

Suratul Baqarah: Verse 124

(١٢٤) وَإِذْ أَبْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ ۖ بِكَلِمَاتٍ ۖ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۗ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, then he fulfilled them: He said: "Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men." (Ibrahim) said: "And of my offspring?" He said: "My covenant will not include the unjust" (124).

Commentary

Beginning with this verse, the Qur'an throws light on some aspects of the life of Ibrahim (a.s.); these verses prepare the minds for the ones promulgating the change of *al-qiblah* (الْقِبْلَةُ = direction of prayer) as well as the rules of the *hajj*.

These stories also explain the reality of the pure Islamic religion – with its different grades and levels – looking at its fundamental beliefs, moral teachings and some rules of the *shari'ah*; among other things they show how Allah bestowed on him *al-Imamah* (الإِمَامَةُ = leadership) of the people, how he built the Ka'bah, and how he prayed to Allah to send an Apostle among them.

Qur'an: And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, then he fulfilled them: It refers to the occasion when Ibrahim (a.s.) was given the *Imamah*. It had happened during the end period of his life; it was the time when he had become very old, after Isma'il and Ishaq both had been born, and he had brought Isma'il and his mother to reside in Mecca, as some other exegetes also have taken note of this fact.

This timing is clearly pointed at by his words, "And of my offspring? ", when Allah told him: "I am going to make you an Imam for men." Obviously he did not know, nor did he even expect, that he would get any offspring, until the angels brought to him the good tidings of Isma'il and Ishaq.

Even when the angels told him that he was to get children, he responded to those tidings in such words as could apparently be construed to have sprung from despair and pessimism. Allah says:

And inform them of the guests of Ibrahim: When they entered upon him, they said: "Peace" He said: "Surely we are afraid of you."; They said: "Be not afraid, surely we give you the good news of a boy, possessing knowledge. "He said:" Do you give me good news (of a son) when old age has come upon me? – of what then do you give me good news!" They said: "We give you good news with truth; therefore, be not of the despairing" (15:51–55).

The same was the reaction of his wife when she was given that good news, as Allah says:

And his wife was standing (by), so she laughed; then We gave her the good news of Ishaq, and after Ishaq, of (a son's son) Ya'qub. She said: "O woe to me! Shall I bear a son when I am an (extremely) old (woman) and this my husband an (extremely) old (man)? Most surely this is an amazing thing." They said: "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 is Praised, Glorious" (11:71–73).

As you see, the talks of both Ibrahim and his wife show that by that time they had lost all hope of getting any child. That is why the angels replied to them in those words to give them hope and make them happy.

Clearly neither he nor his wife knew before that time that they would be given any off-spring. But on this occasion, we see that as soon as Allah told him, "I am going to make you an Imam for men", he pleaded, "And of my offspring?"

This prayer brings before our eyes the image of a man who is sure of having an offspring. How can a man, and particularly one like Ibrahim, the friend of Allah (who very well knew the nuances of the language), speak before his Lord about a thing he knew nothing about?

If he had uttered these words before getting any children, it would have been necessary for him to add some proviso, like "if Thou givest me any offspring". This event, therefore, must have taken place in the end period of Ibrahim's life some time after he had been given the good news.

Moreover, the words, "And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, then he fulfilled them. He said: 'Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men'", show that his *Imamah* was bestowed to him after Allah had tried him with certain trials.

These consisted of various sufferings and tests which Ibrahim (a.s.) underwent in his life. And according to the Qur'an, the clearest and hardest of all was the trial of the sacrifice of Isma'il. Allah says:

And when he reached (the age of) working with him, he said: "O my son! surely I am seeing in dream that I am sacrificing you; consider then what you see." He said: "O my father! do what you are commanded; if Allah please, you will surely find me of the patient ones." So when they both

submitted and he threw him down upon his forehead, and We called out to him (saying): **“O Ibrahim! You have indeed proved the vision true; surely thus We reward the doers of good. Most surely this is a manifest trial”** (37:102–106).

This manifest trial had taken place in the extreme old age of Ibrahim, because even the birth of Isma'il had taken place when Ibrahim had become very old, as Allah quotes him as saying:

“Praise be to Allah, Who gave me in old age Isma'il and Ishaq; most surely my Lord is the Hearer of prayer” (14:39).

And the *imamah* was given to him after these trials.

Now we come back to the verse under discussion:

“And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim”: *“al-Ibtala”* (اِبْتَلَا) and *“al-bala”* (اَبْلَاءُ) both have the same meaning: to try, to put to test. You give someone an order, or put him in a difficult situation, in order to find out his inner strength, his spiritual sublimity; thus you bring out his hidden qualities like obedience, bravery, generosity, chastity, knowledge, faithfulness (or their opposite traits); it is only then that you may say, “I have tested him”, “I have put him to trial”.

One cannot be tested except through action; it is the action which brings out the hidden qualities of a man, and not the word; words may lie but not the actions. Allah says:

Surely We have tried them as We tried the owners of the garden... (68:17);

... Surely Allah will try you with a stream... (2:249).

Now Allah says that He tried Ibrahim with certain words. This sentence looks at the “words” inasmuch as they are related to actions – they are the vehicles to carry the commands of the speaker to the listener. For example, Allah says:

... and speak to men good (words)... (2:83),

that is, behave with them properly.

“With certain words, then he fulfilled them”: *“al-Kalimat”* (اَلْكَلِمَاتُ) is plural of *al-kalimah* (اَلْكَلِمَةُ) = word). Of course, the word, “word”, has sometimes been used in the Qur'an for a substance, a corporeal being (instead of a talk or speech) as Allah says:

... a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah, 'Isa son of Maryam... (3:45).

But this usage is based on the fact that 'Isa, like Adam, was created by a word from Allah as the Qur'an says:

Surely the likeness of 'Isa is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be", and he was (3:59).

Otherwise, whenever the Qur'an attributes the "word" to Allah, it means speech and saying. For example:

and there is none to change the words of Allah (6:34).

there is no changing the words of Allah (10:64).

and Allah desired to manifest the truth of what was true by His words (8:7).

Surely those against whom the word of your Lord has proved true will not believe (10:96).

But the word of punishment proved true against the unbelievers (39:71).

And thus did the word of your Lord prove true against those who disbelieved that they are the inmates of the Fire (40:6).

and had not a word gone forth from your Lord till an appointed time, certainly affair would have been decided between them (42:14).

and the word of Allah, that is the highest (9:41).

He said: "The truth then (it) is and the truth do I speak" (38:84).

Our word for a thing when We intend it, is only that We say to it: "Be", and it is (16:40).

These and similar verses use "word" in the meaning of "talk" because the talk conveys to the hearer the proposition which the speaker intends to communicate, or the command which he wants him to obey. It is for this reason that sometimes the Qur'an describes the "word" as being complete! It is as though a "word" emanating from the speaker remains incomplete until it is implemented, and then it becomes complete, is proved true. Allah says:

And the word of your Lord has been accomplished (completed) truly and justly; there is none to change His words (6:115); and the good word of your Lord was fulfilled (completed) in the Children of Israel (7:137).

The above explanation does not go against the fact that Allah's word is Allah's action. His word and His action are not two different things, they are one and the same. Realities and facts have their own rules, and literary demands and semantic values are governed by other rules.

Whatever realities Allah wishes to disclose to one of His prophets or other servants, and whatever command He wants to impose on someone, it is His talk and speech, inasmuch as it fulfils the same

purpose which a talk or speech does – it conveys information, and proposition as well as His order and prohibition.

Not frequently, the word, “word”, is used for ideas, intentions and actions if they have the same import as “word” has. We say: “I will surely do this because I have already said so, and have given my word.”

In fact, you have never before uttered a single word about it; all that your “given word” actually means is that you do have a firm intention to do it, without any wavering will, without listening to any intercessor.

The Arab poet, 'Antarah, said: “And (it was) my word (to my soul) whenever it was in turmoil or excitement: Be at ease; you will either earn the accolade or will go to (final) rest.” Obviously, he had not talked with his soul or spirit; what he means by “word” is that he had made up his mind to fight bravely, and to face the enemy without retreating from his stand; because if he was victorious, his people would sing his praise, and if he was killed, he would get the rest and tranquility.

In this light it is easy to see that the phrase, “when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words”, refers to the difficult situations he had to face, and the Divine covenants he had entered into, for example, his conflict with his people regarding the stars and the idols, his test by fire and emigration, his supreme trial of sacrificing his son, and other such things.

Allah has not specified which tests those “certain words” refer to, because this information had no-thing to do with the theme of the verse. But one thing is certain: As it was only after the fulfillment of those words that Allah said to him, “Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men”, the words must have been such as to prove his capability for the status of the *Imamah*.

This much about the “words”. Now comes the next phrase: “then he fulfilled them”. If the pronoun “he” refers to Ibrahim (a.s.), then it would mean that he fulfilled the task which was expected of him, he obediently did what he was told to do.

If on the other hand the pronoun refers to the Lord (as it obviously does) then it would mean that his Lord helped him to do what was expected of him.

Somebody has said that the phrase, “certain words”, refers to the Divine Speech, “Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men... My covenant will not include the unjust.” But it is an explanation which does not carry any weight, because nowhere in the Qur'an the word “words” has been used for “sentences”.

Qur'an: “Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men”: That is, I am going to make you a leader for men; they will adhere to you and follow in your footsteps, in words and deeds. *al-Imam* (الإمام) = leader) is the one whom the people follow.

That is why many exegetes have said that *al-Imamah* (الإمامة) = leadership) in this verse means prophethood, because a prophet is followed and obeyed by his *ummah* in their religion; Allah has said:

And We did not send any apostle but that he should be obeyed by Allah's permission (4:64).

But this interpretation has no leg to stand upon. Because: –

First: The word *Imaman* (إِمَامًا) = Imam, leader) is the second accusative of the causative *ja'iluka* (جَاعِلُكَ) = literally, maker of you; translated here as “going to make you”), which is a nomen agentis; and a nomen agentis is never used in place of a past tense; if used in place of a verb it always gives the meaning of present or future tense.

When Allah used these words in His talk with Ibrahim (a.s.), He in effect gave him a promise to make him an Imam in future – in other words, to give him a status which he did not have at that time. And Ibrahim (a.s.) was already a prophet: Remember that this talk itself was a revelation sent to him in his capacity as a prophet.

He was a prophet long before he was given the status of the *Imamah*. Therefore, the *Imamah* in this verse cannot mean prophethood. (This reply is given by another exegete.)

Second: We have described earlier that Ibrahim (a.s.) was given the *Imamah* in his later days after setting the good news that he would be given offspring, Ishaq and Isma'il; and the angels had given him that news while they were on their way to destroy the *ummah* of Lilt; and Ibrahim at that time was a prophet and an apostle. He was a prophet and apostle before he got the *Imamah*; therefore, his *Imamah* was different from his prophethood and apostleship.

Why are such interpretations offered by exegetes from time to time? The reason lies in the banality – because of repeated use during all these centuries – which has degraded the sublime meanings of the Qur'anic words in people's minds.

The word, *Imamah*, has been debased in similar way. Some people say that it means prophethood, precedence, being in authority; others interpret it as *al-khilafah* (الْخِلَافَةُ = successorship), *al-wisayah* (الْوَصَايَةُ = regency) or headship in spiritual and temporal affairs.

But all this is wrong. “Prophethood” means receiving news from Allah; “messaging” means conveying that message to people; “authority” implies that others have to follow one's example and obey one's orders.

Now this authority is a concomitant of prophethood and messaging; *khilafah* and *wisayah* both mean successorship to a prophet; likewise, headship in spiritual and temporal affairs is a sort of the above-mentioned authority; and all of it is different from the correct meaning of the *Imamah*.

The *imamah* implies that a man has an intrinsic quality because of which people should follow him faithfully, making their words and deeds to conform with his words and deeds; but none of the above-mentioned interpretations brings out this meaning.

Ibrahim (a.s.) was already a prophet whose obedience was obligatory for all men. What would be the sense in telling him that Allah was going to make him a prophet for men?

Or, to make his obedience compulsory in all that he said and did? Or, a head of his *ummah* to order or forbid in matters of religion? Or, a successor? Or, a *khalifah* in the earth to decide between the people by the order of Allah?

The difference between the *Imamah* and all the above-mentioned words is not only verbal; it is the realities behind those words that differ from one another. When a man is given prophethood, it becomes obligatory for the people to obey him.

Therefore, it would be wrong to say to that prophet, “I am going to make your obedience compulsory for men although I have already made it compulsory”. Nor will it be correct to convey the same idea in other words, because the same problem will arise again.

When Allah gives someone some status, he does not get merely a new title or name; bounties of Allah are not empty words; there are real things behind those words. Therefore, the *imamah* has its own reality, different from other words' realities.

We find in the Qur'an that whenever it mentions *Imamah* it puts guidance side by side – it looks as though Allah was using the latter to explain the former. Allah says in the story of Ibrahim:

And We gave him Ishaq and Ya'qub as a further gift; and We made (them) all righteous ones; and We made them Imams, to guide (people) by Our command... (21:72 – 73);

and He says in another place:

And We made of them Imams to guide by Our command as they were patient, and they were certain of Our signs (32:24).

Here the *imamah* is explained, or rather defined, in terms of guidance, and then further qualified with the proviso, “by Our command”. Clearly, the *Imamah* does not mean any type of guidance; it is a guidance which emanates from the command of Allah.

And the reality of that command is described in these words:

His command, when He intends anything, is only that He says to it: “Be”, and it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of every thing... (36:82–83);

And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye (54:50).

We shall explain, when writing about these verses, that the Divine Command (which the former verse also calls “the Kingdom”) is the sublime side of the creation, with which they face towards Allah; it is pure, free from fetters of time and space, and untouched by change and variation. It is also the real

meaning of the word “Be”, because the Divine Command “Be”, is nothing other than the actual existence of the thing concerned.

This “command” is in contrast to *al-khalq* (الْخَلْقُ) = creation) which is the other side of the things – it is subject to changes and variations; it grows by and by and deteriorates in the same way; it works within the framework of time and space. (We shall fully explain this theme in its proper place, Allah willing.)

To sum it up, *Imam* is a leader who guides by a Divine Command which is closely associated with him. The *Imamah*, in its esoteric sense, is *al-wilayah* = الْوِلَايَةُ) guardianship, authority) over the people in their actions and activities; and its guidance entails conveying them to the final destination by the command of Allah.

It is different from that guidance which only shows the way – and which is usually done by the prophets and messengers of Allah as well as by other believers who guide the people towards Allah with sincere exhortation and good advice. This second type of guidance is mentioned in the following verses:

And We did not send any apostle but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly; then Allah makes whom He pleases err and He guides whom He pleases... (14:4).

And he who believed (i.e., the believer from the family of Pharaoh) said: “O my people! follow me, I will guide you to the right course” (40:38).

Why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may acquire (proper) understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them, so that they may be cautious? (9:122)

(We shall further explain it later on.)

Then Allah describes the reason why He gave them the *Imamah*, in these words, ***as they were patient, and they were certain of Our signs.*** (See 32:24, quoted above.) The criteria, therefore, are patience and absolute certainty. They were steadfast and patient in the cause of Allah. Patience, in this verse, is unconditional; therefore it means remaining patient and steadfast in all matters and all conditions with which Allah may choose to test the submission and servitude of a servant.

And they possessed highest degree of certainty. Going through the stories of Ibrahim (a.s.), we find the following words of Allah in the Qur'an:

And thus did We show Ibrahim the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and so that he might be of those who are sure (6:75).

The verse clearly indicates that showing of the kingdom to Ibrahim was the prelude to the bestowal of absolute certainty on him. It proves that certainty is an inseparable concomitant of looking at the kingdom. This is also the theme of the following verses:

Nay! if you had known with a knowledge of certainty, you should most certainly have seen the hell (102:5 – 6).

Nay! rather, what they used to do has become (like) ***rust upon their hearts. Nay! most surely they shall on that day be shut out away from their Lord.... Nay! most surely the record of the righteous shall be in the 'Illiyin. And what will make you know what 'Illiyin is? It is a written book; see it those who are near*** (to Allah) (83: 14 – 15; 18–21).

These verses prove that the “near ones” are those who are not shut out away from their Lord; on their hearts there are no rust or coverings of sin, ignorance and doubt; they are the ones who have absolute certainty about Allah, and they see the *'Illiyin* as they see the hell.

In short, it is essential for an Imam to be a man of absolute certainty, who sees the world of the “kingdom” of Allah which is based on the “words” of Allah. And we have explained earlier that the kingdom is the command of Allah, which, in its turn, is the esoteric side of the universe.

Now let us have a fresh look at the verse 21:73 (and 32:24) quoted earlier. “And We made them Imams, to guide (people) by Our command:” it very clearly proves that whatever is the subject of guidance (i.e., the hearts and the deeds), the Imam has its inner reality; he is constantly in touch with its another side – the side of the command, which is never hidden from him.

It is known that the hearts and the deeds, like any other thing, have two sides, one of the “command” and the other of the “creation”; therefore, the reality of the deeds of the men – both good and bad – is always within the vision of the Imam, always under his observation; and he has authority over both ways – the one of happiness and bliss and the other of unhappiness and distress. Also, Allah has said:

(Remember) ***the day when We will call every people with their Imam*** (17:71).

(We shall explain when writing about this verse that the “Imam” here means the true leader, and not the scroll of deeds, as some people think.) There-fore, the Imam is the one who shall lead the people to Allah ***on the day when hidden things shall be tried***, as he leads them to Him in the manifest and esoteric lives of this world.

The last quoted verse also shows that there cannot be a single period, a single moment, without an Imam, because Allah says, “every people”. (The detailed proof of this statement will be given under that verse.)

The *Imamah* is such an exalted and sublime position that it cannot be given except to one who is extremely virtuous by his own self. If someone's soul is polluted, even in a minute degree, by any injustice or sin, then he needs someone else to guide him back to the right way. And Allah has said:

Is he then who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed, or he who himself does not go right unless he is guided? (10:35).

Here Allah puts two groups opposite to each other: one is that which guides to the truth; and the other, that which does not go right unless guided by someone else, in other words, the one which needs a helping hand to be guided aright. This contrast means that the one who guides to the truth, is rightly guided by himself; conversely, the one rightly guided by another person cannot guide to the truth.

It follows from the above discourse that: –

First: The Imam must be *al-ma'sum* (الْمَعْصُومُ) = sinless; protected from error and sin). Otherwise, he would not be rightly guided by himself, as explained above. Also, the following verse proves their *al-'ismah* (الْعِصْمَةُ) = sinlessness):

And We made them Imams to guide (people) by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good (deeds) and the establishing of prayer and the giving of zakat, and Us (alone) did they worship (21:73).

According to this verse, all the deeds of the Imam are good, he is guided to them, not by any other person, but on his own by Divine help. The phrase translated above as “the doing of good (deeds)” is *fi'la l-khayrat* (فِعْلُ الْخَيْرَاتِ) = to do good deeds); it is *al-masdar* (الْمَصْدَرُ) = roughly translated as infinitive verb), used as the first construct of a genitive construction; and such a *masdar* proves that the action has surely taken place. Let us explain it in another way:

If Allah would have said, 'We revealed to them: Do good deeds', it would not have shown that they actually obeyed the command and did good; but when He says, *We revealed to them the doing of good*, it means that whatever they did was good and it was by Divine inspiration and heavenly help.

Second: Conversely, whoever is not *ma'sum*, can never be an Imam, a guide to the truth.

Now, it is clear that the adjective, “the unjust”, (in the Divine declaration, “My covenant will not include the unjust”) covers everyone who might have done any injustice, for example, polytheism, idol-worship or any other sin, in any period of his life, even if he may have repented and been good afterwards.

One of our teachers (may Allah have mercy on him!) was asked as to how this verse could prove that the Imam must be *ma'sum*. He replied:

Logically, we may divide mankind into four groups: (1) One who remains unjust throughout his life; (2) One who was never unjust in any period of his life; (3) One who was unjust in the beginning, but became just later on; and (4) One who was just in the beginning, but became unjust afterwards, Ibrahim was too sublime in position to ask for the *Imamah* for the first or the fourth group.

This leaves two groups (the second and the third) which could be included in his prayer. And Allah rejected one of them – the one who was unjust in the beginning but became just later on. Now, there remains only one group who could be given the *Imamah* – the one who was never unjust in any period of his life; that is, who was *ma'sum*. 1

To sum it up, the verse shows that:

First: *Imamah* is a Divinely-made status.

Second: The Imam must be *ma'sum*, by Divine *'ismah*; in other words, he must be protected by Allah from sins and errors.

Third: The earth cannot remain without a rightful Imam, as long as there is a man on it.

Fourth: It is essential for an Imam to be supported by the Divine help.

Fifth: The deeds of the people are not hidden from the Imam.

Sixth: The Imam must have knowledge of all that is needed by the people for their good in this world and the next.

Seventh: It is impossible for any other person to surpass the Imam in any virtue.

These seven are among the basic factors of the *Imamah*, and this verse, read with other relevant verses, leads us to them, and Allah is our Guide.

Objection: As the *Imamah* means to guide by the command of Allah, and as that guiding to the truth is concomitant with the Imam's being rightly guided by Allah (as has been inferred from the verse: ***Is he then who guides to truth more worthy to be followed...***), then all the prophets should certainly be called Imams.

Obviously, prophethood of a prophet comes into being only when he is rightly guided by Allah through revelation; a prophet is not guided by any other person through teaching or advice etc.

Therefore, bestowal of prophethood would be synonymous with that of the *Imamah*. And the objection you had put against the interpretation of the *Imamah* with prophethood would be turned *in toto* against your explanation.

Reply: What we have inferred from the foregoing description is that if one guides to Allah by His command, he must be guided aright not by any other person but by Allah Himself. But the Qur'anic verses have not shown that its contrary proposition is also true, that is, it has not been proved that whoever is rightly guided by Allah should also be a guide to Allah. Therefore, it is not necessary that every prophet should be called an Imam. In one place, Allah declares about various prophets that they were rightly guided by Him, and yet does not join it with the statement that they guided their people to the truth.

He says:

And We gave to him (i.e., Ibrahim) Ishaq and Ya'qub; each did We guide, and Nuh did We guide before, and of his descendants, Dawud and Sulayman and Ayyub and Yusuf and Harun; and thus

do We reward those who do good; and Zakariyya and Yahya and 'Isa and Ryas; every one was of the righteous (ones) and Isma'il and Ilyasa ' and Yunus and Lut; and every one We did exalt over the worlds; and from among their fathers and their descendants and their brethren; and We chose them and guided them to the straight path. This is Allah's guidance, He guides thereby whom He pleases of His servants; and if they had set up others (with Him), certainly what they did would have become ineffectual for them. These are they to whom We gave the book and the wisdom and the prophethood; therefore if these disbelieve in it, We have (already) entrusted with it a people who are not disbelievers in it. These are they whom Allah guided, therefore follow their guidance. Say: "I do not ask you for any reward for it; it is but a reminder to the worlds" (6:86 -90).²

The context of the above verses shows that this Divine Guidance is an unalterable firm decree; it will continue in this *ummah* even after the Messenger of Allah (S), and will remain confined within the progeny of Ibrahim (a.s.), as the verses 43:26 - 28 prove:

And when Ibrahim said to his father and his people: "Surely, I am clear of what you worship; (I worship) but (only) Him Who created me, for surely He will guide me." And He made it a word to continue in his posterity, so that they may return (to God).

When Ibrahim (a.s.) declared to his people that he was clear of what they worshipped and that he worshipped only Him Who had created him, he had already achieved that guidance which contemplation and logical reasoning can produce.

Then he told them of his expectation that Allah would surely guide him. This subsequent guidance was obviously different from the earlier one; it was a guidance by the command of Allah.

Thereafter, Allah says that He made this Divine Guidance "a word to continue" in Ibrahim's posterity. This is one of those verses in which "word" has been used not for speech but for a substance - it refers to the guidance as "a word". The same is the interpretation of "word of piety" in the verse:

and made them keep the word of piety, and well were they entitled to it and worthy of it (48:26).

The above explanation makes it clear that the *Imamah* after Ibrahim (a.s.), is confined to his descendants. The sentences, "(Ibrahim) said: 'And of my offspring?' He said: 'My covenant will not include unjust'", point to this fact.

Obviously, Ibrahim (a.s.) had asked for the *imamah* not for all but only for some of his descendants, and he was told that it would not be given to the unjust of his descendants. Needless to say that not all of his descendants were unjust; therefore, this reply disqualifies only one group and not all. In other words, it grants the request for a selected group of his offspring and further sanctifies it as a covenant, and on that basis it says that the covenant of Allah will not include the unjust ones.

Qur'an: *"My covenant will not include the unjust"*: This expression shows how far removed are the unjust from the circle of the Divine Covenant 3; therefore, it is an example of *isti'arah bi l-kinayah*.

Traditions

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Verily Allah (to Whom belong Might and Majesty) accepted Ibrahim as a servant before making him a prophet; and verily Allah made him a prophet before appointing him as a messenger; and verily Allah appointed him as a messenger before taking him as a friend; and verily Allah took him as a friend before making him an Imam.

When He combined for him all (the above-mentioned) things, **He said, 'Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men.'**" The Imam further said: "It was because of the greatness of it (i.e., *Imamah*) in the eyes of Ibrahim (a.s.) that he said: **'And of my offspring?' He said: 'My covenant will not include the unjust.'**" The Imam explained: "A fool will not be Imam of a pious." (*al-Kafi*)

The author says: The same meaning has been narrated from the same Imam through another chain of narrators, and from al-Baqir (a.s.) through yet other chain; and al-Mufid has narrated it from as-Sadiq (a.s.).

The Imam has said that Allah accepted Ibrahim as a servant before making him a prophet. This theme is inferred from the Qur'anic verse:

And certainly We gave to Ibrahim his rectitude before, and We knew him fully well. When he said to his father and his people: "What are these images to which you (as devotees) cleave?" They said: "We found our fathers worshipping them." He said: "Certainly you have been (both) you and your fathers, in manifest error." They said: "Have you brought to us the truth, or are you one of the triflers?" He said: "Nay! your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who brought them into existence, and I am of those who bear witness to this" (21:51 – 56).

This story shows how Allah took Ibrahim (a.s.) as a servant in the beginning of his spiritual journey.

It is one thing that someone is a slave or servant of Allah, and a quite different thing that he is taken or accepted by Allah as His slave. Being a slave of Allah is a concomitant of existence and creation; anyone who is created and has perceiving faculties is inescapably a slave of Allah; this servitude does not depend on Divine acceptance.

Man, for example, owes his existence to his Lord, is created and made by Him; he may behave in his personal life according to this servitude's dictates by surrendering himself to his Lord the Almighty, or he may act rebelliously, but his submission or rebellion does not alter the fact that he is a born slave of Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an:

There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Beneficent Allah as a servant

(19:93).

But if he does not act as a slave should do, if he behaves in the earth with arrogance and rebellion, then he does not deserve to be called a slave or servant of Allah, because he does not fulfill the conditions of servitude.

A servant surrenders himself to his Lord, and leaves all his affairs in his Master's hands. Therefore, only he deserves to be called a servant of Allah who is His slave in his person as well as in his action – only such a man can truly be called a slave of Allah.

Allah says: ***And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness...*** (25:63).

Accordingly, when Allah accepts a man as His servant, He takes masterly interest in that servant's affairs; in other words, Allah becomes his *waliyy* and guardian, and takes all his affairs in His Own hands. Such a servitude is the key to *al-wilayah* (الولاية) = guardianship).

The verse 7: 196 points to this reality:

“Surely my guardian is Allah, Who revealed the Book, and He takes in hand (the affairs of) the good.”

The adjective “good”, refers to those who are worthy of Divine guardianship and friendship. Allah has referred to the Prophet in several places in the Qur'an as His servant, for example,

... ***Who revealed the Book to His servant...*** (18:1);

... ***Who sends down clear signs upon His servant...*** (57: 9);

... ***when the servant of Allah stood up calling upon Him...*** (72:19).

In short, to say that Allah accepted someone as His servant, is another way of saying that Allah took him under His *wilayah* and guardianship.

The Imam said: "... and verily Allah made him a prophet before appointing him as a messenger". The difference between a prophet and a messenger, as shown by the traditions narrated from the Imams of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt*, is as follows:

A prophet sees in his dream what Allah intends to reveal to him; and a messenger sees the angel and talks to him.

The same gradual progress is seen in the history of Ibrahim (a.s.). Allah says:

And mention Ibrahim in the Book; surely he was a truthful (man), a prophet, when he said to his

father: “O my father! why do you worship what neither hears nor sees, nor does it avail you in the least” (19:41 – 42).

The verse shows that he was a prophet when he said this to his father. It was a confirmation of what he had told his people as soon as he arrived among them:

“Surely I am clear of what you worship; (I worship) but (only) Him Who created me, for surely He will guide me” (43:26 – 27).

Then we read the verse 11:69 which says:

And certainly Our messengers (i.e., angels) came to Ibrahim with good news. They said: “Peace.” “Peace,” said he.

This event, in which Ibrahim saw the angels and talked to them, had taken place in his old age long after he had left his father and his nation.

The Imam said: “And verily Allah appointed him as a messenger before taking him as a friend.” It is inferred from the words of Allah:

And who is better in religion than he who... follows the faith of Ibrahim, the upright one? And Allah took Ibrahims a friend (4:125).

Apparently it shows that Allah took him as a friend because of the same upright faith and religion which he had promulgated by the command of his Lord; the theme of this verse is to describe the distinction and excellence of that upright religion which so much raised the status of Ibrahim that he was taken as a friend of Allah.

al-Khalil (الْخَلِيلُ) is more exclusive than *as-Sadiq* (الصَّادِقُ), although both are generally translated as “friend”. When a friend is sincere and truthful (*as-Sadiq*) in his dealings with the other friend, he is called *as-Sadiq*; thereafter, if he turns away from all else, confining his needs and requirements to that friend only, he is called *al-khalil*, because *al-khullah* (الْخُلَّةُ) means need and requirement.

The meaning of the Imam's sentence, “and verily Allah took him as a friend before making him an Imam,” may be understood from the foregoing commentary. The words of the Imam: “A fool will not be Imam of a pious,” point to the verse 2:130 – 131:

And who forsakes the religion of Ibrahim but he who makes himself a fool, and most certainly We chose him in this world, and in the hereafter he is most surely among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, Submit (yourself), he said: “I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.”

In this verse Allah says that whoever turns away from the religion of Ibrahim – in other words, whoever is unjust – is a fool; then he contrasts this foolishness with Divine selection – a selection which has been

explained in the next sentences as “Islam” or submission to God. (Ponder on the clause, **When his Lord said to him, Submit yourself**).

Then we see that *al-Islam* (الإِسْلَامُ) = submission) and *at-taqwa* (التَّقْوَى) = piety, fear of Allah) have been made one, or applicable to one meaning, in the verse:

O you who believe! fear Allah as is due to Him, and do not die but as Muslims (3:102).

(Think deeply on it.)

al-Mufid has narrated from Durust and Hisham from the Imams (of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt*): “Ibrahim was a prophet, and he was not an Imam until Allah, Blessed and High is He, said (to him): **“Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men.”** (Ibrahim) said: **“And of my offspring?”** Then Allah, Blessed and High is He, said: **“My covenant will not include the unjust.”** Whoever had (ever) worshipped an idol or a sculpture or an image, cannot be an Imam.”

The author says: Its meaning is clear from the above explanations.

It is narrated in *al-Amali* of at-Tusi (with complete chain of narrators) and in *al-Manaqib* of Ibn al-Maghazili (as a *marfu'* tradition) from Ibn Mas'ud from the Prophet that he said (explaining the words of Allah to Ibrahim in this verse):

“Whoever prostrated before an idol, leaving me, I will not make him an Imam.” Then the Prophet said: “And that prayer was fulfilled in me and my brother Ali; neither of us ever prostrated before any idol.”

Waki' and Ibn Marduwayh have narrated from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) that the Prophet said (in explanation of the words of Allah, **My covenant will not include the unjust**): “There is no obedience except in good.” (*ad-Durru 'l-manthur*)

'Abd ibn Hamid narrated from 'Imran ibn Husayn that he said: “I heard the Prophet saying: ‘There is no obedience of a creature in disobedience of Allah (i.e., a man should not be obeyed if he tells you to disobey Allah).’” (*ibid.*)

The author says: The meanings of those traditions are easily understood from the earlier explanations. al-'Ayyashi has narrated in his *Tafsir*, through several chains, from Safwan the camel-driver, that he said:

“We were at Mecca; and the talk gradually reached the words of Allah, **And (remember) when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, then he fulfilled them.**” (The Imam) said: “That is, he completed them with Muhammad and 'Ali and the Imams from the descendants of 'Ali, as Allah says: **Offspring, one from the other**” (3:34).

The author says: This tradition takes the “word” in the meaning of the *Imamah*; a similar explanation is given to “word” in the verses:... **for surely He will guide me. And He made it a word to continue in**

his posterity... (43: 27 – 28).

According to this tradition, the verse would mean as follows: And remember when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, that is, his own *imamah*, and that of Ishaq and his progeny; then He completed it with the *imamah* of Muhammad and of the Imams from his family members, who were from the progeny of Isma'il; then Allah made it known to Ibrahim telling him:

“Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men.” Ibrahim said: **“And of my offspring?”** Allah said: **“My covenant will not include the unjust.”**

1. It is a simplified version of the argument given by al-Qadi Nurullah Tustari (ash-Shahid ath-Thalith) in his *Ihgaqu 'l-haqq*. (Vide the new ed. with footnotes by Ayatullah Sayyid Shahabuddin Mar'ashi Najafi, Matba'ah Islamiyyah, Tehran, vol. II, pp. 367 – 369.) (tr.)

2. This reply does not seem to meet the objection. The verse clearly says that these prophets were guided by Allah. Also, it is accepted that all the prophets, including those mentioned in this verse, guided their people aright, and that they did so by the command of Allah. Thus, all the characteristics of the *Imamah* were found in every prophet who called his people to the right path. (tr.)

3. Its literal translation: My covenant will not reach the unjust. Note that Allah did not say: The unjust will not reach My covenant, because it would have implied that it was within the power of man – albeit a just one – to reach the status of the *Imamah*.

The present sentences does not leave room for any such misunderstanding; it clearly shows that getting the *imamah* is not within human jurisdiction, it is exclusively in the hand of Allah and He gives to whom He pleases. (tr.)

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