

## Question 4: Who are the Imams?

**Reply:** During his lifetime, the Holy Prophet (S) declared that after him there shall be twelve caliphs all of whom will be from Quraysh, and through whom Islam shall be exalted.

Jabir ibn Samurah narrates:

سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم يقول : لا يزال الإسلام عزيزاً إلى اثني عشر خليفة ثم قال كلمة لم  
أسمعها فقلت لأبي ما قال؟ فقال: كلهم من قريش."

I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) saying: ‘Islam will keep its honor through twelve caliphs.’ Then, he said a statement which I failed to catch. So I asked my father, “What did he (S) say?” He (my father) replied that he (S) said: “All of them will be from Quraysh.”<sup>1</sup>

In the history of Islam, there are not twelve caliphs who preserve the honor of Islam except the twelve Imams in whom the Shi‘ah believe; for they are the twelve caliphs whom the Prophet (S) introduced as his successors.

Now, let us see who the twelve caliphs are. If we say that they are the four caliphs who are known by the Ahl as-Sunnah as “Rightly-Guided Caliphs” {*khulafa’ ar-rashidun*}, there are no other caliphs who contributed to exalting Islam.

The biography of the ‘Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs is a testimony to this fact. As for the twelve Imams in whom the Shi‘ah believe, they were a clear manifestation of piety and virtue during their respective periods.

They were also preservers of the Messenger of Allah’s (S) *Sunnah* and the people to whom *Sahabah* {Companions} and *Tabi’un* {Followers} were attracted,<sup>2</sup> and whose knowledge and trustworthiness are acknowledged by historians. These twelve Imams are:

1. ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib;
2. Hasan ibn ‘Ali (al-Mujtaba);

3. Husayn ibn ‘Ali;
4. ‘Ali ibn al–Husayn (Zayn al–‘Abidin);
5. Muhammad ibn ‘Ali (al–Baqir);
6. Ja‘far ibn Muhammad (as–Sadiq);
7. Musa ibn Ja‘far (al–Kazim);
8. ‘Ali ibn Musa (ar–Rida);
9. Muhammad ibn ‘Ali (at–Taqi);
10. ‘Ali ibn Muhammad (an–Naqi);
11. Hasan ibn ‘Ali (al–‘Askari); and
12. Muhammad ibn al–Hasan (al–Mahdi).

There have been *mutawatir* traditions related from the Prophet (S) regarding the last Imam who is known as the “Promised Mahdi” transmitted by Muslim *hadith* scholars {*muhaddithun*}.

For further information about the life of these great leaders, whom the Messenger of Allah (S) himself has named, one may refer to the following books:

1. *Tadhkirat al–Khawas (Tadhkirah Khawas al–Ummah)*;
2. *Kifayat al–Athar*;
3. *Wafiyat al–A‘yan*; and
4. *A‘yan ash–Shi‘ah* (by Sayyid Muhsin Amin al–‘Amili), which is the most comprehensive of the four books.

<sup>1</sup> Muslim, Sahih (Egypt), vol. 6, p. 2.

Abdul–Hamid Siddiqui (trans.), Sahih Muslim (English Translation), vol. 3, hadith no. 4480. {Trans.}

<sup>2</sup> Tabi‘un {‘Followers’ or ‘Successors’} refers to the second generation of Muslims who came after the Companions, who did not know the Prophet (S) but who knew his Companions. {Trans.}

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