

Chapter 3: The Arguments for Imamate

[The Methods of Selecting the Prophet \(S\)'s Caliph or the Imam](#)

One of the major controversial issues among the Muslims from Early Islamic Era has been the true and legitimate method of selecting the Prophet (S)'s caliph or the Imam of the Muslims. The question is that who is allowed to define the Prophet (S)'s caliph and introduce him to the people. Is the Divine guidance needed in recognition and appointment of the Imam or is this task devolved to the Islamic ummah?

This controversy has divided the Muslims into two sects of Sunnism and Imamiyyah (Shi'ism). The Shi'ah Muslims believe that no one can recognize and introduce the Imam, except the Almighty Allah and Prophet Muhammad (S); therefore, the Imam is appointed by Allah and His Messenger (S).

The Sunni Muslims, however, claim that there is no need to introduction and appointment of the caliph by the Prophet (S); rather, recognition and selection of the Imam is put to the Muslims and they are qualified to do so.

The root of this difference among the two major Islamic sects is another difference about conditions and characteristics of the caliph and the Imam. The Shi'ah Muslims consider two qualities necessary for the caliph of Messenger of Allah (S); first, complete knowledge of Islamic sciences and teachings, values and disvalues, virtues and all Islamic rules and commandments revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S), and second infallibility of faults, forgetfulness, wrongdoing, sins, and transgression of Divine regulations. The Imamiyyah or Shi'ah have proved these two necessary qualities of the Prophet (S)'s caliph in kalam books, using logical arguments and the traditions. [1](#)

Regarding the necessity of these two characteristics, it is said that the introducer of Prophet (S)'s caliph should be able to recognize the infallible individuals and the Divine scholars among other people. Only Allah and His Prophet (S) can do so, because it is He Who has created humans and knows well their innate essence.

The Almighty has created the Prophet (S) and the Imams (a.s.) and is aware of their infallibility.

Therefore, only the Imam who is selected by Prophet Muhammad (S) possesses the Divine sciences and guidance. This way, an infallible Imam can be known in one of these three ways; first, introduction and appointment by the Prophet (S), second, introduction by the previous infallible Imam, who holds Prophet Muhammad (S)'s sciences and knowledge, and third, showing a miracle that is the sign of Allah's support.

The Sunni Muslims, however, do not consider knowledge of Islamic sciences and infallibility as necessary conditions of the Prophet (S)'s caliph. They believe that selecting the caliph is devolved to the people; anyone, who is selected by the people and the people take the oath of allegiance with him, is the Prophet (S)'s caliph and should be obeyed.

They define three methods in this regard. One is people's consensus, as happened in case of Abu Bakr's caliphate. The other method is introduction of previous fallible caliph, just as Abu Bakr introduced 'Umar, as the next caliph, before his demise. One other method is selection by the nobles' council, like what happened in selecting Uthman, the third Sunni caliph after Prophet Muhammad (S).

The Imamiyyah Shi'ahs

The Imamiyyah Shi'ahs are the people who believe in the successive caliphate and Imamate of Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and eleven of his progeny after Prophet Muhammad (S). They are also called Ithna 'Ashari (Twelver). The Shi'ah believe that these Imams are inheritors of the Prophet (S)'s sciences and infallible of mistakes and sins and should all be obeyed.

The Names of Twelve Imams

1. Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)
2. Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.)
3. Husayn Ibn Ali (a.s.)
4. Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s.)
5. Muhammad Ibn Ali (a.s.)
6. Ja'far Ibn Muhammad (a.s.)
7. Musa Ibn Ja'far (a.s.)
8. Ali Ibn Musa (a.s.)
9. Muhammad Ibn Ali (a.s.)

10. Ali Ibn Muhammad (a.s.)

11. Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.)

12. Hujjat Ibn Al-Hasan (a.j., May Allah hasten his reappearance)

Each of these Imams reached the imamate position and were martyred or passed away after a while, except the twelfth Imam, who is alive but hidden from sight. He will remain absent until the world is ready for accepting his worldwide government and Allah orders his reappearance. This important issue will be explained in detail later in the present book.

The Reasons for Imamate of the Imams

It was proved in previous sections that recognition and appointment of the Imam is impossible without Divine guidance. Since the Imam should be away from mistakes, forgetfulness, and sins, only Allah and His Messenger (S) who can recognize the infallibles from among the servants can introduce Prophet (S)'s successor. As a result, the infallible Imam can be recognized in either of three ways:

1. Identifying and appointing by the Prophet (S) who is aware of revelation sciences,
2. Identifying and appointment by the previous Imam, whose Imamate is proved before, and has been aware of the Prophet (S)'s sciences,
3. Bringing a miracle, that is a sign of Divine support.

The First Reason; Prophet Muhammad's Traditions

The honorable Messenger of Allah (S) has mentioned the number of twelve Imams and their names in the traditions recorded in books of the Sunni and Shi'ah narrators. These traditions are of several types:

The First Type; Twelve People and All from Quraysh

There are some traditions of this type, some of which are cited here. Jabir Ibn Samarah said, "I heard from Messenger of Allah (S), 'People's affairs are managed well so long as twelve people rule them.' Then the Prophet (S) said something that I could not hear. I asked my father what the Prophet said. He told me that Prophet Muhammad (S) said, 'All of them are from Quraysh.'²³

Sammak Ibn Harb has quoted Jabir Ibn Samarah who said, "I heard from Prophet Muhammad (S), 'Islam will be honored as long as twelve caliphs will rule the Muslims.' The Messenger of Allah (S) then said something that I did not hear. I asked my father about it and he said, 'The Prophet (S) stated, 'All of them will be from Quraysh.'⁴

'amir Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas said, "I wrote a letter and sent it to Jabir Ibn Samarah by my slave Nafi'. I

asked him to inform me of what he had heard from messenger of Allah (S). He wrote in reply, ‘On a Friday, the Prophet (S) stated, ‘This religion will last until the Resurrection or until twelve caliphs, who are all from Quraysh, rule you.’”[5](#)

Prophet Muhammad (S) has declared the existence of twelve righteous caliphs from Quraysh after himself. They will honor Islam and the Muslims as rulers. The researchers know well that this number of caliphs is not compatible with caliphs of Rashidin, the Umayyid, Bani Marwan, the Abbasid, or combining some of them with some others. The only twelve-caliphs that remain are the Imamiyyah infallible Imams (a.s.), who are all from Quraysh.

The Second Type; Twelve People and All Infallible

Abdullah Ibn Abbas said, “I heard from Messenger of Allah (S), ‘In addition to me, Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and nine people from Husayn’s progeny are purified and infallible.’”[6](#)

The Messenger of Allah (S) told Hadrat Fatimah (s.a.), “Do not cry or be upset! You are the Mistress of the ladies in Paradise, your father is the master of prophets, your cousin (Ali) is the master of caliphs, and your two sons (Hasan and Husayn) are masters of the youth in Paradise. Nine Imams from Husayn’s progeny will be appointed, all of which are infallible. Mahdi (a.j.) of this nation will be from us too.”[7](#)

Abu Tufayl has narrated from Imam Ali (a.s.), “The Messenger of Allah (S) told me, ‘You are my successor and guardian to anyone who dies from the Ahlul Bayt and my caliph among my ummah. War with you is war with me and peace with you is peace with me. You are the father of Imams; eleven Imams from your progeny are infallible and purified. Mahdi of my ummah, who fills the world with justice, is one of them. Woe be to their enemies!’”[8](#)

Based on what was stated before in proving the necessity of infallibility for the Imams, the above-mentioned traditions and many other similar ones confirm the Imamate of twelve Imams (a.s.). Except for these twelve people from the Prophet (S)’s Ahlul Bayt, about who *Tat’hir* verse is revealed, no one has claimed infallibility nor has anyone’s infallibility ever been proved.

The Third Type; Twelve People and the Names of the First and Last Ones

In many traditions, the number twelve for the Imams and the names of their first and last ones are mentioned. As an instance, Salman Muhammadi said, “I went to Prophet Muhammad (S), who had placed Husayn (a.s.) on his lap, kissing his eyes and mouth. The Prophet (S) then told him, ‘You are sayyid, son of sayyid, and father of sayyids. You are the Imam, son of the Imam, and father of the Imams. You are the *Hujjat*, son of the *Hujjat*, and father of nine Imams, the ninth of which will be Qa’im.’”[9](#)

Abdullah Ibn Abbas has quoted from the Messenger of Allah (S), “The caliphs, successors, and Allah’s

Hujjats after me are twelve; the first one is my brother, Ali, and the last one will be one of my progeny too.” The Prophet (S) was then asked, “O Messenger of Allah! Who is your brother?” He replied, “Ali Ibn Abi Talib.” The Prophet (S) was asked, “Who is your last progeny?” Prophet Muhammad (S) answered, “Mahdi, who will fill the earth with justice after being filled with injustice and oppression.”¹⁰

Imam Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.) has quoted from the Messenger of Allah (S), “The number of Imams after me will be as the number of the Israelite leaders and apostles of Jesus (twelve). Anyone who likes them is believer and anyone who dislikes them is hypocrite. They are Allah’s *Hujjats* for the people and like flags of guidance.”¹¹

The Fourth Type; Twelve People in Order of Imamate

Jabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari told the Messenger of Allah (S), “O Messenger of Allah! Who are the Imams from the progeny of Ali Ibn Abi Talib?” Prophet Muhammad (S) stated, “Hasan and Husayn; the masters of youth of Paradise, then Ali Ibn Husayn; Sayyidul ‘abidin (master of the worshippers) in his own age, then Baqir Ibn Ali, who you will see. Say my greetings to him. Then Sadiq; Ja’far Ibn Muhammad, then Al-Kadhim; Musa Ibn Ja’far, then Ridha’; Ali Ibn Musa, then Taqi; Muhammad Ibn Ali, then Naqi; Ali Ibn Muhammad, then Zakiyy; Hasan Ibn Ali, and then his son Qa’im; Mahdi, who will fill the earth with justice as it would filled with injustice. O Jabir! These are my successors, caliphs, sons, and the *‘Itrat*. Everyone who obeys them has obeyed me and everyone who denies one or all of them has denied me. The heaven does not collapse on the earth nor does the earth swallow its occupants for their sake.”¹²

Sahl Ibn Sa’d Ansari said, “I asked Hadrat Fatimah (s.a.), the daughter of Messenger of Allah (S) from the Imams. She said that the messenger of Allah (S) told Imam Ali (a.s.), ‘O Ali! You are the Imam and caliph after me; you are more deserved to interfere in believers’ affairs than themselves. When you pass away, your son Hasan will be more deserved and after him Husayn will be more deserved. After Husayn’s demise, his son Ali Ibn Husayn will be more deserved. When Ali Ibn Husayn passes away, his son Muhammad will be more deserved. When Muhammad passes away, his son Ja’far will be more deserved. After Ja’far’s demise, his son Musa will be more deserved. When Musa passes away, his son Ali will be more deserved. After Ali’s demise, his son Muhammad will be more deserved. When Muhammad passes away, his son Ali will be more deserved. After Ali’s demise, his son Hasan will be more deserved. When Hasan passes away, his son Qa’im and Mahdi will be more deserved; he will conquer the East and the West.”¹³

Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) has quoted from Messenger of Allah (S), “Everyone who likes to meet Allah and be attended by Him should resort to your guardianship (wilayat). Everyone who likes to meet the Almighty Allah without fearing Him should accept the guardianship of your son Husayn. If anyone likes to meet Allah while his sins are forgiven, he should accept the guardianship of Ali Ibn Husayn, since the Almighty said about him,

سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ

'On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration.' [14](#)

Everyone who wants to meet the Exalted Allah while his eyes are illuminated should accept the guardianship of Muhammad Ibn Ali. Anyone who likes to meet his Lord with his Letter of Deeds in his right hand should know Ja'far Ibn Muhammad Sadiq as his guardian. Everyone who wants to meet Allah while he is purified should take Musa Ibn Ja'far Al-Kadhim guardian. Everyone who likes to meet Allah delighted should accept the guardianship of Ali Ibn Musa Ridha'. Everyone who likes to meet Allah with high spiritual degrees and removed sins should accept the guardianship of Muhammad Ibn Ali.

If someone likes to meet the Almighty while his reckoning is easy and go to the paradise, that is wider than the heavens and the earth, along with the pious servants, he should accept the guardianship of Ali Ibn Muhammad. Everyone who wants to meet Allah with salvation should accept the guardianship of Hasan Ibn Ali.

Everyone who likes to meet the Almighty with perfect belief in Islam should accept the guardianship of the waited Imam Mahdi; Sahib Al-Zaman. These are guidance lights in darkness, Imams of guidance, and flags of piety. I guarantee going to the Paradise for everyone who likes them and accepts their guardianship." [15](#)

Imam Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.) stated, "I heard from the Messenger of Allah (S) who told Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), 'You are the inheritor of my knowledge and wisdom and the Imam after me. When you get martyred, your son Hasan will be the Imam. When Hasan will be martyred, your other son Husayn will be the Imam. After Husayn's martyrdom, his son Ali will be the Imam. After him nine people from Husayn's progeny will become the Imams.' Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.) then said, 'O Messenger of Allah! What are the names of these nine Imams?' Prophet Muhammad (S) answered, 'Ali, Muhammad, Ja'far, Musa, Ali, Muhammad, Ali, Hasan, and Mahdi, from Husayn's progeny. Mahdi will fill the earth with justice after being filled with oppression and injustice.'" [16](#)

The Second Reason; Appointment by the Previous Imam

The main reason for the Imamate of twelve Imams (a.s.) is being appointed by their previous Imam. The Imam, who is appointed by the Prophet (S), can recognize the Imam after himself and introduce him to the people, just like the Prophet (S). Since the Imams (a.s.) possess Prophet Muhammad (S)'s sciences, information, and necessary recommendation directly from him or from their earlier Imam (a.s.), they can identify the infallible among the people. The Imamate of Twelve Imams (a.s.) is done in the same way, as recorded in hadith and kalam books. The same method is used in the present book.

As pointed out before, the honorable Messenger of Allah (S) was infallible himself, supported by the Almighty Allah, and recognizer of the infallible. He had prepared the conditions and people's minds for

Imamate of Imam Ali (a.s.) by emphasizing his virtues, innate qualities, scientific stance, and infallibility. Finally, Prophet Muhammad (S) selected and appointed Imam Ali (a.s.) to Imamate in Ghadir Khum in presence of tens of thousands of *Hajj* pilgrims.

This way his Imamate was confirmed for the audience. Prophet Muhammad (S) gave necessary recommendations to Ali (a.s.) for continuation of his Imamate. Imam Ali (a.s.), too, selected and appointed his son, Hasan, for the Imamate position in his lifetime. Imam Hasan (a.s.) selected and appointed Imam Husayn (a.s.) as Imam, before his death. Imam Husayn (a.s.) selected and appointed his son, Ali Ibn Husayn, for Imamate. The same method was continued until the appointment of the twelfth Imam (a.s.).

[The Third Reason; Miracles](#)

The infallible Imams (a.s.) have had some miracles in their lifetimes for proving their Imamate, which are cited in hadith, history, and kalam books. We do not cite them here not to prolong the discussion.

- [1.](#) The issues of Imam's knowledge and infallibility are discussed in detail early in this book and also in the book Review of General issue of Imamate.
- [2.](#) Prophet Muhammad (S)'s tribe.
- [3.](#) Sahih Muslim, Vol 3, p. 1452.
- [4.](#) Sahih Muslim, Vol 3, p. 1453.
- [5.](#) Sahih Muslim, Vol 3, p. 1453.
- [6.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 2, p. 162.
- [7.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 2, p. 239.
- [8.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 193.
- [9.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 2, p. 103.
- [10.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 106.
- [11.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 113.
- [12.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 163.
- [13.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 216.
- [14.](#) Surah Al-Fat'h 48: 29.
- [15.](#) Jami' Ahadith Al-Shi'ah, Vol 17, p. 103.
- [16.](#) Ghayatul Maram, Vol 1, p. 193.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/imamate-and-imams-ibrahim-amini/chapter-3-arguments-imamate#comment>