

In Praise of the Few

Studies in Shi'i Thought and History

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CHAPTER 22

The Abū Baṣīr Tradition: Qur'anic Verses on the Merits of the Shi'a

Al-Kulaynī's *al-Rawḍa*—the eighth and last volume of his renowned *al-Kāfi*—contains an account of a meeting between the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and his follower Abū Baṣīr. The account begins with an introductory passage, in which Abū Baṣīr tells the Imam that, though he is old and approaching death, he remains ignorant of his fate in the next world. The Imam reassures him that no believer will be punished by God, adding: "This (exemption from punishment) applies only to you (i.e., the Shi'a), and not to the rest of mankind". Next Abū Baṣīr complains about the term "Rāfiḍa" by which the Shi'a are addressed by their enemies. Abū Baṣīr takes it to be a term of abuse, but the Imam explains that it is in fact an honorific.¹ He goes on to tell Abū Baṣīr that since the Shi'a alone follow the *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet), God will accept the good deeds of the righteous among them and will forgive the sins of those among them who do evil. The Imam then asks: "Abū Muḥammad, have I made you happy (*hal sarartuka*)?" To which Abū Baṣīr replies: "May I be made your ransom, tell me more (*ju'iltu fidāka zidnī*)!" This leads to the main part of the account, in which the Imam cites ten different passages from the Qur'an and explains how each one relates to the Shi'a. Many of these passages are introduced with the formula: "God has mentioned you in His book (*la-qaḍ dha-karakum allāh fī kitābihī*)". Each explanation is followed by the Imam asking: "Have I made you happy?" and Abū Baṣīr responding with "May I be made your ransom, tell me more!" In conclusion, the Imam makes two pronouncements. First, he says that every verse which mentions the inhabitants of Paradise refers to the Imāms and their Shi'a, and every verse which mentions the inhabitants of Hell refers to the enemies and opponents of the Imāms and their Shi'a. Second, only the Imāms and their Shi'a belong to Abraham's religion (*milla*).²

* I am grateful to Frank Stewart for his helpful comments on this article.

- 1 For more on this see Chapter 8 of the present volume, "The Term 'Rāfiḍa' in Imāmī Shi'i Usage".
- 2 For similar pronouncements on Abraham's religion see, for example, Barqī, *Kitāb al-Mahāsīn*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Muḥaddith (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1950), 1147, nos. 54–56 > (i.e., quoted in) Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1956–74), 68:87–89, nos. 15–17; Furāt b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfi*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzīmī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Nu'mān, 1992), 2:377, no. 506 > Majlisi, 68:98, no. 4; Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*

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