

Abraham is often called the father of three faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. What purpose does this characterization serve? Do you think it is an accurate characterization? Defend your answer with reference to the assigned materials for today.

Abraham being called the father of three faiths makes sense to those outside of each religion as each religion does lay claim to him as an important figure, but within each of those religions that makes no sense

The purpose of this characterization is in promoting the “we are all multiple paths to the same god” ideology, see also God = YHWH = Allah

Accurate is an interesting question. Cite long paper about being unsure if the abraham described in each faith is the same abraham

The three major monotheistic religions in the world today, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, all have their origins in roughly the same geographical region. It is not surprising, then, that there is some amount of overlap in the histories and origins of each of them, as many of the the key figures in the development of each one of them are shared. One of the most significant examples is Abraham, a figure that appears in the early history of all three of these monotheistic religions. A group called the *Abraham Path Initiative* states that “three and a half billion people—over half the human family—trace their history or faith back to Abraham, considered the father of monotheism.”¹ Clearly, then, this character has some significance in the history of the world.

Labeling Abraham as the “father of monotheism” can be seen as an attempt to unify these three major religions under one banner. But why? Religious wars have been at the root of the constant unrest in the Middle East, so it could be seen as a peace-keeping attempt to show these warring groups that they are not as different as they think they might be. We can also see this sort of thing happening with claims that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all worship the same God. This sort of thinking fits especially well with the relativistic world-view that is becoming prominent in the West, where all religions are a different but equally good way to the same end goal. But is labeling Abraham as the universal father of all of these religions accurate?

Each of the three religions do claim Abraham as a key figure in their religion's past. However, they also each make an exclusive claim to Abraham. The Christian perspective, as written by Paul in Romans 4:11, is that Abraham was made to be “the father of all who believe”. The Jewish claim him as the first Jew, and is “the biological father of most Jews and the adoptive yet no less real father of those who have converted to the religion of his descendants.”² For the Muslims, the Qur'an refers to Abraham as the ideal Muslim, stating that no one can be “better in religion” than him.³ It also

1 Jon D. Levenson – The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: A Qualified Dissent <http://jeffkeiser.com/assets/Levenson-The%20Idea%20of%20Abrahamic%20Religions.html>

2 Jon D. Levenson – The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: A Qualified Dissent

3 Brannon Wheeler – Abraham and Islam <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/abraham-and-islam>

emphasizes that Abraham was Muslim, *not* Christian or Jew⁴.

So from this we can clearly see that while it is not wrong to say that Abraham is considered the father in all three religions, it is not really correct, either. Islam clearly separates Abraham from Christianity and Judaism, but why can't Christians and Jews agree to share Abraham? Well, the Jewish view is very familial, in a sense, where Abraham's lineage and offspring, as promised by God in Genesis 17:7, would have an everlasting covenant with God. This covenant also promised Abraham and his offspring huge tracts of land.⁵ For Christians, however, Paul writes that the covenant established with Abraham is to not set aside a specific, exclusive group of people as "God's people", but rather to extend the blessings of God upon all people of the world through Abraham. He writes in Galatians 3:7 (ESV), "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." This flies in the face of the Jewish tradition, where only those who were circumcised, as per God's covenant with Abraham, could be considered part of Abraham's lineage.

In conclusion, then, all three of these religions lay a certain claim to Abraham at the root of their religion, and Abraham is very important in all three of these religions. But to hold Abraham up as a symbol of unity between these three very divided and different faiths is to ignore the exclusivity of the claim each religion has to him.

4 Jon D. Levenson – The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: A Qualified Dissent

5 Genesis 15:18-21