

JIGSAW READING—MONOTHEISM

Religion: Three Religions, One God

Three of the world's major religions—the monotheist traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—were all born in the Middle East and are all inextricably linked to one another. Christianity was born from within the Jewish tradition, and Islam developed from both Christianity and Judaism. All three share many beliefs, especially monotheism, or belief in one god.

JUDAISM

A brief history of Judaism

Judaism is the oldest surviving monotheistic religion, arising in the eastern Mediterranean in the second millennium B.C.E. Followers of Judaism, known as Jews, trace their origin to the ancient Israelites, who set up the kingdom of Israel along the eastern Mediterranean coast. There they made Jerusalem their capital and religious center. Abraham is traditionally considered to be the first Jew and to have made a covenant with God. Because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize Abraham as their first prophet, they are also called the Abrahamic religions.

Despite political division, conquest, and exile to Mesopotamia, Jews and Judaism continued to survive and flourish. While there was always a small community of Jews in historic Palestine, in 73 C.E. the Roman Empire dispersed the Jews after a rebellion against Roman authority. Most Jews then were forced to move elsewhere, taking their beliefs with them. Jews typically lived as minorities in their communities, until the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

When Jews from all over the world came to settle in modern Israel, they found that various subcultures had developed in different areas with distinctive histories, languages, religious practices, customs, and cuisine.

What Jews believe

Judaism teaches obedience to God's law and the creation of a just society. Jews believe in one god and his prophets, with special respect for Moses as the prophet to whom God gave the law. Jewish law is embodied in the Torah (also known as the Pentateuch) and the Talmud (collected commentary on the Torah completed in the fifth-century C.E.).

Judaism is more concerned with actions than beliefs. In other words, observance of rules regulating human behavior has been of more concern than debates over beliefs in the Jewish tradition. Jewish law covers matters such as prayer and ritual, diet, rules regulating personal status (marriage, divorce, birth, death, inheritance, etc.), and observance of holidays (like Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; and Passover, the feast celebrating the exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt). Worship services are traditionally held in synagogues, where a rabbi leads worship.

Modified and adapted from:
(2002). *Religion: Three Religions, One God*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pbs.org/wqmh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/religion/index.html>.

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CHRISTIANITY

A brief history of Christianity

Christianity started as an offshoot of Judaism in the first century C.E. Until the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 324 C.E., early Christian communities were often persecuted. It was then that the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire, and its capital relocated from Rome to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium and now Istanbul). The development of Christian groups derived from major and minor splits.

The Orthodox Church split away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054 C.E. because of political and doctrinal differences. In the 16th century, a man named Martin Luther spearheaded a reform movement that led to the development of Protestantism.

Christian missionaries seek to convert people all over the world to Christianity, and there are large populations of Christians on every continent on Earth, although the forms of Christianity practiced vary.

What Christians believe

Christianity developed out of the monotheistic tradition of Judaism. The life and teachings of Jesus, a member of the Jewish community in Roman Palestine, became the basis of a new religion - Christianity. The Christian holy scriptures came to include the Old Testament and the New Testament together known as the Bible. The Old Testament was the Jewish Torah with some additions. The New Testament was a collection of writings on the life and teaching of Jesus as well as the earliest Christian communities after the death of Jesus.

Some Christians believe that God is revealed through three dimensions: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Followers of Jesus believed him to be the son of God, born to the virgin Mary and come to Earth to offer redemption for mankind's sins. After Jesus was crucified and executed by the Romans because his teachings made him unpopular with those in power, it is believed that he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. This event is celebrated at Easter, while the birth of Jesus is celebrated at Christmas. Worship services are traditionally held in a church, where a pastor or minister lead worship.

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ISLAM

A brief history of Islam

Islam arose in the early seventh century C.E. in the settled desert community of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia). Followers of Islam are called Muslim, a term meaning “those who submit to God’s will.” Islam developed from both the Judeo-Christian tradition and the cultural values of the nomadic tribes of Arabia.

Islam expanded into areas controlled by the Byzantine Empire. By the mid-eighth century, Islam had spread west into North Africa and Europe, and east into Central Asia. Over the centuries, Islam continued to grow in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

As Islam expanded, the new Islamic societies adapted and synthesized many of the customs they encountered. As a result, Muslims in different areas of the world created for themselves a wide array of cultural traditions. Many elements of Islamic society became integral parts of medieval and Renaissance European culture, like the notion of chivalry, and certain forms of music (the lute, the arabesque) and poetry.

Today around one-fifth of the world’s population follow Islam. Within Islam, there are many different communities. Many of these divisions, like the Sunnis, Shiis, Ismailis, Alevis/Alawites, and Druze, originate in political and doctrinal differences in the community. Adherents of Islam may be more or less observant, conservative or liberal.

What Muslims believe

Muslims believe that Allah (the Arabic word for God) sent his revelation, the Quran, Islam’s holy book, to the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century C.E. to proclaim it to mankind. The Quran contains verses (surahs) in Arabic that tell Muslims to worship one god and explains how they should treat others properly. Those that accepted Muhammed’s message acknowledged him as the last in a line of prophets, or messengers, that included Abraham and Jesus.

Another historical text, the Hadith, written by scholars after the death of Muhammad, describes Muhammad's life as an example of virtuous or good behavior, proscribes law for the community based on the Quran and the example of Muhammad, and explains how certain rituals should be performed.

Observant Muslims practice five principles (pillars) of Islam outlined in the Quran: orally declaring their faith in God and the prophet Muhammed; praying five times a day; fasting in the daylight hours during

the month of Ramadan; giving a share of their income for charity and helping the poor; and making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's holiest city, at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. Many Muslims also observe dietary rules, in origin similar to those of Judaism, that forbid certain foods (like pork), outlaw alcohol, and dictate how animals should be slaughtered for food.

Major Muslim festivals include Id al-Fitr (the Fast-Breaking Festival, celebrated at the end of Ramadan) and Id al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice, the commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Ishmail which takes place during the month of pilgrimage). Worship services are typically held in a mosque and lead by an imam.

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