

Paul in Athens

Paul used some spare time in Athens to find out what the local people believed and he reasoned with them about their beliefs. Eventually he drew attention to himself and had the opportunity to speak at the Areopagus (Mars Hill) which was a debating area.

He started by drawing on an inscription in Athens "To the unknown god" and then proceeded to speak about the true and only creator God.

He then explains how we can know this true God and he even quotes from Greek authors who would be well known to his listeners.

He finally gave a challenge for the people to repent and believe in the one who was raised from the dead and who will be our judge.

We can learn a lot from Paul's approach to reaching out to people from other religions:

- He was not afraid to reason with them. "Reason" can mean discuss or dispute and is used many times in Acts to describe how Paul communicated with people.
- He informed himself about their beliefs and was acquainted with some of their literature.
- Major issues for him were the nature of God and the way of salvation.

If we are going to be effective in reaching people of other faiths, we need to be clear about what we believe and be informed about what other people believe.

In line with Paul's talk in Athens, this study we will be concentrating on comparing:

The Nature of God

Religious Texts

Ways of Salvation

Alongside

It is, of course, true that Paul in other situations also used other methods alongside the necessary reasoned explanation of the gospel, including:

- He gave his testimony (Acts 22:1-21, 26:1-29)
- He saw healings and miracles (Acts 14:3, 8-11, 16:25-26, 19:9-12,
- He cast out demons. (Acts 16:18)
- He believed in the use of spiritual gifts - especially intelligible prophecy. (1 Cor 14:24-25)

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. **17** So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. **18** Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because **he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.** **19** And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." **21** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "**Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23** For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24** The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, **25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **26** And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **27** that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, **28** for

"**In him we live and move and have our being**"; (*Epimenides of Crete c 600 BC*)

as even some of your own poets have said,

"**For we are indeed his offspring.**" (*Aratus c 315-240 BC*)

29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. **30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, **31** because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." **33** So Paul went out from their midst. **34** But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Apologies

It is actually impossible to describe the beliefs of other people completely accurately. I apologise if I have misrepresented the beliefs of those from other religions. This is only supposed to be an overview and is necessarily incomplete as I have tried to encapsulate complex beliefs with the minimum amount of words! It is also difficult to describe the way of thinking of people of other faiths.

The information I have gathered is from many sources and I have not given any of these. All of these topics are well covered in internet searches and I hope that my brief summaries will enable you to make useful searches if you wish to research further.

Adherents

Religion	Million	%
Christianity	2400	33
Islam	1800	24
Secular/Agnostic/Atheist	1200	16
Hinduism	1150	15
Buddhism	521	7
Chinese Traditional	394	5

Bible quotes from ESV

Types of belief in God

Theism - Belief in a creator supreme God or gods that can influence the present world - eg in scriptures, miracles, revelation, answered prayer etc.

Monotheism - Belief in the existence of only one God. (Christian, Judaism, Islam, Sikh)

Polytheism - Belief in the existence of many gods. (Pagan, Canaanite, Greek, Roman, Hindu, Shinto, Chinese)

Pantheism - Belief that identifies God with the universe. Everything is God. (Folk religions, African and Native American traditional religions, New-Age)

Deism - Belief in a creator God who does not intervene in the present world - eg in scriptures, miracles, revelation, answered prayer etc. We can find out about God and the meaning of life by science and reason.

Atheism - Belief that God or gods do not exist.

Agnosticism Belief that we do not know or cannot know that God or gods exists.

Christian View of God

There is only one true God. He is the eternal God who made the heavens and the earth. He is the personal God who revealed himself to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Paul and many others in the Bible.

His name in Hebrew is יהוה. The equivalent English letters are approximately YHWH and may be pronounced YaHWeH. (In English versions of the Bible, this is usually translated and written "the LORD").

He is one God but exists eternally as three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All these persons are fully God.

He is the God who revealed himself to human beings in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to save them and bring them close to himself.

He is the ultimate lawmaker and the final judge of all human beings.

There are no other true gods. All other gods with different names and different attributes are false gods. To worship them is sinful and idolatry.

God's name is YHWH

YHWH is the personal name of our God.

Ex 3:13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 **God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**

Ex 20:2 "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

Is 42:8 **I am YHWH; that is my name;** my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

There is only One God

We are monotheistic.

Deut 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God, **YHWH is one.** 5 You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Zech 14:9 And YHWH will be king over all the earth. **On that day YHWH will be one and his name one.**

1 Cor 8:4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that **"there is no God but one."**

He is the Creator

God created everything in the physical and spiritual realms. He sustains all of creation.

Gen 1:1 **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.

Ps 33:6 **By the word of YHWH** the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Is 42:5 Thus says God, YHWH, who **created the heavens** and stretched them out, who **spread out the earth** and what comes from it, **who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.**

1 Cor 8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, **from whom are all things** and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, **through whom are all things** and through whom we exist.

Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 **For by him all things were created,** in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 **And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**

Heb 1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, **through whom also he created the world.** 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, **and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**

Rev 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, **for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."**

He is Eternal

God exists outside the universe, space and time. He has always existed and will always exist.

Is 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? **YHWH is the everlasting**

God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. Is 44:6 Thus says YHWH, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, YHWH of hosts: **"I am the first and I am the last;** besides me there is no god.

Is 57:15 For thus says the **One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity,** whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

John 4:24 **God is spirit,** and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

1 Tim 6:16 **who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light,** whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

Rev 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Rev 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. 13 **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."**

He is All-powerful

There are no limits to God's power. He can do absolutely anything. He can create, uncreate, work miracles, answer prayers and make changes where he wills.

Gen 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am **God Almighty;** walk before me, and be blameless,

Revelation 4:8 ...and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is **the Lord God Almighty,** who was and is and is to come!"

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Jer 32:17 'Ah, Lord YHWH! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! **Nothing is too hard for you...** 27 "Behold, I am YHWH, the God of all flesh. **Is anything too hard for me?**

Luke 1:37 **For nothing will be impossible with God."**

Matt 19:26 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, **but with God all things are possible."**

He is Everywhere and All-knowing

God knows what goes on everywhere in all creation. Nothing is hidden from him.

Jer 23:23 "Am I a God at hand, declares YHWH, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares YHWH. **Do I**

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not fill heaven and earth?

Ps 139:1 O YHWH, you have searched me and **known me!** 2 **You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.**

3 You search out **my path** and my **lying down** and are acquainted with **all my ways.**

4 **Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O YHWH, you know it altogether.**

5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.**

7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or **where shall I flee from your presence?**

8 **If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!**

9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the **uttermost parts of the sea,** 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me...

16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; **in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.**

Prov 15:3 **The eyes of YHWH are in every place,** keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Ps 94:9 He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?

Ps 94:11 **YHWH - knows the thoughts of man,** that they are but a breath.

Matt 9:4 But **Jesus, knowing their thoughts,** said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

Heb 4:13 **And no creature is hidden from his sight,** but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

He is Holy and Righteous

God is perfect, he is always right and never makes any mistakes. He is a righteous judge.

Is 6:3 And one called to another and said: "**Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts;** the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Is 47:4 Our Redeemer—YHWH of hosts is his name—is the **Holy One of Israel.**

1 Sam 2:2 "**There is none holy like YHWH:** for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.

Psalms 33:4 For the **word of YHWH is upright,** and all his work is done in faithfulness. 5 **He loves righteousness and justice;** the earth is full of the steadfast love of YHWH.

Psalms 97:2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; **righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.**

Psalms 7:11 **God is a righteous**

judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

Daniel 9:14 Therefore YHWH has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, **for YHWH our God is righteous in all the works that he has done,** and we have not obeyed his voice.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered her, "The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore **the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.**

John 17:11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. **Holy Father,** keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Rev 4:8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,** who was and is and is to come!"

He is Love

The love of God is a major theme of the Bible and is often connected with his compassion, mercy, goodness, faithfulness and forgiveness.

Exodus 34:5 YHWH descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHWH. 6 YHWH passed before him and proclaimed, "**YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,** visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Psalms 103:1 Bless YHWH, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2 Bless YHWH, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who **forgives** all your iniquity, who **heals** all your diseases, 4 who **redeems** your life from the pit, who **crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,** 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's...

13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so **YHWH shows compassion** to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 108:4 For your **steadfast love** is great above the heavens; your **faithfulness** reaches to the clouds.

Deuteronomy 4:31 **For YHWH your God is a merciful God.** He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

Psalms 100:5 For **YHWH is good;** his **steadfast love** endures forever, and his

faithfulness to all generations.

Lam 3:22 **The steadfast love of YHWH never ceases;** his **mercies** never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your **faithfulness.**

John 3:16 "For **God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,** that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Rom 5:8 but **God shows his love for us** in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Eph 2:4 But God, being **rich in mercy,** because of **the great love with which he loved us...**

1 John 4:8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.** 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him...

16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. **God is love,** and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

He is our Father

Jesus revealed God as his Father and our Father. This was revolutionary and difficult to accept by his Jewish audience.

Matt 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and **pray to your Father** who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you...

9 Pray then like this: "**Our Father in heaven,** hallowed be your name.

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, '**I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**'"

Words for God

Old Testament - Hebrew

EI (God or god used 242 times)

General word for God or a god Gen 16:13

Elohim (God of creation, supreme Deity, used 2,602 times)

This word is actually a plural of EI and is sometimes used for gods, images, idols etc. When used as a singular it refers to the all-powerful creator God Gen 1:1 etc.

EI-Elyon God most High Gen 14:18-20

EI-Shaddai God Almighty Gen 17:1, 28:3

EI-Olam Everlasting God Gen 21:33

YHWH (Personal name of God used 7000 times)

New Testament - Greek

Theos (General word for God used 1317 times)

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Other views of God

Hinduism

Hinduism can be describes as polytheistic, pantheistic or even monotheistic depending on your definitions!

Brahman is the impersonal ultimate reality which is the source of all things and the self (*atman*) or soul of all living beings.

The sacred syllable "om" is used as a symbol for Brahman and as a mantra. The sound is believed to be the eternal universal cosmic sound and vibration. When used in meditation and yoga it can enable us connect us with the ultimate reality. The "om" mantra is also used in Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Brahman can be known through its manifestation as various gods. Hindus have many gods but only a few of these are regularly worshipped. There are many myths about these gods and images and statues are common. The god, *Vishnu*, has 10 incarnations or avatars which include the *Buddha*!

Hindus have many holy men, *sadhus*, *gurus*, *yogis*, monks etc.

Many Hindus respect and honour Jesus. Some believe that he was a holy man (*Sadhu*) and a wise teacher. Others believe that he was divine like their gods or avatars.

Buddhism

Buddhism is essentially atheistic and has no need for a creator God. unlike Hinduism, belief is in *anatman* or non-Self.

Siddhartha Gautama was a prince who lived in the 5th century BC. When he came across suffering, he decided to abandon his rich life to become a poor monk. Famously he meditated for many days under a Bodhi tree and found enlightenment and became the *Buddha*. He spent the rest of his life teaching others.

Buddhist believe in many *Buddhas* who are those humans who have been enlightened. A person on the way to becoming a *Buddha* may be a *bodhisattva*. *Buddhas* are revered almost like gods.

Buddhists have holy men, monks, *gurus* or *lamas* who are teachers.

Many Buddhists respect Jesus. They may consider him to be an enlightened man, a wise teacher or a holy man.

Judaism

Jews, of course, believe in the same God as Christians. Traditional Jews believe that there is only one God who is transcendent, personal, creator, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, just, loving, merciful, forgiving, hears prayers - he punishes the wicked and rewards the

good.

The most common name for God in the Hebrew Bible is YHWH. Jews believe that this name is too holy to speak and when reading the Bible, they replace it with *Adonai* which means Lord. If they refer to YHWH in discussion, they usually use *HaShem* which means "The Name".

Jews also revere other names of God such as: *El*("God"), *Elohim*("Gods"), *El Shaddai* ("God Almighty"), and YHWH *Tzevaot/Sabaoth* ("LORD of Hosts")

Some Jews avoid writing the english word "God" but replace it with eg "G-d".

They are very careful about writing the name of God since they believe that it should never be erased.

Jews accept many historical facts about Jesus and may respect his teachings but they do not believe in the virgin birth or the resurrection etc. They do not believe he was the Messiah/Christ or the Son of God. They strongly object to the idea that Jesus was God.

Unfortunately Christians have persecuted and criticised Jews over the centuries (not least the Holocaust) and understandably Jews are suspicious of Christians.

Islam

Muslims believe in one God called *Allah* who they identify with the God of Jews and Christians. To become a Muslim, you make the following statement:

Shahada (profession of faith) - "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."

The arabic word *tawhid* is used for the oneness of Allah.

Allah is the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is transcendent, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, good, just, merciful, forgiving, compassionate and hears prayers of Muslims.

Chapters of the *Qur'an* begin with "In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful."

Muslims do not address Allah as Father. He is the great, holy, sovereign, powerful judge and should be addressed as such.

The *Qur'an* calls Jesus "Messiah", "Word of truth", "the son of Mary" etc. It accepts the virgin birth, some miracles of Jesus and his return but denies the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Muslims cannot accept that Jesus was the Son of God since for them it contradicts the idea of one God.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses use the name Jehovah for God. This is based on the tetragrammaton YHWH rendered as JHVH with certain vowels inserted: JeHoVaH.

They view Jehovah as Father. Jesus Christ is the Son who was created by Jehovah and inferior to Jehovah. The Holy Spirit is an impersonal, active force.

Jehovah is infinite but approachable and can be known personally. He is kind and merciful and loving.

He is not omnipresent but is located in heaven.

Mormonism

The Godhead consists of three distinct Gods:

God the Father who identifies with Elohim who used to be a man.

His firstborn Son, Jesus, who identifies with YHWH.

The Holy Spirit.

The Father and the Son have perfected glorified physical bodies. There are other gods including a Heavenly Mother (wife of God the Father) and faithful Mormons who have been exalted in the afterlife.

Trinitarians ("main-stream") — Protestants, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Brethren, new house churches, Lutherans, Orthodox, Roman Catholics.

Non-Trinitarian — Christadelphians, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Scientologists, Spiritualists, Unification Church, Unitarians, Oneness Pentecostals.

Non-Trinitarian Beliefs

Ebionitism — Jesus Christ was a man born naturally to Mary and Joseph. He was the promised Messiah and will return to earth in this capacity. He is not God.

Docetism — Jesus Christ was a spirit with only an appearance of human flesh. His crucifixion was not an actual physical death.

Arianism — The Son was created by the Father before which the Son did not exist. The Son is not eternal.

Adoptionism — Jesus was a mere (but special and virtuous) man on whom the Spirit of God came at his baptism and he became the Christ.

Modalism (Sabellianism) — God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the same person in different forms.

Tritheism - The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate Gods sharing one purpose. Not one being.

Partialism - The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are parts of one God. Only together are they God.

Kenosis - Jesus gave up some of his divine attributes while on earth and ministered as a Spirit filled man.

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Religious Texts

Hinduism

There are a large number of ancient Hindu texts:

Vedas (c 1800-800 BC?) These are believed to have existed eternally with no author. They were uttered first by ancient sages and then transmitted orally until they were eventually written down. They contain hymns, chants, rituals, liturgy, sacrifices, prayers, magic, spells, incantations and charms.

Upanishads (c 900-500 BC?) These introduce the basic Hindu philosophy including *samsara*, *karma*, *dharma*, *moksha*, *atman*, *Brahman*, *meditation*, *yoga* etc.

Many more texts over a large time interval describe rituals, mantras, myths, epics, ethics, laws, magic and the history of the universe etc!

Buddhism

The basic texts of Buddhism are the *buddhavacana* - the words of the *Buddha*.

The spoken words of the *Buddha* were transmitted by word of mouth before being written down.

The **Pali Canon** is considered to be the earliest collection. There are various other versions in other Buddhist traditions..

The **Pali Canon** is sometimes known as the **Tripitaka** (three baskets) in three sections:

Vinaya Pitaka (discipline basket) - rules for monks and nuns

Sutta Pitaka (teaching basket) - the teachings of the *Buddha*

Abhidhamma Pitaka (higher teaching basket) - Buddhist doctrine, philosophy and psychology.

Judaism

The Hebrew Bible is called **Tanakh** and is identical with our Old Testament (without the Apocrypha). The canon was established 400-500BC There are three sections:

Torah (Teaching) - five books of Moses - Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut - *Pentateuch*

Nevi'im (Prophets) - Josh, Jud, Sam Kings, Is, Jer, Ez, minor prophets.

Ketuvim (Writings) - remaining books including poetry, history and prophecy.

The Jews also have other ancient literature which explain and interpret the laws with practical application. These include the **Mishnah**, **Talmud** and **Midrash**.

Islam

The **Qur'an** has no human influence, it is purely the direct revelation from Allah to Muhammed who recited the words and

then his companions wrote them down. Muhammad's immediate successor, Abu Bakr, compiled the Quran from the various writings. This original arabic *Qur'an* is the only genuine *Qur'an* and is an exact copy of the *Qur'an* in heaven - it cannot be translated as the *Qur'an*. Reciting the *Qur'an* as the word of Allah is beneficial even if you do not understand it. Muslims are not allowed to question the authority or authenticity of the *Qur'an*.

The Hadith contains thousands of sayings of Muhammad and various details about his life, conduct and behaviour. This is inspired but not direct revelation like the *Qur'an*.

Muslims regard the **Old and New Testaments** as the word of God but believe that Jews and Christians have perverted the original giving the Jews preferential treatment in the Old Testament and making Jesus the Son of God in the New Testament. They believe in many of the prophets in the Bible including Jesus but that Mohammad was the final one.

Jehovah's Witnesses

They use **the Bible** as their primary text. They used to use the King James Version but now use the New World Translation with versions and revisions from 1950 to 2013. The translation committee did not include known scholars of Greek and Hebrew. The word Jehovah is used throughout the Old Testament for YHWH and 237 times in the New Testament where it is believed it is implied. It claims to be a very literal translation. Bible scholars agree that the translation is biased in favour of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses also use monthly magazine "**The Watchtower**" as an ongoing way of instructing their followers and disseminating their beliefs.

Mormonism

Mormons (Latter Day Saints) have 4 sacred texts:

The Book of Mormon - This was claimed to be translated miraculously by Joseph Smith from gold plates found in New York state on the instruction of the angel Moroni. After translation, the plates were returned to the angel. It is written in KJV style english and includes the history of a group of people in the Americas.

The Doctrine and Covenants - This is a book of received revelations of Joseph Smith and his successors. They relate to doctrine and life. This is an open document which may be added to.

The Pearl of Great Price - This further revelation to Joseph Smith has extra material to add to the Old and New

Testaments, articles of faith etc.

The Bible - The Book of Mormon is described as the word of God. The Bible (KJV) is described as the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. Mormons regularly read the New Testament.

Christian Bible

The Bible is a complete rational story from the creation of the universe to its end! It covers the history of the Israelites, the life of Jesus and the spread of the gospel. It contains history, laws, theology, doctrine, letters, poetry, songs, prophecies and visions. It's an amazing book!

The word of God

The word of God is his communication - through the Bible, preaching, teaching, prophecy, the gospel message - and Jesus is the Word of God.

Hebrews 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

The Bible is inspired - God breathed

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...

2 Peter 1:20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible was written by many human authors all inspired by the same Holy Spirit. God used the thoughts, personality, intellect and vocabulary of the writers such that they ended up writing just what God wanted written.

Sometimes we read the actual words of God - eg the 10 commandments and other laws, prophecies "Thus says the LORD...", recorded conversations with God, God's words in visions or dreams, and of course the words of Jesus.

Sola Scriptura

In the Reformation, the protestants complained that the Catholics had many sources of authority including church tradition, papal pronouncements and development of doctrine. Their beliefs had become unbiblical.

The reformers emphasised that the Bible must be the only final authority.

Necessity - the teaching of the Bible is needed for salvation.

Sufficiency - the Bible has all the truth for salvation, faith and living.

Inerrancy - only the Bible is infallible.

Clarity - believers can understand the truth by reading and studying the Bible.

Aren't all religions the same - Information Sheet

John Robertshaw Aug 2019

Ways of Salvation

Indian Religions

Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism share a basic philosophy with variations

Samsara

This is the principle of reincarnation. We are all in a cycle of death and rebirth as something else in this universe.

Karma

This is our condition which determines how we end up in the next life. There is no judgment or forgiveness - just an eternal law operating in the universe.

Dharma

This is our behaviour etc which affects our karma.

In Hinduism it is our duties, rituals, conduct, morality and way of living.

In Buddhism it is more reflecting on the teachings of *the Buddha*:

The Four Noble truths (Buddhism)

Dukkha - the suffering and dissatisfaction caused by life and the cycle of death rebirth

Samudaya - the origin of *dukkha* is our craving, desire or attachment

Nirodha - the end of *dukkha* can be achieved by eliminating craving, desire or attachment

Magga - the Noble Eightfold Path is the means to end *dukkha*

The Noble Eightfold Path (Buddhism)

Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration (*Samadhi* - meditation, trance, yoga, mantras, altered state of consciousness, *dhyana* etc.)

Moksha

Moksha is liberation or release from *Samsara*. It is salvation.

In Hinduism the core of all creatures is *atman* which is self or soul - not our mind or body. It can be perceived only by experience through yoga and meditation. *Moksha* enables our soul to be reabsorbed into *Brahman* like a drop of water returning to the ocean. One of the goals of meditation is to achieve identification with *Brahman*.

In Buddhism there is no self or soul carried through the cycles of death and rebirth - the concept is *anatman* or "non-Self". Realisation of *anatman* through meditation etc. can enable you to experience enlightenment and *nirvana* as did *the Buddha*. This *nirvana* is freedom from craving, desire and attachment in this life. Then on death you may leave the cycle of death and rebirth and attain final *nirvana* which is neither existence nor non-existence and is indescribable!.

Judaism

Jews do not believe that mankind is basically sinful and needs saving. We do sin, of course, but then we need to repent, pray and work on keeping God's commandments and various Jewish rituals. Respect and love for God are important and our main motivation.

The 10 Commandments are very important and there are 613 *Mitzvot* which summarise the laws in the *Torah*.

When the *Torah* speaks of salvation and redemption, it is mainly to do with this life - health, safety, peace, long life, prosperity etc. Often it relates to the fate of the whole nation of Israel - defeat of enemies, release from slavery/exile, possessing the land etc. - this extends to a future Messianic age.

Jews believe in some kind of after-life but claim that the *Torah* and the rest of the *Tanakh* have little information. There may be a short time of temporary punishment but eventually your place in the world to come will be related to your actions here on earth.

Islam

A *Muslim* means one who submits or surrenders. Obedience to Allah is central to *Islam*.

Basic human problems are idolatry, polytheism and disobedience to the laws in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

Human beings are created by Allah to serve him and have free choice to be righteous or wicked. Salvation is by our righteous acts and the mercy of Allah.

Five Pillars of Islam

These are required by Muslims:

Shahada (profession of faith) - "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."

Salat (prayer 5 times a day) - Facing Mecca.

Zakat (almsgiving) - Often 2.5% of income.

Siyam (Ramadan fast) - Abstain from food, drink, sex etc between sunrise and sunset.

Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) - Many Muslims do not achieve this.

Jihad aims to bring about obedience to the teaching of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* in your personal life or by establishing political power and imposing *Sharia* law. Then there will be true *Islam* (submission, surrender and peace). *Jihad* can be by peaceful or military means.

Destinations

Jahannam (Hell) is a place of suffering for wrongdoers and unbelievers.

Jannah (Paradise) is attained by obedience and belief and the mercy and forgive-

ness of Allah. It is described as a beautiful garden with fine food and many pleasures. Muslim martyrs are promised paradise.

Muslims cannot believe in a saviour because we are all responsible for our own sins.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The human problem is sin. To gain salvation, you must repent and exercise faith in Jesus and demonstrate that faith by obeying his commands. Salvation is not earned but is Jehovah's gift based on his undeserved kindness in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ - however your acts of obedience and the way you live show that you have faith. You must persevere in faith and obedience to God's laws or you could lose your salvation.

Membership of the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation is essential and you are expected to serve in the organisation and be an active witness. Baptism as a Jehovah's Witness shows your dedication to serve Jehovah and the organisation.

Only 144,000 faithful and anointed Jehovah's Witnesses will actually get to heaven where they will reign with Christ. Only the anointed ones are born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. Others who are saved will live eternally on the restored new earth.

God's day of judgement will include the destruction of ungodly people.

Mormonism

Mormons believe that we existed as spirits before we were born and that these occupy our mortal bodies for our lives here on earth. The resurrection of all humans is guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On physical death, our spirits exist in a spirit world until the return of Jesus Christ. There is then a judgement and we are assigned to one of three destinations: the *celestial*, *terrestrial* and *telestial* kingdoms.

The aim for Mormons is to live in the *celestial* kingdom with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and to progress to become gods themselves.

To be cleansed from sin through the atonement, you must repent be baptised and receive the Holy Spirit through the proper Mormon *Priesthood*. This salvation is conditional on continued faithfulness and obedience to God's laws.

Eternal life, or *exaltation* is to inherit a high degree in the celestial kingdom. This is achieved by receiving the *Melchizedek Priesthood*, a *covenant of eternal marriage*, and undergoing a number of sacred rituals in a *Mormon temple* which are similar to the Freemasonry which early Mormons were involved in.

New Age

New Age is difficult to define but here are some common features.

NA - Origins in other religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, paganism, animism, pantheism, celtic, primitive religions etc.

Christians believe in one true eternal personal God called YHWH in the Old Testament and revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the New Testament. He created everything in the universe, spiritual and material, but is distinct from them. Gods of other religions have different names and characteristics and cannot be equated with the only true God. It is sinful to worship any other God or to engage in other religions. (Ex 20:2-3, 1 Cor 8:4-6, Gal 4:8-9)

NA - Occult methods - Astrology, fortune telling, divination, sorcery, mysticism, magic, spells, charms, contacting the dead, seances, mediums, spirit guides, auras, clairvoyance, channeling, crystal healing, psychic phenomena, transcendental meditation etc.

The Bible condemns many of these types of practice (Ex 22:18, Lev 19:26, 31, 20:27, Deut 18:10-12, 14, 1 Chron 10:13, 2 Chron 33:6, Ezek 13:18-22, Act 13:8-12, 16:16-18, 19:19, Gal 5:19-21, Rev 21:8)

NA - Connections - Humans beings are one with each other, the earth, living beings, the universe, the spiritual world. God is in everything. Care for

the earth, plants and animals is important.

God is the eternal creator of the universe and is not in it or part of it. (Gen 1:1-2, John 1:1-3, Heb 11:3) Human beings are a special creation in the image of God. (Gen 1:26-27) We have biological similarities with other living beings but we also have a unique spiritual dimension enabling a relationship with God. It is part of the call of mankind to care for the earth. (Gen 1:28, 2:15)

NA - Sources - Energy, enlightenment and information may be found within ourselves, from other people, the earth, living beings and the spiritual world by tuning in and connecting. There is suspicion of science and reason, and a preference for alternative and natural medicine etc.

Creation, nature and the universe declare the glory of God and his power as creator - but our knowledge of God and his purposes are based on his revelation as recorded in the Bible and particularly through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. (Ps 19:1, Luke 10:22, John 10:30-31, 14:9, 1 Cor 2:12-13, Rom 1:20-23, Eph 3:4-5, Col 1:15, Heb 1:1-2, 3)

NA - Relativism - There are no absolutes - each person needs to find their own version of God, religion, truth and morals.

The Christian faith is based on absolutes. God is clearly defined. Right, wrong are distinguished. (Mark 7:20-22, Gal 5:19-24) The one way of salvation is laid out - Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, the

door, the saviour, the mediator. (John 10:9, 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Tim 2:5)

NA - Reincarnation - our existence is cyclic and after death our soul returns to occupy another part of the living natural world.

The Bible teaches a linear existence beginning at conception and continuing through life, death, resurrection and judgement. (Ps 139:13-14, Heb 9:27)

NA - Altered states of consciousness - the use of drugs, hypnosis, posture, yoga, mantras, repeated phrases, music or meditation to detach you from your current reality and take you into a different mystical state or trance. The aim is to lose your awareness of the world around you and reach a spiritual dimension and oneness with spirits and God.

Of course the Bible is full of people having dramatic visions and dreams. (Gen 15:1, 12-13, 40:5-8, Num 12:6, 1 Kings 3:5, Is 6:1-3, Ezek 1:1-2, 3:12, 8:3, Dan 7:1, Matt 1:20, 2:12-13, Acts 2:17, 7:55-56, 9:10, 10:3, 10-11, 16:9, 22:17-18, 2 Cor 12:2-4, Rev 1:10-11, 4:2-3, 17:3) These are by God's sovereign will for particular purposes - God's call, prophecy, information, advice, warning, comfort, assurance etc. There are, however, no instructions to use the various New Age methods above to enter altered states or to manipulate environments so that others enter such states. Prayer is communicating with God but does not require an altered state. (Matt 6:6-13)

The Way of Salvation

The problem of mankind is sin

Our sinful nature is inherited from Adam and we are also all sinners. Sin separates us from God and without salvation we are under God's wrath.

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God** among the trees of the garden.

Gen 5:3 When Adam had lived 130 years, **he fathered a son in his own likeness**, after his image, and named him Seth.

Roms 5:12 Therefore, just as **sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.**

Psalms 51:5 Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity**, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Isaiah 59:2 but **your iniquities have made a separation between you and**

your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

1 Cor 15:22 For as **in Adam all die**, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Mark 7:21 For **from within, out of the heart of man**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 **All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**

Rom 3:10 as it is written: "**None is righteous, no, not one**; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Rom 3:23 for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6:23 For **the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 2:3 ...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, **and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**

Eph 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, **for because of these**

things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

God's solution is Jesus

God sent Jesus to be our saviour. As he died on the cross, he became our substitute and the sacrifice for our sins. He enables us to be free from the penalty and power of sin. This is the grace of God.

John 3:16 "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus **coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Matt 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, **and to give his life as a ransom for many.**

John 10:11 **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God **but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins.**

Aren't all religions the same - Information Sheet

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1 Peter 2:24 **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree**, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

2 Cor 5:21 For our sake **he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Isaiah 53:5 **But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace**, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; **and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

1 Peter 1:18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, **19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**

1 Peter 3:18 For **Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...**

1 Thess 5:9 **For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...**

Our response

Repentance and faith in Jesus as your saviour are necessary for your salvation. You are born again and become a new creation by God's power. You establish a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Mark 1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, **15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, **that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Acts 16:30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" **31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."**

Rom 10:9 because, **if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Acts 20:21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Eph 2:8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

Rom 3:28 For we hold that **one is justified by faith apart from works of the**

law.

John 20:31 but these are written so that you may **believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

John 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...**

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Sola Fides

The Roman Catholic church added many other requirements for salvation such as rituals, good works, attending mass, baptism, membership of the Catholic Church, confession to priests, giving to the church, prayers of priests, prayers to Mary and saints, prayers for the dead etc.

The protestant reformers rejected these extras and emphasised that we are saved by faith alone.

The only way

Jesus himself is the only way to the Father.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."**

Acts 4:11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God, **and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.**

A new life

Having been saved by God's grace and our faith, we can demonstrate our faith by baptism in water. We can also be filled with the Holy Spirit who enables us to live a new life of love and power.

Acts 1:5 for **John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."**

Acts 1:8 **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

Acts 2:38 **And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on **all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.**

Gal 5:22 But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control;** against such things there is no law.

Eternal life

For believers who rely on the grace of God, the end of the story is eternal life with God. Unfortunately unbelievers are not saved. This is why we preach the gospel.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, **"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."**

The Difference

For other religions, salvation is based on human achievements - ritual, religious observance, good works, mysticism, obedience, membership of a religion or organisation etc.

Biblical Christianity is centred on what God has accomplished through Christ's finished work. We are saved only by the grace and mercy of God which we receive through faith.