

## 10) The Canonical Meaning of Ahl al-Bayt ('a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Ahmad has related from Muhammad bin Mas'ab from Awza'i from Shaddad Abi 'Ammar who narrates:

I approached Wathilah bin Asqa' while a group of people was with him and were speaking about (Imam) 'Ali ('a). When they got up and left, Wathilah said:

Do you want me to inform you what I had seen of the Messenger of Allah (S).

I replied in the affirmative. Wathilah said:

I went to Fatimah ('a) to enquire about (Imam) 'Ali ('a) and she said that he had gone to the Messenger of Allah (S). I waited for him to come and saw the Messenger of Allah (S) approaching with 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn. The Prophet entered with Hasan and Husayn holding either of his hands, and he went near to 'Ali and Fatimah and made them sit on their knees in front of him and Hasan and Husayn. Then he covered them with his cloak and recited this ayah:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

***“Indeed, Allah desires to remove uncleanness from you O Ahl al-Bayt and keep you pure as pure can be.”*** (Holy Qur'an 33:33)

Then he said:

“Allahumma haula'i Ahlu Bayti wa Ahlu Bayti ahaqq (O Allah these the people of my house and the people of my house are [certainly] most meritorious).”<sup>1</sup>

B. Aswad bin 'Amir has related to us from Hammad bin Salamah from 'Ali bin Zayd from Anas bin Malik

who narrates that for six months every morning when the Prophet came out (of his house), he would pass by the doorstep of Fatimah's house and say:

“To prayer O Ahl al-Bayt, Indeed, Allah desires to remove uncleanness from you O Ahl al-Bayt and keep you pure as pure can be.”<sup>2</sup>

The above description reveals that the word Ahl al-Bayt in the context of this ayah is a canonical term established by the Holy Qur'an and elucidated by the Prophet who determined the identity of this group. The Prophet by gathering his daughter Fatimah ('a), her husband Imam 'Ali ('a) and the couple's two sons Imam Hasan ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a) under his cloak and reciting this ayah which was revealed in praise of this group, made it clear that who actually are the Ahl al-Bayt and who are not included in the concept of this ayah.<sup>3</sup>

An interesting point to note here is that although Ibn Hanbal's narrations of the above ahadith have made clear the concept of the Ahl al-Bayt in Ayah al-Tathir (Verse of Purity), he has recorded under the section Musnad Ahl al-Bayt several hadith not only from Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn ('a) but from their uncles 'Aqil bin Abi Talib and Ja'far bin Abi Talib as well as from their cousin 'Abdullah bin Ja'far.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting that the last three persons, despite being the meritorious scions of the Prophet's clan, the Bani Hashim, are not members of the Ahl al-Bayt in view of the canonical term of the Qur'anic ayah. This slip on the part of Ibn Hanbal can be explained by the ahadith concerning Imam 'Ali ('a) which he has included in the so-called group 'Asharah al-Mubashshirah and also mixed up ahadith on the merits of Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a) in the section titled Musnad al-Nisa'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Musnad, vol. 4, p. 107 (Musnad Wathilah bin Asqa'), Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah; also refer to vol. 6, pp. 292, 298, 304, 323 (Musnad Umm-i Salamah).

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid, vol. 3, p. 259 (Musnad Anas bin Malik); also refer to vol. 3, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup>. On the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt.

<sup>4</sup>. Al-Musnad, vol. 3, pp. 167, 199 (Ahmad Shakir)

<sup>5</sup>. For hadith on Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a) refer to al-Musnad, vol. 6, p. 282, Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah.

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