Imamate in the Verse of Ilm al–Kitab

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Those who disbelieve say: "You are no emissary (of Allah)". Say: "God suffices as a witness" between me and you (all), as well as the one who has knowledge about the Book". (13:43)

This verse speaks of one of the great virtues of Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on upon him; a virtue that the hadith of Ihtijaj1 has called Imam Ali's (as) greatest virtue. The verse is, therefore, worth further deliberation.

At the outset, the verse refers to the pagans who rejected the prophet hood of the Prophet (saws) and names two witnesses who confirmed his prophecy: the Most Exalted God, and the one who has knowledge about the Book.

In order to clarify what the Qur'anic verse wants to demonstrate, we need to follow up the discussion by considering the following two points:

1. How is God's testimony given?
2. Who is meant by "the one who has knowledge of the Book"?

The Testimony of the Most Exalted God

The Qur'anic verse mentions God, the Most Exalted, as the first witness to the prophet hood of the Prophet (saws). This testimony may be either of these two:

1. The testimony may be an oral one represented in words and discourse, and the Qur'anic verses that clearly point to the prophecy of Mohammad (saws) confirm this view, as shown in this verse, "I swear by the Qur'an full of wisdom; most surely you are one of the apostles" (36:2-3)

2. The testimony may be an actual one, in the form of miracles which God, the Most Exalted, made manifest through the Prophet (saws). These miracles, particularly the Glorious Qur'an, which is Mohammad's ever–enduring miracle are irrefutable documents, lucid proofs and eloquent arguments for the truthfulness of his claim of being messenger of God. These miracles which are made by God in some way attest to the prophecy of the Prophet (saws).

Who Is Meant by "the One Who Has Knowledge about the Book?"

Here, the discussion focuses on what is meant by "the Book", and by "the one who has knowledge about the book". Some ideas are proposed in this regard, and they are as follows:

First: By "The Book" means the divine Scriptures before the Qur'an, and "the one who has knowledge about the Book" means the Jewish and the Christian scholars. Accordingly, the meaning of the verse would be: (O Messenger), Say: God and those who have knowledge about

the previous Books, such as the Jewish and Christian scholars, are sufficient (witnesses between us) to my being messenger.

These Books contain the name and mission of the Prophet (saws); so the Jewish and Christian scholars, who are aware of the matter, bear witness to it.

Answer: This proposition is not valid, because the Jewish and Christian scholars, though well acquainted with their own divine Books, were disbelievers and would never stand witness against themselves.

Second: "The Book" means any divine Scriptures before the Qur'an, and "the one who has knowledge about the Book" means those Jewish and Christian scholars, who were well acquainted with their own divine Scriptures (Torah and the Gospel), and who converted to Islam, such as Salman Farsi, Abdullah ibn Salam, and Tamim al–Dari.

Answer: This proposition is not valid either, because the Qur'anic Surah of Ra'd, and the verse at the beginning of this chapter which comes at the end of this Surah were revealed in Mecca, and when the above mentioned people converted to Islam they were in Medina (subsequent to the Prophet's emigration to this city). So, to invite disbelievers who have not converted to Islam to bear witness against themselves would not make sense.

It is reported that Sha'bi and Sa'id ibn Jubayr have rejected the stated proposition that "the one who has knowledge about the Book" refers to Abdullah ibn Salam, because the Surah of Ra'd is a Meccan one, whereas Abdullah ibn Salam became muslim in Medina.2

Third: "One who has knowledge about the Book" means God, the and "the Book" means the guarded Tablet", thus the verse will mean: God, and the one who has knowledge of" لـــوح محفـوظ the guarded tablet –in which all facts of the world are inscribed– bear witness to your prophet hood.

Answer: This preposition is not valid either because it is understood from the appearance of the organization of the sentence, "Say: God suffices as … the Book", that "the one who has knowledge about the Book" is not God, who is referred to at the beginning as the first witness. Also, in Arabic it is quite common to conjoin two attributive adjectives, as it is noticed in the following verse: "The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Mighty, the Knowing, the Forgiver of faults and the Accepter of repentance" (40:2-3)

in which the two attributive adjectives "the Forgiver of faults", and "the Accepter of repentance", conjoined by "and", refer to God, the Mighty and High. But in the cases where a concrete noun was mentioned, commonly, no adjective is taken to refer to it. Therefore, no one can claim that the phrase "the one who has knowledge about the book" is God, the Mighty and High.

Fourth: The Book, means “the guarded Tablet”, and “the one who has knowledge about the Book” means Imam Ali (p.u.b.h.) the Commander of the Faithful.

Notes:

1. – al-Misbah al-Hidayah, p. 43.

.2. – Ma’alim al-Tanzeel, vol. 3, pp. 364–5; al-Itqan, vol. 1, p. 36; Dar ibn Katheer, Beirut