


From Khilāfah to ‘Ahd: A Qur’anic Model of Conceptual Transformation

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Introduction

In Qur’anic studies, tracing the developmental trajectory of the concepts of khilāfah, ‘ahd, and imāmah is of foundational significance. In verse 30 of Sūrat al-Baqarah, khilāfah appears as the initial representation of divine vicegerency, while verse 124 introduces imāmah as a divine ‘ahd granted only to the worthy. This transition from khilāfah to imāmah is also evident in the life of Ibrāhīm (as). Using qualitative analysis supported by MAXQDA, the present study examines verses 30–124 of Sūrat al-Baqarah. These verses contain 2,011 words, including 179 hapax legomena (1.8% of all rare Qur’anic vocabulary), a rate 1.7 times higher than average. This high concentration of specialized vocabulary underscores the linguistic and conceptual significance of this section. The study aims to uncover the Qur’anic model of progression from khilāfah to ‘ahd, emphasizing the central role of Qur’anic vocabulary and dialogue patterns in shaping this conceptual evolution.

Methodology

The study seeks to extract the trajectory from *khilāfah* to *‘ahd* directly from Qur’anic discourse. As a grounded-theory investigation oriented toward practical application, the study’s scope includes:

- **Temporal domain:** the Prophetic era, the period of the Imams (as) as true interpreters of the Qur’an, and subsequent scholarly exegetical tradition;
- **Spatial domain:** University of Tehran, Faculty of Theology;
- **Topical domain:** *khilāfah* and *imāmah*.

The corpus-Qur’anic verses and related exegesis-operates as the dataset through which the model is derived. The grounded-analysis method proceeds through:

1. Inputting textual data into MAXQDA for qualitative analysis;
2. Extracting conceptual categories;
3. Open coding and identifying all thematic nodes.

Findings

1. Patterns of Dialogue:

The most prominent dialogical interactions include: God with Mūsā (as); Mūsā with the Children of Israel; God with the Jews; God with the angels; and God with Ādam (as). These dialogues structure the conceptual movement from *khilāfah* to *‘ahd*.

2. Centrality of Divine Testing:

The Qur’anic pattern emphasizes divine dialogue coupled with trial and examination as the primary mechanism guiding the transition from *khilāfah* to *‘ahd*.



Conclusion

1. Conceptual Transformation from *Khilāfah* to 'Ahd

- *Khilāfah* in the Qur'an begins as a role of divine representation (2:30) without explicit conditions.
- *Imāmah* ('*ahd*) in 2:124 is presented as a divine covenant granted only after trial and demonstration of worthiness, marked by qualities such as faith, knowledge, piety, and freedom from injustice.
- This shift marks an evolution from a general human responsibility to a more select, divinely sanctioned mandate.

2. Essential Conditions for Attaining the 'Ahd

- The journey from *khilāfah* to *imāmah* requires passing divine tests.
- Key factors include faith, piety, divinely granted knowledge, striving, steadfastness, and the absence of injustice.
- Without these traits, *khilāfah* remains merely nominal and does not rise to the level of divine '*ahd*.

3. Role of Community and Followers

- Community acceptance and obedience to divinely guided leaders are prerequisites for achieving the model.
- Rejecting tyrannical authority and embracing divine guardianship are essential components.

4. Distinction Between Granted and True (Divine) *Khilāfah*

- Some individuals may hold positions of leadership, yet lack divine approval (e.g., Pharaoh, Nimrod).
- True *khilāfah* becomes divine '*ahd* only when combined with justice and adherence to divine law.

5. Socio-political Implications of the Model

- This conceptual trajectory has significant implications for Islamic governance.
- A society aligned with '*ahd* enjoys stability, justice, and security, whereas *khilāfah* without '*ahd* leads to oppression.
- The model thus provides a criterion for evaluating legitimacy and acceptability of governance from a Qur'anic perspective.

Keywords

Qur'an, divine khilāfah, Qur'anic dialogue patterns, qawl, '*ahd*.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with research ethics. The authors observed the ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scholarly research, and this is confirmed by all of them.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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