The Concept of the Divine Covenant in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Comparative Study

Final Research-**RKUD 7304 – Major Themes of Revealed Religions**:

Judaism, Christianity and Islam

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Semester 1, 2025–2026

Abstract

This study explores the concept of the divine covenant in the three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – and provides a comparative analysis of how each tradition understands the relationship between God and humanity established through covenants. **Purpose:** The purpose is to examine each religion's covenant theology in its own context and then juxtapose them to identify common themes and key differences. **Methodology:** The research is qualitative and comparative, drawing on scriptural texts (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Qur'an) and scholarly literature to analyze covenant motifs in each faith. **Main Findings:** Judaism conceives of covenant as the binding agreement between God and Israel, notably the Sinai covenant with its mutual obligations of law and worship in exchange for divine guidance and favor. Christianity centers on the "New Covenant" through Jesus Christ, which it interprets as fulfilling and superseding earlier covenants – emphasizing grace, faith, and salvation extended to all nations. Islam recognizes prior covenants (with figures like Noah, Abraham, and Moses) but views the final **mithāq** (covenant) as manifested in the Qur'an, wherein humans pledge to worship and obey the one God, and God promises guidance and reward. The comparative discussion reveals that all three traditions share the notion of a faithful God who initiates covenants, but they diverge on the terms and scope of these covenants (particular vs. universal, law vs. faith) and on whether later covenants replace or reaffirm earlier ones.

Keywords: covenant, Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, comparative theology

Introduction

The concept of a divine covenant – a solemn and binding agreement between God and human beings – is a foundational theme that runs through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, the term for covenant (*berit*) describes the sacred agreements God made with figures like Noah, Abraham, and Moses, establishing

the Israelites as God's chosen people under divine law. The New Testament in Christianity proclaims a "new covenant" through Jesus Christ, extending God's promises to all believers. Likewise, the Qur'an of Islam frequently speaks of God's covenants (*ʿahd*, *mīthāq*) with prophets and with humanity, emphasizing the continuity of God's message from Adam to Muhammad. Despite this shared vocabulary of **covenant**, each tradition develops the idea in distinct ways, raising important questions about how these faiths converge and differ in their understanding of God's promises and the obligations of believers. This study aims to analyze the covenant concept within each religion and then compare them to gain insight into their theological commonalities and differences.

Research Questions

1. How is the concept of the **divine covenant** understood in **Judaism**?
2. How is the covenant concept reformulated in **Christianity**, particularly in relation to the New Covenant?
3. How does **Islam** conceptualize the divine covenant in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition?
4. What are the **key similarities and differences** in covenant theology across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the concept of the **divine covenant** as articulated in **Judaism**.
2. To analyze the understanding of covenant in **Christianity**, with particular focus on the **New Covenant**.
3. To explore how the **divine covenant** is conceptualized in **Islamic thought** based on the Qur'an and Islamic tradition.
4. To identify and assess the **similarities and differences** in covenant theology among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Literature Review

The concept of the divine covenant has long served as the theological cornerstone of the Abrahamic faiths, garnering extensive scholarly analysis across historical, philological,

and comparative disciplines. This body of literature reveals a rich tapestry of interpretation, ranging from the legal structures of the ancient Near East to contemporary theological debates on supersessionism and interfaith relations.

1. Mendenhall's Structural Analysis This foundational study redefines the biblical covenant by demonstrating its structural dependence on ancient Hittite suzerainty treaties, establishing it as a legal loyalty framework. [1]

2. Weinfeld's Typology of Covenants Weinfeld distinguishes between the unconditional "covenant of grant" (Abrahamic) and the conditional "obligatory covenant" (Mosaic), clarifying the theological tension between grace and law. [2]

3. Lumbard's Qur'anic Theology Lumbard argues that *mithaq* is the central theological thread of the Qur'an, framing all human history as a response to the primordial covenant with God. [3]

4. Levenson's Comparative Critique This work critically examines the rivalry between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, analyzing how each tradition employs supersessionism to claim exclusive ownership of Abraham's legacy[4]

5. Ayoub's Inclusive Theology Ayoub proposes a pluralistic Islamic reading, suggesting that the Qur'an acknowledges the ongoing validity of Jewish and Christian covenants under the umbrella of strict monotheism. [5]

6. Rane's Maqasid Approach This recent study analyzes Qur'anic covenants through the objectives of Shariah (*Maqasid*), arguing that their primary function is to establish social security and ethical commitment. [6]

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[1] Mendenhall, George E. "Covenant." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, 1992

[2] Weinfeld, Moshe. "Covenant in the Old Testament." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 5. Detroit: Macmillan, 2007.

[3] Lumbard, Joseph E.B. "Covenant and Covenants in the Qur'an." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 2 (2015). *EUP*

[4] . Levenson, Jon D. *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton University Press, 2012. *Princeton*

[5] Ayoub, Mahmoud. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007. *Google Books*

[6] Rane, Halim. "Higher Objectives (Maqāṣid) of Covenants in Islam." *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2023). *MDPI*

7. O'Connor's Polemical Context O'Connor investigates the rhetorical function of covenant verses, showing how the Qur'an uses the "breaking of the covenant" motif to legitimize the transfer of divine favor to Muslims. [7]

Methodology Overview

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative methodology grounded in textual analysis of sacred scriptures as primary sources, supported by selected secondary scholarship in biblical studies, Qur'anic studies, theology, and the history of religions.

Data and Sources.
The analysis focuses on key covenant passages from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an, read in light of classical and modern interpretations. These texts form the core empirical material for examining how each tradition conceptualizes the divine covenant.

Analytical Procedure.
The study proceeds in two main stages. First, each religious tradition is examined on its own terms, with attention to its internal theological logic and normative understanding of covenant. Second, a thematic comparative analysis is conducted, addressing central dimensions such as the parties of the covenant, its conditions and signs, the role of law and grace, and questions of continuity, fulfillment, or supersession.

Use of Scholarship.
Relevant academic debates on covenant theory are engaged selectively in order to contextualize the analysis and clarify interpretive frameworks, without aiming at an exhaustive literature survey.

Scope and Limitations.
The study focuses on mainstream doctrinal positions within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It does not attempt to cover all sectarian interpretations, and it limits itself to representative themes necessary for comparative analysis, given the breadth of the topic.

Outline of the Article

Following this introduction, the article is structured into distinct sections as required by standard academic format:

[7] O'Connor, Andrew. "Qur'anic Covenants Reconsidered: Mīthāq and 'Ahd in Polemical Context." *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 30, no. 1 (2019). *T&F*

is backed by textual or academic citations. The goal is a **publishable academic article** that is comprehensive and rigorous, meeting university-level research standards while maintaining a clear, accessible style.

A Brief Definitional Preface to the Concept of "Covenant / Mīthāq"

In religious studies, the concept of covenant is commonly used as an interpretive framework to describe a binding relationship between two parties, structured as a solemn commitment that often combines promise, obligation, and consequence. In many contexts it functions as more than a pragmatic contract: it establishes identity, shapes communal belonging, and carries moral weight through symbolic or ritual forms such as oaths, testimony, signs, and ratification ceremonies.[8]

Historically, modern scholarship on biblical covenant has noted that many covenant formulations—especially in the Hebrew Bible—display features comparable to **Ancient Near Eastern treaty patterns**, including: identification of parties, stipulations, witnesses/guarantees, and a section of **blessings and curses** reflecting the outcomes of fidelity or breach.[9] This "treaty-form" approach became one of the best-known keys for analyzing covenant language and structure in the Abrahamic traditions.[10]

Moving from "form" to "meaning," covenant in the three traditions can be described—at a general level—as a **sacred moral relationship** that typically includes (with varying emphases) recurring elements:

1. a **divine initiative** that establishes or renews the relationship,
2. a **human response** expressed through faithfulness, obedience, or ethical commitment,

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[8] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Covenant," (latest available edition; accessed for general definition and religious usage).

[9] D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963).

[10] George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 2 (1954): 26–46.& Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184–203.

3. a **normative order** (law, commandments, moral obligations) shaping individual and communal life, and

4. a **promise of outcome** (guidance, blessing, salvation) together with warnings about the consequences of violation.

For terminological precision in a comparative study, it is important to recognize that each tradition grounds the concept in its own foundational vocabulary:

- In Judaism, **berit (בְּרִית)** functions as a foundational category that shapes the identity of a covenant people and frames history as meaningful through promise and obligation.

- In Christianity, covenant discourse centers on **diathēkē** in the New Testament and becomes closely associated with the "New Covenant," understood as a decisive transformation in how membership in the people of God is constituted.

- In Islam, the semantic fields of ʿ**ahd** (pledge/commitment) and **mīthāq** (solemn, confirmed covenant) serve as key Qur'anic terms expressing the binding character of the God–human relationship, including the notion of a primordial acknowledgement of divine lordship.[11]

Islam is distinctive in that covenant is not always presented as one single "event" parallel to Sinai or the Last Supper, but rather as a **network of covenants**: a covenant tied to human nature and responsibility, covenants taken from prophets, covenants with communities, and renewed commitments through revelation and obligation. In Qur'anic semantics, "mīthāq" is not merely a lexical label; it functions as a theological frame for accountability: human beings are responsible because they are already addressed and bound by a witnessed commitment to God's lordship and guidance.[7][8]

[11] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964; reprints available).& For Qur'an 7:172 and the "primordial covenant" motif: see classical Qur'anic exegesis, e.g., Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, commentary on Q 7:172; and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, commentary on Q 7:172.

Accordingly, the purpose of this short preface is not to repeat the detailed analysis that follows in the specific chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rather, it offers the reader a compact orientation: **covenant here denotes a sacred, identity-forming bond** expressed through promise, law/ethics, fidelity, and consequence—while the three traditions diverge in major ways regarding the scope of the covenant community (particular vs. universal), the balance of law and grace, the nature of mediation, and the question of continuity or supersession across history.[12]

[12]Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic / Apollos, 2007).&Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Divine Covenant in Judaism

In Jewish tradition, the **divine covenant** (*berit*) is the core framework that defines the relationship between God (HaShem) and the people of Israel. The Hebrew Bible recounts several covenants, which later Jewish thought sees as interconnected stages of one overarching covenantal relationship[13]. Key among these are:

- **The Noahic Covenant:** After the Flood, God makes a covenant with Noah and "every living creature," pledging never to destroy the world by flood again (Genesis 9:8–17). This covenant is **universal**, encompassing all humanity and even animals, and it is **unconditional** – God imposes no stipulation on Noah's descendants beyond the basic moral expectations already incumbent (later rabbinic tradition identified the Noahide Laws as fundamental duties for all mankind, but the Genesis text itself presents the covenant as pure promise)[14]. The sign of this covenant is the **rainbow**, set "in the cloud" as an eternal reminder of God's promise. In Jewish understanding, the Noahic covenant establishes a baseline of God's mercy and the principle of a natural moral order after catastrophe. Importantly, it introduces the term *berit* in Scripture as a one-sided divine promise, emphasizing God's **ḥesed** (loving-kindness) to creation.

- **The Abrahamic Covenant:** God's covenant with Abram/Abraham is introduced in Genesis 15 (promised descendants and land, with a ritual of cutting animals and a divine fire passing through – an ancient oath ceremony) and then elaborated in Genesis 17 (where it is explicitly called a covenant, promising Abraham to be "father of a multitude of nations" and assigning the land of Canaan as "an

[13] Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 249–253.

[14] Weinfeld, "Covenant," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, 249–253.

everlasting possession"[15]. The Abrahamic covenant is partly **unconditional** (God promises blessings and land *regardless* of Abraham's merits – indeed, Genesis 15:6 says Abraham "believed the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness," highlighting faith rather than works) and partly **conditional** in a specific aspect: Abraham and his male descendants must perform **circumcision** as the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:9–14). Circumcision, or *brit milah*, thus becomes the **token** of the Abrahamic covenant, a physical mark in the flesh symbolizing inclusion in the covenant community[16]. Later Judaism regards the Abrahamic covenant as the first formal election of Israel (through Isaac and Jacob) as God's people. It is frequently termed an "everlasting covenant" (*berit olam*) in the Bible (Genesis 17:7, for instance), and Jews have traditionally viewed the promises to Abraham – of land, offspring, and blessing – as never revoked. The Abrahamic covenant's theological significance lies in its **grace-filled nature** (God chose Abraham and bestowed blessings prior to any law) and its focus on faith and identity (descent from Abraham, marked by circumcision, becomes a defining trait of the people of Israel).

- **The Mosaic (Sinai) Covenant:** The covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–24) is the foundation of the Torah and of Israel's constitution as a nation under God. Unlike the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, which were primarily promissory, the Sinai covenant is **reciprocal and conditional**. In Exodus 19:5, God proposes: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples…" – a clear stipulation of obedience as the condition for being a covenant people. The Israelites famously assent, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8) – essentially ratifying the covenant. At the heart of this covenant are the **laws and commandments** given in the Torah (notably the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and many additional laws through Exodus 23, expanded in Leviticus-Deuteronomy). Exodus 24

[15] Ibid.

[16] Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 249–253

describes the **ceremony of covenant ratification**: Moses reads the "Book of the Covenant" aloud; the people again affirm obedience; then Moses sprinkles **blood** from sacrificed animals on the altar and on the people, declaring, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8). This dramatic ritual signifies the bonding of God and Israel – in effect, a kinship-in-blood relationship, as if God and Israel are now family (blood brothers, so to speak)[17]. The Mosaic covenant is thus established with both **promises** and **obligations**: God's promise is to be Israel's God, protector, and to bless them (as earlier promised to the patriarchs), and Israel's obligation is to uphold God's Torah. The covenant includes explicit *blessings and curses* (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28) – blessings for obedience (rain, prosperity, peace) and curses for breach (drought, defeat, exile). This aligns with the ancient treaty structure and underscores the **conditional** nature of this covenant*[6]*. Importantly, however, later biblical passages and Jewish tradition maintain that despite Israel's frequent violations, God does not abandon the covenant. Leviticus 26:44, after listing curses, has God say that even when Israel is exiled, "Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break My covenant with them, for I am the LORD their God." This reflects an underlying **divine fidelity** that tempers the conditional aspect – a theme picked up strongly by prophets.

Within Judaism, the Sinai covenant is often considered the **supreme covenantal moment**, when Israel formally became a nation under God's kingship. It is sometimes referred to as *brit Sinai* or *brit Torah*. Later texts (especially in Deuteronomy) speak of the covenant being renewed (e.g., on the plains of Moab in Deut. 29, or by Joshua in Josh. 24). Such renewals reinforce that the covenant is an ongoing reality, not a one-time event – each generation enters the covenant (Deut. 29:14-15 says the covenant is made "not with you [Israelites] alone, but both with those who are standing here with us today before the LORD our God *and with those who are not here with us today*," which

[17] ibad

rabbinic interpretation takes to mean future generations). The **Sabbath** is designated in Exodus 31:16–17 as a sign of this Mosaic covenant ("a perpetual covenant…it is a sign between Me and the people of Israel") – thus, in Jewish thought, Shabbat observance is a testament of loyalty to the covenant, much as circumcision is for the Abrahamic covenant[18].

- **The Davidic Covenant:** Although not as all-encompassing as the Sinai covenant, the covenant with King David is a pivotal biblical promise. In 2 Samuel 7, God tells David (through the prophet Nathan) that He will establish David's offspring on the throne forever: "I will raise up your offspring after you…and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:12-13). Although 2 Samuel 7 does not use the word *berit*, later scripture does speak of a covenant with David (e.g., Psalm 89:3-4, "I have made a covenant with My chosen one, I have sworn to David My servant, 'I will establish your seed forever'"). This **Davidic covenant** is largely **unconditional** regarding the permanence of David's lineage, but it includes a proviso that disobedience by David's sons will be punished (2 Sam 7:14) without voiding the promise ("but My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul," 7:15). In Jewish interpretation, the Davidic covenant is understood as an amplification of the Abrahamic promise (specifically, the promise of kings descending from Abraham – Genesis 17:6 – is realized in David). After the exile (when no Davidic king sat on the throne), this covenant took on a **messianic** significance: it became the theological basis for expecting a future anointed king (Messiah) from David's line to restore Israel. Thus, the Davidic covenant adds a **kingdom dimension** to the overall covenantal picture: God's covenant loyalty now also guarantees a Davidic monarchy as the channel of His rule (in the ideal, when combined with Sinai, a Davidic king should lead Israel in keeping the Torah covenant, securing blessings).

[18] Covenant, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 249–253.

The Hebrew prophets extensively engaged with the concept of covenant. They often rebuked Israel for "breaking the covenant" – Hosea, for instance, accuses the northern kingdom: "They have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law" (Hosea 8:1). Prophets like Hosea and Ezekiel use the metaphor of **marriage** to describe the covenant: God is the husband, Israel the wife – unfaithfulness to the covenant is likened to adultery. This marital imagery (e.g., Hosea ch. 2, Ezekiel ch. 16) emphasizes both the intimacy of the covenant relationship and the grievousness of idolatry (serving other gods) as betrayal. Jeremiah in particular delivers a poignant analysis: through Jeremiah, God says that although He was a husband to Israel, they broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). As a response, Jeremiah prophesies what is perhaps the most significant development in Jewish covenant theology within the Bible: the promise of a **"New Covenant"** (Jeremiah 31:31-34). "Behold, days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah…not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, *My covenant which they broke*, though I was their husband, says the LORD" (31:31-32). He goes on to describe this new covenant as God's law being put "within them" and written "on their hearts" and that "all shall know the LORD" and their sins forgiven (31:33-34). In Jewish context, several interpretations exist: some see this as fulfilled in the return from Babylonian exile and the internalization of Torah via later traditions (like rabbinic oral law); others see it eschatologically (in the end of days, God will spiritually renew Israel); notably, in mainstream Judaism it was **not** taken to annul or replace the Mosaic covenant, but rather to **renew and perfect it** (the text says "I will write My law (Torah) in their hearts," implying the same Torah, but better observed). The phrase "new covenant" (Hebrew *berit ḥadasha*) is used only this once in the Hebrew Bible, but it had enormous influence on later religious thought (particularly Christian, as we will see). Within Judaism, one could say Jeremiah's prophecy kept alive an expectation that the covenant relationship would ultimately be restored and elevated to an ideal form (complete internalization of God's will, and an unbreakable forgiveness).

Post-biblical Judaism (of the rabbinic era) continued to develop covenant theology. While the term *berit* is certainly used in rabbinic literature (e.g., the "Covenant of Circumcision" is a common phrase; the sages speak of Israel's merits as "the covenant of

the fathers"), the rabbis did not systematize covenant concept the way Christian theologians later did. Instead, covenant is assumed as the backdrop of God's special relationship with Israel. The Mishnah and Talmud emphasize that the Torah covenant is Israel's lifeblood – one famous saying in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 3:17 is "Israel is beloved, for the Holy One, blessed be He, surrounded them with commandments." There's also the concept of **"the covenant of our ancestors"** invoked in prayers, which refers to God's covenant loyalty (זכות אבות, merit of the fathers, essentially the Abrahamic covenant promises). After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and subsequent exiles, rabbis like Rabbi Akiva still affirmed the eternal validity of God's covenant. In Jewish liturgy, God is frequently called זוכר הברית (zocher habrit), "the One who remembers the covenant" – e.g., the daily Amidah prayer praises God for recalling "the love of the fathers and bringing a redeemer to their children's children for His Name's sake, **in love**," which reflects belief in the enduring Abrahamic-Davidic covenant culminating in ultimate redemption. The **sociological function** of covenant in Judaism cannot be overstated: it sacralized Jewish peoplehood and history. To be Jewish is to be part of the covenant; conversion to Judaism is described as coming "under the wings of the Shekhinah (Divine Presence)" – essentially joining the covenant community, which traditionally involves circumcision for males and immersion, seen as analogous to Israel's entering the covenant at Sinai (where midrash says even that event involved a kind of baptism and sacrifices akin to conversion rites).

In summary, **Judaism's concept of divine covenant** can be characterized by the following features:

- It is **relational** and **communal**: God chooses a people (starting with individuals like Noah, then narrowing to Abraham's family, then constituting them as Israel). The covenant is not merely with isolated persons but with a community and its descendants ("to be God to you and your seed after you" – Gen. 17:7).
- It is **ethical and law-oriented**: Especially under the Mosaic covenant, obedience to a revealed law (Torah) is central. The covenant demands certain behaviors (613

commandments in rabbinic count) as the stipulations for Israel to be God's treasured nation[19].

- It has **signs** and **rites**: Circumcision, Sabbath, dietary laws (some have seen kashrut as part of covenant fidelity), and the liturgy of Passover (the Exodus event being essentially the founding moment of the covenant nation – hence Passover becomes an annual renewal of covenant memory).
- It involves **mutual loyalty and love**: The prophets and later Jewish mystics emphasize the covenant as a bond of love (God often speaks in Deuteronomy of loving Israel's ancestors and therefore choosing their seed, and calls Israel His beloved). Jewish thought holds that even when Israel fails, God's covenant love endures – this is often cited as the reason God forgives and will ultimately redeem Israel (cf. Micah 7:20, "You will show faithfulness to Jacob and loyal-love to Abraham, as You have sworn to our fathers"). The term **ḥesed** (steadfast love) in the Bible is frequently connected to covenant (e.g., "keeping covenant and ḥesed to those who love Him," Deut. 7:9).
- It is seen as **everlasting and irrevocable** on God's part: Though Jews acknowledge they can be punished for breach (and indeed explain the exiles as due to covenant breach per Lev.26 and Deut.28), there is a strong belief that God will never annul His covenant with Israel. This belief sustained Jewish identity through millennia of dispersion – the conviction that "God will not break His covenant with us, so we are still His people." Theologically, this is anchored in scriptures like Leviticus 26:44 and Jeremiah's later affirmations (Jer. 33:25-26 where God says only if the natural order could be undone would He reject Jacob's offspring).

In conclusion, the Jewish concept of the divine covenant is that of a **binding, familial alliance** initiated by God's grace (choosing Israel out of love for the patriarchs), formalized in obligations (the Torah), and maintained by God's enduring faithfulness and Israel's commitment. It is at once a legal contract and a loving marriage, a pledge of

[19] "Covenant," *Encyclopedia.com*, s.v. "Covenant," section on Christianity and Israelite religion, drawing on *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference).

loyalty and a gift of destiny. This covenantal worldview shapes nearly every aspect of Judaism – from theology (God as lawgiver and redeemer) to ritual (circumcision, Sabbath, festivals recalling covenant events) to collective memory and hope (the Exodus and Sinai, and the future redemption). It provides the lens through which all of Jewish history is interpreted – as a covenant drama of election, rebellion, punishment, and eventual reconciliation (as the prophets foretell). Understanding this Jewish notion of covenant is essential before we turn to how Christianity reinterpreted the covenant in light of Jesus, and how Islam later positioned itself in relation to previous covenants.

Divine Covenant in Christianity

Christianity emerged from within the Jewish covenantal tradition and fundamentally reinterpreted the concept of covenant (*diathēkē* in New Testament Greek) in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that through Jesus, God established a **"New Covenant"** which fulfills, supersedes, and universalizes the covenants described in the Hebrew Bible. The Christian understanding of divine covenant can be analyzed through the lens of the New Testament and subsequent theological development:

1. Jesus and the "New Covenant" in Scripture: The term "New Covenant" (Latin *Novum Testamentum*, whence the name "New Testament") is explicitly invoked at the Last Supper. According to Luke 22:20, Jesus, when sharing the cup of wine with his disciples, said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." Similarly, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:25 records Jesus saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." These statements are loaded with meaning. By referring to "the new covenant in My blood," Jesus is deliberately echoing the covenant-blood ceremony of Exodus 24:8[20], effectively identifying His forthcoming sacrificial death (His blood shed on the cross) with the blood that sealed the Mosaic covenant. In doing so, He implies that His death will seal a **new divine-human relationship**. The phrase "new covenant" unmistakably alludes to Jeremiah 31:31-34, signalling that Jesus's mission is bringing about that long-promised covenant written on hearts with forgiveness of sins.

Early Christian writers understood Jesus's sacrificial death and resurrection as the inauguration of this New Covenant. The Epistle to the Hebrews provides the most detailed exposition: Hebrews 8:6-13 quotes Jeremiah 31 at length, then concludes[21], "In

[20] Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 249–253.

[21] Hebrews 8:6-13.

speaking of a 'new' covenant, He has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.". Here we see a clear statement that the Mosaic covenant ("first covenant") is considered **superseded** ("obsolete") by the advent of Christ's covenant. Hebrews explains that the Old Covenant, mediated by Moses and involving repeated animal sacrifices and a physical temple, was a "shadow" or type of the reality that has now come in Christ (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus is portrayed as the perfect high priest and the perfect sacrificial victim who, by a single offering of Himself, achieved what the old sacrificial system could not – the full cleansing of sin and the internalization of God's law (Heb. 9:13-15, 10:14-18). This directly ties to Jeremiah's prophecy: Hebrews 10:16-17 cites, "I will put My laws on their hearts… I will remember their sins no more," then comments that where sins are forgiven, there is no longer need of offering for sin (Heb. 10:18). In essence, Hebrews argues that Jesus's **once-for-all sacrifice** has permanently atoned for sins, thus realizing the forgiveness aspect of the new covenant, and through the Holy Spirit, God's law is now written on believers' hearts (Heb. 8:10, implying the transformative inward work of the Spirit under the new covenant).

The Apostle Paul also develops covenant imagery, though he uses it somewhat differently. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says God "has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant[22], not of letter but of Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Paul contrasts the Mosaic covenant, "engraved in letters on stone" (3:7), which he calls a "ministry of death/condemnation," with the New Covenant "of the Spirit," which he calls a "ministry of righteousness" that exceeds in glory (3:8-9). This is a striking allegory: Paul implies that the old written code by itself brought awareness of sin and condemnation (cf. Romans 7, where he describes the law's effect on the sinful nature)[23], whereas the new covenant, mediated by the Spirit, brings inner transformation and righteousness. This dichotomy – *letter vs. spirit* – became a cornerstone of Christian theology: the idea that Christianity is a covenant not of external law but of inward grace. Paul does *not* mean that moral law is discarded (he elsewhere upholds many moral

[22] 2 Corinthians 3:6

[23] Romans 7:6

commands), but that the basis of the relationship has shifted from adhering to the law as an external code to being led by the Spirit in an internalized law of love (Romans 7:6, "we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit").

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (ch. 3-4) further illuminates the Christian view of covenant in relation to Abraham and Moses. Paul argues that God's promise (covenant) to Abraham was based on faith and came 430 years before the law, and that the law (the Mosaic covenant) was added "because of transgressions" as a temporary guardian until Christ came, but it did not annul the earlier promise (Gal. 3:15-19). He identifies Christians (Jew or Gentile) who have faith in Christ as the true "sons of Abraham" and heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:29). Then, famously, in Galatians 4:21-31, Paul uses an **allegory of two covenants**: Hagar (Abraham's slave concubine)[24] and her son Ishmael represent the "covenant from Mount Sinai," bearing children for slavery (corresponding to the present Jerusalem in bondage under the law), whereas Sarah (the free wife) and her son Isaac represent the new covenant, associated with the "Jerusalem above," and bearing free children. Paul concludes that Christians, like Isaac, are children of the promise, not children of the slave woman (and implies that those who want to remain under the Sinai law are like Ishmael, who is not an heir). This highly metaphorical argument strongly asserts **Christian freedom from the Mosaic Law** as a condition of the new covenant. It also implicitly frames the new covenant as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant: Christians see themselves as the continuation of Abraham's line, not through physical descent or Torah observance, but through faith in the promised seed (Christ is identified as the singular "Seed" of Abraham in Gal. 3:16).

2. Content of the New Covenant: If the Mosaic covenant was characterized by law written on stone, the Christian New Covenant is characterized by **law written on hearts** (Jer. 31, echoed in Heb. 8). In practice, early Christians understood this as the **indwelling of the Holy Spirit** given after Jesus's resurrection (at Pentecost, Acts 2) – fulfilling Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes[25]."

[24] Galatians 4:21-31

[25] Ezekiel 36:27.

which they saw as part of the new covenant promise. Thus, under the new covenant, guidance is not primarily through an external code but through the Spirit's work in the believer's life. However, the New Testament does articulate ethical requirements as part of the new covenant: notably, Jesus gave **commandments** as well (the "law of Christ" as Paul calls it in Gal. 6:2). Jesus summarized the moral core of the covenant as **love of God and love of neighbor** (Matthew 22:37-40), quoting the Torah but implying that these are the basis of all commandments[26]. At the Last Supper, Jesus also gave a "new commandment": to "love one another as I have loved you"[27]. The Apostle John's writings emphasize that those in the new covenant will keep Christ's commands (especially to believe in Him and love one another – 1 John 3:23). So, while Christianity doesn't present itself as antinomian (lawless), it sees the **quality and source** of obedience differently: flowing from faith and enabled by grace, not from fear of punishment or mere human effort. The **Beatitudes** and Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) can be seen as a charter of the new covenant ethic – intensifying the moral law but focusing on internal righteousness (e.g., not just avoiding murder but not harboring hate).

3. Universality and People of God: A radical shift in the new covenant is its **universality**. Whereas the Sinai covenant was between God and one nation (Israel), the new covenant, in Christian understanding, is offered to **all nations**. At the Last Supper, Jesus said His blood of the covenant is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). After His resurrection, He commands the disciples to "make disciples of all nations…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus, the covenant community is no longer defined by ethnic lineage or the circumcision boundary, but by faith in Christ and baptism. This is why the early Church, guided by the apostles, did something astonishing from a Jewish perspective: they admitted **Gentiles** into the covenant without requiring them to undergo circumcision or fully adopt the Mosaic Law (see Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem). The apostle Peter, upon witnessing the Holy Spirit fall on the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household, declared, "Can

[26] Matthew 22:37-40.

[27] John 13:34

anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). The **inclusion of Gentiles** as equal members of God's covenant people (often called the mystery of Christ in Eph. 3:6) was a defining mark of Christianity. Paul jubilantly writes that in Christ, the great divisions are overcome: "There is neither Jew nor Greek…for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). And importantly, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" [28]. This implies that the **Church** – composed of Jews and Gentiles in Christ – is now the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant community. The first Christians interpreted Old Testament prophecies about Israel's restoration or renewal as being fulfilled in the Church. For example, the prophecy of a new covenant in Jeremiah, or of Gentiles coming to worship the God of Israel [29] – they saw these as realized in the burgeoning Christian movement.

The term **"Israel of God"** is used by Paul in Galatians 6:16, which some interpret as referring to the Church. The First Epistle of Peter applies covenant language to the predominantly Gentile Christian audience: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people (λαός εἰς περιποίησιν), that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; once you were no people but now you are God's people" [30]. This is nearly verbatim of Exodus 19:5-6 and Hosea 2:23 – indicating that early Christians saw themselves as the new covenant people occupying the role that Israel as a nation had occupied under the old covenantThis belief – that the Church is the "New Israel[31]" – is a cornerstone of what later came to be known (sometimes pejoratively) as **supersessionism**: the idea that the Church supersedes Israel as God's covenant community. Classical Christian theology, from the Church Fathers through the Reformers, largely held this view: that the Mosaic covenant with Israel *as a separate dispensation* had ended with Christ, and that now Jews

[28] Gal. 3:29

[29] e.g., Isaiah 2:2-3

[30] 1 Peter 2:9-10

[31] Hosea 2:23; Exodus 19:5-6

and Gentiles alike could only be part of God's covenant by entering the Church through faith in Christ and baptism.

It should be noted that **not all Old Testament covenants are considered "abolished"** in the same way by Christians. The Noahic covenant, being universal and unconditional, is generally seen as still in effect (God still keeps that promise). The Abrahamic covenant is viewed as *fulfilled* rather than abolished – Christians claim to inherit Abraham's blessings (Romans 4:16-18, Gal. 3). The Davidic covenant is believed to be fulfilled in Jesus Himself as the eternal King (the New Testament repeatedly presents Jesus as the Son of David who now reigns forever, e.g., Luke 1:32-33). It is specifically the **Sinai or Mosaic covenant** – with its elaborate system of law, ritual, priesthood, and sacrifice – that the New Testament claims has been replaced by the new covenant in Christ[32]. The Letter to the Hebrews, for instance, argues that the priesthood has changed (from Levite to Jesus's priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek"), so "when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well" (Heb. 7:12). It speaks of the first covenant as becoming obsolete and the tabernacle worship as an old order now superseded by Christ's direct access to heaven [33].

4. Continuity and Discontinuity with Judaism: The Christian concept of covenant thus has a paradoxical relationship with its Jewish roots: it is in **continuity** insofar as it sees itself fulfilling Jewish prophecy and taking up Israel's role (continuity of promise), but in **discontinuity** insofar as it sets aside the distinctive commandments that separated Jews from Gentiles (like circumcision, dietary laws, holy days – see Colossians 2:16-17) and forms a community not defined by ethnic lineage. The emerging Christian identity as a new covenant community distinct from Rabbinic Judaism was solidified by the late first and early second century. Documents like the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 130 AD) explicitly argue that the Mosaic covenant was meant to be temporary and that Christians alone are the true covenant people[34]. Justin Martyr (2nd century) engaged in dialogues with Jews

[32] Luke 1:32-33

[33] Heb. 9:1-14

[34] Epistle of Barnabas (c. 130 AD

arguing that Christians are the new Israel and that the old law was a sign pointing to Christ. This sometimes adversarial theology unfortunately contributed to supersessionist triumphalism and, later, to negative attitudes toward Jews (the Church saw Jews who did not convert as willfully clinging to an outdated covenant that was null without Christ, which fed into de-legitimizing post-biblical Judaism). In recent times, as noted in the literature review, major Christian bodies (especially the Roman Catholic Church) have nuanced this: the Second Vatican Council in 1965 declared that the covenant with the Jewish people is unbroken from God's side[35], a significant departure from classical supersessionism. Some contemporary Christian theologians hold a "dual-covenant" view or similar, whereby Judaism's covenant is honored as valid – though this is not a universal stance. The majority view in traditional Christian doctrine remains that the New Covenant in Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of all previous covenants, and that salvation and full covenant participation are available only through Christ (hence the ongoing Christian evangelistic impulse). However, most churches also affirm that God is faithful (so they hesitate to say "God broke off His covenant with the Jews" – instead, they might say the covenant is fulfilled and transformed, not simply canceled, and they often cite Romans 11:29 about God's irrevocable gifts).

5. Sacraments as Covenant Signs: In Christianity, the **sacraments** function as covenant signs, analogous in some ways to how circumcision and Passover functioned under the old covenant. **Baptism** corresponds to circumcision as the rite of initiation into the covenant community (Colossians 2:11-12 explicitly calls baptism "the circumcision of Christ[36]" since one is buried and raised with Christ in baptism). Baptism is essentially the **entry oath/sign** of the new covenant – it marks a person as belonging to Christ, having died and risen with Him (Romans 6:3-4). **The Eucharist (Lord's Supper)**, as instituted by Jesus's words "this is the new covenant in My blood," is the ongoing sign of the new covenant. Just as the Sinai covenant was renewed by sacrifices and a communal meal in

[35] Michael Barnes, S.J., "*Nostra Aetate – the Moral Heart of the Second Vatican Council*," *Thinking Faith*, October 27, 2015.

[36] Colossians 2:11-12

God's presence (Exodus 24, where Moses and elders ate and drank on the mountain), so Christians believe the covenant is renewed or remembered in the Eucharistic meal. The early Church understood the Eucharist as the **blood of the covenant** that Jesus mentioned – by partaking of the bread and wine, believers continually **reaffirm and participate in** the New Covenant. Hence, communion is at the heart of Christian worship, much as sacrificial rites were at the heart of old covenant worship, but now understood as a **spiritual sacrifice of praise and remembrance**, since Christ's one sacrifice is believed to be sufficient[37]. The very term "New Testament" originally referred to the Eucharistic chalice content (the new covenant in Christ's blood) before it was applied to the set of writings – indicating how integral the covenant concept is to Christian identity and ritual.

In conclusion, the Christian concept of the divine covenant can be summarized as follows: It is a **new and eternal covenant** mediated by Jesus Christ between God and all humanity (who enter it through faith and baptism). It fulfills God's promises to Abraham (blessing all nations) and David (an everlasting kingdom through Christ) and **transcends the old Mosaic covenant**, which is considered a preparatory dispensation. Under this new covenant, the **Holy Spirit** plays a central role, writing God's law on believers' hearts and enabling them to live righteously – thus achieving the internal transformation that the old covenant could not. The hallmark of the new covenant life is **faith working through love** (Gal. 5:6), not mere adherence to letter. The community of the new covenant, the Church, regards itself as the true continuation of Israel – a chosen people and royal priesthood – but without the ethnic and ritual boundaries of the Sinai law. The theological emphasis is on grace: the covenant is a gift of salvation (hence called a "covenant of grace" by many theologians) whereby humans, unable to fulfill the old covenant's demands perfectly, are brought into right relationship with God through the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

This Christian understanding of covenant sets the stage for a new world religion separate from Judaism, and it heavily influenced Western thought (e.g., covenant theology in the

[37] Halim Rane, "Higher Objectives (Maqāṣid) of Covenants in Islam: A Content Analysis of ʿAhd and Mīthāq in the Qurʾān," *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2023): Article 514, *https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040514*.

Reformation era gave rise to political concepts of social contract). In the context of our comparative study, we now have seen that Christianity took the covenant concept and **universalized** it, making it more spiritualized (centered on belief and Spirit rather than national law), while claiming continuity with prior covenants in a way that often negated the independent validity of the Mosaic Torah for the post-Christ era.

Next, we will examine Islam's concept of covenant, which interestingly both parallels some aspects of the earlier covenants and stakes its own claim as the final and most authentic expression of God's pact with humanity, thus adding a further layer to the Abrahamic covenantal saga.

Divine Covenant in Islam

Islam, which arose in the 7th century CE, regards itself as the final and complete installment of the same monotheistic covenant that God made with previous prophets and communities[38]. The Qur'an does not present a *single* formal covenant event equivalent to Sinai or the Last Supper; instead, it speaks of multiple covenants (*ʿuhūd*, plural of *ʿahd*, or *mīthāq*) spanning from the dawn of creation to the time of Prophet Muhammad. The **concept of divine covenant in Islam** can be understood through several key Qur'anic notions:

1. The Primordial Covenant (Mīthāq al-Ast): One of the most distinctive Islamic ideas is that of a covenant taken from all human souls **before** earthly life. In Surah Al-Aʿraf (7:172), the Qur'an describes: *"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 testify!' Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were unaware of this.'"*[39]. This verse is known as **Ayah al-Mithaq** (the Verse of the Covenant) and is foundational for Islamic anthropology and theology. It depicts a pre-temporal event in which every human soul acknowledged God's lordship (rubūbiyyah). By this act, humanity entered into a **primordial covenant** to recognize and worship the one God (*tawḥīd*). The Qur'an says this was done so that people cannot plead ignorance of God's sovereignty on Judgment Day – implying that the knowledge of God is ingrained in human souls (an idea resonating with the concept of *fiṭra*, an innate disposition to believe in God). In Islamic exegesis, this event is sometimes referred to as *Yawm al-Alast* (the Day of "Am I not [your Lord]"), and it has profound implications: - It means that, from an Islamic perspective, **monotheism is humanity's original religion** – all humans made a covenant to worship only Allah. Thus, any form of

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[38] George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant in Other Religions," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *https://www.britannica.com/topic/covenant-religion/Covenant-in-other-religions*.

[39] Tariq Jaffer, "Covenants in the Qurʾān: Terms, Concepts, and Interpretations," *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2023): Article 514, *https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040514*.

idolatry or atheism in life is essentially a breach of this primal covenant, and the Islamic call (daʿwah) to revert to worshipping the one God is a call to *return to that original pledge*. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Every child is born upon the fiṭra (natural monotheistic disposition), then his parents make him a Jew or Christian or Magian..." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim), underscoring that Islam views its monotheistic faith as the innate covenantal religion of all, with other religions seen as later deviations. - The primordial covenant also emphasizes **personal responsibility**: each soul has already borne witness to God, so individuals are accountable for acknowledging God's rights (*ḥaqq Allāh*) in life. This underpins the Islamic doctrine that God's existence and oneness are truth imprinted on the heart – hence people are without excuse if they reject it (similar in logic to Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 about Gentiles being without excuse, though Paul appeals to nature whereas Islam appeals to a pre-earth memory imprinted on the soul). - It establishes a theological equality: all humans, not just a single nation, stood before God as equal parties to this covenant[40]. Thus, Islam from the get-go has a *universal covenant* concept (which conceptually differs from the biblical narrative where the formal covenant is initially with a particular lineage, though Islam also values the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, as discussed below).

2. Covenants with the Prophets (Mīthāq al-Nabiyyīn): The Qur'an further speaks of a special covenant that God took from the *prophets themselves* to support the final Messenger. In Surah Aal Imran (3:81), Allah says: *"And [recall] when Allah took the covenant of the prophets, [saying], 'Whatever I give you of the Scripture and wisdom and then comes to you a messenger confirming what is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him.' [Allah] said, 'Have you acknowledged and taken upon that My commitment?' They said, 'We have acknowledged it.' He said, 'Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.'"*[41]. This verse is interpreted in Islamic tradition to mean that God gathered all prophets (according to one hadith, all 124,000 prophets) and

[40] Mendenhall, "Covenant in Other Religions."

[41] Rane, "Higher Objectives (Maqāṣid) of Covenants in Islam.& Andrew O'Connor, "Covenant, Treaty, Promise, or Pledge? Reconsidering ʿAhd and Mīthāq in the Qurʾān," *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019): 1–18.

made them promise that if Muhammad (or according to some, any subsequent messenger, but by context Muslims understand it as Prophet Muhammad, the final Messenger) came in their time, they would believe in and help him. Effectively, it is seen as a **binding prophecy** that each prophet informed his community of the eventual coming of the final Prophet (Muhammad) and pledged support to him. The verse uses the term *mīthāq* (covenant) regarding this pledge[42]. Implications of this concept: - It **unifies the mission of all prophets**: Islam teaches that there is a single brotherhood of prophets all preaching Islam (submission to one God). By this covenant, the Qur'an emphasizes continuity of revelation and essentially claims that earlier scriptures foretold Muhammad (Muslims often cite, for instance, Deut. 18:18 or the Paraclete in John as alleged predictions of Muhammad). - It also **validates Muhammad's authority**: since all prophets supposedly agreed to acknowledge the final messenger, their true followers (e.g., Jews and Christians in Muhammad's time) ought to likewise accept him. The Qur'an indeed appeals to this: e.g., Qur'an 2:89 criticizes the Jews of Medina for rejecting Muhammad despite earlier praying for victory by means of the coming prophet. In Islamic polemics, it is argued that scriptures of previous covenants contained references to Muhammad – a fulfillment of that prophetic pledge (Qur'an 7:157 alludes to an unlettered prophet "whom they find written in the Torah and Gospel"). - Theologically, this covenant of the prophets underscores that **Islam is the capstone** of a building built by all prophets. It's as if all prophets were custodians of the covenant in their times, but with the understanding that the final shape of the covenant community would come with Muhammad's ummah (community) – which connects to the idea of Muhammad as *Khatam an-Nabiyyin* (Seal of the Prophets), the last brick in the edifice of prophethood (per a famous hadith).

Islamic tradition adds that the Prophet Muhammad himself, though chronologically last, was "the first in intention" – "I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay,"[43] Muhammad is reported to have said (this reflects the notion of **pre-existence of Muhammad's prophetic spirit** and ties into all earlier prophets essentially working

[42]Rane, "Higher Objectives (Maqāṣid) of Covenants in Islam

[43] Jami` at-Tirmidhi, Vol. 6, Book 46, Hadith 3609.

under his light, an idea particularly elaborated in Sufi cosmology of the *Muhammadan Light*). While this mystical angle goes beyond covenant in legal terms, it poetically reinforces the claim that the covenant with Muhammad is the primordial purpose of creation (some Sufis interpret the primordial covenant voice "Am I not your Lord?" as emanating through the Muhammadan Light calling creation to recognize God).

3. Covenants with Specific Communities (Children of Israel and Christians): The Qur'an frequently references the **covenant with Banī Isrā'īl (the Children of Israel)**. For example,: *"O Children of Israel, remember My favor which I have bestowed upon you and fulfill My covenant [with you] that I will fulfill your covenant [from Me], and be afraid of [only] Me."*[44] And Qur'an 2:83 enumerates aspects of that covenant: *"And [recall] when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them]: Do not worship except Allah; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy... and speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakat."[3]*. The Qur'an thus affirms that God did make a covenant with the Israelites – essentially the Mosaic covenant – requiring monotheism, kindness, prayer, charity, etc. However, the Qur'an also asserts that the Children of Israel **repeatedly broke their covenant**. For instance,: *"Allah had already taken a covenant from the Children of Israel... But [because] they broke their covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts hard..."*[45]. It mentions specific violations: not all of them observing the Sabbath, rejecting prophets, etc. The consequence stated is that God "raised the mount (Sinai) above them" (as if threatening to crush them if they rejected the Law – a midrashic motif also in rabbinic literature) and that they incurred God's wrath and curse for their faithlessness.

The Qur'an also refers to a covenant with the Christians (who are often called "those who say, 'We are Nasara (Christians)'"). In Qur'an 5:14, after describing the Jews, it says: *"And from those who say, 'We are Christians,' We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So We caused among them animosity and*

[44] Qur'an 2:40

[45] Qur'an 5:12-13

hatred until the Day of Resurrection..."[46]. Here, it implies that Christians too were recipients of a divine covenant (presumably the Gospel/New Covenant through Jesus) but that they did not remain true to it (the Qur'anic critique is that they deviated into sects and perhaps neglected commandments). Thus, from the Qur'anic perspective, both Jews and Christians – despite having received genuine scriptures and covenants – failed to uphold them properly. This sets the stage for Islam's claim to **restore and reassert the original covenant**.

4. The Covenant in the Qur'an with the Ummah of Muhammad: While the Qur'an doesn't explicitly say "God made a covenant with Muhammad's followers" in the same formulaic way as with Israel, it strongly implies it in various verses. Qur'an 48:10, regarding the pledge (bayʿah) at Hudaybiyyah, states: *"Indeed, those who pledge allegiance (□□□□□□□) to you, [O Muhammad] – they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands. So he who breaks his word (□□□), breaks it to the detriment of himself; and he who fulfills that which he has promised (□□□□) Allah – He will give him a great reward."*[47]. The vocabulary here of "pledging" (*bayʿah*) and "promised/covenanted" (*ʿahd*) with Allah is covenant language applied to the early Muslims' oath to the Prophet. Essentially, the Qur'an equates the Muslims' oath of fealty to Muhammad with an oath to God, thereby sacralizing what one could call the **Muhammadan covenant**. Those who break it sin, those who keep it are rewarded. This verse shows the direct **continuity of covenant concept**: just as Israelites pledged at Sinai to obey God (through Moses), so the companions pledged at Hudaybiyyah to obey God (through Muhammad). Many Islamic scholars (e.g., al-Tabari) comment that God's "Hand over their hands" indicates divine witness and acceptance of their oath – effectively, the Muslims entered a covenant there.

Additionally, mentions a specific covenant with Muhammad and other prophets: *"And [recall, O Muhammad], when We took from the prophets their covenant and from you*

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[46] Andrew O'Connor, "Covenant and Polemic in the Qurʾān: ʿAhd and Mīthāq in Late Antique Sectarian Contexts," *Religions* 14, no. 4 (2019): 7, *https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040514*.

[47] "Covenant in Other Religions," Encyclopaedia Britannica.

and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, the son of Mary – and We took from them a solemn covenant[48] *(□□□□□ □□□□□□□)* The inclusion of Muhammad by name ("and from you") in this list indicates that Muhammad, too, is part of a **line of prophetic covenants**. The "solemn covenant" here likely refers to the heavy responsibility of conveying God's message faithfully (some interpret this as the covenant of prophethood itself – that prophets must deliver God's command and lead their people).

From hadith literature, there is mention that the Prophet Muhammad had the Muslims swear an oath of brotherhood and to listen and obey, etc., on multiple occasions (e.g., second pledge of Aqaba, pledge of Ridwan)[49]. The Shia branch of Islam places huge weight on the concept of **"covenant of wilayah"** – they believe that at Ghadir Khumm, Muhammad took a public covenant from Muslims to recognize Ali[50] as his successor (an event Sunnis see simply as a declaration of Ali's status but not a formal oath). Thus, within Islam, the concept of religious covenants continued – e.g., Sufi orders require an oath of allegiance (bayʿah) to a master. These are human-to-human, but always with the understanding it's ultimately for God's sake (echoing 48:10).

5. Key Features of the Islamic Covenant Concept: Collating from above, we outline Islamic covenant theology: - It is **universal**: All mankind agreed to God's lordship (7:172). Thus, Islam's invitation to worship one God is essentially reminding people of their original covenant. Unlike the Sinai covenant, no one is excluded; it precedes division into nations. - It is **essentially the same in content across history**: Worship God alone, do good, avoid evil. The Quranic list of covenant terms for Israelites (2:83) – monotheism, good to parents and others, no murder, etc. – are virtually identical to Islamic duties. Islam sees earlier revealed laws as variations of the same core covenant, adjusted for each community's circumstances (Qur'an 5:48 says God gave each people a law and a path). So, the message is consistent (all prophets taught Islam in the generic

[48] Qur'an 33:7

[49] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 64, Hadith 4150 (The Pledge of Ar-Ridwan

[50] Jami` at-Tirmidhi, Hadith 3713; Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2408

sense of submission to God)[51], but specific ordinances could differ (hence legal differences between Torah, Gospel, and Qur'an). - It emphasizes **human failure and divine mercy**: Qur'anic narratives dwell on how past communities "broke" their covenant (e.g., worshiped the calf, etc.) and how God sent prophets to recall them to it. This parallels the prophetic cycles in the Bible. The Quran often concludes these stories by affirming God's forgiveness if they repent (e.g., 2:64 after mentioning Israel breaking Sabbath says God still forgave many of them). Yet, ultimately, if they persistently break it, God's favor shifts: thus, from an Islamic view, Jews and Christians by not accepting Muhammad are *persisting* in a broken covenant state, thereby forfeiting their earlier claim. - It culminates in **the final prophet and final scripture**: Islam teaches that with Muhammad and the Quran, the covenant is both renewed and completed. The Quran calls itself *"Muhaymin"* (guardian) over previous scriptures (5:48) – effectively the final corrective covenant document that preserves truths and overrules distortions. Accepting Islam is therefore depicted as renewing one's pledge to God properly, whereas rejecting it is seen as rejecting a confirmation of what one already supposedly agreed to (hence considered a serious breach). - It is **conditional** on obedience (like the Mosaic idea) but also linked with God's mercy: The Qur'an, much like Deuteronomy, spells out that if the Muslim ummah stays true, God will aid and reward them; if not, He can replace them with others (Qur'an 47:38 warns, "if you turn away, He will replace you with another people"). However, mainstream Islamic theology holds that God will not abandon the community of believers as a whole – an echo of God's faithfulness in covenant. In fact, some interpret Qur'an 3:110 ("You are the best nation raised for mankind, enjoining right and forbidding wrong...") as a covenantal declaration about the Muslim ummah's role, much like Exodus 19:5-6 about Israel. There is also the concept of "Allah's protection" (ʿiṣmah)[52] over the Muslim community from error in consensus, implying a divine preservation reminiscent of the idea that God won't fully let His covenant community fail.

[51] Qur'an 5:48

[52] Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36, Hadith 3950 ("My nation will not unite on misguidance

6. Ritual and Sign of Islamic Covenant: Islam doesn't identify a single physical sign as the mark of the covenant the way circumcision was for Abraham's covenant. However, one could argue **Shahadah** (the declaration of faith, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah") serves as the verbal sign of entering the Islamic covenant. Pronouncing it sincerely is essentially the oath of allegiance to God's covenant in Islam (rather like baptism serves in Christianity – indeed, some hadith call Islam's shahada the mark of faith on the believer's forehead in the hereafter). Circumcision is practiced by Muslims too (as an Abrahamic tradition), but it's considered more a sunnah (practice of Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Muhammad) than a sacrament of a new covenant – it's not in the Qur'an, but widely observed. One might also see **Salat (the five daily prayers)** as a continual reaffirmation of the covenant, since in each prayer Muslims renew submission (the opening Fatiha includes pledging, "You alone we worship, You alone we seek for help" – essentially renewing that primordial pledge each time). The communal Friday prayer and Hajj (pilgrimage) also manifest covenant community behavior reminiscent of biblical assemblies. So, while not termed "signs of covenant," Islamic rituals function to solidify and renew the bond with God regularly. The Qur'an itself could be seen as the **document of the covenant** – Muslims often treat the Mushaf (written Quran) with great reverence, like a king's decree that is to be obeyed.

In conclusion, Islam's concept of the divine covenant is that God made humanity testify to His lordship (universal covenant of tawḥīd), sent messengers and books as a series of covenantal guidance, and finally sent Muhammad with the Qur'an to restore the original covenant in its final form. Being Muslim means consciously accepting and living by this covenant (hence the Quran often uses *ahd* (pledge) regarding obeying God and His Messenger, as in 48:10 and 33:15). In Islamic belief, this covenant is not a "new" religion but a restoration of the oldest religion – "the religion of Abraham" (Qur'an 22:78) – making Islam self-understood as *the original covenant of submission to God reaffirmed*.

From a comparative perspective, Islam presents an interesting amalgam: it is like Judaism in stressing law and collective obedience (Sharia is akin to Torah in many ways), but it is like Christianity in its universal scope and in seeing itself as fulfilling past revelations (Islam openly claims to fulfill both Mosaic and Jesus's teachings, reinterpreting them in

line with the Qur'an). It rejects the notion of any covenant after Muhammad – since he is the final prophet, the covenant in his message is final. There is no concept of supersession beyond Islam (though within Islamic thought there is the idea that if Muslims failed, God could replace them, but it's generally believed true Muslims will always exist)[53].

Having now analyzed Judaism, Christianity, and Islam individually, we can proceed to a **comparative thematic discussion**, examining how these covenant concepts relate, differ, and interact – which will shed light on the broader question of the Abrahamic religious common ground and divergence.

[53] Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Hadith 4715 ("A group of my Ummah will remain steadfast on the trut

The Concept of Covenant in Comparative Perspective

Having examined each tradition's understanding of divine covenant, we now compare and contrast these conceptions to discern patterns of similarity and points of divergence. This comparative discussion is organized thematically:

1. Universality vs. Particularity of the Covenant Community: One striking difference lies in who is included in the covenant. *Judaism* (especially in its classical form) views the covenant as a particular bond between God and the people of Israel – a specific nation descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While Judaism acknowledges a universal aspect in the Noahic covenant (seven laws for all humanity) and welcomes righteous Gentiles as associates (often through the Noahide framework or conversion to Judaism), the Sinai covenant itself is exclusively Israel's heritage. *Christianity*, by contrast, from its inception made the covenant through Christ **universal** – open to Jew and Gentile on equal terms. Paul's declaration that "there is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ" epitomizes this[54]. The new covenant people (the Church) is conceived as trans-national and inclusive; indeed, the term "catholic" (universal) was early applied to the Church. *Islam* similarly positions itself as a **universal community**: the Qur'an addresses all humanity and frequently calls the Prophet Muhammad "a mercy to the worlds" [55]and "Messenger for all mankind." In Islamic thought, membership in the covenant (the Ummah) is not by birth or ethnicity but by professing faith (shahada) – theoretically anyone from any background can join, paralleling Christianity's open invitation[56]. Thus, both Christianity and Islam break the ethnic/national boundary that the Sinai covenant had, whereas Judaism to this day retains a strong ethnoreligious character (being "born into the covenant" is a Jewish concept – male infants enter via circumcision on the eighth

[54] Galatians 3:28

[55] Qur'an 21:107

[56] Mendenhall, "Covenant in Other Religions

day, etc.). One can convert into Judaism, but that is seen as joining the family of Israel; in Christianity and Islam, one is not joining an ethnicity but a belief-community. This distinction has had profound effects: for example, *missionary activity* is central to both Christianity and Islam (as they see the covenant as something to extend to all nations), whereas Judaism historically did not seek converts (the Sinai covenant was not seen as something to impose on other nations – they have their own simpler Noahic covenant in rabbinic thought).

2. Conditional vs. Unconditional Elements: All three traditions grapple with the tension between God's unilaterally bestowed promise and the human obligation within the covenant. In *Judaism*, the Mosaic covenant is clearly **conditional** (blessings and curses contingent on Israel's obedience). However, unconditional aspects appear in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (e.g., God swears to Abraham and David regardless of immediate behavior, though later interpretations often insert conditions of covenant loyalty to enjoy the promises). Post-exile, Jewish theology emphasized God's enduring commitment to the covenant (unconditional on God's part) even if Israel failed (conditional on Israel's part). *Christianity* has a unique stance: salvation under the new covenant is often described as **unconditional gift (grace)** – e.g., "While we were sinners, Christ died for us" [57]The entry into the new covenant is by faith, not works, aligning with unconditional promise to Abraham. However, the new covenant still has expectations[58]. Most Christian traditions teach that persevering in faith and obedience is necessary – implying a conditional aspect (some Protestants stress "once in covenant, always in covenant" if truly saved, while others (Catholic, Orthodox) warn that one can break the covenant by apostasy or mortal sin, losing the benefits unless one repents). Nonetheless, overall, Christianity leans into the idea of **God's faithfulness** guaranteeing the covenant blessings for the elect (the concept of an eternal secure covenant through Christ's perfect fulfillment of conditions on behalf of humanity). *Islam* presents the covenant as largely **conditional**: every surah reiterates obedience, and one's fate (reward or punishment)

[57] Romans 5:8

[58] Jesus speaks of abiding in Him, keeping His commandments, e.g. John 15:10

depends on adherence to God's commands[59]. The Quran repeatedly conditions prosperity on righteousness and warns of replacing the community if it fails (47:38) – more reminiscent of Deuteronomy than of the Gospel promise of unmerited grace. Yet, Islam too has an unconditional side: the promise that God's guidance will ultimately lead the believers to success, and that God will not burden souls beyond capacity (2:286). Also, certain Qur'anic verses suggest the inevitability of Islam's triumph due to God's covenant support (e.g., 24:55, "God has promised those among you who believe and do good that He will surely grant them succession in the land...")[60]. So, Islam's view is that God's promise (to make Islam prevail and to admit believers to Paradise) is sure, provided individuals and the community fulfill their duties – a conditional promise, but one God helps the believers to meet by sending guidance and forgiveness (much like Deut. 30:11-14 says the commandment is not too hard). In all three, there is a concept of **divine mercy overriding strict justice** in the covenant: YHWH in the Bible is "merciful and gracious, keeping covenant and steadfast love", the New Testament highlights God's mercy in sending Christ "while we were enemies"[61], and the Qur'an opens every chapter with "In the Name of God, the All-Merciful...," emphasizing forgiveness if one repents, "Do not despair of God's mercy")[62]. Therefore, while Judaism and Islam accentuate the conditional, and Christianity accentuates the unconditional (due to Christ's atonement fulfilling conditions), all three affirm that **God is ultimately faithful** and **ready to forgive** to maintain the covenant relationship.

3. Role of Law and Ritual: In the covenants of Judaism and Islam, **divine law** (halakha or Sharia) is central. The Sinai covenant is basically constituted by the Torah's commandments[63]. Likewise, Islamic covenant entails following the Sharia (prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, and a broad code of personal and social laws). Both traditions thus see

[59] Mendenhall, "Covenant in Other Religions

[60] Qur'an 24:55

[61] Rom 5:10

[62] Qur'an 39:53

[63] Weinfeld, "Covenant," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5, 249–253.

covenant life as a comprehensive way of life regulated by divine law. Christianity diverges here: the new covenant, according to the New Testament, does not require adherence to the ritual and civil laws of the Torah (see Acts 15, Galatians, etc.). Paul vehemently insisted that works of the Mosaic law (like circumcision, food laws, sacrificial system) were not binding on Gentile converts and not the basis of justification*[7]*. Instead, Christians focus on **moral law internalized** (the "law of Christ," often identified simply as the commands to love God and neighbor, encompassing the ethical core of the Torah without its ceremonial specifics). The early Church dropped circumcision, allowed eating previously forbidden foods (Mark 7:19, Acts 10:15), and ceased temple sacrifices (believing Christ's sacrifice replaced them*[8]*). That was a monumental shift. However, note that not all law is abandoned: e.g., 9 of the 10 Commandments are reiterated in the NT (Sabbath being the exception with a changed approach). But they are framed as part of living out faith, not as identity markers or as burdens for salvation. In practice, this made the Christian covenant far less *externally ritualistic* than Judaism's or Islam's – no mandatory circumcision, no complex dietary system (aside from some fasting periods in certain traditions), no elaborate purity codes. This **simplification/universalization of ritual** helped Christianity spread in the Greco-Roman world. Islam, conversely, retained many **concrete rituals** akin to Judaism's: circumcision (though not in Qur'an, it's Sunnah), halal dietary laws (very similar to kosher, except a bit different e.g. shellfish allowed), regular prayers (analogous to Jewish daily prayers), fasting (Ramadan similar in concept to Yom Kippur fast extended), pilgrimage to a holy sanctuary (Mecca analogous to Temple-centric pilgrimages). Thus, Islam's covenant practice has much more in common with Judaism's in outward form than with Christianity's – not surprisingly, since Islam self-consciously aimed to restore Abraham's religion with its rites (the Kaaba pilgrimage is claimed to be Abrahamic in origin, circumcision traced to Abraham, etc.). Christianity spiritualized and internalized many concepts (temple became metaphorical, sacrifice became eucharistic and ethical praise[64], circumcision became "of the heart" [65]or baptism). Islam physicalized them in

[64] Hebrews 13:15

[65] Rom. 2:29

renewed form (e.g., Qurbani (animal sacrifice) is still done at Eid al-Adha in memory of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son – something Christianity turned into a spiritual lesson, not a continuing practice). Therefore, in comparative terms: Judaism and Islam emphasize *orthopraxy* (right practice) as central to keeping the covenant, whereas Christianity emphasizes *orthodoxy* (right belief/faith) as entry to and sign of the covenant (though of course it expects good works as fruit). This has led to differences in religious legalism: Judaism and Islam developed extensive jurisprudence (Talmud, Sharia) governing life, essentially as covenantal nomism (law-keeping as response to covenant). Christianity developed more theology and creeds, focusing on faith and sacraments as covenant connectors.

4. Views of Each Other's Covenants: Since the question specifically involves a comparative study, it's important to note how each tradition views the others in terms of covenant: - **Judaism's view:** Classical Jewish thought saw Christianity and Islam as *Noahide* movements at best – i.e., Gentiles in their own relationship with God via basic laws, but not possessors of the full Sinai covenant. Jews did not generally accord other religions covenantal status; rather, they believed the Sinai covenant remained uniquely theirs and eternal. Post-medieval Jewish scholars sometimes opined that Islam, being strictly monotheistic, was closer to fulfilling Noahide covenant obligations than Christianity (due to Christianity's Trinity and Incarnation, which many Jews see as violating pure monotheism)[66]. But these were debates about Gentile salvation, not about covenants per se. In modern times, some Jews have taken a more positive view: e.g., seeing Christians as indirectly part of Abraham's legacy or even instruments in God's plan (in part influenced by Christian changes at Vatican II). But the mainstream Jewish position is still that the Sinai (and Abrahamic) covenant is between God and Jews, while righteous Gentiles have their path (Noahide covenant or general providence) without needing to become Jews – a kind of parallelism, but not equality of covenants. - **Christianity's view:** Historically, Christianity considered the Mosaic covenant superseded (the term "Old Covenant" implicitly suggests obsolescence). It saw Judaism as a once valid covenant now *surpassed and completed* by Christ. This often led to the

[66] See: Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a

belief that Jews who do not accept Christ are not under God's favor in the covenantal sense (hence Augustine's theology of Jews as witnesses but in exile)[67]. Regarding Islam, Christians traditionally saw it not as a covenant but as a human or even heretical movement (medieval Christianity viewed Islam as a deviation or a Christian heresy). There was no Christian theological category for Islam akin to how Islam sees Christianity; Christians didn't say "Muslims have partial covenant," etc. They simply viewed Islam as false (though in modern times, many Christian theologians respect Islam as an Abrahamic faith worshiping the same God, yet still lacking the new covenant salvation in Christ). Today, major church statements (e.g., Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*[68], and various ecumenical dialogues) have adopted a more inclusive tone, acknowledging that Jews remain beloved and that God's covenant with them is unrevoked, thus partially undoing supersessionism in Catholic teaching. Some Protestant bodies have similarly affirmed God's ongoing covenant with Israel. However, in terms of salvation theology, most Christian denominations hold that the fullness of the covenant is only in Christ – meaning that while Jews are still in a special relationship with God because of the patriarchal covenants, they still need the new covenant for the fullness of salvation (this is an area of continuing theological debate). As for Muslims, the Church's view now often is that Muslims acknowledge the Creator and aspects of the truth, but do not have the *New Covenant* relationship (since they don't accept Jesus as Son of God and Savior). So, Christianity sees itself as having fulfilled both the Jewish covenant and whatever natural relationship Gentiles had to God, bringing all into a new covenant in Christ – an inherently supersessionist claim (though "supersessionist" is nuanced today). - **Islam's view:** Islam explicitly positions itself as the culmination of previous covenants. The Qur'an addresses Jews and Christians often, asserting that Muslims follow the original faith of Abraham which Jews and Christians have partially deviated from. Islam acknowledges that Jews and Christians were given valid scriptures and covenants (as discussed, Qur'an speaks of their covenant), but accuses them of *tahrif* (alteration of scripture or message) and of failing to keep the terms (e.g., not recognizing Muhammad,

[67] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, Book 18, Chapter 46

[68] Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965), section 4

or in earlier times not adhering to their own laws). Thus, Islamic theology considers **Judaism and Christianity as earlier stages** of the one true religion (Islam in a general sense), now superseded by the final revelation. The Qur'an calls Jews and Christians *"People of the Book"* (Ahl al-Kitab), a title of respect acknowledging their covenantal heritage, and allows a certain accommodation for them within an Islamic state (they could live as dhimmi communities practicing their faiths in exchange for a tax). However, theologically, the Qur'an invites them to "come to a common word" and effectively to accept Islam as the fulfillment of their faith (3:64). So Islam's view is quite parallel to Christianity's classical view: each sees itself as **fulfilling and replacing** the covenantal role of Israel, and also as providing the true faith meant for all humanity. Notably, Islam explicitly honors Jesus (as a prophet and Messiah, though not divine) and even says Jesus foretold Muhammad [69] – thus framing itself not as a new religion but as the restoration of Jesus's true message that got distorted into Christianity. In that sense, Islam is supersessionist regarding both Judaism and Christianity, but it also affirms their original legitimacy (something medieval Christianity rarely did for Islam).

5. Spiritualization vs. Continuity of Earthly Promises: Another comparative point: *Judaism* expects very concrete fulfillment of covenant promises – e.g., the land of Israel given to Abraham's descendants eternally, an earthly messianic kingdom of peace, etc. *Christianity*, in reinterpretation, often spiritualized or universalized these promises: the "Promised Land" becomes a symbol of Heaven or the whole earth renewed [70]"the meek shall inherit the earth" no longer just Canaan), the "kingdom" becomes primarily the reign of God in the hearts now and in the church, and ultimately the Kingdom of God in a new heaven and new earth, not necessarily a political entity centered in Jerusalem (though some Christian groups – e.g., millenarians[71] – do expect a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth in fulfillment of Jewish prophecies, mainstream churches mostly allegorized that). *Islam*, interestingly, partially re-engages the concrete: Islam's covenant

[69] Qur'an 61:6

[70] Matthew 5:5

[71] Revelation 20:1-6

includes establishing a just social order on earth under God's law (hence the concept of Dar al-Islam, a socio-political realm of the covenant). Islam reveres Jerusalem and the Holy Land (though Mecca and Medina are more central to Islamic sacred geography). The Qur'an, while not fixated on the Land of Israel for Muslims, does affirm that the righteous among the Children of Israel were made to inherit the land (7:137) and suggests that the Holy Land belongs rightfully to God's obedient servants[72], "My righteous servants shall inherit the earth"). Some classical Muslim scholars even saw Islamic conquests as fulfillment of that – the idea that ultimately, under Islam, believers inherit what was promised to other communities that failed (so in a sense, a transfer of covenant blessings to the Ummah). This resonates with the way some Christians saw the fall of Jewish Jerusalem in 70 CE as God's judgment and transferring of covenant favor to the Church. Thus, both Christianity and Islam see historical events (destruction of Second Temple, success of early caliphate) as confirmation that the prior covenant had given way to their ascendency.

However, Islam, unlike Christianity, did not *other-worldly-ize* the covenant promises to the same extent. Islam's covenant includes a strong expectation of worldly success for the community (as long as it's faithful) – e.g., victory over enemies, inheritance of leadership on earth[73]– and indeed early Muslims saw their dramatic expansion as vindication of that. Christianity, especially after early centuries when Christ's return did not immediately bring an earthly kingdom, leaned more to seeing covenant blessings in spiritual terms (the Church grew but often under persecution, so its triumph was seen as spiritual/moral rather than political; not until much later did the idea of Christendom give a sense of worldly covenant fulfillment, but even then different theology – it wasn't guaranteed by scripture in the same way).

5. **Attitude toward Post-covenantal Law of Others:** Because each faith saw itself as the definitive covenant, it usually regarded adherence to prior covenantal laws as either unnecessary or even wrong after the new covenant arrived. *Christianity*

[72] Qur'an 21:105; Psalm 37:29

[73] Qur'an 24:55

famously decided that Gentile converts should *not* be circumcised or keep most of Mosaic law (Acts 15). Later, when there was a clear separation, the Pauline view was that those who still insisted on observing the Mosaic law as binding were effectively rejecting the grace of Christ[74] .*Islam* likewise holds that following earlier dispensations (like sticking to Judaism or Christianity after Islam has come) is a grave error, since those were time-bound laws now abrogated by the Sharia of Muhammad. In Islamic jurisprudence, after Islam's advent, previous religious laws are considered *mansūkh* (abrogated) except where the Qur'an or Hadith specifically reaffirm them. For instance, some dietary rules changed: the Qur'an made all foods lawful except explicit prohibitions (even allows Muslim men to eat food of Jews and Christians, which implies more lenience than perhaps Mosaic kashrut)[75]. Circumcision was continued since it predated and fits Islamic concept of fitra. Essentially, *from both Christian and Islamic viewpoints, the continued practice of the older law by Jews* (and in Christianity's view by non-Christian Jews specifically) *and of the Christian Gospel by Christians (from Islam's view) represents a failure to move into God's updated covenant*, and therefore they considered those practices either obsolete at best or spiritually harmful at worst. This laid ground for religious polemics: e.g., Medieval Christians mocked Jewish rituals as dead "letter" without Christ, and Muslim polemicists similarly criticized Christians for worshiping Jesus and not following the final Prophet (often citing that by rejecting Muhammad, they break their own scripture prophecies or the general covenant of monotheism by doing shirk (associating partners with God via Trinity)). Jews, on their side, saw both Christianity and Islam as outside the Sinaic covenant's detailed obligations – essentially Gentiles. This dynamic underscores how each tradition's self-conception as the rightful covenant holder colored its view of the others as deviating communities.

[74] Galatians 5:2-4

[75] Qur'an 5:5

In summary, the concept of divine covenant serves as the spiritual backbone of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three traditions share a fundamental **common ground**: a belief in one God who initiates a relationship with humanity through revelation, ethical commandments, and prophetic guidance. They all uphold the principle of communal responsibility—whether expressed in the Talmudic maxim "All Israel are guarantors for one another"[76], the Christian "Body of Christ," or the Islamic "Ummah."

However, the **theological divergences** are profound, particularly regarding the mediator and the mechanism of salvation:

- **Judaism** maintains a continuous, law-oriented covenant mediated by Moses, where redemption is found in adherence to the Torah and divine mercy, without the need for a singular external savior.
- **Christianity** introduces a radical shift to a grace-centric covenant mediated by Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). It posits that God Himself, through the Incarnation and Atonement, fulfilled the covenant's demands, offering salvation as a gift of grace rather than a reward for law-keeping.
- **Islam** returns to a law-oriented dynamic similar to Judaism but universalizes it. It recognizes Muhammad as the final Messenger who restores the original Abrahamic faith. Islam explicitly rejects the Christian concept of vicarious atonement (Qur'an 6:164) and the crucifixion (Qur'an 4:157), emphasizing instead personal submission (*islām*) and repentance as the keys to covenantal success.

Finally, in their **eschatological outlooks**, each faith possesses a "supersessionist" vision where the End Times vindicate its specific claim. Judaism awaits a Messianic age for Israel; Christianity anticipates the return of Christ and the Kingdom of God (Rom. 11:26); and Islam expects the final triumph of *Tawhid* and the judgment of humanity (Sahih al-Bukhari 2476).

[76] Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a.

Ultimately, while academic analysis reveals deep doctrinal divides, it also highlights a shared heritage. Each religion identifies itself as the true custodian of Abraham's legacy—whether through the lineage of Isaac, the spiritual adoption in Christ, or the restoration of the Hanif faith in Islam. Understanding these distinct self-identities is essential for any meaningful interfaith dialogue.

Conclusion

This study has examined the concept of the divine covenant through a comparative analytical framework that respects the internal logic of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam while situating them within their shared Abrahamic heritage. As a researcher, I have approached this topic with the conviction that rigorous comparison does not require the erasure of doctrinal differences, but rather their careful articulation within historical and theological contexts. The purpose of this study has been to clarify how a single foundational concept can generate distinct religious identities, legal structures, and soteriological visions across the three traditions.

Major Findings

1. The concept of divine covenant functions as a central theological framework in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, shaping each tradition's understanding of revelation, moral obligation, and communal identity.

2. Judaism articulates the covenant primarily as a particular and enduring bond between God and the people of Israel, Christianity universalizes covenant membership through Christ and faith, and Islam presents the covenant as both primordial and universally binding through submission to one God.

3. Judaism and Islam emphasize obedience to revealed law as the primary expression of covenantal fidelity, whereas Christianity places primary emphasis on grace and inner transformation while maintaining ethical responsibility.

4. Each tradition ultimately views itself as the authentic bearer of the covenant, resulting in differing claims of continuity, fulfillment, and supersession that have historically shaped interreligious boundaries.

5. Despite doctrinal divergence, all three traditions affirm divine mercy, moral accountability, and an eschatological horizon in which covenantal faithfulness is ultimately vindicated.

Recommendations

1. Comparative studies of covenant should move beyond limited Judeo-Christian frameworks and integrate Islamic theology as an equal analytical partner.

2. Future research would benefit from examining how covenantal concepts inform legal, political, and ethical systems within each tradition.

3. Greater attention should be given to contemporary theological efforts to reassess covenant, continuity, and supersession in interfaith contexts.

4. Focused studies on specific covenantal themes—such as mediation, covenant breach, and restoration—could further deepen comparative understanding.

In conclusion, the divine covenant emerges as both a shared foundation and a defining boundary among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, illuminating how a common Abrahamic heritage can give rise to distinct theological self-understandings and historical trajectories. A careful appreciation of these convergences and divergences enhances scholarly clarity and provides a more nuanced framework for interpreting interreligious relations, and it is in this spirit that this study is offered, with gratitude to God who grants understanding and insight, asking Him to accept this effort, overlook its shortcomings, and guide us to what is true and beneficial.

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