

# ANSWERING THE CRITICS

*Does Yahweh's Covenant Law Belong in the Category of "Religion"?  
And Does Religion Only Create Problems Rather Than Solve Them?*

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*A Covenant Apologetic Study*

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*Doctrinal Authority: The Tanakh (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim) alone*

## Introduction: The Objection We Must Take Seriously

Among the most common objections raised against covenant governance — and against the very premise of **Yahweh's** law as a framework for national life — is this:

***"Religion doesn't solve problems. Religion creates them. Look at history — every major war, every major atrocity, every act of persecution has been done in the name of God. Keep religion out of governance."***

This objection carries real weight in the modern world. It is made not only by secular critics but by many sincere people who have watched religion manipulated, weaponized, and corrupted across centuries of human history. It deserves a full, honest, and evidence-based answer — not a dismissal.

This study provides that answer. It does so in three movements. First, it challenges the foundational premise of the objection: the claim that **Yahweh's** covenant law is 'religion' in the sense critics mean. Second, it presents the historical evidence that secular governance — the proposed alternative — has a far bloodier record than its advocates acknowledge. Third, it returns to the Tanakh's own testimony to show what the critics are actually responding to — not the covenant of **Yahweh**, but the corruption of it by human beings who refused to walk in it.

The critics are right that something has caused unspeakable harm throughout history. But they have misidentified the culprit. And the Tanakh itself made this case 3,000 years before the critics were born.

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## PART ONE

### The First Error: Equating Yahweh's Covenant with "Religion"

#### I. The Word 'Religion' Does Not Translate Into Hebrew

The first and most decisive response to this objection must be linguistic and structural: **there is no word in Biblical Hebrew that corresponds to the modern Western concept of "religion."**

This is not a minor footnote. It is foundational. The English word 'religion' derives from the Latin *religio*, referring to a system of ritual observance, belief, and institutional practice — something that exists alongside civic life, potentially separated from it, personal in nature, subject to tolerance or suppression. Western secularism was built on this understanding. The 'separation of church and state' assumes religion is one sphere of life that can be walled off from governance, commerce, and public life.

The Hebrew Scriptures operate from an entirely different architecture. What the Tanakh describes is not 'religion' — it is **brit** (בְּרִית) — covenant. And covenant is not a religious

category. It is a **governing, comprehensive, constitutional category** that encompasses civil law, criminal law, agricultural policy, land inheritance, judicial procedure, care for the poor, treatment of the foreigner, commerce, debt relief, and the very structure of governance itself.

The Quran itself offers a parallel witness on this point. As scholars of religious terminology have noted, the Arabic word *deen* — often translated 'religion' in modern editions — was translated throughout its history simply as 'law.' The concept of religion as a separable, private sphere of belief is a distinctly modern Western construction, emerging primarily from post-Reformation European political thought after the catastrophic religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In other words: when critics say 'religion doesn't solve problems,' they are speaking of a concept — institutionalized, hierarchical, sectarian religious practice — that the Tanakh itself does not describe or endorse as the governing model. **Yahweh's** covenant is not Christianity. It is not Islam. It is not any institutional religion. It predates them all and is not reducible to any of them.

## II. What Religion Actually Is — And What the Covenant Is Not

The critics who say 'religion causes wars' are typically pointing at a recognizable historical pattern:

**Institutional hierarchies** — popes, caliphs, high priests — who accumulate political power in the name of the divine.

**Sectarian competition** — 'our interpretation of God' versus 'yours,' producing crusades, inquisitions, and sectarian civil war.

**Human doctrine elevated to divine status** — church councils, hadiths, rabbinical rulings treated as binding revelation over and above the foundational text.

**Political manipulation of faith** — rulers using religious authority to legitimize oppression, conquest, and exploitation.

Now examine **Yahweh's** covenant law against each of these categories:

**No institutional hierarchy above the law.** The Tanakh explicitly warns against this.

The king of Israel in Devarim (Deuteronomy) 17 is not above the covenant — he is its servant and must write his own copy of it and read it daily. When Israelite kings violated this, the prophets rebuked them publicly by the authority of **Yahweh's** word alone.

**No sectarian competition.** The covenant of **Yahweh** does not compete with itself.

There is one covenant, one law-giver, one standard. The divisions that tore religious Europe apart for centuries were not divisions within the Torah — they were divisions within human interpretation and institutional power.

**No human doctrine elevated to divine authority.** Miqdash Bethel's governing standard is explicit: **the Tanakh alone is doctrinal authority.** Talmud, Church councils, and hadiths are historical reference — not binding law. **Commentary is not covenant.** This is the precise distinction **Yahweh's** law demands: **'You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it' — Devarim 4:2.**

**No political manipulation of the covenant.** The covenant of Yahweh is self-correcting. It contains within itself the prophetic standard by which any human ruler — king, priest, or judge — can be measured and rebuked. This is precisely what the prophets did. They did not invent a new religion. They called Israel back to the covenant that already existed.

The conclusion is unavoidable: **what the critics condemn as 'religion' is precisely what Yahweh's covenant law prohibits.** The corruption critics point to is not the covenant functioning — it is the covenant being violated. These are opposite things.

### III. The Tanakh's Own Distinction: Covenant Versus Religious Corruption

The Tanakh is not silent on this distinction. It is, in fact, the world's oldest and most sustained critique of institutionalized religious corruption. The prophets of Israel — **Yeshayahu** (Isaiah), **Yirmeyahu** (Jeremiah), **Amos**, **Michah** (Micah), **Hoshea** (Hosea) — spent their lives confronting exactly what modern critics condemn: rulers and priests who used the name of **Yahweh** to justify oppression, exploitation, and injustice.

***"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.***

***Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.***

***But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."***

***— Amos 5:21–22, 24***

This is **Yahweh** Himself speaking — and He is condemning the religious performance of a people who had abandoned His covenant justice. The critique of empty religion in the Tanakh is more devastating, more comprehensive, and more ancient than anything the modern secular critic has offered. **Yahweh** was the first to say: 'Your religion, without covenant justice, is worthless to Me.'

***"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you***

***but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?"***

***— Michah (Micah) 6:8***

The critics are, in one sense, repeating the prophets of Israel. They have simply made the error of blaming Yahweh's covenant for the failure of human beings to walk in it — the very same error the Tanakh addresses across thirty centuries of text.

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## PART TWO

### The Second Error: Assuming Secular Governance Is the Solution

## I. The Unexamined Premise of the Critics

The objection 'religion creates problems, not solutions' carries an unstated assumption: that secular governance — governance without reference to any divine law or transcendent moral authority — produces better outcomes. This assumption is presented as settled fact. It is not. It is one of the most consequential and least examined claims in modern political thought.

The historical record of secular governance — particularly in the twentieth century, when secular ideologies held unprecedented state power — must be examined with the same rigor the critics apply to religion.

## II. What the Historical Record Actually Shows

Political scientist R.J. Rummel of the University of Hawaii spent his career documenting what he termed 'democide' — murder by governments. His documented findings are among the most important and least discussed facts in modern political history:

**Over 169 million people were murdered by governments in the twentieth century alone.** The overwhelming majority were killed not in the name of religion but by explicitly secular — and in most cases explicitly anti-religious — ideological regimes.

The figures by regime are staggering:

**Mao Zedong's China (1949–1976):** estimated 49–78 million deaths from state violence, forced famine, and political purges. Mao explicitly condemned religion as 'poison.' His regime was among the most aggressively anti-religious in history.

**Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union (1924–1953):** estimated 6–20 million killed through purges, gulags, forced collectivization, and engineered famine. The Soviet state conducted systematic campaigns to eliminate religious institutions, close houses of worship, and imprison or execute clergy.

**Pol Pot's Cambodia (1975–1979):** 1.5 to 2 million killed out of a population of 6.5 million — approximately one in four Cambodians. The Khmer Rouge was explicitly secular, targeting Buddhist monks, Catholic communities, and Muslim minorities alongside all other perceived class enemies.

**Adolf Hitler's Germany (1933–1945):** 6 million Jewish dead in the Holocaust; total war deaths in the tens of millions. Whatever Hitler's personal beliefs, his regime operated on racial-biological secular ideology, not biblical covenant law.

As professor H. Allen Orr of the University of Rochester observed: "The twentieth century was an experiment in secularism that produced secular evil, responsible for the unprecedented murder of more than 100 million." This figure is not disputed. It is not a religious apologetic. **It is documented historical data.**

## III. The Pattern That Emerges

Historian R.J. Rummel's research identified the decisive variable in government mass murder: not religion or lack of religion — but **concentration of power without accountability.**

His conclusion deserves direct quotation. Describing communist regimes he wrote that what made them so lethal was their 'seizure of all the state's instruments of force and coercion and their immediate use to destroy or control all independent sources of power, such as the church, the professions, private businesses, schools, and the family.' The secular state, when it eliminates every independent moral authority — including religious institutions — removes the only countervailing forces capable of saying 'no' to absolute power.

This finding is historically precise. In every case where secular totalitarianism achieved its greatest death tolls, it had first systematically dismantled religious and moral institutions. The church — imperfect as it often was — stood as one of the few structures capable of challenging the state's claim to absolute authority. When the secular state eliminated it, nothing remained to check the state's appetite.

**Yahweh's** covenant law builds this check into its structure. The prophet answers to **Yahweh** alone — and is therefore free to stand before any king and say: 'You have sinned.' Eliyahu (Elijah) said it to Ach'av (Ahab). Natan (Nathan) said it to David. Yirmeyahu said it to the last kings of Yehudah. The covenant creates an authority above the state that the state cannot eliminate — because that authority is not institutional. It is textual and transcendent.

#### IV. Answering the Specific Objections

**Objection 1: 'The Crusades, the Inquisition, religious wars — religion has caused millions of deaths.'**

##### THE ANSWER:

This is true and must not be minimized. Terrible things were done in the name of Christianity, Islam, and corrupted religious institutions across centuries. But two responses are necessary:

**First:** when Christianity launched the Crusades, it was acting in direct violation of the covenantal principles it claimed to represent. The Crusades were not the Torah. The Inquisition was not the covenant of Yahweh. They were the corruption of borrowed religious language in the service of political and economic power — precisely what the Tanakh's prophets condemned throughout their ministries.

**Second:** the death tolls from religious wars across the entirety of recorded history are dwarfed by the death tolls of the secular twentieth century alone. Scholars Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod, in their three-volume *Encyclopedia of Wars*, surveyed 1,763 wars in recorded history. Of these, approximately 123 — fewer than 7 percent — could be classified as primarily religious in motivation. The remaining 93 percent were driven by political, economic, territorial, and ethnic factors.

**Objection 2: 'You can't impose your beliefs on others through governance.'**

##### THE ANSWER:

Every governance system imposes a set of values on the people it governs. Secular governance imposes the values of secularism — including the belief that transcendent

moral authority has no legitimate role in public life. This is not a neutral position. It is itself a philosophical and, some would argue, spiritual conviction.

The more precise question is not whether values will be imposed — they always are — but which values, grounded in what authority, accountable to what standard? Yahweh's covenant answers: grounded in a law that no human being invented and that no human being can change; accountable to a standard that stands above kings, armies, and institutional power. The secular state answers: grounded in whoever holds power, accountable to whatever that power decides.

The Tanakh was not written by kings. It was written to confront them.

### **Objection 3: 'Every religion claims to have the right law. How is yours different?'**

#### **THE ANSWER:**

This is the sharpest version of the objection and deserves the most direct answer. The covenant of **Yahweh** is not a denomination. It is not a sect. It does not compete with other religions for institutional supremacy. It makes one specific, verifiable claim: that the law given at Sinai — recorded in the Tanakh — is the constitutional charter of **Yahweh's** governance, and that its provisions can be examined, studied, tested, and evaluated on their own terms.

The Tanakh's covenant law protects the foreigner (Vayikra 19:34), prohibits judicial partiality (Devarim 1:17), mandates debt release (Devarim 15), protects the laborer's wages (Vayikra 19:13), and makes the king himself subject to the same law as the common man (Devarim 17:18–20). These are not abstract theological propositions. They are testable social provisions. Any society that implemented them would produce measurable outcomes in economic equity, judicial fairness, and social cohesion.

The invitation to critics is not to 'believe in a religion.' It is to examine a document — the Tanakh — and assess whether its governance provisions, honestly applied, would produce a more just society than any secular alternative history has yet delivered.

### **Objection 4: 'The Tanakh itself records wars and violence done in Yahweh's name.'**

#### **THE ANSWER:**

This objection requires honest engagement. The Tanakh does record military campaigns conducted under **Yahweh's** direction — particularly in the conquest of Kena'an (Canaan). These texts are difficult, and no intellectually honest covenant thinker can pretend otherwise.

Three responses are necessary. **First:** the military campaigns of the Yehoshua era were specific, geographically bounded, historically situated commands — not a universal mandate for conquest in **Yahweh's** name across all time. The prophets after Yehoshua never instruct Israel to expand by force. The covenant vision of Yeshayahu 2 and Michah 4 is explicitly peaceful — the nations flowing to Yerushalayim voluntarily, not under military compulsion.

**Second:** every act of violence in the Tanakh that **Yahweh** condemns is condemned in the text. The massacre of the prophets of Ba'al by Eliyahu is itself later condemned through the prophet **Hoshea** (Hosea 1:4–5). The Tanakh is not a book of uncritical

triumphalism. It is a brutally honest record of a people in covenant with **Yahweh** — including their failures, their violence, and their consequences.

**Third:** the bloodiest passages of the Tanakh describe Israel acting on its own authority — departing from the covenant, not fulfilling it. The violence **Yahweh** sanctions is almost always defensive or judicial. The violence He condemns is the violence human beings generate when they abandon His law.

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## PART THREE

### The Third Movement: What the Critics Are Really Responding To

#### I. The Tanakh Agrees with the Critics' Diagnosis — and Disagrees with Their Prescription

Here is the deepest and most important point in this entire study: the critics are not wrong about what they have observed. They have observed centuries of institutional religious corruption. They have watched kings and priests use divine language to justify oppression. They have seen holy wars launched for political and economic gain. They have seen the poor exploited by religious institutions that claimed to represent **Yahweh**.

The Tanakh has seen all of this too — and said so first, and said it more powerfully, and said it across thirty centuries of prophetic testimony. The prophets of Israel are the world's oldest and most uncompromising critics of institutionalized religious corruption. **Yahweh** Himself, through **Yeshayahu**, condemned Israel's religious performance while covenant justice was absent:

***"When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.***

***Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."***

**— Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 1:15–17**

The critics and the prophets are pointing at the same thing. Where they diverge is in the prescription. The critics say: 'remove **Yahweh**'s governance and replace it with secular reason.' The prophets say: 'return to **Yahweh**'s covenant, which you abandoned — and which requires justice, not ritual.'

The twentieth century demonstrated what happens when the critics' prescription is followed. Secular reason, absent a transcendent moral authority, produced the most industrialized mass murder in human history. The prophets' prescription — covenant

justice rooted in **Yahweh's** law — has never been given a full, sustained opportunity. The closest approximations produced exactly what the covenant promised: rest, justice, and peace.

## II. The Core Distinction the Critics Miss

**What has caused conflict throughout history is not Yahweh's covenant law. It is three specific human failures that the covenant itself identifies and prohibits:**

**1. Human beings who claim divine authority they do not possess.** The Tanakh calls this false prophecy — and the penalty for it is severe. The covenant is not a blank check for anyone to claim **Yahweh's** authority for their own agenda. It is a written text, publicly available, against which every claim can be tested. **'To the Torah and to the testimony: if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' — Yeshayahu 8:20.**

**2. Covenant law reduced to ritual without justice.** This is precisely what Amos, Yeshayahu, Michah, and Yirmeyahu condemned. Religion that performs its ceremonies while oppressing the poor, corrupting the courts, and ignoring the foreigner is not the covenant of **Yahweh** — it is its counterfeit. The Tanakh is explicit: **Yahweh** is not interested in worship divorced from covenant justice.

**3. Power concentrated in human hands without covenant accountability.** This is the variable that produces mass atrocity in every system — religious or secular. When no authority exists above the state, the state becomes god. When no law exists above the king, the king becomes law. **Yahweh's** covenant is specifically designed to prevent this: the law is written, the prophets are raised up, the king is made subject to the covenant rather than above it.

Remove these three corruptions — and what remains is not 'religion' in any sense the critics mean. What remains is a covenant governance system grounded in a transcendent and written law, administered by covenant servants accountable to that law, producing justice for the poor, the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan — which **Yahweh** makes the specific test of covenant faithfulness in text after text after text.

## III. The Final Answer

The critics are right that something has caused extraordinary harm throughout human history. But they have made a category error in identifying the cause. What has caused harm is not **Yahweh's** covenant law. What has caused harm is:

**Human beings claiming Yahweh's authority while violating His law.**

**Human beings reducing covenant to ceremony while abandoning justice.**

**Human beings concentrating power without covenant accountability.**

And what has caused the greatest documented harm in human history — surpassing all 'religious' wars combined — is the elimination of **Yahweh's** covenant framework altogether and the construction of purely secular states accountable to no law above their own power.

The Tanakh does not ask critics to 'believe in religion.' It asks them to examine a specific written covenant — tested across thirty centuries of human history — and to

ask honestly: which governance framework, applied with integrity, has produced the most durable evidence of justice, equity, and peace? And which framework, applied without transcendent accountability, has produced the most documented destruction?

The answer is in the record. The covenant of **Yahweh** is not the problem the critics describe. It is — when honored — the most radical, most just, and most comprehensive solution to the problem of human governance that has ever been written.

***"For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab; and you walk in their counsels, that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing; so you shall bear the scorn of My people."  
— Michah (Micah) 6:16***

When leaders abandon **Yahweh's** covenant for human political counsel — the result is desolation. The Tanakh knew this. The twentieth century confirmed it.

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#### **SUMMARY: ANSWERING THE CRITICS**

**The Objection:** Religion only creates problems, not solutions. Yahweh's law is religion.

**Response 1:** Yahweh's covenant is not 'religion.' There is no Hebrew word for religion. The covenant is a constitutional governance framework — civic, judicial, economic, and social in scope.

**Response 2:** Secular governance — the critics' alternative — produced the greatest documented mass murder in human history: over 100 million killed by explicitly secular ideological states in the 20th century alone.

**Response 3:** The Tanakh's prophets made the critics' argument first, 3,000 years ago — condemning religious corruption while calling Israel back to covenant justice. The solution is not less covenant; it is more covenant, honestly applied.

**The Governing Principle:** The problem is never Yahweh's covenant law. The problem is always human beings who claim its authority while refusing to walk in it — whether under religious or secular banners.

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