

Monotheistic Religions



AANM EDUCATIONAL SERIES

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Introduction

The rise, development, and spread of monotheism (the belief in one God), is one of the most significant and fascinating dimensions of human civilization. The three major monotheistic faiths are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Judaism emerged in the second millennium. Christianity surfaced in the 1st century C.E. (Common Era), and Islam appeared in the early 7th century. While differences cultivate distinctions, there are many similarities between the three faiths. We can acquire a more rich and factual understanding of these religions by exploring their diversity of perspectives, the ways their traditions have changed over time, and how many of the tenets of each faith overlap with one another.

All of the monotheistic faiths originated in what is known today as the Arab World and more specifically, within an area that spans no more than 300 miles. An emphasis on family values, charity and respect for others are shared by these three religions. Throughout history, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have spread from their birthplace, crossing the boundaries of race and ethnicity, with followers in nearly every country in the world. Christianity is the single largest religion in the world, with roughly two billion followers globally. Islam, one of the world's fastest growing faiths, has an estimated 1.5 billion followers across the globe. As of the 21st century, there are roughly 12 million Jews worldwide. Each religion traces its roots back to Abraham, who is considered a prophet by all three faiths. While there are differences in the ways in which the stories of Abraham are recounted, the three are united by the belief in Abraham and therefore he is considered, by many, to be the father of monotheism.



Wailing Wall or Western Wall, Jerusalem. (©iStockphoto.com/Deejipilot)

Brief Overview of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Judaism

Judaism, which is 3,500 years old, is the oldest of the monotheistic religions. Jews believe that God made a covenant (known as the first covenant) with Abraham that he would be the father of a great people if he followed God's instructions. Jews believe that God renewed the covenant that he previously made with Abraham with Moses (second covenant), who led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt to Mount Sinai. God also revealed a set of rules that Jews should live by, the most famous of which is known as the Ten Commandments.

The Jewish holy book is called the *Torah*, and is comprised of the first five books of the Bible. Jews also believe in the oral *Torah*, called the *Talmud*, which is the most significant collection of oral interpretations of the *Torah*. The *Talmud* was primarily compiled in ancient Babylonia (modern-day Iraq). Jews believe that both were given to the Prophet Moses.

Throughout the Arab World, there have been significant populations of Arab Jews in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Morocco. After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, many Arab Jews settled there, along with other Jews from around the world. Today, there are approximately 12 million Jews worldwide, the majority of whom live in Israel and the United States.



Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. (©iStockphoto.com/BWBImages)

Christianity

Christianity, which has roots in Judaism, began approximately 2,000 years ago. Followers of the Christian faith believe that Jesus is the Messiah prophesized in the Hebrew Scriptures. Christianity and its doctrine are based on the life and teachings of Jesus; these scriptures are referred to as the New Testament. Through the writings of Paul, we can boil down the teachings of Christianity to the concepts of faith, hope, and love.

Jesus is seen by most Christians as being divine and human at the same time. There is a general belief in a three-part Trinitarian concept, in which there is God (the Father), Jesus (the Son) and the Holy Spirit. Taken together, these three parts form a whole. In addition, the life of Jesus, his death by crucifixion, his resurrection and his ascension to heaven are believed to be a testament to God's love for humankind and a way to attain salvation.

There is a strong Christian tradition in many parts of the Arab World. Some Christian Arabs are the descendants of the very first Christians, and the oldest churches are found in the Arab World. As evidence of these early origins, some church services in the Arab World are still delivered in Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ; in addition to Aramaic and Arabic, other languages used are Syriac, Coptic and Greek. Although Christians in the Arab World share beliefs with other Christians, they have their own churches and religious leaders. Most belong to the Eastern-Rite churches. These include the Catholic Antiochian Orthodox (Greek Orthodox), the Catholic Maronite and Melkite churches, Syrian Orthodox churches and the Egyptian Coptic Church. Most Iraqi Christians belong to the Catholic Chaldean Church.

A smaller number of Christian Arabs are Protestants who were converted by 19th century American missionaries in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. Today, significant populations of Christian Arabs live in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. (William Tracy/*Saudi Aramco World*/SAWDIA)

Islam

Islam is approximately 1,400 years old. Islam considers Abraham the founder of monotheism, and recognizes Moses, Jesus and many others as prophets. The Prophet Muhammad (570-632 C.E.) was born in Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia, and is considered the last of the prophets. Muslims believe that Islam began in 610 C.E. when the Prophet Muhammad began to receive revelations from *Allah* (meaning “God” in Arabic). These revelations continued for 22 years, and were recorded in Arabic in the *Qur’an*, which is the holy book of Islam.

There are two main branches of Islam: *Sunni* and *Shi’a*. The split happened shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, over the question of the rightful successor to lead Muslims. The *Shi’a* believed that it should be his son-in-law and cousin, Imam Ali. The *Shi’a* believed that the Prophet Muhammad pre-selected Imam Ali to lead the Muslims after his death. The *Sunnis* on the other hand, believed that leadership should be held by any capable Muslim through a process of consultation and election.

The religious beliefs and practices of the *Sunnis* and the *Shi’a* are nearly identical. Today, about 85-90% of the Muslim population worldwide are *Sunni*. Iran, a non-Arab country, is primarily *Shi’a*. In the Arab World, most *Shi’a* Muslims live in Lebanon and Iraq. In addition, a small minority of Muslims are *Druze*, a branch of Islam found mostly in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

Holy Books

Each of the three monotheistic faiths has a holy book that sets the foundations of their beliefs and practices. The *Torah*, Bible, and *Qur’an* are believed to be the sacred texts of their respective faiths. The Jewish holy book is the *Torah*, which means “to teach.” It is also referred to as the *Pentateuch*. It is comprised of five books that are believed to be the inspired word of God as told through Moses.

These are the first five books that can be found alongside other books in the Hebrew Scriptures, also known as the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

The New Testament found in the Christian Bible is comprised of the Gospels that tell the life and teachings of Jesus. Other sections of the New Testament include The Acts of the Apostles, The Epistles (Letters) and The Book of Revelation.

The *Qur'an* is the holy book of Muslims. It consists of 114 chapters divided into 30 sections. Muslims believe that the *Qur'an* is the direct word of God that came to Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel.

These scriptures are used by all three faiths for worship, during ceremonies and for personal reflection. All three traditions encourage their followers to consult, reference and read their holy book as well as other religious writings that are pertinent to the faith. The writings of the *Torah* and the other books that comprise the Old Testament were written in Hebrew, while the *Qur'an* was written in Arabic. Both Hebrew and Arabic are Semitic languages. In contrast, the books that comprise the New Testament were written originally in Greek. These books have translations in multiple languages, making them accessible to people all over the world. They can be found in households, libraries, academic institutions and religious places of worship. Moreover, the Internet has broadened the accessibility of these texts for people to read and interpret.

Geographical Origins

One important feature that the three monotheistic traditions have in common is their region of origin. Islam, Christianity and Judaism have roots in what is today known as the Arab World, an area stretching from Morocco in the west, to Iraq in the east. Many religious scholars, anthropologists and historians believe that there is a link between the creation of the first human civilization, which also arose in this part of the world, and evidence of the first monotheistic

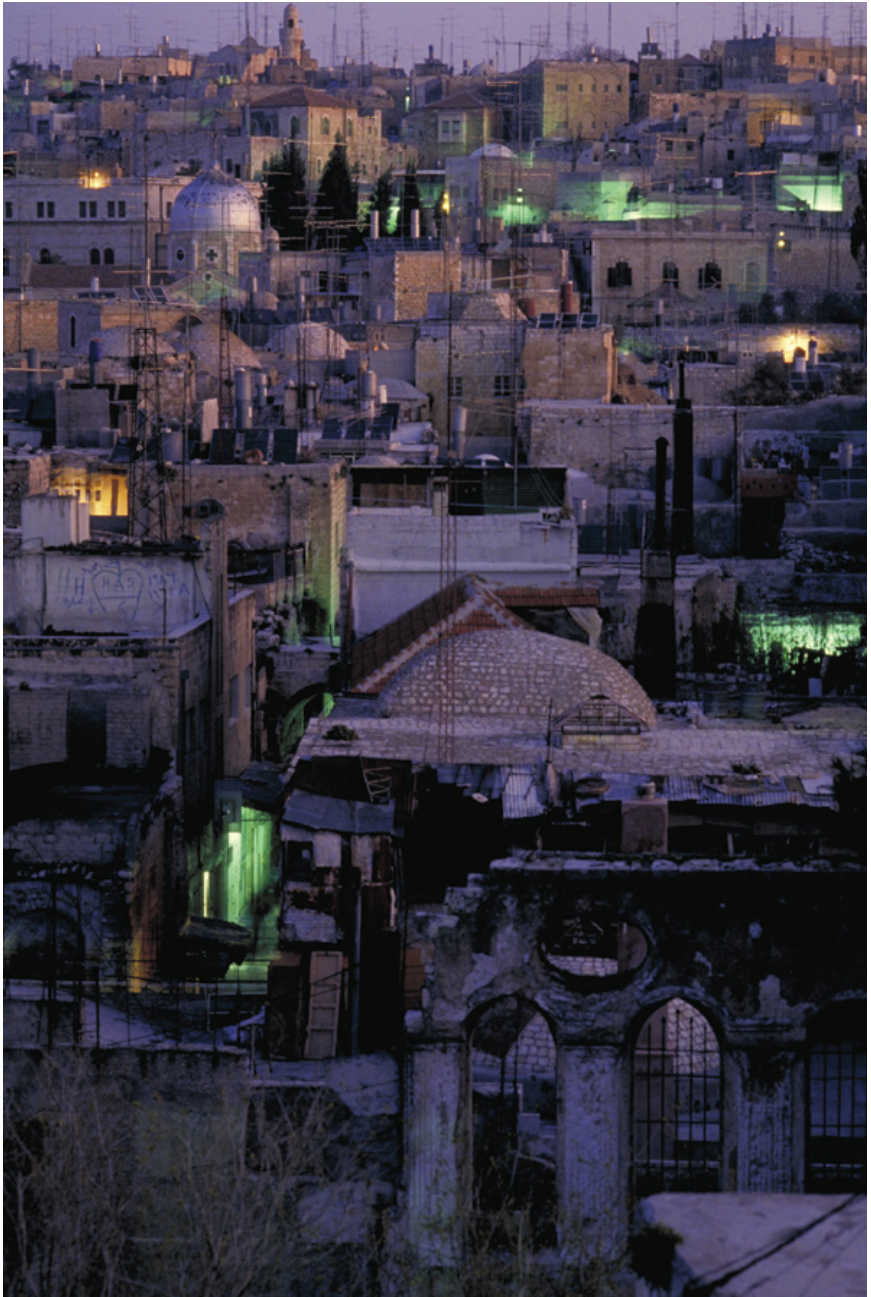
faiths. Because the Arab World is the birthplace of all three faiths, many followers have developed a close connection to this part of the world even though they may never have visited.

Cities and towns in this region represent important sites of shared cultural and religious traditions. Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Mecca and Medina are among the major locales of significance. There are several more common locations that are mentioned in each religious book, such as the Sinai. These are places where Islam, Christianity and Judaism were first propagated and where early followers, saints and prophets are said to have lived.

Jerusalem

Followers of all three religions consider Jerusalem a sacred city, and for this reason place significant importance and value on the city. The reasons for this are innumerable. For Jews, this urban center that both Palestinians and Israelis today regard as their capital is the site of the holiest place in Judaism, the Wailing Wall (or Western Wall). For Muslims, Jerusalem is home to the Dome of the Rock, built in the 7th century, where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. Both the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque are located on the large grounds known as *Haram as-Sharif*. These grounds are considered by some Muslims as the third holiest site after Mecca and Medina. This compound sits in close proximity to the Western Wall.

For Christians, Jerusalem contains the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the New Testament describes the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. This, like the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, is a site visited by many pilgrims each year. Followers of at least 10 Christian denominations that have been present in contemporary Jerusalem for hundreds of years utilize this site for prayer and various rituals. Significantly, in the last century or so, there have been at least two competing notions about where Jesus was actually buried (known as Golgotha). One Protestant sect, for



Jerusalem at night. (Dick Doughty/*Saudi Aramco World*/SAWDIA)

example, believes that Golgotha exists outside the contemporary city walls at a locale a quarter mile north of the Old City.

One of the most noteworthy things about this sacred geography is the fact that the sites of significance mentioned above are found within one square kilometer of Jerusalem's Old City. This shared geography and close proximity of iconic places in such a historically significant city has enflamed religious and nationalist conflict over the centuries. Importantly however, this spatial proximity underscores the shared traditions and values of these three religions and the ways in which they are the product of overlapping histories and, more often than not, positive inter-faith and community relationships.

Religious Law

A set of religious laws can be found within all three traditions. In Judaism, these laws are called the *Halakhah*. In Islam they are referred to as *Shari'a* law, and in Christianity one example from Catholicism is called the Canon Law, which is a body of laws that the Church uses internally to govern. Within Judaism, there are religious laws known as the *mitzvot*, or commandments. Within Islam, *Shari'a* is derived from the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (the life and teachings of Muhammad). The laws deal with issues of family that include marriage, divorce, custody issues and the rights of children. In addition, other main aspects of *Shari'a* law include inheritance, contracts, banking and rules of cleanliness and hygiene.

In contrast, the Canon Law helps direct the daily lives of Catholics. Within the framework of Christianity, religious laws operate in a different way than one might see in Judaism and Islam. Many Christians honor the Ten Commandments that can be found in the *Torah*, however they are not obligated to follow the laws governing daily life that are found in the Hebrew Scriptures that comprise the Old Testament. The laws of morality, however, are expected to be honored, and are detailed in the Ten Commandments.



Jewish rabbi with *Torah* scroll. (©iStockphoto.com/MikeCherim)

Charity

Charity is at the core of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is expected that people share their wealth with those who are disadvantaged. In addition to contributing financially, all three faiths call upon their followers to be socially responsible to one another. Stewardship and care of the earth is also highly valued by all three faiths. To display charity is more than an act of good will; it is an attitude, or way of life, that embodies compassion and a love for humanity. These concepts are deeply rooted in all three religions.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have charitable mechanisms to collect donations from their followers and to redistribute that money for those in need. In Islam, *zakat* is the name of one of the obligatory duties that Muslims must follow. It refers to the mandatory giving of one's wealth to the poor. Interpretations about the amount that must be given varies; some believe it should be 2.5% of a person's annual wealth, while others believe it is 10% of an individual's income. In Judaism, *tzedakah* is the Hebrew word for the obligatory act of charity. Generally, Jews must give one-tenth of their income to the poor. In Christianity there is a similar concept known as the tithe. This is when followers give one-tenth of their gross income to support the Church and its beneficiaries, which include the disadvantaged and needy.

Clergy

Judaism, Christianity and Islam rely on the role of religious leaders and clergy. *Rabbis* are the religious leaders in Judaism; *imams* and *sheiks* are the religious leaders in Islam; and priests, ministers, pastors and bishops are examples of the various clergy in Christianity. The religious clergy play different roles in each faith, however have many similar roles and responsibilities. For example, all clergy members lead their congregations in prayer, counsel those in need and perform marriages.

The role of the religious leader is defined by the congregation and/or by the specific religious tradition with which the clergy member is affiliated. In some cases, there is a hierarchy that the religious leader is part of, and in turn must report to a central authority or counsel. All religious leaders attend a seminary and devote their lives to the study of their particular traditions. Most *imams* are well versed in Arabic, the language of the *Qur'an*, while *rabbis* have studied Hebrew, the language of the *Torah*. While the Bible is found in virtually every language for practical use, many Christian clergy have a working knowledge of Greek or Latin.

The role of women in religious institutions has a long and interesting history. There is a representation of female religious leadership in each of the three faiths, however, that representation is limited to certain sects and has not become universally adapted by all branches and sects. This continues to be a controversial topic, in addition to ordaining religious leaders of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) communities.

Worship

Each of the monotheistic faiths has a specific day of worship. In Judaism, the *Sabbath*, or day of rest and time of worship, is observed starting Friday night and all of Saturday. In Christianity, Sunday is the day of worship when many attend Church services. Friday is the day of congregational prayer for Muslims. Members of various congregations will attend services provided on these days of the week as well as others. In both Judaism and Islam, events begin on the eve of the actual day.

Other forms of worship include prayer. Muslims have a formal prayer that occurs five times a day. Daily readings from prayer books or the holy books are another form of prayer in all three faiths. While many have a personal relationship with God, these traditions set a framework to guide followers in how to worship and communicate with God.

Sects

Within any organized body, be it religious or secular, it is common to find differences of opinion over the interpretation of beliefs and practices. The three monotheistic religions are no exception to this. Throughout history, many of our most violent wars and conflicts have been over religious identity and more specifically, the formation of alternative religious groups. Each of the three faiths has different branches and sects. Reform, Conservative and Orthodox are three branches of Judaism. For Christians there are many religious traditions, a few of which include Catholic, Protestant, Quaker, Baptist, Lutheran and Orthodox. In Islam, the two major sects are *Sunni* and *Shi'a*. In all three faiths, followers may choose to identify specifically by the sect or branch that they follow, or by a more broad term such as: Jew, Christian or Muslim. This is a personal choice that is left to the individual.

Prophets and Beliefs

A central principle of all three faiths is the belief in one God. There is a belief in angels, prophets, an afterlife, holy scriptures and a holy Messiah who will address the world. Significantly, all three faiths believe the Messiah will return to the region from where these religions originated.

In addition, a creation story can be found in all three religious texts. Judaism and Christianity share the same creation story found in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are believed to be the first two humans created in all three faith traditions. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, prophets were the chosen ones who laid the foundation, spread the word of God, and led congregations. The three faiths share many of the same prophets, like Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jacob and Joseph, to name a few. The stories surrounding these prophets may slightly differ between what is found in the Hebrew Scriptures used by Jews and Christians, and the *Qur'anic* stories believed by Muslims.

Circumcision

Male circumcision is practiced by Jews and Muslims. For both it is a religious obligation. This is not a mandatory practice in Christianity, however, many Christian males are circumcised. This is a more common practice for Christian males in the United States than in other parts of the world.

Food restrictions

Judaism and Islam have strict dietary laws for religious observance. Both prohibit the consumption of pork. In Judaism, *kashrut* is the name given to the body of Jewish laws dealing with what can be eaten, which is commonly known as kosher. Meat and dairy can not mix when keeping with the kosher tradition. In addition, for food to be kosher it must meet certain criteria as outlined in the *Torah*; animals must be slaughtered according Jewish law, and all of the blood must be drained before consumption.

Permitted foods in Islam are known as *halal*. Like Judaism, they must meet a certain criteria as outlined by the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. In addition, animals must be killed according to Islamic law in order to be deemed *halal*. However, some Muslims believe that if the animal cannot be slaughtered according to Islamic law, a blessing can be read to make it *halal*. Many stores cater to the needs of those who eat *halal* and kosher foods, making both foods more accessible in restaurants and grocery stores across the world.

There are no formal dietary laws in Christianity as one would find in Judaism and Islam; however, in some Christian traditions some foods cannot be eaten at certain times during the year. Examples include abstaining from meat on certain days during Lent. It is upheld by the three faiths that all foods allowable by religious observance be consumed in moderation.



Some Christian churches reenact the birth of Jesus as part of their Christmas observance. (©iStockphoto.com/Anyka)

Jesus and Mary

Both Jesus and Mary are central to Christianity and Islam. Both faiths believe in Jesus' miraculous birth to the Virgin Mary and that Jesus performed miracles, like walking on water and resurrecting the dead. The Virgin Mary is the only woman in the *Qur'an* to have a chapter named after her. The two faiths differ however, in the nature of Jesus' divinity. In Islam he is seen as a prophet, while in Christianity he is the Son of God and central to the Trinitarian belief system (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). While Judaism does not recognize Jesus as a divine figure, but rather a historical figure, followers believe that Jesus was born to a Jewish family in the city of Bethlehem.

Fasting

Some form of fasting can be found in all three religious traditions. In Judaism, one of the most important days of the year is *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement. On this day, followers begin a 25-hour period of fasting that initiates the eve of *Yom Kippur*. In Islam, the month of *Ramadan* is a time of fasting and reflection. Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset for the duration of the month. Finally, Lent is a time when Christians prepare for Easter. The Lenten season it is a time of reflection, repentance, and fasting. Many Christians fast by refraining from certain foods or activities during the 40 days of Lent that lead up to Easter.

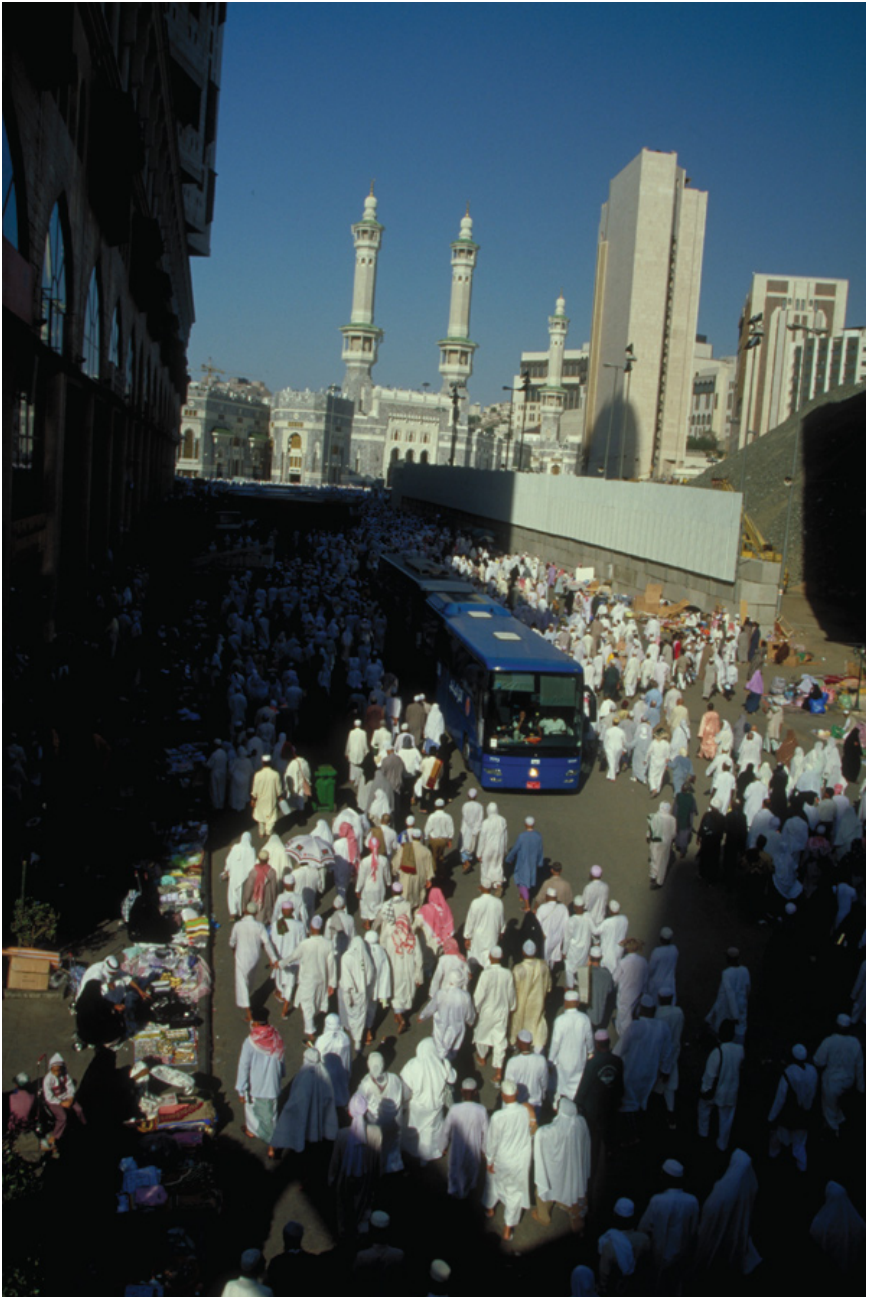
Holidays

There are many celebrations and days of remembrance in all three religious traditions. These are times of reflection, personal growth, community gatherings, family, and celebration. While the three traditions may celebrate or mourn different occasions, they are unified in that they all honor their religious history and significant days.

Passover is a Jewish festival that commemorates the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. It is celebrated for eight days by Orthodox and Conservative Jews outside of Israel and for seven days by Reform Jews and Jews in Israel. *Hanukkah* is another holiday, known as the Jewish Festival of Lights. It commemorates the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple by lighting an eight-candle *menorah*. Another Jewish holiday is *Purim*, marking the liberation of Jews in Persia from genocide. Many observe this holiday by providing charitable acts to the poor and sharing a meal with friends and family. *Rosh Hashanah* is known as the Jewish New Year and is a time of reflection, prayer and penitence. *Yom Kippur* is known as the Jewish Day of Atonement. This holiest day of the Jewish year is observed with strict fasting and ceremonial repentance. There are many more days of remembrance and celebration throughout the year in the Jewish calendar.

Christmas is a season of the Christian year immediately following Advent. On Christmas Eve, December 24 (Christmas is celebrated on January 7 in some Christian sects), many celebrate the arrival of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. Many attend a prayer service at night. The following day is known as Christmas and is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. It is observed by prayers, exchanging of gifts, and family parties. Palm Sunday is another day of celebration in which Christians remember the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Easter is also a sacred day for Christians, on which they honor the resurrection of Jesus from his grave.

For Muslims, *Eid al-Adha* is known as the Feast of Sacrifice. It is an important holiday marking the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca, known as the *hajj*. The other important religious holiday is *Eid al-Fitr* marking the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*. Many Muslims celebrate both of these holidays by giving to the poor, sharing food with family and friends, and gift exchanges. Other important religious dates are the birth and death day of the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the memorial of the Prophet's grandson



Mecca during the Hajj. (Samia El-Moslimany/*Saudi Aramco World*/SAWDIA)

Hussein who was killed in Karbala, is known as *Ashura* (which is derived from the Arabic word *ashra* (the number 10)). *Ashura* is remembered and commemorated by many, specifically *Shi'a* Muslims, during the first 10 days of the month of *Muharam*, which is one of the 12 months of the lunar calendar followed by Muslims worldwide.

Conclusion

Judaism, Christianity and Islam trace their roots back to Abraham and his message of monotheism. The similarities among these faiths range in practices and beliefs. They all have the same geographical roots in the Arab World. A holy book can be found in all three religions and is considered to be the word of God or the inspired word of God. Within the *Tōrah*, Bible and *Qur'an* are creation stories in which God created the universe. Central to these three faiths are the various prophets that came to spread messages of monotheism. All of the biblical prophets shared by Judaism and Christianity can also be found in the *Qur'an* and Islamic writings. A level of accountability for one's actions and the belief in charity and good deeds are another similarity that these faiths share. In addition, the belief in life after death is a shared belief among the three religions.

Lastly, all three faiths regard Jerusalem as a holy city. For Jews, it is home to the Wailing Wall and the Temple Mount. In Christianity, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the spot where Jesus was believed to be crucified. For Muslims it is home to the Dome of the Rock, where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven and where Al Aqsa Mosque is located.

Frequently Asked Questions

1) **Where did Judaism, Christianity and Islam originate?**

The three religions all originated in the region we know as the Arab World. Judaism traces its roots to the land surrounding present-day Israel and Palestine; Christianity began on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean; and Islam started in the Arabian Peninsula.

2) **Do Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe in a different God?**

No, all three faiths believe in the same God. The name may differ slightly because of language, but they all reference the same all-powerful deity.

3) **Is it true that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a common history?**

Yes, each of the faiths observes and reveres the history and traditions of the previous. Christianity has its foundations in Judaism, and Islam traces some of its roots to both Christianity and Judaism.

4) **What was the Prophet Muhammad's view of Jesus and other Old and New Testament personalities?**

The Prophet Muhammad recognized the divine message brought by the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. He regarded these personalities as genuine prophets, having received their messages from God. In the *Qur'an*, the Prophet Muhammad recognizes Jesus as a messenger and prophet, however, he is not recognized as the son of God.

5) What role does language play in the origins and development of the three religions?

The Semitic family of languages has played a large role in the written and oral traditions of all three religions. The Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, were compiled in Hebrew and Aramaic, which are both Semitic languages. The New Testament has its roots in Aramaic, the probable language of Jesus, although it was written in Greek (non-Semitic). Another Semitic language, Arabic, surrounds the oral and written traditions of Islam. Even today, non-Arabic speakers learn the language in order to read the *Qur'an* in Arabic.

6) Have the three Abrahamic religions always been in conflict with one another?

Absolutely not. Conflict between the religions is the exception. For thousands of years, the three religions have lived alongside one another peacefully.

Key Terms

Abraham – The patriarch of monotheism shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Bible – Holy book of the Christians

Halakhah – Set of religious laws in Judaism

Hadith – The sayings and life of the Prophet Muhammad

Imam – Name of religious leader in Islam; similar to rabbi or priest

Jesus – Central to the Trinitarian belief system in Christianity. He is seen as a prophet in Islam and as an historical figure in the Jewish context.

Kashrut – the name given to the body of Jewish laws dealing with what can be eaten, commonly known as kosher.

Monotheism – The belief in one God

Moses – Important prophet in Judaism who brought the Ten Commandments. He is recognized in Christianity and Islam as a prophet as well.

Muhammad – Prophet of Islam

Qur'an – Holy book of Islam written originally in Arabic

Rabbi – Name of the religious leader in Judaism

Shari'a – The code of Islamic law, which is derived from scholarly interpretations of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*

Torah – Holy book of Judaism written originally in Hebrew

Timeline

- 2000-1700 B.C.E. Abraham, Patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is born in Southern Mesopotamia. Judaism is considered by some to start with Abraham.
- 586 B.C.E. Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II conquers the Kingdom of Judah, destroying Solomon's Temple and sending the Jews into exile in Babylon. This is known in Jewish history as the "Babylonian Exile" or "Babylonian Captivity."
- 520-515 B.C.E. Establishment of the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem
- 1-4 C.E. Birth of Jesus
- 70 C.E. Romans destroy the Second Jewish Temple during the "Great Revolt" in Judea
- 313 C.E. Emperor Constantine issues the Edict of Milan, proclaiming religious tolerance throughout the Roman Empire to protect Christians from persecution
- 325 C.E. The Council of Nicaea is held. This was the first of seven ecumenical councils that were held.
- 610 C.E. The Prophet Muhammad begins receiving revelations from God
- 622 C.E. The *hijra*, or emigration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina. This marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

- 632 C.E. The Prophet Muhammad dies. Debate over caliph succession leads to the *Shi'a-Sunni* schism within Islam.
- 720s C.E. Byzantine Emperor Leo III launches the first campaign to destroy icons used for reverence in a religious setting. Debate would rage for over 100 years within the church about the depiction of Jesus and God.
- 750 C.E. The *Umayyad* Caliphate expands the Arab-Islamic Empire to its largest boundaries, stretching from Spain and Morocco in the west to parts of China in the east before being replaced by the *Abbasid* dynasty.
- 1054 C.E. The “Great Schism” divides the medieval Christian Church into what will become the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- 1095 -1291 Christian Crusades in the Holy Land
- 1187 Saladin defeats the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin to retake Jerusalem
- 1453 Ottoman armies, under Sultan Mehmed II, conquer Constantinople

- 1478-1834 The Spanish Inquisition seeks to maintain Catholic Orthodoxy, especially among recent converts from Judaism and Islam
- 1500-1917 The Ottoman Empire rules most of the Arab World, as well as southeast Europe and regions surrounding the Black Sea
- 1517 The Protestant Reformation begins with the completion of Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*
- 1917 The Balfour Declaration is issued, promising British support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine
- 1939-1945 The Holocaust
- 1948 The State of Israel is established following British withdrawal from Palestine
- 1962-1965 The Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II) takes place in Rome
- 1993 The Oslo Accords are signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) The agreement called for PLO recognition of the State of Israel in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. The agreement, however, was never implemented.

Additional Resources

Catholic Encyclopedia <http://www.newadvent.org>

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Sourcebook
by Alexander D. Knysh, Ralph G. Williams, Yaron Z. Eliav

Global Connections: the Middle East (PBS)
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/timeline/text/treligion.html>

The Center for Muslim Christian Understanding
<http://cmcu.georgetown.edu/>

CCJU – Center for Christian and Jewish Understanding -
Sacred Heart University:
http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/122_center_for_christian_jewish_understanding.cfm

Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement –
University of Southern California:
<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/>



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