

World Religions

An introduction to the most relevant world religions of today.

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:15

Definition of religion, noun

- 1 a : the state of a religious <a nun in her 20th year of religion>
b (1) : the service and worship of God or the supernatural
b (2) : commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance
- 2 a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices
- 3 archaic : scrupulous conformity : CONSCIENTIOUSNESS
- 4 a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith

Taken from the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary.

Top 5 Religions

<u>Religion</u>	<u>1990</u>		<u>2000</u>	
Christianity	555m	32%	1.9b	31-33%
Islam	200m	12.3%	1.2b	19-22%
Hinduism			881m	14%
Buddhism			360m	6%
Judaism			14m	< 0.5%

Books Used

- ▶ Islam for Dummies
- ▶ The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism
- ▶ Buddhism for Dummies
- ▶ Judaism for Dummies
- ▶ Christianity for Dummies

My purpose is to present each religion as presented in these books, so we can talk about how each is viewed and how each differs from the Truth, the Life and Works of Jesus Christ. The only exception to this is that I removed any doctrinal errors from the section on Christianity.

Islam

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Islamic Beliefs
- ▶ Islamic Countries
- ▶ Tawhid - Unity
- ▶ The Five Pillars of Worship
- ▶ Jihad
- ▶ The Qur'an
- ▶ Muslim Contributions to the World



Islam – Introduction

- ▶ Islam means submission
- ▶ 610 AD the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in Mecca (modern day Saudi Arabia)
 - ▶ Mecca was a stronghold for the worship of many gods
 - ▶ God commissioned Muhammad as His last prophet
 - ▶ Muhammad received revelations until his death in 632
 - ▶ The revelations were written in a book, called the Qur'an
 - ▶ Teaches a religion of humanity
 - ▶ Teaches submission to God
 - ▶ Teaches there is only one God



Islam – Introduction

- ▶ **622 AD Muhammad and followers emigrate to Medina (in modern day Saudi Arabia)**
 - ▶ 622 is set as the first year of the Muslim calendar
 - ▶ Muhammad established the first Muslim community
 - ▶ A Muslim is an adherent of the religion of Islam
- ▶ **630 AD Muhammad led a Muslim army against Mecca**
 - ▶ Mecca submitted peacefully
- ▶ **By 632 AD, Muhammad's death, most of Arabia had accepted Islam**
 - ▶ Became an Islamic community
- ▶ **Within 100 years Islam spread from Spain to India**



Islamic Beliefs

- ▶ God created the world and all that is in it
- ▶ God established in His revealed word the principles to live by, including concern for the poor
- ▶ One shouldn't worship other gods, or money, or power, or oneself
- ▶ At the end of time God will judge all people
- ▶ If a person had fulfilled the divine command, he or she will go to heaven
 - ▶ God calls upon all people to submit to His will, as embodied in His revealed law, the Qur'an



Largest Islamic Countries

<u>Country</u>	<u>Muslim Population</u>
Indonesia	170m
Pakistan	136m
Bangladesh	106m
India	103m
Turkey	62m
Iran	60m
Egypt	53m
Nigeria	47m



Tawhid – Unity

- ▶ Sura 112 begins:

“Say, he is God, One.

God eternal.

He does not give birth, nor was he born.

And there is none like unto Him.”

- ▶ To believe God has a wife or children, or to believe that other gods exist, is to commit the sin of *shirk* (association)

- ▶ The worst sin possible in Islam

- ▶ Sura 4:116 says, “God does not forgive associating anything with Him; anything else He forgives according as He wills.”



The Five Pillars of Worship

▶ Shahada (First Pillar): Testifying

- ▶ “I testify that there is no God but God, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God”
- ▶ If a person speaks this statement with the intention of becoming a Muslim, the person does indeed become a Muslim
- ▶ They believe all people were originally Muslim, having submitted to God at the time of Adam’s creation
- ▶ A Muslim is obligated to bear witness to his submission to God and to witness to others



The Five Pillars of Worship

▶ Salat (Second Pillar): Praying

- ▶ Ritual prayer, *salat*, follows a prescribed sequence of words with accompanying bodily positions, facing Mecca
 - ▶ The most important way to worship God in Islam
 - ▶ A Muslim stops whatever they are doing to pray five times a day, and is constantly reminded to put God before all other concerns
- ▶ The prayer times are precise, depending on location and time of year
 - ▶ Early morning prayer right before dawn (two prayer cycles)
 - ▶ Noon prayer (four prayer cycles)
 - ▶ Mid-afternoon prayer (four prayer cycles)
 - ▶ Sunset prayer (three prayer cycles)
 - ▶ Evening prayer, between an hour after sunset and midnight (four prayer cycles)



The Five Pillars of Worship

▶ Zakat (Third Pillar): Helping the Needy

- ▶ An obligatory tax that every Muslim pays annually
 - ▶ The basic rate is 2.5% of all liquid assets and income-producing property
 - ▶ Similar contributions are specified for livestock and crops
 - ▶ If one's property is below a certain minimum, about the price of three ounces of gold, they do not pay zakat
- ▶ The zakat is used to help the poor and sick, spread the Islamic faith, ransom captives, aid travelers, free Muslim slaves, help debtors, and defend Islam
- ▶ Sura 2:267 says, "O you who believe! Give in charity of the good things you earn and of what we [God] have brought forth for you out of the earth, and do not aim at giving in charity what is bad."

▶ Additional, voluntary contributions are recommended



The Five Pillars of Worship

▶ Saum (Fourth Pillar): Reflecting and Fasting

- ▶ Originally, fasting took place on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim year
- ▶ In Medina, Ramadan was revealed as the month of fasting, the ninth month of the Muslim year
 - ▶ The Muslim month begins at sunset after the first sighting of the new moon
 - ▶ The fast is from dawn to dusk: no eating, no drinking, no sexual relations, no smoking
 - ▶ Pregnant women and people who are permanently debilitated or mentally ill aren't required to fast
 - ▶ If you break the fast, you can just add a day at the end
- ▶ Sura 2:183-185 says “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint – (fasting) for a fixed number of days Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind.”



The Five Pillars of Worship

- ▶ **Hajj (Fifth Pillar): Making the Pilgrimage to Mecca**
 - ▶ The pilgrimage lasts from the 8th to 12th of Dhul-hijja, which is the twelfth month of the Muslim year
 - ▶ About 2m people a year
- ▶ **The pilgrimage must be made at least once in a Muslim's life, if able to do so**
 - ▶ Muslims will not go into debt or sacrifice the material well being of their families in order to undertake the trip
- ▶ **Sura 22:27, 29 says “Proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to you on foot and on animals lean from the journey through distant mountain highways and deep ravines Then let them complete the prescribed rites, perform their vows and circle the ancient house (ka`ba).”**



Jihad

- ▶ **Jihad means striving or struggle, and by many is considered the sixth pillar of Islam**
 - ▶ Within Islam there are different explanations of jihad, often in conflict with one another
 - ▶ Regardless of explanation, all agree that jihad is required
- ▶ **Use of jihad in the Qur'an**
 - ▶ The greatest jihad is that of the heart against the lower nature
 - ▶ The jihad of the tongue spreads the teachings of Islam
 - ▶ The jihad of the hand engages in actions to achieve justice
 - ▶ The jihad of the sword is the military struggle on behalf of God
 - ▶ Islamic tradition holds that jihad of the sword *in defense* of Islam is required of every Muslim male



The Qur'an

- ▶ **Muslims regard the Qur'an as a work of perfection both in its expression and in its content**
 - ▶ Muslims believe the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad by God in a series of revelations over a period of 22 years
- ▶ **Non-Muslims know the Qur'an only in translation**
 - ▶ In 1841 Thomas Carlyle, the British historian, described the Qur'an as “a confused jumble, crude, incondite, insupportable stupidity in short.”
 - ▶ Compared to most westerners, Thomas Carlyle was sympathetic toward Muhammad and Islam



The Qur'an

- ▶ Divided into 114 primary units, each of which is a sura, which can be referred to by number (Sura 12) or name (the Joseph Sura)
- ▶ Each sura is divided into verses, which can also be referred to by number (Sura 4:116)
- ▶ The Qur'an is the basic revelation or incarnation of God in the world
 - ▶ Literally, God's spoken word
 - ▶ Not just written as moved by the Holy Spirit, but literally God's own word spoken by Him
 - ▶ In the first person, with God as the speaker
 - ▶ Today's Qur'an is a perfect replica of the original one written down by Muhammad
 - ▶ Muhammad brings an Arabic book to a people who previously had no book of their own



Muslim Contributions to the World

- ▶ **Algebra and Mathematics**
 - ▶ Transposition, cancellation, and reduction of terms
- ▶ **Arabic Numbers**
- ▶ **Astronomy**
 - ▶ Precise determination of the date of the new moon, the location of Mecca, the times for prayer
- ▶ **Engineering and Technology**
 - ▶ Inventions: switches, conical valves, float valves, siphons, gears, crankshafts, gas mask, fountains, water raising devices, water wheels, and a lot more



Muslim Contributions to the World

▶ **Medicine**

- ▶ Clinical observation, diagnosis, experiments to increase knowledge and improve treatment, the first hospitals

▶ **Pharmacology**

- ▶ Pharmacy was attached to a hospital, pharmacists were examined and licensed by the government

▶ **Physics, Specifically Optics**

- ▶ Greatly improved theory of vision, the physiology of the eye, transmission of light

▶ **Architecture**

- ▶ Taj Mahal, Alhambra



Hinduism

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ The Hindu Universe
- ▶ The Veda
- ▶ Rishis
- ▶ Vedic Gods
- ▶ Some Vedic Hymns



Introduction

- ▶ Hindus believe their religion has existed forever, even before the universe came into existence
- ▶ They say the truths of their faith are inherent in the nature of reality itself
- ▶ All men and women peering into the depths of their inner nature will rediscover these same truths for themselves



The Hindu Universe

- ▶ **All things are in some sense living entities**
 - ▶ People, trees, mountains, bridges, ...
 - ▶ Those great beings that are more powerful than us, like the ocean or the wind, are called gods
- ▶ **Time circles back around on itself in cycles large and small**
 - ▶ Everything in nature dies and starts afresh, its body ever changing, its spirit ever the same
- ▶ **Hindus have enormous respect for the lineages of spiritual masters who pass the wisdom of the ancient sages from one generation to the next**



The Hindu Universe

- ▶ The reality of psychic phenomena, like telepathy and precognition, is taken for granted
 - ▶ Everyone in the universe is interconnected in a vast inner network of consciousness called *Mahat*, the Great One
- ▶ The mind is the sixth sense, and is able to perceive entities, objects, and fields of energy the other five senses don't register
 - ▶ The living spirits in fire and flowers and ocean froth, as well as souls of the dearly departed, are just as real as hammers and nails
 - ▶ We can sense their presence even if we cannot see them



The Veda

▶ The Bible of Hinduism

- ▶ Passed on by word of mouth till finally written down
- ▶ Existed from before the beginning of time
- ▶ Brahma, the creator god, preserved it during the dissolution of the last universe and then gave it to humanity once again when the world was recreated
- ▶ The great sages of antiquity “heard” the verses of the Veda in deep states of meditation and passed them along to other Brahmins, the priests of Hinduism
- ▶ Four books, written in a the Vedic language, an archaic form of Sanskrit
- ▶ Compiled by the great sage Vyasa into one large oral text, and then organized them into four books

▶ About 5100 years ago



The Veda

▶ The four books

- ▶ Rig Veda – collection of 1017 hymns to a wide assortment of gods, arranged in 10 sections
- ▶ Sama Veda – a selection of the hymns in the Rig Veda with melodies for singing, rather than just chanting
- ▶ Yajur Veda – hymns used specifically for certain types of sacrifices
- ▶ Atharva Veda – contains hymns for a variety of useful purposes including attracting lovers, subduing enemies, regulating weather, and curing diseases

▶ The Brahmanas

- ▶ A huge mass of writings that explain how to perform the Vedic rituals



Rishis

- ▶ A rishi (seer) is someone who sees the divine reality for themselves, with direct personal experience of divinity
 - ▶ Deva rishis – god-like seers, with a level of consciousness beyond human imagination, extending to all worlds and throughout the past and the future
 - ▶ Brahma rishis – god-realized seers, who are fully enlightened and exist here on earth in physical bodies
 - ▶ Raja rishis – royal seers, who have gained mastery in both the physical and the spiritual worlds



Rishis

- ▶ Maha rishis – great seers, who may not be fully enlightened, but have a deep and authentic understanding of the divine and work tirelessly to help raise humanity to higher levels of consciousness
- ▶ Parama rishis – advanced adepts, who are well along the road to enlightenment but have not yet completely purified their minds
- ▶ Shruta rishis – learned seers, who have grasped the truths at the core of their spiritual tradition and are now working hard to translate that knowledge into living experience
- ▶ Kanda rishis – striving seers, who are beginners on the path but don't have much technical knowledge about spirituality, yet feel complete commitment to spiritual life and a burning desire for spiritual truth



Vedic Gods

- ▶ **The gods in the Veda are no longer mentioned -- they reigned a very long time ago**
 - ▶ Personifications of natural forces
 - ▶ Considered actual fields of intelligence
- ▶ **All the different gods are ultimately just different faces of the one Supreme Being**
 - ▶ The various ways its will acts in nature
 - ▶ Expressing the numerous names and forces of the many-sidedness of its unity



Vedic Gods

- ▶ **More important gods and goddesses of the Veda**
 - ▶ Indra – the dragon slayer
 - ▶ Angi – fire in all its forms
 - ▶ Varuna – the Moon, ruler of celestial and terrestrial seas
 - ▶ Mitra – the sun as our celestial friend
 - ▶ Savitar – source of life and light
 - ▶ Ashvins – twin gods of healing and vitality
 - ▶ Ushas – gorgeous goddess of the dawn
 - ▶ Sarasvati – source of intelligence and creativity
 - ▶ Rudra – giver and remover of disease
 - ▶ Bhaga – dispenser of good fortune



Some Vedic Hymns

▶ Part of a hymn to Indra, the dragon slayer

Indra is the lord of all things living and inanimate, of all creatures wild and tame

He contains all beings in himself like spokes in a felly.

▶ Part of another hymn

He to whom the priests sacrifice, what do they know of him? Though set burning in many different fire pits, Angi, lord of fire, is only one. Though his light extends in every direction, Surya, the sun, is only one. That one being has become all this. All this is only one.

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Angi. They call him Garutman, Yama and Matarishvan. There is one God; he is known by many names.



Some Vedic Hymns

▶ Celebrating the goddess Vak, Queen of the Universe

I move with the winds and the destructive powers, with the divisions of the sky, and with the gods I travel.

I hold up the day sky and the night sky, the Sun, the constellations, and the planets.

I love and hold aloft the Moon and the Sun in their many courses.

I shower wealth on those who honor the gods with sacred rites.

I am the Queen, dispenser of treasure, the source of thought, most worthy of those who deserve to be worshipped!

I am established everywhere, I abide in many places.

Your breath, your speech, all your actions are performed through my power alone. I am the force of movement and will.

I celebrate myself, the splendor of my power!



Buddhism

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Shakyamuni Buddha
- ▶ The Philosophy of Buddhism
- ▶ The Practice of Buddhism
- ▶ The Eight-Fold Path



Introduction

- ▶ **Buddhism is not a typical religion**
 - ▶ **No God** – they do not worship a supernatural power
 - ▶ A good religion for atheists
 - ▶ **Not a belief system** – although it does contain certain fundamental principles, most teachers actively encourage their students to adopt an attitude that is opposite to belief or blind faith
- ▶ **A non-dogmatic approach with no rigid system of doctrine or beliefs**
 - ▶ Buddha said, “Do not accept anything I say as true simply because I have said it. Instead, test it as you would gold to see if it is genuine or not, If, after examining my teachings, you find that they are true, put them into practice. But do not do so simply out of respect for me.”



Introduction

- ▶ **Buddhist teachers advise the student to be skeptical about teachings they receive, even if they come directly from Buddha himself**
 - ▶ Don't passively accept what you hear or read, or automatically reject it either
 - ▶ Use your intelligence instead
 - ▶ See for yourself if it makes sense in terms of your own experience and the experience of others
 - ▶ Then, “If you find the teachings suit you, apply them to your life as much as you can; if they don't suit you, just leave them be.”



Introduction

- ▶ Buddhism encourages you to use the entire range of your mental, emotional, and spiritual abilities and intelligence – instead of placing your blind faith in what past authorities have said
 - ▶ This is very appealing in our post modern culture
- ▶ Buddhism offers a set of fundamental teachings on the nature of reality, AND a set of techniques and practices that enables its followers to experience a deeper level of reality directly for themselves
 - ▶ An awakening to the truth of your authentic, innermost nature
 - ▶ This puts me at the center of my reality, and therefore I have no need for God



Shakyamuni Buddha

- ▶ Living about 2,500 years ago, he was born into the ruling family of the Shakya clan in northern India and was expected to someday succeed his father as king of northern India
 - ▶ At the age of 29 he saw the reality of the extensive suffering and dissatisfaction in the world
 - ▶ He set out to find a way to overcome this suffering
 - ▶ At age 35 he achieved his goal, seated under the Bodhi tree – the tree of enlightenment – he achieved the complete awakening of Buddhahood
 - ▶ He became known as Shakyamuni Buddha, the fully awakened sage (*muni*) of the Shakya clan



Shakyamuni Buddha

- ▶ He spent the remaining 45 years of his life wandering across northern India teaching anyone who was interested about the path that leads to freedom from suffering in the full enlightenment of a Buddha
- ▶ The Buddhist spiritual community (*sangha*) took great pains to preserve and transmit his teachings as purely as possible so they could be passed on from one generation to another
- ▶ They were eventually written down, producing a vast collection of more than a hundred volumes of Buddha's own discourses (*sutras*) and twice that number of commentaries (*shastras*) by later Indian masters
- ▶ He's a vital example of what each and every one of us can achieve if we devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the study and practice of Buddha's teachings (*dharmā*)



The Philosophy of Buddhism

- ▶ At the core of all dharma teachings is the understanding that suffering and dissatisfaction originate in the way your mind responds and reacts to life's circumstances
 - ▶ Your own mind causes you suffering by seeking permanence and self, when neither exist
 - ▶ When reality is constantly changing, and you have very little control over the change
 - ▶ But you can exert some control over, and ultimately clarify, your chattering misguided mind, which distorts your perceptions, mightily resists the way things are, and causes you extraordinary stress and suffering in the process



The Philosophy of Buddhism

- ▶ **Happiness is actually quite simple**
 - ▶ The secret is to want what you have and not want what you don't have
 - ▶ Simple, but not easy
 - ▶ All you have to do is put it into practice yourself
- ▶ **Direct personal experience based on self-awareness is considered key**



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Ethical Behavior

- ▶ Essential, so as not to get distracted from the pursuit of truth
- ▶ Codified by Buddha and his followers in a set of guidelines, a moral code (*vinaya*) for the monastic life
 - ▶ And a briefer set for lay practitioners
- ▶ Used to help the practitioner keep focused on the goal of their practice, which is a liberating insight into the nature of reality
- ▶ Addresses only those behaviors that help keep the mind peaceful and focused and contributing to a more supportive atmosphere of spiritual reflection and realization
- ▶ Karmic cause and effect



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Ethical Behavior (continued)

▶ Buddhist precepts

- ▶ Do not kill
- ▶ Do not steal
- ▶ Do not engage in sexual misconduct
- ▶ Do not lie
- ▶ Do not use intoxicants

▶ Additional precepts

- ▶ Do not eat after midday
- ▶ Do not engage in singing, dancing, music, or any other kind of entertainment
- ▶ Do not use garlands, perfumes, or adornments
- ▶ Do not sit on a luxurious seat or sleep on a luxurious bed
- ▶ Do not accept or hold money



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Ethical Behavior (continued)

▶ Additional Zen precepts

- ▶ Do not speak of others' errors and faults
- ▶ Do not elevate yourself and blame others
- ▶ Do not be stingy
- ▶ Do not give vent to anger
- ▶ Do not defile the Three Jewels of Refuge (Buddha, dharma, and sangha)

▶ These precepts lead to automatic expulsion from the sangha

- ▶ Engaging in sexual misconduct
- ▶ Stealing
- ▶ Killing a human being
- ▶ Lying about one's spiritual attainments



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Purifying negative karma

- ▶ Regret – Feeling remorse for the harm you've done; recognizing and admitting your mistakes
- ▶ Resolve – Determining not to repeat the destructive action again
- ▶ Reliance – Depending upon your refuge in the Three Jewels and your dedication to others to eliminate negativity
- ▶ Remedy – Taking specific positive actions to counterbalance whatever negativity you created



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Meditation

- ▶ Used to experience the profound and ultimately liberating insight into the nature of reality and yourself
- ▶ This insight shows you who you are and what life is about, and frees you from suffering once and for all
- ▶ Meditation brings focused, ongoing attention to the workings of your mind and heart
- ▶ Meditation cultivates positive, beneficial heart qualities, like loving-kindness and compassion
- ▶ Meditation is also used to practice visualizations of beneficial figures and energies



The Practice of Buddhism

▶ Devotion

- ▶ It began with devotion to Buddha, a gentle, wise, and compassionate teacher
- ▶ Today it is devotion to the Three Jewels of Buddha, dharma, and sangha
 - ▶ the great teacher, and his successors
 - ▶ the teachings
 - ▶ the community of practitioners who preserve and uphold the teachings



The Eight-Fold Path

▶ Right View

- ▶ The path begins when you see for yourself that suffering and dissatisfaction infect the entirety of ordinary, unenlightened existence

▶ Right Intention

- ▶ Involves giving up selfish attitudes that lead to further suffering and replacing them with their opposites

▶ Right Speech

- ▶ What you say can have a powerful effect on others and affect your own spiritual evolution as well
- ▶ Speak words that are true, pleasing to listen to, and beneficial to others



The Eight-Fold Path

▶ Right Action

- ▶ Avoid causing harm to yourself and others with what you do
- ▶ Seek to protect others

▶ Right Livelihood

- ▶ Avoid occupations that involve harm and deception to others
- ▶ Seek to be in service to others as a way of earning a living

▶ Right Effort

- ▶ Exert continuous, yet relaxed effort to be aware of what's arising in your mind
- ▶ Detach from the negative, and rejoice in the positive



The Eight-Fold Path

▶ Right Mindfulness

- ▶ Keep your attention focused on what's happening at the present moment

▶ Right Concentration

- ▶ In order to develop deep insight into the nature of reality, the focus of your mind must become sharp and free of distraction and dullness
- ▶ This enables you to gain life-altering insight into the true nature of things



Judaism

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Branches of Judaism
- ▶ Jewish Beliefs About God
- ▶ Tradition



Introduction

- ▶ **About 14m Jews in the world**
 - ▶ About 6m in the US, and about 5m in Israel
 - ▶ The rest can be found all over the world
- ▶ **Being Jewish means you're a member of a tribe**
 - ▶ A descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - ▶ Born to a Jewish mother, or converted
- ▶ **Judaism is a set of beliefs, practices, and ethics based on the Torah, the Pentateuch**
 - ▶ You can practice Judaism and not be Jewish
 - ▶ You can be a Jew and not practice Judaism



Introduction

- ▶ In the Bible the people are called “Hebrews”, or “children of Israel”
 - ▶ But in 722 BC the northern 10 tribes went into captivity by the Assyrians, and never returned to the land of Israel
 - ▶ And then in 605-586 BC the other two tribes of Judah and Benjamin were taken into captivity by the Babylonians
 - ▶ They became known as the Judah-ites (*Yebudim*), or the people of Judah (*Yedudab*)
 - ▶ Yeduhim in Hebrew is translated as Jews in English, and the religion became known as Judah-ism, or Judaism



Branches of Judaism

▶ Orthodox Judaism

- ▶ Accept the Torah as the word of God
- ▶ Follow the teachings in the Talmud
- ▶ Some dress in all black, others dress any way they want
- ▶ Hasidim wear black and are ultra-orthodox
 - ▶ Minimize their contact with the outside world
 - ▶ Follow the Sabbath (*Shabbat*) traditions very strictly



Branches of Judaism

▶ Reform Judaism

- ▶ Question whether the Torah and the Talmud are divine
- ▶ Believe Jews have the responsibility to educate themselves and make decisions about their spiritual practice based on conscience rather than simply relying on external law
- ▶ The Torah and the Talmud are necessary resources, but the focus tends to be on social and ethical action based on the writings of the Prophets rather than the ritual observance of the Torah and the Talmud
- ▶ Men and women sit together, dropped the dietary laws, allow instrumental music at Shabbat services, and now ordain women rabbis
- ▶ Usually called Progressive or Liberal Judaism outside the US



Branches of Judaism

▶ Conservative Judaism

- ▶ Also called historical Judaism in Europe, and Masorti in Israel
- ▶ Between Orthodox and Reform
 - ▶ Concerned the Reform movement went too far in its rejection of traditional observance
 - ▶ Concerned the Orthodox communities were too unrealistic in their rejections regarding modern life
 - ▶ They tend to respect many Jewish laws, like keeping kosher, observing Shabbat and other religious holidays, and performing daily prayers
 - ▶ They believe that the Jewish guidelines for life (*halachah*) has its basis in history, and therefore needs to be reconsidered in each age
 - ▶ But it's ok to drive to the synagogue on Shabbat if you live too far away



Branches of Judaism

▶ Reconstructionist Judaism

- ▶ Founded by the ideas of a Conservative rabbi Mordecai Kaplan last century, 1960s
- ▶ He taught that God wasn't a being, but rather the natural, underlying moral and creative force of the universe, the force that creates order
- ▶ He also taught that each generation of Jews had the obligation to keep Judaism alive by reinterpreting the words and practices, in order to find new meanings that are relevant for the time
- ▶ They encourage a lot of lay participation and creative reworking of both ritual and worship



Branches of Judaism

▶ Renewal Judaism

- ▶ It teaches that people can draw wisdom from a variety of diverse sources, including Hasidism, Kabbalah, feminism, the Prophets, environmentalism, and the writings of the ancient rabbis
- ▶ It encourages diverse spiritual traditions, such as Eastern philosophy and both Eastern and Jewish meditative practices



Branches of Judaism

▶ Secular Humanistic Judaism

- ▶ What do you do if you feel Jewish
 - ▶ You like the Jewish holidays, food, music, sense of ethics and social involvement, humor, etc.
 - ▶ But you're not into the idea of God
- ▶ Established in the 1960s by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, is based on humanist ideals of rational, critical thinking, as well as developing the depths and dimensions of both individuals and communities
- ▶ They focus on Jewish culture and civilization, celebrating Jewish heritage and traditions as a way of finding meaning in life, and minimizing the role of God or any cosmic forces



Jewish Beliefs About God

- ▶ **Judaism is the first religion to teach monotheism, the belief that there is only one God**
 - ▶ One unknowable, universal, image-less Being
 - ▶ Who, because the universe is framed in love, requires justice of human beings
- ▶ **A religion of deed, not creed**
 - ▶ It tends to focus more on the way in which you practice and live in the world, than it does on analyzing the nature of God
 - ▶ Belief is most significant in light of the actions motivated by that belief



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ Arguing with God

- ▶ In the Bible, Abraham argued with God for the sake of the righteous citizens in Sodom and Gomorrah
 - ▶ He bargained with God
- ▶ Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and had his name changed to Israel
- ▶ Jews are traditionally taught to question everything in order to learn more deeply
 - ▶ Judaism encourages individuals to explore their own personal relationship with God
 - ▶ Including arguing and wrestling with God



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ Where is God

- ▶ God is outside of the universe
- ▶ He listens to prayers, controls lives, creates miracles, and judges
- ▶ But anthropomorphic images in scripture are just that, poetic metaphors
- ▶ He is ultimately unknowable and therefore unnamable



Jewish Beliefs About God

- ▶ **Calling one God many names**
 - ▶ Each name of God, like the Merciful One (*Ha-Rachaman*), refers to an aspect or quality of His Divine nature
 - ▶ And this does not take away from His Unity
 - ▶ God's name is never written out completely (e.g., G-d)
 - ▶ This ensures that God's name will not be defaced or erased if the paper is ripped up, soiled, or thrown away
 - ▶ God is known by many names, because He is beyond any of them
 - ▶ The simplest, and most used, name for God is *Ha-Shem* (literally "The Name")



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ The four-letter name of God

- ▶ The tetragram יהוה (Eternal One), in English YHVH, or incorrectly YHWH, is never pronounced as written
- ▶ Jewish tradition teaches that anytime יהוה is written, it should be pronounced *Adonai* (אדני, Lord)
- ▶ No one knows how this word is actually supposed to be pronounced
 - ▶ Historically it is mispronounced as Jehovah, or Yahweh
 - ▶ But this is the name beyond pronouncing, to remind people that God is beyond the limitation implied by being named



Jewish Beliefs About God

- ▶ **The singular Being hidden in the plural**
 - ▶ *Elohim* is the plural for *Eloah*, and is translated God
 - ▶ *Elohim* is used to describe the One God
 - ▶ It is plural, but always used in a singular context when referring to the One True God – singular verbs, singular adjectives
 - ▶ *Elohim* is the One manifesting as many
 - ▶ So it is a plural expression that is still a Unity
 - ▶ יהוה refers to the Totality (the transcendent, which contains everything)
 - ▶ *Elohim* (אלהים) refers to the Immanent (indwelling, inherent), that spark of Divinity which awakens within each and every expression of the One Being



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ God's own name

- ▶ When God confronted Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3), he experienced the call to return to Egypt and argue for the freedom of the Hebrews
 - ▶ Moses asks God what to tell the elders of Israel when they ask him who sent him, and God replies *Eh'yeh Asher Eh'yeh* (אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֶהְיֶה, I Am as I Am), tell them *Eh'yeh* (אֶהְיֶה, I Am) has sent you
 - ▶ *Eh'yeh* comes from the same root as YHVH
 - ▶ *Eh'yeh* is unlimited with respect to both time and place
 - ▶ I Was, I Am, and I Ever Shall Be
 - ▶ God is the Ultimate and Universal First-Person Singular



Jewish Beliefs About God

- ▶ **No end to the names of God**
 - ▶ *El Shaddai* – God Almighty
 - ▶ *Ribono Shel Olam* – Ruling Presence of the Universe
 - ▶ *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu* – The Holy One Blessed Is He
 - ▶ *Shechinah* – Indwelling Presence
 - ▶ and many others



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ Looking behind the name

▶ God Creates

- ▶ When God decided to create the world, He opened the Torah scroll and read the beginning of *Bereisheet* (Genesis) as though the Torah were an instruction manual or set of blueprints

▶ God Reveals

- ▶ There were two rabbis who were arguing over a detail in the Torah. The debate almost came to physical blows when, suddenly, there was thunder and lightening. As the rabbis looked on, a giant hand came down from the Heavens and pointed to one of them. “He’s right,” said the massive voice of God. After a moment, the other rabbi shrugged his shoulders and said, “Okay, fine, so it’s two against one. Let’s ask somebody else.”
- ▶ God also communicates through the experience of love, compassion, and creativity, and through the beauty of the natural world



Jewish Beliefs About God

▶ Looking behind the name

▶ God Redeems

- ▶ The key redemptive event in Jewish history, the event which in many ways created the Jewish people, was the exodus from Egypt
- ▶ God redeemed the Children of Israel from the great hardships of enslavement
- ▶ In that redemptive moment lies the beginning of the essential journey of a People in quest of their God
- ▶ Redemption is a process of becoming more human and more able to experience the world – perhaps another name for enlightenment, God-consciousness, or self-actualization
- ▶ The primary path toward redemption is achieved by the healing of the world through a lifelong series of socially responsible actions and intentional blessings



Tradition

- ▶ **Torah, the Teachings, the five books of Moses**
 - ▶ Genesis (*Bereisheet*, “In the beginning”)
 - ▶ Exodus (*Sh’mot*, “Names”)
 - ▶ Leviticus (*Vayikra*, “And he called”)
 - ▶ Numbers (*BaMidbar*, “In the wilderness”)
 - ▶ Deuteronomy (*D’varim*, “Words”)
- ▶ **Nevi’im, the Prophets**
 - ▶ The history books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
 - ▶ The Prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - ▶ The Prophets of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi



Tradition

- ▶ **Ketuvim, the Writings**

- ▶ The books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Ester, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles,

- ▶ **The Tanach, the Hebrew Bible**

- ▶ T – Torah (Teachings)
- ▶ N – Nevi'im (Prophets)
- ▶ Ch – Ketuvim (Writings)



Tradition

▶ Interpreting the Bible

▶ The Torah expresses the Word of God

- ▶ But the literal interpretation may not be the right one
- ▶ There are 70 interpretations for every word in Torah, and they are all correct
- ▶ There are four dimensions of meaning
 - ▶ the literal
 - ▶ the allegorical
 - ▶ the metaphorical
 - ▶ the mystical



Tradition

▶ The Oral Torah

- ▶ The Written Torah doesn't explain how to perform a religious marriage, what "an eye for an eye" really means, or even how to honor Shabbat and other holidays
- ▶ The Oral Torah is a set of teachings, interpretations, and insights that complement the written Torah
- ▶ Orthodox Jews believe that Moses not only received what became the Written Torah at Sinai, but also the Oral Torah
 - ▶ Both are considered the word of God
- ▶ The Oral Torah was eventually written down in the form of the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Midrash



Tradition

▶ The Mishnah

- ▶ Guidelines for a continuing way of Life, called *halachah*
- ▶ Provides the structure for the community's practice of Judaism

▶ The Talmud

- ▶ The Gamara is basically a commentary on the various teachings of the Mishnah
- ▶ The Mishnah with the Gamara is called the Talmud

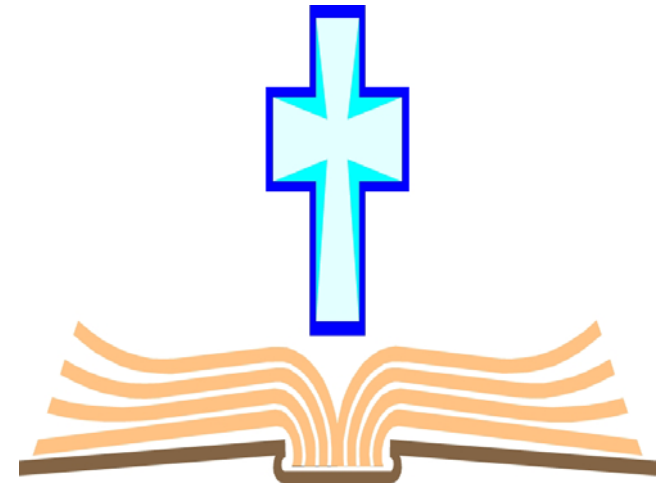
▶ The Midrash

- ▶ The tales and sermons that read between the lines of the Tanach and the Talmud
- ▶ Contains psychological, emotional, and spiritual insights



Christianity

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Key Aspects of Christianity
- ▶ Common Misconceptions
- ▶ The Roman Road



Introduction

- ▶ Christians believe in *what they call* the one True God, who is perfect, existed forever, and created the world and all its creatures
 - ▶ God gave humans free choice
 - ▶ We can choose whether to follow Him and have a relationship with Him or to go our own separate ways
 - ▶ Following Him would bring blessings, and not following would bring judgment
 - ▶ The first human beings, Adam and Eve, followed God for a while, and then disobeyed Him, setting off a chain reaction of disobedience (sin) that has spiraled through every generation since



Introduction

- ▶ **When people recognize sin in their lives**
 - ▶ Their natural response is to try to do something to make up for it
 - ▶ Humans continually try to earn God's favor by doing good deeds as payback for sin
 - ▶ But payback for sin with God is impossible
 - ▶ God has to act on His own initiative to allow some way out of the trap that humans find themselves in
 - ▶ God did this by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to take the punishment that is due you and I by dying on the cross and raising from the dead the third day



Introduction

▶ The good news

- ▶ Rather than deal with the bad news of sin, confess your sins and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior
- ▶ He wipes your sins clean and gives you eternal life
- ▶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” *John 3:16*
- ▶ “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. *Romans 10:9-10*



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ Jesus Christ

- ▶ Christianity is a faith based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- ▶ Jesus lived in Palestine some 2000 years ago
- ▶ Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, sent by His Father in heaven to die on the cross for the sins of all humans
- ▶ Upon this one rock is where faith stands or stumbles
 - ▶ You either believe Jesus is who He said He is, God in human form
 - ▶ Or you believe He was a liar
 - ▶ Or you believe He was a lunatic



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ Grace

- ▶ Christians define grace as God's undeserved love shown toward human beings
 - ▶ They believe that God's grace is what saves humans through Jesus, see Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:24
- ▶ Webster's 1828 Dictionary:
 - ▶ Favor; good will; kindness; disposition to oblige another; as a grant made as an act of grace
 - ▶ The free unmerited love and favor of God, the spring and source of all the benefits men receive from him
 - ▶ Favorable influence of God; divine influence or the influence of the spirit, in renewing the heart and restraining from sin
 - ▶ The application of Christ's righteousness to the sinner
 - ▶ A state of reconciliation to God, see Romans 5:2



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ Truth

- ▶ Christianity is factual, explaining the way events actually happened
- ▶ Truth is absolute, and based on the words of Jesus Christ
- ▶ Jesus Himself said
 - ▶ “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” *John 14:6*
 - ▶ “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” *John 8:32*
 - ▶ “Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” *John 18:37*



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ Life

- ▶ There is more to life than school, marriage, kids, work, 401k's, etc.
- ▶ Christianity claims that every person has an eternal soul that will exist even after his or her earthly body dies
 - ▶ Those who believe in God's grace through Jesus Christ will have eternal life in heaven with Jesus
 - ▶ Those who don't believe will be separated from God forever
- ▶ In the words of Jesus
 - ▶ “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” *John 3:14-16*



Key Aspects of Christianity

- ▶ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” *John 5:24*
- ▶ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” *John 6:32-33*
- ▶ “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” *John 6:40*
- ▶ “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” *John 6:47*
- ▶ “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” *John 10:11*
- ▶ “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” *John 11:25-26*



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ The Bible

- ▶ Christianity says that God revealed who He is and what His plans are through the written words of the bible
- ▶ Christians believe that the Old and New Testaments
 - ▶ Are the inspired word of God
 - ▶ Are without error in the original writings
 - ▶ Serve as the final authority for the Christian faith
- ▶ The Bible says
 - ▶ “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” *2 Timothy 3:16-17*
 - ▶ “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” *2 Peter 1:20-21*



Key Aspects of Christianity

▶ A Transformed Life

- ▶ The Good News of Christianity, on a practical everyday level, means a transformed life
 - ▶ From a life that was empty and spiritually meaningless without God
 - ▶ To a life that has meaning and hope in being a follower of Jesus Christ and therefore a child of God and a joint heir with Jesus in the promises to come
 - ▶ Even in the midst of tragedy



Common Misconceptions

- ▶ **Christianity isn't just about judgment and condemnation**
 - ▶ It's also about forgiveness
- ▶ **Christianity isn't just about love**
 - ▶ It's also about holiness and justice
- ▶ **Christianity doesn't mean "no fun"**
 - ▶ The popular culture thinks that excessive food, drugs, alcohol, sex, or whatever means fun
 - ▶ Christianity teaches that the proper activities at the proper time with the proper people, according to Jesus' teachings, brings an abundance of joy and peace to our lives



Common Misconceptions

- ▶ **Christianity isn't just another path to the same end**
 - ▶ All religions are not the same, and they do not all lead to the same God of heaven
 - ▶ The top 5 religions make mutually exclusive claims about who God is and how to become one of His
 - ▶ The unique difference of Christianity is that it is about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ
 - ▶ Jesus said “**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**” *John 14:6*



The Roman Road

▶ All people know right and wrong

- ▶ “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

Romans 1:20-21

▶ All people have sinned

- ▶ “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” *Romans 3:23*

▶ God still loves people in spite of their sin

- ▶ “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” *Romans 5:8*



The Roman Road

- ▶ **God provides a way out of consequences of sin by giving a gift**
 - ▶ “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” *Romans 6:23*
- ▶ **God gives this gift (salvation) to whoever believes in Him**
 - ▶ “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” *Romans 10:9-10*
- ▶ **Salvation is based on a simple call of faith**
 - ▶ “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
Romans 10:13



The Roman Road

- ▶ In response, people should make Jesus Lord of their lives
 - ▶ “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” *Romans 11:36*



The End

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Joshua 24:15