



The Infallibility of Prophets

LESSON 2: RATIONAL & SCRIPTURAL PROOFS FOR INFALLIBILITY



Why Ismah?

The prophets have to be ma'sum for the same reason for which they were sent: to guide and lead the people towards God. God, who decided to guide mankind, also intended to send immaculate and perfect human beings as models and examples.

If they were not ma'sum, then it would have been extremely difficult even to believe in the message let alone the example they present to us. There would be no trust or confidence in whatever they say: it could be true; it could be false.

العصمة

SENDING FALLIBLE PROPHETS WOULD HAVE DEFEATED THE VERY PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE SENT: FOR THE PROPHETS TO LEAD AND GUIDE, FOR THE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW AND OBEY.

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

“We did not send any prophet, except so that he may be obeyed by the will of God.”

Quran 4:64

- The verse very clearly presents the divine social order: the sole purpose of the prophets on this earth is to be obeyed by their followers, not that the followers are to check every action and statement of their prophet and then decided whether they should obey or not.
- Such absolute obedience cannot be possible unless the prophets were ma'sum, free from sins and mistakes.

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ

“O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger...”

Quran 4:59

- In this verse, God is ordering us to obey Him and the Messenger. There are at least ten other verses where God has used imperative forms to order the believers to obey the prophets and messengers.
- Besides these verses, there are also many verses where God describes the virtue of obeying the prophets, and the dire consequences of disobeying them.

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

- Secondly, in most such verses, God has mentioned obedience to Himself alongside with the obedience to His messengers.
- In fact, in one verse, obedience to the messenger is made synonymous with the obedience to God:

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

“And whoever obeys the Messenger has actually obeyed God”

Quran 4:80

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

- Such assertion on part of God would have been impossible if the prophets and the messengers were not ma'sum and infallible. Otherwise, we would have found ourselves in an impossible situation: a non-ma'sum prophet or messenger exhorts us to do something which is wrong—should we follow or not.

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

- In both cases, we would be doomed. If we obeyed the prophet and committed the sin, then we would be guilty of disobeying God who has told us not to commit sins. If we disobeyed the prophet and refused to commit the sin, then we would be guilty of disobeying God who has told us to obey the prophets and messengers in an absolute way!

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

To the above verses, add those verses in which God forbids you to obey certain types of people who commit sins:

فَلَا تُطِيعِ الْمُكْذِبِينَ وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ وَلَا تُطِيعُ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَهِينٍ

“So do not obey those who accuse you of lying...& do not obey any mean swearer...forbidder of good, one who steps beyond the limits, a sinner.”

Quran 68:8-10

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

وَلَا تُطِيعُ مِنْهُمْ آثِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا

And do not obey among them a sinner or an ungrateful person

Quran 76:24

SCRIPTURAL PROOFS

وَلَا تُطِيعُوا أَمْرَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

And do not obey the command of the transgressors

Quran 26:151

العصمة

CONCLUSION

When you put these verses alongside the previous verses, you will get the complete picture:

- The prophets are to be obeyed unconditionally.
- The sinners and wrongdoers are not to be obeyed.
- The only logical conclusion is that the prophets are not in the categories of the sinners or the wrongdoers.

MORE QURANIC VERSES

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِلْيَاسَ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ وَمِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

And We gave to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - all [of them] We guided. And Noah, We guided before; and among his descendants, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the doers of good. And Zechariah and John and Jesus and Elias - and all were of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot - and all [of them] We preferred over the worlds. And [some] among their fathers and their descendants and their brothers - and We chose them and We guided them to a straight path.

Quran 6:84-87

MORE QURANIC VERSES

Of these prophets, God says:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَانِهِمْ أُقْتَدِهُ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

"Those are the ones whom God has guided, so from their guidance take an example. Say, "I ask of you for this message no payment. It is not but a reminder for the worlds."

Quran 6:90

MORE QURANIC VERSES

وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ

"And whoever God guides - for him there is no misleader.

Quran 6:90

MORE QURANIC VERSES

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصَّدِيقِينَ
وَالشَّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

And whoever obeys God and the Messenger - those will be with the ones upon whom God has bestowed favor of the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions.

Quran 4:69

MORE QURANIC VERSES

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ

[Iblees] said, "By your might, I will surely mislead them all Except, among them, Your chosen servants.

Quran 38:82-83

MORE QURANIC VERSES

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Say, "If you should love God , then follow me, [so] God will love you and forgive you your sins. And God is Forgiving and Merciful."

Quran 3:31

Allegorical Verses of the Quran

After explaining the meaning and importance of ismah for the prophets and messengers of God which is also supported by the Quranic verses we quoted above, some people become confused when they come across verses which give an impression that Adam and other prophets committed some sins.



Allegorical Verses of the Quran

This confusion will only be clear if we realize that the Quranic verses, according to the Quran itself, are of two types:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ
الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ
فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَبَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا
يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ



Allegorical Verses of the Quran

"He is the one who sent upon you the book: some of its verses are clear (muhkamât)—these are the basis of the Book, while others are allegorical (mutashâbihât).

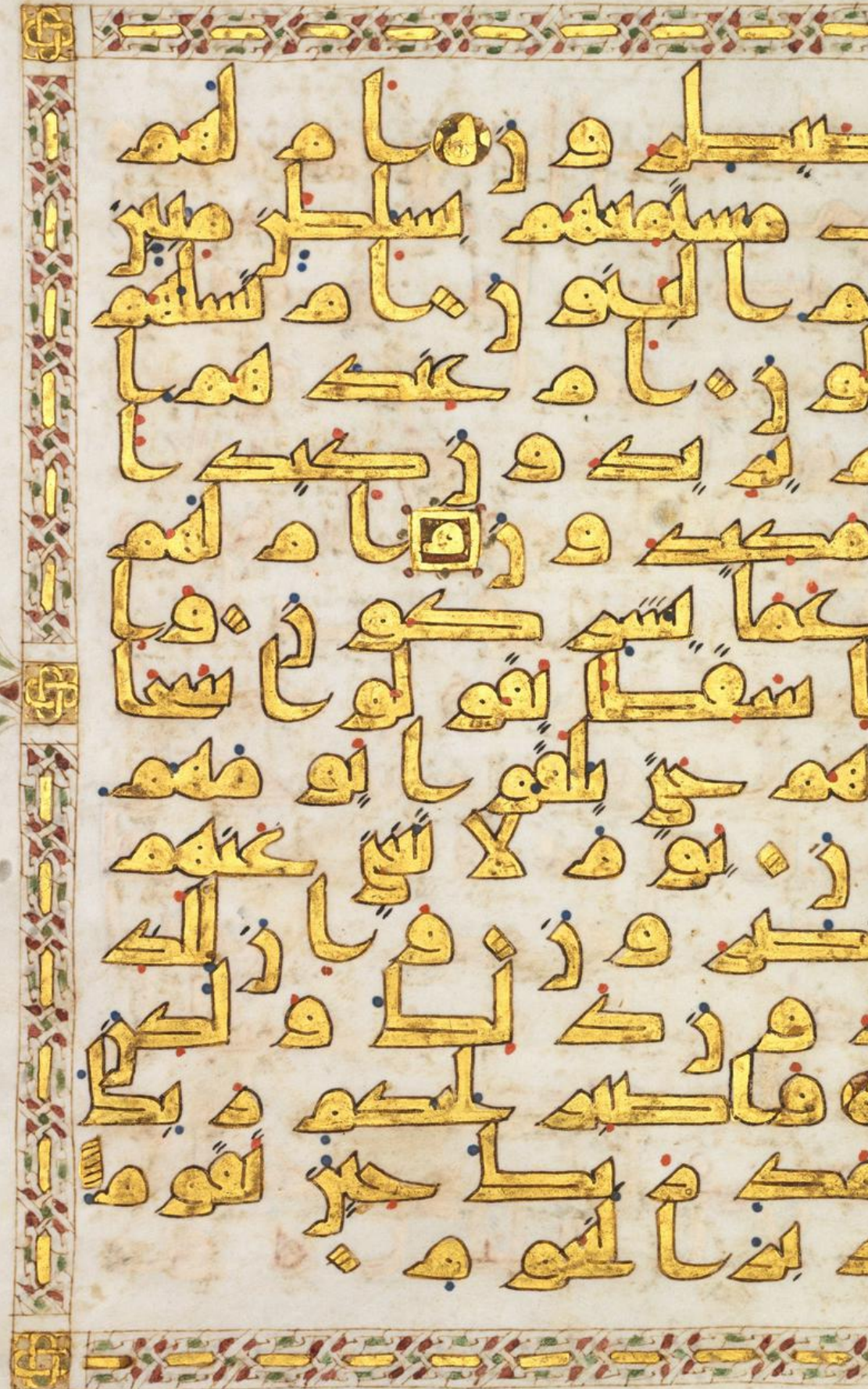
"As for those in whose hearts is perversity, they follow the allegorical verses, seeking to mislead and seeking to give (their own) interpretation.

None know their (i.e., allegorical verses') interpretation except God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge..."



Allegorical Verses of the Quran

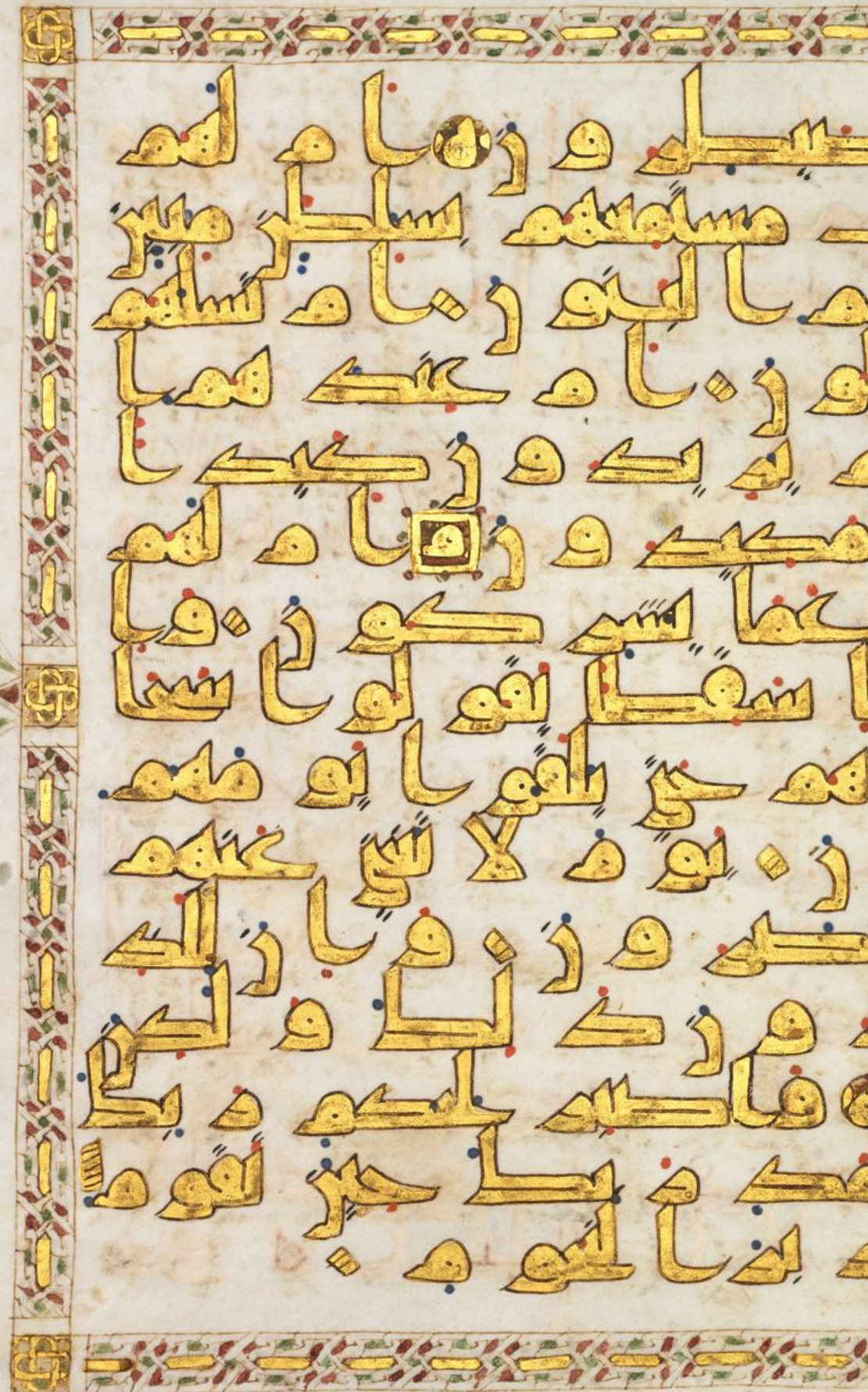
Those who do not differentiate between the clear and the allegorical verses will surely get confused when they apparently find two conflicting messages from the verses of the Quran. The issue of 'ismah is one of those issues in which people have become victim of confusion.



Allegorical Verses of the Quran

The situation, at this stage of our discussion, is as follows:

- Our earlier discussion concluded that the divine guides must be immaculate and above reproach.
- Many verses of the Qur'an support this view, as mentioned above.
- But there are some verses of the Qur'an that apparently attribute sins and wrongdoings to some prophets.



Allegorical Verses of the Quran

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- Our earlier discussion concluded that the divine guides must be immaculate and above reproach.
- Many verses of the Quran support this view, as mentioned above.
- But there are some verses of the Quran that apparently attribute sins and wrongdoings to some prophets.



WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

- **We must accept those verses that are supported by our reason as the clear (muhkamât) verses. And the other verses should be considered allegorical (mutashâbihât) and their true meaning must be sought in the light of the muhkamât, the teachings of the Prophet, and the Imams of Ahlul Bayt who are the twin of the Quran**
- **The Prophet said “I am leaving two precious things among you [for guidance]: the Book of God and my family.”**