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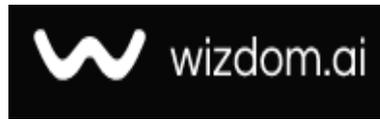
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Usury in the Heavenly Religions: A Comparative Study between the Holy Qur'an, the Gospel, and the Torah

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Abstract

General Background Usury remains a central issue in religious ethics and economic discourse, particularly within Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. **Specific Background** Each of these Abrahamic religions addresses usury through its sacred texts, offering distinct yet related perspectives on financial justice and social responsibility. **Knowledge Gap** Despite existing studies, there is limited integrated analysis that compares these perspectives while linking them to broader moral and economic implications. **Aims** This study aims to analyze and compare the concept, prohibition, and implications of usury across the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Gospel. **Results** The findings reveal a shared ethical rejection of exploitative financial practices, with Islam presenting a strict and categorical prohibition, Judaism allowing conditional application within specific social boundaries, and Christianity emphasizing moral values such as compassion and generosity rather than formal legal prohibition. **Novelty** The study provides a structured comparative synthesis of textual, theological, and ethical dimensions of usury across the three religions. **Implications** These findings contribute to understanding how religious principles can inform contemporary discussions on economic justice and ethical financial systems.

Highlights:

- Comparative interpretation reveals shared ethical rejection of financial exploitation
- Distinct legal and moral frameworks identified across three religious traditions
- Textual analysis connects religious teachings with socio-economic considerations

Keywords: Usury; Comparative Religion; Abrahamic Traditions; Religious Ethics; Economic Justice

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Introduction

Usury has been a topic of great importance in academic and religious discussions. In fact, it has a prominent position in economic discussions as well as in religious law. The restrictions imposed on involvement in usury are strict and are mentioned in the three holy scripts: the Quran, the Torah, and the Gospel. and societal levels. Usury is not merely an issue of economy; it is a religious matter that involves basic religious values of justice, compassion, and human solidarity.

In Islam, the prohibition of usury is explicit and categorical. God Almighty describes it in the Holy Qur'an as one of the major sins that warrants a declaration of war from God and His Messenger, as stated in His saying:

“O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of usury, if you are believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war from Allah and His Messenger...” (Al-Baqarah: 278–279)

Islamic law elaborates the types and rulings of usury in detail and provides legitimate alternatives that achieve justice and protect the economy from corruption.

In Judaism, usury is prohibited among Jews themselves, while it is permitted in dealings with foreigners. In Deuteronomy it states:

To a foreigner you may lend at interest, but to your brother you shall not lend at interest”,

which reflects a selective concept of prohibiting usury linked to religious group affiliation. In Christianity, there was a stricter policy regarding usury during the Middle Ages, where it was considered immoral and inconsistent with the principles of Christianity, which emphasized compassion and generosity. The advent of modern finance has made usury, known today as “interest” in most financial transactions, an indispensable component of most bank transactions. This has reignited debate over how the heavenly religions feel about usury and how one might go about enforcing its ban in today's finance environment. In studying the position of world religions with regards to usury, there is clearly a need for text analysis that goes beyond religious texts and takes into consideration the philosophical and economic background of those religious beliefs and their potential for developing a fairer economic system.

Research Problem: Although usury is explicitly prohibited in Islam and has a defined position in Judaism and Christianity, there are differences in interpreting the extent of this prohibition and its practical applications in each religion, especially in light of modern economic developments. Therefore, the core research problem is formulated as follows

“What are the points of similarity and difference in the stance of the heavenly religions toward usury, and to what extent have these stances influenced economic thought and financial legislation in different religious societies”?

Significance of the Research:

1. Religious: Understanding the depth of the prohibition of usury in the heavenly religions and its ethical and legislative foundations.

2. Social: Highlighting the role of usury in tearing the social fabric and increasing class disparities.
3. Economic: Providing a critical perspective on current financial systems and the extent of their compatibility or incompatibility with religious values.
4. Academic: Enriching comparative studies on a sensitive topic that intersects religion and economics.

Research Objectives:

1. To study and analyze religious texts related to usury in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.
2. To clarify the points of similarity and difference in the religious stance toward usury among the three religions.
3. To evaluate the moral, social, and economic impact of prohibiting usury.
4. To propose economic alternatives consistent with religious values that achieve social justice.

Research Hypotheses:

1. There is a fundamental agreement among the heavenly religions on prohibiting usury, though its application differs according to context.
2. The prohibition of usury is based on ethical foundations aimed at protecting the poor and preventing exploitation.
3. Implementing the prohibition of usury can contribute to reducing class disparities and achieving a form of economic justice.

Methodology

This article, taking a qualitative comparative analytical method, seeks to investigate the concept of usury (riba) and its legal and moral treatment in Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the three heavenly religions. The research was a qualitative study based mainly on the systematic textual analysis of main religious texts from the Holy Qur'an, the Gospel (the New Testament) and the Torah (the Old Testament) to trace the principles of doctrine that govern financial transactions and usury prohibition in each religion. Textual and thematic analysis were used to collect and explicate relevant verses and scriptural passages related to the meanings, contexts and implications of a prohibition or regulation on usury. In addition, classical and modern religious scholarship, comprising Islamic jurisprudence, Christian theological points of view, and Jewish legal interpretation (such as in the Talmud) were included in this study to flesh out the narrative of how religious doctrines evolved over the centuries and how they dealt with financial practices of the different historical contexts in which they were implicated. The comparative component of the methodological framework of the research also concerned the moral, social and economic dimensions of usury in the three religions, with a view to identifying both similarities and differences across the three. Using this method, the study examined the impact of religious beliefs on moral treatment of financial exploitation, civil rights, and economic equity. The research also reviewed secondary sources in the form of academic publications, scholarly articles and the work in the field of religious economics to provide context to the

religious positions in larger economic and philosophical frameworks. Combining textual interpretation with comparative analysis, the study aimed at a holistic exposition in articulated form of 1. the common ethical foundations and doctrinal differences of the three heavenly religions on the prohibition of usury, and 2. their significance in contemporary economic thought.

Result And Discussion

First: Concept of Usury

Linguistic Definition:

Linguistically, the Arabic word *riba* is derived from the verb *raba yarbu*, meaning to increase or grow. God Almighty says:

“But when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells” meaning it increases and grows. Thus, the linguistic meaning of usury is associated with increase and growth, whether tangible or intangible

Technical Definition:

In Islamic legal terminology, usury is defined as “a stipulated increase over the principal amount of capital in return for deferment, or without a legitimate countervalue in a contract.” It refers to any increase imposed by the creditor on the debtor in exchange for delaying repayment, or an unequal increase in the exchange of commodities of the same type. This increase does not correspond to real benefit or legitimate labor, but rather constitutes pure exploitation [1].

Religious texts explicitly prohibit it in several instances, such as God’s saying:

“Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury” (Al-Baqarah: 275.)

This distinction between lawful trade and forbidden usury indicates that usury is not legitimate commerce, but rather prohibited exploitation.

Usury is a stipulated increase on the principal in financial transactions, whether loans or sales, and it is one of the economic and religious issues that received significant attention in divine laws, especially in Islam, due to its negative effects on social and economic justice. Linguistically, it denotes increase and elevation, while technically it refers to a stipulated increase over the principal without a legitimate countervalue [2]

Usury is categorically prohibited in Islam through explicit Qur’anic texts, including:

“O you who have believed, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied, but fear Allah that you may be successful”

Numerous prophetic traditions also warn against dealing in usury and explain its danger to individuals and society. The prohibition is not limited to Islam alone; references to it also appear in the Torah and the Gospel, though religious positions differ in detail and application, which will be addressed later in this comparative study.

Usury is considered a financial phenomenon that disrupts justice and widens the gap between the rich and the poor; therefore, divine laws have sought to regulate financial dealings in a way that achieves social balance and economic stability.

Second: Types of Usury

Usury is among the economic practices prohibited in Islam, and its prohibition is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah due to its harmful effects on justice and economic balance. Its forms vary according to the nature of financial transactions, the most prominent of which are:

1. Usury of Deferment (Riba al-Nasi'ah):

This is one of the most common forms of usury and refers to a stipulated increase on the principal debt in exchange for delaying repayment. It is commonly practiced in loans, where the debtor is required to pay an amount exceeding the original loan in return for a time extension.

Example: Lending 1,000 dinars and requiring repayment of 1,200 dinars after six months.

2. Usury of Excess (Riba al-Fadl)

This involves exchanging usurious commodities of the same type with an increase in one of the two exchanged items without immediate hand-to-hand exchange. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Gold for gold, silver for silver, wheat for wheat, barley for barley, dates for dates, salt for salt—equal for equal, hand to hand. Whoever increases or seeks an increase has engaged in usury.” (Narrated by Muslim)

Example: Exchanging one kilogram of dates for one and a half kilograms without immediate exchange.

3. Pre-Islamic Usury (Riba al-Jahiliyyah):

This was practiced before Islam, whereby the creditor demanded an increase if the debtor failed to repay on time, saying: “Either you repay or you increase,” leading to the multiplication of the debt.

4. Loan Usury (Riba al-Qard):

Any loan that brings a benefit to the lender—whether monetary, material, or moral—is considered prohibited if the benefit is stipulated.

Example: Lending money on the condition of using the borrower's house free of charge [3]

Difference between Riba al-Nasi'ah and Riba al-Fadl:

Riba al-Nasi'ah is related to deferment and time in debts and commonly occurs in loans, whereas Riba al-Fadl is related to sales and immediate exchange of usurious commodities. All these forms fall under prohibition due to the exploitation and injustice they entail, which contradict the principles of economic justice Islam seeks to establish [4]

Second Axis: Usury in the Holy Qur'an

First: Concept of Usury

Usury symbolizes a phenomenon in the realm of finances and society that has gained a lot of attention in Islamic jurisprudence because of the significant implications it holds for the economic system and justice in society. The Quran refers to usury in many verses and provides clear-cut directions on this subject in Islam.

The Qur'an speaks of usury with a strict warning and a clear ban on it, with a number of instances of usury accompanied by a warning of its danger. It is clear from the text that there is a gradual approach to addressing such an issue, starting with a warning, then a condemnation of it, to finally ban it in a manner suited to the context of revelation.

In the Qur'an, usury is understood as a stipulated increase on the principal without right, often occurring in deferred debts. Verses addressing usury appear in Surahs Al-Baqarah, Aal-Imran, An-Nisa', and Ar-Rum [5].

God Almighty says:

“Those who consume usury cannot stand except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity. That is because they say, ‘Trade is just like usury.’ But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden usury. So whoever has received admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns [to usury]—those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.” (Al-Baqarah: 275)

this verse clarifies the fundamental difference between lawful trade and prohibited usury. While trade is based on fair exchange between parties, usury is based on exploitation and unjust excess, making its consumption a clear form of injustice [6].

Second: Stages of the Prohibition of Usury in the Qur'an

The prohibition of usury in the Qur'an was not revealed all at once; rather, it passed through four main stages:

1. The Stage of Moral Condemnation:

Allah Almighty says:

“And whatever you give in usury so that it may increase in the wealth of people, it does not increase with Allah...” (Ar-Rum: 39)

This verse indicates that usury is devoid of divine blessing and is considered an unjust consumption of people's wealth.

2. Warning against the Practice of the Jews in Usury:

Allah says:

“And [for] their taking of usury while they had been forbidden from it, and their consuming of people's wealth unjustly...” (An-Nisa': 161).

Here, Allah condemns the Children of Israel for dealing in usury despite being prohibited from it, which serves as a prelude to understanding the seriousness of this practice.

3. Explicit Prohibition with Elaboration:

Allah Almighty says:

“O you who have believed, do not commit usury, doubling and multiplying, but rather fear Allah, so that you may succeed (Aal 'Imran 3:130). This is the first direct prohibition of usury for Muslims.

Decisive Prohibition and Declaring War against It:

Allah Almighty says:

“O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what is left from usury if you are believers. But if you do not, then take notice that there is a war declared for you from Allah and His Messenger (Al-Baqarah: 278-279). This is the most forcefully worded verse that forbids usury, in which Allah declares war against persons who are committed to this act.

Third: The Wisdom behind the Prohibition of Usury in the Qur’an

Among the various aspects of the injustice and corruption that exist in usury, as mentioned in the Qur’an, is that of Expropriation and Injustice—the creditor taking advantage of the debtor’s weakness by imposing a rise in payments without any just remuneration.

Undermining the Spirit of Social Solidarity: Usury favors effortless gain at the expense of cooperation and mutual assistance.

Concentration of Wealth in the Hands of a Few: It leads to the accumulation of wealth without productive labor or real investment.

Inciting Hatred and Resentment in Society: Especially when the poor are unable to repay their growing debts due to accumulating interest.

Ibn Kathir stated that usury is among the major sins that incur Allah’s wrath because it leads to unjust consumption of people’s wealth (Hassan, published research, www.Darelmashora.com). Allah Almighty has promised to eliminate the blessing from usurious wealth, as He says:

“Allah destroys usury and gives increase for charities...” (Al-Baqarah: 276).

Fourth: The Difference between Trade and Usury in the Qur’an

The Qur’anic verses clearly distinguish between lawful trade and prohibited usury. Trade is based on mutual consent and the exchange of real benefits, whereas usury is an increase in wealth without a corresponding benefit and is imposed upon those in need.

Allah Almighty says:

“Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury”

This indicates that usury is not treated as lawful trade, as the polytheists claimed when they said: “Trade is just like usury.” The Qur’anic context clarifies that trade achieves satisfaction and equivalence between parties, while usury involves clear injustice.

Third Axis: The Concept and Types of Usury in the Gospel

First: An Introduction to the Religious Concept of Usury in Christianity

The term usury as practiced by Christian intellectuals refers to a financial loan given for interest. Historically, early Christian teachings were strict about the prohibition of usury, as it is considered a sin for the early Christian tradition. The teachings about this matter were based on the Torah (the Old Testament), as it prohibits usury, and the teachings of the New Testament emphasized the need for love and goodness in financial transactions [7]

The concept of usury in Christianity goes beyond merely seeking profit, because it also entails a lack of "mercy in economic transactions," thus being an act that goes against religious calls to donate without expecting compensation in return.

Second: Gospel Texts Addressing Usury

There are not many texts in the New Testament that explicitly use the term "usury," but there are implicit references that encourage generosity and criticize greed:

1. The Gospel of Luke (6:34–35:)

"And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great".

This text does not explicitly prohibit usury, but it calls for lending without compensation, based on high ethical and spiritual principles.

2. The Gospel of Matthew (5:42)

"Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you".

This is a call for assistance without conditions or interest, which implicitly reflects a rejection of usury as a commercial concept [8]

Third: Types of Usury in Traditional Christian Thought

1. Excessive Usury:

Explicit usury in which the lender stipulates a high financial interest. This type was the most strongly condemned in classical Christian teachings.

2. Disguised Usury:

This emerged later as a means of circumventing the prohibition, whereby a "compensatory amount" is imposed on the loan and not considered direct interest. The Church debated this extensively and rejected it during certain periods.

3. Moral Usury or "Legitimate Profit:"

In later periods, a distinction emerged between exploitative usury and modest interest charged on commercial loans under conditions of fairness. Some Protestant churches, for example, recognized the legitimacy of fair interest, marking a shift from the classical stance.

Fourth: The Church's Position throughout History

The medieval Catholic Church had an absolute prohibition against usury, based on the scholastic school of thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who regarded usury as a sale of time and therefore illicit. Usury was formally censored and made illegal by both the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils, and it was also made illegal to bury usurers on lands owned by churches. In modern eras, the Catholic Church started to distinguish between usury and interest rates demanded by financial institutions.

Fifth: The Relationship between the Teachings of Christ and Usury

Though Jesus Christ did not enunciate an express prohibition against usury, his teachings about compassion, love, and benevolence call into question the rationale of charging interest and profiting out of other people's needs. The Bible provides a comprehensive framework that conceives financial dealings not merely as tools for individual profit, but also as a means of promoting social solidarity.

Sixth: Contemporary Development of the Christian Understanding of Usury

With the rise of a capitalist economy, there has been an adaptation in the stance adopted by Christian theology. Reformist approaches have appeared, especially in the Protestant church, that state that banking interest is necessary for capital. The Catholic Church continues to emphasize that any kind of usurious agreement has to be just and that there is no exploitation [9].

Third Axis: The Concept and Types of Usury in the Torah

First: Introduction and the Concept of Usury in the Torah

Usury in the Torah is considered one of the ethical and religious issues addressed by ancient Jewish legislation with precision and clarity. Several explicit texts in the books of the Old Testament regulate this concept and define the religious stance toward it, particularly within relationships among members of the Jewish community [10].

The Concept of Usury in the Torah:

In Hebrew, usury is referred to as *Neshekh* (נִשְׁכָּה) or *Tarbit* (תַּרְבִּית), terms that denote increase or added interest on borrowed money. Usury in the Torah is understood as exploiting human need by imposing financial interest on loans. Consequently, usury was strictly prohibited among members of the same people—namely, among Jews themselves—while some texts permitted it in dealings with foreigners (non-Jews) [11].

Second: Torah Texts on Usury

1. Exodus 22:25:

“If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest”.

2. Leviticus 25:36–37:

“Take no interest or profit from him, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit”.

3. Deuteronomy 23:20:

“To a foreigner you may lend at interest, but to your brother you shall not lend at interest, that the Lord your God may bless you.” [12]

Third: Types of Usury in the Torah

In the Torah, usury is understood through two main types:

1. Monetary Usury (*Neshekh*)

This refers to an increase imposed on borrowed money and was prohibited among the Children of Israel. It was viewed as a means of exploiting people's poverty and was therefore completely rejected in internal relations.

2. Usury in Kind or Food Usury (Marbit:)

This involves imposing an increase on loans given in the form of foodstuffs or goods and prohibiting their repayment with an excess amount—for example, lending wheat and demanding more in return.

Lending to a Jew: taking any interest is prohibited.

Lending to a foreigner (non-Jew): taking interest is permitted, according to Deuteronomy. This distinction stems from a religious and social understanding that views the Jewish community as internally compassionate [13]

Fourth: The Impact of Usury in Jewish Law (the Talmud)

The Talmud (the Oral Law of Judaism) strongly emphasizes the prohibition of usury. The text lists the forbidden forms of usury and provides in-depth analyses of complex issues such as usury in commercial transactions and evasion of usury. Usury is considered one of the “grave sins” which hinder the reception of God's mercy by the Talmud.

Circumvention of the Prohibition of Usury

Historically, there were mechanisms within Jewish law to circumvent the prohibition of usury, particularly with regard to commerce. One of the most common of such mechanisms is:

The Heter Iska Contract:

This agreement is a financial structure that facilitates profit from a loan by turning a loaning relationship into a commercial partnership. It is intended to bring Jewish law into line with current realities [14][15][16][17][18][19]

Conclusion

From this comparison, it's clear that each of the three religions has the same ethical tendencies against financial exploitation, although these tendencies occur to different extents and in different ways. The Gospel has the aspect of mercy but does not define the exact legal framework of the economy, while the aspect of outside permission is handled in a different manner.

Results of the Comparative Study between the Qur'an, the Gospel, and the Torah on Usury

When comparing the three religious texts, it becomes evident that usury represents a shared moral and economic issue. However, the legislative approaches and stances differ in their strictness and details.

1. The Holy Qur'an:

The Qur'an adopts a strict and categorical position by absolutely prohibiting usury and considering it one of the major sins that warrant severe punishment, as stated in the verse:

“Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury” (Al-Baqarah: 275.)

It also likens the consumer of usury to one who is driven into madness by Satan. Islam views usury as economic injustice that dismantles society and destroys social justice.

2. The Torah (Old Testament:)

The Torah explicitly prohibits usury among Jews themselves and regards it as exploitation of the poor. However, it permits usury in dealings with foreigners (non-Jews), which reveals a distinction in religious and social rulings within Mosaic law.

3. The Gospel (New Testament:)

The Gospel does not directly address usury as a formal term, but it strongly emphasizes the principles of mercy and giving without expecting repayment, as stated by Christ:

“Give to everyone who asks you, and do not demand back from the one who takes what belongs to you”.

There is no explicit prohibition; rather, the teachings encourage generosity and benevolence, which has been implicitly understood as a rejection of greedy usury, especially when it involves exploiting the poor.

The Holy Qur’an is the most stringent in prohibiting usury, followed by the Torah, which prohibits it internally while From this comparison, it's clear that each of the three religions has the same ethical tendencies against financial exploitation, although these tendencies occur to different extents and in different ways. The Gospel has the aspect of mercy but does not define the exact legal framework of the economy, while the aspect of outside permission is handled in a different manner.

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