

Explicating the Infallibility of Prophets in Light of Q 38:46: A Critical Examination of Other Qur'anic Verses Cited in Its Support

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ABSTRACT

Infallibility from sin constitutes one of the foundational doctrines of the Shi'i school, referring to the purity and immunity of prophets from committing acts of disobedience (*ma'āṣī*). This article employs the research method of content analysis to examine the perspectives of Shi'i scholars on infallibility (*'iṣma*) and their arguments in this domain. Initially, the rational proofs advanced for establishing the infallibility of prophets (*anbiyā'*) are elucidated. Subsequently, the Qur'ānic verses invoked by certain Shi'i scholars to substantiate this form of infallibility are explicated, critiqued, and analyzed. The author of the article, drawing upon verse 46 of *Sūrat Ṣād*, endeavors to accord greater emphasis to this verse in proving infallibility. The merit of argumentation based on this verse lies in its capacity to both affirm the infallibility of prophets from sin and illuminate its essence, thereby resolving objections such as the notion that the infallible individual is compelled to abstain from sin. Based on the article's findings, infallibility possesses a "grace-knowledge" (*luṭfī-ilmī*) nature. The objective of this article is to foster a deeper comprehension of the concept and essence of infallibility, along with its associated Qur'ānic evidence, thereby contributing to the elucidation of this concept's role in Islamic beliefs and teachings, while also highlighting the weaknesses in certain proofs proffered by Shi'i scholars.

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Introduction

Infallibility (‘iṣma) is a pivotal concept in Shi‘i kalām (theology), denoting the immunity of prophets (anbiyā‘) from sin (encompassing both intentional and unintentional acts) and from error in receiving and conveying divine revelation (waḥy). Although Shi‘i theological texts present both rational (‘aqlī) and scriptural (naqlī) proofs for establishing the infallibility of prophets, the author posits that verse 46 of Sūrat Ṣād—"Innā akhlaṣnāhum bi-khālīṣatin dhikrā al-dār" (We purified them with a pure quality: the remembrance of the Abode)—holds a distinguished position in terms of its evidential value and explication of the philosophy underlying infallibility, yet it has received comparatively less attention.

Methodology

This article employs content analysis to critique prevailing proofs and elucidate the distinctive role of this verse. Initially, key Shi‘i theological works were surveyed, with the presented proofs for infallibility examined and categorized. Here, rational proofs and Qur’ānic proofs were differentiated. Following the enumeration of the primary Qur’ānic proofs, each verse was analyzed for its resilience against critique, assessing its capacity to substantiate infallibility. Ultimately, the proposed Qur’ānic proof and the method of argumentation based on it for establishing infallibility were explicated.

Findings

In the history of Shi‘i kalām, the preponderance of arguments for proving infallibility relies on rational demonstration (burhān ‘aqlī), with recourse to Qur’ānic verses being less prevalent. Eminent scholars such as Shaykh al-Mufīd, Shaykh al-Tūsī, ‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī, and Ibn Nūbakht predominantly emphasize rational proofs. Certain Qur’ānic verses, such as "Lā ya‘ṣūna Allāha mā amarahum" (They do not disobey God in what He commands them), are cited, but they often lack direct implication for infallibility or are susceptible to objection.

In later periods, the inclination toward Qur’ānic argumentation has increased. Contemporary authors such as Ja‘far Subḥānī and ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī have endeavored to derive the infallibility of prophets from verses such as verse 7 of Sūrat al-Ḥamd and verse 69 of Sūrat al-Nisā’, but these arguments are critiquable for reasons including the fact that these verses encompass non-infallible individuals, such as the truthful (ṣiddīqīn) and the righteous (ṣāliḥīn), under divine guidance or blessings, thus precluding a complete derivation of infallibility. Other verses, such as verse 58 of Sūrat Maryam, which enumerates attributes like guidance (hudā), election (ijtabā’), and weeping before divine signs for prophets, have also been employed to prove infallibility. However, the author demonstrates that these verses pertain merely to ethical qualities and do not necessarily substantiate infallibility, as individuals who are not infallible may be included among those praised in these verses.

Furthermore, verses pertaining to absolute obedience to the Prophet—such as "Man yuṭī ' al-rasūla fa-qad aṭā' a Allāha" (Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed God)—have been utilized to establish infallibility, but the objection arises that obedience to the Prophet is framed within religious duty and does not inherently indicate infallibility across all domains, akin to the obligatory obedience to a jurist (faqīh) in the era of occultation (ghayba) without claiming infallibility for the jurist. Regarding verses related to revelation, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws upon verses from Sūrat al-Jinn and Sūrat al-Baqara to prove the infallibility of prophets in receiving and conveying revelation. He attempts to extend this form of infallibility philosophically to infallibility from sin, yet this argument is contestable, as committing personal or internal sins does not necessarily conflict with veracity in propagating revelation. Similarly, Sayyid Kāẓim Ḥā'irī, invoking verse 124 of Sūrat al-Baqara—which promises imamate to the non-oppressor (ẓālim)—seeks to derive infallibility. However, the critique lies in the verse's pertinence to imamate rather than prophethood (nubuwwa), rendering it insufficient for extracting a general ruling on the infallibility of all prophets, unless supplemented by an external argument, such as that of al-Majlisī, who maintains that the infallibility of some prophets entails the infallibility of all, given the absence of differentiation.

The seventh Qur'ānic proof is verse 75 of Sūrat al-Ḥajj, which articulates God's selection of prophets. From this election, the necessity of infallibility for prophets is inferred, as post-election susceptibility to error would render the mission meaningless. Yet, in the author's view, mere selection does not prove infallibility, and argumentation for infallibility based on this verse constitutes begging the question (muṣādara 'alā al-maṭlūb).

The eighth Qur'ānic argument pertains to verses 82–83 of Sūrat Ṣād (and parallels in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, Sūrat al-Ḥijr, and Sūrat Yūsuf), wherein Satan vows to mislead all humanity except God's sincere servants (mukhlṣīn): "Illā 'ibādaka minhum al-mukhlṣīn." According to this, the mukhlṣīn are immune to Satanic temptations, as every sin stems from such whispers. Absolute purity from sin equates to infallibility. Thus, this verse substantiates infallibility to this extent; however, the question remains regarding the source of this purity, its quality, and why certain servants become sincere—a matter not discernible from these verses. The pivotal verses emphasized by the author for proving infallibility are verses 45–46 of Sūrat Ṣād: "Wa-dhkur 'ibādanā Ibrāhīma... Innā akhlāṣnāhum bi-khālīṣatin dhikrā al-dār."

Conclusion

Verses 45–46 of Sūrat Ṣād contain two fundamental points: first, an emphasis on purity (ikhṭlāṣ), and second, its instrument, namely "the remembrance of the Abode" (dhikrā al-dār). In the exegeses of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, the purity of prophets results from perpetual attachment to the remembrance

of the Hereafter and detachment from the world. In subsequent sources, such as those by al-Majlisī, Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, and Faḍl Allāh, this interpretation is reiterated, portraying the prophets' infallibility as a consequence of this divine purity. In varied theological exegeses, "dhikrā al-dār" is a point of discussion. According to Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Mudarrisī, "akhlāṣnāhum" denotes the purity of heart engendered by the remembrance of the Resurrection; however, contrary to the apparent meaning, he views the remembrance of the Resurrection as an effect of purity. Ṣādiqī Tihrānī distinguishes between "human sincerity" (ikhhlāṣ insānī)—relative and attainable through deeds and intentions—and "divine sincerity" (ikhhlāṣ ilāhī)—absolute and a divine bestowal—positing that infallibility manifests in the form of divine sincerity. The article's author, based on the verse's apparent meaning, emphasizes that God employs "akhlāṣa" once and for prophets, with "dhikrā al-dār" as its instrument, rather than two distinct forms of sincerity. Qur'ānic evidence concerning young prophets corroborates this. The essence of infallibility is this very insight and perception: recognizing that this world is mere play and amusement (lahw wa la'ib), with true life residing in the Hereafter. One possessing such a view would never jeopardize eternal life for childish play, yielding infallibility as its outcome. This is a divine gift bestowed upon God's elect. Thus, the remembrance of the Hereafter granted to divine elect engenders infallibility; however, this does not imply that every remembrance of the Hereafter held by ordinary individuals yields infallibility. In the final analysis, the infallibility of prophets constitutes a synthesis of divine grace (luṭf ilāhī) and special knowledge ('ilm): divine grace purifying the prophet through "dhikrā al-dār," and knowledge that eradicates doubt and desire from the heart, such that the prophet comprehends the profoundly destructive otherworldly consequences of sin and harbors no motivation to oppose it. This perspective diverges from theories that are purely deterministic (jabrī) or purely knowledge-based ('ilmī).

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