

# Comparing and Contrasting Judaism with Christianity

## God

The most obvious difference between the Jewish and Christian views of God is that Jews do not accept the Christian idea that God is a Trinity of three Persons in one God. God is one and one only according to Jewish theology. There are, however, other, more subtle differences. Observant Jews do not pronounce the name of God out of respect for God's holiness, while most Christians do so without pause. Also, in Christianity, God becomes quite approachable, especially in the person of Jesus. All this having been said, the God of Jews and of Christians (as well as of Muslims) is the same God.

## The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament

The Hebrew Bible is the definitive Revelation of God to the Jewish people. The early Christian Church took the Hebrew Bible and added the books that became known as the Christian New Testament. Christians often refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament to distinguish it from the New Testament. It is important to remember, however, that for Jews, it isn't the "Old" Testament. Christians often interpret their Old Testament as prefiguring or leading up to the final Revelation of God through the Christ of the New Testament, which is the definitive written Revelation of God for Christians. Naturally, Jews do not share this interpretation. Many biblical scholars recommend the use of the references "Hebrew Scriptures" and "Christian Scriptures" instead of "Old Testament" and "New Testament," especially when in the company of Jewish people, to retain a sensitivity to the Jewish faith.

## The Human Condition and Sin

Christians and Jews have differing views on how human salvation comes about, although both emphasize that God desires fellowship with people. Jews believe that in principle, human beings are capable of not sinning. Sins are wrong actions, but there is no inherent tendency to sinfulness apart from the acts themselves. Salvation comes about through repentance and the rituals of the Day of Atonement. God forgives the sins of those who repent and wipes the slate clean for another year. Christians, by contrast, believe that all humans are affected by Original Sin, which is a constant inclination toward sin. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the liturgical celebration of God's forgiveness of sin, through which the sinner is reconciled with both God and the Church. However, salvation is accomplished through God's grace.



## Maimonides, Saint Augustine, and Saint Thomas Aquinas

Maimonides used the thought of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle to interpret and express the theology of Judaism in his well-known Thirteen Principles. Similarly, Greek philosophy has been used to interpret Christian faith. Most notably, Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, used Platonic thought in his interpretation of Christianity, and Saint Thomas Aquinas used the thought of Aristotle in crafting his famous scholastic work, the *Summa Theologiae*. All three of these figures illustrate the essential principle that faith and reason need not be at odds with each other.

