“What About Hindus’ Claim that Hinduism is the Oldest Religion?”

Indian Hindus claim that Hinduism is the oldest religion, but Bible teaches us that God created all this in Jewish form. If so, why do those Vedas and upanishads say they are older than the Bible?

Your question seems to be a complex question with multiple implications and I think we need to be careful to define some of our terms. First of all, even though God did create Adam and did place a special calling, promise and blessing on Abraham and his descendents, the Bible doesn’t say that “God created all this in Jewish form.” When God created Adam, Judaism was not in complete form yet, even though Judaism would descend from Adam and Abraham’s blood. Judaism carefully traces its roots all the way back to the creation of the universe, and the creation of man, connecting Adam to Abraham. This started out as oral tradition which was written down much, much later. So that needs to be taken into account.

Second, even among scholars of the writings of the Vedas, there is some dispute about when the actual writings of the Vedas were written. Some of them might date back to 1500 BC, but some Biblical scholars date the Exodus of the Hebrews around this time. Conservative Biblical scholars (and I) hold that Moses was the primary author of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible.) This would date the Pentateuch as being as old as some of the Vedas. But it is true that Christianity was started with Christ or, technically, after his resurrection. The New Testament was written in the first century. So, in one sense, one might claim that Hinduism is older than “CHRISTianity” because it dates back before Christ. [However, Christianity’s roots are in Judaism, which, again,

traces *its* roots all the way back to the first man and woman.]

But if a Hindu apologist uses the phrase "Hinduism is older than Christianity" kind of as a "gotcha" statement, trying to make something more credible because of its age, their implications include a couple fallacies. First, Hinduism has changed and added books with their Vedas over the years, and it's difficult to say all the Vedas are older than the Torah. Second, just because something is older doesn't make something more true. This is the logical fallacy *"Argumentum ab Annis"* (argument because of age). Just because a religion, a thousand years ago from a primitive group, taught that child sacrifice to the gods was good, this didn't make their belief or their practice true or good. And not just because of the argument that one religion being older makes it better. However, God's existence, his creation, the existence of Adam, and calling of Abraham existed in reality years before Moses documented them in the Torah.

Hope you find this helpful.

Dave Sterrett

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Frasier Worldview Check

I got hoodwinked tonight.

I was watching re-runs of the old NBC television show Frasier—based on the minor character from *Cheers*, Frasier Crane—when I found myself agreeing with Frasier's words describing Judaism. It wasn't until later that night, as I passed those words through my worldview filter, that I came to realize something was wrong about Frasier's comments. Frasier

(at least the writers) was not giving Judaism a fair shake.

In the episode, Frasier's son Freddy is celebrating his thirteenth birthday. Freddy's mother is Jewish, which makes Freddy Jewish as well. The thirteenth birthday is a special one for Jewish children; it is the point in their lives when they become adults. To commemorate their passage into adulthood, a celebration is in order: a *bar–mitzvah*.

Frasier's friend Roz knows that he is not Jewish, and asks him what that's like for him. His response is what hoodwinked me:

> *Roz: Is it weird to have a son brought up in a different religion from yours?*
>
> *Frasier: Not at all, Roz. It's a faith that espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. All values which I cherish.*

What tricked me was not what Frasier said but what he didn't say. Jewish culture definitely espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. I completely agree. Several friends who have helped me through dark times in my life have been Jewish. I feel a special affinity for the Jews as a Christian because I read the Hebrew Bible as a part of my own Christian Bible– essentially the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

But Frasier made no mention of the Hebrew God, who is the central figure of their faith. He is their Creator, Sustainer, Protector, and Savior. The Hebrew Bible is the story of this God and his special, chosen people. How then could Frasier have completely ignored Him?

To be fair, Frasier was merely speaking about the points of Judaism with which he agrees. We all understand that intuitively as soon as we read the dialogue. However, if these aspects of love, compassion, duty, education, and art are the

only elements of Judaism that resonate with him, then I suspect he does not truly identify with the heart of the Hebrew faith because he has not mentioned anything about their God.

Granted, this represents one comment in one episode. However, there may be something else going on beneath Frasier's words. When asked about the apparent conflict between Frasier's religious beliefs and his son's, in some sense he responds by saying that they are not so different. But he only says they are not so different in those five specific aspects: love, compassion, duty, education, and art. If he's saying that's all there is to Judaism, then I would have to disagree.

Philosophers have a fancy name for what Frasier did: *reductionism*. He has reduced Judaism down to smaller constituent parts which, when reassembled, do not recreate the whole. It seems unfair to equate Judaism solely with these five aspects because many other causes, beliefs, or even organizations can be characterized as espousing precisely the same principles, but not be Jewish in the least.

For example, Ancient Greece had a culture that espoused all such principles, yet it had no particular religious affiliation at all. Culturally we could also consider Italy during the Renaissance, or even the Chinese under the Tang dynasty.

Yet, cultures like these that valued love, compassion, duty, education, and art are in other ways very dissimilar to Judaism. Similarities do not equate to identity. That is, just because a religion or culture shares certain attributes does not mean that they are the same in essence. However, *reductionism* falsely makes them seem equivalent just because they share some traits.

So there must be more to Judaism than just these five aspects mentioned by Frasier.

Frasier's religious synopsis may not seem like a very big deal because it is, after all, only one statement. But this one sentence is not what bothers me. I run across people making claims like these all the time in conversation, in magazines, news, practically everywhere. It's sloppy thinking, really. I just want to encourage us not to slip into *reductionism* ourselves—and further, to be even more careful about what we take in, keeping that worldview filter on at all times.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Judaism Viewed from a Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides an overview of Judaism from an orthodox Christian perspective, including basic beliefs and practices and some suggestions for sharing one's faith with a Jewish friend.

Judaism Today

Throughout the last several decades, the eyes of the world have frequently focused on the tiny nation of Israel. What is the significance of this nation and her religion?



The focus of this article is the religion of the Jews. When studying Judaism, however, we must understand that there is a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Many Jews do not embrace Judaism, but consider themselves to be secular, atheistic, or agnostic.

The term *Judaism* is often used to identify the faith of modern

Jews as well as Old Testament Jews. For our purposes, the term is used to refer to the religion of the rabbis established around 200 B.C. and crystallized in A.D. 70. At this time, developments in rabbinic Judaism took place that distinguished it from the Old Testament faith. New institutions arose such as the synagogue (the house of worship and study), the office of rabbi (a leader holding religious authority), and the *yeshivot* (religious academies for training rabbis). One of the greatest changes came with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Sacrifices and the priesthood came to an end, and the rabbis became the authorities on spiritual and legal matters.

Since the eighteenth century, three main branches of Judaism developed: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. Orthodox Judaism upholds the divine inspiration of the Old Testament—giving greater authority to the first five books—and recognizes the Talmud as authoritative for interpreting the Jewish law. This branch continues to observe the traditional Jewish laws as practiced for centuries. An ultra orthodox sect within this branch is the Hasidic movement. This sect adheres strictly to the Law of Moses, and is a separatist group.

Reform Judaism is the liberal wing. It was founded by Abraham Geiger in Germany in the nineteenth century (1810-1874). Geiger was influenced by the Enlightenment, and so viewed reason and science as authoritative. He rejected belief in revelation, messianic hope, and the promise of land. This branch seeks to modernize what are considered outmoded ways of thinking. The primary focus of Reform Judaism is the ethical teachings of the Jewish Law.

Conservative Judaism is considered the intermediate position between Orthodox and Reform. It was founded in the nineteenth century in Germany by Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875). Conservatives seek to practice the Law and the traditions, but cautiously reinterpret the Law and adapt their practices to contemporary culture.

The existence of these and numerous other sects means a wide variety of beliefs within Judaism. In addition, as a result of the Enlightenment and the Holocaust, secularization among the Jews is increasing rapidly. Because of the wide variety of beliefs within Judaism, it is difficult today to define what makes a person Jewish.

Nonetheless, according to the Old Testament, Jews are the descendants of Abraham. It is these people to whom God has made special promises and who will have a prominent role in redeeming the world.

Basic Beliefs of Judaism

Do Christians and followers of Judaism worship the same God? What is Judaism's understanding of Jesus? Let's take a look at some basic Jewish beliefs as compared with Christian ones.

Both religions believe in the Old Testament, the ethical teachings of the Law, and a hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, they differ on some important fundamental doctrines.

Judaism rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and teaches a unified monotheism based on Deuteronomy 6:4.

The main Scripture in Judaism is the Old Testament. Views of divine inspiration vary between the different branches. Orthodox and Conservative schools view the Pentateuch as the most inspired part, the Prophets and Writings less so. Another important book is the Talmud which includes the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah consists of legal rulings, and was compiled around A.D. 200. The Gemara elaborates on the discussions of the Mishnah, and was compiled around A.D. 550. Most Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, consider the Talmud useful for giving instruction for life but not divinely inspired.

Judaism teaches that man is created in the image of God but without original sin. Study of the Torah can overcome our inclination to evil.

A proper relationship with God comes through repentance, prayer, and obedience to the Law. Jews do not feel they need "salvation" but assume a standing with God through their heritage. Conservative and Reform Jews view salvation as the betterment of self and society.

The Orthodox school holds to a bodily resurrection at death. The Conservative school teaches the immortality of the soul. The Reform school generally has no teaching regarding life after death.

Central to Jewish hope is the Messiah. Orthodox Jews anticipate a personal Messiah, while Reform and Conservative Jews view the messianic concept as the ideal of establishing justice by human effort. A key dividing point between Judaism and Christianity, of course, is their views of Jesus. Judaism recognizes Jesus as a moral teacher, but rejects His claims to deity as a creation of the early church. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit eternal life.

From our brief survey, then, it is clear that Judaism and Christianity differ significantly on major doctrines. The two do not worship the same God. They also differ in salvation theology. Judaism is works-oriented and rejects the atoning work of Christ and His divine nature. Christianity proclaims faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit the hope of eternal life.

The Practices of Judaism

Jewish festivals and holidays are an integral part of Judaism. They memorialize key events in the history of the Jewish people and honor their unique heritage. Here are some important Jewish festivals.

The most significant is Passover, the first observance of which is recorded in Exodus 12. Jews continue to commemorate God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. Passover is observed in March or April and lasts a week.

Seven weeks after Passover comes Pentecost, which observes the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The festival of Tabernacles occurs in the fall. This festival commemorates the forty years of wandering in the desert when the Israelites lived in tabernacles or booths. The ceremony includes prayer for rain and the reading of the Torah.

Rosh ha-Shanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year. This joyful festival occurs in September or October and marks the beginning of a ten-day period known as the High Holy Days. Rosh ha-Shanah climaxes on the tenth day which is called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is a solemn day when Jews fast, attend the synagogue, and recite prayers asking God for forgiveness of their sins.

Hannukah is celebrated in November or December and lasts eight days. It honors the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian armies of Antiochus Epiphanes and the rededication of the second Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C. The lighting of the eight-branched menorah is the main feature of this celebration. When Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1948, the menorah became a national symbol.

Purim is a minor holiday celebrated in February or March and commemorates the deliverance of the Jews by God told in the

story of Esther.

Not only are the holidays important, but the celebration of events in the life cycle are as well. Circumcision on the eighth day for boys is one. Another is the religious coming-of-age ceremony of Bar Mitzvah for boys at age 13, and Bat Mitzvah for girls at age 12 or 13. Third is the Jewish wedding. Finally, there is the funeral service and mourning for seven days.

These Jewish practices, especially those surrounding the holidays, not only play a key role in the life of the Jewish people, but are significant to the church as well. Major events in the life of Christ and the church in Acts occurred on these days. Christ died on the Passover, and the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. Also, the symbolisms and rituals enacted at these festivals foreshadow what was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

Witnessing to the Jews

How do we share Christ with our Jewish neighbors? Before preaching the gospel, it would be wise to first build friendships with Jews and learn from them. Second, we should understand the Jewish perception of Christians and Christianity. For a Jewish person to become a Christian means to reject his or her heritage and distinctiveness; in other words, many equate it to becoming a gentile. This is difficult, for many harbor resentment for mistreatment by Christians and gentile nations.

After building trust, encourage them to read their own Scriptures. Many grow up reciting passages of the Old Testament but not *studying* the Old Testament or the messianic prophecies.

There are many messianic passages to which one could refer. One frequently used passage is Isaiah 53 which describes the

suffering servant who takes on the sins of the people. Most Jews have been taught that this is the nation of Israel. However, the context and content of the passage make it clear it is not. A careful study soon reveals that Jesus Christ fits the description of this servant.

Another passage is the prophecy of the seventy sevens in Daniel 9. When properly calculated, the prophecy predicts the Messiah to enter Jerusalem and be crucified in AD 33. Put this date together with Isaiah 53, and who else fits the description but Jesus? Here are two passages that can open the mind of a Jewish friend to begin investigating further the prophecies and the life of Jesus. As you continue to talk, encourage them to read the Gospel of Matthew which was written for the Jews.

There are also many images in the Old Testament and in Jewish festivals that point to Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb is a good example. The lamb was sacrificed and its blood was painted on the doorframe to identify and protect the Israelites from the Angel of Death. In Numbers 9, the Passover lamb was to be without blemish, and none of its bones were to be broken when sacrificed (Numbers 9:12). This is a foreshadowing of Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God who lived a sinless life. His blood was shed and covers the believer delivering us from sin and death. John 19:33 records that the Romans were about to break the legs of the criminals, but finding Christ already dead, they did not break his bones. In every way, Christ meets the requirements for the perfect sacrifice.

These passages and symbols reveal that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Be sure to explain that not only must one acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but that one must put all one’s faith in His atoning work of sacrifice to be brought into a right relationship with God.

Promises for the Chosen

Are the Jews God's chosen people? What is their role in God's plan for the world? To answer these questions, we must first look at the covenants God established with Israel which are the foundation of His redemption plan.

The first is the Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis 12. This pledge includes the promises that Abraham will be a father of a great nation; that his descendants will own the land of Canaan forever; that those who bless Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses it will be cursed; and that the world would be blessed through Israel. Israel was to be a light to the world. Through their special relationship with God, and as they lived in obedience to His law, the nations would take notice of this people and come to learn about their God. However, Israel was not able to live in obedience to God and did not fulfill this call.

The second pledge is the Land Covenant in Deuteronomy 30. In this covenant, the promise of the land of Palestine is reaffirmed to Israel. Added to this is a warning that if the Israelites do not obey God's law, they will be scattered from the land and regathered when they return to the Lord.

The third covenant is the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:11. This promise states that a descendant of David would establish an eternal rule of peace and righteousness. This forms the basis of Israel's hope in a future messiah who will deliver Israel from the rule of the gentiles and bring the Abrahamic Covenant to completion.

Finally, there is the New Covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34: "The time is coming," declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Israel was unable to obey God's law because they depended on their strength to live the law. What was needed was a new heart and empowerment to live the law. This pledge provides this, and guarantees that there will be a time when Israel as a nation will turn to her Messiah.

Several aspects of these covenants have been fulfilled. Abraham's descendants have become a nation. Christ was a descendant of David and fulfilled the old law making it possible for all men to know God. However, other promises are yet to be fulfilled. Israel doesn't yet possess the promised land in peace, and a Davidic Kingdom hasn't been established in Jerusalem.

Despite Israel's failure and rejection of their Messiah, however, God is faithful, and He will fulfill His promises at the appointed time.

Additional Resources

Anderson, Norman. *The World's Religions.* Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991.

Boa, Kenneth. *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult.* Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1990.

Halverson, Richard. *The Compact Guide to World Religions.* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996.

Noss, John. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1968.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *World Religions*. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983

Pentecost, Dwight. *Thy Kingdom Come*. Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1990.

Rosen, Ruth. *Jesus for the Jews*. San Francisco: Messianic Jewish Perspective, 1987.

Smith, Jonathan. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion.* San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1995.

Werblowsky, Zwi and Wigoder, Geoffrey. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

© 2005 Probe Ministries, updated 4/2026

"What About the Person Who Never Heard of Jesus?"

I have a question. I have a Jewish person asking me "What about the guy who lives in a far off place and has never heard the name of Jesus proclaimed—is he going to hell?" My immediate answer is that God finds a way to speak to your heart. Now, the Jews of the times of Abraham and Moses who believed in one God—after the cross I would say that John 3:16 holds true—but to a Jewish person who never looked at The New Testament—is there a sensitive yet clear and concise way to answer this?

I agree with you about God finding a way to speak to your heart.

We are now hearing many stories of people coming to faith in Christ as the result of a dream or vision where He appears to them, inviting them to trust in Him. This is particularly happening in the Muslim world. Many people instantly know it's the Lord Jesus when He appears to them, but some do not. In

some dreams and visions, He tells them who He is, and in others He does not—He just loves them and calls them to come to Him. After the dream/vision, the Lord provides someone to identify Him as they continue to seek Him. (We see something similar in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10.)

So, from what I understand, people are putting their trust in Christ, but some don't know anything more about Him than that He is God, He loves them and He invites them to trust in Him. Two recurrent invitations continue to appear in the dreams and visions we are hearing about: 1) "I am the way, the truth and the life," and 2) "You belong to Me." As people are then able to get a copy of the Bible or talk to a Christian, their knowledge of Christ, the Cross, and the Christian life grows, as well as their faith and their understanding of who Jesus is and what He did.

For years, I have heard that God's only plan for evangelism is for us to share the gospel. But these stories show that sometimes, Jesus goes directly to a person. And, in Revelation 14:6, there is an angel who takes the gospel to men.

So what that means is that if a person has never heard of Jesus through the preaching of the gospel, that is no obstacle for God. He can, and testimony shows that He does, appear directly to—and call a person to—have faith in Him. We still need to diligently pursue the Great Commission and take the gospel to all nations, since evangelism through the changed lives of Christ-followers is still God's main plan. But God's hands are not tied by our inability (or laziness, or selfishness, or disobedience) to get the gospel to everyone He has chosen for eternal life.

Concerning your specific question about a Jewish person who never looked at the New Testament, it's possible he might be in the same category as people who never heard of Jesus. . . however, in today's Jewish culture, part of what defines a Jew is "not believing in Jesus." It's not a valid definition, and

it’s not true, but it’s hard to imagine anyone growing up in a Jewish culture—particularly in North or South America—who wasn’t aware of the Jesus of Christianity in the surrounding culture.

So, I think the bottom line is that God would judge a Jewish person by the same standard as anyone else: “What did you do with the light you received?”

Your Jewish friend asks an important question, and it gives you the opportunity to talk about the character of God. I am grateful that our God is not only just, but loving, and I believe that He will allow the blood of Jesus to cover those who had no chance to reject Him, such as babies who die before or after birth, or the mentally impaired.

God promises that if we seek Him, we will find Him (Deut. 4:29). And since dead people cannot seek God and cannot choose life, that means that it’s all God’s grace allowing us to recognize our need for Him and seek Him in the first place! I would think that this same heart that longs for us to turn to Him, and gives us grace to turn to Him and seek Him, would also respond in love to the cry of a heart that says, “God, if you are there, here I am! I don’t know you, but I want to! Reveal Yourself to me!”

I hope this makes sense.

Sue Bohlin

See answers by
Kerby Anderson
and **GotQuestions.org**

“Why Don’t Jews Believe in Jesus as Messiah?”

Do Jews still observe Old Testament practices like burnt offerings? If Jews believe in a coming savior, why does Christ not meet all of their criteria?

I am not aware of any Jews who currently practice the Old Testament sacrificial rituals. This is at least partly due to the fact that the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. and has never been rebuilt to this day. If, at some point in the future, the temple IS rebuilt, then we may indeed see some of the orthodox Jews begin practicing the various Old Testament sacrificial rituals once again. But I seriously doubt we would see anything of this kind prior to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

Most Jews no longer believe in a coming Messiah. Of the three main branches within Judaism, only orthodox Jews tend to hold to this hope and they do not conceive of Messiah as divine; he is merely a human being. As for why Jesus does not meet their criteria, there could be many possible reasons offered. However, much of it is probably due both to (what I would consider) a misunderstanding of the Old Testament conception of Messiah, as well as simply to ignorance and misinformation about Jesus’ credentials as the promised Messiah. As Louis Lapides, a Messianic Jew and Christian pastor, points out in Lee Strobel’s book *The Case for Christ*, most Jews have never bothered to actually investigate the evidence supporting Jesus’ claims to be Messiah.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

A Short Look at Six World Religions – Understand the Beliefs of Non-Christians

An overview of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses from a conservative Christian perspective.

Islam

There are three monotheistic religions in the world, religions that teach that there is only one God: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The term "Islam" means "submission" to the will of God, and the person who submits is called a "Muslim."

The founder of Islam is Muhammad, who was born in 570 A.D. At age 40 he claimed to begin receiving revelations from a spirit being he believed was the angel Gabriel. These later were recorded and became the Qur'an, Islam's holy book.

There are Six Articles of Faith that all Muslims hold to. The first is that "there is no God but Allah." The second Article of Faith is belief in a hierarchy of angels, of which the archangel Gabriel is the highest. Each Muslim is assigned two angels, one to record his good deeds and the other to record the bad deeds. At the bottom of the angelic hierarchy are the jinn, from which we get the word "genie." They are a Muslim version of demons.

The third Article of Faith is belief in 104 holy books, with the Koran as the final revelation. The fourth is belief in the prophets. According to the Qur'an, God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message that there is only one God. 124,000 prophets have been sent, most of them unknown but some of them biblical characters, including Jesus. Muhammed, though, is the prophet for all times, the "Seal of the Prophets."

The fifth Article of Faith is belief in predestination. All things, both good and evil, are the direct result of the will of Allah. Islam is a very fatalistic religion.

The sixth Article of Faith is the day of judgment. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad will be rewarded with Paradise; those whose bad deeds outweigh their good will be judged to hell. Islam is a religion of human works. The Bible tells us, though, that we can never earn God's acceptance on the basis of our deeds.

There are Five Pillars of Islam, obligations every Muslim must keep. The first is reciting the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger." The second is prayer: 17 cycles of prayer, spread out over five times of prayer each day. They must wash in a prescribed manner before they kneel down and face toward Mecca.

The third pillar is almsgiving, 2.5% of one's income for the poor. The fourth pillar is fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan. Muslims must forego food, water and sex during daylight hours. The fifth pillar is making the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.

Sometimes you will hear people say that Allah is another name for the God of the Bible. Is it the same? "Allah" is the Arabic name for God, and Arab Christians use the name Allah to describe the God of the Bible. Mohammed taught that there is one true God who is the same God that Jews and Christians

("the People of the Book") worship. He began Islam on the foundation of the God of the Bible. We can say that in principle, we worship the same God. Islam began on the foundation of belief in the one true God to combat the pagan polytheism of the area. However, Mohammed departed from this foundation, and we differ in our understanding of how God has fully revealed Himself. In the Qur'an, Allah is a distant spiritual being, but Yahweh is a Father to His children. Allah does not love wrongdoers, but God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Allah has predetermined everything about life; the God of the Bible invites us to share our hearts with Him.

Hinduism

Hinduism may seem like an alien religion of people on the other side of the world, but it has infiltrated our culture in all sorts of ways. You're probably familiar with most of the basic Hindu concepts without even realizing it. Have you seen the *Star Wars* movies? They are filled with Hindu ideas. Ever watch *Dharma and Greg* on TV? "Dharma" is an important Hindu term for moral duty. 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation, which is a Hindu concept. Transcendental Meditation is thinly disguised Hinduism. George Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" invokes a Hindu chant. New Age philosophy is Hinduism wrapped in Western garb.

Hinduism is tremendously diverse. It encompasses those who believe in one reality, Brahman, as well as those who believe in many gods—as many as 330 million! Some Hindus believe the universe is real; most believe it is illusion, or *maya.* (This world view isn't consistent with reality. You won't find Hindus meditating on railroad tracks, for instance.) Some believe Brahman and the universe are one; others see them as two distinct realities.

Despite the diversity within Hinduism, there are five major beliefs of this religion. The first is that ultimate reality,

called Brahman, is an impersonal oneness. In *The Empire Strikes Back,* Yoda tells Luke that everything—the tree, the rock, etc.—is all part of "The Force." This is monism: the belief that all is one. Nothing is distinct and separate from anything else.

Another Hindu belief is that just as the air in an open jar is identical to the air around the jar, we extend from and are one with Brahman. All is one, all is god—and that means that we are god. In her book and movie "Out on a Limb," Shirley MacLaine relates a time when she stood on a beach, embracing this concept and declaring, "I am god! I am god!" It's a very Hindu concept.

Humanity's primary problem, according to Hinduism, is that we have forgotten we are divine. The consequence is that we are subject to the Law of Karma, another important Hindu belief. This is the moral equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect. You always reap what you sow. There is no grace, there is no forgiveness, there is never any escape from consequences. It's a very heavy burden to carry. Not only that, but Hinduism says that the consequences of our choices, both bad karma and good karma, follow us from lifetime to lifetime. This is another Hindu concept: samsara, the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth, also known as reincarnation. A person's karma determines the kind of body—whether human, animal, or insect—into which he or she is incarnated in the next lifetime.

The final major Hindu concept is liberation from the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. One can only get off the reincarnation merry-go-round by realizing that the idea of the individual self is an illusion, and only the oneness of Brahman is real. There is no heaven, though—only losing one's identity in the universal oneness.

Praise God that through the Lord Jesus, Christianity offers hope, forgiveness, grace, and a personal relationship with a

personal God in heaven. Jesus means there's a point to life.

Buddhism

Buddhism does not believe in a personal God. It does not have worship, prayer, or praise of a divine being. It offers no redemption, no forgiveness, no hope of heaven, and no final judgment. Buddhism is more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

In his essay "De Futilitate," C.S. Lewis called Buddhism "a heresy of Hinduism." Buddhism was founded by a Hindu, Siddhartha Gautama, during the sixth century B.C. After being profoundly impacted by seeing four kinds of suffering in one day, Siddhartha committed himself to finding the source of suffering and how to eliminate it. One day he sat down under a fig tree and vowed not to rise again until he had attained enlightenment. After some time, he did so and became the Buddha, which means "enlightened one." He started teaching the "The Four Noble Truths," the most basic of Buddhist teachings.

The First Noble Truth is that life consists of suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that we suffer because we desire those things that are impermanent. This is absolutely central to Buddhism: the belief that desire is the cause of all suffering.

The Third Noble Truth is that the way to liberate oneself from suffering is by eliminating all desire. (Unfortunately, it's a self-defeating premise: if you set a goal to eliminate desire, then you desire to eliminate desire.) The Fourth Noble Truth is that desire can be eliminated by following the Eight-Fold path.

In the Eight-Fold Path, the first two steps are foundational to all the others. Step one is Right Understanding, where one sees the universe as impermanent and illusory and believes that the individual does not actually exist. If you ever hear

someone say, “The world is an illusion, and so am I. I don’t really exist,” they’re probably exploring Buddhism. (You might want to pinch them and see what they do.) Right Thought means renouncing all attachment to the desires and thoughts of oneself, even as he recognizes that the self doesn’t exist.

Other parts of the Eight-Fold path are Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Meditation. Ethical conduct is very important in Buddhism. There are commands to refrain from the taking of any life (that includes ants and roaches in your house), stealing, immorality, lying, and drinking.

The Eight-Fold Path is a set of steps that describe not only a good life but one which will move the follower toward Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism. Nirvana is not heaven; it is a state of extinction, where one’s essence—which does not actually exist in the first place—is extinguished like a candle flame, marking the end of desire and thus the end of suffering.

One of the important concepts in Buddhism is samsara, a cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It differs from the Hindu concept of reincarnation in that Buddhism teaches there is no self to continue from one life to the next. Another important concept is karma, the belief that you reap what you sow, and your karma follows you through the cycles of samsara. Note the inherent inconsistency here: there is no self to continue from one life to the next, but one’s karma does?!

Buddhism says there are many paths to the top of the mountain, so there are many ways to God. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Judaism

Both Christianity and Judaism have their roots in Old Testament faith. But Christianity is really a sister, rather

than a daughter, to Judaism, which is the religion developed by rabbis from 200 B.C. on.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., that spelled the end of sacrifices and the priesthood. Instead of being guided by prophets, priests and kings, the Jewish people turned to rabbis as their authorities on matters of laws and practice.

There was basically one kind of Judaism until the eighteenth century when the Age of Enlightenment swept through Europe. That's when the three major branches of Judaism arose.

That one basic kind of Judaism is what is now called "Orthodox Judaism." It has a strong emphasis on tradition and strict observance of the Law of Moses.

Reform Judaism began in Germany at the time of the Enlightenment. Reform Judaism is the humanistic branch. In fact, there are many Reform Jews who don't believe in God at all. For them, Judaism is a way of life and culture with a connection to one's ancestors that is about legacy, not faith.

The middle-ground branch, seeking to find moderate ground between the two extremes of the Orthodox and Reform branches, is Conservative Judaism.

If there is any religious principle that Judaism explicitly affirms and teaches, it is the unity of God. You may have heard of the *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6:4¾"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This one all-important principle is the reason so many Jewish people have a hard time understanding Christianity, which they see as a religion of three gods, not one God in three Persons.

The Old Testament is the Scripture of Judaism. Many Jews, though, do not consider the Old Testament to be the Word of God or inspired, although they do give it respect as a part of Jewish tradition and history.

There are some lifestyle practices that set people apart as distinctively Jewish. Traditional Jews, usually Orthodox but including some from other branches, observe the Sabbath. This means abstaining from work, driving, and lighting a fire from Friday night to Saturday night. Orthodox Jews also keep kosher, which means keeping the Old Testament dietary laws. The most well known is the prohibition against mixing meat and milk at the same meal, although many people are also aware that most Jewish people do not eat pork or shellfish.

It is difficult for Jewish people to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah because it is not considered a Jewish thing to do. In fact, they see "Jewish Christian" as an oxymoron. For many, being Jewish equals "Not Christian." But there's another big reason it is so hard for Jewish people to come to faith in Christ. They don't see a need for "salvation," because there is nothing to be saved from. If there is a God, then Jewish people already have a special relationship with Him as His chosen people. Jesus is superfluous for Jews.

If you know someone who is Jewish, pray that God will cause the scales to fall from the eyes of their heart and they will see the truth: that there's nothing more Jewish or more godly than submitting in faith to one who was, and is, the very Son of God, and who proved His love for them by dying in their place on the cross.

Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses

Have you ever answered your door to find a couple of nicely-dressed people asking to talk to you about spiritual things? Chances are they were either Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Since both groups send many missionaries not only into American homes but to foreign countries, it makes sense to cover them in a discussion of world religions.

Many people think of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses as Christians in slightly different denominations, but this is

not the case. To put it bluntly, both religions teach another gospel and another Jesus. They are cults, not Christian denominations.

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith, a teenage boy in New York. He claimed that he was visited by first God the Father and the Son, and then by the angel Moroni, who gave him golden plates, which he translated into the Book of Mormon. He said that Christianity had been corrupted since the death of the last apostle, and God appointed him to restore the truth. But Joseph Smith provided nine different versions of these events, which set the tone for the rest of his teachings.

Deuteronomy 18:22 gives God's standards for His prophets: 100% accuracy. Joseph Smith wrote a lot of prophecies, many of which never came true. He was a false prophet, and the religion he founded is not from God.

Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ and salvation by grace. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses was founded by Charles Taze Russell, another false prophet. His Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has produced a prodigious amount of literature. It has prophesied the return of Christ in 1914, 1925, and 1975. Again, by God's standards, the representatives of the Watchtower Society are false prophets.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the basics of the Christian faith. They deny the Trinity. They believe there is one singular God, Jehovah. Jesus is actually the created being Michael the Archangel, and who became flesh at the incarnation. The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. Like Mormons, they deny the existence of hell and eternal

punishment.

Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace. And they teach that salvation is only found in their organizations.

What do you do if they come to your door? First, don't do anything without sending up a prayer of dependence on God. If you are not well-grounded in your own beliefs, unless you know not only what you believe but why it's true, then you should probably politely refuse to talk to them, and work on your own understanding of your faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are very successful at drawing in church-goers who can't recognize false teaching because they don't know what's true.

If you do know the Bible and what you believe, then prayerfully and humbly answer their questions and comments by showing them what the Bible says. And pray that God's Spirit will show them the truth. He is grieved that people for whom Jesus died are so deceived.

©2000 Probe Ministries.