

## Article

# Higher Objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Covenants in Islam: A Content Analysis of *'ahd* and *mīthāq* in the Qur'ān

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**Abstract:** The concept of covenant occupies a central place in the Qur'ān but has been understudied and underrepresented in discourses about Islam. This article contributes to redressing this lacuna by applying the method of content analysis to the Qur'ān, specifically the terms *'ahd* and *mīthāq* that refer to the concept of covenant. The aim of this article is to identify the *maqāṣid* (higher objectives) of covenants in Islam and discuss their implications for education about Islam and contemporary Islamic thought. This content analysis finds that covenants in the Qur'ān provide an overarching paradigm governing human existence and coexistence across six covenantal relationship categories. Covenants establish the terms and conditions of God-human and intra-human relations for human existence on Earth in relation to the afterlife, the dissemination of the divine message, the promotion of righteousness, welfare and wellbeing, and restricting the use of armed force to self-defense in response to treaty violation for preserving peace and security. This article recommends that the study of Qur'ānic covenantal knowledge ought to be integrated into courses and discourses about Islam commensurate, with its centrality in the Qur'ān and Prophet Muḥammad's approach to building peaceful interreligious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

**Keywords:** Prophet Muḥammad; *Sunnah*; Islamic thought; interreligious relations; peace; security; *jihād*; Islamic education; *sharī'a* law



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## 1. Introduction

In ancient and modern times, covenants—solemn agreements governing human relations—have been used to promote peaceful coexistence, religious freedom, and inter-faith harmony (Mehfooz 2022). A custom of issuing covenants and treaties was historically normative in the Near and Middle Eastern region among the Byzantines and Sasanians, as well as the Arabs (Levy-Rubin 2011). Over the past two decades, the field of Islamic studies has produced a considerable body of research on covenants in the Qur'ān (O'Connor 2019; Jaffer 2017; Lombard 2015; Gwynne 2014; Safi 2008) and in relation to the diplomacy of Prophet Muḥammad (Zein and El-Wakil 2020, 2022a, 2022b; Rane 2022a; El-Wakil 2016, 2019; Morrow 2013). As pledges of peace and security to Christian, Jewish, and other religious communities, covenants had an initial, and generally enduring, positive influence on Islam's interreligious relations (Mehfooz 2022; Zein and El-Wakil 2020; Penn 2015; Levy-Rubin 2011).

Fulfilling covenants is emphasized in the Qur'ān alongside Islam's most fundamental teachings. For example, in *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, the characteristics of believers include being humble when in prayer, turning away from ill speech, observing *zakat*, avoiding unlawful sexual intercourse, *fulfilling trusts [amaanihim] and covenants ['ahdihim]*, and maintaining prayers (Q23:2–9). Another example is in *Sūrah al-Baqara*, where righteousness is defined as:

*one who believes in Allāh, the Last Day, the Angels, Books, and Prophets; and gives wealth in spite of love for it to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakāh; [those*

*who] fulfill their covenant [bi'ahdihim] when they promise [‘āhadū]; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. (Q2:177)*

However, a theory of covenants in Islam—concerning the principles governing human existence and coexistence—has never been developed by classical or modern scholars (Gwynne 2014; Lumbard 2015; Jaffer 2017). Covenants remain understudied and under-represented in discourses about Islam today. In particular, covenants in the Qurʾān have not been examined in relation to *maqāṣid* (higher objectives). This article presents a content analysis of the Qurʾānic terms *ahd* and *mīthāq*, used in reference to the concept of covenant, to identify the *maqāṣid* of covenants in the Qurʾān and for Islam.

Islam is the religion of Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632), referred to in the Qurʾān as the same religion as that of previous prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Q42:13). Prophet Muḥammad is instructed in the Qurʾān to follow the religion of Prophet Abraham (Q16:123). Juan Cole's (2019) examination of the meaning of the term 'Islam' in the Qurʾān finds that it refers to the prophetic tradition of monotheism associated with Abraham. Numerous Qurʾānic verses use the term 'Islam' in relation to the religion ordained by Allāh (Q3:19, Q3:85, Q5:3, Q6:125, Q39:22, Q49:17, and Q61:7) and contrast it with following Satan (Q2:208). The Qurʾān refers to this religion as "*lilddīni ḥanīfan fiṭ'rata l-lahi*", the upright, natural religious disposition ordained by Allāh (Q30:30).

The Qurʾān is the preeminent, sacred book, and the primary source of Islam. It is regarded by Muslims as the word of God (Allāh) revealed to Prophet Muḥammad through the Angel Gabriel between the years 610 and 632. It is comprised of over 6000 verses (*āyāt*) and divided into 114 chapters (*sūwar*). Empirical research on early Qurʾān manuscripts adds weight to the traditional Muslim account that the contents and organization of the Qurʾān has remained consistent and stable since the time of Prophet Muḥammad (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012).

As described by the Qurʾān, the book is one of guidance for the God-conscious (*muttaqīn*) (Q2:2), those who believe in the *ghayb* (unseen reality), perform prayers and share with others from their own provisions (Q2:3), believe in the revelation to Muḥammad, previous revelations, and the afterlife, are upon the guidance of Allāh, and will be successful (Q2:4–5). The Qurʾān states that everything is created by Allāh and that all human beings will be accountable to Allāh on the Day of Resurrection. Human life on Earth is considered a small part of human existence that will ultimately continue in the afterlife, experienced by humans as paradise (*jannah*) or hell (*jahannam*) depending on Allāh's judgement of one's beliefs and conduct on Earth. For Muslims, the Qurʾān is a manual for life on Earth, conveying the terms and conditions concerning one's destiny in the afterlife. This article contends that covenants between Allāh and human beings and between groupings of human beings are the central agreements governing this arrangement. In other words, the Qurʾānic conception of human existence and coexistence is governed by covenants.

Modern education and discourses about Islam do not afford covenants sufficient attention commensurate with their centrality in the Qurʾān and significance in the diplomacy of Prophet Muḥammad. Rather, discourses and education about Islam have a disproportionate emphasis on Islamic law, *sharī'a*, and *fiqh* (Farooq 2022; Moosa 2015; Kamali 2006). *Sharī'a* (as law or legal code) is not the paradigm used by the Qurʾān nor Prophet Muḥammad in conveying the message of Islam (Farooq and El-Ghattis 2016; Kamali 2006). As discussed below, an overemphasis on *sharī'a* as law is also apparent in studies of *maqāṣid*. This is not to deny the importance of law in Islam, as Islamic family and commercial law, and other legal contexts such as the *ḥudūd*, are derived from the Qurʾān and *Sunnah* (way or conduct of Prophet Muḥammad). However, in matters of interreligious relations and the treatment of non-Muslims under Muslim rule, *sharī'a* law has been invoked to justify religious persecution and terrible atrocities committed in the name of Islam (Al-Dawoody 2015; Landau-Tasserion 2015). A covenantal paradigm ought to be adopted by scholars, educators, and *ulema* in courses and discourses about Islam to promote an understanding of coexistence and interreligious relations in Islam that aligns with the Qurʾān and *Sunnah*. This may help mitigate the potential for violent extremist interpretations (Rane 2019) and

refute claims of inherent enmity toward non-Muslims and innate militancy in Islam (van de Krogt 2010).

Following this introduction, Section 2 of this article discusses the scholarly literature on covenants in the Qurʾān. It provides key definitions and highlights the centrality of covenants in the Qurʾān. Section 3 presents the methodology, including a brief discussion of the method of content analysis and its use in other studies of the Qurʾān, as well as an overview of the concept of *maqāṣid* in Islamic scholarship. Section 4 identifies and examines the Qurʾānic verses that use the terms *ʿahd* and *mīthāq* in relation to six main relationship categories of covenants between Allāh and humanity, prophets, people of scripture, and people of Prophet Muḥammad’s time, family, and spouses. The scope of the article is confined to covenants in the Qurʾān. It does not engage in analysis of Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), *sīrah* (Prophet’s biography), or *ḥadīth* literature concerning covenants, as this is beyond the scope of a single article.

While some reference is made in this article to the *Constitution of Medina* and *Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya*, historic documents referred to as the covenants of Prophet Muḥammad, such as *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai* and *Covenant with the Christians of Najran* (Zein and El-Wakil 2020, 2022a, 2022b; Rane 2022a; El-Wakil 2016, 2019; Morrow 2013), are not examined. There is indirect reference to the former but not the latter in the Qurʾān. However, it should be noted that recent research on the covenants of Prophet Muḥammad give confidence as to their historicity. Zein and El-Wakil (2022a) find that the copies we have today are *not* the same ones the Prophet and the First Caliphs of Islam issued, *but are* rather “faithful textual replicas of the original covenants that the Prophet and the First Caliphs of Islam issued to the non-Muslim communities of their time” (p. 2). The authors examine the textual anomalies in the extant copies of these covenants, concluding that they “do not entail forgery” but “transmission nuances” that are expected and accepted in the recording and transmission of such historic documents (p. 2).

## 2. Studies of Covenants in the Qurʾān

Covenants in the Qurʾān and those issued by Prophet Muḥammad have received increasing scholarly attention over the past decade. While several studies have examined covenants in the Qurʾān, most focus on verse Q7:172, generally referred to as the primordial covenant. Wadad al-Qadi notes that from the first century of Islam, this verse was the subject of an “enormous” amount of exegetical material among Muslim scholars and received “widely varying interpretations” (al-Qadi 2003, p. 332). Al-Qadi emphasizes the relevance of Q7:172 for understanding the Qurʾānic vision of human history, including an additional ‘pre-earthly’ stage of human existence and new perspectives on the nature of humans, sin, the role of prophets, and human relationship with Allāh.

Louay Safi’s examination of the Qurʾānic narrative contends that covenants and contracts are “the most fundamental principles governing relationships among people” (Safi 2008, p. 167). He contrasts *covenants*, “solemn promises exchanged by individuals”, with *contracts*, “legally binding agreements between parties” (p. 167), noting that the Qurʾān uses three distinct terms in reference to voluntary commitments and agreements: *ʿahd* (covenant), *mīthāq* (pact), and *ʿaqd* (contract). Of these, *covenant* is the “most solemn agreement” made between human beings and Allāh, *pact* refers to “agreements among groups with internal solidarity”, and *contract* is subject to “legal regulation and enforcement” (p. 167). Upholding or maintaining the covenant is regarded by the Qurʾān as “the hallmark of true and sincere faith”, while breaking a covenant is a sign of “hypocrisy and duplicity” that leads to “corruption and failure in this life and the hereafter” (Safi 2008, p. 168).

Safi (2008) identifies three types of covenants and contracts: (1) covenants with Allāh; (2) covenants and contracts among people; and (3) social contract above religious solidarity. The first category involves a “promise” and “agreement” that carries certain “expectations and consequences” (p. 167). Examples include the primordial covenant (Q7:172–73), the covenant of Allāh with the Children of Israel (e.g., Q2:40), and the covenant of Allāh with the followers of Muḥammad (e.g., Q57:8). The second category extends to all aspects of

life, including business transactions and marriage, and must be made in writing (Q2:282). The third category, which Safi regards as the most important after the covenant with Allāh, establishes “peace and cooperation between people and groups with varying religious, tribal, ethnic, and racial backgrounds” (Safi 2008, p. 170). He cites the *Constitution of Medina* as an example of the latter, remarking that it “established a multireligious and pluralist social order” that encompassed Muslims and non-Muslims, including Jews and polytheists (p. 170).

Rosalind Gwynne begins her study of the Qurʾān with a focus on the primordial covenant (Q7:172) as the “pivotal covenant-passage” (Gwynne 2014, p. 2). Remarking on its centrality to the God-humanity relationship, she finds the covenant to be “the logical key to the entire structure of the Qurʾānic argument”, and that “Virtually every argument in the Qurʾān expresses or implies one or more covenantal provisions” (p. 1). Although the Qurʾān makes extensive reference to covenants by such terms as *ʾahd*, *mīthāq*, and *waʿd* (promise), Gwynne observes that “Covenant as a discrete concept does not have a clear profile in Islamic scholarship” (p. 4).

Joseph Lombard notes that in comparison to the rather extensive study of covenants in the Bible and New Testament, “there remains comparatively little examination of teachings regarding the covenant in the Qurʾān and in Islam, and a Muslim or Qurʾānic covenant theology has not been articulated in the modern era” (Lombard 2015, p. 1). Lombard finds *ʾahd* and *mīthāq* to be the main Qurʾānic covenantal terms, used interchangeably in the Qurʾān, treated as synonyms in the Qurʾānic commentary literature, and used to designate “a covenantal or contractual relation between human beings . . . or between God and human beings” (p. 3). Others, such as Torsten Hylén (2016) concur, finding the terms *ʾahd* and *mīthāq* to denote the divine covenant as well as to signify a pact or alliance between people, and to be used interchangeably in the Qurʾān. Similarly to most other studies of covenants in the Qurʾān, Lombard (2015) emphasizes Q7:172, designating it as the “*locus classicus*” for the understanding of the covenant among Sunni, Shiite, and Sufi traditions, while noting differing interpretations (p. 5).

Tariq Jaffer also concentrates on the primordial covenant (Q7:172) but draws on classical Islamic exegeses and earlier academic scholarship to explore whether there exists a covenant theology in Islam. He observes that Q7:172 cements a bond between two parties—Allāh and humanity—which then makes possible “reciprocal ethical obligations” (Jaffer 2017, p. 105). Jaffer identifies four interrelated ideas central to covenant theology in Islam: (1) Allāh as the creator of human beings; (2) a contractual relationship between Allāh and humanity; (3) a program of human conduct; and (4) the idea of salvation through adherence to the covenant. He concludes, however, that scholarship on covenants in the Qurʾān “did not ever develop into a fully-fledged theory” (p. 121).

Torsten Hylén’s (2016) study of covenants in al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) account of the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī (d. 680), finds evidence that Muslim historiographical narratives of early Islam are presented in relation to a Qurʾānic covenantal framework. He remarks that “al-Ṭabarī’s Karbala narrative presents the pact of loyalty to al-Ḥusayn as a clear extension of the divine covenant” (p. 58). Others such as R. Stephen Humphreys (1989) and Andrew Marsham (2009) share this view of the covenant with Allāh as central to the interpretation of early Islamic history, and that the relationship between rulers and their subjects was an extension of this covenant (Hylén 2016). Although Hylén (2016) finds the notion of a divine covenant to be “an omnipresent subtext” in al-Ṭabarī’s writings, he contends that al-Ṭabarī “never deals with covenant in a comprehensive manner in a specific place” (p. 61). This seems to cohere with the view of Jaffer (2017), Lombard (2015), and others that a theory of covenants in Islam was not developed by Islamic scholars past or present.

More recently, Andrew O’Connor examined the Qurʾānic concepts of *ʾahd* and *mīthāq* through a polemical lens, finding that the terms which are used for covenant, treaty, promise, contract, or pledge may refer to “ancient” or “contemporary” agreements, as well as “vertical” (between Allāh and humankind) or “horizontal” (between human beings) ones

(O'Connor 2019, p. 7). He contends the Qurʾān uses the covenant motif for three theological purposes: (1) *prophetological*, to legitimize the mission of Prophet Muḥammad and his revelation; (2) *legal*, to impose obedience to a law or code of conduct; and (3) *eschatological*, to bind covenantal loyalty to a favorable afterlife. O'Connor does not consider Q7:172 to be pivotal, arguing that the formulation of covenants in the Qurʾān serves a polemic function and should be read in relation to sectarian debates between monotheistic communities of late antiquity.

From this brief review of the scholarly literature, we can see that *ʿahd* and *mīthāq* are the main terms used for covenant in the Qurʾān. The scholarly consensus seems to be that these terms are used interchangeably in the Qurʾān, with both being used in reference to covenants between Allāh and humanity and between groups of human beings. Covenants refer to a pre-earthly existence and life on Earth. They regulate intra-human relations by confirming the God-human relationship and establish a code of conduct for life on Earth with implications for the afterlife. There seems to be a general acknowledgement that covenants were not developed by Islamic scholars past or present as part of a theory or overarching paradigm of Islam, nor have covenants in the Qurʾān been examined in relation to *maqāṣid*. Building on previous research, this article examines the Qurʾānic covenantal verses in relation to six main relationship categories and additional subcategories, with a view to identifying their higher objectives.

### 3. Methodology

This article uses the method of content analysis to identify the higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of covenants in the Qurʾān and Islam. The following will define the method of content analysis. This is followed by a brief overview of the concept of *maqāṣid* before presenting the content analysis of covenants in the Qurʾān.

#### 3.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis is an extensively used research method or technique for the quantitative and qualitative study of communication messages in various formats including text, audio, and visual. It allows researchers to determine the frequency with which words, concepts, and phrases are used as well as the meanings, narratives, and themes of a message. Early definitions of content analysis reflect a quantitative focus of this method as “the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson 1952, p. 18). This and later definitions also emphasize objectivity and systematic aspects as integral to the method for “making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1969, p. 14).

As this study is not merely interested in the frequency with which the Qurʾān uses the terms *ʿahd* and *mīthāq* but their implications for the overall Qurʾānic message and for Islam, a qualitative or interpretive approach is needed. The application of content analysis as a qualitative and interpretative method allows for an examination of the narrative, description of meaning, context of communication, and enables researchers to code and analyze data (Drisko and Maschi 2016). Content analysis may focus on manifest content—what is literally or overtly present, and/or latent content—that which is not overtly evident but is implicit or implied in the text or message (Drisko and Maschi 2016). The former may be clear from reading a single verse (*āyah*) or verses (*āyāt*) that comprise a chapter (*sūrah*) or chapters (*suwar*) of the Qurʾān. The latter may only emerge following successive readings of multiple verses across various chapters. Jasser Auda’s (2021) *Maqāṣid* methodology, involving multiple readings of relevant verses or what he refers to as ‘cycles of reflection’ to identify the *maqāṣid* of a Qurʾānic concept, is employed in this study. Auda’s (2021) *Maqāṣid* framework is comprised of seven elements—concepts, objectives, values, commands, universal laws, groups, and proofs—which are intended to encourage a comprehensive reading to help identify the *maqāṣid* through the cycles of reflection.

A number of studies have used content analysis to study the Qurʾān. Various topics using this method have been explored, including the meaning of faith (Ahmadzadeh 2019),

Muslim masculinities (Arat and Hasan 2018), environmental responsibility (Helfaya et al. 2018), the development worldview (Hanapi 2015), and administration, leadership, and management (Ozdasli and Aytar 2014). These studies, among others, use a combination of quantitative and qualitative/interpretive approaches to examine the message of the Qurʾān. Other examples of scholars applying a qualitative approach to analyze the contents of the Qurʾān include Abdul Haleem's (2010) linguistic and contextual analysis of the concept of *jihād*, Smith's (2018) comparative discursive analysis of the Qurʾānic narratives of Moses and Pharaoh's magicians and Biblical narratives transmitted through texts and traditions of late antiquity, and Saleh's (2018) analysis of the Qurʾān concerning the Prophet Muḥammad, his community, and their respective ideas, demonstrating that the Qurʾān presents a record of his preaching in contrast to views suggesting the Qurʾān does not provide much information in this regard. These studies demonstrate the value of content analysis as a method for studying the Qurʾān and extending our understanding of its message in relation to Islam.

### 3.2. *Maqāṣid* (Higher Objectives)

The term *maqāṣid* means higher objectives and refers to the purpose or intent of an Islamic command, principle, or ruling. The idea of higher objectives, intent, and purpose in Islam derives from the Qurʾān. Numerous Qurʾānic verses state that the creation of the heavens and Earth was not done in vain (e.g., Q3:191) or play (e.g., Q44:38) but with purpose, as signs (e.g., Q42:29; Q45:4) and in truth (e.g., Q14:19). Other verses refer to the worship of Allāh as the purpose of creating *jinn* and humankind (Q51:56) and that religion is not to be taken as amusement and diversion (Q6:70). As an approach to interpreting and applying the Qurʾān, the *maqāṣid* can be traced back to the administration of the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) and the Mālikī School of Islamic jurisprudence, with an emphasis on wellbeing or public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) (Raysuni 2006).

In Islamic scholarship, the concept of *maqāṣid* tends to be applied in reference to *sharīʿa* or Islamic law, referred to as *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* (also commonly spelt as *sharīʿah*). The concept of *maqāṣid* was developed by the twelfth century theologian Abū Hāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) in reference to five fundamental protections: life, religion, property, progeny, and intellect. This conception was revised and expanded in the fourteenth century by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and developed as a new philosophy of Islamic law by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388) (Masud 1995). There has been considerable interest in and scholarly contributions to the study of *maqāṣid* in the modern era.

The expansion of *maqāṣid* beyond al-Ghazālī's conception began with ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Salām's (d. 1261) work on legal maxims, which broadened the discussion of *maqāṣid* in terms of promoting benefit and preventing harm. A more open-ended list of values identified by Ibn Taymiyyah, which included the fulfillment of contracts, the preservation of kinship ties, honoring the rights of one's neighbors, sincerity, trustworthiness, and moral purity, further expanded the *maqāṣid* (Kamali 2006). He objected to the essential objectives of Islamic law being limited to the five *maqāṣid* expounded by al-Ghazālī, finding these to not necessarily represent the highest or most significant objectives (Kamali 2006). Al-Shāṭibī made a more profound contribution to the theory of *maqāṣid* by focusing on the concept of *maṣlaḥa* (wellbeing or public interest) as an approach to overcoming the rigidity imposed by literalism and *qiyās* (analogical reasoning). Al-Shāṭibī's theory of *maqāṣid* is based on an inductive reading of the Qurʾān in order to identify the higher objectives, intent, and purpose of the Qurʾānic verses, which are understood to preserve human interests in both this world and the afterlife (Masud 1995).

In the modern era, interest in *maqāṣid* was advanced by Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973). His *Treatise on Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* (first published in 1946), presents an objectives-based approach in light of modern realities, examining the preservation of the family system, freedom of belief, orderliness, civility, human rights, freedom, and equality as objectives of Islamic law (Ibn ʿĀshūr 2006). An association of *maqāṣid* with *sharīʿa* is also

apparent in contemporary studies such as Gamal Attia's (2007) *Towards the Realization of the Higher Intents of Islamic Law* and Jasser Auda's (2008) *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.

Like Ibn 'Ashūr before him, Auda (2008) attempts to bridge the concept of *maqāṣid* as developed by classical Islamic scholars such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī with modern contexts for the realization of the higher objectives of Islamic law. However, in his most recent work on the subject, *Re-envisioning Islamic Scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a New Approach*, Auda (2021) advances the study of *maqāṣid* beyond the confines of *sharī'a* (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*) to "the much more comprehensive and authentic paradigm of *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* (Qur'ānic objectives)" (Auda 2021, p. 20), directing scholarly focus toward the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, rather than the *sharī'a*, to identify Islam's higher objectives.

#### 4. Content Analysis of Covenants in the Qur'ān

The concept of covenant permeates the Qur'ān. *The Qur'ānic Arabic Corpus* (<https://corpus.quran.com/>; accessed on 14 January 2023) search function returns 80 Qur'ānic references to the terms '*ahd*' and '*mīthāq*' in various grammatical forms. The trilateral root '*ayn hā dāl*' occurs 46 times in the Qur'ān: 29 times as the noun '*ahd*'; 6 times as the form I verb '*ahida*'; and 11 times as the form III verb '*āhada*'. The trilateral root '*wāw thā qāf*' occurs 34 times in the Qur'ān: 25 times as the noun '*mīthāq*', 1 time as the form III verb '*wāthaqa*', 1 time as the form IV verb '*yūthiqu*', 3 times as the noun '*mawthiq*', 2 times as the noun '*wathāq*', and 2 times as the adjective '*wuthqā*'. A search of related English language terms such as 'contract', 'covenant', 'oath', 'pledge', 'promise', and 'treaty' finds additional terms, including '*aymāna*' (oath), '*uqūd*' (contracts), '*bāya*' (pledge of allegiance), '*dhimma*' (covenant or treaty of protection), and '*wa'd*' (promise), in relation to agreements and regulation of interpersonal and inter-group relations. Lumbard (2015) and others identify '*ahd*' and '*mīthāq*' as the main Qur'ānic covenantal terms, and note that secondary terms, such as '*īṣr*' (burden), '*amāna*' (trust), and '*wa'd*' (promise), are also linked by some classical commentators to covenants.

Successive readings of the Qur'ānic verses, referring to '*ahd*' and '*mīthāq*' in relation to verses that precede and follow, and the *sūrah* in which they appear, identified six main categories of covenantal relationships in the Qur'ān between (1) Allāh and humanity, (2) Allāh and prophets, (3) Allāh and people of scripture, (4) Prophet Muḥammad and people of his time, (5) family, and (6) spouses, as well as additional subcategories, as follows:

1. Allāh and humanity (Q2:27; Q7:172; Q36:60).
  - 1a. Upholding covenants, pledges, and promises made in Allāh's name (Q2:100; Q2:177; Q3:76–77; Q6:152; Q7:102; Q13:20; Q13:25; Q16:91; Q17:34; Q23:8; Q70:32).
  - 1b. Allāh's promise (Q9:111).
  - 1c. Alleged/claimed pledge/promise from Allāh (Q2:80; Q3:183; Q19:78; Q19:87).
2. Allāh and all prophets (Q3:81; Q33:7).
  - 2a. Adam (Q20:115).
  - 2b. Abraham (Q2:124–125).
  - 2c. Moses (Q7:134; Q43:49).
3. Allāh and people of scripture: (3:187).
  - 3a. Children of Israel (Q2:40; Q2:63; Q2:83–84; Q2:93; Q4:154–155; Q5:12–13; Q5:70; Q7:169; Q20:86).
  - 3b. Christians (Q5:14).
4. Prophet Muḥammad (and Allāh) and people of his time (Q48:10).
  - 4a. Believers (*mu'minīn*) (Q4:92; Q5:7; Q33:23; Q57:8).
  - 4b. Hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*) (Q4:90; Q9:75; Q33:15).
  - 4c. Polytheists (*mush'rikīn*) (Q8:56–58; Q8:72; Q9:1; Q9:4; Q9:7–8; Q9:10; Q9:12).
5. Family (Q12:66; Q12:80).
6. Spouses (Q4:21).

This confirms and expands the categorization of covenantal verses identified by other studies. For example, Safi (2008) discussed three categories: (1) covenants with Allāh; (2) covenants and contracts among people; and (3) social contract above religious solidarity, while Jaffer (2017) identified four interrelated ideas concerning covenants in Islam: (1) Allāh as the creator of human beings; (2) a contractual relationship between Allāh and humanity; (3) a program of human conduct; and (4) the idea of salvation through adherence to the covenant. The present study's six covenantal relationship categories and subcategories are examined below in the conventional order of the *muṣḥaf* using the Saheeh International translation.

#### 4.1. Allāh and Humanity

The first verse in the Qurʾān that mentions a covenant is in the second chapter, *Sūrah al-Baqara*. Q2:27 warns against breaking the covenant with Allāh, severing that which Allāh has ordered to be joined and causing corruption on Earth.

*Those who break the covenant of Allāh [ʾahd Allāh] after contracting it and sever that which Allāh has ordered to be joined and cause corruption on earth. It is those who are the losers. (Q2:27)*

This verse is preceded by a series of verses that contrast the qualities of the God-conscious (*muttaqīn*) (Q2:2–5) with those who disbelieve(d) (*kafarū*) (Q2:6–20) and reminds readers to become righteous (*tattaqūn*) (Q2:21). Q2:27 may be a reference to the primordial covenant, referred to in Q7:172, as indicated by the following verse's (Q2:28) reference to a state of lifelessness of human beings before being brought to life, caused to die, and then brought back to life and returned to Allāh: "How can you disbelieve in Allāh when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life, and then to Him you will be returned" (Q2:28). This view may also be supported with reference to Q2:29, which refers to the creation of the Earth by Allāh as a dwelling place for humans before conveying the story of Allāh informing the angels about the creation of humans as *khalīfa* (successive authority) upon the Earth (Q2:30).

The subsequent verses (Q2:31–39) mention Allāh giving Adam the knowledge of all names (*waʾallama ādama l-asmā kullahā*) (Q2:31–33), Ibʾlīs' refusal to bow to Adam along with the angels upon Allāh's command (Q2:34), Allāh prohibiting Adam and his wife from approaching a certain tree (Q2:35), and Satan tempting them both into error and their resettlement on Earth (Q2:36). This series of verses ends with Allāh accepting Adam's repentance (Q2:37), a reminder to follow the guidance from Allāh that will be sent (Q2:38), and a warning that "those who disbelieve and deny Our signs—those will be companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally" (Q2:39). Read within this series of verses, Q2:27 establishes the covenant as central to human existence on Earth and relates success in the afterlife to following the guidance and reminders Allāh has committed to providing humanity.

It is not until the seventh chapter, *Sūrah Aʿrāf*, that the Qurʾān provides the backstory to the covenant between Allāh and humanity in Q7:172, generally referred to as the primordial covenant. It should be noted that *Sūrah Aʿrāf* is considered to have been revealed in the Meccan period, placing it among the earlier chapters the Prophet received. Hence, from the early stages of the Prophet's mission, he and his companions would have been initiated into an Islamic covenantal conception, understanding, or worldview concerning human relations with Allāh, existence on Earth, and the afterlife. Although the terms for covenant are not used in Q7:172, it conveys that the progeny of Adam (i.e., humanity) entered an agreement, acknowledging Allāh as Lord and accountability to Allāh on the Day of Resurrection:

*And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This]—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware" (Q7:172). Or [lest] you say, "It was only that our fathers associated [others in worship]*

with Allāh before, and we were but descendants after them. Then would You destroy us for what the falsifiers have done?" (Q7:173). And thus do We [explain in] detail the verses, and perhaps they will return (Q7:174).

*Sūrah Aʿrāf* begins with a reassurance to Prophet Muḥammad that the revelation he is receiving is from Allāh, a warning and a *reminder* for the *muʿminīn* (believers) (Q7:2), and that no one should be followed or worshipped besides Allāh (Q7:3). The subsequent verses mention the destruction of previous people and accountability to Allāh (Q7:4–9) before returning to the theme of humans being established on Earth (Q7:10), followed by the story of Adam's creation and Ib'līs' (Satan's) enmity toward humanity (Q7:11–28). The Qurʾān then reminds its readers that Allāh commands justice and establishing prayer, and that Allāh is the origin and destination of humans (Q7:29). Some humans are guided by Allāh, while others have gone astray because they take the *shayāṭīn* (plural for Satan or devils) as their guide instead of Allāh (Q7:30). The Children of Adam (*banī ādam*, i.e., humanity) are then reminded not to be excessive or extravagant (*tusʿrifū*) (Q7:31–32), immoral (*fawāḥisha*), or oppressive (*baghya*) (Q7:33), which stress the imperative of welfare, wellbeing, and security in human relations. The chapter then proceeds with a number of verses that address the themes of accountability to Allāh, the afterlife, and signs of Allāh (Q7:34–58).

The *Sūrah* then narrates stories of previous prophets, Noah (Q7:59–64), Hūd (Q7:65–72), Ṣāliḥ (Q7:73–79), Lot (Q7:80–84), and Shuʿayb (Q7:85–93), which tell of people rejecting the guidance that Allāh's messengers conveyed to them. At the end of this section of verses, we read: "And We did not find for most of them any covenant [*aʿhad*] but indeed, We found most of them defiantly disobedient" (Q7:102). This verse asserts that most people abandoned their covenant with Allāh and indicates that, in spite of Allāh consistently sending guidance and messengers, most human beings tend toward disbelief. We then find a series of verses (Q7:103–171) concerning the message of Moses to the pharaoh, freeing of the Children of Israel, and their disobedience to Allāh before we come to Q7:172. The *Sūrah* ends with a reminder to worship Allāh (Q7:205) and to not let arrogance prevent one prostrating to Allāh (Q7:206).

The next verse we encounter concerning the covenant between Allāh and humanity, Q36:60, refers to the covenant (*aʿhad*) specifically commanding not to follow Satan, the enemy of humanity.

***Did I not enjoin [aʿhad] upon you, O children of Adam, that you not worship Satan—[for] indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.*** (Q36:60)

*Sūrah Yā Sīn* begins with an invocation of the 'Wise Qurʾān (*wal-qurʾāni l-ḥakīm*) (Q36:2) and then reaffirms and reassures Prophet Muḥammad concerning his mission. The *Sūrah* presents the Qurʾān's repeated themes of Allāh's signs, resurrection, accountability to Allāh, and the afterlife. Verses Q36:55–58 refer to the joy of the companions of paradise (*aṣḥāba l-ḥanāt*), who stand apart from the criminals (*muḥrimūn*). In Q36:60, we see the first form verb used in reference to a declaration from Allāh regarding Satan as the enemy of humanity. The enmity of Satan toward human beings is a major theme of the Qurʾān (Rahman 1989) and is presented as the antithesis to guidance from Allāh. Satan is portrayed as a force that distracts humans from the worship of Allāh and attainment of righteousness, the central objective of human existence on Earth for success in the afterlife. It is noteworthy, however, that Fazlur Rahman does not mention covenants among the Qurʾān's major themes, an example of their neglect by even renowned modern Islamic scholars.

#### 4.1.1. Upholding Covenants, Pledges, and Promises Made in Allāh's Name

Twelve verses (Q2:100–101, Q2:177, Q3:76–77, Q6:152, Q7:102, Q13:20, Q13:25, Q16:91, Q17:34, Q23:8, and Q70:32) refer to upholding covenants, pledges, and promises made in Allāh's name. Some examples of these verses include:

***Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allāh, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives,***

*orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakāh; [those who] fulfill their promise [bi'ahdihim] when they promise [āhadū]; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous. (Q2:177)*

*But yes, whoever fulfills his commitment [bi'ahdihim] and fears Allāh—then indeed, Allāh loves those who fear Him" (Q3:76). Indeed, those who exchange the covenant [bi'ahdi] of Allāh and their [own] oaths [aymānihim] for a small price will have no share in the Hereafter, and Allāh will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment. (Q3:77)*

*And do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best until he reaches maturity. And give full measure and weight in justice. We do not charge any soul except [with that within] its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if [it concerns] a near relative. And the covenant [bi'ahdi] of Allāh fulfill. This has He instructed you that you may remember. (Q6:152)*

*And fulfill the covenant [bi'ahdi] of Allāh when you have taken it, [O believers], and do not break oaths [aymāna] after their confirmation while you have made Allāh, over you, a security [kaftlan]. Indeed, Allāh knows what you do. (Q16:91)*

The main themes of these verses concern divine guidance, righteousness, and the afterlife, which are also central to other covenantal verses.

#### 4.1.2. Promise of Allāh

There are many verses that mention the promise of Allāh, such as Q3:9; Q3:152; Q4:122; Q9:111; Q10:4; Q10:55; Q13:31; Q14:47; Q16:38; Q17:5; Q17:7; Q17:104; Q18:21; Q19:61; Q21:9; Q21:104; Q22:47; Q25:16; Q28:13; Q28:61; Q30:6; Q31:33; Q33:22; Q35:5; Q39:20; Q39:74; Q40:55; Q40:77; Q45:32; Q46:16–17; and Q73:18. With the exception of Q9:111, these verses do not use either *'ahd* or *mīthāq* but *wa'd* (promise). According to *The Qur'anic Arabic Corpus* (<https://corpus.quran.com/>; accessed on 14 January 2023), the trilateral root *wāw ayn dāl*, from which the term *wa'd* is derived, occurs 151 times in the Qur'ān in 10 derivative forms: 70 times as the form I verb *wa'ada*, 4 times as the form III verb *wā'ad*, 1 time as the form IV verb *tū'idu*, 1 time as the form VI verb *tawā'ad*, 12 times as the noun *maw'id*, 1 time as the noun *maw'idat*, 6 times as the noun *mī'ād*, 49 times as the noun *wa'd*, 6 times as the noun *wa'id*, and 1 time as the passive participle *maw'ūd*. This highlights the importance and extent to which the concept of promise is emphasized in the Qur'ān.

Verse Q9:111 uses the noun *'ahd* with a preposition and possessive pronoun to form *bi'ahdihim*—'to His covenant/promise' as well as the term *wa'd*. *Sūrah At-Tawba* concerns the conflict between the Muslims and the polytheists, led by the Quraysh tribe. Verse Q9:111, which refers to Allāh's covenant as a promise of paradise for those who sacrifice their lives and property in Allāh' cause, reads:

*Indeed, Allāh has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allāh, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [wa'dun] [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'ān. And who is truer to his covenant [bi'ahdihim] than Allāh? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment. (Q9:111)*

Those who fight in the cause of Allāh are praised and promised paradise, as those among earlier generations are rewarded by Allāh for their sacrifice. This verse links such sacrifice to the covenant of Allāh and encourages the believers to rejoice in their commitment to the covenant.

#### 4.1.3. Alleged/Claimed Promise of Allāh

Another subcategory of verses refers to covenants, pledges, or promises that are alleged to be made by Allāh. These verses generally appear in the context of disputes with the people of previous scriptures, hypocrites, and unbelievers that make false claims about Allāh. In four of these verses, Q2:80, Q3:183, Q19:78, and Q19:87, the term *'ahd* is used, while in Q33:12, the promise is referred to as *wa'da*:

*And they say, "Never will the Fire touch us, except for [a few] numbered days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant ['ahd] with Allāh? For Allāh will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allāh that which you do not know?"*. (Q2:80)

*[They are] those who said, "Indeed, Allāh has taken our promise ['ahida] not to believe any messenger until he brings us an offering which fire [from heaven] will consume." Say, "There have already come to you messengers before me with clear proofs and [even] that of which you speak. So why did you kill them, if you should be truthful?"*. (Q3:183)

*Has he looked into the unseen, or has he taken from the Most Merciful a promise ['ahdan]?* (Q19:78)

*None will have [power of] intercession except he who had taken from the Most Merciful a covenant ['ahdan].* (Q19:87)

*And [remember] when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease said, "Allāh and His Messenger did not promise [wa'da] us except delusion".* (Q33:12)

These verses refer to claims made in relation to punishment in the afterlife, legitimacy of messengers, the unseen, and intercession, to which Allāh is responding by asking if they have a covenant or promise from Allāh to back up the claim. They highlight the role of covenants as a means by which Allāh declares a commitment, promise, or truth, and cohere with the broader Qur'ānic theme concerning the clarity of Allāh's word through messengers and the prohibition of speaking falsely in Allāh's name. This is also apparent in relation to Allāh's covenant with the prophets and people of scripture.

#### 4.2. Allāh and the Prophets

The second main category of covenantal verses concerns covenants between Allāh and the prophets. There are two main Qur'ānic verses (Q3:81 and Q33:7) that refer to a covenant between Allāh and the prophets in general, including Prophet Muḥammad, while others refer to covenants with specific prophets, namely Adam, Abraham, and Moses. Similarly to the primordial covenant with humanity (Q7:172), which involved human beings acknowledging Allāh as Lord, the covenant with the prophets (Q3:81) requires acknowledgement that the revelation they receive is from Allāh, to believe in the messenger sent by Allāh, and to support the messenger in the dissemination of the divine message:

*And when Allāh took the covenant [mīthāq] of the Prophets, [saying], "Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then there comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." [Allāh] said, "Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment ['iṣri]?" They said, "We have acknowledged it." He said, "Then, bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.* (Q3:81)

Verse Q33:7 refers to the covenant with the prophets, specifically mentioning the names of prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, son of Mary. It reads:

*And [mention, O Muḥammad], when We took from the prophets their covenant [mīthāqahum] and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, the son of Mary; and We took from them a solemn covenant [mīthāqun].* (Q33:7)

Various verses of the Qur'ān (e.g., Q36:3–7) and narrations in the *ḥadīth* literature describe Prophet Muḥammad's experience of receiving revelation and conveying the

message as physically, mentally, and emotionally difficult and demanding (e.g., 73:1–20 and Q93:1–8). Prophet Muḥammad seemingly struggled to make sense of the experience of revelation at first and continued to exhibit signs of physical stress in the process of receiving the revelation. He also experienced emotional stress due to the insults and accusations of madness and trickery (e.g., Q7:184, Q23:70, and Q34:46), and because relatively few of those to whom he conveyed the message of the Qurʾān became believers. Many verses of the Qurʾān sought to reassure Prophet Muḥammad with stories of previous prophets whose people similarly rejected the message conveyed to them and remained disbelievers (e.g., Q7:59–93). Although the Qurʾān repeatedly acknowledges that most people throughout human history have rejected the divine message and remained disbelievers, the covenantal verses concerning the prophets affirm that Allāh has fulfilled the divine commitment to send guidance and messengers to remind humanity of their relationship with Allāh, to be righteous for success in the afterlife, and the consequences of rejecting the message.

Covenants with specific prophets, namely Adam, Abraham, and Moses, also concern the responsibility of disseminating Allāh’s message. The covenant with Adam (Q20:115–117) affirms the enmity of Satan towards humanity and warns that Satan seeks to divert humanity from the message of Allāh. The covenant with Prophet Abraham (Q2:124–125) continues the theme of conveying the message sent by Allāh to humanity, a role entrusted to the righteous descendants of Abraham, who, along with his son Ishmael, was honored with establishing the House of Allāh on Earth as a place of “security” (*amnan*) and “prayer”. Verses on the covenant with Moses (Q7:134 and Q43:49) concern him conveying the message of Allāh to the pharaoh.

#### 4.2.1. Covenant with Adam

In Q20:115, the term *‘ahidna* is used in reference to a covenant Allāh took from Adam:

*And We had already taken a promise [‘ahidna] from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.* (Q20:115)

This promise or covenant with Adam refers to Allāh’s warning that Satan (Ib’līs) is an avowed enemy of humanity. In the following verse (Q20:116), we read that when Allāh commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, Ib’līs refused, and then in Q20:117, we read: “So We said, “O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then, let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer”. The issue of Satan’s enmity toward humanity is a reoccurring theme in the Qurʾān. In connection to Q2:27, in which humanity is warned against breaking the covenant and spreading corruption on Earth, we find a series of verses (Q2:30–39) that convey the story of Adam’s creation, Ib’līs’ refusal to prostrate, and his enmity towards humanity. This theme is repeated in Q7:11–28 in connection to Q7:172. Additionally, the enmity of Satan towards humanity is also reiterated in Q36:60, which refers to a covenant (*a’had*) with the children of Adam: “Did I not enjoin [*a’had*] upon you, O children of Adam, that you not worship Satan—[for] indeed, he is to you a clear enemy”.

A central point in the Qurʾānic narrative of this enmity toward humanity is Satan’s refusal to prostrate to Adam when commanded by Allāh and retort citing physical attributes: “I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay” (Q7:12). This suggests that the warning against following Satan includes attitudes of superiority perhaps based on color, ethnicity, or ‘race’, which are central to much human conflict and suffering. The Qurʾān contradicts Satan’s ‘racist’ attitude by declaring that the “diversity in your languages and colors” are “signs” of Allāh (Q30:22) and that “the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you” (Q49:13).

#### 4.2.2. Covenant with Abraham

The Qurʾān contains two verses (Q2:124–125) in which a covenant with Abraham is mentioned:

*And [mention, O Muḥammad], when Abraham was tried by his Lord with words [i.e., commands] and he fulfilled them. [Allāh] said, “Indeed, I will make you a*

*leader for the people.” [Abraham] said, “And of my descendants?” [Allāh] said, “My covenant [‘ahdi] does not include the wrongdoers”. (Q2:124)*

*And [mention] when We made the House [i.e., the Ka‘bah] a place of return for the people and [a place of] security [amnan]. And take, [O believers], from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer. And We charged [wa ‘ahdina] Abraham and Ishmael, [saying], “Purify My House for those who perform ṭawāf and those who are staying [there] for worship and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]”. (Q2:125)*

In verse Q2:124, we read of a covenant between Allāh and Abraham in which he “will be made leader of the people”, but that this covenant does not include wrongdoers from among Abraham’s descendants. The Qur’ān impresses upon its readers that the experiences of humans on Earth are largely a consequence of the conditions they construct for themselves and the guidance they follow or ignore. Righteousness is emphasized for success in this life and the afterlife. Verse Q2:125 states that Allāh’s covenant with Abraham and Ishmael involved them purifying the *ka‘ba* as a place of security for the performance of *ṭawāf*, worship, and prayer. These verses convey that Allāh’s covenant with Abraham established that the righteous among his descendants would be entrusted with the religion, symbolized by the *ka‘ba* as a place of return, security, and worship, functions that relate to the wellbeing of people, connection with Allāh, and success in the afterlife.

#### 4.2.3. Covenant with Moses

The Qur’ān contains two verses (Q17:134 and Q43:49) in which a covenant with Moses is mentioned. In Q7:134, we read:

*And when the punishment descended upon them, they said, “O Moses, invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised [‘ahida] you. If you [can] remove the punishment from us, we will surely believe you, and we will send with you the Children of Israel.*

This verse refers to an appeal from the people of Pharaoh to Moses for him to invoke his covenant with Allāh for intercession to remove the punishment they were experiencing in exchange for them freeing the Children of Israel. Q43:49 also concerns the people of Pharaoh, stating:

*And they said [to Moses], “O magician, invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised [‘ahida] you. Indeed, we will be guided.*

The people of Pharaoh again refer to a covenant of Moses with Allāh for intercession to remove their affliction and be guided. In the following verse (Q43:50), we read that they broke their word after the affliction was lifted.

#### 4.3. Allāh and People of Scripture

The Qur’ānic phrase “Those who were given the Book” (*alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb*) is a general reference to communities, particularly Jews and Christians, that have received messengers with a revelation from Allāh. Q3:187 makes specific reference to a covenant of Allāh with the people of scripture in general regarding their obligation to convey Allāh’s message and not conceal it from people:

*And when Allāh took a covenant [mīthāq] from those who were given the Scripture, [saying], “You must make it clear to the people and not conceal it.” But they threw it away behind their backs and exchanged it for a small price. And wretched is that which they purchased. (Q3:187)*

This verse relates to the overarching Qur’ānic theme of guidance to remind humanity of their accountability to Allāh and the obligation placed upon prophets and religious communities to convey the revealed message. This theme extends from the primordial covenant (Q7:172) with humanity, to the covenant with the prophets (Q3:81), to the people

of scripture (Q3:187), and to the Prophet Muḥammad's relations with the people of his time (e.g., Q9:6). Q3:187 refers to the people of scripture's "exchange" for a "small price", which is a reoccurring Qur'ānic theme pertaining to the defiance and deception of some people putting futile worldly gains ahead of eternal success in the afterlife by distorting or discarding the message of Allāh.

There are an additional 12 verses (Q2:40, Q2:63, Q2:83–84, Q2:93, Q4:154–155, Q5:12–13, Q5:70, Q7:169, and Q20:86) that refer to a covenant with the Children of Israel (*banī is'rāil*), and 1 with Christians (Q5:14) specifically. The 12 verses with the Children of Israel convey 3 main themes:

(i) Reminder about fulfilling the covenant (Q2:40 and Q2:63), for example:

*And [recall] when We took your covenant [mīthāq], [O Children of Israel] and We raised over you the mount, [saying], "Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that perhaps you may become righteous". (Q2:63)*

(ii) Warning against breaking the covenant (Q2:93, Q4:155, Q5:13, Q5:70, and Q20:86), for example:

*So for their breaking of the covenant [mīthāq] We cursed them and made their hearts hardened. They distort words from their [proper] places [i.e., usages] and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded. And you will still observe deceit among them, except a few of them. But pardon them and overlook [their misdeeds]. Indeed, Allāh loves the doers of good. (Q5:13)*

(iii) Conditions of the covenant (Q2:83–84, Q4:154, Q5:12, and Q7:169), for example:

*And when We took the covenant [mīthāq] from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], "Do not worship except Allāh; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakāh." Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you were refusing (Q2:83). And when We took your covenant [mīthāq], [saying], "Do not shed blood or evict one another from your homes." Then you acknowledged [this] while you were witnessing. (Q2:84)*

These verses align with other covenantal verses in regard to upholding the covenant and striving for righteousness, warning against breaking the covenant and distorting or failing to convey the message of Allāh, and command kind, charitable, and peaceful relations with fellow human beings.

Regarding the covenant between Allāh and Christians, Q5:14 refers to "animosity and hatred" between Christians until the Day of Resurrection as a consequence of forgetting the covenant about which they were "reminded". It reads:

*And from those who say, "We are Christians" We took their covenant [mīthāq]; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So We caused among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. And Allāh is going to inform them about what they used to do. (Q5:14)*

This verse informs of negative consequences for intra-religious relations as a result of forgetting or deviating from the message of Allāh. There are 13 additional Qur'ānic verses that specifically refer to *naṣārā* (Christians) in relation to 3 main themes. They do not mention the covenant but refer to intra-Christian division and disagreement, including in their relations with the Prophet Muḥammad and Muslims. The first theme concerns verses that seek to correct beliefs regarding the notion that only Jews or Christians will enter paradise (Q2:111), the condemnation of other faith groups (Q2:113), the religion of Abraham (Q2:135, Q2:140, and Q3:67), being favored by Allāh (Q5:18), and that the Messiah is the son of Allāh (Q9:30).

The second theme includes verses concerning Christian relations with Prophet Muḥammad and the Muslims. These verses indicate that the Qur'ān does not treat Christians as homogenous but acknowledges internal, intra-group diversity and disagreement. Some

Christians are characterized as unwilling to approve of Muḥammad and the Muslims unless or until they accept Christianity (Q2:120). Other Christians (and Jews) are not to be taken as allies (*awliyā*) (Q5:51). Yet, another group of Christians is described as “nearest in affection to the believers”, among whom are “monks and priests” that are “not arrogant” (Q5:82).

The third theme includes verses concerning salvation, which state that righteous Jews, Christians, and Sabeans (and Magians) who believe in Allāh and the Day of Resurrection will have their reward with Allāh and shall not fear nor grieve (Q2:62 and Q5:69). Such verses affirm not only the Qurʾānic recognition of other faith communities, and their intra-religious diversity in relation to the message of Allāh and relations with Muslims, but also their salvation, along with Muslims, based on shared beliefs in Allāh and righteous conduct.

Adding to the case that Muslims must coexist and maintain peaceful relations with Christians and Jews, Q22:40 states: “... And were it not that Allāh checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allāh is much mentioned ...”. This verse has been long understood by commentators on the Qurʾān to mean Muslims have a religious obligation to protect non-Muslim places of worship (Mehfooz 2022).

#### 4.4. Prophet Muḥammad and People of His Time

The Qurʾān refers to covenants and treaties that Prophet Muḥammad established with people of his time, including the believers (*muʾminīn*), hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*), and the polytheists (*mushʾrikīn*). Allāh is part of these covenants and treaties, as verse Q48:10 states:

*Indeed, those who pledge allegiance [yubayyūnaka] to you, [O Muḥammad]—they are actually pledging allegiance [yubayyūn] to Allāh. The hand of Allāh is over their hands. So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself. And he who fulfills that which he has promised [ʾahada] Allāh—He will give him a great reward. (Q48:10)*

In this verse, we find the terms *ʾahada* in reference to a covenant made with Allāh as well as the term *bāya*, meaning a pledge of allegiance. According to *The Qurʾānic Arabic Corpus* (<https://corpus.quran.com/>; accessed on 14 January 2023), the trilateral root *bā yā ʾayn* occurs 15 times in the Quran, in 4 derived forms: 6 times as the form III verb *bāyaʿ*, 1 time as the form VI verb *tabāyaʿ*, 7 times as the noun *bayʿ*, and 1 time as the noun *biyaʿ*. Two verses in the Qurʾān that use the term *bāya* in reference to a pledge of allegiance are Q48:18, which refers to a pledge made “under the tree” by the believers on the occasion of the *Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya* (Ibn Kathīr 2000), and Q60:12 concerning the pledge of women, which included provisions that proscribed associating anything with Allāh, stealing, unlawful sexual intercourse, infanticide, slander, and disobeying the Prophet in what is right.

*Sūrah al-Fath* begins by announcing a “clear opening” (*fathān mubīnan*) (Q48:1), a reference to the Prophet contracting the *Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya* (Ibn Kathīr 2000), which secured a temporary peace with the believers’ main adversary, the Quraysh tribe, who were polytheists at the time. In his *Tafsīr*, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) remarks “Allāh declared the Al-Ḥudaybiyyah peace treaty a manifest victory, because of the benefits peace would carry and the good results that did originate from it” (2000, vol. 9, p. 123). In the following verses, we read that this treaty opened the way for Allāh to forgive and guide the believers to the straight path (Q48:2), aid them with mighty help (*naṣran ʾazīzan*) (Q48:3), send down tranquility to increase the believers in faith (Q48:4), admit believing men and women to paradise (Q48:5), and punish the hypocrite men and women (Q48:6).

##### 4.4.1. Covenant with the Believers (*muʾminīn*)

In addition to verse Q48:10, there are four other verses (Q4:92, Q5:7, Q33:23, and Q57:8) that refer to a covenant with the believers (*muʾminīn*), the followers of Muḥammad. These verses highlight the status of covenants and treaties in not only regulating the affairs of people, but also that the existence of a treaty determines how matters of legal consequence

must be resolved. They also remind the believers of their commitment to Allāh through the primordial covenant and refer to the sacrifices of the believers in the way of Allāh.

*Sūrah al-Nisā* makes extensive reference to issues of peace and security, welfare, and wellbeing. It begins with instructions concerning the treatment of orphans (Q4:2–6, 8–10) and the provision of inheritance (Q4:7–14). It then addresses issues of unlawful sexual intercourse, emphasizing repentance and reform (Q4:15–18), and marriage (Q4:19–28), followed by a series of verses concerning just, fair, and equitable conduct in regard to wealth and wellbeing in interpersonal relations (Q4:29–42). Following verse Q4:43 on the acceptable state for performing prayers, we find a series of verses concerning the people of scripture (Q4:44–57). We then come to another series of verses on fulfilling trusts (Q4:58), obeying Allāh, the Prophet, and those in authority (Q4:59–73), fighting in the cause of Allāh (Q4:74–77), and the good and evil that derives from Allāh and from human (mis)conduct (Q4:78–81), before returning to the theme of fighting and security (Q4:83–85). Q4:88–91 concerns the hypocrites and matters of security. We then come to Q4:92, which reads:

*And never is it for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake. And whoever kills a believer by mistake—then the freeing of a believing slave and a compensation payment [diyyah] presented to his [i.e., the deceased’s] family [is required], unless they give [up their right as] charity. But if he [i.e., the deceased] was from a people at war with you and he was a believer—then [only] the freeing of a believing slave; and if he was from a people with whom you have a treaty [mīthāq]—then a compensation payment presented to his family and the freeing of a believing slave. And whoever does not find [one or cannot afford to buy one]—then [instead], a fast for two months consecutively, [seeking] acceptance of repentance from Allāh. And Allāh is ever Knowing and Wise”. (Q4:92)*

The verse states that if a believer is killed from among a group of people with whom there is a treaty (*mīthāq*), compensation is to be paid to his family, and a believing slave is to be freed. It emphasizes the priority given in the Qurʾān to treaties in the regulation of matters pertaining to human security and justice.

The next covenantal verse in this subcategory (Q5:7) is in *Sūrah al-Māida*, which begins by addressing the believers: “O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts [ʿuqūd]. Lawful for you are the animals of grazing livestock except for that which is recited to you [in this Qurʾān]—hunting not being permitted while you are in the state of *ihrām*. Indeed, Allāh ordains what He intends” (Q5:1). The *Sūrah* highlights the overriding command to fulfill contracts as a central aspect of belief and righteousness. The subsequent verses prohibit hunting while (on pilgrimage) in *ihrām* (Q5:1), command observing the sanctity of the sacred months (Q5:2), prohibit consuming carrion, blood, and pork and animals being inappropriately killed (Q5:3), permit hunting animals to acquire food (Q5:4), permit eating food of and marrying people of scripture (Q5:5), and command performing wudu (ablution) before prayer (Q5:6). Q5:7 then reminds the believers of their covenant with Allāh:

*And remember the favor of Allāh upon you and His covenant [mīthāq] with which He bound you when you said, “We hear and we obey”; and fear Allāh. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing of that within the breasts. (Q5:7)*

This verse is followed by a reminder to be just (Q5:8), which is a repeated command of the Qurʾān. *Sūrah al-Māida* was revealed after the signing of the *Treaty of Hudaibiyya*, which might explain its emphasis on upholding contracts (Q5:1) and the covenant with Allāh (Q5:7) given that some of the terms in the treaty were opposed by some of the Prophet’s companions (Ibn Kathīr 2000). Additionally, as the treaty enabled the Muslims to make a pilgrimage to Mecca the following year, the references to pilgrimage and sacred months seem to relate. The *Sūrah* also encourages coexistence and strengthening inter-community relations between Muslims and people of scripture by permitting intermarriage and the sharing of meat, which both slaughter in the name of the one God.

In *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, which addresses the siege of Medina in the year 627, Q33:23 refers to a promise or covenant the believers made with Allāh:

*Among the believers are men true to what they promised [‘a’hadu] Allāh. Among them is he who has fulfilled his vow [to the death], and among them is he who awaits [his chance]. And they did not alter [the terms of their commitment] by any alteration. (Q33:23)*

The collective obligation to defend the city is a central provision of the *Constitution of Medina* (Zein and El-Wakil 2022a; al-Umari 1991), although the document is not mentioned in the Qurʾān. We read in Q33:22: “And when the believers saw the companies [the besieging armies of the Quraysh and their allies], they said “This is what Allāh and His Messenger had promised us, and Allāh and His Messenger spoke the truth.” And it increased them only in faith and acceptance””. Q33:23 refers to the believers fulfilling their covenant to fight for the cause of Allāh.

The next reference to a covenant between Allāh and the believers is in *Sūrah al-Ḥadīd*. The chapter begins with an exultation to the Might and Wisdom of Allāh and glorious signs visible in the creation of the heavens and the Earth. Q57:8 poses the question:

*And why do you not believe in Allāh while the Messenger invites you to believe in your Lord and He has taken your covenant [mīthāq], if you should [truly] be believers?*

In this verse, we read that Allāh has taken a covenant (*mīthāq*) from the believers concerning Allāh’s lordship. The preceding verses direct the reader’s focus outwardly to the signs of Allāh (Q57:6), and inwardly to righteous charitable conduct for the wellbeing of others (Q57:7). Following the reference to the covenant in Q57:8, we read of Allāh’s revelation as enlightenment and of Allāh’s kindness and mercy (Q57:9), and to spend in the way of Allāh (Q57:10). These verses draw attention to the importance of righteousness, including being charitable, and of the revelation as a guidance from darkness to light or salvation.

#### 4.4.2. Covenant with the Hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*)

There are three main verses (Q4:90, Q9:75, and Q33:15) in which we find reference to a covenant or treaty concerning the hypocrites, which are those who outwardly professed Islam but threatened the security of Muḥammad and the believers. The first of these verses is in *Sūrah al-Nisā*, where in Q4:88 we read that the believers became divided over how to deal with the hypocrites. Q4:89–90 instructs that the hypocrites are to be fought against for their betrayal and not taken as allies, except those who take refuge with a people with whom there is a treaty (*mīthāq*):

*Except for those who take refuge with a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty [mīthāq] or those who come to you, their hearts strained at [the prospect of] fighting you or fighting their own people. And if Allāh had willed, He could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you. So if they remove themselves from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then Allāh has not made for you a cause [for fighting] against them”. (Q4:90)*

Q4:90 emphasizes the role of covenants in regulating relations between groups. This verse demonstrates the overriding precedence and importance given in the Qurʾān to upholding treaties. It emphasizes a prohibition against fighting people who do not make conflict and offer peace, restricts fighting to only with those who violate their treaty, and commands peace as the normative basis of relations.

The next verse we encounter which concerns covenants and the hypocrites is Q9:75, also provides a nuanced perspective on the hypocrites, recognizing that some made a covenant (*‘ahd*) with Allāh to spend in charity and be righteous, and, therefore, are not to be harmed:

*And among them are those who made a covenant [‘ahd] with Allāh, [saying], “If He should give us from His bounty, we will surely spend in charity, and we will surely be among the righteous. (Q9:75)*

This verse should be read in the context of the preceding verses which mention the repeated Qurʾānic theme concerning “*the news of those before them*”, referring to the people of Noah, ‘Aad, Thamud, Abraham, and Madyan who were destroyed after “*messengers came to them with clear proofs. And Allāh would never have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves*” (Q9:70). This section of the chapter then mentions that “*believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakāh and obey Allāh and His Messenger*” (Q9:71). The believers are promised paradise (Q9:72). The Prophet is then instructed to fight against the disbelievers and the hypocrites (Q9:73) for their words of disbelief and plans of treachery (Q9:74). It is at this point we read Q9:75, which recognizes that some hypocrites made a covenant (*‘ahd*) with Allāh to spend in charity and be righteous, and are, therefore, not to be harmed. In the following verse, we read that the hypocrites failed in what they promised and were penalized with hypocrisy for their lies (Q9:76–77).

The third verse referring to the hypocrites in relation to covenants is Q33:15, which affirms that the hypocrites promised not to turn their backs concerning the defense of Medina, a central provision in the *Constitution of Medina* (Zein and El-Wakil 2022a; al-Umari 1991).

*And they had already promised [‘ahadu] Allāh before not to turn their backs [i.e., flee]. And ever is the promise [‘ahd] to Allāh [that about which one will be] questioned.* (Q33:15)

*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* is revealed in the context of a conflict between the Muslims in Medina and the polytheists in Mecca and elsewhere. Within Medina, the hypocrites posed an internal threat to the city’s security in a violation of the *Constitution of Medina*. The chapter begins with an instruction to the Prophet Muḥammad not to obey the disbelievers and hypocrites (Q33:1), to follow what is revealed (Q33:3), and also recalls the covenant of Allāh with the prophets, including Muḥammad (Q33:7). The believers are reminded of Allāh’s favor when the armies besieged Medina (Q33:9–11) and the betrayal of the hypocrites (Q33:12–14). Following Q33:15, in which we read that the hypocrites broke their covenant by abandoning their obligation to defend the city, Q33:16 states: “*Say, [O Muḥammad], ‘Never will fleeing benefit you if you should flee from death or killing; and then [if you did], you would not be given enjoyment [of life] except for a little.’*” In addition to the theme of security, these verses emphasize the ultimate importance of the afterlife over worldly existence.

#### 4.4.3. Covenant with the Polytheists (*mush’rikīn*)

There are eight verses (Q8:56, Q8:72, Q9:1, Q9:4, Q9:7–8, Q9:10, and Q9:12) from *Sūrah al-Anfāl* and *Sūrah al-Tawba* that refer to a covenant or treaty in relation to polytheists. All of Medina’s inhabitants, including Arabs, Jews, and polytheists, were recognized and protected under the *Constitution of Medina* (Zein and El-Wakil 2022a; al-Umari 1991), while peace was established with the Quraysh tribe in Mecca and its allies through the *Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya*. Q48:1 announces a “clear opening” (*fathan mubīnan*), a reference to the Prophet contracting the *Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya*, which secured a temporary peace between the believers and polytheists led by the Quraysh tribe (Ibn Kathīr 2000).

Q8:56 refers to “*The ones with whom you made a treaty [‘ahadta] but then they break their pledge [‘ahdahum] every time, and they do not fear Allāh*” to be made an example of in battle so the one’s behind them may be “reminded” [*la’allahum yadhakkārūn*] of their covenant/treaty (Q8:57). The Prophet is instructed to prepare for war (Q8:60), but that peace is the ultimate objective: “*And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allāh. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing*” (Q8:61). This reading of the Qurʾān refutes claims that the Prophet sought to declare war on all polytheists because of their disbelief, but rather his goal was to establish security and peace among the people regardless of their beliefs by way of establishing and maintaining covenants and treaties.

The Qurʾān emphasizes covenants and treaties for establishing and maintaining peace and security, including with polytheists, above group solidarity, as Q8:72 states:

*Indeed, those who have believed and emigrated and fought with their wealth and lives in the cause of Allāh and those who gave shelter and aided—they are allies of one another. But those who believed and did not emigrate—for you there is no support of them until they emigrate. And if they seek help of you for the religion, then you must help, except against a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty [mīthāq]. And Allāh is Seeing of what you do. (Q8:72)*

Here, we read of an obligation to help fellow believers who had not migrated to Medina if they seek assistance “*except against a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty [mīthāq]*” (Q8:72). Such is the extent to which the Qurʾān emphasizes honoring covenants and treaties, which in addition to Q8:72, is also clear from Q4:90 discussed above.

In *Sūrah al-Tawba*, we find another six verses (Q9:1, Q9:4, Q9:7–8, Q9:10, and Q9:12) that refer to a treaty with the polytheists. In Q8:56, referred to above, we read that some among the polytheists broke the treaty. The ninth chapter begins with a declaration of the treaty’s annulment: “[*This is a declaration of] disassociation, from Allāh and His Messenger, to those with whom you had made a treaty [‘ahd] among the polytheists*” (Q9:1).

However, as also seen in verses concerning the hypocrites and Christians discussed above, the Qurʾān is nuanced in its discourses about communities and groups, recognizing their intra-group diversity of beliefs, views, and conduct. A well-known verse in *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt* emphasizes the diversity of humanity, and that the most noble in the sight of Allāh are the most righteous: “*O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allāh is Knowing and Aware*” (Q49:13). Other verses clearly state that “*there is no compulsion in religion*” (Q2:256) and forbid Prophet Muḥammad from compelling people to accept Islam: “*And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed—all of them entirely. Then, [O Muḥammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?*” (Q10:99).

In the context of conflict, the Qurʾān does not issue a blanket statement against all polytheists and only permits fighting against those who break their treaty. In Q9:4, we read that the treaty is to be maintained with those polytheists who continued to honor it:

*Excepted are those with whom you made a treaty [‘ahd] among the polytheists and then they have not been deficient toward you in anything or supported anyone against you; so complete for them their treaty until their term [has ended]. Indeed, Allāh loves the righteous [who fear Him]. (Q9:4)*

Additionally, Q9:6 grants protection to polytheists who seek protection: “*And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allāh*” (Q9:6). Here, we see a continuation of a theme concerning the covenants and the dissemination of Allāh’s message, noted above in relation to the covenant with all Prophets (Q3:81), Prophet Abraham specifically (Q2:124), and the people of scripture in general (Q3:187). In verse Q9:7, we read that the treaty is also to be upheld with the polytheists who made a treaty with the Prophet near al-Masjid al-Ḥarām:

*How can there be for the polytheists a treaty [‘ahd] in the sight of Allāh and with His Messenger, except for those with whom you made a treaty near al-Masjid al-Ḥarām? So as long as they are upright toward you, be upright toward them. Indeed, Allāh loves the righteous [who fear Him]. (Q9:7)*

**Ibn Kathīr** (2000) refers to the “*treaty near al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*” as the treaty “on the day of Ḥudaybiyyah” (vol. 4, p. 380). This verse explicitly states that as long as the polytheists are upright towards the Muslims, the Muslims must be reciprocally upright towards the polytheists. This reading of the Qurʾān, in reference to covenants and treaties, refutes the notion that Islam is a militant religion that calls for *jihād* or the use of armed force against people because of their rejection of Islam (van de Krogt 2010). Rather, a comprehensive reading of the Qurʾān, with a focus on covenants and their *maqāṣid*, finds that disbelief in the message of Allāh is recognized (e.g., Q7:102), and the Prophet was not permitted to compel people to accept Islam (e.g., Q2:256 and Q10:99) but rather to establish peaceful

relations and even protect non-Muslim places of worship (Q22:40). Such provisions also feature in the covenants of Prophet Muḥammad (Zein and El-Wakil 2022a). The objective of covenants and treaties is to foster a peaceful coexistence among different groups of people, while the use of armed force is reserved for those who violate their treaty and threaten peace and security.

We then read two verses that use the term *dhimma* in reference to a covenant of protection concerning the polytheists:

*How [can there be a treaty] while, if they gain dominance over you, they do not observe concerning you any pact of kinship or covenant of protection [dhimmatun]? They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient. (Q9:8)*

*They do not observe toward a believer any pact of kinship or covenant of protection [dhimmatun]. And it is they who are the transgressors. (Q9:10)*

These verses highlight the polytheists' disregard for the treaty. The use of the term *dhimma* in relation to a covenant of protection refers to the protection and security the polytheists ought to have extended to the believers but refused to do so. The following verse extends another olive branch to the polytheists, stating that "if they repent, establish prayer, and give zakāh, then they are your brothers in religion; and We detail the verses for a people who know" (Q9:11). The verse highlights the importance the Qur'ān places on social cohesion based on shared faith, prayer, and charity, which pertains to human relations with Allāh and intra-human relations to promote security and wellbeing. In spite of hostile relations between the Muslims and polytheists, should the latter repent, establish prayer, and give charity, they become brothers in religion with the Muslims. Q9:12 then states:

*And if they break their oaths [aymānahum] after their treaty [ahdihim] and defame your religion, then combat the leaders of disbelief, for indeed, there are no oaths [aymāna] to them; [fight them that] they might cease. (Q9:12)*

This verse highlights that some of the polytheists refused to honor the treaty of security and protection and as such could not be restrained other than through the use of armed force. However, for those who did not threaten peace and security, the Qur'ānic position holds that there is no compulsion in religion (Q2:256). Had it been the will of Allāh, all of humanity would be believers (Q10:99). Prophet Muḥammad's mission was to convey the message of Allāh, not to compel people to believe as belief is by the permission of Allāh (Q10:100).

In summary, a violation of the treaty, referred to in Q9:1, carried serious consequences. The Qur'ān does not issue a blanket statement against all polytheists, but it permitted fighting only against those who broke the treaty (Q9:12). Q9:4 states that the treaty is to be maintained with those polytheists who continued to honor it. Q9:6 grants protection to polytheists who seek protection: "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allāh." Q9:7 affirms that peace is to be maintained with the polytheists who made a treaty with the Prophet, and as long as they are upright towards the Muslims, the Muslims must be reciprocally upright towards the polytheists. This reading of the Qur'ān conveys that the Prophet did not engage in armed conflict (*jihād/qitāl*) against non-Muslims on account of their disbelief but in response to violation of the treaty, as stated in numerous verses (e.g., Q8:56, Q9:1, Q9:4, Q9:7, and Q9:12). It also highlights that the Qur'ān makes clear distinctions between groups of people, recognizing their internal diversity of views and conduct, and only permitting fighting against treaty violators. The Prophet is instructed to protect those who upheld the treaty to maintain peace and security as a normative basis of relations.

#### 4.5. Covenants within Family

There are two verses of the Qur'ān (Q12:66 and Q12:80) in *Sūrah Yūsuf* where we find three references to the word *mawthiq*, a term that derives from the same root (*wāw thā qāf*) as *mīthāq*. In this context, *mawthiq* means a 'promise' or 'pledge'. *Sūrah Yūsuf* tells the story

of Prophet Joseph who, as a boy, was abandoned by his elder brothers and left to die in a well (Q12:10, Q12:15). He is found (Q12:19) and, eventually, after a term of servitude and imprisonment, becomes a minister to the ruler of Egypt (Q12:54–56), a position that affords him the ability to be reunited with his younger brother (Q12:69) and father (Q12:99–100). At the beginning of the *Sūrah*, a young Joseph tells his father of a dream in which eleven stars, the sun, and moon prostrate before him. Joseph's father, Jacob, cautions him against mentioning the dream to his brothers and reminds him that Satan is a manifest enemy (Q12:4–5). Verse Q12:66 occurs at the point in the story when Joseph has engineered a plan to be reunited with his younger brother that requires his elder brothers to request their father allow the younger brother to accompany them to Egypt where Joseph resides:

*[Jacob] said, "Never will I send him with you until you give me a promise [mawthiq] [i.e., oath] by Allāh that you will bring him [back] to me, unless you should be surrounded [i.e., overcome by enemies]." And when they had given their promise [mawthiqahum], he said, "Allāh, over what we say, is Entrusted". (Q12:66)*

Because the elder brothers had deceived their father years earlier, he feared for the fate of his youngest son. Out of grave concern for the safety of his young son, Jacob only allows him to go with the elder brothers under the condition of a *mawthiq* (promise/pledge) in the name of Allāh, emphasizing the weight of the oath and underscoring the significance of promises, oaths, and covenants in the Qur'ān.

After arriving in Egypt with the youngest brother and having received the goods for which they came, Joseph has his younger brother detained (Q12:76). Mindful of their *mawthiq* to their father (in the name of Allāh), the elder brothers offer one of themselves in the younger brother's place (Q12:78), to which Joseph refuses (Q12:79). We then read Q12:80:

*So when they had despaired of him, they secluded themselves in private consultation. The eldest of them said, "Do you not know that your father has taken upon you an oath [mawthiqun] by Allāh and [that] before you failed in [your duty to] Joseph? So I will never leave [this] land until my father permits me or Allāh decides for me, and He is the best of judges. (Q12:80)*

In this verse, we see the elder brother acknowledge the weight of the promise they gave their father "by Allāh". The use of the term *mawthiq* draws the reader's attention to the magnitude of the promise of safety and protection of the child. This is another example of the Qur'ānic use of covenantal terms in relation to welfare, wellbeing, and security.

#### 4.6. Covenants between Spouses

There is one verse (Q4:21) in which we find the term *mīthāq* used in relation to marriage. To read this verse from *Sūrah al-Nisā* in context, it should first be noted that Q4:19 instructs the believers that women cannot be compelled to enter a marriage relationship and must be treated with kindness: "O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion [karhan]. And do not make difficulties for them in order to take [back] part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality [i.e., adultery]. And live with them in kindness [bil-ma'rūfi]. For if you dislike them—perhaps you dislike a thing and Allāh makes therein much good" (Q4:19). The following verse states that, in the case of divorce, the husband is prohibited from taking the bride gift (dowry/*mahr*) back from his wife: "But if you want to replace one wife with another and you have given one of them a great amount [in gifts], do not take [back] from it anything. Would you take it in injustice and manifest sin?" (Q4:20). Then, verse Q4:21 makes an appeal to the upright character expected of a believer:

*And how could you take it while you have gone in unto each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant [mīthāq]? (Q4:21)*

The use of the term *mīthāq* highlights the importance the Qur'ān places on the marriage agreement as a "solemn covenant" (*mīthāqun ghalīẓan*), which should also be appreciated

in relation to other verses in which guarding one's modesty/chastity is listed among the characteristics of righteousness (e.g., Q23:5).

The above-cited verses in *Sūrah al-Nisā* cohere with a broader Qur'ānic theme concerning the protection, security, kind, and fair treatment of women. A number of Qur'ānic verses refer to marriage as a partnership between a husband and wife (e.g., Q2:233), command that husbands treat their wives with kindness, and that marriage should be based on affection and mercy. For example, Q30:21 says: "And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought", while in Q2:187, husbands and wives are referred to as mutual garments for one another. Additionally, in Q60:12, Prophet Muḥammad was instructed to accept the pledge of allegiance from women, which is further recognition from the Qur'ān of women as active participants in society and religion, in addition to an equitable partnership in marriage.

## 5. Discussion

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion, predicted to be the largest by the latter half of this century (Pew Research Centre 2015). The proliferation of Islam is being met with concern and hostility in some sectors of some Western and other countries, where Muslims constitute a growing minority of the population (Abbas 2021). In response to extremist violence conducted with reference to *sharī'a* (Rane 2019; Al-Dawoody 2015), Islam and Prophet Muḥammad have been intensely maligned and associated with terrorism and inherent enmity toward non-Muslims. Such time-period phenomena increase the urgency for education about Islam, particularly concerning human security and coexistence, interreligious relations, and the legitimate use of armed force in Islam. The content for this education must be derived from legitimate sources of Islam, namely, the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. This article finds Qur'ānic covenantal verses to be particularly instructive in regard to these matters. A reading of the Qur'ān in light of covenantal passages shows that establishing peace and security among people is an overriding objective, while the use of force is restricted to self-defense in response to treaty violation for maintaining human security and peaceful coexistence.

The paradigm through which the modern world has come to know and experience Islam is heavily influenced by a *sharī'a* law orientation. Kamali observes "the tendency to over-legalize Islam is common across the board in the writings of both Muslims and orientalist" (2006, p. 1). This, he regards as "an exaggeration which does not find support in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*" (p. 1). Ebrahim Moosa's (2015) study of the *madrassa* system in South Asia finds an overemphasis on legal thought in institutions of higher Islamic learning. Mohammad Omar Farooq (2022) observes that an emphasis on the legal aspects of Islam "leads to legalism where the principles, norms and values based on the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* are largely ignored or compromised (p. 1). Decrees, such as the apocryphal *Pact of 'Umar*, that restricted rights and religious freedoms, and have been used to justify the persecution of non-Muslims, have no basis in the Qur'ān or *Sunnah*, but were issued in the centuries after the death of Prophet Muḥammad and integrated into some books of Islamic law (Zein and El-Wakil 2022a; Rane 2019; Levy-Rubin 2011). That such decrees and rulings have found recognition among some contemporary Muslim extremist groups (Landau-Tasserion 2015), which actively attempt to recruit vulnerable and impressionable young Muslims, underscores the importance of Qur'ānic covenantal knowledge as the basis of Islamic education concerning interreligious relations, peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims, and the legitimate use of armed force in Islam.

A covenantal paradigm for education about Islam is also relevant to the modern world in which such agreements normatively govern relations between individuals and the state, and transnational relations. Education about the centrality and *maqāṣid* of covenants in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* may have significant implications for the conduct of Muslim-majority states in relation to constitutional provisions and transnational charters and treaties for ensuring human security, human rights, and peaceful coexistence between Muslim and

non-Muslims communities (Abiad 2008; Stahnke and Blitt 2004). Reference to a covenant of Prophet Muḥammad by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the acquittal of Christian women facing the death penalty for blasphemy is a case in point (Rane 2022a). Additionally, among Muslim-minority communities in the West, covenantal knowledge may foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging in relation to citizenship pledges made in the name of God (Rane 2022b; March 2011).

## 6. Conclusions

The Qur'ānic terms *'ahd* and *mīthāq* pertain to the relationship between Allāh and humanity in general, as well as specific groups, including prophets, people of scripture, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims in the time of Prophet Muḥammad. The overarching *maqāṣid* of covenants in the Qur'ān is to convey the terms and conditions by which Allāh has established human beings on Earth and for success in the afterlife. Covenants bind the prophets and their righteous followers to Allāh in a commitment to convey the divine message. They remind human beings about Allāh's lordship and emphasize righteousness, peaceful coexistence, and human security through the mutual welfare and wellbeing of all people. Upholding covenants and treaties with non-Muslims takes precedence over other commitments based on group solidarity. While the Qur'ān does not allow force or compulsion in religion, the use of armed force is permitted in self-defense in response to treaty violation that threatens peace and security.

Covenants are central to the Qur'ānic narrative of human existence and coexistence, though they have not been given sufficient attention in courses and discourses about Islam commensurate with their centrality in the Qur'ān. They are referred to in the Qur'ān alongside fundamental beliefs and conduct that define a righteous believer. Covenants in the Qur'ān offer an alternative paradigm for educating about and understanding the *maqāṣid* of Islam, particularly concerning human existence, coexistence, and interreligious relations in Islam. It is recommended that scholars and educators involved in the dissemination of knowledge about Islam prioritize the study of covenants in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, particularly in regard to issues concerning human existence and coexistence, interreligious relations, and conditions governing the legitimate use of armed force in Islam.

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