

# Monotheism

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you'll continue your study of religions by discussing monotheism and the monotheistic tradition. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Meaning and Usage of Monotheism](#)
2. [Evolution of the Abrahamic Religions](#)
3. [Relationship among the Abrahamic Religions](#)

## 1. Meaning and Usage of Monotheism

As with many concepts in the study of religions, it's very helpful to use etymology, or the study of word roots, to get a deeper insight into the meaning of the terms we use.

The English word “monotheism” comes from two Greek words: “mono,” meaning “one,” and “theos,” meaning “god. Thus the word **monotheism** means the belief that only one god exists.

There are many references to monotheism and the monotheistic tradition throughout the study of religions, but the term usually refers to the three Abrahamic religions:

- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam



### DID YOU KNOW

There are other traditions that would technically be grouped under **monotheism**, but they are not in the Abrahamic tradition. Some examples of these traditions would be African tribes such as Maasai in East Africa and the Himba people of Namibia.



### TERM TO KNOW

**Monotheism**

## 2. Evolution of the Abrahamic Religions

Before the emergence of YHWH, the unspeakable name for the one God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the tribes of Canaan in Mesopotamia had many gods.

It is believed that eventually a deal was struck between the god El and the people that lived in and around Mesopotamia and Canaan. In exchange for security and protection from other tribes, the Canaanites agreed to worship no other gods but El.

At some point in the second millennium before the common era, it is also believed that a covenant or agreement was made between Abraham and YHWH, and Abraham thus set off for the promised land of Canaan.



### DID YOU KNOW

The Hebrew word YHWH, written in biblical Hebrew without any vowels, is sometimes called the tetragrammaton, which means four letters. Yahweh and Jehovah are pronunciations of this word often used by Christians, but Jewish tradition holds that it is forbidden to pronounce this word. Because of this, YHWH is called by different names including Elohim, Hashem, and Adonai, but this doesn't conflict with the radical or strict monotheism that is characteristic of Judaism

In the book of Genesis, it says, "To your offspring I will give this land." The book of Genesis is in the Torah, which is also called the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. This statement begins the Abrahamic journey all the way through Christianity and Islam.

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## 3. Relationship among the Abrahamic Religions

In the order of the three Abrahamic religions, Christianity comes second historically, yet the relationship among all these faiths is very complex because of a weaving of similarities and differences.

One aspect that Judaism and Islam have in common is that they both follow a very strict monotheism when compared to the Trinitarian monotheism of Christianity.

Among Christians in general, there is the belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, which refers to God existing as one God in three divine persons, or hypostases:

- Father
- Son
- Holy Spirit

While for Christians this in no way compromises His unity and role as the single God of the faith, some Muslims and Jews don't agree that Christianity can technically be called a monotheistic religion because of this.

Additionally, Islam and Judaism also both deny the resurrection of Jesus. Judaism regards him as a wise teacher, but not as prophet or messiah, while Islam generally considers him a true prophet, second in importance only to Muhammad, but whose message became corrupted.

Although Judaism and Islam share a strict monotheism, Islam calls God by the name Allah, because this is the Arabic word for God.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **meaning and usage of the term monotheism**. Monotheism simply means the belief that there is only one god. The term applies not only to the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but also to some of the African tribal religions.

You also learned about the historical **evolution of the Abrahamic religions**, as well as the **relationship among these religions**. There are some similarities and differences between the three Abrahamic faiths, including the different protocols for using the name of God in various contexts. Yet perhaps the most notable distinction between Christianity and the other two Abrahamic religions is the idea of three divine persons of God. This form of monotheism is considered a Trinitarian monotheism, which is quite different from Islam and Judaism.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Monotheism**

The belief that only one god exists.