

The Social Imamate of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the Qur'an: Evidence, Its Relationship with Finality of Prophethood, and Its Continuity in Imami Thought

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ABSTRACT

In the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Imamate, beyond prophethood and messengership, encompasses social, sovereign, and judicial functions—termed here "social Imamate." The central research question examines these functions' relationship with the finality of prophethood and their potential continuation in Imāmī thought. Employing a descriptive-analytical, comparative exegetical approach examining key Sunni and Shi'i commentaries (al-Mizān, al-Tibyān, Majma' al-Bayān, Mafāhīḥ al-Ghayb, al-Kashshāf, Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī, and Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr), this study focuses on verses concerning priority (awlā), guardianship (wilāyah), arbitration (hukmiyyah), finality (khātamiyyah), those in authority (ulū al-amr), and succession (istikhlāf). Findings indicate that verses on priority (Q. 33:6), guardianship (Q. 5:55), and arbitration (Q. 4:65, 105; Q. 33:36; Q. 24:48–51) establish three prophetic functions: absolute sovereignty, executive guardianship, and judicial authority. The finality verse (Q. 33:40) merely ends the prophetic line without contradicting continuing sovereign and judicial functions, while verses on authority (Q. 4:59) and succession (Q. 24:55) emphasize continuing divine leadership after the Prophet. Sunni traditions such as "‘Alī is the guardian of every believer after me" and the Hadith of Ghadir conceptually align with continuing guardianship and leadership for ‘Alī (AS), despite certain isnād debates. The study's novelty lies in four domains: conceptual (defining social Imamate via three components), methodological (a triangular, systemic-holistic model), exegetical (linking verses on social Imamate, finality, ulū al-amr, and istikhlāf to demonstrate leadership continuity), and narrative-critical (evaluating Sunni transmission chains to uncover intra-school evidence for Imamate's continuity). Results demonstrate that the Prophet's social Imamate is Qur'anicallly provable, finality does not impede its continuation, and an intertextual approach to both traditions advances ecumenical dialogue.

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1. Introduction

In Islamic thought, particularly within the intellectual framework of the Imāmiyya (Twelver Shī'a), the concept of Imamate (Imāmah) occupies a central and foundational position. This station, which is presented in the Qur'an independently of prophethood (nubuwwah) and messengership (risālah) — as seen in Q. 2:124 — encompasses not only religious leadership and esoteric guidance but also social, sovereign, and judicial functions. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as the Seal of the Prophets, was not only charged with delivering revelation and teaching the Book and wisdom, but also, through the establishment of a government in Medina, assumed the governance of the Islamic community and the adjudication of disputes. These dimensions of the prophetic sīrah, reflected in numerous verses, indicate a station higher than prophethood and messengership — a station which this study refers to as "social Imamate" (Imāmah-yi ijtimā'ī).

2. Methodology

The present research is organized using a descriptive-analytical method and library-based data collection. Its primary approach is a comparative exegesis — limited to a sample of commentaries from both major Islamic traditions (al-Mīzān, al-Tibyān, Majma' al-Bayān, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, al-Kashshāf, Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī, and Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr) — focusing on the verses concerning priority (awlā), guardianship/wilāyah, arbitration/hukmiyyah, finality of prophethood (khātamiyyah), those in authority (ulū al-amr), and succession/vicegerency (istikhlāf).

3. Literature Review and Research Background

The novelty of this research can be identified in four areas:

- **Conceptual innovation:** In defining "social Imamate" as a composite concept consisting of three components — sovereignty (hākimiyyah), guardianship (wilāyah), and judiciary (qaḍā') — and distinguishing it from similar concepts such as "religious government" and "guardianship of the jurist" (wilāyat al-faqīh);
- **Methodological innovation:** In designing a "triangular model" for the simultaneous analysis of verses, and a "systemic-holistic analysis" approach. Unlike previous comparative exegetical studies that have examined verses independently and non-systemically, this article, for the first time, analyzes three categories of verses together as the sides of a single triangle;
- **Exegetical innovation:** In establishing a "logical bridge" between the verses on social Imamate, finality (khātamiyyah), those in authority (ulū al-amr), and succession (istikhlāf), and in uncovering the Qur'an's systemic structure regarding the continuity of leadership — a

connection that has not previously been made between these four categories of verses within a coherent chain of argumentation;

- **Narrative-critical innovation:** In the chain-of-transmission (isnād) evaluation of Sunni traditions based on their own sources (Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb, al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl, al-Thiqāt), and in the separation of "chain" from "text" (matn) to establish conceptual validity — an approach missing in similar studies, which have either ignored Sunni traditions or merely cited them without systematic chain evaluation.

4. Findings

The findings of this research can be categorized into several axes:

First, regarding Qur'anic evidence, the verse of priority (awlā) (Q. 33:6) indicates the Prophet's absolute right to sovereignty, such that commentators from both major traditions unanimously emphasize the absoluteness of the Prophet's priority in all religious and worldly affairs, and consider it the basis for the obligation of absolute obedience to him. The verse of wilāyah (Q. 5:55), introduced with the restrictive particle innamā (indeed/only), and in which the word walī is interpreted as "guardian" and "one in charge of affairs," signifies the second component of social Imamate — namely, executive guardianship and legislative authority.

Second, concerning the relationship between finality (khātamiyyah) and the continuation of the functions of Imamate, the verse of finality (Q. 33:40) merely conveys the end of the line of prophets and contains no indication of the termination of the station of Imamate, guardianship, judiciary, or sovereignty. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in al-Mīzān, by carefully examining the word al-nabiyyīn (the prophets), which appears with the definite article for generic reference, demonstrates that finality pertains exclusively to the cessation of revelation reception and the legislation of a new law (sharī'ah), and that the continuation of Imamate does not imply the advent of a new prophet.

Third, regarding the necessity of the continuity of leadership, the verses on those in authority (ulū al-amr) (Q. 4:59) and succession (istikhlāf) (Q. 24:55) clearly emphasize the necessity of the continuation of divine leadership after the Prophet. The verse of ulū al-amr makes obedience to those in authority obligatory alongside obedience to God and the Messenger, and its unrestricted formulation demonstrates that this obligation is not limited to the Prophet's era. Fakhr al-Rāzī in Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, through a clear argument, establishes the necessity of the infallibility (ʿiṣmah) of ulū al-amr, and under the verse: "If you disagree over something, refer it to God and the Messenger" (Q. 4:59), he shows that the sole authority for determining the referent of ulū al-amr is God and the Prophet, not the people.

Fourth, in response to the doubt concerning the separation of the prophetic function of proclamation from that of governance (as proposed by 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq), this research, using the triangular framework of social Imamate, offers

a structured critique at three levels — "explicit text" (naṣṣ ṣarīḥ), "practical conduct" (sīrah-yi 'amālī), and "necessity of continuity" — and demonstrates that this theory conflicts not merely with one or two verses, but with the entire systemic structure of the Qur'an concerning politics and government.

5. Conclusion

The results of the research demonstrate that the social Imamate of the Prophet (PBUH) is provable from the Qur'an, that the finality of prophethood does not pose an obstacle to its continuation, and that an intertextual approach to the traditions of both major Islamic schools can open new horizons in ecumenical dialogue.

Furthermore, by drawing a precise distinction between infallible Imamate and other forms of political sovereignty, this research emphasizes that the concept of social Imamate, within the framework of Imāmī thought, can never legitimize non-divine, tyrannical, or purely popular-election-based governments. This is because the concept rests upon three essential pillars — divine appointment (naṣb-yi ilāhī), infallibility ('iṣmah), and divinely-bestowed knowledge ('ilm-yi ladunī) — which distinguish it from other forms of governance. As the Qur'an explicitly states in the verse of trial (ibtilā') (Q. 2:124): "My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers" (lā yanālu 'ahdī al-ẓālimīn) — a negation of any legitimacy for unjust rulers.

Declarations

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