

THE IMAM'S IMAMATE IN SUNNI SOURCES

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Followers of every Islamic school believe in a number of principles, including the belief in the Prophet's (SAW) twelve successors and the leaders of the Islamic ummah. The significant principle of faith has its origin in successively transmitted *riwāyahs* narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) and recorded in reliable sources by scholars of hadith and other disciplines from different Islamic schools. Sunni scholars have tried, based on their articles of faith, to identify the twelve successors. The findings of the present study indicate that there are certain features attested in the *riwāyahs*, recorded in Twelver Shia sources, that prove the perspective adopted by Shia scholars and disprove the stance adopted by Sunni scholars.

KEYWORDS: Imamate; the Twelve Imams; Successors to the Messenger of God; the *riwāyahs* narrated by Twelver Shia scholars.

INTRODUCTION

The transmission chains of the *riwāyahs* regarding the Twelver Shia successors transmitted by Sunni and Imāmī Shia scholars are indubitably accurate, but different only in identifying the twelve successors. Imāmī Shia scholars identify them as the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Messenger of God (SAW), arguing that the glad tiding brought by the Prophet (SAW) concerning the coming of the twelve Imams and their successors is but a divine command communicated by the Messenger of God (SAW), since he did not say anything out of his own desire, “Nor does he speak out of [his own] desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]” (53:3-4). The glad tiding is from God and His Messenger is the one who imparts it to people. The referents in such tiding should be designated by God and His Messenger, rather than by the scholars in the service of tyrannical Umayyad and ‘Abbasid rulers falsely claiming that the latter are the successors to the Messenger of God (SAW). Sunni scholars, however, tried to present a justifiable explanation for such *riwāyahs* and thus adopted different views. The present study quotes a number of such *riwāyahs* from Shia and Sunni sources and proceeds to criticize the Sunni perspective on the referents of the twelve successors.

1. The *Riwāyahs* Concerning the Twelve Successors in Sunni and Shia Sources. Imami Shia scholars have recorded Twelver Shia *riwāyahs* as well as those shared by Shia and Sunni hadith scholars.
 - 1.1. The Twelver Shia *Riwāyahs*. The *riwāyahs* narrated from the Messenger of God wherein the twelve Imams have been identified are the ones narrated from the Messenger of God and recorded by Shia hadith scholars, e.g., Sulaym ibn Qays (d. 76/695; *Kitāb Sulaym*, pp. 236, 380, 425-426, 441); Faḍl ibn Shādhān (d. 260/873; *al-Īdāh*, p. 127); Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb Kulaynī (d. 329/940; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 525-535, Chapter on the *riwāyahs* about the Twelve [successors] and Their Designation, *Bāb Mā Jā’a fī ‘l-Ithnā’shar wa ‘l-Naṣṣ ‘alayhim*); Ṣadūq (381/991; *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, pp. 466-480, *The Twelve Successors and the Imams after the Prophet, al-Khulafā’ wa ‘l-A’immah ba’d al-Nabī Ithnā’ashar*); Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu‘mānī, known as Ibn Abī Zaynab (d. 360/970; Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghaybah*, pp. 57-126, Chapter on What is Narrated Regarding the Twelve Divinely Designated Imams, *Bāb Mā Ruwiya fī An al-A’immah Ithnā’ashar Imāman wa Annahum min Allāh-i wa bi-Ikhtiyārihi*); ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Khazzāz al-Qummī (d. 4th/10th cent.) who records approximately 200 *riwāyahs* narrated from a number of the Shia Imams and a large number of the Companions of the Prophet (Khazzāz al-Qummī, *Kifāyah al-Athar*, pp. 9-25, 252); Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022; *Irshād*, vol. 2, 347, 372); Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067; *al-Ghaybah*, pp. 53, 126-128, 130, 132, 137, 141, 149, 150, 188, 192, 221, 223, 224, 227).
 - 1.2. The Shared *Riwāyahs* on the Twelve Successors. Such *riwāyahs* have been narrated from the Prophet by Sunni and Shia hadith scholars wherein the Messenger of God (SAW) mentioned simply the number and attributes of his twelve successors, but did not name them. An investigation of two shared *riwāyahs* will follow.
 - 1.2.1. The Hadith Narrated by Jābir ibn Samurah. Muslim al-Nīshāburī narrates, through a transmission chain, from the Messenger of God (SAW) as saying, “The religion of God is always firm on its firm basis to the Day of Resurrection and there will be twelve successors for you all of whom are from the Quraysh (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb Amārah, Bāb 1*). The said hadith is narrated with four sound transmission chains by Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, vol. 6, p. 2640, *Kitāb Aḥkām, Bāb 51; al-Ta’rīkh al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, p. 446, vol. 3, p. 185, vol. 8, p. 411); with eight sound transmission chains by Muslim al-Nīshāburī (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1453, *Kitāb Amārah, Bāb 1*); with two sound transmission chains by Tirmidhī (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 4, p. 501, *Kitāb al-Fitan, Bāb 46*); with three sound transmission chains by Abī Dā’ūd (*Sunan Abī Dā’ūd*, vol. 4, p. 106, *Kitāb al-Mahdī*); with 32 sound transmission chains by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (*Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 34 [of the 50 volume edition], pp. 398-529).

Jābir ibn Samurah’s hadith has been narrated by some other Companions of the Prophet as well, e.g., Samurah ibn Junādah (i.e., Jābir ibn Samurah’s father) directly narrating from the Messenger of God (Ṭabarānī, *Mu’jam*, vol. 2, p. 197; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb*, vol. 2, pp. 65-656; al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī bi-‘l-Wafayāt*, vol. 15, p. 277); Abī Juḥayfah (Ḥākim al-Nīshāburī, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 618; Bukhārī, *al-Ta’rīkh al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, p. 411; Ṭabarānī, *Mu’jam Kabīr*, vol. 22, p. 120; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 211; Ḥaythamī, *Majma‘ al-Zawā’id*, vol. 5, p. 349); Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (Ṭabarānī, *Mu’jam Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 197); Anas ibn Mālīk

(Muttaqī Hindī, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, vol. 12, p. 34, apud/citing Ibn al-Najjār); Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 184); ‘Abd Allah ‘Umar (Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb l-Fitan*, p. 52); ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (Khazzāz al-Qummī, *Kifāyah al-Athar*, p. 91).

Reliability of Jābir’s Hadith from the Sunni Perspective. The transmission chain is considered by all Sunni scholars to be accurate and the present author has not seen any Sunni hadith scholar trying to weaken it. Having narrated the hadith, Baghawī writes, “This hadith is unanimously maintained to be accurate” (*Sharḥ al-Sunnah, Bāb Ishtirāṭ al-Sā‘ah*, vol. 7, p. 346). Ibn Khaldūn says, “It is narrated in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that he (SAW) said, ‘It shall continue to be firmly established until the time arrives [the Day of Resurrection] or there will be twelve successors from the Quraysh for you [i.e., for your affairs]’ (*Ta’rikh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1, p. 325). Having narrated the hadith, Tirmidhī says, “There is consensus about the soundness of this hadith” (*al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Muḥarriqah*, p. 20).

1.2.2. The Hadith Narrated by Ibn Mas‘ūd. Masrūq ibn Ajda‘, a distinguished Tābi‘ī, i.e., a Successor to the Companions (Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, vol. 4, p. 63, no. 17; Suyūṭī, *Tadhkirah al-Ḥuffāz*, p. 21, no. 26), says, “We were seated at the mosque in the presence of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ūd who was reciting the Qur’an to us. He was asked, ‘O Abā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān [the patronymic title of Ibn Mas‘ūd], did you ask the Messenger of God about the number of the successors who will lead the ummah?’ Ibn Mas‘ūd replied, ‘Nobody had asked me such question since I came to Iraq.’ Then, he added, ‘Yes, we did and he said, ‘Twelve individuals similar to the number of the chiefs of the Children of Israel’” (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 55; Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī, *Mustadrak*, vol. 4, p. 501; al-Dhahabī, *Talkhīṣ al-Mustadrak*, vol. 4, p. 501; Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id*, vol. 5, p. 344; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 212; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā al-Mūṣilī, *Musnad*, vol. 8, p. 444, vol. 9, 222; Ṭabarānī, *Mu‘jam Kabīr*, vol. 10, p. 158; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 2, p. 34; Suyūṭī, *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, p. 367), and the chiefs of the Children of Israel, as mentioned in the Holy Qur’an (5:12), were 12 in number. Ibn Mas‘ūd’s hadith is reliable in terms of the transmission chain, the narrators of which are distinguished and reliable Sunni hadith scholars, hence the reliability of the hadith in question.

2. THE RIWĀYAHs OF THE TWELVE SUCCESSORS NARRATED BY SUNNI SCHOLARS

Their perspective on those *riwāyahs* may fall into two categories: 1. The scholars who had considered as reliable and had narrated with reliable transmission chains the *riwāyahs* regarding the Twelve successors prior to the emergence and formalization of the Four Sunni Denominations or Schools; 2. The scholars, following one of the four schools, who approvingly narrated, with reliable transmission chains, the *riwāyahs* in question.

2.1. The *Riwāyahs* Regarding the Twelve Successors Prior to the Emergence of the Four Schools. A number of distinguished Sunni hadith scholars had approvingly narrated

through reliable transmission chains the said *riwāyahs* prior to the emergence and formalization of the Four Sunni School. They include:

- 2.1.1. Abū Dā'ūd Sulaymān ibn Dā'ūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/819). This distinguished and reliable Sunni hadith scholar had recorded the hadith of the Twelve Successors in his book prior to the birth of Imam al-Jawād (AS), the Ninth Shia Imam (Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb al-Tadhhīb*, vol. 1, p. 384). He narrated the hadith in question twice with two reliable transmission chains through Jābir ibn Samurah, a Companion of the Prophet (Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad Abī Dā'ūd al-Ṭayālīsī*, pp. 105, 180). One of his narrations reads, "I heard from the Messenger of God (SAW), saying, 'Islam will be treasured so long as the twelve successors serve as leaders.' Then, he said a word that I did not understand. I asked my father, 'What did he say?' He replied, 'They are all from the Quraysh'" (ibid, p. 180).
- 2.1.2. Nu'am ibn Ḥammād (d. 229/843) narrated the said *riwāyahs* on the authority of Jābir ibn Samurah, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās, and Ka'b al-Aḥbār (Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, pp. 52-53, 65, 75, 271).
- 2.1.3. 'Alī ibn Ja'd al-Jawharī al-Baghdādī (d. 230/844) narrates Jābir's hadith twice through two transmission chains (Ibn Ja'd al-Jawharī al-Baghdādī, *Musnad*, p. 390).
- 2.1.4. Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) narrates the *riwāyahs* in question on the authority of Jābir ibn Samurah (*Musnad*, vol. 5, pp. 86-90, 92-101, 106-108) and Ibn Mas'ūd (ibid, vol. 1, pp. 398, 406) 34 times through 34 reliable transmission chains.
- 2.1.5. Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869; *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Aḥkām*, *Bāb 51*; *al-Ta'rikh al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, p. 446, vol. 3, p. 185, vol. 8, p. 411).
- 2.1.6. Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Nishābūrī (d. 261/874; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1453, *Kitāb Amārah*, *Bāb 1*).
- 2.1.7. Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888) who considered Imam al-Mahdī as one of the twelve successors to the Messenger of God (*Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 106, *Kitāb al-Mahdī*).
- 2.1.8. Tirmidhī (d. 279/892; *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 501, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, *Bāb 46*).
- 2.2. The *Riwāyahs* of the Twelve Successors Following the Emergence of the Four Schools. The scholars following each of the Four Schools have attended, following the emergence and formalization of the Four Schools, to narrating and commenting on the said *riwāyahs*, as reflected in the following outline.
 - 2.2.1. The Ḥanafī Scholars and the Said *Riwāyahs*. They were accepted by some of them, some of them will be mentioned below.
 - 2.2.1.1. Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī (d. after 470/1077; *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 584).
 - 2.2.1.2. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200; *Tadhkirah al-Khawāṣṣ*, p. 3) who records a variety of its recordings in at least *al-Muntaẓam* (vol. 4, p. 54) and *Kashf al-Mushkil min Ḥadith al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (vol. 1, pp. 449-450) and tried in the latter to present an acceptable justification for the hadith, but confesses to his inability (loc. cit.).
 - 2.2.1.3. Ibn Abī al-'Izz (d. 792/1389; *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, p. 552).
 - 2.2.1.4. Maḥmūd 'Aynī (d. 855/1451; *Umdah al-Qārī*, vol. 24, pp. 281-282).
 - 2.2.1.5. 'Alī Muttaqī Ḥindī (d. 975/1567; *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 11, p. 135, vol. 12, pp. 24, 32-34, vol. 14, p. 585).
 - 2.2.1.6. Sulaymān al-Qundūzī (d. 1270/1853) who extensively narrates the said *riwāyahs* on the authority of a number of the Companions of the Prophet, e.g., Ibn Mas'ūd and Jābir ibn Samurah, and maintains that the second part of the hadith was originally "all of whom

from Banī Hāshim” rather than “all of whom from Quraysh” and explicitly states that all the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet are implied by the *riwāyahs* (*Yanābī‘ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 136, vol. 2, pp. 87, 315, 339, 535, vol. 3, pp. 282, 501).

- 2.2.1.7. Muḥammad Shams al-Ḥaqq ‘Āzīmābādī (d. 1329/1911; *‘Awn al-Ma‘būd Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dā‘ūd*, vol. 11, pp. 244-245, 247).
- 2.2.1.8. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Mubārakfurī (d. 1353/1934; *Tuḥfah al-Aḥwadhī*, vol. 6, pp. 391-396).
- 2.2.2. The Mālīkī Scholars and the Said *Riwāyahs*. They have also approved of and narrated the *riwāyahs* in question. Some of them will be mentioned below.
- 2.2.2.1. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070; *al-Istī‘āb*, vol. 2, pp. 655-656).
- 2.2.2.2. Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 543/1148; *‘Āriḍah al-Aḥwadhī*, vol. 9, p. 69).
- 2.2.2.3. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1405; *Ta’rīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1, p. 325).
- 2.2.2.4. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 855/1451; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 1161, 1163).
- 2.2.3. The Shāfi‘ī Scholars and the Said *Riwāyahs*. They excel the scholars from other schools in terms of scholarly distinction and also in number. Some of them will be mentioned below.
- 2.2.3.1. Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī (d. 405/1014; *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, pp. 617-618, vol. 4, p. 501).
- 2.2.3.2. Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1065; *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 6, pp. 512, 519, 523).
- 2.2.3.3. Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1070; *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 2, p. 124, vol. 4, p. 258, vol. 6, p. 261, vol. 14, p. 354).
- 2.2.3.4. Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī (d. 510/1116; *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, vol. 7, p. 346, *Bāb Ishtirā‘ al-Sā‘ah*).
- 2.2.3.5. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1175; *Ta’rīkh Madīnah Dimashq*, vol. 21, p. 288, vol. 45, p. 189).
- 2.2.3.6. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209; *al-Arba‘īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 216).
- 2.2.3.7. Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah (d. 652/1254) maintains that the Imams of divine guidance are twelve in number, i.e., ‘Alī and eleven descendants of his, the last of whom is the Promised Imam al-Mahdī. He holds that the light of imamate is to be found exclusively in these twelve Imams (*Maṭlab al-Su’l fī Manāqib Āl al-Rasūl*, pp. 30-31).
- 2.2.3.8. Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277; *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 12, pp. 201-203).
- 2.2.3.9. Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 730/1329; *Farā’id al-Simṭayn*, vol. 2, pp. 136, 312-313).
- 2.2.3.10. Abū al-Ḥajjāj al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), narrating the said *riwāyah* from the Messenger of God on the authority of Jābir al-Samurah (*Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 1, p. 21, vol. 3, p. 224, vol. 33, p. 273).
- 2.2.3.11. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347; *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, vol. 8, p. 184).
- 2.2.3.12. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372; *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-Nihāyah*, vol. 1, p. 177, vol. 6, pp. 215, 278-279, *al-Malāḥim wa ‘l-Fitan*, p. 9; *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 2, p. 34).
- 2.2.3.13. Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī (d. 807/1404), narrating the *riwāyah* in a chapter entitled The Twelve Successors (*Majma‘ al-Zawā’id*, vol. 5, pp. 190-191).
- 2.2.3.14. Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441; *Imtā‘ al-Asmā‘*, vol. 12, pp. 302-306, vol. 14, p. 186).
- 2.2.3.15. Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1448; *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, pp. 181-186).
- 2.2.3.16. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), narrating the said *riwāyah* from the Messenger of God on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd and Jābir ibn Samurah, and also considers

the Promised Imam al-Mahdī as one of the twelve successors to the Prophet (*Ta'rikh al-Khulafā'*, pp. 13-15).

2.2.3.17. Ṣāliḥī al-Shāmī (d. 942/1535; *Subul al-Hudā wa 'l-Rashād*, vol. 10, p. 83).

2.2.3.18. Ibn Ḥajar al-Makkī (d. 974/1566) who considers the Promised Mahdī as one of the referents of the *riwāyah* in question, saying, “The reliability of the hadith is unanimously accepted by hadith scholars (*al-Ṣawā'iq al-Muḥarriqah*, pp. 20-21, 166, 189, 237). Including the hadith by him in the chapter on the noble qualities of the Ahl al-Bayt indicates that he considers the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet to be the referents of the hadith.

2.2.3.19. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Manāwī (d. 1031/1621; *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, vol. 2, pp. 458-459, vol. 6, p. 294).

2.2.4. The Ḥanbalī Scholars and the *Riwāyahs* in Question. A number of Ḥanbalī scholars have accepted and narrated the said *riwāyahs*, some of whom will be mentioned below.

2.2.4.1. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī (d. 241/855), narrating two versions of the said hadith, the first of which, i.e., the one narrated on the authority of Jābir ibn Samurah, has been narrated 32 times with 32 transmission chains (*Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 5, pp. 86-90, 92-101, 106) and narrates the hadith on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd with two reliable transmission chains (*ibid*, vol. 1, pp. 398, 406).

2.2.4.2. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1327), his emphasis on the reliability of the hadith is followed by his justification and comments (*Minhāj al-Sunnah*, vol. 4, p. 209).

2.2.4.3. Nāṣir al-Dīn Albānī (d. 1420/1999) who narrates three *riwāyahs* of the said hadith from the Messenger of God on the authority of Jābir ibn Samurah, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, and Abū Juḥayfah, regarding the first one he writes, “This hadith is based on the criteria employed by Bukhārī's and Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* (*Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 719-721).

2.2.4.4. 'Abd al-'Alīm al-Bastawī (b. 1949) who reports the narrations of the said hadith by Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī, Tirmidhī, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, among others, on the authority of three Companions of the Prophet, namely Jābir ibn Samurah, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, and Abū Juḥayfah, and consider it as reliable (*al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar fī Ḍaw' al-Aḥādīth wa 'l-Āthār al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, pp. 332-333).

3. The Referents of the Said Hadith from the Perspective of Sunni Scholars. The disagreement between Imāmī Shia and Sunni scholars, as mentioned above, concerns the identification of the referents of the said hadith. Sunni scholars maintain that specific individuals were not intended by the Messenger of God, but he simply brought the tidings of the coming of twelve righteous individuals of Qurayshī descent who will come after him until the Day of Resurrection and that the twelve individuals need not to succeed each other, but they will lead the ummah prior to the Resurrection Day. Accordingly, each and every Sunni scholar selected a number of Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs who chronologically followed the Four Caliphs and thus made twelve individuals and considered them as the referents of the hadith in which the Messenger of God had brought the tidings.

3.1. Perplexity of Some Sunni Scholars in Interpreting the Said *Riwāyahs* who confessed to their inability to grasp what was precisely intended by the Prophet. A number of such scholars will be mentioned below.

- 3.1.1. Ibn Baṭṭāl is narrated by Muhallab as saying, “I have never met anyone who has attained certainty as to what is intended by the *riwāyah* in question (Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 211).
- 3.1.2. Ibn al-Jawzī writes, “I investigated the meaning of the *riwāyah* for a long time and visited the places which I could have possibly find the answer to my question, but I failed to unravel the implication (ibid, p. 212).
- 3.1.3. Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, having suggested a number of possible answers concerning the said *riwāyah*, says, “God is All-Aware of His Messenger’s intention” (loc. cit.; Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 12, p. 445).
- 3.1.4. Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Mālīkī, having mentioned the names off the Four Caliphs and a number of Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs as the referents of the *riwāyah*, says, “I do not know what is truly intended by the hadith” (*‘Arīḍah al-Aḥwadhī*, vol. 9, p. 69).
- 3.2. Combinatory Justification. Some other Sunni scholars have tried to adopt a combinatory approach to justify the said *riwāyahs*. In this approach they considered twelve individuals following the Messenger of God as the referents of the twelve successors to him. According to Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, the twelve successors are as follows: 1. Abū Bakr; 2. ‘Umar; 3. ‘Uthmān; 4. ‘Alī; 5. Mu‘āwiyah; 6. Yazīd; 7. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān; 8. Walīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik; 9. Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik; 10. Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik; 11. Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik; 12: Walīd ibn Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 214). Accordingly, Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah and the descendants of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam are among the successors to the Messenger of God, but ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who is considered by the Sunnis as the best Umayyad caliph, is not enumerated as one of the successors to the Messenger of God, since the number of the twelve caliphs had been complete!
- 3.3. Selective Justification. Another solution has been found by some other Sunni scholars who selected a number of Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs whom they believed to excel others in acting upon their obligations and thus enumerated them, along with the Four Caliphs, as the twelve successors to the Prophet (SAW). In this respect, al-Suyūṭī writes, “Eight individuals from among the twelve successors are the following: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, Mu‘āwiyah, ‘Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (*Ta’rīkh al-Khulafā’*, pp. 10-12). He further suggests that two of the ‘Abbasid caliphs, al-Muhtadī and al-Zāhir, may be among the twelve successors.” He also says, “There are two other successors for whom we need to wait. One of the two is al-Mahdī who is from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (SAW)” (al-Suyūṭī, *Ta’rīkh al-Khulafā’*, pp. 10-12); however, he does not name the second individual. Therefore, an erudite scholar like al-Suyūṭī, despite all his endeavors, could only suggest the names of eleven successors and was unable to identify the twelfth successor.
4. Assessment of the Sunni Perspective. In criticizing the view held by the Sunni scholars we may make mention of a number of points regarding the characteristics mentioned in the *riwāyahs* concerning the twelve successors.
 - 4.1. Unfounded Claim. No argument has been produced by the Sunni scholars concerning the identity of the twelve successors and such unfounded claim is unacceptable.
 - 4.2. Lack of Qualifications for Successorship Concerning the Referents Suggested by the Sunnis. The Umayyad rulers, considered by the Sunni scholars as the referents of

the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors, as explicitly stated by the Companions of the Prophet (Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 501) and as acknowledged by the Sunni scholars, were tyrannical, illiterate, and sinful (Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī al-Makkī, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-Muḥarriqah*, p. 219), whereas the Sunni scholars have enumerated certain qualifications, e.g., justice and knowledge, for the successors of the Messenger of God and the leader of the Islamic ummah (Māwardī, *Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, vol. 2, p. 20; Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 5, p. 243). Accordingly, based the principles accepted by the Sunnis, the Umayyad and 'Abbasid rulers were not qualified for caliphate such that they could be suggested as the successors to the Messenger of God.

- 4.3. The Prophet made mention of his successors. The *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors indicate that the Prophet (SAW) made mention of all his successors as the leaders of the Islamic ummah to the last day of the world and also specified the qualifications of the successors. The purports of the *riwāyahs* are incompatible with the Sunni perspective, since they maintain that the Messenger of God never took any steps in nominating his successor, but he practically entrusted his Companions with the designation of his successor and they, following taking counsels with each other, designated Abū Bakr. Nonetheless, by making mention of the number and the attributes of the twelve successors, the Prophet explicitly specified that God and the Prophet (SAW), rather than the people, designated his successor.

This is confirmed by a sound *riwāyah* narrated from the Messenger of God according to which when he called the tribe of Banī 'Āmir ibn Ṣa'ṣa'ah to embrace the divinely revealed religion, one of the members of the tribe by the name of Bīḥurrah ibn Firās asked the Prophet, "If we follow you in your mission and God renders you victory over your opponents, will we be your successor when you pass away?" The Prophet replied, "My successor will be divinely designated" (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 66; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-Nihāyah*, vol. 3, pp. 139-140; Ibn Ḥabbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt*, vol. 1, pp. 89-90; 'Alī ibn Burhān al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah al-Ḥalabī*, vol. 2, p. 3; Kāndihlawī, *Ḥayāt al-Ṣaḥābah*, vol. 1, p. 69).

- 4.4. Successorship to the Prophet to the End of the World. The Twelve Imams are the successors to the Prophet for the entire ummah and all coming generations, as it is reflected in the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors, as it follows.

Ummah. The term, as employed in the said *riwāyahs* is applied to all the followers of the Prophet (SAW) to the Day of Resurrection which indicates that the successors to the Prophet (SAW) are the leaders of the entire Islamic ummah who are never left without an Imam.

The form *lā yazāl* 'always, forever', attested in different versions of the said *riwāyahs*, e.g., "The religion shall continue (*lā yazāl*) to be firmly established until the time arrives [the Day of Resurrection] or there will be twelve successors from the Quraysh for you [i.e., for your affairs]" (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1453), indicates that the leadership of the twelve successors of the Messenger of God (SAW) will last to the last day of the world.

(*Min*) *ba'dī* 'after me'. It is attested in some of the versions of the *riwāyahs*, e.g., "There will be twelve successors after me" (Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 501; Ṭabarānī, *Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 216). The unconditional usage of the form *ba'dī*, as attested in the said *riwāyahs*,

indicates that the number of the successors to the Prophet (SAW) to the Day of Resurrection, serving as leaders of the Islamic ummah, is twelve.

Further, the Messenger of God (SAW) named Imam al-Mahdī (AS) as one of the successors to lead the Islamic ummah (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1453; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 5, 37, 49, 60, 96, 317; al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī, *Mustadrak*, vol. 4, p. 454; Abū Dā'ūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 107; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Nihāyah fī 'l-Malāḥim wa 'l-Fitan*, vol. 1, p. 9; al-Suyūṭī, *Ta'riḫ al-Khulafā'*, vol. 10, p. 12). As attested in the *riwāyahs*, the era of Imam al-Mahdī's (AS) leadership in 'the end times' (*ākhir al-zamān*), namely, the period of the leadership of the twelve successors to the Prophet (SAW) continues, in that one of the successors lead the ummah so long as the latter exists.

The said theme is supported by some other *riwāyahs*. The Messenger of God (SAW) is narrated as saying, "This matter [i.e., leadership of the ummah] continues among the Quraysh until [only] two individuals exist" (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 218, vol. 9, p. 78; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1453). The hadith demonstrates that there is currently a successor of Quraysh descent in the Islamic ummah and considering that the number of the successors in the said *riwāyahs* is mentioned as twelve, we may conclude that they are the twelve successors one of whom continues to serve as the leader of the ummah to the last day of the world.

4.5. Consecutive *riwāyahs* narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) indicate that if an individual passes away having failed to recognize the Imam of their time, it would be as if they have died in the time of Ignorance (Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, pp. 19-20; Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*, vol. 5, p. 239; 'Alī al-Qārī, *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍī'ah*, vol. 2, p. 510; al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, p. 259; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 446; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ta'riḫ al-Kabīr*, vol. 6, p. 445; Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 409). The said *riwāyahs* are also attested in many other sources, e.g., Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1478; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 8, p. 156; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 19, p. 335; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 2, p. 302; Albānī, *Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, vol. 2, p. 715).

Investigating the said *riwāyahs* demonstrate that the said Imam is the successor to the Messenger of God (SAW) and one of the twelve successors to him, since, as it was mentioned above, the number of the successors to the Prophet (SAW) to the end of the world is twelve and they are all from the Quraysh. Accordingly, the Imam mentioned in the said *riwāyahs* is necessarily one of the twelve successors to the Prophet (SAW). There is further evidence to support the argument, e.g., Ibn 'Umar narrates the Messenger of God (SAW) said to 'Alī (AS), "O 'Alī, When any of your enemies dies, it is as if he died at the time of ignorance (Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol. 9, pp. 162, 173, 184; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 12, p. 321; Bayāḍī, *al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*, vol. 3, p. 118; Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 11, p. 611).

Justifications of both groups of Sunni scholars are challenged by the *riwāyahs* concerning the necessity of the Imam's presence at all times, since the successors to the Prophet as the twelve successors, as enumerated by the Sunni scholars from the first group lived to the end of the first Islamic century, acknowledging which would necessitate the absence of

the Imam and death of the members of the Islamic community at the Time of Ignorance. The challenge facing the second group of the Sunni scholars emerges a little earlier, in that there was a gap between the lifetime of two successors, e.g., Ibn Zubayr and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and also the last successor enumerated by them died in the mid-second century and thereafter would emerge the absence of the Imam and successor lasting to the end of the world.

- 4.6. Linguistic Features of the term *Khalīfah* (‘Successor’). Mention is made in the *riwāyahs* regarding the coming of the twelve successors of the Prophet. The term *khalīfah* is employed contextually in the sense of righteous successor and the forms *khalif*, *khālīfah*, *khawālif*, all deriving from the root *kh-l-f* imply ‘impious successor’ (*Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 9, p. 85). The form *khalaf* denotes righteous child or descendant, and the forms *khalf* and *khalīfah* are used in the sense of impious child or descendant (ibid, vol. 9, p. 84). The form *khalīfah* is used in the Holy Qur’an (2:30; 38:26) in the sense of righteous successor and *khalf* and its cognates are used in the sense of impious successor(s) (19:59; 9:93).

Attestations of *khalīfah* in the Prophetic sunnah imply that he never used the word to refer to tyrannical and wicked rulers, whereas the majority of the individuals enumerated by Sunni scholars as the successors to the Prophet (SAW) and the referents of the hadith of the twelve successors were Umayyad and ‘Abbasid rulers who were explicit enemies of the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt to the extent that they murdered some of them. It is indicated in consecutively transmitted *riwāyahs* narrated from the Prophet that loving the Ahl al-Bayt is a sign of faith and bearing animosity to them is the sign of hypocrisy and divisiveness (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb 33, Hadith 131; Sunan Tirmidhī, vol. 5, p. 298; Musnad Aḥmad, vol. 1, p. 84; Sunan Ibn Mājah, Introduction, Chapter 11; Suyūṭī, Ta’rīkh al-Khulafā’, p. 170; Ibn al-Jawzī, Ṣifāh al-Ṣafwah, vol. 1, p. 165*). Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī says, “We identified the hypocrites by their animosity towards ‘Alī (*Sunan Tirmidhī, vol. 5, p. 298*). ‘Umrān ibn Ḥuṣayn says, “The Prophet said to ‘Alī, ‘Nobody loves you but the believer and nobody dislikes you but the hypocrite” (*Sunan Nasā’ī, Kitāb al-Īmān, Chapters 19-20; Musnad Aḥmad, vol. 6, p. 292; Qāḍī ‘Iyād, al-Shifā’, vol. 2, p. 107; Haythamī, Majma’ al-Zawā’id, vol. 9, p. 181*). Umma Salamah says, “The Messenger of God (SAW) said, “Hypocrites do not like ‘Alī and believers are not his enemies (*Musnad Aḥmad, vol. 6, p. 292; Sunan Tirmidhī, vol. 5, p. 298*). Now, how a number of tyrannical, impious, and unwarrantedly innovating individuals be the referents of the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors to the Prophet (SAW)?

- 4.7. Immunity of the Imams to the Animosity of the Enemies. It is narrated in a number of the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors that the Imams are unaffected by the animosity of their enemies (‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr ‘Ayyāshī, vol.1, p. 253; Ṭabarānī, Mu’jam al-Kabīr, vol. 2, p. 256; Muttaqī Hindī, Kanz al-‘Ummāl, vol. 12, p. 33*). The said statement indicates that the Twelve Imam’s imamate does not necessarily imply worldly powers, but they are divinely designated, since worldly powers may be affected by the animosity of enemies and they may thus incur great loss.

4.8. The Qurayshī (or Hāshimī) Descent of All the Successors. It is narrated in the sound Prophetic *riwāyahs*, “Successorship will always be among the Quraysh even if there remain but two individuals in the world” (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 218, vol. 9, p. 78; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 1452; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, pp. 114, 117; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 93, 128; Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 3, p. 372). The same interpretation has been produced by Sunni compilers and commentators of the *Ṣiḥāḥ*. The said *riwāyahs* have been included by Bukhārī in the Chapter The Rulers of Quraysh Descent (*al-Umarā’ min Quraysh*), by Muslim in the Chapter The People Follow Quraysh and Successorship Rests with Quraysh (*al-Nās Tabā’ li-Quraysh wa ’l-Khilāfah fī Quraysh*), by Tirmidhī in the Chapter The Successors Will Be from the Quraysh to the Day of Resurrection (*Mā Jā’a An al-Khulafā’ min Quraysh ilā an Taqūm al-Sā’ah*), by Bayhaqī in the Chapter The Imams Are from Quraysh (*al-A’immah min Quraysh*), and by Muttaqī Hindī in the Chapter The Rulers Are from Quraysh (*al-Umarā’ min Quraysh*).

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī and Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ said, “The prerequisite of the Imam being from the Quraysh is unanimously maintained by the scholars and they hold that it is a matter of consensus (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 119). The same theme is attested in the Sunni sources as well, e.g., Ibn Ḥazm (*al-Muḥallā*, vol. 9, p. 359), al-Zabīdī (*Ithāf Ṣadah al-Muttaqīn*, vol. 2, p. 231), Kirmānī (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 117), Nawawī (*Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 12, pp. 441-443), and Mubārakfūrī (*Tuḥfah al-Aḥwadhī*, vol. 6, p. 481).

The said scholars also include the said *riwāyahs* alongs with those regarding the twelve successors in the same chapter, seemingly implying that they believed in their Qurayshī descent and that one of them lives to indicate the prerequisite of Qurayshī descent for successorship, as attested in the *riwāyahs*, and they serve as the referents of the said *riwāyahs*. The Prophetic *riwāyahs* and as a consequence, the views held by the Sunni scholars indicate that it is an obligation incumbent on Muslims to follow at all times an Imam of Qurayshī descent. However, the approach adopted by the Sunni scholars to interpreting the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors suffers from a shortcoming – centuries have passed wherein they had no such obligation, since, according to their approach, the era of the twelve successors to the Prophet (SAW) came to an end in the mid-second Islamic century.

It is to be noted in passing that in a number of the narrations of the said *riwāyahs*, the clause “They are entirely from Banī Hāshim” is attested instead of “They are entirely from Quraysh” (Qundūzī al-Ḥanafī, *Yanābī’ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 2, p. 533). The narration is not that strong in terms of transmission chains, but it is implied in a number of reliable Sunni sources, instances of which are as follows.

4.8.1. The Banū Hāshim family are superior, in possessing merits, to other Quraysh families. It is narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) on the authority of Wāthilah ibn Asqa’, “God chose Kinānah from the descendants of Ismā’īl, from Kinānah the Quraysh, from Quraysh the Banū Hāshim, and me from Banī Hāshim” (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 1782; *Sunan Tirmidhī*, vol. 5, p. 583; *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 4, p. 107; al-Bukhārī, *Ta’rīkh al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, p. 4; Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. 8, p. 301, vol. 20, p. 203). Nawawī says, “Our friends have inferred from this hadith

that non-Qurayshī Arabs are not on a par with the Quraysh, in that non-Banū Hashim from the Quraysh do not equal the Banū Hāshim (al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 15, p. 41). ‘Alī (AS) is also narrated as saying, “The [twelve] Imams are all from the Quraysh whose tree has been planted in the family of Banū Hāshim. The exalted rank of guardianship (*wilāyah*) and imamate is above others and those laying claim to leadership are not qualified to assume such position (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 144, p. 264).

4.8.2. The *riwāyah* of the twelve successors falls into two clauses: the hadith “There will be twelve successors to me” which was clearly heard from the Prophet (SAW) by the narrator. however, the second clause, i.e., “They are all from the Quraysh” was not heard by the narrator owing to the clamor; as a result, he asked other attendees who informed him that the Prophet had said, “They are all from the Quraysh.” There are certain points in different narrations of the *riwāyahs* that cast doubt on the genuineness of the clause “They are all from the Quraysh” and they corroborate the verity of the clause “They are all from Banī Hāshim.” Some of them are as follows.

4.8.2.1. According to a narration of the *riwāyah*, “I heard the Prophet (SAW) saying, “There will be twelve leaders” and he said something that I missed, and some people thought that he had said “They are all from the Quraysh”¹ (al-Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 249, Hadith 2044). The narration in question clearly indicates that the clause “They are all from the Quraysh was not heard from the Prophet (SAW), but a number of Qurayshī immigrants had imagined that it was the second clause of the hadith.

4.8.2.2. According to another narration of the hadith in question, “I heard from the Messenger of God, saying, “There will be twelve treasures from the Quraysh who will not be affected from the animosity of their enemies,” ‘then I turned around and saw that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was present and he confirmed the genuineness of what I had heard” (al-Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 256; al-Ḥaythamī, *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id*, vol. 5, p. 345). Therefore, it could be safely argued that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb had said to the narrator, Jābir ibn Samurah, that the second clause had been “They are all from the Quraysh.”

4.8.2.3. Hadith narrators have narrated certain points from Jābir ibn Samurah regarding his not having had heard the second clause.

4.8.2.3.1. It is reported by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Ṭabarānī, “The people were clamorous and talked” (*Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 5, p. 99; al-Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 196).

4.8.2.3.2. It is reported by Muslim and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, “He said something that I failed to hear by the people’s interference [clamor]” (Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 1453; *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 5, pp. 98, 101).

4.8.2.3.3. Aḥmad reports elsewhere, “The people were arising and sitting all the time” (*Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 5, pp. 93, 99), as a consequence, Jabir failed to hear the second clause.

Accordingly, Jābir failed to hear the second clause of the Prophet’s words owing to the above factors. The Qurayshī immigrants and their likeminded supporters had been upset by the Prophet’s words and they made an attempt to impede others from hearing the Prophet’s words by the attendees. Had the Prophet said, “They are all from the Quraysh,” the Qurayshīs and their likeminded supporters would not have been upset, but they could have rejoiced by the Prophet’s confirmation of their successorship to

him. Accordingly, the second clause must have been “They are all from Banī Hāshim,” which led Shaykh Sulaymān al-Qundūzī al-Ḥanafī to prefer the version with the clause “They are all from Banī Hāshim” (Qundūzī, *Yanābī‘ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 2, p. 535, with slight changes in wording).

- 4.9. The Twelve Successors’ Descent from the Prophet (SAW). Citing the Torah, Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī writes, “It was upon the birth of Ismā‘īl that God thus revealed and bore Ibrāhīm the tidings, “I answered your prayer about Ismā‘īl and made him a blessing and increased the number of his descendants. There will be twelve great figures.” Ibn Kathīr says, “The twelve outstanding individuals are the twelve rightly guided successors whose glad tidings were brought by the Prophet (SAW), as narrated by Jābir ibn Samurah (Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-Nihāyah*, vol. 1, p. 177). He writes elsewhere, “God revealed to Ibrāhīm, “I made Ismā‘īl a blessing, endeared him, increased the number of his descendants, made Muḥammad from among his descendants, and designated twelve Imams from Muḥammad’s descendants” (ibid, vol. 6, p. 199). The Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (SAW) who are his successors, as clearly indicated in God’s tidings to Ibrāhīm, are all his descendants and this qualification is exclusively possessed by the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt (AS).
- 4.10. Divine Designation of Imam al-Mahdī. The Promised Imam al-Mahdī (AS), according to the *riwāyahs* narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) is one of the successors to the Prophet and one of the leaders of the Islamic ummah (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 1361, vol. 4, pp. 2234-2235). A number of Sunni scholars have also enumerated in their *riwāyahs* the Promised Imam al-Mahdī as one of the twelve successors to the Messenger of God as the Prophet had brought the glad tidings of their successorship (Abū Dā‘ūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dā‘ūd*, vol. 4, p. 107; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Nihāyah fī ‘l-Malāḥim wa ‘l-Fitan*, vol. 1, p. 9; Suyūṭī, *Ta‘rīkh al-Khulafā’*, pp. 10-12). As clearly indicated in the sound *riwāyahs* narrated from the Prophet (SAW), Imam al-Mahdī’s designation is divine, rather than by the people. The Sunni scholars of hadith have narrated from the Prophet on the authority of ‘Alī (AS), “Even if there remains one single day in this world, a man from our Ahl al-Bayt will be divinely designated to administer justice in the world when it brims over with injustice” (*Sunan Abī Dā‘ūd*, vol. 4, p. 107; *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 1, p. 99; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, vol. 15, p. 84; Ibn Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-Uṣūl*, vol. 10, p. 330). A question arises here: How may the last successor to the Prophet be divinely designated and the people be unable to select him, but the first eleven successors be selected by the people?
- 4.11. Simultaneity of the True Successors and the False Rulers. It is clearly indicated in the *riwāyahs* narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) regarding imamate and successorship that two series of successors and rulers will simultaneously follow him: the true successors and the false rulers. The former are the twelve successors treated in this study. It is narrated from the Messenger of God (SAW) in other sound *riwāyahs* that rulers will come after him, before long, that weaken the establishment of daily prayers (*ṣalāh*; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 448; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu‘jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, p. 151; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p. 169), turning away from the divine guidance provided by the Prophetic sunnah and failing to follow his commands (al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī, *Mustadrak*, vol. 1, p. 79; Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb*

wa 'l-Tarhīb, vol. 3, p. 193; al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol. 5, p. 445). They are impious and unworthy of serving as the imam in congregation prayers (Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 6, p. 396; *Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, p. 182; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, vol. 1, p. 448; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p. 169; al-Haythamī, vol. 2, p. 81), their words are wise but their hearts reek of a smell fouler than a decomposing carcass, their unwarranted innovations in religious affairs are worse than those of disbelievers (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 499; Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, pp. 177, 183; al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol. 5, p. 424), and their abode will be Hell (Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḫ Baghdād*, vol. 2, p. 362; *Sunan Tirmidhī*, vol. 3, p. 358; Mundhirī, vol. 3, p. 195).

The various readings, e.g., “There will be after me,” “There will be rulers after me,” and “Rulers will come after me,” attested in the *riwāyahs* indicate that the events will happen in near future and the Companions of the Prophet, to whom they were addressed, will be the contemporaries of some of those rulers who were clearly identified by a number of the Companions (al-Ḥākim al-Nīshāburī, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 357) and some Sunni scholars (Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 13, p. 214) with the referents of the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors to the Messenger of God (SAW)! How could the individuals explicitly mentioned by the Messenger of God (SAW) to be weakening the establishment of daily prayers, fabricators, tyrannical, suppressing the sunnah, unwarrantedly innovating in religious affairs, worse than disbelievers, and opponents of the Qur’an be qualified to succeed the Prophet (SAW)?

- 4.12. Correspondence of the Number of the Successors with Their Referents. Making mention of the twelve successors by the Prophet (SAW) is a way of specifying the exact number as well as identifying the referents, otherwise, it would have been in vain to specify simply the number and thereby causing unclarity and discord among the scholars and Muslims. Accordingly, specification of the number demonstrates that the Prophet referred to specific individuals who are designated for carrying out particular missions in line with those of the Prophet (SAW) and leading the Islamic society. It goes without saying that when the Messenger of God (SAW) specifies the number and attributes of his successors and the leaders of the ummah, there would be no sense in specifying the referents of the Sunni scholars so that they may identify, based on their own proclivities, them as a number of Umayyad and ‘Abbasid rulers as the successors to the Prophet and the leaders of the ummah.
5. Results of the Study. The Sunni scholars have not produced reliable evidence in identifying the referents of the twelve successors with Umayyad and ‘Abbasid rulers and unfounded arguments are unacceptable irrespective of the identity of the one who provides them. Considering the reliable sources of the ummah, the interpretations produced by the Sunni scholars regarding the *riwāyahs* of the twelve successors are unacceptable, since, when we take into account the history of Islamic caliphate, we do not find it in line with the qualifications specified in the said *riwāyahs* – a series of twelve leaders of the umma who are the successors to the Prophet to the last day of the world, pious leaders from the descendants of the Prophet (SAW), including the Promised Imam al-Mahdī (AS) who is divinely designated, the leaders whose successorship will last to the last day of the world. The Umayyad rulers, identified by the Sunni scholars

as the referents implied by the *riwāyahs* regarding the twelve successors, as explicitly stated by the Companions of the Prophet and the Sunni scholars, were impious, tyrannical, illiterate, and unqualified to succeed the Messenger of God (SAW). The qualifications, e.g., knowledge and justice, specified for the successors to the Prophet are to be exclusively identified with the Imāmī Shia perspective according to which the twelve Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (SAW) are the true referents of *riwāyahs* regarding successorship to the Messenger of God.

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NOTES

1. Arabic text: يكون اثناعشر اميراً، ثم تكلم بشئ لم اسمعه فزعم القوم، انه قال: كلهم من قریش