

## **An Interpretive Investigation of the Geographical Expanse of Prophets' Appointment in the Warning Verses**

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### **Abstract**

The appearance of some qur'ānic verses implies the inclusion of all places of the earth by the Divine Revelation. However, this implication disagrees with the historical propositions. This disagreement can be investigated either historically or interpretively (i.e. without the consideration of historical reports). This article adopts the second approach and examines the respective qur'ānic verses, while taking for granted the historical propositions on the non-inclusiveness of the divine revelation. The inspection of the three terms "nadhīr", "umma", and "rasūl" in the related verses indicates that there is no contradiction between the qur'ānic verses and the accepted historical facts.

### **Keywords**

Divine Revelation inclusiveness, Contradiction between the Qur'ān and history, The Qur'ān and science, Nadhīr, Umma, Rasūl.

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## **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the disagreement between the Qur'ān or any other sacred Scripture and the robust and constant scientific facts – either real facts or the ones in the minds of the readers – damages the authoritativeness of that Scripture.

Nonetheless, it seems that this quality does not exist in some qur'ānic verses when it comes to the historical inclusiveness of the prophets' appointment. According to the simple appearance of these verses, God has sent a prophet to every land and its people. However, on the other hand, there are historical reports that contradict this qur'ānic proposition, because according to them, no prophet has been mentioned for them. Therefore, either the words of scientists and historians are not definite or the referent or appearance of the verse is something else. Otherwise, this would be a plain disagreement between the qur'ānic text and the confirmed human facts which will bring to mind an outstanding fault with the Qur'ān that needs to be responded.

In this article, we assume that the inclusiveness of prophethood is not obligatory. Moreover, we ignore the rational, scientific, and historical responses and assume the certainty and necessity of history. Then, based on such a basis, we set out to make an interpretive investigation of these verses.

### **The concept of “nadhīr”**

In the verse 24 of the Creator chapter we read: “Verily We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past).” (Qur'ān 35:24).

According to this verse, no nation has been there without a “nadhīr” (warner). With regard to the word *nadhīr* in this verse, it might be said that linguistically viewed, this word does not imply the word “prophet” at all, and if it has been taken in the past to mean so, it has been a mistake by the translator or interpreter. Therefore, this is one of the *mutashābih* (ambiguous) verses of the Qur'ān which should be interpreted according to the confirmed facts.

A careful inspection of this word shows that *nadhīr* is more general than the word “*rasūl*” (messenger), because people such as *Luqmān the Wise* or *Dhul-Qarnayn* were *nadhīr* but (based on the common opinion) they were not prophets. The human reason and conscience are also *nadhīr*. Therefore, as 'Allāma *Mughniya* has said: “The intention of the words *rasūl*, *nadhīr*, and *shahīd* in suchlike verses is any phenomena which functions as the ultimate argumentation; examples include the presence of a prophet, a revealed Scripture, a reformist leader, or an true rational verdict on which no

two soundly wise people disagree (such as the badness of oppression or breach of promise, or goodness of justice and trustworthiness” (Mughniya, 2003, vol. 6: 288). He then adds that there is no disagreement between the aforementioned Qur’ān 35:24 – which proves the existence of a *nadhīr* in every nation – and the verse 44 of the Saba’ chapter which says: “... Nor sent messengers to them before thee as Warners” (Qur’ān 34:44), because in the first verse, any *nadhīr* can be prophet or non-prophet, but in the second verse, it only includes a sent prophet. That is to say, the second verse asserts that no prophet was sent for the people of Ḥijāz before Islam, but there were *nadhīrs* such as reason, the innate disposition, etc. at their disposal, and this has been the ultimate argumentation for them. However, if the warner in the first verse is taken to specifically mean a prophet, there will be a disagreement between the two verses (ibid.).

This interpretation is also confirmed by some narrations, including what has been noted in the noble book *Nahj al-balāgha*: “... And the Pure God did not abandon His creatures without a sent prophet, or a revealed book, or a necessary sign, or a robust path!” (*Nahj al-balāgha*, 1993: 44), because the phrases in this narration are connected together with the word “*Aw*” (or).

The assumed contradiction between the Qur’ān and the historical facts will be solved based on what we said. However, ignoring such narrations and limiting ourselves merely to the word “*nadhīr*” is against the appearance of the Qur’ān, because although some researchers stipulate that “*nadhīr*” in the Qur’ān is also attributed to God, prophet, Scripture, and non-human (Muṣṭafawī, 1982, vol. 10: 273; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991: 797), the word “*nadhīr*” in the common language of the Qur’ān mainly refers to “a prophet from among the prophets”. This word has been mentioned in forty other verses, too, and certainly in most cases is used to mean a prophet from among the prophets (Qur’ān 2:119; 7:184; 11:2).

In the light of this vast usage for a specific instance, it is highly implausible that in this verse, the meaning of this term is anything other than “a prophet”, because according to the scholars of the basics of theology, “The frequent use of a word in a certain meaning leads to taking that word to imply that meaning” (Jazāyirī, 1991, vol. 3: 729; Nā’īnī, 1991, vol. 1: 532). This is true for our discussion. That is to say, the frequent use of the word “*nadhīr*” in the Qur’ān to mean a prophet from among the prophets has made this term in this verse to imply this meaning. In addition to these indications, there is an indication in the verse that strengthens our urge to mean the term in the aforementioned way, because at the beginning of the Qur’ān 35:24, this term is used for the Prophet of Allāh (s): “Verily We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner,” and God continues, “And

there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past).” Due to the use of this term to refer to the Prophet of Islam (s) at the beginning of this verse, it is implausible that it has been used to mean anything other than the Prophet at the end of the verse; rather, the requirement of the unity of linguistic context is that the second “nadhīr” be used to refer to the Prophet or someone at his status such as his trustee or an Imām (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1997, vol. 2: 1025; Ḥusaynī Shīrāzī, 2002, vol. 1: 449).

To answer this doubt, it can be said that here the word *nadhīr* is to denote its kind or to say that the position of the instance is different from the position of the concept, and the Qur’ān should never be limited to the meaning of the instance.

However, as it was proved, it is possible to take the word *nadhīr* in its general meaning, even if such an interpretation is against the appearance of the word, because such a disagreement can be overcome as it is possible to take the word in a meaning other than what comes to the audience’s mind, especially in this verse in which this meaning agrees with the real and primary denotative meaning and is also confirmed by some sound narrations. Since the foregoing doubt (i.e. the contradiction between the meaning of the verses and the historical data) is an intellectual one, the mere possibility dissolves the doubt, because in the intellectual discussions, the principle is that “Whenever a possibility is raised against the argument, that argument is nullified.”

However, we assume that *nadhīr* specifically refers to the prophet and the vicegerent of the prophet and continue our inspection.

According to this assumption that *nadhīr* means prophet, prophets have different dimensions and stations, and although they are the same with regard to the necessity of being obeyed, they are not equal with regard to their status, the preaching scope, and the manner of preaching. Some of them have an exclusive book or religion, but most of them preach the book or religion of another prophet (Kulaynī, 1946, vol. 1: 176). Some of them have miracles but most of them don’t have any miracle (Ma’rifat, 2007, vol. 4: 28). Therefore, we can only accept the famous assertion of the rational theologians “If it was, it would manifest and would be accessible” about some of the prophets and say that their existence is not something that can be hidden in the history. However, this assertion is not true about most of them who did not have an exclusive book, an exclusive religion, or a vast preaching region. So, the lack of any reports on the existence of a prophet in some geographical locations might be due to the point that those lands did not have a prophet with an exclusive book or religion; however, it is possible

that they have had one or some prophets who have been the vicegerent of a prophet or the preacher of a religion but did not have an exclusive book, religion, or miracle, have had a preaching region as small as a village, or have had a short preaching time and have been quickly denied or killed by their people. This is mentioned in a narration: "Nations were presented to me. There was a prophet with who was a small group [of people] and there was another prophet with who a man walked, and there was a prophet who was going by himself. Those prophets who were going by themselves were those who were not responded to by any member of their nation." The content of this diffused narration has been mentioned in the early Sunnī texts and has been narrated and confirmed by later scholars (Bukhārī, 1987, vol. 5: 2157 & 2396; Qushayrī Nayshābūrī, n.d., vol. 1: 199; Tamīmī Bustī, 1993, vol. 14: 339; Ibn Ḥanbal, n.d., vol. 1: 271; Kūfī, 1988, vol. 5: 53; Ḥamīdī, 2002, vol. 2: 41; Ṭabarānī, 1984, vol. 18: 23; Abū Naʿīm Isbahānī, 1985, vol. 4: 302; Bayhaqī, 1989, vol. 2: 57). Although this narration has not been mentioned in the Shīʿa narration collections, the justification of a diffused narration which has been narrated by the Twelver Shīʿa which says that there have been 124 thousand prophets (Ṣaffār, 1984, vol. 1: 121; Ṣadūq, 1992, vol. 4: 180; id., 1997: 236; id., 1983, vol. 2: 641; Khaṣībī, 1998: 337) is congruent with the content of the foregoing narration mentioned by Sunnī scholars.

This assumption gets stronger when we contemplate on the qurʿānic verses.

1. According to some verses, most of the prophets were either quickly killed or strongly denied by their nation. An example is this verse, "And every People plotted against their prophet, to seize him [and bother him]" (Qurʿān 40:5).

2. Even if the word *nadhīr* in the Qurʿān appears to mean the prophet, a reflection on the Qurʿān shows how the prophets differed in their manner of preaching, because some of them have been described for their clarity of warning and admonition. For example, we read about Prophet Noah (a) that he has been an open warner: "We sent Noah to his people (with a mission): 'I have come to you with a Clear Warning'" (Qurʿān 11:25). And since the basic function of conditions is exclusion (of incongruent cases), suchlike statements indicate the exclusion of warners and non-explaining prophets. Therefore, the prophets might be of two types in one aspect:

1. Prophets who have had overt invitation and warning;
2. Prophets who had covert warning, such as the first three years of the mission of the Prophet of Islam (s).

Some narrations also confirm this understanding. An example is the content of the following narration, which has been narrated through various ways and chains of transmission from the Prophet of Allāh (s), the Commander of the Faithful (a), and other Imāms, and is a diffused narration: “The land is not void of one who stands for the signs of God for the cause of God, no matter if he is overt and known or scared and hidden, so that God’s overt signs and evidences do not get fade” (Ṭūsī, 1990: 221; Mufīd, 1992: 322; Ṭabrisī, 1983, vol. 1: 69; Ibn Shu’ba Ḥarrānī, 1984: 169; Aḥsā’ī, 1985, vol. 4: 127; Majlisī, 1984, vol. 1: 193, vol. 23: 45, vol. 37: 27, vol. 51: 211).

This understanding of these verses is congruent with the verses that express the exclusive responsibility of the prophets to overt invitation (Qur’ān 16:35; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 64:12), because the word rasūl is more specific than nabī, muḥaddith, and Imām (Kulaynī, 1946, vol. 1: 176).

### **The concept of “umma”**

Another important word in this regard is “umma”. Today, the words “umma” and “millat” are used in Persian as “people” or “a group of people”, and basically for the people of a certain land. However, it should be noted that there are numerous words which have similar appearance but different meanings in the two languages or Persian and Arabic. This moves us to deeply revise and examine the meaning of umma. First, we carefully inspect the various meanings and functions of this word in the noble Qur’ān itself.

First meaning: Some people who have a unifying rope. These groups are of different sizes.

1. A group is sometimes so large that includes all people of the world, such as “Mankind was one single nation” (Qur’ān 2:213), because they were aligned in their basic beliefs. A similar view is expressed in other instances (Qur’ān 5:48; 10:19; 11:118; 16:93; 43:33).

In the aforementioned verse, umma cannot be assumed to have this meaning, because the indefiniteness of umma is not congruent with this meaning.

2. In some verses, this word has been used as the two large groups of human and jinn, that is, these two groups form two ummas. An example is “These are they against whom the word has proved true among nations of the jinn and the men that have already passed away before them” (Qur’ān 46:18), as well other verses such as Qur’ān 8:37 and Qur’ān 41:25.

According to this meaning of the word umma, too, there is no contradiction between these verses and the (supposedly true) historical facts, because the meaning of the verse will be then “No group of jinns or humans have been without a warner.” Of course, it should be noted that in the aforementioned noble verse, the adverbial phrase fihā (among them) is used

rather than *minhā* (from them), and this shows that there has been a warner for each of these nations intended by the verse, but that warner has not been necessarily from among the members of the same nation.

3. Sometimes *umma* means a group who obey the God's orders, and they are the opposite of a group who disobey His orders. An example is the verse "Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (will)" (Qur'ān 2:128). In this verse, the only unifying theme for this group is their obedience to the divine order rather than the similarity of land or time. Similarly, this word might have this very meaning in the foregoing verse. This way, the verse could be interpreted as: "No group of believers or disbelievers was left without a warner."

If the doubt is posed that the group who obey God do not need a warner and warning them is acquiring what has been previously acquired, we might assert that it is never so, and both groups need warner, because the believer group needs a warner to strengthen their faith and good habits and make them steady in the Right Path.

Therefore, this meaning not only does not disagree with the historical assumptions at all, but also agree with them and with reason, the Qur'ān, and *suuna*.

4. Another meaning of *umma* is a large group from the same race that goes back to the same ancestor and now involves numerous tribes and lands. For example, some scholars such as Ibn 'Āshūr have taken *umma* (people) in the verse "Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (will)" (ibid) this way (Ibn 'Āshūr, n.d., vol. 22: 152).

According to this meaning, the progeny of a human such as Noah or Ibrahim form a nation to the Resurrection Day without any spatial or temporal limitation, even if they are scattered throughout the world. Therefore, all humans who live up to the Resurrection Day can be divided into a few nations, because the ancestry of all humans goes back to Noah and the few people who were saved along with him. Therefore, it is not implausible to say that there have been one or even some prophets among every nation – when nation is defined so.

5. The word *umma* sometimes means a theist group who is distinct from others due to its members' belief in a prophet. An example is the verse "Thus, [as your qibla is a middle one] have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations" (Qur'ān 2:143).

According to this meaning of *umma*, the verse could be interpreted as "There has been no nation of the prophets' nations for whom a prophet has been sent!" There is no doubt that this word cannot have such a meaning in

this noble verse, because in addition to the acquisition of what has been previously acquired, it entails another problem, i.e. the priority of something over itself. If the referent of the word *nadhīr* is more general than the prophet and the trustee of a prophet, this meaning has no problem, because according to the rational indication, this word does not involve the prophet, and the meaning of the sentence is “There has been no people of a cardinal prophet with a religion who have not had a trustee.” This meaning agrees with the diffused narrations of the Twelver Shī‘a.

6. The word *umma* sometimes is attributed to a group the common point of which is the continuous undertaking of an action. An example is the verse “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity” (Qur’ān 3:104). Other similar verses include Qur’ān 3:110 and 113, 5:66, 6:108, 7:159, 164, and 181.

It is possible to assume this meaning for the word *umma* in this verse. That is to say, to interpret it as “God sent a prophet or *nadhīr* to any group who has set an action as its habit: one or some prophets to idolaters, some prophets to monotheists<sup>1</sup>, a prophet to those who use short weights (such as Prophet Shu‘ayb), a warner to homosexuals, a warner to usurers, and a person to each group of people who undertook a grand sin to warn them about the outcome of their act.” There is no doubt that in such a classification, the people who use short weight in any time or place all form one group, and the same is true for the members of any suchlike groups. Based on this meaning, too, the initial doubt was impressible from the very beginning and so there is no need to any solution.

In brief, a *nadhīr* has been sent for any corruption and misdeed to inform the human about its worldly and otherworldly consequences and provide them with the ultimate argumentation on that sin.

7. Sometimes *umma* means a group of people whose common point is their active involvement in undertaking an act rather than doing it as a habit. An example is a part of the Qur’ān’s story of Prophet Moses (a) which reads, “And when he arrived at the watering (place) in Madyan, he found there a group of men watering (their flocks)” (Qur’ān 28:23). There is no doubt that *umma* (a group of men) in this verse cannot mean this, because it is against conscience.

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1. It is noteworthy that this meaning agrees with what has been stipulated in the Old Testament, where it is asserted that the prophets sent to idolaters were different from the ones sent to the theists (Bible, n.d., Old Testament, 1 kings, vol. 18: 20 & 40).



8. This group is sometimes so expansive that it regards every kind of animals (Qur'ān 6:38). The discussion of this meaning is clear and does not need further explanation.

9. The word *umma* can also mean a group of people whose common point is the sameness of their land. *Umma* has not been used in any qur'ānic verse in this meaning, and if one claims that although it has not been used in other verses in this meaning, it might be implied in the three verses previously examined. The answer is that firstly, this is the beginning of the discourse, and its confirmation needs indications. It also is against the appearance of the qur'ānic text, because the Qur'ān uses the words *Sha'b* and *Ahl al-Qarya* for this meaning (q.v. Qur'ān 7:96, 49:13). Secondly, even if we assume this meaning for the word *umma*, still there is no disagreement between these verses and the common historical facts, because it is not necessary for *nadhīr* to be from *umma* itself; rather, what is needed is that the words of that prophet or his trustee to address that *umma*, and there is no need for the words of that divine person to be delivered to each and every person of every land, because of the existence of the phrase "*fīhā*" (among them) rather than "*minhā*" (from them). According to 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, not only such a thing is not necessary, but also it is incongruent with the worldly means that always are in conflict with each other. He says: "As the word (*minhā*) has not been used in this verse, it can be construed that the mere addressing of a prophet's invitation to the people of a land is enough and it is not necessary for the message to be delivered to each and every individual. If it is delivered to them, the ultimate argumentation is provided; otherwise, they are among the oppressed and [the Just] God will address their case" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 17: 37).

Similarly, Rāghib refers to these meanings and says: "Umma is any group gathered due to a common point, no matter if that common point is religion and belief, location, land, or time and era; also, it makes no difference if that common point is volitional or not" (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991: 87).

The second meaning: this word has been sometimes taken to mean "leader", "Imām", or "a man of high dignity". An example is the verse "Abraham was (equal to) a nation, obedient to Allah," (Qur'ān :120) (Maybudī, 1993, vol. 5: 458; Mūsawī Hamidānī, 1996, vol. 12: 520; Abū al-Faṭḥ Rāzī, 1988, vol. 12: 95; Āyafī, 1996: 281; Ashrafī Tabrīzī, 2002: 281; Barzī, 1962: 281; Pāyanda, n.d.: 232; Pūr Jawādī, 1993: 280; Khājawī, 1989: 107; Sha'rānī, 1996: 259; Ṭāhirī Qazwīnī, 2002: 281; Fārsī, 1991: 563; Fūlādward, 1994: 281).

But it seems that this one is not among the real meanings of the word *umma*; rather, it is a metaphorical use of the word. In the same way that the

sentence “Zayd is a lion” means Zayd is so brave that he might be claimed to be really a lion, it can be said that Ibrahim is so great that he is an umma by himself.

At any rate, there is no doubt that this word cannot be taken to mean metaphorically in the foregoing verse.

The third meaning: umma sometimes means belief and religion. An example is the verse: “Nay! they say: ‘We found our fathers following a certain religion [umma]’” (Qur’ān 43:22).

There is no problem with this meaning of the word umma, either, because the meaning of the verse will be: “There is not religion and belief unless there has been sent a warner about it”; that is to say, there has been sent a warner or a prophet for various beliefs so as to warn and admonish the human about it. If the belief is true, this warning is an emphasis and a means to prevent deviation. On the other hand, if the belief is untrue, he can warn against it and make its corruptness clear to people through discussion and argumentation. Therefore, God has sent warning and guidance with regard to wrong beliefs such as idolatry, sun worship, moon worship, star worship, jinn worship, human worship, and polytheism.

If it is said that the appropriate preposition for this meaning is “lām” (for) rather than “fī” (in; among), we might say that one of the true meanings of “fī” is causation, and can be translated in to “in order to” or “about”. This meaning can be found in numerous verses of the Qur’ān, such as the Qur’ān 12:32 and 24:14. This meaning has also been used in traditions, too. An example is “A woman was sent into the Hell because of imprisoning a cat” (Ṭurayhī, 1997, vol. 1: 334). Another meaning of “fī” which is congruent with this meaning of the verse is “companionship”; of course, here spiritual companionship is intended. Other verses of the Qur’ān also use this meaning of “fī”, such as the Qur’ān 7:36 and 28:79 (Anṣārī, 2000, vol. 1: 223-224).

It might be asked “How does sending a warner to lower the status of a wrong belief of some people in a certain place or time benefit other people?”

The answer is that the humans figure out the triviality of all these wrong beliefs by their internal prophet – i.e. their id and wisdom – and the role of prophets here is wiping the dusts off the humans’ wisdom and awakening their id. Their advent is a divine grace and the God’s providence is not to send a separate warner to each and every place, time, and individual, so as not to weaken the reflection and the need to listen to the call of the innate disposition. The Commander of the Faithful (a) says in this regard: “Then He appointed His messengers among them and sent his prophets one after another to ask for help for their creation covenant (innate disposition) and to

remind them of His forgotten grace ... and provoke their buried wisdom ...” (Nahj al-balagha, 1993: 44).

The fourth meaning: another meaning of umma is time and era. An example is the term “a definite time” in the verse “If We delay the penalty for them for a definite term, they are sure to say ...” (Qur’ān 11:8) and “after a space of time” in the verse “One of the two (who had been in prison) and who now bethought him after (so long) a space of time” (Qur’ān 12:45).

It seems that this meaning poses no problem to the interpretation of the foregoing verse, because according to this meaning, that verse is not related to the lands and their inhabitants and rather aims at expressing something else; i.e. there has been no era with no warning in it. Therefore, there has always been a warner (a prophet or his vicegerent) in every era that has been the proof of God on the earth, and the earth has never been void of the proof and vicegerent of God from the time the humans have been wise and legally competent.

It might be said that according to the commonly accepted principle in philosophy, “The ruling for similar things is the same” (Ṭūsī, 1997, vol. 2: 56; Sajjādī, 2001: 124; id., 1995, vol. 1: 419; Shīrāzī, 1981, vol. 1: 401 & vol. 4: 125; id.: 29). This custom is present in all eras and includes the eras after the Prophet of Islam (s), too. Therefore, the verse is an evidence for the Shī‘a beliefs about Islam. So, there should be a nadhīr in this era, too, and because according to definite evidences, there will come no prophet after the Prophet of Islam, the referent for that warner will be the trustee and vicegerent of the Prophet (s). This trustee and vicegerent should have all qualities of the Prophet (s) except for prophetic revelation so that – as the Qur’ān says – he can be described by the word nadhīr. Therefore, in our era, too, there exists such a trustee and vicegerent for the Prophet (s).

In our viewpoint, this meaning of the word umma is one of the best possibilities about the foregoing verse which poses no contradiction between this verse and the commonly believed historical facts.

### **The concept of “rasūl”**

There are two more verses similar to the verse examined in this article: “For We assuredly sent amongst every People a messenger, (with the Command), “Serve Allah, and eschew Evil”: of the People were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)” (Qur’ān 16:36) and “To every people (was sent) a messenger: when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged” (Qur’ān 10:47).

It might be said that the word “nadhīr” does not exist in these verses so that we can take it as the more general term including the Arch messenger and non-Arch messenger, the prophets and their trustees, relater, etc. Rather, the word rasūl (messenger) clearly refers to prophets; more particularly, it refers to some prophets but not all of them (Kulaynī, 1946, vol. 1: 176), especially the second verse which has mentioned a “rasūl” for every “umma”, and there is no doubt that there is no prophet in our era; rather, the highest possibility is the correct belief of the Shī‘a which states that today there exists a trustee of the Prophet. Therefore, undoubtedly the word “umma” in this verse cannot be taken as time so as to solve the problem like the way we did in the Qur’ān 35:24. As a result, even if we consider the problem in that verse as solved, the minor disagreement between the verse and the commonly accepted historical facts will get even stronger.

Nevertheless, the reality is that these two verses have no difference with the Qur’ān 35:24 in this regard, because if we take the word umma as “a specific group formed based on the commonality of land or race”, this problem might arise. However, this meaning is so implausible, because as we mentioned, almost nowhere in the Qur’ān the word “umma” has been used in this meaning. If today such a meaning comes to mind for this word, the reason is what we noted at the beginning of this discussion, and such an implication is certainly invalid. Rather, as we said, if we carefully consider these verses, we will understand that words such as “qarya”, “ahl al-qarya”, “balad”, “bilād”, and “sha‘b” are used for this meaning. Even in the contemporary Arabic, the word “sha‘b” is used for the people of any land. Moreover, even if this meaning is assumed, the ensuing problem can be solved based on what was quoted from *Al-Mizān*.

We can take the word “umma” in these two verses to mean time in different ways:

1. The trustee of a prophet has the same status as the prophet himself, and if the prophet is not among people at a time but his trustee is among them, it is as if the prophet himself is among them. This is similar to the relationship between the representative and the represented body in which the presence of the representative is the same as the presence of the represented body. However, the relationship between the trustee of a prophet and the prophet is much stronger than the relationship between the representative and the represented body, because the representative can be dismissed immediately if the represented body wants, but the trusteeship of the prophets’ trustees comes into effect by the divine order and is permanent.

2. The word rasūl in these two noble verses may not mean the common meaning of the word; rather, it might intend the literal meaning of it as

“messenger”, especially when we consider the point that the basic principle in the interpretation of the Qur’ān is the primary literal meaning, and the secondary narration-based meaning needs indications and evidences. For example, the famous exegetes have taken this word in the following verse to its literal meaning and have deemed the Trustworthy Gabriel as its referent: “Verily this is the word of a most honorable Messenger [the Trustworthy Gabriel]” (Qur’ān 81:19).

Moreover, in the following verses, the literal meaning of the word rasūl is intended: “He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make any one acquainted with His Mysteries, except a messenger whom He has chosen: and then He makes a band of watchers march before him and behind him” (Qur’ān 72:26-27), because verily this knowledge is not exclusive to the famous messengers, and it can be found in the prophets, the Infallible Imāms, and many archangels – though in different degrees.

Accepting the principle of “establishing words to account for the essence of meanings” and understanding the conditions based on indications, this aspect of the meaning of “rasūl” will get stronger, as it was the case with the word “nadhīr” which was previously discussed (q.v. Khumaynī: 2012).

3. Even if someone does not accept the two foregoing answers, we can still insist that the word “umma” in these two verses can mean “time”, because time sometimes is used as moments and time intervals and at other times as periods and eras, and the latter can be long or short. This way, the meaning of the Qur’ān 16:36 will be “We appointed a messenger for every era ...” and the meaning of the Qur’ān 10:47 will be “There is a messenger for every era ...” However, if we assume the common meaning of the word rasūl for it, not only the foregoing interpretation is possible, but also it will be a very strong possibility, because the fact that the Qur’ān 10:47 is a nominal sentence indicates that the verse regards all times and the manner and method of expression of the verse – as the scholars of the basics of theology assert – is void of any personal and temporal specificity. Therefore, if we want to mean “umma” as “group”, the meaning of the verse will be limited to some of the past groups; this is impossible and does not agree with the strong appearance of the verse. According to this interpretation, the time after the Prophet of Islam until the Resurrection Day is all one era the prophet of which is Prophet Muḥammad (s). If the doubt is posed that the clitic pronoun “hum” (they) in the Qur’ān 10:47 is justifiable if the word “umma” exclusively means “group”, we can answer that it is permissible for

the referent of a pronoun to be a prescription<sup>1</sup>, and so, it will mean here “the people of that era.”

At any rate, according to each of these meanings, there has never been any doubt about the congruence of the verses with the historical facts, and so, no resolution has been required.

So far it has been proved that there are numerous possibilities in the meanings of the verse. Some of them primarily and specifically do not suggest any doubt on the congruence, and others solve the doubt using argumentation. The only possibility which entails this doubt is extremely weak and can be resolved. However, the question that arises is that which of the possible verse meanings is stronger. The answer to this question can be sought via verse-internal and verse-external methods. It seems that from the internal aspect, none of these possibilities can be prioritized over the other ones, because all these meanings of the word *umma* have been used equally in the Qur’ān, and prioritizing anyone of them over one or all of the other ones is giving preponderance without a preponderant, because all of them are the real meanings of this word and the prioritization of a real meaning over another real meaning requires an indication. This will be evident for any person who refers to dictionaries. Due to space limitation, this article only reports the profound realization of Muṣṭafawī: “The realization is that the only principle in this issue is the specific intention and will; that is to say, the will along with a specific view to it. This meaning is true for all different offshoots of this issue ... ‘Umma’ – rhymed as Fu‘la – means the determined and limited amount of a phenomenon. Therefore, ‘umma’ is the limited and determined thing that is noted and intended, notwithstanding if it regards people, time intervals, concerns a thought or opinion, or takes into account a determined and noted person different from other people” (Muṣṭafawī, 1982, vol. 1: 135). As a result, the noble verse has no such meaning intrinsically and literally, and all those aforementioned meanings are equally possible.

However, from the verse-external viewpoint – as we said earlier – it seems that the fourth possibility (i.e. *umma* as a time interval) is stronger, because it is congruent with the principle “The ruling for similar things is the same” (which was mentioned earlier), certainly has no contradiction with the scientific and historical facts, and is confirmed with the content of some other verses such as “Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth’” (Qur’ān 2:30). The reason is that although the intention of the verse of the word “*khalīfa*” (vicegerent) is Allāh’s vicegerent, there is no doubt that not every individual human is God’s vicegerent; rather, only

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1. The referents of a pronoun can be literal, semantic, and prescriptive.

humans such as the prophets and their trustees have such a status. On the other hand, the tone and expression manner of the verse (which is a nominal sentence, is started with the word “in”, and has used subject noun for “ja‘ala” rather than a verb, etc.) lacks any personal and temporal specificity – as asserted by the scholars of the basics of theology – while the assumption that this vicegerent and trustee is limited to some eras and in most eras no trustee will be present is an instance of the temporal specificity of the verse and is incongruent with the tone of the verse (which is non-specifiable). Therefore, the fourth possibility agrees with the requirement of this verse – which confirms the constant existence of Allāh’s vicegerents on the earth – contrary to the famous possibility which was not found to be proved by any qur’ānic evidence. Moreover, the requirement of the fourth possibility is confirmed by the diffused – and even frequently narrated narrations – such as this narration: “If there is no divine vicegerent on the earth for a moment, the earth will get frenzied and will devour all its inhabitants” (Kulaynī, 1946, vol. 1: 178-179; Ṣadūq, n.d., vol. 1: 196-198; id., 1958, vol. 1: 172; id., 1975, vol. 1: 201-207; Ṣaffār, 1984: 488; Nu‘mānī, 1977: 138-141; Khazzāz Rāzī, 1981: 162; Ṭūsī, 1990: 220; Ṭabarī, n.d.: 231; Fattāl, n.d., vol. 1: 199).

The doubt might be posed that the time between Prophet Jesus (a) and the noble Prophet of Islam (s) – known as the *fitrat* (interval) era – has been void of prophets and this rejects the foregoing interpretation. The answer is that there has been at most no arch-prophet in this era; however, it is not definite that no messenger, prophet trustee, or relater has existed in this period and rather there is a strong possibility for the existence of such a person. Moreover, the existence of Prophet Khidr (a) – who is commonly known to be hidden and alive up to now – is among the strong possibilities (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996, vol. 13: 353). Likewise, according to the viewpoint of some scholars, the existence of Prophet Khidr (a) and Prophet Ilyās (a) is a definite belief of the Muslims (‘Askarī, 2005: 127).

If the doubt is posed that Prophet Khidr (a) or Imām Mahdī (may God hasten his reappearance) have no actual warning and admonition due to their occultation and the attribution of the word “*nadhīr*” to them is wrong and they are at most Allāh’s vicegerent, the answer is that “*nadhīr*” is a typical attribute, and actuality is not important in this type of attribute; rather, potentiality and disposition is sufficient, even if this disposition could not get actualized due to some obstacles. At most, the definite thing is that this preaching is not overt, but the covertness of preaching and warning some people covertly is adequate (no matter if the addressee knows the warner or not); it is sufficient to say that they have actual warning, too. However, if *nadhīr* is taken in its general meaning, the answer will be very easy, as there

have been numerous non-prophet nadhīrs in the period between Prophet Jesus (a) and Prophet Muḥammad (s) (Ṣadiqī Tihirānī, 1987, vol. 24: 327).

Some exegetes have interpreted the word *umma* in this noble verse as era, and their claim can be confirmed in the light of the arguments presented in this article. For example, Fayḍ Kāshānī in *Al-Aṣṣā* commentary takes it as era and period, and says: “Wa ’in min umma: era. ’Illā Khalā: past...” (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 1997, vol. 2: 1025). Similarly, in its interpretation of this verse, *Al-Burhān* commentary asserts: “There is an Imām for any era” (Bahṛānī, 1995, vol. 4: 544).

This meaning (which can be considered the fifth interpretation) also can be prioritized over the commonly accepted meaning, because according to the commonly accepted meaning, we have to accept specificity, while this is not needed in the fifth interpretation at all, and lack of specificity is certainly the basic principle here. In another occasion, God says about the people of Hijāz: “But We had not given them Books which they could study, nor sent messengers to them before thee as Warners” (Qur’ān 34:44). On the other hand, if we take “*umma*” in the Qur’ān 35:24 in the commonly accepted meaning, there would be a kind of disagreement between these two verses which cannot be resolved unless we accept specificity or come to believe in the difference in the meaning of *nadhīr* in the two verses. However, if in the Qur’ān 35:24, we interpret “*umma*” as “time”, there would be no need to any of these two issues which contradict the basic principle.

From the sixth viewpoint, the narrative interpretation of this verse confirms our interpretation, too. It is noteworthy that in many of our narrations, this noble verse has been relied upon to support the obligation of the existence of a divine proof in all eras and to reject the perception that there can be a lapse of time in which no infallible Imām or divine proof exists. For example, ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm presents a narration from an Imām in his commentary under this verse: “There is an Imām for every era” (Qumī, 1989, vol. 2: 209). Likewise, Kulaynī presents a lengthy narration from Imām Muḥammad Bāqir (a) which suggests that *nadhīr* can be attributed to an Imām (Kulaynī, 1946, vol. 1: 249). The examination of suchlike verses indicates that out of the foregoing meanings of the word “*umma*”, the one which leads to this conclusion will be superior to other meanings, and even if these meanings are equal from the confirmation viewpoint and do not have any disagreement with the historical viewpoints, the first meaning will be more apparent, and it will be more appropriate for this interpretation.

## Conclusion

A profound review of the meanings of the words in these verses (i.e. *umma*,



nadhīr, and rasūl) reveals that these noble verses have many meanings and most of them do not have any contradiction with the commonly accepted historical facts. If nadhīr means “a group”, it has eight significations in the Qur’ān and none of these meanings have any contradiction with the historical propositions. If it means “people of a land” – although it is different from the appearance of the verse – it can be resolved through ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s argumentation. If it means “belief” and “religion”, there has been no disagreement from the beginning so there is no need to any solution. If it means “time” and “era”, it is specifically out of our discussion (i.e. contradiction), and based on the aforementioned reasons, it seems that this meaning is the most robust one. In the verses of the Bee and the Jonah Chapters, too, the word rasūl is defined in its literal meaning. In fact, the referent of this word can be the same as the referent of the word nadhīr.

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