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## JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM: THE MONOTHEISTS

### COURSE GUIDE



Professor F.E. Peters  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

# **Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Monotheists**

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Professor F.E. Peters  
New York University



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Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:  
The Monotheists

Professor F.E. Peters



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## About Your Professor

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### F.E. Peters

F.E. Peters is a professor of history, religion, and Middle Eastern studies at New York University. A native of New York City, he was trained at St. Louis University in classical languages (AB, MA) and in philosophy (Ph.L.), and he received his Ph.D. from Princeton in Islamic studies. His professional interests have since broadened into the comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and of Muslim Spain. In addition to his regular teaching duties at New York University (where he has won a number of teaching awards), Peters has been featured on CBS's *Sunrise Semester*. He has published an autobiography (*Ours*) and a novel, but his energies have been mostly devoted to academics, with works on Greek philosophy, the history of Late Antiquity, Islam, Jerusalem and Mecca, the Muslim pilgrimage, and particularly on the three monotheistic religious communities. His works include *The Children of Abraham; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Classical Texts and Their Interpretation; Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (Princeton University Press); and a major two-volume work, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition* (Princeton University Press).

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## Introduction

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam should be thought of as three faith communities rather than as three “religions.” They are communities of believers, each with its own ideology, history (its ideology is often embedded in its history), traditions, and, of course, members, the great number of Jews, Christians, and Muslims past and present. We cannot take much account of the members here, but they are the ones who are responsible for a good part of the ideology, history, and traditions.

A distinction is sometimes made between history and sacred history. For all three groups, God is always somehow in charge of what happens to humans, but when God is thought to be more or less directly in charge, that is sacred history. The Bible, for example, is sacred history; what happened to the Jews afterwards is just plain history, where God appears to be (closely) observing events rather than directing them. But not in everyone’s eyes: there are still any number of Jews, Christians, and Muslims who regard whatever happens, or will happen, as God’s doing, not man’s.

If the Arabic term is a little unfamiliar, “Islam” means “submission” (to God, of course), and a “Muslim” is “one who has submitted.” The words are Arabic, but not all Muslims are Arabs by a long shot, and a great many Turks and Iranians and millions and millions of Indians and Indonesians will be upset if you insist that they are. Nor are all Arabs Muslims. Many Palestinian Arabs are Christians, for example. Christians too can be anything ethnic under the sun, and what the Jews are will emerge throughout this course.

Finally, it’s easier to study these communities if the student attempts to maintain objectivity about each of the “others.”

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### CALENDAR REFERENCES

Jews, Christians, and Muslims reckon time in different ways, so here all years will be recorded as BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era). A distinction must be made between where people begin counting time and how they count it. The Jews begin with Creation, which they put at 3760 BCE, and count straight onward without a break. Our year 2000 falls in year 5760–5761 by their reckoning. Christians too begin with Creation, except their traditional date is 4004 BCE. They count downward from there to the end of 1 BC, when they reverse at this watershed year of Christ’s birth (AD, *Anno Domini*), which marks the beginning of the Christian Era, and start numbering upward toward the end of the world. For Muslims, the years from Creation to the Hijra of Muhammad in 622 CE are simply lumped together as “the era of Ignorance” (al-Jahiliyya). In 622 CE begins the Muslim era proper, generally designated by H or AH, *Anno Hegirae*, “Year of the Hijra.” On this reckoning, 2000 CE is 1421–1422 AH.

## Lecture 1: “In the Beginning . . .”

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Genesis 1–5 (Bible, Revised Standard Version).

### A. Before Abraham

#### 1. Creation and Original Sin

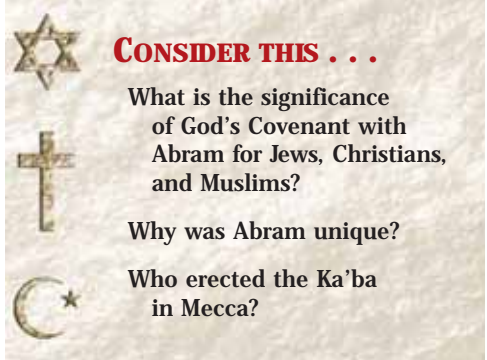
- a. The Bible (the Old Testament portion of the Christian Bible) and the Quran each assumes the Creation as the absolute beginning of time. Both insist on an omnipotent Creation from nothing.
- b. The Bible begins, in the Book of Genesis, with a narrative story that extends into the second book, Exodus. This Creation story features a great deal of information about Adam and Eve, the first couple.
- c. The Quran’s account of Creation, while similar to that of Genesis in intent and some detail, is not laid out in the linear fashion of Genesis. The story that unfolds in the Quran is generally presented as a moral example to underline God’s power and goodness.
- d. The Bible tells the story of the temptation, fall, and banishment of Adam and Eve from paradise (Gen. 2:15–24), a tale that formed the basis for the powerful Christian doctrine of Original Sin.
- e. The Quran never mentions Eve by name, and although aware of the story (Q2:35–39; Q7:19–25), makes no mention of Eve’s role in the fall. Instead, the villain of the tale is a fallen angel, Iblis, later Shaytan, who seduces both Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

#### 2. Noah and Others

After the Flood, God restarted the “human experiment” with Noah. Then, the third major covenant of the Bible was made with Moses, after God delivered the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

### B. Abraham and the Covenant

The history proper of the three great monotheistic communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims begins with God’s Covenant with Abram (later called Abraham).



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## 1. The Covenant and Its Terms

- a. Abraham was unique because, unlike many of his ancestors, Abraham worshiped only one God (Yahweh).
- b. Abraham was a nomad (the Hebrew word for “wanderer”), that is, the head or sheik of a group of people without a homeland. There were two things to which nomads aspired: (1) ownership of land, and (2) a large number of kin to ensure survival of their tribe.
- c. There are two divine promises made to Abraham that are repeated throughout the biblical book of Genesis.
  - i. “I will make you a great nation . . .” (Gen. 12:2). Abram was past seventy-five years of age and had no descendants, yet God promised him an heir.
  - ii. “I give this land to your descendants” (Gen 12:7). This promise to the still nomadic Abram and his descendants was of a land, here defined to embrace all the territory from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the river Euphrates (Gen. 15:18).
- d. Abram was required to leave Haran and have all the males of his household (kin, foreigners, and newborns) circumcised on the eighth day. This acted as a transformation of their state. Abram’s name was changed to Abraham and Sarai’s to Sarah.

## 2. Ishmael: The First Heir

- a. Abraham and his wife Sarah were barren. In fact, Sarah was beyond normal child-bearing years. So when God made the promise of additional descendants, the couple laughed.
- b. Abraham’s wife Sarah suggests that he can perhaps father a son with the Egyptian slave-girl, Hagar, which indeed he does. This leads to the birth of Ishmael when Abraham is eighty-six years old.
- c. Sarah insists that Hagar and Ishmael be driven out of camp to wander in the desert. “God was with the child,” the account concludes, “and he grew up and lived in the wilderness of Pharan” (Gen. 21: 20–21).
- d. God formed another new covenant with Ishmael: Ishmael and his descendants would form a second great nation: they were the Arabs.
- e. But this is not the end of Ishmael’s story. Islamic tradition has it that Abraham began a search to find Hagar and his lost son. When he found them, he and his son erected the Ka’ba (“the Holy House”) in Mecca.



## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. Why do Jews and Christians say “God” and Muslims “Allah”? Are they different deities?
2. Why did He choose Abraham?
3. Why did He promise what He did?

### Suggested Reading

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Book of Genesis. Bible, Revised Standard Version.

### Other Books of Interest

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Feiler, Bruce. *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*. New York: William Morrow, 2002.

Firestone, Reuven. *Journies into Holy Lands*. Albany: Sony Press, 1990.

Hauer, Christian E., and William A. Young. *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Peters, F.E. *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

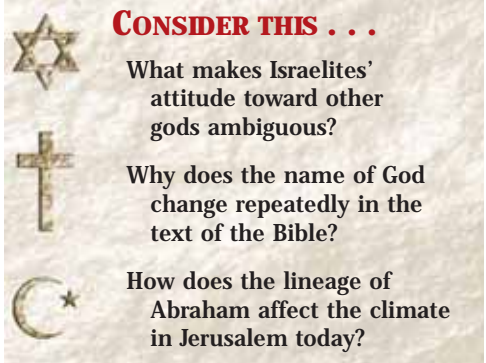
## Lecture 2: The Israelite Experience

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Exodus 1; 1 and 2 Samuel; and 1 and 2 Kings (Bible, Revised Standard Version).

### A. Isaac: The Son of Promise

1. God finally gave Abraham the heir to the Covenant when Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac. It is the line descending from him that inherits the promise of the Covenant.
2. Then God called upon Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering to Him.

God then provides a ram to replace the sacrifice of the boy. This was a test of Abraham's faith and commitment.



### B. Abraham's Descendants

1. The promises of the Covenant were made not only to Abraham but to his descendants, passing down from the firstborn son to the younger son, first from Ishmael to Isaac, and then, in the next generation, from Esau to Jacob, who stole his birthright from Esau.
2. These examples exemplify the Christians' views that the inheritance has gone from the firstborn (the Jews) to the second (the Christians).
3. Jacob had a dream that renews the Covenant with God. In ancient tradition, dreams were often used by God to send messages. Sleep or "incubation" in a sacred place was thought to induce a revelation from God.
4. Jacob called this sacred place Beth-El and commemorated this event by setting up a stone pillar. There are instances of other sacred stones in Muslim history, as well. An example is the Ka'ba, or the stone under the Dome of the Rock.
5. Jacob, called Israel after a divine manifestation, has twelve sons whose descendants constitute the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The history of these descendants leads to Egypt and eventually into bondage to the Pharaoh.

### C. Moses and the Exodus

#### 1. "Let My People Go"

- a. The Book of Exodus tells the story of Moses. His life and role as a prophet of Israel, and the expectation that there would be another like him, shaped the stories of both Jesus and Muhammad.

- b. The story of how Moses overmastered the Pharaoh is given more detail in the Quran than even in the Bible, where it occupies a large portion of Exodus. Through a series of negotiations, miracles, and divine revelations, Moses, under the guidance of God, managed to secure freedom for the nation of Israel.
- c. What follows is the famous parting of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape the Pharaoh's troops.

## 2. Across Sinai

- a. Once the Israelites are freed from Egyptian slavery, they begin a period of wandering in the Sinai for forty years, setting into motion a series of events that preserved the community's integrity.
- b. Moses is also the prophet the "Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:1) and who brought down from Mount Sinai a law both moral and ceremonial, the Torah—or the first five books of the Bible.
- c. From that point on, the Israelites are bound together by three things: (1) tribal identity, (2) belief in the one true God, and (3) the Law handed down to Moses.
- d. The Israelites got what territory in Canaan they could manage to hold by force of arms. It expanded and shrank under different political circumstances, as it still does.
- e. The Torah portion of the Bible (the "Pentateuch" or "Five Pieces") ends with the death of Moses. The books following this from Joshua down to the end of Chronicles carry through the history of the Israelites from their occupation of the land of Canaan to their conquest at the hands of the Babylonians in 597 BCE.

## D. A Kingdom for Israel: David and Solomon

- 1. The original loose confederation of the Twelve Tribes yielded to a reluctantly God-granted monarchy bestowed first upon Saul, then on David, the "anointed one" (*mashiah* in Hebrew), and guaranteed to his descendants forever (2 Sam. 7:16).
- 2. God did not promise the Israelites Jerusalem. That was a later idea of David's, according to the Book of Kings. His conquest of the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem is traditionally dated to 996 BCE and may be his most important accomplishment.
- 3. David then made the city the political center of the unified Israelites. Once David brought the portable Ark-throne of the once nomadic tribes into the city, it became the spiritual center as well.
- 4. David's son, Solomon, enshrined the Ark permanently in the grandiose temple he built atop Mount Moriah. Thus, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and, of course, of Jesus and Muhammad, established His presence in that city, and He was worshiped there.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How did these wandering Hebrews become a people, with a land, and with kings?
2. What is the role of Moses in the formation of the people called Israel? Of David? Of Solomon?
3. Why did He promise what He did?

### Suggested Reading

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Book of Exodus 1; 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings. Bible, Revised Standard Version.

### Other Books of Interest

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Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York: Norton, 1999.

Firestone, Reuven. *Journies into Holy Lands*. Albany: Sony Press, 1990.

Kaufmann, Yechezkel. *The Religion of Israel*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960.

Kirsch, Jonathan. *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel*. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 2000.

———. *Moses*. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1999.

## Lecture 3: From Israelite to Jew

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Isaiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah (Bible, Revised Standard Version).

### A. A Divided Kingdom

1. Solomon's fame lives on not only in Jewish legend but in Islam's, as well: he is portrayed as a prophet and wonder-worker in the Quran and later as a magician extraordinaire.
2. At Solomon's death, the legacy of David immediately began to unravel. The northern kingdom, called "Israel," drew apart from the south, dominated by Judah; paganism became rampant and the kings vile.
3. The times were as evil as the people. The eighth century BCE in the Middle East was one dominated by two superpowers, Egypt and Assyria, and Israel lay across the land bridge between them.



### CONSIDER THIS . . .

How did the Israelites maintain their identity in Babylon?

How did the Jews worship without access to the temple?

Was the exile God's justice brought upon the nation of Israel?

### B. The Exile and After

#### 1. The Cause and Effect of the Babylonian Exile

- a. The conquest of Jerusalem and the looting of its temple in 597 CE—the invaders carried off the Ark, among other things—was followed by exile in Babylon (Iraq) for the upper economic and social classes.
- b. This resulted in diaspora or a dispersal or scattering of the Jewish people across the Middle East. The northerners, ten of the original twelve tribes, disappeared without a trace, and those who remained were so assimilated that they were called "Samaritans."

#### 2. The Reconstitution of Judaism in Judea

- a. The Jews that elected to return to Judah resettled and rewalled Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple, and attempted to restore Jewish observance in the land, as the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe.
- b. Alexander the Great drove the Persian armies out of their conquests and even their homeland in the 330s BCE, and the Middle East became a single cosmopolitan community. The Jews had been allowed to return to Judah by Cyprus, and now many are dispersed throughout the region.

- 
- c. Some Israelites found the culture and style of the new Hellenism alluring. This resulted in the growth of assimilation.
    - i. One of the main propositions of intellectual Hellenism was that man has the unaided intellectual capacity to understand, on the basis of empirical evidence, 1) the existence of God; 2) the position of man in the universe; and 3) the moral imperatives from 1 and 2.
    - ii. This proposition challenges the very need of revelation and the idea that God uses revelation to make his will known to those who do not have the time, education, or inclination to become philosophers.
    - iii. It also challenged the notion that God has a special or individual providence.
  - d. Politically, the community now constituted nothing more than a province named Judea (Jerusalem and its surrounding areas) within the enormous Persian empire, and the people began to be called “Judeans,” from which our word “Jew” derives, although they themselves continued to use *Benei Israel*, descendants of Israel or Israelites.

## **C. The Shape of Early Judaism**

### **1. Sectarian and Assimilated Jews**

- a. For a long time, the best descriptions of the post-Exilic Jewish sectarian groups are found from the descriptions in Josephus and the New Testament.
- b. Many of the Jewish sects mentioned acted as mere political parties. The primary example of such groups were the Zealots, a group of revolutionary priests involved in the insurrection of 66–70 CE.
- c. Other groups Josephus calls “philosophical schools” included the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.
  - i. The Pharisees appear in most sources as staunch upholders of the Torah and lay experts in the Law. They were active in Palestine from the second century BCE to the first CE.
  - ii. The Sadducees were literal interpreters of the Law who rejected all Pharisaic appeals to the “traditions of the Fathers.”
  - iii. The Essenes were a community of priestly dissenters who rejected the authority of the Hasmonean high priesthood in Jerusalem and did not participate in the Temple liturgy.
- d. These groups present in the Jewish community are indicative of a community attempting to redefine itself against the stresses of loss.

### **2. Apocalyptic Despair and Messianic Expectation**

- a. In the light of events in the world of this time, Second Temple (after the Exile) Judaism produced a number of literary works about the End Times. The best example stands as the last book in the New Testament, the *Apocalypse* or *Revelation of John*.

- b. While not all Second Temple Jews were waiting for a messiah, some, or perhaps many, Jews were expecting the restoration of the Davidic kingly line and the reuniting of the Twelve Tribes.
- c. Daniel, the latest book in the canon (near the end of second century BCE) contains a vision that includes the idea of a “Son of Man,” or a messiah that is slain after a fierce battle (Dan. 9:26).
- d. There were several contemporary figures that are interspersed in Josephus’s accounts that could easily fit into the mold of a messiah. Jesus of Nazareth was one of that company (Ant. 18.3.3).
- e. Jesus was born in 4 BCE, the year Herod, the first Roman-installed king, died.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How did the Israelites become Jews?
2. What is different after the Exile?
3. What was the special challenge of Hellenism to Judaism?

### Suggested Reading

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Isaiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Bible, Revised Standard Version.

### Other Books of Interest

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Gaines, Janet Howe. *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

Larson, Mogens Trolle. *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavating in an Antique Land*. London: Routledge, 1996.

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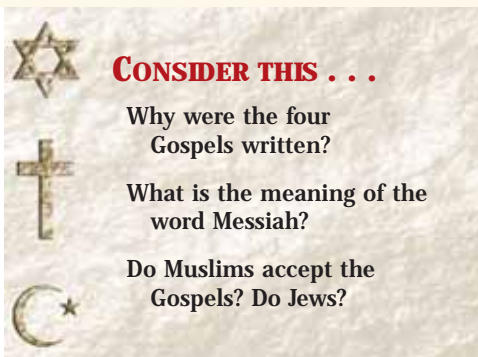
## Lecture 4: Jesus of Nazareth: Teacher, Messiah, Redeemer

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Bible, Revised Standard Version).

### A. Jesus, What Do We Know and How Do We Know it?

#### 1. The Historical Jesus

- a. Daniel was one of many post-exilic books that indicated a growing belief in the coming of a Messiah.
- b. Josephus's writings mention Jesus' life, but he doesn't call him Messiah.



#### 2. The Gospels (Official and Unofficial) and Paul

- a. The New Testament is made up in the first place of four Gospels (*evangelion* or "Good News" in Greek). These books are credited to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- b. The Church eventually chose them, out of a number of such works in circulation, as authentic testimony to the man whom they considered the Messiah and the Son of God.
- c. The Gospels are clearly biographical in intent, telling the story of Jesus' life from birth through death and beyond.
- d. The other books in the New Testament are the Acts of the Apostles, a second volume to the Gospel of Luke, a number of letters chiefly from Paul, who became one of Jesus' most devoted and influential disciples, and an apocalyptic book called The Revelation.

### B. Jesus: Messiah and Redeemer

#### 1. A Theological Take on the Life of Jesus

- a. From the beginning, God had a plan to redeem humankind. His plan was to purchase the freedom of humankind by sending his own son to "take on flesh" and offer himself as a living sacrifice.
- b. The critical event in Jesus' life is his death and resurrection.
- c. Proof of this is indeed the resurrection of Jesus: a number of people saw him alive after his death.

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## 2. Jesus, the Jewish Messiah

- a. Jesus was from Nazareth and lived from 4 BCE to 30 CE.
- b. The Gospels divide his life into four rather unequal parts:
  - i. His (miraculous) conception, birth, and adolescence, which are covered in Matthew and Luke.
  - ii. His public teaching and preaching, chiefly in Galilee. This is where John and Mark pick up the story of Jesus. They begin with Jesus' baptism by John, an apocalyptic preacher.
  - iii. A highly detailed account of his last days in Jerusalem, his arrest, trial, and execution. This covers extensively the last two weeks of Jesus' life and places his death as a highly political move by the priests who engineer his death.
  - iv. His resurrection. Jesus died and was buried on Friday. The Jews stayed in on the Sabbath (Saturday), then on Sunday the empty tomb was discovered.
  - v. Jesus continued to appear to his disciples.
- c. The material in the Gospels is presented to confirm that Jesus fulfilled the scriptural prophecies and so was indeed the Jewish Messiah.

### WHO WAS JOSEPHUS?

Flavius Josephus was a first-century CE historian of Jewish life and an important source for the history of the Jews in the Greco-Roman period. He was a member of Jerusalem's priestly aristocracy. He regarded the great Jewish revolt against Rome (66–70 AD) as political folly and spent the rest of his life in Roman circles as a protégé of the emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. He recorded major events, such as the emergence of religious schools of thought (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes), the rebellion against Rome, and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and he provided a small note on the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He also recorded Jewish history from its beginnings. He wrote voluminous works of history, four of which survived. His writings have given scholars valuable insights into Judea in the first century.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. Why were the Gospels written?
2. How did the Christians decide which Gospels were “true” and which were not?
3. How did Jesus’ death and resurrection affect Muslims? Or did they?

### Suggested Reading

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Bible, Revised Standard Version.

### Other Books of Interest

Brown, Raymond. *The Death of the Messiah*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1994.

Cahill, Thomas. *Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World Before and After Jesus*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Crossan, John Dominic, and Jonathan L. Reed. *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.

Pentecost, J. Dwight, and John Danilson. *Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Sanders, E.P. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. New York: Penguin, 1985.

Wilkinson, John. *Jerusalem as Jesus Knew It*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1978.

## Lecture 5: The Spread of Christianity

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Paul's Letter to the Galatians and Acts of the Apostles (Bible, Revised Standard Version).

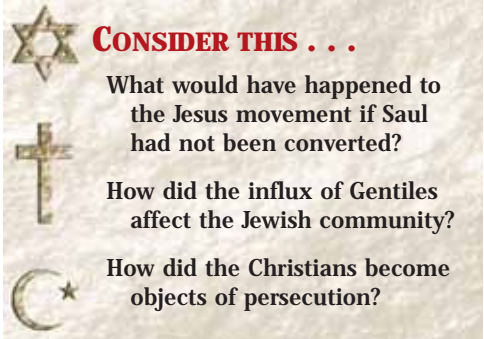
### A. The Parting of the Ways

#### 1. The Ingathering of the Gentiles

- a. Though the letters of Paul are the closest to the times of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles (New Testament) tells the story of the growth of Christianity. It begins with Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven.
- b. Jesus' twelve chosen collect in Jerusalem for Shavuoth (Pentecost in Greek) where the Holy Spirit (of God) comes upon them and stirs them to preach the cause of the Jesus movement (later called "Christianity").
- c. Among the Jewish/Christian community in Jerusalem, dissension arises between Hebrew-speakers and the Greek-speakers.
- d. This dissension leads to the stoning of a Christian disciple named Stephen, who is a Greek-speaking Jew. This is the first instance of having a witness (Greek: *martyros*) to the new faith.
- e. At this stoning is a Jew from the Diaspora named Saul, who is thoroughly Hellenized. He is living in Jerusalem and is appalled by the preaching of Stephen. He begins a priestly sanctioned campaign of persecuting the followers of Jesus.
- f. Then Saul is converted after a personal experience of Jesus and changes his name to Paul. He begins evangelizing Syria, accepting Gentiles into the Jesus community, without benefit of prior conversion (or circumcision) to Judaism.

#### 2. How the Followers of Jesus Became "Christians"

- a. Paul's understanding of the meaning of Jesus, that his crucifixion fulfilled God's long-standing plan for mankind's salvation—redemption and justification are two other of Paul's terms for what happened—became a central dogma of the community of Jesus' followers, the Christian Church.
- b. The increasingly massive influx of Gentiles into new Christian communities on an equal footing with the Jewish Christians was the major factor in the separation of Jesus' followers, now increasingly



called “Christians,” from the main body of the Jewish Community.

## **B. The Spread of Christianity**

### **1. The Persecution and Growth of Christianity**

- a. Throughout Roman history, the Jews were thought of as both a nation and a religion. When Christianity was identified as a new religion, its members lost the exemptions and protections long extended to the Jews.
- b. Romans became increasingly suspicious (and intolerant) of Christians when the latter refused to worship the deified emperor and looked to a kingdom “not of this world.”
- c. In addition, Rome was in a financial crisis and needed a scapegoat to unite the empire. The persecution of Christians (feeding to the lions, for example) enabled the government to distract an otherwise unhappy people.
- d. A century of persecutions followed until Constantine ended them in the early fourth century.

### **2. Constantine: The Emperor Becomes a Christian**

- a. At one point in his life, Constantine prayed to the Christian God for help. He won the battle. This led to Constantine himself becoming a Christian, providing government support and even a degree of leadership.
- b. Even before Constantine, Christianity had actually spread through the upper houses, especially among the women. Christians may have numbered about 10 percent of the empire.
- c. It was Constantine who summoned the Council of Nicea in 325 CE and shortly thereafter began the process of converting Palestine into a Christian Holy Land.
- d. He advised the bishop of Jerusalem to identify and enshrine the sites connected with the life and death of Jesus. Soon, monumental basilica-shrines were erected, at imperial expense, at the site of Jesus’ death and entombment in Jerusalem (Church of the Holy Sepulcher), and over the (supposed) site of his birth (Church of the Nativity) in Bethlehem. Eventually there were similar shrines all over Palestine.

### **CONSTANTINE: A Christian Emperor**

Flavius Valerius Constantinus was the son of Roman officer and future emperor Constantius and Helena, a common woman of humble background who was later sainted. Born in 271, 272, or 273 (the date is uncertain), he rose to power upon the death of his father on July 25, 306.

With his rise to power politically, religious change was on the horizon. Constantine became a Christian and immediately ended all religious persecution and even provided restitution to some sufferers. After defeating the eastern rulers and becoming sole emperor of the Byzantine Empire, Constantine moved the capital of the empire away from pagan Rome and created Constantinople, a new city of devout Christianity.

Constantine died May 22, 337. His sarcophagus was placed in the Church of the Holy Apostles surrounded by the memorial steles of the Twelve Apostles, symbolically making him the Thirteenth Apostle.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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Christianity started out as a local Jewish sect and ended as a distinct (and worldwide) religion. How and why did that happen?

### Suggested Reading

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Paul's Letter to the Galatians and Acts of the Apostles. Bible, Revised Standard Version.

### Other Books of Interest

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Barnes, Timothy David. *Constantine and Eusebius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Durant, Will. *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginning A.D. 325*. Vol. 3. Fine Communications, 1993.

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Eusebius, Pamphili. *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*. Ed. Andrew Louth. Penguin Classics. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Jones, D.H. *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1978.

Pohlsander, Hans A. *The Emperor Constantine*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Wilcken, Robert L. *The Land Called Holy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

Wilkinson, John. *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*. Jerusalem: Ariel, 1977.

## Lecture 6: Muhammad, Prophet of Mecca

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Michael Sells's *Approaching the Quran: The Early Revelation*.

### A. What Do We Have on Muhammad?

#### 1. The Quran as Revelation and History

- a. The Quran is a collection in 114 sūras, or chapters, of the revelations given to Muhammad between 610 CE and his death in 632 CE.
- b. The revelations were given orally and came through the medium of the angel Gabriel. They were repeated by Muhammad verbatim: the Quran is literally the Words of God, not a document.
- c. The sūras are arranged in order of descending length rather than chronologically. However, our study will discuss them in the order they were believed to be written.
- d. In the first books written at Mecca, Muhammad was chiefly engaged in converting pagans, persuading their “submission” to the One True God. At that early stage, “submission” meant primarily daily prayer, alms giving, and a daily commitment to worship only Allah, not the other gods recognized by the Meccan Arabs.
- e. The Medina sūras show him addressing a Muslim rather than pagan audience. The background of his revelations and what is implied by “submission” are given in greater detail.
- f. According to the Quran, Muhammad is one of three prophets who were entrusted with a public revelation in the form of a sacred book: Moses the Tawrât, Jesus the Injil, and himself, the Quran.
- g. By this last revelation, the “religion of Abraham” is revived at Mecca. That is why Islam will still venerate the Ka’ba built by Abraham and Ishmael—and toward which Muslims will now pray—and must continue to practice the ritual of the hajj (pilgrimage) begun in Abraham’s day.

#### 2. Traditions About the Prophet

- a. Unlike Jesus, Muhammad was not the redeemer of humankind. He was a mortal man, but also the perfect paradigm of what a Muslim should be.
- b. Many of the traditions concerning the Prophet were gathered together sometime after 750 CE into a *Life* written by Muhammad ibn Ishaq,



### CONSIDER THIS . . .

Do Christians recognize Muhammad as a prophet?

How do Jews view Muhammad in 632 CE? And now?

Why Medina? Why Mecca?

- and this has become a standard.
- c. Tradition has it that Muhammad was born in Mecca, late in the sixth century, and orphaned young.
  - d. He married Kadijah, a woman who was apparently important in the modest trading life of the town.
  - e. Kadijah was the mother of all of his children except for a son born of a concubine after her death. None of his male children survived infancy.
  - f. The leading tribe in Mecca, the Quraysh, had combined commerce and shrine-pilgrimage in the town.
  - g. The Meccan shrine was the Ka'ba, a stone "House of Allah" with a surrounding taboo zone (haram) in the middle of the settlement. Many gods were worshiped here.

## **B. The Call, the Response**

### **1. The Message at Mecca**

- a. In 610, already well into adulthood, Muhammad had a revelation from the Angel Gabriel and began to recite or chant the message God was sending through him to the Meccans.
- b. The message given to Muhammad was that there is no god but the God.
- c. He also stressed the idea of the "Last Judgement" with its punishments for the wicked and rewards for the just.
- d. Muhammad refused to perform—or have God perform—miracles on his own behalf as testimony to his devotion to the Quran. The Quran itself was God's miracle.
- e. From 610 CE and for the next twenty-two years of his life, God continued to give revelations to his prophet, all attesting to the same message of submission to God (in Arabic, "Allah").

### **2. The Opposition of the Quraysh**

- a. The Quraysh opposed Muhammad's message of monotheism and the Last Judgement. Acceptance would have forced them to abandon their commercially profitable shrines.
- b. Finally, after the deaths of his uncle and wife, the Prophet was driven from Mecca for fear of his life.
- c. In 622 CE, he made a migration (*hijra*) to Medina—the trigger date for the beginning of the Muslim era—where he was taken up as a holyman and leader for the strife-torn oasis.

## **HISTORY OF MECCA**

Situated forty-five miles from the Red Sea Coast, Mecca is considered the holiest city of all Islam.

During the time of Muhammad, Mecca, a shrine city of little distinction and little property, was known as a local pilgrimage and trading center.

The Ka'ba, built by Ibrahim and his son Isma'il, lies in the center of the town. Around the Ka'ba lies a great taboo zone, al-Haram and around this, between mountains the mud brick buildings of Mecca arose. From ancient times, Muslims determined to live closest to the holiest place on earth, and built their houses near the grounds of the mosque.

Mecca today is important for the compulsory hajj made by Muslims. Each year many hundreds of thousands of Muslims make the trek to Mecca to perform the rituals there.



## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. Is this Allah the same as the God of Abraham?
2. Are the Quran and Bible both revealed histories?
3. How does Muhammad continue to affect the lives of people today?

### Suggested Reading

Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Quran: The Early Revelations*. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999.

### Other Books of Interest

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Makiya, Kanan. *The Rock: A Tale of Seventh Century Jerusalem*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

Peters, F.E. *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1994.

Sardar, Ziauddin, and Zafar Malik. *Introducing Muhammad*. New York: Totem Books, 1997.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

## Lecture 7: Muhammad, Lord of Medina

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Marmaduke W. Pickhall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*.

### A. Muhammad as Prophet (Nabi): The Message of Islam

#### 1. Muhammad at Medina

- Medina was an oasis in the grip of civil strife. Muhammad had been invited to help act as an arbitrator.
- The oasis was once owned by the Jews, but the control had passed to the Arabs, who were now fighting among themselves.
- Agreement was made to have Muhammad come to Medina as a mediator. All sides signed the Medina Accords, which are an agreement that made the Muslims, pagans, and Jews one "umma," or community.

#### 2. Muhammad and the Jews

- Muhammad's message was filled with biblical stories and it appears he was originally acceptable to the Jews as a mediator, and perhaps, he thought, as a prophet.
- But the Jews rejected his claims to prophethood and he brought down his wrath upon them, whether for their lack of support or their collusion with his enemies at Mecca, we don't know.
- This rejection eventually led to their violent removal from the town. Muhammad exiled one tribe, enslaved another, and had executed a number of the third.

#### 3. Muhammad as Statesman: An Arabian Empire

- Muhammad struck out militarily against the Meccans in the battle of Badr Wells in 624 CE. This is the first use of force to resist persecution, linking force and violence to religion, as it often was in Judaism and Christianity.
- The prophet and his forces withstood a Quraysh counterattack, but eventually (630) the Meccans capitulated.
- The Muslims embarked on a series of raids in all directions across Arabia—the targets, if they were pagans, were invited to embrace



### CONSIDER THIS . . .

Muhammad was his own Constantine. Why?

Why was Muhammad a failure at Mecca and a success at Medina?

What happened to the Jews of Medina?

Islam or suffer the consequences. If they were Jews or Christians, they had to pay taxes and were given a covenant that even today covers Christians and Jews living under Muslim sovereignty.

- d. By the time Muhammad died in 632 CE, he and his community controlled most of Arabia.

### **B. The Five Pillars of the Islamic Faith**

1. The creed. There is no god but the God, and Muhammad is his messenger.
2. Public prayer. All Muslims must pray five times a day toward Mecca, together on Fridays, first in Muhammad's house, then in a mosque.
3. Tithe. Every Muslim must give a percentage of annual income to charitable work in the Muslim community.
4. Fast. During the twenty-eight days of the lunar month of Ramadan, all food, drink, uncharitable words, and sexual activity must cease until after sunset.
5. Hajj. Once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca. This ritual is performed at a specific time, at specific places in the vicinity of Mecca.

### **C. The Role of Women in Islam relating to the pillars of faith.**

1. Women are bound by the same obligations as men, but they must observe modesty. Hence women can make the pilgrimage but must do so in the company of men.
2. Women are not to circulate freely. In mosques, they must not pray next to men, only with women, children, or in private.
3. Women are exempt from certain other obligations because they are responsible for the home and raising the children until ages six or seven, when the father takes over the raising of the male children. Tithing is part of the male tradition.
4. Women's obligations are limited, as they are in Judaism, by ritual impurity.

### **D. Separation of Church and State**

1. Though the notion of separation of church and state is a modern one, Jesus did not involve himself in politics, while Muhammad freely mixed religion and politics.
2. The use of force for religious ends is commonplace in the monotheistic tradition, at least until the separation of church and state. Its sanction by Muhammad persists in Islam to this day

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How did the apparently failing project in Mecca become a remarkable success in Medina?
2. How to explain Muhammad's engagement with politics?

### Suggested Reading

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Pickhall, Marmaduke William. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

### Other Books of Interest

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**Lecture 8:**  
**The “People of the Book”:**  
**Monotheists and Their Revelations**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters’s *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*, vol. 2, chapter 1.

**A. Shaping the Book:  
The Canon**

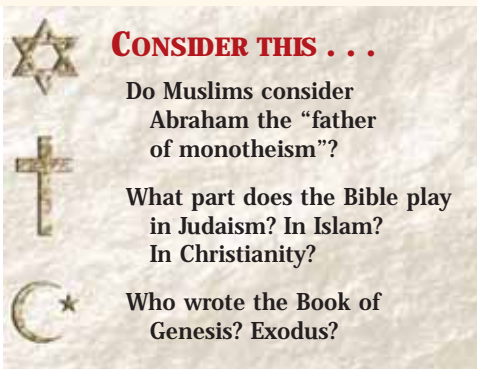
**1. What’s in Scripture?**

- a. The Bible (from Greek *biblia*, “books”) is a collection of twenty-four separate books recognized by the Jews. It is often called TaNaK, an acronym for its three major divisions: Torah, the Nebi’im, and the Ketubim.

- b. When the early Christians began to add their own writings about Jesus, they assembled their own authoritative collection of what they called the “New Covenant” (“covenant” is rendered in Latin as *testamentum*, which gives us New Testament). While the Christians recognize the Jewish Bible, their “Old Testament,” as the word of God, they deny any authenticity to either Muhammad or the Quran.
- c. While Muslims acknowledge the original authenticity of the Bible and the Gospel, they regard the Quran as superceding both, which have, moreover, been tampered with by the Jews and Christians.

**2. Scripture as the Word of God: Inspiration**

- a. The Bible is a composite work, which is the product of many human hands, from Moses’s to those of Ezra and Nehemiah. Although there is some degree of human authorship, it was God who inspired and guided it, particularly the five Mosaic books called the Torah.
- b. Hebrew is the sacred language of this text, although it has been translated into a variety of languages so it might be read by all, first into Aramaic (Targums) then into Mediterranean-wide Greek. This latter translation is called the Septuagint and became the version that Christians read and used as their “Old Testament.”
- c. The Bible began life as a translation, because Jesus preached and conversed in Aramaic, while the Gospels, which date from forty to sixty years after his death, were already in Greek. The translation of the Greek into other vernaculars of Late Antiquity—the Latin version by Jerome (d. 420 CE) is called the Vulgate—occurred without remark.



**CONSIDER THIS . . .**

Do Muslims consider Abraham the “father of monotheism”?

What part does the Bible play in Judaism? In Islam? In Christianity?

Who wrote the Book of Genesis? Exodus?

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- d. The Quran contains the very words of God dictated and pronounced verbatim by Muhammad without the slightest human conditioning. Resistance to translating the Quran exists even now. Some translations prefer to call themselves not “The Quran,” but something like “The Meaning of the Glorious Quran.”

**B. Unpacking the Riches: Scriptural Exegesis: Departing from the Literal**

1. Jews have insisted that the legal precepts of the Bible, though they may have a deeper, more spiritual or mystical sense, must be understood literally.
2. Christians differ from Jews: the former read the same Bible figuratively; they see it primarily as a document foreshadowing the events of Jesus’ life. Christians allegorize away much of the ritual and behavioral aspects of the “Old Testament.”
3. The Quran itself admits that it is ambiguous in places, and so Muslims too have developed a body of exegesis of the Quran that has become traditional and authoritative.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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Whence comes the right (or is it the necessity?) to interpret the words of the All-Knowing God?

### Suggested Reading

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Peters, F.E. *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*. Vol. 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

### Other Books of Interest

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de Hamel, Christopher. *The Book: A History of the Bible*. Harrisburg, PA: Phaidon Press, Inc., 2001.

Gaetje, Helmut. *The Quran and Its Exegesis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

McDonald, Martin, and James A. Sanders. *The Canon Debate*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.

Nicolson, Adam. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

## Lecture 9: Tradition and Law

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*, vol. 2, chapters 3 and 4.

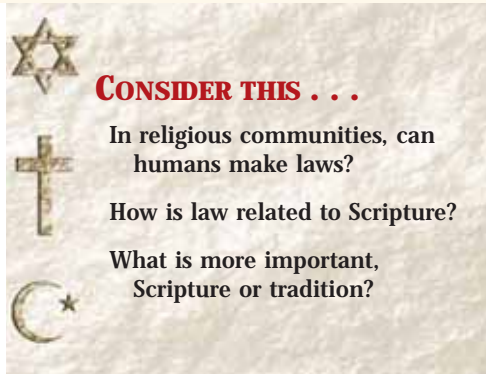
### A. The Law in the Scripture

#### 1. Written Torah and Oral Torah

- a. According to Jewish tradition, Moses was given two Torahs on Sinai, one written to pass on as what is now our Bible and the other to pass on in oral form, the so-called "Oral Torah."
- b. Moses transmitted the Oral Torah to Joshua, and then it was passed down through reliable sources through the Pharisee. The Oral Torah explained and expanded on the written Torah.
- c. Around 200 CE, the discussions concerning the Oral Torah were committed to writing as the Mishna. This was commented upon in detail by the rabbis of both Palestine and of Babylonia. The Mishna plus the "completion" (*gemara*) of the first group constitutes the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud. The same Mishna with the gemara of the second makes up the Babylonian Talmud. Each Talmud, but particularly the Babylonian, became for Jews the authoritative understanding of God's revealed Law.

#### 2. Quran and Tradition = Sharia

- a. There are specific laws in the Quran as well as in the Bible—prohibitions against gaming, swearing, drinking intoxicating spirits, and dietary restrictions; some, like those for theft, are even accompanied by explicit sanctions.
- b. In Islam, the behavioral flesh is put in the Scriptural bones by resort to the "custom of the Prophet." Muhammad was the paradigm of the Muslim life and so his advice and conduct, sometimes down to the smallest details, provides a template for Muslim behavior.
- c. There is much more besides in Islamic religious society, which, like the Jewish one, lacks an authority capable of mandating religious conduct. Islamic lawyers are very reluctant to issue "decrees" or "enactments."





- d. Islam is more a community based upon consensus, and what is correct Muslim behavior is often what the society as a whole has agreed is such.

## **B. The Law Out of Scripture**

### **1. Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession**

- a. The Gospels indicate that Jesus offered private and more detailed explanations of his message to his inner circle of apostles. These traditions and instructions were regarded as the Apostolic Tradition.
- b. By the second century, various churches were claiming to be founded by one of the apostles, or that their “overseer” (*episkopos*) was one in a line of spiritual succession from the apostles, the so-called “Apostolic Succession.”
- c. The combination of these two notions gave the Christian bishop a kind of absolute teaching authority in his church, and when the bishops assembled in council, an even broader authority. Thus, the bishops constituted a living tradition.
- d. The great reform movements that swept over Christianity in the sixteenth century and Judaism in the nineteenth can be read in large part as an attempt to separate scripture from tradition. Protestant groups rejected all Church practices and beliefs that had no warrant in scripture. Reform Jews reject the Mishna and Talmud as man-made, not God-given.

### **2. Canon Law and the Magisterium**

- a. Jesus announced that he had come not to abolish the Torah but to fulfill it, and the Gospels portray him as a typically observant Jew of his day.
- b. But Paul was soon arguing that in this new Messianic Age the redemption of humankind through Jesus had rendered the Torah unnecessary.
- c. As the expected End Time began to recede into the indefinite future, there came the need for some guidelines to behavior.
- d. Councils of churches began to produce not only statements of belief, “creeds,” whereby doctrine or teaching was defined as dogma, but also behavioral norms and canons regulating the life of clergy and laity alike.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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What is the complex relationship of Scripture and tradition in the shaping of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

### Suggested Reading

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Peters, F.E. *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*. Vol. 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

### Other Books of Interest

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Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*. Oxford: One World Publications, 2001.

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Hirsch, Ammiel, and Yaakov Yosef Reinman. *One People, Two Worlds: A Reform Rabbi and an Orthodox Rabbi Explore the Issues That Divide Them*. New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2002.

Lewittes, Mendell. *Jewish Law: An Introduction*. York: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1994.

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## Lecture 10: Defining the Community

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*, vol. 2, chapter 6.

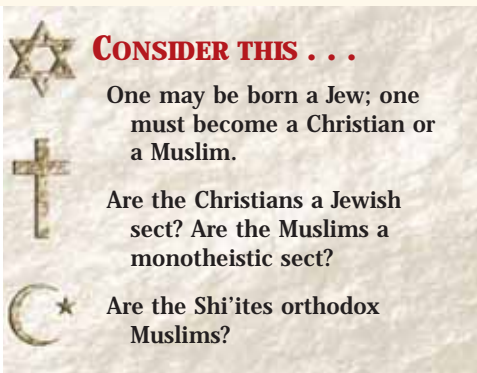
### A. Definitions of a Community

#### 1. Jewish Community: A Nation of Kinsmen

- a. The earliest Jewish community, the "Beni Israil," shared an actual kinship. This particular tribal group also shared a God. The rabbinic definition of a Jew is "someone born of a Jewish mother." This is also accepted by the state of Israel in the case of a claim to "the right to return."
- b. Jews were not content to rest on this particular definition. Much attention has also been paid to "what" is a Jew.
- c. One of the answers, and the one that prevailed, is the Pharasaic answer. To be a Jew, one must imitate or approximate the holiness of God. This includes separating oneself from "impurity," whether from the Gentiles or nonobservant Jews.  
The priority regulations are laid out in the Torah, most of which include the avoidance of unholy things and the observance of certain dietary laws.
- d. Romans regarded Jews as a "*religio*" and a "*natio*," both a religious and ethnic community.

#### 2. Christians: A Serious Identification Problem

- a. How Jewish were they? Most were converted Jews, but there were increasing numbers of Gentiles.
- b. Soon Christians began to define themselves not merely as "followers of Jesus," but as "followers of Jesus, the Messiah of the world, and the son of God."
- c. One of the crucial elements of the survival of the Christians was whether or not they would stay with the Bible (the Old Testament), which they did.
- d. Christians rejected the idea of cutting themselves off completely from Judaism, its scripture, its beliefs, and some of its practices. That has extended through modern times and is evident in church services today.



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- e. Christianity places a high value on orthodoxy or “correct belief”—the creed is a common measure of community adherence among Christians. Both Judaism and Islam stress the need and virtue of orthopraxy, “correct behavior,” or observance.

### **3. Islam: Definition through Observance**

Orthopraxy is the standard by which a Muslim can be defined.

Orthodoxy is the way Christians are defined, by what they believe.

## **B. How do people get into a community?**

1. Jews are born into the community and remain such despite the fact that they may never associate with or follow any of the teachings of Judaism.
2. Both Muslims and Christians are made. The individual must state he or she wants to be a Muslim or Christian. Both faiths have accepted infant initiation, but someone must speak on behalf of the infant and affirm its belief.
3. All must follow a ritual to be initiated.
  - a. Circumcision, or the cutting of the foreskin of the male at eight days after birth, is the symbol of the covenant for the Jews.
  - b. The same is true in Islam. Circumcision was a part of Abraham’s traditions and was passed down through the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims disagree about exactly when this should take place; Turks tend to circumcise the males around nine, ten, or eleven years of age.
  - c. Christianity utilizes baptism, the “pouring over” or “immersing” in water. Baptism is understood to be a spiritual sign.
4. Christianity is far more institutionalized than the other two religions when it comes to the requirements for incorporation into the faith. Formal instruction and the pronouncement of a creed is required to join. This instruction is often in the form of catechism. This is taught usually by the bishop and is typically conducted during Lent. The converts are baptized into the church the day before Easter.

## **C. How do you get out of the community?**

1. Apostasy: you formally deny or disavow the faith. In Islam, this is a capital crime. On occasion in Christianity it was viewed the same way. Conversion to Christianity or Islam is regarded as apostasy in Judaism.
2. Getting thrown out is a different matter.
  - a. In the strict traditionalists in Judaism and Islam, if you don’t observe the Law you, in effect, cease to be a member of the community.
  - b. There is banning in Judaism. The rabbi can declare someone taboo. This was a serious sentence in past times.
  - c. With both Islam and Judaism, there is no authority structure to allow these bans to be used effectively.
  - d. Christianity has a highly institutionalized authority structure that allows heresy to be dealt with. Excommunication (or a ban) can be put in effect by the bishop and effectively cuts a member off from the sacraments.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. Why is maintaining the community so important to the monotheists?
2. What were the charges of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie?
3. How is discipline maintained in other religions?

### Suggested Reading

Peters, F.E. *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The World and the Law and the People of God*. Vol. 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

### Other Books of Interest

Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Bromley, David G. *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*. Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1998.

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## Lecture 11: Governing the Community

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: From Covenant to Community*, vol. 1, chapters 6 and 7.

### A. Learned Elites

#### 1. From Priests to Rabbis

- Kings first ruled the Jews beginning with David down through the Hasmoneans. The later kings had legitimacy problems.
- Kings were often at odds with the religious authorities on the Temple Mount. These priests controlled the religious ritual and, in the state, the Temple.
- The Romans put an end to both kingship and the Temple; politically, Jews became the subjects of others.
- With the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish priesthood lost its function and power, so in its place arose the rabbis.
- Rabbis were scholars of the Law in a community where Torah assumed the role of Temple as the center and focus of Jewish life. The rabbis became judges and arbiters, community leaders and social guides in the scattered Jewish communities where they lived.

#### 2. The Islamic Rabbinate: The Ulama

- The Islamic lawyer elite consists of the Ulama, who have been trained in *madrasas* (law schools) by the Muslims. These *madrasas* have been well financed over the years because of Muslim political dominance and principally through the institution of "*waqf*."
- Waqf* is a pious foundation whereby a Muslim deeds his property to God—which renders it inalienable and untaxable—and stipulates that its income go to a specified pious purpose, and chief among them has been the construction and staffing of mosques and *madrasas*.

### B. Charismatic Leadership

#### 1. The Christian Episcopate

- Jesus appointed an inner circle of twelve, the "Apostles," who seem to have enjoyed a recognized authority among his followers after his death.



### CONSIDER THIS . . .

What are the differences between Muslim learned elites and the Jewish rabbis and Christianity's priests?



What is *waqf*?



Could Shi'ite Imams be considered popes in turbans?

- b. There were other officials as well, none very certainly defined, but what emerges is a church official called an “overseer” (*epikopos*) and it is this bishop who is soon found standing at the head of every Christian congregation, and generally regarded as the spiritual successor of the Apostles.
- c. As the Roman Empire gradually turned Christian in the fourth and fifth centuries, the organization of these bishops began to follow that of the empire, with the bishops of provincial capitals acknowledged as archbishops with jurisdiction over the other bishops of that province.
- d. The bishops of the provinces reported to another in a larger, more cosmopolitan community. The final authority rested with councils of bishops, or as the Western Church claimed, with the bishop of Rome (more often known by the sobriquet of “pope”).
- e. There was opposition in the Eastern Churches to the bishop of Rome’s claim of primacy, which resulted in the schism that separated the Western or Latin Church from the Greek Churches of the East. At the Reformation, the Western Church separated into a variety of confessional churches that refused to accept the authority of Rome. Eastern churches also split into a number of different ethnic or national churches with varying degrees of autonomy from Constantinople.

## 2. Caliphs and Imams

- a. Muhammad had made no provision for his successor, so after his death in 632 CE, the Meccan and Medinan factions of Muslims conferred and chose Abu Bakr to be the first “successor.” That meant he was the executive head of the community, but was assuredly not a prophet.
- b. Abu Bakr was succeeded by three other early pillars of Islam: Umar, Uthman, and Ali, who are all remembered as the “Right Directed Caliphs.”
- c. There were Muslims who disagreed with this appointment. They thought that the office, which they preferred to call the “Imamate,” belonged by divine appointment to Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, and then to members of his family descending in the male line from Ali’s union with Muhammad’s daughter Fatima.
- d. This group also believed that the office was not merely a political one, as the majority of the Muslims, the Sunnis, were willing to settle for in regard to the caliph.
- e. The Imam, they believed, was a spiritual as well as political guide. Indeed, he was infallible. Such partisans are called Shi’ites. They never managed to get one of the revered line of Imams into power. In the ninth century, it began to be understood among Shi’ites that the Imam had gone into hiding and would not return until the End Time. Today he rules through his surrogates, like the Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–1989), the Father of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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Everyone agrees that God will not desert His community; the issue always is, who are His chosen agents for this guidance?

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## Lecture 12: Defending the Community

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: From Covenant to Community*, vol. 1, chapter 7.

### A. Church and State

#### 1. Church and Empire

- a. "Church" and "state" are terms based in the Christian community's experience with the Roman Empire and its various successors.
- b. Christianity's entanglement with the Roman Empire began when Christians were identified as a new religion and so lost the exemptions and protections long extended to the Jews.
- c. The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine led to a closer, more complex relationship between the "Catholic" (universal) Church and the universal empire. Both attempted to maintain their rights and prerogatives in the face of the other.

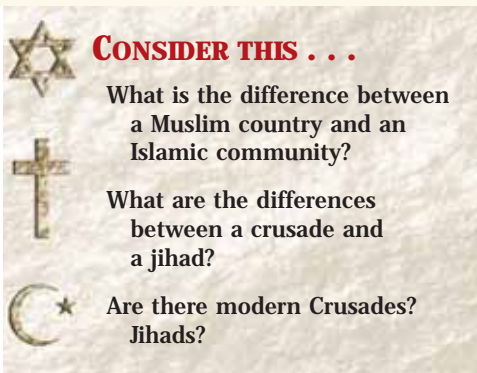
#### 2. The Muslim Umma: The Church as the State

- a. Muhammad's original "community" at Medina included not only his fellow migrants from Mecca and the newly converted helpers at Medina, but Jews and pagans as well.
- b. Jews were soon purged from both the umma and the town, and the pagan Arabs there rapidly adopted Islam. Thus was constituted an exclusively Muslim *umma*.
- c. Thence forward Muslims have imagined the "church" and the "state" as a single entity, the union or community of Muslims.

### B. Defending Faith's Abode

#### 1. Crusade

- a. The Christian Church is not a state and so cannot formally declare or conduct a war, but it has on occasion sanctioned the use of force for religious ends.
- b. Pope Urban II at Clermont in 1095 first called for Crusade. Its formal title was *peregrinatio in armis*, "armed pilgrimage"—and had as its objective the freeing of the Christian holy places in Jerusalem from the Muslims. This "war" was garlanded with the Church's spiritual



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reward and indulgences for those who voluntarily participated in this and later attacks against Muslim lands.

- c. When Innocent IV was elevated to the papacy in 1243, he defined the Church's position on attempts to force the Muslims to convert—though nonbelievers may not be coerced into conversion, the Pope, as Vicar of Christ on earth, had the authority to order even non-Christian powers to admit preachers of the Gospels into their lands, and if they refused, to authorize Christian states to use force to effect their entry.
- d. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica* (1265–1271), echoes Innocent's reasoning and adds three other reasons that justify a state's use of force against the infidel.

## 2. Jihad

- a. Although the Arabic term jihad means “struggling,” or more specifically, “struggling in the path of God,” it is normally translated in English as “holy war.”
- b. The translation is not entirely inaccurate. While the Quranic term is broad enough to cover a variety of efforts on God's behalf, it certainly includes the use of force against God's enemies.
- c. The Quran is circumspect on the subject of violence and generally appears to counsel its avoidance, then permits it in a defensive environment (Quran 2:190, 22:39–40). But under the threat of annihilation, Muhammad's followers were finally permitted to resort to force (Quran 2:191, 217).
- d. Muslim jurists used these texts to divide the world into the “Abode of Islam” (*Dar al-Islam*), where Islamic law and sovereignty prevailed, and the “Abode of War” (*Dar al-Harb*), lands that were not yet subjected to the moral and political authority of Islam.
- e. In theory, the Abode of Islam is always in a state of war with the Abode of War until the latter submits. Jihad is the instrument by which subjection will occur.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. What are the elements that have contributed to the apparent militancy of Islam?
2. How is Judaism or Christianity different? Or are they?

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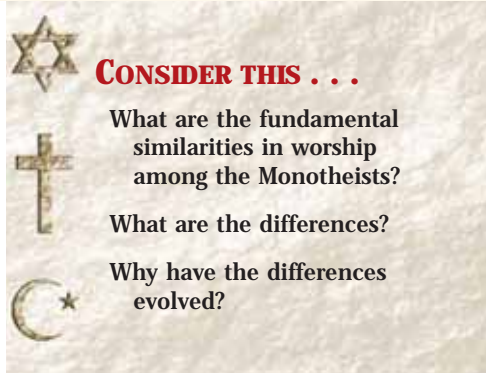
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## Lecture 13: Worshipping God

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Works of the Spirit*, vol. 3, chapter 1.

The Protestant Reformation changed the forms of worship of God away from a public institutionalized process into a private and individual addressing of God. This private worship, while it exists in all three religions, has not been the fundamental type. Since these are religious communities, their formal worship has been public and often social.



### CONSIDER THIS . . . .

What are the fundamental similarities in worship among the Monotheists?

What are the differences?

Why have the differences evolved?

### A. Jewish Worship

#### 1. Sacrifice as Worship

- a. In the Torah, God specifically says how He wants to be worshiped. This includes the time, place, and, most importantly, the sacrifice. This is the basic form of worship defined in the Bible.
- b. The *rohens*, or priests, are appointed to handle this important aspect. They had the important responsibility of going into the holy place and dealing with holy things. God is high voltage, and these priests have the perilous task of drawing close to the presence of God.
- c. The priesthood is governed by strict guidelines and prescribed purity. Women are excluded because of their vulnerability to ritual impurity, like menstruation, which is an inevitable period of impurity.
- d. After David and Solomon built the Temple, a decree was issued in 621 that only at the Temple in Jerusalem could a Jew offer a ritual sacrifice.

#### 2. Prayer as Worship: Synagogue

- a. After 70 CE, Temple sacrifice is replaced with prayer as the chief form of worship among Jews. Prayer is conducted in another building known as a synagogue. This institution may have been devised during the Babylonian Exile. It existed side by side with the Temple from 520 BCE through the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. After that time, there is no evidence of sacrifice; all worship takes place in synagogues.
- b. From that day to this, there has been and there will be one until the Temple is rebuilt, which most Jews associate with the coming of the Messiah and the End Time.

- c. Meanwhile, every Jew is required to pray three times a day and also participate in community prayer on certain holy days.

## **B. Christian Worship**

### **1. The Eucharist as Worship**

- a. The Eucharist was instituted by Jesus during what Christians call the “Last Supper.” Jesus had called his disciples together the night he was arrested to celebrate what is possibly a Passover seder.
- b. Jesus takes bread and wine, blesses it and gives it to his disciples. He says that the bread is his body and the wine is his blood and gives them to his apostles to eat and drink. He says to do this in remembrance of him.
- c. Christians continued to celebrate and reenact this event after his death into modern times. The Eucharist is a basic form of Christian worship.
- d. Christians also introduced the concept of Jesus as the High Priest participating in the sacrificial meal of the Eucharist. The one standing in for Jesus is the Christian priest (one who is presiding over this sacrificial meal).
- e. The Christian priesthood is based on the Jewish priesthood and so also excludes women.

### **2. The Mass as Worship**

- a. The Eucharist, which in the West is called the Mass, is very similar to the Jewish synagogue service. It begins with a series of prayers. Then there is the reading of Scripture.
- b. After this portion of the service, the Eucharist begins with the priest transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Then the participants partake of “communion,” sharing the body and blood of Christ.
- c. There are priests, bishops, and deacons in the Christian community. A bishop is the head of a Christian community, and now every bishop is a priest. The priest’s central task is celebrating the Eucharist.

## **C. Islamic Worship**

### **1. Prayer as Worship**

- a. Islam represents a revolution in pagan Arab custom, substituting prayer for sacrifice. Muslims are required to pray five times a day at very specific times, though not in specific places.
- b. A *muezzin* announces the time for prayer by giving a “call to prayer” from a tower (*minaret*) attached to a mosque. Muslims must pray toward Mecca.
- c. The prayer takes about twenty minutes and includes passages from the Quran and proscribed gestures and postures.
- d. The noon prayer on Friday should be prayed in community in a mosque. There is also a sermon on Fridays.

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- e. Women tend not to attend the mosque or, like their Jewish counterparts, pray in a special area reserved for them.

**D. Other Forms of Worship: Holy Places and People**

1. Some places are holy because God's presence can be felt in them or certain holy events have taken place in them. Jerusalem is such a place—it is sanctified in Judaism as the focus on God's presence (*shekina*); in Christianity as the site of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection; in Islam, as the place of Muhammad's night journey and ascension.
2. Jesus' death sanctified Jerusalem for the Christians. Constantine enshrined the holy places in Jerusalem. People begin to arrive in Jerusalem to worship at these places, tracing the stations of the cross.
3. Islam accepts Jerusalem as a holy place because of the temple and Muhammad's night journey to the Temple Mount. But the primary holy place of Islam is Mecca, not just because of Muhammad, but because Abraham built the Ka'ba there and instituted the *hijj*. Muhammad came to reinstitute the *hijad* in Mecca.
4. Every Muslim must make the *hijad* at one time in their lives. It requires a series of events done in certain places in and around Mecca and includes a ritual sacrifice.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. How did the idea of private, unstructured prayers begin?
2. Can Muslims, Jews, Protestants, and Catholics sit down to pray together?
3. What are the differences between God, Allah, and Yahweh?

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## Lecture 14: Reaching for God

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is F.E. Peters's *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Works of the Spirit*, vol. 3, chapters 3 to 6.

Revelation is God reaching down to His creation. Whoever heeds Him becomes part of His community. If God reaches down, what is their reaction? Traditionally, this is to try and live the way God wants. What God wants has been interpreted through a series of lawyers and translators. Observance and Law has loomed large in this.

Others, however, have tried to reach God in other ways, intellectually through study (theology) or intuitively through experience (mysticism).

There is an enormous problem in God's transcendence, that is, His existence (outside the human dimension). All three religions have committed themselves to the belief in God's transcendence. How do you communicate with something so "totally other"? There are two general approaches to reaching out to God.

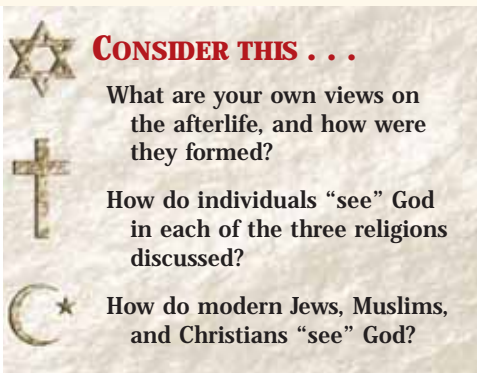
### A. Striving for God

#### 1. The Ascent of the Mind: Theology

- a. The Hellenes felt that human understanding could grasp God unaided. Many Muslims, Christians, and Jews feel that with study, God's nature can be understood.
- b. Hellenism led to the creation of a sacred theology, which is an attempt to illumine God through illuminating of the faith by rational means.
- c. Christianity is the only religion that has fully embraced theology as an active pursuit. There have been Muslim and Jewish theologians, but they have had no major impact on the faith of their communities.
- d. Moses Maimonides, for example, was a Jewish theologian who wrote several books on Judaism, attempting to reconcile religion and philosophy. Ghazal has done the same in Islam, but neither has had the influence that Thomas Aquinas had on Christianity.

#### 2. The Ascent of the Spirit: Asceticism and Mysticism

- a. Asceticism is the adoption of a lifestyle of self-denial and discipline for religious ends. The end is often mysticism, that is, a direct experience of God.





- b. The problem is how to explain this face-to-face with God. Mystics, in particular Christians and Muslims, have claimed to see God and been misunderstood by others.
- c. When a Christian mystic sees God he can see the man-God Jesus face-to-face. Muslims experience God as pure spirit, which raises serious questions among other believers, often resulting in a loss of life for the mystic.
- d. There are good paradigms for seeing God in all three religions.
  - i. Moses experiences God directly on Mount Sinai. He is in the presence of God but doesn't see his "face." After these experiences, Moses was said to glow.
  - ii. In Christianity, James, John, and Peter get the chance to see Jesus in his divine form in the event known as the "transfiguration."
  - iii. In Islam, Muhammad's famous night journey takes him up through seven heavens directly to the presence of God.
- e. In order to see God, one normally follows a set procedure.
  - i. There is first a process of fasting or preparing through asceticism.
  - ii. The next step is bending the will, emptying the Ego.
- f. Often the mystic experience in Christianity and Islam is described in sexual or inebriation terms.
- g. Jewish mysticism is defined more in terms of a journey. God is portrayed as the Absolute.

## **B. Reposing with God**

### **1. The Afterlife**

- a. In the Bible when people die they go to Sheol, a place and time of indeterminate existence. One's existence was justified during life. God's justice was visited on the eighth and ninth generations. But around the fifth to sixth centuries, the notion of the immortality of the soul appears in Jewish writings.
- b. By Jesus' time, the Jews believe in the afterlife. God's punishment will now occur after life, in Hell or in Heaven, or in the Garden of Eden. Islam also follows this same belief, saying that God lives in the seventh heaven and that is where true believers will dwell with Him.
- c. All three religions believe that true believers will eventually see God or else be removed from the presence of God and placed in Hell, with pain for the body and soul.
- d. Heaven has a variety of theological problems: how can one see the face of God, what the body will be like, and other such issues. Jews have some difficulty with the fact that the afterlife is not mentioned in the Bible.

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## 2. The End Time

- a. All three religions agree on the Final Judgement.
- b. This is supposed to take place in the Valley of Kedron, between Jerusalem and Mount Olivet. This also happens to be a place where many dead of all religions are buried.
- c. Several things will happen here:
  - i. On the last day, Muslims believe that the Ka'ba will be miraculously transported to this place.
  - ii. The dead will rise here.
  - iii. All will be judged.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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How can any monotheist “attain” God, because God is so totally other?

### Suggested Reading

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