

## CHAPTER 19:

# MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

BONUS

5000 BC to Today

### INTRO

Religion may be as old as language, or even older. It developed from a fundamental human quality: to ask questions and try to answer them. Why is there day and night? What is the sun? Why do humans exist? Different religions all sought to answer these questions and many others. Some of them have, over time, been answered by science, but religion still serves an important role in many people's lives. Some of the enduring qualities of most religions is that they offer meaning and comfort, and teach us lessons about how to live.

God, as Drawn by Michelangelo



## MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS

### LYRICS

#### Judaism:

The Jewish faith began  
With Abraham,  
Who led the Hebrew people  
To the Promised Land.  
Hebrews, also known as Jews,  
Were unusual at this time.  
There was only one god,  
And they didn't paint his picture.  
They didn't believe  
He had a little sister.  
Their god was a jealous god.  
That's what he said,  
So don't pray to false idols,  
I'll make him mad.  
Moses came down  
With ten suggestions,  
I mean, Ten Commandments  
To command 'em  
To honor thy mother and father,  
Don't steal or kill.  
And every week,  
Take a day off and just chill.

#### Christianity:

Our religion is monotheistic,  
To some the start ain't realistic.  
We don't understand,  
What's the debate, son?  
We make a quarter  
Of the world's population,  
Made a book out of the stories  
That we lived then,  
Became big enough to make a  
State religion.  
Jesus was a Jew,  
He started something new,  
Said, "Do nice to others,

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

#### *The Jewish faith began with Abraham...*

The Jewish faith began with Abraham, who led the Hebrew people to the "Promised Land." This was sometime between 2000 and 1500 BC. The Jews (also known as the **Hebrews**) were unusual at the time for believing in only one god. Most everyone else around them worshipped multiple deities. The Jews called their god Yahweh, and he told them in the Ten Commandments to worship only him. So they did. They followed Abraham out of Mesopotamia and followed Moses out of Egypt, because God said so.

#### *Hebrews, also known as Jews...*

**Canaan** was a land on the Mediterranean where Israel is today. It was a very important place to the Jews, who moved there thousands of years ago when they marched from Mesopotamia with Abraham. In about 2000 BC, the Jews migrated to Egypt to find water and work. When they returned to Canaan in 1200 BC, they found...guess what? People had moved in while they were gone. The Jews claimed rights to the land, based on their history there, but the Canaanites didn't want to give it up. So they fought. The land of Israel, claimed by both the Jews (Israelis) and the Palestinians, is still being fought over today.

#### *There was only one god, and they didn't paint his picture...*

The second commandment states: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in

heaven above." So, to this day Jews (and Christians and Muslims) do not paint pictures of God or make statues of him. Many other cultures throughout time did pray to images of their gods: the Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, the Norse, Aztec and more.

***Their god was a jealous god; that's what he said...***

The second commandment also states: "You shall not worship them or serve [other gods]; for I, the Lord your god, am a jealous god, and I will send punishment on the children for the wrongdoing of their fathers, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me; and I will have mercy through a thousand generations on those who have love for me and keep my laws."

***Moses came down with ten suggestions. I mean Ten Commandments...***

Like Abraham, Moses was a prophet who spoke to God. He was famous for a few things. First, he led the Jews out of Egypt, where they'd gone to escape drought or famine in Canaan. For a time the Jews lived a nice life in the land of the pharaohs, but soon their growing numbers concerned the pharaoh, who thought they were getting too powerful. So he had them all enslaved. It was Moses who got them out of this bad situation. Known as the Exodus, this was a turning point in Judaism. Moses was also the man to whom God gave the Ten Commandments, according to the Judaeo-Christian story.

***To honor thy mother and father, don't steal or kill...***

The Jewish faith is based largely on five

books; add them up and you have the **Torah**, also known as the Five Books of Moses. This sacred Hebrew text comes on large scrolls made from kosher animal parchment. The Jews believe it contains information that came from God to Moses. It features both a history of the Hebrew people and 613 laws. The Jews consider the Torah so sacred, they don't even touch it. It's read with a pointer. Also made up of five parts, the Torah is just one of three texts that comprise the Hebrew Bible.

***And every week, take a day off and just chill...***

Since Jesus was a Jew, Christians didn't write a brand-new bible for themselves; they just added to the Jewish Bible. So the **Ten Commandments** are the same in both the Jewish and Christian religions. Both faiths believe they were the 10 laws that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai to bring back to the people. They form the basis of law in many countries. And, because Moses was a major prophet to Muslims, they are referred to in Islam as well.

***We don't understand, what's the debate, son...***

The Christians had it rough in the early days of their religion. They were Roman subjects and the Romans worshipped multiple gods. When the city of Rome had a huge fire during Nero's regime, he blamed the fire on the Christians, and they were persecuted. Over time, though, Jesus's disciples began to spread their new religion. Unlike the Jews, who hardly ever converted new followers, Christians actively recruited new members. Christianity became a much larger force under the Roman emperor **Constantine**, who converted

LYRICS continued

They'll do nice to you,  
But father, please forgive them,  
You know this world is filled with sin.  
We believe that he died  
And he came back,  
But others just couldn't  
Understand that.  
Disciples believed that  
The Trinity's the one,  
That's why we pray in the name of  
The father and the son, son,  
And the Holy Ghost, ya dig?

Thou shall not kill.  
Turn the other cheek.  
Avoid extremes,  
Find the middle way.  
Fixed in yoga, do thy work.  
There is no God but Allah, and  
Muhammad is his prophet.

Islam:  
Now, the same angel  
Who showed up to Mary,  
To tell her she was going to give  
Birth to God's kid,  
This angel appeared  
To Muhammad, told him he was  
Going to be the next prophet.  
Now he's Islamic,  
And he founded Islam,  
And he wrote a holy book,  
That's the holy Qur'an,  
Called God Allah;  
That means one true good,  
Laid down five pillars  
And here they are.  
One, there's no god but God,  
I testify.  
Two, every day you've  
Gotta pray five times.

to Christianity and pushed the faith all across his empire.

***We make a quarter of the world's population...***

Christianity grew quickly, mostly within Europe, though it would spread across the globe. A 2005 survey found that Christianity is the most practiced religion on Earth (33% of the world's population), followed by Islam (20%); Hinduism (13%); Chinese folk religions including Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism (6%); and Buddhism (6%). Judaism has remained a small religion (0.23%), but essentially gave birth to both Christianity and Islam.

***Made a book out the story that we live then...***

The **Bible** of Christianity comes in two parts — the **Old Testament** and the **New Testament**. The Old Testament is nearly the same as the Hebrew Bible; it tells the history of the Jews. The New Testament tells the story of Jesus, his life on Earth, his death, and what Christians believe happened thereafter. Some Christians take the Bible's text literally, while others see its stories and lessons as a guide.

***Became big enough to make a state religion...***

By 380 Christianity had become the official state religion of the Roman Empire, and it would serve as the official religion of many European nations up to the present day. Islam is currently the official religion of many states in the Middle East, America, in contrast, has no official religion — the Founding Fathers wanted to be very clear about that. As George Washington and John Adams wrote, "The government of the United

## FLOPAB SPITS FACTS LIKE AN ALMANAC

### The 10 Commandments in Brief

1. I am God, one and only
2. Don't make pictures of anything in heaven
3. Don't use my name in vain
4. Rest one day per week
5. Honor you mom and dad
6. Don't kill
7. Don't cheat on your spouse
8. Don't steal
9. Don't lie
10. Don't desire your neighbor's stuff



States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

### *Jesus was a Jew, he started something new...*

There is little doubt that Jesus was a real, historical figure. He was a Jew who was angered by the hypocrisy he saw around him. He was upset that people followed the laws of the Torah without spiritually connecting with God, and he didn't think they did enough to help those who were sick and poor. In his lifetime, he attracted quite a following. These people weren't called Christians; they were just Jews who liked what Jesus had to say.

### *Said "Do nice to others, they'll do nice to you"...*

One of Jesus's most famous speeches is called the **Sermon on the Mount**. In this amazing sermon, Jesus dropped his "**golden rule**" ("Do unto others what you would have them do to you"); told people to "turn the other cheek"; noted that the meek will inherit the Earth; and instructed people not to judge "lest you be judged" as well. Many people say this sermon contained the founding principles of Christianity.

### *But father, please forgive them, you know this world is full of sin...*

Eventually, Jesus attracted a large group of followers who called him a **messiah**, a savior or liberator of the Jewish people. This caught the attention of both the local priests and the Roman authorities, who thought he might start an open rebellion. So they tried him in court as an enemy of the state. Jesus was found guilty and crucified, the typical way that Romans

## RELIGIONS

LYRICS continued

Three, if people don't have money,  
Give them some  
Four, better fast during Ramadan  
Five, if your mommy and your  
Daddy let ya,  
Make the holy pilgrimage  
Over to Mecca  
After Muhammad died,  
Two groups started to fight,  
That's the Sunnis and the Shiite,  
Alright?

### *Hinduism:*

They say,  
I'm the body of philosophies,  
Barely understood,  
But I crossed the seas.  
India, 1500 BC,  
Other thoughts came together  
With me  
Reincarnation,  
That's when you come back,  
Depending on your karma,  
How you interact.  
So stay calm and do your yoga,  
I'll bring you wisdom; I'm Hinduism.

### *Buddhism:*

Buddha, my name,  
The awakened one,  
Embrace the pain,  
It all became one.  
Follow me,  
I bring thought elevation,  
Then bring you closer  
Through meditation.  
And I'm life,  
So with words I'll trade you,  
I'm so popular, all through Asia,  
India, China, then Malaysia,  
I'll amaze you, like Ali and Frazier.

put people to death.

### *We believe that he died and he came back...*

According to the Christian Bible, three days after he died, Jesus was resurrected, or brought back to life. In the following days, he appeared to various people and, apparently, told the **apostles** (his close followers and students) to spread his teachings throughout the world (up to that point, Jesus had directed his teachings to other Jews). Jesus also promised to come to Earth again to resurrect the dead and judge everyone.

Christians believe that Jesus died for all humanity's sins. To most Christians, the way to heaven is to accept that Jesus made this powerful sacrifice.

### *Disciples believe the Trinity's one...*

Jesus himself didn't speak directly about the **Trinity**; instead it was created during a pow-wow between top Catholic officials hundreds of years after his death. These priests got together at **Nicaea** to discuss some important questions: Is Jesus a god? Was he human? If he is part-god, does that make Christianity a polytheistic faith? The Church elders decided to compromise: Jesus is 100% god and 100% human. Jesus (the son), God (the father), and something called the Holy Spirit are all God, but God is only one. This is the Trinity. During the Inquisition, famous people who disagreed with this theory were tortured.

### *This angel appeared to Muhammad, told him he was going to be the next prophet...*

Another powerful prophet, **Muhammad**, is the man who begot

the Muslim faith. He was born in **Mecca** in 570 AD. According to Islam, the angel Gabriel appeared to him when he was 40, bringing the message of God. For the next 23 years, the angel visited Muhammad on many occasions, each time giving him new messages from God. These were written down into the **Qur'an**. Like Jesus, Muhammad's role was to teach the people, and demonstrate the correct way to behave.

#### **Now he's Islamic, and he founded Islam...**

The **Islamic faith**, the religion of Muslims, dates back to the time just after Muhammad's death, around 650 AD. Muslims believe that Moses and Jesus were prophets, but that Muhammad was the last prophet. Their bible, the Qur'an, includes many of the same stories as the Old Testament, which is part of the Jewish and Christian faiths. So there are more similarities than not between the three religions.

The Islamic faith followed the prophet Muhammad very closely. Through him, Allah gave the Muslims the Five Pillars, and told them not to eat pork or drink alcohol.

#### **Called God Allah; that means one true god...**

**Allah** is the Arabic word for God, literally meaning "the one god." Some Westerners believe that the Muslim god is named Allah (like the Greek's most important god was named Zeus), as opposed to the Christian god, whose name, it seems, is just "God." But this is wrong. Arabic Christians and Jews call their god "Allah" as well. And since Islam is a continuation of the faith started by Abraham (just like

Judaism and Christianity), it's clear that Allah and God are the same. This makes it even more heartbreaking to see members of the various religions kill each other over religious differences.

#### **Laid down five pillars and here they are...**

The **Five Pillars of Islam** are somewhat similar to the Ten Commandments – they are supposed to be laws straight from the mouth of God, telling you how you should behave. In fact, the first of the Five Pillars is the same as the first of the Ten Commandments: Allah wants you to have no other god but Allah. In other words, believe only in me. The other four instruct Muslims to pray to God five times a day, facing toward the holy land of Mecca; to make a pilgrimage to Mecca someday; to be charitable toward the poor; and to fast during Ramadan, the holy month.

#### **Four, better fast during Ramadan...**

**Ramadan** happens during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It often occurs in September but is dependent upon the cycles of the moon. During this sacred time, Muslims fast from sunrise to sundown. They eat a very small meal before dawn breaks and another small meal after dark. They devote extra time on their prayers and with their family, and practice a sort of ritual cleansing that includes things like: not gossiping, not touching things that belong to others, not saying or listening to bad words, and not going to bad places.

#### **Make the holy pilgrimage over to Mecca...**

**Mecca** is a city in Saudi Arabia. More important to Muslims, it's the birthplace

of the prophet Muhammad. Inside the Great Mosque at Mecca is the Kaaba, a rectangular building that is the most holy place for Muslims. They believe the prophet Abraham built it, and it's what they face toward during their daily ritual prayers. Even before Muhammad, it was considered an important, sacred city. The second holiest city after Mecca is Medina, the place where Muhammad was buried.

A visit to the holy city of Mecca is something every Muslim is supposed to do at some point during their lives. This religious journey is called a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are common to many religions but are especially important to Islam.

#### **That's the Sunnis and the Shiites, alright...**

After Muhammad died, the Islamic faith split into two branches — Sunni and Shiite (or Shi'ah). The **Sunnis** believe that the first four caliphs, or heirs to Muhammad, were the rightful successors to the prophet. Their descendants ruled the Arab world to after World War I. The **Shiites** think that only one of those caliphs, Ali, was legitimate, and that only his sons, or heirs, should rule. Those sons disappeared in 931, so the Shiites believe that for a long time there was no one who had the divine right to lead them. The two groups often fight to this day.

#### **They say, I'm the body of philosophies...**

**Hinduism** is a truly unique religion in that it had no founder. It just sort of developed, along with the culture and religious traditions of India. Unlike other religions it doesn't have a single dogma – a system of beliefs

– but many. It has numerous subsets, and people who practice Hinduism can have very different ideas or interpretations from each other.

#### **Barely understood, but I crossed the seas...**

Because Hinduism is so diverse, some of its followers believe in multiple gods; others believe in only one; some believe in none. Nearly all believe that the soul is eternal, and that a life force, **Brahma**, exists throughout everything.

#### **India, 1500 BC...**

Hinduism is one of the oldest of the still-practiced religions of the world. It came to India with the Aryans (c. 1500 BC) and merged and morphed with the other religions of the time.

#### **Reincarnation, that's when you come back...**

One of the traditions that developed in Hinduism is **reincarnation** — the idea that our souls migrate to a new body upon death. According to Hinduism, what we come back as depends on our **karma**, the good or bad actions we commit in our lifetime.

#### **So stay calm and do your yoga...**

Hinduism also stresses **meditation**. To meditate is to get in touch with **Brahma**, the universal life force, by relaxing and focusing only on your breath. Meditation is related to yoga, a system of stretching and body movements that have been practiced in some form for thousands of years.

#### **Buddha, my name...**

Imagine walking away from everything you ever had into an uncertain future – and you're a rich and privileged person. That's what **Siddhartha**



## Glossary

**Gautama** did in about 528 BC. In India, he left his cushy role as prince to wander the countryside looking for life's answers. It worked out well for him — if you believe the stories of Buddhism. Unhappy with the Hindu religion, Siddhartha traveled around and meditated for quite some time, trying to understand why pain exists. Then he found what he was looking for — enlightenment. From then on he was known as the **Buddha**, or "enlightened one."

### *Follow me, I bring thought elevation...*

Buddhism spread all across India. People liked it as an alternative to Hinduism. It was a simple, peaceful, loving faith, and when people heard about its tenets in other parts of Asia, they took to them as well. Soon Buddhism would be one of the largest religions in the world, spreading throughout India and China, two of the planet's most populous places. People in India liked that Buddhism broke with the caste system, and that it called for an end to human suffering.

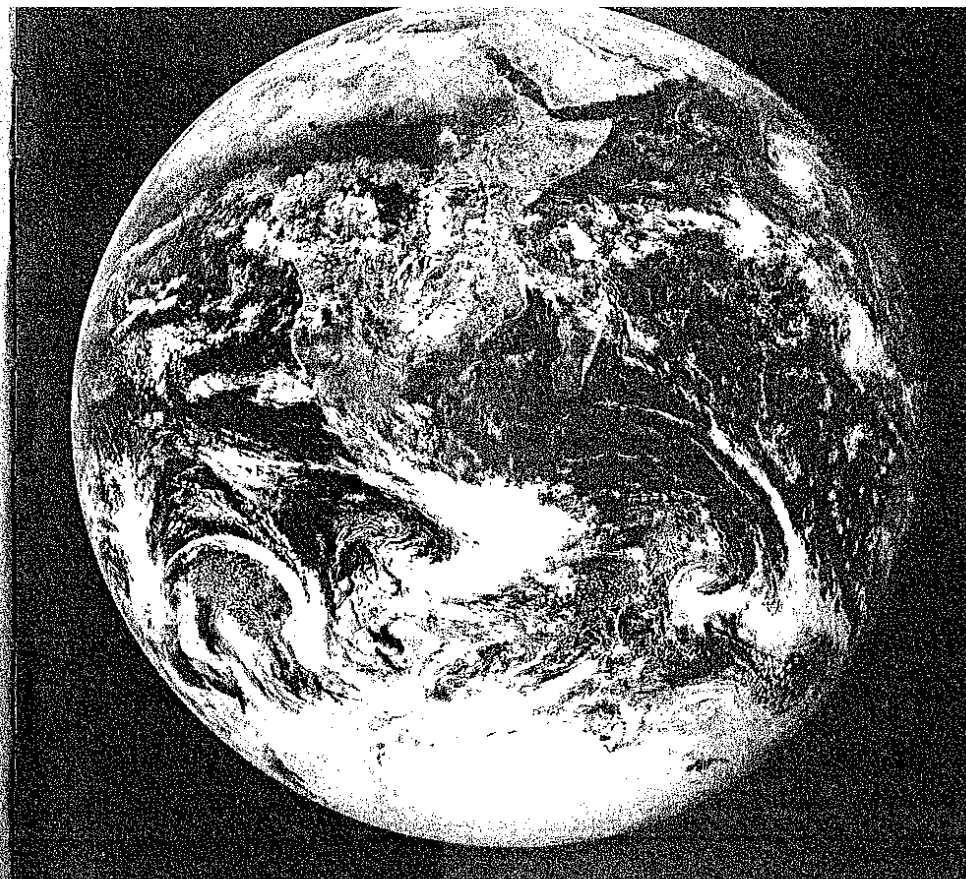
### **What are the other major world religions?**

Other religions and philosophies thrive in Asia. Confucianism is popular in China, while Shinto was once the state religion of Japan.

At roughly the same time the Buddha was wandering around India, **Confucius** (551-479 BC) was teaching in China. Some people confuse his philosophies with religion, but they were more ways of thinking and behaving than a spiritual set of beliefs. Born into poverty, Confucius somehow educated himself to the fullest to become the most important thinker in Chinese history. His ideas about

virtue, family, and society became the foundation for the moral code of China. He thought that children should respect their parents, citizens should obey their government and people should adhere to high standards of behavior if they expect others to.

Buddhism is often mixed with **Shinto** in Japan; in fact, most people there practice both. Shinto is another ancient religion, dating back to about 500 BC. It's unusual, like Hinduism, because it has no real founder and its church structure or organizing body is not rigid. Shinto is also unlike other major religions in that it doesn't have a written scripture or body of laws that its practitioners are supposed to adhere to. It's based on the idea of **kami**, or the Shinto deities. But they're not gods like the omnipotent gods of other religions; they are more like spirit forces that look after humans and help them. And they're often found in natural objects or creatures and in special people. There are four affirmations in Shinto: honor of tradition and family; love of nature; physical cleanliness; and matsuri, the worship of kami. People who believe in Shinto often incorporate other ideas into their religion, like Taoism, Confucianism, and, as mentioned earlier, Buddhism.



## HISTORY SPEAKS

"All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual toward freedom."

— Albert Einstein

"When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion."

— Abraham Lincoln