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Deconstructing the Discourse of the Jewish “Chosen People” in Fakhruddin al-Razi's *Mafātih al-Ghaib*

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Abstract

This study critically deconstructs the theological exclusivism of Judaism, particularly the doctrine of the “chosen people” (*Am Segulah*), through the hermeneutical lens of Fakhruddin al-Razi's *Mafātih al-Ghaib*. Using a qualitative approach based on historical-critical and intertextual analysis, this study examines how al-Razi employs rational theology (*ilm al-kalam*) and dialectical reasoning (*al-jadal*) to challenge claims of perpetual ethnic-religious supremacy. The findings reveal three epistemological maneuvers: (1) *Takhsīs az-Zamān* (temporal specification), which limits the claim of perpetual privilege in *fadhhdhātukum ‘alal-‘ālamīn*; (2) rejection of genetic determinism through the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 124, affirming that Divine leadership is nullified by *ẓulm* (injustice); and (3) a shift from inherited virtue (*Maubūb*) toward ethical merit based on human agency (*Iktisāb*). Thus, al-Razi's interpretation transcends classical polemics and advances an ethical universalism in which Divine favor is not determined by lineage but by moral integrity and responsibility. This study implies that al-Razi's hermeneutical framework offers a relevant theological basis for promoting religious moderation, resisting sectarian and exclusivist claims, and developing a more inclusive understanding of religious ethics. It also encourages contemporary Muslim communities to engage in critical self-reflection concerning similar tendencies toward fanaticism and exclusive truth claims.

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Introduction

The relationship between religion and cross-cultural interaction has long been characterized by a persistent paradox. On the normative level, monotheistic religions promote universal values such as justice, equality, and human dignity. In practice, however, religious doctrines have frequently been transformed into instruments for legitimizing exclusion, domination, and even violence. One of the principal causes of this phenomenon is the emergence of hegemonic truth claims, namely the conviction that a particular religious community possesses an absolute monopoly over divine truth and salvation. Such claims often arise from particularistic and exclusivist interpretations of religious teachings, ultimately generating social segregation and intergroup hostility (Tajrid, 2012).

Exclusive interpretations of sacred texts tend to construct a theological worldview in which salvation is perceived as the sole entitlement of a specific community. This perspective not only reinforces collective superiority but also encourages the marginalization and dehumanization of

groups situated outside the boundaries of primordial religious identity (Bandur, 2019). Within the historical development of the Abrahamic traditions, one of the most influential manifestations of this phenomenon is the Jewish doctrine of the “Chosen People” (*Am Segulah*). Initially, the notion of chosenness was understood as a form of *noblesse oblige*, signifying a special responsibility entrusted by God to the Children of Israel following the covenant at Mount Sinai (Afdillah, 2016). Nevertheless, the historical trajectory of this doctrine underwent a significant transformation. Following the Babylonian Exile and the consolidation of rabbinic authority, the concept gradually shifted from an ethical-spiritual mandate into a form of genealogical and biological privilege. Consequently, Jewish identity increasingly became associated with racial exclusivism rather than moral responsibility (Aulia et al., 2026).

This transformation produced important theological implications. Divine favor and salvation came to be perceived as privileges attached to ethnic lineage, while those outside the community (*Goyim*) were positioned as secondary before God. Although rooted in ancient religious history, the discourse of the “Chosen People” remains highly relevant in contemporary sociological and political discussions. Various studies indicate that Zionist narratives have often appropriated this doctrine to justify claims of ethnic superiority, territorial expansion, and political domination (Sapsuha & Hasaruddin, 2024).

As the final revelation within the Abrahamic tradition, the Qur’an engages extensively with the theological discourse surrounding the Children of Israel and the People of the Book. Numerous Qur’anic passages recount their historical experiences, religious attitudes, and interactions with prophetic guidance while simultaneously addressing theological distortions that emerged within their tradition (Rahman, 2018). Through an intertextual engagement with biblical narratives, the Qur’an seeks to correct historical and theological misconceptions and to reorient religious understanding toward the principles of justice and accountability before God (Wijaya, 2022).

One of the central Qur’anic texts in this debate is Surah al-Baqarah 47: “*wa annī faddaltukum ‘alā al-‘ālamīn*” (“and that I favored you above all peoples”). This verse is frequently invoked by Jewish apologists as evidence of the perpetual superiority of the Children of Israel. However, the Qur’an consistently rejects the notion that divine favor constitutes an unconditional and eternal entitlement based solely on lineage. As reflected in QS al-Baqarah 111–113, claims of exclusive salvation are explicitly challenged and replaced by a universal principle that links divine acceptance to faith and righteous conduct rather than ethnic identity. Despite this theological critique, Qur’anic discussions concerning the Children of Israel are often misinterpreted within orientalist discourse as expressions of anti-Semitism. In reality, the Qur’anic critique is directed toward theological deviations, rebellious attitudes, and moral transgressions rather than toward an ethnic group as such (M. M. Amin, 2020).

Scholarly discussions concerning the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) and Qur’anic intertextuality have received considerable attention in contemporary Islamic studies. For instance, studies by Yanti (2022) examine the concept of *Ahl al-Kitāb* through contemporary exegetical works such as *Tafsir al-Mishbah* and *Tafsir al-Mizān*. Other studies have explored the narratives of the Children of Israel and their relationship with Old Testament traditions through linguistic, historical, and comparative approaches (Affani, 2017; Parwanto, 2019). Likewise, studies by Abubakar & Bin Mohd Sabri (2019) focus on the linguistic and historical dimensions of Qur’anic narratives concerning the Israelites. Although these contributions provide valuable insights into the textual and historical aspects of the discourse, most remain concentrated on descriptive analyses and have

not sufficiently addressed the philosophical and theological foundations that sustain claims of genealogical superiority.

This gap highlights the need for a more critical theological investigation capable of deconstructing the epistemological basis of exclusive religious privilege. In this regard, the exegetical thought of Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 606 H) offers a particularly important perspective. As one of the most influential Ash‘arite theologians (*mutakallim*) and legal theorists (*uṣūlī*), al-Razi developed a rational and dialectical mode of Qur’anic interpretation that integrates textual evidence, theological reasoning, and philosophical analysis. His monumental work, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib*, provides a sophisticated framework for examining theological claims through critical argumentation rather than relying solely on transmitted reports (*riwāyah*).

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to deconstruct the discourse of the Jewish “Chosen People” through a critical analysis of al-Razi’s interpretation in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib*. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on historical narratives or linguistic descriptions, this research examines how the concept of chosenness is constructed, maintained, and critically reinterpreted within the interaction between Qur’anic texts, socio-religious realities, and the principle of divine justice. Furthermore, this study employs a deconstructive perspective to reveal the transformation of the concept of “chosenness” from a claim of ethnic privilege into a moral and spiritual responsibility. Through this approach, the research offers a new perspective on Qur’anic studies, particularly in discussions of religious identity, theological exclusivism, and critiques of genealogical superiority in contemporary Islamic discourse.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine how Fakhruddin al-Razi reconstructs the Qur’anic understanding of the “Chosen People” in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* through a historical-critical and intertextual approach. The central research question addressed in this article is: How does al-Razi, through his hermeneutical reasoning, reconstruct the Qur’anic discourse of chosenness, and what theological and ethical principles emerge from his critique of genealogical religious privilege? To answer this question, the study analyzes al-Razi’s use of *takhsīs al-zamān* (temporal specification), his critique of genealogical essentialism, and his insistence that divine favor is contingent upon ethical qualification and righteous action rather than inherited identity. Ultimately, the study aims to identify the interpretive mechanisms through which al-Razi challenges unconditional religious privilege and to formulate the concept of spiritual meritocracy as an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between religious identity, moral responsibility, and divine favor. The findings are expected to contribute to broader discussions on Qur’anic ethical universalism, religious moderation, pluralism, and contemporary critiques of exclusivist theology in Indonesia (Huda et al., 2023).

Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design to examine the theological exclusivism associated with the concept of *Am Segulah* ("the chosen people") as interpreted by Fakhruddin al-Razi in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* (Fatih, 2022). This design is appropriate for investigating theological and exegetical discourses by analyzing textual and documentary sources rather than field-based data (Bowen, 2009; Snyder, 2019).

The study integrates historical-critical and intertextual approaches. The historical-critical approach is used to reconstruct the socio-historical context underlying the development of the doctrine of Jewish chosenness (*Am Segulah*) and to situate al-Razi’s exegetical thought within the intellectual tradition of *‘ilm al-kalām* and medieval Islamic theological debates. The intertextual

approach examines the relationship between Qur'anic narratives concerning the Children of Israel and theological concepts in Jewish and biblical traditions, thereby identifying patterns of affirmation, reinterpretation, qualification, and theological critique within the Qur'anic discourse (Ali et al., 2025).

The primary source of this study is Fakhruddin al-Razi's *Mafātih al-Ghaib (al-Tafsir al-Kabir)*, a major work of rational and theological exegesis characterized by dialectical reasoning and logical argumentation. The analysis focuses on four Qur'anic passages, namely Q.S. al-Baqarah (2):47, Q.S. al-Baqarah (2):124, Q.S. al-Mā'idah (5):18, and Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3):110. These verses were purposively selected because they directly address themes of divine favor, covenantal status, religious leadership, and the relationship between lineage and moral qualification. Secondary data consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and academic works discussing Jewish election theology, Qur'anic intertextuality, al-Razi's exegetical methodology, and contemporary religious moderation.

Data were collected through documentation, close reading, and textual classification of relevant passages from *Mafātih al-Ghaib*. The extracted materials were organized into several analytical themes: (1) Israelite privilege, (2) the temporality of divine favor, (3) lineage and leadership, (4) *zulm* as a disqualifying factor, (5) *Maubūb* (bestowed virtue), and (6) *Iktisāb* (acquired virtue through ethical action).

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the study identifies explicit and implicit expressions of theological exclusivism within the selected texts. Second, it examines the intertextual relationship between Qur'anic passages and theological claims regarding Israelite election. Third, it reconstructs al-Razi's dialectical reasoning (*al-jadal*) and logical argumentation (*mantiq*) to explain how he critiques hereditary and unconditional claims of religious privilege. Finally, the findings are synthesized to formulate their broader theological and ethical implications, particularly concerning religious moderation, pluralism, and interfaith relations.

To ensure interpretive validity, the study employs source triangulation by comparing al-Razi's commentary with relevant Qur'anic passages, historical sources, and contemporary scholarly literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Analytical claims are grounded in textual evidence, while alternative interpretations are considered to minimize confirmation bias. As a library-based study, however, the findings are limited to the selected Qur'anic passages and al-Razi's exegetical framework and therefore do not represent the entirety of Jewish theology, Islamic exegesis, or contemporary interreligious realities.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of Fakhruddin al-Razi's *Mafātih al-Ghaib* reveals four interconnected exegetical patterns through which the discourse of the Jewish “chosen people” is critically reconstructed (Fitri, 2021). The first finding concerns the temporal limitation of Israelite privilege, particularly in al-Razi's interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:47, “*Yā banī Isrā'ila udhkurū ni'matī allatī an'amtu 'alaykum wa annī faddaltukum 'alā al-'ālamīn*” (“O Children of Israel, remember the favor that I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds”). In explaining the expression *faddaltukum 'alā al-'ālamīn*, al-Razi contextualizes the term *al-'ālamīn* within the historical period in which the Israelites received particular divine favors. He states, “*وَالْمُرَادُ مِنْهُ عَالَمِي ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ*” (*wa al-murādu minhu 'ālamī dhālika al-zamān*), meaning “what is intended by it are the peoples of that particular time” (Tarto, 2023). This interpretation indicates that, for al-Razi, the divine favor

mentioned in the verse should not automatically be understood as an unconditional and perpetual claim of superiority. Rather, the privilege is situated within a specific historical context. The finding, therefore, demonstrates that al-Razi employs a temporal specification (*takhsīs al-zamān*) to limit the universalization of Israelite privilege (Sapsuha & Hasaruddin, 2024).

The second finding concerns the deconstruction of genealogical entitlement, particularly through al-Razi’s interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:124. The verse states, “*Lā yanālu ‘abdi al-ẓālimin*” (“My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers”). In discussing Abraham’s request, “*wa min dhurriyyati*” (“and from my descendants”), al-Razi connects the question of lineage with the qualification for divine leadership (Mursidah et al., 2019). His interpretation emphasizes that divine covenant and leadership cannot be guaranteed solely by descent, as the verse explicitly excludes those characterized by *ẓulm*. Al-Razi’s discussion, therefore, establishes a distinction between genealogical affiliation and moral qualification. In this context, the statement “*لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ*” (*lā yanālu ‘abdi al-ẓālimin*) is understood as establishing a normative limitation on access to divine leadership: injustice constitutes a disqualifying condition (Diman & Arobi, 2026). The finding suggests that al-Razi does not treat descent from a divinely favored lineage as an automatic or permanent entitlement. Instead, the legitimacy of leadership is conditioned by ethical conduct. This textual evidence provides the basis for identifying a movement from genealogical privilege toward moral accountability in al-Razi’s exegetical reasoning.

The third finding concerns the reorientation from inherited privilege toward ethical qualification. This pattern becomes clearer when al-Razi’s interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:124 is read together with his broader discussion of divine covenant and leadership. The verse establishes that even within a lineage associated with divine favor, individuals characterized by *ẓulm* cannot claim the divine covenant. Accordingly, the possession of a particular ancestry does not function as an absolute theological guarantee. The textual logic identified in al-Razi’s commentary demonstrates a distinction between a status that may be bestowed (*maubūb*) and a qualification that must be acquired and maintained through conduct (*iktisāb*). (Ardiyantama, 2019) In this sense, the analysis finds that al-Razi’s interpretation places greater theological weight on ethical responsibility than on hereditary identity. This finding is important because it demonstrates that the critique of exclusivism in *Mafātih al-Ghaib* is not limited to rejecting another community’s claim to privilege; it also establishes a broader principle that divine favor must be accompanied by moral responsibility.

The fourth finding emerges from al-Razi’s interpretation of Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:110 concerning the designation *khayra ummah* (“the best community”). The verse states, “*Kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijat li al-nāsi ta’murūna bi al-ma’rūfi wa tanhawna ‘ani al-munkari wa tu’minūna bi Allāh*” (“You are the best community brought forth for humanity: you enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God”). Al-Razi’s interpretation connects the designation *khayra ummah* with the characteristics explicitly mentioned in the verse, namely *al-amr bi al-ma’rūf*, *al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, and *al-īmān bi Allāh*. His discussion indicates that communal excellence is related to these theological and ethical qualities rather than being simply an inherited characteristic of a particular ethnic group (Septiawadi et al., 2026). The finding is significant because it prevents the argument from producing a reversed form of exclusivism. The Qur’anic notion of communal excellence, as interpreted by al-Razi, is linked to ethical and religious responsibility. Thus, the criterion of distinction is not merely who a community is by lineage, but what that community does in accordance with its ethical and theological obligations.

Taken together, these findings reveal a coherent exegetical pattern in al-Razi’s *Mafātih al-Ghaib*. First, Israelite privilege is historically bounded through *takhsīs al-ẓamān*; second, genealogical descent is insufficient to guarantee divine leadership; third, divine favor is connected to moral qualification and responsibility; and fourth, communal excellence is associated with ethical and theological performance rather than ethnicity alone. These findings indicate that al-Razi’s exegetical strategy operates through a movement from genealogical entitlement to ethical accountability. Importantly, these statements represent the findings derived from the textual analysis of al-Razi’s commentary; the broader interpretation of this pattern as a form of “ethical universalism” constitutes the analytical argument of the present study and should therefore be developed separately in the Discussion section.

The Genealogy of *Am Segulah* and the Abrogation of the Cosmic Covenant

The concept of Jewish collective identity has historically been intertwined with the theological notion of Berit (covenant), which occupies a central position within the religious tradition of ancient Israel. The covenantal relationship established through the Mosaic tradition provided the Israelites with a distinctive religious status grounded in monotheistic commitment and obedience to divine law (Afdillah, 2016). Within this framework, the covenant functioned as a reciprocal relationship in which divine favor and protection were associated with adherence to the commandments (*mitzvot*) and the fulfillment of religious obligations (Halim, 2017).

Historical processes marked by displacement, diaspora, and changing political circumstances subsequently contributed to the reinterpretation of covenantal identity within Jewish religious thought. In response to challenges affecting communal continuity and religious authority, rabbinic traditions developed mechanisms for preserving collective identity, including genealogical criteria of membership and interpretations emphasizing ancestral merit (*Zechut Avot*) (Sapsuha & Hasaruddin, 2024). As a result, the discourse of chosenness became increasingly associated not only with covenantal responsibility but also with hereditary membership in the covenant community.

In the Qur’anic perspective, however, the covenantal history of the Children of Israel is presented through a critical narrative that highlights episodes of disobedience and breaches of covenant. Various passages cite incidents such as the worship of the Golden Calf, Sabbath-related transgressions, and the rejection of prophetic guidance as examples of failures to uphold covenantal obligations (Ulummudin & Su’di, 2019). These narratives are not merely historical accounts but serve as theological reflections on the relationship between divine favor and moral responsibility.

Within this context, Fakhruddin al-Razi interprets the loss of Israelite privilege primarily in relation to ethical and epistemological concerns. In his discussion, particular attention is given to the phenomenon of *taḥrīf ma’nawī* (interpretative or semantic distortion), which he regards as a significant deviation from the authentic meaning of revelation. Al-Razi argues that religious authority can become problematic when interpretative practices are used to support sectarian interests or obscure religious truths. Consequently, the legitimacy of religious distinction is evaluated not solely by genealogical affiliation but by fidelity to revelation and ethical commitment. This perspective becomes an important foundation for al-Razi’s broader critique of claims to exclusive religious superiority.

Al-Razi’s Dialectical Methodology: Positioning the Qur’an as *Muhaimin*

In addressing theological claims that he regarded as inconsistent with Qur’anic principles, Fakhruddin al-Razi employed a methodological framework strongly influenced by *‘ilm al-kalām* and formal logic (*mantiq*). His exegetical approach reflects what later scholars identify as *al-ittijāh al-jadālī*, a dialectical mode of interpretation that combines textual analysis with rational argumentation. Through this method, al-Razi systematically examines competing theological positions and evaluates their coherence within broader Qur’anic teachings (Al-Rāzī, 2000).

One of the characteristic features of his method is the use of *sibr wa al-taqsim*, an analytical technique that investigates various possible interpretations before determining the most convincing conclusion. Through this process, theological claims are assessed not only on the basis of transmitted reports but also through rational examination and internal consistency. Such an approach enabled al-Razi to engage critically with religious narratives that circulated within earlier exegetical traditions.

His methodological orientation also influenced his treatment of *Isrā’iliyyāt*. Although many classical commentators incorporated Judeo-Christian traditions to supplement Qur’anic narratives, al-Razi exercised considerable caution toward reports that conflicted with established theological principles. He frequently subjected such traditions to critical scrutiny, particularly when they appeared to compromise the doctrines of divine transcendence (*tanẓīh*) or prophetic integrity (*‘ismah*) (Parwanto, 2019). Through this hermeneutical framework, the Qur’an functions as *muhaimin*, a criterion by which previous religious narratives and interpretative traditions are evaluated and recontextualized.

Genealogy, Divine Favor, and Moral Qualification in Classical and Contemporary Tafsir

The findings of this study indicate that Fakhruddin al-Razi’s interpretation of Qur’anic narratives concerning the Children of Israel extends beyond a theological refutation of Jewish claims of chosenness. Rather, his exegesis reflects a broader hermeneutical project aimed at redefining the foundations of divine favor, religious legitimacy, and communal distinction. This observation directly addresses the central objective of the present study, namely to examine how *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* reconstructs the discourse of the “chosen people” by shifting the basis of distinction from inherited lineage to ethical and theological responsibility. Through his interpretation of Q.S. al-Baqarah 47, 124, al-Mā’idah 18, and Āli ‘Imrān 110, al-Razi consistently emphasizes that divine favor cannot be understood as an unconditional status permanently attached to a particular lineage. Instead, divine distinction is historically contextualized and ethically conditioned. Consequently, the significance of his interpretation lies not merely in its critique of Israelite exceptionalism, but in its articulation of a theological principle that links privilege with moral accountability (N. F. Amin & Susmihara, 2022)

This interpretation may be situated within the broader trajectory of classical Qur’anic exegesis. Earlier exegetes, including al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr, similarly understood the preference accorded to the Children of Israel as being associated with specific divine blessings and historical circumstances rather than as an unrestricted guarantee of perpetual superiority (Billah, 2023). Al-Razi’s distinctive contribution, however, lies in the systematic and rational manner through which he examines the theological implications of these verses. Drawing upon the intellectual framework of *‘ilm al-kalām*, he moves beyond descriptive narration toward a more analytical exploration of the conditions under which divine favor, covenant, and religious authority may legitimately be claimed. His interpretation of Q.S. al-Baqarah 124 is especially significant

because it establishes moral qualification as a necessary condition for participation in the divine covenant. By emphasizing that the covenant does not extend to those characterized by *ẓulm*, al-Razi shifts the discussion from genealogical affiliation to ethical responsibility as the primary criterion of legitimacy. (Tobing, 2020)

The findings of this study also resonate with trends within contemporary Qur’anic scholarship that foreground the ethical and universal dimensions of scriptural interpretation. Modern scholars such as Muhammad ‘Abduh, Rashid Riḍā, Fazlur Rahman, and M. Quraish Shihab, despite substantial methodological differences, generally argue that Qur’anic notions of communal excellence and divine favor should not be reduced to ethnic identity or hereditary privilege (Marina et al., 2025). From this perspective, Qur’anic criticism of the Children of Israel is more appropriately understood as a critique of particular patterns of conduct, covenantal failure, and moral deviation rather than an essentialist condemnation of an entire religious or ethnic group. Such a reading strengthens the argument advanced in this article that al-Razi’s interpretation forms part of a broader hermeneutical tradition that associates religious distinction with ethical accountability. Nevertheless, this comparison should not obscure the historical specificity of al-Razi’s intellectual context, which remained deeply shaped by the theological debates of the classical Islamic period.

The notion of spiritual meritocracy proposed in this study requires further clarification. The term is not intended to represent a technical concept explicitly formulated by al-Razi. Rather, it serves as an analytical category for describing a recurring pattern in his exegetical reasoning. In this framework, access to divine favor, legitimacy of leadership, and claims of communal excellence are understood primarily in relation to faith, moral integrity, justice, responsibility, and righteous conduct rather than inherited lineage alone (Ilham Khoiri; Alfiyatul Azizah, 2014). The concept emerges from a synthetic reading of al-Razi’s discussions concerning divine covenant, *ẓulm*, *ḵhayriyyah*, and human moral agency. For this reason, spiritual meritocracy should be presented as a contemporary interpretive construct that illuminates al-Razi’s thought rather than as terminology directly attributable to the exegete himself.

Furthermore, the framework of spiritual meritocracy can be linked to several central Qur’anic ethical concepts, including *taqwā*, justice (*‘adl*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and righteous deeds (*al-‘amal al-ṣālih*). The Qur’an repeatedly associates human excellence with moral and spiritual qualities rather than biological or ethnic identity (Septiawadi et al., 2026). This principle is clearly articulated in Q.S. al-Ḥujurāt 13, where the criterion of honor before God is identified as *taqwā*. Likewise, Qur’anic teachings concerning justice and trustworthiness underscore the universal nature of ethical responsibility, while the recurrent conjunction between faith and righteous action reinforces the inseparability of religious identity and moral conduct. When these principles are considered alongside al-Razi’s interpretation of the selected verses, it becomes evident that the discussion transcends the specific issue of Israelite election and instead articulates a more general Qur’anic vision in which religious distinction is grounded in ethical responsibility.

This perspective also creates an important symmetry in the interpretation of religious communities. If the criticism of the “chosen people” discourse is based on the argument that lineage cannot provide an unconditional guarantee of divine favor, the same principle should logically be applied to Muslims. The Qur’anic designation of *ḵbayr ummah* in Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān 3:110 cannot therefore be interpreted as an unconditional ethnic or civilizational superiority. The verse itself associates communal excellence with *al-amr bi al-ma’rūf*, *al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, and faith in God.

Consequently, the analytical framework developed in this study should not be understood as replacing Jewish exclusivism with Muslim exclusivism (Humairah & Hasaruddin, 2023). Instead, it establishes a reciprocal theological principle: no religious community can transform divine favor into an unconditional entitlement detached from ethical responsibility. This symmetry is particularly important for preventing the study from becoming merely an apologetic critique of another religious tradition.

The relevance of this argument becomes particularly evident when examined through the lens of scholarship in Jewish studies and comparative religion. Within Jewish studies, the notion of Israel as a “chosen people” is considerably more complex than a simplistic claim of racial superiority (Maulida & Bashori, 2025). Jewish scholarship has interpreted election in diverse ways, including covenantal responsibility, divine obligation, communal identity, and ethical vocation. Therefore, the term *Am Segulah* should not automatically be equated with racial supremacism. The present study consequently uses “chosen people” as a theological discourse requiring historical and textual contextualization rather than as a blanket characterization of Judaism or Jewish communities. Comparative religious scholarship further demonstrates that concepts of election, chosenness, covenant, and sacred community appear in different forms across religious traditions. This broader perspective allows al-Razi’s critique to be examined not merely as an anti-Jewish polemic but as part of a wider theological question concerning how religious communities understand divine selection and its relationship to ethical responsibility.

From this perspective, the principal implication of al-Razi’s interpretation concerns the problem of religious exclusivism. Religious exclusivism becomes problematic when claims concerning divine favor are transformed into permanent social, political, or moral superiority based solely on group identity. Al-Razi’s exegetical reasoning provides a theological mechanism for challenging such a transformation by emphasizing temporal limitation, moral qualification, and accountability (Hakim et al., 2025). However, this does not necessarily require eliminating religious particularity or denying the theological self-understanding of religious communities. Rather, it suggests distinguishing between religious conviction and claims of unconditional human superiority. A community may maintain its theological identity while simultaneously recognizing that moral accountability remains a universal divine principle.

The findings, therefore, have significant implications for the contemporary discourse of religious moderation. Moderation, in this context, should not be reduced to the elimination of theological differences, because genuine religious traditions necessarily contain distinctive truth claims. Rather, moderation can be conceptualized as the ability to maintain religious conviction while rejecting dehumanization, hereditary superiority, injustice, and unconditional claims to divine privilege. Al-Razi’s hermeneutical strategy offers an important intellectual resource for this approach because it places ethical responsibility at the center of discussions concerning divine favor (Pauzian, 2023). The principle can be formulated as follows: religious identity establishes responsibility, not automatic superiority. Such an approach provides a theological foundation for interreligious engagement based on justice, mutual recognition, and ethical cooperation.

Ultimately, this study argues that the significance of *Mafātih al-Ghaib* extends beyond its historical polemic with Jewish theological claims. Al-Razi’s interpretation provides a framework for reconsidering the relationship among divine favor, religious identity, and moral responsibility. The analytical concept of *spiritual meritocracy* proposed in this study captures this movement from inherited status toward ethically demonstrated worth, while remaining distinct from al-Razi’s own terminology (Firdaus, 2020). Read together with the Qur’anic principles of *taqwā*, justice, *amānah*,

and righteous deeds, this framework suggests that the Qur’anic critique of religious exclusivism is ultimately universal in scope: it applies not only to the “other,” but also to the believing community itself. In this sense, the deconstruction of the “chosen people” discourse becomes an exercise in theological self-criticism, simultaneously encouraging every religious community to understand divine favor not as a license for superiority but as a moral responsibility that must be continually demonstrated through righteous conduct.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the formulation of “spiritual meritocracy” as an analytical construct for understanding Fakhruddin al-Razi’s critique of genealogical religious privilege in *Mafātih al-Ghaib*. The term is not presented as a technical concept explicitly formulated by al-Razi himself; rather, it is proposed by this study to conceptualize a recurring pattern in his exegetical reasoning. The analysis demonstrates that al-Razi’s interpretation moves from a framework in which religious distinction may appear to be associated with inherited or divinely bestowed status (*Maubūb*) toward one in which divine favor, leadership, and communal excellence are conditioned by faith, ethical integrity, justice, and righteous action (*Iktisāb*). In this framework, lineage does not function as an unconditional source of spiritual entitlement, while moral responsibility becomes a significant criterion for evaluating claims to divine favor. The proposed concept, therefore, contributes a theoretical vocabulary for explaining how Qur’anic exegesis can transform inherited religious identity into an ethic of accountability.

This conceptual contribution enriches Qur’anic Studies by demonstrating that al-Razi’s engagement with the discourse of the “chosen people” is not merely a polemical response to another religious tradition but also a sophisticated hermeneutical negotiation among revelation, rational theology, historical context, and ethical universalism. Through the combined application of historical-critical and intertextual analysis, this study highlights how Qur’anic concepts such as *fadl* (divine favor), *‘abd* (covenant), *ẓulm* (injustice), *taqwā* (piety), and *‘amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous action) can be read as interconnected elements of a broader ethical framework. The study thus extends existing approaches to Qur’anic interpretation by shifting analytical attention from the question of who is chosen toward the question of what ethical conditions make claims of divine favor legitimate. This shift provides a basis for reading the Qur’anic discourse of religious distinction not simply in terms of communal identity but also in terms of moral responsibility and accountability.

The study also contributes to interreligious dialogue by proposing an analytical distinction between legitimate religious particularity and claims of unconditional religious superiority. The concept of spiritual meritocracy does not require the elimination of theological differences or the denial of religious communities’ distinctive identities. Instead, it suggests that religious identity should be understood alongside ethical responsibility. This framework is particularly relevant to interreligious engagement because it avoids reproducing a binary in which one tradition is simply positioned as superior to another. The critique of the “chosen people” discourse can therefore become a universal principle of theological self-reflection: if inherited identity cannot by itself guarantee divine favor, the same principle must also be applied to Muslim claims concerning communal excellence, including the Qur’anic designation of *khayr ummah*. Such symmetry creates a basis for dialogue in which each religious community can maintain its theological convictions while critically examining tendencies toward exclusivism, injustice, and the absolutization of communal privilege.

More broadly, the theoretical contribution of this study can be represented as a movement from genealogical identity → divine privilege → ethical accountability → spiritual meritocracy → interreligious responsibility. This framework provides a conceptual bridge between classical

Qur’anic exegesis and contemporary debates on religious pluralism and moderation. Its significance lies not in claiming that al-Razi anticipated contemporary theories of interreligious dialogue, but in demonstrating that elements within his rational-dialectical hermeneutics can be reconstructed to address contemporary questions concerning religious exclusivism and ethical coexistence. The study, therefore, positions *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* as a resource not only for understanding medieval Islamic theological discourse but also for developing ethically grounded approaches to religious difference in pluralistic societies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Fakhruddin al-Razi’s *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib* provides a significant exegetical framework for the critical examination of theological claims associated with the Jewish “chosen people” discourse. Through the interpretation of the selected Qur’anic verses, the study identifies three interconnected hermeneutical strategies: *Takhsīs az-Zamān*, which situates the divine favor granted to the Children of Israel within a particular historical context; the rejection of genealogical essentialism, particularly through Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:124, which connects divine leadership with moral qualification and excludes *ẓulm*; and the movement from inherited or bestowed status (*Maubūb*) toward ethical responsibility and righteous action (*Iktisāb*). These findings indicate that, in al-Razi’s interpretation, religious distinction cannot be understood solely through lineage but is closely related to moral and theological responsibility.

The study, therefore, addresses its research objective by demonstrating how al-Razi’s hermeneutics can be read as a critique of unconditional religious privilege and as an affirmation of ethical accountability. The concept of *spiritual meritocracy* proposed in this study should be understood as an analytical construct rather than as a technical term explicitly formulated by al-Razi. It describes the pattern in his exegesis whereby religious or communal distinction is associated with faith, moral integrity, and righteous conduct rather than inherited identity alone. This interpretation also provides a basis for understanding the relevance of al-Razi’s thought to contemporary discussions of religious exclusivism and moderation, while avoiding the assumption that his sixth-century theological discourse can be directly equated with contemporary interreligious contexts.

The study is limited by its reliance on library research, its concentration on four selected Qur’anic passages, and its specific focus on al-Razi’s *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib*. It therefore does not claim to represent the full diversity of Jewish understandings of election, the entire classical tradition of Qur’anic exegesis, or contemporary Muslim and Jewish perspectives. Future research could extend this analysis through comparative studies of other classical and contemporary exegetes, closer engagement with Jewish theological scholarship on *Am Segulah*, and empirical research examining how concepts of religious privilege, ethical responsibility, and moderation are interpreted within contemporary Muslim and Jewish communities.

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