

A CRITICAL STUDY OF QURANIC COMMENTATORS' OPINIONS OF VERSES ABOUT PROPHET IBRAHIM'S IMAMATE (AS); AN INNOVATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Islamic commentators have long disagreed on the concept of imamate through history. The most important proofs are definitely the verses of the Quran. Among these, an important verse that refers to Imamate is verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah. In this study, after examining the lexical and idiomatic meaning of the word *Imam*, we will explain the uses of Imamate in the Quran and finally, expresses the views of both Shia and Sunni commentators about Imamate. Most Sunni commentators consider prophecy and Imamate equal, and most Shiite commentators consider the position of Imamate beyond prophecy. According to verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah, Sunni commentators are divided into four groups: a) Some have not specified the meaning of the word Imamate, b) in addition to lack of providing meaning, others have dealt with issues such the conditions of choosing the Imam, c) another group only express the lexical root and literal meaning, d) and most Sunni commentators believe that the meaning of "Imam" is the same as prophecy. Shiite commentators have also expressed three views in interpreting the meaning and concept of Imamate: a) Some believe Imamate is the same as leadership, b) Some consider Imamate as the leadership of the prophets over each other, c) And some consider Imamate as an esoteric guidance. In an innovative view presented in this article, it is emphasized that according to the last verse of Surah Al-Kahf, the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) is not scientific, rather "practical".

Keywords: Imamate, interpretation, Shiism and Sunni, Quran, commentators

INTRODUCTION

Leadership, in the general sense, and Imamate in the sense of the succession of the Prophet (PBUH), has been discussed since the beginning of human history, especially during the time of the Prophet (PBUH). Imamate is the most discussed issue and many books have been written about its philosophy. For example, Aghabzorg Tehrani reports a list of 120 specific and independent treatises on Imamate from

scholars of the two parties. (Tehrani, 2007: 2 / 340-320).

Some teachings in the Holy Quran seem simple and easy, but understanding its truth requires deep reflection and exploration. One of these teachings is the subject of Imamate, in general, and the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), in particular. The Holy Quran explicitly states that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) was selected as Imam after many trials and tribulations.¹ (Al-Baqarah / 124).

¹ وَإِذْ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

The completion of these experiments was during Prophet Ibrahim's (AS) final years and took place when Ibrahim (AS) was already a prophet. The question arises that what did Ibrahim (AS) lack as a prophet and achieve in his final years?

The answer to this seemingly simple question is extremely difficult; because prophecy is a type of Imamate or at least guarantees Imamate. How is it possible that the Prophet lacked the position of Imamate most of his prophethood and achieved it later? This has caused many commentators to abandon the interpretation of the verse, and a number have expressed different and contradictory views and theories, some of which are not properly justified.

Many articles and books have been written in the field of Imamate such as "*Al-Ghadir*" written by Allama Amini. To name a few:

"A Comparative study of both party commentators' views on the relationship between the Prophet and the Imam" by Gholam Hossein Arabi; "*Flowology of the interpretations of both parties towards verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah regarding Imamate*" by Nusrat Nilsaz; "A Comparative and analytical interpretation on the verse of Imamate in the interpretations of both parties" by Mohammad Hadi Mofateh.

In this article, after expressing the lexical and idiomatic meaning of Imamate, we deal with the use of the word in the Holy Quran, then categorize and critique both party commentators' opinions and finally explain their points of view.

1. Terminology of Imamate:

1-1. The literal meaning of Imamate:

Khalil ibn Ahmad Farahidi defines "Imam" as leader (Farahidi, 1409: 8 / 429-428). Ibn Faris has presented a similar view (Ibn Faris, 1404: 1/28). Through lexicologists' views, we can say that all lexicographers believe that the word *Imam* is derived from the root "مم" which means *Muqtada*. (Ragheb, 1412 AH: 88; Ibn Manzoor, 1414: 16/25).

1-2. The idiomatic meaning of Imamate:

1-2-1. According to Shiite scholars:

Some Shiite scholars believe that "An Imam is called *Imam* because he is the *Muqtada* of people and has been appointed by God Almighty, so he is obligated to obey" (Saduq, 1981: 96; Mofid, 1413: 73). Some also say: "Imamate is the presidency in religious and

worldly matters" (Hassan Ibn Yusuf, 2007: 187; Tusi, Bi Ta: 83; Tabatabai, 1984: 2/148).

1-2-2. According to Sunni scholars:

Some Sunni scholars believe that, "Imamate is the guardianship of affairs, and there is no level higher than Imamate." (Taftazani, 1992: 5/237). Some also consider Imamate as "general leadership in religion and worldly matters" (Fakhr Razi, 1973: 5/234) (Seyed Sharif, 1413: 16). Some also state: "Imamate is an individual's personal caliphate, introduced by the prophets in establishing the laws and maintaining the field of Sharia, so people are obliged to obey (Seifuddin, 2011: 5/121).

2. Uses of Imamate in the Holy Quran

The word Imam or its plural form (Imams) has been mentioned twelve times in the Holy Quran. This implies several meanings;

2-1. Divine memory

«إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ»
(Yasin / 12)

"Indeed, it is We who bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind, and all things We have enumerated in a clear register".

2-2. Leadership

«وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا»

(Baghara / 124)

"And [mention, O Muhammad], when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with words [i.e., commands] and he fulfilled them. [Allah] said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." [Ibrahim] said, "And of my descendants?" [Allah] said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers".

«وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ»

(Sajda / 24)

"And We made from among them leaders guiding by Our command when they were patient and [when] they were certain of Our signs".

«وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا...»

(Anbya / 73)

"And We made them leaders guiding by Our command. And We inspired to them the doing of good deeds, establishment of prayer, and giving of zakāh; and they were worshippers of Us".

3-2. Holy book

«وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَىٰ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً...»

(Al-Ahqaf / 12)

"And before it was the scripture of Moses to lead and as a mercy. And this is a confirming Book in

an Arabic tongue to warn those who have wronged and as good tidings to the doers of good.”

«.... وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَى إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً...»

(Hood / 17)

“And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days - and His Throne had been upon water - that He might test you as to which of you is best in deed. But if you say, "Indeed, you are resurrected after death," those who disbelieve will surely say, "This is not but obvious magic”.

2-4. Path

«وَإِنْ كَانَ أَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَةِ لظَالِمِينَ * فَانْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَبِإِمَامٍ

مُؤْمِنِينَ»

(Hijr / 78-79)

“And the companions of the thicket [i.e., the people of Madyan] were [also] wrongdoers, So We took retribution from them, and indeed, both [cities] are on a clear highway”.

2-5. False leader

«وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَيْمَةً يُدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ...»

(Qasas/ 41)

“And We made them leaders¹ inviting to the Fire, and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped”.

«.... فَقَاتِلُوا أَيْمَةَ الْكُفْرِ.....»

(Tawba/ 12)

“And if they break their oaths after their treaty and defame your religion, then combat the leaders of disbelief, for indeed, there are no oaths [sacred] to them; [fight them that] they might cease”.

2-6. The right leader

«وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً

وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ»

(Qasas / 5)

“And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors”.

«..... وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا»

(Furqan/ 74)

“And those who say, "Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes¹ and make us a leader [i.e., example] for the righteous”.

«يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِيمَانِهِمْ...»

(Isra / 71)

“Mention, O Muḥammad], the Day We will call forth every people with their record [of deeds]. Then whoever is given his record in his right hand - those will read their records, and injustice

will not be done to them, [even] as much as a thread [inside the date seed]”.

3. Shiite and Sunni commentators' view on Imamate

In theological disputes between Shiites and Sunnis on the issue of Imamate after the Prophet (PBUH), and among the three verses referring to Imamate and leadership, verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah is mostly cited. Therefore, the commentators' views have been arranged accordingly.

3-1. The views of Sunni commentators

In examining Sunni views about verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah, we find that they have adopted four methods:

One: Some have not specified the meaning of the word Imamate. (Ibn Jawzi, 1422: 1/108)

Two: In addition to lack of meaning, some have dealt with other issues such as the conditions of choosing the Imam (Shenqiti, 1415: 1 / 21-24)

Three: Some define Imamate only at the lexical and literal level (Thalabi: 1422: 1/269; Mawardi, Bita: 1/91); Ellipse, 1418: 1/103; Samarkandi, Bita: 1/91; Tha'labi, 1418: 1/312; Qashiri, Bita: 1/121; Siouti, 1404: 1/118; Ibn Abi Hatim, 1419: 1/222).

Four: Most Sunni commentators believe Imam and prophet hold the same meaning. (Surabadi, 2001: 1/119; Rashid Reza, Bita: 1/455; Haghi Brusavi, Bita: 1/224; Khatib, Bita: 9/920; Fakhr Razi, 1420: 4/36; Zamakhshari, 1407: 1/184; Alusi, 1415: 1/374; Maraghi, Bita: 1/209; Ghasemi, 1418: 2/246; Zahili, 1411: 2/306; Baghavi, 162/1 ;1420 ;, Firoozabadi, 1406: 2/110; Sayed Qutb, 1412; 1/112. In the following, we refer to these views and commentators.

3-1-1. Fakhr Razi's point of view

In order to prove that Imamate and Prophecy are equal in meaning², Fakhr-e-Razi says ;

«اولا چون جمله «إني جاعلك للناس اماما»

“Imamate and Prophecy are combined; therefore, an Imam must be a prophet with separate rules; because if he obeys and guards another prophet, he is no longer an Imam and cannot be appointed the Imam of all people.

«جاعلك للناس اماما»

Secondly, the meaning of the word “Imam” implies that he must be the Imam in everything, and only prophets have such an attribute” (Fakhr Razi, 1420: 4/36).

3-1-1-1. Criticism of Fakhr Razi's view

² According to Fakhr Razi : «قال اهل التحقيق المراد من الامام ههنا : النبي و يدل عليه وجوه...»

A question arises in accepting Fakhr Razi's opinion; can God Almighty promise Ibrahim (AS) Imamate while he was a prophet (according to Fakhr al-Razi that Imamate is the same as prophethood, he was also an Imam)?! No, unless we accept that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) had not yet reached prophecy at that time. This possibility also seems untrue; because this promise was made after trials and the birth of Ibrahim's child (Tabatabai, 1417: 1/267). Therefore, the promise of reaching the position of Imamate was given to Prophet Ibrahim (AS) when he was a prophet, and if we consider the position of Imamate the same as prophecy, or assume it a definite requirement of prophecy, then the promise is false. It seems that Fakhr Razi has not been able to provide a logical reason for his claim.

3-1-2. The view of Shahabuddin Alusi

Alusi believes that Imam means prophet³. In response to the objections that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) could not have been promised Imamate during his prophecy, he answers that first of all, Ibrahim's prophethood (AS) was not fixed at the time of the promise; Secondly, if it is proved that he was a prophet at that time, we could say that after the trials and afflictions, the adjective "people" was added to his Imamate (prophecy); That is, he became an Imam for all people from then on (Alusi, 1415: 1 / 374-373).

3-1-2-1. Criticism of Alusi's view

It seems that Alusi has not been successful in responding to the allegations; firstly, the promise was made in Ibrahim's (AS) old age and his prophethood was definite at the time, and secondly, if we consider Imamate to mean only prophecy, the term "people" then is connected to prophecy, because prophethood was never limited to certain people; (Tabatabai, 1417: 3/198). Hence, one cannot assume that God Almighty promised Ibrahim (AS) to make him the prophet of all people around the world.

3-1-3. Mohammad Rashdar Reza's point of view

Rashid Reza has also expressed his views on Imamate mentioned in verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah. While believing that God made the promise of Imamate to Ibrahim (AS) after his prophethood, he concludes that Imamate means

mission; that is Prophet Ibrahim (AS) reached the level of missionary after his trials (Rashid Reza, 1990: 1/28). According to his views, after God's promise, Prophet Ibrahim (AS) was commissioned to propagate his religion, while he did not have this mission beforehand.

3-1-3-1. Criticism of Rashid Reza's view

The promise of Imamate was given to Ibrahim (AS) after the birth of his child which was in his old age (Tabatabai, 1417: 1/267). According to the Holy Quran, before that he repeatedly propagated the teachings of monotheism (For example: An'am / 74 & 81; Anbya / 70 & 51). Therefore, if we also take on Rashid Reza's perspective, Prophet Ibrahim (AS) was an Imam before the promise of Imamate, which is invalid, so this interpretation of Imamate is incorrect.

3-1-4. Ahmad Mustafa Maraghi's view

About the unity of Imamate and Prophethood, Maraghi says: "Almighty God said: I have made you the Imam and leader of the people. I made you a prophet so people will follow you and follow your guidance until the Day of Judgment, and Ibrahim called the people to the religion of Ha'nif, which is the religion and faith in the one and only God and his innocence from polytheism" (Maraghi, 1412: 1/209).

3-1-4-1. Criticism of Ahmad Mustafa Maraghi's view

Despite its acceptance by the Sunnis, Maraghi's view is based on a false premise; Ibrahim (AS) was not a prophet before he was granted Imamate. On one hand, the trials and tribulations began in his youth (being thrown into fire) and continued to his old age (the execution of Ishmael). On the other hand, verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah explicitly states that Imamate took place after the completion of the trials⁵. So, if the Imamate is the same as prophecy, Ibrahim must have reached prophethood in his old age. No Muslim accepts this theory.

3-2. The views of Shiite commentators

Not all Shiite commentators believe that prophethood means Imamate. Some even emphasize the superiority of the position of Imamate over prophecy. (Tabarsi, 1993: 1/38; Balaghi, 1420: 1/241; Tabatabai, 1995: 1 / 422-408; Tusi, Bitā: 1/449; Javadi Amoli, 2006: 6 / 445-448).

³ According to Alusi: «المراد به ههنا النبي المقتدى به فان من عدها لكونه مأموم النبي ليست امامته كامامته.»

⁴ «قال أتى جاعلك للناس اماماً. اى أتى جاعلك للناس رسولاً يؤتم بك و يقتدى بهديك الى يوم القيامة فدعا الناس الى الحنفية السمحة وهى الايمان بالله و توحيدده و اليرائة من الشرك...»

⁵ «و اذا ابتلى ابراهيم ربه بكلمات فاتمهن قال أتى جاعلك للناس اماماً»

Shiite's argument of the superiority of Imamate over prophecy is in fact inspired by the teachings of the Imams (AS); it is rooted in the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH). Imam Sadiq (AS) says: "God Almighty took Ibrahim (AS) as his servant before taking him to prophethood and appointed him the position of prophethood before appointing him *risalat* (mission), and he appointed Ibrahim *risalat* before he made him his Khalil, and made him his Khalil before giving him the position of Imamate, and when these arrangements were made, he said: I have chosen you for Imamate." (Klini, 1983: 1/175; Majlisi, 1412: 12/12).

Even though all Shiite commentators have acknowledged the superiority of Imamate over prophecy, they disagree on the meaning of Imamate. We will categorize the meanings and critique below.

3-2-1. Imamate as leadership

Some commentators believe Imamate means leadership. For example, according to Tabarsi, the word Imam has two uses and definitions: 1) someone whom people follow in their affairs. In this definition, the Imam is someone who is followed by his actions and sayings. 2) the person in charge of the political and governmental affairs in society. In the second definition, the Imam takes action to manage the political, jurisprudential and social affairs among people.

Allameh Tabarsi believes that Imamate and leadership are the same by stating the argument that every prophet necessarily reaches the position of Imamate; and that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) had the status of a prophecy at the time of God Almighty's promise, and also the phrase, «انى جاعلك للناس اماماً» shows the Imamate of Ibrahim (AS) in the present or the future (Tabarsi, 1993: 1/38) Bolaghi has also accepted the same theory in his commentary on Ala 'al-Rahman (Rhetoric, 1420: 1/241).

3-2-1-1. Criticism of Amin al-Islam Tabarsi's and Mohammad Javad Bolaghi's views

In the critique of Tabarsi's and Balaghi's views, it is important to see whether Ibrahim (AS) became the leader in a human society or not? Such an event has not been documented in history or sacred texts of the Ibrahimic religions. Therefore, this interpretation does not correspond to reality.

As mentioned in the lexicography section, the definition of the word Imam according to ancient texts is not the political leadership of society (Çora, H., 2020; Aghamolaei, M. A., et. al., 2020). This meaning was applied to this word centuries later. To conclude, Tabarsi's opinion about the position of Imamate and its application to the government is not acceptable.

3-2-2. Imamate is the prophets' leadership over each other

Some commentators, such as Dr. Sadeghi, refer to the Imamate of Ibrahim (AS) as leadership over non-*Arch* prophets. They believe that the Prophets' Imamate is of three levels: 1) Imamate over normal people, which includes all prophets. 2) Imamate over people and non-*Arch* prophets, which is the special level of Imamate for *Arch* prophets, such as Ibrahim (AS). 3) Imamate over people and all the prophets, whether *Arch* or not. This degree is specific to the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). (Sadeghi, 2016: 2/126).

Sadeghi says: "Since the position of Imamate in the case of Ibrahim (AS) was established after his servitude, prophecy, mission and purity (friendship), and he passed all stages one after the other, the purpose of his Imamate was inevitably towards prophets and not just normal people because he already had accomplished Imamate among people"⁶ (Sadeghi, 2016: 2/129).

3-2-2-1. Criticism of Sadeghi's view

This theory is flawed in many ways. First of all, it does not have any harmony or consistency with the appearance of the verse. In the verse, the word *Nas* is used and it refers to all people and not only the prophets. Secondly, Imamate over the prophets, especially the non-*Arch* (emphasized by the commentator), has no meaning other than leading and dominating the law. This means that Ibrahim's (AS) Imamate is his ruling until the time of Moses (AS). This also is inconsistent with the appearance of the verse; because he attributes the verse of Imamate to Ibrahim (AS) himself, while according to this interpretation, it should be attributed to Sharia. On the other hand, it restricts Ibrahim's (AS) Imamate up to the time of Prophet Moses (AS), which does not have any relation to the word "*Nas*" nor is it compatible with the position of gratitude and forgiveness existent in the verse.

3-2-3. Imamate is inner guidance

⁶ «فلان الإمامة هناهي بعد كامل العبودية والنبوة و الرسالة و النبوة و الخلة و حيث تخطأها الى القمة مرحلياً كلاً تلوا الاخرى اذا فهي الإمامة بين المرسلين

دون سائر الناس فحسب حيث الإمامة الرسالية على الناس كانت له سابقة فلتكن الإمامة الحاصلة بعد اتمام كلماتها هي الإمامة على المرسلين كماهم على سائر الناس.»

Allameh Tabatabai defines Imamate as the inner guidance of human beings. He believes that one who attains the position of Imamate, approaches the position of domination and possession of souls and leads souls and hearts to perfection. According to this view, Ibrahim (AS) was only a leader and guider of Sharia and religion before reaching Imamate. Afterwards however, he led souls and hearts to truth and spiritual divinity which brought them to their valuable positions (Tabatabai, 1995: 1/275).

From Tabatabai's perspective, an Imam guides with the divinity he has at his disposal. Therefore, Imamate is innately a type of guardianship Imams have towards people, and this guidance, much like the prophets', messengers' and believers', is not mere guidance through enjoining to the good. Rather, it means to take peoples' hands and guide them to truth" (Tabatabai, 1995: 1 / 422-408).

3-2-3-1. Criticism of Allameh Tabatabai's view

Unlike previous commentators who considered Imamate as prophecy or risalat, Allameh Tabatabai defines Imamate as a political leader of society, and in some cases, the leader of other prophets, and interpreted it as a special spiritual and esoteric guidance.

His views, which was later on accepted as an idea in the field of Quranic studies, is not free of faults:

First, Imamate in the Holy Quran is not always associated with guidance with a positive connotation. Rather, according to the Quranic usage of the word Imamate, it can be said that Imamate is accompanied by some kind of representation or calling on something, or in other words, leading a group on a specific path, whether right or wrong, such as the following two verses:

«وجعلناهم ائمة يهدون بامرنا»

(Anbya / 73)

«و جعلناهم ائمة يدعون الى النار»

(Qasas / 41)

Secondly, what caused Allama to mention an esoteric guidance in the verse «يهدون بامرنا» is the justification of Ibrahim's (AS) Imamate and his separation from prophethood⁷ (Tabatabai, 1995: 1 / 422-408). Therefore, if we find any another justification for the Imamate of Ibrahim

(AS) that can be consistent with his prophecy, there will be no need for Allameh's interpretation.

4. The New solution: Imamate is pioneering in action

Another interpretation of the verse regarding the Imamate of Ibrahim (AS) is that his Imamate was not one of scientific leadership; It was a practical leadership. Meaning, Ibrahim (AS) is not a leader (showing the way) nor a guide (leading to the desired); Rather, he is a symbol of and a perfect example of the path of worship. Guidance (knowledgeable leader) and being a role model (practical leader) have one point in common; leadership and a muqtada. Others should adjust their behavior in accordance to them and step in their footsteps. They also have one major difference as well; scientific leadership is a phenomenon and status bestowed on them by God according to their merits:

«اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ حَيْثُ يَجْعَلُ رِسَالَتَهُ»

(An'am / 124)

«قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ»

(Al-Imran / 73)

However, practical leadership is an acquired position and the result of one's efforts and struggles, to live according to strict rules of servitude, and eventually reach the position to lead others on this path.

«مَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا»

(Kahf / 110)

Prophet Ibrahim (AS) reached the position of Imamate after passing all God's tests and trials which led to the emergence of merits in servitude and submission. Imamate is only achieved through these tests. According to the Holy Quran: «وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ»

(Baghara / 124)

Here, a question arises. If Prophet Ibrahim's (AS) Imamate means pioneering in action, then what does the promise of God mean?

In this question, it should be noted that promising the position of Imamate by God does not mean to grant it; It means to acknowledge and recognize. That is, Ibrahim (AS) moved on the path of devotion and servitude to a point where God acknowledged his precedence and announced it to all people. The two verses below have the similar structure:

«وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ ائمةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ»

⁷ «ان هذه الهداية المجعولة من شئون الامامة ليست هي بمعنى ارائة الطريق لان الله سبحانه جعل ابراهيم (ع) اماماً بعد ما جعله نبياً... ولا

تتفك النبوة عن الهداية بمعنى ارائة الطريق فلا يبقى للامامة الا الهداية بمعنى الايصال الى المطلوب و هي نوع تصرف تكويني في النفوس...»

(Qasas / 41)

« وَ جَعَلْنَا هُمْ أَيْمَةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا »

(Anbya / 73)

The verses show that the promise does not mean to grant. Therefore, the verse

« إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا »

means “I have awarded you based on your servitude and made you the role model of perfection so people can follow and imitate.

Another truth is revealed according to this innovative view; Ibrahim’s (AS) Imamate is not of the type of Imamate in the verse (Anbya / 72 & 73)⁸; Because here it means scientific guidance and revelation which is specific to prophets. Ibrahim (AS) was already in hold of this position. Rather, it is the leadership type of Imamate:

« وَ اجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا »

(Fuqan / 74)

According to Surah Al-Baqarah verse 124, which refers to Ibrahim (AS) as Imam, as well as the verse,

« قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ »

(Mumtahana / 4)

which refers to him as role model, show that Ibrahim (AS) reached this position through effort and sincerity and God shows the path to all people and invites them to follow Ibrahim (AS).

5. CONCLUSION

Some of the results of this study can be extracted as follows:

1. Among Sunni commentators, none have distinguished between Imamate and Prophecy, and define Imamate the same as the Prophet as in the verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah.
2. Contrary to Sunni commentators, all Shiite commentators do not believe that Imamate and prophecy are the same, but a position that is beyond prophecy.
3. Shiite Arguments in proving the difference between Imamate and prophethood are much stronger than Sunni arguments.
4. Shiite commentators have discussed Imamate in great detail, but most Sunni commentators have omitted the details in discussion.

5. Sunni commentators are divided into four groups in regard to Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 124 of: a) Some have not specified the meaning of the word Imamate, b) in addition to lack of providing meaning, others have dealt with issues such the conditions of choosing the Imam, c) another group only express the lexical root and literal meaning, d) and most Sunni commentators believe that the meaning of “Imam” is the same as prophecy
6. Even though Shiite commentators agree that Imamate is different from prophecy, they disagree on the interpretations and concept of Imamate.
7. Shiite commentators have expressed three views in interpreting the meaning and concept of Imamate: a) Some believe Imamate is the same as leadership, b) Some consider Imamate as the leadership of the prophets over each other, c) And some consider Imamate as an esoteric guidance.
8. A novel and innovative view was presented in this article, which emphasizes that according to the last verse of Surah Al-Kahf and verse 4 of Surah Al-Mumtahanah, Ibrahim’s (AS) Imamate is not of a scientific leadership; rather a practical one.

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« وَ وَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صَالِحِينَ * وَ جَعَلْنَا هُمْ أَيْمَةً 8 يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ »

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