



RS.IB9 The Imamate: The Twelve Imams and Their Role in Shia Belief

AQA 8062 • Calculators not allowed • about 45 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

- 1** Which one of the following best describes the Shia belief in the Imamate as taught about the Twelve Imams in Twelver Shia Islam?

- ☐ A A human political office elected by the community each year
- ☐ B Spiritual and political successors to Muhammad chosen by God from Ali's descendants
- ☐ C A revival movement that appears every century to renew the faith
- ☐ D A set of laws that replace the Quran

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Give two facts about the Twelve Imams that are commonly taught in Twelver Shia belief, in the context of the Imamate doctrine.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Explain two reasons why the concept of Ismah, the sinlessness or infallibility of the Imams, is important in Twelver Shia belief.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

- 4 Explain two reasons why Shia scholars use Quran 5:55 and reports about Ali when arguing that leadership should come from the Prophet's family, in the context of the Imamate doctrine. Refer to this sacred writing in your answer.

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

- 5 Give three ways the idea of the Imamate differs from the Sunni idea of a khalifah, in the context of leadership after Muhammad.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6 Explain the importance of the belief in the occultation of the Twelfth Imam for Twelver Shia communities today.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7 Explain two contrasting Sunni and Shia beliefs about how Islamic leadership should be chosen after the Prophet Muhammad, in the context of the Imamate doctrine and Sunni caliphate theory.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** State two features of belief about the role of the Imams that help maintain religious authority in Twelver Shia Islam, and for each briefly explain its effect.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** Give three reasons why some Muslims find the idea of an infallible Imam difficult to accept, in the context of debates between Sunni and Shia thought.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** Explain two ways the doctrine of the Imamate affects Shia interpretations of scripture and law, in the context of Twelver belief about religious authority.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Which one of the following is a claim made by those who believe the Twelfth Imam is in occultation?

- ☐ A That the Imam will never return and his role ended in the 9th century
- ☐ B That God protects the Imam and he will return as the Mahdi at an appointed time
- ☐ C That the Imam is a symbolic title for a council of scholars
- ☐ D That the Imam is an angel sent to guide the community

(Total for Question 11 is 1 mark)

- 12** Evaluate the statement, 'The Imamate is the most important difference between Sunni and Shia Islam.' In your answer you should give reasoned arguments to support this statement, give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view, refer to religious arguments, and reach a justified conclusion.

(Total for Question 12 is 15 marks)

Mark scheme · RS IB9 The Imamate: The Twelve Imams and Their Role in Shia Belief

Question 1

- **B1** selecting B, God-chosen spiritual and political successors from Ali's descendants, cao
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** fact 1: they are descendants of Ali and Fatima, the family of the Prophet, oe
- **B1** fact 2: the Twelfth Imam is believed to be in occultation and will return as the Mahdi, oe
- **Answer: Any two: descendants of Ali and Fatima; the Twelfth Imam is in occultation and will return as the Mahdi.**

Question 3

- **B1** point 1: Ismah means the Imams are protected from error so their teachings can be trusted as correct guidance, oe
- **B1** development: this allows Shia Muslims to follow the Imams interpretation of scripture and law with confidence, oe
- **B1** point 2: Ismah gives the Imams moral authority to lead the community, since they are seen as models of perfect faith, oe
- **B1** development: believers can imitate their behaviour and rely on them to explain God's will, strengthening community identity, oe
- **Answer: E.g. Ismah ensures Imams are free from error so their guidance is trustworthy and their moral example can be followed by believers.**

Question 4

- **B1** point 1: Quran 5:55 is used to show special status because it mentions giving alms while bowing, interpreted by Shia as referring to Ali, oe
- **B1** development: this verse is read as evidence that a member of the Prophet's household had authority and closeness to God, supporting family leadership, oe
- **B1** point 2: hadith reports about Ali receiving the Prophet's endorsement are used to support immediate succession in the Prophet's family, oe
- **B1** development: these reports are used to argue that leadership was intended to remain within the Ahl al Bayt, providing a basis for the Imamate, oe
- **B1** accurate reference to Quran 5:55 given in the answer, or clear correct paraphrase of its content, oe
- **Answer: E.g. Quran 5:55 is cited as indicating special status for a member of the Prophet's household, and hadith about the Prophet endorsing Ali are used to support leadership passing to his family.**

Question 5

- **B1** difference 1: Imams are seen as divinely appointed and from the Prophet's family, while a khalifah is chosen by the community, oe
- **B1** difference 2: Imams are believed to have Ismah, sinlessness or infallibility, whereas Sunni caliphs are not considered infallible, oe
- **B1** difference 3: the Twelfth Imam is believed to be in occultation and will return as the Mahdi, a concept not found in the Sunni understanding of caliphal leadership, oe
- **Answer: Any three: Imams divinely appointed from Prophet's family vs elected khalifah; Imams have Ismah vs caliphs not infallible; occultation and awaited Mahdi in Twelver belief vs Sunni leadership model.**

Question 6

- **B1** point 1: the occultation gives hope because believers expect the Imam's return as the Mahdi to bring justice and right guidance, oe
- **B1** development: this hope can motivate moral living and patience in the face of injustice, oe
- **B1** point 2: the occultation provides a theological explanation for current absence of divinely-guided leadership, while maintaining continuity of authority, oe
- **B1** development: religious scholars and institutions act as caretakers of guidance until the Imam's return, so community leadership continues, oe
- **Answer: E.g. it gives hope for future justice under the Mahdi and explains the present absence of the Imam while**

Question 7

- **B1** belief 1: Shia belief is that leadership should be divinely appointed from the Prophet's family, specifically Ali and his descendants, oe
- **B1** development: this is supported by interpretations of Quranic verses and hadith that are read as endorsing the Ahl al Bayt, oe
- **B1** belief 2: Sunni belief is that leaders should be chosen by consultation or election among the Muslim community, the khalifah serving as a political and religious steward, oe
- **B1** development: this is supported by the historical acceptance of the caliphs chosen by early Muslim groups and by emphasis on shura, consultation, oe
- **Answer: Contrast: Shia divine appointment from Prophet's family with evidence from scripture and hadith interpretations, versus Sunni selection by community through consultation and consensus.**

Question 8

- **B1** feature 1: belief in Ismah, oe
- **B1** meaning 1: makes their teachings and judgments authoritative and trustworthy, oe
- **B1** feature 2: belief in lineage from Ali and the Prophet, oe
- **B1** meaning 2: links leadership to the Prophet's family, giving Imams special status and legitimacy, oe
- **Answer: E.g. Ismah (gives authoritative, trustworthy guidance); descent from Ali and Fatima (gives legitimacy and special status).**

Question 9

- **B1** reason 1: it seems to conflict with the view that only prophets can have special divine protection, oe
- **B1** reason 2: it is hard to reconcile with examples of moral failure in historical leaders, oe
- **B1** reason 3: it can be seen as concentrating too much religious authority in a single line, which some worry could be misused, oe
- **Answer: Any three: conflict with prophet-only protection; difficulty reconciling with human fallibility; concerns about concentration of authority.**

Question 10

- **B1** point 1: Imams interpretations are treated as authoritative, influencing legal rulings and understanding of Quranic verses, oe
- **B1** point 2: Twelver scholars may prioritise hadith associated with the Imams and the Ahl al Bayt when deriving law, oe
- **Answer: E.g. Imams interpretations shape legal rulings and understanding of the Quran; hadith linked to the Imams and Ahl al Bayt are given high weight in law derivation.**

Question 11

- **B1** selecting B, belief that God preserves the Imam in occultation and he will return as the Mahdi, cao
- **Answer: B**

Question 12

- **Level 4** (10-12): A well-developed, balanced evaluation that addresses the statement directly, uses detailed religious arguments on both sides, refers to Shia and Sunni beliefs accurately, and reaches a justified conclusion with clear reasoning.
- **Level 3** (7-9): A clear evaluation that gives reasons for and against the statement, includes some religious argument and evidence, and reaches a conclusion, though some points may be less developed.
- **Level 2** (4-6): An attempt at evaluation that gives at least one reason for and one reason against the statement, with limited use of religious argument and a basic conclusion.
- **Level 1** (1-3): Simple, undeveloped comments which are relevant to the question but do not form a coherent evaluation; may be one-sided.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Arguments supporting the statement: The Imamate defines a fundamental doctrinal difference, including claims about divine appointment, Ismah and the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, which directly affect ideas of authority, leadership, and legitimacy in Islam.
 - Supporting detail: Shia belief that Imams are divinely-appointed and infallible contrasts strongly with Sunni emphasis on selection and consultation, so this is a primary theological division with practical consequences for law and leadership.
 - Arguments against the statement: Other differences such as historical disputes over succession, different legal schools and practices, and variations in religious practice and communal organisation are also significant and could be seen as equally or more important in shaping Sunni-Shia relations.
 - Counterpoint detail: The historical split, political rivalries and differing collections of hadith and legal methodology have produced distinct identities and practices across the two traditions beyond the Imamate doctrine itself.
 - Religious arguments to include: cite Shia reliance on Ahl al Bayt and Quranic/hadith interpretations supporting Imamate; cite Sunni emphasis on shura and the example of the early caliphs as normative.
 - Conclusion guidance: a balanced answer might argue that the Imamate is among the most important doctrinal differences because it concerns authority and guidance, but concede that historical, legal and communal factors are also central, and so the Imamate is a key difference rather than the sole most important one.