

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR

COMPARING
CHRISTIANITY
with
WORLD
RELIGIONS



BUDDHISM • HINDUISM • ISLAM
JUDAISM • TRIBAL RELIGIONS

Compiled by
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“They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” —**ACTS 17:11**

RECOMMENDED READING:

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- It is very clear from the Bible's own testimony and that of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament prophets that Scripture is to be regarded as the authoritative word of truth on all matters of basic beliefs. The following is a list of just the most significant verses that support the Word of God's claim to authority.
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- But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King (Jeremiah 10:10).
 - Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:22).
 - There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy (James 4:12).
 - For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:5-7).
 - For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:20).
 - God is love (1 John 4:8).
 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).
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- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).
 - You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them (Nehemiah 9:6).
 - For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16-17).
 - So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).
 - So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).
 - What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet (Psalm 8:4-6).
 - God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31).
 - For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

WORD OF GOD

- The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).
- I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:18).

GOD

- A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land (Psalm 68:5–6).
- The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18).
- And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6–7).
- Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong (Habakkuk 1:13).
- God . . . works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:3, 11).
- One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:19–20).

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14).
- For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19).
- Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).
- For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21).
- Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (Romans 1:22–23).
- Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done (Romans 1:28).
- To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:17).

- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

See also Exodus 24:12; 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalms 12:6; 19:7–8; 111:7–8; 93:5; 119; Proverbs 30:5; Daniel 10:21; Mark 12:24; 13:31; John 8:31–32; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:23–25; and 2 Peter 1:20–21.

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- Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33).
 - God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see (1 Timothy 6:15–16).
 - No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18).
 - In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1–2).
 - Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar (Proverbs 30:5–6).
 - I the LORD do not change (Malachi 3:6).
 - Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).
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- The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:19–21).
- The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away (Psalm 90:10).
- Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure (Job 14:1–2).
- What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24).



BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a way of living based upon the teachings of its founder Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Buddha (the "Enlightened One") is said to have discovered that both the life of luxury and the life of extreme poverty were of no use in gaining spiritual freedom. He declared a "Middle Way." However, his teachings would later undertake many transformations.

Buddhism spread greatly throughout Asia, but eventually all but died out in its native India. Among its several branches are the *Mahayana* school, which developed an enormous listing of gods and remains popular in China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. The *Theravada* school, a more sophisticated group, flourishes in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Southeast Asia. *Zen* is technically a Mahayana group but has closer affinities with Theravada. All have grown in popularity in Western cultures as well, with Zen Buddhism particularly increasing in impact throughout North America.

GOD

- There is no absolute God in Buddhism, although many have interpreted Buddhism as a search for God. Buddha did not deny God's existence but said that the question of His existence "tends not to edification." Rather, those seeking enlightenment must concentrate on their own spiritual paths rather than relying on an outside support.
- Buddha did not claim divinity or even a divine source for his teachings. He provided himself as an example to humanity. His teachings have been compared to a raft that should be left behind once the other side of the river has been reached.
- Many Buddhists believe the existence of suffering and evil in the world offers evidence against belief in God.
- Although most Buddhists reject the concept of an ultimate God, the Mahayana school developed teachings of Buddha as still existing for the sake of men. This extended to many additional deities who came to be represented in art and revered in ways very similar to worship of Hindu gods.

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- The beginning and ultimate nature of the world are left unexplained by Buddha. The Mahayana school speculates about a vast series of heavens, seen as stops along the path toward nirvana. Yet even these heavens are only considered an illusion. Mahayanist teaching implies that the powers of the universe will end with all creatures eventually achieving salvation.
- Buddhism does begin with an evaluation of the physical world and humanity. Buddhism sees the cycle of reincarnation filled with pain, largely because life is characterized by impermanence.
- Buddha added the teaching that all creatures, including humans, are fictional. There is really no "self," only a series of occurrences that appear to be individual people and things. Once the fictional person is broken down into his component parts with his different actions and attitudes analyzed during the course of time, it is seen that there is really nothing holding it all together. The question of how there can be both reincarnation and striving for salvation without a self has occupied Buddhist philosophy from the start. The notion of no self remains difficult, and much effort is spent trying to grasp it fully.

HINDUISM

Relatively little is known about the origins of Hinduism as it predates written history. Hindus claim their religion was founded by God Himself. Historically, during the fourth century B.C., certain Europeans—the same people who developed Greek culture—conquered much of present-day India. Their various gods combined with indigenous Indian traditions of meditation to form a loose combination of beliefs and practices that became known as Hinduism. Devout Hindus can either live as pious worshipers of a god or as atheists.

Hinduism had not been a missionary religion until the 1100s and was largely limited to India and surrounding areas. The *Advaita Vedanta* believes in complete identity between the inmost self and the impersonal, ultimate God, and serves as the most common form of Hinduism in the West. *Jainism* represents the most ancient, pre-European elements of Hinduism. The *Sikh* religion attempts to unite elements of Hinduism and Islam. In recent years, Sikhism has grown rapidly in popularity, currently claiming over 20 million adherents.

GOD

- Many gods or incarnations of gods are worshiped by Hindus. Chief among them are *Shiva*, a fierce figure representing both the creative and destructive sides of divinity as well as the ideal of yogic meditation, and *Vishnu*, who incarnates himself many times through history in order to bring the message of salvation to man. Vishnu's incarnations (or *avatars*) include *Rama*, a benevolent king, and *Krishna*. The gods are sometimes amoral; their freedom from the usual restraints necessary to humans is often celebrated, and they are often represented with sexual imagery. Many lesser cults worship a complex variety of gods, all of whom are usually seen as manifestations of the one supreme being, *Brahman*.
- Brahman is seen by many Hindus as a personal, loving God who desires the salvation of all men. More usually, however, he is described as a supreme, impersonal being completely above all creation and uninvolved with life on earth.

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- The physical universe is not the creation of a personal God but a sort of unconscious extension of the divine. It is: 1) without beginning, and some would say endless, and 2) an illusion, because the only true reality is Brahman. Hindus believe that the universe "pulsates," recurrently being destroyed and re-created over periods lasting about four billion years. The world is seen as a huge series of repeated cycles, each cycle a near copy of the last.
- Humans play a part in this gigantic, illusory, and tiresome universe. Each human soul is also without beginning and has encountered a series of reincarnations. Hinduism solves the problem of the existence of suffering and evil in a fairly clean manner. All present suffering is deserved, the payback of one's *karma*, the accumulation of deeds done in past lives. All present evil will be precisely repaid in the form of suffering in future lives. Traditional Hinduism has historically often not paid much attention to relieving the suffering of people, although the past century has shown tremendous change regarding social reform.
- Hindus view life as full of pain and distress only temporarily masked by earthly pleasures. Underlying the unreality and misery, the human soul is identical with supreme Brahman, who has no part of this universe.

ISLAM

In the seventh century A.D. Muhammad founded a strict, monotheistic religion in reaction to the polytheism and lawlessness of the existing Middle Eastern culture. He believed he was the last prophet in a line that included Abraham, Moses, the biblical prophets, and even Jesus. Within a century Islam had conquered an area greater than the Roman Empire at its height and remains the primary religion of nearly all Middle Eastern countries and large portions of Northern Africa.

Muslims follow the *Koran* as the final word of God and the culmination of what was started in the Bible. The word *Islam* refers to the peace that comes from surrender to God. Major groups within Islam include: 1) *Sunnis*, who constitute 85 to 90 percent of today's Muslims, 2) *Shi'a* Muslims who mostly live in Iraq and Iran, where it stands as the majority faith, and 3) *Sufis*, who belong to a school of thought that encourages mysticism and the seeking of a direct personal experience of Allah.

GOD

- *Allah* means "the God," indicating the radical monotheism of Islam. "We shall not serve anyone but God, and we shall associate none with Him" (*Koran* 3.64). Any division of God is rejected, including the Christian beliefs in the Trinity and that Jesus is divine: "It is not meet for God to have children" (*Koran* 19.92).
- The power of Allah is often portrayed in the *Koran*, and it is emphasized that his purposes are always serious. Justice is Allah's most important value for Muslims.
- Allah is merciful and compassionate, but that mercy is shown mainly through him sending messengers to proclaim the truth of humanity's responsibility to live according to Allah's teachings.

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- Muslims view the universe as created by the deliberate act of a personal, omnipresent God. The universe is not considered an illusion and is basically good, being given for the benefit of people. Muslim respect for the world order led to the development of sciences in Middle Eastern countries long before developments in Europe.
- Muhammad did not produce miracles but simply proclaimed the message of Allah. As a result, the presence of God in the world is not seen through supernatural signs but through the wonderful order of nature and the one great miracle of the *Koran*. Muslims generally do not expect miraculous deliverance from suffering in this life. They believe that good deeds will be rewarded in the next life.
- Humans are considered, in effect, co-leaders of creation under the authority of God. Islam's goal is to create a moral order in the world.
- Individuals are endowed with *taqwa*, a sort of divine spark manifested in his conscience that provides the ability to understand truth and act on it. Conscience stands as the greatest value in Islam, much as love is the greatest value to Christians.
- People can cultivate his or her *taqwa* and live according to the way of Allah or suppress it. This results in people either deserving or not deserving God's guidance.

JUDAISM

Judaism is known as the world's oldest monotheistic religion practiced today. Founded by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jacob's twelve sons became the leaders of twelve tribes who formed the original nation of Israel. Never great by world standards, the small nation of Israel was repeatedly defeated and finally dispersed throughout the world. But the Jews are unique in that they maintained their identity in the midst of a large number of diverse cultures. Although a religion closely tied to one ethnic group, Judaism has had a profound effect on beliefs and practices worldwide. Historically, it has served as the basis for later religions, particularly Christianity and Islam.

Several groupings of Jews exist, some quite contrasting with one another. The four traditional categories include: 1) *Orthodox Jews*, who maintain strict adherence to traditional Jewish customs; 2) *Reform Jews*, who attempt to apply Jewish principles in integration with society and a personal interpretation of the Torah; 3) *Conservative Jews*, who seek a middle ground between the previous two, hoping to maintain strong Jewish identity; and 4) *Hasidic Jews*, who follow a mystical path, although many *Hasidic* beliefs are similar to Orthodox Judaism. Culturally, *Hasidic Jews* are those known for wearing black robes as part of their worship practices.

In addition to these categories are two more distinct groupings with Jewish beginnings. *Messianic Judaism* represents those of Jewish background who have embraced the Jesus of Christianity as the Jewish Messiah, integrating Jewish history with New Testament theology. *Kaballah* provides an extremely mystical form of religion rooted in Judaism yet with very different practices from the traditional Jewish faith. As such, many traditional Jews reject *Kaballah* as a form of Judaism.

GOD

- The complete unity of God as a powerful ruler and as a loving deliverer is central to Judaism. Jews do not deny the problem of the existence of pain and suffering, although they freely admit it is a mystery. God is in control even in the midst of an evil world.
- God is not merely some supreme force but a Person. He contains the emotions of anger, sadness, and joy. He is a being who desires a relationship with His creation. He desires to share in the emotions of humanity.
- Yahweh God also includes some distance. He is above the world, and His ways are often beyond the understanding of people. The tension between God's nearness and farness is a recurring theme of Judaism, leading to passionate appeals by Jews for communication with God.
- God is seen as continually active in creation, constantly working in the world to offer individuals the opportunity to fulfill their obligations toward Him and toward other people.

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- The physical world is considered "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Humans have a unique responsibility to order it according to God's purposes. Some Jews believe all people, animals, and things contain a "divine spark" that people are called to bring to completeness through loving action.
- The person of God and His desire for relationship forms an analogy for humanity's most pressing need: to live in harmony with other people.
- History displays God's purposeful activity. Jews often seek signs of His approval or judgment through historical events.
- Judaism emphasizes the strong responsibility of humans along with human frailty and wickedness. The distinguishing mark of people is their ability to make ethical choices. Therefore, Jewish teachings greatly focus upon behavioral and ethical concerns.

TRIBAL RELIGIONS

Tribal religions include the beliefs and practices of people who lack writing and/or have a simple, material culture. This includes primitive religions of early cultures up to the remote tribal cultures of today. They can be defined as religions without divine guidance, trying to make peace with the terrifying and mysterious powers of nature.

Though often considered by many as a religious system of the past, tribal religious beliefs continue in popularity among many people groups worldwide. Several thousand native communities remain deeply rooted in the guidance of nature and created plants or animals in providing spiritual wisdom. North American and Western European cultures have experienced a renewed interest in tribal religions as well, seen through the rise in anthropological research, nature religions, the twentieth century New Age movement, and the popularity in contemporary witchcraft that adheres to many tribal religious values.

Because tribal religions have developed over various people groups often with no contact between one another, great variety exists in beliefs and practice. However, many similar values can be found intersecting the majority of these groups.

GOD

- Tribal religions generally believe in a large number of gods or goddesses, each reigning over a family, clan, village, or certain locality such as a river or mountain. This belief has been called *henotheism*, meaning close adherence to a certain god while recognizing the existence of others.
- Many tribal religions believe in one supreme god who is the first source of all existence. Yet that god is usually considered too distant to be concerned with the lives of humanity.
- As a result, tribal religious beliefs often focus upon several local gods who generally lack mercy and love. Their ways are not always predictable, and followers desire to appease their anger or to gain material favors from them.
- The gods are usually connected in some way with dead ancestors. They relate to the tribe or community and support the customs that have kept the group functioning in the past.

HUMANITY AND THE UNIVERSE

- Tribal religions believe that the universe is under the control of the gods. Droughts, illnesses, and death pose great threats to the tribe or group. Religion provides followers a certain degree of security and sense of control from the problems of daily life.
- It is thought that ancestors and the gods associated with them control human destiny, handing out rewards and punishments for actions that help or hinder the group. Usually those gods and ancestors are as mysterious and fearsome as the natural world.
- Tribal religious beliefs usually view the world as cyclical. There is no clear purpose to history. Various ages repeat themselves with no final goal. This view closely arises from the observation of the natural cycles of nature. Tribal religious followers also often believe that it is only through their own ritual actions that the world order will be maintained.
- Many tribal religions follow customs and rituals without knowing why. Tradition simply tells them that it has worked in the past.

- Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:22).
- From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact place where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:26–28).
- We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).
- Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:7–8).
- God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).
- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).
- For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).
- No longer will there be any curse (Revelation 22:3).

- I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).
- Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).
- Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).
- Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? (Colossians 2:20–21).
- Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16).
- Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (Ephesians 4:31).
- In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).

- I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols (Isaiah 42:8).
- You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me (Exodus 20:4–5).
- The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:24–25).
- God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).
- Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks (John 4:23).
- Serve the LORD with fear and trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way (Psalm 2:11–12).

WORD OF GOD

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe (Galatians 3:21–22).
- Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).
- Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:28–29).
- Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).
- It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4).
- See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).
- For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).
- Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
- Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).

MORALS

- (And for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10).
- Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).
- Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13).
- Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
- But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).
- Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

WORSHIP

- Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false (Psalm 24:3–4).
- Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19, 22).
- For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18).
- You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).
- For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).
- Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name (Hebrews 13:15).
- Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise (1 Chronicles 16:24–25).
- Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name (Psalm 30:4).

- Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).
- We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).
- Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).
- Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28–29).
- For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:22–24).
- Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind (Isaiah 65:17).
- But the cowardly, the unbelieving . . . their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Revelation 21:8).
- Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:5).
- How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2:3).
- Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

- If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).
- But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him (1 John 2:5).
- For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:11–12).
- And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).
- Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9–10).
- Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).

- To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! (Ephesians 3:21).
- And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:16).
- Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).
- So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God (Psalm 100:1–3).
- Therefore God exalted him . . . that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).
- It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God" (Romans 14:11).
- To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! (Revelation 5:13).

BUDDHISM

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- Buddhism views ignorance rather than sin as the roadblock to salvation. Belief that the world and self truly exists keeps the illusory wheel of existence rolling. Only destruction of this belief will end the flawed course of the world.
- Its doctrine is summed up in the Four Noble Truths: 1) Life is basically suffering; 2) the origin of that suffering lies in craving or grasping; 3) the end of suffering is possible through the ending of craving; and 4) the way to end craving and to escape continual rebirth is by following Buddhist practice, known as the Noble Eightfold Path.
- Original Buddhist teaching and the Theravada places emphasis on the individual monk working through self-control and a series of meditative practices that progressively leads a person to lose a sense of craving.
- The Mahayana school began with the insight that the ideal of the monk striving only for their own salvation was selfish and did little for the majority of humanity. Mahayanists eventually came to suggest a vast number of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, "heroes of the faith" who reached the point of nirvana but refused to enter it until the rest of humanity could be brought along with them. In various ways, these heroes can graciously assist in salvation to those who petition them.
- *Nirvana* literally means "blowing out," as with the flame of a candle. The idea is of a transcendent, permanent state of Enlightenment.

MORALS

- Buddhist laity are urged to follow the Five Precepts, which prohibit killing (including animals), stealing, sexual immorality, wrongful words (including gossiping), and drugs or alcohol. They are also expected to support the community of monks.
- Monks and nuns follow a path of moderate asceticism, involving strict celibacy and the loss of all personal property. Buddhist religious leaders are often involved in education and charity, including politics. Other leaders separate themselves within their monasteries, contacting the public only to gain funding.
- Theravada teaching indicates that a Buddhist can help others only by showing them an example of dedication to meditation and self-denial. Mahayana teaching emphasizes "compassion," which involves aiding people in all areas of their lives, even though such help does not lead directly toward nirvana.

WORSHIP

- In most cases what looks like worship before a statue or image is really the paying of respects. The Buddha is revered as an example of a saintly life and as the originator of the teachings of Buddhism. Buddhists are taught that they must personally overcome the obstacle of ignorance.
- Meditation in Buddhism can focus on one's breathing (important because it is halfway between voluntary and involuntary action), one's own attitudes (such as mindfulness meditation, where a person tries to be clear at all times as to one's true motives for every action), a neutral object, or a bodhisattva. In each case the purpose is to remove one's craving and sense of self.
- In some sects it is believed that a bodhisattva can transfer his merit to another person and help them achieve nirvana. In those cases the Buddhist becomes very much like a worshiper petitioning God for grace and mercy.



HINDUISM

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- The ultimate goal of salvation in Hinduism is escape from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. That can mean an eternal resting place for the individual personality in the arms of a loving, personal God, but it usually means the dissolving of all personality into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman.
- Four *yogas*, or ways of reaching such salvation, are described: (1) *Jnana yoga*, the way of knowledge, employs philosophy and the mind to comprehend the unreal nature of the universe; (2) *Bhakti yoga*, the way of devotion or love, reaches salvation through the emotional worship of a divine being; (3) *Karma yoga*, the way of action, strives toward salvation by performing works without regard for personal gain; and (4) *Raja yoga*, "the royal road," makes use of meditative yoga techniques. *Raja yoga* is usually viewed as the highest way. However, for the majority of people who cannot become wandering monks, the other ways are considered valid.
- Most Hindus believe that they have many incarnations ahead of them before they can find final salvation, although some sects believe that a gracious deity will carry them along the way more quickly.

MORALS

- Because of the vast number of reincarnations, Hinduism recognizes that the lack of spiritual maturity among the average person means they must lead normal lives. However, as a person develops, he or she can come closer to the goal of full rejection of the personality. The pursuit of wealth and love of the opposite sex are considered proper to certain stages of life, but when people grow old they often leave behind their worldly possessions to pursue the life of a wandering monk.
- "Renouncing the fruits of your labors" is the supreme law of morality. Hindus seek to remain conscious of the illusory nature of this world and progressively deny themselves, at least in thought, all forms of material, emotional, and even spiritual rewards and property.
- For centuries the notions of reincarnation and *karma* have been used to support the cruelties of the Indian caste system, relegating the majority of people to poverty and subjection. In the twentieth century the caste system was substantially altered, although the idea that all human suffering is deserved is still used by some to justify great injustice.

WORSHIP

- Since God is one but many, Hindus have a magical and legalistic notion that one can attain spiritual "points" through contact with holy objects or people. Among many, an image of a family god is kept in the home.
- Villages also have a selected local icon. Animals such as cows, monkeys, and snakes are considered sacred. Certain rivers, especially the Ganges River, are held as holy. Bathing in them supposedly improves one's *karma*.
- Even among more intellectual Hindus, certain portions of scriptures are memorized and chanted, sacred stories are acted out in plays and songs, and gods are prayed to in an ecstatic manner.
- Holy men are highly revered. In serving them Hindus hope that some of their holiness will be passed along and assist them to salvation.

ISLAM

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- The Koran rejects the belief of redemption. Salvation depends on a man's actions and attitudes. However, *tauba* ("repentance") can quickly turn an evil man toward the virtue that will save him. Islam does not hold out the possibility of salvation through the work of God but invites man to accept God's guidance.
- The final judgment day is described in remarkable terms. On that last day every person will account for what they have done. Eternal existence will be determined on the basis of those actions: "Every man's actions have we hung around his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-open book" (*Koran*, 17.13).
- Muslims recognize that different individuals have been given different abilities and various degrees of insight into the truth. Each person will be judged accordingly. Every person who lives according to the truth to the best of his or her abilities will reach heaven. Infidels who are presented with the truth of Islam and reject it will receive no mercy.
- The Koran provides vivid descriptions of both heaven and hell. It depicts heaven as containing earthly treasures. Hell, in contrast, describes details of pain and torture. Muslims disagree as to whether those descriptions are to be taken literally or not.

MORALS

- Islam presents a "straight path" of clearly defined duties and commands. Islamic morals are a combination of genuine acts of love and legalistic performances.
- Muhammad is pictured in the Koran as a loving person, helping the poor and slow to take revenge. Nevertheless, the firm belief that Muslims possess the one truth and are to spread that truth through "struggle" has led to much violence on behalf of Allah through the ages. While today Muslims in general try to live lives of peace, there has been a resurgence of a more violent form of Islamic fundamentalism among both the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam.
- Although the Koran actually elevated the degraded position of women in Middle Eastern culture at the time of its writing, women are often regarded more as possible temptations to sin for men than as human beings with their own responsibilities.
- While some Muslim communities continue the tradition of polygamy, many modern Muslims take the Koran's approval of multiple wives as applicable only to ancient times.

WORSHIP

- Allah is worshiped, not Muhammad. Due to strict rules against depictions of human forms in art, there is a strong bias against idolatry or saint-worshiping in Islam.
- Allah is revered in hymns that depict his power and majesty. However, even Allah cannot be ultimately trusted for salvation, because salvation is the individual's responsibility. As a result, his guidance in the form of words rather than as a person is emphasized.
- Based on this belief, Muslims revere the Koran as a sacred book. Highly studied among devout Muslims, it is arguably the most memorized book in the world.
- Acts of worship in Islam are embodied in the Five Pillars: 1) A Muslim must recite the basic creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet"; 2) recite prayers of praise to Allah five times daily while facing Mecca; 3) give money to the poor; 4) fast for one month a year (daytime only); and 5) make a pilgrimage at least once to Mecca, the city where Allah revealed the Koran to Muhammad.



JUDAISM

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- One's eternal existence in the afterlife is determined by actions and attitudes. Although different from the Christian belief of saving grace, Judaism teaches that God always offers even the most evil person the possibility of repentance (*teshuvah*). After such repentance one can atone for one's rebellion against God's ways by positive action.
- Traditional Judaism does not highly emphasize the ideas of personal salvation and heavenly existence. Many Jews criticize Christianity for being a "selfish" religion, too concerned with personal eternal rewards.
- Jews continue to anticipate the coming of the Messiah. This Messiah will hand out eternal judgment and reward to all. This hope is largely communal. All Jewish people and the entire creation are in view more than the individual.
- In the end, the moral lives of people on earth are considered the most proper concerns of humanity. Final judgments are left for God.

MORALS

- *Torah* ("to point the way, give direction"), often translated "law," refers in Judaism to a complete pattern of behavior, applicable to all aspects of communal and individual life. It is to be found in the Old Testament as well as in a wide variety of oral traditions, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and commentaries on Scripture.
- Jews have often tried to develop rules of behavior to cover each situation encountered in their various cultures. Thus a gigantic literature covering codes of conduct has arisen. From time to time movements have emerged that have tried to cut through those rules and get back to the original meaning of *Torah*, though legalism has been a perennial emphasis of Judaism.
- Most Jewish morality is related primarily to the good of the community. The Jewish prophets were early strong proponents of social justice in the ancient world. Concern for economic justice continues to remain an integral part of Judaism.
- Physical possessions are not considered bad in themselves. Even the prophets did not denounce wealth itself but wanted a greater equality among members of the community.
- Marriage and children are held in high regard in Judaism. Singleness is generally viewed negatively even for religious leaders (though exceptions exist among Jewish prophets), and much time is spent teaching children the precepts of the faith. Education continues to be a strong value within most Jewish communities.

WORSHIP

- Ritual and ceremony remain important within Judaism. Life is sacred and to be shared with God. Jewish writings say that to eat or drink without praying is like robbing God of His property.
- The Jewish calendar includes a full range of daily, weekly, and yearly celebrations, based both on the Torah and additional Jewish writings.
- A major part of scheduled celebrations is the remembrance of spiritual history. Both biblical and extrabiblical stories relating God's deliverance of Israel are retold countless times.
- Devout Jews observe a regular weekly Sabbath day of rest in reverence to God's law to rest on the seventh day as described in the Torah.

TRIBAL RELIGIONS

SALVATION AND THE AFTERLIFE

- Tribal religions often teach that a messiah will someday come and bring a reign of peace and prosperity for the tribe. Hopes for salvation generally relate to the group and to this world.
- There is little focus upon understanding the next life. Beliefs vary and can include the expectation of merging with one's ancestors in another world upon death, reincarnation, or some form of nirvana where a person becomes one with nature.
- Salvation is never fully achieved. Various forms of atonement may be practiced, including the blood sacrifice of animals, temporary escapes through "dream time," or even the casting of spells. Through reenactments of mythological events, followers can mystically participate in the actions of gods and ancestral heroes. In this way they inject a sense of meaning into a chaotic world.
- The end result of a tribal religious follower's view of salvation means a person may flee from pain and suffering for a short time, but can never fully escape from this world's purposeless existence.

MORALS

- Survival of the group is of paramount importance. Ways must be found to make group members adhere strictly to codes of conduct. Tribal religions have developed communal ways of coping with the world, embodied in religious traditions they create to promote stability and continuity within the group.
- In many basic moral areas standards are similar among tribal religious followers. Often those rules apply only within the group. For some groups, the general idea of doing what you would like unless it hurts someone else forms the foundational basis of moral beliefs and actions.
- Generally a sense of conscience is aroused only when some disaster occurs. For example, if it is felt that an illness is the result of a wicked deed, then the person will repent to the god or gods. Therefore, tribal morality is largely a matter of transactions, acting in ways that will benefit the self and the community. "Sins" are usually a matter of overstepping concrete rules, even when the reasons for those rules are not understood.

WORSHIP

- Worship has the purpose of binding members of the community together, providing a sense of common purpose. When people from different tribes with different gods meet, they usually speak in terms of the "high" god or a common god.
- *Totemism*, the use of certain animals, plants, and even human artifacts such as skulls to contact the spiritual realm, is idolatry in a strict sense—believing that an image or animal actually *is* a god—is rare. Most often such worship is symbolic.
- Fasting, self-mortification, and drugs are sometimes used to attain states of trancelike "oneness." The purpose is sometimes to obtain communication from the world of spirits. At other times, the goal is to actually participate in the life of the god, to "be" the god for a short period of time.
- Each group usually has at least one holy man or woman who regularly makes journeys to the land of the gods or spirits for the good of the community. These leaders may take the form of a medicine man, witch doctor, or tribal spokesperson.
- Power, rather than justice, love, or mercy, most often characterizes the object of worship.



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