

The Names of the Imams in the Holy Qur'an

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?Question: Why aren't the names of the Imams expressly mentioned in the Qur'an

Brief Answer

are not specified in the Qur'an, (ع) It must be noted that although the names of the pure Imams A .(ع) did assert their names, especially the name of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ص) the Prophet very clear instance of such assertion occurs in hadith Ghadir, which is considered the official Regarding the question of .(ع) announcement of the caliphate of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib transmission, this hadith is mutawatir [i.e. it has been narrated through so many lines of transmission that it can be accepted without doubt.] and its content reveals clear evidence for Moreover, there are several verses in the Qur'an that .(ع) the Imamate of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib the most important of which is verse 55 of ,(ع) pertain to the status of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib Surat al-Ma'idah; "Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down." In books of exegesis and history, both among the Shi'ite and Sunni sources, it has been pointed out that this verse was revealed after the gave his ring to a poor beggar as charity while he was (ع) event in which Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib .(ع) bowing down in prayer, and so this verse refers to no other than Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib has not been mentioned in the Qur'an by name, there (ع) Thus, although Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib are evident references to him.

have not been mentioned by name, at least two answers could be (ع) But as to why the Imams propounded.

Firstly, the normal pattern of the Qur'an is to deal with issues in a general tone, providing the general principles and rules, without getting into the explanation of the minute details. This is the method the Qur'an takes up in many instances and it is for this reason that when Imam was asked about this question, he replied that, "It is the (ع) Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq same case with the daily prayer, the zakat, and hajj: Allah has mentioned only their general who expressed (ص) rules in the Qur'an but has not elucidated the details. It was the Prophet the precise method of carrying out such duties and their related details. In the same vein, himself specified the names of 'Ali and (ص) regarding the question of succession, the Prophet as his successors and so there was no need for their names to have been (ع) his household

expressed in the Qur`an itself.

Secondly, in such an issue, where there was a good chance of opposition, prudence necessitated that the Qur`an mention the issue indirectly and through allusions for there was the possibility that opposition to the issue of Imamate might lead to opposition to the Qur`an and the main core of Islam, which was certainly not in the interest of the Muslims. That is, if the opponents would have distorted it, (ع) there were a verse specifying the succession of 'Ali out of their opposition to him, and this would have violated the value of Islam and the Qur`an as the final religion and the eternal and divine book. For, it should be borne in mind that one of the ways by which the Qur`an could be preserved - for Allah (awj) has asserted, "Indeed We have sent down the Reminder [i.e. the Qur`an] and indeed We will preserve it." [1] - is to remove the natural motives for opposition and distortion.

and secondly, (ع) Hence, the Qur`an, firstly, refrains from expressing the names of the Imams successorship, (ع) places the verses that are related to the question of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ع) the Verse of Tabligh (which regards the official announcement of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib's successorship), and the Verse of Tathir (which regards the infallibility of the Prophet's household) between other apparently unrelated verses so as to diminish, as much as possible, the motives for distortion and in so doing secure the Qur`an against all possible attacks.

Detailed Answer

To begin with, the reader's attention should be drawn to the fact that the names of the Imams especially the blessed name of Imam 'Ali b. (ص) were mentioned expressly by the Prophet (ع) on several occasions. (ص) whose successorship was affirmed by the Prophet (ع) Abi Talib mission when he embarked on (ص) One occasion was at the beginning of the Prophet's spreading his message to his clan and family, saying, "The first [of you] to believe in me will be my spiritual heir (wasi), my vizier, and my successor." To this offer no one gave a positive said, "After me, you (ص) and so finally the Prophet (ع) answer except for Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib will be my spiritual heir, my vizier, and my successor." [2] Another occasion was the event at is also his (ع) Ghadir Khum in which he expressly said, "Whomever I am his master, then 'Ali master." [3] Another of such assertions appears in the hadith of Manzilat in which the Prophet You are to me what Harun was to" (ع) is related as having told Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ص) Musa, except that there will be no prophet coming after me." [4] regarding the successorship of (ص) It should be noted that the related sayings of the Prophet are too numerous to be impugned, and this point has been alluded to (ع) Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib is recorded to have (ص) in many Sunni and Shi'ite books. [5] In another hadith, the Prophet

and (ع) specifically mentioned the names of all the Imams - starting with Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib to Jabir b. 'Abdullah Ansari.[6] Thus this fact must be kept in mind that - (ع) up to Imam Mahdi - (ص) do not appear in the Qur'an, but the Prophet (ع) although the names of the Imams whose sayings are, according to the Qur'an, all true and are essentially revelations[7] - did specify their names and reiterated their successorship and leadership. Furthermore, in the Qur'an there is an allusion to the Commander of the Faithful' position of leadership, and although his name has not been mentioned there, nevertheless, the majority of the exegetes, status, and as such applies to (ع) whether Shi'ite or Sunni, admit that the allusion refers to 'Ali's no other than him.[8] The verse in which that allusion occurs is verse 55 of Surat al-Ma'idah, which reads, "Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down." [9]

Considering that in Islam there is no such rule that the Muslim should give zakat while bowing down in prayer, it becomes evident that this verse is referring to an incident that really took place while performing the (ع) place. That incident took place on the day when Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib ritual bow in the prayer, a beggar came up to him and asked him for some help. In response, Imam 'Ali pointed to his ring, and so the beggar took the ring off of his finger (ع) Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib and left.

According to the reading derived from the aforementioned historical incident, the verse asserts that the leadership of the Muslims is "only" in the hands of Allah (awj), his Apostle, and Imam and no other but them enjoys that status. Hence, up to this point, it has (ع) 'Ali b. Abi Talib (ص) were expressly mentioned by the Prophet (ع) been clarified that the names of the Imams and that there is an unmistakable allusion in the Qur'an to the Commander of the Faithful' position of leadership. These points are such that if an impartial person intends to clarify the (ص) truth for himself, he will, with only a little amount of research, realize that the Prophet's opinion regarding the question of successorship and leadership was in favour of Imam 'Ali b. and his pure sons. But as to why their names are not specifically mentioned in the (ع) Abi Talib Qur'an, two justifications could be proposed. First, the normal procedure that the Qur'an takes up is dealing with issues in a general manner and in the form of general rules and principles without enumerating their details, such as is the case about many of the fundamental and minor principles mentioned in the Qur'an. This answer has been suggested in a hadith narrated (ع) and according to the narration, the Imam (ع) from Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq corroborates his answer by providing three examples.

1. One is how the issue of the ritual prayer is dealt with in the Qur'an. The Qur'an's mention of the prayer is only a general description without elucidating the quality [i.e. the method] or

quantity [i.e. how many times each act must be repeated during the course of a prayer] of every explained to the Muslims the manner in which the prayer should (ص) prayer. But the Prophet be preformed and the number of the raka'at [pl. of rak'ah, the most general part of the ritual prayer, consisting of recitation of parts of the Qur'an while erect, then bowing, thereafter standing up and from there going down for prostration, after which one sits up and then again falls in prostration before Allah (ع)].

cited was the issue of zakat, which has been introduced (ع) Another example that the Imam .2 who determined the items to (ص) in the Qur'an in a general manner, and it was the Prophet which zakat pertained and the amounts with which the zakat of each item is identified. 3. His third example was the issue of hajj, about which the Qur'an only expresses its obligatory nature, while it was the Prophet who personally demonstrated to the Muslims the method (ص) by which this ritual should be carried out.^[10]

Thus, it is unreasonable to expect that the Qur'an should examine the details of all religious (ع) issues. And so it is with regards to the issue of the leadership of the Prophet's household have not been specified should not be cited as (ع) the fact that the names of the Imams the household of the Prophet), just as (ع) grounds for rejecting the school of the Ahlul Bayt one should not curtail the noon prayer from four rak'ats to two rak'ats, for instance, with the excuse that the Qur'an does not specify that it should be four rak'ats, or just as one should not refrain from performing the ritual cycles around the Ka'bah with the excuse that it has not been expressed in the Qur'an.

The second justification is that regarding such a controversial issue, where there existed a high risk of opposition, prudence dictated that the Qur'an mention the issue in an implicit manner, for there was the risk that opposition to the issue of the Commander of the Faithful' leadership might even jeopardize the integrity of the Qur'an itself. Thus a direct mention of the issue was certainly not in the interest of the Muslim community. For, it should be noted that one of the methods for preserving the Qur'an from any distortion, as promised by Allah (awj), "Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it;"^[11], is precisely this: To express the issues in such a way as to eliminate any motives on the side of the pseudo-Muslim hypocrites for distortion, so that groups that do carry strong motives for distortion, out of material desires or opposition to the truth, would not alter the Qur'an to conform it to their inclinations, thereby violating the integrity of the Qur'an.

Ayatullah Mutahhari expresses this explanation in the following manner: "As to the question of successorship, they (ع) why the Qur'an has not specifically mentioned the issue of 'Ali's answer is as follows: Firstly, the norm of the Qur'an is to express issues in the form of general

or Allah (awj) did not want to propound this issue (ص) principles, and secondly, the Prophet [i.e. the issue of the leadership of the Muslim community] - an issue that was at risk of being manipulated by men out of egocentrism and ambition - so bluntly. For, just as they [i.e. the had said about this issue on the basis (ص) opponents] so readily disregarded what the Prophet said in this (ص) of various excuses - including the claim to ijihad [i.e. that what the Prophet regard was his own personal view and we also have the right to put forward and follow our own did not intend the (ص) opinions] - and so justified their position by claiming that the Prophet when he said those things about him, but rather he actually meant such (ع) leadership of 'Ali

and such, if there were a verse in this relation, they would just as well have misinterpreted it. is his [i.e. the Muslim's] (ع) in his statements said very clearly, "This here 'Ali (ص) The Prophet master." Would you like anything more frank than this! But there is a difference between albeit so clear, and that of a verse of the Qur'an (ص) discarding a statement of the Prophet It was (ص) clearly mentioning the issue, especially only a day after the demise of the Prophet for this reason that I related the following story in the preface to my book, Succession and Leadership: During the Commander of the Faithful reign, a Jew wanted to scold the Muslim community concerning the events surrounding the Prophet's death - and they did really You had not buried your prophet before you opposed each" (ع) deserve scolding! He told 'Ali other regarding him." The Commander of the Faithful retorted, "We opposed each other not regarding him but regarding a verdict that he had addressed to us. But as to you; your feet were still soaked from the sea [which Musa had miraculously split in half] when you told your prophet, 'make for us a God like the gods that they have.' He [i.e. Musa] said, 'You are indeed an ignorant lot.' So there is a big difference between what happened amongst us and what happened amongst you. We did not quarrel over the Prophet himself, but rather about what was the actual content of his command. These two are very different."

It is very different to justify a mistake - although this justification might not be the real cause for the mistake but only a pretext for the real cause of the mistake - by saying that those who intended, (ص) made the mistake thought their claim was in accordance with what the Prophet and in so doing manipulated the Prophet's statement - such justification is better than to say that those who made the mistake discarded the related Qur'anic verse despite its clarity, to say that they distorted the Qur'an. Therefore, it can be said that the main point in not specifying the in the Qur'an, or at least the name of the Commander of the Faithful, (ع) names of the Imams was securing the Qur'an against any distortion.

Thus, as can be witnessed, the Verses of Tathir, Tabligh, and Wilayat are inserted among the or the verses about the rules pertaining to the (ص) verses regarding the wives of the Prophet

People of the Book and those explaining that Muslims should not make friends with them [i.e. the People of the Book], which apparently have no bearing on the issue of the leadership of the Muslims. Thus an impartial researcher can, with the least attention realize that the tone of the part of the verse pertaining to the issue in question diverges from the main body of the verse and that it has been placed there for a certain reason [namely, concealment].

Notes:

[1] Surat al-Hijr (15), Verse 9:

[2] al-'Umdah, pg. 121,133; Ghayat al-Maram, pg. 320; al-Ghadir, vol. 2 pp. 278-279:

[3] This hadith is mutawatir and exists in both Shi'ah and Sunni books. 'Allamah Amini, in his book al-Ghadir (vol. 1 pg. 114), has gathered the narrators of this hadith from all sources and put them in chronological order. At the top of this list are 60 of the Noble Prophet's companions which Sunni books use as narrators. In his book 'Abaqat, Mir Hamid Husayn has also proven this hadith to be mutawatir. (refer to: Ibn al-Maghazili, Manaqib, pp. 25-26)

[4] al-'Umdah, pg. 173-175; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol. 3 pg. 32; al-Ghadir, vol. 1, pg. 51, also vol. 3, pg. 197-201

[5] 'Allamah Amini and Mir Hamid Husayn have put forth much effort in proving the tawatur of Fadil Quchani, a Sunni scholar who has rejected the (ع) hadith's on the Imamate of Imam 'Ali tawatur of some of these hadith's, has accepted the tawatur of some others.

[6] Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, vol. 3, pg. 398-399:

[7] Surat al-Najm (53), Verses 3-4:

[8] Refer to tafsir books under verse 55 of Surat al-Ma'idah such as: al-Tafsir al-Kabir by Fakhr Razi; Tafsir-e-Namuneh; al-Durr al-Manthur. Some Sunni books of tradition have also mentioned this event - refer to: Dhakhayir al-'Uqba, pg. 88; Lubab al-Nuqul, pg. 90; Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 6 pg. 391. A list of books containing other books can be found in Tafsir-e-Namuneh, vol. 4, pg. 425.

[9] Surat al-Ma'idah (5), Verse 55:

[10] al-Kafi, vol. 1, pg. 286-287:

[11] Surat al-Hijr (15), Verse 9