

Lesson 17: Twelve Caliphs Or Imams

1. The Hadith on Twelve Imams

After studying about the leadership of Imam ‘Ali and briefly reviewing the khilafat of Saqifah, it is now advisable to refer to several parts of the 77th chapter of *Yanabi‘u ‘l-Mawaddah* of a famous Sunni scholar al-Hafiz Sulaymān al-Qundūzi al-Hanafī (d. 1294AH/1877AD).

Al-Qundūzi first quotes a well known hadīth of the Prophet that: “There will be twelve caliphs, all from the Quraysh.” This hadīth has been quoted by many books of ahadith including that of Bukhārī, al-Muslim, Abu Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi.

Then al-Qundūzi quotes many traditions to the effect that the Prophet said, “I, ‘Ali, Hasan, Husayn and nine of the descendants of Husayn are pure and sinless.” Then the author quotes that the Prophet said to Imam Husayn bin ‘Ali: “You are a chief, brother of a chief; you are an Imam, son of an Imam, brother of an Imam; you are Proof (of Allah), son of a Proof (of Allah), brother of a Proof (of Allah), and father of nine Proofs (of Allah), the ninth of whom will be al-Mahdi.”

After quoting many such traditions, he writes: “Some scholars have said that the traditions (which show that the caliphs after the Prophet would be twelve) are well known, from many chains of narration. Now, with the passage of time and through historical events, we know that in this hadīth the Prophet has referred to the Twelve Imams from his family (Ahlu ‘l-bayt) and descendants, because:

“This hadīth cannot apply to the four *al-khulafā‘u ‘r-rāshidun* from among his companions, as they were less than twelve.

“And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the tribe of Umayyad, because (a) they were more than twelve; (b) all of them were tyrants and unjust (except ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdi ‘l-‘Azīz); and (c) they were not from the Banu Hāshim as the Prophet has said in a hadīth that ‘all of them will be from the Banu Hāshim!...

“And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the ‘Abbāsids, because (a) they were more than twelve; and (b)

they did not comply with (the demands of) the verse ***Say, 'I do not ask of you any recompense for it except the love for (my) near relatives' (42:23)***, nor with the tradition of the Mantle.

“Therefore, the only way to interpret this hadīth is to accept that it refers to the Twelve Imams from the Holy Prophet's Ahlu 'l-bayt and descendants, because they were, in their times, most knowledgeable, the most illustrious, the most God-fearing, the most pious, the highest in their family lineage, the best in personal virtues, and the most honoured before Allah; and their knowledge was derived from their ancestor (the Prophet) through their fathers, and by inheritance and by direct teachings from Allāh.”*

2. A Few Facts About the Twelve Imams

First Imam: Amiru 'l-Mu'minin Abu 'l-Hasan `ALI al-Murtaza, son of Abu Tālib, was born on 13th Rajab, 10 years before the declaration of the Prophethood (600 A.D.), inside the Ka`bah; became Imam, on the death of the Prophet on 28th Safar, 11/632; was fatally wounded by the poisoned sword of Ibn Muljim while engaged in prayers at the mosque of Kufa (Iraq), and expired two days later on 21st Ramadhan, 40/661 and was buried at an-Najaf (Iraq).

Second Imam: Abu Muhammad AL-HASAN al-Mujtaba, son of `Ali, was born on 15th Ramadhan, 3/625 in Medina; died of poison on 7th or 28th Safar, 50/670 at Medina.

Third Imam: Sayyidu 'sh-Shuhada' Abu `Abdillah AL-HUSAYN, son of `Ali, was born on 3rd Sha`ban, 4/626 in Medina; was martyred with his sons, relatives and companions, on 10th Muharram, 61/680 at Karbala (Iraq). He and his elder brother, al-Hasan, were sons of Fatimah az-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet of Islam (may peace be upon them all).

Fourth Imam: Abu Muhammad `ALI Zaynu 'l-`Abidin, son of al-Husayn, was born on 5th Sha`ban, 38/659; died of poison on 25th Muharram, 94/712 or 95/713 in Medina.

Fifth Imam: Abu Ja`far MUHAMMAD al-Baqir, son of `Ali Zaynu 'l-`Abidin, was born on 1st Rajab, 57/677 in Medina; died of poison on 7th Dhu 'l-hijjah 114/733 in Medina.

Sixth Imam: Abu `Abdillah JA`FAR as-Sadiq, son of Muhammad al-Baqir, was born on 17th Rabi`u 'l-Awwal, 83/702 at Medina; died there of poison on 25th Shawwal, 148/765.

Seventh Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan al-Awwal MUSA al-Kazim, son of Ja`far as-Sadiq, was born in al-Abwa' (7 miles from Medina) on 7th Safar 129/746; died of poison on 25th Rajab, 183/799 in the prison of Harun ar-Rashid at Baghdad and was buried at Kazimiyyah, near Baghdad (Iraq).

Eighth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Thani, `ALI ar-Riza, son of Musa al-Kazim, was born in Medina on 11th Dhu 'l-hijjah 148/765; died of poison on 17th Safar, 203/818 in Mashhad (Iran).

Ninth Imam: Abu Ja`far ath-Thani MUHAMMAD at-Taqi al-Jawad, son of `Ali ar-Riza, was born on

10th Rajab 195/811 in Medina; died of poison in Baghdad on 30th Dhu 'l-qa`dah 220/835; was buried near his grandfather at al-Kazimiyyah.

Tenth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Tha`liq al-Hadi, son of Muhammad at-Taqi, was born on 5th Rajab 212/827 in Medina; died of poison in Samarra (Iraq) on 3rd Rajab, 254/868.

Eleventh Imam: Abu Muhammad `AL-HASAN al-`Askari, son of 'Ali an-Naqi, was born on 8th Rabi`u 'th-Thani, 232/846 in Medina; died of poison in Samarra (Iraq) on 8th Rabi`u 'l-Awwal 260/874.

Twelfth Imam: Abu 'l-Qasim MUHAMMAD AL-MAHDI, son of al-Hasan al-`Askari, was born on 15th Sha`ban 255/869 in Samarra (Iraq). He is our present Imam; he went into Lesser Occultation in 260/874 which continued until 329/844; then the Greater Occultation began, which still continues. He will reappear when Allah allows him, to establish the Kingdom of Allah on earth, to fill the world with justice and equality, as it would be full of injustice and tyranny. He is *al-Qa'im* (the one who shall stand to establish the rule of Allah); al-Hujjah (the Proof of Allah over His creatures); *Sahibu 'z-Zaman* (the Lord of Our Time), and *Sahibu 'l-Amr* (the one vested with Divine authority).

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This lesson has been adapted from chapters 16 & 17 of *Imamat: the Vicegerence of the Prophet* (Tehran: WOFIS, 1985) by Syed S. Akhtar Rizvi.

Question Paper on Lesson 17

Question 1: [10 points]

(a) Name the famous Sunni scholar who narrated the following hadith: "There will be twelve caliphs, all from the Quraysh" and also the book in which he narrated it.

(b) Name at least four other Sunni scholars who also narrated the above mentioned hadith.

Question 2: [20 points]

Consider the hadith: "There will be twelve caliphs, all from the Quraysh." Now state one reason why this hadith does not apply to:

(a) The Four al-Khulafau 'r-Rashidun:

(b) The Banu Umayyah

(c) The Banu `Abbas:

Question 3: [10 points]

Answer the following questions:

(a) Which Imam/Imams did not die of poisoning?

- (b) Which Imam/Imams is/are also known as Abu Muhammad?
- (c) Besides Imam Husayn (a.s.) which later Imam/Imams had witnessed the massacre of Karbala.
- (d) Which Imam had the shortest life?
- (e) Which Imam/Imams died in prison?
- (f) Which Imam had the title of “Amīru ‘l-munīnīn”?
- (g) Name the person who martyred Imam ‘Ali?
- (h) Which Imam/Imams is/are buried in Kazimiyyah?
- (i) Name the place where Imam Musa al-Kādhim (a.s.) was born?
- (j) Which Imam/Imams is/are buried in Samarra?

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