

Covenant and Covenants in the Qur'an

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The question of the covenant in the Old and New Testaments has been among the most fertile topics for critically engaged Jewish-Christian dialogue in the twentieth century, especially over the past three decades. It has given rise to re-examinations of some central tenets in Judaism and Christianity and to more pluralistic readings of both the Old and New Testaments.¹ Covenant studies has even give rise to an independent school of thought known as 'dual-covenant theology' that has been supported by prominent Jewish and Christian thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig, Irving Greenberg, and Reinhold Niebuhr.² Such developments demonstrate that covenantal pluralism has become a significant player in both Judaism and Christianity. In addition the fields of Christian Studies, Judaic Studies, Old Testament Studies,³ and New Testament Studies all boast robust scholarship and debate regarding the meaning of the covenant in their respective scriptures and traditions. In contrast, there remains comparatively little examination of teachings regarding the covenant in the Qur'an and in Islam, and a Muslim or Qur'anic covenant theology has not been articulated in the modern era. Scholars have not provided extensive studies of the covenant in the Qur'an, and Muslims have not fully engaged with developments in covenant theology within Judaism and Christianity.

Given the extensive treatment of this subject in the Qur'an, in which words pertaining to the covenant occur well over 100 times, it would be an understatement to say that the understanding of the covenant between God and human beings is one of the many important Qur'anic concepts that remain severely understudied. Wadād al-Qāḍī's excellent essay 'The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qur'ān' will hopefully mark a turning point in this state of affairs.⁴ But other than various encyclopedia entries,⁵ this is the first article to directly address the question of the covenant in the Qur'an in over 25 years. Of the few articles preceding it that do discuss the covenant, most focus upon the treatment of the covenant in Ṣūfī literature.⁶

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In the field of Qur'anic studies, the covenant has been dealt with most extensively in Toshihiko Izutsu's *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, though only eight pages are devoted to it.⁷ The covenant is also addressed briefly by Arthur Jeffery in *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, written in 1950,⁸ and in John Wansbrough's much-debated *Quranic Studies*.⁹ While both Jeffery and Wansbrough make interesting observations, neither provides in-depth analysis. One can find only brief mentions of the covenant in other studies of the Qur'an. Perhaps this is because, as Andrew Rippin claims, the various aspects of the covenant mentioned in the Qur'an 'do not form into one cohesive picture of a treaty-covenant.'¹⁰ But, as will be seen in the pages to follow, that is not how most classical commentators, from Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in the third/ninth century to Muḥammad Ḥūsayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1401/1981) in the fourteenth/twentieth century, have seen it.

Given the paucity of scholarship regarding the place of the covenant in the Qur'an, one cannot even say whether or not this lacuna in scholarship arises from the fact that the concept of covenant is not as central to Islamic theology and self-understanding as it is to Judaism and Christianity, or that it is not as cohesive. The covenant is in fact quite prevalent in the Qur'an itself and even more prevalent in the commentary tradition, where many issues and concepts are linked by various commentators to the covenant between God and human beings. According to many exegetes, the covenant is central to the Qur'anic conception of humanity and of religious history. It is thus a topic that merits further investigation in its own right for a better understanding of the Qur'an and of Islam in general. Such investigation can also lead to interesting parallels and contrasts when compared to the conception of the covenant in the Old and New Testaments and may open new doors in the field of Muslim-Christian-Jewish understanding.

This brief study will first examine the terms pertaining to the covenant in the Qur'an and their relevant semantic fields. It will then highlight some of the predominant trends in the Qur'anic account of the covenant and the exegetical treatment of it, which often appears in relation to verses where the technical terms for covenant are not found. The Qur'anic account of the covenant inevitably leads to comparisons with Biblical accounts of the covenant, but that is not the focus of this study. Such comparisons will thus be kept to a minimum in order to focus on the Qur'anic account in and of itself. The study will then conclude with some observations regarding the implications of the Qur'anic understanding of the covenant for Islamic theology and for interfaith understanding.

Qur'anic Terms for 'Covenant'

Two Arabic terms are central to the Qur'anic concept of covenant: *'ahd* and *mīthāq*, and there are several secondary terms, such as *iṣr* ('burden'), *amāna* (pl. *amānāt*,

'trust'), and *wa^cd* ('promise') that some Qur'anic commentators link to the covenant. Several other verses in which none of these terms occur are also understood as references to the covenant. This is most notable in the case of Q. 7:172, which will be discussed extensively in this paper. As Gerhard Böwering observes, '[Q. 7:172] became the fulcrum of qur'ānic interpretation for the primordial covenant'.¹¹ Discussions of the covenant are also found in the exegetical treatment of Qur'anic terms such as *ḥabl Allāh* (*the rope of God*, Q. 3:103, cf. Q. 3:112) and *al-urwat al-wuthqā* (*the most unfailing* (or *the firmest*) *handhold*, Q. 2:256; Q. 31:22), among others. Furthermore, as Wansbrough observes, 'other essentially neutral terms, like *baya'a* (to acknowledge authority) and *aymān* (oaths), may in Qur'anic usage be lent divine sanction by occurring in context with *ahd* and its derivatives.'¹²

The term *ahd* appears 29 times in the Qur'an, while its verbal form occurs nine times,¹³ and *mīthāq* occurs 25 times.¹⁴ As Wansbrough observes, *ahd* and *mīthāq* are used interchangeably in the Qur'anic text, and like the Old Testament term *berit*, both *ahd* and *mīthāq* can designate a covenantal or contractual relation between human beings (as, especially, in some of the later Medinan verses), or between God and human beings.¹⁵ In addition, *ahd* and *mīthāq* are often treated as synonyms in the commentary tradition. Following upon this trend, both are rendered as 'covenant' in this study. The word *ahd* is related to the verb *ahida*, which in Qur'anic usage is most commonly joined to the preposition *ilā*, meaning 'to enjoin, charge, bid, order, command',¹⁶ as in Q. 36:60, *a-lam a^chad ilaykum yā banī Ādama an lā ta^cbudū'l-shayṭān* (*Did I not enjoin you* (or *make a covenant with you*), *O children of Adam, to not worship Satan?*),¹⁷ or as in Q. 2:125, *wa-^cahidnā ilā Ibrāhīma wa-Ismā^cīla an ṭahhirā baytī* (*And I enjoined* (or *I made a covenant with*) *Abraham and Ishmael to purify My house*, Q. 2:119). When used without the preposition *ilā*, *ahida* can mean, 'to fulfill', as in the phrase, *ahida ahdahu* ('he fulfilled his pact/covenant'). In and of itself *ahd* thus implies a reciprocal agreement and obligation, but when used with the preposition *ilā*, *ahd* indicates a unilateral 'agreement' that has been 'enjoined' by one party upon the other. The third form from the same root *āhada* has more reciprocal implications and is employed in eleven Qur'anic verses.¹⁸ Most instances refer to the covenant between God and human beings (Q. 2:100; Q. 9:75; Q. 16:91; Q. 33:15 and 23; Q. 48:10), while others provide specific references to treaties made between the Muslims and other groups in Arabia (Q. 8:56; Q. 9:1, 4, 7), and one (Q. 2:177) can be read as a reference to fulfilling the covenant between God and human beings or as a reference to maintaining pacts and treaties among human beings.

The term *mīthāq* derives from the verb *wathuqa*, meaning 'to become firm, stable, fast, or strong'.¹⁹ The verb *wathīqa* when conjoined with the preposition *bi* then indicates trusting or confiding in another, or making a firm resolution. Wansbrough states that the most common Qur'anic usage of *mīthāq*, in the phrase *akhadha mīthāq*

(‘He took a covenant’),²⁰ ‘invariably expresses unilateral imposition’,²¹ but the classical texts do not agree with this interpretation. The term *mīthāq* itself implies reciprocity between two parties, and while it usually occurs by itself in the phrase *akhadhnā mīthāq* (*We took a covenant*, Q. 2:63, 83, 84, 93; Q. 5:14, 17, 70), it also occurs in the phrase *akhadhnā minhum mīthāq* (*We took a covenant from them*, Q. 4:154; Q. 33:7; see also Q. 4:21) which implies that human beings actually had something to give. It is important to note that in Q. 4:21 – *And how can you take it back, when you have lain with one another and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?* – the phrase *they have taken from you a solemn covenant* (*akhadhnā minhum mīthāq ghalīz*) refers to marriage contracts between husbands and wives, with the wives being those who have taken the covenant from their husbands. Here the ‘solemn covenant’ may refer to the contractual words the groom utters during the marriage ceremony, or to the groom’s assent to the charge that he keep his new wife honorably or release her virtuously – language derived from Q. 2:229–31,²² or simply to the groom’s verbal acceptance of the marriage (‘*zawwajtuhā*’ or ‘*nakaḥtuhā*’).²³ Seen in this light, the idea that one can ‘take a covenant’ (*akhadha mīthāq*) does not in and of itself imply ‘unilateral imposition’, since in Q. 4:21 it indicates a reciprocal agreement between husband and wife.²⁴

In his commentary upon the use of the term *akhadhnā minhum*, °Allāmah Ṭabātabā’ī notes that it implies both something taken (*ma³khūdh*) and something from which it is taken (*ma³khūdh minhu*) and cites examples such as taking knowledge from a scholar (°*ālim*).²⁵ In this sense the Qur’anic use of the phrase *akhadhnā minhum mīthāq* (*We took a covenant from them*) can actually be taken to imply a manner in which God honours and elevates the human being: a theme found in many other verses, most notably Q. 17:70, *We have indeed honoured the Children of Adam*. As some commentators have observed, such honouring is particularly evident in the phrase, *who shall lend unto God a goodly loan?* (Q. 2:245; Q. 57:11, cf. Q. 5:12; Q. 57:18; Q. 64:17; Q. 73:20),²⁶ for it implies that although God is the Creator, Lord and Master of all, He allows human beings to freely give back to God that which is His. By extension, the phrase *akhadhnā minhum mīthāq* and its variations could be taken to indicate that God allows human beings to participate in the covenant of their own free will. God thus gives human beings free disposition (*taṣṛīf*) to maintain or break the covenant. Such covenantal reciprocity is most evident in Q. 2:40, where God addresses the Children of Israel, saying, *Fulfill My covenant* (°*ahdī*), *I shall fulfill your covenant, and be in awe of Me*.²⁷

Covenant in the Qur’an

Having examined some aspects of the two terms that are central to the Qur’anic treatment of the Covenant, I will move to the verses that are central to the discussion, after first laying some groundwork by outlining a few aspects of the Biblical treatment

of the covenant. As many scholars have noted, the main transition from the Old Testament understanding of the covenant to the New Testament covenant is that the Old Testament covenant is for the Israelites alone, whereas the New Testament understanding is that the covenant has become universal – available to Jew and Gentile alike.²⁸ While the Book of Genesis (ch. 9) does speak of a universal covenant with all of creation that is made after the flood and this has given rise to the concept of the Noahide covenant,²⁹ this is not commonly understood to be the same covenant that is made with Abraham and continually renewed through other patriarchs and prophets.

Similar to the New Testament, in the Qur'an the covenant is also understood to be universal, applying to all human beings. But for the majority of Sunnī Muslims, and for the Šūfī tradition, it is also believed to be pre-temporal, established before the beginning of creation as we know it. Some passages in the Old and New Testaments can be understood as references to an everlasting covenant between God and humanity, as in Genesis 17:7, 'And I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you' (cf. Gen 17:13, 19); and Psalm 105:8–10, 'He is mindful of his covenant for ever, of the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, His sworn promise to Isaac, which He confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.'³⁰ But such Biblical passages only speak of covenants made between God and human beings during the course of human history, such as that made between God and Abraham in Genesis 17, and that made with Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 19 and 20 and re-established in Exodus 34.

These Old Testament covenants are then held in perpetuity thereafter and renewed over and again, particularly in the books of the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel.³¹ In the Qur'an, however, the eternality of the covenant stems from its being made between God and all of humanity before the beginning of creation. The majority of exegetes maintain that this is alluded to in Q. 7:172, *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yea, surely, we bear witness.'* This verse has become the *locus classicus* for the understanding of the covenant in Sunnī and Shī'ī Islam, as well as the Šūfī tradition, though there are significant variations in how it is understood. In the context of this verse, many other verses are then understood to mean that all human beings would recognise the truth were they to follow what is available to them through revelation and through the intellect.³² Conversely, the root of all sin and iniquity is the breaking of the covenant, as in Q. 2:26–7, which describes the iniquitous as: *those who break God's pact ('ahd) after accepting His covenant (mīthāq), and sever what God has commanded be joined.* In this same vein, Q. 13:25 states: *And for those who break God's pact after*

*accepting His covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, theirs shall be the curse, and theirs shall be the evil abode.*³³

In examining the meaning of these and other verses, this study will draw mostly upon Sunnī commentaries, chiefly those of al-Ṭabarī, regarded by many as the Dean of classical exegetes, Abū °Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/ 1273), the famous Mālikī jurist, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), whom many Muslims today regard as one of, if not the greatest of the classical commentators,³⁴ and Aḥmad b. °Ajība (d. 1124/1809), the Moroccan jurist and Ṣūfī whose commentary combines concise summaries of classical Sunnī positions with what he refers to as ‘allusions’ (*ishārāt*) that seek to bring out the inner meanings of Qur’anic verses. The line of interpretation represented by such commentators, while more prevalent, is not the only one known to the Islamic tradition. Mu°tazilīs, Shī°īs, and the occasional Sunnī held that in this covenant God did not address the spirits of human beings, but rather ‘human beings made of flesh and blood, who were of full rational capacity and who had reached the age of maturity’.³⁵ In addition the Ṣūfī tradition, while sharing the understanding of a pre-temporal primordial covenant, had a vision of the covenant focused more upon the union between the individual human being and God.³⁶

Q. 7:172

Q. 7:172 is reminiscent of God’s promise to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai, and their response in Exodus 24:7, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient’. It also bears similarities to reaffirmations found in later books of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 43:10, ‘You are My witnesses says the Lord’. In contrast the Qur’an would appear to refer to existence before human beings are brought into this world, when the spirits of all human beings are said to have been assembled before God on a single plain, just as it is said that they will be assembled on a single plain at the end of time for the Day of Judgement.³⁷ God’s question to human beings, ‘*Am I not your Lord?*’ is understood as a rhetorical question whereby God affirms His principal reality as the Lord of all humankind and of all creation. And the human response is seen as the everlasting affirmation of this covenant to which human beings are forever beholden and to which they will bear witness on the Day of Judgement.

In addition to this covenant to which all human beings bear witness, several exegetes, al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Muḥammad b. °Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250–5/1834–9) among them, interpret Q. 33:7, *And [remember] when We took from the prophets their covenant*, as a reference to another covenant (*mīthāq*) that is particular to the prophets, which is made after the covenant with all of humanity, and which states that the

prophets worship God, call others to worship God, and affirm one another.³⁸ This particular prophetic covenant is more evident in Q. 3:81:

And [remember] when God made the covenant of the prophets, 'By that which I have given you of a Book and Wisdom, should a messenger then come to you confirming that which is with you, you shall believe in him and you shall help him.' He said, 'Do you agree and take on My burden on these conditions?' They said, 'We agree'. He said, 'Bear witness, for I am with you among those who bear witness.'

The function of this covenant with the prophets in relation to the more general covenant made with all of humanity becomes evident when viewed in relation to the last part of Q. 7:172 which, continuing into Q. 7:173, establishes that in making the pre-temporal covenant, God will hold human beings accountable for it on the Day of Resurrection, such that none will be able to claim that he or she was not responsible for maintaining it:

[This was] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Truly we were oblivious to this', or lest you should say, '[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God aforesaid, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?'

In other words, many human beings may claim that they are not responsible for maintaining the covenant because their ancestors did not follow it, and they could not observe that of which they were not informed. But in fact all of humanity is held responsible because every human being bears the imprint of this initial pre-temporal covenant within. In this vein Ibn Kathīr states that when the truthful (*al-ṣiddīqūn*) are questioned concerning their truthfulness (Q. 33:8), they respond. *The messengers of our Lord certainly brought the truth* (Q. 7:43).³⁹

Some commentators even propose that, among other interpretations, the reference to all of humanity as a *single community* in Q. 2:213 (cf. Q. 10:19) alludes to this time when all human beings made the covenant with God, then followed a single religion and a single creed.⁴⁰ In this vein, Ibn Kathīr says of Q. 7:172 and several *aḥādīth* that he cites to elaborate upon it:⁴¹

These locutions (alfāz) indicate that He brought them into existence as witnesses to this, asserting it both in their natural state and in their words. The witnessing is sometimes in words, such as His words, They said, 'We bear witness against ourselves.' [The life of this world deluded them, and they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers] (Q. 6:130), and sometimes in their natural state, such as

the saying of God, *It is not for the idolaters to maintain the mosques of God, bearing witness to disbelief against themselves* (Q. 9:17). That is, their natural state bears witness against them in this regard, even if they do not assert it in words. And likewise the words of God, *And truly he [mankind] is a witness unto that* (Q. 100:7).

Based upon the subtle discussion of covenant and revelation history in these and other Qur'anic verses, some commentators speak of two covenants that pertain to all of humanity: one taken before human beings come into this world and another taken while human beings are in this world. That taken before is referred to as the general covenant (*al-ʿahd al-ʿāmm*) to which human nature (*al-khiṣla*) itself bears witness, while that taken in this world is said to be a particular covenant (*ʿahd khāṣṣ*),⁴² which is manifest through adherence to one of God's revealed religions that God's prophets covenanted to deliver in the particular prophetic covenant to which Q. 3:81 and Q. 33:7 are said to refer. From this perspective, each religion reminds human beings of the first, primordial, pre-temporal covenant. As Aḥmad b. ʿAjība writes in his commentary on Q. 7:172:⁴³

They said 'Yea, surely [You are our Lord], we bear witness to that concerning ourselves' because all spirits were at that time in the original disposition (*fiṭra*), knowing, perceiving. Then when they alighted in this mould (*qālib*) [i.e. the human body], they forgot the witnessing. Then God sent the prophets and messengers reminding the people of that covenant (*ʿahd*). So whosoever attests to it is saved and whosoever denies it is destroyed.

When continuing the commentary onto Q. 7:173, Ibn ʿAjība writes, 'the implication is "We took that covenant in the world of spirits and sent the messengers renewing it in the world of figures (i.e. this world) to avoid your saying, "We were oblivious to this."'" He then likens Q. 7:173 to Q. 17:15, *And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger*, and to Q. 4:165, which speaks of *messengers [who are sent] as bearers of glad tidings and as warners, that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers*. Regarding all of these verses, Ibn ʿAjība writes, 'The testification as spirits does not suffice as a proof [against them] during the Resurrection because the spirits forgot that covenant when they entered the world of figures. So they do not guide them to it except through an indication that reminds them of it.'⁴⁴ By which Ibn ʿAjība means the revelations sent through God's prophets. In this same vein, al-Qurṭubī writes, when commenting on Q. 7:172, 'when they neglect the covenant, God reminds them through His prophets and seals the reminding with the purest of them, for them [i.e. the prophets] to be a witness against them.'⁴⁵

From the perspective proposed by this line of interpretation, every covenant made while humankind is on earth is a recognition, renewal, and continuation of the

pre-temporal covenant made while they were disembodied (or 'pre-embodied') spirits. What one could call the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition is thus seen as a multi-faceted series of temporal manifestations of a single pre-temporal covenant.⁴⁶ From this perspective, the function of revelation and prophecy, for which another covenant was made with the prophets, is to reawaken the awareness of this imprint and remind humankind that they must return to observance of the first covenant. In support of this position, commentaries upon Q. 7:172 cite a wide range of Qur'anic verses, such as Q. 16:36, *And We have sent to every people a messenger, that they may worship God*; Q. 10:47, *And for every people there is a messenger. When their messenger comes, they are judged with fairness and they are not wronged*; and Q. 53:56, *This [i.e. the Qur'an] is a warning from the warnings of old*. From this perspective, every human collectivity throughout history has been sent a reminder of God's Oneness, Lordship, and Sovereignty, and all revelations represent a series of renewals of the covenant. Every revealed book and every prophetic messenger is thus held to be, like the Qur'an and the Prophet Muḥammad, 'a reminder'.⁴⁷ In this vein, al-Qurṭubī cites the famous verse of *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyā* ('The Overwhelming'), which is said to be addressed directly to the Prophet Muḥammad, *So remind! Thou art but a reminder* (Q. 88:21),⁴⁸ and Ibn 'Ajība interprets the plaintive refrain of Sura 54, *is there anyone who remembers?* (Q. 54:15, 17, 22, 32, 40, 51) as a call to remember this pre-temporal covenant, meaning, 'Is there any who remembers the covenant that was made by Us with him?'⁴⁹

Reaffirmation of the Previous Covenants

Being presented as a continuation of the Abrahamic tradition, as another reminder in this series of reminders, the Qur'an explicitly confirms the covenant that God has made with previous communities, seeking to remind human beings not only of the covenant made *before* spirits were embodied, but also of the previous covenants made *while* human spirits were embodied, covenants that the Qur'an says have been forgotten or neglected. Regarding the Christians Q. 5:14 states, *And with those who say, 'We are Christians', We made a covenant. Then they forgot a part of that whereof they had been reminded*. The Children of Israel are criticised on several occasions for breaking the covenant, as in Q. 2:83, *And [remember] when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel, 'Worship none but God; be virtuous towards parents, kinsmen, orphans, and the indigent; and speak to people in a goodly way; and perform the prayer and give the alms.'* Then you turned away, save a few of you, swerving aside. Such references to the covenant God made with the Children of Israel provide the most frequent usage of *mīthāq* in the Qur'an.⁵⁰

Despite the claim that previous communities have broken their covenants with God, the Qur'an, in contrast to the New Testament, does not claim to establish an entirely

new covenant. Rather, it is interpreted as a reaffirmation of the general or universal covenant, and thus of the essential substance that is at the heart of every particular covenant. As the Prophet Muḥammad is said to be 'the seal of prophets' (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*, Q. 33:40), he is seen as bringing to completion that which was revealed through all previous prophets. But from a Qur'anic perspective, he does not bring anything that was not brought by the preceding prophets in one form or another. This position is reflected in several Qur'anic passages, among them:

Naught has been said unto thee save that which has been said unto the messengers before thee (Q. 41:43);

Truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit (i.e. the angel Gabriel) *upon thy heart – that thou mayest be among the warners – in a clear Arabic tongue. It is indeed in the scriptures of the ancients* (Q. 26:192–6);

Truly this [message] is in the first scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses (Q. 88:18–19).

From a Qur'anic perspective, the line of prophecy alluded to in such verses does not begin with Noah, Abraham, or Moses. Rather, it begins with Adam, the first human being with whom God is said to have made a particular 'temporal' covenant, as in Q. 20:115, *And We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot; and We did not find in him any determination.*⁵¹ Most scholars understand Adam to be the first prophet. Nonetheless, there is some debate as to whether or not Adam was indeed a prophet and some maintain that Noah was the first prophet.⁵² Although Adam is not found in the lists of prophets given in several Qur'anic passages (Q. 4:163, 84; Q. 33:7; Q. 42:13; Q. 57:26), he does appear to be the first to be 'chosen' by God, *Truly God chose Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham, and the House of 'Imrān above the worlds* (Q. 3:33). The prophethood of Adam is attested in some *ḥadīth*. Abū Dharr is reported to have asked the Prophet who was the first, to which he responded, 'That is Adam who spoke with God'⁵³ and Wahb b. Munabbih is reported to have said that Adam was the first of all messengers and Muḥammad was the last.⁵⁴ From this perspective, the cyclical drama of receiving, forgetting, breaking, and renewing the covenant that is a central theme of the Bible began not with Abraham as in the Old Testament (or Noah depending upon how one understands it), but with the first of all human beings. The whole of the human drama is thus encapsulated, in a sense, in the life of Adam himself. In this vein, the Qur'an gives a different end to the story of Adam's fall than does the Bible. Adam is not tempted by Eve; rather Adam and Eve are tempted by Satan and both are responsible for their fall, since Satan tempted both of them with *the Tree of Everlastingness* (Q. 20:120) and *they both ate therefrom. Then their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden. Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred* (Q. 20:121).

For their transgressions, all of humankind is then banished to the earth, as in Q. 2:36, *And God expelled them from that wherein they were, and We said, 'Get ye down, each an enemy to the other. In the earth a dwelling place and enjoyment shall be yours, for a time'* (see also Q. 20:123). This event represents the first breaking of the covenant, and the descent 'each an enemy unto the other' represents the consequences of forgetting and breaking the covenant. But unlike the Bible, in the Qur'an, after the Fall Adam and Eve immediately repent for their sin, as they are made to say in Q. 7:23, *Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou dost not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers.* Then God relents unto Adam and renews the covenant by offering 'words' and guidance, as in Q. 2:37–8:

Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He relented unto him. Indeed He is the Relenting, the Merciful. We said, 'Get down from it, all of you. If guidance comes to you from Me, then for whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

From one perspective, the words and guidance received by Adam mark the beginning of the cycle of revelation. For before falling from grace, Adam and Eve lived in adherence to the first general covenant and were in no need of a particular covenant to remind them of it. But, having forgotten, Adam and Eve, and thus all human beings, must now have periodic reminders if they are to reaffirm the covenant and be brought back to what the Qur'an maintains is their natural state as those who recognise the oneness of God and worship none but God.⁵⁵

The Original Disposition (or Primordial Norm)

Seen in this light, the underlying substance of the human condition is the Adamic nature before the Fall, a nature by virtue of which the human being is said to be 'knowing, perceiving', that is ever-aware of the pre-temporal covenant and all that it entails. According to the majority of commentators, this nature is what is referred to in the Qur'an as the *fiṭra* – the original disposition (or literally the 'initial cleaving') – mentioned in Q. 30:30:

Set thy face to religion as one truly devout (ḥanīfan) – in the original disposition (the fiṭra) of God, upon which He originated mankind. There is no alteration in God's creation; that is the religion upright – but most people know not.

Almost every major Qur'anic commentary links Q. 30:30 to the discussion of Q. 7:172, just as most also cite Q. 30:30 in the discussion of Q. 7:172. The nature of the link that the commentators see between these two verses can be seen in a saying attributed to Ibn Mazāḥim al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 212/827), the famous second–third/eighth–ninth century Qur'anic commentator, who is reported to have said when his infant son

was being prepared for burial, 'Whoever attains awareness of the latter covenant and ratifies it, the first covenant has benefited him, and whoever attains awareness of the latter covenant and does not ratify it, the first covenant does not benefit him. But whoever dies as a child before having become aware of the latter covenant dies upon the first covenant, upon the *fiṭra*.'⁵⁶ In this vein al-Qurṭubī observes that some commentators maintain, 'Whoever dies as a child enters the Garden due to having affirmed the first covenant'.⁵⁷

Q. 30:30 is understood by most commentators as a command to follow the religion of God for which He created human beings. It is interpreted as being addressed directly to the Prophet or to all who hear the message of the Qur'an,⁵⁸ though in both interpretations the meaning is said to apply to all human beings. Some commentators take the first phrase to mean, 'Follow the religion as one truly devout (a *ḥanīf*) and follow the original disposition in which God created you'.⁵⁹ In another, slightly less tenable interpretation, *fiṭra* is said to modify 'religion', meaning 'set thy face to the religion, as one truly devout, as God originated it'.⁶⁰ In either interpretation, it implies that human beings were made for belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), for religion, and for worship. To make this connection al-Qurṭubī explains the meaning of Q. 30:30 through recourse to Q. 51:56, *And I did not create jinn and mankind save to worship Me*, implying that to be in a state of worship is to live in accord with the *fiṭra*.⁶¹

The term *ḥanīf* is etymologically enigmatic and this has led to much debate regarding its meaning and origins.⁶² From the perspective of the commentary tradition, the term *ḥanīf* most likely derives from the verb *ḥanīfa*, meaning 'to incline' and is understood to indicate one who inclines away from misguidance (*al-ḍalāl*) towards belief in the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*),⁶³ 'one who inclines away from every false religion towards the true religion',⁶⁴ or one who 'inclines to the religion of God'.⁶⁵ The Prophet Abraham is described as a *ḥanīf* in eight verses (Q. 2:135; Q. 3:67, 95; Q. 4:125; Q. 6:79, 161; Q. 16:120, 123). And in Q. 10:105, the Prophet Muḥammad is enjoined, *Set thy face toward the religion as a ḥanīf, and be not among the disbelievers* (see also Q. 22:31 and Q. 98:5).⁶⁶ In other Qur'anic verses, the term *ḥanīf* is associated with being virtuous and submissive before God (Q. 4:125), straight (Q. 6:161), and devoutly obedient (*qānit*, Q. 16:120). The basic understanding of *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*) in the Islamic tradition may best be illustrated by a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* that is cited by many commentators in relation to Q. 30:30, according to which God says, 'Verily I created My servants as *ḥunafā'*, then the satans came to them and distracted them from their religion.'⁶⁷ In light of such interpretations of Q. 30:30, to be truly devout (*ḥanīf*) and incline towards God and away from idolatry is to live in the *fiṭra*, according to which all human beings have been created. One cannot change this underlying nature because, as the next phrase of Q. 30:30 states, *there is no altering the creation of God*. To accept this reality and submit to one's fundamental nature is thus understood as the substance of true worship.

When discussing Q. 30:30, it is important to mention that in recent discourse both apologists for Islam and polemicists against Islam have maintained that *fiṭra* means the religion of Islam, implying the reified religion of Islam with a capital 'I' that coalesced over time,⁶⁸ not the universal attribute of submission (*islām* with a lower case 'i') that the Qur'an attributes to the prophets who came before Muḥammad, as well as some of their followers.⁶⁹ When viewed in light of these polemical interpretations (which are not foreign to the classical commentary tradition), Q. 30:30 is read to mean that human beings are born for Islam and no other religion, such that anyone who follows any other religion is 'astray' or 'misguided'. But al-Qurṭubī maintains, 'It is impossible for the *fiṭra* here mentioned to be Islam because *islām* and *īmān* ('faith') are declaring with the tongue, embracing with the heart, and performing with the limbs'.⁷⁰ This understanding of the *ḥadīth* means that if *fiṭra* pertains to the original human disposition, that of the spirit, it cannot pertain to the specific practices of a particular religious tradition because these practices can only be performed while a spirit resides in a body in this world. In this regard, the Andalusian commentator °Abd al-Ḥaqq b. °Aṭīyya (d. 541/1147) states, in a passage also quoted by al-Qurṭubī:⁷¹

The explanation of this locution (*lafẓ*) is that it pertains to the innate character (*khilqa*) and disposition (*haya'a*) that is in the soul of a child, which is prepared/destined (*mu'adda*) and established (*muhayya'a*) to distinguish that which God has fashioned. The child is guided to his Lord by it (i.e. the innate character) and knows His laws and believes in Him. So it is as if God said, 'Set thy face to the religion that is *ḥanīf*, and it is the originating by God (*fiṭrat Allāh*) in preparation for which God originated humanity', but obstacles arise for them. Regarding this there is the saying of the Prophet, 'Every child is born upon the *fiṭra*. Then its parents make it a Christian, a Jew, or a Zoroastrian.'⁷² And the mention of the parents is an example of the obstacles, which are many.

Al-Qurṭubī expands upon Ibn °Aṭīyya's commentary stating, 'Our Shaykh has said, "Verily God created the hearts of the children of Adam with an aptitude for receiving the truth, just as He created their eyes and their ears receptive to things seen and things heard."' ⁷³

When viewed in the light of this line of interpretation, it is to bring human beings back to this original disposition that all religions are fashioned or revealed. But over time, human beings lose sight of this original intention and come to follow religion with *taqlīd* ('blind emulation'), rather than *īmān* ('faith'). Religious affiliations that do not remain focused upon the universal realities at the heart of each covenant thus come to be seen as so many super-impositions upon the original human disposition.

This understanding is implied by an interpretation of Q. 7:172 that Ibn ʿAjība attributes to al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) (though it is not in the printed editions of al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl*), 'What is intended by these words here [in the Qur'an, i.e. after the story of the revelation on Mount Sinai] is to compel the Jews to follow the general covenant after they have followed the covenant that is particular to them ... and preventing them from blind emulation (*taqlīd*).'⁷⁴ Such an interpretation reflects many passages from later books of the Old Testament that speak of people ceasing to follow the teachings of their religious traditions though they maintain the outward form. For example Isaiah 29:13–14 states, 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour Me with their lips, while their hearts are far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men learned by rote therefore, behold, I will again do marvelous things with this people, wonderful and marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid.'⁷⁵

This is the same affliction from which the Qur'an maintains many Jews and Christians suffer, as in Q. 62:5: *The parable of those [who were] made to bear the Torah then did not bear it is that of an ass bearing books. How evil is the likeness of a people who denied God's signs!* But this is also an affliction from which the Prophet warns Muslims they, too, will suffer. Just as Moses was reported to have foreseen the partiality that would overcome his people immediately after receiving the Torah,⁷⁶ so too, Muḥammad is reported to have foretold that his people would follow the course of those before them.⁷⁷

The Messenger of God said, 'You will follow the customs of those before you, length for length, cubit for cubit, until if they go down a snake hole, you will go down after them.' His companions asked, 'O Messenger of God, [do you mean] the Jews and the Christians?' He said, 'Who else?'

In this same vein, a companion is reported to have asked the Prophet how it could be that Muslims would fall away from the practice of Islam when Muslims would continue to teach the Qur'an generation after generation. The Prophet replied, 'May your mother weep for you! Do you not see these Jews and these Christians? They read the Torah and the Gospels and do not act in accord with them.'⁷⁸ That the scriptures would come to be treated by Muslims as mere words is maintained in another saying attributed to Muḥammad:⁷⁹

There will soon come upon the people a time in which nothing of the Qur'an remains save its trace and nothing of Islam remains save its name; their mosques will be full, though they are devoid of guidance. Their scholars are the worst people under the sky, from them strife emerges and spreads.

Such 'scholars' have succumbed to the hypocrisy that the Qur'an says befell the caretakers of other religions. Among them are those to whom the Prophet referred when he said, 'There will arise within this nation a people whose prayer will make you think little of your prayer. They recite the Qur'an and it does not go past their throats.'⁸⁰ These and other sayings attributed to the Prophet indicate that criticisms of previous religious communities need not be read as condemnations of those communities in and of themselves. In light of the Qur'anic understanding of the covenant, they can be read more broadly as a criticism of the human tendency to forget and thus break the covenant with God. In this sense, they serve not only as condemnations of those who have broken the covenant in times past, but also as warnings of the general tendency to break the covenant and fail to live in accord with the *fitra*.

Conclusion

This brief examination has only been able to provide a general outline of the Qur'anic presentation of the covenant and to examine two verses in depth, and but a part of the rich and diverse interpretations both have received. Nonetheless, one can say that an expanded reading of the commentary tradition makes it clear that there is a notion of 'covenantal pluralism' inherent to the traditional Islamic understanding of the Qur'an and of revelation in general. The multiple covenants envisioned by Qur'anic exegetes unfold in three phases: the first phase is the primordial, pre-temporal general covenant made by God with all human beings when they were taken from the loins of Adam; the second phase is the particular covenant made by God with the prophets, that they will call people to worship and thus back to observance of the first covenant and that they will affirm the covenants with which other prophets are sent. This second phase then prepares the way for the third phase, the phase on this earth, wherein human beings take one of the particular covenants, with which God has sent the prophets, as a recognition and renewal of the general covenant that they had made before time.

A fuller recognition of this 'covenantal pluralism' within the Qur'an and within the Islamic tradition has important implications for Islamic theology, especially as many Muslims still grapple with the question of the other. Developments in this area could give rise to a classically rooted and canonically literate Islamic theology of the other that is not in deep tension with the contemporary pluralistic experience. Rather than viewing the succession of covenants throughout human history as superseding or abrogating one another, each can be seen as bearing witness to the reality of the first covenant, and every human being can be viewed as one who is born upon the *fitra*, and thus as one who bears witness, or has the potential to bear witness, to that original covenant within.

NOTES

- 1 See for example, Lohfink, *The Covenant Never Revoked*.
- 2 In recent years, dual-covenant theology gained enough momentum that the United States Catholic Catechism stated, 'The covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them' (though this statement was removed two years later by a vote of 231 to 14).
- 3 Old Testament studies has been the most fertile area for Covenant Studies, giving rise to classic works such as McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*; Nicholson, *God and His People*; and Hillers, *Covenant*.
- 4 For other studies of the covenant see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. ii, p. 486; vol. iii, p. 432; vol. iv, pp. 278–9, p. 362, p. 461, p. 527, pp. 592–4; vol. v, p. 441; van Ess, *Zwischen ḥadīth und Theologie*, pp. 32–9; Izutsu, *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, pp. 87–95; Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light'; Schöck, 'Adam and Eve'; Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, pp. 166–92. The idea of the covenant is also touched upon by Neuwirth, 'The House of Abraham'; Firestone, 'Is There a Notion of "Divine Election" in the Qur'ān?'; Lawson, 'Coherent Chaos and Chaotic Cosmos'. For a study of the covenant and its manifestation within Shī'ism and the Bāhā'ī faith, see Lawson, 'Seeing Double'.
- 5 Bosworth, art. 'Mīthāq', p. 187; Böwering, art. 'Covenant'.
- 6 For studies regarding the covenant in Sūfī literature, see Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, pp. 76–87, pp. 160–4; Anawati, 'La Notion de 'péché originel''; Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, pp. 145–57, pp. 185–95; Gramlich, 'Der Urvertrag in der Koranlegung'; Massignon, 'Le "Jour du Covenant"'; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimension of Islam*, p. 24, pp. 57–8.
- 7 Izutsu, *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, pp. 87–95.
- 8 Jeffery, *The Quran as Scripture*, pp. 31–3.
- 9 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 8–10.
- 10 Rippin, 'God', p. 230.
- 11 Böwering, 'Covenant', p. 466.
- 12 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 10.
- 13 'Ahd is rendered by various translators as 'covenant' (Arberry, Palmer, Sale, Yusuf Ali), 'pledge' (Rodwell, Khalifa), 'pact' (Pickthall, Sher Ali), and 'promise' (Shakir).
- 14 *Mīthāq* is rendered by various translators as 'compact' (Arberry, Palmer, Rodwell, Sale), 'pledge' (Abdel Haleem), and 'plighted word' (Yusuf Ali) – but it is most commonly rendered as 'covenant' (Asad, Pickthall, Shakir, Yusuf Ali, Sher Ali, Qara'i, Sale), with some translators using several different words, such as Muhammad Abdel Haleem, who switches between 'covenant', 'pledge', and 'treaty' according to context.
- 15 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 9.
- 16 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2182a.
- 17 Translations of Qur'anic passages are from Nasr *et al.*, *The Study Quran*.
- 18 Q. 2:100, Q. 2:177; Q. 8:56; Q. 9:1, 4, 7, 75; Q. 16:91; Q. 33:15, 23; Q. 48:10.
- 19 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 3,049a.
- 20 *Akhadha'llāhu mīthāq* (Q. 3:81, 187; Q. 5:12).
- 21 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 8.
- 22 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 4, pp. 389–90; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, vol. 3, p. 94; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 523; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 50.

23 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi^c al-bayān*, vol. 4, pp. 390–1; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 523; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 3, p. 95. Commentators have also considered the solemn covenant as a reference to the Prophet's statement made during his sermon at the Farewell Pilgrimage, 'Be reverent with regard to women! Truly you take them as a trust from God, and their private parts are made lawful for you by the word of God' (Muslim, *Saḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ḥajj*; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi^c al-bayān*, vol. 4, p. 391; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 524; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 3, p. 95; al-Ṭabarsī, vol. 3, p. 50).

24 For various interpretations of this verse, see Dakake, 'Commentary on "Sūrat al-Nisā"', p. 198.

25 al-Ṭabātābā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, pp. 365–6.

26 For interpretations of this phrase, see Lombard, 'Commentary on "Sūrat al-Ḥadīd"'.

27 Several commentators propose that this verse refers to specific pledges or covenants made with God. The most common interpretation is that it refers to the covenant or pact (*ahd*) made with the Israelites that they would recognise Muḥammad as a messenger of God (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 1, p. 308; al-Rāzī; *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 3, p. 34; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi^c al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 287–8; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, pp. 159–60). Many also assert that *My covenant* refers to the injunction to be obedient to God, while *your covenant* refers to God's promise to allow them to enter into Paradise if they do so (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 1, p. 308; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi^c al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 287–8). Nonetheless, when viewed in relation to the broader discussion of the covenant in the Qur'an, it can also be understood as a reference to the pre-temporal covenant to which Q. 7:172 is interpreted as a reference. This interpretation is more prevalent in Ṣūfī *tafsīrs*, such as that of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who writes 'One of the Baghdadī's said, "Fulfill My covenant" to which you pledged in the first covenant (*mūthāq*) when you said "Indeed (Q. 7:172)"' (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 213).

28 For the covenant in the New Testament, see Matthew 26:26–9; cf. Mark 14:22–5; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; and especially Hebrews 9.

29 For the Noahide covenant and a study of the manner in which it has been interpreted over time, see Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*. For a more recent study that examines some of the theological implications of the Noahide covenant, see Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*.

30 Also see Leviticus 26:42–46 where God promises that despite the transgressions of the Israelites, He will not break the covenant, but will 'remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD' (Leviticus 26:45); cf. Deuteronomy 4:31, 29:14–15; Judges 2:1–2; 2 Samuel 7:13–15. In contrast, several passages appear to indicate that the covenant is eternal only if the people keep the terms that God has stipulated; see 1 Kings 2:4, 8:25, and 9:4–5.

31 See Jer 31:31–4, 50:5; Ezek 16:59–63, 20:37, 34:25–31, 37:26.

32 For example Q. 57:8: *And how is it that you believe not in God when the Messenger calls you to believe in your Lord – and He has indeed made a covenant with you – if you are believers?* is understood by some to mean that all human beings have two sources for understanding the truth to which they are called, revelation and intellect, or revelation and the pre-temporal covenant within. See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 29, p. 217; al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, sub. 57:8, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=17&tSoraNo=57&tAyahNo=8&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>, accessed 23/2/2015.

33 In this respect Q. 56:46 describes the 'companions of the left' who are said to be the denizens of Hell as persisting 'in great sin'. The word employed for sin, *ḥinṭh*, derives from the phrase *ḥanīṭha fī yamīnihi*, meaning 'He broke an oath that he had taken with his right hand'

(al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c, vol. 9, p. 178; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, p. 462), and thus alludes to the breaking of the covenant as the 'great sin'.

34 Despite Ibn Kathīr's relative popularity in the modern era, it should be noted that his *tafsīr* marks a significant change in the classical commentary tradition (see Calder, 'Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr').

35 al-Qādī, 'The Primordial Covenant and Human History', p. 20.

36 See Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*; al-Qādī, 'The Primordial Covenant and Human History', pp. 21–7.

37 According to various passages of the Quran, each community will be gathered behind its prophet (Q. 17:71), on a single open, barren plain for judgment, as in Q. 18:47: *On the Day We will set the mountains in motion, and you will see the earth an open plain. And We will gather them, and leave not one of them behind* (see also, Q. 3:25; Q. 4:87; Q. 6:128; Q. 18:47; Q. 20:106; Q. 79:14).

38 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi*^c *al-bayān*, vol. 21, p. 134; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c, vol. 7, p. 439; al-Shawkānī, *Faḥḥ al-qadīr*, p. 1,158.

39 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 3, p. 452.

40 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi*^c *al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 405; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c, vol. 2, pp. 31–2.

41 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 2, p. 252.

42 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 414.

43 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 413.

44 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, pp. 413–14.

45 al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c, vol. 4, p. 273.

46 Such observations could potentially be applied to non-Abrahamic traditions, especially when viewed in light of Q. 4:163–5, *Verily We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms, and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee, and unto Moses God spoke directly, messengers as bearers of glad tidings and as warners, that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers. And God is Mighty, Wise*. But, for the purposes of this study, the discussion remains focused upon the Abrahamic traditions, since these are the traditions mentioned directly in the Qur'an.

47 The Qur'an refers to itself as 'a reminder' (*dhikr*, *dhikrā*, or *tadhkira*) throughout. See, for example, Q. 6:90; Q. 7:2; Q. 11:114, 120; Q. 12:104; Q. 20:3, 99; Q. 21:24; Q. 36:69; Q. 38:82; Q. 43:44; Q. 65:10; Q. 68:52; and Q. 73:19. The revelation given to Moses is also referred to as 'a reminder' in Q. 21:48 and Q. 40:54. Furthermore, the Prophet Muḥammad is referred to as 'a reminder' in Q. 65:10–11, *God has certainly sent down unto you a reminder, a Messenger reciting unto you the clear signs of God to bring those who believe and perform righteous deeds from the darkness into the light*.

48 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*^c, vol. 4, p. 273.

49 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 7, p. 255. Here Ibn ^cAjība is employing ^cAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) interpretation with a slight variation; see al-Qushayrī, *Latā'if al-ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 258.

50 See Q. 2:84, 93; Q. 3:187; Q. 4:154, 155; Q. 5:12, 13, 70.

51 The school of Federal Theology has interpreted Hosea 6:7, 'But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against Me', as a reference to a covenant that was established with Adam. Nonetheless, this verse is not understood as a

reference to a covenant before Adam of which the covenant with Adam would be a manifestation.

52 A *ḥadīth* reported on the authority of Ma^cmar b. Rashīd states that Noah was the first prophet sent. See al-Ṭabarī, *al-Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, p. 178, and Ibn Sa^cd vol. 1, p. 27.

53 al-Ṭabarī, *al-Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, p. 151.

54 Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, p. 26.

55 Regarding the place of Adam in the Qur'an and in Islam in general, see Schöck, *Adam in Islam*.

56 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi^c al-bayān*, vol. 9, p. 135.

57 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 4, p. 273.

58 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 343.

59 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 351.

60 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 351.

61 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 351.

62 The possible origins of the word *ḥanīf* in other Semitic languages have led to numerous speculations among Western scholars. See Margoliouth, 'On the Origin and Import of the Names *Muslim* and *Ḥanīf*'; Lyall, 'The Words 'Ḥanīf' and 'Muslim'; Bey, 'Some Considerations with Regard to the *Ḥanīf* Question'; Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran*, pp. 151–61; Denny, 'Some Religion-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur'ān'; François de Blois provides a useful summary of various perspectives in '*Naṣrānī* and *Ḥanīf*', esp. pp. 17–30. See also Bashear, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*, ch. xiv; Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 75–87.

63 al-Isfahānī, *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān*, p. 260. As Neal Robinson observes, 'This etymology is plausible, particularly in view of Q. 6:79 which occurs at the climax of an account of Abraham's rejection of astral divinities after he observed the setting of a star, the moon and the sun. Unfortunately, however, we cannot be certain that it is correct, because *ḥanafa* is not attested in the Qur'an and it may be a post-Qur'anic de-nominal verb derived from *ḥanīf*' (Robinson, '*Ṣūrat Āl 'Imrān*', p. 7).

64 al-Zamakhshārī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 220.

65 al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 4, p. 41.

66 Regarding the place of the *ḥunafā'* (sing. *ḥanīf*) in pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islam, see Rubin, '*Ḥanīfiyya* and *Ka'ba*'.

67 Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb ṣifāt al-janna*, p. 63, cited in commentary on Q. 30:30 by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 3, p. 418; Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 5, p. 344.

68 For a discussion of the more universal understanding of Islam that may have prevailed in the first century of Islam, see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

69 For more on this distinction and its relation to the term *ḥunafā'*, see Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, pp. 189–93. See also, Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, pp. 3–7.

70 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 354.

71 Ibn ^cAtīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, vol. 12, p. 258; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 354.

72 al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janā'iz*, no. 79, *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, no. 30(2); Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, '*Kitāb al-Qadar*', no. 6.

73 al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi^c*, vol. 7, p. 354.

74 Ibn ^cAjība, *al-Baḥr al-madīd*, vol. 2, p. 414.

75 This passage is also referred to in Matthew 15:8 and Mark 7:6: 'This people honours Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me.'

76 Deuteronomy 31:24–29: 'When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book, to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, "Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are; behold, while I am yet alive with you, today you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more after my death! Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.'"

77 al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Aḥādīth al-anbiyā'*, no. 53.

78 Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, no. 26.

79 al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān*, vol. 2, p. 311.

80 al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Irtibat al-murtaddīn*, no. 3; Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Zakāt*, no. 49; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, *Muqaddima*, p. 34.

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