



Incest Taboos in Sacred Texts: Theological and Historical Analysis of Prohibitions and Sanctions in Abrahamic Religions

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Abstract

The study examines the role of religion in shaping and enforcing social norms regarding the taboo of incest, with a focus on theological and historical interpretations within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Incest, as a form of intrafamilial sexual violence, is under-researched due to societal stigma. The research aims to provide insights into how religion influences values and social order, especially concerning taboo subjects like incest. A qualitative phenomenological approach is used, gathering primary data through interviews with religious leaders, academics, and individuals with personal experiences, alongside secondary data from sacred texts and academic sources. The findings reveal that the prohibition of incest in Abrahamic religions serves as both a moral rule and a social regulatory tool, reinforcing family and societal boundaries. The sacred texts from these religions explicitly forbid incest, with corresponding sanctions, underscoring the sanctity of family. The study also explores how these religious interpretations shift in response to social and cultural changes. This research offers a new perspective on the relationship between theology, law, and social structures, emphasizing religion's proactive role in addressing taboo issues, including offering solutions grounded in theological principles. It calls for a more open, inclusive approach to research on neglected and sensitive issues like incest.

Keywords: Incesttaboos, sacred texts, Theology, Historical, Abrahamic Religions.

Introduction

Incest is one of the least reported and researched forms of sexual violence in America, often due to profound social stigma and taboo. Available data, albeit limited, reveal a disturbing reality: the U.S. Department of Justice reports that 34% of child sexual abuse cases involve family members. Other studies indicate that perpetrators of child sexual violence are often known to the victim, with 91% being individuals known to the child or their family (Incest Aware, 2022). Such violence is particularly damaging, with serious long-term effects on victims who



often suffer from mental health issues, substance abuse, and difficulties in education and employment (Rainn, 2024). Ironically, the lack of current data and in-depth research makes it challenging to fully explore and understand the scale and dynamics of this issue, which is crucial for formulating effective interventions and solutions (Chaniago et al., 2022; Hijriani & Ramadani, 2022; Sulastri & Nurhayaty, 2021).

Research into the taboo of incest in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—provides deep insights into how social norms and religious ethics shape moral principles in various societies. Although each religion has specific views and rules, all these traditions condemn incest emphatically. In Judaism, the Torah specifically regulates prohibitions on sexual relations between close relatives. In Christianity, similar prohibitions are affirmed in the Old Testament books adopted into Christian doctrine. Meanwhile, in Islam, these prohibitions are explicitly stipulated in the Quran and Hadiths, which also detail prohibited marriages (Sachs-Shmueli, 2021; Van, 2021).

Examining the prohibitions of incest in these sacred texts helps understand how religion plays a role in shaping and maintaining social order. These norms affect not only individual behaviour but also family structure and power dynamics within societies. This research investigates how religion, as a tool of social regulation, utilises sacred concepts to strengthen family bonds and maintain moral and social continuity (Suraiya, 2023; Rohmad et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study critiques how interpretations of incest prohibitions have evolved over time and how this is influenced by varying social and cultural contexts. For instance, in some contexts, laws regulating sexual relations among relatives may change depending on shifts in social norms or interpretations by religious leaders and scholars. The regulation of cousin marriage, traditionally permitted under Sharia, has faced restrictions in various places due to health concerns (Van Buren Van Gordon, 2020). This demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of religion to continually changing social contexts (Sajaia, 2018). The importance of this study also lies in its ability to uncover taboos that are often unspoken but have deep psychological impacts on victims of incest. By examining the sanctions and prohibitions articulated in sacred texts, the research explores how the Abrahamic religions address issues that are deeply personal and often hidden (Akbas et al., 2016; T. Quiajno et al., 2021).

This study also critiques the shortage of data and research on incest, which is often overlooked in academic discussions due to the sensitivity of the topic. Incest is often overlooked in academic discussions due to its sensitive and taboo nature, which makes it challenging to study and discuss openly. Social stigma, cultural norms, and the fear of backlash can deter researchers, participants, and institutions from engaging with the topic. This shortfall reflects broader challenges in addressing taboo issues in social and humanities research, highlighting the need for more open and inclusive approaches in religious studies (Choate & Sharan, 2021). In analysing the effects of incest, this research also examines how victims of incest face challenges in seeking justice and recovery within the frameworks of their religions. This opens a crucial discussion on how religious institutions can play a role not only as enforcers of norms but also as providers of support and recovery for victims (Klar-Chalamish & Peleg-Koriat, 2021; Soares & Setyawan, 2023).

This research poses critical questions about how religion, with all its moral and spiritual authority, can be more proactive in addressing and preventing incest, offering solutions rooted in a deep theological understanding and empathy for human experiences. Through this analysis, the study seeks to offer new insights that can enrich the dialogue between religion, ethics, and contemporary social realities

Literature Review



This article refers to a comprehensive study on the views and regulations regarding incest as governed by the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The aim of this research is to understand how norms and laws related to incest are interpreted and implemented within the historical and theological contexts of these three religions. By analysing doctrines, scholarly interpretations, and the historical contexts in which these laws were applied, this study examines the role of religion in shaping social views towards incest, as well as the consequences faced by those who violate this taboo. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the research also explores how prohibitions on incest inform and influence the social structure and family ethics in diverse societies. Djawas et al. (2022) conducted research examining the legal position of children born from incest according to Madhhab Scholars and the Compilation of Islamic Law. Utilising document analysis and interviews with Islamic legal experts, the study revealed differences in views among Islamic schools regarding the status of children from incestuous relationships, particularly in terms of inheritance and legitimacy. This contrasts with the research on "Incest Taboos in Sacred Texts: Theological and Historical Analysis of Prohibitions and Sanctions in Abrahamic Religions," which focuses more on the theological and historical understanding of incest prohibitions in Abrahamic religions, demonstrating how religious norms influence social and legal orders without specifically discussing the legal status of individuals born from such relationships.

Furthermore, Samuels (2021), in his article "Incest, classified: A seventeenth-century Tibetan ruler's perspective on sexual proscriptions and the boundaries of kinship," explores the views of a Tibetan ruler on incest prohibitions and kinship boundaries. Historical methods and textual analysis were used to unravel these views within the social and political context of the 17th century. Samuels found that these conceptions were part of the ruler's efforts to consolidate power and control social structures. Unlike the research on Abrahamic religions, this study provides insights into how incest was interpreted and regulated within a specific cultural and political context, offering a comparative perspective on the influence of religious and social values on incest taboos. Lastly, Quiajno et al. (2021), in their study titled "Incest the victims and their abusers" in the *International Journal of Advanced Engineering, Management and Science*, focused on the psychological and social impacts of incest on victims and perpetrators. Employing a survey approach involving incest victims, the research revealed significant patterns of trauma and a continuing cycle of violence. These findings contrast with the focus of the research on "Incest Taboos in Sacred Texts," which prioritises the analysis of religious and historical texts over the direct individual and social impacts. Thus, both studies complement each other in discussing the phenomenon of incest from different perspectives.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this study is a qualitative approach, utilising phenomenology as the primary framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Weyant, 2022). Phenomenology was selected because it allows researchers to delve into the subjective experiences and deep perspectives regarding the taboo of incest within the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions. The data employed in this research includes both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with religious leaders, academics specialising in religious studies, and individuals who have personal experiences related to incest, while secondary data comprised relevant literature such as sacred texts, theological interpretations, and previous academic research on similar topics.

Data collection techniques in this study were multifaceted. Initially, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect primary data, enabling research subjects to express their experiences and views freely and in detail. Additionally, a documentary study method was also employed to gather secondary data from existing textual sources, such as academic publications, books, and journal articles relating to incest in Abrahamic religions. This data collection approach was designed to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which involves three



streams of activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2020). This process aids in identifying emerging patterns, themes, and categories from the data. Source triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the research findings. By comparing information from various data sources, both primary and secondary, the study ensures that the interpretation of the incest phenomenon within the context of the Abrahamic religions is accurate and credible. This triangulation also supports the research in overcoming subjective biases and strengthening the reliability of the findings.

Results and Discussion

The Taboo of Incest in the Literature of the Qur'an

Incest, or sexual relations between close family members, is considered a significant taboo in many societies, including in Islamic tradition. The Qur'an, as the holy book of Islam, contains various verses that explicitly forbid this practice. These prohibitions aim not only to preserve the moral and physical purity of individuals but also to maintain the integrity and harmony of the family structure. In the Qur'an, Allah explicitly sets boundaries within family relationships that must not be violated, emphasizing the importance of maintaining family honour and social cleanliness as crucial elements in upholding devotion and obedience to Divine commandments. Investigations into the Qur'anic verses related to the incest taboo reveal a deeper understanding of Islamic views on family relationships and the imposed limitations.

The Qur'an serves not only as a spiritual guide but also as a legal framework regulating various aspects of Muslim life, including rules about marriage and family relationships (Lasker & Ghilardi, 2018). Through the study of these verses, we can see how Islam, through the Qur'an, seeks to uphold principles of justice, protect human vulnerabilities, and promote a healthy and harmonious social order. This narrative is relevant not only to those who follow Islamic law but also provides insights to the wider world about how ethical and moral principles are maintained and respected in one of the world's major monotheistic religions. The following are the Qur'anic texts relating to the incest taboo:

Reference	Translation	Description
Qur'an: Surah An-Nisa (4:23)	"It is forbidden for you (to marry) your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster mothers who gave you suck, your foster milk suckling sisters, your wives' mothers, your step-daughters under your guardianship born of your wives unto whom you have gone in but if you have not gone in unto them, there is no sin on you (to marry their daughters), and the wives of your sons who (spring) from your own loins, and that you take two sisters together in marriage at the same time except for what has already occurred; indeed Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."	This verse explicitly establishes prohibitions against marrying and engaging in sexual relations with certain family members, reflecting Islamic values on the sanctity of familial relationships and the importance of boundaries in social interaction.
Qur'an: Surah Al-Isra (17:32)	"And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is an indecency and an evil way."	This prohibition includes all forms of illicit sexual relations, including with family members, highlighting Islamic values that prioritize the purity of the self and lawful relationships.
Qur'an: Surah Al-Ahzab (33:55)	"No sin upon them (the Prophet's wives) regarding their fathers, their sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, or their own women or what their right hands possess. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is ever, over all things, a Witness."	This verse explains the permissible interactions among family members that do not incur sin, also reflecting wisdom in maintaining personal and social boundaries.
Qur'an: Surah An-Nur (24:31)	"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and protect their private parts and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms and not reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers,	This verse provides guidance on modesty and the boundaries of covering within family relationships, reflecting ethical and moral values in familial interactions.



	their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess."	
Qur'an: Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60:12)	"O Prophet, when believing women come to you to take the oath of allegiance to you that they will not associate anything with Allah, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery, that they will not kill their children, that they will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood, and that they will not disobey you in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask Allah to forgive them; indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."	This verse reaffirms the prohibition of adultery and improper acts, including incest, in the context of the loyalty oath of believing women to Islamic values.
Qur'an: Surah An-Nur (24:60)	"And women of post-menopausal age who have no desire for marriage—there is no blame on them if they lay aside their outer garments, not displaying adornment. But to abstain is better for them; and Allah is Hearing and Knowing."	This verse grants an exception regarding the covering for older women not expecting marriage, yet it still emphasizes the importance of maintaining purity and decency in social interactions.

Table 1. The Taboo of Incest in Qur'anic Literature (Authors own)

In addressing the taboo of incest from an Islamic perspective, interpretations by scholars on relevant verses in the Quran offer profound insights. Surah An-Nisa (4:23) through Tafsir Maraghi suggests that the prohibition of marrying certain family members aims to maintain genetic and social integrity within the family structure (Maraghi, 1910). Tafsir Jalalain highlights that this law reflects the deep Islamic principle of the sanctity of familial relationships and the importance of maintaining boundaries in social interactions, indicating that Islam views family relationships as an entity that must be protected from actions that could diminish its honour (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015).

Shifting focus to Surah Al-Isra (17:32), Tafsir Hamka articulates that the prohibition against adultery—including all forms of illicit sexual relations such as incest—is intended to avoid actions considered morally and socially abhorrent (Hamka, 2012). Conversely, Shihab in his interpretation adds that this verse underscores the prohibition against all forms of immoral behavior, reinforcing the principle that maintaining personal and family honour is essential (Shihab, 2015).

Surah Al-Ahzab (33:55), according to Tafsir Muyassar, explains that the verse provides exceptions for interactions among family members that do not incur sin, aiding in maintaining social order and lawful relations (Al-Qarni, 2008). This verse illustrates the wisdom in maintaining personal and social boundaries and protecting family integrity. From Surah An-Nur (24:31), Tafsir Al-Qurthubi asserts that the verse regulates modesty and the boundaries of covering, especially among family members, to maintain decency and avoid scandal (Qurtubi, 2002). Tafsir Al-Jazairi and Baydhawi for Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60:12) show that the prohibition against adultery and other inappropriate behavior is included in the oath of allegiance sworn by believing women, depicting how Islam requires adherence to high ethical norms (Al-Jaza'iri, 2003; Baydawi, 2010).

The Brief Tafsir by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Tafsir Al-Kashaf, and Mafatih al-Ghaib for Surah An-Nur (24:60) emphasize the importance of following Islamic guidelines in social interactions, particularly respecting older family members, showing flexibility and sensitivity to social conditions and individual needs, without forgetting the fundamental principles of sanctity and decency (Al-Zamakhsyari, 1995; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2016). These interpretations demonstrate how Islam comprehensively addresses the issue of incest, integrating theological, social, and ethical aspects to maintain the structure and sanctity of the family within society.



In the Islamic context, teachings about incest are not only found in the Quran but also in many hadiths narrated by Prophet Muhammad PBUH. These hadiths provide more specific and situational guidance, emphasizing strict prohibitions against acts leading to adultery or incest, which are directly associated with major sins in Islam. One particularly relevant hadith reported in Sahih Bukhari states as follows: "Avoid committing prohibited evils, among which is engaging in sexual relations with women who are unlawfully yours."

This hadith not only explicitly advises Muslims to avoid fornication but also emphasizes the avoidance of sexual relationships with family members who are legally and morally forbidden. This teaching illustrates the seriousness and clarity of Islam's stance on incest, where such acts are considered not only a social violation but also a breach of divine law. Another hadith narrated by Sahih Muslim states: "Whoever protects his own honour and that of his family will be in paradise."

This suggests that in Islam, protecting one's own and one's family's honour from disgraceful acts such as incest is not only a moral obligation but also a path to heavenly reward (Baqi, 2017). It underscores that moral cleanliness and abstaining from all forms of vile acts, including incest, are core to the life practice of a devout Muslim. Together, these narratives provide a robust and profound view of how Islam regards and regulates the issue of incest. Through these teachings, Muslims are encouraged not only to adhere strictly to explicit laws but also to deeply reflect on the importance of maintaining the sanctity of family and social relationships as part of their worship to Allah SWT.

Christian Scriptures in the Context of Incest Taboo

Christian Scriptures profoundly and explicitly address the issue of incest as a stringent social and moral taboo. In the Old Testament, particularly within the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, a series of verses explicitly detail various familial relationships prohibited from engaging in sexual relations or marriage (Harmadi et al., 2023). This clarification serves not only to preserve individual sanctity but also to maintain the moral and social integrity of the community. These teachings reflect an understanding that familial relationships should be based on respect and honour, not lust or inappropriate interests, which can undermine social structure and familial tranquillity (Eriksson & Ineland, 2023; Palahniuk & Fomin, 2023).

In the New Testament, the approach to incest is equally stringent. For example, Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians sharply condemns the presence of incest among the congregation members, considering it a violation not even committed by non-Jews. This admonition demonstrates that norms related to family relationships are highly valued and enforced within the Christian community. Instances in these texts also emphasize that such behaviour not only degrades human dignity but also tarnishes the faithful community. Thus, Christian religious teachings set high standards for personal and family morality, signifying the importance of maintaining clear boundaries in family relationships as an expression of divine will (Aftyka & Mazur, 2020; Ballano, 2022).

Verse	Text of the Verse	Description
Leviticus 18:6-18	"None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord."	This verse explicitly prohibits sexual relations between close family members, reflecting the importance of purity and sanctity in family relationships according to Christian teachings. It underscores the necessity of maintaining boundaries within family relationships to preserve the honour and sanctity of individuals.
Leviticus 20:11-21	"If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them."	This verse prescribes punishment for those who violate the incest prohibition, affirming that such actions not only breach social laws but also divine laws, highlighting the gravity of the offence in a religious context.
Deuteronomy 27:20-23	"Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has	This passage emphasises the prohibition of incest by declaring a curse upon those who commit it, reinforcing



	uncovered his father's nakedness."	the concept of sin and divine retribution in Christianity concerning actions that violate ethical and moral standards.
1 Corinthians 5:1	"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife."	In the context of the New Testament, this verse condemns incestuous behaviour among the congregation, indicating that such conduct is unacceptable and exceeds moral boundaries recognised even by non-Jewish societies.
2 Samuel 13:11-14	"But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her."	The story of Amnon and Tamar illustrates the severe consequences of incest, which not only harms the victim emotionally and physically but also damages family relationships and leads to serious conflict.
Ezekiel 22:11	"One commits abomination with his neighbour's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter."	This prophecy denounces immoral behaviour in Israel, including incest, showing how such actions are considered defilements of society and violations of divine laws.

Table 2. The Taboo of Incest in Christian Religion (Authors own)

In the context of Christian Sacred Texts, the prohibition against incest is explicitly and thoroughly explained in various books, emphasising the importance of purity and integrity in family relationships. The Book of Leviticus, for instance, in chapter 18, verses 6 to 18, specifically prohibits sexual relations between close family members. The verse states, "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord." This assertion not only establishes boundaries for physical relationships but also underscores the value of purity that must be maintained within the family structure, simultaneously affirming the honour and sanctity of the individual within the Christian religious context.

Further in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 20, verses 11 to 21 provide an account of the punishment for those who violate the incest prohibition. The verse declares, "If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them." This verse not only reiterates the prohibition but also adds an element of severe punishment, indicating that the violation of this prohibition is considered an act that is destructive not only to individuals but also to the entire community (Hovey, 2014). The Book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 27, verses 20 to 23, expresses the spiritual consequences of incest through the language of curses. It states, "Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's nakedness." The emphasis on 'cursed' signifies the serious religious and moral implications, underscoring that such actions are not merely social law violations but also breaches of the ethical principles taught by the religion (Zakovitch, 2010).

In the New Testament context, the Apostle Paul specifically condemns the practice of incest within the Corinthian congregation as recorded in 1 Corinthians 5:1. This verse states, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." Paul highlights that such actions are unheard of even among non-Jewish people, illustrating the severity of this violation in the Christian religious view, reflecting the high expectations to uphold morality within the Christian community (Gulo, 2018).

The story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:11-14 is a narrative example illustrating the tragic consequences of incest. It recounts, "But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her." This story not only highlights a serious moral violation but also the emotional and physical damage experienced by the victim, as well as the destructive impact on family dynamics, underscoring that such actions are against all principles of justice and humanity upheld in Christian teachings (Adelman, 2021; Natar, 2023).

In the Book of Ezekiel, chapter 22, verse 11 adds a prophetic perspective condemning immoral behaviour in Israel, including incest. The verse says, "One commits abomination with his



neighbour's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter." This verse not only highlights the breach of moral law but also portrays how such actions defile society as a whole, indicating violations against the divine laws regarded as sacred in Christian teachings (Piotrowski, 2013).

In the context of Christian Sacred Texts, the taboo against incest is not only considered an ethical and moral violation but also a profound breach of divine law. These prohibitions, as outlined in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and reiterated in the New Testament, emphasise the importance of purity and integrity within family relationships. These texts affirm that behaviour upholding family honour in accordance with divine will is key to a harmonious and just communal life. Through repeated assertions and the inclusion of severe sanctions, Christianity promotes a social order where every individual is respected and protected from exploitation within the most private and sacred realm—the family (Moss, 2021; Tarsney, 2018).

Jewish Religious Perspective on the Incest Taboo

In Jewish tradition, the laws regarding the incest taboo are considered an essential part of the Torah's commandments aimed at preserving purity within the Jewish community. The Torah, particularly in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, details the prohibition of sexual relations and marriages between close family members. These laws, known as arayot, not only regulate social dynamics but also emphasise the importance of maintaining moral order and family integrity. This reflects the understanding that family relationships should be based on principles of sanctity, where sexual relations are deemed to violate the boundaries established by divine law (Keshky, 2022).

In Judaism, the violation of these laws is considered a grave sin that can result in significant spiritual and social damage, not only for individuals but for the entire community. This prohibition is reinforced by severe punishments described in sacred texts, highlighting the seriousness with which the Jewish community regards violations of these laws (Atzmon, 2022; Moskowitz, 2022). This perspective indicates that in Judaism, maintaining the purity of family relationships is fundamental, not only to uphold social decorum but also as an expression of obedience to God's commandments, which are central to Jewish life and belief. The relevant verses from Jewish sacred texts concerning the incest taboo are as follows:

Verse	Text of the Verse	Relevance to the Incest Taboo in Judaism
Leviticus 18:6-18	"No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord."	This verse provides an explicit list of family relationships that must not involve marriage or sexual relations, emphasising the importance of separating family relationships from sexual contexts as a means of maintaining purity and sanctity.
Leviticus 18:7-8	"Do not dishonour your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonour your father."	This verse specifically prohibits sexual relations with parents and a parent's spouse, highlighting the depth of the incest taboo to protect family integrity and respect parent-child relationships.
Leviticus 20:12	"If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads."	The severe punishment for such relations underscores the seriousness of the prohibition within Jewish society, where maintaining family purity is considered vital for social and religious stability.
Deuteronomy 27:22-23	"Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother. Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his mother-in-law."	The pronouncement of curses underscores the social stigma and divine punishment associated with incest, emphasising that such actions not only violate social norms but also transgress divine commandments.
Leviticus 18:9	"Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or	This prohibition includes relationships between full siblings and half-siblings, reinforcing the idea that boundaries within family relationships must



	your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere."	be respected to maintain harmony and purity in family life.
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Table 3. The Taboo of Incest in Jewish Religion

In the framework of Torah law outlined in the Book of Leviticus, there are highly explicit instructions regarding the prohibition of sexual relations between close family members. Leviticus 18:6-18 specifically instructs, "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord." This verse explicitly forbids sexual relations between close relatives, which are culturally and religiously considered a significant transgression. This reflects the importance Judaism places on separating family relationships from sexual contexts, as a means to preserve purity and sanctity within the community (Bos et al., 2019; Khatiwada et al., 2023). According to the Book of Jubilees, Cain married his sister Awan. "And Cain took *Āwân* his sister to be his wife and she bare him Enoch at the close of the fourth jubilee" (190-196 A.M.). In 2 Samuel 13 we read that Amnon, a son of King David, raped his half-sister Tamar.

Furthermore, Leviticus 18:7-8 extends this prohibition by adding, "Do not dishonour your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonour your father." This verse targets relationships specifically involving parents and a parent's spouse, affirming that such relationships are considered taboo and violate divine law. This verse underscores the importance of respecting family structure by maintaining the integrity and sanctity of parent-child relationships, which is fundamental in Jewish teachings and practices.

In a broader context of the consequences of violations, Leviticus 20:12 prescribes a severe punishment: "If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads." This punishment demonstrates the serious view Judaism takes on incest, where violations of this prohibition are not only considered moral failures but also breaches of communal sanctity requiring the most extreme corrective measures to maintain social and religious stability (Tener & Silberstein, 2019). In the Book of Deuteronomy, the prohibition against incest is followed by the pronouncement of curses, as recorded in Deuteronomy 27:22-23: "Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother. Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his mother-in-law." This pronouncement of curses highlights the serious spiritual consequences of such violations within Judaism, underscoring not only social sanctions but also divine retribution (Basta, 2019).

Moreover, Leviticus 18:9 reinforces this prohibition by encompassing all forms of relationships between full and half-siblings: "Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere." This verse ensures that boundaries within family relationships are respected, not only to maintain internal harmony but also to preserve individual sanctity within the context of family life (Gnuse, 2015). Through these verses, Judaism establishes a clear and strict legal framework regarding sexual relations and marriage within the family, demonstrating the depth and complexity of the religious perspective on family structure and social interaction. These laws highlight the importance of maintaining boundaries within family relationships, not just as social rules but also as expressions of compliance with divine will.

Discussion

The incest taboo has deep roots in the sacred texts of Abrahamic religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Adegboyega et al., 2023; Bouchara, 2021). In these religions, laws and prohibitions concerning sexual relations between close family members regulate not only individual morality but also broader social structures. According to Durkheim's theory of social solidarity, such laws play a crucial role in reinforcing boundaries between social categories and regulating relationships within society (Durkheim, 2018). In the Jewish context, as



recorded in Leviticus, the prohibition of incest is associated with maintaining communal purity, considered essential for proper relationships with God. See inter alia Leviticus 18:6-28.

In Christian tradition, the regulations against incest are explicitly outlined in the New Testament, particularly in Paul's epistles, which highlight sexual immorality, including incest, as behaviours that violate divine law and disrupt the sanctity of the body, which is regarded as the temple of the Holy Spirit. See inter alia 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 for example and also 6:1-20. Foucault's theory, as discussed in Jouet (2022), on sexuality and power shows how religious authority influences sexual norms to assert social control, evident in how early Christian communities handled cases of incest. In Islam, the Qur'an provides specific guidelines about who is considered 'mahram' (unmarriageable kin), reflecting a set of rules designed to ensure that family boundaries are maintained, supporting family structure and avoiding genetic and social conflicts (Fortier, 2020).

From a historical perspective, the incest taboo in Abrahamic sacred texts also illustrates the evolution from ancient tribal practices to more formal legal systems in larger, more organised societies. According to Maine's theory of legal evolution, the transition from status to contract and from private to broader property rights reflects how incest regulations also evolved from tribal norms to codified laws aimed at maintaining social and moral stability (Logan, 2024; Vargas Toledo, 2024). This analysis shows how Abrahamic religions use the incest taboo as a means not only to regulate individual morality but also to reinforce social structures and community power dynamics. The incest taboo in Abrahamic religions is evidenced by scriptural laws, such as those in Leviticus 18, which outline prohibited relationships to maintain moral order and solidify communal identity and cohesion. The interplay between religious laws and social structures in this context illustrates how theological and historical aspects of these laws work together to shape and maintain social norms.

Overall, the study of the incest taboo in Abrahamic religions reveals the complexity of the interaction between religion, law, and society in shaping behaviour and social norms. By analysing sacred texts and their historical contexts, and linking them to relevant social theories, we gain a deeper understanding of how and why these regulations were enacted and how they shape boundaries within and between human communities. The novelty of this research lies in integrating a thorough theological and historical analysis of incest prohibitions in Abrahamic religions with modern social theories, helping to explain the role and function of these prohibitions within broader social structures. This study not only traces the origins and evolution of incest laws in a religious context but also connects them with theories such as Durkheim's social solidarity and Foucault's theory of sexual power, offering new perspectives on how religious laws interact with and influence social power dynamics. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study provides broader insights into the influence of religious laws in shaping norms and values in society, demonstrating their relevance not only in historical contexts but also in contemporary social applications.

Conclusion

This research has revealed how the prohibition of incest is explained in the sacred texts of Abrahamic religions and how these prohibitions not only affirm moral norms but also shape broader social structures and maintain societal stability. From an in-depth analysis, it is evident that these prohibitions support family integrity and preserve personal and communal sanctity, both of which are highly valued in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Through these laws, each religion reaffirms its commitment to deeply rooted moral values within its doctrines and its role in shaping and maintaining an ethical and sustainable social order. The results of this study underscore the importance of understanding the theological and historical contexts behind religious laws, as this provides insight into the origins of practices and beliefs that have a wide impact on behaviour and social interactions in many societies around the world.



This conclusion also highlights the importance of further studies that combine theological, historical, and sociological perspectives to understand the dynamics of power and the influence of religion in shaping social norms. This research raises critical questions about how religion, with all its moral and spiritual authority, can more proactively contribute to addressing and preventing complex social phenomena such as incest, which are often shrouded in taboo and stigma. It paves the way for further dialogue between religious leaders, policymakers, and academics to develop strategies that not only respect religious values but also support the welfare and justice of all members of society, particularly the victims of actions condemned by both religion and society at large.

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