

**Sabbath in the Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam**  
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**I. Abrahamic Religions**

**A. Gen 12**

<sup>1</sup>Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

**B. Gen 17**

<sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

**C. Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed I:71**

There is no doubt that there are things that are common to all three of us, I mean the Jewish, the Christians and the Moslems: namely, the affirmation of the temporal creation of the world, the validity of which entails the validity of miracles and other things of that kind.

**D. Quran, Sura 3**

<sup>65</sup>O People of the Scripture! Why will ye argue about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye then no sense

<sup>66</sup>Lo! ye are those who argue about that whereof ye have some knowledge: Why then argue ye concerning that whereof ye have no knowledge ? Allah knoweth. Ye know not.

<sup>67</sup>Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters.

<sup>68</sup>Lo! those of mankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet and those who believe (with him); and Allah is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.

**E. Romans 4**

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.' <sup>10</sup>How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, <sup>12</sup>and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

### F. Rambam, Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte

I received the question of the master Obadiah, the wise and learned proselyte...You ask...if you, too, are allowed to say in the blessings... “Our God” and “God of our fathers” ...Yes, you may say all this ...The reason for this is, that Abraham our Father taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith and the unity of God...Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name, as it is prescribed in the Torah, is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father, peace be with him...Thus Abraham our Father, peace be with him, is the father of his pious posterity who keep his ways, and the father of his disciples and of all proselytes who adopt Judaism.

### G. Rambam Responsa 149

It is permitted to teach the commandments to Christians and to draw them to our religion, but this is not permitted with Muslims because of what is known to you about their belief that this Torah is not divine revelation. When you will teach them something from Scripture, they will find that it contradicts what they have devised from their own minds according to the confused stories and incoherent doctrines which have come to them, and this will not be a proof to them because they possess error...but the uncircumcised ones believe that the version of the Torah has not changed, only they interpret it with their faulty exegesis...But when these scriptural texts will be interpreted with correct exegesis, it is possible that they will return...

## **II. Sabbath in Christianity**

### A. Mark 2

<sup>23</sup>One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?’ <sup>25</sup>And he said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? <sup>26</sup>He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.’ <sup>27</sup>Then he said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; <sup>28</sup>so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.’

### B. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 85a-b

...Whence do we know that in the case of danger to human life the laws of the Sabbath are suspended? — R. Ishmael answered...R. Jonathan b. Joseph said: For it is holy unto you; I.e., it [the Sabbath] is committed to your hands, not you to its hands.

### C. Origen, Commentary on Romans 6:12

Indeed, what could be more impossible than the observance of the Sabbath according to the letter of the law...? For it is commanded not to go out of the house, not to move from one's place, and to carry no burden. Because the Jews, who observe the law according to the flesh, also regard these things as impossible, they contrive certain inept and ridiculous interpretations...

D. Origen, Homilies on Numbers 23.4.2

On the Sabbath everyone sits in his place and does not leave it [Exodus 16:29]. What, then, is the spiritual place of the soul? Its place is righteousness, truth, wisdom, holiness and everything which Christ is, that is the place of the soul. The soul ought not to leave this place, if it is to keep the true Sabbath....

E. Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them...

F. Revelation 1:10

I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice...

G. Didache

8. Let your fasts not [coincide] with [those of] the hypocrites. They fast on Monday and Thursday; you, though, should fast on Wednesday and Friday...

14. Assembling on every Sunday of the Lord, break bread and give thanks, confessing your faults besides so that your sacrifice may be clean. Let no one engaged in a dispute with his comrade join you until they have been reconciled, lest your sacrifice be profaned...

H. Ignatius, Magnesians 9.2

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day...

I. Constantine's Edict on March 3, 321

The Emperor Constantine to A. Helpidius. All judges, townspeople and all occupations should rest on the most honorable day of the sun...

J. Jerome, Dominicae Paschae

They (the Jews) did no servile work on the Sabbath, we do none on the Lord's day.

K. Ephrem Syrus

Honor is due to the Lord's day, the first-born of all days, for in it lie hidden many secrets. Pay our respect to this day, for it has taken away the right of the first-born from Sabbath....Blessed is he who honors it with spotless observance...The law ordains that rest be granted to servants and animals, in order that laborers, serving

girls and employees may cease from work. While our body rests, it does indeed cease from work, but we sin on the day of rest more than on other days...

#### L. Rule of Benedict of Nursia 48

On Sundays likewise all shall apply themselves to reading, except those who are assigned to various duties. But if there be anyone so careless and slothful that he will not or cannot study or read, let him be given some work to perform, so that he may not be idle.

#### M. Augustine, Serm. 9.3

You are told to keep the Sabbath in a spiritual fashion and not by bodily inactivity, as is the custom of the Jews. They only wish to devote themselves to their pleasure and revelries. The Jew would do better by working usefully on the land than by sitting discontentedly in the theatre, and their wives would do better to spin wool on the Sabbath day than to spend the whole day shamelessly dancing at home.

### **III. Sabbath in Islam**

#### A. Quran 62 (al-Jumu'ah)

<sup>5</sup>The likeness of those who are entrusted with the Law of Moses, yet apply it not, is as the likeness of the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of folk who deny the revelations of Allah. And Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk....

<sup>9</sup>O ye who believe! When the call is heard for the prayer of the day of congregation, haste unto remembrance of Allah and leave your trading. That is better for you if ye did but know.

<sup>10</sup>And when the prayer is ended, then disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty, and remember Allah much, that ye may be successful.

<sup>11</sup>But when they spy some merchandise or pastime they break away to it and leave thee standing. Say: That which Allah hath is better than pastime and than merchandise, and Allah is the Best of providers.

#### B. Quran 50

<sup>38</sup>And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in six Days, and naught of weariness touched Us.

#### C. Quran 16

<sup>123</sup>And afterward We inspired thee (Muhammad, saying): Follow the religion of Abraham, as one by nature upright. He was not of the idolaters.

<sup>124</sup>The Sabbath was appointed only for those who differed concerning it, and lo! thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ.

#### D. Al-Tabari (9-10<sup>th</sup> century, as elaborated by I. Goldziher)

Tradition mentions a discussion between the Jews and the Prophet as the cause for the revelation of this passage. Out of simple beginnings this account grew steadily

until it acquired the following form: The Jews inquired of the Prophet the sequence of events of the creation of the world. The Prophet answered: On Sunday God created Heaven and earth, on Monday the mountains, on Tuesday the animals, on Wednesday the light, on Thursday paradise and hell, on Friday Adam and Eve." "Very good," the Jewish replied, "if only you had added the conclusion of the story. After God completed the creation, he lay down on his back, put his feet on top of one another and rested. This is the Sabbath, and this is why we decreed it to be our holiday during which we rest." Infuriated, the Prophet announced Sura 50:38.

E. Al-Sinhaji (13<sup>th</sup> century) Question 87

The Jews say that according to the Torah, when God almighty created the world in six days He rested on the seventh...they attribute weariness and fatigue to Him, to such an extent that elsewhere it is transmitted from one of them that on the seventh day He laid down on His back...This involves a number of follies, including anthropomorphism, attributing incapacity to God...and compelling them to accept that their deity is contingent, since...weariness and fatigue are accidents. What is this talk compared to what the Muslims say (about God)?!

F. Al-Qazwini (13<sup>th</sup> century)

And his statement: 'Adhere to the Sabbath forever, as long as heaven and earth exist': This is not genuine, and is rather one of the forgeries of Ibn al-Rawandi. Were it genuine, the scholars of the Jewish would have based allegations upon it in the time of the Prophet.

G. Ignatz Goldziher

On which day began and on which day ended the creation? This question has been answered in the most diverse ways by Muslim theologians, and, as an overt protest against the Jewish Sabbath, they finally agreed after much indecision that the creation began on the Sabbath. The opinion that it started on a Sunday could, eventually, be presented as if it was the individual opinion of Ibn Jarir (al-Tabari), the famous historian.

H. R. Saadya Gaon's Torah Commentary (Exod 20:10, 31:17)

'*Vayanakh* (God rested)'-*vayanakh otam* (God rested them)

'*Vayinafash*'-*heshbitam vehenicham* (God brought them to a halt and rested them)

I. Rambam, Responsa 204

Q: What will our master state regarding the matter of commercial partners, some Jews some gentiles. The partners agreed that the Friday profits will belong to the Jews, and the Saturday profits to the gentiles...can they split the profits? Answer: the profits of Shabbat should be for the gentiles, and the profits of Friday...exclusively to the Jews, and they should split the profits of the remaining days.

#### IV. Sabbath in Judaism

##### A. Midrash, Tosafot Hag 3b

Three testify concerning each other: God, Israel and the Sabbath. God and Israel testify that the Sabbath is a day of repose; Israel and the Sabbath testify that God is One; God and the Sabbath testify that Israel is unique among the nations

##### B. Mekhilta, Bahodesh 7

Observe (*shamor*) and remember (*zachor*), they both were uttered in one utterance.

##### C. Jerusalem Talmud Shabbat 15:3

R. Haggai in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahman: Sabbaths and festivals have been given only for eating and drinking...R. Berekhiah in the name of R. Hiyya bar Ba: Sabbaths and festivals have been given over only for people to engage on them in studying Torah.

There is a Tannaitic teaching which supports the views of both parties...How so? Set aside part of the day for the study of Torah and part of the day for eating and drinking.

Said R. Abbahu: "It is Sabbath to the Lord" observe the Sabbath as does the Lord. Just as the Holy One, blessed by He, observed a Sabbath I regard to speech, so you should observe a Sabbath in regard to speech.

There is the story of a certain pious man, who went to take a stroll in his vineyard on the Sabbath. He saw a hole in a wall and thought of fencing it up at the end of the Sabbath. He then said, Since on the Sabbath I gave thought to fencing it up after the Sabbath, lo I shall never fence it up. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do for him?...

Said R. Hanina, It was only with difficult that [sages] permitted greetings to be give on the Sabbath.

Said R. Hiyya bar Ba, When R. Simeon b. Yohai would see his mother chattering a great deal he would say to her, Mother, it is the Sabbath.

It has been taught: It is forbidden on the Sabbath [in prayer] to beseech the things one needs.

##### D. Babylonian Talmud, Bezah 15b

...It happened that R. Eliezer was once sitting and lecturing the whole day [of the Festival] on Festival laws. [When] the first group left [the lecture hall] he said: These

are people of butts; [when] the second group [left] ...[When] the sixth group began to go out he said: These are the people of the curse. He cast his eyes at his disciples and their faces began to change, [whereupon] he said to them: My sons, not of you said I this, but of those who have gone out, who put aside life eternal and occupy themselves with the life temporal [or ephemeral]....The Master said: 'Who put aside life eternal and occupy themselves with the life temporal'. But the enjoyment of the Festival is a religious duty! — R. Eliezer is consistent with his [own] view, for he said: Rejoicing on the Festival is optional. For it was taught: R. Eliezer says: On a Festival a man has nought [to do] save either eat and drink or sit and learn. R. Joshua says: Divide it, half of it for the Lord, [and] half of it for yourselves...

#### Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 68b

Rabbah said: All agree in respect to the Sabbath that we require [it to be] 'for you' too. What is the reason? And thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight.

#### E. Ramban on Exod 20:8

The purpose of the cessation (sabbath) for us is due to the sanctity of the day, to be clear from concentrating on calculating thoughts and the vanity of times, and to privilege joy in our souls in the paths of God, to go to the sages and the prophets to hear the word of God...This is why the sages taught that Sabbath is equal to all the commandments of the Torah...since we testify through it regarding the principles of faith regarding renewal, providence and prophecy.

#### F. Rambam Hilchot Shabbat, Chapter 30

1. There are four [dimensions] to the [observance of] the Sabbath:... [The two dimensions originating] in the Torah are the commandments "Remember [the Sabbath day]" and "Observe [the Sabbath day]." [The two dimensions] given exposition by the Prophets are honor and pleasure, as [Isaiah 58:13] states: "And you shall call the Sabbath 'A delight, sanctified unto God and honored.'

2. What is meant by honor? This refers to our Sages' statement that it is a mitzvah for a person to wash his face, his hands, and his feet in hot water on Friday in honor of the Sabbath. He should wrap himself in *tzitzit* and sit with proper respect, waiting to receive the Sabbath as one goes out to greet a king. The Sages of the former generations would gather their students together on Friday, wrap themselves [in fine robes] and say, "Come, let us go out and greet the Sabbath, the king..."

7. What is meant by [Sabbath] delight? This refers to our Sages' statement that a person must prepare a particularly sumptuous dish and a pleasantly flavored beverage for the Sabbath....

14. Sexual relations are considered a dimension of Sabbath pleasure. Therefore, Torah scholars who are healthy set aside Friday night as the night when they fulfill their conjugal duties...[. Rashi on Ketuvot 62b 'From Friday Night, etc'—for it is a night of pleasure and cessation and bodily pleasures. ]

15. [The observance of] the Sabbath and [the prohibition against] worshiping false deities are each equivalent to [the observance] of all the mitzvot of the Torah. And the Sabbath is the eternal sign between the Holy One, blessed be He, and us.

For this reason, whoever transgresses the other mitzvot is considered to be one of the wicked of Israel, but a person who violates the Sabbath is considered as an idolater. Both of them are considered to be equivalent to gentiles in all regards. Therefore, our prophets praise [Sabbath observance], saying [Isaiah 56:2]: "Happy is the man who does the following, and the mortal who holds fast to it, who keeps the Sabbath, without desecrating it..."

It is explicitly stated in our prophetic tradition that whoever observes the Sabbath according to law and honors it and delights in it according to his ability will receive reward in this world in addition to the reward that is preserved for the world to come, as [Isaiah 58:14] states: "'You will then delight in God. I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and I will nourish you with the heritage of Jacob your ancestor'; thus has the mouth of God spoken."