

Part 33: Imam or Ummah in the Quran

Verses that mention Imam or Ummah; Their interpretation

First verse:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ.

And among from you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and those it is that shall be successful. (Surah Ale-Imran 3: 104)

Shaykh Tabarsi has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that he used to recite this verse in this way:

And among from you there should be Imams...

It means that there should be an Imam and leader amongst you, having these qualities. 1

Second verse:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ
بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ...

You are the best of the nations raised up for (the benefit of) man, you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah, and if the followers of the book had believed it would have been better for them, of them (some) are believers. (Surah Ale-Imran 3: 110)

Ali Ibne Ibrahim from good-like chain of narrators has narrated from Ibne Sinan that: I recited this verse before Imam Sadiq (a.s.), and the Hazrat said: Is this nation the best amongst all nations? One which has martyred Amirul Momineen (a.s.), Imam Hasan and Imam Husain (a.s.)? I said: May I be sacrificed for you, then how was this verse revealed? The Imam replied: You are the best of Imams, who were created for the guidance of the people. Then he said: Don't you see that after this Allah has praised them with qualities that are the qualities of the Imams?

Ayyashi has narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that this verse was revealed in praise of Muhammad (S) and his vicegerents.

In another authentic tradition from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) in the explanation of this verse it is mentioned that it is the nation on which the prayer of Ibrahim became incumbent, as the Almighty Allah says:

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ. رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرْنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ. رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ.

And when Ibrahim and Ismail raised the foundations of the house: Our Lord! Accept from us, surely thou art the hearing the knowing, Our Lord and make us both submissive to thee and (raise) from our offspring a nation submitting to thee and show our ways of devotion and turn to us (mercifully), surely thou art the oft returning (to mercy), the merciful. Our Lord and raise up in them an Apostle from among them who shall recite to them thy communications and teach them the book and the wisdom, and purify them, surely thou art the mighty, the wise. (Surah Baqarah 2: 127-129)

When Allah accepted the supplication of Ibrahim and Ismail and appointed Imams from his progeny who will be obedient and from that nation and appointed a Prophet who will read the verses of Allah and teach the book and wisdom. After that Ibrahim recited another prayer that keep that progeny away from polytheism and idol-worship and protect them from all these things, so that Imamate can be from them, and that people may follow them, and then said:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ. رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ أَضَلُّنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنْ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ.

And when Ibrahim said: My Lord! Make this city secure and save me and my sons from worshipping idols. My Lord! Surely they have led many men astray, then whoever follows me, he is surely of me, and whoever disobeys me, Thou surely art forgiving Merciful. (Surah Ibrahim 14:36)

The Imam said that Imams and the nation can be only those from whom the Prophet has been raised and they will be from the progeny of Ibrahim. That is why the 'medium nation' and the 'best nation' are the Aale Muhammad from whom the Prophet was raised and the Almighty Allah has turned the hearts of the people towards them and that is the aim of the prayer of Ibrahim:

فَجَعَلَ أَفئِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ.

...therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them... (Surah Ibrahim 14:37)

Ibne Shahr Aashob has narrated from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that he said: The 'best nation' are Ahle Bayt of the Prophet and according to another tradition the Ahle Bayt of the Prophet are better than all Ahle Bayt who are created for guiding the people.

Also, it is narrated that Imam Baqir (a.s.) recited the verse in this way: *You are the best nation...* and said that Jibraeel had brought in this way and it refers to Muhammad, Ali and the vicegerents from their progeny.²

Third verse:

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ.

And surely this your nation is one nation and I am your Lord, therefore be careful (of your duty) to Me. (Surah Mu'minin 23:52)

Most commentators have said that 'nation' refers to community. Ibne Mahyar and Ibne Shahr Aashob have narrated from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that 'nation' refers to Aale Muhammad (a.s.).

Fourth verse:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ.

And we made of them Imams to guide by our command when they were patient and they were certain of our communications. (Surah Sajdah 32:24)

At another place after the mention of Firon and his army Allah says:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أُمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ. وَأَتَّبَعْنَاهُمْ فِي هَذِهِ
الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُمْ مِنَ الْمَقْبُوحِينَ.

And we made them Imams who call to the fire and on the day of Qiyamat they shall not be assisted. And we caused a curse to follow them in this world, and on the day of Qiyamat they shall be of those made to appear hideous. (Surah Qasas 28:41-42)

Ali Ibne Ibrahim, Kulaini, Saffar, Ibne Mahyar and others with many chains of narrators have narrated from Imam Sadiq and Baqir (a.s.) that there are two types of Imams according to the book of Allah, because Allah has said:

And we made of them Imams to guide by our command... (Surah Sajdah 32:24)

That is they guide people according to Allah's command and not according the wish and will of the people and they give preference to the commands of Allah rather than their own. At another place He says:

And we made them Imams who call to the fire...

It means the leaders of disbelief and deviation who prefer their own opinion to that of Allah and give judgements according to their whims and fancies against the orders of Allah.

In *Basairud Darajat* there is a tradition from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that the world was never devoid of a good Imam and a bad Imam. The good character Imam is the one who is mentioned in the first verse and the bad character Imam is one who is mentioned in the second verse.

In another tradition he says: Only a just Imam reforms the people and not an unjust Imam. After that Imam (a.s.) recited both the verses.

It is narrated from Amirul Momineen (a.s.) that: From the Quraysh are good character Imams for the good people and of them are bad Imams for the evil people, then Imam read the second verse.

Furat Ibne Ibrahim and Ibne Mahyar relate from Imam Baqir (a.s.) on the explanation of the verse:

And we made of them Imams to guide by our command... (Surah Sajdah 32:24)

That this verse was revealed for the Imams from the progeny of Fatima and it is especially for them because they guide people according to the commands of Allah.

Ibne Mahyar has narrated from the same Imam that this verse was revealed for the Imams of the progeny of Fatima and the Holy Spirit (Ruhul Qudus) brings divine revelation in their hearts.³

Fifth verse:

وَكذلكَ جَعَلناكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَداءَ عَلى النَّاسِ.

In this way we have made you the medium nation so that you be witness for the people. (Surah Baqarah 2: 143)

There are many traditions narrated by Pure Imams (a.s.) that we are the medium nation and we are witness for the creatures of Allah and His proof on the earth.

Sixth verse:

وَكُلَّ شَئٍ أَحْصَيْناهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ.

...and We have recorded everything in a manifest Imam. (Surah Yaseen 36: 12)

Most commentators have said that the ‘manifest Imam’ refers to the Protected Tablet (Lauh-e-Mahfuz), but in many traditions related by the Holy Imams (a.s.) it is mentioned the Manifest Imam refers to Amirul Momineen (a.s.). The Almighty Allah has gathered the knowledge of all the things in his person.

In *Maniul Akhbar* there is a tradition from Imam Baqir (a.s.) that when this verse was revealed on the Holy Prophet (S), Abu Bakr and Umar were standing near by and asked whether the manifest Imam refers to Taurat. He replied in the negative. Then they asked whether it is Injeel and he replied in negative. Again they asked that it must be the Quran. He replied: No. At that Ali (a.s.) entered. The Prophet looked at him and pointed towards him and said: He is the manifest Imam, to him Allah has given the knowledge of all things.

There are many traditions on this topic, which will come in the life sketch of that Hazrat, Insha Allah.

1. The writer says: Even if this verse has ‘Ummat’ it would refer to the Imams (because to order good and stop from evil is their effective duty).

2. The writer says: It is clear from traditions that in whichever way the verse may be it addresses the Holy Imams (a.s.)

only. Even if the whole Ummat is meant, since they are the best, the verse refers to them alone and not to every person of the Ummat.

3. The writer says: There are many traditions on this topic but these are sufficient for sensible people. If someone doubts that the first verse was revealed after the mention of Moosa and Israel and the other one after the mention of Ishaq and Yaqoob and all the Prophets and similar to that and the other verse came after the incident of Firon and his army. So how it is possible that the first be in the praise of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and the second verse about their enemies? The reply answer is that many a times it is stated that Allah mentions the stories of the past people so that this Ummat acquires advice from it and that it should be an example for it. So apparently the verse is about the past people, but in it allegorical meaning it is the example of the Holy Prophet (S) and after him the Holy Imams (a.s.) and their enemies that they are similar to Firon, Qaroon and Nimrod and people like them would be similar to the Caliphs of this Ummat and they would be enemies of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). It has thus come that Firon, Haman and Qaroon are the first, second and third (caliphs) and that Samri of this Ummat is the second fellow and the calf is the first one because in Quran there are many verses whose beginning portion is about one and the last portion about some other.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/hayat-al-qulub-vol3-allamah-muhammad-baqir-al-majlisi/part-33-imam-or-ummah-quran>