

TAFSĪR AL-MĪZĀN AS A REPRESENTATION OF SHĪ'Ī EXEGESIS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IMĀMAH, IṢMAH, AND MUT'AH

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Abstract: This article examines the development of Qur'anic exegesis within the Shī'ī tradition, focusing its analysis on the book *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Rather than treating Shī'ī exegesis only as a by-product of early political conflict, this research also foregrounds the tradition's own theological self-understanding, in which the *imām*'s authority as *naṣṣ* grounds a periodization running from the era of the *imāms* through *ghaybah ṣuḡhrā* and *kubrā*, shaping the shift from *riwāyah*-based to *ijtihādī*-rational exegesis. *Al-Mizān* emerges as the pinnacle of this trajectory, employing *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, in which verses are read against other verses while *ḥadīth* and reason serve as secondary instruments. Through a qualitative, library-based approach engaging the primary Arabic text alongside recent scholarship (2017–2026), this article analyzes how Ṭabāṭabā'ī applies that method to *imāmah* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124, cross-read with Q.S. Ibrāhīm [14]: 35–36), *iṣmah* (the verse of purification, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33), and *mut'ah* marriage (Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 24), comparing each conclusion against classical and contemporary Sunni exegesis and against critical scholarship on *al-Mizān* itself. The article also engages the methodological question of whether this approach is more accurately classified as *tafsīr bi al-Qur'ān* or as a sophisticated instance of *ijtihādī* reasoning. The results show that *al-Mizān* presents a moderate, argumentative exegesis that renders Shī'ī doctrine academically discussable, even as its distinctly Shī'ī conclusions remain intact beneath that inclusive style—a finding that contributes to comparative Sunni–Shī'ī exegetical scholarship and to a more precise mapping of where the two traditions genuinely converge and diverge.

Keywords: *Al-Mizān*, *Ijtihādī Tafsīr*, *Imāmah*, Shī'ī Exegesis, Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji perkembangan tafsir Al-Qur'an dalam tradisi Syiah dengan memfokuskan analisis pada kitab *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* karya Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Alih-alih memperlakukan tafsir Syiah semata sebagai produk konflik politik awal, penelitian ini juga mengedepankan pemahaman diri teologis tradisi tersebut, yang menempatkan otoritas para imam sebagai *naṣṣ* dasar periodisasi yang berjalan dari fase para imam hingga

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ghaybah suhbrā dan *kubrā*, membentuk pergeseran dari tafsir berbasis riwayat menuju tafsir *ijtihādī*-rasional. *Al-Mizān* hadir sebagai representasi puncak dari lintasan ini, menggunakan metode *tafsir al-Qurʾān bi al-Qurʾān*, di mana ayat dibaca melalui ayat lain, sementara hadis dan akal berfungsi sebagai instrumen sekunder. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dan studi kepustakaan yang melibatkan langsung teks primer berbahasa Arab bersama kajian akademik Indonesia dan internasional mutakhir (2017–2026), artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana Ṭabāṭabāʾī menerapkan metode tersebut secara konkret pada *imāmah* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124, dibaca silang dengan Q.S. Ibrahim [14]: 35–36), *ʾismah* (ayat penyucian, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33), dan nikah *mutʿah* (Q.S. An-Nisāʾ [4]: 24), membandingkan setiap kesimpulan dengan tafsir Sunni klasik maupun kontemporer serta dengan kajian kritis atas *al-Mizān* sendiri. Artikel ini juga membahas pertanyaan metodologis apakah pendekatan ini lebih tepat diklasifikasikan sebagai *tafsir bi al-Qurʾān* atau sebagai bentuk canggih dari penalaran *ijtihadi*. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa *al-Mizān* menampilkan corak tafsir yang moderat dan argumentatif yang menjadikan doktrin Syiah dapat didiskusikan secara akademis, meskipun kesimpulan khas Syiah tetap melekat di balik corak inklusifnya—temuan yang berkontribusi bagi kajian perbandingan tafsir Sunni-Syiah serta pemetaan yang lebih presisi mengenai titik temu dan titik perbedaan sesungguhnya di antara kedua tradisi tersebut.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Al-Mizān*, *Imāmah*, Tafsir Ijtihadi, Tafsir Syiah, Ṭabāṭabāʾī.

Introduction

The history of Islamic thought records that the development of exegesis (*tafsīr*) cannot be separated from the theological and political dynamics that surround it. Within the Shīʿī tradition, exegesis began as a movement bound to the question of leadership after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, which subsequently evolved into an established theological school. In the early period, Shīʿī exegesis relied heavily on *riwāyah* originating from the authority of the *imāms* of the *ahl al-bayt*, in which interpretation was regarded as a hierarchical inheritance of divine knowledge. However, alongside the doctrine of *ghaybah* (occultation) and the challenges of successive eras, this tradition underwent a significant shift toward a more systematic and rational approach.

Entering the modern era, the need for an exegesis capable of responding to the surge of materialism and rationalism became increasingly urgent. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, a great scholar and philosopher of the twentieth century, answered this challenge through his monumental work, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Unlike classical exegeses that tended to be defensive or sectarian, *al-Mizān* offers the *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi al-Qurʾān* approach, which positions the Qurʾān as a light (*nūr*) capable of explaining itself. Ṭabāṭabāʾī positioned reason and philosophy as instruments of analysis rather than as independent sources of law, in order to objectively unpack the meaning of revelation.

Al-Mizān has already attracted substantial scholarly attention. Indonesian studies such as those of Fauzan (2018, 117–36), Kurniawan and Khairunnisa (2021, 146–50), Karimah and Gunawan (2022, 41–48), Anshori (2022, 77–94), Khaerurrazikin and Tahir (2023, 1–15), and Hopipah et al. (2023, 50–67) have each described the general characteristics of *al-Mizān*’s *manhaj*—its reliance on *tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi al-Qurʾān*, its philosophical orientation, and select *fiqh* applications. Ihsan (2023, 76–77) situates *al-Mizān* within the broader trajectory of Shīʿī exegesis

moving from sectarian apology toward moderation. What remains comparatively underdeveloped in this literature is a sustained, verse-by-verse juxtaposition of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's own primary-text argumentation against classical and contemporary Sunnī exegesis on the same contested doctrinal loci, read together with the internal theological logic—rather than only the external political-sociological logic—that Shī'ī scholarship itself uses to periodize its exegetical history (Musolli 2015, 39–43). This article positions itself in that gap: rather than repeating the general descriptive overview already available in the works cited above, it selects three verses that sit at the doctrinal core of Sunnī–Shī'ī difference—*imāmah*, *iṣmah*, and *mut'ah*—and asks, of each, precisely where *al-Mīzān*'s own textual argument diverges from its Sunnī counterparts, and why.

This article aims to describe the development of Shī'ī exegesis and to critically analyze how *al-Mīzān* represents—and contributes to—that transformation. The discussion focuses on Ṭabāṭabā'ī's intellectual background, the distinctive methodology applied in *al-Mīzān* and its concrete application to contested verses, and a direct comparison with Sunnī exegesis and with critical scholarship on *al-Mīzān* itself. It is hoped that this will illustrate how *al-Mīzān* functions not only as an explanation of the sacred text, but also as a Shī'ī intellectual response to the realities of the modern world, and as a specific, analyzable contribution to the wider field of comparative Qur'anic exegesis rather than a static object of description.

This research is a qualitative study employing a library research approach. Data were obtained through the tracing and analysis of primary and secondary sources relevant to the theme of the development of Shī'ī exegesis and *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. The primary source of this research is the book *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, consulted directly in the Arabic 3rd edition (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973) and cross-checked against the authorized English translation for the three case-study passages analyzed below. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and other scholarly works discussing the history of Shī'ī exegesis, the biography of Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation, prioritizing peer-reviewed journal literature published within the last ten years (2017–2026).

The data analysis technique employed is descriptive-analytical. This method is applied by systematically describing the development of Shī'ī exegesis based on its own internal theological periodization (Musolli 2015, 39–43), and then critically analyzing the method, orientation, and contribution of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. The analysis emphasizes the relationship between Iran's social-intellectual context and the formulation of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegetical methodology. A historical approach is used to map the development of exegesis, while a thematic and comparative method—of the kind applied in comparative *tafsīr* scholarship more broadly (Umar et al. 2021, 161–74)—is used to examine the distinctive characteristics of *al-Mīzān* and to compare its conclusions systematically, verse by verse, with

classical and contemporary Sunnī exegesis on the same passages, as well as with source-critical scholarship on *al-Mīzān* itself.

The Historical Development of Shī'ism

In order to comprehensively understand the dynamics of Shī'ī development, the discussion must begin by tracing the phase of its emergence in the early period of Islam. This period constitutes an important foundation for the formation of Shī'ī theological and political identity, which subsequently influenced the direction of its development in later phases.

The Emergence of Shī'ism: Political Genesis and Theological Self-Understanding

Shī'ism initially emerged amid the question of Muslim leadership after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The term *shī'ah* linguistically refers to a group of supporters or followers, and in the context of early Islamic history it was used to designate the supporters of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib within the political dynamics following the Prophet's death. Read through this historical-critical lens, Shī'ism had not yet formed as a systematic theological school, but rather as a political orientation rooted in loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt (Momen 1985, 11–14).

Subsequent historical developments show that this political conflict gave rise to an increasingly profound religious reflection. The experience of political marginalization drove the Shī'ī community to formulate a concept of leadership that was not merely administrative but also possessed religious legitimacy. In this context, the concept of *imāmah* developed as a theological doctrine affirming that the leadership of the Muslim community was to be understood as a divine appointment, not entirely dependent on political consensus (Halm 1997, 19–22).

This political-genesis account, however, is not the only available reading, and it is not the account Shī'ī theology gives of itself. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's own primary presentation of Shī'ism to outside readers makes this explicit: imamate, in his account, is not a doctrine that crystallized gradually out of factional conflict but a *rukn* (pillar) of faith belonging to the fundamental elements of Shī'ism itself, established by *naṣṣ* (explicit textual designation) from the very beginning (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1975, 11–17). On this reading, the *imāms* were, during their lifetimes, the authoritative textual reference (*naṣṣ*) after the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, which is precisely why there was no scope for independent *ijtihād* by others in that period, and why the exegesis produced under their direct authority was overwhelmingly *tafsīr bi al-mā'thūr*: not because Shī'ī scholarship lacked the rational tools for *ijtihād*, but because the presence of a living, infallible textual authority made such *ijtihād* theologically unnecessary. This is consistent with the broader claim in the specialist literature on Shī'ī political theology that imamate is properly theological in its own self-understanding, and that political legitimacy is a consequence of that theological

status rather than its origin (Khurasani 2010, 113–37). Indonesian scholarship on Shī'ī *tafsīr* historiography treats this self-periodization—beginning from the era of the *imāms* rather than from the Companions or from the codification (*tadwīn*) that anchors Sunnī periodization—as itself theologically motivated: a deliberate grounding of the tradition's history in the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt rather than in the timeline the majority tradition uses (Musolli 2015, 39, 43).

A number of contemporary Muslim scholars note that the differences between Sunnīs and Shī'īs in the early phase of Islamic history were driven more by political factors than by established theological differences (Shihab 2007, 33–38; Herman et al. 2024, 551–59). Held together with the internal theological account above, the more defensible position is not that one reading simply replaces the other, but that both operate simultaneously: the historical record shows a political conflict over succession, while Shī'ī theology reads that same conflict as the moment a pre-existing doctrinal principle was denied its due recognition, rather than as the moment the principle was invented.

Over time, this historical experience—read through either lens—shaped a Shī'ī religious ethos emphasizing loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt, justice, and resistance against tyranny. These values subsequently became the ethical and theological foundation influencing the entire edifice of Shī'ī thought, including the development of theology, jurisprudence, and Qur'anic exegesis (Newman 2012, 28–31).

The Institutionalization and Formation of Shī'ism as an Established School

Entering the fourth century AH (tenth century CE), Shī'ism underwent a process of institutionalization marking the transition from a limited religious community toward a school possessing an established scholarly and institutional structure. This process occurred alongside the strengthening political position of Shī'ī groups in several regions of the Islamic world. Political support enabled the development of educational institutions, the codification of *ḥadīth*, and the composition of more systematic works of theology, jurisprudence, and exegesis (Halm 1997, 63–67).

One important phase in this process occurred during the rule of the Buwayhid dynasty (10th–11th century CE), when Shī'ī scholars gained a relatively wide space to develop their scholarly tradition. During this period, the *Imāmī Shī'ī* school began to be formulated more clearly through the codification of the doctrine of *imāmah*, a system of jurisprudence, and a methodology of Qur'anic exegesis (Momen 1985, 189–94).

The process of Shī'ī school-formation reached its peak during the Ṣafavid dynasty (16th–18th century CE), when *Imāmī Shī'ism* was established as the official state school of Iran. This designation had a major impact on the development of Shī'ī thought, as the state played an active role in supporting scholars, establishing madrasas, and producing religious literature (Newman 2006, 71–76).

Within the context of exegesis, this institutionalization drove the emergence

of exegetical works that not only sought to preserve the school's identity but also to develop a scholarly approach on a par with other Islamic exegetical traditions (Newman 2012, 90–94).

A number of Indonesian Muslim scholars note that the formation of Shī'ism as an established school was the result of an interaction between political, theological, and scholarly factors (Shihab 2007, 71–75). This phase constitutes a crucial point in understanding the position of Shī'ism as a major school within the Islamic tradition, and it sets the stage—discussed next—for how Shī'ī scholarship itself periodizes the history of its exegesis.

Contemporary Shī'ism and the Dynamics of Modern Thought

Entering the modern era, Shī'ism underwent a significant transformation alongside social, political, and intellectual change across the Islamic world. This development was marked by the active involvement of Shī'ī thinkers and scholars in responding to contemporary issues such as colonialism, modernity, social justice, and the relationship between religion and the state.

One of the main characteristics of contemporary Shī'ism is the strengthening role of rationality and philosophical reflection within religious discourse. Modern Shī'ī *kalām* thought shows a tendency to engage in dialogue with Western philosophy and modern social theory, without abandoning theological foundations such as *imāmah* and *wilāyah* (Nasr 2006, 268–71). This paradigm shift is evident within Iran itself: Afni and Kharomen (2025, 77–88) trace how regional Iranian tafsīr shifted across the twentieth century toward the rational-philosophical register *al-Mīzān* exemplifies.

In the field of exegesis, contemporary Shī'ism no longer displays sectarian polemics openly, but instead emphasizes methodological and ethical approaches (Momen 1985, 275–79). Ihsan (2023, 76–77) documents this shift concretely: on his reading, the trajectory from al-Ṭūsī through al-Ṭabarsī to Ṭabāṭabā'ī moves from closed, community-internal exegesis toward increasingly inclusive engagement with non-Shī'ī scholarship, with *al-Mīzān* as its culmination rather than an isolated exception.

A number of Indonesian Muslim scholars also note that the development of contemporary Shī'ism must be understood within the framework of the globalization of Islamic thought (Shihab 2018, 145–49). Recent comparative scholarship, such as Aprianti, Amri, and Thalib (2025, 330–38), likewise argues that the historic points of difference between Sunnīs and Shī'īs continue to be renegotiated in the present without changing the substantive doctrinal core on either side.

The development of Shī'ism in the contemporary era thus demonstrates a continuity between tradition and change. This phase confirms that Shī'ism is a living and dynamic school with an important contribution to contemporary Islamic discourse, including in the development of a Qur'anic exegesis oriented toward justice and humanity.

The History and Development of Shī'ī Exegesis

Having traced Shī'ism's political and theological emergence, the discussion now turns to how Shī'ī scholarship periodizes the history of its own exegesis (Rohman 2022, 59–70)—a periodization that, as noted above, is itself theologically motivated (Musolli 2015, 43). Rather than the *qabl al-tadwīn/ba'd al-tadwīn* (pre-/post-codification) scheme used in Sunnī historiography, Shī'ī scholarship organizes its exegetical history around the era of the *imāms* and the doctrine of *ghaybah* (occultation), and it is this internal logic, not merely external sociological circumstance, that the following subsections adopt.

Theological and Epistemological Foundations of Shī'ī Exegesis

Shī'ī exegesis is rooted in a theological view regarding the authority of Qur'anic interpretation after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the Imāmī Shī'ī perspective, the interpretation of the Qur'an was not entirely entrusted to the community of Companions or scholars through the mechanisms of *ijmā'* and *ijtihād* but was specifically attached to the *imāms* of the *ahl al-bayt* as the heirs of the Prophet's scholarly and spiritual authority (Momen 1985, 147–50).

Epistemologically, Shī'ī exegesis rests on the belief that the Qur'an possesses two layers of meaning: an outward meaning (*ẓāhir*), which is exoteric, and an inward meaning (*bāṭin*), which is esoteric. The *ẓāhir* meaning can be understood through linguistic and historical approaches, while the *bāṭin* meaning can only be fully known by the infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) *imāms* (Momen 1985, 147–50).

The implications of this doctrine are clearly visible in the dominance of the *imāms' riwāyah* within the early Shī'ī exegetical tradition. Exegetical narrations attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Muhammad al-Bāqir, and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq occupy a central position as sources of interpretation, understood not as individual speculation but as the sustained transmission of religious knowledge within the lineage of the Ahl al-Bayt (Modarressi 2003, 28–31).

A number of academic studies within Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions likewise affirm the distinctiveness of this Shī'ī exegetical methodology. One study by Kerwanto, a lecturer at Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, shows that classical Shī'ī exegesis tends to place the authority of interpretation on the figure of the Imam and to emphasize the aspect of *wilāyah* in reading Qur'anic verses, particularly those relating to leadership and religious legitimacy (Ramadhani et al. 2025, 1–13).

The theological and epistemological foundations of Shī'ī exegesis thus shape an interpretive character distinct from the Sunnī exegetical tradition. Shī'ī exegesis functions not only as an explanation of the Qur'anic text but also as a theological expression reflecting the Shī'ī school's fundamental beliefs concerning religious authority and Muslim leadership.

The Era of the *Imāms* (1st–3rd Century AH): *Naṣṣ*-Based Authority and the Dominance of *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*

In Shī'ī scholarship's own periodization, exegetical history begins not with the Companions in general but specifically with the students of Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—figures such as Ibn 'Abbās and, in turn, his student Sa'īd ibn Jubayr—followed by Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī (d. 148 AH), a companion of four successive *imāms*, who's fragmentary *tafsīr* became a reference point for later exegetes, Shī'ī and non-Shī'ī alike (Musolli 2015, 39). The earliest identifiable independent Shī'ī *tafsīr* is attributed to al-Imām al-Jābir al-Ju'fī (d. 128 AH), and by the third century AH, the (incomplete) *tafsīr* attributed to the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260 AH), appears (Musolli 2015, 39).

As argued in the previous section, this period's overwhelming reliance on *riwāyah* is best explained theologically rather than merely sociologically: during the lifetimes of the *imāms*, their word functioned as *naṣṣ*—an authoritative text standing immediately after the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah—so that independent *ijtihād* by other scholars was, within the Shī'ī framework itself, both unnecessary and epistemically subordinate. Exegesis in this period was therefore not viewed as the result of free individual reasoning, but as a normative explanation originating from a living authority whose interpretive pronouncements were, in principle, as binding as the text itself (Modarressi 2003, 21–25).

This period corresponds to what Shī'ī theology calls the pre-*ghaybah* era: the Twelfth Imam's occultation is dated by Shī'ī sources to 260 AH, beginning the *ghaybah ṣuḡhrā* (Lesser Occultation), during which the Imam continued to communicate through four successive special deputies (*nuwwāb*), before the *ghaybah kubrā* (Greater Occultation) began in 329 AH with the death of the last deputy, 'Alī ibn Muhammad al-Samurī, and continues to the present. This *ghaybah*-based periodization—rather than the *tadwīn*-based scheme of Sunnī historiography—is the framework Shī'ī scholarship itself uses to mark the transition treated in the next subsection (Musolli 2015, 39–40).

The Era of *Ghaybah* (4th Century AH–Present): From *Riwāyah* to *Ijtihādī-Rational Exegesis*

With the onset of the *ghaybah kubrā* and the resulting absence of direct access to the Imam, religious authority shifted to the *marāji'* (sing. *marja'*) and the *fuqahā'* acting through *niyābah* 'āmmah (general deputyship), and it is precisely at this point—the early fourth century AH—that Shī'ī exegesis begins to move from pure *riwāyah* toward *ijtihādī* engagement with the text. The monumental *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (early 4th century AH) and *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* still belong methodologically to the *riwāyah*-dominated pattern, but they mark the moment Shī'ī scholarship achieves full codification (*tadwīn*) of its exegetical tradition, a milestone Sunnī scholarship had already reached earlier with al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH)

(Musolli 2015, 40; Ihsan 2023, 72–73).

The decisive methodological turn comes with al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH) in *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*—the first complete Shī'ī *tafsīr* to combine *riwāyah* with sustained rational and linguistic analysis, and, notably, to draw on Sunnī scholarship directly (Ihsan 2023, 73–74). This is continued and, in terms of later influence, arguably surpassed by al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548 AH) in *Majma' al-Bayān*, a work praised even by the Sunnī historian of exegesis al-Dhahabī for its moderation despite his reservations about its Shī'ī affiliation (Ihsan 2023, 83–84). It is important to note precisely what shifts here: what replaces *riwāyah* is not what Shī'ī scholarship itself calls *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*—a term carrying, as in Sunnī *uṣūl*, the negative connotation of unregulated personal opinion condemned in the well-known prophetic warning against interpreting the Qur'an by mere *ra'y*—but rather *tafsīr ijtihādī* or *tafsīr 'aqlī*: reasoned interpretation that remains answerable to *riwāyah* and to the *muḥkam* structure of the text, rather than personal opinion imposed upon it (Ihsan 2023, 91–92; Chotimah 2023, 12–20).

This *ijtihādī* trajectory was neither linear nor uncontested. The Akhbārī movement of the eleventh–twelfth centuries AH pushed back sharply, insisting on an exclusive return to the *riwāyāh* of the *ahl al-bayt* and treating *ijtihād* as impermissible (Ihsan 2023, 75–76); the Ṣafavid court itself favored this Akhbārī orientation for a period, before the *uṣūlī* school reasserted the legitimacy of *ijtihād* by the thirteenth century AH (Musolli 2015, 41; Ihsan 2023, 89–90). Seen against this back-and-forth, the emergence of *al-Mīzān* in the fourteenth century AH is not simply one more *tafsīr* among many, but the culmination of the *ijtihādī* line that al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī had opened centuries earlier—reached, as Musolli notes, only after this internal *riwāyah/ijtihād* oscillation had largely settled in *ijtihād's* favor (Musolli 2015, 42–43).

Kerwanto's study, a lecturer at Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, affirms that this transition reflects an internal dynamic of the school responsive to changing times, without abandoning the doctrine of *imāmah* as its theological foundation (Ramadhani et al. 2025, 1–13). Whether *al-Mīzān's* own method is best described, from an external academic vantage point, as *tafsīr bi al-Qur'ān* or as a highly disciplined form of *tafsīr ijtihādī bi al-ra'y al-maḥmūd* (praiseworthy reasoned exegesis) is a question this article returns to directly in the methodology section below.

Table 1. Periodization of Shī'ī Qur'anic Exegesis.

Period	Timeframe	Textual Authority	Dominant Method	Representative Works
Era of the <i>Imāms</i>	1st–3rd AH.	c. <i>Naṣṣ</i> of the living <i>imams</i> .	<i>Tafsīr al-l-m a' t h ū r (riwāyah)</i> .	<i>bi</i> Fragmentary <i>tafsīr</i> of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī; Al-Jābir al-Ju'fī.
<i>Ghaybāh Ṣughrā</i>	260–329 AH.	Four special deputies (<i>nuwwāb</i>).	Codification (<i>tadwīn</i>) begins.	<i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> ; <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> .
Early <i>Ghaybāh Kubrā</i>	4th–6th AH.	c. <i>Marāji' /fuqahā' (niyābah 'āmmah)</i> .	<i>Ijtihādī</i> -rational turn.	<i>Al-Tibyān</i> (Ṭūsī); <i>Majma' al-Bayān</i> (Ṭabarsī).
<i>Akhhārī</i> Reaction	11th–12th c. AH.	<i>Riwāyah</i> of <i>ahl al-bayt</i> exclusively.	Return to <i>riwāyah</i> ; <i>ijtihād</i> rejected.	<i>Al-Ṣāfi</i> (Fayḍ Kāshānī).
<i>Uṣūlī</i> Reassertion	13th–14th c. AH.	<i>Marāji'</i> (<i>ijtihād</i> reaffirmed).	Mature Qur'an-anchored <i>ijtihād</i> .	<i>Al-Mīzān</i> (Ṭabāṭabā'ī).

Biography of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī and His Intellectual Legacy

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī was one of the principal pillars of the twentieth-century Islamic intellectual revival, born in 1903 CE in Tabriz, in the Azerbaijan region of northwestern Iran (Khaerurrazikin and Tahir 2023, 1–15). Raised in a religious family that loved knowledge, his intellectual journey matured in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, which served as a center of Shī'ī Islamic education. It was in this city that he studied under multidisciplinary masters, ranging from Mīrzā 'Alī Qāḍī in the field of gnosis (*'irfān*), Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī in jurisprudence, to Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Khwānsārī in mathematics. His love of philosophy was likewise nurtured under the guidance of Sayyid Husayn Bādkūba'ī, through whom he studied canonical texts such as *al-Shifā'* by Ibn Sīnā and *al-Asfār* by Mullā Ṣadrā (Anshori 2022, 77–94).

As a scholar who mastered various disciplines, Ṭabāṭabā'ī was known for his inclusive and open outlook. He did not confine his intellectual engagement to Muslim circles alone but also entered into deep dialogue with Western scholars such as Henry Corbin. Together with figures such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, he engaged in intensive discussions on comparative gnosis, a study comparing the mystical teachings of sacred texts from various religions with the doctrines of

Sufism and Islamic knowledge (Anshori 2022, 77–94).

In his role as an educator, Ṭabāṭabā'ī dedicated his life to the non-political intellectual path of Islamic studies, even though his influence produced a diverse spectrum of students. Some of his students, such as Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, subsequently became key ideologues of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, while others, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, chose to continue their teacher's path in the purely academic and spiritual sphere. In the field of philosophy, Ṭabāṭabā'ī made a significant contribution through his work *Uṣūl-i Falsafeh va Ravesb-e Realism* (*The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*), which offers a realist Islamic worldview while critiquing both idealism and materialism (Anshori 2022, 77–94).

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's concern for cross-sectarian understanding is also evident in his efforts to correct the outside world's misunderstanding of Shī'ism. Through his dialogue with Henry Corbin and his writing of the book *Shī'ite Islam*, later translated into English by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, he sought to present the history and doctrines of Shī'ism objectively. In addition, he also wrote standard philosophy textbooks, *Bidāyah al-Ḥikmah* and *Nihāyah al-Ḥikmah*, which remain principal references in the study of Islamic philosophy to this day (Khaerurrazikin and Tahir 2023, 1–15).

The pinnacle of his entire intellectual and spiritual journey was manifested in his monumental work, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. This exegesis was written with extraordinary diligence using the method of interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, an approach that distinguishes it from other great exegetes (Tahir et al. 2023, 1–18). Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī passed away on 15 November 1982 at the age of eighty, leaving behind an enduring legacy as a reformer who infused fresh vitality into religious and philosophical education in the Islamic world (Khaerurrazikin and Tahir 2023, 1–15)—a legacy that later generations of Indonesian scholarship have continued to reassess for what it implies about human potential and moral function (Zakiy and Ali 2023, 21–53).

Ṭabāṭabā'ī was a prolific scholar who left behind a cross-disciplinary intellectual legacy encompassing exegesis, philosophy, theology, and Sufism. His magnum opus in Qur'anic studies is *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, which remains the principal reference for contemporary Shī'ī exegesis. In the field of philosophy and epistemology, his expertise is evident in standard philosophy textbooks and in the profound philosophical work entitled *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, while the depth of his spirituality and mastery of *'irfān* (Sufism) is manifested in works such as *The Return to Being and Kernel of the Kernel* (Anshori 2022, 77–94).

***Tafsīr al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* and the Motivation behind Its Composition**

The Qurʾanic exegesis composed by Ṭabāṭabāʾī is known as *al-Mīzān*, meaning the scale, balance, or moderation. From the outset, this exegesis was dedicated to imparting an understanding of the Qurʾān to a number of his students who attended his study circle. After settling in Qum, precisely in 1375 AH, corresponding to 1956 CE, the first volume of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* was completed. Linguistically, *al-Mīzān* derives from the word *wazn*, meaning scale, measure, equivalence, or barometer. When connected to the full title of the book, this meaning would render it as ‘the Balanced Exegesis’ (Filmizan et al. 2024, 585–95). The Arabic original was published in its third edition in Beirut in 1393 AH, corresponding to 1973 CE, by Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li al-Maṭbūʿāt, and follows the *tartīb al-muṣḥaf*, the order of the *muṣḥaf* beginning from Q.S. Al-Fātiḥah through to Q.S. An-Nās (Anam 2020, 60).

As for the motivation that drove Ṭabāṭabāʾī to write *al-Mīzān*, it was because he wished to teach and interpret the Qurʾān in a manner capable of anticipating the upheaval of rationalism in his time. On the other hand, because materialistic ideas had come to dominate to a great extent, there was a pressing need for rational, philosophical, as well as Sufi discourse that would enable the *ḥawzah* to combine the intellectual and doctrinal principles of Islam with rational arguments to defend the position of Islam (Fauzan 2018, 120).

This exegesis was named *al-Mīzān* as though Ṭabāṭabāʾī wished to make his exegesis a brilliant scale of balance, prioritizing the interpretation of the Qurʾān through the Qurʾān rather than being bound and fanatically attached to any particular theory (Fauzan 2018, 129). Karimah and Gunawan (2022, 41–48) emphasize that this *manhaj* was not an incidental stylistic choice but a deliberate response to the ideological pressures of Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s era, intended to keep the exegetical process anchored to the text itself—though, as the case studies below will show, that anchoring did not in practice erase his Shīʿī theological point of departure.

Why *al-Mīzān* as the Representative Text?

The claim that *al-Mīzān* represents Shīʿī exegesis is not self-evident and cannot rest merely on *al-Mīzān*’s popularity; given the sheer number of Shīʿī *tafsīr* works produced across fourteen centuries, the claim requires grounding in how the primary bibliographical literature of *tafsīr* studies itself classifies and weighs the book. Three primary-source anchors, one Sunnī and two Shīʿī, support this article’s use of *al-Mīzān* as the representative text.

First, from outside the Shīʿī tradition itself, the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī—author of *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn*, the single most widely used reference work for classifying the entire history of Qurʾanic exegesis

in modern *tafsīr* scholarship—singles out *al-Mīzān* for direct discussion in the third, posthumously published volume of his work (Dhahabī 2000, 65–66). That al-Dhahabī, writing from a Sunnī and often critical vantage point toward Shī'ī exegesis in general, nonetheless found *al-Mīzān* specifically worthy of sustained attention is itself evidence of the book's status as the reference point by which Shī'ī exegesis is judged from outside the tradition, rather than one Shī'ī *tafsīr* among an undifferentiated many.

Second, from within the Shī'ī tradition, Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifat's *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn fī Thawbihi al-Qashīb*—composed explicitly as a Shī'ī scholarly response to al-Dhahabī's work, defending the principles and legitimacy of Shī'ī exegesis against al-Dhahabī's characterization of it (Ma'rifat 2004, 1)—situates *al-Mīzān* within its own account of the most significant *riwāyah*- and *dirāyah*-based *tafsīrs* produced by both Shī'a and Sunnīs; its Persian recension, *Tafsīr va Mufasssīrān*, devotes sustained, specific discussion to *al-Mīzān*'s place in that lineage (Ma'rifat 2009, 2:497). That the canonical Shī'ī answer to al-Dhahabī's survey treats *al-Mīzān* as a central reference point, rather than as a peripheral or idiosyncratic work, is direct primary-source evidence—in Persian and Arabic scholarship on *tafsīr* historiography itself—for the claim this article makes in its title.

Third, and most directly, recent scholarship specifically investigating why *al-Mīzān* is read across sectarian lines converges on the same point this article's case studies illustrate: Wahid and Ibrahim (2023, 27–38) show that *al-Mīzān* is accepted as reading material by Sunnī as well as Shī'ī scholars precisely because its philosophical and Qur'an-anchored method allows its arguments to be evaluated on textual and rational grounds rather than dismissed on sectarian grounds alone—a judgment echoed in the leading English-language handbook treatment of Twelver Shī'ī exegesis, which likewise identifies *al-Mīzān* as the natural culmination point for any account of the tradition (Rizvi 2020, 715–32), and confirmed at the level of individual verses by studies that trace *al-Mīzān*'s argumentation through to specific exegetical conclusions on discrete passages rather than treating it only in general terms (Ramadhan and Mala 2022, 378–402)—which is exactly why, as the Methodology and Analysis sections below demonstrate, *al-Mīzān*'s Shī'ī conclusions can be placed in direct, verse-by-verse dialogue with Sunnī exegesis rather than simply juxtaposed against it. *Mut'ah*, discussed at length below, is a useful test of this claim in miniature: precisely because *al-Mīzān* argues its position on *mut'ah* philologically and through named classical exegetes rather than through sectarian assertion alone (Islam 2017, 71–101), the disagreement it provokes is traceable to specific, identifiable points of evidentiary divergence—which is the mark of a text substantial enough to serve as representative of the tradition it speaks for, rather than a marginal outlier within it.

The Methodology of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*

Methodology (*manhaj*) is the aspect that most distinguishes *al-Mīzān* from other exegetical works. Ṭabāṭabā'ī adopted and refined the method of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an) to a level never before achieved (Hopipah et al. 2023, 50–67; Amin et al. 2025, 340–59; Achmad 2021, 248–63; Sachedina 2022, 401–14).

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's basic principle is simple yet radical: the Qur'an describes itself as *nūr* (light) and as *tibyānan li kulli shay'* (an explanation of all things). Logically, something that constitutes light does not require external illumination to illuminate itself (Sa'adah 2022, 47–48).

In its application, Ṭabāṭabā'ī engaged in cross-referencing: when he encountered an ambiguous verse (*mutashābih*), he did not turn directly to *ḥadīth* but instead sought out other verses sharing a similar theme or vocabulary within a clear (*muḥkam*) context, using that *muḥkam* verse as the key to unlocking the *mutashābih* verse (Sa'adah 2022, 47–48). This is not merely an abstract procedural claim; the case studies below show the technique applied concretely—most clearly in how *al-Mīzān* reads the *imāmah* of Ibrāhīm in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124 directly against Q.S. Ibrāhīm [14]: 35–36, and in how it tests each proposed abrogating verse for *mut'ah* against the specific wording of Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 24 rather than against *ḥadīth* alone.

He believed that the Qur'an possesses a complete and interconnected unity of meaning, without any internal contradiction. If any apparent difference or tension in meaning between verses arises, in his view this does not originate from the Qur'an itself, but rather from the limitations of human understanding (Sa'adah 2022, 47–48).

Furthermore, Ṭabāṭabā'ī classified the sources of interpretation within a strict hierarchy (Hopipah et al. 2023, 50–67):

- a. The Qur'an (the Absolute Primary Source): the highest authority. Every understanding must be validated by the internal structure of the verses. No proof can invalidate the apparent (*zāhir*) meaning of the Qur'an once it has been established by another verse.
- b. The Sunnah/*Riwāyah* (a Secondary Source Providing Detail): unlike the Akh-bārī position, which places *ḥadīth* on a par with or even above the Qur'anic text in matters of interpretation, Ṭabāṭabā'ī positions *ḥadīth* as providing detail for matters not elaborated by the Qur'an. *Ḥadīth*, whether transmitted through Shī'ī (*ahl al-bayt*) or Sunnī channels, must be tested against the Qur'an; if sound in chain (*sanad*) but conflicting in content (*matn*) with a definitive Qur'anic principle, it must be rejected or interpreted allegorically. He frequently cites Sunnī *ḥadīth* compilations such as *al-Durr al-Manthūr* by al-Suyūṭī for comparison.
- c. Reason and Philosophy (Instruments of Analysis): reason is not an independent source of law equal to revelation, but rather a tool for understanding it.

Ṭabāṭabā‘ī rejected the view that opposes reason to revelation, holding that sound reason necessarily accords with true revelation. Nevertheless, he opposed the reprehensible *tafsīr bi al-ra’y* in its condemned sense—the imposition of speculative personal opinion upon a verse—a distinction taken up directly below.

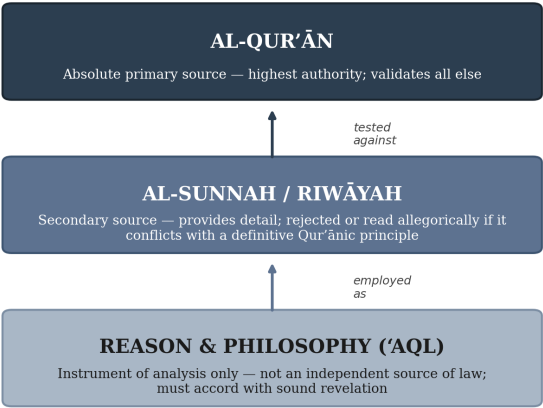


Figure 1. Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s Hierarchy of Sources of Interpretation in *al-Mīzān*

One important contribution of Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s methodology is the distinction between *tafsīr* (the meaning of a verse at the time of its revelation) and *jary wa taṭbīq* (the continuously flowing application of a verse). He affirms that narrations stating that this verse was revealed concerning so-and-so are frequently not a restriction of meaning (*takhṣīṣ*), but rather the clearest example of application (*miṣdāq*) (Kurniawan and Khairunnisa 2021, 146–50). The meaning of the verse itself continues to flow (*jary*) throughout the ages and can be applied to other individuals or situations sharing similar characteristics.

Bi al-Qur’ān or Bi al-Ra’y? A Methodological Reassessment

A serious objection deserves direct engagement here: read against its dominant content, is *al-Mīzān*’s method actually *tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān*, or is it, more accurately, a sophisticated instance of *tafsīr bi al-ra’y*—given how heavily its *Baḥṭh Falsafī* and *Baḥṭh Kalāmī* sections rely on Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s own philosophical reasoning to select which *muḥkam* verse governs which *mutashābih* one? The objection has real force. Selecting which cross-reference controls a given verse’s meaning is itself an interpretive act, not a mechanical one, and as the case studies below demonstrate, the *muḥkam* verses Ṭabāṭabā‘ī selects to govern the *imāmah* and *‘ismah* verses are not self-evidently the only candidates available; a Sunnī exegete working from the same corpus of verses reaches a different *muḥkam* anchor and, consequently, a different conclusion.

The resolution lies in the distinction Shi‘ī *uṣūl* itself draws—one already noted in the discussion of the *ghaybah* era above (Ihsan 2023, 91–92)—between *tafsīr bi al-*

ra'y in the condemned sense (imposing a conclusion the *mufasssir* already holds onto the text, with no accountability to the text's own structure) and *tafsir ijtihādī* or *bi al-ra'y al-mahmūd* (praiseworthy reasoned interpretation, disciplined by the text and by *riwāyah* even where it goes beyond both). Ṭabāṭabā'ī's own procedure—cross-checking every philosophical or theological conclusion against the *ẓāhir* of other verses, and subjecting *ḥadīth* to critique against Qur'anic principle rather than the reverse—fits the second category by his own tradition's definition, not the first. From an external academic standpoint, however, the more precise classification is that *al-Mīzān* is not purely *bi al-Qur'an* in the sense of requiring no interpretive selection at all; it is a highly disciplined, source-critical form of *ijtihādī* exegesis that uses Qur'an-to-Qur'an cross-referencing as its primary evidentiary method rather than as a claim to interpretive neutrality. Reviewers of this literature are therefore correct to note that purely Qur'an-by-Qur'an somewhat overstates the case; Qur'an-anchored *ijtihād* is the more defensible description, and this article adopts that more precise formulation throughout the analysis below.

Systematics and Structure of *Tafsir al-Mīzān*

In terms of its systematic arrangement, *al-Mīzān* follows the *tartīb al-muṣḥaf*, discussing the Qur'an sequentially from Q.S. Al-Fāṭīḥah through to Q.S. An-Nās. This systematic choice shows that, despite its highly philosophical content, Ṭabāṭabā'ī nonetheless wished to preserve the traditional structure so that his work would remain accessible as a standard reference for the community (Kurniawan and Khairunnisa 2021, 146–50).

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's genius is also evident in how he systematically arranged the material of his exegesis, separating the objective meaning of the sacred text from supporting discussions of a multidisciplinary character (Kurniawan and Khairunnisa 2021, 146–50). Each chapter of discussion generally follows the pattern below:

- a. Grouping of Verses: presenting a set of verses (usually 5–10 verses) that share a thematic unity (*siyāgh*); verses are not interpreted individually in isolated fragments.
- b. *Al-Bayān* (Explanation): linguistic analysis and interpretation of the Qur'an through the Qur'an—the core of the exegesis, explaining word meanings, sentence structure, and inter-verse correlation without the intervention of narrations or outside opinions.
- c. *Baḥṭh Riwā'ī* (Discussion of Narrations): a collection of *ḥadīth* from both Shī'ī and Sunnī sources related to the verse, with a critique of their content (*matn*) against the conclusion reached in *al-Bayān*.
- d. *Baḥṭh Falsafī* (Philosophical Discussion), optional depending on the topic: an in-depth essay on metaphysical issues employing arguments from logic and Islamic philosophy.

- e. *Baḥṭh Ijtimā'ī* (Social Discussion), optional: an essay on social issues using a sociological approach.
- f. *Baḥṭh 'Ilmī* (Scientific Discussion), optional: a discussion of the correspondence between the verse and modern scientific findings, conducted cautiously to avoid forced concordism.
- g. *Baḥṭh Tārīkhī* (Historical Discussion), optional: an analysis of the stories of the prophets, frequently compared with the Old/New Testament to critique *isrā'iliyyāt*.
- h. This separation is highly crucial. By separating *al-Bayān* (pure exegesis) from *Baḥṭh Falsafī* or *Riwā'ī*, *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* preserves the purity of the Qur'anic message from contamination by the biases of other disciplines, while still providing space for broad intellectual discussion (Kurniawan and Khairunnisa 2021, 146–50).

Exegetical Orientation

In the introduction to his exegesis, Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not acknowledge any single orientation or particular character underlying his interpretation. He acknowledges only that the method of interpretation he employs is *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, containing an interpretive process he termed *istintāq al-Qur'ān*, that is, allowing the Qur'an to elaborate its own meaning (Sa'adah 2022, 47–48).

Even so, researchers have identified *al-Mīzān* as possessing a multidimensional character (Tamrin 2019, 1–26). The following are several views regarding the exegetical orientation found in *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*.

The *Falsafī-Kalāmī* (Philosophical-Theological) Orientation

This is the most dominant coloring. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's background as a great philosopher made him fluent in philosophical terminology (*wujūd*, *māhiyyah*, *'illah*, *ma'lūl*) when explaining verses of doctrine, and this philosophical register extends into his treatment of the soul, the unseen, and spiritual perfection, which several studies read as evidence of a deeper mystical (*'irfānī*) substratum beneath the philosophical surface (Otta 2018, 1–15)—a specific instance of the broader *falsafī* current within Qur'anic exegesis that reaches back through Ibn Sīnā and continues into contemporary typologies of philosophical *tafsīr* (Syafieh 2018, 140–58; Hakim and Ahmad 2022, 191–214). Nevertheless, he consistently rejects forced allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*), affirming that philosophy must submit to the truth of revelation, not the other way around (Putri et al. 2025, 1–17).

The *Adabī-Ijtimā'ī* (Social-Literary) Orientation

Similar in spirit to *Tafsīr al-Manār* in Egypt, *al-Mīzān* is highly responsive to the problems of the community, discussing at length issues of social justice, independence, and human rights (Hafsah 2021, 31–47). Read in the Indonesian

reception context specifically, this social orientation has been shown to translate into an emphasis on tolerance and coexistence rather than exclusivism (Setiawati 2024, 38–51), and extends to concrete leadership ethics—justice, trustworthiness, and fidelity to the Qur'an and Sunnah—that Ṭabāṭabā'ī derives from the Qur'an's account of exemplary leadership (Qori'ah and Dani 2024, 17–40).

A Moderate and Inclusive Shī'ī Orientation

As a Shī'ī scholar, Ṭabāṭabā'ī certainly upholds Shī'ī doctrines such as the *imāmah* and *īsmah* of the *ahl al-bayt*. However, his approach is highly academic and far removed from sectarian fanaticism, building arguments on linguistic analysis and inter-verse correlation rather than on dogmatic claims alone, and avoiding the vilification of the Prophet's Companions frequently found in classical Shī'ī literature (Hafsah 2021, 31–47). This makes *al-Mīzān* one of the few Shī'ī exegeses referenced and seriously studied within the Sunnī academic world.

Analysis of Exegetical Examples

1. *Imāmah* in *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*

In *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, the concept of *imāmah* is invested with a meaning far deeper than mere political leadership or the succession of power after the Prophet. Ṭabāṭabā'ī situates *imāmah* as a spiritual position bestowed directly by God through divine selection, developed through an in-depth examination of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124, cross-read against Q.S. Ibrāhīm [14]: 35–36—a concrete instance of the Qur'an-anchored *ijtihād* described in the methodology section above (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973).

Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124 means: “(Remember) when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain words, and he fulfilled them. He [God] said, ‘Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people.’ [Abraham] said, ‘And of my descendants?’ [God] said, ‘My covenant does not include the wrongdoers.’”

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's analysis begins by highlighting the chronological sequence of Abraham's life: he was appointed Imam only after passing through a series of severe trials in his old age, long after he had already been appointed a Prophet and Messenger—after, that is, both Ismā'īl and Ishāq had already been born to him (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973). This chronological fact grounds Ṭabāṭabā'ī's core argument: *imāmah* is a distinct station carrying a higher rank than prophethood alone, one concerned with guiding humankind to its spiritual destination rather than merely indicating the way (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973).

The cross-reference to Q.S. Ibrāhīm [14]: 35–36 is where the *bi al-Qur'an* method becomes concrete rather than abstract. There, Abraham prays: “...and save me and my sons from worshipping idols.” Ṭabāṭabā'ī reads this together with al-Baqarah 124 to argue that the *imāms* promised to Abraham's line must, by the terms of Abraham's own prayer, come specifically from among those of his offspring kept free of idol-worship—a *muḥkam* anchor he treats as controlling the *mutashābih* scope of “My

covenant does not include the wrongdoers" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973). He reinforces this reading with a narration transmitted through al-Amālī of al-Ṭūsī and the Manāqib of Ibn al-Maghāzili, on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd, in which the Prophet is reported to have explained the verse: "*Whoever prostrated before an idol, leaving me, I will not make him an imām*," adding that this was fulfilled in himself and in "*my brother 'Alī*," neither of whom had ever prostrated to an idol (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973).

This chronological and cross-referential argument yields Ṭabāṭabā'ī's four-part classification of human moral standing relative to the covenant: one wrongdoing throughout life; one purely righteous throughout life; one initially wrongdoing who later repented; and one initially righteous who later became wrongdoing. Read against the absolute wording of God's refusal, a person who has borne the description wrongdoer at any point—even before later repentance—still fails to meet the condition, so that the covenant may only be granted to one possessing purity from the very beginning of life. Ṭabāṭabā'ī employs this argument to affirm that only a figure such as 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, reported never to have worshipped idols, meets the condition (Syafi'i 2019, 35–46).

This reading is not immune from source-critical scrutiny even within scholarship sympathetic to *al-Mīzān's* project. Ni'mah's (2019, 44–64) study of al-dakhīl (exegetically infiltrated or source-critically weak material) specifically in *al-Mīzān's imāmah* verses argues that some of the *riwāyāh* Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws on for this reading—including material of the kind cited above—carry weaker chains than the weight placed on them would suggest, meaning the argument's cross-referential Qur'an-to-Qur'an core is more secure than its supporting *riwāyāh*. This is a materially different, and more precise, criticism than dismissing the method wholesale, and it is consistent with the Qur'an-anchored *ijtihād* reassessment proposed above: the Qur'anic cross-reference does real argumentative work, while the supporting narration remains open to the same *isnād*-critical scrutiny any *ḥadīth* would receive.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation also needs to be set against classical Sunnī exegesis of the same verse. Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī likewise emphasize the chronological sequence of Abraham's appointment following trial but interpret *imām* more broadly—as prophetic exemplar and moral leadership inheritable by any of Abraham's righteous descendants, including later prophets—rather than as a single, exclusive, infallible office (Kathīr 2000; Ṭabarī 2001). Rahman and Rahman (2020, 181–95) add a further data point: Mu'tazilī exegetes, working from their own rationalist commitments, likewise read this verse through a prior doctrinal lens—toward a conclusion about divine justice (*'adl*) rather than a designated infallible lineage—indicating that letting a prior theological framework shape the *muḥkam/mutashābih* selection on this verse is not unique to Shī'ī exegesis, even though the specific conclusion Ṭabāṭabā'ī reaches remains distinctly Shī'ī. This pattern of kalām-driven selection recurs across other verses touching leadership (Sidik 2022, 559–64) and is visible even where *al-Mīzān* is set directly against Sunnī rationalist exegesis such as al-Manār on cognate questions

of moral accountability (Mahdavi-rad et al. 2022, 659–68). The comparison as a whole shows that the difference between *al-Mīzān* and Sunnī exegesis here lies not in the textual data—both traditions read the same chronology and largely the same supporting narrations—but in which verse is allowed to control the interpretation of which, a selection each tradition’s prior theological commitments help to make.

2. The Concept of Purity (*ʾiṣmah*) in *al-Mīzān*

In *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, the concept of purity (*ʾiṣmah*) is explained not as divine compulsion that eliminates freedom of choice, but as the result of perfect knowledge of the true nature of sin: an infallible (*maʾṣūm*) person perceives sin the way an ordinary person perceives fire, capable of committing it yet voluntarily avoiding it through perfect knowledge (Nafiuddin and Holis 2022, 21–40).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s main argument concerning the purity of the *ahl al-bayt* centers on Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33: “*Indeed, God only wishes to remove from you the impurity, O people of the [Prophet’s] household, and to purify you with a thorough purification.*”

Ṭabāṭabāʾī analyzes this verse through three layers. First, he distinguishes legislative will (God commanding something to be obeyed) from creative will (God decreeing that something will certainly occur), arguing that the will here is creative—otherwise there would be no special distinction for the *Ahl al-Bayt*, since a mere command to preserve purity applies to all Muslims (Nafiuddin and Holis 2022, 21–40). Second, he reads impurity (*rijs*) as encompassing every form of corruption, belief and action alike, so that the emphatic purifies you with a thorough purification becomes proof of absolute purity, freedom from both major and minor sins (Nafiuddin and Holis 2022, 21–40).

Third, he highlights the verse’s pronoun shift: the surrounding verses address the Prophet’s wives in the feminine plural, while this clause shifts to the masculine plural, signaling a change in the addressed group. Based on the *ḥadīth* of the Cloak—in which the Prophet gathered ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn beneath his cloak and prayed specifically for them when this verse was revealed—Ṭabāṭabāʾī concludes that the verse establishes a special purity for these Five People of Purity, a conclusion Shīʿī theology treats as resting on a *ḥadīth* transmitted through numerous chains, the majority recorded in Sunnī sources (Momen 1985, 16–17). His reading of the same *sūrah*’s later verses on modesty follow the identical interpretive logic, subordinating apparent *ẓāhir* instruction to a deeper theological or moral purpose (Khair et al. 2021, 128–45; Mulahdori et al. 2024, 18–32).

This interpretation needs to be set against Sunnī exegesis of the same verse. Ibn Kathīr, working from the principle of the unity of *siyāq* (context), places the verse within the sequence addressing the Prophet’s wives, including them within the *ahl al-bayt* addressed—even while acknowledging and transmitting the *ḥadīth* of the Cloak and its inclusion of ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn (Kathīr 2000, 7). The decisive difference is that Sunnī exegetes generally do not draw the theological

conclusion of *ʿiṣmah*, or absolute freedom from sin, from this verse, since in the majority Sunnī view *ʿiṣmah* (infallibility) applies to the prophets alone, not to family members in general (Momen 1985, 16–17). As with the *imāmah* verse above, the primary difference lies not in the narrations employed—both traditions largely acknowledge the same reports—but in the theological weight each tradition is willing to place on the same evidence: precisely the kind of interpretive selection the Methodology section above identifies as the real work being done under the banner of letting the Qurʾan explain itself.

3. The Polemic of *Mutʿah* (Temporary) Marriage (Q.S. An-Nisāʾ [4]: 24)

Ṭabāṭabāʾī's analysis of Q.S. An-Nisāʾ [4]: 24 is a case study in the integration of his methodology: linguistic, historical, legal, and sociological. It should be stated clearly at the outset that Shiʿī *fiqh* does not frame *mutʿah* as a secular contract marriage in the sense that term carries in ordinary usage; the more accurate rendering is temporary (*muʿaqqat*) marriage—a union bound by a fixed term, still constituted through the standard Islamic marriage *ʿaqd* (offer, acceptance, and a specified mahr), and this terminological precision matters for how the verse itself is read (Islam 2017, 71–101; Qalbi 2020, 1–24; Subhan 2018, 1–20; Robiah et al. 2023, 181–87).

This verse conveys that whatever benefit has been obtained from marriage must be compensated (with a mahr) as an obligation, and there is no sin in whatever is mutually agreed upon after the fixing of that obligation (Q.S. An-Nisāʾ [4]: 24). Ṭabāṭabāʾī begins by dissecting the word *istamtaʿtum*. He notes that in the Arabic of the revelation period, *istimtāʿ* paired with women and the obligation of a fee (*ujūr*, rather than *ṣadāq* or *mahr* as used for permanent marriage) technically denoted temporary (*muʿaqqat*) marriage. He grounds this philologically rather than only theologically, naming the specific early exegetes among the Companions and Successors who read the verse the same way—Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Qatādah, Mujāhid, al-Suddī, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī—noting that this is also the position of the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1973). Islam (2017, 71–101), comparing *al-Mīzān* directly against al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-Manthūr* on this same verse, finds that both exegeses acknowledge this same philological link between *istimtāʿ* and a bounded-term union, indicating that the *mutʿah* dispute is not primarily philological but turns on which reports of prohibition are accepted as authoritative.

The majority Sunnī position holds that the permissibility of *mutʿah* in this verse was abrogated (*naskh*), whether by *ḥadīth* or by verses regulating inheritance and the waiting period (*ʿiddah*), since *mutʿah* involves neither. Ṭabāṭabāʾī rejects each proposed abrogating text in turn rather than in the aggregate: against the inheritance verse (Q.S. An-Nisāʾ [4]: 12), he argues it regulates permanent marriage specifically, so the absence of inheritance in *mutʿah* is a *takhṣīṣ* (specification) marking a different marriage type, not a contradiction; against the *ʿiddah* verses,

he makes the parallel argument that these too presuppose permanent marriage's dissolution procedure and do not by their wording extend to a union already time-bound by its own terms (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973). Against abrogation by the Sunnah, he cites reports—including ones preserved in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and *Musnad Aḥmad*—that *mut'ah* continued to be practiced through the time of the Prophet, through Abū Bakr's caliphate, and into part of 'Umar's, before 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's own address: "*Two mut'ahs were lawful in the time of the Messenger of God; I now forbid them and will punish anyone who practices them*" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973).

From this, Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes that the prohibition was a political-administrative ruling (*ḥukm wilāyati*) of 'Umar, not a divine law conveyed by the Prophet—reasoning that, had the Prophet prohibited it, the Companions (including Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, per the narration in Muslim) could not have continued the practice after his death (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973). Amanudin and Nelli (2022, 1–7), reviewing this debate comparatively, note a real point of convergence often missed: both camps agree 'Umar's prohibition occurred, and both accept the broad reliability of the underlying *ḥadīth* corpus; the dispute is confined to whether that prohibition reported a Prophetic ruling already in force or constituted the caliph's own independent *siyāsah shar'īyyah* (discretionary policy) decision.

This needs to be set against the Sunnī account of the prohibition's chronology, which generally relies on the report in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, narrated from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself, that the Prophet permanently prohibited *mut'ah* at the Battle of Khaybar—long before 'Umar's caliphate (Ḥajjāj 1955; 'Asqalānī 1960). On this account, the abrogation traces to the Prophet's own Sunnah rather than to 'Umar's policy, making the prohibition permanent and religious rather than temporary and political. Al Amin and Ridho (2022, 131–44) add that this Khaybar report is precisely the one Shī'ī scholars, following Ṭabāṭabā'ī, subject to the sharpest *sanad* criticism, since it conflicts, in their reading, with the more numerous reports placing continued practice into Abū Bakr's and part of 'Umar's caliphates. The difference in which narrations are accepted as authoritative—not any disagreement over the literal wording of Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 24—is therefore the primary point of departure between *al-Mīzān* and the majority Sunnī position.

In the *Baḥṭh Ijtīmā'ī*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī rationally defends the institution, arguing that sexual desire is a biological nature (*fiṭrah*) that cannot be entirely suppressed, and that where permanent marriage is difficult—economic hardship, war, long travel, or study—Islam, as a realistic religion, must provide a lawful solution (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1973). He argues that if the lawful door of temporary (*mu'aqqat*) marriage is closed, human beings will break down the unlawful door of fornication, and criticizes societies that reject *mut'ah* as tantamount to prostitution while permitting unregulated free mixing: in his view, a properly constituted temporary marriage—with its *'aqd*, its mahr, and its waiting period to secure the lineage of any child, who is regarded as fully legitimate—is far more dignified and protective

of women than a clandestine relationship carrying no responsibility whatsoever (Ṭabāṭabā‘ī 1973).

Table 2. Comparative Summary—*al-Mīzān* and Sunnī Exegesis on Three Contested Verses.

Verse	<i>Al-Mīzān</i> (Shī‘ī) Conclusion	Sunnī Exegesis Conclusion	Locus of Difference
Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 124 (<i>Imāmah</i>)	<i>Imāmah</i> is a distinct, higher station restricted to the infallible line of ‘Alī.	<i>Imām</i> is a prophetic exemplar, open to any righteous descendant of Ibrāhīm.	Which <i>muhkam</i> verse controls the <i>mutashābih</i> scope of covenant.
Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 (<i>‘Iṣmah</i>)	Creative will; absolute purity (<i>‘iṣmah</i>) of the Five People of the Cloak.	Legislative will; wives included via unity of <i>siyāq</i> ; <i>‘iṣmah</i> reserved for prophets.	Theological weight placed on the same <i>ḥadīth</i> of the Cloak.
Q.S. An-Nisā’ [4]: 24 (<i>Mut‘ah</i>)	Permission stands; prohibition = ‘Umar’s administrative ruling (<i>ḥukm wilāyati</i>).	Prohibition = Prophetic <i>naskh</i> at the Battle of Khaybar.	Which <i>ḥadīth</i> chain of the prohibition’s origin is accepted as authoritative.

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the history, methodology, and case studies within *al-Mīzān*, it can be concluded that Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s work represents a landmark of renewal that transformed the face of Shī‘ī exegesis from a *riwāyah*-dominated pattern—theologically grounded in the *naṣṣ*-authority of the *imāms* during their lifetimes—toward the *ijtihādī*-rational pattern that the doctrine of *ghaybah* made both possible and necessary (Musolli 2015, 39–43). Read more precisely as Qur’an-anchored *ijtihād* rather than as pure, interpretively neutral *tafsīr bi al-Qur’ān*, Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s method demonstrates that theological doctrines can be substantiated through disciplined linguistic analysis and inter-verse correlation without collapsing into either unregulated *ra’y* or sectarian fanaticism—a contribution to method, not merely a description of one.

Al-Mīzān has, moreover, transcended sectarian boundaries to become an important reference within global Islamic scholarship, its moderate and academic exegetical orientation making it widely read even within Sunnī academic circles and shaping the thought of leading modern exegetes such as M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Saputra et al. 2025, 11–18)—a debt critically examined in Husti’s (2017, 56–70) study of Shihab’s engagement with Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, and consistent with the distinctive *manhaj* Shihab’s own *tafsīr* is independently shown to have developed (Budiana and Gandara 2021, 85–91). Yet as the verse-by-verse analysis above demonstrates, this cross-sectarian reception proceeds alongside fundamental theological differences of conclusion between

al-Mīzān and Sunnī exegesis on *imāmah*, *ʿiṣmah*, and *mutʿah*—differences traceable, in each case, not to disputed textual data but to which *muḥkam* verse or which chain of narration each tradition’s prior theological commitments lead it to privilege. *Al-Mīzān*’s character as a representation of Shīʿī exegesis thus remains firmly attached beneath its inclusive academic style, even as source-critical scholarship such as Ni’mah (2019, 44–64) shows that *al-Mīzān*’s own argumentation is not exempt from the same *isnād*-critical scrutiny it applies to others.

This article’s specific contribution, against the largely descriptive prior literature on *al-Mīzān*, is to show concretely where and why *al-Mīzān*’s conclusions diverge from Sunnī exegesis on three doctrinally central verses, and to argue that both traditions’ own internal theological periodizations—*ghaybah*-based for Shīʿism, *tadwīn*-based for Sunnism (Musolli 2015, 43)—are themselves part of what shapes those divergent readings, rather than a neutral backdrop to them. Future research would benefit from extending this verse-by-verse comparative framework to additional contested passages, and from a systematic reception study of *al-Mīzān* among contemporary Indonesian Sunnī exegetes.

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