

# Despite differences, Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God

By Philip Almond, The Conversation, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.12.17

Word Count **790**

Level **990L**



Part of William Blake's "God answers Job" from around 1804. The same God is worshiped in the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Image from Wikimedia

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three of the world's major religions. Each believes that there is one true God. While they have many differences, they actually all worship the same God. In all three religions, God has a complicated nature. He can be all-merciful at times. At other times, he is stern and fearsome.

In each religion, God is "revealed" by a chosen messenger, called a prophet. Ancient prophets in Judaism include Noah, Abraham and Moses. Christians recognize these prophets as well, and think that Jesus was another prophet in the same line. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, saw himself as the last in this same line of prophets. The Quran says that God, called Allah, "sent down the Torah of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus ... as a guidance for the people."

To those who turned to him to ask for forgiveness, this God was infinitely merciful. Those who failed to find the path, though, or those who found the path but failed to follow it, would know God's judgment and wrath.

For Jews, God is fully revealed in the Hebrew Bible, called the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament can be both good and evil. He acts in ways that seem cruel, such as when he ordered Abraham to offer up his son as a burnt sacrifice. He is also a warrior God who murdered the first child of every Egyptian family and drowned the army of Pharaoh. He even approved of Elijah killing the 450 prophets of an opposing God, the ancient Canaanite God Baal.

### **Sometimes Merciful, Sometimes Cruel**

He is, at other times, a merciful God. In Psalm 23 in the Book of Psalms, for example, he is described as a loving guide who brings comfort and happiness to his followers. In the Old Testament, he loves Israel like a father loves a son.

The Christian Bible includes the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, which tells of the life and teachings of Jesus. As in older texts, the God of the New Testament is a complicated figure. On the one hand, Jesus describes him as tender and loving, referring to him as "Father." On the other hand, the God of the New Testament is still very much to be feared.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus predicted a day when God will punish humankind, and will be merciless in doing so. On this day, called the Last Judgement, God will bring an end to history. The dead will then be brought back to life. The people that God favored, a fortunate few, will receive eternal happiness in heaven. The wicked majority, including those who refused to listen to Jesus, will be cast into the eternal fires of hell.

Muhammad warned of a similar day of judgment. At the end of the world, God will act as a God of justice. All the dead will be resurrected to receive God's judgment. God will then reward or punish each person in the gardens of paradise or the fires of hell according to their deeds. Each will be presented with a record of their deeds – in the right hand for those to be saved, in the left for those to be damned to the fires of hell.

### **Those Who Surrender To Allah Will Be Saved**

For those who are saved, the pleasures and comforts of paradise await. Those who died in the cause of Allah, however, do not need to wait for the Last Judgment. They will go straight to heaven.

The key to being saved is, above all, to surrender to Allah ("islam" means "surrender" in Arabic). In other words, the key is to obey his commands, as described in the Quran, and pledge loyalty to his messenger Muhammad. Like the God of Moses, Allah is a lawmaker. The Quran provided rules and guidelines on various subjects, including marriage and family law, inheritance, food and drink, warfare, punishments for adultery and false accusations of adultery, alcohol and theft. Over the coming centuries, it provided the foundation for an Islam-based system of law, called sharia.

In sum, Muslims, Christians and Jews all worship the same complex God. Each religion believes, however, that its books and teachings reveal the true nature of that God. This disagreement has shaped the course of history. The followers of each religion believe that only they will be saved by God. They see each other as damned.

This way of seeing other people, as disfavored by God and beyond saving, has led to violence and intolerance. So it is that these religions both unite and divide.

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## Quiz

1 Read the section "Sometimes Merciful, Sometimes Cruel."

Select the sentence from the article that BEST explains a major similarity between all three religions.

- (A) The Christian Bible includes the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, which tells of the life and teachings of Jesus.
- (B) As in older texts, the God of the New Testament is a complicated figure.
- (C) The dead will then be brought back to life.
- (D) Each will be presented with a record of their deeds – in the right hand for those to be saved, in the left for those to be damned to the fires of hell.

2 Read the opinion below.

*Strict followers of religion tend to think only their religion is correct.*

Which sentence from the article provides the BEST support to the statement above?

- (A) In sum, Muslims, Christians and Jews all worship the same complex God.
- (B) This disagreement has shaped the course of history.
- (C) The followers of each religion believe that only they will be saved by God.
- (D) So it is that these religions both unite and divide.

3 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the article's CENTRAL idea?

- (A) Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three of the world's major religions.
- (B) While they have many differences, they actually all worship the same God.
- (C) In each religion, God is "revealed" by a chosen messenger, called a prophet.
- (D) The founder of Islam, Muhammad, saw himself as the last in this same line of prophets.

4 Read the following detail from the section "Those Who Surrender To Allah Will Be Saved."

*For those who are saved, the pleasures and comforts of paradise await.*

HOW does this detail develop the CENTRAL idea of the article?

- (A) It elaborates on a key similarity between Christianity and Islam about what to expect at the end of the world.
- (B) It introduces a concept that is unique to Islam through terms used by Jews and Christians.
- (C) It suggests that paradise is something that Muslims, Jews and Christians strive for by dying for their God.
- (D) It emphasizes an important difference in the terminology used by Jews, Muslims and Christians.