

4- IMAM SAJJAD (AS): THE IMAM OF PRAYER

This chapter reviews the life of Imam Sajjad (AS), and gives an overview of the political instability during his lifetime. It also highlights the Imam's critical role in guiding the Muslims and reconstructing Islamic society.

4-1-Before the Government of Yazid

4-1-1-Birth

Imam Ali ibn Hossein (AS), also known as Sajjad, was born on the 15th of Jumada al-Awwal in the year 36 Hijri in Medina. His mother was Shahr-Banu, the daughter of Yazdegerd III, the last Persian king of the Sasanian Empire. She was captured as a captive, then brought to Medina where she married Imam Hossein (AS). Imam Sajjad's mother passed away shortly after giving birth to him. Historical records suggest that Imam Sajjad was the second son of Imam Hossein, after his older brother, Ali al-Akbar.

4-1-2-During the Government of Imam Ali

Imam Sajjad, who was born during the government of Imam Ali (AS), was only four years old when his grandfather, Imam Ali, was struck with a poisonous sword. When Imam Ali was on his deathbed, he passed his sword and his Holy Quran to Imam Hasan (AS), as directed by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He then requested Imam Hasan to pass these items to Imam Hossein after himself, then asked Imam Hossein to continue passing these items to Imam Sajjad. Imam Ali then held the tiny hand of Imam Sajjad, telling him to pass these items, as well as his and the Prophet's greetings, to Imam Sajjad's future son, Muhammad.

4-1-3-During the Government of Muawiyah

Imam Sajjad grew up during the long caliphate of Muawiyah for about 20 years. Of these 20 years, 10 were during the Imamate of his beloved uncle, Imam Hasan. The other 10 were during the Imamate of his father, Imam Hossein. Imam Sajjad witnessed Muawiyah's oppression of the Ahlul-Bayt, the progeny of the Prophet. He lived during a time when he heard cursing of his grandfather, Imam Ali, from the pulpits all around Islamic territory, by order of Muawiyah. Imam Sajjad also witnessed his uncle, Imam Hasan, suffering from the poison which took his life.

4-2-During the Government of Yazid

4-2-1-The Uprising of Imam Hossein

Imam Sajjad supported his father with the uprising against Yazid. He migrated with his father from Medina to Mecca, then from Mecca to Karbala.

4-2-2-In Karbala

Imam Sajjad was only 24 years old in Karbala. He became sick a few days before Ashura. On the night before Ashura, while still very sick, he witnessed that his father, Imam Hossein, allowed his companions to freely leave and save their own lives, but none left.

On the day of Ashura, while Imam Sajjad was struggling with his illness and repeatedly falling unconscious, Imam Hossein came to see him for the last time. He embraced his beloved son, and said his final words to him. He also gave him a precious prayer to recite during a sorrowful calamity. This prayer was passed down from angel Gabriel to the Holy Prophet, and from the Prophet to Lady Fatimah (SA), and finally to Imam Hossein. When Imam Hossein was leaving for the battlefield and Imam Sajjad saw his father's loneliness, he leaned on a stick, attempting to walk, and proceeded to help him. While he was struggling to stand on his feet, Imam Hossein asked his sister to take care of Imam Sajjad, saying, "The earth should not be left without a representative from God."

In the afternoon of Ashura after Imam Hossein's martyrdom, while the tents were being attacked, looted, and set on fire, Lady Zainab, Imam Hossein's sister, asked Imam Sajjad about what the women and children should do, stay in the burning tents or escape the fire. Imam Sajjad's first ruling as an Imam was to command them to escape to the desert and save their lives. Lady Zainab herself stayed with Imam Sajjad to protect him from the enemies and fire. When the enemies saw Imam Sajjad and his severe condition, they left him to die from his illness. However, they looted his tent and even stole the rug he was laying on.

On the day after Ashura, Umar ibn Sa'ad and his troops, who were responsible for the tragedy of Karbala, stayed in Karbala until noon to bury the bodies of their men. They then took the surviving family of Imam Hossein and his companions to Kufa. The number of those captives is estimated by some to be around 61 people. The enemies tied their hands and made them ride camels without saddles. As the Imam was the eldest male among the captives, the enemies tied the hands of Imam Sajjad to his neck to afflict him with more suffering. Since the Imam was very sick and could fall, they also tied his legs to the underneath of the camel. When the captives passed by the bodies of Imam Hossein and the other martyrs, they wept and cried with hearts full of pain and sorrow.

4-2-3-In Kufa

Two days after Ashura, the captives arrived in Kufa. Ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, ordered the captives and the severed heads of 72 martyrs and Imam Hossein, mounted on spears, to be taken throughout the city. He wanted to instill fear in the hearts of the people of Kufa. People came to the streets to watch the captives. Lady Zainab began to speak to the crowd such that the people were reminded of her father, Imam Ali. She condemned the Kufans for breaking their allegiance to Imam Hossein and killing him. She told them, "You have ruined your life in this world and the hereafter and have become deserving of the wrath and punishment of God." Imam Sajjad then started speaking, and introduced himself as the son of the one who they had martyred. He condemned their betrayal. He asked them how they could face the Prophet now that they have destroyed their hereafter. People started crying and said, "We are ready to submit and follow your orders." The Imam said, "I will not trust you anymore. Do you want to do the same thing that you did to my forefathers? You just killed my father. My only request to you is not to support our enemy nor claim to support us."

Ibn Ziyad gathered the people in his palace. Imam Hossein's head was brought before him, filling him with delight. With his stick, Ibn Ziyad kept hitting the teeth of Imam Hossein. Later, the captives were also

brought in. Ibn Ziyad addressed Lady Zainab and praised his own victory. He asked her, "How did you find God's action against your family and brother?" Lady Zainab responded by saying, "I didn't see anything but beauty. The family of the Prophet is blessed with the rank of martyrdom. Soon you will face them in the court of the Almighty and then you can see who overcomes." This conversation triggered Ibn Ziyad's anger. He decided to kill Lady Zainab, but someone advised him not to degrade himself by killing a woman and he reluctantly accepted.

Ibn Ziyad then pointed to Imam Sajjad and asked, "Who is this young man?" They said, "Ali son of Hossein." Ibn Ziyad said, "Didn't God kill Ali the son of Hossein?" Imam Sajjad responded, "I had a brother whose name was also Ali (Ali al-Akbar) and your army killed him." Ibn Ziyad said, "No, God killed him." The Imam responded by reciting the following verse of the Quran [39:42], "God takes the souls at the time of their death" implying that you killed my father and God took his soul upon his martyrdom. Ibn Ziyad angrily said, "How dare you talk back to me? He ordered the beheading of Imam Sajjad. Lady Zainab quickly embraced Imam Sajjad and said, "I swear by God, I will not let him go. You must also kill me with him." Upon seeing this, Ibn Ziyad said to leave the Imam be, since his illness is enough to kill him. He then ordered the imprisonment of the captives.

Three days after Ashura, upon becoming confident that Umar ibn Sa'ad and his troops had left Karbala, the tribe of Bani Asad, who lived nearby, came to bury the martyrs. The bodies were headless so they were unable to recognize them. Miraculously, Imam Sajjad came from imprisonment in Kufa and arrived at Karbala. He guided the Bani Asad tribe on where to bury the martyrs. Imam Sajjad himself buried the body of his father, Imam Hossein.

Ibn Ziyad sent a letter to Yazid to request his orders. Yazid ordered him to send the captives and the heads of the martyrs to Damascus, Syria. Ibn Ziyad only sent the captives from Imam Hossein's family and relatives to him, whose number is estimated by some to be around 25.

The captives were taken on camels and their hands were tied with ropes. Imam Sajjad's hands were tied tightly to his neck. During the journey, Imam Sajjad did not speak to anyone but his family. He constantly prayed, glorified God, and recited the Quran.

4-2-4-The Journey to Damascus

During the journey, the heads of the martyrs were transported in boxes, and upon arriving at any city, the heads would be mounted on spears in front of the captives. If the family and loved ones of the martyrs cried, the soldiers would beat them with spears. The caravan was taken from city to city to show off Yazid's power, and the captives were presented to the people as rebels.

When the caravan approached the city of Mosul, the governor ordered the city to be decorated to celebrate and welcome the caravan. However, when the people found out that the head of Imam Hossein was coming, they prepared an army of around 4,000 people to fight and capture the head of Imam Hossein to be respectfully buried. This news led the caravan to redirect its route and not to enter the city of Mosul to avoid conflict. After this incident, the caravan moved expeditiously towards Damascus.

The Syrian region was seized during the government of the second Caliph, who had appointed Muawiyah as the governor of Syria. He stayed in power for 42 long years until his son, Yazid, took over. Thus, the Syrians were only familiar with the Islam spread by Muawiyah's propaganda. Many Syrians did not know that the Prophet had left behind his family. Thus, the closer the caravan got to Damascus, the more people grew in favor of Yazid's government and celebrated his victory.

4-2-5-In Damascus

After about 12 days of traveling in hardship as captives, the caravan finally arrived in Damascus. This was the place Imam Sajjad recalled as the most difficult part of their captivity since Ashura. To expose the captives, particularly the ladies, they had to enter from the most

crowded entrance of the city. They also placed the spears with the mounted heads in the middle of the caravan to draw more attention to the women.

Yazid prepared a gathering in his palace and ordered the captives' presence. When he saw the heads approaching him from a distance, he said the following poem, "The Prophet killed my family (the Umayyads) in the Battle of Badr and I took my revenge by killing his children." The heads of the martyrs were brought to Yazid while, as usual, he was intoxicated. He was amused and used profanity to insult the head of Imam Hossein.

The captives were brought inside later, still tied to one chain. When Lady Zainab saw the head of her brother, Imam Hossein, she started weeping. The people in the palace became emotional, and started crying as well. However, Yazid was delighted by his victory. He asked for a stick and continuously hit the teeth of Imam Hossein. Yazid then addressed Imam Sajjad and said, "May God bless the one who killed your father." Imam Sajjad fearlessly said, "May God curse him." Yazid became furious. He wanted to kill Imam Sajjad, but God's plans altered the situation. During the discussion of the Imam with Yazid, Yazid justified his actions by reciting the following verse from the Holy Quran [42:30], "Whatever misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned; and yet He (God) pardons much." The Imam rejected Yazid's justification and responded, "Our situation is instead described in the Quran in [57:22], 'No calamity occurs on earth or in your souls, but it is in a Book, even before We make it happen. That is easy for God.'" Later, Lady Zainab delivered a bold speech to Yazid, condemning him.

Yazid imprisoned the captives in an old and wrecked house, which could not protect them from the heat or the cold. His intention was that the house collapse and kill the captives. In that prison, the beloved daughter of Imam Hossein, Ruqayyah, passed away after enduring all the atrocities. Imam Sajjad had to perform his little sister's burial rites in the same place.

To flaunt his power to the people, Yazid took Imam Sajjad to the Mosque of Damascus and appointed a lecturer to deliver a sermon against Imam Hossein and his father, Imam Ali. The Imam rose up and asked to enlighten the people with his words. Yazid resisted, but his near ones insisted that he allow Imam Sajjad to speak. Imam Sajjad's most important and critical sermon in Damascus was delivered in this place. The Imam praised God and said, "We, as the Ahlul-Bayt, have been bestowed with six blessings and seven excellences from the Almighty. The blessings are knowledge, forbearance, chivalry, eloquence, courage, and the love of believers for us. The excellences are that Prophet Muhammad, Sediq (Imam Ali), Tayyar (Ja'far ibn Abi-Talib), Asad al-Allah (Hamzah), Lady Fatimah, and the leaders of the youth of paradise (Imam Hasan and Imam Hossein) are from our family." The Imam then continued, "Allow me to introduce myself for those of you who don't know me." The Imam glorified his lineage from the Prophet, Lady Khadija, Imam Ali, Lady Fatimah, and Imam Hossein and described them with their best attributes. The people were influenced by the Imam's sermon and began to cry. Yazid feared the effect of the Imam's words on the hearts of the people. Suddenly, he interrupted the Imam's speech by ordering that the Azan, the call to prayer, be recited. When the Azan reached the verse of bearing witness to the Prophet, the Imam looked at Yazid and strongly said, "Is Muhammad your grandfather or mine? For if you say he is yours, then you're a liar and if you believe that he is my grandfather, then why did you kill his family and capture his descendants?" When Yazid proceeded to lead the noon prayer, people dispersed, and not many followed him in the congregational prayer.

The Imam's words were so powerful that Yazid faced objections from the Syrians. Thus, Yazid had to change his policy towards the Imam to save his own government. He delivered a speech for the Syrians and said, "I did not kill nor did I order to kill (Imam) Hossein" and then he blamed his governor Ibn Ziyad for the horrific tragedy. During the Imam's short stay in Damascus, someone asked the Imam about his life. The Imam responded by comparing his life to that of the children

of Israel, when the pharaoh killed their sons and enslaved their women.

4-2-6-Arba'een (the Fortieth Day)³⁸

Yazid asked the captives from the family and relatives of Imam Hossein if they wanted to stay in Syria or return to their homes in Medina. They asked him to allow them to gather and mourn for the loss of their loved ones. Thus, one of the first gatherings of mourning for Imam Hossein was set up in the heart of the Umayyad government. The captives wore black, gathered people, and mourned for one week. Then, they decided to return to Medina.

Yazid gathered a caravan to respectfully return the captives to Medina so the people would think he was innocent. On their way to Medina, the captives requested the caravan to stop in Karbala. Exactly 40 days after the martyrdom of Imam Hossein, the caravan arrived in Karbala. They met Jabir ibn Abdullah, one of the Prophet's close companions and the first visitor to pay his respects to the grave of Imam Hossein. This day was called Arba'een, or Fortieth (Day), and became an important day on the Shia calendar. Many believe that, during this visit, Imam Sajjad returned the head of Imam Hossein to Karbala and buried it with the rest of his body. After a few days of mourning, the caravan continued its journey to Medina.

4-2-7-Return to Medina

When the caravan neared Medina, Imam Sajjad requested a poet to go and recite a poem for Imam Hossein to inform the people of Medina about their arrival. The entire city of Medina was overcome with grief. The grieving people came out of the city to receive the caravan. While weeping, the Imam delivered a sermon. He praised God and mourned Imam Hossein's martyrdom. The Imam reminded the people about the Prophet's command of loving and respecting his progeny, the Ahlul-Bayt. The Imam said, "Even if the Prophet had commanded a war against us, it could not be worse than the tragedy that we have endured."

³⁸ 20 Safar, 61 AH (Imam's age: 24)

The people of the caravan had returned to Medina after about seven long months, but without their loved ones. They visited the tomb of the Prophet, where they sorrowfully cried and mourned.

4-2-8-In Medina

When in Medina, Imam Sajjad visited Um Salamah, the Prophet's wife, and requested the items that Imam Hossein had entrusted her with, prior to leaving Medina. He received the swords of the Prophet and Imam Ali, and other holy scriptures that were special belongings of the Imam of the time. Imam Sajjad also received a scroll from his sister, Fatimah, that Imam Hossein had entrusted to her on the day of Ashura to pass on to Imam Sajjad.

During the rest of Yazid's government, Imam Sajjad and the Prophet's family, Banu Hashim, remained in deep sorrow and grief. Their pain was such that they only wore black clothes and never ate hot meals. The grief was so heavy on their hearts that Imam Hossein's sister, Lady Zainab, and his wife, Rabaab, passed away shortly after the tragedy of Karbala.

During this time, the Imam's activities and interactions were under intense surveillance by the government, as Yazid feared an uprising from the Imam to seek revenge for the tragedy of Karbala. Due to this, the Imam only had three companions. Eventually, the Imam moved outside of Medina for a few years and lived in a temporary residence. He isolated himself and limited his interactions with the people. The Imam's isolation from society protected him from Yazid's threats, since Yazid was looking for any excuse to eliminate him.

During this isolation, the Imam occasionally traveled in secret to visit the hidden grave of his grandfather, Imam Ali, in Najaf and his father, Imam Hossein, in Karbala. The well-known supplication of Ameenullah was originally narrated by Imam Sajjad during a visit to Imam Ali's grave.

4-2-9-Reviving Karbala

4- Imam Sajjad (AS): The Imam of Prayer

After Ashura, for around 34 years until the end of Imam Sajjad's life, the Imam always wept tears of sorrow for the tragedy of Karbala. The Imam is one of the five divine characters who wept the most, along with the Prophets Adam, Jacob, Joseph, and Lady Fatimah. The Imam was constantly reminded of Karbala. Every glance at water would evoke tears in his eyes. He used to fast during the day, and at night upon seeing food, tears would roll down his cheeks. Once the Imam saw a butcher slaughtering a sheep. He asked him if the animal had been given water before it was slaughtered. The Imam's eyes used to fill up with tears as he would say that the grandson of the Prophet had been slaughtered thirsty by the (Euphrates) river. Someone once requested the Imam to come out of grief, to which the Imam responded, "(Prophet) Jacob had 12 sons. God only hid one (Prophet Joseph) and he wept for 40 long years while he knew that his son was alive. Why shouldn't I cry when my beloved father, brother, and 17 of my family members were beheaded and cut into pieces?" Imam Sajjad was also the first person to perform his prayers on the sands of Karbala to keep the message of Imam Hossein alive. This custom exists until today.

4-2-10-The True Imam

At the beginning of Imam Sajjad's Imamatus, there was confusion among some people about the true Imam of the time. Some thought Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah was the Imam, since he was older than Imam Sajjad. Also, in the past, Imamatus had been passed through brothers from Imam Hasan to Imam Hossein. Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah was the son of Imam Ali and the younger brother of Imam Hossein, but was not from the progeny of the Prophet from Lady Fatimah. To convince the people of the truth, Imam Sajjad and Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah stood in front of the Ka'ba and called the Hajar al-Aswad stone to testify to their Imamatus. The Hajar al-Aswad only responded to Imam Sajjad's call and testified to his Imamatus.

4-2-11-The Uprising of Ibn Zubayr

Less than a year after the tragedy of Karbala, Abdullah ibn Zubayr started to rise against Yazid in Mecca. Although he was against Yazid,

he sought power for himself by portraying an Islamic outlook. Ibn Zubayr was an opponent of Yazid's caliphate who had not paid allegiance to him. After Imam Hossein's martyrdom, Ibn Zubayr found a suitable opportunity to gather people around him. He was the son of Zubayr, one of the Prophet's companions, and the nephew of Aisha, the Prophet's wife. He opposed Imam Ali and his family, and had played a key role in instigating the Battle of Jamal against Imam Ali. Imam Ali had said, "Zubayr used to be with us Ahlul-Bayt until his ill-fated son, Abdullah, turned him against us."

4-2-12-Battle of al-Harrah³⁹

Ibn Zubayr secretly sent his agents to encourage the people of Medina to pay allegiance to him. To overcome this plot, the governor of Yazid in Medina tried to influence the elderly of Medina by sending a group of them to visit Yazid in Damascus. The group received many gifts and hospitality from Yazid. However, upon returning to Medina, they informed the people that they had witnessed Yazid, their so-called Caliph, or successor of the Prophet, openly indulge in sinful behavior, intoxication, and womanizing. This led the people of Medina, the city of the Prophet, to rebel against Yazid and his family, the Umayyads. The people expelled Yazid's governor and approximately one thousand of the Umayyads, including Marwan ibn al-Hakam. Even though Marwan was an open enemy to Imam Ali and his family, and had a direct role in disrespecting Imam Hasan's body during his burial, he came to Imam Sajjad with a desperate request of entrusting his family, which the Imam accepted.

When Yazid was informed about the rebellion in Medina, he sent his troops, under the leadership of Muslim ibn Uqbah, to suppress it. This led to a battle on the outskirts of Medina called the Battle of al-Harrah, during which the people of Medina were defeated. The survivors withdrew and sought refuge in the Mosque and the tomb of the Prophet. Yazid's troops entered the holy mosque with their horses and

³⁹ 28 Zu al-Hijjah, 63 AH (Imam's age: 27)

created a bloodbath within it. Muslim ibn Uqbah allowed his army to loot, rape, and steal from the people of Medina, the city of the Prophet, for three days. Around 10,000 people were murdered, including hundreds of the Prophet's companions, as well as Islamic and Quranic scholars.

Imam Sajjad was isolated during this uprising. He had moved his family, along with 400 people who sought refuge to him, to the outskirts of Medina. They had all remained safe. Muslim ibn Uqbah had orders from Yazid to not get into a conflict with Imam Sajjad due to his isolation from the rebellion. Yazid knew of the Imam's isolation through his spies. Yazid also wanted to avoid the shame the Umayyads had brought upon themselves from the tragedy of Karbala, so they did not interfere with Imam Sajjad.

After three days, Muslim ibn Uqbah ordered the people of Medina to come to his presence. He demanded they renew their allegiance to Yazid, bear witness that they are Yazid's servants, and threatened to kill anyone who opposed this order. However, he did not harm Imam Sajjad and excluded him from this order. When Imam Sajjad came to him, the Imam's greatness struck fear in Muslim ibn Uqbah's heart. He stood up from his position, respected the Imam, and allowed him to return unharmed.

4-2-13-Yazid's Troops in Mecca

After the massacre in Medina, Yazid's army continued towards Mecca to suppress Ibn Zubayr's rebellion, despite the army leader, Muslim ibn Uqbah, dying on the way due to an illness. Yazid's army outnumbered Ibn Zubayr's army, and surrounded Mecca for a few months. They attacked Ibn Zubayr's army, who had sought refuge in the vicinity of the Ka'ba by shooting fire balls which burned the Ka'ba. This event proved that Yazid would go to any extent to eliminate his opponents, and highlighted the importance of Imam Hossein's decision to leave Mecca towards Karbala to keep the honor of the Ka'ba and avoid bloodshed within it. During this period, Yazid's army received the news

of Yazid's death⁴⁰, and they finally returned to Syria. During his short reign of only three years and eight months, Yazid committed three outrageous crimes, the tragedy of Karbala, the massacre of Medina, and the burning of the Holy Ka'ba.

4-3-During the Government of Ibn Zubayr

4-3-1-Muawiyah II in Damascus

The death of Yazid was a shock for the Umayyads, who had been in power for years. They tried to maintain their power by convincing the Syrians to pay allegiance to Muawiyah II, the 22-year old (and the oldest) son of Yazid, as the new caliph. When Muawiyah II appeared to deliver a speech to the people, he condemned the actions of his grandfather, Muawiyah ibn Abu-Sufyan, and his father, Yazid, against the Ahlul-Bayt, the progeny of the Prophet. He withdrew himself from the caliphate because he did not want to bear the sins of an unlawful government. The Umayyads were shocked by his speech, and blamed his teacher for his differing opinion. Even though Muawiyah's teacher rejected their claim, they still buried him alive. Muawiyah II also died less than three months later.

4-3-2-Turmoil within the Umayyads

Yazid's death and the lack of unity in Syria provided Ibn Zubayr with an opportunity to expand his government and declare himself as the caliph. He appointed some of the elderly to get allegiance from the people on his behalf from all around the Islamic territory. This led to a division among the Umayyads in Syria, where some were supportive of Ibn Zubayr's caliphate, and some, under the leadership of Marwan ibn al-Hakam, were against him. In a big battle known as Marj Rahit⁴¹, which took place between the two sides, Marwan ibn al-Hakam defeated the other Umayyads, taking control of Syria.

⁴⁰ 14 Rabi' al-Awwal, 64 AH (Imam's age: 27)

⁴¹ 15 Zu al-Hijjah, 64 AH (Imam's age: 28)

4-3-3-Ibn Zubayr and the Imam

Medina fell under the control of Ibn Zubayr. During his government, the pressure and cruelty on Imam Sajjad and the Prophet's family increased. Although Ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads were against each other for the caliphate, both hated the Ahlul-Bayt and their Shia followers. While the Umayyads followed Muawiyah's legacy of cursing Imam Ali from the pulpit, Ibn Zubayr said that he had hidden his hatred against the Prophet's family in his heart for 40 years. For 40 consecutive weeks, he removed the salutations to the Prophet from his Friday sermons, because he did not want Banu Hashim to feel the pride of belonging to the Prophet's family. He imprisoned 26 of the Banu Hashim, and threatened to burn them alive if they did not pledge allegiance to him. In this situation, the Imam did not approve of Ibn Zubayr's government, and was concerned about Ibn Zubayr's plots against the Shias. The Imam continued his strategy to appear isolated from politics, and he did not involve himself in any activity that would benefit Ibn Zubayr, or the Umayyads.

4-3-4-The Tawwabin's Uprising

The division in power provided an opportunity for the Shia followers in Kufa to seek revenge for Imam Hossein's blood from his killers. The Shias were outraged to see the killers of Imam Hossein living freely in Kufa. They were in deep sorrow after the tragedy of Karbala, and they felt guilty for inviting Imam Hossein to Kufa, but not supporting him. However, the Shia followers were split into two groups. One group was under the leadership of Mokhtar al-Thaqafi, a great warrior and politician, who initially wanted to establish a government in Kufa and then proceed to fight against the Umayyad army, which was under the leadership of Ibn Ziyad. The other group was called the Tawwabin, or the repenters, who were determined to seek revenge by waging a war against the Umayyad army. They were under the leadership of Sulayman ibn Surad al-Khuza'i, a Shia scholar and a companion of the Prophet and the Imams.

The Tawwabin could not gather more than 4,000 troops, since many

were leaning towards Mokhtar. They proceeded to the Battle of Ayn al-Wardah,⁴² and were defeated by Ibn Ziyad's large army of around 30,000 troops, who tremendously outnumbered them.

There is no historical evidence of any relationship between the Tawwabin and Imam Sajjad. The Tawwabin were ashamed to contact Imam Sajjad and invite him for an uprising since they had invited his father, Imam Hossein, to Kufa but had failed to support him. In addition, the Imam's strategy was to avoid open involvement in any political activity. He was living with a few supporters in Medina and was far from his Shia followers in Kufa. The Imam had said, "We as the Ahlul-Bayt do not even have 20 people who love us within the entire cities of Mecca and Medina." Any political activity by the Imam would have endangered his life in Medina.

4-3-5-Abdul-Malik in Power⁴³

Marwan ibn al-Hakam died with a very short reign in government of less than a year. He kept the Umayyad's governorship in his lineage. This lineage is known as the Banu Marwan. After his death, his son, Abdul-Malik, assumed power. He proved to be a very cruel caliph, and had appointed oppressive and tyrannical governors to suppress people in order to keep his government stable.

4-3-6-Mokhtar's Uprising⁴⁴

With the defeat of the Tawwabin, Mokhtar found the opportunity suitable to initiate his uprising. He introduced himself as the representative of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, and was able to gather around 17,000 allegiances. The survivors of the Tawwabin also joined his uprising. Mokhtar defeated Ibn Zubayr's governor in Kufa in a civil war and took control of the city.

About five years after the tragedy of Karbala, Mokhtar took revenge

⁴² Jumada al-Awwal, 65 AH (Imam's age: 29)

⁴³ Ramazan, 65 AH (Imam's age: 29)

⁴⁴ 12 Rabi' al-Awwal, 66 AH (Imam's age: 29)

from the Kufans who had been responsible for the tragedy. He sent his troops to fight against Abdul-Malik's army, which was under the leadership of Ibn Ziyad. In the Battle of al-Khazir, Mokhtar's troops defeated and killed Ibn Ziyad on the day of Ashura, exactly six years after the tragedy of Karbala.

Mokhtar had a brief government of about one-and-a-half years, and was eventually suppressed by Mus'ab, the brother of Abdullah ibn Zubayr, and his governor in Basrah, Iraq. Upon his victory, Mus'ab ordered the beheadings of around 7,000 of Mokhtar's troops, who had surrendered and left Mokhtar without support. This incident showed the cruelty of Ibn Zubayr's caliphate against Shias, and also highlighted that the Shias of Kufa were not fully dedicated to their faith and were still untrustworthy.

Due to the political circumstances, the Imam did not directly endorse Mokhtar's movement. However, there are historical records that show his consent for the revenge for the blood of Imam Hossein. When a group of Shia followers from Kufa came to Imam Sajjad in Medina to inquire about the legitimacy of Mokhtar's uprising, the Imam said, "Even if a slave stands up for us, the Ahlul-Bayt, the people must support him." The Imam then appointed his uncle, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah, to guide them on political matters. Also, when Mokhtar sent the head of Ibn Ziyad to Imam Sajjad, he fell into prostration and prayed for him. He then donated a large amount in charity to thank God for this event. After six long years, Imam Sajjad requested the ladies of the Banu Hashim, who had been mourning for Karbala, to change out of their black dresses and to come out of grief.

4-3-7-The Imam: Symbol of True Islam

While the Islamic territory was split between Abdul-Malik and Ibn Zubayr, Abdul-Malik feared the influence of Ibn Zubayr's propaganda on his people, as they were going to Mecca to perform Hajj. Thus, with the help of bribed scholars, they fabricated fake narrations from the Prophet to encourage the people to perform Hajj at Masjid al-Aqsa in Palestine, which was in his territory, instead of Mecca. To fulfill this

purpose, he also built the famous Dome of the Rock building in Masjid al-Aqsa.

Under these circumstances, where any governor could change Islamic rituals in his favor, Imam Sajjad was a representative of the true Islamic values taught by the Prophet. The Imam tried to guide the bribed scholars, and warned them about their actions. The Imam's powerful letter to al-Zuhri, one of the bribed scholars, is narrated in history. Despite the ban enforced on narrations from the Holy Prophet since his demise, the Imam tried to inform the Muslims about the actual teachings of the Prophet through his advice and character. The Imam explained the true way of performing Hajj in his *Manaasik al-Hajj* book in order to guide Muslims who did not even know how to perform Hajj correctly. The Imam performed Hajj more than 20 times during his lifetime. When he wore the white garments of pilgrimage and said, "Labbayk" to his Lord, he would faint. When he would regain consciousness, the people would ask him the reason for his loss of consciousness. The Imam would respond by saying, "I feared denial from my Lord (God)". As a result, people would think that if the Imam of the time, the great grandson of the Prophet, feared the acceptance of his Hajj, then what would become of their own Hajj.

4-3-8-The Downfall of Ibn Zubayr's Government

After a few years of suppressing various rebellious uprisings around Syria, Abdul-Malik moved his army towards Kufa. In the Battle of Dayr al-Jathaaleeq, he defeated Mus'ab and took control of Iraq. When the proud Abdul-Malik entered Kufa, he was presented with the head of Mus'ab in the town hall. A member of the audience said, "I was here in the town hall when the head of (Imam) Hossein was brought to Ibn Ziyad, the head of Ibn Ziyad for Mokhtar, the head of Mokhtar for Mus'ab, and now I see the head of Mus'ab in front of you." Abdul-Malik, who feared that this historical pattern would repeat with his head being offered next, ordered the roof above them to be destroyed.

After seizing Kufa, Abdul-Malik sent his troops under the leadership of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf to conquer and suppress Ibn Zubayr in Mecca. Hajjaj

surrounded Mecca for several months. Ibn Zubayr and his troops sought refuge in the vicinity of the Holy Ka'ba, but Hajjaj ordered his troops to launch rocks at them. As a result, the Ka'ba was entirely damaged. Abdullah ibn Zubayr was finally killed,⁴⁵ and his caliphate terminated after about nine years. After a long unrest in Hijaz and Iraq, Abdul-Malik was able to unify them under a single government.

After the Holy Ka'ba was heavily damaged, Imam Sajjad played a critical role in guiding the Muslims to rebuild the Ka'ba.

4-4-During the Government of Abdul-Malik

4-4-1-Banu Marwan and Degradation of Islam

Yazid's public indulgence in sinful behavior made it a custom for the upcoming caliphs, including Banu Marwan, to also openly indulge in those behaviors. This legitimized their sinful behaviors for the public. Furthermore, years of civil unrest, battles, cruel governors, and elimination of the Islamic scholars had taken away any motivation for religious practices. Religion was no longer a priority for the people. It became publicly common, even in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, to have open concerts by female singers, where many onlookers sought to womanize. According to historical records, in one incident, there was a famous female singer in Medina who decided to perform Hajj, and her fans also accompanied her in large numbers. Upon entering Mecca and returning to Medina, the people gathered in crowds to welcome her, and she sang in public to please them.

In such a society, people were not interested in any religious guidance and would also ridicule any advice or teaching provided to them. The Imam had described his situation by saying that, "If we give them the teachings of the Prophet, they ridicule us. However, we can not remain silent, either." The Imam used every opportunity to guide the people. He held weekly Friday lectures in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina.

⁴⁵ 17 Jumada al-Awwal, 73 AH (Imam's age: 37)

The Imam's advice focused on the short duration of this life, and the significance of the hereafter. The Imam's words would impact the people who would listen to him, cause tears to flow from their eyes, and touch their hearts.

4-4-2-Hajjaj in Medina

As a token of appreciation, Abdul-Malik assigned Hajjaj as the governor of Medina. Hajjaj was a bloodthirsty man who would kill people for any excuse and had created a brutal and suppressive regime. He sought approval from Abdul-Malik to kill Imam Sajjad. In a letter to Abdul-Malik, he said, "If you want the stability and endurance of your government, kill Ali ibn Hossein (Imam Sajjad)." Abdul-Malik responded by warning against spilling the blood of the Banu Hashim and said, "I have witnessed that when Yazid killed (Imam) Hossein, the government was removed from his lineage."

The Imam had knowledge of this communication. He wrote a letter to Abdul-Malik to inform him about the content and the timing of his communication with Hajjaj, and that he had received this knowledge through the Prophet. The Imam wanted to let Abdul-Malik know that he had complete knowledge of his government, and reminded him about his close ties and revelations through the Prophet. Ultimately, the Imam wanted to prohibit Abdul-Malik from harassing him. Once Abdul-Malik confirmed that the Imam's statement regarding the timing of his communications was accurate, he responded by sending gifts to the Imam as recognition.

During this time, the Imam continued his isolation from politics. On one occasion, Abdul-Malik met the Imam near the Holy Ka'ba and complained to him about his distance from the Banu Marwan government, but the Imam rejected his request to come out of isolation.

4-4-3-Hajjaj in Iraq

Although Abdul-Malik had control over the entire Islamic territory, there were various rebellions during his government, especially in Iraq. Thus, he assigned Hajjaj as the governor of Iraq. Once Hajjaj arrived in

Kufa, he entered the mosque, removed the cover on his face, and threatened the people by saying that their heads were like ripe fruits ready to be cut.

Hajjaj brutally suppressed the people of Iraq, especially when he doubted they were Shia. He fought for years with the Khawarij. He also battled the rebellion by his army commander, Ibn Ash'ath, which had been the biggest threat to the Umayyads before their destruction. In total, Hajjaj killed around 120,000 people outside of war, and imprisoned tens of thousands of Iraqis during the 20 years of his government in Iraq until his death. The Imam did not support any side of these fights, since both sides were hostile against the Ahlul-Bayt.

4-4-4-The Imam and the Islamic Promotion

During this situation, the Imam was planning an ideal Islamic government in the long-term. His goal was to influence the people with his prayers and moral actions, and to attract them towards true Islamic teachings. The Imam also trained real Muslims in a society where everyone called themselves Muslims, yet did not abide by the Prophetic values. The Imam illustrated the framework of an ideal Islamic government in his book, *Risalat al-Huquq*.

Imam Sajjad was a symbol of prayer and piety in society. He fasted and prayed one thousand units of prayer daily. His face would become pale in worship in the presence of God. His prayers would often remind people of the prayers of Imam Ali. Imam Sajjad had multiple honorable titles reflecting his worship. He was known as 'Sajjad', which means 'the one who prostrates abundantly', and 'Sayyid al-Saajideen' which means 'the Master of the Prostrators'. He received these titles because he was constantly in prostration and prayer to God for every blessing he had received. He was also known as 'Dhu 'Thafanaat', which means 'someone who has grown calluses or hard thickened skin on all places touching the ground while prostrating', and he used to treat his hardened skin twice a year. He was also known as 'Zayn al-Abidin' which means 'the Adornment of the Worshipers'.

The Imam tried to attract the people to the true Islamic teachings. He wanted to open their relationships with God through the language of prayers. This was not suspicious for the governors, nor did it repel the people. Many supplications have been narrated from the Imam, such as the famous supplication of Abu Hamza al-Thumaali, which the Imam used to recite during the dawns of the month of Ramazan. A collection of 54 of the Imam's supplications is compiled in a book called al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya. This book is the greatest Shia book after the Quran and Nahj al-Balagha. It is also called 'Sister of the Quran', 'Gospel of the Holy Household', and 'Psalms of Muhammad's progeny', which clearly indicate the importance of the book. In this book of supplications, the Imam expresses Islamic knowledge regarding various aspects of individual, social, political, and cultural life. The famous Makarim Al-Akhlaq is just one of the supplications in al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya.

Imam Sajjad also worked hard to raise Muslims with true Islamic values. The Imam, who had started with only three companions, expanded to tens of companions during his lifetime. The names of more than 170 companions of the Imam are recorded in history. The Imam offered classes to teach Islamic lessons in the Mosque of the Prophet and in his own home. He would purchase enslaved men whom he didn't need, and would train them to become model Muslims. The Imam would even take them to Hajj with him, provide them with financial resources, and eventually free them into society. He would never keep any of them for more than a year, and every year at the end of the month of Ramazan, he would free about 20 slaves. The men freed by the Imam are estimated to be in the thousands. The Imam's actions conveyed his message against the discrimination of slaves in society.

Imam Sajjad taught how an ideal Muslim should act and live through his book, Risalat al-Huquq. In this book, the Imam stated 50 rights that every person should recognize and respect. These rights cover all of the rights involved in the relationships between an individual with God, an individual with himself, and an individual with others. These rights include the rights of God and our deeds to Him, of different organs of

the body, and of the social relationships such as family, various members of the society, and the government. Some of these rights are compulsory by Islamic rulings, but the majority of them are recommendations only identified in a true Muslim.

4-4-5-Abdul-Malik and the Imam

As time passed, Abdul-Malik's power grew, and so did his cruelty and oppression toward Imam Sajjad. He had spies to monitor the Imam's relations, and all details of his personal and social life. In one incident, he sent a letter to the Imam and threatened him while asking for the sword of the Prophet. The Imam rejected his demand and ended his statement with the following verse from the Holy Quran [31:18], "Verily, God does not love the proud and boastful." The Imam then asked Abdul-Malik to judge which one of them was more representative of this verse.

In another incident, Abdul-Malik summoned Imam Sajjad and ordered that he be brought to him in Damascus in chains. On the way, the Imam miraculously freed himself and voluntarily presented himself in Abdul-Malik's palace. The Imam asked Abdul-Malik firmly, "What business do you and I have together?" The Imam left the palace while Abdul-Malik was in great shock and fear.

4-4-6-Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik in Hajj

One year, Abdul-Malik sent his son Hisham to perform Hajj in Mecca. When Hisham was near the Ka'ba, he decided to touch Hajar al-Aswad, the heavenly rock, but he was unable to reach it due to the crowd. Shortly after, while watching the Ka'ba, he noticed Imam Sajjad coming through the crowd. The crowd moved away in respect to the Imam and made room for him to reach Hajar al-Aswad. Hisham felt offended by the great respect people had shown to the Imam, and pretended not to know the Imam. A poet named Farazdaq, who had close ties to Banu Marwan's government, witnessed this incident and told Hisham, "I know that man and can describe him for you." He then recited a long and beautiful poem describing and praising the Imam. Hisham became

angry and ordered that Farazdaq's allowance from Bayt al-Mal (public treasury) be cut and that he be imprisoned.

After his custody was lengthened, Farazdaq requested the Imam to pray for his release. He was released and came to the Imam and told him that his allowance was stopped by the government. The Imam provided him with an allowance, even though Farazdaq was hesitant to accept it. The Imam gave him the amount of allowance for a specific number of years and told him, "If I knew that you would need more, I would definitely provide you with more." Upon the completion of the specific number of years, Farazdaq passed away.

4-5-During the Government of Valeed

4-5-1-Valeed in Power

Abdul-Malik died after 21 years of being in power⁴⁶. His son, Valeed, replaced him. Valeed was a cruel and stubborn character who lacked literacy of the Arabic language, and would make obvious mistakes in his speech. In his first sermon as the caliph, he told the people that whoever stands against him would be beheaded, while whoever keeps silent and obeys his orders would die a natural death. He also kept Hajjaj in his position as the governor of Iraq. The majority of his reign was spent in military campaigns and the expansion of his territories into Northern Africa, India, Central Asia, and Andalusia in Europe.

4-5-2-The Imam and Hisham ibn Isma'il

Valeed replaced the cruel governor of Medina, Hisham ibn Isma'il, who had oppressed and harassed the people of Medina, and particularly Imam Sajjad. Hisham was persecuted for his atrocities and was tied in public where people could take revenge. Hisham said that he feared Imam Sajjad more than anyone else, since he had been the most oppressive towards the Imam. When the Imam and his companions passed by Hisham, the Imam asked his companions not to insult him.

⁴⁶ 15 Shawwal, 86 AH (Imam's age: 50)

The Imam greeted Hisham, treated him respectfully, and offered him help. By this treatment, Hisham was deeply ashamed. When the Imam left him, Hisham recited the following verse from the Holy Quran [6:124], “God knows best where to place His Prophethood.” This was one of many examples of how the Imam had influenced the hearts of the people by his actions.

4-5-3-Martyrdom

Imam Sajjad’s efforts to guide the Muslims and reconstruct Islamic society had made him the center of attention and respect from the Muslims. For example, the famous reciters of Quran in Medina would not leave for Hajj until Imam Sajjad left the city and they would follow him in large numbers, and the people would not return until the Imam left Mecca. The Umayyads, who were afraid for their own power, could not tolerate the Imam’s social popularity and influence among the people. Thus, Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik, who hated the Imam due to his observations at Hajj, encouraged his brother, Valeed, to order the poisoning of the Imam.

After Imam Sajjad was poisoned, he called his children and chose his son, Muhammad, as his successor in the Imamate. He addressed him with the title of Baqir. Imam Sajjad gave him a heavy chest passed down from the Imams. The chest was full of holy books, scriptures, and the swords of the Prophet and Imam Ali. Imam Sajjad (AS) spoke to his son, Imam Baqir (AS), in private for some time. Among his last words, the Imam emphasized the importance of kindness to the people. He also told Imam Baqir what his father, Imam Hossein, had passed down to him on the day of Ashura, which was to avoid oppressing someone who has nobody but God to defend him. Then, the Imam became unconscious. When he regained consciousness, he recited the chapters of Waq’ah and Fath from the Holy Quran. The chapter of Waq’ah describes the Day of Judgment and the categorization of the people on that day. The chapter of Fath describes the treaty of Hudaibiyyah during which the Muslims achieved victory peacefully. The Imam then recited the following verse [39:74], “Praise be to God, who has fulfilled

His promise to us and made us inherit the land, enjoying paradise as we please. How excellent is the reward of the workers.” Then, his soul ascended, and he passed away on the 25th of Muharram, in the year 95 Hijri, at the age of 58.

4-5-4-Burial

While preparing the body of the Imam for burial, calluses were found on his back from carrying sacks of food. The Imam used to distribute food secretly at night to around 100 needy families of Medina. After the Imam’s martyrdom, people discovered that their livelihoods had been coming from him. This was in addition to the two occasions where the Imam had split his entire wealth with the needy in the way of God. The Imam’s martyrdom brought grief to the entire city of Medina. The people of Medina gathered in a large crowd for his funeral. The Imam was buried in the Baqi’ cemetery within the vicinity of his uncle, Imam Hasan (AS).

4-6-Conclusion

Imam Sajjad is one of the Imams with the longest duration of Imamatus. He lived in a critical and complex political situation. When studying the life of Imam Sajjad, one can divide his Imamatus into two different periods. The first period begins at Karbala on the day of Ashura, continues to Kufa and Damascus, and ends with the Imam’s return to Medina. The second period begins after his return to Medina and lasts until his martyrdom, a period of about 34 years. During the first period, the tragedy of Karbala was the biggest sorrow of the Ahlul-Bayt, the progeny of the Prophet. Although Imam Sajjad was very sick and in captivity, he did not fear for his life, and knew that his silence would fade the message of Karbala. He spoke up against Ibn Ziyad and Yazid, condemned their actions, and confronted their justifications. The Imam also tried to awaken the people by delivering subjective lectures. The Imam’s lecture for the people in Kufa was focused on condemning their actions during the tragedy of Karbala. His focus in Damascus was to familiarize them with the Ahlul-Bayt, and in Medina, he reminded them

4- Imam Sajjad (AS): The Imam of Prayer

of the heartbreaking losses to the Ahlul-Bayt. The Imam's lectures pressured Yazid to deny his role in the tragedy of Karbala and free the captives, and caused the people to doubt the government. This contributed to the subsequent political unrest in the Islamic territory.

The second period of the life of Imam Sajjad in Medina was during a long period of wars and uprisings. It was as if God had punished the people responsible for the tragedy of Karbala. This punishment was not limited to just the killers of Imam Hossein, but everyone whose reluctance or approval led to the tragedy of Karbala from all around the Islamic territory. The Iraqis who had left Imam Hossein without support and killed him in Karbala suffered the most. They endured various wars, uprisings, and brutal governors. The Imam isolated himself from politics and put all of his efforts into saving the lives of his followers in the endless wars for power. Any political activity in this time would endanger the Imam's life, since the fugitive rulers were looking for any excuse to remove the Imam and stabilize their own governments.

The Imam was one of the closest living blood-relatives to the Prophet. He was the only light of guidance in a society that was lacking interest in Islamic teachings due to long wars, political unrest, and cruel governors. The Imam knew that it was not possible to establish an ideal Islamic government in the near future, so he decided to plan for such a society in the long-term through various efforts. The Imam attracted Muslims to the true Islamic teachings by his prayers, behavior, and supplications such as *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*. The Imam's supplications would not make the government suspicious, nor repel the people. The Imam taught true Islamic values to his companions and the freed slaves, so they would become true representatives of such an ideal society. He also depicted the framework of this ideal society with his book, *Risalat al-Huquq*.

With the Imam's martyrdom, the first Islamic century was almost over. The true Islamic teachings and values that were established by the Prophet had faded away gradually after his demise, so much so that

nothing could stop the so-called Muslims from attaining their political interests, even if they had to brutally kill his dear grandson in Karbala or destroy the Ka'ba, the holiest site in Islam. Imam Sajjad reconstructed the Islamic foundation from the beginning, similar to what the Prophet had done at the beginning. Imam Sajjad's efforts led the people to recognize the Shia Imams as the true representatives of Islam, and prepared an environment for Imam Baqir to establish a seminary in Medina to provide deep Islamic knowledge for the people who were eager for it.

IMAM SAJJAD (AS):

Three things would save a believer:

- Holding one's tongue from backbiting and ill-talks about people
- Engaging in activities which would benefit this world and hereafter
- Feeling guilt and seeking forgiveness for mistakes