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The Concept of Islam as the Primordial Religion: A Theological Analysis within Islamic Tradition

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Abstract

Although Islam is frequently understood as a historically bounded religious tradition that emerged in seventh-century Arabia, the Qurʾānic and classical Islamic theological sources present *islām* as a primordial and universal reality. This study examines this conception through a theological textual analysis of the Qurʾān, authenticated prophetic traditions (hadith), and the classical exegetical (*tafsīr*) works of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī. Integrating the Qurʾānic concepts of *tawḥīd*, *fiṭrah*, *khātam al-nubuwwah*, and *taṣdīq*, the analysis advances four interconnected arguments. First, *islām* in Qurʾānic usage denotes the universal ontological condition of submission to Allah rather than exclusively referring to a particular confessional community. Second, Adam (*ʿalayhi al-salām*) represents the beginning of prophetic consciousness and the first human embodiment of this submission. Third, divine revelation constitutes a unified and continuous theological enterprise extending throughout prophetic history. Fourth, the Qurʾān and Sunnah represent the final, preserved, and universally applicable articulation of this primordial truth. The study therefore concludes that Islam's manifestation in seventh-century Arabia constitutes the culmination rather than the inception of the primordial religion of submission. By distinguishing the universal theological meaning of

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islām from its historically institutionalized form, this study clarifies a foundational Islamic doctrine and addresses persistent misconceptions concerning Islam's historical emergence and relationship to earlier prophetic traditions.

Keywords: *Fiṭrah*; Primordial Religion; Prophetic Continuity; Qurʾānic Theology; *Tawḥīd*

Introduction

Background and Context

The concept of religion (*dīn*) in Islamic theology is fundamentally distinct from many modern academic or comparative religious frameworks. Within the Qurʾānic worldview, religion is not understood as a culturally evolving system of belief but as a divinely revealed and continuous reality grounded in the principle of *tawḥīd* (the absolute oneness of Allah) and expressed through *islām*—complete submission to God. The Qurʾān repeatedly emphasizes that divine guidance has been sent to all human communities through a chain of prophets beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), who occupies a foundational position in Islamic theology as both the first human being and the first recipient of divine instruction. In this theological framework, religious truth is not historically constructed but divinely initiated and continuously transmitted. This study is situated within classical Sunni theological discourse—the *ʿaqīdah* and *tafsīr* traditions—where the unity of prophetic message and the continuity of revelation are central doctrinal commitments.

Research Problem

Despite the clarity with which the Qurʾān presents the unity of prophetic missions, a persistent misconception surrounds the historical identity of Islam: the assumption that Islam emerged as a religion in the seventh century CE with the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam). This paper addresses the conceptual and theological question that this misconception raises: How does Islamic revelation construct the relationship between Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), the chain of prophethood, and the finality of Muḥammad's message so as to present Islam as simultaneously primordial in its essence and final in its articulation?

Research Objectives

This study pursues six interrelated objectives: to examine the Qurʾānic concept of Islam as universal submission to Allah; to analyse the role of Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) as the origin of prophetic consciousness; to explore the continuity of prophethood across human history; to investigate the system of revealed scriptures and their theological unity; to clarify the doctrine of finality of revelation in Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam); and to demonstrate the role of the Sunnah in completing and operationalizing divine guidance.

Methodology

This paper employs a textual and exegetical methodology grounded in primary Islamic sources. The Qurʾān serves as the foundational text of revelation, authenticated hadith literature provides prophetic commentary, and the classical *tafsīr* works of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī constitute the primary interpretive framework. The analysis is interpretive and theological in nature, operating within Islamic epistemology rather than seeking external empirical validation. It prioritizes the classical Sunni scholarly tradition (*turāth*) as the appropriate lens for understanding doctrinal concepts and does not claim to adjudicate the truth claims of other religious traditions.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research is confined to Qurʾānic theology and classical Sunni exegetical interpretation, the concept of prophethood and revelation within Islam, and the relationship between Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), successive prophets, and Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam). Engagement with non-Islamic religious traditions is limited to cases where such engagement illuminates the Islamic theological argument. Historical-critical analysis of earlier scriptures on their own internal terms lies outside the scope of this study. The interpretations offered are those of classical Islamic scholarship and are presented as such.

Significance of the Study

This study clarifies a foundational theological principle in Islam—the unity of prophetic message across time—that is frequently misunderstood both within and outside Muslim communities. It also highlights Adam's central role in Islamic anthropology and theology, offering a structured account of Islam as both primordial reality and final revelation. By integrating Qurʾānic, prophetic, and classical scholarly perspectives into a

coherent framework, the study contributes to a deeper appreciation of Islamic theological continuity and the comprehensive nature of divine guidance.

Conceptual Framework: Islam as Submission (*islām*) in Qurʾānic Theology

Introduction

A proper understanding of Islam within Qurʾānic theology requires precise conceptual grounding. The term *islām* is employed in both linguistic and theological registers, and its meaning extends considerably beyond the historical emergence of a religious community in seventh-century Arabia. In its Qurʾānic usage, *islām* denotes the act and state of complete submission to Allah, constituting the core of all prophetic teachings. This section establishes the conceptual foundation for the paper's central argument: that Islam is not merely a historical religious identity but a universal and timeless reality of submission spanning the entire prophetic tradition from Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) to Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam).

Linguistic and Qurʾānic Meaning of Islām

The Arabic term *islām* derives from the triliteral root s-l-m (س-ل-م), which conveys the interrelated meanings of peace, safety, and surrender. In classical Arabic lexicography, *islām* designates the act of submitting, yielding, and surrendering oneself completely to another's authority—in the theological sense, to Allah alone. The Qurʾān employs derivations of this root in both verbal and conceptual registers, describing the disposition of all true worshippers:

﴿بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ﴾

"Rather, whoever submits his face to Allah while being a doer of good..." (Qurʾān 2:112)

Here *aslama* describes an action transcending time, ethnicity, or historical membership, denoting a state of spiritual orientation rather than belonging to a later historical community. Classical lexicographers such as Ibn Manẓūr define *islām* as *al-istilsām li-llāh wa al-inqiyād lahu* (complete submission and surrender to Allah) (Ibn Manẓūr, 1990, Vol. 12, s.v. "s-l-m"), establishing *islām* as an ontological condition of servitude to the Creator rather than merely a socio-religious label.

Islam as the Religion of All Prophets

A central Qurʾānic principle is that all prophets were themselves in a state of *islām* and that they called their communities to the same reality. The characterization of Abraham (ʿalayhi al-salām) is paradigmatic:

﴿مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَٰكِن كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُّسْلِمًا﴾

"Abraham was neither Jewish nor Christian, but he was a ḥanīf (pure monotheist), a Muslim." (Qurʾān 3:67)

Similarly, the disciples of Jesus (ʿalayhi al-salām) are recorded as declaring: "Bear witness that we are Muslims" (Q. 3:52). These verses establish a principle of foundational theological significance: Islam is not a historically bounded identity but the essential disposition of all prophets and their genuine followers. It is the unifying essence of all prophetic messages rather than a separate religious system appearing later in history.

Dīn as Divine Order and Submission

The Qurʾānic term *dīn* carries a considerably broader semantic range than its modern colloquial usage suggests. In its full theological scope, *dīn* encompasses divine authority, moral accountability, legal and ethical order, and final eschatological recompense. The Qurʾānic declaration "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" (Q. 3:19) is interpreted by al-Qurṭubī not as a reference to a specific confessional community but as a statement about the only acceptable mode of submission to Allah in every prophetic era (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 3:19). The conceptual relationship is triadic: *dīn* constitutes the divine system of submission; *islām* is its realization in human conduct and spiritual orientation; and the prophets are the designated carriers of this system across the span of human history.

Tawḥīd as the Core of All Revelation

At the theological core of every prophetic mission lies *tawḥīd*—the absolute oneness of Allah. The Qurʾān states with unmistakable clarity: "We did not send any messenger before you except that We revealed to him: There is no god but Me, so worship Me" (Q. 21:25). Ibn Kathīr observes in his commentary that this verse constitutes categorical proof that no messenger was ever sent except with the message of tawḥīd as its essential content, establishing three interconnected realities: the unity of theological message across all prophets, the continuity of divine instruction through history, and the

internal doctrinal coherence of the entire prophetic corpus (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 21:25). Figures such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (ʿalayhim al-salām) all stand within the same doctrinal framework; their differences pertain to law and practice, never to core theological witness.

Islam as Fiṭrah (Primordial Human Disposition)

Islamic theology situates submission not only in the historical record of prophethood but within the very structure of human nature. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: "Every child is born upon the *fiṭrah*..." (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, hadith no. 6599). Classical scholars interpret *fiṭrah* as the innate recognition of Allah, the natural inclination toward truth, and the primordial state of submission preceding all external socialization. This reading is grounded in the Qurʾānic account of the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*): "Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes" (Q. 7:172), understood as a pre-temporal recognition of divine sovereignty by all human souls (al-Ṭabarī, 2000, commentary on Q. 7:172; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 7:172). On this theological account, Islam is not an external imposition upon human beings but an internal restoration of their original created disposition.

The Dual Dimension of Islam: Primordial Essence and Final Sharia

A critical distinction emerges in Islamic theology between two dimensions of Islam that must be held simultaneously. The first is Islam as a universal and eternal reality of submission to Allah—shared by all prophets, rooted in human nature, and co-extensive with the entire history of divine guidance. The second is Islam as the final Sharia: the completed legal system revealed to Muḥammad ﷺ, finalized in divine legislation, and universally applicable to all humanity from that point forward. This duality is not a contradiction but a theological coherence: the essence of Islam is primordial precisely because submission to Allah is the purpose of human creation, while the Sharia is final because divine legislation reached its complete and perfected form in the Qurʾān and Sunnah. This dual dimension is essential for interpreting the argument developed throughout the paper.

Conclusion

The Qurʾānic conceptual framework establishes *islām* as a universal reality of submission to Allah rather than a historically confined religious identity. All prophets

embody and teach this submission, and all true religion is defined by it. This foundational understanding underpins the subsequent sections, which examine Adam's role as the origin of prophetic consciousness, the continuity of revelation through successive prophets, and the completion of divine guidance in Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam).

Adam (ʿAlayhi al-Salām) and the Origin of Prophetic Consciousness

Introduction

In Islamic theology, Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) occupies a foundational position extending beyond his identity as the first human being. The Qurʾān presents him as the first recipient of divine instruction, the first moral agent, and—according to the dominant interpretation of classical Sunni scholarship—the beginning of the prophetic tradition. This section develops the argument that Adam represents the origin of human religious consciousness, the point at which awareness of God, moral responsibility, and divine communication first converge in human existence. From this perspective, Islam as submission to Allah begins not with a historical community but with the creation of humanity itself.

Creation, Vicegerency, and Moral Purpose

The Qurʾān describes Adam's creation with a theological framing that immediately establishes the moral character of human existence:

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً﴾

"And when your Lord said to the angels: I am placing upon the earth a vicegerent." (Qurʾān 2:30)

The term *khalīfah* (vicegerent) is central to Islamic anthropology. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret it as designating a representative of divine authority on earth: a moral agent responsible for justice and a being entrusted with knowledge and accountability (al-Ṭabarī, 2000, commentary on Q. 2:30; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 2:30). Adam's creation is thus purposeful and moral in nature, not merely biological. Human existence begins within a framework of divine responsibility, and the first human being is, by design, a recipient of divine guidance and a bearer of moral conscience.

Divine Teaching and the Inauguration of Knowledge

The Qurʾān further records: "And He taught Adam all the names" (Q. 2:31). Classical *tafsīr* understands this as the divine granting of language and conceptual understanding, and the cognitive capacity that distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 2:31). A key theological principle follows: human consciousness is inaugurated through divine instruction. Unlike frameworks that locate the origin of knowledge in purely natural or evolutionary processes, the Qurʾān situates knowledge as revealed from the very beginning of human existence, establishing the epistemological priority of divine communication over independent human inquiry.

Adam as Recipient of Divine Words

﴿فَتَلَقَّىٰ آدَمُ مِن رَّبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

"Adam received words from his Lord, and He turned to him in forgiveness; indeed, He is the Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful." (Qurʾān 2:37)

Classical scholars differ on the precise content of these "words"—the majority regarding them as a divinely inspired formula of repentance, and a minority identifying them with the supplication recorded in Q. 7:23—but agree on their theological implications: Adam receives divine guidance; repentance is taught by revelation rather than independently invented; and divine mercy is established in direct response to human error (al-Ṭabarī, 2000, commentary on Q. 2:37; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 2:37). Moral restoration begins through divine instruction—a principle recurring throughout the prophetic tradition. This passage also establishes that the relationship between creator and first human being is communicative and relational from its inception, not merely hierarchical or legislative.

Adam's Prophetic Status

The widely accepted position among Sunni theologians is that Adam received direct divine communication, was instructed by Allah, and conveyed divine guidance to his descendants. A narration in the Musnad of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal states: "Adam was a prophet to whom Allah spoke" (Ibn Ḥanbal, 2001). While the chain of this report is subject to critical debate in hadith scholarship, Adam's role as the first human being to receive divine communication and transmit guidance to his posterity is affirmed consistently across classical *ʿaqīdah* literature. Adam therefore represents the beginning of *nubuwwah* as a

functional transmission of divine guidance—not necessarily in its formal technical definition, but in its essential communicative reality.

The Descent and the Establishment of Moral Agency

The Qurʾānic account of Adam's descent to earth is not presented as permanent condemnation but as a formative moral transition: "Then his Lord chose him, turned to him in mercy, and guided him" (Q. 20:122). Three theological principles emerge from this passage: that human error exists from the very beginning of human history, establishing the universality of human fallibility; that repentance is divinely accessible at every stage of human life; and that divine guidance continues in direct response to moral deviation. Human life thus begins not with perfection but with divine mercy and correction, a pattern characterizing the entire subsequent prophetic tradition.

Adam as the Beginning of Islam

If *islām* is defined as submission to Allah, then Adam represents the first human act of submission; the first moral awareness of divine authority; and the first reception of divine instruction. Islam, in its essential meaning, therefore begins with Adam—not as an organized religion with legal codes and ritual systems, but as a primordial state of submission to the Creator. This establishes a fundamental continuity between creation, prophethood, and human moral consciousness that is sustained throughout Islamic theological history. The concept of *fiṭrah*—that every child is born with an innate recognition of God—reinforces this continuity, reflecting Adam's original state preserved within the structure of human nature itself.

Conclusion

The Qurʾānic narrative of Adam establishes him as the origin of human moral and spiritual awareness. Through divine instruction, repentance, and sustained guidance, Adam becomes the first human being to embody *islām*—submission to Allah. Islam is therefore not introduced at a later historical stage but is rooted in the very beginning of human existence, forming the basis for the subsequent chain of prophethood.

Continuity of Prophetic Message and the Unity of Revelation

Introduction

A central principle of Qurʾānic theology is that divine guidance has never been fragmented in its essence, even as it has been historically delivered through multiple prophets and addressed to different communities. While the external forms of law (*sharāʾiʿ*) may differ across prophetic missions, the core message remains singular: the exclusive worship of Allah and the rejection of all forms of polytheism and association. This section develops the concept of prophetic continuity, demonstrating that the prophetic mission constitutes a unified historical continuum beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) and extending through all prophets until its completion in Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam).

The Unified Prophetic Message

The Qurʾān states with explicit theological force: "We did not send any messenger before you except that We revealed to him: There is no god but Me, so worship Me" (Q. 21:25). As Ibn Kathīr notes, this verse categorically establishes that all prophets carry the same core doctrine of *tawḥīd*; that the differences between prophetic communities are legal and contextual rather than doctrinal; and that there is an internal doctrinal consistency across the entire prophetic corpus (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 21:25). No prophet transmitted a message that fundamentally contradicted another in its theological substance.

Diversity of Law versus Unity of Belief

Islamic theology draws a foundational distinction between the unity of doctrine (*uṣūl al-dīn*)—comprising belief in one God, moral accountability, and the reality of prophecy—and the diversity of law (*sharāʾiʿ*)—comprising ritual practices, legal rulings, and social regulations. The Qurʾān states: "For each of you We have assigned a law and a way" (Q. 5:48). Al-Qurṭubī explains that this diversity reflects the historical circumstances of different communities, the developmental stages of human societies, and the gradual implementation of divine guidance according to human capacity and context (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 5:48). Prophetic diversity is therefore functional and adaptive rather than doctrinal and divisive.

Prophets as One Brotherhood in Faith

The Qurʾān consistently portrays prophets as members of a unified spiritual lineage, united in faith, mission, and divine authorization. The verse "All believe in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers" (Q. 2:285) establishes unity of faith among all prophets and believers, and the further declaration—"We do not distinguish between any of His messengers"—indicates that they are not competing religious founders but participants in a single divine mission directed toward a single divine purpose: the guidance of humanity.

The Concept of Taṣdīq (Confirmation)

A key Qurʾānic term in understanding prophetic continuity is *taṣdīq* (confirmation). The Qurʾān describes the final revelation as "confirming what came before it" (Q. 3:3), and this principle applies both to the Qurʾān confirming previous scriptures and to each prophet confirming earlier ones. Ibn Kathīr explains that *taṣdīq* means affirmation of the original divine truth transmitted through earlier revelations, even while those texts have undergone degrees of historical transformation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 3:3). Confirmation is thus a structural theological principle governing the entire prophetic chain, not merely a literary or rhetorical gesture.

Distortion and the Preservation of Theological Continuity

The Qurʾān acknowledges that earlier scriptures underwent distortion (*taḥrīf*): "They distort words from their proper places" (Q. 4:46). This does not negate theological continuity; rather, it establishes that original revelation was true, that distortion occurred in transmission or interpretation, and that the Qurʾān restores the original monotheistic message. The continuity is theological in its primary register rather than purely textual: the message of *tawḥīd* persists unbroken across all prophetic eras, even as the textual vehicles of earlier revelations suffered varying degrees of historical alteration.

Conclusion

The Qurʾānic evidence establishes prophethood as a single continuous reality rather than a collection of independent religious systems. Despite differences in legal rulings, all prophets share a unified message centered on *tawḥīd*, moral accountability, and submission to Allah. From Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) to Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam),

revelation unfolds as a coherent and cumulative divine narrative, providing the necessary foundation for understanding the finality of prophethood addressed in the next section.

Finality of Revelation in Muḥammad (Ṣallāllāhu ʿAlayhi wa-Sallam)

Introduction

A defining doctrine in Islamic theology is the finality of prophethood (*khātam al-nubuwwah*), which establishes Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) as the last in the chain of divine revelation. This doctrine does not negate the continuity discussed in Section 4; it signifies that continuity's completion and perfection. This section examines the Qurʾānic, prophetic, and classical theological foundations of final revelation, demonstrating that the mission of Muḥammad ﷺ represents the culmination of the divine communicative process that began with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām).

Qurʾānic Declaration of the Seal of the Prophets

﴿مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ﴾

"Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets." (Qurʾān 33:40)

Classical exegetes unanimously interpret *khātam al-nabiyyīn* as designating Muḥammad as the final prophet in chronological succession, the completion of the prophetic institution, and the cessation of new law-bearing revelation. Ibn Kathīr states that this verse establishes a definitive theological boundary—no prophet or messenger will come after Muḥammad ﷺ—reflecting a broad scholarly consensus that khātam al-nabiyyīn means "the last of the prophets," which he identifies as the uniform reading of the Companions of the Prophet (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 33:40).

Completion of Religion

A further foundational verse reinforces completion: "Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you" (Q. 5:3). Revealed at the Farewell Pilgrimage, this verse is interpreted by al-Qurṭubī as indicating the completion of doctrinal content, the completion of legal legislation, and the completion of divine favour upon humanity (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 5:3). Religion is no longer in a

developmental or preparatory stage; it has reached its final, perfected form. No subsequent addition, revision, or supplementary revelation is required or possible.

Finality, Universality, and Preservation

Unlike earlier prophets who were sent to specific communities, Muḥammad ﷺ is addressed as a universal messenger: "We have not sent you except to all of humanity" (Q. 34:28). This universality is directly linked to finality: because no further prophet will come, the final message must be universally applicable, permanently preserved, and complete in its guidance. The Qurʾān's guarantee of preservation—"Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and We will preserve it" (Q. 15:9)—ensures that the final revelation remains accessible to all humanity until the end of time. Finality is thus not only temporal but spatial and universal in its scope.

Prophetic Narration on Finality

The Prophet ﷺarticulated his position within the prophetic chain with memorable precision: "The example of me and the prophets before me is like a man who built a house... I am the final brick, and I am the Seal of the Prophets" (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, hadith no. 3535). The metaphor of the "final brick" is theologically precise: it denotes completion and structural wholeness, not replacement or negation. The house—the prophetic tradition—is made complete precisely because the final brick is in place. Muḥammad ﷺ is therefore not a rupture with the prophetic past but its fulfilment.

Conclusion

The Qurʾān and Sunnah establish a clear and decisive doctrine: Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) is the final prophet, and through him divine revelation reaches its completion. This finality fulfils rather than breaks the continuity of prophecy. The chain that began with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) reaches its perfected form in the mission of Muḥammad ﷺ, where revelation is both concluded and preserved for all humanity.

The Role of the Sunnah in Completing and Operationalizing Revelation

Introduction

The finality of revelation in Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) is not limited to the Qurʾān as a textual corpus; it is completed through the Sunnah—the recorded sayings, actions, tacit approvals, and lived example of the Prophet ﷺ. Together, the Qurʾān and Sunnah form a unified epistemic and legislative framework constituting the full articulation of divine guidance. This section examines the role of the Sunnah in explaining, implementing, and completing revelation.

Qurʾānic Authority for the Sunnah

The Qurʾān establishes the binding authority of the Prophet ﷺ through two foundational verses: "Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah" (Q. 4:80) and "Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it" (Q. 59:7). Together these verses establish that prophetic instruction carries divine authorization, that obedience to the Prophet ﷺ is equivalent to obedience to Allah, and that the Sunnah possesses independent legislative and interpretive weight alongside the Qurʾān. Al-Shāfiʿī, in his foundational work *Al-Risālah*, deployed these verses as the primary textual proof for the legal authority of Sunnah as a source of Islamic law (al-Shāfiʿī, 2005/2015).

Sunnah as Explication of the Qurʾān

A substantial portion of Islamic practice is not detailed in the Qurʾān but is explained and operationalized through the Sunnah. The Qurʾānic command "establish prayer" (ʿaqīmū al-ṣalāh) does not specify the number of units (*rakʿāt*), the physical postures, or the detailed structure of each prayer; the Prophet ﷺ provided this through direct instruction: "Pray as you have seen me pray" (Al-Bukhārī, 2001, hadith no. 631). Similarly, while the Qurʾān mandates zakat, the Sunnah defines the minimum wealth thresholds (*niṣāb*), the rates, and the categories of eligible recipients. The Sunnah thereby transforms Qurʾānic principles from general directives into fully actionable religious practice.

The Sunnah as Inspired Guidance

The Qurʾān indicates that the Prophet's speech is guided by divine revelation: "He does not speak from [mere] desire; it is nothing but revelation revealed" (Q. 53:3–4).

Classical exegetes interpret this as encompassing prophetic teachings outside of Qurʾānic recitation, including legal judgments, ethical guidance, and inspired interpretation of divine law (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 53:3–4). The Sunnah is therefore understood as divinely guided in its essential content, even when it differs from the Qurʾān in its form and mode of transmission—both drawing from the same divine source of guidance.

The Prophet as Living Model

The Qurʾān presents the Prophet ﷺ as an ethical and spiritual exemplar: "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent model" (Q. 33:21). This establishes that Islam is not purely textual but is embodied in human conduct: faith is demonstrated in lived practice; law is expressed in habituated behaviour; ethics are modelled in the character of the Prophet himself. The Sunnah thus transforms revelation from a textual system into a fully lived divine tradition, ensuring that the completion of religion is not merely theoretical but practically realizable for every Muslim in every generation.

Conclusion

The Sunnah of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is essential for the completion and operationalization of divine revelation. It clarifies the Qurʾān, embodies its teachings, and ensures its applicability across all contexts and generations. The completion of religion declared in Q. 5:3 encompasses both dimensions—al-Qurṭubī notes that this completion includes doctrinal beliefs, legal rulings, and practical implementation through the Prophet ﷺ (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 5:3). Without the Sunnah, religion would remain theoretically complete but practically inaccessible.

The System of Revealed Scriptures (Ṣuḥuf and Kutub) and Their Unity

Introduction

A central pillar of Islamic belief is the divine revelation as a structured and continuous system spanning human history. This system includes multiple revealed scriptures (*ṣuḥuf* and *kutub*) sent to various prophets, each reinforcing the same core message of *tawḥīd* and submission to Allah. This section examines the Qurʾānic and prophetic framework of revealed books, demonstrating that despite their diversity in form

and audience, they originate from a single divine source and culminate in the Qurʾān as the final and divinely preserved revelation.

The Qurʾānic Doctrine of Multiple Scriptures

The Qurʾān explicitly affirms belief in multiple divine books as a mandatory component of faith: "All believe in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers" (Q. 2:285). Revelation is thus presented as plural in its historical forms while unified in its divine origin. Islam accordingly affirms a multi-scriptural but single-origin theology: different books for different peoples and eras, but one God, one essential message, and one ultimate purpose.

The Ṣuḥuf and the Early Record of Revelation

The Qurʾān refers to earlier revelations in the form of *ṣuḥuf* (scrolls): "The scriptures of Abraham and Moses" (Q. 87:19). Classical exegetes understand *ṣuḥuf* as early revealed writings and pre-scriptural forms of divine guidance given to prophets such as Abraham and Moses, noting that although the specific contents of these scrolls are not fully preserved, their significance lies in establishing written revelation as an ancient practice (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 87:18–19). This demonstrates that revelation existed in documented form from the earliest stages of prophetic history, establishing divine communication as a structured process preceding the major revealed books.

The Major Revealed Books

Islamic tradition identifies four major scriptures: the Tawrah (Torah) given to Moses (Mūsā ʿalayhi al-salām); the Zabūr (Psalms) given to David (Dāwūd ʿalayhi al-salām); the Injīl (Gospel) given to Jesus (ʿĪsā ʿalayhi al-salām); and the Qurʾān given to Muḥammad ﷺ. The Qurʾān confirms: "He sent down the Torah and the Gospel, before, as guidance for the people" (Q. 3:3–4). Despite differences in form, audience, and legal content, all these books originate from Allah and contain guidance directed toward their respective communities. The unity of their message is expressed with particular clarity in Q. 98:5: "They were not commanded except to worship Allah, sincerely devoting religion to Him." All scriptures are thus variations of a single divine message adapted to different peoples in different historical circumstances.

The Qurʾān as Final and Preserved Scripture

Unlike previous scriptures, the Qurʾān is described as protected from corruption by divine guarantee: "Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and We will preserve it" (Q. 15:9). Classical scholars interpret this as a guarantee of textual preservation, the absence of lasting alteration or irrecoverable loss, and the permanent authority of Qurʾānic guidance across time, understood to encompass both the fixed Arabic text and the unbroken chain of oral transmission through the ḥuffāẓ (memorizers of the Qurʾān) (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 15:9). The Qurʾān thus differs from earlier scriptures not in its essential message but in its finality and preservation. It functions simultaneously as confirmation (*taṣdīq*), criterion (*muhāymin*), and completion (*ikmāl*) of all prior divine revelation (Q. 5:48). This triple function establishes a hierarchical yet continuous structure within the entire system of divine revelation.

Preservation versus Distortion

The Qurʾān's acknowledgment of *taḥrīf* in earlier scriptures (Q. 4:46) does not negate their divine origin but recognizes the vulnerability of human textual transmission over time (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 4:46; al-Ṭabarī, 2000, commentary on Q. 4:46). The Qurʾān's exemption from this process by divine guarantee ensures that the final revelation preserves the original divine message in its authentic and complete form, serving as the authoritative criterion against which all claims to revealed truth are to be measured.

Conclusion

The Islamic doctrine of revealed scriptures presents a unified theological system in which multiple books were sent to different prophets, all conveying the same essential message of submission to Allah. The Qurʾān stands as the final, preserved, and universal scripture, confirming and completing all previous revelation. This reinforces the paper's central thesis: that Islam represents the continuity and culmination of divine guidance beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) and concluding with Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam).

Prophetic Foretelling of Muḥammad (Ṣallāllāhu ʿAlayhi wa-Sallam) in Earlier Scriptures

Introduction

Within Islamic theology, the relationship between the Qurʾān and earlier scriptures is not limited to confirmation and correction; it extends to the claim that previous revelations contained explicit foretelling of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam). This doctrine forms an important component of the Qurʾānic understanding of revelatory continuity, reinforcing the argument that all prophetic history is directed toward a single divine culmination. This section examines Qurʾānic affirmations, classical Islamic interpretations of earlier scriptural passages, and the theological significance of prophetic foretelling within the Islamic framework.

Qurʾānic Affirmation

﴿الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِندَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَاةِ وَالْإِنجِيلِ﴾

"Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel..." (Qurʾān 7:157)

Classical exegetes interpret "written with them" (*maktūban ʿindahum*) as referring to descriptions of Muḥammad ﷺ recognizable to learned scholars of previous traditions (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 7:157). The Qurʾān thus asserts not only theological continuity but explicit prefiguration of the final prophet within the body of earlier divine revelations.

Classical Islamic Engagement with Earlier Scriptural Passages

Islamic scholarship has historically identified several passages in earlier scriptures as containing references to Muḥammad ﷺ. Deuteronomy 18:18—"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren..."—is read in the Islamic tradition through the criteria of: resemblance to Moses in bringing a comprehensive law-bearing mission; the description of "brethren" as denoting the Ishmaelite lineage; and the universal scope of the described prophetic authority (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, Vol. 2). Classical scholars argue that Muḥammad ﷺ fulfils these criteria more completely than subsequent Israelite prophets, given the comprehensive legal system and universal scope of his mission. Similarly, Isaiah 42 is read by Muslim exegetes as describing a servant who brings justice to nations and establishes a new covenant of universal scope—attributes consistent, in the Islamic reading,

with the mission of the final prophet. These interpretations operate within Islamic confessional epistemology and should be understood as such, rather than as claims about the internal exegetical traditions of Judaism or Christianity.

The Foretelling by Jesus (ʿAlayhi al-Salām)

﴿وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِن بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ﴾

"And giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Aḥmad." (Qurʾān 61:6)

Ibn Kathīr explains that Jesus (ʿalayhi al-salām) confirmed the coming of a final messenger, establishing a direct prophetic continuity between his mission and that of Muḥammad ﷺ. The Islamic interpretation identifies the Paraclete of the Gospel of John with this announcement, understanding the Greek *Periklytōs* (praised, glorified) as corresponding to the Arabic name *Aḥmad* (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 61:6). Within the Qurʾānic narrative, even the earlier prophets actively announce the final stage of revelation, reinforcing the unity and directionality of the entire prophetic tradition.

Conclusion

The Qurʾān and Islamic tradition maintain that earlier scriptures contained prefigurations of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, forming part of a continuous prophetic narrative. The coming of Muḥammad ﷺ is presented not as an isolated historical event but as the fulfilment of a long-established divine trajectory, reinforcing the paper's central argument that all prophetic revelation, beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), is directed toward a single unified culmination.

Theological Implications of the Primordial Conception of Islam

Introduction

Having established through the foregoing analysis that Islam in its Qurʾānic sense constitutes a primordial and continuous divine reality, this section examines the broader theological implications that follow. These implications bear upon the Islamic understanding of divine acceptance across history, the resolution of apparent paradoxes in the doctrine of finality, the question of the religious other within an Islamic theological framework, and the conceptual clarification of Islam's universal claim. Taken together,

these reflections consolidate the paper's central argument and demonstrate its significance for Islamic theological discourse.

Islam as the Criterion of Divine Acceptance across History

The Qurʾānic declaration "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" (Q. 3:19) carries profound implications when read alongside the doctrine of prophetic continuity. If Islam denotes universal submission to Allah rather than a specific confessional community, then divine acceptance across all prophetic eras is evaluated by the same fundamental criterion: sincere submission to the one God according to whatever authentic guidance was accessible to a given people at a given time (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, commentary on Q. 3:19; cf. Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 2:112). The Qurʾānic description of Abraham as "a ḥanīf, a Muslim" (Q. 3:67) and of the disciples of Jesus as declaring "we are Muslims" (Q. 3:52) is therefore not a retroactive appropriation but a theological affirmation of the universal reality of submission that predates and undergirds all particular religious communities.

Resolving the Apparent Paradox: Primordial yet Final

A central conceptual challenge in the doctrine under examination is the simultaneous claim that Islam is primordial—rooted in the creation of Adam—and final—completed in the revelation to Muḥammad ﷺ. This apparent paradox is resolved through the distinction introduced in Section 2.7 between the unchanging essence of submission (*islām* as *dīn al-fiṭrah*, the religion of human nature) and its historically articulated legal forms through different prophets and different *sharāʾiʿ*. This distinction between universal Islam as *dīn al-fiṭrah* and the final Sharia is implicit throughout classical ʿaqīdah literature (Nasr et al., 2015); for a modern academic treatment, see Shehu (2018). The essence of Islam has always existed because submission to Allah is the purpose of human creation; the final Sharia is final because divine legislation reached its complete and perfected form in the Qurʾān and Sunnah. These are not contradictory claims but two aspects of a single coherent theological reality.

The Status of Pre-Final-Revelation Believers

A question that naturally arises from this doctrine concerns the status of those who submitted to Allah through earlier prophets. Islamic theology is clear that those followers of previous prophets who maintained authentic *tawḥīd* and adhered to their respective

revealed guidance were *muslimūn* in the essential sense—submitters to Allah, as reflected in the Qurʾān's description of Jesus's disciples declaring themselves Muslims (Q. 3:52) and its identification of Abraham as a ḥanīf, a Muslim (Q. 3:67), which classical exegetes interpret as evidence that the essence of Islam predates the final prophetic dispensation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, commentary on Q. 3:52, Q. 3:67). However, classical Islamic theology equally emphasizes that after the advent of Muḥammad's prophethood (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam), the authentic expression of Islam is that which was revealed and practised in the final prophetic dispensation. The completion of revelation creates a new category of universal obligation: all humanity is called to the final and complete form of divine guidance, not to the superseded legal dispensations of earlier prophets.

Addressing the Misconception of a Seventh-Century Origin

The common assumption that Islam originated in the seventh century CE reflects a confusion between two distinct phenomena: the historical emergence of the Muslim community as a distinct religious-social entity under Muḥammad's prophethood (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam), and the primordial essence of Islam as submission to Allah. The former is indeed a seventh-century phenomenon; the latter, according to Qurʾānic theology, predates human history itself, existing as a divine reality within the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) affirmed by all souls prior to their entry into the world (Q. 7:172). The seventh-century revelation is therefore the historical completion and universal articulation of an eternal truth—the moment at which a primordial reality receives its final, definitive, and permanently preserved expression. To confuse historical completion with historical origin is to misread the very structure of Islamic theological time.

Islamic Universalism and the Primordial Foundation

The primordial conception of Islam provides the theological basis for Islamic universalism. Because the essence of Islam is universal submission to Allah, it transcends ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries by definition: the capacity for submission is co-extensive with human nature itself, grounded in *fiṭrah*. At the same time, the final Sharia provides a particular and definitive legal articulation of this universal reality applicable to all humanity. Islamic universalism is therefore not an abstract claim imposed from outside but is grounded in the very structure of human nature as divinely created.

Implications for Theological Education and Daʿwah

Understanding Islam as the primordial religion carries significant implications for Islamic theological education and outreach. It positions Muslims not as adherents of a new religion but as inheritors and practitioners of the original divine disposition (*fiṭrah*), expressed fully and finally in the Qurʾān and Sunnah. This framing deepens appreciation for the theological continuity between the prophetic figures revered across traditions and the final revelation, and provides a theologically grounded response to the objection that Islam is a merely regional seventh-century phenomenon.

Conclusion

The theological implications of Islam's primordial nature are wide-ranging and foundational. They illuminate the Islamic understanding of divine acceptance across history, resolve the apparent paradox of a religion both primordial and final, clarify the status of pre-final-revelation believers, and provide a coherent basis for Islamic universalism. Most importantly, they establish that the revelation brought by Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) is not a rupture with the past but its fulfilment—the perfection of a divine reality as old as humanity itself.

Conclusion

This final section synthesizes the arguments presented throughout the paper and consolidates its central thesis: that Islam, in its Qurʾānic and theological sense as *islām* (submission to Allah), represents both the primordial reality of human existence and the final, perfected expression of divine revelation through Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam). The preceding sections have demonstrated that Islamic theology constructs a unified narrative of revelation beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), continuing through successive prophets, and culminating in the Qurʾān as the final preserved scripture.

Section 2 established that *islām* is not a historically confined identity but a universal ontological reality of submission to Allah, presented in the Qurʾān as the essence of all prophetic missions. Section 3 demonstrated that Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) represents the first human being, the first recipient of divine instruction, and the beginning of moral and spiritual awareness, making the origin of human religious consciousness coterminous with

divine communication itself. Section 4 showed that all prophets share a single message centred on *tawḥīd*, despite differences in legal systems, establishing prophethood as a continuous chain rather than a collection of isolated religious episodes. Sections 5 and 6 established the doctrine of finality—that Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) is explicitly the Seal of the Prophets (Q. 33:40)—and that the Qurʾān and Sunnah together form a complete, embodied, and practically realizable system of divine guidance. Section 7 demonstrated that all revealed books originate from a single divine source with a unified message, with the Qurʾān serving as the final and divinely preserved scripture. Section 8 showed that earlier scriptures contained anticipations of Muḥammad ﷺ, reinforcing that prophetic history is a continuous and unified trajectory toward a single culmination. Section 9 examined the wide-ranging theological implications of this entire framework.

When integrated, these findings produce a coherent theological framework characterized by five interlocking principles. First, Islam as primordial reality: *islām* exists as the original state of submission beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), embedded in human nature as *fiṭrah*, and reinforced through divine instruction across all prophetic history. Second, historical continuity: all prophets reaffirm this same reality, each delivering the same essential message of monotheism while addressing the needs of their respective communities. Third, progressive revelation: divine guidance advances through *ṣuḥuf* and *kutub* in a structured communicative system moving toward its culmination. Fourth, final completion: this progression culminates in the Qurʾān and Sunnah, revealed to Muḥammad ﷺ, the final prophet and universal messenger. Fifth, integrated guidance: Islamic revelation is unified in its divine origin, continuous in its historical unfolding, progressive in its form, final in its completion, and universal in its application.

The central thesis of this paper can now be stated in its fully supported form: Islam, when understood as total submission to Allah (*islām*), constitutes the primordial religion of humanity beginning with Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām), and the final revelation brought by Prophet Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam) represents the completion of this continuous divine tradition rather than its point of origin. This conclusion is fully supported by Qurʾānic theology, classical *tafsīr*, and prophetic tradition, all of which emphasize unity rather than multiplicity in divine religion.

The Qurʾānic worldview presents religion not as a sequence of competing systems but as a single divine reality unfolding through human history. Differences between prophetic communities are structural and legal in character, never theological in their essential content. The core message remains constant across all prophetic eras: worship Allah alone and live in accordance with divine guidance. From Adam (ʿalayhi al-salām) to Muḥammad (ṣallāllāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam), the story of revelation is not a story of new religious beginnings—it is the story of one eternal truth gradually disclosed and finally perfected. Islam is both the beginning of human spiritual existence in its primordial form and the completion of divine revelation in its final, universal articulation. This dual reality reflects the Qurʾānic principle that truth is one, guidance is one, and the path to Allah is one—expressed across history, perfected in revelation, and preserved for all humanity.

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