals the verse's depth and central objective, which is the spiritual cleansing and sanctification of the Prophet's family.

### B. Meaning of *al-Rijs* from Qur'anic perspective

In the verse of purification (Qur'an 33:33), the term *Al-Rijs* (the uncleanness) with the definite article *Al-* signifies a general concept encompassing both physical and spiritual forms of impurity. This dual meaning can be illustrated through examples in the Qur'an.

Physical *rijs* is explicitly mentioned in Qur'an 6:145, where forbidden foods such as carrion, blood, and pork are described as *rijs* (unclean). This indicates material impurity related to dietary prohibitions.

Spiritual *rijs* is described in Qur'an 6:125, where Allah places uncleanness upon those who do not believe, metaphorically narrowing their hearts. This spiritual uncleanness reflects misguidedness and rejection of faith. Similarly, Qur'an 5:41 refers to *rijs* in terms of impurity arising from disbelief or hypocrisy.

Further examples of spiritual *rijs* include Qur'an 22:30, which commands avoiding the uncleanness of idols—not the physical idols themselves, but the act of idol worship—as well as Qur'an 10:100, which attributes *rijs* to those overwhelmed by doubt and misguidance. Hypocrisy (*nifaa*) is also classified as *rijs* (Qur'an 9:95).

Sin, being of varying degrees and both open and secret, is also considered *rijs*. Qur'an 6:120 commands believers to avoid all sin, and sin is connected with misguidance (Qur'an 36:60-62), which itself is likened to a form of polytheism (*shirk*), categorized as *rijs* (Qur'an 31:13). Generally, unrighteous actions are sins and thus classified as *rijs* (Qur'an 3:162-163). These distinctions highlight that *rijs* exists on a spectrum of physical and spiritual uncleanness.

### C. *Tahārah* (Purity or Cleanliness)

The concept of *Tahārah* (purity) similarly covers both physical and spiritual cleanliness in the Qur'ān. Physical purity includes practices such as ablution with water, as stated in Qur'an 8:11 and 5:6, where believers are instructed to purify themselves through ritual washing.

Spiritual purity is also emphasized, as seen in Qur'an 2:25, where purified mates are promised, and in Qur'an 2:13-15, which references purified books. The allowance of dry ablution (*tayammum*) in Qur'an 5:6 and the mention of *zakaat* (almsgiving) as a form of spiritual purification in Qur'an 58:12 further illustrate this duality.

Together, these examples from the Qur'an demonstrate that the verse of purification (33:33) addresses both the physical and spiritual purification of the Ahl al-Bayt from all forms of *rijs*, emphasizing a comprehensive sanctification.



## VI. REMOVAL OF *AL-RIJS* (THE UNCLEANNES) FROM THE AHL AL-BAYT

In the Verse of Purification (“And Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the house, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying”), the definite particle *Al-* in *al-rijs* indicates a comprehensive scope, encompassing all forms of uncleanness—moral, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, and acts connected to anything other than Allah. This signifies that Allah removes all these forms of *rijs* from the Ahl al-Bayt.

The phrase *wa yutahirakum tathira* (“and to purify you a (thorough) purifying”) is an example of *maf’ul al-mutlaq* (absolute object) in Arabic grammar, which denotes absoluteness, perfection, and completeness. This absolute purification is unrestricted by any particular state or condition, whether of forgetfulness, ignorance, propagation, or others, meaning that the removal of *al-rijs* applies universally in all circumstances.

Shihāb al-Dīn Ālusi, commenting on the verse, explains that *al-rijs* metaphorically refers to sin, immorality, Satan, polytheism, doubt, miserliness, whims, innovations, and other spiritual impurities. Though some interpretations may vary in precision, the term covers all such impurity and shortcomings comprehensively (Ālusi, 1994, p. 14).

This removal of *al-rijs* is understood as a divine grace (*lutf*) bestowed upon the Ahl al-Bayt. Al-Tabarī states that the *ahl al-bayt* are purified from all evil and favored by God’s mercy, emphasizing this as Allah’s intentional act to cleanse them from the impurity found among the disobedient (Al-Tabari, 2001, p. 6-8).

Thus, the verse affirms an absolute and thorough spiritual purification of the Prophet’s household from all forms of uncleanness as part of Allah’s special grace.

### A. Implicit Exclusion of the Wives of Mohammad

If the Verse of Purification aims to remove all forms of uncleanness from the Prophet Mohammad’s Ahl al-Bayt, then only those members who fulfil the Qur’anic criteria of true faith and righteousness within this context can be included in that purified group. Consequently, any individual lacking these qualities is excluded despite any marital or blood relationship.

Regarding the wives of the Prophet, the Qur’an explicitly addresses them in Surah Al-Ahzab (33:32), stating: “O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women provided you have *taqwa* (fear of God).” This verse clearly places spiritual status on the basis of *taqwā* and righteousness rather than on marital bond alone. The preceding verses (28–31) offer the wives a choice between worldly pleasure and the hereafter, outlining requirements such as fear of God, uttering good speech, decent

conduct, staying within their homes, maintaining prayer, giving charity, and obeying Allah and His Messenger (Qur'an 33:28-33).

Only after establishing these conditions does the verse of purification affirm Allah's desire "to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying" (Qur'an 33:33). Therefore, those wives of the Prophet who meet these Qur'anic conditions of piety and righteousness are truly part of his purified Ahl al-Bayt. Conversely, those who do not fulfill these criteria are Ahl al-Bayt only nominally, not spiritually or in terms of divine purification. This framework clarifies inclusion within the purified Ahl al-Bayt as dependent on moral and spiritual merit rather than solely familial ties.

### **B. Spiritual Conduct and Accountability of the Prophet's Wives**

The conduct and spiritual status of some of Prophet Mohammad's wives are critically examined in Surah At-Tahrim (66). The Qur'an reveals an incident where the Prophet confided a secret to one wife, who then disclosed it to another, breaching trust and faithfulness (Qur'an 66:3). This breach indicated a deeper deviation in their hearts, reflecting opposition against the Prophet. The subsequent verse warns them to repent, describing their hearts as "crooked" or "deviated" (Qur'an 66:4). Classical exegetes such as Ibn Abbas and Mujāhid interpret this deviation as a serious spiritual failing—sin and moral crookedness—underscoring that these wives did not fulfil the spiritual purity demanded by the Verse of Purification (Al-Tabari, 2001, p. 483).

Moreover, the Qur'an explicitly issues a stern warning, including the prospect of divorce, stating that Allah could replace these wives with others who are true believers—obedient, repentant, sincere in worship, fasting, emigrants for Allah's sake, whether previously married or virgins (Qur'an 66:5). This highlights that the acceptance into the purified Ahl al-Bayt depends not simply on marital relation but on genuine faith and righteousness.

The Qur'an sets a high spiritual standard for the Prophet's wives, emphasizing that they are distinct from other women only if they possess *taqwa* (fear of God) and obedience (Qur'an 33:32). Their elevated status entails double reward or punishment, reflecting their role as exemplars for the Muslim community.

Additionally, the Qur'an recalls the example of the wives of Prophets Nūh and Lūt, underscoring that unrighteous family members, even of prophetic lineage, are excluded from the pure Ahl (family) if they act treacherously (Qur'an 66:10). This serves as a precedent that lineage alone does not guarantee inclusion.



Historically, Surah At-Tahrim is generally accepted to have been revealed after Surah Al-Ahzab, addressing a specific private matter in the Prophet's household, while Al-Ahzab focused on broader social and marital issues, including the Battle of the Trench (5 AH) and marital laws. At-Tahrim, likely revealed around 7-8 AH, serves as the final Qur'anic revelation concerning the Prophet's wives.

The consequence of this divine standard is evident after the Prophet's death. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani records a prophetic narration about one wife who disobeyed the Prophet's commands by leaving her house, leading a faction that ignited the first Muslim civil war—the Battle of the Camel—resulting in thousands of deaths (Al-Asqalani, 2005, p. 55). This event exemplifies the violation of the conditions necessary for inclusion in the purified Ahl al-Bayt and affirms that spiritual and moral criteria govern true membership in this sanctified group.

## VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The article addresses the highly nuanced problem of whom constitutes the Prophet Mohammad's Ahl al-Bayt, a problem which has occasioned so much debate amongst Muslims throughout history. By means of investigating the Prophet's companions' accounts—specifically Zayd ibn Arqam—and investigation of the Qur'anic revelations and hadiths, the study reveals that even early Muslims grappled with this issue. Classical Sunni and Shi'a scholars offer differing interpretations: Sunnis often include the Prophet's wives as part of Ahl al-Bayt, while Shi'a authorities, drawing on the Hadith al-Kisā' and the Verse of Purification, restrict the term to the Prophet, Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn. The etymological roots of "Ahl al-Bayt" and its use in the Qur'an are discussed in the article, where it is noted that even though the term is employed to denote all close relatives in general, its scope narrows when the context of religious naivety and guidance is connoted. The research also considers the priority of earlier prophets such as Ibrahim, where his kinspeople were praised but whose covenant was not sealed with unjust descendants. Lastly, the article dispels the apparent paradoxes in early descriptions through emphasizing the necessity of context in interpreting "Ahl al-Bayt," arguing that the meaning of the term varies depending on theological and historical contexts.



Finally, the identity of the Prophet Mohammad's Ahl al-Bayt is a multifaceted and situationally relative issue in Islamic scholarship. The article establishes that while the common linguistic and societal meaning of "Ahl al-Bayt" is wives, children, and close kin, the Qur'anic and hadith evidence, particularly in cases involving spiritual purity and stewardship, rely on a more restricted meaning centered on the Prophet, Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn. This distinction is reinforced by both Sunni and Shi'a sources, though each tradition emphasizes different aspects. The study underscores the necessity of contextual interpretation, recognizing that the term's application varies according to the theological and historical framework. By carefully examining primary sources and scholarly opinions, the article provides a balanced perspective that acknowledges the diversity of Islamic thought on this foundational issue. It not only sheds much light on the classical debate but also illuminates contemporary debates related to religious authority and the prophet's family heritage.



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