

# The Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Concept of God

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## A Perspective

The purpose here is to present some “take home” value on this subject, not to give an exhaustive study. There are, of course, liberals and conservatives in all three religions, plus many variations and individual beliefs. For example, many Jews are atheists. But there is enough consistency to make a comparison, which is worth knowing. What I will discuss here is **the prominent views today** of most Talmud-following Jewish rabbis, most Koran-following Muslim imams, and most Bible-believing Christian pastors and priests.

## The Big Picture

There are two basic things to understand (which I find most people don't know):

**First**, the Muslim view of God is much closer to the Christian view than either of them are to the Jewish view. All three are monotheistic, in that they believe in only one God. But, whereas Christianity and Islam are a true theism, Judaism is a not. Today's Judaism is a finite-ism.

**Second**, the Jewish view of God is that of Rabbinic Judaism, not Old Testament Judaism. Most Christians think today's Jews believe in the God of the Old Testament and just add some traditions to it. Not so. The Old Testament God is infinite; the God of Rabbinic Judaism is finite.

**All three religions believe** God is:

|          |             |          |
|----------|-------------|----------|
| Singular | Omnipresent | Truthful |
| Personal | Omniscient  | Holy     |
| Eternal  | Just        | Loving   |
| Involved | Eternal     |          |

The Jews disagree with the Christians and the Muslims in that the **Jews do not believe** God is:

- Omnipotent
- Sovereign
- Infinite
- Unchanging

The Muslims disagree with the Christians in that the **Muslims do not believe**:

- Allah can be known
- Allah can be understood
- Allah is consistent
- Allah is reasonable
- Faith in Allah is tied to evidence

In general terms:

**Judaism** believes in a finite God, who is loving but not all-powerful.  
**Islam** believes in an infinite God, who is loving and powerful but cannot be known.  
**Christianity** believes in an infinite God, who is loving and powerful and can be known.

## **Judaism**

The dominant thinking in Rabbinic Judaism is that God is finite. He is all loving, but He is limited in His power. For example, He was incapable of preventing the Nazi-Jewish holocaust. Bad things happen to good people because God is incapable of preventing it. They believe God is the creator, in that He was the first cause of what evolved into what we have today. He is personal and involved with His creation to the extent that He can be. But He is not sovereign over His creation. He wants to help us because He is all-loving, but He is limited in what He can do. He may (or may not) be eternal, but He is not infinite. God is limited in three areas:

- (1) He is limited by evil. A God who is all-powerful and all-loving would destroy evil. Since evil is not destroyed, God is not all-powerful.
- (2) God is limited by the free will of man because free will and sovereignty are incompatible.
- (3) God is limited by the nature of reason because He could not make square circles, sticks with one end, or rocks so big He cannot move them. So, by definition, God cannot do everything.

Therefore, His power is limited. Therefore, He cannot be all-powerful.

Obedience to God has to do with keeping the Jewish traditions which God established in antiquity, helping God eliminate evil, and improving the world. But most Jews believe there is no assurance that good will prevail.

## **Islam**

Muslims believe Allah is a personal, loving, sovereign, infinite creator. But Allah cannot be known. We are only to submit to his laws and commands. Good is what Allah wills at that moment, independent of what he willed in the past and apart from reason. For example, Allah could say killing the infidels is right, even if he says killing is wrong. Bad things happen to good people because it is the will of Allah, yet Allah is good and sovereign. The contradiction only requires faith. Each of Allah's attributes are disconnected from the other. So his love may contradict his justice. Allah has no limitations because contradictions are a matter of faith. His attributes, commands, or decisions may contradict one another, because he is not limited to consistency. He chooses to save people (or not) depending solely upon his will/choice, without any other conditions. For example, if you are not a believer in Allah because you were born in a non-Muslim country, then it is not the will of Allah that you believe. Morality is in submitting to what Allah says, not in making sense out of it. Faith is submitting to the laws and commands and teachings of Islam, even when, or especially when, they are inconsistent, contradictory, or illogical.

## **Christianity**

Christianity believes that God is a personal, loving, sovereign, infinite Creator. Although God can never be completely known, because He is infinite, we can know something of His heart, His character, and His ways. And it is from this understanding, not just His laws, that we apply His Word. Good is the character of God, and evil is anything inconsistent with God's character. Bad things happen to people, but there are no good people. Bad happens because of the fall of man and the result of his own sin. An evil world does not mean there is no good sovereign God because evil is the result of man's free will, and God will judge it in the future. Human free will is not a limitation to God's sovereignty, we just lack knowledge about how both are true (like many things in the natural world). God is restricted but not limited. He cannot be holy and sin, or make square circles because that's absurd. Being restricted to virtues, like holiness, consistency, and reason, is not a limitation. Also, God does not change. His laws may change, for example, from one age to another or from Israel to the church, but His character is the same. And His attributes are not disconnected from one another. His love is connected to His justice, which is connected to His holiness, etc. They are simply different views of the same God, like looking at a ball game through different holes in a fence.