

## 12) The Verse of Al-Imamah: The Heirs of Ibrahim and Muhammad

One of the greatest blessings of Allah upon Ibrahim and his family, ‘alaihim al-salam, was that He made them Imams of mankind. The Qur'an has informed us about this. For instance, it states concerning Prophet Ibrahim, ‘alaihi al-salam:

وإذ ابتلى إبراهيم ربه بكلمات فأتمهن قال إني جاعلك للناس إماما قال ومن ذريتي قال لا ينال عهدي الظالمين

*And when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with some statements, and he fulfilled them, He said, "I will appoint you an Imam OF MANKIND." He (Ibrahim) asked, "And of my offspring?" He (Allah) replied, "My Covenant shall not reach the wrongdoers."*<sup>1</sup>

Often, our brothers from the Ahl al-Sunnah confuse the Imamah mentioned in this verse with al-nubuwwah (prophethood). However, the matter itself is totally clear. Every prophet or messenger, except Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah, sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi, was sent only to his people. None of them was ever sent to all of mankind:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمٍ لِّيَبْيَنَ لَهُمْ

*We sent not a messenger except with the language of HIS PEOPLE in order that he might clearly explain TO THEM.*<sup>2</sup>

Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) also records:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبي ثنا هشيم أنا سيار عن يزيد الفقير عن جابر بن عبد الله قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم أعطيت خمسا لم يعطهن أحد قبلي بعثت إلى الأحمر والأسود وكان النبي إنما يبعث إلى قومه خاصة

وبعثت إلى الناس عامة

‘Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Hushaym – Sayyar – Yazid al-Faqir – Jabir b. ‘Abd Allah:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “I have been given five things which were never given to anyone before me. I have been sent to the red and the black. The prophet used to be sent to HIS PEOPLE ONLY, and I have been sent to all mankind.”<sup>3</sup>

Al-Arnaut comments:

إسناده صحيح على شرط الشيفين

Its chain is sahih upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.<sup>4</sup>

Imam Muslim (d. 261 H) too has this:

حدثنا يحيى بن يحيى أخبرنا هشيم عن سيار عن يزيد الفقير عن جابر بن عبد الله الأنصاري قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أعطيت خمسا لم يعطهن أحد قبلي كان كل نبي يبعث إلى قومه خاصة ويعثث إلى كل أحمر وأسود

Yahya b. Yahya – Hushaym – Sayyar – Yazid al-Faqir – Jabir b. ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “I have been given five things which were never given to anyone before me. Every prophet was sent to HIS PEOPLE ONLY, while I have been sent to every red person and every black person.”<sup>5</sup>

So:

As a prophet and messenger, Prophet Ibrahim was sent to his people only.

But as an Imam, his assignment covered all human beings of his time – including even all the contemporary prophets and messengers.

Needless to say, whoever insists that “Imam” means “prophet” must explain how Ibrahim – the Khalil of al-Rahman – was made the prophet of all mankind during his time!

There are a number of other points from the verse that must be noted:

وإذ ابْتَلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبِّهِ بِكَلْمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَهُنْ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعَلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَاماً قَالَ وَمَنْ ذَرْتَنِي قَالَ لَا يَنْالُ عَهْدِ الظَّالِمِينَ

And when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with some statements, and he fulfilled them, He said, “I will appoint you an Imam of mankind.” He (Ibrahim) asked, “And of my offspring?” He (Allah) replied, “My Covenant shall not reach the wrongdoers.”

Firstly, Allah identifies Imamah as His Covenant. This means that it is solely His affair. He Alone decides and defines it. Therefore, it is He Who grants it and makes its appointments. It is NOT their affair. As such, they have no control whatsoever over it. Secondly, it never gets to wrongdoers. Allah will NEVER permit Imamah to get to any wrongdoer till the Day of Resurrection. Al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H) explains further:

قال الله تعالى} :وَإِذْ أَبْتَلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبَّهُ بِكَلْمَاتٍ فَأَتَمْهَنَ، قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعَلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا، قَالَ وَمَنْ ذُرْتِي؟ قَالَ لَا يَنْالُ عَهْدِ الظَّالِمِينَ {لِمَا وَفَى مَا أَمْرَهُ بِهِ رَبُّهُ مِنَ التَّكَالِيفِ الْعَظِيمَةِ، جَعَلَهُ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَاماً يَقْتَدُونَ بِهِ وَيَأْتُمُونَ بِهِدِيهِ. وَسَأَلَ اللَّهَ أَنْ تَكُونَ هَذِهِ الْإِمَامَةُ مَتَّصِلَةً بِسَبِيلِهِ، وَبِاقِيَّةً فِي نَسْبَهِ، وَخَالِدَةً فِي عَقْبَهِ فَأَجَيَّبَ إِلَيْهِ مَا سُأَلَ وَسَلَّمَتْ إِلَيْهِ الْإِمَامَةُ بِزَمامِهِ، وَاسْتَثْنَى مِنْ نِيلِهَا الظَّالِمِينَ، وَاخْتَصَّ بِهَا مِنْ ذُرِيَّتِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ الْعَالَمُونَ.

Allah the Most High says: *{And when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with some statements, and he fulfilled them, He said, “I will appoint you an Imam of mankind.” He (Ibrahim) asked, “And of my offspring?” He (Allah) replied, “My Covenant shall not reach the wrong-doers.”}*

When he fulfilled the huge obligations which his Lord commanded him with, he appointed him the Imam of mankind, whom they must follow, and whose guidance they must copy. He requested Allah that this Imamah be connected with his lineage, and be uninterrupted within his offspring, and be perpetual forever among his offspring. So, what he asked WAS GRANTED, and he was granted full authority of Imamah, and the wrong-doers were excluded from its reach, and it was made exclusive to the righteous scholars among his offspring.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Imamah has never ceased on the earth – at least, since the time of Ibrahim. It has remained “uninterrupted”, “perpetual” and “forever”, within the offspring of Ibrahim the Khalil. Therefore, there is always an Imam for all mankind from the offspring of Prophet Ibrahim. In fact, there is one right now! Moreover, Imamah never gets to wrong-doers. Therefore, the Imam from the offspring of al-Khalil is one who never does wrong. With these facts, would it still be wise to insist that Imamah is prophethood? Is nubuwwah “uninterrupted”, “perpetual” and “forever”?

Prof. Ibn Yasin records:

أَخْرَجَ الطَّبَرِيُّ بِسَنَدِهِ الصَّحِيفَ عَنْ مُجَاهِدٍ (قَالَ لَابْنَالْعَهْدِ الظَّالِمِينَ) قَالَ: لَا يَكُونُ إِمَاماً ظَالِماً.

Al-Tabari records with his sahih chain from Mujahid that he said: “(My Covenant shall not reach the wrongdoers) There will never be an Imam who does wrong.”<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the offspring of Ibrahim al-Khalil, as Allah states, are in two categories only:

سلام على إبراهيم كذلك نجزي المحسنين إنه من عبادنا المؤمنين وبشرناه بإسحاق نبيا من الصالحين وباركنا عليه وعلى إسحاق ومن ذريتهما محسن وظالم لنفسه مبين

***Peace be upon Ibrahim. Thus indeed do We reward the good-doers. Verily, he was one of Our believing slaves. And We gave him the glad tidings of Ishaq, a prophet from the righteous. We blessed him (i.e. Ibrahim) and Ishaq, and of their offspring are good-doers and some that are plainly wrongdoers to themselves.***<sup>8</sup>

Of course, anyone who disobeys Allah is someone who wrongs himself:

ومن يتعد حدود الله فقد ظلم نفسه

***And whosoever transgresses the set limits of Allah, then indeed he has wronged himself.***<sup>9</sup>

We also read:

ومن يتعد حدود الله فأولئك هم الظالمون

***And whosoever transgresses the set limits of Allah, then such are the wrongdoers.***<sup>10</sup>

Imam Salihi al-Shami (d. 942 H) explains:

معنى قوله تعالى}: ومن يتعد حدود الله فأولئك هم الظالمون} {البقرة ٢٢٩ (وذلك أن حدود الله هي محارمه ونواهيه}

The meaning of the Most High's Statement: {***And whosoever transgresses the set limits of Allah, such are the wrongdoers***} {***Baqarah: 229***}, that is, the set limits of Allah are things He has made haram and His prohibitions.<sup>11</sup>

'Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) submits that the scope is far wider than that:

من تعدى بكل عمل وقته الذي حده الله تعالى لذلك العمل فقد تعدى حدود الله وقال تعالى: {ومن يتعد حدود الله }{أولئك هم الظالمون}

Whosoever exceeds, in performing an act, the time set for that act by Allah the Most High, he has transgressed the limits of Allah, and the Most High says: {***And whosoever transgresses the limits of***

**Allah, then such are the wrong-doers}.** [12](#)

And Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 H) seals it:

{قوله تعالى}: لا ينال عهدي الظالمين {فكل من أقدم على الذنب كان ظالما لنفسه لقوله تعالى}: فمنهم ظالم لنفسه

His Statement {My Covenant shall not reach the wrongdoers}: So, whosoever commits a sin, he is a wrongdoer to himself due to His, the Most High's Statement: **{And of them are those who wrong themselves}** [35:32] [13](#)

So, any descendant of Prophet Ibrahim who delays his Salat, for instance, without any cogent excuse or who does anything haram or prohibited, is a wrongdoer, and – as a result – can never be an Imam. Without any doubt, every sinner breaks a limit set by Allah in order to become one! As such, all sinners among the progeny of Ibrahim are automatically and absolutely disqualified and barred from Imamah.

Allah informs us of some of the Imams from Ibrahim's immediate offspring:

ووهبنا له إسحاق ويعقوب نافلة وكلا جعلنا صالحين وجعلناهم أئمة يهدون بأمرنا

**And We bestowed upon him (i.e. Ibrahim) Ishaq and Ya'qub. Each one We made righteous. And We appointed them Imams, guiding by Our Command.** [14](#)

We know from this verse that Imams are guides. Secondly, they guide by the Command of Allah. This means three things. One, their Imamah is bestowed by an explicit Decree from Allah. This, of course, is very obvious already. Two, these Imams themselves stick to the Commands of Allah, and never deviate from it. This too is very apparent, since they never wrong themselves. Three, the Imams hold the Command of Allah.

So, their commands are Commands of Allah, and their prohibitions are Prohibitions of Allah. Obedience to them is obedience to Allah, and disobedience to them is disobedience to Allah. Moreover, it is interesting that Allah has used the plural (جعلناهم) while mentioning the Imams. This clearly is to indicate that Ishaq and Ya'qub were not the only Imams in the immediate lineage of Ibrahim. There were several others that have not been mentioned.

Among the Israelites, there were equally many Imams chosen by Allah, from the offspring of Ibrahim:

ولقد آتينا موسى الكتاب فلا تكن في مരية من لقائه وجعلناه هدى لبني إسرائيل وجعلنا منهم أئمة يهدون بأمرنا لما صبروا وكانوا بآياتنا يوقنون

***And indeed We gave Musa the Book. So be not you in doubt of meeting him. And We made it a guide to the Children of Israel. And We appointed from among them Imams guiding by Our Command, when they (i.e. the Imams) were patient and used to believe with certainty (yaqin) in Our Verses.*** [15](#)

There are two quick questions at this point:

Are there any Imams from the offspring of Ibrahim in our Ummah too?

If there are, who are they?

This hadith of Imam Abu Ya'la (d. 307 H) gives the first hint:

حدثنا الحسن بن إسماعيل أبو سعيد بالبصرة حدثنا إبراهيم بن سعد عن أبيه عن أنس رضي الله عنه قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : الأئمة من قريش

Al-Hasan b. Isma'il Abu Sa'id – Ibrahim b. Sa'd – his father – Anas, may Allah be pleased with him:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “The Imams are from Quraysh.” [16](#)

Shaykh Dr. Asad says:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is sahih [17](#)

This hadith is actually mutawatir, as al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) declares:

الحديث: "الأئمة من قريش"، النسائي عن أنس، ورواه الطبراني في الدعاء، والبزار والبيهقي من طرق عن أنس . قلت: وقد جمعت طرقه في جزء مفرد عن نحو من أربعين صحابيا

The hadith “The Imams are from Quraysh” is recorded by al-Nasai from Anas, and al-Tabarani narrated it in al-Du'a, and al-Bazzar and al-Bayhaqi also narrated it, through several chains, from Anas. I say: I gathered its chains in a separate volume from forty Sahabah. [18](#)

This hadith establishes absolutely that there are Imams in this Ummah from the offspring of Ibrahim who hold the Covenant of Allah and guide the rest of us by His Command. Most importantly, all of these Imams are appointed by Allah, and none of them ever goes against His Laws, before and during his Imamah. A crucial point to note, also, is that all our Imams are from the tribe of Quraysh.

Meanwhile, Quraysh is a large tribe, with several clans. Are the Imams spread across the entire tribe?

Or, are they concentrated in a single clan? Our answers are firmly established in this salat:

اللهم بارك على محمد وعلى آل محمد كما باركت على إبراهيم وعلى آل إبراهيم إنك حميد مجيد

O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, in exactly the same manner as You blessed Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim. You are the Most Praiseworthy, the Most Glorious.[19](#)

Undeniably, Ibrahim and his offspring were the Imams of their past Ummahs. So, Muhammad and his family are the Imams of their present Ummah. Allah has blessed Muhammad and his family in exactly the same manner as He blessed Ibrahim and his family. Therefore, Muhammad was the Imam of mankind during his lifetime, as Ibrahim was; and the family of Muhammad are the Imams after Muhammad, as the family of Ibrahim were after Ibrahim.

We must not forget also that the family of Muhammad have been “chosen” by Allah above all creation of their times. Let us remind ourselves of this crucial submission by Prof. Ibn Yasin:

{إن الله اصطفى آدم ونوحًا وآل إبراهيم وآل عمران على العالمين}

أخرج الطبرى وابن أبي حاتم بسنديهما الحسن عن علي بن أبي طلحة عن ابن عباس قال: هم المؤمنون من آل إبراهيم وآل عمران: آل ياسين وآل محمد يقول الله عز وجل (إن أولى الناس بإبراهيم للذين اتبعوه).

**{Verily, Allah chose Adam, Nuh, the family of Ibrahim and the family of Imran above the worlds}**

Al-Tabari and Ibn Abi Hatim record with their hasan chain from ‘Ali b. Abi Talhah from Ibn ‘Abbas that he said, “They are the believers from the family of Ibrahim, the family of ‘Imran, the family of Yasin AND THE FAMILY OF MUHAMMAD. Allah the Most Glorious say: {Verily, the most entitled to Ibrahim are those who followed him}.”[20](#)

We must equally remember Hadith al-Thaqalayn, which leaves no doubt about the identity of the supreme guides of humanity after Muhammad:

يا أيها الناس إني قد تركت فيكم ما إن أخذتم به لن تضلوا كتاب الله وعترتي أهل بيتي

O mankind! I have left behind over you that which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my offspring, my Ahl al-Bayt.

Supreme guides of mankind, of course, are always the Imams:

***And We appointed them Imams, GUIDING by Our Command.<sup>21</sup>***

- [1. Qur'an 2:124](#)
- [2. Qur'an 14:4](#)
- [3. Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad \(Cairo: Muassasat Qurtubah\) \[annotator: Shu'ayb al-Arnaut\], vol. 3, p. 304, # 14303](#)
- [4. Ibid](#)
- [5. Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, Sahih Muslim \(Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi\) \[annotator: Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Baqi\], vol. 1, p. 370, # 521 \(3\)](#)
- [6. Abu al-Fida Isma'il b. Kathir, Qisas al-Anbiya \(Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah; 1st edition, 1388 H\) \[annotator: Mustafa 'Abd al-Wahid\], vol. 1, p. 232; Abu al-Fida Isma'il b. Kathir al-Dimashqi, al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah \(Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi; 1st edition, 1408 H\) \[annotator: 'Ali Shiri\], vol. 1, p. 191](#)
- [7. Prof. Dr. Hikmat b. Bashir b. Yasin, Mawsu'at al-Sahih al-Masbur min al-Tafsir bi al-Mathur \(Madinah: Dar al-Mathar li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi' wa al-Taba'at; 1st edition, 1420 H\), vol. 1, p. 229](#)
- [8. Qur'an 37:109–113](#)
- [9. Qur'an 65:1](#)
- [10. Qur'an 2:229](#)
- [11. Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Salihi al-Shami, Subul al-Huda al-Rashad fi Sirah Khayr al-'Ibad \(Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1414 H\) \[annotators: 'Adil Ahmad 'Abd al-Mawjud and 'Ali Muhammad Ma'ud\], vol. 2, p. 289](#)
- [12. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh al-Albani, Al-Thamar al-Mustatab fi Fiqh al-Sunnah wa al-Kitab \(Gharas li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'\); 1st edition, 1422 H\), p. 70](#)
- [13. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, 'Ismat al-Anbiya \(1406 H\), p. 14](#)
- [14. Qur'an 21:72–73](#)
- [15. Qur'an 32:23–24](#)
- [16. Abu Ya'la Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Muthanna al-Mawsili al-Tamimi, Musnad \(Damascus: Dar al-Mamun li al-Turath; 1st edition, 1404 H\) \[annotator: Dr. Husayn Salim Asad\], vol. 6, p. 321, # 3644](#)
- [17. Ibid](#)
- [18. Abu al-Fadhl Ahmad b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Hajar al-'Asqalani, Talkhis al-Habir \(Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1419 H\), vol. 4, p. 116, # 1730](#)
- [19. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar \(Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H\) \[annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha\], vol. 3, p. 1233, # 3190](#)
- [20. Prof. Dr. Hikmat b. Bashir b. Yasin, Mawsu'at al-Sahih al-Masbur min al-Tafsir bi al-Mathur \(Madinah: Dar al-Mathar li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi' wa al-Taba'at; 1st edition, 1420 H\), vol. 1, p. 411](#)
- [21. Qur'an 21: 73](#)

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