

Module: Cultural Geography
Topic Content: Cultural Regions Based on Religion

Cultural Regions Based on Religion



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Religion as a Unifying Force



Close bonds develop among people who practice the same religion. These shared religious beliefs help form the basis for a common cultural identity, which can unify people across national borders. The major world religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

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Hinduism

Hinduism	
Traditions date back at least 3,000-4,000 years	
An ethnic religion rooted in India	
Most practitioners believe in dharma (duty)	
Reincarnation is another common belief	

The traditions of the Hindu religion date back at least three to four thousand years, but the word Hinduism was first used in the sixth century B.C. (B.C.E.) to describe the people living on the Indian subcontinent. As such, Hinduism is an ethnic religion rooted in India, with roughly 97% of its followers residing there.

Most practitioners believe in concepts such as dharma, which refers to personal duty or the right way to live. Reincarnation is another common belief, which refers to the rebirth of the soul into another form after death. A Hindu place of worship is called a temple, or a mandir.

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Buddhism



Based on the teachings of Siddhartha Guatama

Buddha was born during the fifth century in Nepal

Buddha's teaching are revered and meditated on

Practiced all over the world with most followers in Asia

Buddhism was founded based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha, which means "enlightened one." Buddha was born during the fifth century B.C. (B.C.E.) in present day Nepal. Buddha is not typically worshipped as a god, rather it is his teachings that are revered and meditated on.

Buddhism is currently practiced all over the world, but the majority of its followers are concentrated in Asia. A wat is a Buddhist religious complex that typically contains a monastery and a shrine, also known as a stupa or pagoda.

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Judaism



Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic faith, and is practiced by only fourteen million people worldwide. Almost one-third of the Jewish population lives in the United States. Judaism is rooted in the Middle East, in present day Israel and other areas of the former Fertile Crescent.

The key beliefs and written records of Judaism are found in the Torah, which is part of the Hebrew Bible. Judaism is an ethnic religion based upon the descendants of Abraham and the ancient Hebrews who emigrated from Egypt. A Jewish house of worship is called a synagogue, or in certain sects, a temple.

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Christianity



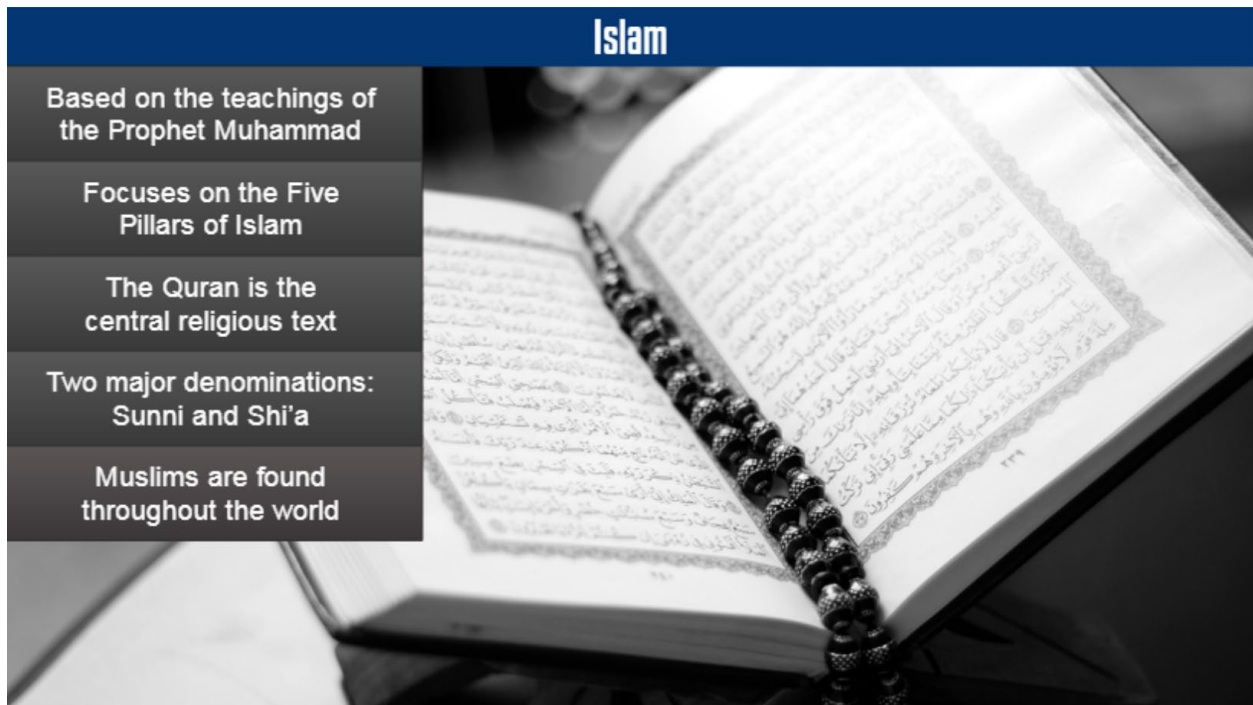
Christianity is a monotheistic religion that began as a branch of Judaism. The two religions split in the first century A.D. (C.E.) due to a number of events, including Jesus of Nazareth. Members of the Christian faith believe that Jesus is the son of god, and study the teachings of Jesus and his followers, as described in the New Testament of the Bible.

Over time, Christianity has split into various denominations that interpret the Bible differently, including the three major branches of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. Christianity is the most widely practiced religion in the world. A Christian place of worship is called a church.

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Islam



Islam is the youngest of the five major world religions. Islam is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and focuses on the Five Pillars of Islam, which include the profession of faith, prayer, fasting, charity for the poor, and pilgrimage to the city of Mecca.

The Quran (Koran) is the central religious text of the Islamic faith, and there are two major denominations: Sunni and Shi'a. Muslims can be found throughout the world, but are particularly concentrated in North and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, Western Asia, and Indonesia. An Islamic place of worship is called a mosque.

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Religion as a Divisive Force



Religious beliefs can also cause deep divisions among groups of people who might otherwise share many cultural characteristics. These divisions often end in hostility and violence. Click each of the points below to learn more about religious conflicts around the world.

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Northern Ireland: Catholics and Protestants

Northern Ireland: Catholics and Protestants

Conflict began in the sixteenth century	 A map of the British Isles and surrounding regions. Northern Ireland is highlighted in red and labeled 'Northern Ireland'. The Republic of Ireland is highlighted in dark red and labeled 'Republic of Ireland'. The United Kingdom (England, Scotland, and Wales) is highlighted in red and labeled 'United Kingdom'. The rest of Europe and the Atlantic Ocean are shown in light blue and yellow.
Protestant King of England persecuted Irish Catholics	
Protestant settlers took control of land in the north	
Caused many deaths and a revolution that split Ireland	
Protestant Unionists want to remain with the UK	
Catholic Nationalists want Ireland to reunite	

The conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland began centuries ago. During the sixteenth century, King Henry VIII decreed that all of England's territories convert to Protestantism. Irish Catholics refused, which resulted in harsh laws and persecution. Protestant settlers from England and Scotland were sent to occupy Ireland, taking control of much of the land in the north.

The conflict has continued for hundreds of years, resulting in countless deaths and a revolution that split Ireland in two. In modern times, this conflict is mainly focused on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Protestant Unionists want Northern Ireland to remain as part of the United Kingdom, while Catholic Nationalists want Northern Ireland to leave the UK and reunite with the Republic of Ireland.

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Jerusalem: Jews, Christians, and Muslims

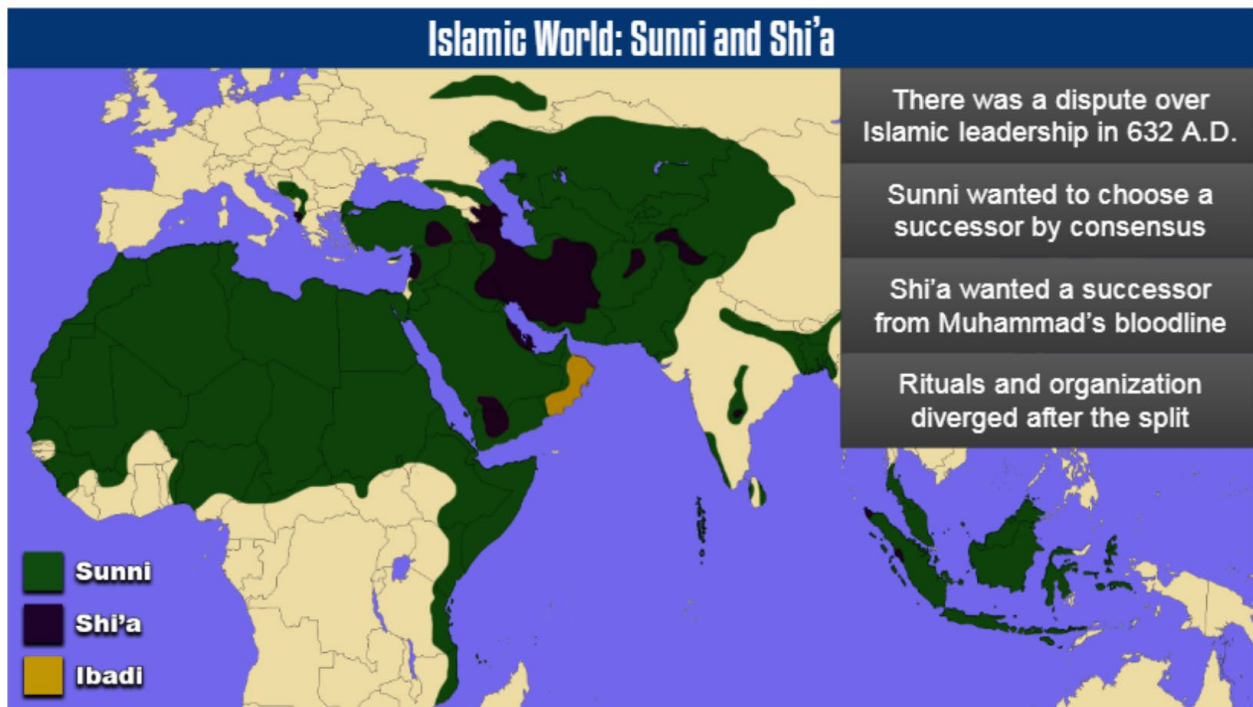


Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all originated in roughly the same geographic area. The cultural similarities among these religions have caused all three to claim the historical city of Jerusalem as a religious heritage site.

Jews pray at the Western Wall, considered sacred because it is the remains of the wall of the Temple Mount, where they believe the ancient temple of King Solomon was erected. Christians consider Jerusalem sacred because they believe it is where Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Muslims pray at the shrine of the Dome of the Rock, which is where they believe Muhammad ascended to heaven. The deep religious significance of the city has caused violent conflict over ownership throughout history.

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Islamic World: Sunni and Shi'a



After Muhammad died in 632 A.D. (C.E.), his followers disputed who should lead the growing faith. One group, which became the Sunni, believed Muhammad's successor should be chosen by consensus. The other group, which became the Shi'a, believed Muhammad's successor should be part of his bloodline.

After this initial split, the rituals and organization of these sects began to diverge. These ideological differences have led to violent conflict and persecution throughout the Muslim world.

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India and Pakistan: Hindus and Muslims



People living on the Indian subcontinent gained independence from the British Empire in 1947. The region was partitioned into separate countries based on religious beliefs: India, which was predominantly Hindu, and Pakistan, which was predominantly Muslim.

Kashmir, which bordered both India and Pakistan, chose to remain independent at first; however, unrest in the region prompted Kashmir to join India seeking military support. The region is still considered disputed territory, and has resulted in three wars and multiple violent skirmishes over the years.