

Bible Study Overview

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Common Roots, Major Differences, and Opportunities for Understanding

Opening Prayer

Lord God, Creator of all people, help us to seek truth with humility, to speak with charity, and to grow in understanding of our neighbors. May our study deepen our faith in You and strengthen our commitment to love all people as You have commanded. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often called the **Abrahamic religions** because all three trace their spiritual heritage to Abraham, whom they regard as a model of faith and obedience to God.

Together, these three religions represent more than half of the world's population and share certain beliefs about God, morality, prayer, and divine revelation. At the same time, they differ significantly in their understanding of Jesus, salvation, Scripture, and God's relationship with humanity.

For Catholics, understanding these religions can help us engage respectfully with others while remaining rooted in the truth of the Gospel.

I. Historical Overview

Judaism

Origin

Approximately 2000 B.C.

Founder

Not founded by one person, but traces its beginnings to God's covenant with Abraham.

Key figures include:

- Abraham
 - Isaac
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- Jacob
- Moses

Sacred Text

The Hebrew Scriptures (Tanakh), including:

- Torah (Law)
- Prophets
- Writings

Central Belief

One God who entered into a covenant with Israel.

Christianity

Origin

1st Century A.D.

Founder

Jesus Christ

Christianity emerged from Judaism and proclaims Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God.

Sacred Text

- Old Testament
- New Testament

Central Belief

Jesus Christ is Lord, Savior, and the Son of God who died and rose from the dead.

Islam

Origin

7th Century A.D.

Founder

Muhammad

Muslims believe Muhammad received revelations from God through the angel Gabriel.

Sacred Text

The Qur'an

Central Belief

There is one God (Allah), and Muhammad is His prophet.

II. Major Common Beliefs**1. Belief in One God**

All three religions are monotheistic.

Judaism

One God, creator of all.

Christianity

One God in three Persons:

- Father
- Son
- Holy Spirit

Islam

One God (Allah), absolutely one and indivisible.

2. Abraham as a Spiritual Father

All three traditions honor Abraham.

Judaism

Father of the Jewish people.

Christianity

Model of faith and ancestor of Jesus.

Islam

A prophet and spiritual ancestor through his son Ishmael.

3. Prayer

All three traditions emphasize prayer.

Judaism

Daily prayers and synagogue worship.

Christianity

Personal and communal prayer centered on Christ.

Islam

Five daily prayers facing Mecca.

4. Moral Living

All teach:

- Charity
 - Honesty
 - Care for the poor
 - Respect for God
 - Accountability before God
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5. Divine Revelation

Each religion believes God has spoken to humanity.

The disagreement concerns how and through whom God has revealed Himself most fully.

III. Major Differences

Who Is Jesus?

This is the most important difference.

Judaism

Jesus is generally viewed as:

- A historical Jewish teacher
- Not the Messiah
- Not divine

Jews still await the Messiah.

Christianity

Jesus is:

- The Messiah
- The Son of God
- Fully God and fully man
- Savior of the world

Matthew 16:16

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The death and Resurrection of Jesus stand at the center of Christian faith.

Islam

Jesus (Isa) is:

- A prophet
- Born of the Virgin Mary
- Worker of miracles

However:

- Not divine
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- Not God's Son
- Not crucified in the traditional Christian understanding

Muslims honor Jesus but do not worship Him.

Understanding the Trinity

Christianity

One God in three divine Persons:

- Father
- Son
- Holy Spirit

Not three gods.

One divine nature.

Judaism

Rejects the Trinity.

God is absolutely one.

Islam

Rejects the Trinity.

God's unity is understood in a way that excludes any division of persons within the Godhead.

Sacred Scriptures

Judaism

The Hebrew Bible.

Does not accept the New Testament.

Christianity

Old Testament and New Testament.

Believes God's revelation reaches its fullness in Christ.

Islam

The Qur'an.

Muslims believe previous revelations were given by God but that the Qur'an is the final and complete revelation.

Salvation

Judaism

Focuses on covenant faithfulness and living according to God's law.

Christianity

Salvation comes through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9

"By grace you have been saved through faith."

Catholics also emphasize participation in the sacramental life and cooperation with grace.

Islam

Salvation is associated with submission to God, obedience, repentance, faith, and God's mercy.

Worship

Judaism

Synagogue worship and observance of the Sabbath.

Christianity

Worship centered on Christ.

Catholics worship through the Mass and the Eucharist.

Islam

Worship includes prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, and submission to God's will.

Catholic Perspective

The Catholic Church teaches that there are important bonds between Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Regarding Judaism

The Church recognizes the unique covenant relationship between God and the Jewish people.

The Church rejects antisemitism in all forms.

Regarding Islam

The Church teaches that Muslims worship the one God and strive to submit themselves to His will.

The Church encourages mutual understanding and dialogue.

What Makes Christianity Unique?

For Christians, everything centers on Jesus Christ.

The Christian claim is not simply that God sent a prophet or a lawgiver.

The Christian claim is that:

God Himself entered human history in Jesus Christ.

John 1:14

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

This belief distinguishes Christianity from both Judaism and Islam.

Comparison Chart

Topic	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
Founder	Abraham/Moses	Jesus Christ	Muhammad
One God	Yes	Yes	Yes
Accepts Abraham	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jesus as Messiah	No	Yes	No
Jesus as Son of God	No	Yes	No
Trinity	No	Yes	No
Sacred Scripture	Hebrew Bible	Bible	Qur'an
Muhammad as Prophet	No	No	Yes
Salvation	Covenant faithfulness	Through Christ	Submission to God
Worship Day	Saturday	Sunday	Friday Congregational Prayer

Discussion Questions

1. Why are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam called Abrahamic religions?
2. What beliefs do all three religions share?
3. Why is the identity of Jesus the central difference among them?
4. How does the Christian doctrine of the Trinity differ from Jewish and Islamic understandings of God?

5. How can Catholics engage respectfully with Jews and Muslims while remaining faithful to the Gospel?
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Closing Reflection

The study of Judaism and Islam helps Christians better understand both our shared heritage and our distinctive beliefs. While all three religions affirm one God and honor Abraham, Christianity stands apart in its proclamation that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, crucified and risen for the salvation of the world.

As followers of Christ, we are called to witness to this truth with conviction, humility, and charity, remembering the words of St. Peter:

"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15-16)