

42) What Is Promise?

The word, 'Ahd' means to promise to do something. One of the main examples of it is the 'Ahd' with God Almighty, the Messenger of Allah, or God's 'Ahd' with His servants. Both cases have been mentioned in the Holy Quran. Addressing the Children of Israel, God says:

“O children of Israel! Call to mind My favor which I bestowed on you and be faithful to (your) Covenant with Me, I will fulfill (My) Covenant with you; and of Me alone, should you be afraid. And believe in what I have revealed, verifying that which is with you, and be not the first to deny it, neither take a mean price in exchange for My communications; and Me, Me alone should you fear.”¹

One of the other examples of 'Ahd' is prophethood and Imamate. When Prophet Ibrahim (AS) observed the position of Imamate in himself (he was ready to sacrifice his son for the sake of God) as Imam Sadiq (AS) has reported: “God Almighty chose Ibrahim as His servant before choosing him as a prophet. God chose Ibrahim as a prophet before making him a Messenger, and He made him a Messenger before making him His friend (Khaleel). God made Ibrahim His friend before making him as an Imam, for Ibrahim (AS) had prepared all the devices of Imamate. God said:

“And when his Lord tried Ibrahim with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely, I will make you an Imam for mankind.”²

As Imamate was something great to Ibrahim, he asked God: And my issues? God said: My 'Ahd: covenant' does not include the unjust. An insane man cannot be the leader of the pious. The Imam has also been reported as saying: One who has worshipped an idol cannot be an Imam.³

Prophet Ibrahim (AS) wished Imamate for some of his children. God said: ***“My covenant does not include the unjust.”***⁴

This is the greatest proof of showing that prophets and their successors must be infallible. Hence, a tyrant or wrongdoer cannot be a leader to people, for he cannot keep the covenant, which he undertakes, in all states and conditions. An Imam is one who has self-restraint in all conditions. Imam Ali

(AS) has been reported as saying: “I have not seen a thing without having seen Allah with, before, and after it.” It was this state that produced a perfect immunity for him.

The meaning of the above-mentioned verse as interpreted by Zamakhshari, quoted by at-Turayhi, is the following: “Imamate will not include anyone from your progeny who is unjust. An Imam will be one who is just and free from injustice. Hence, it is not obligatory to obey a wrongdoer, whose judgment and witness are not permissible. The news he gives is not to be approved, cannot lead the prayer, and is not qualified to be an Imam.

The word ‘Ahd’ meaning agreement, promise and covenant, has been used in forty-six occasions in the Holy Quran, showing its importance. Being truthful to promise is a sign of devotion to God. Describing the state of Prophet Ishmael, God says: **“And mention Isma’eel in the Book; Surely, he was truthful in (his) promise, and he was an apostle, a prophet.”**⁵

Imam Sadiq (AS) said: “Isma’eel had promised to meet a man in a certain place. He was waiting for the man to come. People took notice and informed the man from Ta’if (in Arabia) about the matter. The man came and apologized to Ismail who then said: ‘By God, If you did not come today, I would keep on waiting here until the Day of Judgment to meet you there.’ It is for the same reason that God has mentioned him as Truthful in Promise.”⁶

About Isma’eel, God, after describing him as ‘loyal to promise’, says: “He enjoined his household to prayer and zakat and was trustworthy with his Lord.”

From what we have discussed, it is inferred that being loyal to promise and observing Taqwa not to break a promise or breach an agreement is a virtue which is praised and loved by God. In the meantime, the importance of prayer and zakat becomes clear.

In describing the features of believers, God has said: **“Successful indeed are the believers... And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant.”**⁷

In introducing those possessed of understanding, God says: **“Those who fulfill the promise of Allah and do not break the covenant.”**⁸

Describing righteousness, God says: **“It is not righteousness that you turn your face towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets....and performers of their promise when they make a promise...”**⁹

Taqwa in relation to ‘Ahd should be observed and it does not make a difference whether the covenant is with God, His Messenger, the Imams of guidance or it is an agreement or promise to people. One should note that breaking a covenant or promise might sometimes lead to disbelief or weak faith. At any rate, it is a blameworthy act which entails losses. It has also been prohibited in traditions.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) has been reported as saying: “The closest of you to me on the Day of Judgment is the most truthful ones in speaking, giving the trusts (back to their owners), the keepers of promise, and the most close to people in good temperament.”¹⁰

The Holy Prophet (SAW) has been reported as saying: “Whoever has the following features is a hypocrite though he may observe fasting, offer prayer and claims to be a Muslim; one who breaches the trust when he is trusted, one who tells lie when he speaks, one who makes a promise and then breaks it. In His book, God says: **“Surely Allah does not love the treacherous!”** And He says: **“The curse of Allah be on liars!”** And: **“And mention Isma’eel in the Book; surely he was truthful in (his) promise.”**¹¹

Jurisprudents, in their books on the rulings of transactions and business, have invoked the phrase “believers abide by their covenants”, showing that they should not make a contract null and void without reason, for it is binding for the two parties.

Imam Baqir (AS) has been reported by Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali as saying: “There are four features that make perfect the faith of whoever have them, remove his sins, and make him meet his Lord while being pleased with him though his sins are from top to toe. Those features are the following: to fulfill what one has made incumbent on himself for the sake of God, to be truthful to people with his tongue, to be ashamed of what is blameworthy to God and people, and to have a good temperament with people.”¹²

The fulfillment of a promise will lead to the perfection of human beings. It is also a feature of the prophets. In relation to Prophet Abraham, God says: **“And (of) Ibrahim who fulfilled the commandment.”**¹³

God describes the believers as ones who fulfill their promises. It is a good feature which leaves its impact on the unjust too. In this relation, it has been narrated that one day, an-No'man ibn al-Munthir, An Arab king, had gone for hunting. The king became tired after some activity and his glance fell on an old tent set up in the middle of the desert. Moving toward it, he asked: “Whose tent is it?” Handhalah, a man from the tribe of Tay, said: “It belongs to me.” The king said: “Can I rest here tonight?” Handhalah said: “You are welcome!”

An-No'man descended from his horse. Handhalah took the horse, tied it to a tree and put some grass before it. Handhalah's wife baked bread and he himself milked a sheep and took the milk to his guest. Then, he slaughtered a lamb for dinner. He served whatever he had in power for the guest. When it was morning, an-No'man introduced himself and asked Handhalah to come to him one day so that he would make up for his hospitality.

After some time, there came a famine which made Handhalah helpless. His wife said: “O Handhalah! Do you remember what the king said to you on that day? You would better go to him today. He might help you.” So Handhalah decided to go to the king, but when he reached the court, the king was not in a

good condition.

An-No'man had two guards who had died on the same day. He had called it a sinister day (Youm al-Bu's) and had set up an edifice by the name of 'Ghariyyaynn'. He went there with his entourage. They would punish and kill the first person they saw in the way.

Accidentally, the first person an-No'man saw was Handhalah. Being upset, An-No'man said: "Why did you come on such a day?" Handhalah said: "I did not know anything about it!" An-No'man swore by Ozza, an idol, saying: "O Handhalah! If I see even my own son on such a day, I will order him to be killed. Now talk about your demand, for you will be killed soon." Handhalah said: "If there is no option, let me go to my family, inform them, arrange their affairs, and then come back."

An-No'man said: "Do you have a bail?" Handhalah said: "No." Finally, someone was found as a guarantor for him. An-No'man gave Handhalah five hundred camels and a deadline of one year to come back. On the Bu's Day, the king went to the same place as usual. It was almost Sunset and an-No'man had not shown up. They brought the bailsman to be killed. The Sun was about to set. They ordered the executioner to come. He drew his sword and put it on the neck of the bailsman. Suddenly, they saw a camel-rider approaching. It was Handhalah! An-No'man restrained his anger, saying: "O ill-fated! Why have you come here? You had escaped death and now you are coming towards it!"

Handhalah said: "The ruling of fulfilling one's promise in my religion compelled me to come here." An-No'man asked about his faith, and Handhalah said: "My faith is Islam." An-No'man thought for some time. He abandoned idol worshipping, embraced Islam and ordered the Ghariyyayn to be ruined.

[1.](#) Qur'an, 2:40-41.

[2.](#) Qur'an, 2:124.

[3.](#) Tafsir of Safi, p. 47.

[4.](#) Qur'an, 2:124.

[5.](#) Qur'an, 19:54.

[6.](#) Mostadrak, Kitab al-Hajj, p. 85.

[7.](#) Qur'an, 23:1,8.

[8.](#) Qur'an, 13:20.

[9.](#) Qur'an, 2:177.

[10.](#) Safeenat al-Bihar, vol. 2, p. 675.

[11.](#) Wasa'il al-Shiah, Kitab al-Jihad.

[12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 260.

[13.](#) Qur'an, 53:37.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/taqwa-piety-advice-ahl-al-bayt-sayyed-hussain-sheikh-al-islami-toyserkan/i/42-what-promise#comment-0>