

CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are known as Abrahamic traditions as all of them trace their history back to Abraham (Prophet Ibrahim). Abraham became the centre of Abrahamic traditions as they respectively acknowledge to have the same faith in God as in Abrahamic teaching according to their interpretation of beliefs. After Abraham, the ancestry was promised by God with the coming of prophets in the future to continue guiding people in maintaining true faith as revealed to Abraham.

One of the prophets that God sent is Jesus for the people of Israel. All these three Abrahamic traditions have their own history and views about Jesus in determining his role and nature. Jesus was debated among Abrahamic traditions in relations to faith and his teaching with several argumentations that led to several tensions.

This study examines and compares the views and positions of these three Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) toward Jesus. Jesus was an important figure in Judaism and was one of God's messengers who preached in the house of Israel at the time. In Christianity, Jesus is believed to be the incarnation of the Son of God, whereas Islam believes that Jesus was a righteous prophet. It is hoped that this study will be able to create mutual respect and harmony between these three religions.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam share various similarities. They are considered Abrahamic traditions as well as a three-sister monotheistic religion that claim the

prophet Abraham as their common bone father. Thus, this study will examine the beliefs and teachings of these three religions about Jesus and then identify in which angle these three religions can be harmonised.

Controversy erupted when Jesus was said to have brought new teachings by Jewish followers. For Muslims, they believe and acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus but do not acknowledge that the prophet is a Son of God as believed by Christians in the concept of trinity. In Islam, Jesus is responsible in preaching to the people of Israel, similar to other prophets before him that fulfil God's commandment to spread true faith.

Judaism rejects any outside claims that contradict with the Torah. The divinity concept on human beings is prohibited as it leads to idolatry. Judaism maintains that the Torah and Jewish law are divine in origin, eternal and unalterable, and that they should be strictly followed. Regarding the eschatological concept, Judaism grounds its faith in God, hope for the future and prophecy.

In Christianity, they believe in the coming of Jesus to fulfil the promise of the Old Testament (Hebrew bible). They also believe in the concept of salvation from the divine through Jesus thereby, acknowledging him as the Messiah through his sacrifice and resurrection for humankind.

Despite many interpretations of Jesus in the Abrahamic traditions, all agree that he was respectively respected as a figure, thus they have the potential to create harmony among their followers by understanding the personality and behaviour of Jesus through interactions between Abrahamic traditions. For this purpose, research is needed to examine or investigate the prospect of mutual understanding.

1.2 Statement of problem

Jesus Christ or Prophet Isa, son of Mary is a highly revered figure in Islam. He is considered a great prophet and messenger of Allah, classified as one of the five major prophets (*ulul al-azmi*) including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. In the Islamic view, Jesus was a prophet similar to other prophets who were commissioned to convey to the people of God. Without the guidance or path of the prophet, it would have been impossible for human life to walk in the right path.

A common ground between Muslims and Christians can be built upon shared themes in the theological, moral, and narrative elements of Jesus's life. Jesus is respectfully mentioned in the Quran for being commendable and no criticism is offered. He was sent to deliver preaching to Jewish people.

One of the accurate facts about Jesus was that he was a Jew who fully grew up in a Jewish tradition. In every Islamic and Christian scripture there is a great deal of praise for Jesus, both in terms of his behaviour and the spread of his preaching. The Quran and gospel describe Jesus as a prophet who was miraculously given by God the ability to bring back the dead and heal the blind.

However, there is a significant difference in the Abrahamic traditions of varying beliefs in determining who Jesus was. In the Islamic faith, it is said that Jesus was a prophet sent by God to deliver preaching, while according to Christianity, Jesus was the Son of God. Some Jews claimed that Jesus brought a new teaching.

These differences in belief create discomfort and strife in the Abrahamic traditions. Without ethics and respect for each other, misunderstandings result in fanatics thus, make the situation worse. With this study, a mutual understanding and respect for Jesus among the Abrahamic traditions can be achieved. Other than that,

understanding this subject can avoid the figure that is respectively believed by Abrahamic traditions according to their understanding, from being insulted.

Islam, Christianity and Judaism have their own point of view on Jesus. We can take it as a platform for religious harmony and make Jesus the subject of that approach. Despite many similarities, the status of Jesus is sometimes controversial between Abrahamic traditions. This study will open the door to finding points of understanding and angles that can open the way towards religious harmony especially between Abrahamic traditions.

1.3 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the history and teachings of Jesus according to Abrahamic traditions?
2. How have the status and miracles of Jesus been understood by Abrahamic traditions?
3. Are there any similarities and differences between these Abrahamic traditions on the status of Jesus?

1.4 Research Objective

1. To know the history and teachings of Jesus according to the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
2. To examine the status and miracles of Jesus according to the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
3. To explore (discuss) the similarities and differences among Abrahamic traditions on the status of Jesus

1.5 Significance of Research

The Abrahamic traditions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) all believe in Jesus. It is based on their own beliefs either from their followers or scriptures. This study is significant to create a better understanding of Jesus's personality or behaviour as a figure in religion without prejudice from personal interpretations that cause tension between followers.

Through understanding, escalating disputes and violence that give rise to intolerance can be avoided. At the same time, discrimination can be harmoniously overcome without animosity as reported in the world nowadays. For instance, news reported by Al-Jazeera about what happened in France whenever the French President, Emmanuel Macron comments regarding the display of cartoons of Prophet Muhammad but added that "radical Islam" causes tension between Western and Islamic countries (n.a. 2020. "Macron says he understands Muslims' shock over Prophet cartoons". Al Jazeera. 31 October).

This study is important because it provides a clear understanding about Jesus according to the Abrahamic traditions. Furthermore, it is a step toward political and national stability by having adherents live peacefully and harmoniously whilst avoiding extremism.

1.6 Research Scope

The scope of this study is limited to the historical and religious accounts of Jesus from Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in explaining the history, teaching and status of Jesus. Next is how the understanding of Jesus will create opportunities for harmony and mutual respect between the three religions.

1.7 Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative and library research. The information related to this study were collected and analysed. This research is a library research (Library Research). To complement the research and obtain data and information, the researchers have used bibliography methods:

i. Method of Data Collection.

This study analyses relevant verses of the Quran and Bible together with their commentaries related to Jesus. The relevant manuscripts of the Abrahamic traditions will also be referred to in order to examine their teaching and position on Jesus. Other additional books and journals will be used to provide a clear picture of the description and provide a detailed understanding of the issue.

ii. The Method of Data Analysis.

For data analysis, the data will be organized according to a clear and detailed theme, beginning with the biographical history of Jesus, his teachings and the status of Jesus in the respective religions. All the data will be collected and arranged accordingly to provide a clear picture and comparison for easy understanding. The data collected will be analysed and compared according to the themes.

1.8 Literature Review

1.8.1 Abrahamic Traditions

According to Suhaida and Khadijah (2002) in the Journal entitled "*Analysis of the Concept of Abrahamic Faiths and Its Relation to Religious Pluralism*", they argue that most scholars of comparative religion recognise Judaism, Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic Traditions. This recognition is based on the fact that these three religions have many similarities in their faiths. The characteristic classification consists of three elements: first, all three religions descended from Abraham; second, monotheism which is praying to one God; and third, their origin from Semitic religion. Sharing the same acknowledgment of Abraham as the prophet of God, Abraham is considered the father of the descendants of Bani Israel and Arabs. Two sons of Abraham are traced as ancestors. Through Isaac comes the descendants of Judaism and Christianity, and Ismail is seen as a branch of the descendants of the Arabs.

That statement is also agreed by Reuven (2015). He explained in the book "*The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions*" that the three Abrahamic traditions respectively acknowledge that God chose Abraham as a prophet to pass down divine teachings to his progeny in order for humanity to keep ongoing relations with God, showing they have the same belief. Based on the biblical Torah, New Testament and Quran respectively, Abraham is depicted as a special figure that realises the truth of monotheism and lives having a relationship with God.

Jamal Badawi (2016) has the same opinion. In the book "*The Abrahamic Encounter: Local Initiatives, Large Implications*" he states that the Quran accords Jews and Christians a special position as People of the Book. That title is to

acknowledge that their religions are based on revealed books or scriptures. Other than that, he quotes existing verses in the Quran that exhorts Muslims to engage in peaceful dialogue with Jews and Christians: “Say: ‘O people of the Book! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God’”. And if they turn away, then say: “Bear witness that it is who have surrendered ourselves unto Him” (3:64).

1.8.2 Jesus in the Islamic Perspective

According to Adil Nizamuddin Imran (2009) in the book “*Christ Jesus, the Son of Mary: A Muslim Perspective*”, he argues that Jesus in the Islamic perspective is acknowledged as a great servant of God and a prophet similar to other prophets in Islam that were given the creed for conveying to their communities. Therefore, Jesus was sent as the final prophet in the house of Israel to call out the worship of one God as in Abraham’s teaching. Islam also fully respects Jesus more than what other religions express.

Abd Ar-Rahman (2017) agreed with that statement. In the book “Jesus in The Quran”, he describes Jesus and his mother, Maryam as pious servants. God chose Maryam from the Imran family coming from Abraham’s descendants to give birth to a prophet. Jesus is privileged above other prophets as he was born to a virgin. Allah has chosen and praised his mother above all the women of the world.

At the same time, Nabeel Qureshi (2016) maintains that statement. In the book “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity”, he argues in the Islamic perspective that miracles are unnatural events that happen in normal human life given by God to His prophets as proof of God’s power and the pureness of the prophet’s teaching. The Quran describes that Jesus spoke to the people while in his

cradle to show the power of God by defending his mother that gave birth without marriage.

Ibnu Katheer (2002) has the same opinion. In the book entitled "*The Islamic view of Jesus*", he states that Jesus was supported by other clear proofs and miracles to show the truth that he is the messenger of God who preaches his teaching among the Bani Israel with good manners and attitude. Jesus has the capability to know what people ate yesterday, what people store in their houses, and to raise the dead back to life.

1.8.3 Jesus in the Christianity Perspective

According to Thomas P. Rausch (2003) in the book "*Who is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology*", he states that in Christianity, Jesus is acknowledged as an important figure in history. Jesus of Nazareth, known by several names such as Yesu, Jehosua or Joshua became a theological affirmation based on the Old Testament's prophecy to affirm Jesus's Davidic Messiahship. He teaches Bani Israel about the Kingdom of God and salvation in Galilee during the first century.

On the other hand, D.M Murdock (2017) in the book "*Who Was Jesus?: Fingerprints of the Christ*" argues that the miraculous conception of his birth to a virgin is described in the Old Testament scriptures. He was born from the genealogy of David to fulfil the prophecy of the Messiah. Jesus is acknowledged as an ideal man, a good human, a great leader and a political rebel that teaches the Kingdom of God by following the commandments.

However, Maurice Casey (2010) in the book "*Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*" contended Jesus as an ethical teacher. He follows the teaching of the Torah and calls people toward

repentance and to return to God. In his teaching, Jesus has summarised the Torah into the “golden rule” that became the framework of obedience to the will of God. Besides developing a relationship with God, his teaching convinces people to improve relations between human beings and how they treat each other.

1.8.4 Jesus in the Judaism Perspective

According to Clyde W. Votaw (1905) in the journal “*The Modern Jewish View of Jesus*”, he states that Jesus was a historical personage, an ardent Jew of prophetic spirit and an insightful man who performed religious work of lasting influence upon humanity. He possessed extraordinary religious ideas and shared many of his ideas and practices his own methods, distinct from any other class of Jews. In his attitude toward the law, Jesus was a faithful Jew. He considered that it was his duty to obey the Mosaic statutes in their current interpretation. Jesus was also recognised as a kind man. The kindness of Jesus in helping the people of lower class caused him to be expressed by followers as divine and the “Messiah”, the saviour in Judaism. Nevertheless, Jesus himself never claimed his divinity and messiahship. In his great doctrine of the fatherhood of God which he made central in his teaching, he was but reiterating a truth of which the Jews were already in full possession. No new religious movement or organisation was constructed by Jesus, nor did he intend any such to result from his work. Since he considers himself a true Jew and his mission to be in Judaism, his purpose is to build up truth and righteousness within the confines of existing Jewish institutions.

Zev Garber (2010) in “*Jesus in the Context of Judaism: Quest, Con-Quest, or Conquest?*” also maintains that statement. In the book “*Jesus in the Context of Judaism*”, Jesus never changes the law and teachings in Judaism. The conflict only

happens when the followers of Jesus assume that Jesus has authority above the law. That belief opposes the Old Testament as the source of authority in Judaism. As a Rabbi, Jesus taught the divine authority of the Torah and the prophets, as well as respect for its presenters and preservers. His followers acknowledging him to surpass the Torah is the reason that led Jesus into conflict with the religious establishment of his day.

Schalom B. Chorin and Robert J. Cottrol (2012) in the book "*Brother Jesus: The Nazarene Through Jewish Eyes*", contended that Jesus has a great attitude in religion. He has a tendency to insert motivating elements when calling people to follow the commandment. Despite the overclaim made by his followers, Jesus has never acknowledged himself as the Messiah. Moreover, believing the concept of Jesus being divine has never existed in the history of Jews.