



Mahdi in the Qur'an

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Introduction

Muslim belief in the Mahdi is reflected in a vast and complex literature. While Shi'ite Messianism and the myriad aspects of the Mahdi have been described and analysed in a number of works, the purpose of this particular study is to explore the Messianic ideas implicit in the Qur'an in the light of both classical and contemporary Shi'ite commentaries on the Qur'an.

According to Islamic belief, the Qur'an has a universal character and its message is the continuation of that contained in the earlier Revelations made to Abraham, David, Moses and

Jesus. It contains a wealth of information that has served throughout Muslim history as a basis, or code, of living, intended for mankind in general and Muslims in particular. The Qur'an embodies God's final Revelation imparted to mankind through Islam's last Prophet. Moreover, according to the Islamic faith, and in particular to the Shi'ites, the Qur'an is believed to contain profound underlying significance, quite apart from its face-value meaning. Indeed, according to Shi'ite beliefs, only the Prophet and his Household (his daughter and the twelve Imams) possess knowledge of both outer (zahir) and inner (batin) meanings as well as the deeper underlying significance of the writings of the Qur'an. According to such beliefs, therefore, the true science of Qur'anic tafsir and ta'wil lies exclusively within the reach of these fourteen personages, and it is only through their teachings that people can find answers and solutions to problems in the Qur'an.

Concerning the Mahdi, the Qur'an does not mention him explicitly, either by name or by description. The time of his reappearance is also not mentioned. According to the Shi'ites, the reason for this is that the Qur'an is not a historical or political treatise addressing a specific readership or community or affecting a particular period in the history of mankind; rather, it is a universal discourse addressed to the whole of mankind from the dawn of humanity until the Day of Judgement. In fact, the Qur'an also makes reference to certain events in the future and to the end of time: the victory of Good over Evil in the world, and the coming to power of the Righteous over their oppressors. Also, the Qur'an alludes several times, albeit indirectly, to the society's need for the Mahdi and his government. Apart from the hundreds of hadith (traditions) concerning the Mahdi, there are many that provide an exegesis of these verses through both Shi'ite as well as Sunni chains of transmitters, in order to explain the Qur'anic stand vis-a-vis belief in Mandawiyah (Mahdism). These traditions clearly state that the verses refer to the Mahdi. According to some Shi'ite scholars, more than one hundred and twenty Qur'anic verses have been recorded that refer to the Mahdi, as interpreted in the Shi'a traditions. 1

For example, the Qur'an explains that the moral and spiritual improvement awaited by mankind can become a reality according to the traditions under the government of the Mahdi. Indeed, the Shi'ites claim that the universe is a harmonious system based on order and balance, where corruption, oppression and injustice are the consequences of society's misdeeds. However, these man-made imperfections are considered as accidents and exceptions, to be erased finally by the appearance of the Mahdi. Also according to the Qur'an, God promises to restore earthly power to those believers who, although weakened by injustice, remain praiseworthy and basically sincere. The traditions (hadith) explaining these verses remind that they concern the government of Mahdi. According to the Qur'an, people are not abandoned to their own devices but God, through His wisdom and justice, will save Man by replacing unjust governors with pious and just ones. These verses are said to be about God's Will to put an end to the era of Satan's rule, annihilating his partisans, and restoring

power to God's Righteous Servants throughout the universe.

The first chapter of this study will attempt to clarify terms such as Messianism as generally understood in Islamic belief,

1 Seyyed Hashem Bahrani : Sima-ye Hazrat-e Mahdi dar Qur'an, p.23

and the concept of the eschatological figure of the Mahdi in both Sunnism and Shi'ism.

The second chapter will present a brief survey of the origin, principles and development of Shi'i Tafsir as well as the lives and works of the commentators dealt with in this research.

The third chapter will be devoted to a limited comparative study between classical and modern works of Shi'i Tafsir dealing with the specific subject of the Mahdi, in order to see how the mufassirin interpret the presence of the Mahdi in the Qur'an. Among modern references, the works of Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (Tafsir al-Mizan), and Banu Amin Isfahani (Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan) will be used for this purpose, while the Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan of Shaykh Tabarsi (d.548 AH/1153 AD) will be studied as classical reference.

Chapter I - Mahdi in Islam

1-1 Messianism in Islam

According to the New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Messianism may be described in general terms as an ideology consisting of a complex of ideas, doctrines, attitudes, and expectations which, at a particular moment in history and as a result of a specific configuration of facts, has the potential to materialize in a Messianic movement with a markedly eschatological or Utopian revolutionary character and message. Messianism, which tends to develop in conditions of frustration, stress and suffering, includes both a negative evaluation of the present as well as a hope and expectancy that the time process will bring about a major change for the better, leading either to the restoration of a past golden age or to the creation of a new one. Although Messianism both as ideology and as movement is not necessarily centered upon a Messianic figure, Messianic movements are usually initiated by a charismatic personality. 1

1 "Messiah and Messianic Movements " in the New Encyclopaedia Britannica P. 1017-1022

Messianism is a widespread ideology present among people from all kinds of cultural and religious background. As A.A. Sachedina states: "The notion of an expected deliverer who is to come... and establish the rule of justice and equity on earth, is shared by all major religions in the world. Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians who at different times were subjected to the rules of those who did not share their religious heritage, cherished their traditions concerning a Messiah or Saoshyant of a divinely chosen line." 1 Also Shari'ati in his Expectation.. a School of Protest, acknowledges that the "yearning instinct" for a saviour is a universal phenomenon in all human cultures and that Islamic yearning for the Mahdi is identical to the expectation in Christianity of Christ's second coming and to a universal hope for establishing a "golden age". 2

The similarity of this ideology in all religions and the question of its origin often leads to studies and conclusions on the influence of one religion on another as regards the Messianism issue. For example, we find studies about the Jewish influence upon Christian and Islamic Messianism or Persian and Zoroastrian influence on Jewish, Christian or Muslim apocalypticism, Messianism and eschatology. In modern scholarship, these conclusions are a subject of controversy. In fact, the sheer extent of belief in this ideology

1 A.A. Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, P.1.

2 Shari'ati, Intizar, p.4

would seem to reflect the universality and innateness of humanity's hope for a better future.

In the Islamic context, Messianism is emblemized by the eschatological figure of the Mahdi who, it is believed, will rise to restore the purity of the faith and to create an ideal religiopolitical system under a just social and legal order, a world free from oppression in which the Islamic Revelation will be the norm for all nations. However, it is difficult to discuss Messianism as a concept within the Islamic faith in general without first considering it separately within the two main branches of Islam, Sunnism and Shi'ism, as the dimensions, the functions and the importance of this ideology vary between them.

1-2 Mahdi in Sunnism

Al-Mahdi, "The Rightly Guided One", is the name given to the restorer of religion and justice who, according to a widely held Muslim belief, will rule before the end of the world. The term Mahdi as such does not occur in the Qur'an but is derived from the Arabic root h-d-y commonly used in the Qur'an with the meaning of divine guidance. 1 During the Second Civil War, after the death of Mu'awia, the term first came to be used for an expected ruler who could restore Islam to its

original

1 W. Madelung: "al-Mahdi" in EP, p.1230

perfection. Among religious scholars, discussions about the Mahdi and his identity can be traced back to that time. These discussions developed in different directions and influenced later beliefs about the Mahdi to varying degrees. 1

There are a number of differences between the two main branches of Islam as to the conception of the creed in the final restorer. According to the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, the status of the Mahdi awaited by the Sunnites is different from that of the twelfth Imam awaited by the Shi'ites. The essence of Sunnite Islam is that the Muslim people will accede to self-rule, attaining a state of truth and certitude through their own exertions. The idea of an absolute Mahdi as an infallible guide is therefore rejected by Sunni theologians. 2 The Sunnites, in fact, expect the Mahdi to be the ultimate Caliph of the Prophet 3 and to spread justice throughout the Earth. They do not believe in the future restorer as one of the fundamental principles of faith, as do the Shi'ites.

Furthermore, a minority among the Sunnites do not accept that the Restorer will be called Mahdi and, indeed, entertain doubts as to his existence. The Encyclopaedia of Islam asserts that: "Lingering doubts concerning the Mahdi may partly account for the absence of any traditions about him in the Sahih's of al-Bukhari (810/870 AH) and Muslim (817/875

1 Ibid, p.1231

2 "al-Mahdi" SEI, p.311

3 Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, P.14

AH)." 1 "There is no mention of the Mahdi in either of the two Sahih's of Muslim or Bukhari". 2

There are also controversial discussions about whether the idea of Messianism rightly belongs to Islam or not. Some claim that the idea of Messianism is not Islamic. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica says that "Islam is not a Messianic religion and has no room for a Saviour-Messiah." 3 Riffat Hasan supports this thesis and states that: "Messianism appears to be incompatible with the teachings of the Qur'an, nonetheless in the Muslim world it is a widespread phenomenon, playing a pivotal role in the lives of many present-day Muslims from all segments of society." 4 Also: "Normative Islam as embodied in the Qur'an does not support the idea of Messianism in any of its forms, while Messianism is an essential part of religious belief and practice for almost all Shi'a Muslims. Shi'a Messianism does not fit theologically or logically into the framework of normative

Islam." 5 Riffat Hasan also relies on Fazlur Rahman's comments showing that Messianism was not a part of original Islam. He stated: "As for Messianism, it was originally adopted in Islam either by Shi'ism or Sufism, but in any case it came to Sunni Islam through the Sufis or rather through the precursors of the Sufis

1 "al-Mahdi", EI2, p. 1234

2 "al-Mahdi" SEI, p.311

3 "Messiah and Messianic Movements "p.1020

4 R. Hasan: "Messianism and Islam", p.262

5 Ibid, p.267.

- the public preachers of the 2nd /8th century who consoled and satisfied the politically disillusioned and morally starved masses by holding out Messianic hopes." 1

These discussions are ongoing even though the belief in the Mahdi is essentially Islamic and is widely accepted among scholars and ordinary Muslims. Even though it is not an essential part of the Sunni creed, it is accorded widespread belief among this community. Indeed, early Sunni sources record several traditions from the Prophet about the appearance and attributes of the Mahdi. These traditions are designated as Mutawatir, meaning that they have been reported from the Prophet successively by so many different unbroken chains of transmission and such a number of narrators in every generation that it would be virtually impossible to fabricate their existence without such fabrication becoming known. 2 The verses of the Qur'an concerning the Mahdi have also been interpreted by numerous traditions through Sunni chains of transmission, as will be seen in the third chapter. There are many other important terms and practices widely accepted by the Sunnis but that are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. The authenticity or otherwise of the traditions of classical and post-classical

1 Fazlur Rahman , Islam , p.245

2 Concerning the Mahdi, Hafez Abu Abdullah Ganzi Shafei (d. 658 A.H.) reports in his book al-Bayan:

عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: "يَأْتِي فِي آخِرِ الزَّمَانِ نَبِيٌّ يُدْعَى الْمَهْدِيَّ، يَأْتِيهِ نَارٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَتُطْفِئُهَا بِرِجْلِهِ، يَأْتِيهِ نَارٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَتُطْفِئُهَا بِرِجْلِهِ، يَأْتِيهِ نَارٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَتُطْفِئُهَا بِرِجْلِهِ" (M.R. Hakimi, Khorshid-e Maghreb, p. 81).

collections of hadith are open to discussion as regards all fields of Islamic thought, not only on the subject of the Mahdi.

Moreover, despite the absence of the term "Mahdi", both the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions

(hadith) in the two Sahihs provide strong grounds for expecting the appearance of someone who, both through thought and deed, will represent the long-awaited spiritual "guide". Indeed, in different hadiths the two Sahihs allude to the coming of a personage at the End of Time, someone whom Jesus will accompany. For example, let us cite two hadiths: The Sahih of Bukhari mentions a tradition reported by Abu Hurayra: "The Prophet said: 'How will you react when the son of Mary (Jesus) descends among you while your Imam will be from among yourselves?'" 1 The Sahih of Muslim reports a tradition from Jabir b. 'Abdullah: "I heard the Prophet saying: 'A group of Pure ones from my Community will fight continuously for the Truth (Haqq) until the Day of Judgement.' He said: 'Then will descend 'Isa ibn Maryam. And your Leader (Amir) will tell him: Come and lead the prayer for us. He will answer: No, for some of you are leaders of others, that is what God has granted to this Community.'" 2

1 M. ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari, Bab. Nuzul 'Isa ibn Maryam 49, Vol. 4, p.143:

U'a" C,E`i' a*N~i'N~a* ?C,a' : ?C,a' N~O'?'a' C,... (O~) ~i'Y' C,a"E^a~ C,?C, a"O`a' C,E`a" a~N~i'a~ Y'i~a~ ? C,a~C,a~a~ a~a"~a~?

2 Muslim ibn Hajjaj, Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Iman, num. 247, Vol. 1, p. 137:

In the rest of the authoritative collections of traditions, the Mahdi and all that concerns his advent is explicitly mentioned in traditions from the- Prophet, which allows us to think that the idea is not exclusively Shi'ite. Several compilers of hadith like Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.241 AH/857 AD), Ibn Madja (d.273 AH/887 AD) al-Tirmidhi (d.279 AH/892 AD), Abu Dawud al-Sajistani (d. 275 AH/889 AD), Ahmad al-Bazzar (d.292 AH/904 AD), Abu Ya'lah al-Mawsili (d.307 AH-1/919 AD), alTabarani (d.360 AH/971 AD), al-Hakim al-Naysaburi (d.431 AH/1040 AD), and al-Bayhaki (d.1077 AD) have specifically recorded traditions about the Mahdi in their collections. According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, the Mahdi traditions contained in the canonical Sunni hadith collections of Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Madja and al-Nassa'i as well as the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal, were numerous enough to provide a solid basis for the popular belief in the Mahdi as well as in the post-classical collections of hadith like those of al-Tabarani, al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, and al-Bayhaki. The eschatological role of the Mahdi became generally more pronounced, but it never became an essential part of Sunni religious doctrine and Sunni creed rarely mentions it. The view that the Mahdi would rule the Muslim community at the time of the descent of Jesus was commonly accepted. 1 Ibn Khaldun (d. 405 AD), who

1 "Al-Mahdi" in EI 2, p.1234.

refutes the certainty of the majority of the //MO - concerning the Mahdi, nevertheless accepts a

minority of them. 1 In his Muqaddimah, he has summarized the Sunnite position on the question of the future restorer of the faith in the following terms:

"It has been well known (and generally accepted) by all Muslims in every epoch, that at the end of time a man from the family (of the Prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen Islam and make justice triumph. The Muslims will follow him, and he will gain domination over the Muslim realm. He will be called the Mahdi. Following him, the Antichrist will appear, together with all the subsequent signs of the Flour (the Day of Judgement), as established in (the sound traditions of the Sahih)" [authoritative collections of the prophetic sayings recognized by the Sunnites.] After the Mahdi, 'Isa (Jesus) will descend and kill the Antichrist. Or, Jesus will descend together with the Mahdi and help him kill (the Antichrist), and have him as the leader in his prayers." 2

In spite of support for the belief in the Mahdi by some prominent traditionists, opposition to the belief in him did not entirely disappear among the hadith scholars. 3 In the early period of the Islamic history, a minor group of Muslim scholars denied the appearance of the Mahdi and claimed that

1 A. Amin, al-Mahdi wal-Mahdawayah, p.108.

2 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. 2, p.156.

3 "Al-Mahdi", EI2, p.1234

only Jesus would come. Ibn Maja reports this hadith ("la Mahdi illa 'Isa; there shall be no Mahdi except Jesus ") in his Sunan and says that it was reported by one person only, and that is Idris Shafi'i. 1 Furthermore, Imam Qurtubi states that there are unknown transmitters in the chain of the narration of this hadith and that it is therefore weak. He also states that this hadith contradicts all the hadiths reported by the Prophet about the Mahdi, descended from the Prophet's family through Fatima. 2

On the other hand, in the middle of the 7th/13th century, several Sunnite scholars supported the Shi'ite belief that the twelfth Imam was the expected Mahdi, relying solely on Sunnite traditions and countering Sunnite objections to the Mahdi-ship of the twelfth Imam. Among them, Sibte ibn alDjawzi, shortly before his death in 654 AH/1256 AD in Damascus, assembled reports from Sunni sources about the virtues of 'Ali and his descendants, and at the end affirmed that the Twelfth Imam was the expected Mahdi in his Tadhkira khawas al- 'umma bi- dhikr khasa 'is al-a 'imma . Support of the Mahdi-ship of the Twelfth Imam by these Sunni authors, as also by later ones, was regularly noted by Imami apologists. 3

1 Ibn Madja, Muhammad Ibn Yazid al-Qazwini (207-275 A.H.) Sunan Ibn Madja, Kitab al-Fitan, Bab Shiddat al-Zaman, Vol. 3, p. 434.

2 Imam al-Qurtubi, Al-Tadhkirah Fi Ahwal al-Mawta wa umur al-Akhira , Bab Fi al-Mahdi.

3 "Al-Mahdi", EI2, p.1237

Regardless of the authenticity or otherwise of the traditions cited on this question, the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil in the Qur'an and the universal idea of hope in Islam is embodied in the figure of the Mahdi. The belief in a future Saviour and the Messianic concept has had a significant social and psychological impact on Muslims. In every crisis and in times of turbulence, these beliefs served to raise their hopes.

1-3 Mahdi in Shi'ism

In Imamite (Twelver) Shi'ism, the belief in the appearance of the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam descended from the Prophet who promised an end to corruption, has been a central aspect of the faith throughout its history, in contrast to the beliefs of Sunnism. This is not only a basic tenet of the creed, but also the foundation on which the entire spiritual edifice of the Imamite religion rests. The belief in a temporary absence or occultation (ghayba) of the Mahdi and his eventual return in glory is also common. The idea of the Mahdi has a greater significance and presence in the lives of the Shi'ites than in any other religion and is the most important factor in the development of Shi'ism, where unshakeable belief in the advent of the Mahdi continues to be expressed in most of their daily prayers.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the spread of Western-style modernism, Messianic and eschatological aspirations largely disappeared from the mainstream Sunnite discourse, although important Mahdi-st movements emerged in the mid-nineteenth century to subsist well into the twentieth century in different parts of the Islamic world. On the other hand, in the Shi'ite world, the desire to create a true Islamic community with a Messianic deliverance was more intense than in the Sunni world. In the decade leading up to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, there were some attempts to reassess such themes as the nature of the hereafter, the coming of the Mahdi and the order he is expected to establish. Topics such as the duties of believers during the Occultation were more assertively linked to the questions of political legitimacy and clerical leadership on behalf of the Imam. There was a gradual distancing from the traditional narrative of the apocalyptic end in favour of portraying the Imam's return as an all-embracing revolution with this-worldly causes and consequences. According to Shari'ati, Messianism and futurism in Shi'ite Islam were the outcomes of a "synthesis between the ideals and the realities" of Islam, an ambition to restore the ideals of Ali's just rule... To reconstruct such an idealized past, Shari'ati believed, the disinherited (mustad'afin) of the earth should strive for a "classless society" in which justice and equality will triumph over exploitation, imperialism and tyranny. 1

1 Shari'ati, Expectation: a School of Protest, p. 15

The difference between Sunnism and Shi'ism is a question of political succession and religious authority. There was the problem of the succession to the Prophet as leader of the community after his death. A small group backed Ali whom they believed to have been designated for this role by appointment (la 'yin) and testament. They became known as his 'partisans' (shi'ah) while the majority agreed on Abu Bakr on the assumption that the Prophet left no instructions on this matter; they gained the name of 'The people of tradition and consensus of opinion' (ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah). But more generally the Shiite of Ali, in the sense of those who backed and followed him among the Companions, already existed during the Prophet's lifetime and there are several references to them in prophetic sayings. Only with the death of the Prophet did they become crystallized as a group distinct from the Sunnis. 1 They follow the family and successors of the Prophet (Twelve Imams) as their source for the understanding of the Quranic Revelation. The Imam is the sustainer of the religious law and the guarantor of its continuation. The earth can never be devoid of the presence of the Imam, even if he be hidden or unknown. His duties are essentially to rule over the community as the Prophet's representative, to interpret religious science and law to men and to guide people in their spiritual life.

1 Nasr, Ideals and realities of Islam, p.149

Like the Imams before him, the twelfth Imam is said to have had a miraculous birth. He was born on the fifteenth day of Sha'ban in the year 255 of the Hijrah. He came out of his mother's womb prostrate in the attitude of prayer, pure and circumcised, raising his voice in the profession of faith (shahadah). His mother, called Narjis (Narcissus), is believed to be the grand-daughter of the Byzantine Emperor, who disguised herself as a slave girl, and was captured during a Muslim expedition against Byzantine territory. Long before her captivity, she was visited in her dreams by Fatimah, the venerable ancestress of the Imams and daughter of the Prophet, who instructed her in the Islamic faith and prepared her for the great role she was to play. Finally, the Prophets Jesus and Muhammad, with their vicegerents Simon Peter (Shim'un) and Ali, appeared to the girl. Muhammad asked Jesus for Narjis's hand, and Ali and Simon Peter acted as witnesses to the marriage contract. Fatimah and the Virgin Mary also came to bless the sacred marriage. From that time on, the 1 Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, the girl's future spouse, came to see her every night in a dream. He finally ordered her to flee her country and allow herself to be sold into slavery. 1 Thus, the twelfth Imam's lineage combined both royalty and prophecy. More important is the direct presence of Christianity

1 Ibn Babu'ayeh, Kamal al-din, Bab 41 Ma ruwi'ah al-Narjis umm al-Qa'im, vol.2, p.418-423
Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Kitab al-Ghayba, Bab wiladatih wa ahwal al-ummihi, num. 12, vol. 51,
pp.6-7-8.

in the popular concept and history of the Imams in Twelver Shi'ism. According to Imamite authors, none of the previous Imams had been spied upon as had the eleventh. Al-Hasan al'Askari attempted to hide the fact of the birth of his son from everyone but his closest friends. 1 The caliph al-Mu'tamid and his entourage, as well as the majority of the partisans of the Imams, were even convinced that the eleventh Imam had passed away (in 260 AH/874 AD) without leaving any progeny.

a) Mahdi in Shi'ite traditions

The literature dealing with the Mahdi, his birth, concealment and return is vast and complex. Sachedina states, concerning this literature, that the primary sources in the study of the doctrinal evolution of the idea of the Mahdi in Imami Shi'ism 2 can make an essential contribution to an understanding of the period in which the idea of the Hidden Mahdi became crystallized in Imamite dogma. 3 M.A.A. Moezzi explains very clearly that the Imams passed on two kinds of traditions concerning the Mahdi: the first category contained confusing information, where the name of the Mahdi is not specified and was aimed at that large group of disciples who were involved in the writing down of traditions. In fact, the Imams prohibited the pronouncing of the latter's name (al-nahy 'an al-ism, al

1 Ibn Babu'ayeh, Kamal al-din, vol I, pp.474

2 Imami (or imamate); the Shia who believe in twelve imams.

3 Sachedina, "A treatise on the Occultation..." , p.110

man' 'an al-tasmiya) 1. According to the authors, this prohibition was maintained in effect up to at least the beginning of the minor Occultation. A second kind of tradition, aimed only at the closest of disciples, contained specific information about the identity of the Mahdi. His name was included here, except that, in order to guarantee the safety of his life, this category of traditions was only to be transmitted orally until after the beginning of the Occultation; it could be put into writing only after the life of the son of the eleventh Imam was out of danger. 2

Among the first Shi'ite compilers of traditions concerning the number of Imams, the twelfth Imam, his two occultations, his final Return and Rise, let us cite: Shaykh al-Kulayni, who died in 329 AH/940 AD, the same year as the beginning of the major Occultation, and who compiled his Usul min al-Kali during the period of the minor Occultation; al-Nu'mani Ibn Abi Zaynab (d.circa 345 or 360 AH/956 or 971 AD); Ja'far alQummi (d.369 AH/979 AD); Ali ibn Muhammad al-Khazzaz al-

Razi al-Qummi (d. in the second half of the fourth AH/tenth AD century); Ibn Babu'ayyeh (d. 381 AH/991 AD) who, especially in his *Kamal (Ikmal) al-din*, seems to have collected the essentials of all the information from his predecessors; Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn 'Ayyash al-Jawhari (d.401 AH/1101 AD);

1 al-Kulayni, *Usul*, "kitab al-hujja", bab fi al-nahy 'an al-ism, hadith 1 and 3, vol.1, p.332-333.

2 M.A.A. Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p.106

Al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413 AH/1022 AD), author of *Kitab al-Irshad*; id. *Al-Fusul al-'ashara fi al-ghayba*; Al-Murtada 'Alam al-Huda (d. 436 AH/1044 AD), a disciple of al-Mufid; Ali al-Karajaki (d. 449 AH/1057 AD), another of al-Mufid's disciples; and finally Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan al-Tusi (d.460 AH/1067 AD). All these authors' works preceded the minor Occultation. 1

The Twelver Shi'ite doctrine on the Occultation, based on traditions attributed to the Imams, was authoritatively elaborated by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Nu'mani in his *Kitab al-Ghayba*, by Ibn Babu'ayyeh in his *Ikmal al-Din*, and by Shaykh al-Tusi in his *Kitab al-Ghayba*. In Imami traditions, as in Sunni traditions, the Mahdi will rule the world, with Jesus praying behind him after his descent from heaven. This did not raise a theological problem as it would in Sunnism, since the Mahdi, like all other Imams, according to prevalent Imami doctrine, exceeds all Prophets except Muhammad in religious rank. 2

b) The Occultation

The Occultation (*ghayba*) is a period of concealment chosen by God for the Imam who will continue to live in this state as long as God deems it necessary. Then He will command him to reappear and take control of the world in order to restore

1 M.A.A. Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, p.101

2 "Al-Mahdi", EI2, p. 1236

justice and equity. The mysterious fate of the son of the eleventh Imam divided the early Shi'ite family into some eleven to fifteen different schisms. 1 But the idea according to which the twelfth Imam was alive and hidden and would return at the End of Time, was later adopted by all Imamites due to the tenacious efforts of authors/compilers like al-Kulayni, al-Nu'mani and especially Ibn Babu'ayyeh, who, through the great mass of traditions surrounding this belief, progressively managed to convince the population of the faithful. 2 In fact, early Imamites attempted to present the Imamate and Mahdi-ism of the Twelfth Imam in occultation in a logical and rational way. 3 According to Imamite sources, Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan al-'Askari (al-Mahdi)

had a first occultation when he was a child, in 260 AH/874 AD, at the time of his father's death, and it lasted nearly 70 years. At Samarra in Iraq, beside the shrines of the tenth and eleventh Imams, is a mosque under which there is a cave from where the Imam Mahdi is said to have disappeared 4 when he was five years old. This cave was a place of retreat and meditation for the eleventh Imam and his son, and also a hiding place from the Abbasid agents. 5 During this Occultation, the Imam

1 Cf. A.A. Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, pp. 42-55, see also an Nawbakhti, les sectes shines (Kitah Firaq al-shi'a), pp. 109

2 M.A.A.Moezzi, The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism, p.105

3 Sachedina, "A treatise on the Occultation..." , p.111.

4 M. Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam, P.161.

5 H. Corbin, En Islam Iranien, vol.4, p. 322.

communicated with his faithful via four successive Representatives (na'ib):

1. Abu 'Amr 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-'Umari (or al-'Amri), representative from 260 AH/874 AD to 267 AH/880 AD.
2. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Uthman al-'Umari (or al-'Amri), the son of the above, from 267 AH/880 AD until 305 AH/917 AD.
3. Abul-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Rawh alNawbakhti, from 305 AH/917 AD to 326 AH/937 AD.
4. Abul-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Simarri, from 326 AH/937 AD to 329AH/941 AD.

This was "the minor Occultation" (al-ghayba al-sughra).

Then, around 329 AH/941 AD, came the beginning of "the major Occultation" (al-ghayba al-kubra) after the fourth representative received a last autographed note from the hidden Imam :

"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; Ali ibn Muhammad al-Simarri, may God increase, through you, the reward of your brothers [in religion; that is the Shi'ites]; your death will take place in six days. Prepare yourself and name no one as your successor [as representative] after your death. This is the advent of the second Occultation in which there will be no more manifestation, except if it be with divine permission, and that will only take place after a long time, when hearts will be hardened and the earth filled with violence. Among my partisans, some will claim to have seen me with their eyes. Beware! He who claims to have seen [me] with his eyes before the raising of al-Sufyani and [the sounding of] the Cry is a liar and an impostor. Greatness and Power belong to God alone."

Six days later al-Simarri, on his deathbed, was asked, "Who will be your successor?" He replied,

"From this point on, the matter is in God's hands, He will arrange it Himself." Those were his last words. 1 The major Occultation is still in effect. and will not end until the End of Time (akhir al-zaman) when the Mahdi comes back to re-establish Justice on earth. The Imam is not completely cut off from his followers but has spokesmen. in the form of learned jurist, (marja' taqlid), who can act on his behalf and guide the Shi'ites in their religious matters. Imamite traditions give four reasons for the Occultation : 2

1. Safeguarding the life of the twelfth Imam

1 Ibn Babu'ayeh, Kamal al-din, vol. 2, ch. 45, p.516, num.44.

2 Al-Kulayni, Usul, Kitab bab nadir ti hal al-ghayba, vol. 1 pp. 333-335, bab 6 l-ghayba, vol. 2 pp. 132- 45. Ibn Babu'ayeh, Kamal al-din, vol. 2 . ch. 44 PP .479 -- 82, nuns 1, 2, 6, 8.

2. Independence vis-a-vis temporal powers; through his Occultation, the Mahdi will owe allegiance to no temporal powers.

3. Putting the Imamites to the test; the Occultation serves as a long period of trial, a challenge to their faith.

4. Finally, there is a hidden reason for the Occultation, that is said to be the most important of all, although it will not be revealed until the Return of the Mahdi.

With the major Occultation, the secret life of the Twelfth Imam begins, whose occult presence has dominated the Shi'ite religious consciousness for more than ten centuries. The Twelver tradition illustrates this from as early as the fourth AH/tenth AD century, the hidden Imam living in his physical body, providentially endowed with a long life. To support this claim, Ibn Babu'ayeh dedicates six chapters of his Kamal al-din to those known for their extraordinarily long lives in the Arabic tradition. It is also said in the Twelver tradition that the hidden Imam attends the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and that he sees people even if they cannot see him. 1 He is visibly present and walks through their marketplaces and into their

1 Ibn Babu'ayeh, Kamal al-Din, Bab Dhikr man shahada al-Qa'im wa raahu 43, vol.2, pp.351, num 8.

homes, and nobody recognizes him. 1 In this latter case, he is compared to Joseph (Qur'an, sura 12, Yusuf), seen but not recognized by his brothers. As in Joseph's case, God can allow him to be recognized by some people. The Prophet is said to have stated: "...His faithful are illuminated by his Light; they profit from his wilaya during his Occultation, just as one profits from the sun even when it is covered by clouds." 2 The history of the twelfth Imam during his major Occultation is constituted of stories and narratives recounted by those who saw the Mahdi in their dreams or in reality. 3 The compilations of al-Kulayni, al-Nu'mani, and Ibn Babu'ayeh, to name the oldest and the

best known, and numerous other Shi'ite works throughout the centuries, contain a number of eyewitness accounts from even ordinary people who were in great distress or other unfortunate circumstances and who claim having met the twelfth Imam. "None of these mysterious appearances to his faithful suspends his Occultation but each of these appearances suspends for his faithful the common laws of time and space for Men who do not perceive the occult presence of the Imam." 4

1 Ibn Babu'ye, Kamal al-din , vol. 2, ch.33, p.341, num.21. also, alKulayni, Usul, Kitab al-Hujja, bab Nahi 'an al- Ism, vol.1, num 1 & 3 , p. 332-333 ; Al-Nu'mani, Kitab al-ghayba, p.257.

2 Ibn Babu'ye, Kamal al-din, vol.2, ch.43, p.253, num.3.

3 H. Corbin, En Islam Iranien, vol.4, p. 304.

4 Ibid, p.306

c) The concept of Intizar

Complementary to the doctrine of the greater Occultation is the notion of Intizar, or the expectation and awaiting of the Hidden Imam's return. Intizar is a state of expectancy for the reappearance of the Hidden Imam; it is a doctrine of hope and trust that he will one day reappear and establish an ideal Islamic society. The expectation of release from suffering, grief and sorrow (Intizar al-faraj) is enjoined upon the believers. The doctrine of Intizar has important connotations for the personal and political lives of the Twelver Shi'ite faithful during the Occultation of the Imam: their personal duties as believers vis-a-vis God and their attitude to the question of religious leadership and earthly government.

The most comprehensive collection of the Twelver Shi'ite narratives on Intizar was made by the Shi'ite scholar Muhammad Baqir Majlisi in his encyclopaedic work on Shi'ite traditions, Bihar al-Anwar. 1 The disappearance of the Mahdi and his Occultation are presented in the traditions as a severe test for the Shi'ite faithful, bringing with it much hardship and many schisms. The Shi'ites will undergo a process of sifting in which the unbelievers will be rooted out from the believers. Several traditions mention the merit of Intizar al-faraj without specifying the nature and cause of suffering. In one tradition, the Prophet is reported to have said: "The best of all acts

1 Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol.52, Bab Fazl al-Intizar va madh al-Shi'a fi zaman al-ghayba, pp.122-127.

carried out by my people is their expectation of release from suffering, granted to them by God."

1 Several of the eighty or so traditions on the excellency of Intizar, class it as the most noble (afdal) of all actions, and in one narrative as synonymous with worship (` lbada). 2 Acts of worship

... must be carried out clandestinely during the ghayba, are more meritorious than those performed openly after the return of the Imam. One must strive to carry out all of the obligatory duties laid down in the Shari'a, which remain incumbent on the individual despite the absence of the Imam. The Twelver Shi'ites during the occultation are superior to those in the company of the Mahdi, for the simple reason that the former must contend with tyrannical regimes, against which they move neither tongue nor hand nor sword in opposition. ³ The expectation of salvation through the rise of the twelfth Imam is dominant throughout the Occultation. The persistent faith in freedom from grief through his appearance requires the Shi'ites to be on the alert at all times and also to pave the way for the Imam's reappearance.

Murtaza Mutahhari, a prominent student of Imam Khomeiny and a teacher of philosophy, in his essay on the uprising and the revolution of the Mahdi, no longer treated the advent of the Lord of the Age as a sudden, impromptu event,

1 Bihar vol.52, P. 122.

2 Ibid vol.52 p.122.

3 Ibid vol.52, p.122

but as the final stage in an ideologically driven revolution to establish Islam's "ideal society". Mutahhari conceived the coming of the Mahdi as the climax of a revolutionary struggle that in its primary stages requires the believers' active involvement ¹ during the Occultation. Unlike the Marxist theory of revolution, Mutahhari believed that Mahdi's revolution is divinely inspired and remains contingent upon the alertness and action of the community. Thus, the establishment of a just state became for Mutahhari and like-minded activists a legitimate first step toward the final revolution of the Mahdi.

The well-known work *Wilayat-e faqih* (authority of the jurist) was clearly meant to provide an answer to the most urgent of these concerns. In this work, Imam Khomeiny advocated the necessity for instituting an Islamic government in the absence of the Hidden Imam in order to prepare the terrain for the Rise of the Mahdi. He argued that while the Imam is in Occultation, preserving the essence of Islam and defending its sacred values should be accomplished by an Islamic government under a Guardian Jurist to be upheld as the Imam's vicegerent. In support of this doctrine, Imam Khomeiny cites one of the Hidden Imam's decrees in which the `ulama were upheld as "proofs" (hujaj) of the Lord of the Age.

1 Mutahhari, p.5-10

Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977), a major ideologue of revolutionary Shi'ism, in a pamphlet entitled

"expectation, a school of protest", regarded the End of Time as nothing but an "ultimate revolution" for humanity. The Mahdi's revolution could not come about without Muslims arriving at a new understanding of expectation as a way of acquiring social responsibility, working toward a just and equitable order and rejecting political oppression and cultural degradation. Complying with the Shi'ite prophecies, he repeated that the Lord of the Age will come when the entire lifespan of humanity reaches its lowest ebb of corruption, but until that time, he recommended that the community of believers should settle on the leadership of a democratically elected jurist (faqih) to serve as the Hidden Imam's general deputy (na'ibe 'l, gam). A true understanding of the End, he stated, will evolve only when Muslims abandon troubling theological 1 entanglements concerning circumstances of the resurrection (and in effect, the Occultation) and instead, develop a perspective conforming to modern social and human sciences, and based on a sociological analysis of class conflict. Shari'ati's ideological dimensions of expectation go so far as to endorse a Marxist-inspired Islamic revolution. True expectation, according to Shari'ati, is "believing that in the life of humankind on this very earth and before death, not in the resurrection after death, history will bring about the triumph of the oppressed and destruction of the oppressors".

d) The Return and the Rise

The future Return and Rise of the Mahdi constitutes the most frequent of the Imam's predictions and has been described in numerous traditions from the early times in Imamite history. It is believed that the Mahdi will come to fulfill the mission of all the prophets before him, and complete the task of Imam Husayn (the third Imam), the great martyr of Karbala. He shall appear, according to many traditions, on the day of 'Ashura, the day on which Imam Husayn, son of Imam Ali, was killed, 1 showing himself first in Mecca, Islam's holiest city, where he will be joined initially by 313 believers, the number of the martyrs of Badr, then he will make his headquarters in Kufah where Imam Ali was killed and buried. The Return as well as the Rising of the Qa'im, will be preceded by signs. The theme of 'Signs of the Return' is one of the most developed of those that occur in collections of hadith, in both Sunnite and Shi'ite literature. Sometimes a number of chapters are dedicated to the subject. 2 The universal sign of the Return consists in the generalized invasion of the earth by Evil. There are also a great number of more specific signs listed in the compilations.

1 Mufid, p.341

2 Al-Nu'mani , Kitab al-ghayba, ch. 14, 15, 18, 21; Ibn Babuye, Kamal al-Din, ch. 47, 57, 58

Chapter II - Shi'ite commentators (Mufassirin) and their commentaries (Tafsirs)

The Sacred Text has been subject to interpretations (tafsir), hermeneutics (ta'wil) and mystical exegesis throughout Islamic history. The Shi'ite understanding of the Qur'an is founded on the doctrinal belief that the Shi'ite Imams possess the hidden, esoteric (batin) knowledge of the verses of the Qur'an.

2-1 The principles of Shi'i tafsir and the relation between the Imams and the Qur'an

Tafsir means "interpretation" in general but not always of the Qur'an. "The most significant usage of the word is its reference to the branch of Islamic learning concerned with the Qur'an. A tafsir of the Qur'an is a work which provides an interpretation of the Arabic text of the scripture. In most cases, a work entitled tafsir will follow the text of the Qur'an from the beginning to the end and will provide an interpretation (tafsir) of segments of the text (word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase or verse-by-verse) as a running commentary. The major exceptions to this fundamental characteristic are to be found in the formative and the contemporary periods of Islam. In the formative period, one finds works of tafsir, which cover only isolated segments of the text, and in the contemporary period, thematic tafasir (mawdu'i) have become quite popular. Different mufassirun have different concerns and goals and this is reflected in the relative weight they put upon elements such as history, grammar, law, theology ..." 1 The commentaries of the Qur'an are useful for deciphering the message of the Qur'an. Many people who read the Sacred Book receive no more from it than the literal message. It is in the commentaries, based on the clarification afforded by the hadith and written by those who are qualified in the true sense, that man comes to understand explicitly and in more extended form what is contained often implicitly and in a contracted form in the Qur'an. 2

a) The principles of Shi'i tafsir

- The exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Qur'an

Among the principles of the Shi'i tafsir is that the Qur'an has an outer dimension (zahir) and an inner dimension (batin) and the simple surface text of a verse unfolds multiple

1 A. Rippin, "Tafsir", EI2, p.83-84.

2 H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities in Islam, p.58

meanings and exemplifies a feature to be found throughout the Qur'an. 1 Indeed the Qur'an is

meant for men and women of any level of intellect and from any social background, and "since the expounding of subtle knowledge is not without danger of misinterpretation, the Qur'an directs its teachings primarily at the level of the common man. The Qur'an reveals itself in a way suitable for different levels of comprehension so that each benefits according to his own capacity." Also certain verses contain metaphors which indicate divine gnosis far beyond the common man's understanding but which nevertheless become comprehensible through their metaphorical form. 2

These exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Qur'an have also been identified with the principles of tafsir and ta'wil respectively, Tafsir being the explanation of the external aspect and the literal exegesis of the Qur'an using different fields like Arabic grammar, poetry, linguistic, jurisprudence or history as references to elucidate the difficulties of the literal text, and Ta'wil signifying "to take back or reconduct something to its origin and archetype (asl)". 3 The basis in any case remains the corpus of teachings and hadith of the Imams who expounded the rules of the plurality of meanings in the Qur'an. 4 In other words, Ta'wil or symbolic and hermeneutic

1 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p.29.

2 Ibid, p.31-32

3 H. Corbin, En Islam Iranien, vol.1, p.212.

4 H. Corbin, En Islam Iranien, vol.1, p.214.

interpretation enables penetration into the inner meaning of the Sacred Text, which in fact entails a reaching back to its Origin. The idea of penetrating into the inner meaning of things can be seen everywhere in Islam. But it is particularly in the case of the Qur'an that ta'wil is applied, especially by the Sufis and the Shi'as 1. 2

There is considerable disagreement as to the meaning of ta'wil, and it is possible to count more than ten different views. Tabatabai explains that ta'wil is not in opposition to the actual text but is used to extend the idea expressed to include a further meaning. 3 Also, sufficient deliberation upon the Qur'anic verses and the hadith of the Imams will show that the Qur'an never uses enigmatic methods of explanation. "What has been rightly called ta'wil or hermeneutic interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is not concerned with certain truths and realities that transcend the comprehension of the common run of men". In fact, "the whole of the Qur'an possesses the sense of ta'wil, of esoteric meaning, which cannot be comprehended directly through human thought alone." Only the Prophet and

1 H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities in Islam, p.58-59

2 In the tafsir of the Qur'an, the Sunni have mainly depended on the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses, whereas the Shia have depended on the apparent meaning and the inner meaning of the verses understood from other verses (for the Qur'anic verses explain each other) and from the traditions of the Prophet (s.a) and the infallible Imams (a.) that explained the Qur'an. But as for the Sufis, they have depended on their personal understanding of the Qur'an, and therefore, most of their tafsirs (interpretations) are not accepted by other Muslims, especially the Shia.

3 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p.41

the pure among the saints can contemplate these meanings in this world. "On the Day of Resurrection, the ta'wil of the Qur'an will be revealed to everyone." 1

- The abrogating (nasikh) and the abrogated (mansukh) verses

Abrogating verses are those which are applicable and relevant at all times and abrogated verses are not relevant and have already been fulfilled. 2

- The explicit (muhkam) and the implicit (mutashabih) verses

The verse 7 in the sura 3 of the Qur'an divides the Qur'an into two parts: the explicit and the implicit, the clear and the allegorical, or the muhkam and the mutashabih. The verses, which are explicit and immediate in their message, are incapable of being misinterpreted. The implicit verses are not of this nature, but seem to express a meaning containing a further truer meaning whose interpretation is known only to God. This view is accepted by both the Sunnite and the Shi'ite scholars; however, the Shi'ites believe that the Prophet and the Imams of his family also understood the hidden meanings and maintain that the ordinary man must seek knowledge of the implicit verses from them (the Prophet and his family). 3 Tabatabai relates from the Imams that each verse, even if its

1 Tabataba'i in H. Nasr, Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality, p.24

2 M. Ayoub, "The speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an", p.189.

3 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p. 33-34

meaning is not apparent or., explicit, can be explained by reference to other verses. Thus, the real meaning of the implicit verses can be found in relation to the explicit verses and the assertion that no means exist for understanding the implicit verses is fallacious. He also reports a prophetic hadith (reported by al-'Amili, in al-burr al-Manthur, vol.2, p.8): "In truth, the Qur'an was not revealed so that one part may contradict the other, but rather was revealed so that one part may

verify the other. You understand what you can of it, then, act accordingly; and that which is unclear for you, simply believe in it." 1

b) The Imams and the Ahl al-Bays in relation to the Qur'an

The Shi'ites have agreed that God revealed to Muhammad both the Qur'an and its exegesis and appointed him as the teacher of the Book, 2 while the Prophet appointed his progeny to carry on this work after him. In two places of the Qur'an, (33:33) and (56: 77-79), God has confirmed the Prophet's declaration that his progeny held real knowledge of the Book. 3 In a long and well-known tradition (hadith al-Thaqalayn) related by both Shi'i and Sunni traditionists, the Qur'an is presented as the 'greater weight' (al-thaqal al-akbar) and the

1 Ibid, P.36.

2 Qur'an : 62 :2

3 Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, p.12

Imams as the 'lesser weight' (al-thaqal al-asghar). In the presence of many of his Companions, the Prophet declared: "I am soon about to be received..... I am telling you before I am taken up that I shall leave with you, as representatives after me, the Book of my Lord, and my progeny, the people of my household, the ahl al-bayt that the All-Gracious, All-Knowing, told me that they shall not be separated until they meet me on the day of Resurrection..... Do not precede them, for you would go astray, and do not fall behind them, for you would perish. Do not teach them, for they are of greater knowledge than you." 1

Numerous traditions in several chapters describe the knowledge of the Imams, especially in the hadith collection of Kulayni. The Shi'ites consider the Imams as associates of the Qur'an. The Prophet and Imams are distinguished by the inheritance of divine knowledge and they alone know the full meaning of the Qur'an, since it was to them that it was primarily addressed and through them to the rest of humankind. Also they possess all the revealed Books of the previous Prophets and knew their tafsir and ta'wil despite the number of languages in which they were written. Thus, the Imams have a unique relation to the Qur'an that gives Shi'i tafsir its unique character. It is also believed that the Qur'an, which Ali wrote down from the dictation of Muhammad with its true exegesis (ta'wil), was passed down from one Imam to

1 Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Bab 7, vol.23, p.108

the next and is now with the hidden Imam who will disclose it and judge by it when he returns as the expected Mahdi. 1

2-2 The historical development and method of Shi'i tafsir

The interpretation of the Qur'an (tafsir) began right at the time of its revelation and is one of the earliest activities in Islamic sciences. The first exegetes among the Companions of the Prophet were Ibn 'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Ubay ibn Ka'b and others. 2 People used to ask the Prophet all sorts of questions as to the meaning of certain statements in the verses and the Prophet undertook the teaching and explanation of the Qur'an. The Prophet's answers were stored up in the memory of his Companions. After the Prophet's death, a group of his Companions were occupied with the science of commentary and its transmission. Just as they had heard the Prophet explaining the meaning of the verses, they would transmit it orally to other trustworthy persons. 3 Exegesis in those days was confined to the explanation of literary aspects of the verse, the background of its revelation, and occasionally interpretation of one verse with the help of another. Sometimes a few of the Prophet's traditions were narrated.

1 Ibid, Kitab Fadl al-Qur'an, Bab al-Nawadir, vol.6, p.474

2 Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, p.3

3 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p.47

Followers of these first Companions (Tabi'un), who lived in the first two centuries of hijra, used the same exegetic style. However, they relied more on traditions, and even Jewish sayings and dictums to explain the verses containing details of the previous nations present in Genesis 1 because the tafsir transmission from the Prophet through the Companions and the Tabi'un did not cover all the verses in the Qur'an. Some scholars relied on their knowledge of the language and historical facts of the Prophet's epoch. 2 During the time of the Companions and the Tabi'un, the science of tafsir was part of the hadith and there was hardly any difference between mufasssirin and muhaddithun (traditionists or narrators of hadith) until the complete separation of the two in the early third century, 3 when exegesis became an independent, autonomous science. 4 The activity of tafsir during the first two centuries is reflected by the tafsir of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari. His collections are said to have contained materials from various earlier works and his work is evidence of the general recognition of tafsir in early third century AH. It was the first attempt to comment on the whole of the Qur'an verse by verse. 5

1 Al-Mizan, p.4

2 M. Abdul, The Qur'an: Shaykh Tabarsi's commentary, p.47

3 Ahmad Amin, Duha al-Islam, II, p.140

4 Ibid p.137

5 M. Abdul, The Qur'an: Shaykh Tabarsi's commentary, p. 52-53.

During the second century A.H., Muslim society split into four groups: the theologians, the philosophers, the Sufis, and the people of tradition. This divergence showed itself later in exegesis of the Qur'an. 1 Indeed, after Tabari, the development of tafsir came to be associated with different fields of knowledge, doctrines and thought, and scholars attempted to make their field of knowledge a basis for their commentary in order to support their views from the Qur'an. Scholars working in the field of philosophy considered philosophy a basis for their commentaries while scholars in the legal field employ the tafsir to project the doctrine of their particular school of thought, and so on. 2

For Tabatabai, all these ways of exegesis are defective because they superimpose their conclusions on the Qur'anic meanings, making the Qur'an conform with their ideas. Thus, explanation turns into adaptation. 3 Tabatabai stated that the only correct method of exegesis is that the exegete explains the verse with the help of other relevant verses, meditating on them together. The Prophet and the Imams descended from his progeny always used this method for explaining the Qur'an. 4 Similarly Mutahhari explains that the Qur'an constitutes a coherent unified structure and some verses need to be explained with the help of other verses in order to prevent any

1 Al-Mizan, p.5

2 M. Abdul, The Qur'an: Shaykh Tabarsi's commentary, p.55 Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, p.9

3 Ibid, p.12

misunderstanding about certain problems. If a solitary verse is studied without placing it in its proper context, it will give a different meaning from when it is compared with other verses dealing with a similar subject. 1 Also, while Sunni commentators in the early period of tafsir relied primarily on prophetic traditions and those of the Companions and their successors, the Shi'ite commentators, in studying a verse of the Qur'an, viewed the explanation given by the Prophet as proof of the meaning of the verse, and did not accept the sayings of the Companions or their followers as indisputable proof that the tradition came from the Prophet. The Shi'ite commentators only recognized as valid an unbroken chain of narration from the Prophet through members of his family. Accordingly, in using and transmitting the verses concerning Qur'anic commentary, they restricted themselves to the use of traditions transmitted by the Prophet and by the Imams belonging to the Prophet's family. 2

The first generation of Shi'ite commentators and authorities on tafsir were disciples of the Imams and others close to the disciples, who learned the traditions directly from the Prophet and the Imams of the Prophet's family. Among them were such scholars as Zurarah ibn A'yun and Muhammad ibn Muslim, Ma'ruf ibn Kharbudh and Jarir, who were

1 Mutahhari, in H. Nasr, Shi'ism Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality, p. 27

2 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p.50

Companions of the fifth and sixth Imams, or Abu Hamzah alThumali (a special Companion of the fourth and fifth Imams) 1. Their traditions have been preserved in the works of the second generation of commentators and compilers of commentaries. These were consecutively :

- Furat Ibn Ibrahim al-Kufi, who lived during the Imamate of the ninth Imam, Muhammad al-Jawad, and might have lived until the first years of the tenth century A.D. He was one of the foremost authorities in Shi'ite traditions and one of the teachers of the famous traditionist al-Qummi.

- Muhammad al-'Ayyashi, a contemporary of Furat Ibn Ibrahim al-Kufi, was a Sunni scholar who accepted Shi'ism, and became a great Shi'a scholar.

- Ali Ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 307 AH/919-20 AD), who related traditions received from his father who had, in turn, learned them from many of the Imams' disciples.

- Muhammad al-Nu'mani, who survived into the tenth century AD. Al-Nu'mani (d.360 AH/971 AD) was one of al-Kulayni's students. He left an important tafsir that he related on the authority of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. These two generations represent the pre-classical period of

1 Ibid, p.50

Shi'ite tafsir. 1 They avoided any kind of ijtiḥad or passing of judgement. The Imams were indeed living among Muslims and available for questioning for a period of almost three hundred years.

The third generation of Shi'ite commentators extended over a very long period, well into the sixteenth century AD. They included: al-Sharif al-Radhiy (d.405 AH/1015 AD) and his well-known brother al-Sayyid al-Murtadha (d.436 AH/1044 AD); Abu Ja'far al-Tusi (d.460AH/1067AD) who was a student of al-Murtadha and whose commentary, al-Tybian fi tafsir al Qur'an, represents an important approach in Shi'i tafsir; and his disciple Abu al-Fadl Ibn al-Hasan Ibn al-Fadl al-Tabarsi (d.548 AH/1153 AD). They represent what may be considered as the classical period of Shi'i tafsir. These commentators took a broad approach to tafsir using Shi'i as well as Sunni traditions and also rejected Shi'i popular claims regarding the inauthenticity of the `Uthmanic recension of the

Qur'an. 2 Included, too, were later commentators such as al-Maybudi al-Gunabadi (sixth century A.H) and his gnostic commentary, Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (d.1050 AH/1640 AD), Hashim al-Bahrani (d.1107 AH/1695 AD) who composed al-Burhan, `Abd Ali al-Huwayzi (d.1112 AH/1700 AD) who composed the Nur al-Thaqalayn, and Mulla Muhsin Fayd al-

1 M. Ayoub, "The speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an", p. 184

2 Ibid, p.185

Kashani (d.1191 AH/1777 AD) who compiled the work known as al-Safi. 1 Other works of Shi'ite gnostics, such as the 8th AH/14th AD century figure Haydar Amuli, were also included.

The Qur'anic commentaries of Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, known as Mulla Sadra "are the most important by an Islamic philosopher or theosopher (hakim) and also the most voluminous by a representative of the Islamic philosophical tradition" until Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d.1983) wrote the tafsir al-Mizan. "In the same way that Mulla Sadra's "Transcendent Theosophy" marks the synthesis of the various schools of gnosis, theosophy, philosophy and theology within a Shi'ite intellectual climate, his Qur'anic commentaries mark the meeting point of four different traditions of Qur'anic commentary before him, the Sufi, the Shi'ite, the theological and the philosophical." 2

The final stage of the development of Shi'i tafsir is the contemporary one. Among modern works, the most important are al-Mizan .fi Tafsir al-Qur'an by Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, al-Bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an by al-Sayyid AbulQasim al-Khui, and Tafsir-e Nemune by Nasser Makarem Shirazi, this last being oriented more towards youth readership.

1 Tabataba'i, The Qur'an in Islam, p.51

2 H. Nasr, "The Quranic Commentaries of Mulla Sadra", p.45

Chapter III - Mahdi in classical and modern Shi'ite tafsir

Shi'ite Messianism and all that concerns the Mahdi have, of course, been studied in a number of works, but this chapter focuses on the Qur'anic verses reported as concerning the Mahdi and their interpretation according to classical and modern Shi'ite commentators. Although only a few mufassirin are mentioned in this research, three regularly refer to their predecessors and their

opinions, therefore we will report on these in the translation we will give of their tafsir. Under each verse, we will only give the opinions and commentaries of the mufassirin as far as they concern the Mahdi, and not their commentary in its entirety, while we will give the relevant verses of the Qur'an and some of the traditions concerning the Mahdi in the footnotes in Arabic. Subsequently, in the conclusion, we will attempt to compare the manner in which classical and modern mufassirin - experts in different fields of Islamic thought - view the Mahdi in their tafsir of the same few verses that we will use in this research.

As part of our research in this third chapter, we first studied separately, within three different Tafsir works, the Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, the Tafsir al-Mizan, and the Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan dar Ulum-e Qur'an (Kanz al-'Irfan), examining each one of the 120 verses from the Qur'an which are believed to have been revealed for the Mahdi according to Seyyed Hashim al-Bahrani (d.1107 AH/1695 AD), a prominent Shi'ite scholar and mufassir, who relied upon the Shi'ite traditional reports. 1

Results of our research show that :

- In his Majma' al-Bayan, Shaykh Tabarsi has interpreted as concerning the Mahdi only nine verses from among the 120 verses reported by al-Bahrani. These nine are the following :

Qur'an 2 : 3 Qur'an 4 : 159 Qur'an 9 : 33
Qur'an 8 : 39 Qur'an 21 : 105 Qur'an 11 : 8
Qur'an 24 : 55 Qur'an 34 : 51 Qur'an 48 : 28

- In his Tafsir al-Mizan, Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i has also interpreted nine verses and eight of them are the same as those interpreted by Shaykh Tabarsi, although he gives a broader meaning to the verses of the Qur'an [2: 3], [21: 105] and [24: 55]. His nine are as follows:

1 Seyyed Hashim al-Bahrani : Sima-ye Hazrat-e Mahdi dar Qur'an, p.23.

Qur'an 2 : 3 Qur'an 4 : 159 Qur'an 9 : 33
Qur'an 8 : 39 Qur'an 21 : 105 Qur'an 11 : 8
Qur'an 24 : 55 Qur'an 34 : 51 Qur'an 41 : 53

- In her Makhzan al-'Irfan, Banu Nusrat Amin has interpreted six verses from among the 120 verses and four of her verses are the same as those of the above authors :

Qur'an 2 : 3 Qur'an 21 : 105 Qur'an 61 : 9
Qur'an 24 : 55 Qur'an 34 : 51 Qur'an 97 : 5

Therefore, the Majma' al-Bayan, the al-Mizan and the Makhzan al-'Irfan have four verses in common. The Majma' and the al-Mizan have eight verses in common and in total there are twelve verses discussed by these three mufassirin that we will present below. We may therefore conclude that these twelve verses are among the most important ones.

1) Qur'an 21: 105

Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth." 1 [Yusuf Ali 21:105]

A- Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan by Shaykh Tabarsi

Concerning the meaning of the first part of the verse "wa laqad katabna fi az-zabur mim ba'di adh-dhikr" ("Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses)"), Shaykh Tabarsi reports several views : 1

1- Zabur are all the Prophets' Books. The meaning of the verse is then 'We wrote in all the Prophets' Books after the Mother of the Books which is in Heaven'. Zabur and Kitab (Book) have the same meaning here.

2- Zabur are the Books which were revealed after the Tawrah (Torah), and Dhikr in this verse means Tawrah, so the verse means "after the Tawrah, We wrote in the Zabur".

3- According to Sha'bi, Zabur is the Book of the Prophet David and Dhikr is the Book of the Prophet Moses. He also says that Dhikr is the Qur'an and transforms mim ba'd (after) to min qabl (before).

Concerning the second part of the verse: "inna al-ardh yarithuha `ibadiya as-salihun" ("My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth"), Tabarsi reports its meaning from several commentators :

1- Some define the word ardh as the earth of Heaven. So the verse means: "My righteous servants shall inherit the earth of

1 Majma' al-Bayan, Vol. 16. p. 170

Heaven". According to this view, this verse does not concern the Mahdi.

2- Some define the word as the same Earth we are living in and which will belong to the Umma of the Prophet Muhammad. As the Prophet says: "The Earth was gathered for me, and the Eastern and Western parts of it were offered to me. And soon the Kingdom of my Community (Umma) will recover all of them." 1 Regarding this verse, Imam Baqir asserts that these righteous servants are the Companions of the Mahdi at the End of Time. To confirm these statements, there is a tradition that both the Shi'ites and the Sunnites report as emanating from the Prophet: "Even if there remains only a day on the Earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny so that he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny." 2

After having reported that the verse concerns the Mahdi, Shaykh Tabarsi mentions a tradition which denies the Mahdi and gives his own opinion. He writes that, in his work *al-Ba'th wa an-Nushur*, Imam Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Husayn Bayhaki cites several traditions in this regard; his grandson `Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad also reported all of these in the

year 517 AH, but the tradition reported from Abu `Abdullah Hafez from Muhammad ibn Khaled from Aban ibn Saleh from Hasan from Anas ibn Malek, claiming that the Prophet said: 'The people are living in difficulty and miserliness and Mahdi is no one but `Isa ibn Maryam' 1 is first of all a tradition reported only by Muhammad ibn Khaled, and secondly both the latter and Abu `Abdullah Hafez are unknown. Finally, declared Tabarsi, there is also disagreement in the Isnad or the transmissional chain of the Hadith: once Muhammad ibn Khaled reports the tradition from Aban ibn Saleh from Hasan from Anas from the Prophet, and once he reports the tradition from Aban ibn Abi `Ayyash (who can be omitted) from Hasan from the Prophet, and this chain of transmission is broken.

Tabarsi finally confirms his position, saying: "The traditions which clearly concern the reappearance of the Mahdi have a more trustworthy chain of narration. In these same traditions, it is reported that the Mahdi is from the Prophet's progeny. Among them, there is one that Bayhaki's grandson reports in his work from Abu Ali Rudbary, from Abu Bala ibn Das, from Abu Dawud Sajestani from the Prophet who said: 'Even if there remains only one day on the earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny.' And in some of these traditions it is reported that the Prophet also said: 'His name is the same as my name and he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny.' Also he reports a tradition from the Prophet who said: 'The Mahdi is from my progeny, and from the descendants of Fatimah'."

B- Tafsir d-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

As for the Zabur, several meanings are reported by Allama Tabataba'i 1 from different commentators :

1- Apparently, the Zabur is the Book which was revealed to the Prophet Dawud as mentioned in another part of the Qur'an: "wa aatayna Dawud Zabura".

2- Some commentators believe that this refers to the Qur'an.

3- Some are convinced that it concerns all the Books in general that were revealed to the Prophets, or that were revealed to the Prophets after Moses. However, there is no apparent support for this view.

For the word Dhikr, Tabataba'i reports that :

1- Some believe it means the Tawrah because God used the word Dhikr in two other places of this same chapter, clearly referring to the Tawrah.

2- Some say that it refers to the Qur'an because God used it several times in the Qur'an with that meaning. If this is so, the

1 Al-Mizan, vol. 14, p. 453

fact that the Zabur comes after the Qur'an in this verse where the Qur'an was revealed before the Zabur is not a problem because this order corresponds to the rank of the Books and not to their chronology.

3- Dhikr is also said to mean al-Lawh al-Mahfuz (the Protected Tablets), but according to Tabataba'i this is not correct.

For Inheritance (waratha), Tabataba'i reports that Raghib says Inheritance means the donation of goods to someone without any monetary exchange and that the inheritance of land means in this verse the transfer of that land from others to the virtuous people as well as the wealth and abundance of this land which belongs exclusively to them. This inheritance may be this-worldly or otherwise.

Tabataba'i's view is that the verse here has a general meaning and that the inheritance to which it refers concerns both this world and the hereafter, and that those who say that it concerns only the inheritance in the hereafter are in error. Also, the commentators who believe that the verse concerns exclusively the inheritance in this world, interpreting it for the time of the Mahdi's reappearance (about which there are authentic traditions from the Prophet reported by both Sunnites and Shi'ites) are also in error. The traditions concerning the Mahdi, even authentic and

certain, cannot be applied exclusively to this verse, according to Tabataba'i. Tabatabai also refers to the Tafsir al-Qummi in which it is written that the word Dhikr means all the divine Books and that the Zabur comprises the predictions, praises and prayers (du'a). As far as the inheritance of land by the virtuous is concerned, it is mentioned that it refers to the Mahdi and his followers.

Tabatabai concludes that the traditions concerning the Mahdi and his advent, whether originated by the Shi'ites or the Sunnites, by the Prophet or the Imams, are so numerous that they are considered as mutawatir, reported by several unbroken chain of transmitters, and authentic. It would perhaps be better to refer to the works devoted specifically to this subject.

C- Tafsir Makhzan al-`Iran by Banu Nusrat Amin

Banu Amin first reports from several commentators the meaning of Zabur and Dhikr. The meaning of Zabur :

1- According to some commentators, the Zabur means the Book of the Prophet Dawud (David), as God says in the Qur'an 4: 126 ("wa aatayna Dawud Zabura") and in the Qur'an 17: 55.

2- Others claim that the Zabur refers to the Qur'an.

3- Also, the Zabur is said to consist of all the revealed Books or the Books revealed after that of the Prophet Musa (Moses).

1 Makhzan al-Irfan, Vol. 10 p. 309

The meaning of Dhikr :

1- According to some commentators, it means the Tawrah, because God used the word Dhikr several times in the Qur'an when referring to the Tawrah.

2- It is also said to refer to the Qur'an because it was used to indicate the Qur'an on different occasions. In this case, the fact that the Zabur comes after the Dhikr (Qur'an) in the verse does not mean after in chronological time but in the sense that it comes after the Dhikr because of its lower rank.

3- The Zabur is said by some to represent the al-Lawh alMahfuz.

Banu Amin then briefly reports the commentators' views concerning the second part of the verse ("My servants the righteous, shall inherit the earth") :

1- The meaning of Ardh is the earth of Heaven which the virtuous and pious servants of God will inherit, as we can see in the Qur'an 23: 11 and in the Qur'an 39: 74.

2- Ardh is also said to be a sacred land that the Community of the Prophet will inherit.

3- Ardh is the earth and the verse concerns people who have faith in general.

4- The virtuous members of the Community are being referred to here; it is said that, at the End of Time, the Umma of the Prophet will conquer the earth and its unbelievers, and will rule it.

At this point, Banu Amin reports a tradition from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (fifth Imam) concerning the Righteous mentioned in the verse: "These are the Companions of the Mahdi at the End of Time, who will conquer the Eastern and Western parts of the earth". She adds that, in confirmation of this, there is a tradition reported by the Shi'ites and the Sunnites, according to which the Prophet said: "Even if there remains only one day on Earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny so that he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny".¹ Moreover, she adds that the traditions concerning the reappearance of the Mahdi and his descendency from Fatima are numerous among the Shi'ites and the Sunnites."

2) Qur'an 24 : 55

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

¹ The same tradition is reported by Shaykh Tabarsi in his tafsir of the same verse, see note 5.

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. 1 [24:55]

A- Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan by Shaykh Tabarsi

Shaykh Tabarsi explains the verse as: 2 "God promised to those who sincerely have faith and are obedient that he will make them heirs of the ancients and that He will grant them all the Arab and non-Arab unbelievers' lands, and will make them inhabitants and governor of these lands, in the same way as he made the Bani Isra 'il the heirs of the ancients and destroyed the tyrant of Egypt, and granted all his goods and lands to them." He then reports several views concerning this verse :

- 1- Some commentators believe that it concerns the Prophet.
- 2- Some say it concerns the Umma.
- 3- From the sayings of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt, it is reported that it concerns the Mahdi from the Prophet's descendants. The fourth Imam once recited this verse and said: "By God, these people are our Shi'ites about whom God will accomplish all the promises he made in this verse by the hands

2 Majma' al-Bayan, Vol.17 p.161

of a man from among us, who is the Mahdi of this Community." The Prophet said about him: "Even if there remains only one day on Earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny and who is named as I am, so that he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny" 1 The same tradition was reported by Imam Baqir and Imam Sadeq.

Shaykh Tabarsi adds that the expression "al-ladhina amanu minkum wa `amilu as-salehat" ("those among you who believe and work righteous deeds") refers to the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt and that this verse gives them the good news that they will be the Caliphs (governors) and will seize power in every land and that during the revolution of the Mahdi, they will be made safe. Moreover, he affirms that the meaning of "kama estakhilqfa al-ladhina min qablihim" ("as He granted it to those before them") is that, before them also, God granted the governorship (khilafa) and power to those who deserved it, such as Adam, Dawud and Sulayman, as we can see in the following verses:

Qur'an 2: 30; 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." [2:30] 1

Qur'an 38: 26; 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. [38:26] 2

Qur'an 4: 54; Or do they envy mankind for what Allah hath given them of his bounty? But We had already given the people of Abraham the Book and Wisdom, and conferred upon them a great kingdom. [4:54] 3

Finally, concerning the Mahdi, Shaykh Tabarsi remarks that consensus has been reached among all the Imams concerning this subject and their consensus is a proof (hujja) because the Prophet said: " I am leaving among you two weighty things: the Book of God and my progeny. They will never be separated from each other until they meet me again next to the fountain".

B- Tafsir al-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

Tabataba'i explains that this verse constitutes a beautiful promise from God to the believers who also worked virtuous deeds; He promised to have them live in a just and virtuous society, to put the earth at their disposal, to make their religion reign on earth, to replace their fear by safety so that they will no longer be afraid of the hypocrites and their tricks or the unbelievers, and so that they will be able to worship their God freely and in safety. The verse and the promise mentioned in it is exclusively aimed at those believers (mu'minin) of robust faith but who also carried out virtuous deeds.

According to Tabataba'i, this verse was the subject of strong disagreement among the commentators. He then reports their different opinions :

1- Some of them said that the verse was revealed about the Companions of the Prophet and that God fulfilled the promise He made to them by putting the land at their disposal, making their religion triumph, or by replacing their fear by safety. In fact, after the death of the Prophet, during the time of the Caliphs (al- Khulafa al-rashidin), God enabled Islam to progress and gain dignity, and consequently the Muslims' fear of Hypocrites and unbelievers was assuaged. These commentators also said that the believers' inheritance mentioned in this verse refers to the inheritance of the four Caliphs after the Prophet or otherwise only to the first three Caliphs.

2- Other commentators said that the verse is aimed at the Community (Umma) of the Prophet in general. And the meaning of the inheritance of the Prophet's Umma, the supremacy of their religion, and the replacing of their fear by safety, is that they inherited the earth in the same way that the Communities before Islam inherited the earth. Or it can also refer to the inheritance of the Caliphs after the Prophet in which case God fulfilled His promise by making the Caliphs triumph over the unbelievers and conquer cities and countries of the world.

Here Tabataba'i remarks that, according to the two different views expressed above, this verse is among the predictions of the Qur'an because good tidings are mentioned that were not fulfilled at

the time the verse was revealed and even the hope of their fulfillment was absent.

3- Other commentators said that this verse concerns the Mahdi whose reappearance is predicted in numerous authentic traditions, acknowledging that he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with tyranny and oppression. The meaning of "al-ladhina amanu minkum wa `amelu as-salehat" ("those among you who believe and work righteous deeds") refers to the Prophet and the Imams from his family (Ahl al-Bayt).

Tabataba'i comments on the verse and gives his own opinion: "What we understand from the verse, leaving aside the many instances of negligence on the commentators' part, is that the verse is undoubtedly aimed at some of the people of the Community (Umma) and neither at the Community as a whole nor at some designated individuals from the Community, and these people are the people who believe and work righteous deeds as mentioned in the verse. This meaning is clear in the verse, and there is no evidence, either in the words of the verse or intellectually, that "the people who believe and work righteous deeds" are exclusively the Companions of the Prophet, or the Prophet himself with the Imams from his family, or the Community as a whole".

He adds, "The meaning of their inheritance of earth, like the inheritance of the Communities of the past, is that God will make of them a virtuous society who will inherit the earth as He did for the Communities of the past. This inheritance is dependant on their being a virtuous society and not on particular individuals. Also the interpretation of this inheritance as the Divine Caliphate or the Divine Kingdom and authority, like the Kingdom of Dawud, Sulayman and Yusuf, is highly unlikely, because the Qur'an would not talk about such Prophets by saying "al-ladhina min Qablihim" ("those before them"). Moreover, this expression appears more than fifty times in the Qur'an and in any case it is applied to the Prophets."

Concerning the virtuous society, the author adds that this can only become a reality in the time of the Mahdi: "It is clear in the verse that God promised to those who believe and work righteous deeds that He will soon grant them a society that will be virtuous in all its meanings, that will be purified from blasphemy, hypocrisy and debauchery, that will inherit the earth and in which the True religion masters the beliefs and deeds of its people, that will be in safety and will have no fear from enemies from inside or outside and that will be free from the oppressors, tyrants, and dictators. Such a pure and perfect society has never existed in the world. Neither has such a society existed since the beginning of the Prophet's mission. But if a society such as this ever becomes a reality, it will inevitably be during the time of the Mahdi, because the traditions reported by numerous unbroken chains of transmitters (Akhbar Mutawatira) from the Prophet and the Imams of his family concerning the characteristics of the Mahdi and his government mention the creation of such a society. Of course the people the verse is addressing are virtuous people in general and not only the Mahdi in particular."

Tabataba'i answers possible objections to this view as follows: 'According to this point of view, the verse addressed people who believed and worked righteous deeds at that time, while the Mahdi and anyone from his time did not yet exist'. He then goes on to say: "It is possible to address people in two different manners: On the one hand, we can address people while taking into consideration their individual qualities and characteristics, while on the other hand, we can speak to the same group without considering them as individuals but rather as a group with particular qualities. In this second case, designated individuals are not involved but those in general who possess the qualities mentioned in the verse are addressed, even though they did not exist when the verse was revealed. In this verse, the second case is applied as well as in most of the verses which address either the believers (Mu'minin) or the unbelievers, or in the verses which criticise the People of the Book, particularly the Jews, not speaking to them individually but only to those among them who committed such and such a fault."

The author adds, "The reality is that, if we really want to give a true meaning to the verse, it can only be in conformity with a society founded through the reappearance of the Mahdi." But, says the author, "if we interpret the verse negligently, then :

- It is possible to say that the inheritance of those who believe and act virtuously is the inheritance of the whole community. In denying this view, we can answer that it is overgeneralizing. In fact, it is like saying that Shams (Sun) and Qamar (Moon) are the Shamsayn (two Suns), or the Qamarayn (two Moons), and so on.

- We can also interpret the supreme reign of their religion, the one they love, as the fact that God will make them renowned throughout the world as the Islamic Community (Umma), and will consider Islam as their exclusive religion, and this, even if they divide into seventy-three different schisms, and each one of these branches considers the others heretics and unbelievers or find it permissible to kill the members of other branches and steal their goods.

- We can also interpret the fact that God will replace their fear by safety and that they will worship God and nothing else, as the granting by God of dignity and power to their religion, so that it will spread throughout the world, and people will then be able to practise their religion freely, even if among these people themselves, there is no security, and if the truth has abandoned the inhabitants of the earth."

Tabataba'i then reports from the Majma' al-Bayan, Shaykh Tabarsi's work, concerning this verse, that the commentators have different interpretations related to the expression "alladhina amanu minkum" ("those among you who believe") and that there are traditions from the Ahl al-Bayt which attribute it to the Mahdi from the family of the Prophet. He also reports from the Majma' that 'Ayyashi reported from Ali ibn al-Husayn (fourth Imam) that when he recited the verse, he said: "By God these are our Shi'ites, about whom God will fulfill his promises through a man from

us, and he is the Matadi of this Community, about whom the Prophet said: 'Even if there remains only one day on Earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny whose name is the same as my name and he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny.' A similar tradition is reported from Abi Ja'far (fifth Imam) and Abi `Abdillah (sixth Imam). Tabataba'i says: "Traditions are reported from the Imams concerning the subject that we mentioned previously. Also the Majma' al-Bayern, after the tradition reported above, mentions that: 'In consequence, "al-ladhina aamanu minkum wa `amelu as-salehat" ("those among you who believe and work righteous deeds") are the Prophet and his family.' Tabatabai comments: "The reader has understood that the verse is general and the tradition does not argue more than that. In the work al-Durr al-Manthur, it is mentioned that ibn Abi Hatem and ibn Marduyeh reported from Bara' about the interpretation of the verse that he said: 'It was revealed about us, because we were living in fear and insecurity'. It appears from this tradition that the meaning of 'al-ladhina aamanu ...' is the Companions of the Prophet, but the reader must have realised that the verse does not argue at all in favour of this meaning."

C- Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan by Banu Nusrat Amin

Banu Amin 1 reports different views concerning this verse from the work of Shaykh Tabarsi, Majma' al-Bayan :

- 1- The verse concerns the Companions of the Prophet.
- 2- According to ibn 'Abbas and Mujahid, the verse is general and concerns the whole Community of the Prophet.

1 Makhzan al-'Irfan : Vol. 9 p. 137

3- It is reported from the Ahl al-Bayt that this verse was revealed by the family of the Prophet about the Mahdi, while `Ayyashi reports from Ali ibn al-Husayn (fourth Imam) that the Imam recited the verse saying: 'By God, those who are described in this verse are ourselves the Ahl al-Bayt and God will fulfill what is said in the verse through a man from us who is the Mahdi of this Community and who is the person about whom the Prophet said : 'Even if there remains only one day on Earth, God will prolong it until He will bring forth a pious man from my progeny whose name is the same as my name and he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny.'" 1 A similar tradition is reported from Abi Ja'far (fifth Imam) and Abi `Abdillah (sixth Imam). According to this tradition, we understand that "those among you who

believe and work righteous deeds" refer to the Prophet and his family, and the verse gives them the good tidings that during the time of the Mahdi's uprising, He will make them Governors on the earth and will enable them to live in security. God also says that they deserve the governorship as did Adam, Dawud and Sulayman. Also all the Imams have a consensus on this subject and their consensus is considered as a proof (hujja) because the Prophet said: "I am leaving among you two weighty things: the Book of God and my Progeny. They will not be separated from each other until they

1 See note 5

meet me next to the fountain". 1 Such conditions as those described in the verse have never occurred in reality for the believers, but they must occur one day because God never break His promises.

3) Qur'an 2: 3

Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; 2 [2:3]

A- Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan by Shaykh Tabarsi

Shaykh Tabarsi 3 explains that the verse concerns the attributes of the virtuous ones guided by the light of the Qur'an. Their first attribute is their belief in the unseen (ghayb). He then gives several views concerning the meaning of ghayb here :

- 1- it means jurisprudence
- 2- the Day of Judgement, the Heaven, the Hell (according to Hasan)
- 3- anything from God (according to ibn 'Abbas)
- 4- the Qur'an (according to Zirr ibn Hubaysh)

5- anything that is outside the knowledge of ordinary people (according to ibn Mas'ud). Here, Shaykh Tabarsi makes a connection between this verse and the Mahdi and says that this view includes what the Imams said concerning the Occultation (ghayba) of the Mahdi and the time of his Appearance since no one but God knows the date of his appearance.

B- Tafsir al-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

Tabatabai, 1 in his explanation of the term "al-Ghayb" (the unseen), says that it is the opposite of "the perceived", and that we cannot perceive through our usual senses. He adds that the term is used to denote Allah, and His great signs, including the revelation, which is referred to in the

Qur'an 2: 4; And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter. 2 He affirms that it also includes the hereafter, but in this verse, the belief in the revelation and in the hereafter have been mentioned separately. Therefore, "the unseen" must have been used only to mean Allah. In this way the belief in the three fundamentals of religion becomes complete.

Tabatabai then reports from the Ma'ani al-akhbar a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (sixth Imam), who said that: "Who believe in the Unseen" means those who believe in the rising of al- Qa'im (the Mahdi) and consider it as the Truth."

1 Al-Mizan: Vol.1, p.68

The author comments that this explanation is given in other traditions also. But Tabataba'i adds that in order to interpret the verse as concerning the Mahdi in this case implies transforming the general meaning of the verse to a specific one, the verse having a general meaning.

C- Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan by Banu Nusrat Amin

Banu Amin 1 describes the word Ghayb in this verse as something that is not perceptible through our senses like the sense of hearing or the sense of sight. She gives as examples, the existence of God, the Hereafter that we cannot perceive through our usual senses, or the Imam of the Time who is not visible and hidden from our sight; however, at the same time she says that he is attentive to the situation of his Shi'ites. She then explains the superiority of those who have faith and are living in the time of the great Occultation of the Mahdi, which is the most difficult period in which to preserve one's faith: the Prophet in his greatness declared, concerning believers of this time, that he was impatient to meet them and considered them as his brothers. There are also traditions. Banu Amin argues, concerning the importance of those who believe during the period of the Occultation. She adds that if we can find believers in this time (of the greater Occultation) who believe intelligently, i.e. after having carried out some research and not only by imitating their parents, we can say that they are

1 Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan : Vol.1 p. 91.

even superior to believers at the very beginning of Islam who had an opportunity to be with the Prophet and to learn directly from him, and also there were fewer temptations for them of being lead astray from the truth compared to the temptations of our time.

4) Qur'an 34: 51

If thou couldst but see when they will quake with terror; but then there will be no escape (for them), and they will be seized from a position (quite) near. 1 [34:51]

A- Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan by Shaykh Tabarsi

For this verse, Shaykh Tabarsi reports traditions which interpret the verse as concerning the fate of the army of the Sufyani. 2 Indeed, Shaykh Tabarsi 3 reports from Abu Hamza Thumali who said: "I heard Ali ibn al-Husayn and Hasan ibn Ali saying that they are the army of the desert of Bayda 4 where the earth will swallow them starting by their feet." He added: " `Amr ibn Marah and Hamraan ibn A'yan

2 Among the signs of the Mahdi's reappearance in the traditions is the emergence of the Sufyani (a short time before the Mahdi's appearance) from the region of Syria, who will massacre the Shi'ites, and whose army will be swallowed up by the earth in the desert on the way to Mecca where he planned to destroy the Ka'ba. See Ali Kurani, Asr-e Zuhur, p.90.

3 Majma' al-Bayan, Vol. 20, p.294

4 a desert between Mecca and Medina

told me that they heard from Muhajir ... who said that he heard from Umm Salama who said that the Prophet said: "He will take refuge in the House of God, then God will guide an army towards him until they reach the desert of Bayda' and get swallowed up by the earth."

Also Shaykh Tabarsi reports a tradition from Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman that the Prophet once reminded that: "Discord and unrest between the Westerner and the Asians will occur, and at that time of war between them, the Sufyani will come out with a big army from the valley of Yabes and will reach Damascus. Then he will raise two armies, one toward the East and the other one toward Medina. They (the army toward the East) will enter in the land of Babylon next to Bagdad. They will start killing more than three thousand people, and rape more than a hundred women, and will kill three hundred people from the nobles of Bani al-Abbas (Abbasids). They will then move to Kufa and destroy the areas of Kufa and will move toward Sham. At the same time, a well-guided army will come out of Kufa and will reach them and kill them, and they will not even leave an informant and they will take their captives, goods and booty. The second army will attack Medina and will pillage the city for three days and nights. They will finally move toward Mecca until they enter the land of Bayda'. God will call Jibril (Gabriel) and tell him: 'O Jibril, Go and destroy them!' Then Jibril will go and hit the land of Bayda with his foot and the army will be swallowed up by the earth and only two men among them will survive from Juhayneh." 1 The author says that this

tradition is reported by Tha'labi in his tafsir and similar traditions are also reported by the Shi'ites among the traditions concerning the Mahdi from Abi `Abdillah al-Sadiq (sixth Imam) and Abi Ja'far al-Baqir (fifth Imam).

B- Tafsir al-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

The author of al-Mizan 2 reports from the work al-Durr al-Manthur a tradition reported from Hakim (who considers the tradition as authentic) who reported it from Abu Hurayra who says that the Prophet of God said: "In the future, a man will come out from Damascus who will be called Sufyani, and the totality of his followers will be from the tribe of Kalb; he will start to kill and massacre, he will even open the women's

wombs, and will assassinate the children, until the tribe of Qays will rise against him, and he will end up killing Qays, and he will not leave a place free of his oppression and violence. At that moment, a man from my Household will come out and will reach Sufyani and will send his army to suppress Sufyani and his army, and finally he will put him to flight, defeating him and his army. Sufyani and his followers will then travel to Bayda and, in that place, they will have an accident and be swallowed up by the earth and none of them will remain but one person among them who will describe for people what happened." Tabataba'i adds: "This tradition has been reported from the Sunnites many times whether in detail or briefly, and was reported from several chains of transmitters from ibn 'Abbas, ibn Mas'ud, Hudhayfah, Abu Hurayra, the grandfather of `Amr ibn Shu'ayb, Umm Salama, Safiyya, `Aa'isha, and Hafsa (the Prophet's wives), and Nufayra (the wife of Qa'qa'), and also from Sa'id ibn Jubayr".

And, concerning the Shi'ite sources, Tabataba'i then reports from the Tafcir Qummi that it is written: "My father reported a tradition to me from ibn Abi 'Umayr, who reported it from Mansur ibn Younus, who reported it from Abi Khalil Kabuli that Imam Abi Ja'far said: I swear by God! It is as if I am right now seeing the al-Qa'im who is leaning against the Hajar (al-Hajar al-Aswad = the black stone) and is inviting people in the name of God to maintain his Right, and then he is saying: 'O people, whoever talks with me about God, know the best about Him. O people, whoever talks to me about Adam, I know the best about him and I am the closest to him. O people, whoever talks to me about Nuh (Noah), I know more than anyone the best about him. O people, whoever talks to me about Ibrahim (Abraham), I am closer to Ibrahim than anyone else is. O people, whoever talks to me about Musa (Moses), I know the best about him. O people, whoever talks to me about `Isa (Jesus), I am closer to `Isa than anyone else is. O people, whoever talks to me about Muhammad, I am closer to Muhammad than anyone else is and I know him the best. O people, whoever talks to me about the Book of God, I am closer to the Book of God than anyone else.' At that moment, he will get closer to the Maqam Ibrahim (sanctuary of Abraham) and will perform two-rak'a prayers and will swear by God as to his truthfulness.' Imam Abi Ja'far then said: 'By God, he is the one in distress in the Qur'an 27: 62; 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! 1 The first one to pledge allegiance to him will be Gabriel and then three hundred and thirteen people; among them, some will do their best to find their way to him and will finally be successful, and those who will not be able to reach him in this way will disappear from their beds... and this is also the meaning of the

Qur'an 2: 148; To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things. 1' The Imam continues: 'The meaning of good deeds (al-khayrat) is the Love for the Ahl alBayt (Wilaya) and also in the verse 'If We delay the penalty for them for a definite term, they are sure to say, "What keeps it back?" Ah! On the day it (actually) reaches them, nothing will turn it away from them, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to mock at!' [8:11], the meaning of `ummatin ma `dudah ' refers to the Companions of the al-Qa 'im (Mahdi) who will gather together in one place within an hour. When the al-Qa 'im reaches the land of Bayda, the army of Sufyani will stand in rank in front of him, and then God will order the earth to swallow up their feet and absorb them."

C- Tafsir Makhzan al-Irfan by Banu Nusrat Amin

Banu Amin 2 reports from ibn 'Abbas the cause of the revelation of that verse and says: "The verse concerns the people who will sink in the desert of Bayda' and who will be eighty thousand from Sufyani's 3 army and will march from Damascus with the intention of destroying the Ka'ba. When

2 Tafsir Makhzan al- Irfan : Vol. 8, p. 311

3 See note 17 concerning the Sufyani.

they are close to the desert of Mecca, all of them will be swallowed up by the earth, and the meaning of "they will be seized from a position (quite) near" in the verse is that they will be in danger right under their own feet (which is the closest place to them) and these will be the people of Sufyani who will live again at the End of Time. Sufyani will send an army to demolish the Holy Ka'ba and among the eighty thousand people, only two will survive. One of them will bring the news to the people of Mecca and the other one will go back to inform Sufyani about the event."

Banu Amin also reports from the Minhaj al-Sadiqin a tradition from Hudhayfah, who said that: "I heard from the Prophet who said while giving information about the events of the End of Time: `Sufyani will come out and will send an army from the arid land to Damascus (toward the East) and another one to Medina. When they (the army toward the East) reach Babylon, which is located between the lands of Medina and Bagdad, they will kill more than a thousand people,

open up the women's wombs and kill three hundred well-known men from the family of the Bani 'Abbas; then they will move toward Kufa and will destroy the whole area; after that, they will go to Sham while a guided army emerges from Kufa who will follow them and after two days of traveling they will kill most of its members, pillaging and taking captives. And Sufyani will send one of his armies to Medina and for three days and nights, they will pillage the city, then move to Mecca, and then they will reach Bayda', God will send Gabriel to destroy them. Gabriel will hit the earth with his feet and all of them will at once be swallowed up by the earth and this is the meaning of the words of God : "If thou couldst but see when they will quake with terror; but then there will be no escape (for them), and they will be seized from a position (quite) near" and among them two people will survive, Bashir and Nadhir; Bashir will inform the people of Mecca and Nadhir will frighten Sufyani, informing him of the annihilation of his people; and both of these survivors will be from Juhayna.' This tradition is reported by our Companions from Abi Ja'far and Abi `Abdillah among the traditions of the reappearance of the Mahdi"

B- Tafsir al-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

Tabataba'i 1 explains the expression "Ila ummatin ma 'dudah" in this verse and gives several meanings from different mufassirin :

1- The word umma means "time"

2- It is also possible that "umma" means "community", and in this case the meaning of the verse would be "and if we delay the punishment of the nonbelievers until the arrival of a limited community, they would say: why that punishment did not appear?" "Limited community" would refer to the believers (mu 'minin), since God promised that one day He would grant this religion to a virtuous community, a community that would never consider anything above the religion of God, and whenever these people are gathered

1 Al-Mizan, Vol.10, p.217

together and ready, God would establish for them the religion that is pleasing to them, as it appears in the Qur'an 5: 54; O ye who believe! if any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him,- lowly with the believers, mighty against the rejecters, fighting in the way of Allah, and never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault. That is the grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He

pleaseth. And Allah encompasseth all, and He knoweth all things, 1 and in the Qur'an 24: 55; 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. 2 And this view is acceptable.

3- Some of the commentators said that the word "Umma" means "community" but a community that would arrive after

the non-believers, and would be even worse than the preceding one, and the members of this community would persist in their blasphemy and lack of belief. At that time, God would trap them in his punishment, just like he did at the time of the prophet Nuh.

4- Others said that the word "Umma" conveys the meaning of "community" but a community that will come after the present infidels and that will persist in sinning against God to the extent that the Day of Judgement will come because of its members.

However, these last two versions are weak and incorrect because they rely on a false foundation, which is that those punished are the future non-believers and not the ones discussed in the verse.

Tabataba'i then reports from the TO* of al-Nu'mani who, according to his own source from Ishaq ibn `Abd al-`Aziz who himself reported from Imam al-Sadiq who said regarding this verse: "The meaning of punishment and penalty (`athaab) is the reappearance of the Mahdi and "Ummatin ma 'dudah" means the Companions of Badr and those who participated in that battle." 1 The writer adds that this last meaning is also reported by al-Kulayni in his Kafi and Qummi and `Ayyashi in their Tafsir works from Imam Ali, Imam al-Baqir and Imam al-Sadiq.

Finally, he mentions that in the Majma' al-Bayan, it is reported that some commentators said that "Ummatin Ma'dudah" refers to the Companions of the Mahdi who number just over three hundred and ten, the same number as the Companions of Badr, and who will gather around him on the day of his reappearance within an hour, in the same way as the clouds in autumn gather. It is said that this meaning was reported from Imam Abi Ja'far and Abi `Abdillah.

9) Qur'an 48: 28

It is He Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion: and enough is Allah for a Witness. 1 [48:28]

A- Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan by Shaykh Tabarsi

For this verse, Shaykh Tabarsi 2 explains the expression "liyudhirahu `ala al-dini kullihi" ("to proclaim it over all religion") as the fact that he will make Islam, with all its arguments and proofs, dominate over all the religions. He then reports some views that he does not reject :

2 Majma' al-Bayan, Vol. 23, p.175

- Some of the commentators said that Islam would be victorious over all the religions by means of propagation and development and success throughout the lands.

- Some of the commentators said that all this would happen at the time of the reappearance of the Mahdi when no other religion will remain on earth except Islam.

10- Qur'an 41: 53

Soon will We show them our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord doth witness all things? 1 [41:53]

A- Tafsir al-Mizan by Allama Tabataba'i

Tabataba'i 2 explains that "the verse concerns God's promise that soon He will show the Signs on the horizons and within the people themselves, so that it becomes clear for everyone that the Qur'an is the truth. Indeed in "annahu al-Haqq" ("this is the Truth") the pronoun hu seems to refer to the Qur'an. And the Signs which are able to prove the veracity of the Qur'an will be the Signs from the Qur'an itself, those which inform the people about events and promises which will soon 2 Al-Mizan: Vol.17, p.601

be realised; for example, the verses informing people that God will help His Prophet and the believers (Mu 'minin), will put the earth at their disposal, will enable their religion to triumph over all other religions, and will take His revenge on the polytheists from Quraysh."

The author then mentions several possible tafsirs for the verse :

1- This prediction came to be realised by the victory over the polytheists in the battle of Badr and the conquest of Mecca by the Prophet and the believers. Of course, these events are historical and constitute a sign in favor of the veracity of the Qur'an, because the Qur'an had predicted these events before their fulfillment, and they occurred exactly in the way the Qur'an described.

2- It is also possible that the signs by which the truth will become clear may be applied to the fact that God will soon enable His religion to triumph over all the religions in its true meaning, so that no one and nothing will be worshipped but God the Unique. We have already mentioned this meaning from other verses such as in the Qur'an 24: 55.

Tabataba'i comments that the difference between the two interpretations given above is that in the first case, the verse addresses the Polytheists (Mushrikin) of Mecca and their followers, and in the second case, it addresses all Polytheists in general. It is also possible to consider the two meanings together.

3- The verse can also be applied to the situation of a person in the last moments of his life, when he has to renounce all his hopes and claims, when he has not any further choice and nothing is left for him but God. In this case, the pronoun hu in "annahu al-Haqq" refers to God. The commentators have also given other interpretations for the verse but we will not go into them here.

Tabataba'i does not himself interpret this verse as regarding the Mahdi but reports traditions from the Rawdhat al-Kali and from the Kitab al-'Irshad, which interpret the verse as concerning the Mahdi and does not reject these views. He says that in the Rawdhat al-Kafi, it is reported from at-Tayyar from Imam al-Sadiq who said that: "The meaning of the verse is to sink into the earth, metamorphose and become a victim of the meteorites." The narrator adds that he asked the Imam: "What does "hatta yatabayyana lahum" ("until it becomes manifest to them") mean?" The Imam answered: *Leave this aside for the time being, it concerns the uprising of the Al-Qa'im (the Mahdi)'." 1 The author then reports from the Kitab al-it-shad of Shaykh al-Mufid: " In Mufid's 'Irshad, it is reported from Ali ibn Abi Hamza, from Abi al-Hasan Musa ibn Ja'far (seventh Imam) concerning this verse that 'It concerns tumult

and oppression that will take place on the earth and the transformation that will eliminate the enemies of the Truth'." 1 He again reports from the Rawdhat al-Kafi a tradition reported from Abi Bassir from Imam al-Sadiq (sixth Imam) who said that: "The meaning of the Sign within the people is the transformation, and the Sign on the horizons is the incompatibility of the time until they see the power of God within themselves and around them.' I asked: 'What does "hatta yatabayyana lahum annahu al-haqq" ("until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth") mean?' The Imam answered: 'It means the uprising of the al-Qa'im (Mahdi), because the Truth that is in God's hand and that will become clear and obvious for the creation and that will be seen by everyone, is the al-Qa'im (Mahdi).'" 2

11) Qur'an 97: 5

Peace!...This until the rise of morn! 1 [97:5]

A- Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan by Banu Nusrat Amin

Banu Amin 2 after having translated and explained the verse, says that the Qur'an has an outer (Zahir) and an inner (Batin) meaning and that both tafsir and ta'wil are used to interpret the verses as they appear in the traditions where the Qur'an has seven inner meanings. She then asserts that it is consequently permissible to ascribe another meaning to the verses in addition to the meaning given by other commentators to this chapter.

Banu Amin then interprets the verse "Salamun hiya hatta matla 'il-fajr" ("Peace it is until the rise of morn!") in two different ways: The angels and Gabriel (Ruh) send their blessings and greetings to the Muhammadan soul and body and nature as long as nature and creation exist and until his pure soul returns from the world of nature to the world of Light and rejoins the Truth. It is reported in some of the traditions that the pronoun hiya refers to the Imam of the time, the Mahdi. Banu Amin adds that "this view confirms our interpretation of the verse as referring to the Prophet

2 Makhzan al-'Irfan, Vol.4, p.206

Muhammad, since the Imam of the time is the manifestation, the incarnation and the representative of the Prophet."

12) Qur'an 61:9

It is He Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it). 1 [61:9]

A- Tafsir Makhzan al-'Irfan by Banu Nusrat Amin

In the interpretation of "liyudhhirahu 'ala al-din kullihi" ("that he may proclaim it over all religion") Banu Amin 2 says that there is no doubt that the pronoun hu refers to the Qur'an and the religion of Islam which means that Islam will prevail and reign over all the religions of the world. She adds that we can see that Islam has not yet reached the whole world but we know that the promise of God is the Truth, so a time must certainly come when Islam will dominate all the religions, and this can only be realised with the help of the Mahdi's reappearance from the Prophet's offspring, after which no one will remain unless he pronounces the declaration of faith in Islam (Shahada). She then reports from the Minhaj al-Sadiqin and from Ali ibn Ibrahim Qummi that the al-Qa'im from the

2 Makhzan al-'Irfan, Vol. 5, p. 279

Prophet's offspring will complete the religion of God and will establish it and enable it to reign over all other world religions in such a way that, apart from God, nothing else will be worshipped, and this is the meaning of the Prophet's saying: "he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with oppression and tyranny."

Conclusion

In this study, we have seen that the idea of Mahdawiyyah (Mahdism) in Islam, in both Sunnite and Shi'ite creeds, is particularly strong, although this idea did not originate solely within the Islamic faith. Indeed, Islam only confirms the period of waiting and the belief in a Saviour at the End of Time in terms of the world religions. As for the Shi'ites, they believe that this Saviour, who is also awaited by non-Muslims, is exclusively the twelfth Imam who is presently in Occultation. For these Muslims, the earth could not even last a day without the Occult presence of the Imam. Also, the idea of Messianism is stronger in Shi'ism than in any other religion and has its place in day-to-day life, the greatest act of worship for Shi'ites being to wait for the Mahdi's reappearance and to be prepared at any time to help him.

The subject of our study was to explore the presence of the Mahdi in the Qur'an according to Shi'ite commentators. In order to assess these Shi'ite scholars' opinion concerning the idea of Messianism in the Qur'an, we have studied two tafsir works that according to us are the most representative and widely accepted among the Shi'ite works, and that are also praised by Sunnite scholars, especially the work of Shaykh Tabarsi, representing the classical works, and Allama Tabataba'i, representing more modern thought. We also studied the tafsir work of Banu Amin as a modern work, because we found it interesting and important to introduce her to the Western world as the first woman in Islam to have written the entire tafsir of the Qur'an.

Their methods :

Concerning the method used in her commentary, Banu Amin follows Tabarsi's method in general terms. She first explains the words and grammar of the verse, then reports on the points of view of several commentators. It is possible to assert that her tafsir is a summary of the Majrna, at least in the verses studied in this research. Of course, a reliable comparison between the two works in their entirety can only be done by studying the gnostic verses, since Banu Amin's is known as a gnostic tafsir given that she is considered to be a disciple of Molla Sadra, however research such

as this would need to be tackled as a separate study.

Concerning the Mahdi, Banu Amin follows Tabarsi as other Shi'ite and Sunnite mufassirin have done. However, she does not follow him in all the nine verses he interprets as referring to the Mahdi. Indeed, she interprets four verses in common with Tabarsi in this respect while also discussing the Mahdi in the Qur'an 61: 9, and in the Qur'an 97: 5. Another difference between Banu Amin's work and that of the two other authors is the absence of Sunnite references in her tafsir. This may be the reason why her tafsir is less voluminous.

Tabataba'i makes the most use of the Sunnite references and being a modern mufassir, his independent view and non-imitation of the opinions of the classical mufassirin, plus the fact that his commentary is based on the principle of having one part of the Qur'an interpreting other parts, has earned him a major position among the Shi'ite commentators, as is the case for Tabarsi. Indeed, Tabataba'i, as we see in his debates, relies more on his own understanding of the verses than the others do.

If we compare the way the verses are interpreted, we get the following results :

In the Qur'an 21: 105, the Majma', after having reported from other commentators that the verse concerns the Mahdi that he did not reject, reports the view of someone who denies the Mahdi, arguing his case through a demonstration of the weakness of the hadith while affirming that the Mahdi's appearance is certain and that the traditions concerning the Mahdi are mutawatir. Banu Amin interprets the Qur'an 21:105 as concerning the Mahdi. As for Tabataba'i, where most of the Shi'ite mufassirin have followed the classical works, saying that according to this verse (21:105] the Companions of the Mahdi will inherit the earth, the author of al-Mizan (Tabataba'i) disagrees with this interpretation, stating that it carries a general meaning, although the belief in the Mahdi itself is certain and has been reported in mutawatir traditions by the Shi'ites and the Sunnites, and there is no need to interpret this verse as referring to the Mahdi.

In the Qur'an 24: 55, Tabarsi and Banu Amin share the same method of interpretation, both interpreting the verse explicitly as referring to the Mahdi. However, Tabataba'i, after having mentioned the views of other mufassirin, offers a broader interpretation of this verse and does not attribute it exclusively to the Mahdi.

In the tafsir of the Qur'an 2: 3, Tabarsi reports different opinions concerning the verse; one of them mentions the occultation of the Mahdi. His style of relating this seems to imply that he also believes in this interpretation. Banu Amin attributes this verse to the hereafter and all that we cannot perceive through our senses, but also to the occultation of the Mahdi that she explains in more weighty terms. Tabataba'i gives a broad meaning to the verse, implicitly suggesting that the Mahdi may be one among many other meanings embedded within the verse.

In the tafsir of the Qur'an 34:51, the three authors report traditions from different sources concerning the rise of the Sufyani and his being swallowed up by the earth in Bayda at the time of the Mahdi. They thus agree that the verse concerns one of the signs of the time of the Mahdi.

Concerning the Qur'an 4:159, Majma' discusses the faith of the People of the Book in `Isa, suggesting that it concerns the time of the Mahdi's reappearance. Al-Mizan offers the same tafsir as Majma' . The author of Makhzan does not mention the Mahdi in her tafsir.

In the Qur'an 8: 39, Tabarsi and Tabataba'i confirm that the verse refers to the time of the Mahdi, and that the people of the time of the Mahdi will understand the ta 'wil of this verse. Banu Amin does not offer an interpretation of this verse.

For the Qur'an 9: 33, Tabarsi sees the verse as a prediction of the Qur'an and interprets it as concerning the time of the reappearance of the Mahdi. Tabataba'i interprets it without doubt as the rise of the al-Qa 'im and reports this tafsir from several commentators. The Makhzan al- 'Irfan offers no interpretation for this verse.

For the Qur'an 11: 8, Majma' considers the verse as referring to the Mahdi and his Companions while al-Mizan confirms Majma's tafsir and those of other mufassirin. The Makhzan offers no interpretation concerning the Mahdi.

For the Qur'an 41: 53, al-Mizan reports two tafsirs concerning this verse and considers one of the two as concerning the Mahdi according to references gleaned from other commentators. The Majma' and the Makhzan have no tafsir for this verse.

In the Qur'an 48: 28, Tabarsi reports two interpretations for the verse, one of them concerning the time of the Mahdi's reappearance. Al-Mizan and Makhzan offer no tafsir concerning the verse.

The Qur'an 97: 5, and the Qur'an 61: 9, are only interpreted by Banu Amin as concerning the Mahdi. Neither al-Mizan nor Majma' offer an interpretation concerning the Mahdi.

What we can understand from the verses reported as implicitly concerning the Mahdi and their interpretation by three Shi'ite commentators is the future supremacy of Islam over the world and good tidings from God to the Muslims of the future Universal Reign of Islam. There are diverging opinions among the commentators concerning the above-mentioned victory of Islam over all the religions. Some say that this victory can be understood in intellectual and rational terms, and that it has already occurred since Islam is the most logical and rational religion practised in the world today.' But most of them agree, as do the authors studied here, that a more correct interpretation would encompass a victory on all fronts, meaning that the day will come when Islam will be

victorious over all the religions of the world, not only intellectually and spiritually, but also politically through the constitution of a new world government, and belief in the predictions of these verses and that such important and universal events can only be realised at the time of the Mahdi. These commentators give as an argument for their opinion that these verses are N. Makarem Shirazi: Tafsir-e Nemune, Vol 7, p.359 unconditional and general, and that there is no reason to limit their meaning by affirming that the victory will be limited to a particular region demarcated at the time of the Prophet or at some time afterwards, or to a particular intellectual standpoint. Moreover, they argue that the verses concerning the victory of Islam on a worldwide scale at the time of the Mahdi have been interpreted by numerous traditions explicitly announcing the appearance of the Mahdi who will enable Islam to triumph throughout the world. Apart from those reported by the Imams, the Mahdi traditions are also reported by a number of the Prophet's Companions; for example, `Othman ibn `Affan, Ali ibn Abi Talib (first Imam for the Shi'ites, but also considered as a Caliph and Companion by the Sunnites), Talha ibn `Ubaydillah, `Abdurrahman ibn `Awf, `Abdullah ibn Harith, Abu Hurayrah, Jaber ibn `Abdullah, Abu Umamah, `Abdullah ibn `Omar, Anas ibn Malek and others, also Umm Salama or `Aisha (the Prophet's wife). These traditions concerning the rise of the Mahdi are accepted by most Muslim scholars because of the multiplicity of their sources allowing a certain certitude (tawatur), although a limited number of them ¹ doubt their Prophetic origin, objecting that the content of such traditions is not rationally acceptable, even as mutawatir traditions.

¹ like Ibn Khaldun or Ahmad Amin

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