

THE BIBLE AND WORLD RELIGIONS

The Bible and Contemporary Judaism

Early History (c. 2100 B.C.–586 B.C.)

Beginning with Abraham, the founding “rock” of the Jewish people, and continuing to the modern era, Judaism has maintained continuity and passed down a remarkable legacy (cf. Isa. 51:1–2). Judaism has also been a religion of innovation, adaptability, and change. God progressively revealed his will and teachings to Abraham and his descendants (cf. Rom. 4:11–18; Gal. 3:29). The cataclysmic events leading to the exodus, and the revelation at Sinai, gave the nation of Israel its foundational spiritual identity. The religion of Moses, and later that of King David and the prophets, was far more dynamic than static. The understanding of Israel’s faith continued to be shaped and reshaped by social expansion, cultural interaction, and critical events such as the destruction of the temple, the exile, and restoration, all of which were recorded and interpreted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Second Temple Judaism (c. 516 B.C.–A.D. 70)

After the exile to Babylon in 586 B.C., Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. (Five centuries later, Herod the Great [who ruled 37–4 B.C.] lavishly expanded this second temple.) In the mid-fifth century B.C., Ezra, a priest and scribe, was a major force in reforming and reshaping the postexilic Jewish community. Ezra introduced the public reading and explanation of the Torah (that is, the Scriptures; cf. Nehemiah 8), which has remained a focal point of Jewish religious life to this day. The era between the Testaments was a very creative time for Judaism. During this period: the synagogue emerged; the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes all took shape (see *Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament*, pp. 1799–1800); and the oral law became increasingly important—especially for the Pharisees—in defining the boundaries of Jewish religious life. The rapid rise of Hellenism (the adoption of Greek culture) posed other challenges, some of which threatened the stability, purity, and piety of the Jewish community. In response to the surge of Hellenism, Jews in the third and second centuries B.C. produced a translation of their Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the Septuagint Version (see *The Septuagint*, pp. 2601–2603). These and other factors contributed to the diversity and complexity of the Jewish movements at the time of Jesus. Christianity is an outgrowth of Second Temple Judaism, i.e., “pre-A.D. 70 Judaism.”

Judaism after A.D. 70 (c. A.D. 70–c. 1750)

After the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70), only two Jewish sects survived. One sect, the Pharisees, gave rise to the rabbis of subsequent centuries and eventually developed into modern Judaism. A second major sect that

survived, the “Nazarenes,” were the Jewish followers of Jesus (cf. Acts 24:5). For the first few years after the death of Jesus, the earliest church was comprised mostly of Jewish believers and was viewed as a movement within Judaism (cf. “temple” in Acts 2:46). Beginning with Peter’s ministry to Cornelius (Acts 10) and Paul’s initial ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1–43; 11:20–26; 13:1–52), the church expanded rapidly with the inclusion of many non-Jews, and thus the modern Christian church was firmly established (cf. Acts, esp. chs. 2; 15; Eph. 2:11–22).

One cannot draw a straight line from the Bible to every current Jewish belief and practice. After A.D. 70, Judaism continued to undergo significant reformulation and change. For example, the temple sacrifice of Passover lambs was discontinued, and the yearly entry of the high priest into the Most Holy Place was no more. The rabbis replaced these and other rituals of the temple with symbolic reminders, liturgical references, and spiritual exercises such as repentance, prayer, and good deeds. With the destruction of the central sanctuary in Jerusalem and the scattering of Jews from their land, the home became increasingly important as the fountainhead of Jewish religious life.

The most significant source in the development of post-biblical (rabbinic) Judaism is the Talmud (lit., “learning”). This massive compilation of rabbinic teachings and discussions accumulated its material in both oral and written form for several centuries, and attained its final written form about A.D. 500. Centuries later, medieval scholars such as Abraham Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Rashi, along with modern scholars, would further shape postbiblical Jewish thought. Contemporary Judaism thus rests on more than the Jewish Scriptures (what Christians call the Old Testament). A significant hallmark of contemporary Judaism is its recognition of an ongoing, living tradition: the commentary of the rabbis and sages, both past and present.

Contemporary Judaism (c. A.D. 1750–present)

Modern Judaism is a development of rabbinic Judaism. Like Second Temple Judaism, it is greatly diverse and sometimes difficult to define. Furthermore, there is often a difference between what a religion formally teaches and what an individual adherent may practice. Judaism today does not see itself as a dead, legalistic religion, whose mission is long over, now replaced by Christianity. Rather, Judaism considers itself a valid and dynamic faith whose followers are in covenant relationship with God. In the Jewish view, the claims of Christ are not valid, so the NT writings are not considered binding, authoritative sources, as are the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible), the Talmud, and

other rabbinic writings. Therefore, Jewish interpreters of a passage in the Tanach will often differ from Christian interpreters, since Jews are not reading it through the inspired lens of the NT writers.

Judaism is a religion of laypeople. As such, it reflects the early concept of “freedom of the synagogue,” valuing individual expression and thriving on reasoning through dialogue and polarity of thought. With its community-centeredness, today’s synagogue maintains its historic threefold function as a house of study, prayer, and assembly. A congregational rabbi, though ordained by the laying on of hands, carries no vested authority over that congregation. The rabbi is primarily a scholar-teacher, a transmitter of Jewish heritage. The rabbi speaks *to* the people, not *for* the people.

Contemporary Branches or Movements

Today, Judaism is comprised of several branches or movements, each with certain distinguishing features. *Orthodox Judaism* is strongly committed to *halakhah*, the legal tradition of the Talmud and other law codes. In Orthodoxy, God is personal. The Torah (Scripture) and its *mitsvot*, or “commandments,” are divinely revealed. The Torah is unchanging, a focal point for study and living. Orthodox Jews usually hold to a more literal interpretation of Scripture, a distinctive dress code, dietary laws, and strict Sabbath observance.

Reform Judaism, by contrast, does not view *halakhah* as binding. Reform Judaism seeks to adapt to modern times by encouraging innovation, diversity, and egalitarianism. In Reform Judaism, the basis for decision making is not a legal system but individual autonomy, informed by reason and experience. Consistent with that approach, Reform Judaism adopts a modern, higher-critical approach to the Hebrew Scriptures and mainly deems the Scriptures to be a product of human reflection, not a result of divine inspiration (see Liberal Protestantism, pp. 2618–2619, for a similar approach). Reform Jews tend to emphasize human progress, social justice, and the ethical teachings of the prophets more than specific doctrines or ritualistic observances.

Conservative Judaism, a third major branch, falls theologically between Orthodoxy and Reform. Conservative Jews accept tradition but with an openness to change. *Halakhah* is not “frozen” but is a dynamic entity, subject to modification or adjustment in order to make it more relevant in light of current cultural concerns. Consistent with this understanding, Conservative Jews understand the Scriptures to be the words of God but would also see God’s revelation as an ongoing process, not confined to the ancient Hebrew Scriptures alone. For Conservative Jews, the decision for change is not based on an individual’s right to choose but on the congregation or the community itself, informed by the consensus of current historical scholarship.

Two additional groups—though very dissimilar theologically—are the Hasidic Jews and the Messianic Jews. *Hasidism* is the mystical movement in Judaism. Hasidic Jews are very “Torah-centric,” and they are traditional in their lifestyle. God is to be celebrated, for he is present everywhere; he seeks loving, sincere hearts to let him in. Hasidic worship is characterized by dancing, spontaneity, joy, and great intensity. Folk tales abound in the Hasidic movement.

Messianic Jews are culturally Jewish people who believe Jesus is the Messiah. As a means of affirming their Jewish identity, many messianic believers attend messianic Christian congregations. Services are structured along the lines of synagogue worship, in music and liturgy. As a movement, messianic Judaism has struggled to find acceptance within the larger Jewish community. Opponents have often marginalized messianic Judaism both theologically and socially, claiming its adherents really belong to the Christian church, not the Jewish community. The theology of many messianic Jews is closely linked to that of the evangelical Christian community, from which it has generally found support.

Today, numerous Jews do not identify with a synagogue or live religiously observant lives. The religion of Judaism and being culturally Jewish are not synonymous. Jews who do not choose to practice Judaism often define themselves as culturally or ethnically Jewish; others variously identify themselves as humanistic, secular, or agnostic. For many Bible-centered Christians who are unaware of the great diversity in Judaism, such definitions appear incongruous or simply confusing. For these Jews, however, it may in part reflect the influence of modernity, the Age of Reason, and the decimating tragedy of the Holocaust upon their understanding of God and the Jewish experience.

Judaism and Evangelicalism

Evangelical Christianity and traditional Judaism share many biblically-based beliefs and much ethical common ground. Some of these concepts, however, may be nuanced differently. This common heritage is not surprising. Evangelicals and Jews share the Scriptures of the OT and are heirs of the same spiritual ancestry: early Israelite religion through Second Temple Judaism. Areas of basic agreement include belief in one eternal, omniscient God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Further, God revealed his Torah to Moses, and his word to the prophets. In the future, he will send the Messiah, will raise the dead, and will judge (Jews look forward to this as the Messiah’s first coming; Christians think of it as his second coming). Other jointly held beliefs include: the necessity to bear witness to one’s faith, the imperative to love one’s neighbor, and the recognition that all individuals are created in the image of God. Evangelicals and most Jews also agree on the sacredness of life, the integrity of the family, the pursuit of justice and peace, and the recognition that God is providentially and progressively guiding history toward a glorious climax.

While acknowledging that both faiths hold much in common, it must be recognized that major differences exist, especially in the area of theology. Jews do not consider the NT of equal authority to the Tanach. Jews are monotheists, but not Trinitarian monotheists. Jews do not embrace the concept of original sin inherited from Adam. Jews do not accept the divinity of Jesus, his messiahship, and his vicarious atonement. Jews do not teach salvation by faith, apart from works, through Christ alone.

Growing numbers of evangelicals see the importance of becoming involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Interfaith encounters give opportunities to build respectful friendships, thoughtful alliances, and a deeper understanding of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Dialogue provides an occasion to define oneself spiritually, and an avenue to eliminate misconceptions and

stereotypes. Evangelicals have much to learn from Jews, and likewise Jews from evangelicals. While contemporary Judaism and evangelical Christianity are in the end two different faiths, authentic witness to one another—conducted with genuine humility and without theological compromise—allows for the establishment of trust and beneficial spiritual growth.

Evangelicals have been among the strongest non-Jewish supporters of the modern state of Israel. Many evangelicals base their solidarity and support on various prophetic passages which seem to imply a future restoration of Jews to their land prior to God's final act of redemption at the end of the age; others appeal to certain biblical texts emphasizing God's covenant faithfulness to his people and the promise of land (cf. Gen. 17:7–8; Jer. 31:35–36; Amos 9:14–15). However, some evangelicals prefer to support Israel's right to a homeland more on historical, judicial, and moral grounds, rather than on specific scriptural or theological considerations. Still other evangelicals are reluctant to take a position of active support for Israel. Their reasons include: the church is a universal body and has

permanently replaced Israel in God's economy; the modern state of Israel is a secular nation and not biblical Israel; justice concerns on the part of Palestinian Arabs will be compromised if active support is given to Israel.

Eschatology should never annul justice. If evangelicals believe Israel has an unconditional "divine right" to the land, it would be unwise to uphold such a claim without first thinking through its implications for justice and compassion toward every inhabitant of the land. For evangelicals to express their "solidarity" with Israel, however, it need not imply evangelical support for any unjust treatment of Palestinian Arabs. God loves all people and he delights when the land is shared with a maximum of justice and a minimum of injustice. The preservation and return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland is, at the very least, evidence of God's ongoing faithfulness and love for them (Rom. 11:1, 28–29). Whatever millennial views evangelicals hold, they must not absolutize the land, nor in any way idolize it. God alone is sovereign; he is Lord of life, Lord of history, and Lord of land. ◀

The Bible and Other World Religions

Although the Bible nowhere discusses "other religions" as such, much in it is relevant to the subject. The OT includes repeated references to the deities and religious practices of the Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Babylonians. The NT world was populated with "many 'gods' and many 'lords'" (1 Cor. 8:5) and characterized by religious syncretism. But the religions of the ancient world have been replaced today by the so-called major world religions. This article will briefly examine Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, noting similarities and differences between their teachings and Christian faith.

Hinduism

Hinduism is a family of diverse religious traditions that are the product of some 4,000 years of development in India. There is no single founder of Hinduism; it has no prescribed ecclesiastical structure; nor does it have a carefully defined creed. A Hindu may believe in one god, many gods, or no god. Some Hindus think of the religious "ultimate" as a personal being; others regard it as a nonpersonal reality. Any unity that exists within Hinduism is found in the common acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, composed between 1400 and 400 B.C., as sacred literature; belief in reincarnation of the soul in accordance with *karma*; and, at least until modern times, the importance of caste.

According to the doctrine of reincarnation, persons are continually being reborn as the *atman* (the soul) passes from one life to another. A person's present life is one in an unimaginably long series of past and future lives. Rebirths are regulated by *karma*, a metaphysical principle that determines current and future states on the basis of past actions and dispositions. The repeated cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is *samsara* (lit., "wandering"), and the traditional soteriological goal of Hinduism is *moksha*, or liberation from rebirths through breaking the causal conditions of *karma*.

Traditionally there are three ways to attain *moksha*:

1. The way of right action (*karma marga*) involves living in accordance with one's duty as determined by gender, caste, and stage in life. Classical Hinduism divided society into four major castes, with hundreds of smaller subdivisions. At the top were the *Brahmins* (teachers, priests), followed by the *Kshatriyas* (rulers, warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants, craftsmen) and *Sudras* (laborers, servants) formed the two lower castes. Menial laborers who perform "unclean" tasks were regarded as "outcastes" or "untouchables," although they are now referred to as *Dalits* ("oppressed ones").

2. The second way to liberation is that of liberating knowledge (*jnana marga*). A central question in the later Vedas concerned the relation between Brahman (the supreme being; see below) and the human self, and in an influential text the self is identified with Brahman: "That thou art" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6.9–13). What breaks the cycle of rebirths, then, is the existential realization of one's essential identity with Brahman.

3. The way of devotion (*bhakti marga*) is open to members of any caste and is the most popular way of seeking liberation. *Bhakti* means love, reverence, or adoration for a particular deity, and involves *pūja*, or ritual worship of deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, or Krishna.

Most Hindus accept the idea of Brahman as the supreme being and sustaining power of the cosmos. But there is disagreement over the nature of Brahman and its relation to the human person. An early text declares, "He is one, [though] wise men call Him by many names" (*Rigveda* I.164.46). The idea that the religious ultimate can be understood and experienced in many different ways is central to Hinduism.

Thus, Hinduism includes both monistic and theistic traditions. The Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) tradition of Shankara (d. A.D. 820), e.g., claims that the sole reality is Nirguna Brahman, a nonpersonal reality utterly beyond human concepts and categories. The world of ordinary experience is *maya* (appearance), a lower level of reality, and

moksha comes through an existential awareness of one's essential identity with Brahman.

More theistic forms of Hinduism regard Brahman (or Shiva or Vishnu) as a personal deity and insist that liberation comes not through knowledge alone but through devotion to the deity. The Vishisht Advaita (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja (d. A.D. 1137) teaches that there is only one reality, Saguna Brahman, or Brahman with personal attributes. Brahman is thus a personal being. The world is real and is the "body" of Brahman.

Theistic Hinduism teaches that Vishnu has taken on human or animal form as ten *avatars* ("descents" or "manifestations"), most famously as Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Other *avatars* include nonhuman appearances as a fish, a tortoise, a boar, and a man-lion.

Buddhism

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama (traditionally, 563–483 B.C.; also known as "the Buddha"), was born into a wealthy chieftain's family in northern India. Determined to find the cause of suffering and pain, he rejected his luxurious lifestyle and became a wandering ascetic. After much meditation and ascetic discipline, Gautama experienced "enlightenment," and for the next 40 years he traveled throughout India preaching the *dharma* (truth) and attracting a large following.

The heart of the teaching of the Buddha (lit., "awakened one") is the Four Noble Truths. The First Truth states that all existence is characterized by *dukkha* ("suffering," "pain," or "discontent"). The Second Truth holds that the root cause of suffering is *tanha* (lit., "thirst" but often translated "desire"). It is not simply wrong desires but desire itself that results in suffering. The Third Truth says that when desire ceases, then suffering ceases as well. The Fourth Truth introduces the Noble Eightfold Path, which sets out ideals in moral self-discipline, meditation, and wisdom that provide the way to eliminate desire and suffering.

The Buddha held that everything that exists is characterized by *anitya*, or impermanence, and is continually coming into being and passing out of being as a result of certain interrelated causal conditions. A 12-link chain of causation (the "wheel of life") explains how these causal conditions produce people's mistaken perceptions of enduring realities.

The Buddha rejected contemporary Hindu views about the reality of an enduring self (*atman*), an indestructible soul that passes from one life to another. He claimed that belief in a substantial self is mistaken and results in the grasping or desire that produces suffering. What is normally thought of as a person is merely the ever-changing combination of psychophysical forces—the "Five Aggregates" of matter, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. At death, what passes from this life to the next is not a soul but simply the cumulative *karmic* effects of actions, which then produce in the next life the (mistaken) perception of an enduring person.

Only *nirvana* is permanent, unconditioned, and ultimately real. *Nirvana* is not heaven. Rather, it is a state that is realized when the fires of desire and the conditions producing rebirth are eliminated. Since it is the absence of suffering in any form, it is a state of utter bliss.

Buddhism today is divided into two major groups. Theravada Buddhism, found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Kampuchea, accepts only the writings of the Pali

canon as authoritative, emphasizes the Four Noble Truths in attaining *nirvana*, and generally avoids metaphysical speculation. Early Buddhists rejected Hindu belief in Brahman, and this atheism is retained in Theravada. Moreover, each person is said to be responsible for attaining his or her own enlightenment ("self-effort"), which is restricted to the few who can master the required disciplines.

Mahayana Buddhism is today found in China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and the West and includes a wide variety of schools. It has developed its own sacred texts and metaphysical doctrines. The traditional understanding of *nirvana* as release from the cycle of rebirths was largely replaced by Mahayana in China, with an emphasis on attaining enlightenment in this life. Whereas Theravada Buddhism emphasized self-effort in attaining *nirvana*, Mahayana opened the way to the masses by acknowledging a vast multitude of spiritual beings, such as the *bodhisattvas*, who assist in the quest for enlightenment. Moreover, the Pure Land schools, the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan today, teach that rebirth in the Pure Land (a kind of Buddhist paradise) is possible, not by one's own efforts but solely by relying on the compassion, merit, and "other power" of the Amida Buddha.

Whereas Theravada Buddhism regards Gautama largely as an extraordinary human being who attained enlightenment, Mahayana developed the doctrine of the Three Bodies of the Buddha (*Trikaya*). The ultimate reality is the *Dharmakaya*, or the Law Body, an all-inclusive Buddha essence sometimes identified with the Void or Emptiness (*sunyata*). The many enlightened *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* constitute the *Sambhogakaya*, or Body of Bliss. The *Nirmanakaya*, or Transformation Body, refers to the man Gautama as a specific historical manifestation of the universal Buddha nature.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a system of social, ethical, and religious teachings derived from Confucius. It has been influential in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultures. Confucius (552–479 B.C.) was born into a poor but respected family in northwestern China. He became educated in the ancient Chinese classical writings and offered instruction in history, poetry, government, music, and moral conduct. Confucius was given various ministerial positions in the government of the Duke of Lu, eventually becoming prime minister. Tradition maintains that his honesty and eagerness to implement changes in government led to his dismissal. After traveling widely, seeking in vain a "wise ruler" who would implement his ideas, Confucius returned to his native area and continued teaching and editing the classics. After his death his disciples compiled the *Lun Yu* or *Analects*, a collection of Confucius's sayings that form the basic understanding of his teachings. The *Analects*, along with the *Da Xue* (*Great Learning*), *Zhong Yong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), and *Meng Tzu* (*Mencius*) constitute the authoritative Four Books of Confucianism. Mencius (372–289 B.C.) was the most influential Confucian thinker after Confucius.

Sixth-century B.C. China was undergoing severe social and political pressures that eventually resulted in civil war. Confucius called for a return to the practice of ethical and social principles of an earlier era in order to produce order and harmony within the family, society, and the nation at large. During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) Con-

fucianism became the established social and religious philosophy of the state.

Order within the family, society, and nation is patterned after the way of Heaven (*Tian*). Confucius's views on God/gods are unclear, but he did speak often of Heaven. Although Heaven seems to be purposive in directing cosmic affairs, it is perhaps not so much a personal being as a cosmic principle or the ground of the moral order. The universe has a moral character, so that when one practices the moral law in social relationships, one reflects the moral will of Heaven.

Li ("propriety"), a central concept in Confucian thought, refers to a proper and appropriate way of being and doing things, including the proper way of conducting rites and ceremonies, proper interpersonal relationships, and the ideal standards of social and religious conduct. The ideal of *li* is reflected socially in the Five Relationships: father/son; elder brother/younger brother; husband/wife; elder/younger; ruler/subject. Each relationship is hierarchical, with distinctive roles for both superiors and inferiors. Central to harmonious family relationships is filial piety (*xiao*), or respect and reverence for one's parents and ancestors. Filial piety includes participating in proper rites for honoring one's parents when they are dead. While the practice of offering sacrifices to one's ancestors predates Confucius, he encouraged it as a way of solidifying the family and honoring one's elders.

Confucius sought the cultivation of the "superior man" (*jun-zi*), who exemplifies moral virtues such as *ren* ("humaneness," "benevolence," or "love"). *Ren* is distinctive to human beings; it makes humans uniquely human. On one occasion Confucius said that *ren* means "to love men" (*Analects* 12:22). On another he described *ren* by giving his statement of the Golden Rule: "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire" (*Analects* 12:2; cf. 15:24). Confucius taught the perfectibility of humankind. But Mencius (a highly influential Confucian philosopher; 372–289 B.C.) later taught that human nature is inherently good and is corrupted by external factors, and this view eventually became Confucian orthodoxy.

Confucius never regarded himself as anything other than a man. Nevertheless, in time a state religious cult of devotion to Confucius developed, so that by the seventh century A.D. the Tang emperor mandated that every prefecture in China have a state temple to Confucius in which sacrifices to him were offered. The state cult of Confucius languished in the early twentieth century with the demise of the emperor system.

Islam

Islam, the second largest religion in the world after Christianity, is found not only in the Middle East but throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. (See also *The Bible and Islam*, pp. 2628–2630.) Although historically discussion of Islam begins with Muhammad (c. A.D. 570–632), Muslims insist that Islam is God's eternal religion for all humankind and that Muhammad was simply the last and greatest in a long line of prophets. Born in Mecca, an important trading center in the Arabian peninsula, Muhammad was an orphan by age six and was reared by his grandfather and uncle. At age 25 Muhammad married a wealthy widow named Khadija, and he became engaged in various business ventures.

The Arabs of Mecca were largely animists and polytheists, although there were Jewish and Christian influences in the area. Living in Mecca, Muhammad was troubled by the polytheism and superstition all around him. Around the year 610 he began to have experiences that he took to be revelations from Allah, the one true God. Convinced that he had been called to be a "Messenger of God," Muhammad continued to receive revelations supposedly dictated by the angel Gabriel over a 20-year period. The revelations were memorized by Muhammad's followers and were eventually written and codified in the Qur'an, which is understood to be the Word of God. Muhammad regarded himself as being in continuity with prophets of the OT and Jesus. He claimed to be restoring the original revelation of God that Jews and Christians had corrupted.

But Muhammad met stiff resistance to his message in Mecca, and in 622 he and his followers moved to Medina (in western Saudi Arabia). Under Muhammad's leadership, Medina was transformed into an Islamic theocracy, and the social and religious patterns of Medina are regarded as an ideal for Islamic societies. In 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca, captured it, and began transforming the city. Then suddenly, in 632, at about 62 years of age, Muhammad died.

Questions about the legitimate successors to Muhammad resulted in the two major divisions within Islam. Sunni Islam, comprising roughly 85 percent of Muslims today, recognized caliphs (Islamic leaders) not necessarily related to Muhammad as his legitimate successors. Shi'ite Islam, comprising 10 to 15 percent of Muslims, insisted that legitimate successors must descend directly from Muhammad and that Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law, who was martyred) and his sons were the rightful heirs to leadership.

Both branches of Islam embrace a strict monotheism. Islam calls for acknowledgment of the incomparable greatness of Allah and submission to his sovereign will in all of life. Allah is the eternal creator who sovereignly rules over nature and the affairs of humankind.

The religious, intellectual, and social life of devout Muslims is structured around the "Five Pillars": (1) the *Shahada*, or "witness" of the basic creed of Islam ("I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah"); (2) prayer; (3) fasting; (4) almsgiving; and (5) the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Islam teaches that the present world will one day be destroyed by Allah and that all humankind, past and present, will then be raised to face divine judgment. Human beings have a weakness of will and a tendency toward sin. Although humans are tempted by Iblis (the devil), it is within their power to resist and remain faithful to the will of Allah. In the judgment, each person's deeds will be impartially weighed in the balance. Salvation is strictly on the basis of submission to Allah and faithful adherence to the teachings of Islam. Some will be admitted to Paradise, others consigned to Hell.

Jesus is mentioned frequently in the Qur'an. He is called the Messiah, Son of Mary, Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word, and Spirit of God. Jesus is portrayed as a great miracle worker and one of the greatest of the prophets. The virgin conception of Jesus is affirmed in the Qur'an.

But the Qur'an omits Jesus' teachings as contained in the Gospels and provides no narrative description of his ministry. The Qur'an depicts Jesus as explicitly disclaiming deity (5:109–119) and includes numerous denunciations

of what seem to have been views that were common in Muhammad's lifetime regarding the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity (cf. 4:171; 5:17; 9:30–31). Although a great prophet of God, Jesus is said to have been in no sense divine. Particularly offensive is the Christian title "Son of God," which is understood by Muslims as referring to physical generation. "Never has Allah begotten a son, nor is there any other god besides Him" (23:93). Muhammad seems to have thought of the Trinity as consisting of the Father, the Virgin Mary, and their child, Jesus.

Traditionally, most Muslims have believed that Jesus was not crucified. Surah 4:155–159 denies that Jesus was in fact killed on the cross. A widely accepted interpretation of this text has been that the Jews tried to kill Jesus but were unable to do so, and that God rescued him and carried him away to a safe place in the heavens. Islam denies the need for a Savior and the substitutionary atonement. The Qur'an states that "no soul shall bear another's burden and that each man shall be judged by his own labors" (53:38). Salvation is by works. "On that day no soul shall suffer the least injustice. You shall be rewarded according only to your deeds" (36:54).

Biblical Themes and Other Religions

Even this cursory survey indicates that there are some similarities between Christian faith and other religions. Islam and Christianity, e.g., both believe in an eternal Creator God and a judgment to come after death. Both Jesus and Confucius taught a version of the Golden Rule, and both Christianity and Confucianism teach respect for one's parents. Such similarities are not surprising and can be understood in light of the biblical teaching that all people, including adherents of other religions, have been created by God in his image (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1–2) and that God has revealed himself in a general manner to all peoples through the created order (Ps. 19:1–4; Acts 14:15–17; 17:22–31; Rom. 1:18–32; 2:14–15).

But the differences between Christian faith and other religions are greater and more significant than any similarities.

1. *God.* The Bible teaches that there is one eternal Creator God who has created all else that exists (Genesis 1–2). Hinduism has theistic traditions, but it also includes polytheistic, monistic, and atheistic traditions. Confucianism's views on the religious ultimate are unclear, and Buddhism explicitly denies the existence of an eternal Creator.

2. *Death.* Hinduism and Buddhism both accept the idea of multiple rebirths regulated by *karma*. The Bible, by contrast, teaches that there is only one life, after which all persons face judgment before God (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11–15).

3. *Sin.* Many religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, identify the root problem afflicting humankind as ignorance about the true nature of reality. But the Bible

teaches that the problem is not ignorance but sin, that is, deliberate rejection of God and his ways (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 3:9–26). Moreover, contrary to Confucianism, the Bible teaches that after the fall of Adam and Eve all humankind has been corrupted by sin infecting their moral nature, so that people are not inherently good but sinful (Genesis 3; Rom. 3:9–20; 5:12–14).

4. *Soul.* Buddhism teaches that there is no enduring, substantial soul that passes from one life to another. But the Bible teaches that there is an immaterial dimension of the person, created by God, which continues to exist after death (Matt. 10:28; Rev. 6:9; 20:4).

5. *Salvation.* Although some forms of *bhakti* Hinduism and Pure Land Buddhism do teach that salvation cannot be attained through one's own efforts but rather is a gift from another being, Islam, along with most other religious traditions, teaches that salvation is based on one's own deeds. But the Bible clearly states that salvation is not something that human beings can earn through their own efforts; it is the gift of God's grace, which is to be accepted by faith (Rom. 3:20, 28; Eph. 2:8–9).

6. *Christ's incarnation.* The Bible teaches that the eternal Creator is a tripersonal Being, and that the second person of this Trinity, while remaining fully God, became a man (John 1:1–14; Rom. 1:3–4; Phil. 2:7–8; Col. 2:9). In a unique onetime event, the Son of God became incarnate as the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. The Hindu notion of *avatar*, by contrast, concerns multiple manifestations of Vishnu as both humans and animals, and involves legendary figures such as Krishna, not actual historical persons. In fact, no other world religions teach that the eternal Son of God became a true man.

7. *Christ's preeminence.* Jesus is not just another great religious teacher. The truth of Jesus' teachings cannot be separated from its grounding in the person of Christ as the incarnate Word of God, the eternal, omnipotent Son of God who shares fully in all the attributes of God. It is because of who he is and what he has done on the cross that Jesus is himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), the only Savior for all humankind (Acts 4:12).

8. *Christ's substitution.* The Bible teaches that salvation is based on the sinless life (Heb. 4:15) and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross, as he took upon himself the punishment for the sins of the world (Rom. 3:25–26; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:2). There is nothing like this teaching in Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism, and it is explicitly denied in Islam.

9. *Christ's resurrection.* The Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, and Jesus all died, but there is no reliable historical record of any—apart from Jesus—being resurrected after death (1 Cor. 15:1–8). It is because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we, too, can have victory over sin and death and anticipate our own resurrection to eternal life with God (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:20–22, 54–58). ◀

The Bible and Islam

The Revelations of the Qur'an

There is no more widely recognized utterance of the Islamic faith than the declaration known as the *shahadah*: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." Islam is about Allah and his prophet, Muham-

mad. The Qur'an teaches that Muhammad was an ordinary man (43:31). Yet, according to Muslims, Allah sovereignly chose Muhammad to receive a series of revelations through the intermediary presence of the angel Gabriel. While Muhammad was praying and fasting in the hills outside of

Mecca in A.D. 610, Gabriel appeared to him. Many Muslims believe the first revelation to Muhammad was the command to “Recite in the Name of Thy Lord” (96:1). These revelations continued until Muhammad’s death in A.D. 632 (17:82). According to Islamic traditions, approximately 20 years after Muhammad’s death his “recitations” were written down and codified into a collection of 114 chapters (called *surahs*) known as the Qur’an. The word “Qur’an” is Arabic for “recitation.” The Qur’an, containing 6,346 verses (known as *aya*), is approximately the same size as the NT. The first chapter of the Qur’an is known as “The Opening” and is widely regarded as the greatest summary of the Islamic message. The remaining chapters are arranged by length from the longest to the shortest.

The Qur’an and the OT

The emergence of Islam and the Qur’an can be properly understood only within the larger context of the Bible and the monotheism of Islam’s two main predecessors, Judaism and Christianity. The dozens of superficial similarities between the Qur’an and the Bible are striking. For example, in the Qur’an, Allah creates the earth in six days (25:59), culminating in the creation of the first man, Adam. Adam and his wife eat of the forbidden fruit and become aware of their nakedness (20:115–122). Allah sends Moses to confront Pharaoh, inflict the plagues on Egypt, and lead the Israelites out of Egypt through the parting of the Red Sea (26:9–75). Allah gives Moses the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, which are subsequently broken (7:143–150). Throughout the Qur’an several of the Ten Commandments are repeated, including the commands to “serve no other gods” (24:55), refrain from making idols (4:116), not covet (4:32), not murder (6:151), and honor one’s father and mother (6:151). In the Qur’an one can read about such familiar OT stories as Noah building the ark and preaching judgment to his generation (11:25–49; 23:23–32); Joseph being betrayed by his brothers, sold to a caravan of travelers, and brought to Egypt (12:7–21); King David’s adultery with Bathsheba (28:21–25); the queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon (27:22–44); and Jonah being swallowed by the great fish (37:139–148). There are times, however, when the Qur’anic version has surprising departures, historically and theologically, from the biblical account. For example, Abraham is asked to sacrifice Ishmael rather than Isaac (37:100–111), and Jesus Christ is not accorded his full status.

The Qur’an and Christian Theology

Islamic View of God and the Trinity

Islam teaches a doctrine of absolute monotheism known as *tawhid*. Absolute monotheism is distinct from the *Trinitarian* monotheism of Christianity in that the Qur’an permits no distinctions within God. Christianity teaches that there is one God, known in three eternal persons. While Muslims welcome the Christian affirmation of one God, they maintain that belief in the three persons compromises the unity of God and makes Christianity functionally tritheistic (i.e., believing in three gods; see 4:171).

Islamic View of Jesus Christ

The Qur’an has dozens of references to Jesus (*Isa* in Arabic), found in 15 different surahs of the Qur’an. Jesus is often called *ibn Maryam* (“son of Mary”), a phrase that appears only once in the NT (Mark 6:3). The Qur’an also refers to him as “servant of Allah” (19:30), “messiah” (5:75), and “messenger/prophet” (61:6). The Qur’an even gives

Jesus several honorific titles, including a “Word from Him” (3:45; 4:171), a “Spirit from God” (4:171), and a “Sign for all peoples” (19:21; 21:91).

Several of these titles appear consistent with Christian claims about Jesus. Indeed, the Qur’an often speaks positively about him: Jesus was born without sin to the Virgin Mary (3:47; 19:19, 20; 21:91; 66:12) and was a miracle worker (2:253; 3:49; 5:110; 43:63; 61:6) whose ministry was foretold by John the Baptist (3:39). Yet, several surahs denounce any view of Christ that would elevate him beyond the status of a human prophet. Indeed, some passages in the Qur’an seem to deliberately contradict the biblical proclamation about Jesus Christ. For example, “Those who say: ‘The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,’ preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust . . . that they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become Him to beget one!” (19:88–91). In Surah 61, Jesus is pictured as a prophet heralding the way for the coming of Muhammad (61:6). Surah 4 teaches that Jesus was not crucified on the cross (4:155–159). Thus, while respecting Jesus as a prophet of God, the Qur’an does not affirm the deity of Jesus Christ or his death as a substitute payment for sins.

Islamic View of Sin and Humanity

Traditional Islamic teaching does not accept that humans were created in the image of God. Islam has no doctrine of a sin nature and therefore does not believe that humanity is either depraved or fallen. Instead, men and women have the innate capacity to believe and submit to the Islamic revelation. Islam classifies the entire human race into four categories. The first is *jahiliyyah*, meaning those in a “state of ignorance” (5:50) who do not have a monotheistic revelation and have not yet heard Muhammad’s message. The second are the *ahl al-kitab*, or “People of the Book.” These are monotheistic people who have not received the Qur’an but who have a book of revelation, such as Christians and Jews (see, e.g., 2:105; 3:64–199; 4:123; 5:15; 29:46; 33:26; 57:29; 59:11; 98:1–6). The third category is *Muslim*, an Arabic word meaning “those who submit”; it refers to monotheists who have submitted to Allah and regard the Qur’an as Allah’s greatest (some say, eternal) revelation and Muhammad as the final “seal” of the prophets (33:40). The fourth category refers to those peoples who have heard the message of Islam but rejected it, the *kafir* (meaning “unbeliever” or “infidel”).

Islamic View of Other Religions

Muslims universally affirm that Islam is the highest and only non-corrupted religion. Christianity and Judaism are accorded some respect as monotheistic religions flowing from the Abrahamic tradition (29:46). All other religions are generally regarded as expressions of human ignorance and an unwillingness to submit to Allah.

Islamic View of Salvation

Since Muslims do not accept the doctrine of the fall or of a subsequent sin nature, there is no need of redemption. Islamic “salvation” is understood almost wholly as future deliverance from final judgment. Many Muslims maintain that whoever believes in the oneness of God (*tawhid*) and the prophethood of Muhammad will be saved from the fire of judgment. Other Muslims insist on submission to Allah through adherence to the five pillars of Islam: con-

fession of faith (*shahadah*), daily ritual prayer (*salat*), the giving of alms (*zakat*), fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*), and a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*). Based on revered Islamic traditions known as *Hadith*, some Muslims believe that Allah grants Muhammad the honor of interceding for the entire Islamic community at the final judgment, allowing all Muslims to be saved.

Islamic View of the Bible

Muslims universally regard the Bible as a corrupted text. The doctrine of corruption (*tahrif*) asserts that the transmission of Jewish and Christian texts was unreliable (5:13–14), or Christians and Jews willfully altered the biblical texts because of enmity or jealousy (2:109) (see the articles on The Reliability of the Old Testament Manuscripts, pp. 2585–2587; and The Reliability of the New Testament Manuscripts, pp. 2587–2589). On the other hand, the Qur'an does affirm Allah's sending revelation in the Torah and the Gospels (*Injil*) (5:46, 67, 69, 71). Furthermore, the Qur'an says that Jesus' words should be "believed" (4:171; 5:78), and even commands the Muslims to listen to those who had the Torah/*Injil* before the Qur'an, calling it a "Truth come to thee from Thy Lord" (10:94).

Islamic Attitudes toward the Use of Violence

There is no single Islamic attitude toward the use of violence, and scholars of Islam are divided over the extent to which the Qur'an permits or even advocates violence against unbelievers. The Qur'an asserts that there should be "no compulsion in religion" (2:256) and peacefully calls or invites (*dawah*) people to follow Islam (16:125). The Qur'an also permits the use of violence in certain circumstances (8:38, 39; 47:4), and two texts in particular have sometimes been cited as justification for violence against unbelievers (9:5, 29). Historically, the Islamic caliphate extended protected status (*dhimmi*) to other monotheistic religions and prohibited the exercise of violence against them as long as a special tax, known as *jizyah*, was paid.

Islam generally embraces the honor of martyrdom and affirms that integral to Islamic faithfulness is a struggle (*jihad*) against idolatry and unbelief. Some Muslims emphasize the "higher jihad," which is nonviolent and focuses on the internal struggle within the individual to live in purity. However, many Muslims accept the use of violence in certain instances, especially against *kafirs* (or unbelievers). In the last few centuries more radical groups, such as the Wahabis and Salafis, have accepted violence even against other confessing Muslims who behaved in ways they deemed idolatrous. Most recently, the growth of extremist movements such as Islamism, the writings of intellectuals such as Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), and the emergence of terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda (lit., "the base") have served to make the use of violence more widely acceptable.

Islamic Attitudes toward Civil Government

Historically, Islam has envisioned the unity of civil and religious life under the all-encompassing guidance of Islamic law, known as *Sharia*. Until modern times, the only acceptable form of Islamic government has been the caliphate, which unites civil and religious authority under the rule of a caliph. Sunnis and Shiites differ as to how this caliph is chosen. (For the distinction between Sunnis and Shiites, see the section on Islam in The Bible and Other World Religions, pp. 2625–2628.) Over the centuries, Muslims have lived under a wide range of caliphates including the Rightly Guided Caliphs (7th century), the Umayyads (7th and 8th centuries), the Abbasids (8th to 13th centuries), and the Ottomans (15th to 20th centuries). In 1924 Kemal Ataturk, the president of Turkey, constitutionally abolished the caliphate. Several contemporary Islamic movements have encouraged political pluralism and even acceptance of religious diversity. However, since the 1970s more Islamist movements have emphasized the need to assert Islamic hegemony and to resist the secularization of Islamic governments. ◀

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