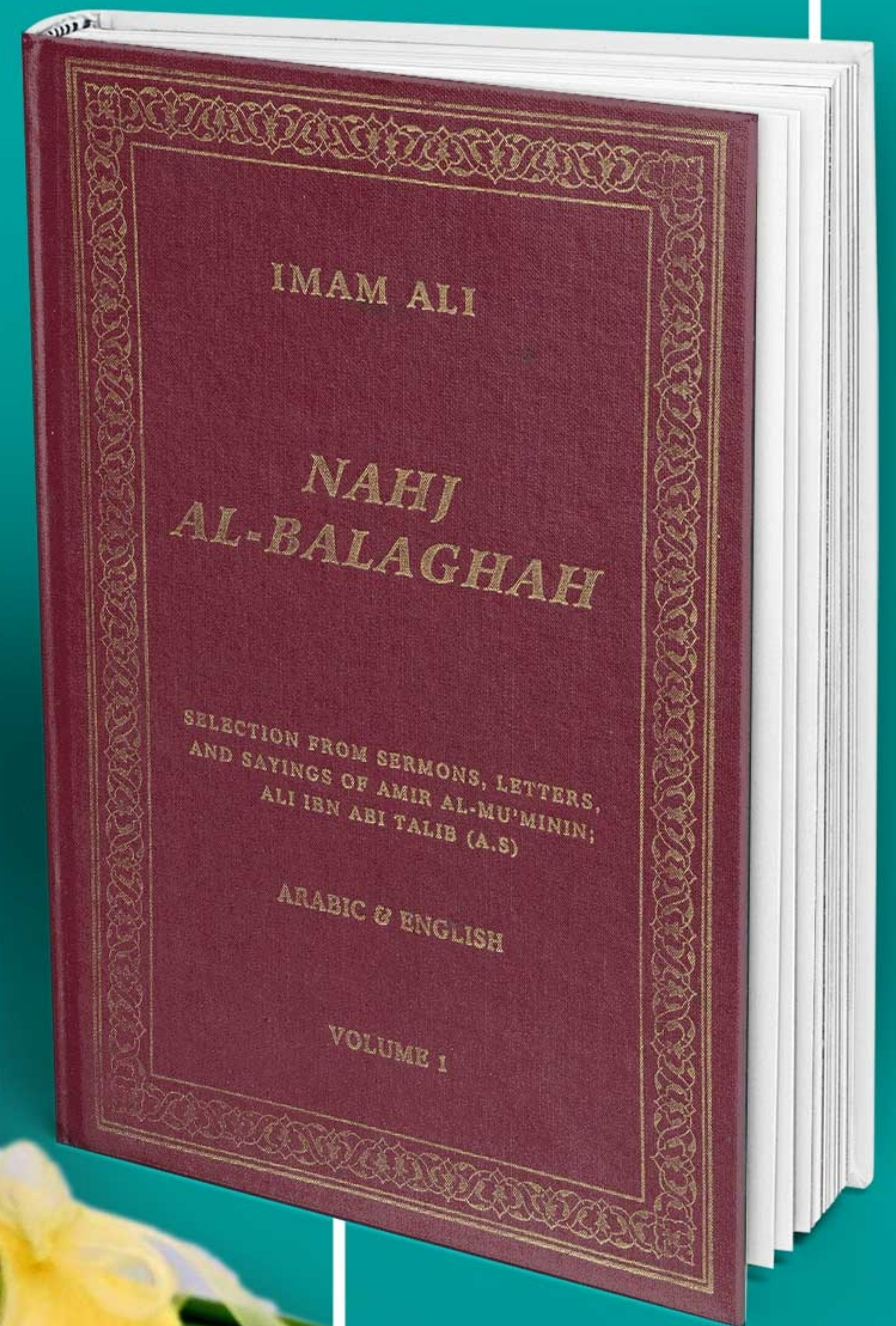


Imam Mahdi
in Nahj
al-Balāghah



Islamic Seminary of Qom
Specialized Center of Mahdism



The Promised Mahdi
Cultural Foundation



In the name of God



An introduction

Human beings, according to their religion and culture, have been always waiting for the coming of a world peacemaker and savior. Not being neglectful about this need, the infallible prophets and Imams have spoken a lot about this matter, its related conditions, the period of its emergence, its signs, and its outcome. In fact, in all the divine religions, there is the news of prophecy about the events related to the apocalypse and the eventual appearance of a savior. Pretty much the same, in the Shiite religion, there are many narrations about this theme, which in addition to the emergence of Imam Mahdi as the promised savior, predict the events of the End of Time. Since a detailed analysis of the related events to the apocalypse requires proper and accurate knowledge and awareness of those conditions, strict attention to these elaborative narrations is imperative; because the situation at that time will be so tumultuous that it would become difficult for people to distinguish the right from the falsehood.



In the noble book of Nahj al-Balāghah, in many cases, the promised Islamic Savior (Imam Mahdi) is mentioned implicitly. This valuable book is a selection of sermons, letters, and short sayings of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali bin Abi Tālib, which was compiled by Sayyid Razī in the fourth century A.H. Imam Ali's speeches in this book are categorized in three chapters: sermons, letters, and short sayings. In his speeches, Imam Ali sometimes speaks about the personal characteristics of Imam Mahdi; and sometimes describes the events of the apocalypse and the bright future of mankind at the time of the Advent. He also tells us about the features of the global government of that Imam and expresses how justice will be universal in that age. The Imam also declares how Islam, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah will be revived; and how the corrupt and the oppressors will be punished and perished.

Among these instances, there is the 138th sermon of Nahj al-Balāghah, in which there are phrases that many commentators of the book consider to be compatible with the conditions of the End of the Times. Since, at first glance it may not be plausible to find a clear link between them and the apocalypse, the article at hand seeks to review and analyze the commentators' viewpoint concerning this sermon and prove that the connection exists.

The 138th sermon of Nahj al-Balāghah

Imam Ali, in sermon 138 of Nahj al-Balāghah predicts some future events. This sermon consists of three parts all of which are related to each other and they pursue the same subject.

In the first part, the Imam refers to a divine man who bases his work on the guidance of the Qur'an and proceeds according to its conduct. Most commentators of Nahj al-Balāghah, according to the descriptions offered in this sermon, consider this divine man to be the global reformer - Imam Mahdi.

In the second part, Imam Ali refers to the bloody events that will take place at the threshold of the rise of that divine man who intends to establish a government, so that later on, peace, justice, wealth, and welfare will fill the earth.

In the third section, he refers to other bloody incidents which arise from Damascus (Syria) that afflicts people severely. This section may refer to the rule of some "Banī Marwān" (the tyrant rulers of Marwān's descendant), or to the emergence of some despot people like "Sufyānī" that will take place before the appearance of the Upriser.



The first section of this sermon

«... يَعْطِفُ الْهَوَى عَلَى الْهُدَى إِذَا عَطَفُوا الْهُدَى عَلَى الرَّأْيِ...»

"He will direct desires towards (the path of) guidance while people will have turned guidance towards desires, and he will turn their views to the direction of the Quran while people will have turned the Quran to their views."

As it is clear, this part of the sermon gives focus on two important points:

The first point

It gives a hint to the conditions of the world community before the advent of that divine leader, which is the isolation of the Quranic truths; and the spread of corruption and sedition in all areas regarding one's individual, social, cultural, political, and economic life; and the emergence of heresies and distortions of religions.

In these phrases, from the point of view of the commentators of Nahj al-Balāghah, Imam Ali refers to the climate and conditions of the apocalypse and tries to depict it. The Imam's expression in this part seems to refer to an apocalyptic controversy in which "guidance" is subjected to the games of people's "whims and desires" and "the Quran" follows "one's self-opinion". It also points to a battle at a hard time when man is so obsessed with his ego that the rule of guidance is lost, and the "one's personal conception" reaches such a position that it overpowers the manifest words of the revelation.

If we contemplate wisely, we can acknowledge that the root of all the misery is linked to these two factors: Preferring one's carnal desires to the intellect; and interpreting the verses of the Quran based on one's particular understandings. All the issues that have plagued Muslims from the beginning until now are due to these two major deviations. Consequently, if these two problematic factors are eliminated, the way to implement the rules of divine justice is paved and the steps along the path of improvement can be taken.

In the field of discussing the matters related to the study of human knowledge and cognition, scientists have mentioned destructive effects of the veils that cover one's knowledge which is resultant from following the demand of carnal desires, as the Holy Qur'an says,



﴿أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَغَطَّىٰ قَلْبَهُ
وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾.

"[O the Messenger!] Have you observed the one who takes his dominating carnal-self as his god and follows its orders? So, Allah has left such person in his error while he is aware of the truth and has sealed his ears and his heart; and has put a cover on his sight [that he should not hear, understand, and see the Truth.] Then who is there but Allah to guide such a person? Will you people not reflect and take admonition?"

The Quran, 45:23.

Interpreting the verses of the Quran based on one's personal understanding; and adopting a personal verdict as an unchanged fact and trying to find some Quranic examples to support it are two major traps of Satan that eventually will devalue the divine revelation altogether. For this reason, this form of approach with regard to the verses of the Quran is rendered as infidelity in Islamic hadiths as Imam Sādiq states,



«مَنْ فَسَّرَ بِرَأْيِهِ آيَةً مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ كَفَرَ.»

"Whoever interprets (even) a verse of the Quran by his own opinion has become a disbeliever."

Tafsir 'Ayyāshī, vol. 1, p. 18, hadith no. 6.

The second point

This point alludes to the practical programs and comprehensive reforms offered by the expected reformer that will lead to human being's emancipation from the ties of carnal desires, corruption, debauchery, and deception.

Following the previous point, Imam Ali gives glad tidings that people's desires and lust will be turned towards intellect and divinity; and people's opinions and thoughts will follow the words of revelation (the Holy Quran). It means that, on the day when people forget the logical points of their reason and depreciate the rules of divine guidance, the mentioned reformer helps them remove the curtain of adversities, adapt the Quran as their guide book; and he gives direction to how people should interpret their opinions and control their desires.

It is now important to know who that great reformer is, how he leads humanity who were drowned in the mire of their "degraded opinions" to a utopian society that is supervised based on "divine revelation" and "perfect guidance". Since fighting against the two mentioned deviations is definitely listed in the plans of Imam Mahdi, the commentators of Nahj al-Balāghah believe that this part of the sermon is going to target him.

Ibn Abi al-Hadīd, one of the well-known exegetes of Nahj al-Balāghah, states herein,



"The Shia believe that by these words, Imam Ali points to Imam Mahdi... and it is not unlikely that he wanted to point to the Upriser who is among of the household of the Prophet and will rise at the End of Time." Sharh Nahj al-Balāghah, by Ibn Abi al-Hadīd, vol. 10, p. 96.
Elsewhere he says

"This statement of Imam Ali refers to the Imam who will come at the end of Time whose arrival is announced in many narrations; and by his appearance, a comprehensive guidance will emerge, the practice of one's self-opinion will be disappeared, and people will act according to the Quran."

Sharh Nahj al-Balāghah, by Ibn Abi al-Hadīd, vol. 2, p. 386.

The second section of the sermon



«... حَتَّى تَقُومَ الْحَرْبُ بِكُمْ عَلَى سَاقٍ بَادِيًا نَوَاجِدُهَا مَمْلُوءَةٌ أَخْلَافُهَا حُلُومًا رِضَاعُهَا عَلَقَمًا عَاقِبَتُهَا.»

"(This situation continues) till war will rage among you (with full force) like a (dangerous and angry) animal standing on its feet, showing forth its teeth, with udders full of sweet milk but with a bitter (and unfortunate) outcome."

«أَلَا وَفِي غَدٍ وَ سَيَاتِي غَدٌ بِمَا لَا تَعْرِفُونَ يَأْخُذُ الْوَالِي مِنْ غَيْرِهَا عُمَّالَهَا عَلَى مَسَاوِي أَعْمَالِهَا وَ تُخْرِجُ لَهُ الْأَرْضُ أَفَالِيدَ كَبِدِهَا وَ تُلْقِي إِلَيْهِ سِلْمًا مَقَالِيدَهَا فَيُرِيكُمْ كَيْفَ عَدَلُ السَّيْرَةِ وَ يُحْيِي مَيِّتَ الْكِتَابِ وَ السُّنَّةِ.»

"Beware! It will be tomorrow and the morrow will come soon with things which you do not know. The Man in power, not from this crowd (who are the instigators of bloody and cruel wars), will take to punish all those who were formerly appointed for their ill deeds; and the earth will pour forth its internal treasures; and submit to him easily her keys. He will show you the just way of behavior; and revive the Quran and Sunnah which have become lifeless (among people)."

In this section, Imam Ali refers to the insurrections and hard wars that will take place at the threshold of the advent of Imam Mahdi; and through enchanting words and beautiful metaphors, implicitly points to the continuity, extent, and intensity of the battle. What is remarked in Islamic narrations is the occurrence of wars and the massacre of human beings through those battles; and the widespread resultant diseases and hardships like the plague, microbial weapons, famine, and so on. Perhaps the reason why the Imam likened the initiation of war to sweet and refreshing milk is that usually at the beginning of any war, typically war booty and achievements are given to the warriors; and in the hope of gaining greater benefits and a complete victory over the opposition front, it will be sweet to the taste of the combatants in such a way that neither the two opposing sides in any battle accept the ceasefire plan from the other one. But the outcome of those battles is nothing but some ominous results like murder, destruction, many disabled people with amputated body parts, mental and physical illnesses, looting of property, rape, and all kinds of misfortunes that make it totally insufferable both for the warmongers and war-torn nations.



Afterward, Imam Ali alludes to the satisfactory, pleasant, and blessed climate that arises after the man's uprising in several cases:

- ◆ Through the government of Imam Mahdi, precious mines of the earth are easily discovered.
- ◆ The key to these resources or the key to governing the whole parts of the earth is given to the Upriser.
- ◆ By having those rich resources and this all-encompassing government, the Upriser will let justice pervade the whole earth.
- ◆ The Upriser revives the forgotten teachings and values of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet so that people will be on the path of evolution both materially and spiritually and they can easily proceed on this path with peace of mind. Thanks to the government of Imam Mahdi, people's intellect is perfected, human values are revived, all kinds of divine gifts are given to human beings, and the roots of oppression are eliminated.

Similar to these sentences is clearly seen in narrations related to the rise of Imam Mahdi. As one instance, Imam Bāqir states,



«... وَ تَظْهَرُ لَهُ الْكُنُوزُ وَ يَبْلُغُ سُلْطَانُهُ الْمَشْرِقَ وَ الْمَغْرِبَ وَ يُظْهِرُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ بِهِ دِينَهُ وَ لَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ فَلَا يَبْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ حَرَابٌ إِلَّا عُمَرَ وَ يَنْزِلُ رُوحُ اللَّهِ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ.»

"The treasures of the earth are revealed to him, his rule covers the East and the West of the world, and Allah prevails His religion over all other religions even if the polytheists detest it. So, at that time no ruin remains on the face of the earth unless it is settled and Jesus, the Son of Mary, descends." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 191, hadith no. 24.

In another narration, it is quoted from Imam Bāqir to have said,

«يَمْلَأُ اللَّهُ الْأَرْضَ بِهِ عَدْلًا وَ قِسْطًا كَمَا مَلَأَتْ ظُلْمًا وَ جُورًا فَيَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لَهُ شَرْقَ الْأَرْضِ وَ غَرْبَهَا... وَ تُطْوَى لَهُ الْأَرْضُ.»

"Allah through him will fill the earth with justice, as it is filled with oppression, and Allah will conquer the East and the West for him... and the earth will be twisted for him. (meaning that the Imam by using some so-called modern facilities will be able to move from one place to the other quickly)." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 390, hadith no. 212.

Therefore, from the point of view of Imam Ali, the ultimate goal of that Uprising reformist that will undoubtedly take place is to establish a universal justice and revive the book (the Holy Quran) and the tradition of the Prophet.



The third section of the sermon

«... كَأَنِّي بِهِ قَدْ نَعَقَ بِالشَّامِ وَ فَحَصَ بِرَايَاتِهِ فِي صَوَاحِي كُوفَانَ فَعَطَفَ إِلَيْهَا عَطْفَ الضَّرُوسِ وَ فَرَشَ الْأَرْضَ
بِالرُّؤُوسِ قَدْ فَغَرَّتْ فَأَغْرَتْهُ وَ ثَقُلَتْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَطَأْتُهُ بَعِيدَ الْجَوْلَةِ عَظِيمَ الصَّوْلَةِ.»

"As if I see him (the bloodthirsty ruler) shouting in Syria and extending his banners to the outskirts of Kūfa. He is bent towards it like a biting camel. He has covered the ground with (cut) heads. His mouth is wide open (swallows everything) and (the trampling of) his footsteps on the ground have become heavy (and takes all areas under its influence). His advance is broad and his attack is severe."



«وَاللَّهِ لَيَشْرِدَنَّكُمْ فِي أَطْرَافِ الْأَرْضِ حَتَّى لَا يَبْقَى مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ كَالْكُحْلِ فِي الْعَيْنِ فَلَا تَزَالُونَ كَذَلِكَ حَتَّى تَتُوبَ إِلَى الْعَرَبِ عَوَازِبُ أَحْلَامِهَا.»

"By Allah, he will disperse you throughout the earth till only a few of you remain like the kohl in the eye. You will continue being in this situation till the Arabs return to their senses (and through wisdom, put aside differences and join hands to awaken people and move against the oppressors)."

«فَالزُّمُوا السُّنَنَ الْقَائِمَةَ وَالْآثَارَ الْبَيِّنَةَ وَالْعَهْدَ الْقَرِيبَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ بَاقِي النُّبُوَّةِ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّمَا يُسِّنِّي لَكُمْ طُرُقَهُ لِتَتَّبِعُوا عَقْبَهُ.»

"You should therefore stick to established traditions, clear signs, and the early period which has the lasting virtues of the prophethood. You should know that Satan makes his ways easy so that you may follow from its behind."



In this part of the sermon, Imam Ali refers to a bloodthirsty, hard-hearted, and powerful ruler who will rise from "Syria", and will take the whole country of Islam under his control by force. The Imam counts nine attributes for him. These nine expressions, which include a complete introduction to that mighty and ruthless ruler, indicate that he crushes the believers to the degree that only a few of them will remain. The environment will become deeply suffocating, people due to a profound fear will hold their breath, and those who rise will be subject to defeat. The mentioned ruler with its extensive bloodshed will take from Syria to Kūfa under his authority.

Who is this oppressive person with these descriptions? The commentators of Nahj al-Balāghah have two different views:

Some consider it to refer to 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwān, who was the fifth Umayyad caliph and a very murderous and tyrannical man. With a great expedition from Syria, he overthrew his rival, Mus'ab bin Zubayr, who ruled in Kūfa, crushed his adversaries, and took control of Kūfa and Iraq. Bin Marwān then sent a considerably massive army under the supervision of Hajjāj bin Yūsuf to the Hijāz who killed Abdullah bin Zubayr, who had risen there, and took control of Mecca and Medina. He even destroyed a part of the Ka'ba where a group of Abdullah bin Zubayr's army had taken refuge to.



Another group of the commentators believe that this person is none other than Sufyānī who appears from Syria prior to the advent of Imam Mahdi. Sufyānī will shed blood greatly and call people to himself.

Considering that the previous parts of this sermon were about the advent of Imam Mahdi, it seems that this part is also about his coming, and the above sentences refer to the advent of Sufyānī.

At the end of this sermon, Imam Ali anticipates that this unfortunate situation will continue until the lost Arab's intellect and wisdom return back to them. Here the Imam gives four orders to people to help them gain victory over the tyrant rulers and restore safety and security to their community:

Following the "established traditions" which are the divine necessities and the eternal plans of Islam, which should be the center of all political, social, and individual activities at all times.

Acting based on the "clear signs" which are the narrations that their authenticity is proven through authentic methods; and embody a large part of Islamic teachings and programs.

Sticking to "the early period" which is the will of the Holy Prophet about the guardianship of Imam Ali who possessed the legacy of the knowledge of the Prophet.



And the fourth advice is to beware of the satanic tempting and alluring deceits concerning the abovementioned points since Satan offers its method in straightforward and imploring ways to prevent people from obeying Allah and being submissive to the guidelines of the Infallible Leaders.

In fact, in the final part of this sermon, Imam Ali explains the duty of people in that time of fear, warns them not to abandon the divine traditions, and not to forget the covenant (about the Prophet succession) which had not been made in a distant past lest people do not follow the devil in that troubled time

These warnings clearly show that the future situation will be so complex and unfamiliar that people may simply stumble in realizing the truth, and would treat on the evil path - the road that Satan paves for people to simply get trapped and be hunt.

It is worth mentioning that those who consider this part of the sermon to be related to the government of 'Abdul Malik bin Marwān" confront with two problems:

First, the result of their opinion is that the defeat of Umayyads and the establishment of the Abbasids dynasty was in agreement with Arab's wisdom and an example of returning to the right path, while there is no doubt that Bani Abbas also continued to perpetrate the same crimes as Umayyads; and even their authoritarian and tyrannical government was not less than that of the Umayyads. However, it may be claimed that the fall of the Umayyads and the beginning of the movement of the Abbasids was a wise and calculated incident that put an end to the oppression of the Umayyad rulers, although they also went astray soon in the near future

Second, the emergence of the Bani Abbas did not take place immediately after the death of Abdul Malik, rather it took decades for the sons of Abdul Malik to rule, and then the fall of the Umayyads began; unless in response to this objection, it is said that the rule of the sons of Abdul Malik was also a continuation of his own rule..



But those who consider this section to refer to the rise of Sufyānī that will take place before the appearance of Imam Mahdi interpret the above sentences as follows: After the immense bloodshed, and the corruption, and destruction that will take place corresponding the advent of Sufyānī, the veils of negligence will be lifted, the intellects awakened, and people will be ready to accept the divine rule of Imam Mahdi. For being more prepared in those circumstances, people must preserve the Islamic traditions, adhere firmly to their true beliefs, and keep away from any sort of distortion in their religion.

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