



MENORAH



CROSS



ALLAH



JUDAISM



CHRISTIANITY



ISLAM

All are considered faiths of the Abrahamic Tradition. What do I mean?
All three religions see themselves, in one way or another, as descendants of Abraham.



In Judaism, the first Covenant made between God and the People of Israel was through Abraham. Recall how the Hebrew people wandered nomadically in Mesopotamia until God calls Abraham to lead his people. God communicates himself to Abraham through a Pillar of Fire and leads him to Canaan, the Land of Milk and Honey.



Among all the Middle Eastern cultures, it was to Israel alone that God offers them, through Abraham, land, progeny and protection from their enemies. In return, all that Abraham and his descendants needed to do was obey whatever God commanded of them, which, in Abraham's case, was to trust God at all times. So, from almost 4,000 BC, Abraham's perfect trust in God earned him the position as the first great Patriarch. It was through him, that the Chosen People of Israel was born.



Abraham obeyed when he was called by God to lead the people to a Promised Land which would be his inheritance, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith, Abraham, in his old age, produced an heir with his wife, Sarah. The child was given the name "Isaac," and as much as he loved his family, by faith, when put to the test by God, Abraham was ready to sacrifice his beloved son. Upon seeing Abraham's blind trust in the Almighty, God called off the sacrifice and allowed Isaac to live. Abraham is regarded as one of the six Prophets of Islam.



Thinking herself sterile, Sarah offered her Egyptian slave-girl, Hagar, to Abraham in order to serve him as a concubine, so that she might conceive an heir for him. When Hagar became pregnant, Sarah treated her so harshly that Hagar fled into the wilderness. There she was told by an angel of the Lord to return home and was promised that she would have many descendants through a son, Ishmael. So, Hagar went home and bore Abraham a son, whom he did name "Ishmael." Several years later, Sarah conceives a son and gives birth to Isaac. God promised to make Isaac the heir to the Covenant initially made with Abraham. But Sarah did not trust God as did Abraham.



One day, Sarah saw Isaac and Ishmael playing together. Suddenly, she became obsessed that Ishmael might also inherit the promises made to Abraham. So she banished Hagar and Ishmael from their camp. Islamic legend holds that Hagar and her son went off to Mecca while Sarah and Isaac remained with Abraham in Israel. Muslims believe that all Arabs are descendants of Ismael and his father Abraham, including Muhammad, the Greatest Prophet of Islam.



In Christianity, we continue to refer to Abraham as Father of Faith. Why? Jesus was born into a Jewish household. After his birth, Jesus is initiated into the Covenant made with Israel through Abraham as, on the eighth day, he is circumcised as prescribed by the Torah for all newborn males. Since we know that Jesus did not come to abolish the covenants made with Abraham, Moses or David but to fulfill these, it follows that the Covenant and Promises made to Abraham are still in effect. We, by our being related to Jesus through Baptism, are therefore heirs of these Covenants and Promises as well.



Sadly, as so acutely pointed out by Pope Francis, there are fundamentalists in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. These religious fanatics commit violent acts of terror in the name of God; however, they obviously worship a false-god who inspires them to commit terrorism in word and deed.



Compare them to the mainline Muslims and Jews who attended the funeral of the French priest who was slain by a 19 year old fanatical Muslim, an ISIS sympathizer, just last week near Rouen, France. These non-Christians attended the funeral Mass to show their respect for the dead priest, their solidarity with Christians—and to declare their opposition to inter-faith violence.



Tragically, the fundamentalists, who sow division, death and discord, forget the common aspiration to which we are all called to forge on earth, by virtue of the love between God and Abraham, a goal which can be summed up three ways in one word: “Shalom” in Hebrew, “Salaam” in Arabic, “Peace” in English. This is what God desires for all of us:

Jewish, Muslim and Christian: the People he has chosen to be his own.



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