THE CONCEPT OF *KHILĀFAH* ACCORDING TO
SELECTED SUNNĪ AND SHĪʿĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES

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Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit
has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.
Dedicated to

My parents

and

my wife, Marhana
Acknowledgements

In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful.

I owe a great debt of gratitude, first of all, to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, and its academic and administrative staff.

My sincere thanks are due to Dr. Elizabeth Sirriyeh, who never tired of commenting on this research, for all her kind words, and for the invaluable guidance, encouragement, ideas and support she offered. I must also pay my tribute to Professor Neal Robinson for his wise advice and guidance as supervisor during the earlier stages of my research.

I would like to thank several colleagues and friends, including Dr. Ismail al-Bayrak, Dr. Ahmet Onay and Dr. Asyraf Abd Rahman, for their assistance and discussion to improve my research. My special thanks are also due to Peter Coleman, for his invaluable editing of and comment on this thesis.

Finally, I am greatly indebted to my parents, to my wife, Marhana, and also to my daughter, Nur Najwa, and my two sons, Fikri and Farhan, without whose love, patience and support the completion of this study would not have been possible.
Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the Qur'anic conception of *khilāfah* from selected Sunnī and Shi`ī points of view, in both the classical and modern periods. The term *khilāfah*, widely used by the Sunnis, is inseparable from *imāmah*, the term which the Shi`īs prefer. The concept arose very early in Islam and has continued to provoke discussion into the modern period. Yet, while the thought of Muslim political theorists on the subject has received much scholarly attention, far less notice has been taken of the ideas of Qur'anic exegetes. For this reason it has been judged worthwhile to seek to throw light on some relatively neglected interpretations of *khilāfah* by examining the views of certain major commentators on the Qur'an. These are principally scholars of the 9th–14th centuries who are regarded as having made substantial contributions to thought on this issue. However, some consideration is also given to the ideas of three modern writers who have adapted and revised the concept of *khilāfah* to a considerable extent.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the historical development and nature of the *khilāfah* in Islam, providing a general overview of the concept of the *khilāfah*, its necessity, functional role and duties, from many Muslim scholars’ viewpoints. As the main discussion concerns the Qur’anic interpretation, the commentators’ approaches to exegesis and their backgrounds, which may have influenced their interpretation of the concept, are examined in the second chapter. The main discussion and argument are presented in chapters three to six. These chapters provide a close textual analysis of selected Qur’anic verses, which contain various terms relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* (*imāmah* for the Shi`īs) as interpreted by commentators from the two major Muslim communities, the Sunnī and Shi`ī, particularly the Ithnā `ashariyyah (the Twelver). Some modern interpretations of the *khilāfah* and the influence on them of the classical works are discussed in the seventh chapter. This is of great importance, since some aspects of classical teaching have been changed in response to twentieth-century conditions. The conclusion brings together and clarifies the arguments and findings of the previous chapters in order to explain the significant contributions of the various Qur’anic interpretations considered in the main part of the study.
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List of Abbreviations

CE common era
b. date of birth
d. date of death
AH. Anno Hijrae, the year of Hijra
n.d. no date
n.p. no place
pbuh peace be upon him

EI² Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition, Leiden, 1960-.
IQ The Islamic Quarterly: A Review of Islamic Culture
IS Islamic Studies: Journal of the Central Institute of Islamic Research.
AJISS American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences
OEMIW The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World
IJIA Iranian Journal of International Affairs
HI Hamdard Islamicus: Quarterly Journal of Studies and Research in Islam
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
IJMES International Journal of Middle East Studies
JSS Journal of Semitic Studies
JSAMES Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
Note on Translation and Transliteration

The translations from the Qur'an are based substantially on Ṣ Abdullāh Yūsuf Ṣ Ali's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1992). The system for numbering the Qur'anic verses is that of writing the sūrah's name first, with its number in brackets, followed by the number of the verse, e.g. sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.

The transliteration system used in this thesis is based on the standard *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition, 1960-) transliteration from Arabic. The exceptions are the use of the letter J for the Arabic letter jim and the letter Q for qāf. Other modifications include the rendering of tā' marbūtah as ah, not a, thus giving 'sūrah', not 'sūra' and at when in construct state.

The diphthongs are written: ay and aw.

The three short vowels are represented by a for fātah, i for kasrah and u for dāmmah.

The long vowels are represented by ā, ū, ī.
## TRANSLITERATION

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<td>١</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>ل</td>
<td>l</td>
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<tr>
<td>٢</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>م</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
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<td>٣</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ن</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td>th</td>
<td>و</td>
<td>w</td>
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<td>٥</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ه</td>
<td>h</td>
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<td>٦</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ي</td>
<td>y</td>
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<td>٧</td>
<td>kh</td>
<td>ع</td>
<td>ah</td>
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<td>٨</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>Short Vowels</td>
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<td>٩</td>
<td>dh</td>
<td>ح</td>
<td>Long Vowels</td>
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<td>١٠</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>ء</td>
<td>å</td>
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<td>z</td>
<td>û</td>
<td>û</td>
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<td>١٢</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>ى</td>
<td>i</td>
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<td>١٣</td>
<td>sh</td>
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<td>١٦</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>u</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>١٧</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>i</td>
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## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>'ahd</td>
<td>promise</td>
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<tr>
<td>ahl al-bayt</td>
<td>family of the Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-aqd</td>
<td>the people who loose and bind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahl al-ḥilm wa 'l-fiqh</td>
<td>the learned and the jurists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-amān</td>
<td>peace, safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amānāh</td>
<td>trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-Amīn</td>
<td>the trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amīr</td>
<td>chief, leader or commander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amīr al-mu'minīn</td>
<td>leader of the believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'aql</td>
<td>reason or rational thinking</td>
</tr>
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<td>aqwāl al-ʿulamā'</td>
<td>the opinions of learned Muslim scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-arḍ</td>
<td>the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asbāb al-nuzūl</td>
<td>reasons of the revelation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣḥāb Muḥammad</td>
<td>the Companions of the Prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aṣḥāb al-sarāyā</td>
<td>members of the expedition</td>
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<td>āthār</td>
<td>examples shown by the Companions</td>
</tr>
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<td>bay'ah</td>
<td>pledge of allegiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bid'ah</td>
<td>heresy, innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dīn Allāh</td>
<td>the religion of Allah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fāsiq</td>
<td>a category of persistently sinful people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiqh</td>
<td>Islamic jurisprudence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fitnah</td>
<td>sedition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fuqahā'</td>
<td>jurisconsults or jurisprudents</td>
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<td>ḥadīth</td>
<td>tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḥudūd</td>
<td>Islamic legal penalties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḥukūmah</td>
<td>a form of Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'ibādah</td>
<td>acts of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'id al-ʿaḍḥā</td>
<td>the Sacrifice Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṕūʾūf</td>
<td>the miracle or inimitability of the Qur’ān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ijmāʿ al-ṣaḥābah</td>
<td>the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet</td>
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imāmah  
imāmate

ʾiṣnah  
infallibility of the imām

isnād  
chain of transmission

al-jabarīrah  
a kind of sovereignty exercised by tyrants

jihād  
Holy war

khalīfah  
caliph

khalīfat Allāh  
God’s caliph

khalīfat rasūl Allāh  
caliph of God’s Messenger

khilāfah  
caliphate

kitāb al-ʾamal  
record book

lutf  
God’s mercy

al-Mahdī  
the guided one

al-Manṣūr  
the victorious

maṣlahah  
public interest

matn  
content

mubham  
indefinite

mudābbir  
administrator

mufassirūn  
Qur’anic commentators

mujtahid  
a person who delivers an independent judgement in the interpretation of Islamic law

mulk  
kingship

mulūk  
kings

munāfīqūn  
the hypocrites

mustakhlīf  
succeeding or appointing as khalīfah

nabī  
prophet

nāʿib  
representative

naṣṣ  
Divine source

nubuwwah  
prophethood

qādah  
chiefs or leaders

qādis  
judges

qarn  
generation

riyāsah  
also means leadership
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ru'asā'</td>
<td>heads or leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shar'ah</td>
<td>Islamic law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shūrā</td>
<td>consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sulṭān</td>
<td>the title for Muslim ruler, the one with power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-sulṭān al-ʿazam</td>
<td>the supreme ruler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-tābiʿān</td>
<td>the followers of the Companions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tafsīr</td>
<td>Qur'anic commentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tafsīr bi 'l-maʿthūr</td>
<td>traditional commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taqiyyah</td>
<td>prudential dissimulation when in danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taqlīd</td>
<td>imitation without assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʿulamāʾ</td>
<td>those learned in religious knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ulū ʿl-amr</td>
<td>those charged with authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-umarāʾ</td>
<td>military commanders or leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umarāʾ ʿal-ḥaqq</td>
<td>the true and pious leaders or rulers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umarāʾ ʿal-sarāʾyā</td>
<td>leaders of a military expedition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ummah</td>
<td>Muslim community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wājib</td>
<td>obligatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walāyah</td>
<td>governance of the faqīh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wasiyyah</td>
<td>designation or legacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wulāh</td>
<td>plural of wali, leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zakāt</td>
<td>alms tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ẓālim</td>
<td>a sinful and evil-doing person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ẓulm</td>
<td>injustice</td>
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</table>
INTRODUCTION

On the basis of teachings found in the Qur’an and in certain hadiths, many traditional Muslims have claimed that Islam provides guidelines for the formation and propagation of the caliphate (khilāfah). This claim, however, remains a matter of some contention and the issue has provoked much argument and debate among Muslim communities. From the beginning of the Islamic khilāfah to the present day (excluding the khilāfah of the Prophet, which Muslims accept as the most perfect model), Muslims’ understanding and application of the concept has been overshadowed by uncertainty and dispute. This study intends to arrive at a more precise understanding of the guidelines for the caliphate and to clarify the uncertainties surrounding the subject. However, it does not intend to decide which interpretation is the best or the most suited to the original teaching. Rather it will investigate the differences and agreements to be found among Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, and especially between the Sunni and the Imāmiyyah Ithnā ʿashariyyah (hereafter Imāmiyyah), from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries and in the twentieth century.

The concept of the khilāfah is an aspect of Islamic political thought, which has been extensively debated within Muslim society. Muslims have referred to the divine source (naṣṣ), the Prophet’s hadiths and several other valid pieces of evidence in order to prove the fundamental need for a khalifah in the ummah. Unfortunately, the Muslim ummah is divided into several sects, of which the Sunnis and the Shi‘is are the two most famous and the largest, and their separation has caused differences and arguments to arise in justifying the concept of khilāfah. The argument includes the question of who is legally entitled to hold the office of khalifah, the possibility of having more than one caliph and the functions of the caliph. All these matters constitute a very wide topic, and all are pertinent to the basic concept of khilāfah.
Since the khilāfah has been a subject of much argument, many theological works have been produced to deal with the relevant issues. The available literature goes back to the eleventh century to the time of the ābāsid caliphate although the matter was bitterly disputed before the beginning of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyads (41/661-132/750). Significant classical works such as al-Ahkām al-sulṭāniyyah of al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), Naṣīḥat al-mulūk of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Sirāj al-Mulūk of Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurtūshī (d. 520/1126) have been considered as particularly important contributions to the debate. These works, however, are merely comments and advice on the qualifications relating to the caliph (khalīfah), but do not offer an exploration from a Qur’ānic perspective. Modern scholars have also produced works on the khilāfah, on the sectarian doctrine, and on more general aspects of Islamic political thought. Significant among these scholars are Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (al-Khilāfah aw 'l-imāmat al-‘uzmā, 1922-3), Ālī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, (al-Islām wa ʿusūl al-ḥukm, 1925) and al-Mawdūdī (al-Khilāfah wa 'l-mulk, 1966).

Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in both the West and Islamic countries, particularly in the modern period, have examined the various areas relating to the concept of khilāfah. Historical description, the divisions of Muslim sectarianism, Qur’ānic analysis, and its dogmatic and doctrinal theology have all been considered in their discussions. Consequently, works such as The Caliphate by Sir Thomas Arnold (1925), Introduction to the Qur’ān by Richard Bell (1953), Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age by Albert Hourani (1962), God’s Caliph by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds (1986),

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1 It has been argued that the treatise, Naṣīḥat al-mulūk, which consists of two parts, may not be al-Ghazālī’s. There is no doubt that the first part, comprising an exposition of the faith written for a prince, is his own work. However, Patricia Crone argues over the authenticity of the second part, which pays special attention to the art of government. She maintains that its presentation is arguably characteristic of al-Ghazālī. The reference to al-Ghazālī as the author of the treatise is therefore a general perception and not necessarily a legitimate claim. See Patricia Crone, ‘Did al-Ghazālī Write a Mirror for Princes? On the Authorship of Naṣīḥat al-mulūk’, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAI), 10 (1987): 168.
Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (1991) and many more have appeared and contributed to the development of the subject.

As many works have been published on the khilāfah and imāmah, which have employed both theological and Qur’anic analyses, this research attempts to fill some gaps, considering especially those areas that have been somewhat neglected or that have not been examined in detail. Although this study outlines the historical development of the khilāfah and briefly discusses its nature and basic concept, its significant contribution is, firstly, that it combines the analyses of both Sunni and Imāmiyyah Shi‘i Qur’anic interpretations of the khilafah- and imāmah-verses. Consequently the similarities and differences of interpretation between these two sects are clearly presented. Secondly, and somewhat more importantly, the analysis covers both the classical and modern commentaries, examining the differences of method and approach and the influence of the classical interpretations on the modern. To achieve its aims, the study considers a broad range of terms relevant to khilāfah and imāmah, such as khalīfah, khulafā‘, khalā‘if, yastakhlif, istakhlafa, yakhluif, imām, a’immah and ulū ‘l-amr.

In conducting this research, two methods are used: descriptive and analytical. The former is essentially found in the first two chapters, whereas the remaining chapters are mostly based on a close textual analysis of the Sunni and the Imāmiyyah Shi‘i interpretations. Due to the practice of these two methods, the main sources are the Qur’an, selected classical and modern commentaries of both Muslim communities, and relevant works comprising theological discussions.

Qur’anic commentaries, which are the main references for this study, can be divided into two categories, traditional (tafsīr bi ‘l-ma‘thūr) and rational (tafsīr bi ‘l-ra‘y). The
sources of traditional *tafsîr* are normally the Qur’anic verses under consideration and other verses of similar meaning, supported by *hadîths* of the Prophet and, sometimes, by the opinions (*ijmâ’*) of the Companions and scholars. On the other hand, rational *tafsîr* employs reason as an essential component of the method of interpretation.² The work of an outstanding exponent of rational *tafsîr*, al-Zamakhshari, will be extensively discussed.

Classical commentaries were basically written for a small group, mostly scholars. Modern *tafsîr*, however, tends to address a much wider audience, which incorporates the common people. This is because many modern scholars, including those examined in this study, have sought to engage with the political movements of their time and promote the revitalisation of Islam. In addition, unlike classical *tafsîr*, the modern works that will be considered in this study have been translated for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the languages in which they were originally written. It is in order to communicate directly with this wider audience that some modern commentators have abandoned certain aspects of classical *tafsîr*, such as grammar, rhetoric, and theology.³ They have preferred to emphasise the discussion of social problems, concentrating on the interpretation of verses that bear on issues in the economic, social, moral and political spheres.⁴ This has sometimes led to a rigid and strongly ideological stance. Mawdūdī, for example, does not admit the possibility that more than one reading – his own – could be acceptable.

⁴ Ibid, 174.
The selection of the classical and modern Qur’anic commentaries is based on the principle that they have been generally the most widely read and highly esteemed by Muslims through the ages. Having myself originated from a Malaysian Sunnī background - the majority of Muslim countries in Southeast Asia are Sunnī and follow the Shāfī‘ī school of law - the process of selecting the Sunnī materials was fairly straightforward. On the other hand, until I went to university in Malaysia, I had been exposed to very little Shi‘ī literature. Works written by radical Shi‘īs are much more accessible in the West than in Malaysia, where many are banned. In fact, Malaysians are forbidden to hold to Shi‘ī doctrines. My early education led me to view these doctrines as deviating from the original teachings of Islam, but my subsequent researches have brought about a moderation of my former opinion. The selection of tafsīr from both Sunnī and Imāmiyyah Shi‘ī communities is based on the same criteria: all the commentaries are major works of reference which have maintained their reputation in the Muslim community until now. The classical commentaries are:


iii- **Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm** by Abū Ja‘far Ismā‘īl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr (d. 774/1373).

iv- **Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān** by Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1056).

v- **Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān** by Abu ʿl-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī (d. 548/1153).

Apart from the classical interpretations, which are of the primary concern to our analysis, reference will also be made to modern commentaries, although this group is limited to two Sunnī and one Shi‘ī.
Moreover, the research also makes reference to other commentators, such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razı (d. 606/1209), known as Mafāṭih al-Ghayb, and to scholars of Islamic law such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), al-Māwardi, al-Ghazāli, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406).

As this research mainly concerns the classical and modern Qur’anic interpretations of the khilāfah and imāmah-verses by the Sunnis and Shi‘is, especially the Imāmiyyah, the main aim is to discover to what extent their interpretations reflect their doctrinal beliefs. In doing so, any similarities and differences between them will be clearly emphasised. In the case that no detailed elaboration can be obtained from the Qur’anic sources, the study will analyse and clarify their use of other elements and sources to support their arguments. Moreover, it is also the purpose of this research that, by comparing the interpretations of the classical Sunnis with those of the Shi‘is and the classical opinions and method with those of the moderns, the influence of the earlier on the later commentators will be made clear, as will the impact of religious and socio-political factors on Islamic interpretations of the concept of khilāfah.

Structure of the Study

The thesis begins with a discussion of the importance, scope and political history of the khilāfah in the context of Islam. The thesis is divided into seven chapters, the first of which briefly elaborates the concept of khilāfah. It is mainly concerned with the classical scholars’ views, but also considers those of modern scholars, regarding the
necessity of the *khilafah* and its function within the Muslim community. The last section of the chapter discusses the selected Qur'anic verses and terms in relation to the *khilafah*.

Chapter two also deals with historical background, mainly as it concerns the classical Sunnî and Shi'i, particularly the Imâmiyyah, Qur'anic commentators and their respective *tafsîr* (commentaries). In order to ensure the usefulness of the analysis, the two Muslim communities will be represented by their most famous scholars of Qur'anic exegesis. The significance of this discussion lies partly in giving some idea of their development in terms of education, writing and involvement in political affairs and events, but mainly in pointing out the differences and similarities in their approach to the interpretation of each Qur'anic verse.

The next four chapters (third to sixth chapters) explore any agreements and disagreements that might exist between the classical Sunnî and Imâmiyyah Shi'i commentators and how differently or similarly they interpret the Qur'anic verses relevant to the concept of *khilafah*. The analysis is divided in order to discuss these communities separately, and each division is further divided into sections: those discussing the *khalifah*-verses and those discussing the *imâm- and ulû 'l-amr*-verses.

The seventh chapter shows the impact of the classical interpretations on three modern commentators - two Sunnis and one Shi'i - and discusses their views concerning the *khilafah*. The brief accounts of their biographies and the analysis of their interpretations of the verses are similar to those found in the chapters dealing with the classical exegetes.

The conclusion presents the findings of the whole study. This chapter discusses any agreements and disagreements found as a result of the analysis of the Sunnî and Shi'i
interpretations, and thoroughly examines several major arguments that reveal their understanding of the concept of *khilafah*.

**A Brief Political History of the *Khilafah***

Our study on the concept of the *khilafah* opens with a brief historical account of the *khilafah* itself. These preliminary sections will avoid discussing the nature and meaning of the Islamic caliphate, although the matter became problematic immediately after the death of the Prophet. The discussion is divided into four different periods, each of which is significant for a better understanding of the concept of *khilafah*.

**The *Khilafah* in the Early Period of Islam**

The early Muslim community believed that it benefited from ideal leadership under the divine guidance given to the Prophet Muhammad. But the organisation of Muslim society became problematic with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 11/632: some Muslims apostatised and others refused to pay *zakat* (alms tax). However, stability was restored by the appointment of Abü Bakr (11/632-13/634), the first of the four rightly-guided caliphs in 11/632 as the *khilafat rasûl Allâh* at a general meeting held in Saqifah Banî Sä'îdah. After Abü Bakr’s death, another three caliphs, ʿUmar (13/634-23/644), ʿUthmân (23/644-35/656) and ʿAlî (35/656-40/661) were given the

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5 Abü Bakr and ʿUmar b. al-Khattâb refused the title of ‘*khilafat Allâh*’ (God’s caliph), but accepted the title ‘*khilafat rasûl Allâh*’ (caliph of the Messenger of God). They believed that the former title could no longer be used after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, as he was the last prophet to be sent by Allah. Meanwhile, the former title was widely used by most of the Umayyads and ʿAbbâṣids. Qur’anic interpretation also reflects some discussions on this issue, which will be dealt later in Chapter Three. See Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 4-23.
responsibility to lead the Muslim community. The *khilāfah* of these four caliphs was based on several procedures such as designation, *shūrā* (consultation) and *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance).

Although the majority agreed their appointments, the last two caliphs faced opposition within the Muslim community. Many opposed the way ʾUthmān (d. 35/656), a member of the Umayyad clan, administered the office of *khilāfah*, and it was alleged that the genesis of hereditary succession in Islam can be traced to his perpetuation of the *khilāfah* within his family.6 The next caliph, ʾAli (d. 40/661) the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, also faced opposition from Muslim groups, and civil wars broke out. The strongest challenge came from the governor of Syria, Muʿāwiya b. Abi Sufyān (d. 60/680), who refused to acknowledge the leadership of ʾAli; this enmity eventually led to military confrontation and the assassination of ʾAli in 661 C.E.7

From the Shiʿi point of view, the right to become the *khalifah*, after the death of the Prophet, was vested in ʾAli. They believe that this claim is based on the Prophet’s designation, derived from a divine ordinance (*nāṣṣ*) promulgated at Ghadir Khumm, and on some other *hadīths*.8 Tabātabāʿī, a modern Iranian Shiʿi scholar, supported the

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6 It has also been reported that ʾUthmān favoured his relatives with public offices, even though there were others who were more suitable and eligible. However, we find it difficult to accept this allegation since no concrete proof has been found and ʾUthmān never nominated any of his kinsmen to succeed him. See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973): 10. See also Yahya Oyewole Imam, 'Hereditary Succession in Islamic Polity', *Islamic Quarterly (IQ)*, 37.2 (1993): 148-49.


8 The famous *hadīth* of Ghadir Khumm was related on the authority of al-Barāʾ b. ʿAzīz b. al-Ḥārīth al-Awsī al-Anṣārī (d. 72/691-2), a Companion of the Prophet. He was too young to take part in the Battle of
validity of the sources and further believed that the designation was the turning point of
the dispute between the Sunnis and the Shi'is over the *khilāfah*.\(^9\)

Even though the Shi'is believed that 'Ali should have been designated as *imam* and was
the best-qualified person for the position, Abū Bakr (d. 13/ 634) was appointed for the
sake of public interest (*mašlahah*). Those who took 'Ali's part, however, continue to
believe that the leadership of the community was the right of 'Ali and his descendants.
Moreover, 'Ali himself possessed all the necessary qualities, and was also of noble
lineage: he was of the Hāshimite clan, the Prophet's own clan which was highly
respected among the Quraysh (the only tribe to be considered eligible for the *khilāfah*).
'Ali's supporters, however, kept silence; they did not acclaim 'Ali, and this resulted in

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*Badr*, but he accompanied the Prophet on numerous other expeditions, and later took part in the wars of
conquest. He later espoused the cause of 'Ali b. Abī Ṭalib and fought under his banner at the Battle of
the Camel (*al-Janāl*), at Šiffin and at al-Nahrāwān. The *ḥadīth* reads: 'I was in the company of the
Prophet during the farewell pilgrimage. When we reached Ghadir Khumm, he ordered that place to be
cleaned. Then he took 'Ali's hand and placed him on his right side. Then he said, 'Am I the authority
whom you obey?' They answered, 'We obey your directions.' Then he said, 'For whomever I am his
master (maulu) and the authority, whom he obeys, 'Ali will be his master. Oh God! Be friendly with the
friends of 'Ali and enemy of the enemies of 'Ali.' Then 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb said to 'Ali, 'May this
position be pleasing to you, for now you are my master and the master of all the believers.' The above
tradition, however, is the subject of disagreement among the Muḥaddithīn, and none of the Sunni
Muḥaddithīn interpreted it in the way it is understood by the Shi‘ī scholars. Some other *ḥadīths* which
the Shi‘īs claimed to be the proof of the designation of 'Ali as the immediate successor of the Prophet
are: 'My household is like the ship of Noah; whoever embarks upon it will be saved and whoever turns
away from it will be drowned', 'It seems that God has called me unto Himself and I must obey his call.
But I leave two great and precious things among you: the Book of God and My Household. Be careful as
to how you behave toward them. These two will never be separated from each other until they encounter
me at kawthar (in paradise).' and 'Umm Salmah has said, 'I heard from the Prophet of God who said,
'Ali is with the Truth (*ḥaqq*) and the Qur'an, and the Truth and the Qur'an are also with 'Ali, and they
will be inseparable until they come upon me at kawthar'. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn

a critical political situation at a later period, particularly after the establishment of the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid dynasties.\textsuperscript{10}

As the Shiʿis’ claim of the imāmah transferred to ʿAli’s descendants after his death and the number of their supporters increased, they were divided into several divisions, mainly the Imāmiyyah and the Ismāʿiliyyah or the Seveners. Other divisions were also of great importance, such as a group of more radical Shiʿis, al-Kaysāniyyah, and the most moderate and the closest to the Sunnī teachings, al-Zaydiyyah. The existence of these divisions was the outcome of disagreement in claiming their own candidate to the imāmah and argued over the total number of the appointed imāms. Moreover, their dogmatic doctrines, such as the belief in the return of the Mahdi, were also among subjects of their argument.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, it should bear in mind that the analysis of the classical Shiʿí commentaries is mainly drawn from the Imāmiyyah, with additional remarks occasionally from other divisions.

The Development of the Khilāfah in the Umayyad Period

The Umayyad dynasty started with the appointment of Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān as khalīfah 41/661 and ended in 132/750. The followers of ʿAli attempted to obtain the khilāfah for his descendants, starting with his son Hasan (d. 41/662), who, however, renounced his claim. Consequently Muʿāwiyah became the caliph almost without opposition and transferred the capital to Damascus. It is generally accepted that this period was the starting point of the hereditary succession to the khilāfah.


However, it is reported that those Companions of the Prophet still living in Medina had opposed Mu'āwiya's new and ruthlessly achieved policy of appointing his son, Yazid (d. 64/683) as his successor and they dissociated themselves from it. They knew that the situation under the first two caliphs had been very different from that introduced by Mu'āwiya, since neither Abū Bakr nor ʿUmar (d. 23/644) had named his kinsman as his successor.12

With the appointment of Yazīd in 60/680 CE, the trend of Islamic political history changed to that of a son succeeding his father, or a dying khilāfah being succeeded by his brother, cousins or other members of his family, thus narrowing the khilāfah down to a particular family. After Yazīd, there were another twelve Umayyad caliphs. The normal pattern was for the ruling caliph to nominate his successor during his lifetime and to have him acclaimed by representatives of the main groups of Muslims, thereby preserving the fiction that he was chosen by consensus.13

ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (99/717-101/720) played an important role in the development of Islamic knowledge, its teachings and practices during the Umayyad dynasty. He is generally considered by Sunni historians to have checked most of his predecessors' excesses. For example, property which was unjustly confiscated was returned to the owners. He is also credited with having compiled the sūrah of the Qur'an into a single volume. He has been described as the fifth orthodox caliph of Islam.14 Even the

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Kharijites, who were notorious for their opposition to the \textit{khilafah} and the most familiar opponents of Umayyad rule, were reported to have co-operated with him, although they held that the Umayyads had no particular right to the \textit{khilafah}, which they felt belonged to any righteous Muslim chosen by the community.\footnote{Ira M. Lapidus, ‘The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society’, \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} (IJMES), 6 (1975): 366.}

The Umayyads facilitated the extension of the \textit{khilafah}'s frontiers. Their conquests, commencing from Mu'awiyah through his able successors with the aid of their unrivalled lieutenants such as Muhammed b. Amr b. al-\textv{\textmu}\text{\texta}s (d. 65/684), al-Mughirah b. Shu\text{\textb}bah (d. 50/670) and others, expanded the Umayyad Empire westwards to incorporate North Africa and Spain, and eastwards as far as the Indus valley.\footnote{Laura Veccia Vaglieri, ‘The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates’ in \textit{The Cambridge History of Islam: The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War}, eds. P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, IA (Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 78-80. See also Rom Landau, \textit{Islam and the Arabs} (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958): 45-47.}

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\textbf{The Development of the \textit{Khilafah} in the \textit{‘Abbasid Period}}
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The Umayyad dynasty was violently overthrown by another clan of Quraysh, the Hashimites, led by Banu \textv{\textmu}\text{\texta}bb\text{\texta}s, who founded the \textit{‘Abbasid} dynasty (750-1258 CE). The overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty came as a result of a revolution that began in Khurasan (Eastern Persia). This was successfully achieved with the help of non-Arab peoples in the conquered territories and the followers of \textit{‘Ali}'s descendants.\footnote{Tayeb el-Hibri, \textit{Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 2. See also M. A. Shaban, \textit{The Abbasid Revolution} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 138-139.} With the overthrow of the Umayyads, the political unity of the Muslim world came to an end and a variety of Muslim empires emerged, such as the Buyids (945-1055), Samanids
(261/874-999), Seljuks (1055-1157), Fātimids (969-1171) and the Umayyads of Spain. All these empires had begun to expand their control of various Islamic territories during the decline of the ʿAbbāsids. This development was an important factor in the decline and fall of the dynasty. 18

The second ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Manṣūr (136/754-158/775) moved the capital city of the dynasty from Damascus to Baghdad in 762. 19 The ʿAbbāsid khilāfah was renowned for its cultural achievements: learning and culture were patronised, schools were built and academies were established. Scholars of note in different disciplines were attracted to the courts of these caliphs and were rewarded substantially. 20 This period produced many Qur'anic commentators and Muslim jurists. Sunni scholars such as al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari, and Ibn Kathīr, who was born just after the fall of the ʿAbbāsids, profited from the development of Islamic knowledge. But, like the Umayyads, the ʿAbbāsids also practised hereditary succession, thus establishing the concept of divine kingship. In this regard, the ʿAbbāsid caliphs assumed titles such as al-Mahdī (the guided one), al-Manṣūr (The victorious), al-Amin (the trustworthy) and others. 21

By the middle of the tenth century, political fragmentation and weakening of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate was setting in and the real power was in the hands of others. The impotent caliphs first came under the control of Iranian Shiʿī amirs, the Buyids and later, in the eleventh century, their new masters were Turkish Sunni amirs, the Seljuks (431/1040-590/1194). Other territories under the Seljuks’ control were Iran, Mesopotamia and Anatolia. At the same time, the Iranian provinces had broken away from the empire, the Fatimids (297/909-567/1171), a Shiʿī and rival of the ʿAbbāsid,  

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19 El-Hibri, Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography, 4.
21 Crone and Hinds, God’s Caliph, 13-14.
ruled over Egypt and Syria with their own claims to the caliphate, and Spain remained independent under a rival dynasty of Umayyad caliphs. Thus, the caliphate had become an empty shell with no real power, and was finally destroyed by the Mongols in 1258. However, the invasion of the Mongols did not entirely put an end to the Abbāsids, as the Mamlūks (648/1250-922/1517) in Egypt crowned a survivor of the Abbāsid family as their caliph.22

The decline and final phase of the Abbāsid caliphate also witnessed the emergence of some other Muslim dynasties. The Buyids, within a few years of 320/932, had risen to greater importance until they managed to conquer Iraq, western Iran and occupied Baghdad in 334/945. Although they managed to install a new caliph, al-Muṭʿī, real Buyid authority existed only under Aḏud al-Dawla from 366/976 to 372/983. Meanwhile, the Samanids had risen to power as early as 261/874 on the Persian plateau, in eastern Iran and Transoxania, on the break-up of the Tahirids (259/873) and the Saffarids (287/900). They were the descendants of a Zoroastrian priestly family from Sāmān in the district of Balkh and considered themselves convinced Sunnis. The Samanid state collapsed in the years 389-94/999-1004 and the dynasty perished. Due to the collapse of the Samanids, the Ghaznavid Sunnis, who were descended from a Turkish mercenary leader, took over south of the river Oxus. During that time, the Ghaznavid dynasty was represented by Maḥmūd of Ghazna (388-421/998-1030). Their provinces includes Khurasan (999-1040) and Afghanistan (961-1186).

The Development of the Khilāfah in the Ottoman Dynasty, its Abolition and the Contemporary Situation

Another dynasty of the Islamic caliphate came into existence with the establishment of the Ottoman empire (1281-1924). This was the longest-lasting and most powerful of

Muslim empires, as it attained the greatest success in the expansion of Islam and posed the biggest threat to the European powers. The origin of the Ottoman empire was basically derived from the two great trends of earlier centuries, namely the Turkish migrations and the post-Abbāsid reconstruction of state and society, which provided the institutional and cultural precedents for latter Ottoman society.²³

In the thirteenth century, during the decline of the Seljuks and the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols, the early Ottomans were forced to move to north-western Anatolia. They managed to strengthen their power and consequently took Bursa from the Byzantines in 1326. Bursa was then made the first capital of the Ottoman Empire. The most significant success for the Ottomans in Europe was the capture of Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, in 1453, after which its name was changed to Istanbul.²⁴

The Ottomans entered their golden era in the sixteenth century, as they managed to conquer Egypt and Syria from the Mamlūks. Their empire also expanded to Hungary and Iraq. In addition, the Ottomans captured many parts of North Africa including Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.²⁵ At that time, another two great Muslim dynasties came into existence: the Safavids (1501-1732) and the Mughals (1526-1858).

However, the golden age of the Ottoman Empire began to wane in the late sixteenth century, starting with their defeat in the Eastern Mediterranean by a European coalition at Lepanto in 1571.²⁶ The Ottoman decline continued from the seventeenth to early

²⁴ Ibid, 373-374.
²⁵ Rom Landau, Islam and the Arabs, 61.
twentieth centuries and culminated in the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The abolition was the result of two crucial events: the Ottomans’ defeat in the First World War by the European allies and the effort of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the founder of modern Turkey, to establish a secular state. His effort was successful since he associated himself with the foreign invaders of Turkey and internal reactionary forces.  

In the modern and contemporary situation, particularly after the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate, there have been many attempts by Muslim countries to re-establish the Islamic state. Muslim revivalists have been in the forefront of these movements, the majority of them being against the ruling governments. In Egypt, the key figures were Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) and the Muslim Brotherhood’s leaders, Ḥasan al-Bannā‘ (1906-1949), ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwdah (d. 1954) and Sayyid Qūṭb (1906-1966). In the Indian sub-continent, this effort was focused partly on creating and establishing their own independent state, Pakistan, in 1947, but subsequently on implementing the Islamic state according to the sharfah. The most successful influence was that of the Jamaʿat-i Islami’s leader, Abū Aḥlām Mawdūdī (1903-1979) and Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Zia Ṣul-haq, who, after a military coup, ruled and formed an Islamic state between 1977 and 1988. Another attempt to establish an Islamic state occurred in Sudan: Jaʿfar Nimeri’s regime (1969-1985) ruled with the support of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood leader, Ḥasan al-Turābī. A similar situation exists in Libya, where its leader, Muṣṭafā al-Qādāfī, has reduced the conception of the Islamic system to the simple notion of rule by al-Jamaheeriyah (rule of the masses or command of the people).  

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The Shi'is have also attempted to build the Islamic state according to their belief, teaching and practice, eventually succeeding in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) drove out the Shah. No Islamic state, however, has managed to become an Islamic superpower. Although many Muslim countries are now ruled by their own independent governments, they are either controlled or dominated by Western superpowers or influenced by secularism. Moreover, it is doubtful that any of these governments rule in full conformity with the real principles of Islamic khilafah.
CHAPTER 1   THE NATURE AND BASIC CONCEPT OF THE
KHILĀFAH

1.1 Introduction

While Muslims are in agreement about some aspects of the khilāfah, there are deep-
seated differences of opinion about others. The most fundamental principle of the
khilāfah, which concerns the need for a caliph, has been unanimously accepted; but
although Muslims have generally agreed that a caliph is necessary, there has been a
debate about the possibility of having more than one caliph. Although the majority of
Muslims seem to reject the idea, there have been some that permit this situation in
special circumstances. More significantly, the issue of who might be the most suitable
and qualified candidate for the position has also been debated. The Sunni and Shi`i
Muslims have supported their own candidate and at the same time have denied the
claims of others.

It should be noted that a detailed discussion of the dogmatic doctrines relating to the
concept of khilāfah such as the bay`ah (pledge of allegiance), shūrā (consultation),
taqiyyah (prudential dissimulation when in danger), `iṣnah (infallibility of the imām)
and so forth, is not our primary objective in this chapter. Rather it is concerned with
clarifying the basic concept of khilāfah from both Sunni and Shi`i points of view,
particularly dealing with its functions and duties. In addition, the qualities and
characteristics of the khalīfah will also be examined. Another matter for discussion is
that of the various Qur’anic terms relating to the concept of khilāfah. The Qur’an
contains not only the term ‘khalīfah’ itself, but also some others closely related in
meaning, such as imām, mulk, sulṭān, amīr and ulū ‘l-amr. However, analysis of the
selected Qur’anic commentaries will be restricted to those verses that are clearly
relevant to the study. In other words, not every single verse that contains the term *imām*, for instance, will be analysed, since this would not add significantly to the study.

1.2 The Nature of the *Khilāfah*

The *khilāfah* is an essential element in the teaching of Islamic political thought and the formation of the Islamic State. Historically, its importance has been proved by the *khilāfah* of the Prophet himself in Medina and of some others such as the four rightly-guided caliphs, the Umayyads, the ʿAbbāsids and the Ottomans. It has been the nature of the Sunni conception of *khilāfah* that it closely relates to the *sharīʿah* (Islamic law), *bayʿah*, *shūrā* and *ahl al-ḥall waʾl-ʿaqd* (the people who loose and bind). Moreover, the Sunnis also consider their caliphs as heirs to the Prophet. On the other hand, the Shiʿis promote the principles of ʿīsmah, taqiyyah and *walīyah* (governance of the faqīḥ).

There has been no argument between the Sunnis and Shiʿis about the obligation to have only one *imām* in the community; they argue, however, over the matter of who is the most appropriate person to be appointed. The Sunni opinion is that the *khilāfah* is essentially a temporal leadership and he should be selected from the Quraysh, whereas the Shiʿis give a further specification that the *khilāfah* should be chosen from among the descendants of ʿAlī.1 Unlike the Sunnis, who stress that sinlessness is one of the conditions of prophethood, the Imāmiyyah and other subdivisions of Shiʿi also believe in the principle of the sinless (*maʿṣūm*) *imām*. The early Zaydis do not initially endorse the doctrine of sinlessness, although later Zaydi scholars significantly hold the same

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opinion. However, only three imāms - ʿAlī and his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn - are free from sin and error. Although these divisions are not in agreement regarding the total number of imāms, they are of the opinion that their respected imāms are infallible. Moreover, the Sunnīs believe that the nature of a person's appointment as imām is different from that of the Prophethood, whereas the Imāmiyyah Shiʿīs regard the position of their twelve imāms as similar to that of the Prophet and therefore, they are sinless because they fulfil the same appointment.²

The Sunnīs claim that the khilāfah should be established either through designation or election by the community. The latter procedure is very important, since the caliph's authority is legitimated thereby. The Shiʿīs, on the other hand, accept the first procedure, by which the imām is appointed through designation, but totally reject election.³ In addition, both sects have laid down the qualities required by their imāms in order to make them eligible for the post. It is unnecessary to go into the details of these qualifications; it is sufficient to say that a caliph is expected to be free from physical infirmities, profoundly knowledgeable both in theology and statecraft, courageous and, above all, indisputably pious and dedicated to the service of the ummah according to the injunctions of the Qurʾan and the sunnah of the Prophet.

1.2.1 The Necessity of the Khilāfah

The election of a leader was seen as essential after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in order to continue his work of preserving the religion and administering the temporal


affairs of the Muslim community. Both Sunnis and Shiites insist that it is necessary to have a leader or khalifah for the maintenance of justice and the preservation of society. However, each sect differs in defining the source for this imperative.

The majority of Sunni scholars believe that the maintenance of the khilafah is a social task and permanently obligatory (wajib) on the community. This obligation is claimed to have been established by the sharafah (revelation); at the same time, the scholars deny that it is based on rational grounds. This idea is widely accepted by the majority of both classical and modern Muslim scholars and even by most Muslim political theorists, including such figures as al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Jamakah (d. 732/1333) and Ibn Khaldun.

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5 Abū 'l-Ḥasan `Ali b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb Al-Mawardi, was a Shafi’ī faqih. He was born in Basra in 364/974 and died in Baghdad in 450/1058 at 86 years of age. He wrote many books in different fields; his tasvir is known as Tafsir al-Qurʾān, and also as al-Nukāṭ wa ʿl-ʿUyūn. His writings include works on the legal system of the Imām al-Shafi’ī such as Kitāb al-Iqna’ and on the political and social nature of mankind such as al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyyah, which is considered his major work. This last treatise was written in an attempt to assert the authority of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs against the Buyid (Buwayhid) emirs, who were in effective control of their state. See E. I. J. Rosenthal, Political Thought in Medieval Islam (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985): 27.
6 Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī Al-Ghazālī, was born at Tus in Khurasan in 450/1058 and died in 505/1111. He was an outstanding theologian, jurist, mystic and religious reformer. He wrote many books covering questions of esotericism, autobiography, law, philosophy and logic, dogmatic theology, polemics and sufistic practice and theory, his major work being Ḥyā’ ʿUlūm al-Din.
7 Taqi al-Din Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Jamākah was born in Harrān in 661/1263 and died at Damascus in 728/1328. He was a Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist-consult, and possessed a very sound knowledge of all the great works of his school. His major works are Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrāʾ and Kitāb Majmūʿat al-Fatāwā.  
8 Badr al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Jamākah (639/1241-333/1333) was a distinguished Shafi’ī jurist of the Mamlūk regime.  
9 Wali al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis in 732/1332 and was a Muslim historian, sociologist and philosopher. Among his famous books are Taʾrif and Muqaddimah.
Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) emphasised the importance of the *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. He cited the first dispute over electing the *khalīfah*; this took place at Saqīfah Bani Sā'īdah, where, from the death of the Prophet onwards, various Muslim tribes argued with one another. Perhaps this argument would not have arisen if the Prophet, before his death, had designated a particular person to hold the position of *khalīfah*. The argument, however, was resolved by the agreement to choose Abū Bakr as the first caliph, and he managed to overcome all sorts of quarrels and disagreements among the Muslim community. Abū Bakr’s achievement demonstrates the vital role of a *khalīfah* in preventing arguments or disputes, which can lead to civil war. Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal supported the importance of having a *khalīfah*, which he believed to be a means of avoiding *fitnah* (sedition) in society.

Muʿtazilite scholars, such as ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), also provided the Qur’anic justification for the necessity of the *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. The reason for its necessity, according to him, was that the implementation of *ḥudūd* punishments (Islamic legal penalties) was vested in the *khalīfah*. The absence of a caliph in the community indicated the absence of the implementation of Islamic *sharīʿah*. He quoted two verses that formulate the *ḥudūd*; the first from surat al-Māʾidah (5): 38, ‘As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands...’ and the second, in surat al-Nūr (24): 2, ‘The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes:...’

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10 He was ‘the Imām of Baghdad’, a celebrated theologian, jurist and traditionist. He was born in 164/780 and died in 241/855 at the age of 75. He was the founder of one of the four major Sunni schools, the Ḥanbali.

These two verses, regarding the *hudūd* punishments for thieves and adulterers, are the basis for the institution of the *khilāfah*. The observance of the *hudūd* and therefore the implementation of the *sharī'ah*, according to al-Jabbār, is consequently the task of the caliph. In order to ensure the successfulness of its implementation, the office of *khilāfah* must be instituted. In other words, the caliph is the right person to fulfil the task, and since he holds the post, he must possess a comprehensive knowledge of the *sharī'ah*. Moreover, the possession of this knowledge is one of the basic qualifications a *khilāfah* must have.

Al-Māwardī also insisted on the necessity of the *khilāfah* because of the revelation of the divine law (*sharī'ah*). His justification of its necessity and attempts to define it further took place at a time when the Seljuk Turks had taken Baghdad from the pro-Shí`i Buyids in 447/1055 and freed the caliphate from Shí`i control. The establishment of the office of *imām*, al-Māwardī believed, is fundamental in order to replace and resume the role of the Prophet and previous caliphs in upholding the Islamic faith and administering Muslim affairs. He quoted a verse from *sūrat al-Nisā’* (4): 59 that provided this justification:

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O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you.\(^{15}\)

Owing the fact that caliph and imām are both leaders in the Muslim communities, I will briefly discuss leadership (qiyyādah) within the khilāfah context. Responding to this issue, al-Mawardi further argued that while the need for leadership is based on revelation (sharfah), it is also quite compatible with rational thinking. The rationale of having a leader, according to him, is that it is the nature of reasonable men to entrust themselves to a leader who will prevent them from committing injustice towards one another and who may at the same time adjudicate their arguments. Without a leader, men would live in anarchy and dispute.\(^ {16}\)

Al-Ghazāli contributed to the debate by arguing that the primary justification for leadership is that it is for the benefit of the Muslim ummah, who need to live in order and unity and ignore the difference of religious sects. Without the existence of the khilāfah this goal cannot be achieved. Al-Ghazāli stressed that even the tyranny of an usurping leader is better than having none at all, which is likely to lead to chaos and dispute. The function of leadership is:

\[\ldots\text{to see that justice is done, send the armies to the battle field, distribute allowances among the soldiers and appoint commanders to them...}\] \(^{17}\)


He clarified his opinion as follows:

...it is impossible to have a permanent organisation in worldly affairs without a ruler or a sultan, and an office without such an organisation would be impossible to act according to divine commandments with peace and order.\(^\text{18}\)

Ibn Jamā'ah held the same opinion regarding the necessity of leadership and adduced several Qur'anic verses in its support. He quoted two verses from the Qur'an, Ṣād (38): 26 and al-Ḥajj (22): 42 that justify its necessity. Apart from these, he also accepted the sunnah of the Prophet, the examples shown by the Companions (āhār) and the opinions of learned Muslim scholars (aqwāl al-`ulamā') as the secondary sources that clarified it as obligatory.\(^\text{19}\) For example, he cited the saying of Muslim jurists:

Forty years of tyranny of a sultan are better than the abandonment of his subjects for one hour.\(^\text{20}\)

Just as it is necessary to have a sultan (the one with power), it is equally important to have an imām or caliph in order to ensure the implementation of the sharfah. The positions of sultan and imām are both positions of authority and leadership. Moreover, Ibn Jamā'ah emphasised the obligation of the leader to perform his functions and duties. As the imām is chosen from among the most suitable and qualified persons, the role of implementing Islamic sharfah is one of his main duties. Ibn Jamā'ah summarised some other important duties as follows:

The defence of din (religion), the warding off of offenders, granting compensation to those wronged, and establishing right. For herein

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{20}\) There is one hadith that indicates a similar meaning to this saying but is phrased slightly differently: 'sixty years of an unjust ruler (imām) are better than one night without a sultan'. See E. I. J Rosenthal, Political Thought in Medieval Islam, 242.
consists the welfare of the lands, the security of the subjects, and the stemming of the tide of corruption (and decay). The affairs of mankind are in good order only if a sultan devotes himself to their administration (siyāsah) and to their protection exclusively.\footnote{Ibn Jama`ah, 'Tabrir al-Abkam if Tadbir AN al-Islam'; quoted in Rosenthal, \textit{Political Thought in Medieval Islam}, 43. See also E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'The Role of the State in Islam', \textit{Der Islam}, 50 (1973): 16.}

The importance of the \textit{khilāfah}, which is based on religious law (Islamic \textit{sharī'ah}), was also supported by Ibn Taymiyyah. He underlined this view by referring to a \textit{ḥadīth} of the Prophet, narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah,\footnote{Abū Hurayrah al-Dawsi al-Yamani, a Companion of the Prophet. His name 'Abd Shams was changed to 'Abd Allah or 'Abd al-Rahmān when he became Muslim. He was called Aba Hurayrah because when he herded his people's goats, he kept a kitten to play with. He is noted as a prolific narrator of traditions from the Prophet, the number of which is estimated at 3500. He is said to have died in 57, 58 or 59, but most historians used the year 58/678.} which elaborated the need to have one leader on any journey:

\begin{quote}
If three of them were on a journey, they should choose one of them as a leader.\footnote{Tagi al-Din Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah, \textit{al-Siyāsah al-Sharī`iyah fi Iṣlāḥ al-Ra`iyyah}, ed. Muḥammad al-Mubārak (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-`Arabiyyah, n.d.): 169; Quoted in Tamara Sonn, 'Political Authority in Classical Islamic Thought', \textit{American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS)}, 13. 3 (1996): 323-324.}
\end{quote}

Regarding this \textit{ḥadīth}, he explained that the Prophet insisted that someone should be chosen to lead even the smallest group of travellers. It was also given as a forewarning to Muslims that if even the smallest group needs a leader, then it is essential that a bigger group should be led by a qualified and properly selected person. Ibn Taymiyyah's view seems to be consistent with the political situation of his time, where the authority of the leader and the unity of the community ceased to be intact and political and social unity were no longer obtainable. His insistence of the importance to appoint a leader based on the \textit{sharī'ah}, is therefore a solution for ideological unity.
Ibn Khaldun, as Arnold pointed out, also argued for the necessity of leadership, which he insisted is based on divine revelation: according to him, the revelation is absolute evidence for this necessity. Moreover, the pledge of allegiance (bay'ah) given by the majority of the Companions of the Prophet after his death should be considered as strong evidence of the need to have a leader in the Muslim community. Although Ibn Khaldun opposed the view that rational thinking provided a basis for the need for an imam, he recognised that it is in the nature of human beings to designate a leader to manage the government:

All society must have a moderator (wāsil) who governs it and who constitutes a source of appeal.

More significantly, Ibn Khaldun was very much concerned about the quality and function of the khalifah. The objectives of the Islamic State, from his point of view, will be achieved only as long as the khalifah performs his tasks. Otherwise, society will become more disorganised and, at worst, fail to form the Islamic State according to the basic principles of Islam. The function of the khalifah is to resume the established duties of the Prophet Muḥammad even if he cannot perform them as perfectly. Among his major duties are the preservation of religion and the exercise of political leadership.

The need for a khalifah is also based on the hadiths of the Prophet, who on several occasions expressed his thought on the matter. One clear example of these hadiths, as quoted earlier, narrates the need to elect one person as the leader when three or more people are on a journey. In another hadith, narrated on the authority of Ibn `Umar (d. 73/693), the Prophet insisted that Muslims should give a pledge of allegiance to the

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26 Ibid, 155.
27 For a consideration of the hadith in the Arabic text, see Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Al-Musnad, ed. Muḥammad Shākir, 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.): 1776-77.
khalifah and those who refused to do so were classified among the unbelievers. There are also several hadīths that insisted that Muslims should obey and be loyal to the caliph as long as he himself obeyed and implemented the sharfah of Allah. The obedience to the caliph is an obligation equalling that of obedience to the Prophet himself. 28

The necessity of the khilāfah is not only based on the Qur'anic revelation and the hadīths of the Prophet, it is also justified by the ijma' al-sahābah (the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet). 29 The appointments of Abü Bakr and ʿUthmān were two clear examples of this method. The dispute over the right to the caliphate at Saqifah Bani Sā'īdah was finally sorted by the consensus of the Companions, who agreed on the appointment of Abū Bakr as the first caliph. The appointment of the latter also employed the same method, as ʿUthmān was elected to be the third caliph from the list of six recommended Companions. These two appointments, based on the consensus of the Companions, indicate that the Muslim community recognised and accepted that method of electing the khalifah. Moreover, it also implied the necessity of appointing a person as a leader, to rule the state and administer the affairs of the Muslim community.

The Shi'is, on the contrary, assert its necessity by naṣṣ (divine decree) through the Prophet and according to 'aql (reason). 30 In addition, the two main Shi'i divisions, the Imāmiyyah and Ismāʿiliyyah believed that the need for an imām in the Muslim community is based not only on sharfah' and 'aql, but that the imām is also decisively appointed by Allah's grace (luṣf), providing that he guides human beings to the right

28 Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought, 62.
30 ʿAbātabāʾī, Shi'ite Islam, trans. and ed. S. H. Nasr, 10-11. See also Momen, An Introduction to Shi'ite Islam, 159.
path and warns them against evils. In other words, the imâm is designated by the grace of God through the intermediary of His emissary. In elaborating this view, they referred to a statement reported on the authority of the sixth imâm of Imamiyyah Shi'i, Imâm Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 140/757), who attributed it to the Prophet, who received it from Allah:

Allah says: “I have not left the earth except there being an ālim (imâm), guiding men to obey and follow God’s guidance, And I have not left (the earth) for iblis to misguide the people....”

However, some exponents of the Shi'i view asserted that the need for a khalífah or imâm (the title which the Shi'i use to refer to a caliph) is justified by 'aql (reason). They argued that it is necessary for Allah to provide an imâm in order to maintain social justice and order. They further argued that no community can dispense with the delegation of authority and that wilâyah (leadership) is an immutable law of nature. This natural law demands the existence of wilâyah in every community for the preservation of its interests. The best example, which supports the necessity of the imâmah according to God’s mercy (lutf), divine source and rational thinking ('aql), comes from the medieval Shi'i scholar, 'Allamah al-Ḥilli (d. 726/1325), who is quoted as saying:

The imāmate is a universal leadership (riyāsa) by a single individual in religious and secular matters. It is a matter which is incumbent upon

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32 Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam, 147.
35 'Allamah al-Ḥilli's full name was Ja'mal al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf. Ṣāliḥ b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli (d. 726/1325).
God, for it is a divine mercy (lutf), and every divine mercy is incumbent upon Him, so the imamate is incumbent upon Him.\textsuperscript{36} Shi'i political doctrine is based on the recognition of \textsuperscript{6}Ali as the legitimate imam after the death of the Prophet, which they believe derives from the hadith of Ghadir Khumm. Therefore, according to the Shi'i doctrine of leadership, the necessity of the imamah is based on both divine ordinance and reason. This doctrine is believed to establish a hereditary right among the descendants of \textsuperscript{6}Ali.\textsuperscript{37}

In contrast, the Khawarij/Khairijites had a totally different view from that of the Sunnis and Shi'is regarding the need for a khalifah in the Muslim community. They believed that the appointment of a caliph is not necessary for the community, the reason being that Muslims themselves can fulfil all the obligations imposed upon them by their religion. Moreover, contrary to the assertions of both Sunnis and Shi'is, the legitimate form of civil administration, according to the Khairijites, can be implemented without the need to appoint a caliph.\textsuperscript{38} However, under certain circumstances, a caliph may be elected, not necessarily from the Quraysh, if it is found necessary to have one. For example, a total breakdown of law and order, and the absence of peace and harmony in society would require the appointment of a caliph.\textsuperscript{39} Mehdi Mozaffari, a former professor and head of the Department of International Relations at the University of Tehran, explains the Khairijites' view of this matter as follows:

The ideal community is a community of just men, which therefore has no need of political leaders. It is only the injustice of men that oblige

\textsuperscript{37} ʿAbd al-Naṣir, Masʾalat al-Imāmiyyah wa 'l-Waḍʿī fi ʿl-Ḥadīth ʿinda ʿl-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah, 151-70.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 100.
them to give themselves, or to accept, a leader. Persons who refrain from destroying one another have no need of an imām.40

1.2.2 The Argument Concerning the Permissibility of Having More Than One Caliph

The foregoing discussion has provided us with some understanding of the doctrine of the necessity of the khilāfah in Muslim society. Both the Sunnis and Shiʿis concur on this point, although there has been disagreement concerning the sources of the teaching. Now we come to the question of whether it is permissible to have two caliphs. The general view of both Sunnis and Shiʿis was that there should be only one imām at any time. Other religious sects, such as the Muʿtazilites and the Khārijites, also accepted this view, even though some individuals, including Abū Bakr al-Asamm41 of the Muʿtazilites, totally rejected the idea that a caliph should be appointed to rule over the society.

The majority of Sunnis are of the opinion that there can be only a single caliph at any time. Nevertheless, it might be possible, in certain exceptional circumstances, to have two caliphs in two different countries. It is believed that this exceptional situation may be permitted in the case where a sea separates these two countries, thus preventing mutual military aid. Therefore, the idea of simultaneously accepting both ʿAli and Muʿāwiyyah as legitimate caliphs was rejected by the Sunnis, since no sea separated their territories and indeed Muʿāwiyyah’s right to be the khalīfah was legitimated only after the assassination of ʿAli.42

40 Mozaffari, Authority in Islam, 30.
41 Al-Asamm was a conspicuous figure among the early Muʿtazilites, and lived ca. 800.
It would be useful here to clarify the view of Ibn Khaldūn, who rejected the appointment of two men to the position of caliph at the same time. In his famous book, *al-Muqaddimah*, he pointed out that religious scholars generally are of this opinion, on the basis of certain traditions in the *Sahih Muslim (kitāb al-imārah)*. The discussion is complicated, however, by the existence of another view, which Ibn Khaldūn mentions in his book, namely that the prohibition against two caliphs applies only to two caliphs in the same locality, or living fairly close to each other. When great distances separate them and the caliph is unable to control the farther region, it is permissible to set up another caliph there to take care of the public interest.

The appointment of two caliphs in the above situation seems to be realistic and acceptable in accordance with one hadīth of the Prophet, given when he appointed Muṣādh b. Jabal (d. 32/653) as Governor of Yemen. Because of the difficulty of communication, if any dispute arises which needed an urgent solution, the Prophet allowed his messenger to act on his behalf. Moreover, such permission might also be considered to accord with rational thinking, as the delay in contacting the caliph might lead to religious and social disagreement. Therefore, it would be reasonable to appoint another caliph to take care of the interests of that particular region. Another situation justifying the appointment of two or more caliphs would be where local problems arose, unique to one area, resulting in the need for a local caliph who would be more familiar with the situation.

Among the famous authorities who are reported to have held this opinion was the leading speculative theologian, Abū Ishāq al-Isfārāyini. The Imām al-Ḥaramayn, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) also showed himself inclined towards it in his *Kitāb al-Irshād*.

43 For example: 'If the oath of allegiance has been rendered to two caliphs, kill one of them', and 'The oath of allegiance to caliphs should be rendered to one at a time.'

On the other hand, some scholars have rejected the possibility of more than one caliph by reference to the general consensus. However, there is no evidence of the existence of this consensus, for if it had existed, neither Abū Ishāq nor the Imām al-Ḥaramayn would have opposed it. They knew better than any one else what the consensus meant. Therefore, Ibn Khaldūn rejected the idea that the general consensus prohibited two caliphs. In addition, the Imām al-Mazāri\textsuperscript{45} and al-Nawawi\textsuperscript{46} were also inclined to admit two caliphs under certain circumstances, although their basic understanding was that there should be only one caliph. Their opposition to the permissibility of more than one caliph, however, did not mean that they accepted the existence of a consensus, but rather based that view on certain traditions found in \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim}.\textsuperscript{47}

As mentioned earlier, the Khārijites supported the conditional appointment of a caliph in exceptional circumstances. But it is not our intention to discuss further whether the conditions of this permission, from the Khārijites’ point of view, are similar to those accepted by the Sunnis or not. Somewhat more importantly, there were also some Khārijite splinter groups that thoroughly approved the possibility of having two or more caliphs even when the situation was not exceptional enough to demand it. This argument has been considered a matter of considerable importance by the Khārijites and their doctrinal opinion on the matter is easily found. For instance, Madelung, discussing their view, explains:

There can be only a single \textit{imām} at any time according to the prevalent view, though some splinter groups admitted the legitimacy of more than one contemporary \textit{imām} …Against the doctrine of the splinter group

\textsuperscript{45} The Māliki Muḥammad b. 'Ali, who was born in 453/1061 and died in 536/1141.

\textsuperscript{46} Muḥyī 'l-Dīn Yahyā b. Sharaf, who was born in 631/1233 and died in 676/1277.

Khalafiyya, the common doctrine affirms that there cannot be more that one imām belonging to the same “way” at any time.48

The Mu'tazilites, in agreement with the doctrine of the majority of Khārijites, emphasised the need for one caliph, who should be just. Significantly, they further stressed the obligation of the community to remove an unjust leader, if necessary by force.49 On the other hand, Abū Bakr al-Asamm asserted that because of the wide expansion of Islam, it was preferable for each town to choose its own caliph.50 Ibn Khaldūn, however, discussing al-Asamm's view, presented it in quite a different light. According to his interpretation, al-Asamm opposed the need for a khalīfah in Muslim society. Considering that two such different versions exist, it is obvious that no consistent opinion has been established regarding al-Asamm's opinion on the permissibility of having more than one caliph.

If al-Asamm did indeed reject the need for a khalīfah, then he would also have been unlikely to permit the appointment of more than one caliph. Perhaps what he meant here was that when Muslim society is in agreement regarding justice and the observance of the divine laws, no caliph is needed and, therefore, the position of caliph is superfluous. Otherwise, it is important to appoint a caliph to maintain observance of the religious laws and as the Muslim territory widened it became permissible to appoint a caliph for every region.

A similar opinion has been held by the Zaydi Shi'is. According to their doctrine, only a single caliph is to be appointed at any time; however, like other Muslim sects, they accepted the possibility of having more than one caliph in certain circumstances. For

48 Madelung, 'Imāma', 1168.
49 Ibid, 1165.
50 Ibid, 1166.
instance, the existence of two separate Zaydi communities in the southern coastal areas: the Caspian Sea and in the Yemen led in some instances to a later recognition of two contemporary claimants as caliphs, but the formal admission of the legitimacy of two contemporary caliphs was exceptional.\textsuperscript{51}

1.3 The Basic Concept of Khilāfah and its Functions

The above discussion implies the necessity of having one particular leader in the Muslim community. Both Sunni and Shi‘ī scholars have agreed on this principle, except that they have argued over who should have been elected after the death of the Prophet. In spite of this theoretical disagreement, they have generally justified the necessity of leadership based on its functional importance: leadership is necessary in order to implement the sharī‘ah of Allah and preserve justice and order in the Muslim community. In other words, the khilāfah is certainly essential and is an outgrowth of the phenomenon of the community and its dynamism and complexity. It was both natural and logical that the establishment of the Muslim community should necessitate some form of leadership, as has been argued by Manzooruddin Ahmed:

\begin{quote}
Once the moral and psychological foundations of the ummah are laid on the primordial covenant between man and God, the next step in developing the ummah is the emergence of organised authority.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

The function of this organised authority is to facilitate the further development of the ummah and to achieve various goals and objectives. The Prophet and his Companions succeeded in effectively fulfilling this role and therefore it follows that later generations should do the same for the benefit of the Muslim community.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 1166.

1.3.1 The Functions of the Khalfah/Imām According to Classical Muslim Scholars

A number of classical Muslim scholars have explored the functions of the khalifah. The existence of a khalifah or imām in the Muslim community certainly facilitated the implementation of various functions. Without these functions, the position of imām is superfluous. Although the functions may vary according to the situation and condition of the society itself, the implementation of certain religious functions, such as the practice of justice and observance of the divine laws, is considered one of the fundamental duties of the caliph.

According to historical evidence, the first two khalifahs were persons who exercised wide authority in matters of war and peace. They are believed to have had the final say in the interpretation of the revealed text of the Qur’an, and the practice of the Messenger of Allah. In addition, they successfully implemented the right and duty to lead and establish prayer and to settle disputes. In other words, they were responsible for all legislative, executive, judicial and military authority. While the caliph was absent, the implementation of these functions was vested in his representative. However, only the khalifah could delegate some of these functions to commanders of armies or qādis, and any authority not derived from him was invalid.53

According to the common doctrine of the Sunnis, the duties of the imām were defined as:

Guarding the faith against heterodoxy, enforcing law and justice between disputing parties, dispensing legal punishments (ḥudūd), protection of peace in the territory of Islam and its defence against external enemies, conducting the jihād against those resisting the supremacy of Islam, receiving the legal alms, taxes and the fifth of 53 Ishaque, ‘Al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyyah: Laws of Government in Islam’, 278.
booty, distributing the revenue in accordance with the law, and the appointment of reliable and sincere men in delegating authority.\textsuperscript{54}

The majority of Sunni scholars acknowledged these functions; there were also several other duties, which for the purpose of space, have not been discussed here. In order to show the agreement of the majority of Sunni scholars, we will cite and discuss their observations regarding the functions of the \textit{khilāfah}. One of those scholars is al-Māwardi, who defined the establishment of the \textit{khilāfah} as being for the purpose of replacing prophecy in the defence of the faith and the administration of the world.\textsuperscript{55} He further underlined the functions of the \textit{khalīfah} as:

the defence and maintenance of religion, the decision of legal disputes, the protection of the territory of Islam, the punishment of wrong-doers, the provision of troops for guarding the frontiers, the waging of \textit{jihād} against those who refused to accept Islam or submit to Muslim rule, the organisation and collection of taxes, the payment of salaries and the administration of public funds, the appointment of competent officials and lastly, personal attention to the details of government.\textsuperscript{56}

Al-Ghazālī also stressed the fundamental function of the \textit{khalīfah} in the Muslim \textit{umma}, claiming that, unfortunately, the justification of its function was being misused during his time and the legitimisation of rights was acquired by force. In general, al-Ghazālī held that the caliphate system at that time was merely based on military power,

\textsuperscript{54} Arnold, \textit{The Caliphate}, 72. These essential duties of the \textit{imām} are also highlighted by Madelung; see Madelung, \textit{‘Imāma}, 1165.

\textsuperscript{55} Rosenthal, \textit{‘The Role of the State in Islam’}; 12.

\textsuperscript{56} Al-Māwardi, \textit{al-Abkām al-Sultānīyyah}; quoted in Behzadi, \textit{‘The Principles of Legitimacy and Its Influence Upon the Muslim Political Theory’}, 284. See also Sonn, \textit{‘Political Authority in Classical Islamic Thought’}, 315-16.
due to the fact that the ruling caliph decided the function according to his own interests:

We consider that the function of the caliphate is contractually assumed by that person of the 'Abbāsid house who is charged with it, and that the function of government in the various lands is carried out by means of sultans, who owe allegiance to the caliphate. Government in these days is a consequence solely of military power, and whosoever he may be to whom the possessor of military power gives his allegiance, that person is the caliph.57

Ibn Khaldūn went further, as he assumed that the main function of the khalīfah was to represent the Prophet, but as he would not receive revelation, his prime duty was to maintain the practices instituted by the Prophet. This view is in accordance with the perception of the title ‘khalīfat rasūl Allāh’ (the caliph of the Messenger of Allah) used by the first four khalīfahs of Islam. In addition, he must perform other relevant duties of the Prophet. Regarding this view of the caliph, Ibn Khaldūn noted:

The khalīfa is the representative (nā'ib) of the Prophet, the exponent of the divinely inspired law (shar'ah), and his functions are the protection of religion and government of the world; he must belong to the tribe of the Kuraysh, and possess the other personal qualifications laid down by al-Māwardi.58

Moreover, he clarified the caliph’s function in terms of the implementation of religious law:


It should be known that all the religious functions of the religious law, such as prayer, the office of judge, the office of mufti, the holy war and market supervision (hisbah) fall under the "great imāmate", which is the caliphate.\(^{59}\)

In fact, the functions of the caliph between the 2\(^{nd}/8\(^{th}\) and the 4\(^{th}/10\(^{th}\) centuries, that is, during the golden age of the ʿAbbāsids, are easily determined using information found in the classical records. The caliph was then seen as the guardian of dogma, and in this capacity opposed any action leading towards bicfāh (heresy). He was thus permitted to play a part in the formulation of doctrine, but did not participate in the formulation of law.\(^{60}\) Many examples of this situation may be cited from historical events of that time, such as al-Mahdi’s (d. 785) order to persecute the atheists (zindīqs). Another example is that of al-Ma’mūn’s (d. 833) preference and enforcement of the Muʿtazilite doctrines. In 833, the caliph instituted the miḥna (inquisition) partly in order to enforce his claim to legal absolutism. Moreover, the miḥna was also used by the caliph to promote his dogma of the ‘created’ Qur’ān. Only the supporters of this dogma were permitted to official positions.\(^{61}\)

Theoretically, the caliph should be an excellent individual, worthy to conduct the Friday Prayers. In the same way, the caliph was expected to lead the military expeditions against infidelity, as personally performed by Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809) and al-Ma’mūn. He is also responsible to lead campaigns against rebels; but normally delegated this task to an effective regent when it had to deal with particularly forceful enemies. The maintenance of order was in fact one of the normal obligations of the caliph, who was obliged to defend the community against all types of subversion. It was also the caliph who was obliged eventually to deal with those governors who


demanded financial autonomy and the hereditary status of their office. Furthermore, it was his duty to ensure the nomination of his successor, as the practice had been established since the start of the Umayyad caliphate. Finally, the caliph ensured the wellbeing of the state, though this concept was to some extent ignored in the middle period of Islam.\(^\text{62}\)

The Shi`is, on the other hand, did not discuss the functions of the \textit{imām} in detail. As has been noted in the first section of this chapter, the Shi`is were mainly inclined to the imāmate of \textsuperscript{6}Ali b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, of which they were held to have been deprived by the Umayyads.\(^\text{63}\) To conclude the discussion, we can say that the majority of Muslim sects agree on the importance of the caliph's or \textit{imām}'s functions in society. Although there have been disagreements about some particular aspects, it should be noted that none of these differences deny the essential function of the caliph. The Shi`is, as well as the Sunnis, acknowledge these functions although they do not discuss this matter thoroughly in their examination of the concept of \textit{imāmah}.

\textbf{1.3.2 The Functions of the \textit{Khalīfah}/\textit{Imām} According to Modern Muslim Scholars}

Compared with the classical justifications of the functions of a \textit{khalīfah}, the moderns' views seem to be more simple and easily predicted, but they tend to be influenced by the spirit of the re-emergence of the Islamic caliphate. Consequently, the modern scholars particularly stress the importance of the \textit{khalīfah}'s functions and duties in the Muslim \textit{ummah}. Among these scholars was Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), who totally agreed with the classical justification of the necessity of the \textit{khalīfah} according to divine source (\textit{nass}), \textit{ḥadīth}, \textit{ijmāʿ} of the Companions and rational consideration. He


\(^{63}\) Momen, \textit{An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism}, 15.
believed that without the office of khilāfah, the law cannot be enforced and the welfare of the community will not be protected. Moreover, he was firmly convinced that, through the restoration of the khilāfah, the unity and identity of Islam as well as its defence against its enemies would be preserved. Riḍā shared the opinion of his master, Muḥammad ʿAbdūh, and of the classical scholars, that the khilāfah was the substitution for the prophethood (nubuwwah). Leading the people, protecting them and guiding them towards their eternal destiny are among the khalīfah's functions, as he underlined:

It is his function to protect Islam from innovation and to promote its law and beliefs, with the aid of the community, which is given through the process of consultation.

Believing that it was essential to re-institute a form of Islamic khilāfah, Riḍā proposed a plan for the reform of the caliphate during the turbulent first quarter of the twentieth century. Following this call by him and other intellectuals, a caliphal congress was held in Cairo and Mecca in 1925, the year after the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate. However, it was an unsuccessful effort since the congress decided to drop the matter until circumstances became more favourable. This decision caused the initial rejection of a plan presented to the congress recommending the full restoration of the caliphate.

Abū Aḥāfūlā al-Mawdūdi, the founder of Jamaʿat-i Islami in the Indian sub-continent, was another important figure concerned with the significance of the khalīfah's duty and

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67 Ibid, 35-36.
function in the Muslim ummah. His real role, according to al-Mawdūdi, is to protect the religion and the territory of the Islamic state, and to put an end to all evils; his more basic function is to foster a balanced system of social justice and encourage every kind of virtuous deed. Al-Mawdūdi also promoted the theory of the 'great man', whereby the notion of the necessity of leadership is a logical outgrowth of the theory of social change. According to this theory, the character of a social order flows entirely from the top down to the bottom. This indicates that the establishment of the society and the achievement of its goals are determined according to the credibility of its leaders. Therefore, the moral and religious qualities of a leader are more important than socio-economic, political and institutional considerations in ensuring the achievement of the goals of the society.

It seemed obvious to al-Mawdūdi that the existence of inequality and injustice in a society is a result of the leader's lack of religious and moral orientation. If this situation occurs in a society, al-Mawdūdi recommends that the inadequate leader should be replaced by a better one. The need for a good and religiously oriented leader who can fulfil his responsibilities is strongly emphasised by al-Mawdūdi.

Ali Shari'atī (1933-77), a prominent and distinguished modern Iranian Shi'i scholar, also supported the idea of the importance of leadership. In addition, he argued that the Muslim community has its special goals, which are only achievable under the supervision of an elected leader. However, the achievement of the goals of the ummah can be ensured by a harmonious and peaceful administration, and so the leader must produce a clear vision and practical strategies. For their part, the followers must give

69 Ibid, 102.  
him their full support and unequivocal obedience, as had been done by the first
generation of Muslims. Shari'at'i justified this idea by saying:

\[ \text{imāmah is the leadership of the ummah towards its common goals.} \]

Hence, the necessity of the imām is one hundred percent implicit in the

Accordingly, he reinterpreted the functions of the imām, in radically
modernistic fashion, as:

- a committed and revolutionary leadership, responsible for the movement
- and growth of society on the basis of its worldview and ideology, and

Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-89), the leading figure in the Iranian Revolution of 1979,
asserted that the appointed imām is vested with particular duties and functions. First of
all, he is the person who administers the office of imāmah, and thus determines the
smoothness of its functioning. Furthermore, the implementation of the divine laws
\((\text{sharī'ah})\) is also one of his main duties. In fact, Khomeini stresses that no community
could manage to undertake the practice of \text{sharī'ah} without the existence of an imām.
Consequently, the development of Islam as a religion and the expansion of its empire
could not take place. In other words, the implementation of the \text{sharī'ah} and the
dissemination of Islam can only be preserved by a securely established imāmah. With
regard to some of the functions and duties shouldered by an imām, Khomeini states:

The just imāms and jurisconsults \((\text{fuqahā‘})\) are under the obligation to
utilise the organisation and the formation of the government to apply
divine prescriptions, establish the equitable regime of Islam, and serve the people. 73

Khomeini believed that his right to the title of imām was entirely based on the fulfilment of the above duties. 74 While leading the revolution from his exile, Khomeini broke sharply with Shi'ī traditions and sometimes borrowed radical rhetoric from foreign sources, including Marxism. He also presented a bold appeal to the public based not on theological themes, but on real economic, social and political grievances. In other words, he transformed Shi'ism from a conservative, quietist faith into a militant political ideology that challenged both the imperial powers and the country's upper class. 75

Despite many views that support the need for the khilāfah and his office, modelled upon the ideal caliphate of the four rightly-guided caliphs, its necessity is sometimes completely denied. A very controversial view is that advanced by the Egyptian, cAli cAbd al-Rāziq (1888-1966) in his treatise al-Islām wa usūl al-ḥukm (Islam and the Principles of Government) published in 1925, asserting the separation between religion and political power. He took full advantage of the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in Turkey to launch a forceful attack on the entire traditional school of Islamic political thought. He contests the views of not only the orthodox ʿulamā', but also modernists like Rashid Riḍā. 76 cAli cAbd al-Rāziq's central argument is that the caliphate has no

73 Mozaffari, Authority in Islam, 50.
basis, whether in the Qur'an, the traditions or the consensus (ijma'). He argues that the Qur'an nowhere makes any mention of the *khilāfah* in the specific sense of the political institution known in history and, therefore, Muslims are not bound to accept its establishment. In presenting his argument, he deals in detail with the major pieces of evidence, which are normally drawn from these three sources to establish the obligatory nature of the caliphate.

1.4-Some Qur'anic Terms of Relevance to the *Khilāfah*

The Qur'an has laid down some basic principles regarding the political aspect of social life. The aim of the establishment of a political system in the Muslim community is to preserve the *sharī'ah* and to maintain social justice. This objective is achievable through the formation of a leadership which is based on the essential guidelines contained in the Qur'an and the *hadīth* of the Prophet. There are a number of Qur'anic verses relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*. Some of them use the term *khalīfah* directly, while others mention terms such as *imām*, *mulk*, *sultān*, *amīr*, *ulū 'l-amr* and so on, which are very closely related in meaning. Thus, this study, which considers in some detail the terms related to *khilāfah*, is important for the understanding of the concept of *khilāfah* in the Qur'an.

The first term directly concerned with this concept is the word *khalīfah*. It is derived from the root *khalafa*, which means 'to come after, to be followed, succeeded, or to remain after another that had perished or died'. Its informative noun is *khalf*, which means 'back, near, or behind'. The term *khalīfah* occurs in the Qur'an twice in the

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78 Ibid, 83-84.
singular (2: 30 and 38: 26), and seven times in the plural, four of them in the form khalā'if (6: 165, 10: 14, 10: 73 and 35: 39) and three in the form khulafā' (7: 69, 7: 74 and 27: 62). Moreover, the term istakhlaṣa, in most instances, refers to the act of appointing someone as one’s successor, and is found in five places (6: 133, 7: 129, 11: 57 and twice in 24: 55).

In all these instances, it should be noted that the term has one or more of three contextual characteristics: the word is connected in the various verses with some form of the verb ja‘ala (to make); with the word al-ard (the earth) or the prepositional phrase fi ‘l-ard (on earth); and sometimes with the expression min ba‘d (thereafter). These verses have many meanings; not all of them are related to the word khalifah and hence not all are relevant to this discussion.

As there are some irrelevant aspects of the interpretation of the term khalifah, we will limit the discussion to the related verses only. Therefore, two verses, sūrahs 2: 30 and 38: 26, the first being the commandment of Allah appointing the prophet Adam as His vicegerent on earth and the second referring to the appointment of the prophet David as ‘prophet-ruler’, will be thoroughly examined. In addition, seven verses that contain two forms of the plural (khalā‘if and khulafā‘) and five others using the term istakhlaṣa will be analysed individually. However, there are two other forms of the term khalifah that have the same meaning. The first is mentioned in sūrah 7: 142, which uses the form ukhluf, and the second occurs in surah 43: 60, using the form yakhluf.

The second important term that is relevant to the concept of khilāfa is imām and its form a‘immah. Imām is derived from the Arabic amma, which means ‘to precede or to

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79 Ibid, 85.
lead’. In the Qur’an, the word is found with the meaning of example, leader, pattern, model or prototype. Therefore, *imām* is a title indicating leadership, governance or rule, which is used in a variety of contexts by both Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims. The most common contemporary use of the word is to designate the leader of congregational prayers, this being justified by the etymological sense of *imām* as “one who stands in front”.

The word *imām* occurs in the Qur’an as an attribute not only of prophets, such as Abraham, but also of the revelation entrusted to Moses, as well as serving as a designation for the record of deeds with which man will be presented in the hereafter. However, numerous traditions of the Prophet Muhammad refer to the leader or ruler of the Muslim community as the *imām*, and the term came to be recognised, by both Sunnis and Shi‘is, as meaning the one exercising general leadership in both religious and political affairs. The use of this singular form appears in seven places, but we will focus our discussion only on the relevant verses, which are sūrah 2: 124, 36: 12 and 46: 12.

The study also examines the interpretation of the plural form *a‘immah*; this form occurs in five different places, in sūrah 9: 12, 21: 73, 28: 5, 28: 41 and 32: 24, and, as was noted in the case of the term *khilafah*, not all of them are related to this discussion. The verses that are irrelevant to this topic will not be analysed. They are sūrah 9: 12 and 28: 41. The term *a‘immah* in surah 21: 73 refers to the prophets Abraham (Ibrāhim), Isaac (Išāq) and Jacob (Ya‘qūb). It is also found in sūrah 28: 5; al-Ṭabarī interprets it in the sense of *umarā‘*, *walāh* (those charged with authority) and *mulūk*

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82 Algar, ‘Imām’, 2: 182
83 Ibid., 182.
The last verse in this category related to the concept of *khilāfah* to be included in this study is surah 32: 23, which concerns the appointment of leaders among the children of Israel.

It is clear from a brief examination of the occurrences of the term *imām* in the Qur'anic perspective that none of them indicate an absolute meaning of the concept of *khilāfah*, but rather imply various meanings depending on the context of each verse. Even though some of these meanings and interpretations have only a slight bearing on this concept, it would be an insufficient and ambiguous argument to consider the term *imām* as reflecting the modern implications of political leadership. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the related meanings and interpretations as constituting a step towards the better understanding of Islamic political thought, specifically concerning the concept of *khilāfah*.

The third term that might have a meaning similar to *khalīfah* and *imām* is *mulk*. This term is derived from the Arabic root *malaka*, which means 'to take into possession', 'to dominate', 'to rule, reign, exercise power or authority'. Therefore, *mulk* itself means kingship, sovereignty or supreme authority. *Mulk* and its various forms occur frequently in the Qur'an to indicate exclusively Allah the Almighty. However, there are a few Qur'anic verses that refer to the prophet-ruler. For instance, the term *mulk* in surah 2: 102 refers to the prophet Solomon (Sulaymān), while surah 2: 247 concerns the prophet Saul. The reference in surah 2: 251 is to the prophet David, who was appointed by Allah as temporal ruler and messenger.

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Other verses that contain this term are not relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*, as they refer to Allah the Almighty. Therefore, the usage of the title *mulk* to mean leader has no basis in the Qur'an, but is rather based on historical occurrences in ancient civilisation. However, a careful study of these irrelevant verses indicates that the term is used consistently to indicate the sovereignty of Allah over His creatures and, because of this, they provide us with some basic principles of Islamic political theology, especially regarding the appointment of human beings as His vicegerents on earth.

Another term that is of some relevance to the concept of *khilāfah* is *amir*. The importance of this term can be noted in several *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, particularly the *ḥadīth* that deals with the order to give obedience to the ruler. The term *amir* is derived from the Arabic root *amara*, which means ‘to order, command, bid, instruct someone to do something’. It produces several forms, which are *amr* and its plural *umtir* or *awāmir*, *umarā*, and *imarah*. These forms occur in some Qur'anic verses, but the word *amir* itself does not appear at all. However, most of these forms of *amir* will be excluded from the discussion of the concept of *khilāfah*, as their interpretation does not aid the explanation of the concept.

The only one to be considered is the form *ulū 'l-amr*, which is a combination of two words, namely *ulū* and *al-amr*. The word *ulū* refers to owners, possessors or people of, while *al-amr* has the meaning of ‘the matter, affair, concern, business and authority’. The combination appears twice in the Qur'an, both times in surat al-Nisā' (4): 59 and 83. Qur'anic commentators have differed in interpreting the full term *ulū 'l-amr*: some of them have regarded it as referring to rulers (*al-salāṭīn*), while others have defined it as having the meaning of *al-umarā*, which means commanders or tribal chiefs. On the

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87 Ibid, 96.
other hand, it might also indicate the meaning of ulū 'l-fīqh wa 'l-ʿilm (jurists and learned). 88

There are numerous Qur'anic verses containing the term sūltān and its derivative forms. Sūltān is derived from the root salaṭa, which means 'prevailed', or 'predominated'. 89 With respect to the Qur'anic usage of this term, several forms appear, namely sūltān, sūltāniyyah and sallāta. However, none of the sūltān-verses will be discussed in this study, as they tend to indicate either the evidence, proof and power of Allah, or the power, kingship and miracle of a particular ruler.

In conclusion, we suggest that the study of the term khālīfah and other related terms is vital for a better understanding of the concept of khilāfah. Although numerous Qur'anic verses contain these terms, the discussion will be limited to the significant khilāfah-terms and verses only. It is unnecessary to examine in detail verses that may make passing reference to the meaning of khilāfah but are not particularly relevant. Therefore, the analysis of the concept of khilāfah, as interpreted in Sunnī and Shiʿī Qur'anic commentaries, will be concentrated only on the khilāfah-verses that have been mentioned above.

88 Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmīʿ al-Bayān, 8: 497-503, 570-73
1.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter's discussion of the concept of khilāfah, particularly dealing with its nature, definition and functions, has produced several significant conclusions, which inevitably reflect the underlying principles of the Islamic political thought, particularly the understanding of the concept of khilāfah. The most fundamental principle is the obligation to establish the office of the khalifah in the Muslim community. There is no doubt that the majority of Muslim communities have accepted this idea. They also agree on the need to designate one imām only and the possibility of having two or more imāms is widely rejected, except in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that differences of view are unavoidable and that there has never been one universally accepted doctrine of the caliphate either among Sunnis or Shiʿis.

The necessity of the khilāfah in the community is based on several sources, and justified mainly by reference to the sharfah, to nās (divine decree) and to the ḥadīths of the Prophet. In addition to that, ijmāʿ (the consensus of the scholars) and rational thinking have also been considered important contributions. In this regard, the Shiʿis have differed significantly from the Sunnis, since they have stressed its justification through lutf (God's mercy) and refused to accept ijmāʿ as a source. But whatever the source used to justify their opinion, both sects agree that the existence of the khilāfah is undeniably vital for the ummah. Moreover, the function of the caliphs' appointment has been regarded as a replacement and continuation of the Prophet's duties. Therefore, they must continue some of the duties undertaken by him in order to ensure the implementation of sharfah and the interests of the Muslims. This does not mean, however, that a ruler's fulfilment of these basic duties entitles him to adopt the title khalīfah Allāh, as the Umayyad and the ʿAbbāsid caliphs did.
The discussions and arguments that have helped formulate the Sunni and Shi'i theories of the caliphate, and which have been examined in this chapter, are mostly based on the foundations laid down in the Qur'an and sunnah of the Prophet. Although neither of these two sources contains direct statements of principle, much may be deduced from them of relevance to this issue. More significantly, there are many terms in the Qur'an that may be connected with the concept of khilāfah. While some, as has been shown, are not relevant, most are very useful for this study.
CHAPTER 2  CLASSICAL SUNNĪ AND SHĪʿĪ COMMENTATORS:
BIOGRAPHIES AND APPROACHES TO QUR’ANIC COMMENTARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before analysing the relevant *khilāfah*-verses in the next five chapters, we have undertaken to investigate the historical backgrounds and approaches of the classical Qur’anic commentators, both Sunni and Shi‘i. This study is of some importance, as it may shed light on their interpretations at a later stage. Of course, a commentator’s background cannot be the only factor influencing an interpretation, but it might provide valuable information concerning his situation at the time of writing. In addition, it may show us that the conditions of these scholars’ lifetimes, which fall during the golden period of the Islamic dynasties (seventh-fourteenth centuries CE), had considerable impact on their interpretations of certain *khilāfah*-verses.

The study of these commentators’ backgrounds should help us to gain a better understanding of how their ideas and perceptions affected their approaches to the concept of *khilāfah*. Its significance is very similar to the understanding of the historical background of the *khilāfah* itself, which we have attempted to provide in the introduction and previous chapter. Furthermore, we suggest that the influence, even if limited, of their backgrounds in education, social interaction and political thought had an impact not only on their approaches to the interpretation of some *khilāfah*-verses in the Qur’an but also on their methodology. Therefore, this chapter will deal with these
aspects in as full and detailed a manner as possible. It is necessary, however, to bear in
mind that the main objective in exploring the backgrounds of these figures is to provide
some introductory reflections before embarking on the primary analysis of the
interpretations of the *khilafah*- and *imāmah*-verses by both Sunnis and Shi'īs, which
will be undertaken in the next five chapters.

2.2 SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS

In this section, we will concentrate on the biographies of three famous Sunni Qur'anic
commentators, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/924), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and Ibn Kathīr (d.
774/1373), presenting their method, style and approaches to Qur'anic commentaries.
These commentators are widely considered to be the most reliable of their time, since
later generations as well as modern commentators have been heavily dependent on
their works. Although there have been other famous commentaries written during this
period, these are among the most frequently cited. These three commentators and their
commentaries will be discussed separately.

2.2.1 Al-Ṭabarī (224/839-310/923)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The investigation of the backgrounds and approaches of the Sunni *mufassirūn*
(Qur'anic commentators) begins with Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ṣar b. Muḥammad, who is
well known simply as al-Ṭabarī. His full name was Muḥammad b. Ṣar b. Yazīd b.
Kathîr b. Ghâlib. Sometimes al-Ṭabarî has been called by his kunyah, Abû Jaʿfar (father of Jaʿfar). However, this title, since as far as is known he never married nor had a son, appears to be of an honorary nature.¹

With regard to the nisbah al-Ṭabarî, this refers to the district where he was born, Tabaristan. This is his most famous title and is the one most commonly used in his works. He has another two titles, al-Āmuli and al-Baghdâdi, which are less well known and rarely appear in any of his works. Al-Ṭabarî was probably born in 224/839² at Āmul in the one-time Sassanian province of Tabaristan. He grew up in Āmul under his father’s care. From childhood, he showed great intelligence, even genius, and a strong desire for knowledge. As is said concerning other gifted Muslim children, he is reported to have memorised the Qur’an by the age of seven.³

During his early education, al-Ṭabarî became closely acquainted with the teachings of the Shâfiʿî legal school, but, determined to analyse critically the legal dogma prescribed by others, he studied their sources of law. Consequently, he came to be recognised as an independent mujtahid (a person who delivers an independent judgement in the interpretation of Islamic law). After completing his education, which

² Some historians have argued as to the exact year of al-Ṭabarî’s birth. Probably he was born at the end of 224 or in the beginning of 225 A. H. but the date most commonly mentioned is 224 A. H. See Yâqūt b. Abî Allâh al-Ḥamawi, Muṣjam al-Udabâʾ, 18 (Cairo: Matbaʿat al-Maʿmûn, 1938): 40, 48.
³ Al-Ṭabarî’s childhood intelligence is acknowledged by Paret: ‘He (al-Ṭabarî) began to devote himself to study at a precociously early age, and is said to have known the Qur’an by heart by the time he was seven’. See Rudi Paret, ‘al-Ṭabarî, Abu Djâʿfar Muhammad B. Djarîr’, Encyclopaedia of Islam 1st ed. (EI¹), 7 (1987): 578
covered the study of various schools of thought, he later chose to establish his own legal school, the *Jarā'iyah*, which differed slightly from that of the Shāfi‘i.\(^4\) It seems that this project aroused the anger of the partisans of the Ḥanbali school of thought in Baghdad, and al-Ṭabarî came under their severe criticism. Moreover, he was strongly condemned by the Ḥanbalîs as a result of his readiness to classify Imām Āḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) as a traditionist, not a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). He was also criticised by the Râfiḍîyyah, a group of more radical Shi‘î, who were apparently incensed by his extreme praise and promotion of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (d. 13/634).\(^5\)

Very surprisingly, al-Ṭabarî seems never to have married. The reason for this is not certain, but is probably that he was devoted to seeking knowledge from his childhood until his old age. It is evident that he travelled all over the Muslim world throughout his life in search of knowledge, never settling down in one place. At the end of his life, he took up residence in Baghdad, then the capital of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty and one of the world’s most brilliant centres of civilisation and learning.

Al-Ṭabarî is generally acknowledged to be one of the great minds of his era. The extent and depth of his erudition and the magnitude of his written works have impressed all his biographers. His is not a case of unmerited praise or of admiration without any clear evidence; as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), the eleventh-century historian and jurist-consult noted:

He had a degree of erudition shared by no one of his era.\(^6\)

Al-Ṭabari made use of all the knowledge he possessed by passing it on to his students and those who solicited his legal opinions. He obviously was not a materialistic opportunist, since he never gained any high position in the government and even refused to accept any offer that came to him. In general, he devoted his life entirely to the development of knowledge, dedicated teaching and prolific writing. Al-Ṭabari died in the city of Baghdad, where the Islamic State was ruled by the ʿAbbāsid al-Muqtadir bi ʾIlāh (296/908-320/932), on 26 Shawwāl in the year 310/923.\(^7\)

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur’anic Commentary

Al-Ṭabari produced several famous books on Qur’anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, history, ḥadīth, ʿusūl al-dīn and some other subjects. He was also the author of one of the most reliable works of tafsīr in Islamic history, which is called Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fi Taʾwīl al-Qur’ān (Collection of Explanations for the Interpretation of the Qurʾān). His tafsīr has been regarded by the majority of scholars as the ‘father’ of Qur’anic commentary.


\(^7\) Al-Zuhayli, Al-Imām al-Ṭabari:, 33-34. Some historians believe that al-Ṭabari died in either the year 311 A.H. or 316, but this opinion is weak and rejected by the majority of ʿulamāʾ. There has also been some argument over the exact date of his death. Some scholars, including Ibn Kathir, are of the opinion that al-Ṭabari died on 27 Shawwāl 310 A.H. Nevertheless, the solution is quite simple: he died on the 26th, as is accepted by most historians, and was buried the next day, the 27th. Therefore, the confusion has simply been caused by the existence of two different dates, the date of his death and the date of his burial. See Abū ’l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn Kathir, al-Bidāyāh wa ʾl-Nihāyāh, 11 (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1966): 146. See also al-Ḥamawi, Muḥjam al-Udabāʾ, 18: 40.
commentaries and the representative of the earliest documented *tafsīr bi 'l-maʿthūr* (traditional commentary). In other words, the work is an encyclopaedia of *tafsīr* comments and opinions from their beginnings up to his own time. It is a very extensive work, containing a large number of traditions handed down by authoritative chains of transmitters (*isnād*). Furthermore, it is considered to be the first of its kind and therefore of particular interest and value; as al-Qīṭī (d. 646/1248) commented:

One will never find a book more voluminous and beneficial than *tafsīr* al-Ṭabārī.⁹

An industrious writer, al-Ṭabārī never imitated anyone in his methods of Qur’anic commentary. In most of his Qur’anic interpretation, he drew upon the entire breadth of the materials of traditional *tafsīr* extant in his time. His *tafsīr* is an indispensable source of traditionist *tafsīr*, consisting as it does of reports transmitted from early authorities. He also endeavoured to cite the material of the standard authorities as completely as possible for every verse of the Qur’an and also noted even insignificant variants. He meticulously reproduced the exact chain of transmission (*isnād*) and on some occasions placed materials having the same content (*matn*) but received through different chains of authority side by side.¹⁰ For example, in interpreting the word ‘*khallīlah*’ in surat al-Baqarah (2): 30, he produced three *ḥadīths* indicating a similar meaning, that is, a reference to the children of Adam, but narrated on different chains of authority: Ibn

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⁸ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, 125. See also B. Carra De Vaux, ‘*Tafsīr*’, *EI*, 7: 603-604.


Thābit (d. 45/665), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and Ibn Zayd (d. 181/798). Ibn Khuzaymah considered al-Ṭabari’s method as being in a class of its own, and his presentation, from the beginning of the *tafsīr* to the end, is clear.12

In addition, whenever he had reservations concerning the validity of certain materials, he openly expressed them. In order to illustrate the text, he sometimes provided simple paraphrases and lexical references including numerous poems. He aimed at being comprehensive rather than selective, even though in some cases he did cite his preferences. An example of this can be seen in his treatment of the term *imām* in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124. In interpreting the word “*ahd*” (promise) in this verse, he presents five possible meanings, every one of which is supported by a *ḥadīth*. At the end of the discussion, however, he clearly states his two preferences, which deliver the meanings *al-nubuwwah* (the Prophethood) and *al-imāmah* (the office of *imām*).13 In this way, he made his book a treasure house of information, enabling later commentators to select data on their own principles. He also provided the names of authorities for the reports he cited, but generally did not evaluate the chains of transmission, although he often gave his opinion on the reports themselves, without putting any constraints on the reader. In this too he helped later scholars to form their own judgements.14

On the other hand, his failure to evaluate the chains of transmission made his work a relatively uncritical encyclopaedia of traditional commentary, in which weak and

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trustworthy views, rigid and flexible opinions about religion, and traditional and intellectual concepts of those days, could be seen side by side. Rashid Ahmad, a modern researcher in Qur’anic commentary, mentions that some of al-Ṭabarī’s authorities, such as al-Suddi (d. 127/744) and Juwaybar (d. 150/767), are considered weak. These weak authorities derived much of their information from the People of the Book, and were, therefore, rejected by the majority of scholars. Al-Ṭabarī himself sometimes acknowledged this, but above all, his own critical observations were very valuable and represented an important contribution.

Furthermore, in this work, al-Ṭabarī collected for the first time the ample material of traditional exegesis and thus created a standard work upon which later Qur’anic commentators drew; it is still a mine of information for historical and critical research by Western scholars. Al-Ṭabarī’s own position with regard to the traditions collected by him is mainly defined by linguistic criteria, either lexicographical or grammatical.

In other words, al-Ṭabarī’s commentary covers a comprehensive characteristic of tafsīr and provides a large range of interpretations from many earlier commentators and muḥaddithūn.

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2.2.2 Al-Zamakhshari (467/1075-538/1144)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The second Sunni Qur'anic commentator to be considered is the Mu'tazilite Abū 'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhshari, who was born at Zamakhshar, a village in Khwarazm, on 27 Rajab 467/8 March 1075.17 He was a Persian by birth but became one of the great Arabic scholars, theologians and philologists. He was a man of exceptional talents and profound learning. He studied at many places including Bukhara and Samarqand, and at one time was closely associated with the jurists of Baghdad. Among his famous teachers, and probably his greatest intellectual influence, was Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Qabī al-Iṣbahānī, better known as Abū Muḥarrar (d. 507/1113).18 In the course of his travels in Khwarazm, he lost one of his feet. After this loss, he always carried with him the written testimony of eyewitnesses to prove that it had been accidental, and that he had not been maimed as a punishment for some crimes.19

17 C. Brockelmann, 'Al-Zamakhshari, Abū 'l-Kāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿOmar', EI, 8: 1205. By the eleventh century, Zamakhshar had become an influential centre of Sunni 'orthodoxy' and scholarship. At the time of al-Zamakhshari's birth, Khwarazm had already passed from Ghaznavid to Seljuk domination. He spent the first eighteen years of his life as a subject of the great Seljuk sultan, Mālik Shah I. See McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis, 49. See also C. E. Bosworth, 'Khwarazm', EI, 4: 1063.
18 McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis, 51.
From his native city, al-Zamakhshari travelled to Baghdad. The city’s glory was beginning to fade. The golden days of the Seljuk vizier, Niżām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) had ended, and the empire was feeling the strains of internecine rivalry. However, its intellectual and scholarly reputation remained high, and many students were attracted to the study centres and mosques. Seizing his opportunity, al-Zamakhshari gained certificates in ḥadīth and literary studies from some of the leading scholars of that time. Later, he went to Mecca, where he spent the greatest portion of his life as a pupil of Ibn Wahhās and received the title of Jār Allāh (neighbour of God). He must, however, have achieved a literary reputation before this, as he was warmly welcomed by the learned ʿAlīd Ḥībāt Allāh b. al-Shajari when he passed through Baghdad on the pilgrimage.20

His commentary on the Qur’an, entitled al-Kashshāf `an ḥaqīq al-tanzil wa `uyūn al-aqāwīl fi wujūd al-ta’wil, took two years and was completed in 528/1133, on his second visit to Mecca.

Al-Zamakhshari was a Ḥanafi as regards fiqh, but as a theologian he followed the teachings of the Muʿtazilites. It is quite surprising that he was a Muʿtazilite at this late date, since this school of thought had largely faded out by this time. It had first appeared about a century after the Prophet Muḥammad’s death (second century of Hijrah), but did not really have an influence in terms of political thought and movement until the next century (third century of Hijrah). Muʿtazilism continued as a force well into the fifth/eleventh century, especially under the Buyids in Iran. However, its influence seems to have waned after the death of its prominent scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār


(d. 415/1025). During the time of al-Zamakhshari, late fifth and early sixth century hijrī, this school of thought had ceased to be an influential movement. In terms of Muʿtazilite principles, which al-Zamakhshari practised, reason is a fundamental source of knowledge. Moreover, they believed that human beings are free to act according to their will. Because of this particular belief, the Muʿtazilites are sometimes classified as freethinkers.21

It is interesting that as a philologist, in spite of his Persian descent, al-Zamakhshari championed the absolute superiority of Arabic and used his mother tongue only in instructing beginners. He was a great scholar proficient in many fields of knowledge such as Qur’anic studies, hadīth, Arabic literature, grammar and philosophy. He was a very prolific author and his writings covered various branches of knowledge. He died on the day of ʿArafah 538/14 June 1144, at the age of seventy-one, at Jurjāniyyah in Khwarazm after his return from Mecca.22

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur’anic Commentary

Al-Zamakhshari’s principal work, completed ten years before his death in 528/1134, is his commentary on the Qur’an, al-Kashshāf `an Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzil. As it was the fruit of mature years, this work fully represents his thought in the field of tafsīr. In spite of this commentary’s Muʿtazilite bias, it was widely read in ‘orthodox’ Sunnī circles. Nevertheless, his works differ in some ways from early commentaries such as those of

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22 Brockelmann, ‘Al-Zamakhshari’, 1205; see also al-Dhahabi, Tafsīr wa 'l-Mufassirūn, 430.
al-Ṭabari and al-Baghawi (d. 516/1122) because these were traditional in nature. It should be noted that these early commentaries had very little influence on his writing.

Al-Zamakhshari devoted most attention to dogmatic exegesis of a philosophical nature and paid only slight attention to tradition. Besides engaging in purely grammatical exposition, he devoted special attention to pointing out rhetorical beauties. In other words, he tried to produce the commentary in which the doctrine of the miracle or inimitability of the Qur’an (fījāz) is clearly expounded and displayed. He gave particular care to the lexicographical side of his work, going fully into the readings and supporting his explanations with ample extracts from ancient poetry.23 His work still retained its place in literature when al-Bayḍawi (d. 685/1286 or 692/1293) produced his own ‘orthodox’ counterpart and tried to surpass him in the accuracy of his grammatical exposition and in quoting variant readings.

Though al-Ṭabari’s tafsīr was not a purely traditional commentary in the true sense of the word, nevertheless it has been generally considered an outstanding traditional commentary because it incorporated traditions concerning Qur’anic subjects. Unlike that of al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari’s tafsīr was in the category of rational commentary (tafsīr bi ‘l-ma’thūr). Apart from the reference to other Qur’anic verses and the ḥadīths, reason played the major role in interpretation. In commenting on the punishment of a major sinner in surat al-Nisā’ (4): 116, for instance, he concentrated on the phrase ‘whomever He wants to (pardon)’. He asserted that the phrase expresses Allah’s promise to forgive a person who practises shirk (polytheism) if he shows

23 Gätje, The Qur’an and Its Exegesis, 35.
repentance. Denial of forgiveness for the same offence is applied to those who do not repent.\(^{24}\) In this interpretation, the use of reason is clear and is typical of Mu'tazilite Qur'anic interpretation. As a Mu'tazilite, al-Zamakhshari regarded reason as a fundamental source of knowledge rather than as detrimental to human dignity. Reason and tradition were both essential to the development of knowledge, he maintained:

Knowledge is a city, which has two doors for entry, one reason, the other tradition.\(^{25}\)

In addition, he refused to accept that imitation might be a virtue in Qur'anic commentary. At the same time, he condemned the attitude of those traditionists who relied heavily on the traditions quoted by the earlier commentaries without making any effort to evaluate their authenticity. He attacked such intellectual laziness in strong terms:

A man with proof is more honourable than a lion in its lair. An imitator is more despicable than a mangy goat.\(^{26}\)

As a result of his attack on the traditionists, however, al-Zamakhshari's commentary has had considerably less influence than al-Tabari's. Although its excellence in the linguistic-rhetorical sphere is undeniable, it is still not widely read in Sunni circles due

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\(^{25}\) Al-Ḥamawi, Muḥjam al-Udābāʾ, 7: 150; quoted in Ahmad, 'Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsīr', 87.

to his omission of some traditional material and his inclusions only of what he himself considered important.\textsuperscript{27}

Having a firm command of the Arabic language, al-Zamakhsharî knew how to employ his outstanding philological skills in the interpretation of the Qur'an. In addition, he laid down the criterion of intellect as the main source of his argumentation. This is due to the fact that he was a freethinker as well as a Mu'tazilite, who constantly sought solutions to intellectual problems and stood firmly by his ideas.\textsuperscript{28} Consequently, his \textit{tafsîr} appealed more to reason than any other commentary of his time.

Although al-Zamakhsharî was best known for his rational interpretation and mastery in the linguistic-rhetorical sphere, his commentary accommodated all other major trends. In other words, it should be noted that his \textit{al-Kashshäf} would fit into more than one category, as it dealt not only with the rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an but also with theological issues.\textsuperscript{29} Nonetheless, he brought the characteristic themes of Mu'tazilite theology, such as the doctrine of the unity and justice of Allah, the recognition of the intellect as the source of understanding the faith and the advancement of freedom and free will, into his discussion of the verses.

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\textsuperscript{27} Gätje, \textit{The Qur'an and Its Exegesis}, 36.
\textsuperscript{28} Al-Dhahabi, \textit{Tafsîr wa 'l-Mufassirûn}, 445-47.
\textsuperscript{29} Mir, \textit{`Tafsîr'}, 4: 173.
\end{flushright}
i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The last Sunni Qur'anic commentator to be analysed in this section is one of the most famous figures in the field of *tafsîr*. Ibn Kathîr's full name was ʿImäd al-Dîn İsmâ'îl Ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathîr. He was born in the citadel town of Başra in Southeast of Damascus, which was under the Mamlûk control, in 700/1300. He spent his early childhood there until his father's death. He then moved to Damascus at the age of six as the ward of his brother. As a Sunni stronghold, Damascus offered the young Ibn Kathîr a wealth of organised educational opportunity. His teachers ranked among the leading intellectuals of that era and they found in him an eager student of the Islamic sciences, and particularly of *hadîth* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence).\(^{30}\)

Almost four centuries separate the death of al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/923) and the birth of Ibn Kathîr. This was, of course, a momentous period in the history of Islamic culture and society. As regards the socio-political situation, Ibn Kathîr lived in a very unstable and disruptive period, since the Mongols had already invaded and conquered Central Asia, Iran and Iraq. The ultimate disruption was to come with their capture of the capital of the ʿAbbâsids, Baghdad, in 750/1258. From the point of view of Qur'anic studies, however, the world into which Ibn Kathîr entered in the first years of the eighth/fourteenth century had seen the maturation of the major forms of Qur'anic commentary. The works of such figures as al-Ṭûsî (d. 460/1067), al-Zamakhshârî (d. 1793), and others, had set the stage for the development of *tafsîr* as a scholarly discipline.

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\(^{30}\) McAuliffe, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics:', 55.
538/1144), Fākhūr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) had left their mark. These early works, to some extent, reflected his thought, either in contributing to Qur’anic commentary or fiqh.

In fiqh, Ibn Kathīr studied under a great teacher and leading Shāfiʿī jurist-consult, Burhān al-Dīn al-Fazārī (d. 729/1329). Moreover, he furthered his acquisition of Islamic knowledge in hadīth under the Ḥafīẓ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341). Later, his own students would praise him as having ‘the best memory, of those with whom we studied, for the mains (contents) of hadīth and being the most knowledgeable in expounding them, in ranking their transmitters and rating their soundness or faultiness’.

One of Ibn Kathīr’s illustrious teachers, and perhaps the one who influenced him most, was the Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist-consult, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328). Ibn Kathīr was about twenty-eight when his teacher died and it was, therefore, during the last ten years of Ibn Taymiyyah’s life that he knew him. Ibn Kathīr’s own career developed quietly in the years following Ibn Taymiyyah’s death, but gradually his reputation spread as a scholar of fiqh, a teacher of hadīth and a prominent khatib. Although Ibn Kathīr was a Shāfiʿī, his closeness to Ibn Taymiyyah, a Ḥanbalī, was due to their shared views on the traditionalist approach. As a conservative Ḥanbalī, Ibn Taymiyyah opposed innovation and rationalism and promoted traditionalism. The Shāfiʿī legal school also regarded the traditionalist viewpoint as the dominant and continuing mode. Therefore, the impact of Ibn

Taymiyyah's teaching and thoughts on Ibn Kathîr was significant, since the latter shared and used a similar approach to the former. Ibn Kathîr died in 774/1373 and was buried near his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah.

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

Ibn Kathîr's commentary, which is entitled Tafsîr al-Qur'an al-'Azîm, is solidly in the class of tafsîr bi'l-ma'thir (traditional commentary). In fact, it is generally considered one of the soundest of tafsîr bi'l-ma'thir, if not absolutely the soundest. It might be considered merely an abridgement of al-Ţabarî's work, except that it is much more selective, evaluates the chains of transmission and pronounces on the authenticity of reports. Ibn Kathîr was essentially a muhaddith (traditionist), however, and his approach to the subject reflected the viewpoint of one determined to advance the established 'orthodox' viewpoint.

Ibn Kathîr introduced his work of tafsîr with a clear and careful analysis of correct hermeneutical procedure as he saw it, presenting a brief but sound historical background describing the early development of Qur'anic tafsîr. The introduction also outlined his systematic approach to tafsîr, in which references to the Qur'an itself, prophetic hadîths, the traditions related from the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and the sayings of the followers (al-tâbî'ûn) were extensively used. Nevertheless, he referred to the sayings of the followers only when it was clear that

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33 Smith, An Historical Study of the Term 'Islam', 129.
35 McAuliffe, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics': 56-58.
they had been in complete agreement in any particular discussion. If there had been conflicts among them, Ibn Kathîr believed that these sayings could not be considered an authoritative source.

Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr*, according to Henri Laoust, one of his Western biographers, should be regarded as an essentially philological work written in a very elementary style. Furthermore, his commentary is very largely devoted to *hadîth* and traditions related from the Companions, although on a few occasions, he adds some explanatory comments and judgements of his own. But while Ibn Kathîr rarely put forward his own views, he was willing to refer to and cite the views of previous commentators. However, any reference made to others is not accepted without full evaluation and a detailed assessment, following which he expressed his opinion, either confirming or rejecting the view under discussion.

This approach shows his intellectual ability to judge the authenticity of every source and strictly reject any incorrect opinion. Consequently, his commentary has been less subject to individual interpretation than that of al-Bayḍâwî (d. 685/1286). For this reason, his *tafsîr* has been much appreciated by Muslims even though it has been much less attractive to Western scholars.

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37 McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis, 75.
38 Smith, An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam', 128. Ibn Kathîr's method of stating his own views is considered by Qâsim al-Qaysî, the Iraqi scholar, to be a good 'indication of the power of his intellectual ability'. He adds: 'Ibn Kathîr did not accept any statement even from al-Ṭabari and al-Râzî blindly, without assessing its validity. Whenever he thought it correct, he confirmed it, otherwise, he rejected and criticised it.' See McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis, 75.
2.3 SHI'I QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS

While this study has considered three Sunnî commentators, the discussion on the backgrounds of the Shi'i Qur'anic commentators will be limited to two, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi, since between them they represent sufficiently well the ideas and viewpoints of the majority of Shi'i believers. Later classical Shi'i commentators as well as the modern have relied on them in formulating their own interpretations. In other words, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi provided the guidelines for later commentaries.

2.3.1 Al-Ṭūsī (385/995-460/1067)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The third generation of Shi'i commentators extended over a very long period, well into the sixteenth century CE. One of them was al-Ṭūsī, who was also known as Shaykh al-Ṭā'i'ifah. His full name was Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Ṭūsī. He was born in Ṭūs during Ramadān 385/995. Generally, the Shi'īs consider him as a great faqīh (jurist), a pre-eminent jurist of the Ja'fari rite, a muḥaddith (traditionist) and a mujtahid (a jurist formulating independent decisions in legal questions on theological matters).

After receiving his early education in his native place, al-Ṭūsī travelled to Baghdad in 408/1017 at the age of twenty-three. Baghdad at that time was under the authority of the Shi'i Buyid dynasty and the flourishing centre of Shi'i intellectual life. While there,
he studied under the Shafi'i al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022). Following al-Mufid's death, he is reported to have continued his studies under a great Shi'i jurist, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍa (436/1044), whose views on the Qur'an he represented. After the death of this great scholar, he stayed on in Baghdad for another twelve years and tried his utmost to spread his influence as an Imamiyyah Shi'i to his students. He assumed the leading intellectual position in the Baghdad Shi'i community, where his reputation drew students from far and wide to come to learn from him.

Al-Ṭūsī is noted as having strained relations with the caliph, al-Qā'im (422/1031-467/1075). Following his attack on the first three Sunni orthodox caliphs, he faced a severe reaction from the authorities and the public in Baghdad.41 As a result of continuous hostility from the public, he moved to Najaf, a major centre of Shi'i learning in Iraq, where he passed the rest of his life. Al-Ṭūsī dedicated himself to

39 Muhammad b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān al-Baghdādi (d. 413/1022). He was the most noted Shi'i scholar and jurist-consult (faqih) of his day. Al-Mufid is identified as a Shafi'i and it is noted that al-Ṭūsī issued fatwās in accord with this madhab (school of thought). See McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis, 46.

40 Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍa's real name was Abū 'l-Qāsim ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 436/1044). It is said that al-Ṭūsī associated himself with al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍa and was his companion and student for about twenty-three years. See M. Hidayet Hosain, ʿAI-Iasi, Muhammad b. al-Ilasan b. ʿAlī Abo Djaʿfar', EI, 8: 982.

41 It is known that his house was burned down, a result of the work of opponents who had complained against him to the caliph. Their complaint had been that in one of his books he had cursed the Companions of the Prophet in a passage he had written about 'the early oppressors being accursed'. He escaped the caliph's punishment by denying that this had ever been his intention. See Dwight M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak (London: Luzac & Company, 1933): 287.
learning and writing throughout his lifetime, and is considered the greatest doctor of the Shi'a. He died in Najaf in the year 460/1067 at seventy-five years of age.42

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

The most important work produced by al-Tusi was his commentary on the Qur'an, al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (The Elucidation of the Interpretation of the Qur'an). He also wrote many books in various fields including hadith (Kitab tahdib al-ahkam and al-istibsar fi makhtulifa fihi min al-akhbâr), fiqh ('Udlat al-usûl) and others. Two of his works, Tahdib al-ahkam and al-Istibsar, are among the four Shi'i canonical books (al-kutub al-arba'ah),43 which are held in the highest veneration by the sect.

While al-Tabari's commentary is considered to be the earliest documented tafsir produced for the Sunnis, the Shi'is, especially the Imamiyyah, regard al-Tusi's commentary as their earliest completed tafsir. Its significance is obvious because it represents an important approach in Shi'i tafsir. The Shi'is classify al-Tusi's commentary as tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur (traditional commentary), in which they take al-ma'thur to mean the explanation of the Qur'an by reference to other Qur'anic verses,
or to the *hadīth* of the Prophet, or to the opinions of the twelve *imāms*. His *tafsīr* was the first of its kind among the Shi‘īs, since no such book as *al-Tibyān* and no commentators of his like existed before him. Even the theme of another famous *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarānī’s *Majma‘ al-Bayān*, was adopted from al-Ṭūsī’s commentary.

Al-Ṭūsī’s *al-Tibyān* is a large work whose value is attested by al-Bahrānī in the succinct tribute, “*la‘m yu‘mal mithluhu* (nothing like it has ever been produced). However, many modern commentators have challenged this opinion since al-Ṭūsī undoubtedly copied phrases and sometimes, whole sections of interpretation from al-Ṭabarānī’s commentary. Nevertheless, *al-Tibyān* is a comprehensive work, comparable to that of al-Ṭabarānī in terms of its breadth. Al-Ṭūsī, however, arranges his material in a somewhat different way from other commentators. He begins by mentioning any variant readings and next addresses issues of etymology and word signification. He then moves to a discussion of the meaning of particular words and phrases as they are used in the verse under examination. In addition, matters of syntax are also analysed, while in certain situations, the elaboration of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (reasons of the revelation) is easily noted.

Although al-Ṭūsī was a Shi‘ī commentator, he was quite liberal in his references to

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45 Jane I. Smith endorses this argument: ‘Indicative of the high esteem in which the *tafsīr* was held by many, this statement is nonetheless open to some questions as al-Ṭūsī not only echoed many of the phrases of al-Ṭabarānī, but in several places apparently copied whole sections.’ See Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islam’*, 82.

Sunni materials. Occasionally, he quoted hadiths from non-Shi'ī sources, but this liberality was limited to non-doctrinal issues; he held strictly to Shi'ī ideas on doctrinal issues and refused to accept any other source. His approach may have been influenced by his historical circumstances; his tafsīr emerged during the rise to power of the pro-Shi'ī Buyid dynasty (334/945-447/1055) at the centre of the 'Abbāsid state, the development from which the Imāmiyyah Shi'ī (the Twelver) exegesis benefited most. The changes occurring in the political and social position of Shi'īsm began to be reflected in al-Ṭūsī's commentary.  

2.3.2 Al-Ṭabarsi (468/1075-548/1153)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

Another important Imāmiyyah Qur'anic commentator, and almost the only twelfth-century Shi'ī theologian of importance, was Shaykh al-Ṭabarsi. His full name was Abū ʿAlī al-Fadl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Fadl al-Ṭabarsi Amin al-Dīn Thiqat al-Islām. His importance does not lie in his being a Shi'ī, but in his being an eminent theologian and scholar. He was born in the year 468/1075 in Tabaristan. His early life was occupied with the study of religion, literature and language. Al-Ṭabarsi lived in Mashhad al-Riḍā for such a long time that some writers add to his nisbah that of al-Mashhadi. He engaged himself in public teaching until the year 523/1129, when he moved to the

quiet town of Sabzawar in Khurasan; here, at the advanced age of over sixty, he wrote his famous commentary on the Qur'an, *Majma` al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. 49

Al-Ṭabarsi's life falls within the Sunni Seljuk period in Iran (431/1040-590/1194). The Muslim world had been torn by political and religious dissension into several autonomous states by the eleventh century. Each of these states was now ruled by different groups holding to different 'orthodoxies'. The Shi`i Fatimid caliphate (365/975-567/1171) controlled Egypt and maintained vassal states in the Maghrib, Syria, Sicily and Western Arabia, whereas the Ziyadids and the Najahids ruled the Yemen. 50

The existence of these various ruling groups indicates the rapid emergence and development of an internal decay in both state and society. This situation had been worsened by a series of simultaneous attacks by internal and external enemies. The Sunni Turkish Seljuks had reached Baghdad in 447/1055 and wrested power from the last Shi`i Buyid ruler. They had extended their kingdom to Syria, Palestine and Anatolia by the year 470/1079, a few years after al-Ṭabarsi's birth. By the end of the eleventh century, they controlled a united empire including almost all the lands possessed by the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. 51


51 Ibid., 97.
Al-Ṭabarsi spent the last twenty-five years of his life in Sabzawar, where he died at the age of about eighty, on the night of "id al-ādḥā (the Sacrifice Festival), in the year 548/1153.52

ii. Major works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

There is no dispute that al-Ṭabarsi’s Majmac al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān is his principal work in Qur’anic commentary, since he himself refers to it as ‘kitābī al-kabīr fī ‘l-tafsīr’ (my major work in Qur’anic commentary). This indicates the existence of some other works, although they are not as famous; but one in particular is noteworthy, not least for the manner of its inception; it was his response to al-Zamakhshari’s great commentary, al-Kashshāf:

When I had finished my major book on tafsīr which bears the title Majmac al-bayān li ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān, I came by chance across the book al-Kashshāf li ḥaqā’iq al-tanzil of jār Allāh al-Allāmah. I prepared an extract from the wonders of its meaning and the marvels of its expressions and constructions, (an extract) the like of which is not to be found in a book combining many aspects (of knowledge). I considered (the matter of) its title and entitled it al-Kāfī al-Shāfi‘ī. Thus the two books came into existence.53

52 Various dates have been cited for al-Ṭabarsi’s death. 502, 509, 518, 533 and 548 are among the years. But the most commonly cited is 548. See Abdul, ‘The Unnoticed Mufassir: 15: 104.
Al-Ṭabarsi clarifies the methodology used in writing *Majma‘ al-Bayān* in the preface of this work. It seems to be a combination of two early *tafsīr* works, al-Ṭabari’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* and al-Ṭūsī’s *al-Tibyān*. A comparative reading of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi reveals a great similarity and it seems plausible that the former had greatly influenced him.  

Al-Ṭabarsi did not restrict his interest to these two commentaries; he sometimes combined certain aspects of the interpretations of some other well-known commentaries. As regards the organisation of this work, the literary aspects, mode of revelation and meanings of the verses were all dealt with in a systematic and classical way. It contains so many good and previously unheeded points that several later commentators, for example al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1403/1982), have at times explicitly referred to it.

In dealing with the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of revelations), al-Ṭabarsi employed the traditionist method and entirely relied on the chains of authorities. This approach might have been due to the strong influence of al-Ṭabari’s commentary, which had impressed him most while completing his own work. In some circumstances, however, he accepted reports and traditions narrated by weak or untrustworthy *hadith* transmitters, such as Ubayy b. Ka'b (d. 29/649). Al-Ṭabarsi also employed philological manipulation in his *tafsīr* and what he is likely to ascribe to the passage may be easily predicted by referring to the way he deals with the linguistic aspect.

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54 Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shi‘ism*, 75-76.
Al-Ṭabarsi’s *tafsîr* also dealt with reading problems by giving variant readings, quoting several authorities, and citing classical and pre-Islamic Arabic usage in order to support his choice. He also occasionally quoted statements from Shi‘î *imāms* such as Abū Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 140/747). This method of producing variant views on a single matter provides his readers with the opportunity to make their own judgements and evaluations. In this way, he showed that he was one of the moderate followers of Shi‘ism, as al-Dhahabî points out:

Ṭabarsi is moderate in his (following) Shi‘ism; unlike others among the Shi‘ite Imāmites, he is not extravagant in his Shi‘ism. We have read his *tafsîr*; we do not find against him much fanaticism, nor can we reproach him for cursing any of the companions or for accusing them of anything that nullifies their trustworthiness and piety.\(^{57}\)

However, a study of al-Ṭabarsi’s *tafsîr* shows that his moderation in interpreting Qur’anic verses is limited to non-doctrinal matters. Otherwise, he seems to be a very strong adherent of the Imāmiyyah Shi‘î. In interpreting the term *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet) in surah 33: 33, for instance, al-Ṭabarsi regards it as referring conclusively to five persons, namely the Prophet himself, ʿAli b. Abî Ṭâlib, the Prophet’s daughter (Fātimah), and the Prophet’s two grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.\(^{58}\)

Therefore, it is clear that al-Ṭabarsi’s employment of a moderate method of Qur’anic commentary is exclusively confined to non-doctrinal aspects. Otherwise, his views are


accordingly presented as a means of supporting the Imāmiyyah Shiʿi’s teachings and belief. In doing so, he occasionally incorporates evidence that is hardly accepted by the Sunni Muslims.

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, we suggest that the biographies of the above Qur’anic commentators influenced and were reflected in their approaches to producing tafsir. Every commentary has had its importance for the Muslim ummah, particularly among those people who lived shortly after its production. The Shiʿi commentaries, for instance, have had a great impact within their circles, since they represent their own concepts regarding belief in the Qur’an. While some among the Shiʿis recognise the major part of the religious tradition (ḥadīth), they sanction and supplement it by means of the doctrinal authority of the imāms, who are claimed to have inherited the ‘genuine’ Qur’an edited by ʿAli. Thus, when exegetical traditions arose which reflected current notions concerning the imāmate and the khilāfah, Shiʿi exegesis bore a more direct relationship to post-Qur’anic events, because of the historic ties of the imāms. Therefore, whenever positive statements in the Qur’an concerning leadership and authority were indefinite (mubham) and general, they have been interpreted as referring to ʿAli, the imāms and their community, with a series evidence presented as a support. On the other hand, negative statements were interpreted as referring to their opponents, as well as to the first three caliphs.59 Similarly, the background of the Sunni have also

59 Gätje, The Qur’an and Its Exegesis, 38.
influenced and reflected the underlining of their interpretations in conformity with their belief and teachings.

It can be said that these commentators lived in turbulent times both politically and socially (from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries). During this period, the authority of the caliphate diminished considerably, to the point of disappearance. Several commentators witnessed a change of dynasty, which had a great impact on their writings and was a factor in differentiating one commentary from another. Differences and arguments on certain matters of importance became, and still remain, unavoidable. Considering the fact that they came from different backgrounds and produced different interpretations, both Sunnî and Shi'î communities have not directly rejected one another's approaches. Indeed, as we will see in the following chapters, their interpretations have been very similar on numerous occasions.
CHAPTER 3  THE INTERPRETATION OF THE KHILĀFAH-VERSES IN CLASSICAL SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having compared the Sunni and the Imāmiyyah Shiʿī commentators' historical backgrounds and approaches to Qur'anic interpretation, which has provided the basic preliminary information necessary to undertake the analysis of the concept of khilāfah, the next four chapters generally deal with the main discussion of the research. This will be divided into two separate sections, namely the Sunni and Shiʿī interpretations of the relevant verses. Therefore, this chapter in particular seeks to examine in some detail the Sunni interpretations of the selected verses related to the khilāfah and imāmah, found in the Qur'an, which reveal their perceptions of the concept.

The discussion will concern the three Sunni Qur'anic commentators discussed previously: al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathīr. In order to make the discussion clear and well structured, this chapter will undertake the interpretation of the khilāfah-verses only, such as those containing the terms khilāfah, khulafā’, khalīfah, yastakhlif and yakhluf. The verses containing the terms imāmah and ulī ‘l-amr will be dealt with in Chapter Four.

The analysis will be structured according to the classification of the terms, starting with the khilāfah-verses and concluding with the term ukhluf, rather than by following the
order of the 'Uthmānic text. This method is preferred because a certain term may appear once at the beginning of the Qur'an, and not recur until the middle or end of the text. Therefore, the discussion will proceed from one verse to another according to the classification of terms. Consequently, some early Qur'ānic verses may be discussed at a late stage in this chapter whereas some verses that come later may be analysed in the first part. Every verse will be discussed according to the interpretation provided by the selected Sunni commentators. It is intended that our analysis will show that these commentators’ interpretations of the relevant verses will reflect Sunni thought, particularly regarding the concept of khilāfah.

3.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM KHALĪFAH.

The term khalīfah, literally defined as leader or, more precisely in this context, caliph, is found twice in the Qur'an, in surah al-Baqarah and in surah Ṣād. The first instance is recorded in surah al-Baqarah (2): 30, which reads:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.”

They said: “Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?—Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises And glorify Thy holy (name)?” He said: “I know what ye know not”.¹

Before considering the interpretation of the word *khalifah*, it would seem desirable to examine the meaning of the word *ja`ila* (will create). This term is derived from the Arabic root `ja`ala`, which means ‘to make, to create or to appoint’. Qur’anic commentators have argued whether it corresponds more closely to the meaning of *fa`iil* (doing) or of *khäliq* (creating). Al-Ṭabarî, in his commentary, notes that al-Ḥasan al-braska (d. 110/728) and Qatādah (d. 118/736) prefer *fa`iil* (doing, acting, performing some activity), whereas al-Dahhāk (d. 105/723) favours *khäliq* (creating). After examining these two possibilities, al-Ṭabarî’s inclination is to accept the reports of al-Ḥasan and Qatādah. However, he does not interpret the term as they did, but rather gives a close definition of it, which is *mustakhliif* (succeeding or appointing as *khalifah*). Wadād al-Qādi asserts that due to al-Ṭabarî’s dogmatism on the philological level, defining *ja`ila* as *fa`iil*, the notion of the *khalifah* here means ‘to succeed’. Ibn Kathîr agrees with al-Ṭabarî’s opinion, as he cites the same reports in his commentary. Moreover, he quotes many opinions from al-Ṭabarî and sometimes from al-Zamakhsharî as guidelines before delivering his own interpretation.

Both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr explain that *khalifah* is a form of *fa`iil*, derived from the Arabic root *khalafa*. Thus, the meaning is to take someone’s place in a particular situation. Al-Ṭabarî quotes another verse, sûrah Yûnis (10): 14, which means that Allah appointed Prophet Adam to be His vicegerent on earth to see how he would

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3 Ibid, 236.
4 Al-Qādi, ‘The Term ‘Khalifah’ in Early Exegetical Literature’: 396.
6 Verse 10: 14 reads: ‘Then We made you heirs In the land after them, To see how ye would behave!’.
behave, in order to show its similarity to the above verse. Taking this interpretation into account, al-Ṭabari argues that the supreme ruler (al-sultān al-aʿzam) is to be considered a khalīfah because he replaces the previous ruler and takes on the responsibility for his administrative duties. This view, in some respects, indicates his support for the Sunni authority, particularly practised by the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid caliphates. As we see in the historical background of the emergence of the khilāfah, the process of succession had been determined by appointment of the current ruler, which started after Yazid inherited the post from his father, Muʿāwiyyah. Although the caliphate was no longer decided by an election but had become a hereditary process, the recognition of the supreme ruler as khalīfah, because he takes the responsibility from his predecessor, shows his acceptance of their authority.

Ibn Kathīr interprets this verse in the same sense as al-Ṭabari, since he sees it as referring to the khilāfah of a group of people that succeed one another decade by decade and generation by generation. To support this view, he quotes another four verses in the Qurʾan that indicate a similar meaning to this interpretation. They are in sūrah al-Anṣām (6): 165, al-Naml (27): 62, al-Zukhruf (43): 60 and al-Aʾrāf (7): 169.

A similar interpretation is offered by al-Zamakhshari, who sees in the khalīfah a reference to the appointment of Prophet Adam and his children. Moreover, the word khalīfah in this verse means one who replaces or succeeds the previous caliph and this

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7 Al-Ṭabari, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwil al-Qurʾān, 1: 236.
8 Kennedy, The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates:, 88-89
process is achieved through continuous succession from one to another. One question, however, arises, if the interpretation does indeed refer to Adam and his children: why is the singular word *khalifah* used in this verse if a plural meaning is intended? In responding to this question, al-Zamakhshari, whose approach is based largely on philological and lexicographical interpretation, makes it very clear that the answer is to be found in the nature of the Arabic language, where some singular words indicate a plural meaning: The name of a tribal leader, for instance, might well refer to his people. This example can be seen in the usage of the word *Hāshim*, which also implies the people of *Hāshim* clan (*Banī Hāshim*). Al-Zamakhshari’s explanation is noted by Lambton, who observes that the singular *‘khalifah’*, in certain circumstances, has the meaning of a plural, and therefore in this case can be held to designate Adam, the prophets and, by extension, all mankind.

Al-Ṭabari varies the way in which he offers his interpretation, particularly in presenting certain traditions. Sometimes, he gives various explanations for a single verse, even though he rejects some of them, and supports his opinion with different reports. For example, he quotes Ibn Ishāq’s report (d. 151/768-9), which Montgomery Watt defines as meaning that Allah will appoint ‘someone who settles in or inhabits’ (*sākinan* and *āmiran*) on the earth as a successor. However, he does not agree with this

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11 Ibid, 271.
interpretation: he puts forward his own view, which he supports by quoting a report from Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 86/687). The report narrates that the first inhabitants on this earth were the jinn, who were later succeeded by iblīs because they had spread corruption, shed blood and killed one another. Then Allah created Adam and appointed him to succeed the iblīs. This is why Allah says: “I am about to place a vicegerent on earth”.14

Furthermore, al-Ṭabarî quotes another report from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to support the view that regards khalīfah as a reference to the children of Adam. They succeed their father Adam and each subsequent generation (qarn) succeeds the generation before it.15 He also notes a similar opinion reported on the authority of other narrators, Ibn Sābit (d. 118/736) and Ibn Zayd (d. 145/762). However, the latter explicitly holds that no resident on the earth existed before the creation of Adam, who was the first creature to reside on the earth.16 If we combine all the views above, the conclusion is that the khalīfah refers to Adam and to every single person that takes his place. Another significant point concerns the process of succession, which is understood to begin only with the creation of Adam.

Ibn Kathîr definitely agrees with al-Ṭabarî’s view that khalīfah refers not only to Adam, as claimed by some commentators, but also to those who take his place to obey Allah and rule justly among their people. On the other hand, those who spread corruption and shed blood are not classified in this category.17 In other words, they

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15 Ibid, 237.
16 Ibid, 237.
cannot represent the real qualities of the Islamic khalifah as outlined by most of the Qur’anic commentators even though they hold the office and rulership.

Discussing the matter further, al-Ṭabari quotes several reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), Ibn Masʿūd (d 32/853 or 33/854) and other Companions of the Prophet, who reported the dialogue between God and the angels: God said to the angels: “I am about to place a khalifah on earth”. They said: “Our Lord, what/who will this khalifah be? He said: “He will have offspring who will work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other”. 18

Basing his view on these reports, al-Ṭabari comments:

‘Thus khalifah .... is My vicegerent who shall represent Me in judging among My creatures’. That representation was bestowed on Adam and whoever (of his descendants) occupies his place in obedience to Allah, judging justly among His creatures. As for the shedding of blood and corruption, they were not committed by the representatives of Allah such as Adam and those who followed his example in obedience to and true worship of Allah. This is because the angels did not attribute the shedding of blood and corruption to the vicegerent of God Himself, but rather said, “Would you place therein one who will spread corruption?” 19

19 Ibid, 237.
Al-Ṭabari attempts to reconcile the reports of al-Ḥasan, Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās by claiming that although the reports of Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās contradict the meaning of khalifah as related by al-Ḥasan in one respect, in another respect, they agree with it: they do not attribute corruption and the shedding of blood on earth to Adam, although others have been guilty of these offences. The difference between them occurs when Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās limit the meaning of khalifah to Adam alone, in the sense that Allah directly appointed him as His vicegerent on earth. Al-Ḥasan, however, takes it to mean his offspring, since they are each other’s successors, each generation succeeding the position of the one before it, and therefore attributes corruption and the shedding of blood to the khalifah. 20

Al-Ṭabari suggests that the reason for al-Ḥasan’s interpretation is as follows: when the angels said to their Lord, “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?”, they were speaking of the vicegerent whom Allah had said He was placing on earth, and not of anyone else, because the exchange (dialogue) between the angels and their Lord concerned only him (the khalifah). They believed that, if this was the case, Allah had purified Adam from corruption on earth and shedding of blood, and it was clear that whoever might be corrupt and shed blood was not Adam, but certain of his offspring. Furthermore, al-Ṭabari argues that when the angels said to their Lord, “Will you place someone on earth who will corrupt the world and shed blood?”, they were not attributing those characteristics to the khalifah on earth that is, Adam; Rather

20 Ibid, 237-238.
they said: “Will you place therein one (someone, not necessarily Adam) who will work corruption there?” \(^{21}\)

Another argument that might be interesting to consider regards the angels’ reasons behind their questioning the appointment of Adam and his children. As stated in al-Ṭabari’s, al-Zamakhshari’s and Ibn Kathir’s commentaries, the term *khalīfah* is accepted as referring not only to Adam, but also to his children. Therefore, the angels appear to be questioning God’s judgement when they ask, “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood...?\(^{2}

Ibn Kathir explains that all the angels are trying to point out is the possibility of Prophet Adam’s descendants acting corruptly and shedding blood upon the earth, as had happened in the case of the creatures before them. Their prediction of this disaster might be based on their special ability to foresee future events or on their understanding of human nature. Or, it may be that they understand that it is in the power of Allah alone either to allow human beings to commit disorder and violence or to prevent them from acting sinfully. Or, the angels may be thinking of what had happened to the previous creatures, who were guilty of corruption and bloodshed. \(^{22}\)

According to Ibn Kathir, the angels’ question is neither for the purpose of disobeying Allah nor is it due to a feeling of jealousy for the descendants of Adam, as has been claimed by some Qur’anic commentators. The truth is that the angels will not ask

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\(^{21}\) Ibid, 238.

anything which is forbidden by Allah. The reason for their question, as Ibn Kathîr states with reference to the report from Qatädah (d. 118/736), is that, acknowledging God’s intention to place a vicegerent on the earth, the angels recall that corruption and bloodshed had occurred before, owing to the actions of the beings created before Adam. Therefore, they say to their Lord out of simple curiosity: “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?” 23

According to Ibn Kathîr, the angels ask this question to acquire knowledge and receive an explanation from Allah of what would be the benefit from this creation, even though it seems certain that human beings will be corrupt and shed blood. If Allah desires loyal and faithful servants, then the angels are the ones who continually celebrate His praises and glorify His holy name. However, Allah answers this question by saying: “I know what ye know not”. 24 In other words, Allah alone knows the beneficial purpose of this creation even though disaster and violence will inevitably spread among mankind. In addition, Allah mentions that He will appoint many more prophets, messengers and even khalîfahs from among the children of Adam, and all of them will possess many excellent qualities and characteristics. 25

Ibn Kathîr finds another possible reason, cited in al-Râzi’s commentary. He notes that this phrase may be God’s response to the angels’ claim, “Whilst we do celebrate thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)”. 26 In other words, Allah has certain unknown

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23 Ibid, 230.
26 Ibid, 230.
purposes and benefits in mind in creating Adam to be the *khálīfah* on earth. It implies that mankind’s creation and appointment as *khálīfahs* will not lead to the problems that occurred in the case of the *iblīs*. The angels, on the other hand, cannot understand the secret behind this creation. Another possible meaning is the angels’ implied wish to replace the descendants of Adam as *khálīfahs* on the earth.\(^\text{27}\) Allah, however, replies, “I know what ye know not”: Allah alone knows the secret of appointing Adam and his descendants to be *khálīfahs*; He also knows that it is much better for the angels to remain in their appointed place.

In defining the precise meaning of the word *ørđ* (earth), al-Ṭabarî asserts that some Qur’anic commentators see it as referring specifically to Mecca, as in the narration from Ibn Sābīt. However, most commentators, and al-Ṭabarî himself, believe that its meaning is more general and that probably this word refers to any place where the process of *khálīfah* occurs.\(^\text{28}\) Ibn Kathîr mentions the report narrated on the authority of Ibn Sābīt, but considers it to be weak in terms of *sanad* (chain of transmission) and therefore, holds that the real meaning is much more extensive.\(^\text{29}\)

The second appearance of the word *khálīfah* can be found in sūrah Sād (38): 26, which reads:

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\text{بَشَّارَةٌ إِلَى مَنْ خَلَقَهُ خَلِيْقَةً فيَأَطُوَّبْنَ بِهِ رَبَّنَا وَأَطُوَّبْنَ عَنْ سَيْلِ اللَّهِ وَأَطُوَّبْنَ عَنْ حُجَّةِ اللَّهِ وَأَطُوَّبْنَ عَنْ شِيْطَٰنِ اللَّهِ}
\]

\(^\text{27}\) Ibid, 230.


O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in Truth (and justice): nor follow thou the lusts (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah: for those who wander astray from the Path of Allah, is a Penalty Grievous, for that they forget the Day of Account."

In terms of the story, the dialogue in this verse relates to the prophet David, as Allah specifically mentions his name at the beginning of this verse. The conversation takes place without any intermediary, whereas on the word’s first appearance, in surat al-Baqarah (2): 30, even though the meaning refers to Adam, the dialogue is between Allah and the angels.

If we examine the content of this verse, it seems to refer specifically to David’s selection as the khalifah. According to al-Tabari, its main idea is the appointment of David as a replacement for the prophet before him in ruling and leading the people.\(^\text{30}\) This view is supported by al-Zamakhshari, but Lambton asserts that al-Zamakhshari’s opinion in this case has a different emphasis from that concerning the appointment of Adam in the previous discussion, claiming that the appointment of David was to the dual role of king and prophet.\(^\text{31}\) Ibn Kathir’s interpretation goes further: he does not consider khalifah as referring directly to David, as al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari did; rather he believes that this verse is to be considered a commandment to all leaders to

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administer the office properly and prevent any kind of injustice among the people. A leader’s appointment as khalifah applies not to a specific place only but to every corner of the world. The significance of this idea is that the system of replacing one khalifah by another has taken place since the appointment of the first human being. Furthermore, it might have already occurred before that, if the report, which mentions that the khilafah started with the replacement of the jinn by the iblis is accepted.

This verse also gives some fundamental guidelines that are necessary in order that the khalifah performs his duty perfectly. In al-Tabari’s view, justice and self-awareness are the two defining qualities of the word al-haqq (literally means ‘the true’, ‘the real’). Both are very important elements, alongside others, in ensuring the implementation of truth in the community. Besides, Allah warns David not to follow the lusts of his heart, which will lead him and his people to stray from justice and self-awareness. Consequently, truth will not exist among the people and they will be numbered among the annihilated. Furthermore, argues al-Mawardi, the establishment of justice and truth, as stated in this verse, was completed when Allah granted David power and authority. In other words, the khalifah is allowed to possess some kinds of power while exercising his responsibility, as long as his powers are used in the right way.

33 Al-’j’abari, Jam( al-Bayan fi Ta’wil al-Qur’an, 10: 575.
3.3 The Plural (*Khalā’if* and *Khulafā’*)

Two plural forms of *khalifah* can be found in the Qur’an, namely *khalā’if* and *khulafā’*. The first occurs four times; once in surah Al-An‘ām (6): 165, once in Fātir (35): 39, and twice in surah Yūnus (10): 14 and 73. *Khulafā’* appears three times: twice in surah Al-A‘rāf (7): 69 and 74 and on a single occasion in surah Hūd (11): 57. The analysis of these verses will be carried out in two separate discussions, as mentioned above.

3.3.1 *Khalā’if*

The first plural form of the word *khalifah* to be considered is *khalā’if*, which al-Ṭabari defines as ‘to replace someone in charge to rule in a particular place’. This term appears four times and every single appearance indicates the meaning of the concept of *khilāfah*. The first one is found in surah Al-An‘ām: 165 (6: 165), which reads:

*وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلِیفَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَقَبَّلَ مِنْكُمْ فَوَاتَى قَبْلَ ذِينَ جِسَمٍ*  

It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

According to al-Ṭabari and al-Zamakhshari, this verse is particularly regarded as the reminder to the Prophet Muḥammad and his people that Allah is the one who has made

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them *khalifahs* on the earth. It is in His power to create human beings, as well as to destroy them, and confer power and responsibility on whoever He chooses. Without His consent, the changing of the *khalifah* will not take place. The appointment of the Prophet Muḥammad and his people to dwell on and rule the earth is the beginning of the *khilāfah* of the last prophet in this world. Therefore, Prophet Muḥammad’s followers take all the benefits of being the last ummah to hold the position as *khalīfah*; they inherit, and succeed all previous generations.

Ibn Kathir’s interpretation of this verse seems to be similar to those of al-Ṭabari and al-Zamakhshari in most ways, but he differs in two respects. Firstly, his approach to the concept of the *khilāfah* is in total contradiction to that of al-Ṭabari. It is evident that he does not see the *khilāfah* as specifically that of Prophet Muḥammad and his people but extends the notion to apply to human beings in general. The eligibility to be the *khalīfah* is open to every human being as long as he possesses the right qualifications and fulfils all the required conditions. In other words, appointment to the *khilāfah* is not necessarily limited to the Prophet Muḥammad or his people.

Secondly, Ibn Kathir tries to make his readers understand the precise meaning of this verse, for example by citing four other verses that may be interpreted similarly. In this way, the readers are led to examine and compare the interpretation of all five.

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36 Ibid, 422.
Al-Ṭabari is not so thorough in his comparisons, though he quotes one report from al-Suddi (d. 127/744) that delivers the meaning of this verse. On the other hand, al-Zamakhshari’s style of interpretation rarely makes use of these two methods and therefore it is very hard to find any parallels in his Qur’anic commentary.

The next two verses that contain the word khalā’if are found in surah Yūnus (10). The first one, which is the second appearance of the word khalā’if in the Qur’an, can be seen in verse 14 (10: 14), which reads:

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\text{فَلَمْ نَحْضَرُكُمْ كَأَنْكُمْ آُمَّةٌ مَّنْ دَعَاهُمْ لَنَتَطَوَّلَ
\]

Then We made you heirs in the land after them, to see how ye would behave!

As in their comments on the previous verse, there are also slight differences between al-Ṭabari’s and Ibn Kathir’s style of interpretation of this one. By contrast, al-Zamakhshari does not elaborate on this verse in detail, simply noting that khalā’if is a reference to the Prophet Muḥammad’s followers who succeed the previous generations. However, al-Ṭabari interprets it as referring to Allah’s power to appoint human beings as khalīfa (khalā’if). This time he ascribes to khalā’if a general meaning without specifically referring to any particular people or generation as he did regarding the previous verse. Nevertheless, the significance of this verse derives from the notion of the appointment of human beings as khalā’if and the process of succession from one generation to another. This replacement occurs because the

40 Al-Ṭabari, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fi Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān, 5: 422.
41 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshāf`an ʿaṣa’iq al-Tanzil, 2: 228.
42 Al-Ṭabari, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fi Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān, 6: 539.
previous generation has failed to follow the right rules and is unable to implement fundamental principles. Consequently, oppression and injustice arise within the community, and a new leadership is needed in order to put things right.

Ibn Kathir explains this verse in a very short and precise interpretation. Because many previous generations rejected the appointed prophets, another group of people came into existence and replaced them. As Ibn Kathir remarks, they were led by a new prophet, implying Muḥammad, who was sent as the khalīfah for this new generation. This people and their Prophet (Muḥammad) are considered by Ibn Kathir as those really referred to by the term khalā'if in this verse. God’s primary purpose in bringing this about is to evaluate the degree of their obedience to their khalīfah. If they fully obey and follow him in every right path, the purpose will be fulfilled and they will receive every blessing from Allah. But if they fail, they will deserve an appalling punishment.

The second verse of sūrah Yūnus (10), which is the third in the Qur’ān to contain the plural khalā'īf is found in verse 73 (10: 73). The verse reads:

They rejected him, but We delivered him, and those with him, in the Ark and We made them inherit (the earth), while We overwhelmed in the Flood those who rejected Our Signs, Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not)!.
According to al-Ṭabari, this verse concerns the Qur'anic narrative of the story of the prophet Noah and his people. The significant point, which is relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*, is the commandment to obey Allah and the messenger or, in other words, the *khilāfah* in this world. The example given in this verse shows how important it is for the people to obey and follow the *khilāfah*. There have been many examples in the Qur'an mentioning the severe punishment of unbelievers. Therefore, this verse is revealed and directed to Prophet Muhammad and his people explicitly to warn them not to follow this wrong path. In addition, other *khalifahs* will be appointed to replace the unbelievers, as through Allah's will Noah and those who survived in the ark replaced the people who refused to accept the message and were drowned.⁴⁴

In comparison with al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathir do not elaborate their interpretations of this verse. The former explains the meaning of the term *khālīf* very briefly,⁴⁵ while the latter gives a direct definition in a few words without explaining the story behind this revelation.⁴⁶ It is generally accepted that their lack of elaboration does not necessarily imply their rejection of al-Ṭabari’s commentary, but nor is it suggested that they fully accept and agree with al-Ṭabari’s point of view.

The fourth and last verse containing the word *khalīf* appears in surah Fāṭir (35): 39, which reads:

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⁴⁵ Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqqā‘iq al-Tanzīl, 2: 246. He connects *khālīf* to the followers in Noah’s ark who succeeded the drowned unbelievers.
He it is that has made you inheritors in the earth: if, then, any do reject (Allah), their rejection (works) against themselves: their rejection but adds to the odium for the Unbelievers in the sight of their Lord: their rejection but adds to (their own) undoing.

There is little to be added concerning this verse by al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari or even Ibn Kathir because it is the last verse of the four in terms of the Qur’anic order, and they have already discussed the interpretation of the term *khalā’if* in some detail in commenting on the first three verses. However, their brief explanations still imply the continuance of the *khilāfah* system. For example, al-Ṭabari mentions the *khilāfah* of the people who succeeded those of Ād and Thamūd and who took up the duty to rule. 47 Moreover, this system of replacement continues from one nation to another and from one period to another.

This interpretation is very similar to Ibn Kathir’s point of view. Another essential idea that he briefly mentions concerns Allah’s warning against disobedience. 48 It is not the first time in the Qur’an that Allah gives an example of predecessors who did not follow their *khilāfah*, in order to help later generations avoid His severe punishment. Nevertheless, human beings are fallible, and generation after generation continues to


disobey this commandment and those holding the office of khalifah continue to be replaced.

3.3.2 Khulafā’

Another plural form of khalifah is the term khulafā’. It appears three times in the Qur’an, twice in sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf and once in sūrat al-Naml. The first occurrence of this term is in sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf (7): 69, where the text reads:

Do ye wonder that there hath come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own People, to warn you? Call in remembrance that He made you inheritors after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Call in remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah: that so ye may prosper.49

This verse deals mainly with ‘salvation history’50 in which a certain motif recurs: God installs a group of people on earth (Noah’s); they go astray and refuse to heed the words of the messenger sent to them; consequently, Allah destroys them and replaces

50 There are numerous verses in the Qur’an that emphasise the salvation history of the earlier people. These stories, in general, relate to the concept of khilāfah by describing how the changing of peoples and their khulafā’ (khaliyahs) takes place. Historically, it occurs in the khilāfah of almost every prophet sent among human beings. See David Marshall, God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers (Richmond: Curzon, 1999).
them with other people. These substitutes and successors are called their *khalā‘if* or *khulafā‘*, as the people they succeed and replace have been destroyed.

In al-Ṭabari’s opinion, the term *khulafā‘* in this story refers to the people of Prophet Hüd (cĀd). They were elected to replace the people of Noah, who, according to the Qur’anic narration, refused to accept the message delivered to them by Allah. Considering another aspect, al-Ṭabari highlights the punishment that this people received as the result of their ignorance and rejection of the divine message. Allah mentions the story of this punishment with the purpose of reminding the next chosen people, cĀd, to comprehend and obey the message sent to them. Any refusal and disobedience will lead them to the same fate as their predecessor.

This detailed explanation is not found in al-Zamakhshari’s and Ibn Kathir’s Qur’anic commentaries because neither of them elaborate as much on this verse as al-Ṭabari does. They follow his interpretation regarding the meaning of the term *khulafā‘* only, where he refers to the *khilāfah* of cĀd (the people of Hüd). Ibn Kathir, however, concentrates on the interpretation of other aspects and seems to ignore al-Ṭabari’s discussion of the meaning of the term *khulafā‘*. Nevertheless, he notes one essential idea, that concerning the blessings and graces of Allah to the people of Hüd (cĀd), whom He has chosen to succeed the annihilated people of Noah.

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52 Ibid, 523.
The second verse that uses the term *khulafā’* occurs in the same sūrah as the first one, al-A’rāf (7): 74, where the text reads:

And remember how He made you inheritors after the 'Ad people and gave you habitations in the land: ye build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and carve out homes in the mountains; so bring to remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah, and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth.\(^{55}\)

If the first verse refers to the people of Hüd (‘Ad), verse 74 concerns the vicegerency of the prophet Sālih and of the next generation (Thamūd). The process of succession is narrated as being continuous from one generation to another. The main reason for these changes, as pointed out in the Qur’an, is the result of a people’s ignorance and disobedience to the messengers of Allah. Moreover, Allah has given various examples of the earlier people who had received appalling punishments, as a means to remind Sālih and his people (Thamūd) not to follow the same direction.

Al-Ṭabarî brings this understanding to his interpretation of this verse. The people of Prophet Sālih (Thamūd) were appointed as *khulafā’* as they were chosen from among mankind to replace and succeed the people of Hüd (‘Ad).\(^{56}\) This appointment is described as Allah’s true and real blessing; therefore, they should react in the right way

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and make every effort to perform this task successfully. Otherwise, they will face a situation similar to that of their predecessors and another chosen people will be appointed as their successors.

Surprisingly perhaps, al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathir give no explanation at all concerning the term *khulafā‘* in this verse. They may have thought that their explanations of surat al-A’rāf (7): 69 were sufficient, even though they devote only a few sentences to its elucidation. Another possibility is that they think the meaning of *khulafā‘* is easily understood from the ‘salvation story’ of the people of Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ which is narrated in numerous verses in this sūrah. Even so, al-Zamakhshari does interpret other phrases in this verse, and Ibn Kathir uses a similar method, as he ignores the interpretation of *khulafā‘*, but elaborates on the historical story of the people of Thamūd, which is fairly relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* but not so important as to warrant interpretation in detail.

The last verse that mentions the term *khulafā‘* appears in surat al-Naml (27): 62. The text reads:

أَمَّن يَسْمِعُ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَيَغْفِرُ لِذَٰلِكَ وَيَزِيدُهُم مَا كَانُوا يَجَادِلُونَ

Or, who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and who relieves its suffering, and makes you (mankind) inheritors of the earth?

(Can there be another) god besides Allah? Little it is that ye heed!

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Considering the style presented in this verse, it is clear that the inquiry and question method has been adopted. However, it is not used to explain the meaning of the term *khulafā’*, but to clarify the meaning of the first phrase, ‘Or, who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him...’. Al-Ṭabari spends little time interpreting the term *khulafā’*, but he asserts that the question or inquiry form of this verse is specifically directed to the people of Prophet Muḥammad. Hence, the term *khulafā’* implies the succession of Prophet Muḥammad's generation; a newly elected person has replaced all previous leaders. Al-Zamakhshari, however, considers *khulafā’* in a wider and general context that means the successors who inherit from earlier nations or the succession of rulership and kingship (*al-mulk*).

Ibn Kathir gives a quite lengthy interpretation of this verse but does not merely define the term *khulafā’*. A small part of his discussion, however, seems to be very useful to the interpretation of this term. Generally, he stresses that this verse refers to the changing process of the *khilāfah* among *khulafā’* (plural of *khalīfah*), from one generation to the next. His interpretation is very close to al-Ṭabari’s and al-Zamakhshari’s points of view. Moreover, he considers that the term *khulafā’* in this verse has a similar meaning to those found in surat al-An‘ām (6): 133 and 165 and, surat al-Baqarah (2): 30.

After examining the three verses that use the term *khulafā’*, we suggest that the significant point concerns the existence of a process of succession among human

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60 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshāf `an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzil, 3: 155.
beings. This process could be said to start with the appointment of Adam, but in the above three verses, *khulafā‘* refers to different addressees; Hūd, Šāliḥ and Muḥammad with their respective people. It then continues from one person to another, from one generation to another and from one period to another until it reaches the last descendants in this world, the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. In one respect, this interpretation seems to support the Sunnis’ perception of the dynastic *khilāfah*. Since all three commentators are of the opinion that the process does not stop at the end of Muḥammad’s appointment (*nubuwwah*), it could be that their view of the succession related to dynastic concerns of their own day, and particularly to the Ābbāsids, and that their opinion influenced their interpretation of the term *khulafā‘*. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether this was really their intention, considering that not even a single sentence exists which unequivocally refers to the dynastic succession of their own day.

### 3.4 The Interpretation of Some Other Derivative Forms of *Khalīfah*

Apart from the term *khalīfah*, there are a number of other terms that indicate the concept of *khilāfah* such as *yastakhlif*, *istikhlafa*, *ukhluf* and *yakhluf*. In some instances, the use of these terms provides a detailed and deep explanation of the basic concept of *khilāfah*. On the other hand, they sometimes refer to the general meaning only and are thus not very useful. The relevant verses to be examined will be divided according to the several derivative forms of the original term, *khalafa*. 
3.4.1 Yastakhlif and Istakhlafa

Another derivative form of the term khilafah is yastakhlif, which functions as a verb, the meaning of which in every instance, is 'to appoint a successor', 'to make someone an inheritor' or 'to succeed'. It appears in four different surahs of the Qur'an. The first occurrence is found in surat al-An'am (6): 133, where the text reads:

Thy Lord is Self-sufficient, Full of Mercy: if it were His Will, He could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom He will as your successors, even as He raised you up from the posterity of other people.

This verse obviously contains ideas pertaining to the concept of khilafah. Al-Tabari stresses that the power to create, to destroy or to replace the khilafah in this world belongs to Allah alone (the concept of sovereignty). He can choose anybody to hold the position of khilafah and can also choose to replace him with somebody else. Al-Tabari gives the example of the succession of Adam's descendants, where the khilafah transferred from one person to another because of the destruction they caused during their period of rule. Therefore, this verse acts as a reminder to the Prophet Muhammad and his generation that Allah might have reason to replace them with another creature. Their committing unacceptable and ruthless destruction would be the main cause. It should be emphasised that this is neither a mere possibility nor an idle threat, but is Allah's promise to make it a reality if this generation were to fail. This can be

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seen in the examples of the many previous generations that had been destroyed, as narrated in many Qur’anic verses and traditions of the Prophet. More significantly, it might be the case that al-Ṭabarî offers this explanation knowing what might be the political implications in his own period, that of the ʿAbbāsids, during which some khâlîfâhs had not ruled according to the ideal expectations and had judged according to their own self-interest, and dealing unjustly with the people.

Al-Zamakhshârî, in a similar way, interprets this verse to mean that it is Allah’s decision alone to replace the disobedient with the pious and faithful. The survivors of the flood (Noah’s companions) according to him, are to be classified as among the pious and faithful. Ibn Kathîr’s interpretation is much closer to al-Ṭabarî’s in that he highlights the power of Allah to replace the disobedient with the pious, who will submit in true loyalty to Him. In fact, this process has happened many times to previous generations. Therefore, this verse seems to be a reminder to the Prophet Muhammad and his people, given by Allah in order to prevent them from receiving the punishment suffered by the disobedient and disloyal generations.

The second verse containing this term occurs in sūrat al-‘Ārâf (7): 129, where the text reads:

63 Al-Zamakhshârî, Al-Kashshâf’an Ḥaqîq al-Tanzîl, 2: 52.
They said: "We have had (nothing but) trouble, both before and after thou camest to us." He said: "It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth; that so He may try you by your deeds".

The story of this verse is an extension of the first two verses that we have considered in the discussion concerning the term khulafā'. It narrates the story of Pharaoh (Firāun), Prophet Moses and his descendants, the Israelites. The Pharaoh at that time intended to kill every son born to the Israelites in order to prevent one of them from taking his place. Al-Ṭabārī points out that the term yastakhliṣ here refers to the people of Prophet Moses; they succeed Pharaoh after his destruction. Al-Ṭabārī does not elaborate this point, but he must have been aware that the Israelites did not succeed Pharaoh as rulers of Egypt. His meaning is probably that the khilāfah passed to the Israelites as a people or that it passed to Moses as the messenger of Allah.

Al-Zamakhshāri’s interpretation of this verse is very similar to al-Ṭabārī’s except that al-Ṭabārī quotes two traditions, both on the authority of Mujāhid (d. 104/721), to support his view. Nevertheless, there is no reason to discuss these traditions, since they are not used to interpret the term yastakhliṣ, but as a means to explain the initial phrase ‘They said; "We have had (nothing but), both before and after thou camest to us." .......’. Al-Zamakhshāri gives a fairly detailed interpretation of the text without citing any reports. Therefore, al-Ṭabārī’s commentary, in comparison to that of al-

65 Al-Ṭabārī, Jāmi` al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān, 6: 28-29. For a detailed information on the Qur’anic narratives of Pharaoh and the Israelites, see Marshall, God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers, 71-73 and 106.

Zamakhshari, is much more detailed and gives a deeper understanding of the meaning of *khilâfah*.

While both al-Ṭabari and al-Zamakhshari give some explanations of the term *yastakhlif* as used in this verse, nothing pertinent can be found in Ibn Kathîr's commentary. He interprets other phrases in this verse without any mention of the meaning of *khilâfah*, perhaps because he has already done so in regard to the previous two verses (7: 69 and 74) and thinks that it is not necessary to repeat the same explanation.

Another verse that contains the term *yastakhlif*, and an important one for this analysis is found in sûrah Hüd (11): 57, which reads:

> فِيْنَ تَعْلَوْاْ فَقُلْ أَنْبَأْتُكُم مَا أَرَأْيْتُ وَإِلَيْهِمْ رَحْمَةٌ وَيُخْلِفَ لَهُمْ رَيْسًا قَوْمًا

> ‘If ye turn away, I (at least) have conveyed the Message with which I was sent to you. My Lord will make another People to succeed you, and you will not harm Him in the least. For my Lord hath care and watch over all things”.

The story in this verse refers to the Prophet Hüd and his people; Allah warns them of the outcome of their disobedience and refusal to worship Him. Al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathîr describe *yastakhlif* as having the meaning of replacing Hüd’s people with another nation after Allah destroys them. This new people will do
their utmost to obey Him and carry out all His commands. All three commentators are generally agreed concerning this verse and there are no substantial differences between them.

The last verse containing the term *yastakhlf* appears in surat al-Nur (24): 55, whose text reads:

> وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَةِ لِتَمْتَمَّ نِعْمَتَهُمْ فِي
> الْأَرْضِ كَمَا أَعْطَى الْأَرْضَ لِلَّذِينَ مِن قِبْلَهُمْ وَلَيُكُونَ لَهُمْ دَيْنَهُمْ الَّذِي
> أَرْضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُكُونَ لَهُمْ مِن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ مَا كَانَ مِن دَيْنِهِمْ أَحَدًا مَّعَ دَيْنِهِمْ لا يَشَاءُ كُونَ بِهِ شَيَّاً وَمَن كَثِرَ مَن تَعَدَّى ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْقَادِمُونَ

Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion, the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me.' If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked.

The term appears twice in this verse, once in the form *yastakhlf* and another in the form *istikhlaqa*. All three exegetes provide a fairly long elaboration on this verse, perhaps because of the existence of two terms in one surah, which seems to call for an extended explanation. Nevertheless, they all agree that this verse refers to the Prophet Muḥammad and his people.

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Al-Ṭabarî explains that this verse is a promise from Allah to the people of Prophet Muhammad, especially to the believers and righteous people, that they will be the khalīfahs and succeed their predecessors. Moreover, he provides an example of a previous generation, the Israelites, from whom khalīfahs were chosen to replace the people before them. 68 Al-Zamakhshari, by contrast, interprets it in a more convincing way, as expressing Allah’s solemn promise to make the people of the Prophet Muhammad khalīfahs on this earth. In addition, he also points out the promise to make Islam prevail over all other religions. While al-Ṭabarî sees it as referring to Prophet Muhammad’s people in general, the indication of al-Zamakhshari’s commentary is that it is more specifically applied to the four rightly-guided Caliphs of the Prophet Muhammad’s people. This is apparent from his quotation of one hadīth of the Prophet, which gives the meaning that the period of the khilāfah will last for only thirty years. 69 This hadīth, however, is not mentioned in al-Ṭabarî’s commentary on this verse. Indirectly, this period of thirty years is taken to imply the period of the first four caliphs of Islam. If this report is accepted, whoever comes to power after them is not to be considered as khalīfah.

The acceptance of this hadīth inevitably affects the status of the later caliphatæ, particularly the Umayyads, ʿAbbāsids and Ottomans. Basically, their periods of rule cannot be regarded as true caliphatæ, like those of the Prophet and the other four caliphs, but must be seen as merely another form of monarchy. The rulers of the first of these two dynasties claimed the title of khalīfat Allāh (caliph of Allah), but if the

69 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshîf ʿan Ḥaqiq al-Tanzûl, 3: 73.
khilafah is restricted to some thirty years only, the usage of this title, after the caliphate of the four rightly-guided, seems to contradict the meaning of the hadith.⁷⁰ Although khalifat Allah was an official title of the Umayyads, Abbāsids and even of the third rightly-guided caliph, Uthmān, this title, as viewed by Crone and Hinds, was not commonly used for the purpose of individual reference and address to the caliph. In this situation, they normally adopted amīr al-muʾminīn (leader of the believers).⁷¹ Similarly, the majority of Shiʿī divisions also assumed the same title. For example, the Ismāʿīlis proclaimed ʿAli to have been khalifat Allah and the Fāṭimid dynasty was officially proclaimed khalifat Allah ʿala ʾl-ʾālāmin. In contradiction, the Zaydi Shiʿī has never been recorded of adopting the same title.⁷²

Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on this verse, in contradiction to that of al-Zamakhshari, is much closer to al-Ṭabari’s point of view. He also connects the appointment of the khilafah to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad without restricting it to the first four caliphs. Nonetheless, he gives a long description of the historical background of the periods in which the Prophet, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, Uthmān and ʿAlī were the khilafahs. His similarity with al-Zamakhshari lies in that, even though he does not specifically refer it to the khilafah of the first four, he quotes the same hadīth, describing the period of the khilafah as only thirty years.⁷³ After analysing the various interpretations of this verse, Sir Thomas Arnold apparently agreed with the interpretations of al-Ṭabari and Ibn Kathīr according to which the term refers in a general way to the people of Prophet Muḥammad and rejects its limitation to the four caliphs only (al-Zamakhshari’s view).

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⁷¹ Crone and Hinds, God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam, 11.
Arnold’s preference was based on the fact that nowhere in the Qur’an can any such limitation be found.\(^{74}\)

Another significant point concerns Ibn Kathîr’s citation of one hadîth, restricting the number of the earliest khalîfahs to only twelve people. It is surprising that this hadîth is never cited by the other two commentators. The explanation of this hadîth, according to Ibn Kathîr, is that the rule of the twelve khalîfahs was not necessarily to be continuous from one person to another, but they were rather chosen at random (except for the first four caliphs). Moreover, these twelve caliphs were selected only from among the Quraysh, which is considered one of the most respected tribes in the early Islamic community. Nonetheless, they are not the twelve imâm, as has been claimed by the Imâmiyyah Shi‘î.\(^{75}\)

Regarding the privilege of membership of the Quraysh as one of the qualifications to be khalîfah, the majority of Muslim scholars claim that this is due to the great number of reported sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad affirming the excellence of the Quraysh.\(^{76}\) While it is not our intention to dispute the authenticity of these utterances of the Prophet, it should be borne in mind that their privileges arose under specific circumstances and, therefore, they do not reflect their excellence at all times.

\(^{73}\) Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr al-Qur‘ân al-‘Azîm, 6: 2525.

\(^{74}\) Arnold, The Caliphate, 42-43.

\(^{75}\) Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr al-Qur‘ân al-‘Azîm, 6: 2525.

\(^{76}\) Some sayings of the Prophet that express the excellence of the Quraysh are, ‘The caliphate will remain among the Quraysh even if only two persons are left (on the earth)’. ‘People are subservient to the Quraysh; the Muslims among them being subservient to the Muslims among them and the disbelievers among the people being subservient to the disbelievers among them’. ‘Leadership should come from the Quraysh’. Quoted in Oyewale Imam, ‘Hereditary Succession’, 153-154 and 146.
Moreover, some other sayings of the Prophet opened the khilāfah to every Muslim, irrespective of his race or clan, which is more or less the Khārijite position. It is also recorded that the Prophet, during his expeditions or other journeys, appointed many different deputies without restricting these appointments to a particular race or tribe; and, it is claimed that the restriction of the khilāfah to only the Quraysh indicates tribal and racial favouritism and prejudice, which is totally contradictory to the teaching of Islam.

Considering the sayings of the Prophet and the above argument, it is apparent that these divisions of view arose as a result of the Arab cultural practice giving each tribe a different status. Some were considered to be above the others, which afforded them a greater opportunity. On the other hand, the lower-class tribes, realising that their chances of producing a khalīfah was very slim, attempted to use different sources, which usually indicated a general meaning. In addition, the existence of contradictions among the ḥadīths also contributed to this division, as each group usually selected the meaning closest to its own opinion.

77 The ḥadīth that allows other tribes or clans to hold the office of khilāfah is ‘Hear and obey even though your Amir be an Abyssinian slave...’. Quoted in Oyewale Imam, ‘Hereditary Succession’, 154 and 146. This ḥadīth provided the justification for the opinion of the Khārijites concerning appointment to the khilāfah. They believed that the Quraysh hold no special and exceptional status which would uniquely qualify them for the post. This opinion is, however, understandable for another reason: the majority of the Khārijites were non-Quraysh. Therefore, narrowing the selection of the khalīfah to the Quraysh alone would have greatly diminished the chances of appointing the caliph from their group.
3.4.2 Ukhluf and Yakhluf

The fourth term to appear in the Qur'an that offers some further interpretations of the meaning of the khilāfah, is ukhluf, which is a verb, derived from the root khalafa. This term occurs only once in the Qur'an, in surat al-A'rāf (7): 142; the text reads:

We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more): thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up): "Act for me amongst my people: do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief".

Regarding the term ukhlufni in this verse, both al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari give the meaning kun khalifati, or, in other words, 'be my deputy' (or 'representative'). Here we have a dialogue between Moses and Aaron, which takes place during the appointment of Aaron as Moses' deputy during his absence; Aaron is ordered to look after the affairs of his people. Giving a similar interpretation to those of his fellow exegetes, Ibn Kathir points out that Moses' appointment of Aaron serves as a reminder and warning that he should practise good deeds and avoid any disastrous actions.

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78 See Al-Tabari, Jāmī al-Bayān fī Ta'wil al-Qur'ān, 6: 49; Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzil, 2: 111.
The most significant point of this interpretation concerns the necessity of appointing another leader or person who will take charge of the office during the absence of the usual leader. It is compulsory in the Muslim community to have someone to take charge of its affairs at all times. The necessity of having a leader, even in a small group of three, is one of the basic principles underpinning the concept of *khilāfah*. A fuller discussion on the necessity of the *khilāfah* has already been presented in the first chapter.

Another derivative form of *khilāfah* is *yakhluf*. This particular term appears in surat al-Zukhruf: 60 (43: 60), which is the last verse found in ʿUthmān’s Qur’anic order that indicates the meaning of *khilāfah*. Here, however, it is used in the plural form, *yakhlufūn*, as the text reads:

And if it were Our Will, We could make angels from amongst you, succeeding each other on the earth.

Al-Ṭabarī remarks that this verse is Allah’s warning to the descendants of Adam that the angels might be appointed to replace them as *khilāfahs* on this earth. If this eventuality were to occur, their existence and role as the chosen and Adam’s successors would at last come to an end. This is very possible if Allah so wills it, ultimately the angels will be the beneficiary as their successors. 80 A similar interpretation can be found in al-Zamakhshari’s and Ibn Kathīr’s commentaries, except that al-Zamakhshari

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regards the warning in this verse as referring specifically to the Israelites, and not generally to the descendants of Adam, as interpreted previously by al-Ṭabarî.\(^8^1\)

Perhaps this verse has the deliberate purpose of reminding the descendants of Adam not to repeat the disastrous actions that occurred during the appointment of the jinn and iblîs. Whatever the reason, it is essential to admit the possibility of this becoming a reality, even though it is understood from several Qur’anic verses and traditions of the Prophet that human beings are the best of Allah’s creatures and the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad are the best among them.

In order to produce a clear interpretation of this verse, al-Ṭabarî cites two more verses that indicate a similar meaning: the first is sûrat al-Nisā’ (4): 133 and the second, which has been discussed earlier, is sûrat al-An‘âm (6): 133.\(^8^2\) The method of producing another verse to emphasise the meaning of the one under discussion is rarely found in al-Zamakhshari’s style of interpretation.\(^8^3\) Even, Ibn Kathir seldom uses this method of making the interpretation more effective.

Al-Ṭabarî also introduces five complete reports into his elaboration of the meaning of this verse. Every report indicates the possibility that the angels may replace human beings as the khalîfahs in this world and that, if so, they will succeed one another, as in


\(^8^2\) Al-Ṭabarî, Jâmî’ al-Bayân fi Ta’wil al-Qur’ân, 11: 204.

\(^8^3\) Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshâf`an Ḥaqā‘iq al-Tanzîl, 3: 494.
the process of succession among human beings. This method, very common in al-
Tabari, is again rarely found in al-Zamakhshari, but Ibn Kathir’s commentary often
makes use of it. On most occasions, however, he does not quote the report’s complete
original text, but points out its general meaning only.

3.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concluding remarks for this chapter will be placed at the end of the next (fourth)
chapter, thus combining the conclusions regarding the Sunni analyses of both the
khilafah- and imāmah-verses.

CHAPTER 4  CLASSICAL SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION
OF THE IMĀMAH AND ULŪ 'L-AMR-VERSES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Using the same methodology as in the previous discussion of the khilāfah-versed in Chapter Three, this chapter will deal with the analysis of the imāmah- and ulū 'l-amr-verses. The same three Sunni commentaries - those of al-Ṭabari, al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathīr - will be examined. The analysis is divided into two different sections: the first concentrates on the imāmah-verses, covering the singular and plural forms, while the second examines the two ulū 'l-amr-verses.

4.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM IMĀM AND ITS PLURAL FORM (A'IMMAH)

Having analysed those terms having the same root as khalīfah, the study will now concentrate on the analysis of a different root word, which is imām. In the Qur'an, imām and its plural a'immah appear on many different occasions, each appearance indicating a different meaning. In addition, the reference of these verses is addressed to different groups of people. The discussion will be confined to two forms of the term, the singular imām and the plural a'immah. The structure of the analysis is divided into two subsections; the first covers the analysis of the verses containing the singular imām and the second part examines the plural a'immah.
4.2.1 Imam

The term *imām*, which literally means leader, only appears twice in the Qur’an, and in each case it refers to a different group of people or audience. Nevertheless, it is important to see these verses in their context according to different commentaries. Even though the term itself does not literally have the meaning of *khalīfah*, it is quite reasonable to explore it in some depth, as it might be useful in order to understand the concept of *khalīfah* more fully.

The first instance occurs in surat al-Baqarah (2): 124, describing the appointment of Prophet Abraham as an *imām*, whose text reads:

And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: he said: "I will make thee an *imām* to the Nations." He pleaded: "And also (*imāms*) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers".

According to al-Tabari, the phrase ‘I will make thee an *imām* to the nations (literally peoples or humankind)’ means ‘Allah shall make Abraham an *imām* (leader) of those who shall come after him, from the people who have faith in Allah and His messengers; he shall be the first among them. Then they shall follow the guidance sent to him and follow the *sunnah* (way), which he practises through the command and
revealing of Allah. The leadership that Allah promises is not only addressed to Abraham's own people but also extends to the generations after him as long as they become true believers. On the other hand, al-Tabari asserts that this promise is not applicable to the people who practise evils even though they are descendants of Abraham.

Al-Zamakhshari seems to agree with al-Tabari's definition of this term since he defines it in the same way. Furthermore, this verse implies that a zālim (a sinful and evil-doing person) cannot be appointed as an imām. Besides being refused the position of imām, evildoers are also prohibited from witnessing testimony, delivering judgement, reporting hadîth and leading the congregational prayer. This shows how the appointment of a person to be a qualified imām involves a very strict and detailed selection process. Only a competent and qualified imām can manage to rule justly and avoid corruption and the shedding of blood.

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, it is necessary that at all times there should be an imām to represent the role of the Prophet. Consequently, he should perform the duties of the Prophet, such as guiding the people and showing them the way of goodness and prosperity in this world. Since he holds the highest position of public authority, regulating all aspects of people's lives, it is compulsory for him to ensure justice in the community, eliminate enmity between believers and, at the same

1 Al-Tabari, Jāmi' al-Bayān ʿan Taʿwīl al-Qurʾān, 1: 577.
2 Ibid, 577.
3 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshâjʿ an Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl, 1: 309.
time, alleviate oppression. Therefore, Allah promises that only those of the faithful will occupy the office of the *khilāfah*.

The promise to make only believers entitled to carry out the task is understood from the interpretation of the term *cahda* (promise), which reads:

He answered: “But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers.

In determining the precise reference of the term *cahda* (promise), al-Ṭabarî underlines some arguments between the commentators. Some scholars were of the opinion that it refers to *al-nubuwwah* (prophethood). Since unbelievers are not to be considered for the position of *imām*, it is obvious that prophethood is not within their reach. It further implies that the last prophet was indeed the last, and that no further prophets will arise even among the pious and righteous, because the prophetic mission came to an end with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. Devout and virtuous men will, however, lead and govern the people under the title *khalīfah* or *imām*. Al-Ṭabarî supports this view by citing a report narrated on the authority of al-Suddi (d. 127/744), who interprets *cahda* as referring to *al-nubuwwah*.⁴

Al-Ṭabarî also presents another definition, given by some ḥadīth reporters, who consider *cahda* as referring to *al-imāmah* (leadership or imāmate), which implies that the promise of leadership applies only to believers with a merciful attitude and clement personality. Brutal and inhumane people, on the other hand, are completely unacceptable as *imām*. This view is supported by the reports narrated on the authority of Mujāhid (d. 104/721) and ʿIkrimah (d.105/723), who defines *cahda* in this verse as

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referring to imāmah. Given this interpretation, it is obvious that the appointment to the khilāfah by Allah (or in this context, to the imāmah), is only applicable to qualified and capable people. Moreover, the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, from the very beginning, have already clarified the criteria and characteristics of the khilāfah and imām.

The third meaning, by contrast, relates to the followers of the imām rather than to the imām himself. In this regard, it is not obligatory for a Muslim to obey and follow a wicked or impious leader. Al-Ṭabari supports this definition with a report related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-88), which explains that the obedience to a leader is subject to his being obedient to Allah. Nevertheless, the term can also be connected to al-amān (peace, safety) and din Allāh (the religion of Allāh), views which are supported by the reports of Qatādah (d. 118/736), al-Rabiʿ and al-Dāhīkhāk (d. 105/723). With all these possible meanings of the term ʿahd, al-Ṭabari prefers the first two, which are concerned with al-nubuwwah and al-imāmah.

In offering the above interpretation, it is possible that al-Ṭabari was influenced by the reprehensible acts of the ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Muqtadir (295/908-320/932), which he himself witnessed. The period of al-Muqtadir was infamous; for its brutality, corruption and exploitation by the ruling power. For example, his extortion of taxes led to the amassing of huge fortunes by the political elite. Moreover, his court was

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5 Ibid, 578-579.
6 Ibid, 579.
7 Ibid, 579-580.
8 Ibid, 580.
wastefully extravagant and financially mismanaged, finally becoming bankrupt.\footnote{Marshall G. S. Hodgson, \textit{The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization}, I (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974): 493.} Although al-Ṭabarānī does not explicitly address the political corruption of his time, his interpretation can in part be read as a condemnation of this notorious figure.

Ibn Kathīr, in this regard, interprets the phrase which appoints Abraham as the \textit{imām} to mean that this appointment is the result of his success in performing the duty to promote good deeds and prevent prohibited actions.\footnote{Ibn Kathīr, \textit{Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿĀẓm}, 1: 382.} For that reason, Allah makes him the \textit{imām} of the people, whom they will follow and perceive as a role model in every aspect of their lives. This interpretation yields the same meaning as the first two, since Ibn Kathīr lived later than al-Ṭabarānī and al-Zamakhshārī, who have already used most of the \textit{ḥadīths} that he quotes in his commentary. Therefore, since he is in agreement with them, although he tries to define \textit{imām} in a slightly different way, the meaning is the same; that is, the \textit{imām} can only be appointed from a qualified, competent and hence limited group of people in order to secure the implementation of the \textit{sharīʿah} and, at the same time, to uphold the dignity of Islam itself.

If a \textit{zālim} (an evildoer) is not permitted to be a \textit{khalīfah} or \textit{imām}, as interpreted by both al-Ṭabarānī and al-Zamakhshārī, then what can be said about the position of \textit{fāsiq}\footnote{A \textit{fāsiq} is classified as a Muslim but disobeys Allah's commandments. He keeps doing evil deeds and calling others to do the same. In certain circumstances, \textit{fāsiq} is also defined as \textit{zālim}.} (a category of persistently sinful people). Are they allowed to hold the title? Or are they to be considered among those to whom Allah denies the post? This is answerable from
the exclusion of an evildoer from the ʿahd (promise) in the last phrase of this verse. According to al-Ṭabari, this term indicates that Allah prohibits the appointment of an unbeliever, including ʿālim and fāsiq, as imām. He also concurs with al-Zamakhshari’s point of view mentioned earlier, maintaining that to be a khalīfah or imām one has to possess certain qualities and characteristics; otherwise, he will not qualify for the position, since his primary duty is to uphold the sovereignty of Islam. The performance and attitude of the khalīfah himself crucially determine the first impression of the nature of Islam. If he fulfils all the criteria, and embodies the characteristics, of a good leader, his qualities and actions will win respect from other religions and help to present the true face of Islam. Therefore, the khalīfah or imām, in al-Ṭabari’s opinion, cannot be appointed from among the sinful and evildoers (zālimin).\(^{12}\)

After all, it is believed that the exclusion of a sinful and evildoer person from the khilāfah gives one clear indication and explanation. It is not necessary for them to commit the most serious sins in order to be disqualified, but persistent milder offences are sufficient grounds for their being rejected. Therefore, the prohibition of a sinful evildoer indicates that the same result applies to the fāsiq. In other words, how can they be fit to be a khalīfah or imām if they cannot protect society from brutality and evil? Their own actions may influence and lead other people in the wrong direction, although one of their duties is to put an end to sinful behaviour.

The refusal by these three commentators to accept the khilāfah of evildoers is supported by another prominent Qur’anic exegete, al-Jassās (d. 370/981), who strongly

\(^{12}\) Al-Ṭabari, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʿwil al-Qurʾān, 1: 577.
emphasised that an evildoer (in this context, fāsiq) should not be recognised as a ruler. Therefore, the community is not bound to obey his orders. However, examples from the history of the early Muslim dynasties, both the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids, show that opposition to this kind of ruler usually resulted in severe punishment and even execution. For example, Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) refused outright to accept a post offered first by the Umayyad officials and later by the ʿAbbāsids. He disobeyed on the ground that they were evil rulers, and his refusal of the latter incurred a heavy penalty of being imprisoned and tortured by caliph al-Manṣūr (136/754-158/775).

The second verse incorporating the term imām is found in sūrat al-Isrāʾ (17): 71. The text reads:

One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) 
imāms: those who are given their record in their right hand will read it 
(with pleasure) and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least.

In interpreting the term imām in this verse, al-Ṭabarī highlights three different opinions given by commentators. Firstly, it has the meaning of nabi (prophet) and the leaders who have been followed in this world. According to this view, Allah informs us in this verse that on the Day of Judgement, all people will be called together with their

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13 Ahmad, 'Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsīr', 12. 1: 90.
14 Ibid, 8: 115-116.
leaders. This interpretation is supported by reports related on the authority of Mujāhid and Qatādah, which narrate that men will be called in the hereafter together with their leaders, either good or bad, whom they have glorified and honoured in this world.15

Secondly, al-Ṭabarî considers the definition of the term as the kitāb al-ṣamal (record book) that records both the good and bad actions done during a person’s time on earth. This view is supported by reports related on the authority of Ibn āʿAbbās, al-Hasan al-Baṣrî (d. 110/728), Qatādah, al-Ḍāḥik and Abū ʿl-ʿAlīyah.16 The tenor of these reports is that the term imām means the kitāb al-ṣamal, which will be given to every individual on the Day of Judgement. Thirdly, the term indicates the meaning of kitāb (Holy book), those texts revealed by Allah to His messengers, such as the Torah, Zabūr (Psalms), Injīl (Gospels of the New Testament) and the Qurʾan. He supports this view with reports narrated on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Zayd and Mujāhid.17

Of these three possible interpretations of the term imām, al-Ṭabarî shows his preference for the first, the one that defines it as leader. He further claims that his choice is determined by his understanding of Arabic linguistic usage, where the term imām usually has the meaning of leader.18

Al-Zamakhsharî produces only two possible meanings of the term. Just like al-Ṭabarî, he interprets it either to give the meaning of nabi (prophet) or record book.19 However,
nowhere in his commentary is *imām* given the meaning of *kitāb* (Holy book), the third definition of the term according to al-Ṭabari’s commentary.

Ibn Kathir’s interpretation of the term is very similar to al-Ṭabari’s; he also produces the three possible meanings with support from various reports. In addition, he tries to extend the interpretation by comparing this verse to some other relevant Qur’anic verses. Nevertheless, he differs from al-Ṭabari as regards his preference for the meaning of the term. While al-Ṭabari favours the definition of *nabi* or leader, Ibn Kathir is inclined to accept *kitāb al-ʿamal* (record book). He claims that this choice is consistent with the meaning of two other verses, sūrah Yūnus (36): 12 and al-Kahf (18): 49.

4.2.2 The Plural (*Aʿimmah*)

*Aʿimmah*, the plural form of *imām*, appears in four verses. The first appearance can be found in sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ (21): 73, where the text reads:

> And We made them leaders, guiding (men) by Our Command, and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practise regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).

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21 Ibid, 2112.
The term *aʿimmah* in the above verse has the meaning of *ruʿasāʾ* (heads or leaders) of the believers. These leaders guide the people to obey Allah and practise good deeds. Both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr interpret the term in this way in their commentaries, but on this occasion Ibn Kathîr does not rely on the support of other Qur’anic verses, and his interpretation is neither as long nor as profound as al-Ṭabarî’s.²² By contrast, al-Zamakhshari is not at all concerned to interpret the meaning of *aʿimmah*.²³ Perhaps he considers that the meaning of the term in the context of the verse is clear enough not to need further elaboration. Whatever his reason might have been, the meaning of the term is obvious and there is no argument between al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr.

Perhaps more importantly, al-Ṭabarî sees the verse as referring specifically to the prophets Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as their names are mentioned in the previous verse.²⁴ Allah chooses them as the messengers who will guide the people to the right path and submission to Him. Their duty to perform this special task is included in Allah’s commands, which are passed down through the revelation that enjoins the encouragement of good actions and the prohibition of evil.

Two further verses that include the term *aʿimmah* occur in sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28). The first one occurs in verse 5, whose text reads:


And We wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed on the land, to make them leaders (in faith) and make them heirs,

The term is also found in verse 41 of the same surah, where the text reads:

And We made them (but) leaders inviting to the Fire; and on the Day of Judgment no help shall they find.

According to al-Ṭabari’s commentary, the term a’immah in verse 5 refers to the children of Israel. The story behind this verse is that of the inhumanity and cruelty of the Egyptian Pharaoh, who kills every single male child born in their community in order to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy that a man of the children of Israel would assume his kingship. As a result of his barbarity, Allah promises to appoint a’immah from among the people of Israel. In giving the exact interpretation of the term a’immah, al-Ṭabari inclines to the meanings of wuläh (leaders) and mulük (kings). In other words, Allah elects the people of Israel to rule in the place of Pharaoh. In addition to the authority to rule the community, they inherit everything that used to belong to Pharaoh. Al-Ṭabari’s analytical interpretation of the words a’immah and wārithūn does much to clarify the concept of Islamic leadership.

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25 Ibid, 10: 28. This verse is connected to the punishment narratives in the Qur’an. For additional discussion, see Marshall, God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers, 27-116.
Al-Zamakhshari, in the same way, starts his commentary on this verse with an account of the story of Pharaoh’s cruelty to the people of Israel. He then interprets the term *a'immah* to give the meaning of leaders who are in charge of both religious and social matters. In order to prove his point, he cites another three definitions that indicate a similar meaning, supporting each definition with an accurate and valid report. The first report is from Ibn 'Abbās, which defines *a'immah* as *qādah* (chiefs), whom people follow in good deeds only. The second defines the term as callers to the good deeds (*du`āh*), which is narrated in a report related on the authority of Mujāhid. The last definition gives the meaning of leaders (*wulāh*), which is supported by a report from Qatādah and is the most accurate from al-Zamakhshari’s point of view.

Ibn Kathir’s style of presenting this verse is rather different from al-Ṭabarî’s and al-Zamakhshari’s. In order to understand its meaning, he compares it with two other verses: from surat al-‘A`rāf (7): 137 and surat al-Shu‘arā’ (26): 59. Both indicate a similar meaning. Yet all three verses are interpreted in the same way: Ibn Kathir highlights the story of Pharaoh’s inhumanity to the people of Israel and neglects the definition of the term *a'immah*.

While surat al-Qasas (28): 5 is concerned with the children of Israel, verse 41 refers to the wicked leaders. Al-Ṭabarî points out that this verse, which pertains to the fate of Pharaoh and his committed followers are to be seen as a lesson and warning to the

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27 Ibid, 3: 165.
followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Allah condemns Pharaoh’s inhumanity: he is the leader of unbelievers, calling society to darkness and infidelity.\(^{29}\)

Al-Zamakhshari tries to elaborate the term in a more general way and give a deeper interpretation. He defines it similarly to al-Ṭabari, but he extends the meaning of the term: if the term *a‘immah* in the previous verse means the leaders of the truth, who invite to good deeds and thus to paradise, al-Zamakhshari is very confident that here it refers to the wicked leaders, who exhort society to commit actions leading to hellfire and darkness.\(^{30}\) In contrast to his two predecessors, Ibn Kathir interprets this verse in only a single sentence, which mostly concerns the qualities of those who are to be classified as wicked leaders.\(^{31}\)

The last verse that incorporates the term *a‘immah* is found in surat al-Sajdah (32): 24, whose text reads:

\[
\text{And We appointed, from among them, Leaders, giving guidance under Our Command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in Our Signs.}
\]

It is clear that the use of this term is linked with the story of Pharaoh and the people of Israel, which lies behind not only this verse but also the three verses discussed above. Therefore it would not be surprising if the interpretation of this verse were similar to 


that of surat al-Qasas (28): 5. For example, while al-Tabari believes that a'immah can either refer to good or wicked leaders, his inclination regarding this verse, is to accept the meaning of good leaders.\textsuperscript{32} The meaning of the verse is, then, that Allah has appointed many good leaders from among the people of Israel; they were chosen to guide people to the right path and invite them to practise good deeds. Furthermore, they were considered as role models by their followers.

There is a great deal of agreement between al-Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari in interpreting this verse in particular, and the a'immah-verses in general. The only difference, but not disagreement, lies in what they choose to emphasise. Sometimes the detail of al-Tabari's explanation cannot be found in al-Zamakhshari or Ibn Kathir, but in some other respects, al-Zamakhshari's or Ibn Kathir's interpretation reveals a wider and deeper understanding than al-Tabari's. For instance, al-Zamakhshari, elaborates on this verse by focusing on the roles of the a'immah themselves rather than on the definition of the term. Their roles, according to him, are to guide people, to invite them to submit to the religion of Allah and to bring them to the implementation of the sharfa in accordance with the holy book, the Torah, which was revealed to Moses.\textsuperscript{33}

In the same way, Ibn Kathir's interpretation is concerned with the leaders' roles: these are to guide people to the truth with guidance from Allah and to invite them to do good by practising right actions and preventing evils.\textsuperscript{34} So it is evident that their

\textsuperscript{32} Al-Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan 'an Tawil al-Qur'an, 10: 250.

\textsuperscript{33} Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqiq al-Tanzil, 3: 246.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, 6: 2775-2776.
interpretations are congruent and that almost no major disagreement occurs in their clarifications of the meaning of each verse.

4.3 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM ULÛ 'L-AMR

The language and style of Qur'anic verses vary according to the occasion and the meaning of the verses themselves. Sometimes, various indirect and apparently distinct terms are used, but the indication is the same as that of the direct term. The usage of indirect terms can be seen on numerous occasions in the Qur'an. One essential term related to the concept of khilâfah, is ulû 'l-amr, which consists of two words, ulû and al-amr. The word that has implications for the meaning of khilâfah is the second, al-amr. It is derived from the root amara, which means 'command' or 'the command of Allah'.

One straightforward form of amara, amîr, which definitely means leader, unfortunately occurs nowhere in the Qur'an. However, other derivative forms appear frequently, such as amara, ya'muru, amr, and the compound, ulû 'l-amr, which is the term under discussion in this section.

The notion of leadership is reflected in the term ulû 'l-amr (those charged with authority), which occurs twice in the Qur'an, both in surat al-Nisâ' (4): 59 and 83. Both verses are significant for the understanding of leadership since, for the first time, a very general meaning (those charged with authority) is indicated. The first appearance of this term occurs in 4: 59, which reads:

35 Ibn Manzûr, Lisân al-'Arab, 4: 26-27. See also Lane, Lexicon, 1. 1: 95-96.
O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination.

In this verse Allah stresses the concept of *amānah* (trust), which it is the obligation of all people to fulfil. Furthermore, Allah emphasises the term *ulū‘ l-amr* and thus the prerogatives of those appointed as leaders of the Muslims. Al-Ṭabarî cites different interpretations from various ḥadīths regarding the term *ulū‘ l-amr*, some of which indicate that it has the meaning *al-umarā‘* (leaders),36 but the usage of this term is too general to be of much use. However, there are many types of leader: for example leaders of expeditions and of administrations. These possibilities are mentioned in several ḥadīths, which are reported by Abū Hurayrah (d. 58/678), Ibn ʿAbbās, Layth, Ibn Zayd and al-Suddī (d. 127/744). None of these reports, however, give a direct interpretation of the meaning of the term *ulū‘ l-amr*. Nevertheless, the first one interprets it very clearly, giving the meaning *umarā‘*. Two reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, however, indicate that the verse specifically refers to ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥudhayfah, who was appointed as chief of the army by the Prophet on one of his expeditions. This opinion is also shared to some extent by Layth, who gives the term the meaning of *aṣḥāb al-sarāyā‘* (members of the expedition).37

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36 Plural of *amīr*, which originally means a military commander. Used for commander, ruler or prince.

Al-Ṭabarî also interprets the term as *ahl al-ʿilm wa ʿl-fiqh* (the learned and the jurists). These, therefore, are the people that must be consulted in any dispute. His interpretation might also indicate that the *khalīfah* should be elected from this group. Indeed, this view seems to accord with a principle of the Sunni doctrine regarding the concept of *khilīfah* that the *khalīfah* should be selected from among the *ahl al-ḥall wa ʿl-ʿaqd* (the people who loose and bind). Al-Ṭabarî, in offering this opinion, refers to reports narrated on the authority of Mujāhid, Ibn Abī Najib, Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿAṭṭāʾ b. Sāʿīb, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Abū ʿl-ʿAbbās al-Bari and Abū ʿl-ʿAffiyah. 38 Yet, another group holds the view that *ulū ʿl-amr* refers to *ṣaḥāba Muḥammad* (the Companions of the Prophet). This interpretation is supported by a report on the authority of Mujāhid. 39 A report from ʿIkrimah, on the other hand, regards *ulū ʿl-amr* as referring specifically to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar only, 40 the first two caliphs after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. This interpretation is, of course, unacceptable to al-Ṭabarî as it entails the rejection of all other caliphs.

Of the several possible interpretations provided above, al-Ṭabarî seems to be inclined to the view of those who interpret *ulū ʿl-amr* as *al-umarāʾ* and *al-wulūḥ* (military commanders and leaders). He argues that this interpretation is in accordance with the ḥadīth of the Prophet narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, who reported that the Prophet had said:

> There will come to you leaders who are good and bad, the good will command the good deeds, while the wicked will enjoin the evil deeds.

38 Ibid, 151-152.
39 Ibid, 152.
40 Ibid, 153.
You must obey them if they are on the right path. And follow them, if they do good, because the reward is for them and for you, but if they act wickedly, the punishment is for them alone.\textsuperscript{41}

In another \textit{haddith} reported on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh, the Prophet has said:

A Muslim has to listen to and obey (his ruler) whether he likes it or not as long as his order involves not one in disobedience (to Allah), but if an act of disobedience (to Allah) is imposed, one should not listen to it.\textsuperscript{42}

From the above and other related \textit{haddiths}, al-Ṭabari concludes that the obedience of a Muslim to his fellow Muslim is deserved only when this is in the cause of Allah and His messengers. Therefore, obedience and loyalty to a leader is compulsory as long as he obeys Allah and the Prophet, and rules the community according to Islamic \textit{sharī'ah}.

Thus al-Ṭabari's favoured interpretation suggests that the appointed ruler or leader is not necessarily the most knowledgeable person in the community. The reason for this argument is quite clear: \textit{ulūl 'l-amr}, his preferred view, has the meaning of a military leader rather than a scholarly individual learned in various branches of Islamic knowledge. However, it may be that he gives \textit{umarāʾ} and \textit{wulāḥ} a broader definition than is usual. In other words, it is desirable that the \textit{ulūl 'l-amr} should possess not only qualities of military leadership but should also be righteous, pious and knowledgeable in religious matters.


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 153.
The question arises whether al-Tabari restricts his interpretation only to umarā', wulāh or another similar definition, or whether the term ulū 'l-amr, in a wider context, includes the meaning of caliph or imām as the authority vested by the community. Most probably what al-Tabari intends here is to note the most suitable and accurate interpretation of the term, which in one way indicates a limited meaning, while recognising that it may also have the meaning of caliph or imām. This can be seen by referring to various hadīths mentioned in his commentary, which are mostly acceptable and are clearly interpreted to give such a meaning.

A Shāfi‘i scholar, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) interprets the order to obey God, His Messenger and those in authority, as commanded in this verse, to mean ‘you should obey God and the prophets and your amīrs’. It means that the obligation of obedience to the caliph, whether good or bad, is incumbent upon all Muslims because it is Allah’s will to give him kingship and the divine light (farr-i izādi). This is in total contradiction to al-Tabari’s understanding. However, Lambton points out that this difference arises from al-Ghazālī’s adherence to Sasanian tradition, which draws most of its main inspiration from Persian cultural and social aspects rather than from the original Islamic teaching.

Al-Zamakhshari, in his interpretation of the term ulū 'l-amr, agrees with al-Tabari’s point of view, as he considers that it has the meaning of umarā’ al-haqq (the true and pious leaders or rulers). These kinds of leaders, in all situations, are responsible for

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44 Ibid, 51.
guiding the people to submit to Allah. Moreover, they should not only concern themselves with the material fulfilment of their people, but also their spiritual needs, so that a balance can be established in their worldly life.

However, al-Zamakhsharī notes one hadith, which is reported on the authority of 5 Abd al-Malik, which gives the meaning of umarā' al-sarāyā (leaders of a military expedition). He also, however, mentions its meaning ulamā' (those learned in religious knowledge), who take the responsibility of teaching Islam to the community, promoting good actions and preventing all sorts of evils. Combining these three possible meanings, Hamid Enayat states that al-Zamakhsharī’s concern is that those eligible to be ulū 'l-amr should have good characteristics and the required qualifications. These criteria are usually possessed by the ulamā', to whom al-Zamakhsharī refers as one possible definition of the term.

Commenting on al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse, Mazher-ud-Din Siddiqi, a modern analyst on the Mu'tazilites, asserts that his preferred view (umarā' al-sarāyā) was greatly influenced by the Mu'tazilites’ political theory of obedience, which encourages Muslims, if they have sufficient means, not only to fight to uphold justice but also to resort to armed conflict for the purpose of removing injustice. If we take this theory into account, then according to al-Zamakhsharī, the commandment contained in this verse to obey the rulers does not necessarily signify absolute obedience, since the rulers have been enjoined to discharge their trusts faithfully and observe strict justice in

46 Ibid, 535.
deciding matters. If they fail to perform their obligations, they automatically lose the qualities that bring them within the meaning of the term *ulū' l-amr* (those charged with authority). Moreover, a leader’s failure to turn to God and His Prophet for guidance in solving their differences with the people is also considered another reason for permitting disobedience.\(^{49}\)

Ibn Kathir’s interpretation of the term *ulū' l-amr* is basically similar to those of al-Ṭabarî and al-Zamakhshari. He also mentions the same *ḥadīths* as those cited by al-Ṭabarî, while noting a few mentioned by al-Zamakhshari. These *ḥadīths* are related on the authority of Ibn cAbbās, cAbd Allah Ibn 'Umar (d.73/693), Abū Hurayrah, and al-Suddī.\(^{50}\) Nevertheless, there are some *ḥadīths* not mentioned by al-Ṭabarî, which Ibn Kathir uses as valid and authentic references, showing that he does not totally rely on al-Ṭabarî’s commentary in making his own and that he is attempting to enlarge and widen the debate by quoting a variety of *ḥadīths* as authentic references.

Ibn Kathir is not much concerned with detailed differences of interpretation, focusing rather on explaining the general meaning of *ulū' l-amr*. However, he does consider various opinions, mostly derived from *ḥadīths* such as those narrated by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Imām Aḥmad and Abū Dā’ud (d. 275/888-9). In other words, he does not try to indicate clearly its specific meaning as al-Ṭabarî does, but provides a general understanding of what kinds of people are to be regarded as *ulū' l-amr*. The only argument that he brings forward is concerned with the interpretation of the term as *ahl*


\(^{49}\) Siddiqi, ‘Some Aspects of the Mu’tazili Interpretation of the Qur’an’, 2. 1: 115.

al-fiqh wa 'l-dīn and 'ulamā' (the jurists and those learned in religious knowledge).\(^{51}\)

Whereas al-Ṭabarî points out various possible meanings and al-Zamakhsharî tries to elaborate the characteristics of \(\text{ulū l'amr}\), Ibn Kathîr, asserts that the real meaning is much more general and cannot be stated definitively; but according to numerous hadîths, the most suitable and acceptable meaning might be the learned people, or those who have a deep understanding in various areas of Islamic knowledge.

While they may disagree on minor matters, Ibn Kathîr and the other two exegetes concur on the required characteristics of \(\text{ulū l'amr}\). A leader (whose more global title is \(\text{khalīfah}\) or \(\text{imām}\)) must, in any circumstances, promote good deeds and strive to eradicate any evil actions, starting with himself as the model for the Muslim community. The community must obey and give their loyalty to him as long as he does not stray from the right path. But if he should cease to obey God’s commandment, they must not follow him, as there are several hadîths that mention this situation, including one which is reported on the authority of Abû Hurayrah.\(^{52}\)

The Sunni interpretations of this verse seem to indicate that each commentator has his own approach and method, but it is obvious that they agree with each other’s interpretation and explanation. The only difference lies in their use of different hadîths to support their view, but whichever hadîths are used, their interpretations remain compatible. Sometimes al-Ṭabarî gives his own preference, which is more specific than those of the other two. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether any general interpretation provided by Ibn Kathîr indicates rejection of a specific one.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 957.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 958.
The second appearance of the term *ulû 'l-amr*, which is related to the concept of *khilâfah*, can also be found in surat al-Nisâ' (4): 83. The verse reads:

> When there comes to them some matter touching (public) safety or fear, they divulge it. If they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them (direct). Were it not for the Grace and Mercy of Allah unto you, all but a few of you would have followed Satan.

The significant point of this verse is seen in the phrase ‘...if they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them,...’. Al-Ṭabarî, in the context of this verse, provides four definitions of *ulû 'l-amr*; referring to the religious scholars (*'ulamâ*), the learned in religion and thought (*al-fiqh fî 'l-dîn wa 'l-'aqî*), the knowledgeable (*al-`ilm*) and the leaders of war (*wulûh fî 'l-'arb*). It seems that he offers the same possible definitions regarding this verse as expounded in his previous discussion of al-Nisâ’ (4): 59. In presenting these various definitions, al-Ṭabarî mentions a variety of reports narrated on the authority of Qatâdah, Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), Abû 'l-'Alîyâh and Ibn Zayd (d. 181/798).53 Whichever definition suits the context of this verse, it still indicates the meaning of those authorised to lead in the community. Regarding a different aspect, al-Ṭabarî underlines some significant roles of *ulû 'l-amr* in the Muslim community. They are considered to be the third most

53 Al-Ṭabarî, Jâmi‘ al-Bayân 'an Ta‘wîl al-Qur‘ân, 4: 184
fundamental source to be consulted, after the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, in the case of any question or dispute arising. Also any news, good or bad, should be reported to them before all others because of their knowledge, learning and judgement.

Al-Zamakhshari interprets this verse in the same way by suggesting that any doubtful matter should first be referred to the authorised person. A similar explanation is found in Ibn Kathir’s commentary, but he also cites several reports that emphasise the characteristics of the munafiqûn, the hypocrites who spread news deliberately to harm the people. Therefore his interpretation of this verse emphasises the need to cautiously treat any news brought by the munafiqûn, who spread news, particularly bad news, for the purpose of establishing chaos and dispute in the community, without examining its accuracy. Another important point, which is particularly relevant to the concept of khilâfah, concerns the crucial functions and roles of a leader of the community, whose members depend very much on him regarding almost every aspect of their lives.

Moreover, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the authority in ruling the state, implementing the sharî'ah and making decisions has been vested in 'ulû l-amr, who must be consulted whenever an important decision is to be taken, whether it concerns religious or social matters. Considering all these interpretations, it is obvious that 'ulû l-amr in this verse indicates the person who holds the position of ruler or who, in other words, is known as khilâfah.

54 Al-Zamakhshari, Al-Kashshâf' an Haqîq al-Tanzîl, 1: 547.
4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Sunnis' analysis of the relevant khilāfah-verses, covering the terms khalīfah, imām and ulū ʾl-amr, allows us to draw some interesting conclusions. The three commentators' interpretations are generally consistent with the Sunni theory of the khilāfah, and do not seek to question the power of the dynastic rulers of their time. According to Sunni principle, the khalīfah replaces and takes over the duties and responsibilities of the previous one. These commentators all subscribe to this view, as seen in the interpretation of surah al-Baqarah (2): 30, and apparently regard the supreme ruler (sultān al-aʿzām) as a legitimate khalīfah. By adopting this definition, the Sunni commentators indirectly support the hereditary succession practised by their own dynastic rulers and seek to perpetuate the unbroken line of succession.

The nature of the Sunni discussion of the khilāfah is basically concerned with the features and characteristics of the khalīfah himself. This principle appears to be an important point in the scholars' interpretation because two characteristics - to seek the truth and practise justice - are frequently mentioned. This can be seen in the Sunni interpretation of surah Sad (38): 26, in which both features are essential to the khalīfah and more importantly to the wider society. Mutual understanding and the practice of truth and justice are seen as essential to a peaceful and united Muslim ummah, which is the main objective of the institution of the khilāfah. However, this goal is only achievable through the implementation of the sharīʿah, as has been emphasised by many scholars of jurisprudence such as al-Māwardī and Ibn Taymiyyah (as discussed in the sections on the necessity and functions of the khilāfah). This matter will be further developed in the general conclusion.
The Sunni commentators, despite their attempts to maintain the line of hereditary succession and avoid its rupture, are of the opinion that evil and brutality should not be imposed by the khalifah. Their view is seen in the interpretation of surah al-Baqarah (2): 30, which excludes evildoers from the imamah. Thus these commentators are firm in their opposition to oppressive and evil acts committed by the khalifah. However, their interpretations make no attempt to undermine the Sunni conception of the khilafah because nowhere do they mention the obligation to depose and replace the evil ruler.

On the other hand, in the analysis of the Qur’anic narrative-verses (the interpretation of the khalif and khulafar verses), these three Sunni commentators emphasise the changing nature of the process of the khilafah, which is due to the khalfahs’ failure to perform the duties entrusted to them. But their interpretations do not draw on historical examples in order to comment on the weaknesses and crimes of their own rulers. For example, as we noted earlier in the section dealing with the biography of al-Tabari (section 2.1 in chapter two), he lived under the regime of the ‘Abbāsid, al-Muqtadir, who was notorious for his brutality and evil acts. Yet his interpretation, as well as those of his two successors, seems not to depart from the Sunni theory: the evil khalifah, though he may be opposed, cannot be deposed. The Sunni commentators’ reason for holding to this principle is based on the hadith concerning tyranny and the sayings of the Sunni jurists, as has been discussed in chapter one (the necessity of the khilafah).

There is sometimes a difference of emphasis among the Sunni commentators. The discussion of the limitation of the khilafah to the four rightly-guided caliphs is based on the hadith of the Prophet (the hadith that limits the khilafah to thirty years and states that authority after this period would be based on mulk (kingship)). This theory, which
influences al-Zamakhshari's and Ibn Kathîr's interpretations of sûrah al-Nûr (24): 55 (Sunni analyses of the term yastakhliý), entails a negative view of the later khalîfahs, especially the Umayyads, since, according to the hadîth, after the death of the fourth caliph, ālî, no ruler would be justified in adopting the title of khalîfah. It is not known why al-Ṭabarî makes no mention of the above hadîth. Another example of the difference between the Sunni scholars' commentaries can be found in Ibn Kathîr's quotation of a hadîth, not cited by the other two commentators, restricting the khilāfah to twelve people. Although, in Ibn Kathîr's view, they are not the twelve Imâmiyyah Shî'î imâms, the mere citation of this hadîth, from the Sunni perspective, might give rise to misinterpretation, because its general meaning is very close to the Shî'ís' notion of the twelve imâms, which we will discuss in chapter six.

Although all three Sunni Qur'anic commentators are in agreement on the nature of the khilāfah, they do not offer an extensive commentary on its meaning. This may be because the term was not controversial in Sunni circles. It may be that the three commentators took the meaning of the term so much for granted that they did not comment on it. For example, when they examine the singular form of the term, they sometimes neglect it and concentrate on other words or expressions in the same verse. This sometimes leads to a lack of clarity in their discussion of the main term.

It is also apparent that the main method used by al-Ṭabarî, al-Zamakshari and Ibn Kathîr for commentary and interpretation is that of philological analysis. However, since the root khalafa is very rich and has a large number of meanings, they are faced with a daunting challenge. In the event, they accept different meanings of khalafa and hence come to different conclusions. For instance, al-Ṭabarî's argument rests partly on
the meaning of jā'īl, which inevitably affects the meaning of khalīfah: either ‘to succeed’ or ‘to replace’. But it can be argued that the Sunni commentators’ divergences of opinion are usually due to the richness of the root khalīfa and to the methods they adopt rather than to any substantial disagreement.

As the khilāfah is closely related to the establishment of truth and justice through the implementation of the sharī'ah and the relations between the khalīfah and the community, the notion of obedience is very important. The exhortation to obedience is essentially laid down in the Sunni interpretation of surah al-Nisā’ (4): 59 and 83 (the analysis of ṣūrah ul-ʿamr-verses in chapter four). The Sunni commentators are in agreement on the demand to give obedience to ulū ʿl-amr, but differ in defining the meaning of the term. Military commanders and ʿulamā’ are two very different possibilities indicated by the phrase ‘those charged with authority’. According to Ibn Kathīr, the term refers to the ʿulamā’, whereas the other two commentators prefer the meaning of military commanders. This difference of opinion reflects the divergent view to be found among the Sunnis. It is likely that al-Ṭabarî and al-Zamakhsharî viewed the military virtues as particularly important, given the political reality of their time, and would have approved the khalīfahs’ main concern: to preserve, defend and extend their power and territories.

In conclusion, it can be argued that a number of classical Sunni scholars - these three Qur’anic commentators in particular and also scholars in other fields, such as al-Māwardî (d. 450/1058), al-Ghazālî (d. 505/1111) and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) - attempted to legitimise both the hereditary caliphate and the usurpation of power by military dynasties through their scholarly interpretations and their promulgation of
certain political theories. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that their efforts were, in large part, an attempt to palliate the evil effects of a situation they saw no hope of changing. What is indisputable is that the influence of these theories has far outlived the circumstances that produced them. This influence continues to affect the political attitudes of Sunni Muslims, although it is now diminishing.
CHAPTER 5  THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *KHALIFA*-VERSES IN THE CLASSICAL SHI'Í COMMENTARIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will follow the same procedure as the previous chapter except that the analysis will concentrate on the Shi'i Qur'anic commentators. In order to specify the discussion, two famous exegetes, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi, have been chosen. The main reason for this choice is that both commentaries are considered major references among the Shi'īs, particularly the followers of the Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'ashariyyah (the Twelver). Moreover, al-Ṭūsī lived and worked between two of the Sunni commentators examined in this study, al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhshari. Thus, it is very important to discover whether there are any significant agreements and differences between them. Al-Ṭabarsi has been chosen because, besides being an eminent Shi'i commentator, he was born in the same year as al-Zamakhshari, and therefore provides a very good comparison between the Sunnis and the Shi'īs.

The main objective of the analysis is to highlight the Shi'i view of the Qur'anic statements concerning the concept of *khilāfa*. At the same time, the study also tries to discover any differences of interpretation between the Shi'i commentators and the reasons that might lie behind them. In addition, any disagreement with the Sunni interpretations will also be pointed out.
The analytical structure of this chapter is very similar to that of the discussion of the Sunni interpretations in the previous two chapters. The relevant verses are therefore divided between two chapters. This chapter, the fifth, will examine those verses that contain *khalīfah* and its other forms, while the next, the sixth, will analyse the *imāmah* and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses. This method is used for the sake of clear organisation and sound structure. Moreover, it will facilitate the reader’s understanding of the discussion of every term and at the same time will clarify any distinction of the Imāmiyyah Shi`ī ideas from those of the Sunnis. Since the full Arabic text and translation of the verses has been presented in the previous two chapters (the Sunni interpretations), it is not considered necessary to repeat the text in this chapter.

**5.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM **KHALĪFAH**

Any analysis of the Qur`anic scripture from the Shi`ī point of view might be expected to reveal very strong disagreements and detailed arguments with their counterparts the Sunnis. However, it is worth noting, before discussing the verses relevant to the concept of *imāmah*, that one of the early causes of dispute between them was due to the argument raised by the Shi`īs over the validity of the 6th Uthmānic Codex. While the Sunnis have fully accepted and referred to this version, the Shi`īs, particularly the Imāmiyyah, have refused to accept this version. They believe that the fourth caliph,
All, owned the original and completed version, which was allegedly three times longer than the present text.¹

The concept of the *khilāfah*, which is regarded as the office of a Muslim ruler, has been a topic of scholastic argument among both sects and individuals. It is connected with some basic principles that have been debated by the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Shīʿīs. After thoroughly examining the Sunni interpretations of the concept in the previous two chapters, we are now in a position to grasp not only the similarities and differences among the Shīʿīs but also, perhaps more significantly between them and the Sunnis.

A very concise summary of the concept of the *imānah*, as a basic guideline, has been presented by Ade Shitu-Agbetola, referring to al-Ṭabarsi’s point of view. He defines the position of a caliph as that of a judge who, with God’s authorisation, manages the affairs of people. It involves the calling to one Supreme God, the maintenance of justice and the teaching of the religion of Islam.²

¹ It has been noted in Goldziher’s discussion of the ‘Uthmānic Codex, revised by Eliash, that many verses which supported the Shīʿīs’ claims had been omitted and the original order of the sūrahs had been altered. Their original text had been lost with the disappearance of the Twelfth *imām* and, until his return, they are required to follow the ‘Uthmānic text. Most of their claims, however, particularly those supporting their concept of *imānah*, are derived from the omitted verses, which are not found in the ‘Uthmānic Qurʾān. A detailed discussion of this matter can be seen in Joseph Eliash, ‘The Shiʿīte Qurʾān: A Reconsideration of Goldziher’s Interpretation’, *Arabica* 16 (1969): 15-24. A further discussion can also be seen in Etan Kohlberg, ‘Some Notes on the Imāmi Attitude to the Qurʾān’, in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented to R. Walzer*, eds. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani and Y. Brown (Oxford: Cassirer, 1972): 209-224. For a brief discussion of this argument, see, B. Todd Lawson, ‘Note For the Study of a ‘Shiʿi Qurʾān’’, *Journal of Semitic Studies (JSS)*, 36. 2 (1991): 279-281.

² According to Shitu-Egbetola, the *khilāfah* is referred to by three different titles. Firstly, he is a caliph in conformity with his appointment as successor to the previous authority. Secondly, he is *amīr al-
Adopting the same structure as that of the Sunni commentaries, we find that the term *khalīfah* first occurs in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30. Before going directly to the interpretation of the term, it is very important to consider the literal definition of the word *ja‘il*. Like the Sunnis, al-Ṭūsī believes that it can either give the meaning of *fā‘il* (doing, acting, performing some activities) or *khāliq* (creating). Both definitions, however, according to him, are identical and therefore, either one can be used in the context of this verse without affecting its meaning. Al-Ṭabarṣī, on the other hand, mentions only one possible definition of the word *ja‘il*, which is *khāliq*.

Regarding the general meaning of the term *khalīfah*, al-Ṭūsī interprets it as ‘to succeed or replace someone in authority and take his place.’ He remarks that this verse has a similar meaning to another verse, sūrah Yūnus (10): 14. According to this interpretation, the elected person is called a *khalīfah* because he replaces the one before him and takes on his responsibilities. More specifically, al-Ṭūsī interprets this verse as referring to the *khilāfah* of Adam and his descendants, basing his view on several

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reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ḥasan al- Başrī and Ibn Masʿūd. An almost identical explanation is given by al-Ṭabarsī in interpreting the meaning of this verse. He also uses the reports cited in al-Ṭūsī to support his opinion. Ironically, the Sunni commentators also use the same reports, which were narrated on the same authorities, in justifying the meaning of khalīfah in this verse. Thus, the idea that khalīfah refers not only to Adam but also to any person among his descendants, who is charged with taking on the responsibility, is accepted by Shiʿī and Sunni alike.

In response to the question whom or what kind of creature Adam succeeded, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī provide a very clear explanation. Again, both of them use the same report as the Sunnis, narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, emphasising that Adam is believed to have succeeded the jinn after they had spread corruption on the earth and shed blood among themselves. Nevertheless, both commentators mention one group who claim that Adam and his descendants succeeded the angels, and not the jinn as claimed by Ibn ʿAbbās, because the angels inhabited the earth before Adam. Despite this apparent contradiction, which neither approve, the main concern of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī regarding this verse is to highlight the process of unbroken succession, which started with the appointment of Adam and has ever since applied to his descendants. Moreover, the acceptance of the Prophet Muḥammad as the last prophet to be identified as the khalīfah of Allah does not indicate that this process came to an end with his death. It continues through the khilāfah of non-prophets, who are identified as

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6 Ibid, 131.
7 Al-Ṭabarsī, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 106.
the *khalīfahs* of the Messenger of Allah, the title preferred by the first non-prophet caliph, Abū Bakr.

The history of the Muslim dynasties, however, shows that many early Muslim rulers, the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids in particular, believed their appointments represented a continuation of the *khillāfah* from the Prophet and the first four rightly guided caliphs. Although one *hadīth* of the Prophet mentioned that the *khillāfah* would last for only thirty years, the period of the first four caliphs, they maintained that they were continuing the duty of the Prophet and so deserved to be known as *khalīfat Allāh*, the title of the Prophet and the four caliphs. The Shiʿis, despite using a different title, *imām*, had a similar perception except that their main concern was the right to the *imāmah* of the *ahl-al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet), particularly the descendants of ʿAli. In supporting this argument, the Imāmiyyah Shiʿis, for example, regarded their *imāms* as *khalafāʾ Allāh fi arḍīhi* (caliphs of Allah on His earth) and the Ismāʿilis claimed ʿAli as *khalīfat Allāh* (the caliph of Allah).⁹

One question arises of importance to this analysis concerning the possibility of Adam’s descendants being *khalīfah*. Is the *khillāfah* limited to a particular group, those divinely elected to be prophets after the prophet Adam, or does it signify every descendant of Adam who succeeds to the office, even though he is not a prophet? This argument, however, is not controversially debated, and in any case it is apparently resolved by the reports of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ḥasan al-BASHR and Ibn Masʿūd, which al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī use as deliberately referring the *khillāfah* not just to Adam and other prophets, but also to

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any person among his descendants that takes his place. Their interpretation suggests that they generally acknowledge and accept the inclusion of non-prophet rulers in the meaning of *khālīfah* in this verse.

Having said that, the appointment of non-prophet rulers, according to the Shi‘ī view, is bound by a special condition. It can only be accomplished by divine designation through the Prophet or through the previous *imām*. It is therefore believed, by reference to the *ḥadīth* of Ghadir Khumm, that the appointment of ʿAlī had followed this procedure. While claiming the authenticity of their *imāms*, they deny that an *imām* can achieve the office through public election, which was the method of appointment of Abū Bakr, since they believe that the people have neither the authority to choose their *imām* nor to depose him.

Concerning the angels’ question ‘Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?’, al-Ṭūsī points out that it is asked out of astonishment, wonderment and the simple desire for an explanation. This view is very similar to the Sunni interpretation, which stresses that the angels certainly have no intention of disobeying Allah, but rather wish to ascertain the benefit of and secret motive behind the appointment of this *khālīfah*. Furthermore, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī insist that the reference to the corrupt and the shedders of blood cannot be to either the prophets or

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the infallible imāms. Only those descendants of Adam who are not appointed to the khilāfah are considered to be capable of performing such inhumane and evil actions.\textsuperscript{13}

There is a crucial doctrinal difference between the Shiʿis and the Sunnis with regard to this issue. The Sunnis do not concern themselves with the sinlessness or otherwise of the imāms. They do not consider them incapable of sin, but nor do they accuse them of intentionally becoming involved in corruption and bloodshed. Their view seems to be that the imāms, unlike the prophets, are not infallible, since they have never been proven in the Qurʾān, hadīth or any other sources to be so. The Shiʿi interpretation, however, denies that the imāms can be guilty of sinful actions, probably with the purpose of emphasising one of the principles of the concept of imāmah, the doctrine of infallibility (ʿiṣmah).\textsuperscript{14} According to this doctrine, an imām must be free from all error and sin, either intentional or unintentional, during his life. Moreover, the imām’s position is regarded as the same as that of the Prophet. Thus the infallibility of the Prophet prefigures and reflects the infallibility of the imām.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 134; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 107.

\textsuperscript{14} According to Shiʿi belief, the imām is a perfect man (al-insān al-kāmil), whose appointment is based on divine decree and is restricted to the members of the Prophet’s household (his daughter Fāṭimah, and the twelve imāms). Therefore, their appointment, which is gifted with spiritual kingship, is construed as the guardianship of genesis (al-wilāyāt al-takwini), similarly to those of the prophets. In other words, their imāms are free from committing sin. For a study on the Shiʿi concept of imāmah, see ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭābātābāʾī, Shīʿa, trans. S. H. Nasr, (Qom, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 1989): 174-189; Henry Corbin, ‘The Meaning of the Imām for Shiʿi Spirituality’, in Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought and Spirituality, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988): 167-187.

\textsuperscript{15} Al-Muzaffar, The Faith of Shiʿa Islam, 32.
Regarding the second verse, surah Sad (38): 26, al-Tusi and al-Tabarsi define the meaning of the term khalifah as mudabbir (administrator), who inherits responsibility for the affairs of the people from the previous administrator. According to their interpretation, when Allah appointed David to perform the prophetic role (nubuwwah) in administering the affairs of the Israelites, He also simultaneously appointed him as the khalifah. This process can also be applied to the non-prophet administrators who came after David and particularly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, since the khilafah of non-prophets began immediately after that event. Nevertheless, their appointment is only to the khilafah, not to prophethood (nubuwwah), which is restricted to divinely selected individuals (such as the Prophet). The implication of this view seems to be in accord with their interpretation of the previous verse and with the interpretation provided by a Sunni commentator, Ibn Kathir. Since the word mudabbir (administrator) has a very general and wide-ranging meaning, it can be applied to various situations and conditions, as is suggested by the interpretation given by al-Tusi and al-Tabarsi.

Two important functions of the imam are also mentioned in this verse, which are to judge and rule the community in the right way (with justice) and to avoid any involvement in evil actions. As the importance of these duties is clear from the phrase 'so judge thou between men in Truth (and justice): nor follow thou lusts (of thy...'

16 Al-Tusi, Al-Tabyin fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, 8: 556; Al-Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayin fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, 8: 274.

17 For a detailed analysis of this verse from Ibn Kathir's viewpoint, particularly outlining his preferred interpretation, refer to the Sunni discussion of the khalifah-verses in chapter three. Alternatively, see Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'A'lim, 7: 3010-3011.
heart)' it is not difficult for both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī to comment on it. It is also
worth noting that these two obligations are also emphasised in the Sunnis’
interpretation. In other words, there is agreement between the Shiʿis and the Sunnis on
the matter of the basic roles and functions of the appointed *imām*.

5.3 The Plural (*Khalāʾif* and *Khulafāʾ*)

As with the discussion presented in the chapter on the Sunnis’ interpretations, analysis
of two plural forms of *khalīfah*, *khalāʾif* and *khulafāʾ*, as seen from the Shiʿi
perspective, is now divided into two sections. The first covers the *khalāʾif*-verses; the
second examines the interpretation of the *khulafāʾ*-verses. Every verse that contains
these two plural forms will be examined.

5.3.1 *Khalāʾif*

In interpreting the first verse containing the term *khalāʾif*, surat al-Anʿām (6): 165, al-
Ṭūsī produces three possible meanings. The first interpretation, which he, al-Ṭabarṣī
and even one Sunni commentator, Ibn Kathir, prefer, is regarded as having the meaning
of continuous succession among human beings from one generation to another. Both
al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī support this view by quoting reports narrated on the authority of
al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabṣīrī and al-Suddī. These emphasise that the later *khalīfah* takes his
predecessor's place because the latter's period of rule has ended. Moreover, this process of succession will continue to take place and therefore many khalifahs (khalif'if) will succeed and be replaced. This process will not stop until the Day of Judgement, when the last khalifah to hold the office will have no successor.

Giving a second possible interpretation, al-Ṭūsī quotes the opinion of one group that the term khalif'if in this verse refers to the succession of Adam and his descendants after the jinn, who were appointed before Adam's appointment as khalifah. Al-Ṭūsī also notes another possible meaning, that khalif'if refers to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad, who have been chosen by Allah to succeed all previous peoples. This interpretation is based on the assertion that they (the people of the Prophet) are led by the most perfect khalifah and that Allah has helped them and given them victory over all other creatures on this earth.

Of the three interpretations offered by al-Ṭūsī, the third, which narrows the reference to the Prophet Muḥammad's descendants, is the one that the Sunnis, especially al-Ṭabari and al-Zamakhshari, believe to be the most suitable. Al-Ṭūsī, however, refuses to accept the last two interpretations as appropriate and so indirectly rejects the Sunnis' preference. The same view is held by al-Ṭabarsi, who does not mention the second interpretation, and, although he includes the third meaning, it seems to be merely for the sake of showing that more than one is possible. He endorses the first interpretation without further discussion and seems unwilling to accept any other view.

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18 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, 4: 338; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majma' al-Bayān, 4: 164.
19 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, 4: 338.
The term *khalēf* in surah Yūnus (10): 14, from al-Ṭabarsi’s point of view, refers to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad, whom Allah appoints to succeed the previous generation.\(^1\) He further emphasises that the process of this appointment is subject to strict conditions and requirements. Moreover, theirs is not an easy task, since they are entrusted with heavy duties and responsibilities. They may choose either to successfully perform it by obeying all Allah’s commands or to ignorantly abandon it. However, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi point out that whichever path they choose, Allah will be the judge of the actions: their faith and obedience will bring all benefits and rewards in both this world and the Hereafter, but a terrible punishment will await them if they choose the evil way. In addition, Allah reminds them that He will destroy them, just as He did the previous generations, if they persist in their disobedience.\(^2\) Then a new *imām* from the next generation will be appointed to face similar responsibilities. It is clearly expected that this newly elected *imām* will manage to perform the task, otherwise another person will replace him.

In contrast to the previous verse, the general meaning of surah Yūnus (10): 73 emphasises the fate of the unbelievers, who eventually receive Allah’s punishment. In terms of historical reference, this verse highlights the story of the people of Noah, who reject the message revealed by their prophet. Moreover, they claim that he brings a false message in order to throw them into chaos and disputation. As with verse 14, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi are in agreement in interpreting this verse. They state that some of the believers in Noah’s message, said to be eighty souls, were chosen to be the *khalēf*


to replace the drowned unbelievers. Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi also quote al-Balkhi's view (d. 194/810) that there were ruʿāsāʾ (leaders), but not khalāʾif, among these saved people. It is clear, however, that the use of a different term, ruʿāsāʾ instead of khalāʾif, is just a matter of substituting one term for another without changing the original meaning of the verse.

Regarding the fate of the drowned unbelievers, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi highlight another significant point, which concerns the awful consequences of unfaithfulness to Allah and failure to obey the khalīfah. With regard to this verse, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi emphasise the way in which these ignorant people met their punishment, which is described as one of the most horrible ways of being destroyed, that of being drowned in a flood of water. This would have been avoided if they had believed and accepted the messages delivered by Noah.

In the last khalīfah-verse, sûrah Fāṭir (35): 39, the interpretation of both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi is somewhat different from that of the Sunni commentators, even though all refer to the same report from Qatādah. The Shiʿī commentators interpret it to mean that the appointment of the khalīfah may take place in a society of the unbelievers, and that the succession from one generation to another may continue for many decades. The Sunnis, however, emphasise the succession of various groups of people in general, as

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25 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 8: 434; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 8: 189.
shown by previous examples such as the people of ČĀd and Thamūd, without mentioning the society of the unbelievers.

In offering this interpretation, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi may intend to refer to the Sunni rulers of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty, in whose time they lived in fear. Al-Ṭūsī himself, for instance, experienced the dangers of living under an evil overlord when his house was burned down by the Sunni Seljuk ruler, who had taken Baghdad from the Shīʿī Buyid in 447/1055.26 Since many Shīʿī scholars and adherents were brutally oppressed by some ʿAbbāsid khulafāʾ, the possibility of succession occurring in an unbelieving society was an idea based on traumatic personal experience.

5.3.2 Khulafāʾ

The first occurrence of the term khulafāʾ appears in surat al-ʾArāf (7): 69. The Shīʿī and even the Sunni commentators provide only brief interpretations of this verse. Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi discuss the appointment of a new generation, that of Prophet Hūd and his people, to be the khulafāʾ after the destruction of Noah’s people.27 Although they are very fortunate and privileged in this appointment, their selection is subject to the successful performance of certain tasks. Otherwise it is possible that they will meet the same doom as the people of Noah. This explanation is short because the two Shīʿī commentators and also the Sunnis probably consider that the literal meaning of this

26 McAuliffe, Qur’anic Christians:, 48.
verse is clear enough not to need any further elaboration, and that the analysis of some earlier verses, which has discussed the terms *khalífah* and *khalâ'if*, has already provided an adequate explanation.

The second occurrence, which is found in verse 74 of sûrat al-A`râf (7), emphasises the same kind of succession, but with reference to a different group of people. If the previous verse concerns the replacement of the people of Noah, this one refers to the people of the prophet Sâlih, whom Allah appoints to succeed the cAd. Both al-Ṭūsî and al-Ṭabarî briefly note this interpretation in their commentaries and further elaborate that these people should accept it as one of the greatest blessings received from Allah.28 The significant point regarding the appointment of Sâlih, and which has been emphasised in many earlier verses, concerns the cAd’s failure to obey Allah’s commandment and their continuously practising evil actions, even though they have received many warnings and reminders instructing them to desist.

Regarding the last *khulafâ’*-verse, sûrat al-Naml (27): 62, no view or explanation can be found that might make either al-Ṭūsî’s or al-Ṭabarî’s interpretation substantially different to those of the Sunnis. They apparently agree with the Sunnis’ opinion of this verse, that it is a reminder to the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants that only Allah has absolute power to act and create.29 Thus, the supremacy of His power is applied to the appointment of the Prophet and his descendants as the *khulafâ’*,

replacing the previous generation because of its disobedience and unfaithfulness.

The analysis of these three khulafā'-verses as interpreted in the two Shi'i commentaries indicates several important results. First of all, it is clear that the process of succession or khilāfah is continuous; it did not end with the death of the last prophet, but it will continue until the last day of this world. Secondly, whenever one particular generation is removed from the office of khilāfah, another group, who are expected to fulfil their responsibilities, will be appointed. Finally, there is only one reason for these substitutions: the previous generation's disobedience and failure to perform their duty.

5.4 The Interpretation of Some Other Forms of the Term Khilafah

There are some other forms, derived from the same root word 'khalafa', that give rise to significant interpretations of the concept of khilāfah (imāmah). Terms such as yastakhlif, istakhlafa, ukhluf and yakhluf are occasionally found in the Qur'an and, as their analysis will contribute to the study, every verse in which they appear will be discussed.

5.4.1 Yastakhlif and Istakhlafa

The same four verses as were examined in the Sunni discussion, containing the terms yastakhlif and istakhlafa, will be analysed in this section. The first verse, surat al-Anām (6): 133, generally highlights the absolute power (sovereignty) of Allah over
His creatures. According to al-Ṭūsī's interpretation, this absolute power includes the ability to replace any creature by destroying them and appointing a newly selected creature. Furthermore, he shows that many previous examples illustrate this process, which culminates with the people of the last prophet, Muḥammad.\(^{30}\) Al-Ṭabaršī also produces this kind of interpretation, but he elaborates at greater length than al-Ṭūsī, suggesting that this verse is a reminder to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad that this situation may well happen again. It depends on Allah's will and, if He wishes it, a similar circumstance will occur, either through the appointment of another *khalīfah* of the same kind or the appointment of a new creature, just as the *jinn* were succeeded by Adam.\(^{31}\) However, this will not occur for no discernible reason. In other words, the changing of *khulāfā‘*, as seen in many previous examples, is always the result of disobedience, unfaithfulness and failure to implement Allah's command.

These additional remarks offered by al-Ṭabaršī, reminding the ruling authorities of the possibility of being deposed as a result of their oppressive brutality and evil actions, may be read as similar to the strictures of his Shī‘ī predecessor and even the Sunni commentators. They also suggest his dissatisfaction with the kind of rule exercised by the *khalīfahs* of that particular period, particularly the Sunnīs, who governed according to their own interests. Given the circumstances, in which he interpreted this verse, he would have had to disguise his anger towards the Sunnī caliphate and therefore makes no direct reference to the Sunni rulers.


Regarding the interpretation of surat al-A°räf (7): 129, Allah again demonstrates His absolute power by destroying the wicked and replacing them with a good and obedient nation. As time passes, however, this new nation will sooner or later act in the same way as the one that was destroyed, resulting in their role being taken by another group of people. This is what al-Ţūsī mainly tries to emphasise when interpreting this verse, as he cites the story of Pharaoh and his followers, who were destroyed by Allah in order to make way for the people of the prophet Moses. In order to support this interpretation, he quotes Abū ˙Alī al-Fārisi’s opinion that the people of Moses were appointed as successors in the land of Egypt (Miṣr). 32 Al-Ţabarši’s interpretation is not as detailed as that provided by his predecessor, but its meaning is clearly similar to that of al-Ţūsī’s since nowhere does he express his disagreement. 33

The view of al-Ţūsī discussed above, which seems to sanction the overthrowing of an evil ruler and the appointing of a replacement by reference to the example of Pharaoh and his people, is important in that it shows his rejection of the Sunni authorities. It suggests that al-Ţūsī is symbolically equating Allah’s appointment of Moses and his people to replace the annihilated Pharaoh and his forces with the plight of the Shiites under their Sunni rulers, the Seljuks in particular, who took Baghdad in 447/1055 and freed the caliph from the supremacy of the Shi‘i Buyid dynasty (334/945-447/1055). Subsequently, civil disorder between the Sunnis and the Shiites erupted and many Shiites were killed by the new caliphate. 34 In addition, as we have seen, al-Ţūsī’s own house

was burned, forcing him to leave Baghdad. In order to avoid persecution, he might have resorted to symbolism, to the example of Pharaoh and his people, rather than risk mentioning current rulers when discussing Allah’s punishment of evil and oppression. This use of symbolism appears to be closely linked with the method used by al-Ṭabarsi in his interpretation of the previous verse.

The use of symbolism to indicate opposition to the ruling authorities seems to be very common among oppressed groups. The majority of the Shiʿīs were indeed oppressed by the Sunni authorities. Except during the period when the Shiʿī Buyids were in control in Baghdad (408/1055), the Shiʿīs lived in fear and had to make every effort to avoid Sunni persecution. Another example of this use of symbolism may be seen in the way that critics of the Shah before the Iranian Revolution of 1979 referred to the khilāfah of Yazid, the second Umayyad caliph, who was accused by the Shiʿīs of seizing power illegally from Ḥusayn, rather than attacking the Shah directly. Although the reason for resorting to symbolism is to avoid persecution, this is not always successful. Despite their use of this method, which was expected to protect them from the Shah’s punishment, Khomeini and another fourteen clerics were arrested in Qom, Mashhad and Shiraz as a result of his sermon, delivered on 2nd June 1963, which alluded to the Shah as the ‘Yazid’ of his time.35

In the next verse, sūrah Hüd (11): 57, the main theme concerns the series of parables and stories of the ancient nations narrated by the Qurʾan. Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi produce an interpretation of this verse similar to that of the previous one. The only

35 Halm, Shiism, 123.
difference is that this verse, containing the term *yastakhlif*, specifically refers to the people of Hüd, while the previous one pertains to the people of Moses. Al-Ṭūsī defines the nature of succession (*istikhlāf*) in this verse by the way Allah appoints one person to replace another due to the latter’s failure to perform the task required by his office, which results in the selection of another *khalifah* to complete it.\(^{36}\)

Al-Ṭabarsi’s interpretation has an emphasis similar to that of his predecessor; in presenting the interpretation of the term *yastakhlif* in this verse, he briefly highlights the reason for succession (*istikhlāf*) and the duty of a new *khalifah*. The main reason for this replacement, according to al-Ṭabarsi, is the disobedience of the deposed *khalifah*.\(^{37}\) As a result of this infidelity, Allah appoints another *khalifah* who will promote His sovereignty and obey all His commands.

The series of parables and stories of the ancient nations continues in the interpretation of *sūrat al-Nūr* (24): 55, where two relevant terms appear in a single verse. Al-Ṭūsī interprets the first succession-term, *yastakhlif*, in this *sūrah* as referring to a typical form of succession applying to the early Companions of the Prophet and those who practise good deeds. In other words, it is Allah’s promise to award the right of succession to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad in general as long as they promote the commandments of Allah. Moreover, their obedience will bring them great benefit, since they will take possession not just of the lands of the Arabs but also of the lands of non-Arab unbelievers.\(^{38}\)


Al-Ṭūsī interprets the second term, istakhlafa, as meaning the succession of the ancient examples, with particular reference to the people of Israel in the land of Shām (Syria) after the abolition of al-jabābirah (a kind of sovereignty exercised by tyrants).39 Presenting a variety of interpretations, al-Ṭūsī also quotes the opinion of al-Jubah’ī (d. 303/915) who considers that this term (istakhlafa) relates to the period of two prophets, David and Solomon; but al-Ṭūsī refrains from explicitly approving it. A very similar interpretation is found in al-Ṭabarisi’s commentary, but he uses a different reference, that of Muqatil, in clarifying this meaning.40

In addition, al-Ṭūsī brings forward another argument by al-Jubah’ī, who deduces that the term yastakhlif implies that the khilāfah includes only the first four rightly guided khulafā'. In discussing this term from the Sunni viewpoint, al-Zamakhshari interprets this term in the same way, but the rest of the Sunnis, al-Ṭabarisi and Ibn Kathir in particular, do not accept this opinion. Despite being a Shi’i, al-Ṭūsī also rejects al-Zamakhshari’s view because, according to his conviction, the term cannot be defined as the imārah and khilāfah of these four caliphs, but rather has the usual, more general, meaning. In support of his argument, he quotes four verses: 35: 39, 7: 29, 6: 133 and 25: 62.41

Although al-Ṭūsī dismisses the notion that this verse refers to the first four caliphs, perhaps due to the Shi’i doctrinal principle that ‘Ali should have been appointed after the Prophet’s death, it seems that he and later generations of Shi’i commentators are

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39 Ibid, 455.
40 Al-Ṭabarisi, Majma’ al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an, 7: 212.
prepared to mention an opinion which connects the term *khalifah* to all four caliphs instead of ʿAli alone. On the other hand, the majority of Shiʿi proponents, including the Imāmi Shiʿi, do not accept that *khilāfah* may apply to the first three, whose validity they deny and, are known to have cursed Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.42

Regarding another aspect, al-Ṭūsī denies that the interpretation of al-Jubbāʿi has been unanimously approved by the majority of hadith reporters. For instance, he states that Mujāhid interprets it as meaning the people of Muḥammad (ummah Muḥammad) and even Ibn ʿAbbās and some others produce a similar definition. In addition, the term is also interpreted as the Mahdī, who is claimed to have descended from the family of the Prophet Muḥammad, without restriction to ʿAli’s descendants. Nevertheless, the report from al-ʿAyyāshi transmitted on the authority of ʿAli, which al-Ṭūsī mentions in his commentary of this verse, has been understood by the Shiʿis, especially the Imāmiyyah to indicate that the Mahdī is further narrowed to a descendant of ʿAli only.43 In fact, the belief in the return of the Mahdī (raʾfah) is a controversial doctrine even among the mainstream Shiʿis. According to this belief, the messianic reappearance of the Mahdī will take place at the end of the world.

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43 Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al- Qurʿān*, 7: 457. The return of the Mahdī or the Messianic tendency (raʾfah) is one of the Shiʿi doctrines. However, the Shiʿis, which are divided into many divisions, have argued over the matter of who is the real Mahdī. For the Imāmiyyah Ithna ʿashariyyah Shiʿis, the Mahdī will be the twelfth imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who disappeared in 260/873-4, returning. A small group of Shiʿis, the Nawūsiyyah, named after their leader, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Nawūs, refused to believe in the death of the sixth imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and awaited his reappearance as the Mahdī. The Ismāʿilī Shiʿis, however, believed in the return of their seventh imām, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿil, since Ismāʿil b. Jaʿfar to them was the sixth imām, See Halm, *Shiism*, 38. See also Farhad Daftary, ‘The Earliest Ismāʿilis’, *Arabica*, 38 (1991): 219-221 and W. Madelung, ‘Shiʿa’, *EI2*, 9 (1997): 423.
A variety of interpretations are also offered by al-Tabarsi in his commentary on this verse. Unlike al-Tusi, he does not specify which opinion he is most inclined to accept, but emphasises Allah's promise to make the believers successors to the previous generations. He does give considerable space to the view that the Mahdi is the person referred to in this verse.† Perhaps, as a Shi‘i, he cannot bring himself to reject this interpretation. Although it is not clear which interpretation he prefers, nowhere does he disagree with his predecessor.

Considering all the above opinions, al-Tusi seems to provide a more satisfactory interpretation and one much closer to the Sunni interpretations. There are clear reasons for this, such as the uncertainty of the commentators as to the exact meaning and his presentation of various closely related verses in order to prove that the term has a general rather than a specific meaning. Therefore, it seems reasonable to agree with al-Tusi's interpretation that yastakhlif in this verse has the meaning of succession generally rather than referring to any particular group or person, as claimed by some commentators.

5.4.2 Ukhluf

The term ukhluf in surat al-A‘raf (7): 142 implies a quite different type of khilafah, which is delegation or deputisation. According to al-Tusi and al-Tabarsi, the general reference of this verse is to the prophet Moses' request to his brother Aaron to be his deputy while he is away meeting Allah; this responsibility is to be temporary-on his

return, Moses will resume this duty himself.\textsuperscript{45} Since Moses has been appointed as khalifah to the nation and even to Aaron, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi believe that it is not possible for the latter to request the same thing. This form of delegation during the absence of the appointed khalifah reflects one of the Shi`ī doctrines of imāmah, which permits the imāmah to be assumed by the deputy imām (imāmat al-mafdūl) in the presence of the appointed one, as long as he accepts and agrees with the arrangement.

Another significant point concerns the position and status of imāmah, which is definitely separate from and lower than the category of prophethood (nubuwwah). In this case, however, khilāfah is included in the category of nubuwwah because both Moses and Aaron have already been appointed as prophets before their appointment as khalifah. In other words, their appointments indicate both nubuwwah and khilāfah. This circumstance is not possible in the case of non-prophet khulafā’ since their appointment is restricted to the status of khalifah of the people.\textsuperscript{46}

5.4.3 Yakhluf

The general interpretation of the term yakhlufūn in surat al-Zukhruf (43): 60 is, in one aspect, very much like that of surah 6: 133, where Allah’s omnipotence is the main subject. According to al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi, Allah’s intention in this verse is to

\textsuperscript{45} Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsir al-Qur’ān, 4: 532; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majma’ al-Bayān fi Tafsir al-Qur’ān, 4: 269.
\textsuperscript{46} Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsir al-Qur’ān, 4: 532; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majma’ al-Bayān fi Tafsir al-Qur’ān, 4: 269.
emphasise His power and right to appoint a new generation from among similar creatures or even from among quite different creatures in order to replace those who have proved sinful and unfaithful. In this regard, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī agree that Allah gives a warning and reminder concerning the possibility that He will put an end to the human succession and appoint the angels as their successors. Moreover, this might come to pass if human beings do not maintain the purity of their role as khalifahs and instead persistently follow the example of their evil predecessors, and it is very simple for Allah to make this warning a reality because He has already done so on many previous occasions. 47

If these evil circumstances do occur, it seems that another type of creature, the angels, will be trusted to assume and maintain the duty of the khalifah. 48 This suggests that the status of the person to be khalifah is not the most important criterion, but rather obedience, piety and faithfulness are considered to be the principal characteristics of the khalifah. This opinion has much in common with another significant perception of the khilāfah, which is closely related to the Khārijite view: since obedience and piety are far more important than the status of the person to be appointed as khalifah, it is possible that a lower-class person who possesses those qualities may take on the duty,

48 Many Sunni and Shi‘i scholars have argued over the question whether the angels are superior to the prophets. According to some Sunni scholars, like al-Bayḍāwī, the prophets are far superior to the angels. However, the majority of the Mu‘tazilites, including al-Zamakhshāri, believe in the superiority of the angels. Although al-Zamakhshāri was a Mu‘tazilite, his view does not represent the view of that group as a whole because others assert that only the sinless angels are considered more excellent than the prophets, whereas those angels who commit even the slightest sin, such as Hārūt and Mārūt, are inferior to the prophets. See Lutpi Ibrahim, ‘The Questions of the Superiority of Angels and Prophets between az-Zamakhshāri and al-Bayḍāwī’, Arabica, 28 (1981): 65-66.
if they can fulfil their responsibilities better than a person of higher class. Although this view would be unlikely to be endorsed by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi, since the Shiʿis propose that an imām can only be chosen from a certain group of people - the family of ṬAli - their interpretation may be seen as unintentionally supporting the Khārijites.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The conclusion of this chapter will be placed at the end of the next (sixth) chapter. Since both fifth and sixth chapters concern the analysis of the concepts of khilāfah and imāmah by the same two individuals, combining their conclusions into one section seems well suited to the propose of the study. It is hoped that some significant conclusions will be reached, particularly those deriving from a comparison between the Shiʿi and Sunni interpretations.
6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the previous chapter's focus on the Shi'i interpretation of the concept of khilafah. The scope of the discussion covers the verses containing the terms imam and ulū 'l-amr. Other related terms such as mulk, wali and sultan however, will not be examined, since their inclusion would make the study too long. Nevertheless, some verses containing these terms are occasionally mentioned, particularly when presenting the interpretation of the khilafah, imamah or ulū 'l-amr-verses. This chapter is divided into two major sections in order to separate the analyses of the imamah and ulū 'l-amr-verses.

6.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM IMĀM AND ITS PLURAL

The analysis of the term imām as seen from the Shi'ī viewpoint will be divided into two sub-sections. The first of these covers the examination of two verses containing the singular form imām, while the second considers the interpretation of the plural form a'immaḥ, which appears in four verses.
6.2.1 \textit{Imām}

As has been done with the analysis of the Sunni interpretations, two verses, which use the term \textit{imām}, will be examined in detail. The first, sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, is significant for the understanding of the Shi'a's conception of \textit{imāmah}. Compared to the analysis of some previous terms, their interpretation of this verse is very critical and appears to clarify its meanings, ideas and principles in a way opposed to those of the Sunnis. Regarding the literal meaning, the Shi'a's emphasise that the \textit{imāmah} referred to in this verse was conferred on ālī and his designated successors in the same way as it had been on Abraham, and that ālī and his successors' status is therefore similar to that of the Prophet. This idea may be seen in Shi'i translations of the phrase that retain the Arabic word \textit{imām} and give it an initial capital. Two examples of such translations are the versions of Mir Ahmad ālī (‘Verily I make thee \textit{Imām} for mankind’) and Shākir (‘Surely I will make you an \textit{Imām} of men’).\footnote{Mir Ahmad ālī and Shākir are two well-known Twelver Shi'i Qur'anic translators. Their translations are: S. V. Mir Ahmad ālī, \textit{The Holy Qur'an: Text Translation and Commentary} (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988) and M. H. Shākir, \textit{The Qur'an} (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988). See Neal Robinson, ‘Sectarian and Ideological Bias in Muslim Translation of the Qur'an’, \textit{Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations}, 8. 3 (1997): 261.}

The commentators' analysis of this verse can be divided into discussions of three different, but interrelated subjects. The first subject considered by al-Ṭūsī is the nature of the \textit{ibtilā'\textsuperscript{a}} (test or trial) undergone by Abraham. Many possible answers have been offered, but the most important one, in al-Ṭūsī's view, is the opinion of Mujāhid, who believes that the key may be found in the next phrase of the verse, ‘I shall make you an
imān to mankind. Al-Ṭabarṣi provides a similar interpretation, with the difference that he does not mention Mujāhid, referring instead to the report from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the phrase clearly indicates the appointment of Abraham and his descendants as imāms, and therefore from the Shiʿi point of view exemplified by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣi implies and justifies the Shiʿi imāmah.

Another possible meaning of the trial (ibtilā) can be derived from two different reports that al-Ṭūsī relates on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās and Qatādah. Referring to a report with a similar meaning, but narrated on the authority of Imām Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (d. 140/757), al-Ṭabarṣi states that the report mentions that the testing of Abraham by Allah was ‘what He showed him in his dream concerning the slaying of his son, and which he successfully fulfilled. Because of this fulfilment, Allah said to him, ‘I shall make you an imān to mankind.’ This imān was to be revealed through a purification (ḥanfyah), which consists of ten actions: five of them performed on the head and another five on the body.” Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣi enumerate these ten acts in their commentaries. Some other possible meanings of the trial, which both of them

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2 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 445-446.
3 Al-Ṭabarṣi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 293.
4 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 445-446.
5 Al-Ṭabarṣi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 293.
6 The five actions regarding the head are trimming the moustache, rinsing the mouth and nostrils, cleaning the teeth and parting the hair. Another five in the body are clipping the finger and toe nails, shaving the pubic hair, circumcision, plucking the hair under the arms and washing off traces of urine and faeces with water.
point out, are the thirty acts of Islamic law that have never applied to anybody apart from Abraham, and the way of performing pilgrimage (manāsik al-ḥajj).\(^7\)

Moving to the second subject, al-Ṭūsī considers the meaning of the fulfilment and completion of the trial. He quotes al-Balkhi’s opinion that the phrase ‘I will make thee an imām to the Nations’, which announces the appointment of Abraham as the imām indicates the real meaning of this fulfilment. This is due to al-Balkhi’s definition of the word kalimat as imāmah, a definition supported by a report narrated on the authority of Mujāhid.\(^8\) Therefore, the essential meaning here is that Allah tests Abraham and his descendants by appointing them to the imāmah.

Al-Ṭabarsi seems to agree with al-Ṭusī since he also produces the same kind of interpretation and quotes similar reports. Furthermore, he relates another report on the authority of al-Mufaqḍal b. ʿUmar\(^9\), who asked Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq the real meaning of the kalimat. The latter said, ‘These are the words of inspiration which Adam learns from his Lord, and He turns toward him. The words are what Adam says: ‘My Lord, I beg you, for the sake of Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to turn toward me’, and then Allah does turn toward him for He is oft-returning, most merciful’.\(^10\) Al-Mufaqḍal asks further, ‘O son of the apostle of Allah, what means the phrase ‘which he

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\(^7\) Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 445-446; Al-Ṭabarsi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 293.

\(^8\) Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1: 446.

\(^9\) Al-Mufaqḍal b. ʿUmar was among the former followers of Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb, the founder of the radical Shiʿi sect, the Khāṭṭābiyyah, who had repented and reverted to a moderate view of the imāmah.

\(^10\) Al-Qurʾān, al-Baqarah (2): 37.
fulfilled'? He answered, 'He fulfils with the appointment of twelve *imāms*; nine of them from Ḫusayn’s descendants...'.

This report seems to indicate two significant principles held by the Shiʿī. Firstly, it suggests that the reference of *khilāfah* to ṣAlī and his descendants is consistent with al-Ṭabarṣī’s sectarian background as a Shiʿī. As has been emphasised on several occasions in the study’s earlier chapters, the Shiʿīs claim that the right to the *imāmah* after the death of the Prophet should have been given to the *ahl al-bayt* (people of the House, meaning the family of the Prophet), particularly to ṣAlī, and that it should have been inherited by his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḫusayn. The right of ṣAlī as the legitimate *imām* instead of Abū Bakr is believed to derive from divine guidance, awarded by the Prophet through his *waṣīyyah* (designation or legacy). This method is considered the only way to legitimate the transfer of the *imāmah* to the next *imām*. From the Shiʿīs’ viewpoint, the *imāmah* after ṣAlī should be conferred on the *ahl al-bayt* and particularly on the descendants of ṣAlī. However, the history of Muslim dynasties ran counter to the Shiʿīs’ claim, since the *khilāfah* was controlled by the three first caliphs and by Muʿāwiya and his descendants, who later formed the Sunni Umayyad dynasty. This circumstance eventually negated the Shiʿīs claim and effectively prevented their growth, since they were living under Sunni oppression.

Secondly, the report underlines the doctrinal concept of the twelve *imāms*, starting with ṣAlī, Ḥasan and Ḫusayn and continuing with nine others. The citation of this report,

intending either to support the Shi'is' belief or to deny the Sunnis' interpretation, reflects al-Tabarsi's inclination to restrict the imâmah to 'Alî and his descendants. This view is consistent with al-Tabarsi's background as an Imâmî Shi'i, which led him to promote the series of twelve imams. Al-Tusi, although he does not cite this report, also considered himself to be an Imâmîyyah Shi'i and, as such would have adhered to the doctrine of the twelve imams.

The final subject is the interpretation of the word 'ahd (promise), which was made to Abraham and his descendants. Al-Tusi points out that here 'ahd might indicate the promise of nubuwwah (prophethood), a view put forward by al-Suddi and al-Jubbâ'i. On the other hand, both al-Tusi and al-Tabarsi incline to the view that it is more likely to refer to the imâmah; this is the opinion of Mujâhid, who refers to the report narrated on the authority of Abû Ja'far and Abû 'Abd Allâh. Generally, this report emphasises Allah's promise to make Abraham's descendants imams. However, the phrase afterwards 'but My promise is not within the reach of evil-doers' explicitly excludes evil people from this promise. Therefore, this phrase is regarded as the specification of the general meaning of imâm, whereby only the just, pious and obedient are entitled to hold the office.

In connecting the interpretation of this verse to the Shi'i concept of imâmah, three important principles may be identified. First of all, the permission to give the imâmah to those of Abraham's descendants who are just, pious and obedient indicates that it is

13 Al-Tusi, Al-Tibyân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'an, 1: 448.
permissible for any Shi`i imâm to hand on the imâmah to his own chosen descendants. This concept is very close to the meaning of a report, which is found in al-Ṭabarši’s commentary and narrated on the authority of al-Mufaqdal b. ʿUmar. Secondly, the Shi`is’ interpretation of the evildoers’ exclusion from the imâmah supports their doctrine of ʿiṣnah (infallibility of the imâm). A wrongdoer, according to the interpretation of this verse, cannot be an imâm. In other words, all the appointed imāms are free from any sin, or, to be more specific, the twelve Shi`i imāms are infallible (maʿṣūm), because Allah has already excluded all sinful people (zālim) from this post. Finally, Abraham’s appointment as a prophet and an imâm indicates that the imâmah and the prophethood are different from each other. These two tasks are not applicable in the imâmah of mankind, since they are specially given to some selected individuals, the prophets.

The second verse containing the term imâm is sūrat al-Isra’ (17): 71. Similarly to the Sunnī commentators, when treating this verse both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarši also produce various possible definitions of the term imâm. Thus, according to al-Ṭūsī, imâm might have the meaning of prophet (nabī), as understood by Mujāhid and Qatādah, or it might, as in the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ḥasan and Abū ʿl-ʿĀliyah, be defined as a book of knowledge (kitāb ʿilmī). In addition to these possibilities, al-Ṭūsī mentions another report from Ibn ʿAbbās which takes it to mean the Holy Books, such as the Qur’an and the Torah, which Allah revealed to human beings and which contain

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15 This tradition regards the appointment of the twelve imāms, nine of whom are the descendants of Ḥusayn.
16 For a further discussion on the concept of infallibility from the Shi`i point of view, see Ahmad Ḥasan, ‘The Concept of Infallibility in Islam’, IS, 2. 1 (1972).
Islamic laws. Al-Tabarsi provides a similar interpretation, but does not accept the authority of the report that interprets it as Holy Books, which he believes to be narrated on the authority of Ibn Zayd and al-Ḍahījāk, whereas al-Ṭūsī refers to a ḥadīth with similar meaning, which is, however, from Ibn ʿAbbās.

Another definition considered by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣi equates imām with men of religious knowledge (ʿulamāʾ), whom the people follow and accept as their imāms. Al-Ṭūsī bases this interpretation on the opinion of al-Balkhi, Abū ʿUbayd, Abū Jaʿfar and Abū Abd Allāh. Although the same opinion is put forward by al-Ṭabarṣi, he refers to different sources: al-Jubbāʾi and Abū ʿUbaydah (d. 210/825). Whichever is the best of all these definitions from the Shiʿi perspective, this verse undoubtedly has implications for the basic and general meaning of imām, even though al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣi do not indicate that any of their interpretations support directly the Shiʿi doctrines of the imāmah. For example, the possibility that the term imām may refer to the ʿulamāʾ reflects the application of the doctrine of knowledge to the imāms. This doctrine affirms the excellence of the Shiʿi imāms in every aspect of human knowledge. They receive this knowledge from the Prophet or from the previous imām. Possessing this knowledge, the imām is capable of answering any question, deriving from his wisdom and divine inspiration through the pure mind that Allah has given him.

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17 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Ṭibyān fi Tafsir al-Qurʾān, 6: 504.
19 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Ṭibyān fi Tafsir al-Qurʾān, 6: 504.
20 Al-Ṭabarṣi, Majmaʿ al-Bayān fi Tafsir al-Qurʾān, 6: 217.
It should however be noted that the Shi'is' interpretation of this verse is little different from that of the Sunnis, since both suggest a variety of choices, giving the same possible meanings and using almost the same sources. This close similarity between al-Ṭūsī and al-Tabarsi and between themselves and the Sunnis is possibly due to the fact that they refer to reports that emphasise the same meanings. Although the Shi'i commentators offer different elaborations from those of the Sunnis, these do not imply any substantial doctrinal disagreement. Moreover, the earlier commentators like al-Ṭabarî of the Sunnis and al-Ṭūsī of the Shi'is compiled an extensive array of possible interpretations for this term, thus discouraging later commentators from further elaboration and discovery of new possible meanings.

6.2.2 The Plural (A'immah)

The plural form of imām, a'immah, can be categorised as having two opposite meanings; good leaders and wicked leaders. The first meaning is indicated in surahs 21: 73, 28: 5 and 32: 24, while the second is noted in surah 28: 41. The term a'immah in surat al-Anbiyāʾ(21): 73 signifies that the leadership and prophetic role assumed by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was in accordance with the command of Allah. According to al-Ṭūsī, their major duty was to guide people of their time to the truth of Islam by setting a good example in all their actions. Therefore, followers will imitate and practise only the good examples while, at the same time, desisting from evil actions, which have been strictly prohibited. In addition, al-Ṭabarsi suggests that another way

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22 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Ṭibyān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 7: 265.
for a person carrying the role of leadership to fulfil this duty is through the utterance of kind words at all times, whether in the presence or the absence of his people. In other words, he implies that through the exercise of gentleness, piety and decency in both actions and words, instead of rudeness and insensitivity, the leader will have a positive effect on his people and inspire them to accept the teaching of Islam.

In surat al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 5, Allah promises the followers of Moses that they will be appointed as leaders and inherit all the power and property of Pharaoh, who has been drowned in the sea together with his followers. Al-Ṭabarsi defines the exact meaning of the term aʿimmah to be qādah or ruʿasāʾ, as interpreted by Ibn ʿAbbās. Furthermore, he produces another two possible definitions, wulāh (rulers) or mulūk (kings) which he derives from the report of Qatādah. Considering these two categories, aʿimmah or ruʿasāʾ (leaders) and wulāh or mulūk, al-Ṭabarsi states that both have a similar meaning and each implies the other. Therefore, wulāh and mulūk are interpreted to mean leaders, in the same way as qādah and ruʿasāʾ, which literally mean leaders.

Al-Ṭūsī is not much concerned with the literal definition of the term, but rather produces an interpretation of the phrase itself, which in his opinion refers to the selection of the people of Israel as leaders. This appointment is a result of the destruction of the kingdom of Pharaoh, who had been the oppressor of the people of Israel. Like al-Ṭabarī before him, al-Ṭūsī cannot have thought that the Israelites became

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23 Al-Ṭabarsi, Majmāʿ al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 7: 80.
24 Ibid, 7: 328
26 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 8: 129.
the rulers of Egypt, but his reluctance to elaborate points to a probable lack of awareness of ancient Egyptian history. Giving a quite different interpretation from that of al-Ṭabarsi, al-Ṭūsī asserts that this verse is revealed to refer to the twelfth imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdi, who will reappear in the distant future before the Day of Judgement. The function of the promised Mahdi is to strengthen the spirit of Islam, which, according to this verse, will be in a weakened state; as the appointed leader, he will destroy all the causes of darkness and error.

This is another verse that the Shiʿīs relate to the figure of the Mahdi, but while they have agreed that it may refer to Imām al-Mahdi, they have argued about who the promised Mahdi really is. Many Shiʿī groups have formulated their view in responding to this question. One of the early radical Shiʿīs, the Kaysāniyyah believes in the return of another son of ʿAlī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah. The Imāmiyyah believes in the occultation of the twelfth imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdi in 260/873-4 (the lesser occultation) and in his future reappearance, whereas the Ismāʿīlīs look forward to the return of their seventh imām, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl. Despite this disagreement, both believe that when their Mahdi reappears, he will help Muslims, particularly the Shiʿīs, defeat all their enemies.

In contrast to the previous verse, the term aʿīmāh in sūrat al-Qaṣās (28): 41 has the

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27 Ibid, 129.
28 Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, despite being regarded as the seventh imām among the Ismāʿīlīs, was not one of the twelve Imāmiyyah imāms.
29 Halm, Shiʿism, ed. Carole Hillenbrand, 38. For a detailed discussion on the doctrine of the Mahdi, see Sachedina, Islamic Messianism:, 8-9.
meaning of wicked leaders, specifically Pharaoh and his people, who lead the people to
darkness and evil. Allah characterises these leaders as those who exhort others to
commit actions that will lead to hell fire. Basically, the word *imām*, according to al-
Ṭūsī's interpretation, is the person whom people follow and obey. Therefore, anyone
who promotes the wrong path or calls others to any kind of action that leads to hell fire
is classified as an evil leader, which al-Ṭūsī defines as *ru'āsā' al-dalālah*.

From the general viewpoint of the Shi'īs, evil leaders are denied the right to be *imāms*.
They consider the legitimate holder of authority to be only those *imāms* who act on
their behalf; all other *imāms* are illegitimate and their rights are denied, just as much as
those of evil leaders. This belief has been expressed throughout history in Shi'ī
uprisings against different authorities. For example, the uprising of the Iranian people
against the Pahlavi dynasty, which was indeed accused by the Iranians of practising
evil, was held to be an Islamic duty. Many Sunnis, however, regard this kind of
rebellion against oppressive authority as incompatible with Islam. For instance, the
committee of the Azhar, the foremost institution of religious learning in Egypt,
opposed the Iranian Revolution and condemned the Iranian people. The committee
believed that even an oppressive ruler must be obeyed, and their belief was based on
the Sunnī Qur'ānic interpretation concerning the concept of obedience. The Azhar's
pronouncements, however, were not prompted only by scholarship and piety; President
Sadat (1970-1981) had not been hostile to the Shah, and had even invited him and his
family to Egypt. Both rulers looked for support to the United States.

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In fact, the root of the matter is the question of who actually wields power and authority. In those places where Sunnis form the majority of the population, they tend to believe in the principle of obeying their ruler however oppressive and evil, whereas the Shi`is, living mainly under Sunni rulers, have sometimes rebelled against such evil rulers, but in other circumstances, have kept silent.

Al-Ṭabarsi produces a similar interpretation to that of al-Ṭūsī, but emphasises the contrast between the prophets, who invite to paradise and the leaders of evil, who entice to hell fire. It is the nature of the latter type of leader, personified by Pharaoh and his followers in this verse, to perform and practise every kind of iniquity; indeed, the figure of Pharaoh has become a popular symbol of wickedness.\(^{32}\) One clear implication of this interpretation is that there is a possibility that two opposing types of \textit{imām}, the prophet, representing the good \textit{imām} and the wicked ruler (Pharaoh) representing evil, will emerge. If the \textit{imāmah} of an \textit{imām} is classified in the prophetic category, even though he himself is not a prophet, the people that follow and obey him will enjoy prosperity under his leadership and pass through death into paradise. On the other hand, if the leader is of the other type, the people that accept his commands blindly will be condemned to hell fire according to Allah’s promise in this verse.

In the last verse containing the term \textit{aʾīmmah}, sūrat al-Sajdah (32): 24, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi seem to offer a similar interpretation. They believe that \textit{aʾīmmah} in this verse indicates those leaders who urge the practice of good deeds. Not only do they agree in their interpretation, they refer to the same source for verification, which is the

Nevertheless, al-Ṭabarsī adds a further possible interpretation, which cannot be found in al-Ṭūsī's commentary: he specifically emphasises that *aʿimmah* is a reference to the prophets, not just leaders in general as stated by al-Ṭūsī, who fulfil the command of Allah to guide people to the right path. Apart from this additional remark, there is no other striking explanation to be found in al-Ṭabarsī's commentary.

### 6.3 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *ULŪʿL-AMR*

The discussion of the term *ulūʿ l-amr* in the Shiʿī commentaries puts forward a controversial and critical view of the concept of *imāmah*. The Qur'ānic use of this term is one of the main sources they call on to support the criteria and characteristics of their *imāms*. As the term *ulūʿ l-amr*, which is found twice in the Qur'ān, has a general meaning, it provides a golden opportunity for various interpretations. Thus we find that the Shiʿīs' commentaries present a totally different interpretation from that of the Sunnīs.

The first occurrence of the term is in surat al-Nisā' (4): 59. This verse is regarded by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860)\(^{35}\), who was influenced to a large extent by...
Mu'tazilism, as the most obvious proof and the most illuminating revelation concerning the obligation of the *imāmah*. Perhaps somewhat more importantly, it highlights the responsibilities of the people towards Allah, His Messenger and those charged with authority (*ulū l-amr*). Among these responsibilities is the trust (*amānah*) that Allah emphasises in the previous verse. In the first stage, leaders are charged with the implementation of trust in administering public affairs. In the next stage, it is the people's obligation, in response to the completion of their leaders' duties, to obey their leaders in the same way as they owe obedience to Allah and His Prophet.

It is in connection with the meaning of 'obey those charged with authority' that the Shi'i interpretation of this verse becomes critical and controversial. According to al-Ṭūsī, *ulū l-amr* in general can reflect two essential meanings. Firstly, it means leaders (*al-umarā*), as mentioned by a number of *ḥadīth* reporters including Abū Hurayrah, Ibn ʿAbbās, Maymūn b. Mahrān and al-Suddi. In addition, al-Ṭūsī observes that this interpretation is the one preferred by al-Jubbā'ī, al-Balkhi and al-Ṭabarī. There are clear differences between the Shi'i and the Sunni commentators in producing the chain of transmission for this *ḥadīth*, which defines *ulū l-amr as al-umarā*. In the Sunni sources, Maymūn b. Mahrān is never mentioned, and the Shi'is do not cite Layth and Ibn Zayd, who are named in the Sunnis' interpretation of this verse as the transmitters of this *ḥadīth*. Yet there is no clear explanation for this difference and neither party has ever directly denied the validity of the other's choice.


36 Refer to the Qur'an in *sūrat al-Nisā’* (4): 58.

Nevertheless, one possible reason for this discrepancy, even though it has not been claimed by the Shiites as the main cause, may be the Shiites’ and the Sunnis’ reference to different collections of traditions. The Shiites base their discussion of the doctrinal aspects of Qur’anic commentary on their four canonical hadith books, which are al-Kāfi fi ʿilm al-dīn (What Suffices in the Knowledge of Religion) by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), Man lā yahḍuruhu ʿl-faqīḥ (He Who Has no Jurist at his Disposal) by Sheikh Ṣaḍūq b. Babuya (d. 381/991), Tahdhib al-ahkām (The Correction of Doctrines) by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and al-Istibṣār fī ma ikhtalafa fīhi min al-akhbār (The Clear-Sighted View of the Divergences of Tradition) also by al-Ṭūsī. On the other hand, the Sunnis mainly refer to their six books on the collection of hadith, which are by Bukhārī (d. 256/870) Muslim (d. 261/875), Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887), Abū Dā’ūd (d. 275/ 889), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and al-Nasā’ī (d. 303/915).

Secondly, al-Ṭūsī suggests that ulū ʿl-amr may be taken to mean al-ʿulamāʾ, as claimed by Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh, Ibn ʿAbbās, Mūjāhid, ʿAṭṭāʾ and Abū ʿAlīyah. They argue that the ʿulamāʾ, rather than the wulāḥ (rulers) are consulted in any case of Islamic jurisprudence regarding disputes arising in the community. Nevertheless, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī clearly reject this interpretation because, in their view, the term can never be defined to mean ʿulamāʾ. According to al-Ṭūsī, the verse commands the people to give obedience to ulū ʿl-amr, which is definitely to be interpreted as

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39 Al-Ṭūsī, Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 3: 236.
40 Al-Ṭabarṣī, Majma′ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 3: 86.
obedience to a person who has or holds *al-amr* (power/authority).\(^{41}\) The ‘*ulamā‘*, whatever their virtues, are not the ones who hold that kind of power in their hands.

Al-Ṭūsī further argues that the Sunnis’ view, that the ‘*ulamā‘’ are to be considered as *ulū ‘l-amr* only if they practise truth and justice, whereas if they do not, there should be no obligation to give obedience to them, has no basis at all in this context. In order to deny this opinion, al-Ṭūsī claims that the commandment to give obedience to ‘those charged with authority’ has a general scope and does not specify any particular people. Therefore he refutes the Sunnis’ interpretation in an effort to narrow the general reference of obedience to a much more specific addressee, and argues that they provide no concrete evidence to support their definition of the term as ‘*ulamā‘’.\(^{42}\)

Al-Ṭūsī’s and al-Ṭabarsi’s rejection of the Sunnis’ interpretation of *ulū ‘l-amr* as ‘*ulamā‘’ reflects their promotion of the Shi‘ī view. They argue that the term is most appropriately defined as *al-a‘immah min äl Muḥammad* (*imāms* or leaders descended from the Prophet Muḥammad), referring to a report narrated on the authority of Abū Ja‘far and Abū Ābd Allāh.\(^{43}\) This is an instance of their attempts to show that their preferred interpretation of a term is consistent with the Shi‘īs’ claim concerning the legitimate right of the *ahl al-bayt*, particularly Ali and his descendants, to the *imāmah*. In other words, two objectives are simultaneously attempted; their definition is a means of rejecting the Sunnis’ preference for ‘*ulamā‘’ and of supporting the right of Shi‘ī *imāms* to the *imāmah*.


\(^{42}\) Ibid, 236

Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi further emphasise that it is compulsory for the public to obey these imāms in the same way they obey Allah and the Prophet. In one respect, this view suggests that their imāms have the same status as that of the Prophet except as regards the degree of their appointment, which is slightly lower than that of the prophets. In another context, it indicates the position of their imāms as divinely guided and designated through the Prophet. This they try to prove by arguing that the commandment of obedience to the imāms is no different from that enjoining obedience to the prophets, who were divinely and directly appointed by Allah; and therefore, the appointment of the imāms is also divine, even though transmitted through the wasiyyah (designation or legacy) of the Prophet Muḥammad.

It seems that the main reason behind al-Ṭūsī’s and al-Ṭabarsi’s interpretation is that they wish to support the important Shi‘ī doctrine of the infallibility of the imām (‘īṣnah). This can be seen in the way that they demand the same degree of obedience to their imāms as that given to Allah and the Prophet. Their argument is that if the position of the imāms is on the same level as that of the prophets, who are appointed by Allah and free from any sin, the same condition must apply to the imāms.

In the next phrase of this verse, Allah commands the people to refer to His book and the Prophet in the case of any dispute, as it reads: ‘If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His messenger’. The reference in this phrase is clearly limited to the two primary sources without any mention of the role of the imām. Nevertheless, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi stress another possibility, which is that the imām is

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also to be consulted. In their opinion the situation is similar to the case of entitlement to public obedience, which the *imām* fully merits. Therefore, the *imāms* are also to be considered as adjudicators of public affairs even though the term *ulū 'l-amr* is not included in this phrase. In addition, the possession of an exceptional criterion by the *imāms* themselves, which is their supposed infallibility, implies their ability to produce the right decision at all times.\(^{45}\)

*Ulū 'l-amr* appears again in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 83, and is used to give further support to the previous interpretation. The Shi'is take the opportunity to elaborate this verse in accordance with their concept of *imāmah*, since this is the second verse in the Qur'an that seems to have a bearing on the meaning of *imām* in general. In their view the most significant phrase of this verse is ‘...if they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them,...’.

Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarṣī interpret the term *ulū 'l-amr* to mean either the leaders of expeditions (*umārā' al-sarā'yāh, wulāh*) or the knowledgeable and learned men who were close to the Prophet Muḥammad (*ahl al-`ilm* and *al-fiqh*).\(^{46}\) The former interpretation is referred to the opinion of Ibn Zayd, al-Suddī and Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī, while the latter is quoted from al-Ḥasān, Qatādah, Ibn Jurayj, Ibn Abī Najih and al-Zujāj.\(^{47}\) Analysing these two interpretations with their references, the variety of


possible meanings presented by these two Shi'i commentators is very much alike with the Sunnis.

Although al-Tusi and al-Tabarsi does offer this possibility, they provide and prefer another interpretation, quoted from Abü Ja'far, that it rather means the infallible leaders.\(^{48}\) Al-Tusi gives his reason for this preference by emphasising that the term *ulû ʿl-amr* should not be defined as leaders of expeditions or *ʿulamāʾ*, since these leaders will undoubtedly make mistakes, even though not in every judgement, in delivering decisions on the matters on which they are consulted. On the other hand, the infallible *imams*, he and al-Tabarsi believe, are free from all error and sin, and will produce only truth and justice, thus ensuring the establishment of peace and the ideal community.\(^{49}\)

### 6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the *khilafah-* or, more accurately, *imāmah-*verses, in these two Imamiyyah Qur'anic commentaries, raises some important issues. Al-Tusi's and al-Tabarsi's exposition of the dogmatic doctrines of the *imāmah* have their basis in the Qur'anic perspective although they devote little space to the development of the concept. As with the Sunnis, the writings of the classical Imamiyyah *ʿulamāʾ*, particularly in the fields of jurisprudence and theology, offer a wide range of discussion and provide a detailed examination of the concept of the *imāmah*, which


cannot be found in the Qur'anic commentaries. For example, the doctrines of the infallibility of the imāms and the return of the twelfth imām (the Mahdi) are exhaustively analysed in the Imāmiyyah works of theology and jurisprudence, but are simply and directly dealt with in the Qur'anic commentaries.

Interestingly, the Qur'anic treatment and interpretation of certain relevant verses indicate a marked similarity between the Shi'īs and the Sunnīs. On most occasions this similarity can be found in the discussion of non-doctrinal issues such as the reference to khalīfah as a person appointed from the descendants of the Prophet (the interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30). This similarity makes both commentaries, particularly that of al-Ṭūsī, acceptable to some degree in 'orthodox' Sunnī circles. Also, such moderation (from a Sunnī point of view) has brought about Sunnī recognition of certain aspects of their commentaries.

Examining the methods and styles used by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsi in presenting their interpretations, we find that they are almost identical. Al-Ṭabarsi's style of interpretation is so similar to al-Ṭūsī's that on some occasions it seems to border on plagiarism. It was, however, normal practice in medieval scholarship to draw upon earlier scholars' knowledge, as we have seen in the interpretation of sūrahs Fātir (35): 39, al-Baqarah (2): 124 and al-Nisā' (4): 59. More importantly, their main concern was to discover the correct meaning of the verses they were interpreting and therefore, they had little cause to challenge the interpretations of their predecessors: and indeed, differences of opinion are rarely encountered. A similar reliance on an earlier commentary can be seen in Ibn Kathīr's indebtedness to his predecessor, al-Ṭabarī.
The early part of the analysis, which concerns the terms *khalifah*, *khalä'if* and *khulafä'*
has considered several doctrinal issues in which the views and interpretations of the
Imāmiyyah Shiʿis and the Sunnis are notably different. For example, both the Shiʿis’
preferred interpretation of the phrase ‘*Wilt Thou place therein one who will make
mischief therein and shed blood?*’, from sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30 (analysis of the term
*khalifah* in chapter five) seems to differ from that of the Sunnis, since both hold to the
doctrine that the *imāmah* is immune from the power of evil. It is suggested that this
interpretation has been underlined by these commentators to implicitly support the
doctrine of infallibility regarding the twelve Imāmiyyah *imāms*, which is also briefly
mentioned in chapter one (The nature of the Khilāfah).

This doctrine asserts that it is impossible for the *imāms* to be prone to evil, although
their people or communities may be. In other words, people are fallible and do not hold
authority in the manner of the *imāmah*. In contrast, the Sunnis stress the essential role
of the *ummah* - particularly *ahl al-ʿilm wa ʾl-ʾaqd* (the people who loose and bind) - as
well as the *khalifah* in resolving any argument concerning the *khilāfah*. The Sunni
interpretation of this verse, as we have noted in chapter three and the concluding
remarks of chapter four, supports the continuation and propagation of the form of
hereditary succession practised by their dynastic rulers.

It is undeniable that the Shiʿis were oppressed by the Sunni dynastic rulers, and it is
suggested here that this had a marked influence on their interpretations. The Qurʾan’s
condemnation of the wickedness of Pharaoh (sūrah al-Anʿām (6): 133), which has been
discussed in chapter five, is used by the Shiʿis to indirectly attack their Sunni
oppressors. Al-Ṭūsī, as we have already noted in the section containing his biography, personally witnessed the ʿAbbāsids’ persecution of the Shiʿīs and had to flee Baghdad after his house had been set ablaze. Therefore, the Shiʿīs’ interpretation of sūrah Fāṭir (35): 39, that the khilāfah can be preserved even in an unbelieving society, was meant to be understood as referring to the injustices of the Sunni dynastic rulers, while carefully avoiding any overt criticism. The Sunni commentators’ dilemma was in some ways more difficult. Although they were well aware of the vices of their own rulers, nowhere in their interpretations do they imply that moral evil is sufficient grounds for deposing an oppressive ruler.

The two Shiʿīs’ interpretations of some other terms, such as imām, aʿimmah and ulū ʿl-amr, are notably different from those of the Sunnis, perhaps because of the general form of the verses themselves. For example, the term ulū ʿl-amr, discussed earlier in the chapter, is defined by the Imāmiyyah commentators in such a way as to legitimate the appointment of ahl al-bayt, especially from the descendants of ʿAlī, to the imāmah. Therefore, obedience to them is fundamental because the status of these imāms is similar to that of the Prophet: in other words, the imāms are divinely designated just as the Prophet was. This view is clearly incompatible with that held by the Sunnis, who hold that the appointment to the prophethood (nubuwwah) is a power vested only in Allah. On the other hand, the appointment of a non-prophet khilāfah is to be determined and resolved by the Muslim community, but this process must be consistent with the principal guidelines laid down by the Qurʾan and sunnah of the Prophet. Viewed in a positive light, the Shiʿīs’ narrow interpretation of this term seeks to clarify
the meaning of the verse, but the fact remains that its implications are unacceptable to Sunni opinion.

The differences between the Sunni and the Shi`i interpretations of these general verses arise for many reasons. Some result from the difficulty of certifying the validity of sources, or from the existence of various different sources: some are due to the attempt by commentators to produce interpretations that support their own fundamental beliefs. On many occasions, the Imamiyyah Shi`i interpretations are notably different from those of the Sunni counterparts, because their efforts are directed towards defending their basic doctrines, which underlie their concept of the imama. This can be seen from the two exegetes’ interpretation of surah al-Baqarah (2): 124, discussed in chapter five, which promotes the doctrine of twelve imams, and of al-Qasaṣ (28): 55, examined in chapter six, which provides evidence of their belief in the return of the Mahdi.

In conclusion, then, the analysis of the Imamiyyah Shi`i interpretations of the relevant khilafah- and imama-verses has shown that these often serve to underline their doctrines. It has been noted that significant divergences occur only when the terms are in general forms, providing the possibility of variant readings, which is an important characteristic of classical tafsir. Otherwise, the Shi`i interpretation is little different from the Sunni, since on most occasions they refer to similar sources. The arguments and disagreements inherent in the interpretation of certain verses stem from the incompatibility of certain essential doctrines, which greatly influence the commentators’ understanding of the concept of imama.
CHAPTER 7   MODERN SUNNĪ AND SHĪʿĪ INTERPRETATIONS OF AND REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF KHILĀFAH

7.1 INTRODUCTION

After having made a thorough analysis of the classical Sunnī and Shīʿī Qurʾānic conceptions of the khilāfah, we will in this chapter examine the concept from the modern perspective. The analysis, however, will not be as detailed as the exploration of the classical points of view, but will rather highlight some of the essential interpretations, which have contributed to a very interesting debate in modern times and, in some circumstances, raised very controversial arguments. The objective of this chapter is to point out either similarities or differences of view among modern scholars, and between them and their classical counterparts, concerning the concept of khilāfah, which is furthermore, related to broader questions concerning the theory of the Islamic state.

No study of the concept of khilāfah would be complete which referred to the classical interpretations only, while neglecting to analyse the modern perspectives. It is undoubtedly accepted that most of the twentieth-century Qurʾānic interpreters have adopted their theories and understandings from their early predecessors. They have considered this method to be very important in justifying the principles of their political thought, especially in relation to commentary on the Qurʾān. For this particular reason and for the better understanding of each modern commentator, the first part of this chapter will deal with the backgrounds of three of the most significant modern commentators.
Knowing the details of each commentator in terms of their life, educational background and socio-political development makes the analysis of the modern interpretations easier, as it is likely that their views might be influenced by their backgrounds. The analysis of the interpretations of the modern Sunni and Shi'i commentators aims to trace the agreements, as well as to clarify the disputes, concerning each particular interpretation.

### 7.2 BACKGROUND OF MODERN MUSLIM QUR’ANIC COMMENTATORS

The scope of this part of the study is limited to just three modern Qur'anic commentators, two Sunni and one Shi'i. Although the number of commentators are less than those discussed in the classical part, more space will be available for a detailed analysis of the concept of *khilāfah* as it has been developed in modern times. The discussion of modern commentators has been limited because the main matter of the whole study is the analysis of the concept of *khilāfah* from the viewpoint of the classical Qur'anic interpretations; however, no account of the classical interpretations would be complete without careful consideration of the work of modern commentators. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that conclusions drawn from the analysis of these three cannot be generalised across the whole range of modern interpretations. Each of these three, however, is a very well known figure in his respective country and has played a major role in the revival of Islam in recent decades.
7.2.1 Abū A‘lā Mawdūdi (1903-1979)

Sayyid Abū A‘lā Mawdūdi, one of the chief architects of the contemporary Islamic resurgence, was born in South India on 25 September 1903. His family was deeply involved with the glories of Muslim history in India, having had a long history of service to the Muslim Mughal rulers until the fall of the dynasty in 1858. Therefore his family, unlike many, did not re-establish friendly relations with the British colonialists. In his childhood, Mawdūdi was exposed to a traditional Islamic education. In 1920 he went to Delhi, where he studied English and modern subjects and received a formal religious education, eventually gaining a certificate in religious training.¹

Mawdūdi became an author at the early age of thirteen and started to write on issues of concern to Indian Muslims in a variety of newspapers and journals at the age of sixteen. He was the author of more than one hundred works on Islam, both scholarly and popular, and his writings have been translated into several languages. He began to attract notice with the publication of two books, al-Jihād fī 'l-Islām (1926) and Towards Understanding Islam (1930). In 1932 he became the editor of a monthly journal called Tarjuman al-Qur‘ān (Exegesis of the Qur‘ān) and occupied that position for the rest of his life.²


Mawdūdi was one of the outstanding Islamic thinkers and writers of his time. He devoted his entire life to expounding the meaning and message of Islam and to organising a collective movement to establish the Islamic Order. In this struggle, he had to pass through all kinds of sufferings. In 1941, he founded Jama‘at-i Islami, of which he remained amīr (chief) until 1972 and which has been one of the most prominent Islamic movements of the modern period. Between 1948 and 1967, he was imprisoned on four occasions, spending a total of five years in different prisons in Pakistan. The climax of all these arrests came in 1953, when a Martial Law court sentenced him to death for writing a ‘seditious’ pamphlet entitled ‘The Qadianī Questions’,3 which was believed to be instrumental in the agitation against the Ahmadiyyah, but later the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Even though Mawdūdi and his party were not involved directly in the agitation, the military authorities saw them as indirect instigators of anti-Ahmadi activity. In fact, Mawdūdi acted with the intention of spreading his own constitutional proposals for the Islamic state and to gain political support.4

The intention behind the establishment of Jama‘at-i Islami was to turn Pakistan into an Islamic state based on the sharfah. In this respect the party was similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. More significantly, Mawdūdi described in detail the encompassing Islamic order to be realised in the hoped-for Islamic state. In order to achieve it, an Islamic ‘revolution’, not necessarily of a violent nature, was required, and this would guarantee the fundamental transformation of society, its Islamisation. Even under the regime of Ziā ul-Ḥaq (1977-88), who imposed this kind of Islamisation

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3 Qadiani is sometimes used as another name for the Ahmadiyyah.
in Pakistan, the hoped-for realisation of *sharțah* in an Islamic social order did not take place; the various Islamic states apply *sharțah* in widely differing ways.⁵

Mawdūdī is considered to be the man who began the movement to create an Islamic renaissance, particularly in the contexts of the Indian sub-continent and Pakistan. He continued to encourage the development of the Islamic movement, and occupied a pivotal position in the movement for Islamic rebirth in the twentieth century. The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate (1924) had extinguished the last apparent hope of the Muslim *ummah* to restore the sovereignty of Islam. Realising the possibility of the demise of Islamic authority, Mawdūdī, together with the members of his party, raised a clarion call for Islamic revival and reassertion. They invited Muslims to return to the real source of their strength, the Qur’an and *sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Moreover, it was the party’s objective to awaken Muslims to a new goal and mission and at the same time to encourage them to live and die for the sake of Islam.

The *Jamaʿat-i Islami* movement, which Mawdūdī formed as the foundation of Islamic revivalism in Pakistan, represented an extension of the freedom movements that began as an attempted *jihād* against British colonialism. At that time, this liberation movement brought everything in its power, including the entire intellectual and cultural heritage of the *ummah*, to bear against the enemy, calling Muslims to the glory of the past. Even though it is doubtful that the movement accomplished what it set out to do, the colonialists did leave and national government became securely established. But the national government was not established as a direct result of the *Jamaʿat-i Islami*’s activities. Indeed, the influence on the Indian Muslims of the Western concepts of nationalism, national government and the exercise of power was overwhelming.⁶

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Mawdūdi detested this influence; writing before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, he vehemently rejected the very idea of nationalism.

Even a cursory glance at the meaning and the essence of nationalism would convince a person that in their spirit and in their aims Islam and nationalism are diametrically opposed to each other.  

Nevertheless, after the creation of Pakistan, Mawdūdi and his party launched a campaign to establish an Islamic state and re-formulated the idea of nationalism. In fact, that move was the starting point for Mawdūdi’s acceptance of the principle of nationality. More significantly, the party appeared to be staunch supporters of their national state by 1971, particularly after the secession of Bangladesh. The change in Mawdūdi’s position may be clearly understood from his speech:

Since, by God’s will, I was born in this particular nation and belong to it, it is natural for me to wish and pray that my nation should have the proud privilege of leading an Islamic revolution in the present age, of being the first of the nations to adopt Islam in its totality, and to set up a model Islamic society, which should serve as an example and a beacon for the rest of mankind.

The Jamaʿat-i Islami’s campaign to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan was based from its foundation upon the sharfah. Nonetheless, the influence of Western ideas was obvious in the way Mawdūdi defined the shape of the Islamic state. He borrowed some valuable elements of Western democracy and combined them with Islamic principles. Consequently, the concept of a theo-democratic Islamic state, which he believed to be

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different from both theocracy and Western democracy, appeared to express his political preference:

If I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe this system of government as a ‘theo-democracy,’ that is to say a divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God.  

The distinction between Mawdūdi’s theo-democracy and Western democracy, in short, rests on the principle that, while in the latter the people’s representatives exert a kind of absolute authority, where political power is relatively free and uncontrollable, sovereignty in the former is specially dedicated to Allah. Given this definition, the authority and power of an Islamic state is dependent on the Divine Laws and must not go beyond the rules and limits prescribed by Allah. This idea is found in most of Mawdūdi’s writings, as the following passage illustrates:

In Western democracy the people are sovereign, in Islam sovereignty is vested in God and the people are His caliphs or representatives. In the former, the people make their own laws; in the latter they have to follow and obey the laws (sharī'ah) given by God through His Prophet. In one the government undertakes to fulfil the will of the people; in the other the government and the people alike have to do the will of God. Western democracy is a kind of absolute authority which exercises its power in a free and uncontrolled manner, whereas Islamic democracy is

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Mawdūdi was a prolific author, producing around 150 books of erudite scholarship and delivering hundreds of speeches and lectures. His most extensive work is the Urdu text of Qur’anic commentary, *Tafhim al-Qur’ān*, which he began in 1942 and which was finally completed in 1972. The work of translating it into English was begun some years ago and has still not been completed: only six volumes have so far appeared, covering the translation from the second sūrah (al-Baqarah) until the twenty-fourth sūrah (al-Nūr). Mawdūdi’s commentary on the Qur’an shows that, in his view, there is usually only one right way to understand the various strands of Qur’anic thought. Therefore, although he occasionally indicates that a variety of views have existed, he explains systematically just how every aspect of the Qur’an is to be understood. In other words, his interpretation makes it clear that his readers are to apprehend the meaning of the Qur’an through his mind only. Some other commentators, by contrast, have believed that the interpretation of the Qur’an should include explanations of the various interpretations of previous scholars with respect to controversial matters, and should give individual Muslims the freedom to accept whatever interpretation they prefer. Mawdūdi also wrote many books, mainly related to Islamic political thought, which were a part of his efforts to encourage Muslims to embrace the real spirit of Islamic revivalism. Mawdūdi died in September 1979.


12 McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity*: 68.
7.2.2 Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966)

Mawdūdī was a key figure in organising the Islamic revival in the Indian subcontinent and, from 1947, in Pakistan; the same role was carried out by Sayyid Qutb in Egypt. He was one of the foremost Muslim thinkers of the mid-twentieth century. Sayyid Qutb Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Shādhili was born in 1906 in the village of Qaha in Asyut Province. He came from a deeply religious, well-respected and relatively affluent family. His early education started at the age of six when he was sent to a modern primary school (madrasah) instead of a traditional Qur’anic school. Like many Qur’anic commentators, Qutb, at a very early age, managed to master important aspects of traditional Arab Muslim culture such as memorising the Qur’an by the age of ten and acquiring an excellent knowledge of the Arabic language.  

At the age of thirteen, Qutb continued his education in Cairo, where he lived with his maternal uncle, Aḥmad Ḥusayn ʿUthmān. Here Qutb came under the influence of liberal nationalist forces. At this early stage of his life, he became closely associated with and influenced by the modernist and outspoken Wafdist journalist, ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (1899-1964). 14 In 1929 he began to attend Dār al-ʿUlūm, from which he graduated in 1933. At this point, he became engaged in literary activities and started his career as a literary man. However, his bright reputation as a young literary critic had been firmly established while he was still at Dār al-ʿUlūm, when he published ‘Muhimmat al-shfʿir fi ʿl-ḥayāt wa shfʿr al-jīl al-ḥāḍir’ (The Mission of the Poet in Life and the Poetry of the Present Generation) in 1932. Following his

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graduation, he became a schoolteacher in government schools and was later appointed as inspector of schools for the Ministry of Education. He spent two years in the United States (1948-1950), and while resident there, his book 'al-Adālah al-Ijtīmā'īyyah fī 'l-Islām. (Social Justice in Islam) appeared in 1949. His sojourn in the United States is considered to mark a stage of transformation in Qūṭb’s thought. The economic, political and social dislocations resulting from British war policies during World War II were the main causes of the many drastic changes that began to take place in Qūṭb’s outlook and he became increasingly interested in the study of the Qur’ān.\footnote{Ibid, 68-69.}

On his return to Egypt, Qūṭb joined the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (the Muslim Brotherhood). After his formal affiliation with the Brotherhood, he emerged as a leading ideologue of the organisation of the Propagation of Islam section in 1952-1953. He also became a regular contributor to the Muslim Brotherhood circular, mainly concentrating on issues pertaining to the Qur’ān and Islamic society. In late 1952, he resigned from the Ministry of Education in protest against what he saw as un-Islamic governmental policies in education. During this period (late 1940s and early 1950s), he was greatly influenced by many writings disseminating the spirit of Islamic revivalism, such as those of Muḥammad Assad and Abū Aḥlāl Mawdūdī of Pakistan.\footnote{Ibid, 70.} Such works were readily available in Egypt in 1951 and inevitably had a special impact on Islamic groups. As for the classical scholar that most influenced him, it is believed that he was deeply inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah.\footnote{Ayubi, ‘Islamic State’, in OEMIWW, ed. John L. Esposito, 322.}

Significantly, Qūṭb was arrested with many members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954, as a result of an alleged assassination conspiracy against Jamal Ğālīl Ėabd al-Nasir. He was duly sentenced to fifteen years of hard labour in 1955, but after serving nine years...
he was transferred to the prison hospital due to bad health.\textsuperscript{18} It was during his imprisonment that he made use of the time to complete his work on Qur’anic commentary and to develop his controversial work, \textit{Ma’ālim fi ‘l-Tariq} (Milestones).

The climax of his troubles began with the publication of this work (Milestones) in 1964. He wrote with a profound sense of conviction, knowing the likely impact of his words on Nasir’s regime, of which the book was particularly critical. His most controversial statement was his condemnation of the government as well as of Egyptian society in general as \textit{jāhiliyyah} (total pagan ignorance). Indeed every aspect of the whole system, including the people’s beliefs, habits, art and laws were, in his eyes, expressions of \textit{jāhiliyyah}. A famous passage in Milestones is the following:

\begin{quote}
We are surrounded by \textit{jāhiliyyah} today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people’s beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws, is \textit{jāhiliyyah} even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of \textit{jāhiliyyah}. Our aim is to change the \textit{jāhili} system at its very roots – this system which is fundamentally at variance with Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression, is keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our Creator. All the existing so-called “Muslim” societies are also \textit{jāhili} societies.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Consequently, Qutb was executed by the Nasir regime in 1966 together with Muḥammad Yūsuf Ḥawwāsh, his friend during his ten-year imprisonment, who became an avid reader and critic of his writings. Without ceasing to be occupied with

\textsuperscript{18} Smith, \textit{An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'}, 205.

\textsuperscript{19} Quoted in Musallam, ‘Sayyid Qutb’s View of Islam, Society and Militancy’, 82.
the definition of jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic paganism), he also discussed at length the concept of authority (ḥākimiyyah). In his political thought, ḥākimiyyah belongs solely to Allah. Allah possesses all power, and the authority that human beings possess is, without doubt, based on His authority over them. However, the authority of Allah is totally different from that of human beings, as their authority is bestowed on them by Allah, but Allah's authority derives from, or is one with, His possession of power.  

Quṭb wrote more than twenty-five books, of which the longest, Fi ḽalal al-Qur'ān (In the Shade of the Qur'an) is regarded as the most important. It is not just another commentary on the Qur'an, but, on the one hand, is a sincere and sober effort to understand man's contemporary achievements and difficulties in the light of the Qur'anic message. On the other hand, it vigorously explores the Qur'an's guidance for an increasingly sophisticated and highly perplexed human society. The work spans the whole of the text of the Qur'an and was largely written over a period of fifteen years, most of which its author spent in prison.  

It has been widely recognised as an outstanding contribution to Islamic thought and scholarship, to which students and scholars all over the world owe a great deal. It has been translated into English and has also been published in a monthly Arabic newspaper. This achievement has enabled people all over the world to read and benefit from Quṭb's ideas and knowledge.

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21 Musallam, 'Sayyid Quṭb's View of Islam, Society and Militancy', 79.
7.2.3 Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1903-1981)

Ṣallāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī was born in Tabriz in 1903 into a respectable religious family. He lost his mother at the age of five and his father died when he was eight. He then became closely attached to his brother. He received his earliest education in his native city, mastering the elements of Arabic and the religious sciences. At about the age of twenty Ṭabāṭabā’ī and his brother set out for the great Shi‘ī University of Najaf, Iraq, to undertake more advanced studies. While he was there, he married a prominent cleric’s daughter, which enabled him to enjoy solid domestic serenity. 22

Most students in the madrasahs at that time followed the branch of transmitted sciences (al-ʿulūm al-naqīyyah), especially the sciences dealing with the Divine Law, fiqh or jurisprudence, and usūl al-fiqh or the principles of jurisprudence. Ṭabāṭabā’ī, however, sought to master both branches of the traditional sciences: the transmitted and the intellectual. He studied Divine Law and the principles of jurisprudence with two of the famous masters of that day, Mirza Muhammad Ḥusayn Na’īnī and Shaykh Muhammad Isfahānī. 23

Ṭabāṭabā’ī returned to Tabriz in 1934 and spent a few quiet years in that city teaching a small number of disciples. However, he was as yet unknown to the religious circles of Persia at large. It was the devastating events of the Second World War and the Russian

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occupation of Persia that brought Ṭabāṭabā’ī from Tabriz to Qom in 1945. Qom was then, and continues to be, the centre of religious studies in Persia. In his quiet and unassuming manner he began to teach in this city, concentrating on Qur’anic commentary and traditional Islamic philosophy and theology, which had not been taught in Qom for many years.\(^{24}\)

In addition to formal learning, or what the traditional Muslim sources describe as ‘acquired science’, Ṭabāṭabā’ī sought after the knowledge of Islamic gnosis. He was fortunate in finding a great Shi’ī master of this discipline, Mirza ʿAlī al-Qazi (1868-1946), who initiated him into the Divine mysteries and guided him in his journey toward spiritual perfection.\(^{25}\) While resident in Qom, Ṭabāṭabā’ī also made frequent visits to Tehran. After the Second World War, when Marxism was fashionable among some of the youth in Tehran, he was the only religious scholar who took pains to study the philosophical basis of Communism and supply a response to dialectical materialism from the traditional point of view. The fruit of this effort was one of his major works, *The Principles of Philosophy and the Realistic Method*, in which he defended realism in its traditional and medieval sense against all dialectical philosophies.\(^{26}\)

In addition to a heavy programme of teaching and guidance, Ṭabāṭabā’ī occupied himself with writing many books and articles, which attest to his remarkable intellectual powers and breadth of learning within the world of the traditional Islamic sciences. His greatest work is probably the monumental Qur’anic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*. In his *tafsīr*, Ṭabāṭabā’ī approached the verses of the Qur’an from philosophical, sociological and traditional points of view. Moreover, he added a large


\(^{26}\) Nasr, ‘Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn ’, 161.
section to each verse or passage commented upon, citing both Shi`ī and Sunni hadiths. In addition to his tafsīr, he also wrote another book on Qur’anic studies entitled Qur’ān Dār Islām (The Qur’ān in Islam). He devoted his time completely to teaching and writing until he died in Qom in 1981.

7.3 MODERN MUSLIM COMMENTATORS’ INTERPRETATIONS OF THE KHILĀFAH, IMĀMAH AND ULŪ’L-AMR-VERSES

The analysis of modern Sunni and Shi`ī interpretations will be divided according to the classification of terms. However, it should be noted that the analysis will not examine every verse, as was done in the classical part, but will rather focus on certain verses which are particularly relevant to the study.

7.3.1 Khilāfah

Sūrat al-Baqārah (2): 30 gives much significant information regarding the concept of the khilāfah, highlighting the appointment of human beings as vicegerents on earth. As has been noted in the classical analysis, khalīfah in this verse specifically refers to the prophet Adam and his descendants. Mawdūdi, discussing this aspect, interprets it more generally than the classical exegetes. He refers to the khilāfah of human beings without connecting the term to Adam or his descendants. Although it may be assumed from his interpretation that his view is similar to that of the classical commentators, it is surprising that he should not have used a more direct and specific reference to Adam.

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and his descendants, as his predecessors had done. Nevertheless, his interpretation is not intended to refute them, even though he prefers the general interpretation (human beings).

Qutb's interpretation of this verse is very similar to Mawdūdi's, but although he highlights the story of Adam and his descendants' appointment to the khilāfah, when it comes to a detailed elaboration he differs from Mawdūdi. This is due to the fact that he usually starts his commentary on the khilāfah-verse, and particularly this verse, with a discussion of ḥākimiyah (divine authority): the ultimate power of Allah to create, appoint and replace any khali āh is the overriding idea. His interpretation later moves on to consider the authority of human beings, especially as Allah's vicegerents on this earth.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, defining the meaning of khali āh in this verse, seems to agree with the two earlier interpretations; he holds that khali āh refers not only to Adam but also to his descendants. This indicates his agreement with every commentator who interprets the khilāfah in a general way. However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī indicates that the khilāfah begins only with the appointment of Adam as the khali āh, and at the same time he denies the khilāfah of the beings created before Adam. Although Adam was not the first creature created by Allah, he was the one appointed to the khilāfah, and according to

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Tabātabā’i, the process of khilāfah started with his appointment. In other words, the early creatures such as jinn and iblīs were not regarded as khālifah, even though, according to some authentic hadīths, they were created earlier than Adam. In order to support his view that the use of khilāfah in this verse indicates human beings in general and not Adam alone, Tabātabā’i quotes three more verses, which elaborate the khilāfah of the prophets after Adam. They are al-Aʿrāf (7): 69, Yūnus (10): 14 and al-Naml (27): 62. Therefore, it is clear that Tabātabā’i has no argument either with the modern or classical commentators when discussing the term khilāfah in this verse.

The appointment of human beings to the khilāfah, as has been agreed by many Qur’anic commentators, is the primary subject of this verse. However, it is not mentioned what type of creature the khalīfah is and what sort of characteristics he should possess. The only clear statement that Allah makes concerns His intention to place a vicegerent on earth. There is no indication in this verse whether the earth had already existed before the appointment of this khilāfah or whether it was created after the creation of Adam. Mawdūdi and Tabātabā’i, and even Qūtb do not, however, deal with this question in their comments on this verse. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Mawdūdi’s and Qūtb’s interest is focused more on the analysis of political thought and movements, discussing the Islamic state, its form of government and so forth, which was their main purpose in writing their commentaries. Perhaps all three of them considered that all the questions relating to theological knowledge had already been discussed and answered by the majority of the classical scholars, while the issue of the pertinence to political thought of the concept of khilāfah was both contemporary and more controversial.

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However, Mawdūdi does emphasise the general nature of the term *khalifah*. In the first place, he defines the meaning of the term itself, which according to him means ‘the one who exercises the authority delegated to him by his principal, and does so in the capacity of his deputy and agent’. This *khalifah* has not been created to do as he wishes, but rather he carries important responsibilities and duties enjoined by God. On the grounds that God is his creator, a man is bound to serve and obey Him. Moreover, on the basis that God is his master who gives him the task of being His vicegerent on earth, he has to do more than just serve and obey according to his own judgement. It is a compulsory duty for him to serve and obey God within all the guidelines and rules provided by Him.

Discussing a somewhat different aspect, Mawdūdi mentions the importance of the functional concept of *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. Its real role, according to him, is to protect the religion and the territory of the Islamic state and to put an end to all evils, and its even more essential function is to foster a balanced system of social justice and encourage every kind of virtuous deed. He considers the theory of the ‘great man’, according to which the necessity of leadership is a logical outgrowth of the theory of social change. According to this theory, the character of a social order flows entirely from the top to the bottom. This indicates that the establishment of the society and the achievement of its goals are determined according to the credibility of its leaders. Therefore, the moral and religious qualities of a leader are more important than socio-economic, political and institutional considerations in ensuring the achievement of the goals of the society.

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34 Adam, ‘Maudūdi and the Islamic State’, 119.
The exercise of the *khalifah’s* obedience to God in accordance with His guidance and instructions is permitted by the limited authority bestowed by Him. The authority vested by God in the *khalifah* must, according to Mawdūdi, be fairly and rightly manipulated; it is not intended to allow him to do as he pleases and abuse his power, nor should he imagine that he fully owns that authority and can deliver it over to anybody he chooses. Rather it is to be used as a means to achieve God’s will, as the *khalifah* is the intermediary charged with delivering God’s message to humankind.36 Moreover, God has set the limits within which the *khalifah* can use this power, even though it is his free choice whether to go beyond or to keep within them.

Another significant aspect discussed by Mawdūdi concerns the exercise of authority by the *khalifah’s* deputy or agent. Here Mawdūdi tries to be more explicit and detailed than the classical commentators because they only define the meaning of *khalifah* as *qādah, amīr* or *imām*. Mawdūdi, however, goes further by including the role of the *khalifah’s* deputy in helping him exercise his responsibilities. Mawdūdi’s intention, in including a discussion of the role of the deputy or assistant, may be to show the importance of teamwork to the leadership structure. The fact that the *khalifah* is the head of the organisation, just as the Prophet Muḥammad was the leader of his people, is undeniable, but his leadership will not be firmly founded without the contribution of his deputy.

Regarding the words addressed to God by the angels, ‘*Will you place on it one who will spread mischief and shed blood?*’, Mawdūdi elucidates that it does not indicate their objection to the appointment of human beings as vicegerents. According to him, it is merely an inquiry and shows curiosity about the hidden reason behind God’s

In giving this explanation, Mawdūdi produces a similar interpretation to that of the classical commentators. God, at the end of this verse, quickly answers the angels’ inquiry and curiosity by replying ‘Surely I know what you do not know’, an answer which is more than enough to satisfy the angels, although it does not reveal the real reason for the appointment. Moreover, it is implicit that God alone may judge what is good and bad; therefore, when He says ‘Surely I know what you do not know’, it is evident that He has reasons for His appointment of human beings as vicegerents which are not known to any other creatures.

Mawdūdi denies that the phrase ‘while we celebrate Your glory and extol Your holiness?’ indicates the angels’ intention to claim that they are more suitable than human beings to be the vicegerents. Again Mawdūdi produces an argument similar to that of the classical commentators in interpreting this phrase. He believes that all the angels intend to do is to emphasise their obedience in fulfilling God’s orders. _Tabātabā’i, however, is silent on this matter.

While Mawdūdi does not produce any relevant interpretation of the concept of khilāfah as it is found in sūrah Sād (38): 26, an almost identical explanation to that given for sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30 is provided by Qutb and _Tabātabā’i. But while the reference of 2: 30 is to Adam and his descendants, here khalifah refers not only to the prophet David but also to all khalfahs on the earth. To explain further, _Tabātabā’i outlines two characteristics, justice and fairness, that every khalifah should possess and must practise. A similar interpretation can also be found in Qutb’s commentary. A. H. Johns offers a significant contribution to the interpretation of this verse, highlighting the view of the nineteenth-century Malay scholar, Nawawi (d. 1897), which combines

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37 Ibid, 60.
38 _Tabātabā’i, Al-Mtāf fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān, 17: 205.
the *khalīfah*‘s roles as prophet and king. In the context of this verse, however, the two roles are applied to David only, since he was appointed as prophet as well as king to the people of Israel.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī also considers that it is the *khalīfah*‘s duty to practise justice, as stated in the phrase ‘*judge between men with justice*'; this is something almost impossible for ordinary *khalīfahs* to perform. Doing perfect justice is a duty, which they will definitely fail to perform due to their lack of one significant criterion of *khilāfah*, namely infallibility (*ʿismah*). *Khalīfahs* may carry out this duty successfully only if Allah grants them protection from all error and sin (*al-maʿṣūm*). Indirectly, Ṭabāṭabā’ī indicates here the doctrine concerning the infallibility that the *imāms* possess during the period of their rule.

Quṭb, in defining the nature of the *khilāfah*, opposes the Shi‘ī opinion. A caliph, in his opinion, is the representative of God on earth and must dispense justice among the people while refraining (like the prophets) from following his personal opinion. The modern Muslim rulers, however, are merely *umarā*’ (plural of *amīr*), which are equivalent to governors in the early period of Islam. They (*umarā*’ or governors) assume the role of caliph in their respective provinces. He further emphasises that the assumption of leadership in structuring the life of the people is related not only to their religious life, but also to their political, social and economic life.

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40 Nawawi was one of the important figures in the Malay archipelago. He was born in Banten, West Java in 1813 and died in Mecca in 1897. He was the author of the *tafsīr Marāh labīd*, a two-volume Arabic commentary on the Qur’an. His commentary on sūrah Sād has been analysed by Johns. For a detailed discussion on the interpretation of the term *khalīfah* in sūrah Sād (38): 26, see A. H. Johns, ‘On Qur’anic Exegetes and Exegesis: A Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning’, in *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science* 28 (1997): 29-30.


Regarding the qualifications needed to be a caliph, Qutb takes the position that anyone is eligible provided he is a Muslim. He denies that nobility is a pre-requisite for the caliphate, stressing that the requirement of the Qur'an concerns the caliph's dispensing of justice and refraining from following personal opinion to the neglect of the public interest. Indeed he is very much concerned with the caliph's ability to dispense absolute justice, commenting as follows:

Absolute justice is that which is not swayed by affection or by hatred, and its base cannot be affected by love or by enmity. It is not influenced by any relationship between individuals or by any hatred between people. It is enjoyed by all Muslims without discrimination arising from descent or rank, wealth or influence. It is enjoyed by other people even though there may be hatred between them and the Muslims.43

7.3.2 Khalif

Commenting on surat al-An'am (6): 165, Mawdūdi and Qutb again emphasise the ultimate power (sovereignty) of Allah - Qutb preferring to use the term 'divine authority' (hākimiyah)44 - in appointing human beings as vicegerents on earth. Similarly to the interpretation of surat al-Baqarah (2): 30, the issue of the authority and power given to human beings during their appointment as Khalifah is once again the main

43 Ibid, 27.

44 The principle of the Sovereignty of Allah is sometimes given another title, which is the Tawḥīd (Unity of God). This means that God alone is the Creator, Sustainer and Master of this universe and of all that exists in it. It also means that the sovereignty of this kingdom rests only in Him, as He alone has the right to command or forbid. No creature can claim sovereignty, be it a human being, a family, a class or group of people, or even the human race in the world as a whole. See Mawdūdi, Islamic Way of Life, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, 40-41.
There is no doubt that the appointment of human beings as khalā'if entails the exercise of power, which is one of the greatest responsibilities entrusted by Allah to his creatures. Even the angels, as interpreted earlier in al-Baqarah (2): 30, were curious about the trust awarded to human beings, perhaps simply acknowledging the difficulty inherent in being appointed as vicegerents and that the matter will inevitably be complicated by Allah’s entrusting such power to human beings, a decision which could lead to misuse and abuse. Therefore, Mawdūdi believes that this power, which is given together with the appointment of human beings, will produce positive and beneficial results rather than prove destructive to themselves only if they use it in the right and proper manner.

Besides this simple explanation, no further opinion is to be found in either Mawdūdi or Qūṭb, perhaps because they have given a similar interpretation regarding the earlier verse. Ṭabātabā’ī, on the other hand, gives no interpretation at all for this verse; he apparently believes that its meaning is clear enough to need no further discussion, although he has elucidated a similar verse in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.

In sūrah Yūnus (10), two verses, 14 and 73, show the usage of the term khalā’if. Apart from providing the literal translation of the Qur’anic text, Mawdūdi does not produce a detailed interpretation of these two verses, especially the latter one, although he points out the first verse does give some indications of the ancient concept of khilāfah. Regarding this interpretation, he refers to the story of the previous nations to whom Allah had given the opportunity to do well, and which had been destroyed as a result of their decision to participate in wrong-doing and rebellion. Those nations were given the opportunity to succeed but failed as a result of their ignorance. At the end of his

45 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’an, 2, 299; Qūṭb, Fi Zīlāl al-Qur’ān, 3: 1240-1241.
46 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’an, 2: 299.
discussion, Mawdūdi highlights the possibility that this calamity might also befall the people of Arabia, who have been given the same task and test, if they do not take their obligation seriously. Moreover, in order to avoid meeting a tragic fate similar to that of the previous nations, they should take those stories as the lessons that will prevent them from committing the same mistakes.\(^{48}\)

By interpreting sūrah Yūnus (10): 14 in this way, Mawdūdi seems to suggest that the holders of authority should always strive to honour their responsibilities. This condition applies to any Islamic form of government. Failure to excel and act correctly, although warned by the story of the previous nations in this verse, will put them in a critical situation, where the worst thing that they might face is to be removed and replaced with another type of leadership. Not only that; they will also be questioned by Allah about all their deeds and actions while holding the post. The objective of removing and replacing one leadership group with another is to ensure the establishment of the sharfah in the Muslim community and the implementation of justice according to the law and guidance of Allah. While this may be only an assumption concerning Mawdūdi’s interpretation of sūrah Yūnus (10): 14, if one considers the way he comments on and emphasises the previous nations’ failure, this interpretation is probably the most acceptable one.

Taking many past experiences as examples, it is obvious that the existence of inequality and injustice in a society is partly a result of the lack of religious and moral orientation on the leaders’ part. If this situation occurs in a society, Mawdūdi recommends that the leader must be changed for a better one. The need for a good and religiously oriented leader who can fulfil his responsibilities is strongly expressed by Mawdūdi:

What we need is a group of people..., a leader... imbued with the spirit of Islam and who is determined to establish Islam... We all know that if a building has to be constructed, the objective can be achieved if the architects know the design of the building and have the will to construct it and possess the requisite resources. On the other hand, if they are available, anything can be built, be it a temple, mosque or (any other building).\textsuperscript{49}

Qutb, however, discusses this matter from a different angle in his comments on surah Yūnus (10): 14. He points out that the khilāfah of one nation takes place as a result of the abolition of the previous one, which has continuously committed sins and engaged in wrongdoing. The newly selected one, therefore, must be aware that the responsibility of being appointed is a test set by Allah, which it may pass or fail. Therefore, the new leadership must abide by all His commandments to perform good deeds and avoid any means that lead to the wrong path. This responsibility is of the greatest importance, as Allah will judge its outcome on the Day of Judgement.\textsuperscript{50}

The term khalīf in surah Fāṭir: 39 (35: 39) is regarded by Ṭabāṭabā’ī as the basis for the concept of tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah (unity of Lordship). It is easily understood from the phrase ‘He who made you successor on earth’. It states that Allah is the only creator of human beings and that he has appointed them to be His khalīf. As He has the power to create or destroy the universe, He can also destroy a people if they stray from the right path. Therefore, obedience must be rendered only to Him and He must not be compared with any other being. Because He has total control over all power, Ṭabāṭabā’ī insists that human beings should rely on and seek help only from Him.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Maudūdi, \textit{Islamic Law and Constitution}, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, 126.

\textsuperscript{50} Qutb, \textit{Fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān}, 3: 1770.

\textsuperscript{51} Ṭabāṭabā’ī, \textit{Al-Mā‘ān fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān}, 17: 53.
These are some of the arguments that Ṭabāṭabā’ī uses to justify the concept of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*.

An almost identical interpretation is found in Quṭb’s commentary on sūrah Fāṭir: 39. It also derives the concept of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*, which entails that there can be no change or limit to the being or power of Allah. All other things inevitably change, including the *khilāfah* of human beings, which Quṭb emphasises, changes from one generation to another; no *khallīfah* can remain on his throne forever. Whether the *khalīfah* practises Allah’s commands as ordered or disregards them, he has no excuse for disobedience, which will cause him to be replaced. For only Allah is irreplaceable (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*), whereas it is the fate of all *khalīfā* to yield their position to another.⁵² Ultimately, the good and the bad *khalīfā*, who are all replaceable, will receive what they deserve.

### 7.3.3 Khulāfā’

Mawdūḍi does not produce a significant interpretation of the term *khulāfā’* in sūrat al-ʾĀrāf (7): 69. The only essential point that he makes, with reference to the concept of the *khilāfah*, concerns the Qur’anic narration of the stories of the prophets. The story describes the appointment of the prophet Hūd to be the leader or, more importantly, as the messenger to the people of ʿĀd, replacing Noah, who had been sent to guide and reform his own people; they, the Qur’an narrates, were the first to drift away from the right way of life followed by Adam and his descendants. As a result of their

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disobedience, Allah totally destroyed them with the flood and only the companions of Noah, who did believe and accept his message, survived.\textsuperscript{53}

While Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not produce a significant interpretation of this verse, Qurṭb presents it in a slightly different manner. He does not take the khilāfah of the prophets as his main subject, but stresses that the appointment to the khilāfah and the consequent award of high status is bestowed solely to make the recipients thankful for Allah’s grace. Moreover, they should preserve the grace of being appointed to the khilāfah by fulfilling their duty in the best possible way. Only if these two conditions are accomplished will they receive their reward from Allah, which is the ultimate blessing of life in this world and the Hereafter.\textsuperscript{54}

The Qur’anic narration of the stories of the prophets continues in verse 74 of sūrat al-Ārāf (7). Here Mawdūdī provides a little more interpretation, compared to his treatment of the previous verse. After the story of the prophet Hūd and the annihilation of Ād, it is written that the prophet Ṣāliḥ was next appointed to deliver the message of Islam to his people, the Thamūd. With his appointment, Allah reminded them to act wisely and to learn lessons from the annihilation of previous peoples, like those of Noah and of Hūd. Moreover, Mawdūdī notes that the appointment of Ṣāliḥ to the people of Thamūd did not last long because of their inclination to sin and rebellion. This situation also applies to all other nations who were appointed afterwards. Even the condition of being the nation of the last prophet, Muḥammad, is not an automatic guarantee that the people will escape punishment. Allah has decreed that every single nation have to serve Him and act according to His command. They will receive the same fate if they cross the line laid down by Allah in His sharfah, which is delivered

\textsuperscript{53} Mawdūdī, \textit{Towards Understanding the Qur’an}, 3: 37-42.

\textsuperscript{54} Qurṭb, \textit{Fi Zīl al-Qur’ān}, 3: 1311.
through the channel of the appointed prophets. In other words, Mawdūdi’s reading of this verse is intended to make the people aware of the power of Allah to destroy the ummah of the Prophet Muḥammad if they become sinful and disobedient and, according to His will, to appoint another people to carry out His commands.

Since the term khulāfāʾ in sūrat al-ʾĀrāf (7): 74 also concerns the khilāfah of the prophets, Qūṭb produces an interpretation similar to that of the khalāṣif verse discussed earlier. The responsibility of being appointed as khalīfah to replace the previous one and the gratitude felt for being entrusted with the task are again the main substance of this verse. Other than that, Qūṭb raises no further significant issue nor does he discuss any different matter to develop the understanding of the concept of khilāfah. A similar situation is also found in Ṭabāṭabā’i’s commentary, since he merely explains this verse in a similar way to the previous one (verse 69).

Regarding sūrat al-Naml (27): 62, unlike Mawdūdi and Ṭabāṭabā’i, Qūṭb makes several important points. They include the ultimate power of Allah, the appointment of human beings as khalīfah and the changing process of the khilāfah. Although they are significant issues relating to the concept of khilāfah, they have already been emphasised on many occasions in the earlier discussions.

### 7.3.4 Yastakhlif

Of the four verses that use the term yastakhlif, Mawdūdi offers interesting interpretations of two only, which are al-Anʾām (6): 133 and al-Nūr (24): 55. The other two verses, al-ʾĀrāf (7): 129 and Hüd (11): 57, contribute nothing which is not found

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55 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’an, 3: 47.
56 Qūṭb, Fī Ḫīlāṣ al-Qurʾān, 3: 1313.
in the verses elucidated by Mawdūdi. Starting with the first one, sūrat al-Anām (6): 133 Mawdūdi notes that it provides some meanings of the concept of khilāfah, mainly highlighting the absolute power (sovereignty) of Allah over His creatures. This power, which Mawdūdi defines from the phrase ‘Your Lord is Self-Sufficient, full of compassion’, is capable of appointing another kind of creature as a replacement for those previously destroyed. As with many of the verses of its kind, it is clear that the replacement usually occurs as a result of the failure to obey Allah’s instruction. Therefore, this verse is also a warning to the appointed people not to go beyond the limits prescribed for them. In order to make them fully aware and take Allah’s warning seriously, the verse ends with the reminder of what happened to previous peoples, like those of Ād, Thamūd and so forth. 58

Qūṭb seems to agree with Mawdūdi’s interpretation, as he emphasises that human beings’ appointment to the khilāfah is entirely due to Allah’s grace and will. 59 In this way, the verse highlights the concept of Allah’s sovereignty, whereby ultimate power belongs to Him only. More significantly, the beginning and end of human existence also depends on His will. Therefore, Qūṭb states that it is Allah’s choice whether to appoint His chosen khālifahs or to replace them with others. 60 In fact, the khilāfah of human beings, either good or bad, changes and no one can claim an everlasting right to the position. Therefore, it is very important for any khalifah, during the short period of his responsibility, to perform his duties as perfectly as possible and to follow all God’s orders and commandments.

Ṭabāṭabā’i explains the term istakhlafa in sūrat al-Anām (6): 133 in a different way. This verse, according to him, shows that Allah does not practise zulm (injustice), and

58 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’an, 2: 275-76.
60 Ibid, 1210.
His mercy will be given to all human beings, whether virtuous or wicked. They are then free to choose their own way and, since freedom is granted, whatever their choice, they are answerable for it.\(^{61}\) Therefore, any particular people who are given this chance should fulfil the responsibility and the failure to do so will not have any effect on Allah, but only on themselves, since Allah can appoint another khalifah to replace them, just as He did in the past.

Regarding surat al-A‘rāf (7): 129, on the other hand, the only significant interpretation comes from Quṭb; Mawdūdī and Ṭabāṭabā’i do not contribute any further elaboration. This situation is quite common in any work of tafsīr, as there is no need to reinterpret a verse which produces a similar meaning to one that has already been treated. Nevertheless, Quṭb points out that Allah’s promise to appoint men to the khilāfah is restricted to those who are patient. In this sense, the unbelievers and ungrateful are not the subjects of this promise. He further argues that the appointment of human beings is for one momentous reason only, which is to test and put them on trial, as understood from the phrase ‘He may try you by your deeds’.\(^{62}\)

Unlike the interpretations of the previous two verses, which are considered as a warning and reminder to human beings, the meaning of verse 55 in surat al-Nūr (24) serves rather as a promise and encouragement to them. Mawdūdī produces a very long discussion on this verse, if not the lengthiest of all. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the term is used twice in the verse. In the first place, Allah makes a promise to place human beings on the earth as vicegerents. On the other hand, the second instance emphasises the examples of the previous peoples to whom Allah had given the khilāfah.


\(^{62}\) Quṭb, Fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān, 3: 1356-57.
Mawdūdi asserts that the *khilāfah* (vicegerency), in every case, is only awarded to a selected group of people, who are obviously believers and who practise good deeds in accordance with the prescriptions of Allah. In other words, the *khilāfah* is given only to those with good qualifications and characteristics. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, a researcher at the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, agrees that this interpretation is essentially what Mawdūdi means in regard to this verse. His agreement with Mawdūdi’s interpretation can be seen from his statement:

> God has used the term ‘vicegerent’ instead of sovereignty. Sovereignty in Islam belongs to God alone...the power to rule over the earth has been promised to ‘the whole community of believers’; it has not been stated that any particular person or class among them will be raised to that position. From this it follows that all believers are repositories of the caliphate. The caliphate granted by God to the faithful is “the collective right of all those who accept and admit God’s absolute sovereignty over themselves”.

Mawdūdi asserts that both the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth* give clear guidance about the criteria of eligibility for the *khilāfah*. He prescribes five conditions which qualify an individual for the *khilāfah*: he should be Muslim, male, sane, adult and a citizen of the Islamic State. Consequently, these conditions indicate that unbelievers, wrongdoers and unfaithful people are not to be included in this promise. However, the *khilāfah* is not exclusively dedicated to any particular people, but rather to whomever is most worthy, as Mawdūdi points out:

> According to the Qur'an, the vicegerency of God is not the exclusive birthright of any individual or clan or class of people; it is the collective

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right of all those who accept and admit God’s absolute sovereignty over themselves and adopt the Divine Code, conveyed through the Prophet, as the law above all laws and regulations.66

Regarding another aspect, Mawdūdi condemns and rejects the idea of interpreting the khilāfah, in any circumstance, as mere power, dominance and hegemony,67 the belief that power is all that is needed and is therefore the only prerequisite for the office of khalīfah, according to which anyone holding power is considered the real khalīfah and well deserving to be included in Allah’s promise. According to Mawdūdi, this is a very serious misinterpretation of the term, which confuses and complicates the true understanding of the Islamic khilāfah. If anyone accepts it as the real meaning, it indicates his acceptance and recognition of anyone holding power even if he has never qualified for the post and has never possessed the required qualities and characteristics. Therefore this sort of khilāfah, which is defined as mere power, like that of Pharaoh over the people of Israel, is not to be included in the promise of this verse.

Mawdūdi further argues that exclusion from the khilāfah does not apply to unbelievers only, but also to hypocrites. This indicates that Muslims who do not truly practise Islam (munāfiqūn) disqualify themselves from the opportunity to be Allah’s khalīfahs.68 If this less sinful group of people, who are recognised as munāfiqūn, are refused the khilāfah due to their ignorance and failure to fulfil Allah’s commands, a far worse category of people in the eyes of Allah are the unbelievers (kāfirūn), who are definitely excluded. They are automatically denied the khilāfah in its real meaning according to this verse. Moreover, Mawdūdi comments on the existence of some superpowers of this kind in modern times. They dominate through power and have

68 Ibid, 265-266.
total control over their people but they cannot be considered as coming under the real meaning of *khilafah* given in this verse, since their power is obtained only through invasion and oppression of the weak; they are just like the examples given of the ancient ancestors who failed in their responsibilities.\(^69\)

It is accepted that most of the superpowers possess their power as a result of their invention or control of modern sources of power or the creation of new technology, and Mawdūdī states that they are not to be included in the promise of Allah. The reason for the exclusion is very obvious and obtainable from the verse itself. It is noticeable that any discussion of the nature of the *khilafah*, such as occurs in this verse, is always connected with the issue of the characteristics and criteria of the *khilafah* itself. Therefore, the promise of appointment to the *khilafah* only applies to those that believe and practise good deeds, and this situation has been narrated in many instances in the Qur’an.

In commenting on surat al-Nūr (24): 55, Qutb seems to agree with Mawdūdī’s interpretation. In his own style, Qutb points out two significant issues. Firstly, Allah’s promise to make all believing Muslims *khalifahs* on earth is something every Muslim should accept, since Qutb stresses that Allah has never broken His promise. Secondly, the promise only applies to those who use good means. In other words, the *khilafah* of evil and injustice is not what Allah means in this verse. The kind of *khilafah* which Allah prescribes as the only true way should lead to good deeds and the practice of justice. In order to support his interpretation, Qutb emphasises that this kind of *khilafah* may be seen in the deeds of many previous figures, who successfully fulfilled their appointment as *khalifah*.\(^70\)

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\(^{69}\) Ibid, 265-266.

Ṭabātabāʾī, in defining the term *yastakhlf* in sūrat al-Nūr (24: 55) differs not only from Sunni but also from many Shiʿī commentators. This is due to his interpretation of the term as the appointment of divinely guided *khilāfah* (*istikhlāf khilāfah al-ilāhiyah*) or, more precisely, the appointed prophets such as Adam in sūrat al-Baqarah (2: 30), David in sūrah Šād (38: 26) and Solomon in sūrat al-Naml (27: 16). In Ṭabātabāʾī’s interpretation of this verse, the term *yastakhlf* specifically designates the prophets, who were divinely appointed. At the same time, the context of this term implies the denial of non-prophet *khalfahs*. As for the second term in this verse, “as He empowered those before them”, Ṭabātabāʾī emphasises the fulfilment of Allah’s promise to the previous *khalfahs*, who were among His prophets and *awliyāʾ* (friends).

### 7.3.5 Ukhluf

Progressing to the one and only use of *ukhluf*, in sūrat al-ʿArāf (7: 142), Mawdūdi notes the importance of the *khilafah*’s characteristics and attitude. It is implicit in the historical story of the prophets that the brothers Moses and Aaron were both appointed to the *khilāfah*. However, Allah did not prefer Aaron to Moses even though he was three years Moses’ senior. It is assumed that the characteristics and attitude of Moses suited the situation more than those of Aaron. In this context, therefore, the age of a *khilifah* is secondary to his eligibility and suitability. Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that Mawdūdi does not intend to deny Aaron’s suitability as one of Allah’s messengers. It is simply that Allah appointed each to a different status according to

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72 Ibid, 151.
their qualities, since Moses was appointed as a rasūl (a messenger with divine revelation) and Aaron as a nabi (a prophet).

In a different context, the appointment of a non-prophet khilāfah depends on the same method, whereby the most qualified and eligible candidate, regardless of his age, should be appointed. It is the same method as was used in the appointment of Moses. Choosing the khilāfah in this way, even though Mawdūdi does not explicitly endorse it, indicates that anyone with better qualifications and more righteous behaviour is preferable for the khilāfah, although he may be much younger than some other candidates in the community.

Qutb notes two important points from surat al-‘Āraf (7): 142. The first one deals with the appointment of a new khilāfah on the recommendation of the former one. Although it is not clear whether Qutb accepts this kind of appointment or not, he does highlight this method in his commentary. However, it is only an implication from the example of Aaron’s appointment as a result of Moses’s recommendation. Perhaps this method can only be applied in this particular circumstance, where the appointment is based on a prophetic mission. The khilāfah of rulers such as the Umayyads, ʿAbbāsids and so forth, on the other hand, is not based on prophetic mission and therefore may not suit this method.74 Secondly, Qutb also asserts the responsibility of a khilāfah, as well as of Muslims in general, to always remind and advise their fellow Muslims. In fact, it is a reciprocal relationship: if a person, whether caliph or not, does wrong, his fellow should remind him of the right way. This is very vital, in Qutb’s opinion, in order to ensure harmony and good relations between the ruler and the ruled.75

74 Qutb, Fi Ṣilāl al-Qur’ān, 3: 1367-68.
75 Ibid, 1367-68.
In general, Muslims believe that there is no specific reference explaining the way of choosing the caliph to be found anywhere in the divine sources, except the instruction to the people whose affairs are decided by counsels among themselves. Therefore, this may lead to many different interpretations, with various commentators arguing for the effectiveness of their own methods. However, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin) of Egypt, suggested election through an electoral college (ahl al-shura) in an effort to prevent his contemporaries reverting to the old, dangerous system of hereditary succession as adopted by the Umayyads. 'Abd al-Qadir 'Awdah (d. 1954), the legal luminary and one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood agreed with his colleague. However, he went further, emphasising that the election could be in the form of nomination by a previous ruler or by the electoral college, or through selection and acceptance by the electoral college, or by an act of fealty like the bay'ah (oath of allegiance).

Qutb, on the other hand, differs completely from these two scholars. He totally rejects the system of bay'ah, as promoted by 'Abd al-Qadir 'Awdah, because it neither suits the modern age, nor is it in agreement with the political system of Islam. Nevertheless, Qutb believes that there should be an election even if there is only one unopposed

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76 Al-Qur'an, 42: 38. The verse reads: 'Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;'.

77 Under the Umayyads, the system of hereditary succession was a flexible one. In fact, 'the appointment of a son as heir apparent was not always followed by his accession; for, in the absence of a principle of hereditary succession or of primogeniture and in the face of the legal disapproval of such a principle, it was generally the most powerful member of the royal family who secured the throne for himself'. See Reuben Levy, The Social Structure of Islam (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962): 282.


79 Bay'ah is a system whereby some leading members of the society or family heads give an oath of allegiance to the new caliph. See Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, 247.
candidate. He points out the most proper way to choose the caliph, explaining it in his characteristically radical manner:

The ruler has no religious authority direct from Heaven, as had some rulers in ancient times in the theocratic government; he becomes a ruler in his position only by the completely and absolutely free choice of all Muslims; and they are not bound to elect him by any compact with his predecessor, nor is there any necessity for the position to be hereditary in the family. Thereafter, he must derive his authority from his continual enforcement of the divine law. When the Muslim Community is no longer satisfied with him, his office must lapse; and even if they are satisfied with him any dereliction of the law on his part means that he no longer has the right to obedience.  

7.3.6 Imān and Aʾimmah

Literally, there is no doubt that imān in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, which is the only one from the total of six comprising singular and plural terms (imām and aʾimmah) that Mawdūdi believes to generate the concept of khilāfah, refers to the appointment of the prophet Abraham as the imān. It further emphasises God’s promise to confer leadership on Abraham’s offspring. According to Mawdūdi’s interpretation, the promise does not apply to every one of these offspring, but is specifically directed to the righteous and pious.  

The opportunity of Abraham’s offspring to be designated for religious leadership, for whatever reason, does not, however, indicate the exclusive privilege of their blood, but is due to sincere obedience and faith in following God’s

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81 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qurʾān, 2: 111.
orders. While the good among his offspring enjoy the promise of appointment to the leadership, the wrongdoers are obviously excluded. In other words, it is the nature of God’s approval to appoint only the righteous and pious to fulfil the sacred responsibilities. Perhaps He does so due to His knowledge that the wrongdoers will abuse abundantly the authority and power given to them if they are approved for the conferment of leadership.

The appointment of Abraham and his descendants to the imāmah, according to Quṭb, serves to create a role model for the people: he will lead them to Allah by the practice of good deeds. Abraham and the imāms selected from among his descendants were charged with some important responsibilities during their terms. However, we must remember that in order to perform this great task successfully, an imām must possess good qualities and characteristics; these, Quṭb believes, are the vital criteria for every imām. More significantly, he argues that the possession of good qualities and characteristics will result in the successful fulfilment of their duty. On the other hand, this view denies the acceptance of evildoers and the unbelievers into the imāmah; this, Quṭb explains, is the meaning of the words ‘He pleaded: And also (imāms) from my offspring! He answered: ‘But my promise is not within the reach of evildoers’.’

It is obvious from Quṭb’s interpretation of this phrase that Allah, from the beginning, has warned human beings to exclude evil people from the imāmah. On the other hand, he emphasises that the imāmah is suitable for anybody with the right qualifications. The process of changing the imāmah is also one of the issues discussed by Quṭb concerning this verse. He strongly rejects the idea of appointing a new imām through the process of hereditary rights and inheritance. The appointment of the imāmah has nothing to do with selecting from one’s own family, nor can it be inherited as a result of kinship ties.

82 Quṭb, Fi Ḩalāl al-Qur’ān, 1: 152.
83 Ibid, 152.
which Qutb considers as symptomatic of the culture of ignorant people (jāḥiliyyah). Rather it is closely linked with the religious integrity and state of faith of the imāms themselves.

To give a better understanding, Qutb justifies the minimum standards pertaining to religion and faith, which decide whether a person deserves to be included in the imāmah. The exclusion of evildoers seems clear, as Qutb points out that either committing evil to the soul through polytheism or evil to mankind through iniquity will lead to a total exclusion from the imāmah. In fact, he considers that the exclusion applies to all kinds of imāmah such as the imāmah of prophethood, khilāfah and religious rites. In other words, anything that bears the name of imāmah and khilāfah is not applicable to those involved in evil actions.

Tabātabā'ī, in his treatment of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124 pays special attention to the term ‘imām’. He observes that whenever Allah speaks of the imāmah, He also speaks of guidance (hidāyah), as in sūrahs 21: 73 and 32: 24. He therefore concludes that the imāmah is guided by Allah and that is subject to His command. The imāmah is not merely a source of general guidance, but rather of guidance from which Allah’s command is derived. He further claims that the authority of the imāmah over mankind is of the same nature as the divine authority (wilāyah). The imām’s guidance brings humanity to the goal by Allah’s command and not simply by showing them the way through wisdom and good counsel, which is the responsibility of the prophet and apostle as well as of every faithful person.

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84 Ibid, 153.
85 Tabātabā'ī, Al-Mā'in fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, 1: 272.
Furthermore, Ṭabāṭabā’ī stresses that the imām must be a man of certainty (dhā yaqīn), to whom the celestial Kingdom (ālam al-malakūt) is unveiled, and his certitude is attained through certain words of Allah. Another verse that reads ‘they Guide through our command’ (21: 73) provides clear evidence that both hearts and deeds (emotion and action), are related to guidance; thus both belong to the imām. It is therefore the responsibility of the imām to lead mankind to Allah, as all will be called on the Day of Judgement together with their own imām, as is understood from the verse 17: 71, which reads: “On the day when we shall call every people by their Imām”.\(^{86}\)

In addition, Ṭabāṭabā’ī emphasises that the imām, when performing his duty, must be protected (maṣūm) from error and disobedience. The concept of the infallibility of the imām is of great importance in the Shi‘i perspective, as Ṭabāṭabā’ī concludes that whoever is not infallible can never be an imām capable of guiding people to the truth. Thus he explains the last phrase of the verse, which reads: ‘My covenant shall not include the wrongdoers’. Therefore, what Ṭabāṭabā’ī intends to imply is that this phrase’s exclusion of wrongdoers from the imāmah indicates the necessity of infallibility for the imām. Moreover, he asserts that even the person who has committed an act of wrongdoing and later repented is also not included in this promise.\(^{87}\)

From the preceding discussion, Ṭabāṭabā’ī draws the following conclusions:

i-The imāmah is something given by Allah

ii-The imām is safeguarded by divine protection (ʿismah)

iii-The earth and its human inhabitants cannot be without its own imām

iv-The imām is strengthened by Allah

v-The deeds of the creatures are not veiled from the knowledge of the imām

\(^{86}\) Ibid, 273.

\(^{87}\) Ibid, 274.
vi-The knowledge of an *imām* should encompass all things which human beings need for their life in this world and in the Hereafter.

vii-No person can ever be superior to the *imām*. 88

### 7.3.7 Ulū' l-Amr

Of the two instances of the term *ulū' l-amr*, the first one, in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59, provides a very significant explanation of the concept of the *khilāfah*. Mawdūdi considers this verse to be the cornerstone and starting point of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam. Moreover, and remarkably, it lays down the very first clause of the constitution of an Islamic state, which commands obedience to Allah, His prophets and those in authority (*ulū' l-amr*). 89

Obedience to the first two, Allah and the prophets, is not the major concern of our discussion. It is the instruction to give obedience to people in authority (*ulū' l-amr*) that implies the relation of this verse to the concept of the *khilāfah*. Nevertheless, it would not be wise to neglect any discussion on obedience to the first two, since they are very much interrelated. In other words, disobedience has a destructive effect on all aspects of a person's faith. It affects the practice of the other *'ibādah* (acts of worship), depriving all actions of meaning. A similar situation results from failure to obey a prophet: if someone refuses to obey, it is obviously to be regarded as disobedience to Allah Himself. Thus Mawdūdi attempts to explain with the greatest clarity the relationship between obedience to Allah and to the prophets. 90

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88 Ibid, 274-75.
90 Ibid, 50.
There are many Qur'anic verses that command Muslims to give their obedience to the prophets. For example, Allah says: 'Each and every Messenger who was sent by Us was sent for the purpose that he should be obeyed under the sanction of Allah'.\(^{91}\) In addition, He again states 'He who obeys the Messenger obeys God'.\(^{92}\) Mawdūdi further emphasises that Islam enjoins Muslims to obey the prophets implicitly and without any reservations, since all the divine commandments and instructions come through them. In this connection, Mawdūdi declares:

They are the true agencies through whom the directives and the commands of Allah are communicated to mankind.\(^{93}\)

Allah further commands human beings, especially believers, to obey those of their fellow Muslims who are invested with authority and power. As has been emphasised earlier, obedience to the prophets indicates obedience to Allah. A similar principle applies when Allah orders believers to obey their rulers. Mawdūdi believes that it is an obligation to obey those chosen to bear the responsibility of ruling the community, and that it is a very serious duty, as important as obedience to Allah and the prophets.\(^{94}\) Nonetheless, Mawdūdi does stress that it should not be a blind obedience, given without assessing and examining the value of each leadership. What he means is that even though the Qur'an itself does not mention what kind of obedience Muslims should render, there have been many hadīths of the Prophet explaining this issue. Mawdūdi therefore quotes several hadīths which lay stress on two conditions for this obedience. Firstly, those in authority should be believers themselves. Secondly, they

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\(^{91}\) Al-Qur'an, 4: 64.

\(^{92}\) Al-Qur'an, 4: 80.

\(^{93}\) Mawdūdi, First Principles of the Islamic State, 23.

\(^{94}\) Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur'an, 2: 50-51.
should also submit completely to Allah and His prophets before asking the people to obey them.  

In elucidating the term *ulū 'l-amr* in this verse, Mawdūdi defines it in a very general and broad way, arguing that *ulū 'l-amr* covers a very broad context of power, since it does not refer to rulers or *khallīfahs* only, but also includes other categories of people: those who are entrusted with directing the community. Elaborating this interpretation, Mawdūdi states that *ulū 'l-amr* includes intellectual and political leaders, as well as administrative officers, judges of the courts and others. The list is not exhaustive; these professions are cited as examples to show the extensive meaning of *ulū 'l-amr*. In fact, many more might be classified in the category of *ulū 'l-amr*, as long as they involve the responsibility of controlling and directing the people.  

As already noted, two conditions are imposed on the rulers in order to legitimise the obedience of the people. The two conditions have been derived from the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, since the Qur'an is silent on this matter. In order to elaborate this discussion, Mawdūdi produces four *ḥadīths*. The first two outline the significance and conditions of obedience, while the third goes a little further by stating that as long as the rulers perform their prayer, even privately, Muslims should give obedience to them. No attempt at rebellion must be made in this situation and Mawdūdi even indicates his  

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95 Ibid, 51.  
96 Ibid, 51.  
97 Ibid, 51. The first *ḥadīth* is translated as: 'A Muslim is obliged to heed and to obey an order whether he likes it or not, as long as he is not ordered to carry out an act of disobedience to God (ma′ṣūmah). When ordered to carry out an act of disobedience to God he need neither heed nor obey'; the second *ḥadīth* states: 'There is no obedience in sin; obedience is only in what is good (ma′rūf)'. The third *ḥadīth* declares: 'There will be rulers over you, some of whose actions you will consider good and others abominable. Who even disapproves of their abominable acts will be acquitted of all blame, and whoever resents them he too will remain secure (from all blame); not so one who approves and follows them in their abominable acts. They (i.e. the Companions) asked: 'Should we not fight against them?'. The
strong disapproval of such action. This hadīth, stressing the significance of performing prayer, indeed sets the limit beyond which any khalīfah may be expelled from office. At the same time, he also produces another hadīth, which enunciates the Prophet’s disapproval of any kind of rebellion as long as the rulers perform congregational prayer. In other words, this hadīth allows and even encourages Muslims to replace their rulers if they have strong proof that either the congregational prayer is no longer being performed or no effort has been made to establish it.

Another substantial principle that can be derived from this verse concerns the instructions to refer any dispute and question to Allah and the Prophet. This instruction applies to every human being, whether he is an ordinary believer or the ruler himself. It is convincingly argued that those entrusted with authority are also likely to be involved in confusion and disagreement, mostly relating to administrating and managing the people. In this circumstance, Allah has laid down a guideline, reiterated by Mawdūdi, that the rulers should refer to the two primary sources, which are the Qur’ān and the sunnah of the Prophet. Nevertheless, the people should refer to the rulers, who have been entrusted with authority, in any disagreement for which neither the Qur’ān nor the sunnah of the Prophet has the answer.

Yet there are some who stress that all questions arising should be referred to the two main sources only and not to the rulers. From their point of view, these two sources are complete enough to solve any question and there is no need to refer to the rulers. In

Prophet (peace be on him) said: ‘No, not as long as they continue to pray.’ Finally, the fourth hadīth is translated as: ‘Your worst leaders are those whom you hate and who hate you; whom you curse and who curse you. We asked: ‘O Messenger of God! Should we not rise against them?’ The Prophet (peace be on him) said: ‘No, not as long as they establish Prayer among you: not as long as they establish Prayer among you.’

98 Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur’ān, 2: 51.
99 Ibid. 52.
debating this issue, Mawdūdi argues that there have been many new and unprecedented questions, occurrences and issues, which definitely need clarification although none of them is mentioned either in the Qur'an or the sunnah. Therefore the absence of answers to these new problems is dangerous, as it might lead to disastrous argument and disagreement among the community if they are not quickly solved. In such circumstances it is, in fact, very important to reach clear conclusions and obviously the only resource besides the Qur'an and the sunnah, is the appointed rulers. Those in authority will perform this duty in the best possible way according to the guidelines and laws of Allah only as long as they strictly meet the two conditions emphasised earlier.

Quṭb, in interpreting sûrat al-Nisā’ (4): 59 seems to agree with Mawdūdi, since he considers this verse to be a concise statement of the basic principle of the Islamic faith (imān). It is the order to give obedience to Allah, His prophets and those entrusted with authority which underlines that principle. The objective of this order is to ensure the implementation of the sharfah and hence of justice in the society. Perhaps more importantly, Quṭb lays down several other principles of the Islamic faith derived from this verse: first of all, the principle of divine authority (hikimiyyah), which is exclusively dedicated to Allah. By accepting this dogmatic principle, he implies that we believe in the sovereignty of Allah, who lays the foundations of the Islamic law (sharifah) through the revelation of Qur'anic verses. In another respect, it also indicates the acceptance of His power in creating human beings to dwell on earth, where some of them are selected to be His messengers and khalfahs. Therefore, it is the obligation of all human beings, and of believers in particular, to accept the fact that obedience to Allah is fundamental.

100 Ibid, 52.
101 Quṭb, Fi Ḥilāl al-Qur'ān, 2: 416.
102 Ibid, 416.
The second principle of Islamic faith found in this verse is obedience to Allah’s prophets. In Quṭb’s opinion, since Allah sends down the prophets for the benefit of human beings, it is vital that they are obeyed. This is important because Allah has already stressed that obedience to a prophet is similar to obedience to Himself, and that consequently failure to follow this order is the same as disobedience to Him. Even though this connection is not made explicit in the verse, it is basically rational and Quṭb cites several hadīths that contribute to a better understanding of this principle.103

The order to obey those charged with authority in society is the last principle found in this verse. Quṭb explains this in some detail. He begins with a justification of who should be regarded as ulū ’l-amr: only believers are eligible in accordance with the conditions of the Islamic faith (īmān) and the boundary of the Islamic definition (ḥadd al-Islām).104 Moreover, Quṭb asserts that the ability to refer to ulū ’l-amr is vital in the many situations where disputes occur regarding thought, understanding, and belief, and for which no divine source can be found to settle the matter.

According to Quṭb, the divine sources (nuṣūṣ) certify that obedience to Allah and His Messenger is a fundamental obligation, while obedience to ulū ’l-amr is of secondary importance. In the context of this verse, Quṭb states, there is no need for a repetition of ‘obey’ in order to recognise the obligation to obey ulū ’l-amr, because obedience to ulū ’l-amr flows directly from obedience to Allah and His Messenger.105 Nevertheless, it should be noted that this obedience should be rendered only in the practice of good deeds. If evil is inseparable from this obedience, for whatever reason, the instruction is no longer valid and a person may disobey ulū ’l-amr. In support of this view, Quṭb

103 Ibid, 416.
104 Ibid, 416.
105 Ibid, 417.
cites three hadīths, which state that obedience is only legitimate in the case of good means.

In discussing the term ʿulū ʿl-amr in surat al-Nisāʾ (4): 59, Ṭabāṭabāʾī is at pains to refute the argument of al-Rāzī in his Tafsīr Mafāṭīḥ. Generally, the Shiʿī commentators classify this verse as dealing with the concept of obedience, which here can be divided into two categories: firstly, obedience to Allah and secondly, obedience to the Prophet and ʿulū ʿl-amr. The command to obey the Prophet and ʿulū ʿl-amr is based on the use of the letter waw in this verse. The linguistic usage of waw implies that obedience to ʿulū ʿl-amr also means obedience to the Prophet.

Having analysed the interpretation of this verse from both Sunni and Shiʿī points of view, it may be concluded that ʿulū ʿl-amr must be protected from sin. However, the main argument concerns “the object” of infallibility. The Sunnis claim that the infallible in this case is the ummah, or more specifically ahl al-ḥall wa ʿl-ʿaqd, as their ijmaʿ (consensus) is binding upon Muslims. The Shiʿīs, on the other hand, claim that the verse refers to ahl al-bayt, who are protected by Allah from any error and sin. Ṭabāṭabāʾī refuses to accept the Sunni interpretation of ahl al-ḥall wa ʿl-ʿaqd, as he argues that the meaning of the hadīth, which reported that the Prophet said, “My community will not agree in error (al-khatāʾ), shows that the exemption from sin applies to the ummah only, and therefore the exemption does not include ahl al-ḥall wa ʿl-ʿaqd.

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106 For the argument of al-Rāzī, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb, (usually known as Tafsīr al-Kabīr), 3: 243-45.
7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the ideas concerning the *khilāfah* contained in the modern Sunni and Shi'is Qur'anic commentaries are mostly derived from the classical interpretations, certain areas have clearly been developed. These mostly concerned the reinterpretation of the *khilāfah* in ways consistent with the changes which have taken place in the political landscape of the twentieth century. However, the moderns were also committed to returning to the original teaching regarding the concept, which concerns the establishment and perpetuation of truth and justice through the implementation of the *sharī'ah*. On most occasions, they draw examples from the political events of their time as a means of expressing their strong dissatisfaction and awareness of the need for the true Islamic *khilafah*. Therefore, any verse that can be used for this purpose is dealt with at length by the modern commentators, especially Mawdū'ī.

An analysis of the relevant verses has shown that although the moderns are concerned to formulate and develop new ideas, they do not altogether abandon sectarianism. We have found that the commentators are more inclined to adhere to the ideas of their respective schools of thought when trying to interpret the concept of *khilāfah* enunciated in the Qur'an. This situation can clearly be seen in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation of sūrah Sād (38): 26, in which he emphasises that the *imāms* must be infallible in order to ensure the practice of justice. Ṭabāṭabā'ī also offers a literal interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 124, which excludes evildoers from the *imāmah* for the same doctrinal reason.

In general, the modern Sunni Qur'anic commentators, Mawdū'ī and Quṭb, are found to agree on most occasions with each other's interpretations. They normally define the term *khalifah*, as it appears in sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30, to mean 'vicegerent of Allah'.
or ‘successor of the previous generation’. Occasionally, they define it as referring to a person appointed supreme authority after the *khilāfah* of the Prophet. It is therefore clear that Mawdūdī and Qutb offer more or less the same definition of the *khilāfah*. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Qutb was very much influenced by Mawdūdī, not only in respect of his political thought, but also in his method of interpreting the Qurʾān. Mawdūdī, in his interpretation of sūrah Yūnus (10): 14, and Qutb, when commenting on sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 124, take the opportunity to criticise openly social structures they find unacceptable and to call for the abolition and replacement by a more radically Islamic society.

While Ṭabāṭabāʾī sometimes interprets some of the connotative terms, such as *imām* and *ulū ʿl-amr*, as referring to the Shiʿīs’ *imāms* and doctrinal principles, the Sunnis offer a wider range of interpretations and provide a bolder and more critical commentary. They were freer than their classical predecessors, whose chief concern, politically speaking, was the preservation of the hereditary succession.

It is also undeniable that the Qurʾānic interpretations of all three scholars were used by interests of the cause to which each had devoted himself. The Sunnis and Shiʿī often interpret the same verses differently, according to their own beliefs and ways of thinking, in order to support their particular principles and ideas. Both Sunnis are concerned to condemn and reject the political establishment in their own countries – the Indian subcontinent and Egypt – and to advocate with passion their replacement by a society fundamentally obedient to Islam and the principles of the *sharṭah*. Ṭabāṭabāʾī is also concerned to establish the rule of the *sharṭah*, but he has more in common with his classical predecessors than the modern Sunnis have with theirs, since he is above all determined to justify Shiʿī doctrine concerning the *imāmah*. Despite their differences, each commentator’s interpretation is always supported by other Qurʾānic verses and
hadīths, and this supporting evidence has also been the subject of argument and disputation leading inevitably to a variety of interpretations.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to examine the Qur'anic conception of khilāfah from the point of view of two Muslim communities, the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'ashariyyah Shi'is, in both the classical and modern periods. These Muslim communities were chosen because they are the two largest and constitute the overwhelming majority of Muslims. The primary objective in covering these two groups has been to investigate any instances of agreement and disagreement which reflect their beliefs regarding the concept of khilāfah or imāmah. Although their teachings are exemplified by their interpretation of many Qur'anic verses, the analysis of the study has been limited to verses containing certain important terms, which have a direct bearing on the meaning of the khilāfah, since it was considered that the inclusion of some other terms, such as wali, mulk and sulṭān would overextend the discussion. The commentaries selected were chosen because they are still widely read in Muslim circles. They represent a variety of approaches; that of al-Zamakhshari, for example, being notable for its use of reasoned argument. Also, the early commentaries, especially of al-Ṭabarî and al-Ṭūsî, have been greatly influential on later Muslim scholars. Lastly, narrowing the scope of analysis to these selected exegeses has allowed the discussion to be developed in greater depth.

The protracted argument over the khilāfah has been conducted among Muslims for centuries. Despite their disagreements, the majority of Muslim communities, including the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Shi'is, have been aware of how important and essential the idea of the khilāfah or imāmah is to Islam. They have acknowledged that doctrinal
disputes do not amount to a denial of the essential functions of the caliph. The Shi‘is and the Sunnis claim that these functions derive from the Qur’anic interpretations of their own exegetes. The question arises whether the fulfilment of those functions requires that a caliph should rule. There have of course been groups within Islam – for example the Khārijites – who have denied the necessity of the khilāfah, but their arguments have never been accepted by the majority of Muslims.

The study’s examination of the relevant khilāfah-, imāmah- and ulū ’l-amr-verses in the classical Sunni and Shi‘i interpretations, which have been discussed over four chapters (third, fourth, fifth and sixth), has given rise to several noteworthy conclusions. First of all, these commentators are in agreement concerning the existence of a process of succession among human beings, holding that it starts with the appointment of Adam and continues in the khilāfah of other prophets. For instance, three khulāfā’-verses are interpreted as referring to Noah and his people. This process of succession continues from one person to another, from one generation to another and from one period to another until it reaches the last khilāfah on earth, who will be a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹ Therefore, the process did not end with the death of the last prophet, but will continue until the Last Day. Moreover, whenever one particular generation is removed from the office of khilāfah, another potential group, who are expected to fulfil the divinely ordained responsibilities, will be appointed. The changes of khilāfah, seen in the historical examples of early generations given in the Qur’an, are normally caused by wilful disobedience and failure to perform the duties

¹ See Chapter Three, 3.3.2. (The Sunni Interpretation of the Khulāfā’-Verses).
inherent in the office. The study has shown that both Sunnis and Shi`is are in agreement that the process of the khilafah is founded upon the Qur’anic message.

Secondly, since both Sunnis and Shi`is agree that the concept of khilafah is essential, it is inevitably a fundamental obligation to have a khalifah, or an imam in the Shi`i view, to represent and continue the role and duty of the Prophet. However, the appointment to this task, according to the Sunni perspective, is very different from that of the prophets, who are given the dual roles of prophetic mission (al-nubuwwah) and leadership (khilafah or imamah). Khalifahs, on the other hand, have a mission to fulfil and continue the leadership role only. For this reason, the first four caliphs, while accepting their appointments, refused to use the title caliph of Allah (khalifat Allāh), deeming others, such as ‘caliph to the Messenger of Allah’ (khalifat rasūl Allāh) and ‘commander of the believers’ (amīr al-mu’minīn), more suitable. Nevertheless, the dynastic rulers who came after them adopted the first title (khalifat Allāh) because their main functions were seen by their subjects as the continuation of the Prophet’s duties and the preservation of the religion. Despite being appointed to a lesser role, the khalifah should discharge the duties performed by the Prophet to ensure the implementation of the sharfah, such as guiding the people to truth and justice and showing them the way of goodness and prosperity in this world. Since this role involves the setting of a good example in behaviour, administration, management and communication, the Sunnī and Imāmiyyah Shi`i commentators alike agree on the need

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2 A detailed discussion on the function, role and duty of a khalifah is presented in Chapter One, 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 (The Functions of Khalifah/Imam According to Classical and Modern Perspectives)
to choose the *khalīfah* from among the faithful only, as can be understood from the interpretation of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124.³

Another significant conclusion concerns the implication that the evildoer, as well as the *fāsiq* (impious and evil person), is not permitted to be a *khalīfah* or *imām*. In this regard, the Sunni commentators generally believe that injustice and evil are absolutely incompatible with the concept of the *khilāfah*. But the dilemma inherent in reconciling this principle with practical politics affected particularly the classical Sunni commentators, whose dynastic rulers wielded absolute authority, abusing their great power and becoming notorious for their misdeeds. As we have noted in the chapters analysing the Sunni interpretations (third and fourth), they never directly accuse their rulers of failing to meet the challenges of the office of *khilāfah*. This could be said to be the essential problem confronting the classical exegetes: unwillingness or limited freedom to offer critical interpretations that might be seen as a condemnation of their own rulers.

The classical Shiʿī commentators were not faced with this problem, since they did not regard their dynastic overlords as anything other than tyrants, and certainly not as *khalīfah*. They had their own twelve *imāms* who, they claimed, were infallible (*maʿṣūm*) and free from all sin. This is one of their doctrines concerning the concept of *imāmah*, which, while not disagreeing with that of the Sunnis regarding the exclusion of evildoers from the *khilāfah*, has always been quite unacceptable to Sunnis.⁴ It should

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³ See Chapter Four, 4.2.1. (Classical Sunni Interpretations of the Term *Imām*)
⁴ Regarding the Shiʿī interpretations that reflect the doctrine of the infallible *imāms*, see Chapter Five, 5.2 (The Interpretation of the Term *Khilāfah*) in the discussion of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.
be acknowledged, however, that the rulers of the Shi'i dynasties, such as the Buyids, were not the spiritual leaders of the Shi'is. The line of the imāmah did not pass through them, but through the imāms. Therefore, the Shi'i rulers did not have to confront the problem of reconciling political necessity with spiritual purity.

Regarding the analysis of the relevant khilāfah-verses, it has been suggested that the three classical Sunni Qur'anic commentators, in most cases, reach a consensus as to the correct definition of its meaning although they occasionally bring out other possible meanings. For example, due to their definition of khalīfah as one who replaces his predecessor (discussed in chapter three), they are of the opinion that the supreme ruler is therefore a legitimate khalīfah. This similarity in their interpretations reflects what was their main concern: that is, a correct interpretation of the material of the verses, which they produced within dangerous and unstable social and political contexts. Their commentaries had to accommodate to the political reality of their time.

Sometimes, these three Sunni commentators disagree on the interpretation of a particular term, but most of the arguments do not concern matters of doctrine, and are relatively minor. Thus we can say that overall the three exegetes' interpretations are fairly similar. Sometimes al-Ṭabarî, who is the earliest of the three, elaborates in greater depth and points out several possible meanings. The two later commentators seem to rely heavily on his commentary, although on several occasions they provide a wider-ranging interpretation than al-Ṭabarî. This is understandable since, as later commentators, they were able to draw upon all the sources and materials for interpretation which had been discovered and collected by the early exegetes including
al-Ṭabarî. Therefore they tend to take the early interpretations on trust, and if they do encounter any new interpretation that is incompatible with those of the early commentators they do not accept it. It may be that this method of imitation (taqlid) of the early sources is a result of their reluctance to avoid producing a wrong or misleading interpretation. Consequently, the later classical Sunni commentators as well as their Imāmiyyah counterparts had no reason to adopt an overtly critical stance towards their predecessors, especially al-Ṭabarî who defined the method of interpretation.

The Sunni commentators, however, on several occasions, neglect to discuss certain issues in their interpretations; for example, the possibility that the term ulū 'l-amr may be defined as al-umarā' (military commanders or leaders) and as ʿulamā' (discussed in chapter four). The cause of this neglect is not known, but may be that the political reality of their time, which appeared to necessitate the use of military power as the means of preserving the khilāfah, influenced their interpretations of the relevant verses. Moreover, it is possible that they decided that political and military order and stability was more important than adopting a strictly ‘correct’ position in terms of sharī'ah and Islamic teachings. But there were probably other reasons: all three had a clear Sunni identity, and their acceptance and recognition of the Sunni rulers, particularly the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids, as the ruling authority may have been based on their fear of political instability and desire to help to ensure the unbroken succession of the khilāfah.
Occasionally, the Sunni commentators covertly attack those among their own rulers who were particularly evil by stressing that an evildoer is prohibited from being appointed as *khalīfah*. However, they fail to call into question the notion of the hereditary succession. This may be because even an implicit criticism of the established system might expose the scholar to persecution. Hence, the emphasis that the *khalīfah* is not to be removed for political reasons, but only for dereliction of his religious duties. Corruption and tyranny are reprehensible but acceptable; therefore the commentators avoid a radical interpretation of the relevant verses. Their silence, which may be taken as an indication of their acceptance of the necessity of an unbroken line of succession, shows that their interpretation is inclined to conservatism. Both the radical and conservative methods of interpreting these verses would have their own impact. An emphasis on the former might well help to bring about political instability and even civil war, since the *ummah* might wish to forcibly replace an evil ruler with a suitably qualified and more beneficent caliph, while the latter method endorses the necessity of accepting unjust, corrupt and violent rulers.

The two classical Imāmiyyah exegetes also show their mutual understanding and agreement in interpreting the relevant verses. Rather than using the word *khilāfah*, they prefer the title of *imāmah*, and their leaders are called *imāms* rather than *khulīfahs*. Generally, their interpretation of each verse is almost identical and it is difficult to find any substantial disagreement between them. Moreover, the style of presenting the discussion is notably similar. This phenomenon is not surprising because the later Sunnis also adopted the same method towards their predecessors. Since al-Ṭabarsi is the later Shiʿi commentator, he understandably had to rely on the earlier commentary,
as Ibn Kathir did when he quotes a number of interpretations from his early predecessor, al-Ṭabarî.

Of all the terms analysed, the Shi'i interpretations of imām, a'immah and ulū 'l-amr depart most from the position articulated by the Sunnis. This is partly due to the fact that some of these appear in a general form such as 'those charged with authority' (ulū 'l-amr), and may thus reflect and give rise to many possible interpretations. This opportunity has been seized by both 'radical' and 'conservative' Shi'is (that is, those whose views were opposed to the Sunnis' and those whose views were to some extent compatible with Sunni opinion) in the search for evidence that would support their beliefs. For instance, the classical Shi'i commentators, referring to the term imām in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, use the prohibition of imāms from committing evil actions, and of evildoers from occupying the position of khalīfah, to justify the doctrine of the infallibility of their imāms. Furthermore, they claim that the status of the imāms is equal to that of the prophets, a view unacceptable to the Sunnis. This interpretation may also be said to be in conflict with the Sunni view of human creation, which is that only Allah can appoint a person to prophethood (nubuwwah), whereas the appointment of a non-prophet khalīfah is decided by the human community – a view rejected by the Imāmiyyah Shi'is.

The study has shown that some of the Shi'is' interpretations reflect ideas characteristic of their doctrinal convictions. However, it is not intended to reject them and uncritically accept the validity of the Sunnis' interpretations, since the latter are also

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5 See Chapter Six, 6.2.1 (The Interpretation of the Term Imām).
concerned to support their doctrines. In addition, although the study’s analysis of the Shi'is’ interpretations of the relevant khilafah-verses has highlighted those issues which differentiate them from the Sunnis, these arise only when the term appears in a general form, such as *ulū 'l-amr*, and reflects the discussion of dogmatic doctrines. Otherwise, the Shi'is interpretations are little different from the Sunni, since on most occasions they refer to similar sources.

Though the doctrines are not subjected to a detailed and complete elaboration, as they are in theological works, these exegetes’ interpretations are consistent with their basic doctrines. We have seen that *shīrā*, *bay'ah* and *ahl al-bāl wal-'aqr* are among the important doctrines for the Sunnis and *taqiyyah*, *wilāyah*, *'īsmah* and *raj'ah* (return of the Mahdi) are essentials for the Shi'is. The study has shown that these doctrines are based on the Qur'an as the main source, and later developed with the support of other sources such as reports of the Prophet, *ijmā' al-ṣaḥābah* (consensus of the Companions), *ijtihād* (personal diligence) and the *fatwā* (opinion) of the classical scholars from both communities.

The question remains whether the succession of the khilafah is transmitted by means of the *ummah*, for example the children of Israel (when they were obedient), or through the ruler, such as in the case of Moses (when the people were disobedient). It may be suggested that the classical Sunni scholars never resolved the tension between the responsibilities of the ruler and the *ummah*. The main concern of the dynasties was to preserve, defend and extend their power in the Islamic world and the classical Sunni exegetes would not have dissented from this aim. Therefore the question whether the
succession applied to the rulers or the ummah was never examined critically, as to do so would have implicitly called the unjust rulers to account and perhaps destabilised the existing Sunni hegemony. The classical Imamiyyah Shi'i exegetes avoided this problem, as their principles were clear: the unbroken succession, divinely sanctioned, passed through their line of infallible imams and the virtues or vices of the ummah were relatively unimportant. They saw themselves as oppressed and therefore their interpretations were inevitably different from those of the oppressors.

The study's discussion of the modern perceptions relating to the concept of khilafah, which concerns the formation and establishment of an Islamic state, has produced several interesting conclusions. Firstly, it is noticed that the modern scholars generally define the concept of khilafah in almost the same way as the classical scholars did. However, some differences are unavoidable, since they reinterpreted and developed many aspects of the classical works of theology and tafsir in order to make them relevant to modern society (see for example Mawdudi's treatment of the ulū 'l-amr in 7.3.7). Secondly, most of the famous figures of recent decades, who engaged in comment and analysis, possessed excellent qualifications in various fields of Islamic teaching. They were not merely jurists, but also learned Qur'anic commentators, and their understanding of the matter of the khilafah was comprehensive. Finally, they were greatly influenced by the classical conception of khilafah, which animated and motivated their thinking on the establishment of the Islamic state.6

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6 For a full discussion on the Modern Sunni and Shi'i analyses of the khilafah, imamah and ulū 'l-amr-verses, see Chapter Seven.
The modern Sunni and Shi'i commentators are seen to be more radical than their classical predecessors in the interpretation of the *khilāfah* and *imāmah*-verses. One likely explanation for this radicalism lies in the nature of their socio-political situation. Unlike in the classical period, where the institution of the *khilāfah* had already been established, the period in which these modern commentators lived was marked by the lack of an established and genuine *khilāfah*. Although, in most countries concerned, Muslims possessed political power and authority (except in the Indian subcontinent before 1947), the original nature of the *khilāfah* had been diluted or abandoned due to the impact of Western secularism. Aware of the significance of practising the authentic form of the *khilāfah*, similar to that of the Prophet and his Companions, the modern commentators based their interpretations on the need for a spiritually and politically revitalised Islam.

Their aims were therefore different from those of the classical commentators, who were concerned to improve and eventually perfect an already existing institution. But since the modern Sunni and Shi'i scholars had to deal with the contemporary world, their interpretations could not avoid an intense engagement with their own culture and society, in terms of the politics of their own nation and the broader implications of seeing the *khilāfah* as the only effective solution for the problems besetting the Muslim world.

The important social role the moderns played in their respective countries should not be forgotten. The two Sunni commentators were leading figures in political movements, fighting for the establishment of what they saw as the ideal Islamic state.
However, Mawdūdī of Jamaʿat-i-Islami and Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood offered guidance to their Muslim movements in different ways. The former was influenced by the spirit of Islamisation, fighting for the formation of the Islamic state and a government independent of both British colonialism and Hindu control. The latter attempted to promote the implementation of justice and the sharīʿah in every aspect of human life, as instructed by the Qurʾān, and to oppose the nationalism and socialism of Nasir’s regime in Egypt. We have seen that he attacked the Egyptian way of living according to Islam as jāhilīyyah (paganism). Although the Shiʿī commentator, Ṭabāṭabāʾī, did not personally assume a leadership role, his moral support for the Iranian Revolution and his many writings urging his fellow Muslims to emulate that spiritual and political transformation are consistent with his radical interpretation.

It is obvious that the modern commentators and scholars were more politically critical of the so-called Islamic rulers of their time, who, according to them, were un-Islamic. Therefore, these rulers should be removed and the existing Muslim society transformed into a genuinely Islamic state. This radical and critical stance may be seen as the starting point of the spirit of revivalism. For example, Ṭabāṭabāʾī expressed strong support for the Iranian revolution and opposed the Shah, whose dynasty was seen as the enemy of Islam because of his attempt to transform the Islamic system of leadership into a hereditary monarchy. The moderns suggested that the solution to such unacceptable political situations was the abolition of the status quo and its replacement by a society based on the principles of the sharīʿah.
It appears, then, that both the modern Sunni and Shi'ī commentators’ main concern is the practice of social justice and the implementation of the sharī'ah; in other words, how should Muslims live and interpret Islam correctly? Their situation was very different from that of the classical commentators, who, as we have noted earlier, attempted, above all, to correctly interpret the material they had to deal with; and for whom therefore a critical attitude to politics was of secondary importance. The modern Shi'īs, as exemplified by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, still have the same concerns with political engagement as their classical predecessors. It is in this respect that the distinction between the Shi'īs and the Sunnīs lies. In addition, they as well as the Sunnī commentators seek to emphasise their relevance to the modern world and especially to issues of social justice.

While the scope of this research has specifically concerned the interpretation of some selected verses relevant to the concept of khilāfah and imāmah, there are other terms such as wali, sultan and mulk, which have not been analysed here for reasons of space. However, they could prove to be a valuable focus of further research, since these terms concern the concept of leadership in Muslim society. It is also worth mentioning that only seven volumes of Mawdūdi’s tafsīr (originally written in Urdu) have yet appeared in English; these cover the first twenty-four sūrahs of the Qur’an. When the remaining volumes appear, the whole work should be of great interest to scholars in many fields, including studies related to the khilāfah. Another opportunity that might be considered relates to the Shi'īs’ belief in the superiority of their own Qur’anic text, which is allegedly three times longer than the present ʿUthmānic text. They claim that many verses of great importance have been omitted from the ʿUthmānic codex, mainly
concerning the right of 'Ali and his descendants to the imāmah. It would be a fruitful area for future research if those omitted verses, which are claimed by the Shiʿīs as evidence of their imāmah, could be analysed. But until these verses, if indeed they exist, are made accessible by the Shiʿīs, such research will remain impossible.

The question whether an ideal Islamic khilāfah exists, or is possible, is inevitably a very sensitive matter among Muslims. It is conceded here that there may be no practicable ways to resolve the question on a worldwide basis. However, some grounds for optimism exists. Firstly, the Qurʾanic claims are the most reliable and irrefutable proofs. There are numerous Qurʾanic verses that promise the continuity of the khilāfah system. According to Muslim belief, these verses constitute the strongest guarantee of the continuation and propagation of the Islamic khilāfah. Secondly there is the matter of the perpetuation of the existence of Islam and the Muslim community in this world. Although the Islamic khilāfah remains an ideal at the present time, the status of Islam as one of the world’s great religions is still undeniable. Moreover, the spirit of Islamic revivalism and reformation, and the awareness of the reinstitution of the khilāfah based on the sharfah proves that Muslims have never abandoned or forgotten the essential idea of the Islamic khilāfah. Despite all the problems and difficulties associated with the concept, it is a fundamental requirement of Islamic teaching that every Muslim community should maintain a form of khilāfah, which can be simply defined as leadership. Bearing this definition in mind, a khalīfah, in my opinion, is needed to lead the community, and not act merely as a final authority in disputes, as a Supreme Court does. More importantly, the khalīfahs must defend, protect and extend the influence of

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7 See Chapter Five, 5.2 (The Interpretation of the Term Khalifah)
Islam through their leadership and example, not through a military conquest as practiced by many previous caliphs.

The matter of the *khilāfah* will probably remain an inexhaustible source of discussion, argument and even controversy. However, the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate and state has, for the time being, failed to materialise. If the true *khilāfah* system allegedly exists in theory, as suggested by many Muslim jurists and Qur'anic exegetes, where is the visible proof of this claim in the present day? Certainly, if the claim is based on the formation of an Islamic state that fully implements the *sharī'ah*, it is commonly accepted that at present no such state exists.
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