

CHRISTIANITY

Historical Origins

Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, also called Jesus Christ by Christians. Christians believe he was the son of God who died to save humanity from sin. He was a Jew who lived in the first century near Jerusalem, which was then part of the Roman Empire. Roman rulers put him to death fearing he might lead a revolt. The life of Jesus is recorded in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, which also contains stories of his followers and letters outlining Christian beliefs.



Detail of Jesus in Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*

Central Beliefs

Most Christians believe there is only one God, who exists in three forms: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The New Testament teaches that after Jesus was executed, he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Christians believe they gain salvation by believing in Jesus and following his teachings. Christians gather at places of worship called churches. Their religious leaders are called either priests or ministers.

Spread of Christianity

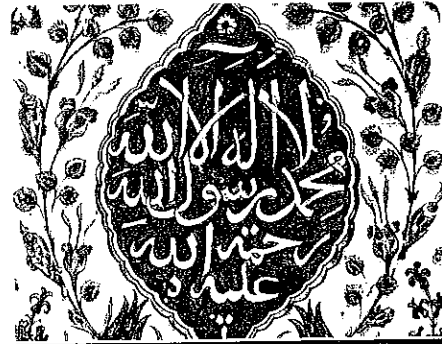
Jesus' followers, called disciples, carried their faith around the Mediterranean world. In the A.D. 300s, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Later, during the period of colonization, Europeans spread Christianity around the globe. It is now the largest and most widespread religion.

Christians wave palm fronds in Managua, Nicaragua, as they celebrate Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week.

ISLAM

Historical Origins

Islam teaches that in the year 610, an Arab trader named Muhammad was visited by the angel Gabriel. The angel told Muhammad that he was God's messenger. Muslims believe that through a series of these visits, Muhammad received the words of the Qur'an, or sacred book. According to Islam, Muhammad was the last prophet that Allah, the Muslim name for God, sent to humanity. Muslims believe he is a direct descendant of Abraham, who is also the founder of Judaism.



A 17th-century Turkish ceramic tile from a mosque

Central Beliefs

Muslims, or followers of Islam, believe there is only one God, the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians. The word *Islam* means surrender, and the goal of Islam is to surrender to the will of Allah. Muslims do this by practicing the Five Pillars of Islam. These are professing faith, praying five times a day, giving to charity, fasting, and making a journey to Mecca to reenact Abraham's dedication. Muslims worship in mosques.

Spread of Islam

In the centuries after Muhammad's death, Muslims spread their religion by conquest. Islamic rulers took control of Southwest Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, and parts of India and Spain. Today Islam continues to spread around the world through migration and conversion. It is the world's second largest religion.

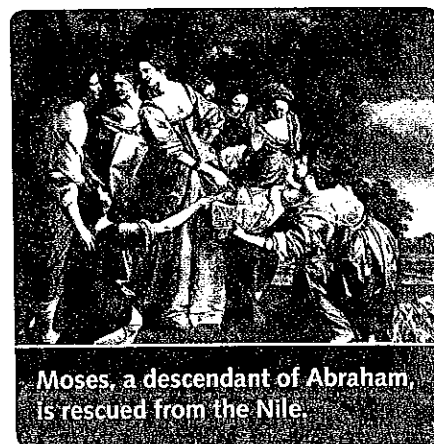
Muslims engage in prayer at a mosque in Delhi, India, during Ramadan, a holy month of fasting.



JUDAISM

Historical Origins

Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people, dates back more than 4,000 years. Its founder was Abraham, who lived in Mesopotamia. According to the Hebrew Bible, God told Abraham to move to Canaan in present-day Israel and Lebanon. God made an agreement with Abraham to bless his descendants. They later became known as Hebrews or Israelites. The Hebrew Bible contains books of law, history, and prophecy. Another important work is the Talmud, a collection of scholarly writings.



Moses, a descendant of Abraham, is rescued from the Nile.

Central Beliefs

Judaism was the first major religion to teach monotheism, or the belief in one god. Jews believe God is the creator of the whole universe and has given them special responsibilities. Jews are to live holy lives by treating others well and pursuing justice. Today, Jews worship in synagogues, and their leaders are called rabbis.

Spread of Judaism

For centuries, Judaism was practiced primarily in what is present-day Israel. Several times in history, empires conquered the region and drove many Jews from the area. The last major event occurred in A.D. 135 when Rome punished Jewish rebels attempting to regain independence. As Jews spread out around the world, Judaism spread with them.

A worshipper holds up a Torah scroll during a Passover blessing at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Israel.