

Comparing World Faiths & Introduction to John's Gospel

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Comparing world faiths

Hinduism

- A mystical religion - not based on historical events.
- Endless reincarnation paying for one's sin and supposedly improving.
- A belief in prophets, including the claim of some prophets to have previously been the Buddha and Christ ... but faith is not dependent on belief in such prophets.
- Multiple gods (some 30,000) but no historical claim to a divine presence upon earth and no divine person bringing salvation.
- Sections practice ethnic cleansing (Orissa today) – yet it's an ethics based religion!
- Social control is very important – the Caste system.

Islam

- A historical religion – based on the belief of being descendants of Abraham's first son Ishmael- the father of Islam –whose descendant was Muhammad.
- So... Judaism, Christianity and Islam all trace their roots back to Abraham. It all starts as God states in the book of Genesis:

Read Genesis 12 vs 1-3: Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Read Genesis 25 v 6: But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

Ishmael, being the son of Abraham's slave, was sent out of Israel, "**to the east**" (India).

- Until Judgement Day, a Muslim cannot know whether he has pleased Allah. Muhammad himself said that he did not know what would happen to him at Judgement Day.
- There is a well-accepted Hadith where Muhammad is said to have been visiting a home where a Muslim man had died and the body was still there.

Muhammad said: *"As for him, death has come to him and I wish him all good from Allah. By Allah, although I am Allah's apostle, I neither know what will happen to me, nor do you,"*

[The Correct Books of Bukhari, vol.9, bk.87, no. 145. Narrated by Kharija bin Zaid bin Thabit.]

- Allah – a God of judgement – i.e. you get what you deserve – So Allah is a merciful God as long as actions are taken e.g. :
 - Fasting in Ramadan
 - Alms to the poor etc
 - Law keeping
- No historical claim to divine presence upon earth and no divine person for Salvation
- Belief is that Jesus, as a prophet, swapped places so that someone less important died in his place!! Impossible to believe that such a great prophet should die such a criminal's death!
- Would utterly (violently) reject as blasphemous the view of God being a Trinity (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Buddhism (an off-shoot of Hinduism)

- A historical religion – Buddha born in 560BC in India.
- As a Crown Prince, he was brought up in a totally sanitised existence within the palace.
- He snuck out and saw:
 - a corpse (didn't know people died);
 - an old man(didn't know people aged) and
 - a leper (didn't know of such disease).

- He therefore thought: “what is the point of inheriting such a kingdom?” and escaped/left - to find ‘meaning’ – through identifying with nature and experienced ‘the enlightenment.’
- Buddha means “the enlightened one” – he said, “I am awake”.
- Founded 4 Noble Truths:
 1. Suffering
 2. Desire – which is the cause of the first
 3. Selfish craving –follows from second
 4. Overcoming the above by an 8 fold path:
 - Right
 - Knowledge
 - Aspiration
 - Speech
 - Behaviour
 - Livelihood
 - Effort
 - Absorption
- This is a “do-it-yourself” religion! Meaning that, from within one’s self, you work your way to Nirvana.
- Salvation by works ... and re-incarnation. (But NO GOD).
- Buddha died, accidentally eating a poisoned mushroom, around 460BC.

Christianity

- Utterly undone if not historically supported.
- Makes outrageous claims of divine intervention and salvation.
- Jesus – meeting God at the throne of GRACE – God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense

Example:

- My son comes before me in court as I am the judge.
 - He robbed a bank!
 - Do I say – “Don’t do it again” or apply the maximum punishment?
 - Grace can be viewed as applying the deserved punishment ... but then I step down from my judgement seat and offer to pay the fine in full.
 - My son has 2 options:
 - Accept my gift – a helpline. He has done nothing to deserve the gift, he just has to accept/ receive it ...
 - ... or he could tell me to get lost!
- There IS judgement but God took the punishment Himself.

What’s the difference between the 4 gospels..?

- Mark – is Peter’s account
 - The earliest written Gospel – 60-70AD
 - Comes in 2 parts:
Succinctly explains -
 - who JESUS is
 - what JESUS came to do + what He expects of us if we follow Him
- Luke – more the Gospel for Gentiles – all non-Jews – (including Muslims).
 - Compilation includes more about women (whose status as Roman wives was legally described as “Imbecilitas”!!)
 - Expands the theme that Jesus is the Saviour of the world – not just for the Jews.
- Matthew – Shows the link between Jesus and Jewish History in order to help the early Jewish church i.e it shows the fulfilment of the Old Testament
 - From the eye-witness tax collector.

- John – A developed theological treatment for the identity of Christ.
 - It's a great analytical approach – ideal for the modern day businessman ... it even starts with an Executive Summary!
 - It stresses there was ALWAYS a plan...and that Jesus was always in control of that plan!
 - The great "I AM" meets all needs and answers all questions:

Read Exodus 3 vs 13-14: *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.'"*

What do we know about John?

- John probably wrote his Gospel around 80-90AD – within his lifetime and the lifetime of others who would have been around while Jesus was on the scene.
- He was the last of the Gospel writers to die, i.e. as an old man.
- In John 21 v 24 it is written about him:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

- The above verse suggests he is still alive at the time it is written, and that he has clearly been preaching what has been written down in his Gospel ...

... and a small fragment of one copy exists dated back to 125-130 AD - in the John Ryland Library in Manchester!!

- Papias talks of John and his ministry, and he wrote in 117 AD.
- John 20 vs 30-31 sets out what John said about his own book:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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.