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Critique of Views Regarding the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Centered on the Article by Imam Musa Sadr and the Elucidation of the Theory of the Imam of Nations

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Abstract

In response to the question of why Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was appointed to the position of Imamate, various theories have been proposed in verse 2:124 of *the Quran*. Imam Musa Sadr, in his article "*A Reflection on the Verse of the Imamate of Abraham (PBUH)*", critiques four theories: the same status of Prophethood, appointment to political-social leadership, Imamate at the rank of the Ulul Azm Prophets (PBUH), and inner guidance. He also presents a fifth theory titled "Pioneering in Action". However, this theory has also failed to provide a suitable explanation for the Imamate of that Prophet (PBUH). In this article, using a descriptive-analytical method, we reject these five theories and propose a new theory titled "Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Imam of the Nations". This theory, based on verses, narrations, and historical evidence, distinguishes the Sharia of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in its universality from the Sharia of the other three Ulul Azm Prophets (PBUH) and considers it in harmony and unity with Islamic Sharia. The Sharia of that Prophet has always been present in the world after him and has been connected to Islamic Sharia. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) has been a role model for all people of the world and a standard for monotheism and religiosity. For this reason, he has been the Imam of the nations, and his appointment to the position of Imamate is a specific appointment that even differs from his Imamate in terms of being one of the Ulul Azm.

Keywords: Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Verse Al-Baqarah/124, Imam of the Nations, Ulul Azm Prophets (PBUH), Imam Musa Sadr.

Statement of the Problem

Verse 2:124 indicates that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was chosen for the position of Imamate after numerous trials, and he requested this position for his descendants as well. In response, it was stated that this position does not reach the wrongdoers:

"And when his Lord tested Abraham with words, and he fulfilled them, He said, 'Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people.' He said, 'And of my descendants?' He said, 'My covenant does not include the wrongdoers'".

Although this verse addresses important issues regarding Imamate and has a special place in the theological texts of the Imamiyah concerning the essence of Imamate and its characteristics (see: Milani, 2013; Najar zadegan, 2011), a point that has received less attention is the Imamate of Prophet

Abraham himself. The main question in this regard is: Given that all prophets, especially the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH), held the position of Imamate and leadership of the community, what significance does the Imamate mentioned in this verse for Prophet Abraham (PBUH), who is himself one of the Ulul Azm prophets, hold? Of course, there are other questions raised in this regard, such as why the installation to this position has been specifically mentioned for that individual. Commentators and theologians have provided various answers to this question, and Imam Musa Sadr, in his article "*A Reflection on the Verse of the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH)*", has elaborated on and critiqued four theories regarding this matter, ultimately adopting a fifth theory titled "Pioneering in Action" (Sadr, 2007). However, serious critiques have also been directed at this theory.

In this study, we aim to present a new theory regarding the

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Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) under the title "Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Imam of the Nations", by critiquing five existing theories. In this context, we will first focus on the article by Imam Musa Sadr to explain and critique these five viewpoints. The critiques presented in this article serve as the main basis for rejecting four of the theories, and we will attempt to expand upon these critiques, dedicating a specific section to critiquing Imam Musa Sadr's theory. However, the main part of the article will be the explanation of the new theory, namely that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is the Imam of the Nations, which will be elucidated in light of his status in *the Holy Quran* and the relationship of his Sharia with Islamic Sharia, from both historical and doctrinal perspectives. In the conclusion, we will also address some objections and provide responses to them.

Critique of four theories regarding the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in the article by Imam Musa Sadr

As we have mentioned, there are five theories regarding the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in verse 2:124 of *the Quran*. Although some of these theories reveal certain aspects of his Imamate and express the truth about it, they have not succeeded in providing a comprehensive perspective on the matter. In the present discussion, we will critique these viewpoints to pave the way for presenting a new theory that we intend to propose.

Imamate is the same as Prophethood

Most Sunni commentators consider the positions of Imamate and Prophethood to be identical, stating that the purpose of appointing that individual to Imamate is his attainment of the rank of Prophethood. This verse indicates that he has reached Prophethood and taken on the leadership of the people (Fakhr al-Razi, 1992, v. 4/31). Imam Musa Sadr, in his article, also refers to other Sunni sources, such as Maraghi and Qasemi (Sadr, 2007). Allameh Tabatabai attributes this viewpoint to the superficiality that has dominated the interpretation of the words of *the Holy Quran*, which has gradually arisen due to the repetition of these words. This perspective uses the words without contemplation of their meanings, resulting in the interpretation of Imamate as equivalent to Prophethood or general leadership in religion and the world (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 1/272). He has also presented another critique, suggesting that the apparent meaning of the verse indicates that this individual reached the rank of Imamate later in life, after having children and overcoming trials, while he had been a Prophet from a young age, receiving revelation and guiding the people. Therefore, one cannot consider his rank of Imamate to be the same as that of Prophethood. Imam Musa Sadr has also raised this critique (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 1/290; Sadr, 2007). Fakhr al-Razi has countered this objection by stating that although these trials occurred after Prophethood, the meaning of "atamuhmin" in the noble verse is that God, knowing he would be able to handle these tests, granted him the rank of Prophethood and Imamate, meaning this rank was established in his youth and before the trials occurred (Fakhr al-Razi, 1992, v. 4/35). Imam Musa Sadr has rejected this statement of Fakhr al-Razi, as in this case, one would have to interpret the past tense "atamuhmin" as present tense. He has also pointed out that if the intended meaning is Prophethood, there is no justification for using the term "Imam" in the verse of *the Holy Quran* (Sadr, 2007). Therefore, this viewpoint cannot be accepted.

It is appropriate here to address the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt regarding the ranks of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), which

clarify his positions and refute such viewpoints. Imam Sadiq (PBUH) discusses the five ranks of Prophet Abraham (PBUH):

"Indeed, Allah, Blessed and Exalted, took Abraham (PBUH) as a servant before He took him as a prophet, and Allah took him as a prophet before He took him as a messenger, and Allah took him as a messenger before He took him as a friend (Khalil), and Allah took him as a friend (Khalil) before He made him an imam." (Kulayni, 1986, v. 1/175).

According to this category of narrations, which completely aligns with the verses of *the Holy Quran*, Prophet Abraham attained stages of ranks in order, starting from servitude and culminating in imamate. Even his rank as a friend (Khalil) was realized after his prophethood and messengership. Therefore, there remains no doubt that the imamate of Prophet Abraham is not only a rank that differs from his prophethood, but it is a lofty position that is considered to be of much greater value than the rank of prophethood, and he attained it after passing through various stages.

The Imamate as Appointment to Political-Social Leadership

One of the theories regarding the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) interprets it as a political-social leadership. According to this theory, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was merely a prophet before his appointment to the position of Imamate, and not an Imam. Sheikh Tusi, in his commentary on verse Al-Baqarah/124, points out that scholars of the Imami School have argued that the position of Imamate differs from that of prophethood; otherwise, the appointment of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to Imamate would be meaningless. He refers to the main discussion about the difference between prophethood and Imamate in his treatise on this subject. In that treatise, he presents two meanings for Imamate: first, someone who is a model for others in speech and actions; second, someone who manages the affairs of the community and its politics, such as defending the integrity of the country, enforcing legal limits, waging war against enemies, appointing governors, and so on. He then explains that all prophets (PBUH) were Imams in the first sense, but only some prophets (PBUH) were in the second sense; and that Prophet Abraham (PBUH), by being appointed to the position of Imamate, became an Imam in the second sense (Sheikh Tusi, 1993, p. 111). Tabarsi has also articulated this same point (Tabarsi, 1993, v. 1/370). Allameh Tabatabai critiques this view by stating that obedience and social leadership are inherent aspects of prophethood and mission, and it does not make sense to create a new distinction regarding the essentials of a single concept (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 1/271). However, Imam Musa Sadr critiques this view from a historical perspective, stating that upon studying the life of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), we find no instance where he assumed political-social leadership of society. On the other hand, this interpretation implies that the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was specific to his own people, whereas the apparent meaning of the verse indicates that he was appointed as an Imam for all people "for the people" (Sadr, 2007). It seems that separating political-social leadership from prophethood and mission is also incompatible with the logic of *the Holy Quran*. *The Holy Quran* describes the divine prophets as men of struggle and combat in the field (3:146) and as those who led the people with the book, the scale, and the sword to establish justice in society (57:25). Therefore, how can they be considered detached from political-social activities, while only specific individuals like Prophet

Abraham (PBUH) are introduced as the leaders of these matters, and that too during a specific period of their lives?!

The Imamate in the Rank of the Prophets of Resolute Determination (Ulul Azm)

Another perspective, rejecting the interpretation of the Imamate as Prophethood and Messenger-ship, while accepting the inseparability of the Imamate from Prophethood and Messenger-ship, explains the appointment of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to the rank of Imamate in light of the levels of Imamate. According to this view, the Imamate has three levels: the Imamate of all Prophets (PBUH) who lead the people, the Imamate of the Prophets of Resolute Determination (PBUH) who lead both the people and other Prophets (PBUH), since the non-Ulul Azm Prophets follow their religions (Shariats) and scripture, and the Imamate of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which is the highest level of Imamate and superior to the Imamate of the Prophets of Resolute Determination (PBUH). The appointment of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to the rank of Imamate signifies reaching the level of Imamate among the Prophets of Resolute Determination (Sadeqi Tehrani, 1985, v. 2/127). Imam Musa Sadr considers this view inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the verse, because, firstly, the verse attributes the Imamate directly to Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and the Imamate of the Prophets of Resolute Determination (PBUH) over other Prophets is based on their religions (Shariats) and scripture, not on their person. Secondly, the verse in question presents his Imamate as applicable to all people, not specifically to the Prophets (PBUH). Thirdly, the apparent meaning of the verse suggests that his Imamate is permanent and everlasting, whereas the Imamate, religion (Sharia), and scripture of the Prophets of Resolute Determination (PBUH) are only until the time of the next Ulul Azm Prophet. Consequently, the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) should only have lasted until the time of the Sharia of Prophet Moses (PBUH) and should not have continued thereafter (Sadr, 2007). However, there are other criticisms of this theory. A fundamental objection is that this theory contradicts the view of the Shia Imamia. This theory links the Imamate with Prophethood, while the Shia Imamia uses this verse to argue for the Imamate of the Infallible Imams (PBUH) (see: Najarzagagan, 2011), which necessitates the independence of the Imamate from Prophethood. On the other hand, this verse specifically addresses Prophet Abraham (PBUH) with the expression "I have made you", whereas in the case of others, such as in verse 73 of Surah Al-Anbiya, it is mentioned generally with the expression "We made them". This indicates a type of exclusive Imamate concerning him and uniformity regarding the Imamate of others.

Imamate in the realm of inner guidance

Allameh Tabatabai interprets the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) as inner guidance and relates it to existential authority. He first points out that the misunderstanding of interpreting Imamate as Prophethood stems from the definition of Imamate, which is the following and emulation of people towards a person in speech and action, as people also follow the Prophet (AS) in his words and deeds. He rejects this interpretation, as it is incompatible with the essence of Imamate and cannot explain the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (AS), who previously held the position of Prophethood and Messengership. He later proves, based on the verses of *the Holy Quran*, which firstly, guidance is a prerequisite for

Imamate; secondly, guidance in Imamate is not absolute but is conditioned by "command"; and thirdly, this "command" is a celestial matter to which all beings are directed towards God. This command is the existential word "Be" (Kun) with which God creates beings without the interference of time and space. Therefore, the "Imam", through existential authority, guides with an existential command and through the means of reaching the desired goal, not through legislative authority and command, which is the duty of the Prophets (AS). Of course, what Allameh Tabatabai expresses is the essence of Imamate; otherwise, the Imam also has the responsibility of outward guidance. Now, considering that Prophet Ibrahim (AS) previously held the position of Prophethood, his appointment to the position of Imamate means that God has also granted him the rank of guidance through command and reaching the desired goal (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 1/272). Therefore, from Allameh Tabatabai's perspective, Imamate is a rank distinct from Prophethood, and the guidance in it is through existential command rather than legislative.

Imam Musa Sadr, in critiquing this viewpoint, first denies the necessity of the Imamate being associated with guidance, as *the Holy Quran* sometimes refers to the Imamate in the context of false leaders who are not guides. He then associates the Imamate with a type of invitation and leadership that encompasses both the invitation and leadership of truth and falsehood. Secondly, he reminds us that the term "command" in *the Holy Quran* has two types of applications: the actions of God and the divine revelations. The verses of *the Holy Quran* indicate that the divine tradition in the matter of guidance is such that guidance is mediated through revelation. Therefore, "guidance by command" refers to legislative command, meaning divine revelation, and not to existential command. He believes that Allameh Tabatabai has taken the command in "guidance by command" as an existential "be" command; whereas this command pertains to the actions of God and not His guidance. Thus, if we accept that the Imamate is always accompanied by a form of guidance, that guidance is legislative and not existential. Ultimately, he argues that Allameh Tabatabai, unable to resolve the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) through legislative guidance, has turned to existential guidance and the existential command. Therefore, if we can show a way in which Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) was appointed to the Imamate after prophethood, there is no need for the work that Allameh Tabatabai has done (Sadr, 2007). He has proposed the theory of the Imamate as a form of practical leadership and believes that this can clarify the issue.

Regarding Imam Musa Sadr's critique of Allameh Tabatabai's viewpoint, we can say that the essence of his theory—that the Imamate in the noble verse is legislative and should not be reduced to existential command—is entirely correct and consistent with the context of the verse. However, he has not provided a reason for equating "guidance by command" with guidance through divine revelation and legislative guidance. Simply stating that *the Holy Quran* has mentioned guidance through revelation in some instances does not justify applying this to the cases of "guidance by command" and taking the command as legislative. Of course, Imam Musa Sadr's assertion is correct that if we can resolve the appointment of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) to the Imamate through legislative guidance, there is no need to refer to existential guidance. Therefore, in future discussions, we will present a theory based on legislative guidance, considering the apparent context and implications.

Critique of Imam Musa Sadr's theory titled "Imamate as Leadership in Action"

Imam Musa Sadr, by rejecting various theories regarding the leadership of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in the interpretation of verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah, has developed a fifth theory titled "Leadership as Practical Guidance" (Sadr, 2007). This theory is based on the distinction between scientific leadership and practical leadership, asserting that the former is granted by God, while the latter is achieved through individual effort and striving. In scientific leadership, God selects individuals based on their merit, whereas in practical leadership, a person must reach perfection through effort and dedication in the path of servitude. After being chosen by God, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) attained the pinnacle of servitude through divine tests, ultimately achieving practical leadership and imamate. Following the clarification of this issue, Imam Musa Sadr addresses two questions. The first question is: if practical leadership is achieved through effort and not through appointment, why does this verse attribute the leadership of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to God's decree? He responds that this decree does not mean granting but rather confirming the actions of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and recognizing his individual efforts. The second question is: were not other prophets (PBUH) practical leaders of their people, which is why leadership was specifically attributed to Prophet Abraham (PBUH)? Imam Musa Sadr finds the answer to this question in the varying degrees of effort in the path of servitude, emphasizing that although all prophets (PBUH) are leaders and guides for their communities in the path of servitude, they differ in their journeys, with some being superior to others. Only those who reach the pinnacle attain the status of practical imamate, while others must follow them. He elucidates the difference between the imamate of the prophets (PBUH) by referencing two verses from *the Holy Quran*. The imamate in the verse "And We made them leaders guiding by Our command" (Surah Al-Anbiya, 73) pertains to all prophets (PBUH) and represents scientific leadership achieved through revelation, whereas the imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is of the practical kind mentioned in the verse "And make us leaders for the righteous" (Surah Al-Furqan, 74). All servants of the Most Merciful aspire to such a position, and the aspirations of that Prophet were realized through his efforts and sincerity, leading him to this esteemed rank (Sadr, 2007).

It seems that although Imam Musa Sadr's perspective has somewhat unveiled the truth of the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), this theory also has ambiguities that cannot be overlooked. The first ambiguity lies in the difference between the prophets (PBUH) regarding scientific and practical leadership. Can we assert that, despite acknowledging that all of them possessed both types of leadership, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) can be considered a practical leader simply because he excelled in servitude? Certainly, the other prophets (PBUH) also traversed various levels of servitude, and consequently, they too can possess practical leadership and be imams in their own right. Therefore, it cannot be argued that practical leadership, in the sense of Imamate, is exclusive to Prophet Abraham (PBUH) based solely on the reasoning that he was at the pinnacle of servitude. This reasoning merely suggests that he is among the foremost practical leaders, not that this type of Imamate is limited to him alone. In other words, the perfection of servitude for a prophet (PBUH) is more of a personal

perfection and is effective in relation to God; from a social standpoint, it merely contributes to the perfection of that status, not to its essence. For instance, the type of revelation for the prophets varies (Sadr, 2007). However, this difference does not affect the essence of prophethood; rather, it pertains to the rank of prophethood, the relationship with God, and the social status of the prophets, whether a prophet is a preacher, a messenger, or one of the resolute prophets (PBUH). On the other hand, the distinction between scientific and practical leadership leads one to think that one type of leadership is merely about providing knowledge and guidance, without any practical direction, meaning guiding individuals toward the truth is absent. Practical leadership, which involves guiding individuals, is a different type that is specific to certain prophets (PBUH). However, this notion is neither compatible with the acknowledgment that all prophets (PBUH), in addition to providing guidance, also had practical leadership, nor with the reality that all prophets (PBUH), especially the messengers (PBUH), both provided guidance and consistently led their communities in practice. Therefore, the distinction between these two types of scientific and practical leadership regarding the prophets lacks substantive meaning and cannot elucidate the status of the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

The second issue is the distinction that this theory makes between these two leadership roles in terms of appointment and confirmation. Considering the interpretation, there is no inclination towards oppression, and in servitude, they reach the highest rank; however, divine will does not pertain to their leadership. Therefore, although individual effort is necessary to attain prophethood and leadership, and these ranks are confirmed by the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT), the verse of Al-Baqarah 124, which discusses appointed leadership (Kulayni, 1986, v. 1/198), indicates that leadership is from God. If the leadership mentioned in the noble verse were merely an individual act and God only confirmed what had occurred, there would be no room for the question of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and it would be clear that any of his descendants who could endure in servitude like him and reach the highest rank would attain the position of leadership, consequently receiving divine confirmation as well. Those who could not reach this rank; thus, the request of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in this regard would seem unnecessary. God's response to Prophet Abraham's (PBUH) request also indicates this matter. The response mentioned in the verse is merely a negative one, stating that leadership does not reach the oppressors. However, the verse does not specify to whom leadership will be granted. It seems that this response is intended to express the necessary condition for attaining the rank of leadership, while the sufficient condition in this regard is left to God's will. It may be that leadership does not reach the unworthy and oppressive individuals, but the essence of attaining these ranks is based on God's will and appointment, and individual effort alone is not sufficient.

Explanation of the theory of "Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Imam of the Nations"

In the previous discussion, it was established that five theories regarding the truth of Prophet Ibrahim's (PBUH) appointment to the position of Imamate, as mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:124), have not provided a satisfactory answer. In this discussion, we present a new theory titled "Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH), Imam of the Nations", based on the characteristics of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH). In this regard, we will first address the Imamate of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH) and the dimensions of their Imamate. Then, we will examine the status of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) in *the Holy Quran* and finally analyze the characteristics of Prophet Ibrahim's (PBUH) Imamate that have made him the Imam of the nations.

The Imamate of the Ulul Azm Prophets (PBUH)

Some narrations, by enumerating the ranks of the prophets (PBUH), have mentioned the position of Imamate for the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH) in relation to other prophets. Although the characteristics of their Imamate are not explicitly stated in these narrations, based on other narrations, their Imamate is considered to have three characteristics: a heavenly book, the establishment of a religion (Sharia), and universality. There is no doubt about the first two characteristics, as *the Holy Quran* and narrations explicitly address them. Surah Ash-Shura (42:13) subtly refers to the five divine religions (Sharias) and their heavenly books:

"He has ordained for you in religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and what We enjoined upon Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa, that you establish the religion and do not divide therein. It is great for the polytheists that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back".

In this verse, the names of the four Ulul Azm prophets, namely Prophet Noah (PBUH), Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Prophet Moses (PBUH), and Prophet Jesus (PBUH), are mentioned. It is noted that the religion (Sharia) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is based on the revelation sent to them and what has been revealed to him. Although the names of the books of these prophets are not mentioned in this verse, in other verses and narrations, the names of all except for the book of Prophet Noah (PBUH) are explicitly stated (Kulaini, 1986, v. 2/17, hadith 1). However, Allameh Tabatabai considers the book of Prophet Noah (PBUH) to be "the Book", which is mentioned in verse 213 of Surah Al-Baqarah, as this verse addresses the differences among people after their unity and the revelation of the book for adjudicating their disputes, and Prophet Noah (PBUH) is the first prophet with a religion (Sharia) (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 2/128). There is also evidence in some narrations supporting this view. Imam Sadiq (PBUH), while naming the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH), refers to these two characteristics and mentions the names of all the books of these prophets. However, regarding Prophet Noah (PBUH), he states that he was sent with a book and religion (Sharia). He also describes the historical progression of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH) in such a way that with the arrival of each prophet, his religion (Sharia) and book replaced those of the previous prophet. The same is mentioned regarding Prophet Noah (PBUH) (Kulaini, 1986, v. 2/17, hadith 2). Therefore, it seems there is no doubt about these two characteristics of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH). Of course, some other prophets, like Prophet Zechariah, also had books, but their books were

in line with the religion (Sharia) of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH) and did not lead to the formation of a specific religion (Sharia).

Regarding the third characteristic, which is the universality of the religion (Sharia) of the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH), we can discuss it from two aspects: temporal and spatial. From a temporal perspective, in Islamic thought, Islam is considered an eternal religion (Sharia), while other religions (Sharias) are limited to specific times, supported by numerous verses and narrations. From a spatial perspective, concerning the geographical scope of each religion (Sharia) before Islam, some narrations indicate that each one encompassed the entire territory of the earth during its time, and everyone was obligated to adhere to it (Majlisi, 1982, v. 11/33). Other narrations regard the Ulul Azm prophets as those whose followers, both during their time and afterward, were bound to their books and obligated to follow their religion Sharia (Majlisi, 1982, v. 11/34). This suggests that each of these religions (Sharias) covered the entire expanse of the earth. However, there are also narrations that explicitly or implicitly consider only the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as universal, while the missions of the others are seen as regional and specific. One narration categorizes the missions of the prophets based on ethnicity (Majlisi, 1982, v. 11/43), while another divides their missions according to specific regions, stating that the mission of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and Isaac (PBUH) was in a sacred land granted to the Children of Israel, the mission of Prophet Jacob (PBUH) was in Egypt, and the mission of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) was in the land of the Jurhum tribe, the inhabitants near the Kaaba (Majlisi, 1982, v. 11/57; Kulayni, 1986, v. 8/113). In any case, it seems that there are serious doubts regarding the universality of these religions in terms of geographical scope, which we will discuss further in future discussions.

The Status of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in the Holy Quran

The Holy Quran addresses the personality of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) from various dimensions. The most important characteristic of this Prophet is his servitude and submission to the Truth, which is mentioned in verses 130-132 of Surah Al-Baqarah:

"And who would turn away from the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself? And We certainly chose him in this world, and indeed, he will be among the righteous in the Hereafter" (130). "When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds'" (131). "And Abraham instructed his sons, and so did Jacob, 'O my sons, indeed Allah has chosen for you this religion, so do not die except while you are Muslims'" (132).

These verses initially discuss the selection of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in this world and his salvation in the Hereafter, emphasizing that anyone who turns away from this path has devalued and humiliated themselves. It then introduces the reason for his selection as his submission to the Almighty God and continues with his and Prophet Jacob's (PBUH) advice to their children to follow no other path than submission to God. It is clear that these verses regard the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) as fundamental and essential in the entire religion. However, in other verses, the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is introduced as a pillar of faith. Surah An-Nisa (4:125) considers the best religion to be submission to God and following the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH): "And who is better in religion than one who submits himself to Allah while being a doer of good and

follows the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth? And Allah took Abraham as an intimate friend". This noble verse outlines three characteristics of the best religion and faith: complete submission to God, being a doer of good, and following the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), whom God has chosen as His friend. Of course, the first two characteristics can also be linked to the third, as in the verses we previously examined, the most important characteristic of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was his submission to the Truth. In verses 103-110 of Surah As-Saffat, he is addressed as a doer of good, and the reward for the doers of good is granted to him. Therefore, *the Holy Quran* considers the best religion to be adherence to the teachings of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and calls everyone to this matter.

Of course, by referring to other verses, it becomes clear that this verse actually describes the religion of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Verses 120-123 of Surah An-Nahl indicate this: "Indeed, Ibrahim was a nation, devoutly obedient to Allah, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah. Grateful for His favors; He chose him and guided him to a straight path. And We gave him good in this world, and indeed, he will be among the righteous in the Hereafter. Then We revealed to you, 'Follow the religion of Ibrahim, inclining toward truth, and he was not of those who associate others with Allah". These verses initially portray Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) as a person who was himself a nation, a monotheist, grateful for God's blessings, and chosen by Him. He was granted a good life in this world and will be among the righteous in the Hereafter. Then, verse 123 addresses the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and conveys this important point: We have revealed to you to follow the religion of Ibrahim (PBUH), who was a monotheist and not of the polytheists. By putting these verses together, it becomes clear that the intended meaning of the best religion in verse 125 of Surah An-Nisa is indeed the religion of Islam, to which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) invites, as it encompasses submission to the truth, doing good, and following the religion of Ibrahim (PBUH). Considering what has been stated, it becomes evident that the status of Ibrahim (PBUH) in *the Holy Quran* is much higher than that of the other three resolute prophets, and he is very close to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Characteristics of the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH)

Considering what has been stated regarding the third characteristic of the Imamate of the Ulul Azm prophets. It seems that the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), in terms of its universality, possesses a unique feature compared to the three other divine laws. The essence of his Imamate also relates to this characteristic. *The Holy Quran* connects the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to the universality of Islam, which is the final divine law and will continue until the Day of Resurrection. In verse 78 of Surah Al-Hajj, this connection is presented from two perspectives: first, in that the Islamic law is identified as the same nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), who is regarded as the father of the Muslims; and second, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) designated the name of Islam and Muslims:

"And strive in the cause of Allah with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. The religion of your father, Abraham, is what He has named you Muslims before and in this

[revelation], so that the Messenger will be a witness over you and you will be witnesses over the people. So establish prayer and give zakah and hold fast to Allah; He is your protector. And excellent is the protector and excellent is the helper".

Allameh Tabatabai refers to three verses to explain why Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is considered the father of Muslims: Verse 2:131, which introduces him as the first Muslim; Verse 14:36, which identifies Muslims as followers of Prophet Abraham; and Verse 3:68, which states that the closest individuals to Prophet Abraham (PBUH) are his followers, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the believers. He emphasizes that the naming of Muslims by the name chosen by Prophet Abraham (PBUH) during his time, which is also reflected in *the Holy Quran*, is a favor from God, acknowledging their Islam (Tabatabai, 1996, v. 14/411). Furthermore, *the Holy Quran* considers Prophet Abraham (PBUH) a special model for Muslims (60:4) and commands adherence to his way (22:95). This is also manifested in the laws and regulations of Islam. The Qibla of Muslims, namely the Kaaba, is a symbol built by Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and the rituals of Hajj are directly connected to the Abrahamic rites. These verses indicate a unity of identity between the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and the religion (Sharia) of Islam, showing that Islam is nothing but the religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Narrations also refer to important aspects of this identity unity. Some narrations introduce the religion of Imam Ali (PBUH) and the religion of the Shiites as the same religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) (Majlisi, 1982, v. 65/84, 89). Another narration identifies the believers mentioned in Verse 3:68 as the Imams (PBUH) and their followers (Kulayni, 1986, v. 1/416). These narrations express the truth that the intended believers following Prophet Abraham (PBUH) are the true believers in the religion of Islam, who are manifested in the infallible Imams (PBUH) and their true followers.

Historical evidence suggests a temporal connection between the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and the Islamic religion (Sharia). The ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were followers of the Hanif religion, which was propagated by Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) in the land of Jurhum (Majlisi, 1982, v. 11/57; Kulayni, 1986, v. 8/113). The essence of this religion was the adherence to the teachings of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and they were not obligated to follow the religion (Sharia) of Prophet Moses (PBUH) or Prophet Jesus (PBUH). Thus, at a time when these two religions (Sharias) were the basis of practice in other regions, the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) also existed in a part of the Earth's geography and was recognized from a divine perspective. This temporal connection indicates that the leadership of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was, even in a temporal sense, universal and has never been severed; it has coexisted with the other two religions (Sharias) in the world and has united with the Islamic religion (Sharia) for eternity. All these matters and other evidence show that the religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) differed from the religions of Prophet Moses (PBUH) and Prophet Jesus (PBUH), serving as a complete model and example whose essence has been present in all religions (Sharias), but it has a closer connection with Islamic religion (Sharia), both in its outward form and inner meaning. Therefore, it can be said that the practice and religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) have never been abrogated and have always remained alive and dynamic in human life.

Doubts Surrounding the Theory of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Imam of the Nations

Considering the narrations we have previously discussed and the religions (shariats) of the Ulul Azm prophets, even the religion (sharia) of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is regarded as having a specific time frame. It may be questioned whether the time of his law also came to an end with the advent of the law of Prophet Moses (PBUH), and whether it can be said that his law had any particular distinction in terms of universality. Although the response to this doubt has been addressed in earlier discussions, it is essential to pay attention to one point. There is no doubt that the book of the law of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) did not exist after the advent of Islam and lacks validity. *The Holy Quran* has not stated anything in this regard; rather, it has articulated a profound connection in terms of the name of Islam, the rituals, and the teachings of Islamic law with the law of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), while merely referencing the presence of some of their rulings within Islamic law concerning other laws (21:108, 5:45). Therefore, the universality of the law of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is due to the fact that, firstly, it had an official presence until the emergence of Islamic law in the Arabian Peninsula. Secondly, the followers of the law of Prophet Moses (PBUH) and Prophet Jesus (PBUH) also consider themselves to be followers of Abraham, and the nation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) has been present within these laws as well. Of course, *the Holy Quran* denies the Jewish and Christian identities due to their deviations from Prophet Abraham (PBUH) (3:67). Thirdly, after the emergence of Islam, the nation of Abraham (PBUH) and the name of Islam, which is fundamentally the name of the true religion (3:19), have continued to exist within it. This very verse, which considers the essence of religion to be Islam, also points out that the People of the Book, through their conscious differences and deviations in religion, have distanced themselves from the path of Islam, which is the path of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Fourthly, in the application of the term "for the people" in appointing him to the position of Imamate, there is a subtle point that indicates that he has become an Imam for all of human history and for all people. Therefore, the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) has its own unique characteristics that distinguish it even from the Imamate of other prophets of resolute determination (Ulul Azm). Prophet Abraham (PBUH) is the Imam of all nations, while they have been the Imams of their own nations. The appointment of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to Imamate in verse 2:124 carries the message that all nations must align their paths with that of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and accept him as a model of religious adherence.

Considering that this theory presents a kind of exclusive

high rank of Imamate for Prophet Abraham (PBUH), it may raise the question that after being appointed to the position of Imamate, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) requests it for his descendants and family from God, which generalizes the concept of Imamate and contradicts its exclusivity. In response to this question, it can be said that, as discussed previously, the rank of Imamate has levels, and the request of that Prophet was not for his descendants to attain the exact same high rank of Imamate that was granted to him, but rather that his descendants also be placed on this path and attain a level of Imamate. This level of Imamate could manifest in the form of Prophethood in various social ranks, and it was not necessary for all his descendants to hold the Imamate at the level of the Ulul Azm Prophets (PBUH). This is a point that is embedded in God's response to that Prophet's request. The response shifts from the discussion of Imamate to the concept of "Covenant". The Covenant is a general matter that is mentioned in relation to both the Prophets (PBUH) and the nations in *the Holy Quran* (Taha/115, Yasin/60), but considering its addition to God Himself and its not reaching the oppressors, it is clear that it is a specific covenant that God takes from particular individuals in guiding people, which is manifested in the Prophets (PBUH) and their successors. Therefore, the Imamate in the verse is a transcendent rank that is exclusive to Prophet Abraham (PBUH), and his request is directed towards ensuring that the essence of Imamate does not depart from his family, and God responds that the essence of Imamate is a divine covenant that does not reach the oppressors.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined an important question regarding the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), which is raised in verse 124 of Surah Al-Baqarah. Despite the prophetic status of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), what does his appointment to the position of Imamate mean? In response to this question, we focused on the article by Imam Musa Sadr, "A Reflection on the Status of the Imamate of Prophet Abraham (PBUH)", in which he refutes four theories and presents a fifth theory. By analyzing these five theories, we concluded that although Imam Musa Sadr's critiques of the four theories are valid and there are additional criticisms that can be made against them, his own theory also fails to provide a satisfactory answer to this question. These theories have attempted to provide an explanation for the general concept of Imamate that can be reconciled with the status of Prophethood, neglecting the fact that the essence of Imamate in this verse is specific to Prophet Abraham (PBUH). This verse is unique in the entire *Holy Quran* and has not been mentioned for any other prophet, not even the Ulul Azm prophets (PBUH). On the other hand, each of these theories is either inconsistent with the verses of *the*

Holy Quran or incompatible with the Shia perspective on Imamate; therefore, a response must be provided to this question that does not encounter such issues.

The new theory presented in this article titled "Prophet Abraham (PBUH) as the Imam of Nations" is based on the exclusivity of the Imamate for Prophet Abraham (PBUH), supported by numerous Quranic and narrational evidence. In this theory, considering the dimensions of the Imamate of the Ulul Azm prophets, we have attempted to explain the exclusive Imamate of that Prophet from a global perspective, both in terms of geographical and temporal scope. From the viewpoint of *the Holy Quran*, the Sharia of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), referred to as "Millah", differs from the Sharia of other Ulul Azm prophets and has a close connection with Islamic Sharia. *The Holy Quran* has established the Millah of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) as a model and standard, indicating that any deviation from it, as realized in Judaism and Christianity, leads to a deviation from the true religion. Islam not only derives its name and rituals from that Prophet, but its true followers are entirely aligned with his Millah, and for this reason, they are considered followers of the Millah of Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

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