

Compare 20 Religions and Cults with Biblical Christianity

Christianity

Cults & Religions

7th Edition

**Side-by-side
comparison chart
of 20 groups**

Jehovah's Witnesses
Mormonism
Unification Church
Christian Science
New Age
Wicca
Scientology
Islam
Bahá'í
Kabbalah Centre
Hinduism
Hare Krishna
Buddhism
and more...

Founder, date, location
Who is God?
Who is Jesus?
How to be saved
What happens after death?
Key writings
Other beliefs and practices

ROSE
PUBLISHING

Biblical Christianity

Key Person or Founder,
Date, Location

Jesus Christ. Founded about AD 30–33, in the Judean province of Palestine (Israel today), under the Roman Empire. Followers of Jesus Christ became known as Christians.



Key Writings

The Bible, written originally in Hebrew and Aramaic (Old Testament), and Greek (New Testament).

Who is God?

The one God is Triune (one God in three persons, not three gods): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Often the title “God” designates the first person, God the Father. God is a spiritual being without a physical body. He is personal and involved with people. He created the universe out of nothing. He is eternal, changeless, holy, loving, and perfect.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity. As God the Son, he has always existed and was never created. He is fully God and fully man (the two natures joined, not mixed). As the second person of the Trinity, he is coequal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In becoming man, he was begotten through the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the only way to the Father, salvation, and eternal life. He died on a cross according to God’s plan, as the full sacrifice and payment for our sins. He rose from the dead on the third day, spiritually and physically immortal. For the next 40 days he was seen by more than 500 eye-witnesses. His wounds were touched and he ate meals. He physically ascended to heaven. Jesus will come again visibly and physically at the end of the world to establish God’s kingdom and judge the world.

Who is the
Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or energy field. He comforts, grieves, reproves, convicts, guides, teaches, and fills Christians. He is not the Father, nor is he the Son, Jesus Christ.

How to be Saved

Salvation is by God’s grace, not by an individual’s good works. Salvation must be received by faith. People must believe in their hearts that Jesus died for their sins and physically rose again, which is the assurance of forgiveness and resurrection of the body. This is God’s loving plan to forgive sinful people.

What Happens
after Death?

Believers go to be with Jesus. After death, all people await the final judgment. Both saved and lost people will be resurrected. Those who are saved will live with Jesus in heaven. Those who are lost will suffer the torment of eternal separation from God (hell). Jesus’ bodily resurrection guarantees believers that they, too, will be resurrected and receive new immortal bodies.

Other Facts, Beliefs,
or Practices

Group worship, usually in churches. No secret rites. Baptism and Lord’s Supper (Communion). Active voluntary missionary efforts. Aid to those in need: the poor, widows, orphans, and downtrodden. Christians believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah promised to Israel in the Old Testament (Tanakh). Jesus said his followers would be known by their love for one another.

Jehovah's Witnesses

(Watchtower Bible & Tract Society)

Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916), later Joseph F. Rutherford (1869–1942). Began 1879 in Pennsylvania. Headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.



Charles Taze Russell

All current Watchtower publications, including the Bible (*New World Translation* only), *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*; *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines.

One-person God, called Jehovah. No Trinity. Jesus is the first thing Jehovah created.

Jesus is not God. Before he lived on earth, he was Michael, the archangel. Jehovah made the universe through him. On earth he was a man who lived a perfect life. After dying on a stake (not a cross), he was resurrected as a spirit; his body was destroyed. Jesus is not coming again; he "returned" invisibly in 1914 in spirit. Very soon, he and the angels will destroy all non-Jehovah's Witnesses.

Impersonal "holy spirit" is not God, but rather an invisible, active force from Jehovah.

Be baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses. Most followers must earn everlasting life on earth by "door-to-door work." Salvation in heaven is limited to 144,000 "anointed ones." This number is already reached.

The 144,000 live as spirits in heaven. The rest of the righteous, the "great crowd," live on earth, and must obey God perfectly for 1,000 years or be annihilated.

Also known as the International Bible Students Association. Meet in "Kingdom Halls" instead of churches. Active members encouraged to distribute literature door-to-door. Once a year, Lord's Evening Meal (communion); only "anointed ones" may partake. Do not observe holidays or birthdays. Forbidden to vote, salute the flag, work in the military, or accept blood transfusions.

Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

Holy Spirit

Salvation

Death

Beliefs/Other

Mormonism

(Latter-day Saints)

Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–1844) organized what is now the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in 1830 near Rochester, New York. Headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, plus the Bible (King James Version only or Smith's "Inspired Version") which is seen as less reliable. Authoritative teachings of Mormon prophets and other LDS "general authorities." *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines.

God the Father was once a man, but "progressed" to godhood. He has a physical body, as does his wife (Heavenly Mother). No Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate gods. Worthy members may one day become "exalted" to godhood themselves.

Jesus is a separate god from the Father (Elohim). He was created as a spirit child by the Father and Mother in heaven, and is the "elder brother" of all men and spirit beings (including Lucifer). His body was created through sexual union between Elohim and Mary. Jesus was married. His death on the cross does not provide full atonement for all sin, but does provide everyone with resurrection.

The "holy spirit" is different from the "Holy Ghost." The "holy spirit" is not God, but is an influence or electricity-like emanation from God (or "light of Christ").

Resurrected by grace, but saved (exalted to godhood) by works, including faithfulness to church leaders, Mormon baptism, tithing, ordination, marriage, and secret temple rituals. No eternal life without Mormon membership.

Eventually nearly everyone goes to one of three separate heavenly "kingdoms," with some achieving godhood. Apostates and murderers go to "outer darkness."

Secret temple "endowment" rituals and "celestial marriage" available only to members in good standing. Baptism on behalf of the dead. "Word of Wisdom" prohibits tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine drinks. Two-year missionary commitment encouraged. Tithing essential. Door-to-door proselytizing. Extensive social network. People of African ancestry denied full access to Mormon priesthood and privileges until 1978.



Seventh-day Adventism

Primarily organizers: James (1821–1881) and Ellen (1827–1915) White, Joseph Bates (1792–1872). Incorporated in 1863 in Michigan. Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The Bible, including Adventist paraphrase *The Clear Word*. Over 600 published titles by Ellen White, including *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*. *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*; *SDA Bible Commentary*. *Adventist Review*, numerous other magazines.

God is comprised of a unity of three coeternal persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who are one in motive and purpose, but not substance. God the Father is generally understood to possess a physical body. Both trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism are believed in the church today.

Ellen White says God the Father exalted Jesus to be his Son, thus provoking Lucifer's jealousy and a war in heaven. Jesus is our example to prove we can live sinlessly. His sacrifice on the cross did not complete the atonement; since 1844 he has been applying his blood in heaven in an ongoing "Investigative Judgment" after which he will return. Also identified as Michael the Archangel; most Adventist founders denied Jesus' deity.

Originally thought to be a force or power from God, today the Holy Spirit is understood to be the third person of the Godhead.

Salvation by grace through faith, but maintained by commandment-keeping and repentance. Seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath observance is the sign of the seal of God, Sunday worship is the mark of the beast. Satan is the scapegoat to be punished in the lake of fire for the sins of the saved.

Humans have no immaterial spirit, so at death the body goes into the ground and the breath goes to God. Nothing remains except in God's memory. At judgment, the lake of fire annihilates the wicked.

The SDA Church considers itself to be God's one, special remnant church. Old Testament clean/unclean meat laws observed. SDA "health message" includes abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine and advocates veganism. Traditionalist SDAs believe wearing jewelry is sinful. Proselytizing programs include "Revelation seminars," health outreach.

Ellen White



Unification Church

Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012). Started "Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity" (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification) in 1954 in Korea. Known in the U.S. as "Lovin' Life Ministries." Based in New York City.

Divine Principle by Sun Myung Moon, considered the "Completed Testament." *Outline of the Principle, Level 4*, and the Bible. (The Bible is "not the truth itself, but a textbook teaching the truth.")

God is both positive and negative. God created the universe out of himself; the universe is God's "body." God does not know the future, is suffering, and needs man (Sun Myung Moon) to make him happy. No Trinity.

Jesus was a perfect man, not God. He is the son of Zechariah, not born of a virgin. His mission was to unite the Jews behind him, find a perfect bride, and begin a perfect family. The mission failed. Jesus did not resurrect physically. The second coming of Christ is fulfilled in Sun Myung Moon, who is superior to Jesus and will finish Jesus' mission.



Moon and his wife performing a mass wedding

The Holy Spirit is a feminine spirit who works with Jesus in the spirit world to lead people to Sun Myung Moon.

Obedience to and acceptance of the True Parents (Moon and his wife) eliminate sin and result in perfection. Those married by Moon and his wife drink a special holy wine containing 21 ingredients (including the True Parents' blood).

After death one goes to the spirit world. There is no resurrection. Members advance by convincing others to follow Sun Myung Moon. Everyone will be saved, even Satan.

Emphasis on mediumism (channeling) to contact the dead, "liberate" souls of one's ancestors. Mass marriages, based on different racial backgrounds, arranged and performed by Moon. Efforts to persuade churches to remove their crosses. Belief that Jesus bows down to Rev. Moon, who is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and the Lamb of God.

Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

Holy Spirit

Salvation

Death

Beliefs/Other

Christian Science

Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910). Founded 1875 in Massachusetts. Headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts.

Science and Health, With Key to the Scriptures; Miscellaneous Writings; Manual of the Mother Church; and other books by Mrs. Eddy. The Bible (not as reliable). Christian Science Journal, Christian Science Sentinel, and other official periodicals.

According to Mrs. Eddy, God is an impersonal Principle of life, truth, love, intelligence, and spirit. God is all that truly exists; matter is an illusion.



Mary Baker Eddy

Jesus was not the Christ, but a man who displayed the Christ idea. ("Christ" means perfection, not a person.) Jesus was not God, and God can never become man or flesh. He did not suffer and could not suffer for sins. He did not die on the cross. He was not resurrected physically. He will not literally come back.

Holy spirit is defined as the teaching of Christian Science. Impersonal power.

Humanity is already eternally saved. Sin, evil, sickness, and death are not real.

Death is not real. Heaven and hell are states of mind. The way to reach heaven is by attaining harmony (oneness with God).

Members use Christian Science "practitioners" (authorized professional healers who "treat" supposed illnesses for a fee) instead of doctors. Healing comes through realizing one cannot really be sick or hurt and that the body cannot be ill, suffer pain, or die since matter is an illusion. Attracts followers by claims of miraculous healing. Publishes *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper.

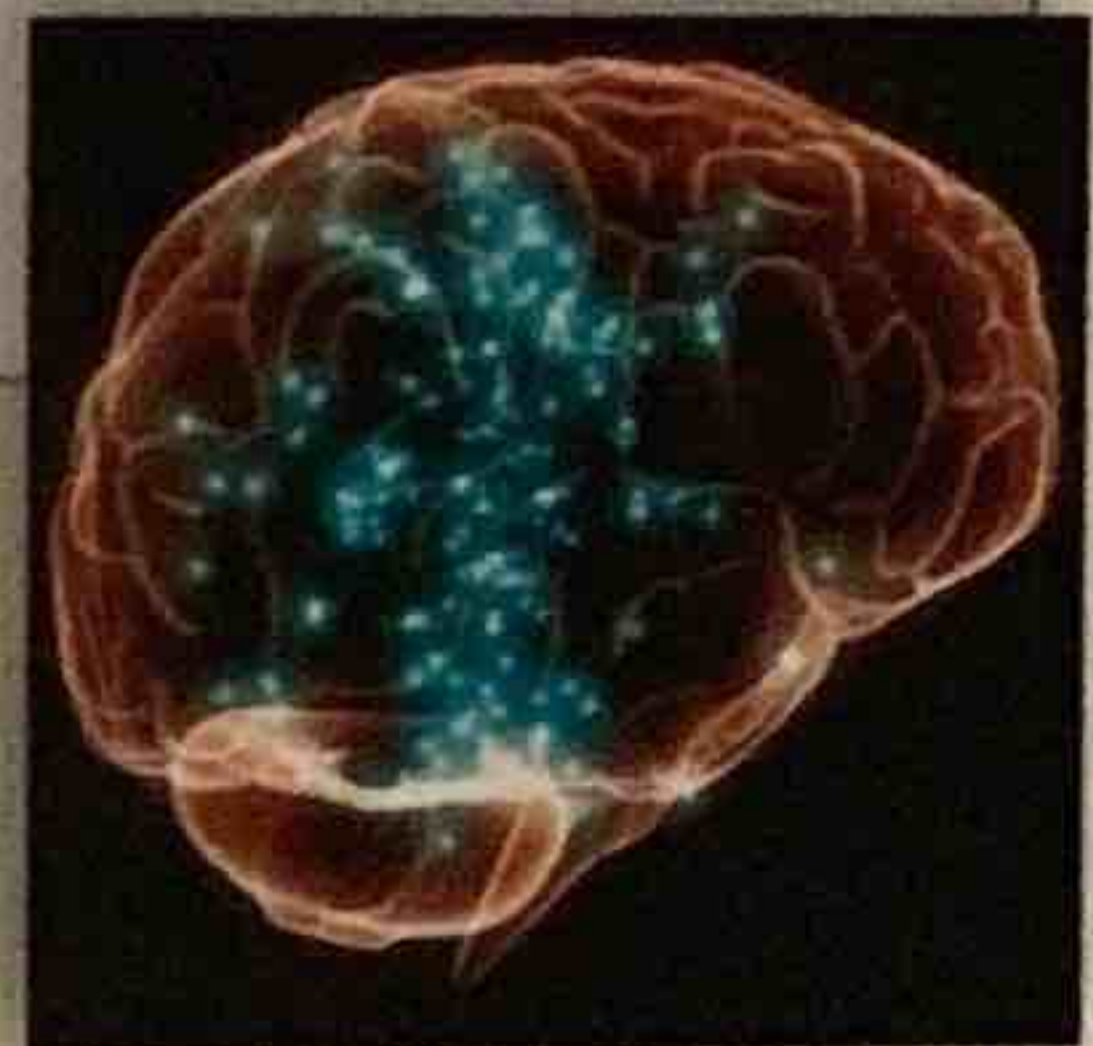
Unity School of Christianity

Charles (1854–1948) and Myrtle (1845–1931) Fillmore. Founded 1889 in Kansas City, Missouri. Headquarters in Unity Village, Missouri.

Unity magazine. *Lessons in Truth*, *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, the Bible (not as reliable, interpreted with "hidden" meanings).

Invisible impersonal power. "God" is interchangeable with "Principle," "Law," "Being," "Mind," "Spirit." God is in everything, much as the soul is in the body. No Trinity. The spirit is reality; matter is not.

Jesus was a man and not the Christ. Instead, he was a man who had "Christ Consciousness." "Christ" is a state of perfection in every person. Jesus had lived many times before and was in search of his own salvation. Jesus did not die as a sacrifice for anyone's sins. Jesus did not rise physically and will never return to earth in physical form.



The Holy Spirit is the law of God in action, the "executive power of both Father and Son." A "definite" thought in the mind of man.

By recognizing that each person is as much a Son of God as Jesus is. There is no evil, no devil, no sin, no poverty, and no old age. A person is reincarnated until he learns these truths and becomes "perfect."

Death is a result of wrong thinking. One moves to a different body (reincarnation) until enlightenment. No literal heaven or hell.

Worship services in Unity churches. Counseling and prayer ministry ("Silent Unity") by phone and mail. It is reported that Unity receives millions of prayer requests annually. Unity devotionals, such as *Daily Word*, are used by members of other religious groups and churches. Millions of pieces of literature are printed each year.

Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

Holy Spirit

Salvation

Death

Beliefs/Other

New Age

Based on Eastern mysticism, Hinduism, and paganism. Popularized in part by actress Shirley MacLaine (1934–) in the 1980s and 1990s. Beliefs vary.

No holy book. Use selected Bible passages; *I Ching*; Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist writings; and Native American beliefs. Writings on astrology, mysticism, and magic.

Everything and everyone is God. God is an impersonal force or principle, not a person. People have unlimited inner power and need to discover it.

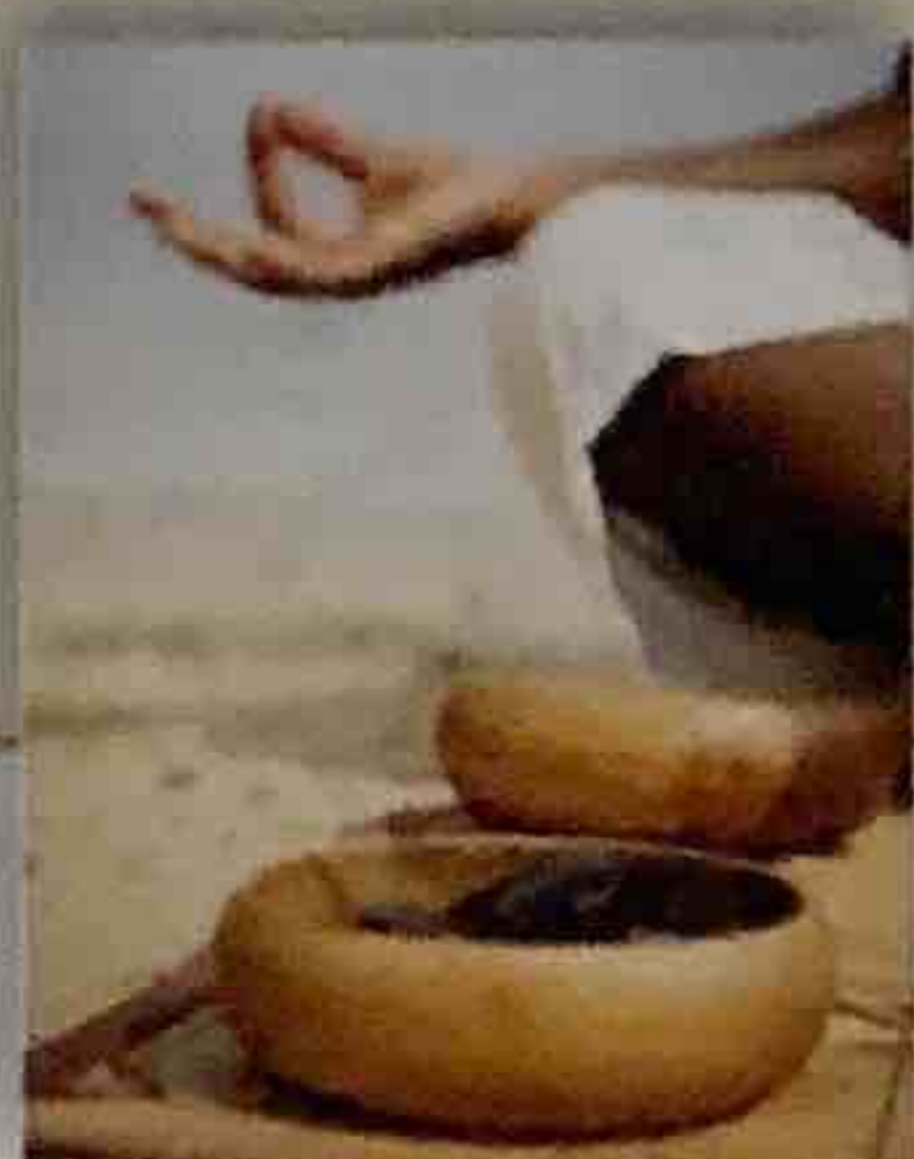
Jesus is not the one true God. He is not a savior, but a spiritual model and guru, and is now an “ascended master.” He was a New Ager who tapped into divine power in the same way that anyone can. Many believe he went east to India or Tibet and learned mystical truths. He did not rise physically from the dead, but “rose” into a higher spiritual realm.

Sometimes considered a psychic force. Man is divine and can experience psychic phenomena such as contacting unearthly beings.

Need to offset bad karma with good karma. Can tap into supernatural power through meditation, self-awareness, and “spirit guides.” Followers use terms such as “reborn” to describe this new self-awareness.

Human reincarnations occur until a person reaches oneness with God. No eternal life as a resurrected person. No literal heaven or hell.

Can include yoga, meditation, visualization, astrology, channeling, hypnosis, trances, and tarot card readings. Use of crystals to get in harmony with God (Energy), for psychic healing, for contact with spirits, and for developing higher consciousness or other psychic powers. Strive for world unity and peace. Emphasis on holistic health.



Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

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Salvation

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Beliefs/Other

Wicca

No one person. Roots in 19th-century Britain. Partly inspired by Margaret Murray (1862–1963) and organized by Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) in the 1930s to 1950s.

No holy books; however, many groups use *The Book of Shadows*, first compiled by Gardner and later expanded by him and other leaders. Other popular works include *A Witches' Bible* and *The Spiral Dance*.

The supreme being is called the Goddess, sometimes the Goddess and God, or goddess and horned god (“Lord and Lady”). The Goddess can be a symbol, the impersonal force in everything, or a personal being. Wiccans can be pantheists, polytheists, or both.

Jesus is either rejected altogether or sometimes considered a spiritual teacher who taught love and compassion.

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief. However, some Wiccans may refer to “Spirit” as a kind of divine energy.

Wiccans do not believe that humanity is sinful or needs saving. It is important for Wiccans to honor and work for the preservation of nature (which they equate with the Goddess).



The body replenishes the earth, which is the Goddess’s wish. Some Wiccans are agnostic about life after death, others believe in reincarnation. Some believe in a wonderful place called Summerland.

Wiccans practice divination and spell-casting, with most rituals performed in a circle. Many Wiccans are part of a coven (local assembly), though many others are “solitary.” Covens meet for ritual and seasonal holidays, including the eight major holidays (such as Vernal Equinox, Summer Solstice, and Beltane). Wicca is an occultic “nature religion,” not Satanism.

Scientology

Founder

Founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) in 1954 in California. Major headquarter facilities in California and Florida.

Writings

Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health and others by Hubbard. *The Way to Happiness*.



God

Does not define God or Supreme Being, but rejects biblical description of God. Everyone is a “thetan,” an immortal spirit with unlimited powers over its own universe, but not all are aware of this.

Jesus

Jesus is rarely mentioned in Scientology. Jesus was not the Creator, nor was he an “operating thetan” (in control of supernatural powers, cleared from mental defects). Jesus did not die for sins.

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.

Salvation

No sin or need to repent. Salvation is freedom from reincarnation. One must work with an “auditor” on his “engrams” (negative experience units) to achieve the state of “clear.” One then progresses up the “bridge to total freedom” to higher “Operating Thetan” states and eventual control over matter, energy, space, and time (MEST).

Death

Hell is a myth, and heaven is a “false dream.”

Beliefs/Other

Members observe birth of Hubbard and anniversary of publication of *Dianetics*. Controversy follows the group worldwide. *Time* magazine and *Reader's Digest* have published damaging exposés. Organizations related to Scientology include Narconon, Criminon, Way to Happiness Foundation, WISE, Hubbard College of Administration, Applied Scholastics.

How to Test Prophets

“If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.”

—Deuteronomy 18:22

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” —1 John 4:1–3

How to Recognize False Gospels

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” —Galatians 1:8–9

How to Become a Christian

The Bible says God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God loves you and wants a relationship with you. Here are God’s promises:

- A All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 John 1:10).
- B Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31; John 1:12).
- C If you Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8–9).

What Some Groups Teach about Jesus and the Bible's Response

What Others Teach	What the Bible Says
Jesus was not God.	John 1:1-18; 8:56-58; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16
Jesus was created by God.	John 10:30-38; 17:5; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18
There are three separate gods: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not one God in three persons.	Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 7:14; 43:10; 44:6-8; Matthew 1:18; 28:18-19; John 10:30-38; Hebrews 1:1-14; 1 Peter 1:2
Jesus is not necessary because there is no sin.	John 3:14-17; Romans 3:23-30; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 1 John 1:8-10
Jesus was not raised bodily from the dead.	Luke 24:36-53; Acts 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-23
Jesus was a great prophet, but not God.	Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18; John 5:17-18, 23; 10:30-38; Colossians 2:9-10
There are many ways to God, not just one.	John 3:14-17; 14:6-7; 1 Timothy 2:5-6
Jesus is not necessary because people must pay for their own sins.	John 17:2-3; Romans 6:23; 10:3-10; Ephesians 2:8-9
Jesus died for sins, but people can't be saved unless they obey all of the teachings of the church.	John 14:6-7; Romans 10:3-10; Ephesians 2:8-9
Jesus is God, but less than God the Father.	John 5:17-23; 14:6-7; Colossians 2:9-10
Jesus was just a man.	Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18; John 10:30-38; 2:18-22
Jesus is not the only son of God.	John 3:14-17, 36; Hebrews 1:1-14
Jesus will never come again.	Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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RELIGION/Biblical Studies/General

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Islam

Comparing Sunni and Shi'a Islam

Founder

Founded in Mecca, Arabia by Muhammad (AD 570–632), considered the greatest man who ever lived and the last of more than 124,000 messengers sent by Allah (God). Main types: Sunni (“people of the tradition”), Shi’a (“party of Ali”), Sufi (mystics).

Writings

The Holy Qur’an (Koran), revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Essential commentaries are found in the *Sunnah* (“tradition”), composed of *Hadith* (“narrative”) and *Sirah* (“journey”). The Qur’an affirms the biblical Torah, Psalms, and Gospels, but Jews and Christians have corrupted the original texts.

God

Allah is One and absolutely unique. He cannot be known. The greatest sin in Islam is *shirk*, or associating anything with Allah. Human qualities like fatherhood cannot be attributed to Allah. Many Muslims think that Christians believe in three gods and are therefore guilty of *shirk*.

Jesus

Jesus (*Isa* in Arabic) was not God or the Son of God. His virgin birth is likened to Adam’s creation. He was sinless, a worker of miracles, and one of the most respected prophets sent by Allah. He was not crucified or resurrected. He, not Muhammad, will return to play a special role before the future judgment day, perhaps turning Christians to Islam.

Holy Spirit

“Holy spirit” can refer to Allah, to the angel Gabriel, or to a spirit used by Allah to give life to man and inspire the prophets.



Salvation

Humans are basically good, but fallible and need guidance. The balance between good and bad deeds determines one’s destiny in paradise or hell. Allah may tip the balances toward heaven. One should always live with the fear of Allah and judgment day.

Death

Belief in bodily resurrection. One may pray for and seek favor for the dead before judgment day. Paradise includes a garden populated with *houris*, maidens designed by Allah to provide sexual pleasure to righteous men.

Beliefs/Other

Muslims meet in mosques for prayers, sermons, counsel. Emphasis on hospitality, developing a sense of community, and maintaining honor (or avoiding shame). *Shari’a* (Islamic law) governs all aspects of life in places where it is enforced. *Jihad* (“fight”) may be used to refer either to one’s inner struggle to obey God or to literal warfare. Muslims who convert to Christianity or other religions face persecution and possible death.

Adherents

Sunni: Over 1 billion worldwide

Shi’a: Estimated 170 million, primarily in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Bahrain



© Steve Reinbeck

Succession

Sunni: Muhammad’s successors (called *caliphs*) should ideally be chosen by consensus/election. The first was Abu Bakr (c. AD 573–634), and over the centuries many others followed. No new caliphs since 1924.

Shi’a: Muhammad’s successors (called *imams*) should be from his family and descendants (*Ahl al-Bayt*). The first of these was his cousin and son-in-law, Ali (c. AD 600–661), and thereafter all imams were bloodline descendants from Fatimah (Muhammad’s daughter and Ali’s wife). No new imams since AD 869.

Authoritative Writings

Sunni: The Qur’an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to companions of Muhammad such as Abu Bakr, Umar, and Aisha.

Shi’a: The Qur’an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to members of Muhammad’s family and their supporters.

Main Teachings and Practices

Sunni: Five Pillars (or duties): Profession of Faith (*shahadah*); Prayers (*salat*); Almsgiving (*zakat*); Fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*); Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Six Beliefs: in Allah; in Prophets and Messengers; in Angels; in Holy Books; in the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection; in the Decree (destiny/fate)

Shi’a: Ten Central Practices: Profession of Faith (*shahadah*); Prayers (*salat*); Almsgiving (*zakat*); One-Fifth Tax (*khums*); Fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*); Pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*); Religious War (*jihad*); Enjoining to Do Good (*amr-bil-ma’ruf*); Exhortation to Desist from Evil (*nahi-anil-munkar*); Loving the Ahl al-Bayt and their followers (*tawalla*); Disassociation from the Enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt (*tabarra*) Five Principles: Oneness (*tawhid*); Justice (*adl*); Prophethood (*nubuwwah*); Leadership (*imamah*); Day of Resurrection (*yawm al qiyamah*)

Major Divisions

Sunni: Four “schools of law” (*Madh’hab*)—Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi’i

Shi’a: Three branches—majority “Twelvers” (*Jafari*), who believe in a succession of twelve infallible, divinely ordained imams; “Seveners” (*Ismaili*); and “Fivers” (*Zaidi*)

Eschatology

Sunni: Majority believe that a figure known as the *Mahdi* (“guided one”), from Muhammad’s family, will appear with Jesus before the final judgment.

Shi’a: Majority believe in a series of twelve imams serving as Muhammad’s spiritual and political successors. The final one, Muhammad al-Mahdi (b. AD 869), is alive but hidden (in “occultation”) since AD 874; at the proper time he will appear with Jesus.

Nation of Islam

Wallace D. Fard (1891–?) in Detroit in 1930, but led by Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) since 1934. Current head is Louis Farrakhan (1933–). Headquarters in Chicago, Illinois.

Publicly, the Holy Qur'an is authoritative and the Bible is quoted often, but *Message to the Blackman in America, Our Saviour Has Arrived*, and other books by Elijah Muhammad supply its distinctive views. Current teachings are in *The Final Call* newspaper and speeches of Minister Farrakhan.

Officially, there is one God, Allah, as described in the Qur'an. But Elijah Muhammad's teachings are also true: God is a black man, millions of Allahs have lived and died since creation, collectively the black race is God, and Master Fard is the Supreme Allah and Savior.

Officially, Jesus is a sinless prophet of Allah. Privately, Jesus was born from adultery between Mary and Joseph, who was already married to another woman. Jesus was not crucified, but stabbed in the heart by a police officer. He is still buried in Jerusalem. Prophecies of Jesus' return refer to Master Fard, Elijah Muhammad, or to Louis Farrakhan.



Louis Farrakhan

The Holy Spirit is not significant to this belief, but is generally regarded as the power of God or as the angel Gabriel who spoke to the prophet Muhammad.

People sin, but are not born sinful; salvation is through submission to Allah and good works. Older beliefs still held include: Fard is the savior, salvation comes from knowledge of self and realizing that the white race are devils who displaced the black race.

There is no consciousness or any spiritual existence after death. Heaven and hell are symbols. Statements about the resurrection refer to awakening "mentally dead" people by bringing them true teachings.

Farrakhan's public messages coexist with earlier, esoteric doctrines. Elijah Muhammad's older views (such as polytheism, God as the black race, Master Fard as Allah incarnate, whites as devils bred to cause harm) are still distributed, but public preaching now focuses on Islamic themes (one eternal God, non-racial emphasis) with frequent use of the Bible.

Bahá'í Faith

Sayyid 'Ali-Muhammad, "the Báb" (1819–1850) and Mirzá Husayn-'Alí, "Bahá'u'lláh" (1817–1892).

Founded 1844 in Iran. Headquarters in Haifa, Israel.



Bahá'u'lláh

Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, including *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ("Most Holy Book") and *Kitáb-i-Iqán* ("Book of Certitude"). The Bible, interpreted spiritually to conform to Bahá'í theology.

God is an unknowable divine being who has revealed himself through nine "manifestations" (prophets), including Adam, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh. No Trinity.

Jesus is one of many manifestations of God. Each manifestation supersedes the previous, giving new teachings about God. Jesus, who superseded Moses, was superseded by Muhammad, and most recently by the greatest, Bahá'u'lláh ("Glory of Allah"). Jesus is not God and did not rise from the dead. He is not the only way to God. The "Christ spirit" returned to earth in Bahá'u'lláh, who is superior to Jesus.

Holy Spirit is divine energy from God that empowers every manifestation. "Spirit of Truth" refers to Bahá'u'lláh.



Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

Faith in the manifestation of God (Bahá'u'lláh). Knowing and living by Bahá'u'lláh's principles and teachings.

Personal immortality based on good works, with rewards for the faithful. Heaven and hell are "allegories for nearness and remoteness from God," not actual places.

Bahá'í originated as an Islamic sect and is severely persecuted in Iran. Bahá'í teaches that all religions have the same source, principles, and aims. Stress on oneness and world unity. Regular local gatherings called "feasts," administrative meetings called "spiritual assemblies." "Universal House of Justice" in Haifa, Israel, is the ultimate governing body.

Founder

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Beliefs/Other

Judaism

Abraham of the Bible, about 2000 BC, and Moses in the Middle East. There are three main branches of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform—each with its own beliefs.

The Tanakh (Old Testament), and especially the Torah (first five books of the Bible). The Talmud (explanation of the Tanakh). Teachings of each branch. Writings of sages, such as Maimonides.

God is spirit. To Orthodox Jews, God is personal, all-powerful, eternal, and compassionate. To other Jews, God is impersonal, unknowable, and defined in a number of ways. No Trinity.

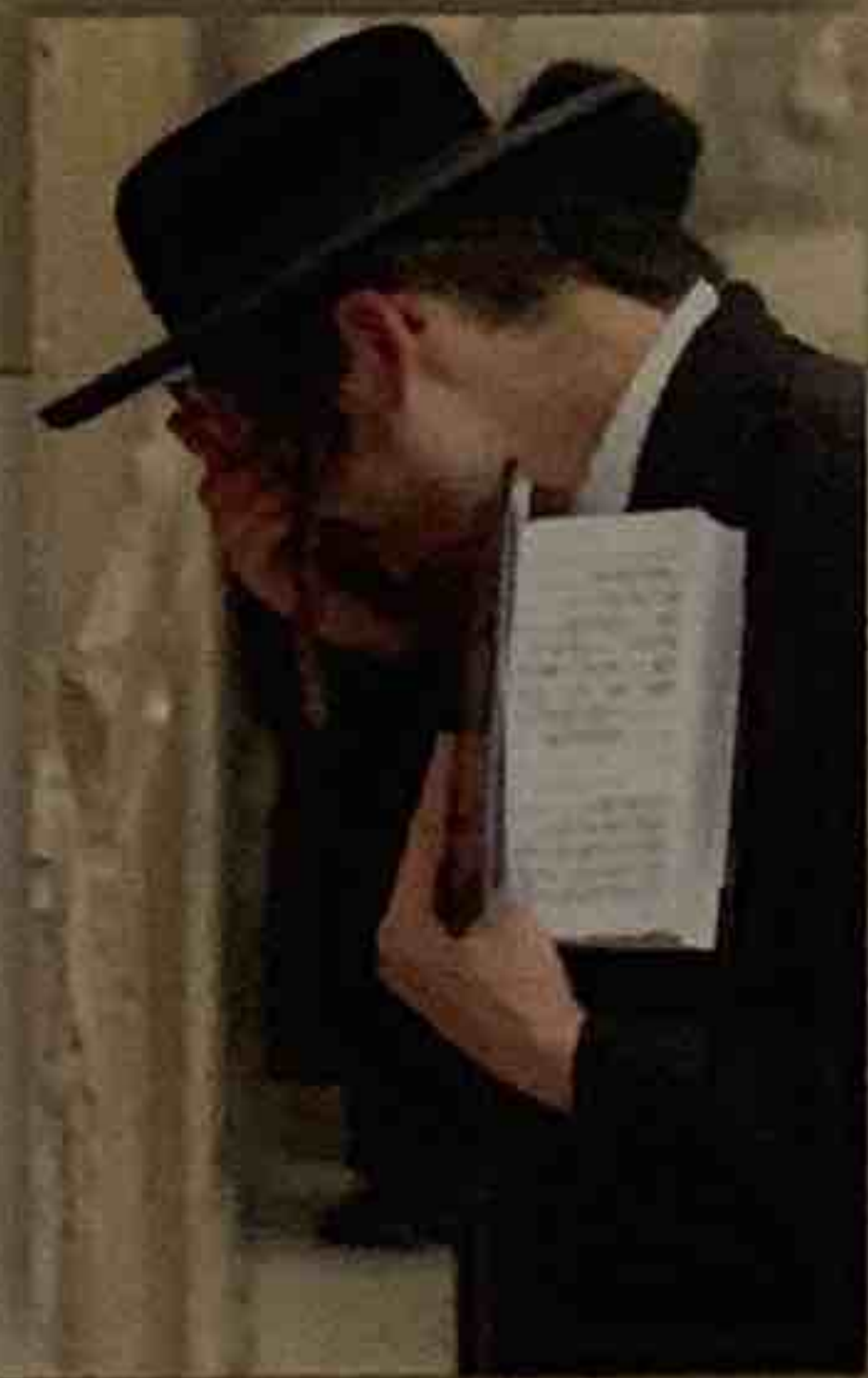
Jesus is seen either as an extremist false messiah or a good but martyred Jewish rabbi (teacher). Many Jews do not consider Jesus at all. Jews (except Messianic Jews and Hebrew Christians) do not believe he was the Messiah, Son of God, or that he rose from the dead. Orthodox Jews believe the Messiah will restore the Jewish kingdom and eventually rule the earth.

Some believe the Holy Spirit is another name for God's activity on earth. Others say it is God's love or power.

Some Jews believe that prayer, repentance, and obeying the Law are necessary for salvation. Others believe that salvation is the improvement of society.

There will be a physical resurrection. The obedient will live forever with God, and the unrighteous will suffer. Some Jews do not believe in a conscious life after death.

Meeting in synagogues on the Sabbath (Sabbath is Friday evening to Saturday evening). Circumcision of males. Many holy days and festivals, including Passover, Sukkoth, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim. Jerusalem is considered the holy city.



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Kabbalah Centre

Shraga Feivel Gruberger (1927?–2013), now known as Philip S. Berg. Followers claim it was originally founded in 1922 by Rav Yehuda Ashlag (1885–1995) in Jerusalem. Headquarters in Los Angeles, California.

The *Zohar* ("Book of Splendor"), the Centre's 23-volume translation of mystical Aramaic and Hebrew writings which first appeared in Spain in the 13th–14th centuries. Books by Philip Berg and his son, Yehuda, including *Kabbalah for the Layman*, *The Essential Zohar*, and *The 72 Names of God*.

The supreme being (*Ein Sof*, "endlessness") is unknowable, infinite, and impersonal—described as both "everything" and "in everything." This Creator God is revealed through ten emanations or manifestations, called *sefirot* ("numbers"), which are illustrated with male and female aspects as ten points on the Kabbalah "Tree of Life" diagram.

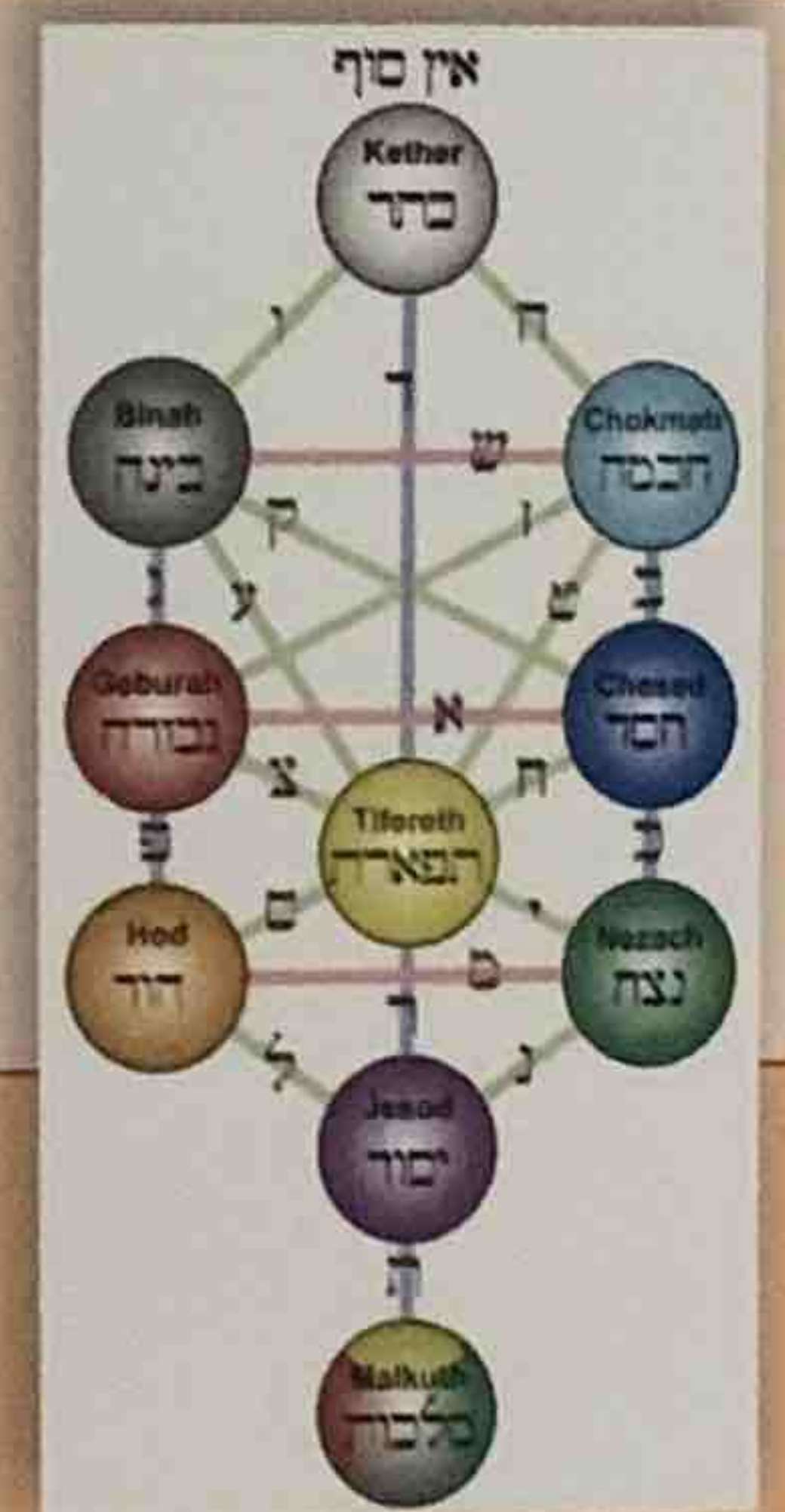
Jesus is not God, nor is he the Jewish Messiah (who is yet to come). Some believe Jesus was a Kabbalist himself.

Ru'ah HaKodesh (the "spirit of holiness") is said to be a state of the soul that enables one to prophesy.

Man is a vessel with the spark of the Creator; he repairs God/the universe by right living and sharing so he can hold more of the Creator's light. Kabbalah enables us to understand and live in harmony with spiritual laws on which the universe operates.

Followers believe in reincarnation, not resurrection. Man is said to climb the Tree of Life back to God, and thus return to Paradise and "restore Eden."

Evil is not a moral issue, but a question of violating universal principles. Controversy over expensive merchandise, courses, and fundraising methods. Followers use the red string bracelet and other talismans to protect themselves from the "Evil Eye" and various negative spiritual influences. Extensive use of astrology and meditation.



"Tree of Life" diagram

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Beliefs/Other

Hinduism

No one founder. Began 1800–1000 BC in India.
Main types: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism.



Many writings, including the Vedas (oldest, about 1000 BC), the Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

God is "The Absolute," a universal spirit. Everyone is part of God (Brahman), but most people are not aware of it. People worship manifestations of Brahman (gods and goddesses).

Jesus Christ is a teacher, a guru, or an avatar (an incarnation of Vishnu). He is a son of God as are others. His death does not atone for sins and he did not rise from the dead.

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.

Release from the cycles of reincarnation. Achieved through yoga and meditation. Can take many lifetimes. Final salvation is absorption or union with Brahman, like a raindrop falling into the ocean.

Reincarnation into a better status (good karma) if a person has behaved well; if badly, a person can be reborn and pay for past sins (bad karma) by suffering.

Many Hindus worship stone and wooden idols in temples, homes. Disciples meditate on a word, phrase, or picture; may wear orange robes and have shaved heads. Many use a mark, called a *tilak*, on the forehead to represent the spiritual "third eye." Yoga involves meditation, chanting, breathing exercises. Some gurus demand complete obedience. Foundation of New Age, TM.

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Beliefs/Other

Hare Krishna (ISKCON)

AC. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977) began the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in 1965 in New York. Based on 16th-century Hindu teachings. Headquarters in Mayapur, India.

Back to Godhead magazine. Prabhupada's translations of and commentaries on Hindu scriptures, especially *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

God is Lord Krishna. Krishna is a personal creator; the souls of all living things are part of him. ISKCON teaches that what Krishna does freely for his own pleasure (intoxication, sex outside of marriage) is prohibited to his devotees.

Jesus is not important to this group. He is usually thought of as an enlightened vegetarian teacher who taught meditation. He is not an incarnation of God. Some Krishna devotees consider Jesus to be Krishna. Others say he is a great avatar (teacher).

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.



Chanting Krishna's name constantly, total devotion to Krishna, worshipping images, and obeying the rules of ISKCON throughout many reincarnated lives, releases a follower from bad karma.

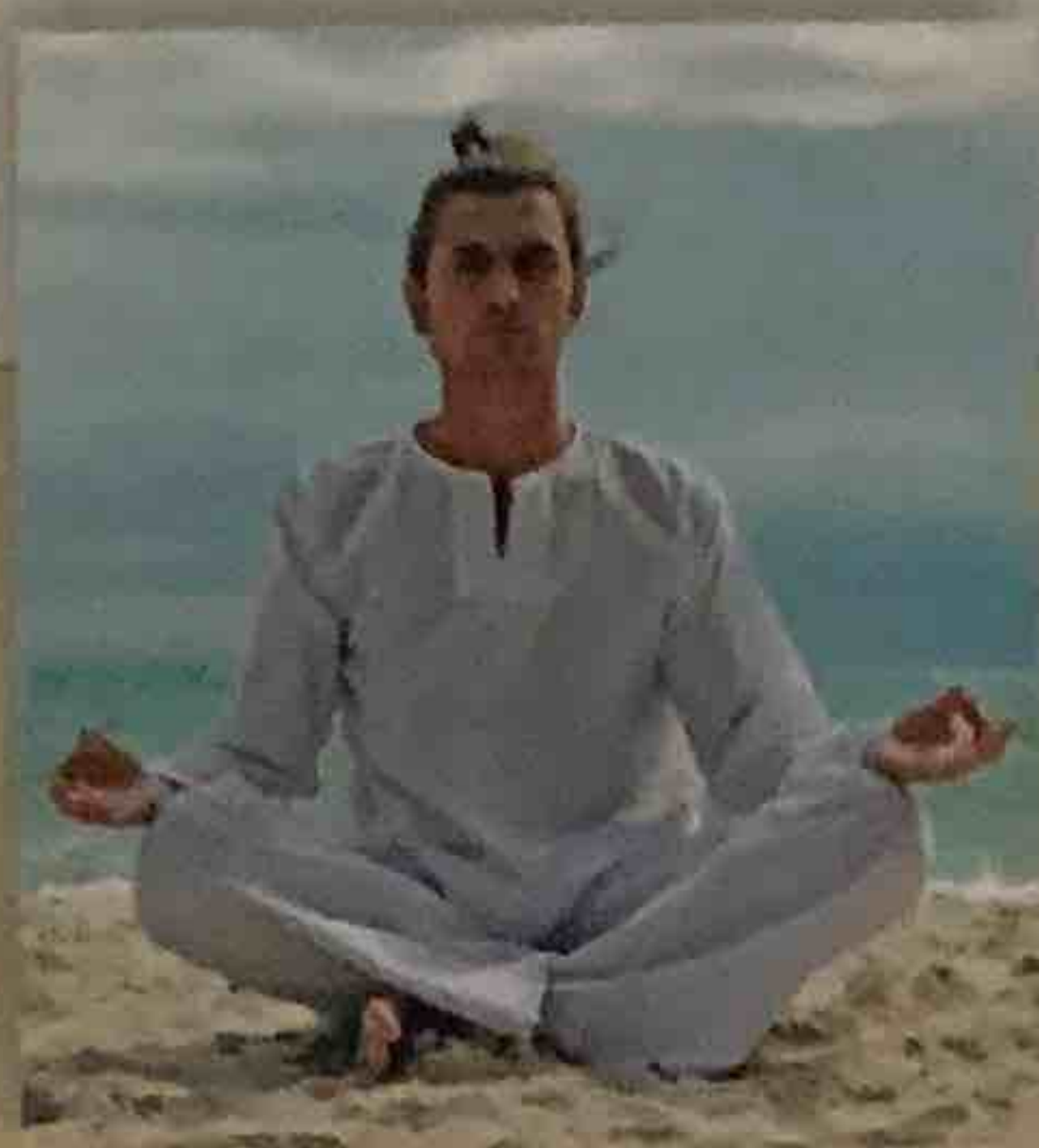
Those who are unenlightened continue in endless reincarnation (rebirth on earth) based on the sinful acts of a person's previous life.

Public chanting of Hare Krishna "Maha Mantra," yoga, food offerings, soliciting donations. "Four regulative principles" require vegetarian diet, no intoxicants, no gambling, and sex for procreation only. New members are often attracted through feasts and Indian cultural programs. Followers are given new names and may cut family ties.

Transcendental Meditation (TM)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917–2008). Founded 1955–1958 in India, based on Hinduism and karma yoga. Headquarters near Vlodrop, the Netherlands. Also called World Plan Executive Council.

Hindu scriptures including the *Bhagavad-Gita*. *Meditations of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Science of Being and Art of Living*, other writings by the founder.



Each part of creation makes up "God" (Brahman). Supreme Being is not personal. All creation is divine; "all is one."

Jesus is not uniquely God. Like all persons, Jesus had a divine essence. Unlike most, he discovered it. Christ didn't suffer and couldn't suffer for people's sins.

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.

Humans have forgotten their inner divinity. Salvation consists of doing good in excess of evil in order to evolve to the highest state (final union of the self with Brahman) through reincarnation.

Reincarnation is based on karma (reaping the consequences of one's actions) until loss of self into union with Brahman. No heaven or hell.

Mentally recite a mantra (word associated with a Hindu god). Meditate twice a day to relax and achieve union with Brahman. Maharishi University of Management in Iowa offers advanced T.M. programs in "levitation" and "invisibility." Practices include yoga, Hindu astrology, use of crystals, and idol worship (offerings of flowers, fruit, and cloth for Maharishi's dead teacher, Guru Dev).

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Beliefs/Other

Sikhism

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539), in what is now the Punjab in Pakistan. Nine gurus followed (1504–1708). Main place of worship is the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India.

Main scripture is the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* ("the master book," also called *Adi Granth*), first compiled in AD 1604. It is worshiped by Sikhs, who consider it their final and perpetual guru. Other key works include the *Dasam Granth*, *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, and *Sikh Reht Maryada*.

One omnipresent god (referred to as *Waheguru*, "Wondrous Teacher"), who is known to the spiritually "awakened" only through meditation. Sikhism is also pantheistic, considering the universe itself part of God (leaving no clear distinction between the Creator and creation). Representing God by pictures or idols is forbidden.

Jesus is not specifically part of this belief, although the *Adi Granth* specifically denies the Trinity and describes God as "beyond birth" and incarnation.



The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.

Bondage to the material realm and the "five evils" (ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust) condemn the soul to 8.4 million reincarnations. Those who successfully overcome these evils through proper behavior and devotion will be released from karma and the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*).

Upon death, those who escape *samsara* will be absorbed into God and lose their individuality, like a raindrop falling into the ocean. The *Adi Granth* both affirms and denies existence of a literal heaven and hell.

Baptized (*Khalsa*) Sikhs are known by their use of the "five K's": the *kirpan* (a small ceremonial sword), *kes* (uncut hair), *kanga* (a small wooden comb), *kachera* (knee-length shorts), and *kara* (steel bracelet). Adult males wear a turban and include "Singh" in their names. Emphasis on full equality of men and women. Meeting places called *gurdwaras*.

Buddhism

Gautama Siddhartha, (563–483 BC), also known as Buddha (“Enlightened One”). Founded in modern-day Nepal and India as a reformation of Hinduism. Main types: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana.

The *Mahavastu* (“Great Story,” a collection covering the Buddha’s life story), the *Jataka Tales* (550 stories of the former lives of the Buddha), the *Tripitaka* (“Three Baskets”), and the *Tantras* (as recorded in Tibetan Buddhism).

The Buddha himself did not believe in the existence of God. Others speak of the Buddha as a universal enlightened consciousness or as a god.



Jesus Christ is not part of the historic Buddhist worldview. Buddhists in the West today generally view Jesus as an enlightened teacher, while Buddhists in Asia believe Jesus is an *avatar* or a *Bodhisattva*, but not God.

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief. Buddhists do believe in spirits, and some practice deity yoga and invite spirit possession.

The goal of life is *nirvana*, to eliminate all desires or cravings, and in this way escape suffering. The Eightfold Path is a system to free Buddhists from desiring anything and eventually achieve nonexistence.

Reincarnation. People do not have their own individual souls or spirits, but one’s desires and feelings may be reincarnated into another person.

Eightfold Path recommends right knowledge, intentions, speech, conduct, livelihood, right effort, mindfulness, and meditation. Some Buddhist groups talk about an “eternal Buddha” (life-force). Through the “Doctrine of Assimilation” the belief systems of other religions are blended into their form of Buddhism.



Soka Gakkai International

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and Josei Toda (1900–1958). Founded 1930 in Japan. Based on 13th-century Nichiren Buddhism. Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan.

The *Lotus Sutra* (a sutra is a discourse of the Buddha as recorded by his disciples). *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, plus writings of Daisaku Ikeda.

There is no god in Soka Gakkai. Followers hold to a monistic worldview, believing that there is no separation between creator and creature and that they are protected by Buddhist, Hindu, and Shinto gods that they regard as spiritual forces.

Jesus Christ is not part of this belief.



Josei Toda



Tsunesaburo Makiguchi

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief.

Enlightenment, prosperity, and healing come from chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, a mantra (phrase) expressing devotion to the law of karma. Fulfilling worldly desires brings enlightenment, which can be achieved in one lifetime.

Repeated reincarnation until one awakens to one’s Buddha nature, then enters nirvana (escaping the cycle of rebirth). Heaven and hell are two of ten states of existence. After death, one enters a suspended state called *Ku*.

Worship of a scroll called the *Gohonzon* by chanting *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (roughly translated, “hail to the mystic law of cause and effect”). *Shakubuku* (literally, “the tearing and crushing of other faiths”) is their form of proselytizing, which they believe helps them change their karma. Soka University is their main educational institution in the United States.

Founder

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