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The Twelve Successors of the Holy Prophet

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Narrations of the Prophet on the number of Imams, the twelve Imams according to the school of caliphate, brief account of the Imams.

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Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds. Benedictions be upon Muhammad (S) and his Purified Progeny.

Peace be upon the righteous Companions.

Some of the controversial issues have divided the Muslims. These issues have been misused by the enemies of Islam to divide the Muslims and to weaken them. Therefore, in order to unite the Muslims and to defend the boundaries of Islam it is necessary to clear the misunderstandings regarding these differences. In sorting out these issues we have been ordered to confine ourselves within some limits. As the Almighty Allah says:

"And obey Allah and His Apostle and so not quarrel for then you will be weak in hearts and your power will depart..." (Sura al-Anfal, 8:46)

It is a must for us today, and for all times to refer to Qur'an and Hadith in case of any difference of opinion. As the Almighty Allah says:

"...then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle..." (Sura an-Nisa', 4:59)

In this series we shall refer to the Qur'an and Hadith to guide us on the correct path in various controversial topics. We seek the help of the Almighty in this.

Al-'Askari

Narrations of the Holy Prophet (S) Stipulating the Number of Imams

The Messenger of Allah (S) informed that the number of Imams after him are twelve, as the compilers of *Sihah* and *Masanid* have narrated it.

In *Sahih* of Muslim:

The Prophet (S) said: "The (Islamic) religion will continue until the Hour (day of resurrection), having **twelve Caliphs** for you, all of them will be from Quraysh."

حدثنا قتيبة بن سعيد وأبو بكر بن أبي شيبة قالوا حدثنا حاتم
وهو ابن إسماعيل عن المهاجر بن مسمار عن عامر بن سعد بن
أبي وقاص قال كتبت إلى جابر بن سمرة مع غلامي نافع أن
أخبرني بشئ سمعته من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال

فكتب إليّ سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يوم الجمعة
عشيّة رجم الأسلمي يقول لا يزال الدين قائماً حتى تقوم
الساعة أو يكون عليكم إثنا عشر خليفة كلهم من قريش
وسمعه يقول عُصيبة من المسلمين يفتتحون البيت الأبيض
بيت كسرى أو آل كرى وسمعه يقول إن بين يديّ الساعة
كذابين فاحذروهم وسمعه يقول إذا اعطى الله أحدكم خيراً
فليبدأ بنفسه وأهل بيته وسمعه يقول أنا الفرط على الحوض
حدثنا محمد بن رافع حدثنا ابن أبي فُديك حدثنا ابن أبي ذنب
عن مُهاجر بن مسمار عن عامر بن سعد أنه أرسل إلى ابن
سمرة العدويّ حدثنا ما سمعت من رسول الله صلى الله عليه
وسلم فقال سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول
فذكر نحو حديث حاتم.

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1453, Tradition # 10

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1010, Tradition # 4483

Hadith # 3398 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

The Prophet (S) said: "The affairs of people will continue to be conducted (well) as long as they are governed by the **twelve men**, all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا ابن أبي عمر حدثنا سُفيان عن عبد الله بن عمير عن
جابر بن سمرة قال سمعت النبيّ صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول
لا يزال أمر الناس ماضياً ما وليتم اثنا عشر رجلاً ثم تكلم النبيّ
صلى الله عليه وسلم بكلمة خفيت عليّ فسألت أبي ماذا قال
رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال كلهم من قريش ،
وحدثنا قتيبة بن سعيد حدثنا أبو عوانة عن سماك عن جابر بن
سمرة عن النبيّ صلى الله عليه وسلم بهذا الحديث ولم يذكر لا
يزال أمر الناس ماضياً

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1453, Tradition # 6

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1010, Tradition # 4478

Hadith # 3394 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

Narrated Jabir ibn Samura: The Prophet (S) said: "This matter (life) will not end, until it is passed by **twelve Caliphs**." He then whispered a sentence. I asked my father what the Prophet said. He said, the Prophet added: "All of them will be from Quraysh."

حدثنا قُتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ حَدَّثَنَا جَرِيرٌ عَنْ حُصَيْتٍ عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ سَمُرَةَ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ وَحَدَّثَنَا رِفَاعَةُ بْنُ الْهَيْثَمِ الْوَاسِطِيُّ وَاللَّفْظُ لَهُ حَدَّثَنَا خَالِدُ يَمْنَى ابْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الطَّحَّانِ عَنْ حُصَيْنٍ عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ سَمُرَةَ قَالَ دَخَلْتُ مَعَ أَبِي عَلِيٍّ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَسَمِعْتَهُ يَقُولُ إِنْ هَذَا الْأَمْرُ لَا يَنْقُضِي حَتَّى يَمْضِيَ فِيهِمْ اثْنَا عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً قَالَ ثُمَّ تَكَلَّمَ بِكَلَامٍ خَفِيَ عَلَيَّ قَالَ فَقُلْتُ لِأَبِي مَا قَالَ ، قَالَ كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ .

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1452, Tradition # 5

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1009, Tradition # 4477

Hadith # 3393 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

The Prophet (S) said: "Islam will continue to be triumphant until there have been **twelve Caliphs**, all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا هَدَابُ بْنُ خَالِدِ الْأَزْدِيِّ حَدَّثَنَا حَمَّادُ بْنُ سَلْمَةَ عَنْ سَمَاكِ بْنِ حَرْبٍ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ جَابِرَ بْنَ سَمُرَةَ يَقُولًا سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ لَا يَزَالُ الْإِسْلَامُ عَزِيزًا إِلَى اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً ثُمَّ قَالَ كَلِمَةً لَمْ أَفْهَمَهَا فَقُلْتُ لِأَبِي مَا قَالَ ، فَقَالَ كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ .

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1453, Tradition # 7

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1010, Tradition # 4479

Hadith # 3395 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

The Prophet (S) said: "Islam will continue to be triumphant until there have been **twelve Caliphs**, all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا أبو بكر بن أبي شيبة أبو معاوية عن داود عن الشعبي عن جابر بن سمرة قال ، قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لا يزال عزيزاً إلى اثني عشر خليفة قال ثم تكلم بشئ لم افهمه لأبي ما قال فقال كلهم من قريش.

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1453, Tradition # 8

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1010, Tradition # 4480

Hadith # 3396 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

The Prophet (S) said: "Islam will continue to be triumphant and protected until there have been **twelve Caliphs**, all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا نصر بن علي الجهضمي حدثنا يزيد بن زريع حدثنا ابن عون وحدثنا أحمد بن عثمان النوفلي واللفظ له حدثنا ابن عون عن الشعبي عن جابر بن سمرة قال انطلقت إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ومعني أبي فسمعتة يقول لا يزال هذا الدين عزيزاً منيعاً إلى اثني عشر خليفة فقال كلمة صميتها الناس فقلت لأبي ما قال ، قال كلهم من قريش.

Sahih Muslim (Arabic version) Kitab al-Imaara, 1980 Edition Pub. in Saudi Arabia, v. 3, p. 1453, Tradition # 9

Sahih Muslim, (English version) Chapter DCCLIV (titled: The People are subservient to the Quraysh and the Caliphate is the Right of the Quraysh), v. 3, p. 1010, Tradition # 4481

Hadith # 3397 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

In *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi:

The Prophet (S) said: "There will be after me **twelve Amir** (Prince/Ruler), all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا أبو كُريب محمد بن الملاء حدثنا عُمر بن عبيد الطنافسي[ؓ]
عن سماك بن حرب عن جابر بن سمرة قال ، قال رسول الله
صلى الله عليه وسلم يكون من بعدي اثنا عشر أميراً ، قال ثم
تكلم بشئ لم أفهمه فسألت الذي يليني فقال كُلهم من
قريش ، قال أبو عيسى هذا حديث حسن صحيح حدثنا أبو كُريب
حدثنا عمر بن عبيد عن أبيه عن أبي بكر بن أبي موسى عن
جابر بن سمرة عن النبي[ؐ] عن النبي[ؐ] صلى الله عليه وسلم مثل
هذا الحديث وقد رُوِيَ من غير وجه عن جابر بن سمرة قال أبو
عيسى هذا حديث حسن صحيح غريب يُستغرب من حديث أبي
بكر بن أبي موسى عن جابر بن سمرة وفي الباب عن ابن
مسعود وعبيد الله بن عمرو.

Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Arabic) Chapter of Fitan, 2:45 (India) and 4:501 Tradition # 2225 (Egypt)

Hadith # 2149 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

In *Sunan* of Abu Dawud:

"This religion remains standing until there are **twelve vicegerents** over you, all of them agreeable to the nation, all of them from Quraysh."

حدثنا عمرو بن عُثمان حدثنا مروان بن معاوية عن إسمعين
يعني ابن أبي خالد عن أبيه عن جابر بن سمرة قال سمعت
رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول لا يزال هذا الدين قائماً
حتى يكون عليكم اثنا عشر خليفة كُلهم تجتمع عليه الأمة
فسمعت كلاماً من النبي[ؐ] صلى الله عليه وسلم لم أفهمه قلت
لأبي ما يقول قال كُلهم من قريش.

Sunan Abu Dawud (Arabic) 2:421, Kitab al-Mahdi.

Sunan Abu Dawud (Arabic) 3:106, Kitab al-Mahdi.

Hadith # 3731 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

"The Prophet (S) said: "Islam will continue to be triumphant until there have been **twelve Caliphs**," So people said Takbir and made noise, then he said a light word I didn't hear. I (Jabir bin Samura) said to my father: What did he say? He said "All of them are from Quraysh."

حدثنا موسى بن اسمعيل حدثنا وهيب حدثنا داود عن عامر عن جابر بن سمرة قال سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول لا يزال هذا الدين عزيزاً إلى اثني عشر خليفة قال فكبر الناس وضجوا ثم قال كلمة خفيفة قلت لأبي يا أبت ما قال ، قال كلهم من قريش ، حدثنا ابن نفيل حدثنا زهير حدثنا زياد بن خيثمة حدثنا الأسود بن سعيد الهمداني عن جابر بن سمرة بهذا الحديث زاد فلما رجع إلى منزله أتته قريش فقالوا ثم يكون ماذا قال ثم يكون الهرج.

Sunan Abu Dawud (Arabic) 2:421, Kitab al-Mahdi.

Sunan Abu Dawud (Arabic) 3:106, Kitab al-Mahdi.

Hadith # 3732 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

In *Sahih* of al-Bukhari:

Narrated Jabir ibn Samura: I heard the Prophet saying, "There will be **twelve commanders** (*Amir*)." He then said a sentence which I did not hear. My father said, the Prophet added, "All of them will be from Quraysh."

حدثني محمد بن المُنْثِي حدثنا غندر حدثنا شُعْبَةَ عن عبد الملك سمعت جابر بن سمرة قال سمعت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول يكون اثنا عشر أميراً فقال كلمة لم اسمعها فقال أبي إنه قال كلهم من قريش.

Sahih al-Bukhari (English) Hadith: 9.329, Kitabul Ahkam.

Sahih al-Bukhari (Arabic) 4:165, Kitabul Ahkam.

Hadith # 6682 (numbering of *al-'Alamiyyah*)

These traditions are also narrated in other sources¹.

And in a tradition:

Then the Prophet (S) spoke a few words which I could not understand. Then I asked my father: "What did the Messenger of Allah (S) say?" He said: "All of them are from the Quraysh."²

And in another tradition:

"The enmity of their enemies will not harm them."³

And in another tradition:

"This nation will always remain straight in its affairs, and triumphant against the enemies, till **twelve Caliphs** will be among them; all of them from Quraysh. Then there will be discord and confusion."⁴

And in a tradition:

"There will be **twelve upright Imams** for this nation. Those who try to disgrace them will not succeed; all of them shall be from the Quraysh."

"The affair of the people will continue as long as **twelve men** rule over them."

And from Anas:

"This religion will remain till **twelve Imams** from Quraysh (will pass), then when they expire the earth will swallow its inhabitants."⁵

And in a tradition:

"The affair of this nation will always be apparent till the **twelve Imams** will rise, all of them from the Quraysh."⁶

Ahmad and Al-Hakim and others have narrated similarly from Masrooq who said:

"We were sitting one evening with Abdullah (ibn Mas'ud). We were reciting the Qur'an, then a man asked him: "O Abu Abdur-Rahman, did you ask the Messenger of Allah (S) how many Caliphs will rule this nation?" Abdullah said: "No one asked me about this before you from the time I arrived in Iraq." He said: "We asked him {the Prophet (S)}, he said: "**Twelve**, (like) the number of the Chiefs of Bani Israel."⁷

And in a tradition:

Ibn Mas'ud said: "The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "There will be Caliphs after me, whose number is like those of the companions of Musa."⁸

Ibn Kathir said: "And there is a similar narration from Abdullah bin 'Umar, Hudhayfah and Ibn 'Abbas."⁹

However, I have been unable to find this tradition of Ibn 'Abbas or others as reported by Al Hakim Al Haskani.

The traditions assert that the number of authorities are twelve and all of them are from Quraysh, and, Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) clarified it in his speech that they shall be from the Quraysh when he said: "Surely Imams will be from the Quraysh, they have been planted in this line through Hashim. It would not suit others nor would others be suitable as heads of affairs."[10](#)

And he said: "O Allah! Yes, but the earth is never devoid of those who maintain Allah's plea either openly and reputedly or, being afraid, and hidden in order that Allah's pleas and proofs should not be rebutted."[11](#)

- [1.](#) Muslim b. al-Hajjaj, Sahih, 3:1453, Tradition No. 1821, Kitabul Imarah. Al-Bukhari, Sahih, 4:165, Kitabul Ahkam. Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, Chapter of Fitan, 2:45 (India) and 4:501 Tradition # 2225 (Egypt) Abu Dawud, Sunan, 3:106, Kitab al-Mahdi. Al-Tayalisi, Musnad, Tradition No. 767 and 1278. Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, 5:86. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal 13:26-27. Abu Nu'aym al-Isbahani, Hilyat al-'awliya' , 4:333. Jabir bin Samurah bin Junada was the nephew of Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas. He died at Kufa. The compilers of traditions have narrated 146 traditions from him. For his biography, refer to Usd al-Ghaba or Taqrib al-Tahdhib.
- [2.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:338. Al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, Mustadrak al-Sahihayn 3:167.
- [3.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:338.
- [4.](#) Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummal 5:321. Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:249. Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, Vol 10. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal ,13:26. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa Vol 28.
- [5.](#) Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal , 13:27
- [6.](#) Ibid.
- [7.](#) Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, 1:398 and 406. Al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, Mustadrak , 4:501 Al-Dhahabi, Talkhis , 4:501. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:339. "Ali b. Abu Bakr al-Haythami, Majma' al-Zawa'id 5:190. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, vol 12. Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, Vol 10. (Al-Suyuti or al-Tabarani), Jami' al-Saghir 1:75. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal, 13:27.
- [8.](#) Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:248. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal, 13:27. Al-Haskani , Shawahid al-Tanzil, 1:455, Tradition No. 626.
- [9.](#) Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:248.
- [10.](#) Imam "'Ali b. Abi Talib (a), Nahjul Balagha, Sermon no. 142.
- [11.](#) Shaykh Sulayman Qanduzi al-Hanafi, Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, p. 523.

The Twelve Imams in the Old Testament

Ibn Kathir says:

We see the following prophecy in the Taurat which is in the hands of the Jews and the Christians: "Indeed Allah, the Exalted, has given Ibrahim (a.s.) the glad tidings of Isma'il, and he has bestowed a favour and multiplied it and placed in his progeny twelve mighty (personalities)."

And he says:

Ibn Taymiyya said: "And these are the same, regarding whom the Prophet (S) has given the glad tidings in the tradition of Jabir bin Samurah and stated their number; indeed this is with regard to the Imams and the Hour will not come till they last. And many of those who accepted Islam from among Jews think they are the same Imams of the *Rafidi* sect."¹

The afore-mentioned glad tiding is present in the section of Genesis (17-18:20) of our era. It is also present in the original Hebrew.

The words (of the Lord) to Ibrahim (a.s.) translated from the Hebrew are as follows:

*"And as for Isma'il, I have blessed him, and I have made him fruitful. And I have truly multiplied him, he will beget twelve leaders and I will provide for him a large nation."*²

This also indicates that the blessings, fruits and multiplication is in the generation of Isma'il (a.s.). "Shanim Asaar" means "twelve"; and the word "Asaar" is used for a compound number when the counted things are masculine. The singular "Naasi" means: Leader, chief, head, etc.³

The Almighty Allah ordered Ibrahim (a.s.) to leave the city of Namrood and go towards Syria. So he left the city with his wife Sarah, and Lut (a.s) and migrated according to the Divine Order. In due course, they reached the land of Palestine.

By the Grace of Almighty Ibrahim (a.s.) was bestowed an excess of wealth. He said: "O my Lord what can I make by this wealth, and I do not even have a son?" The Almighty revealed to him, "I will increase your progeny till it reaches the number of stars." Hajra was the slave girl of Sarah. Sarah betrothed her to Ibrahim (a.s.). She bore for him a son, Isma'il (a.s.). The age of Ibrahim (a.s.) was 86 years when Isma'il (a.s.) was born to Hajra.⁴ The Holy Qur'an mentions in the following words the prayer of Ibrahim (a.s.).

"O Our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, Our Lord! That they keep up prayer; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful." (Sura Ibrahim, 14:37)

The holy verse points to the fact that Ibrahim (a.s.) had settled some of his progeny, that is Isma'il (a.s.) in the area of Mecca and he also prayed that the Almighty Allah may bestow them with His Mercy and that they remain the medium of guidance for humanity till the end of time. The Almighty accepted his invocation by appointing Muhammad (S) from his progeny, and after him his twelve successors as the leaders of humanity for the time to come.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says: "We are the remnant of progeny. And that was the prayer of Ibrahim (a.s.) regarding us."

¹ Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:249 and 250.

² Genesis 17.

³ Al Mu'jam al-Hadith.

⁴ Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 1:24-25 (Printed at Qum).

Explanation of the Narrations

After having discussed the traditions regarding twelve successors, we can derive the following points: The number of Imams for this *Ummah* shall be twelve, in a continuous line. Secondly after the twelfth of these Imams, the world shall reach its end.

According to the first tradition:

"The Islamic religion will continue until the Hour has been established, or you have been ruled over the twelve Caliphs have passed among you."

This tradition has fixed the period of Islam's supremacy till the day of Qiyamat and also fixed the number of Imams for this *Ummah* as twelve.

According to the fifth tradition:

"The Islamic religion will continue until there are twelve (Imams) from the Quraysh. And when they all die the Earth will swallow its inhabitants."

This tradition proves that Islam will continue till the end of this world or till the reign of twelve Imams and after them this Earth shall be destroyed.

The eighth tradition limits the number of Imams to twelve:

"After me there shall be Caliphs equal in number to the companions of Musa (a.s.)."

This tradition shows that there will be no more than twelve Caliphs after the Holy Prophet (S). And the Messenger of Allah (S) has clarified that the number of Caliphs will be limited to twelve and after these Twelve, the Qiyamat will surely occur and the Earth shall be destroyed.

Other traditions clarify the above statements.

On the basis of this, we have to admit that in order to supervise the affairs of humanity, one of the Imams must have a long life which is an unusual phenomena. Thus the twelfth Caliph and the successor of the Holy Prophet (S), that is, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was bestowed with a long life.

Bewildering Interpretations

The scholars of the school of Caliphate are at pains to explain the traditions that mention the Twelve Successors. We present herewith, in brief, their contradictory explanations.

Ibn al-'Arabi says in his "*Sharh Sunan al-Tirmidhi*":

We have counted the Amirs after the Holy Prophet (S) as twelve.

We found them as follows: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Hasan, Mu'awiyah, Yazid, Mu'awiyah ibn Yazid, Marwan, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, Yazid bin 'Abd al-Malik, Marwan bin

Muhammad bin Marwan, As-Saffah... After this there were twenty-seven caliphs from the Bani Abbas.

Now if we consider twelve of them we can reach only till Sulayman. If we take the literal meaning we have only five of them and to these we add the four Righteous Caliphs, and 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz...

I cannot understand the meaning of this Hadith.[1](#)

Qadi 'Iyad, says in reply to the claim that there shall be only twelve Caliphs;

"The number of Caliphs are more than that. To limit their number to twelve is incorrect. The Holy Prophet (S) did not say that there will be only twelve and there is no scope for more. Hence it is possible that there can be more."[2](#)

Al-Suyuti says:

There are only twelve Caliphs until Qiyamat. And they will continue to act on truth, even if they are not continuous.[3](#)

It is mentioned in *Fath al-Bari* that:

Four of them (the Righteous Caliphs) have passed. The rest also must pass before Qiyamat.[4](#)

Ibn al-Jawzi says:

"It can be concluded that the phrase "then there will be discord" implies the disturbing events like the coming of Dajjal and whatever will come after it."[5](#)

Al-Suyuti has explained as follows:

We see that from the twelve, four are the Righteous Caliphs, then Hasan, then Mu'awiyah, then Ibn Zubayr, and finally 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz. They are eight. Four of them remain. Maybe Mahdi, the Abbasid could be included as he is an Abbasid like 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was an Umayyad. And Tahir 'Abbasi will also be included because he was a just ruler. Thus two more are yet to come. One of them is Mahdi, because he is from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).[6](#)

It is also said:

It could also mean that the twelve Imams will remain during the period of Islam's supremacy. The time when Islam will be a dominant religion. These Caliphs will, during their tenure, glorify the religion. All the Muslims will collect round them in unison.[7](#)

Al-Bayhaqi says:

"This number (twelve) is found till the period of Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik. After this, there was chaos and disturbance. Then came the Abbasid dynasty. This report has increased the number of Imams. If we neglect some of their characteristics which came after the disturbance, then their number will be much higher."[8](#)

And they said:

The Caliphs around whom the people had collected were the first three Caliphs, then 'Ali,

until the Battle of Siffin against Mu'awiyah when pages of Qur'an were raised on spears. Then the people collected around Mu'awiyah, and then again at the time of the treaty with Imam Hasan. Then with Mu'awiyah's son Yazid. But the people did not collect around Imam Husayn (a.s.). He was murdered before he could gain this type of support. When Yazid died, they collected around Marwan after the killing of Abdullah ibn Zubayr.

Then they supported the four sons of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan; Walid, Sulayman, Yazid and Hisham. There was a break between Sulayman and Yazid when 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz occupied the throne. The twelfth of them was Walid ibn Yazid. After that Hisham collected people around him. He ruled for four years.[9](#)

On the basis of this the Caliphate of the twelve Caliphs was valid due to the people's support. The Holy Prophet (S) had given the good tidings of their Caliphate; that they will propagate Islam among the people. In this connection Ibn Hajar says, "The above reason is correct and it is more preferable."

Ibn Kathir says:

Whosoever follows Bayhaqi and agrees with his assertion that Jama'ah means those Caliphs who came intermittently till the time of Walid ibn Yazid ibn 'Abd al-Malik the transgressor comes under the purview of the tradition quoted by us criticising and denouncing such people. It is a controversial sect. The Caliphs are till Walid bin Yazid. Their total is more than twelve. And their argument is that the Caliphate consisted of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali. (The Righteous Caliphate).

After this the Caliphate of Hasan was true because he had been nominated by 'Ali and the people of Iraq had also pledged their allegiance to him. It continued till the time of his treaty with Mu'awiyah. Then came Yazid the son of Mu'awiyah. Then his son Mu'awiyah ibn Yazid, then Marwan bin al-Hakam, then 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, then his son, Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik, then Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Malik, then 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, then Yazid ibn 'Abd al-Malik, then Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik. This takes the total to fifteen. Then after this, Walid ibn Yazid ibn 'Abd al-Malik became the Caliph.

And if we accept the Caliphate of ibn Zubayr before 'Abd al-Malik the total shall be sixteen. Whereas their total should be twelve before 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. In this method Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah will be included and not 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. However, it is established that the majority of the *ulama* accept 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz as a truthful and a just Caliph. There was complete peace and justice during his reign. Even the *Rafidi* accept this fact.

Suppose we say that we will accept the Caliph as the one who has the acceptance of all the Ummat, then we cannot accept 'Ali and his son. Because the whole Ummat had not supported them.

The Syrians had accepted their superiority but not their Caliphate. In this way they cannot be accepted as Caliphs.

He (Bayhaqi) has also written that some people included Mu'awiyah, his son and his grandson among the Caliphs. The time of Marwan and ibn Zubayr is also not included. For none of them had the unanimous support. Therefore we say about this sect that they believe in the first three Caliphs, then Mu'awiyah, then Yazid, then 'Abd al-Malik, then Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Malik, then 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, then Yazid ibn 'Abd al-Malik, then Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik. This comes to ten. Then they consider Walid ibn Yazid ibn 'Abd al-

Malik the transgressor as the Caliph. In this way they exclude 'Ali and his son. Now this is absolutely against the belief of the majority of Muslims , whether Shi'as or Sunnis.[1025](#)

Ibn al-Jawzi has offered two explanations in his book, "*Kashf al-Mushkil*":

The Holy Prophet (S) has informed about whatever is going to occur after him with his Companions. And that the actions of the Companions will be similar to those of the Prophet's. At that time he had also indicated the number of Caliphs of Bani Umayya. As the Messenger of Allah (S) has said, "*La Yazaluddin*" (the religion will not decline), it indicates the chain of Wilayat till the Twelfth Caliph. The Second and the more serious meaning is that after the passing of the twelve Caliphs the conditions will deteriorate. The first Caliph of Bani Umayya was Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah and the last, Marwan Al-Himar. Their total is thirteen. 'Uthman, Mu'awiyah and ibn Zubayr are not included as they were among the Companions of the Holy Prophet (S).

If we exclude Marwan bin al-Hakam because of the controversy about his being a Companion or that he was in power even though Abdullah ibn Zubayr had the support of the people. Then we can get the figure of Twelve.

When the Caliphate came out of the Bani Umayya, a great disturbance arose. Until the Bani Abbas established themselves. Hence, the original conditions had changed completely.[11](#)

Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-Bari* has refuted this.

The second explanation of Ibn al-Jawzi is as follows:

Abu al-Husayn bin Mauaadi in his book, "*Al-Mahdi*" says, "The more probable meaning refers to the Mahdi who will come towards the end of the world. I have seen in the book of Daniel, "When Mahdi will die five men from his elder grandson, then five men from his younger grandson will succeed him. Then the last of them will make a will in favour of one of the descendants of the elder grandson. After this his son will become the King. This proves the twelve Imams mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet (S). All of them will be known as Imam Mahdi."

He says, "...This affair will continue with the twelve persons. Six of them will be from the progeny of Hasan and five from the progeny of Husayn. The last will be someone else. After his death, confusion will prevail upon the earth."

Ibn Hajar says, "This tradition is without any chain of narrators and hence we cannot rely upon it."[12](#)

And some people say:

Maybe the Holy Prophet (S) has meant to say in this perplexing tradition regarding the future, that at one and the same time the people will be divided under twelve kings. If he had intended something else he would have described the activities of the Amirs who were to succeed him. Therefore it is possible that they will be present contemporaneously.[13](#)

It is also said:

In 500 A.H. in Andalus, there were six people in power at one and the same time. Each of them claimed to be the Caliph. Included among them were the Abbasid of Baghdad and the ruler of Egypt. The Alawis and the Kharijis also claimed to be the rulers of the earth.[14](#)

Ibn Hajar says:

"No one has much knowledge about this particular *hadith* of *Sahih Bukhari*." [1530](#)

Then he says:

"It is not correct to say that these Imams will be present at one and the same time." [16](#)

There is no agreement in the explanation of the above tradition. These scholars have not paid attention to those reports which mention the names of the twelve successors. For it was against the political expediency of the time. However, the Hadith scholars of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) have recorded numerous such traditions with proper chains of narrators going back to the trustworthy Companions of the Holy Prophet (S). We mention herewith a few of these traditions.

- [1.](#) Ibn al-'Arabi, Sharh Sunan Tirmidhi 9:68-69.
- [2.](#) Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, 12:201-202. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:339.
- [3.](#) Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, Vol 12.
- [4.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:341.
- [5.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:341.
- [6.](#) Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa Vol 19. Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, Vol 12. There is unanimity in the School of Caliphate that the awaited Imam is Mahdi, as is the belief of the followers of the School of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).
- [7.](#) Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim ,12:202-203.
- [8.](#) Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:249. Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa Vol 11. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa Vol 19. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:341.
- [9.](#) Al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa Vol 11.
- [10.](#) Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh, 6:249-250.
- [11.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:340 quoted from Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi.
- [12.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:341. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa.
- [13.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:338.
- [14.](#) Al-Nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim, 12:202. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:339.
- [15.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:338.
- [16.](#) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari 16:339.

The Twelve Imams According to the School of the Caliphate

Al-Juwayni¹ reports that Abdullah ibn Abbas remarked that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, "I am the chief of the Prophets and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib is the chief of successors, and after me my successors shall be twelve, the first of them being 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and the last of them being Al Mahdi."

Al-Juwayni has also mentioned another tradition from Ibn 'Abbas (r.a.) that he narrates from the Messenger of Allah (S):

"Certainly my Caliphs and my legatees and the Proofs of Allah upon his creatures after me

are twelve. The first of them is my brother and the last of them is my (grand) son."

He was asked: "O Messenger of Allah, who is your brother?"

He said, "'Ali ibn Abi Talib"

Then they asked, "And who is your son?"

The Holy Prophet (S) replied, "Al Mahdi, the one who will fill the earth with justice and equity like it would be brimming with injustice and tyranny. And by the One Who has raised me as a warner and a give of good tidings, even if a day remains for the life of this world, the Almighty Allah will prolong this day to an extent till he sends my son Mahdi, then he will make Ruhullah 'Isa ibn Maryam (a.s.) to descend and pray behind him (Mahdi). And the earth will be illuminated by his radiance. And his power will reach to the east and the west."

Al-Juwayni also narrates from his chain of narrators that the Messenger of Allah (S) informed:

"I and 'Ali and Hasan and Husayn and nine of the descendants of Husayn are the purified ones and the infallible."²³³

Among the scholars of the School of the Caliphate it was the general tendency, due to the political expediency, to conceal such traditions from the people. A majority of their scholars have tried their best to explain away these traditions in a confusing manner. They have endeavoured to make vague guesses regarding the names of the Caliphs mentioned in these reports. On the other hand the Holy Prophet (S) has mentioned clearly, by name, his Twelve Successors.

It is not possible to relate all such traditions in this brief treatise. However we shall present the biographical sketches of the Imams (a.s.) who have been named by the Messenger of Allah (S).

- [1.](#) Al-Dhahabi says in Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, vol. 4, p. 298, that Sadruddin Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin al-Hamawayh al-Juwayni al-Shafi'i was a great scholar of Hadith. Also see his biographical note in Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, al-Durar al-kaminah, vol. 1, p. 67.
- [2.](#) Al-Juwayni, Fara'id al-Simtayn, pg 160.

A Brief Account of the Twelve Successors of the Holy Prophet (S)

The First Imam, Amirul Mu'mineen 'Ali (a.s.)

Father: Abu Talib bin Abdul Muttalib bin Hashim.

Mother: Fatimah bint Asad bin Hashim bin Abd Munaf.

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abul Hasan and Husayn, Abu Turab

Laqab (Title): Al-Wasi, Amir al-Mu'minin

Birth: He was born in the Ka'ba¹, in thirty 'Am al-Fil (the year of the elephant).

Martyrdom: He was martyred by the Khwariji named Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam at Kufa during the month of Ramadhan in the fortieth year of Hijrah and is buried in Najaf on the outskirts of Kufa.

The Second Imam, Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)

Mother: Fatimah az-Zahra (a.s.), the daughter of the Holy Prophet (S).

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu Muhammad

Laqab (Title): Al-Sibt al-Kabir (the elder grandson), Al-Mujtaba.

Birth: He was born in Madina in the middle of the month of Ramadhan in 3 A.H.

Martyrdom: He died on the 28th of Safar in the year 50 A.H. He was buried in the graveyard of Baqi in Madina.

The Third Imam, Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)

Mother: Fatimah az-Zahra (a.s.), the daughter of the Holy Prophet (S).

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu 'Abdillah.

Laqab (Title): Al Sibt, Shahid ash-Suhada fi Karbala.

Birth: He was born in Madina in the month of Shaban in the year 4 A.H.

Martyrdom: He was martyred with his companions by the army of Yazid in the month of Muharram 61 A.H. His tomb is in Karbala, a town of Iraq.²

The Fourth Imam, 'Ali ibn Al-Husayn (a.s.)

Mother: Ghazala, Shahzanaan

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu al-Hasan

Laqab (Title): Zayn al-'Abidin, Al Sajjad

Birth: He was born in 38 A.H. in Madina.

Martyrdom: He died of poison in the year 94 or 95 A.H. at Madina and is buried at Baqi near his uncle Hasan (a.s.).³

The Fifth Imam, Muhammad ibn 'Ali (a.s.)

Mother: Umm Abdullah, the daughter of Imam Hasan (a.s.).

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu Ja'far.

Laqab (Title): Al Baqir.

Birth: He was born at Madina in the year 57 A.H.

Martyrdom: He died of poisoning in Madina in 114 A.H. and is also buried at Baqi near his father.[4](#)

The Sixth Imam, Ja'far ibn Muhammad (a.s.)

Mother: Umm Farwa, the daughter of Qasim bin Muhammad bin Abu Bakr.

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu 'Abdillah.

Laqab (Title): Al-Sadiq.

Birth: He was born at Madina in 83 A.H.

Martyrdom: He died of poison in 148 A.H. and is buried at Baqi near his father.[5](#)

The Seventh Imam, Musa bin Ja'far (a.s.)

Mother: Hamidah

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu al-Hasan

Laqab (Title): Al-Kazim

Birth: He was born at Madina in the year 129 A.H.

Martyrdom: He was poisoned in the prison of Harun al-Rashid at Baghdad in the year 183 A.H. He is buried in Kazimiyyah in Iraq.[6](#)

The Eighth Imam, 'Ali bin Musa (a.s.)

Mother: Al Khayzran

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu al-Hasan

Laqab (Title): Al-Ridha'

Birth: He was born at Madina in 148 A.H.

Martyrdom: He was poisoned in the year 203 A.H. and is buried in the Khurasan district of Iran.[7](#)

The Ninth Imam, Muhammad bin 'Ali (a.s.)

Mother: Sakina

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu 'Abdillah

Laqab (Title): Al Jawad

Birth: He was born at Madina in 195 A.H.

Martyrdom: He died of poison at Baghdad in the year 220 A.H. and is buried near his grandfather at Kazimiyyah in Iraq.[8](#)

The Tenth Imam, 'Ali bin Muhammad (a.s.)

Mother: Samana al-Maghribiya

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu al-Hasan al Askari

Laqab (Title): Al Hadi

Birth: He was born at Madina in the year 212 A.H.

Martyrdom: He died of poison in 254 A.H. at Samarra (Sarmanra) in Iraq and is buried there.[9](#)

The Eleventh Imam, Al Hasan bin 'Ali (a.s.)

Mother: Ummul Walad - Susan.

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu Muhammad.

Laqab (Title): Al Askari.

Birth: He was born at Samarra in the year 232 A.H.

Martyrdom: He was poisoned in 260 A.H. at Samarra and is buried there.[10](#)

All the tombs of the eleven Imams (a.s.) are a place of Ziyarat (visitation) by Muslims. Four of the Imams are buried at Baqi in Madina al-Munawwara. However, their tombs were demolished by the authorities along with the tombs of the wives of the Prophet (S) and his companions.

The Twelfth Imam, Al Hujjat Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (a.s.)

Mother: Ummul Walad Narjis alias Saiqal

Kunniyat (Patronymic): Abu 'Abdullah, Abu al-Qasim

Laqab (Title): Al-Qa'im, Al-Muntazar, Al-Khalaf, Al-Mahdi, Sahib al-zamaan.

Birth: He was born at Samarra in the year 255 A.H. He is the last Imam (a.s.) and he is alive and hidden.[11](#)

[1.](#) Fatimah bint Asad was circumbulating the Ka'ba when she was carrying 'Ali (a.s.). The wall of Ka'ba cracked to create an opening and she entered it to give birth to 'Ali (a.s.). Al-Mustadrak 3:483.

[2.](#) For biographical sketches of 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn (a.s.) refer to Tarikh Tabari in the events of 40, 50 and 60 A.H. Also see Usd al-Ghaba.

3. Ibn Athir, Ta'rikh. Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh.
4. Al-Dhahabi, Tadhkirat al-Huffaz. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Abu Nu'aym al-Isbahani, Hilyat al-'Awliya. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:230. Al-Dhahabi , Tarikh al-Islam Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh.
5. Refer Abu Nu'aym al-Isbahani, Hilyat al-'Awliya, Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:381. Al-Mas'udi 3:46.
6. Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, Maqatil al-Talibiyyin. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:414.
7. Al-Tabari, Tarikh. Ibn Kathir, Ta'rikh. Al-Dhahabi , Tarikh al-Islam Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:381. Al-Mas'udi 3:441.
8. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad 3:54. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Al-Mas'udi 3:464.
9. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad 12:56. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:484. Al-Mas'udi 4:84.
10. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan. Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi , Tadhkirat al-Khawwas Al-Shaykh Muhammad bin Talha Shafi'i (died 654 A.H.), Matalib al-Su'ul fi Manaqib Aali Rasul Al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh , 2:503.
11. Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi , Tadhkirat al-Khawwas Al-Shaykh Muhammad bin Talha Shafi'i , Matalib al-Su'ul. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan.

An Important Advice

One of the points in the traditions mentioned above is that each of the twelve will be from the Quraysh. After them there will be chaos. Another point is that the religion will remain established till the twelve Caliphs of Quraysh are present. When they die, the earth will swallow its inhabitants.

The above two points thus prove that after the twelve Caliphs of the Holy Prophet (S) the earth will be destroyed.

Therefore it is necessary that one of these twelve successors should have such a long life that it should surpass the age of this earth.

This is exactly how it happened. The Twelfth successor of the Holy Prophet (S) was bestowed with a long life. He is Al-Mahdi Muhammad ibn Hasan Al Askari (a.s.).

The traditions discussed in this treatise prove the Imamatus of these Twelve Noble Personalities. Not anyone else.

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