

# Understanding Our Religious World

# QUICK FACTS



Hinduism ॐ

Buddhism 卐

Jainism 卐

Sikhism 卐

Confucianism 仁

Daoism 卐

Shinto 卐

Judaism 卐

Christianity 卐

Islam 卐



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# QUICK FACTS

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## Legend

The following symbols have been used in the QUICK FACTS timelines.

 Temple / Shrine

 Text

 Conflict / Battle

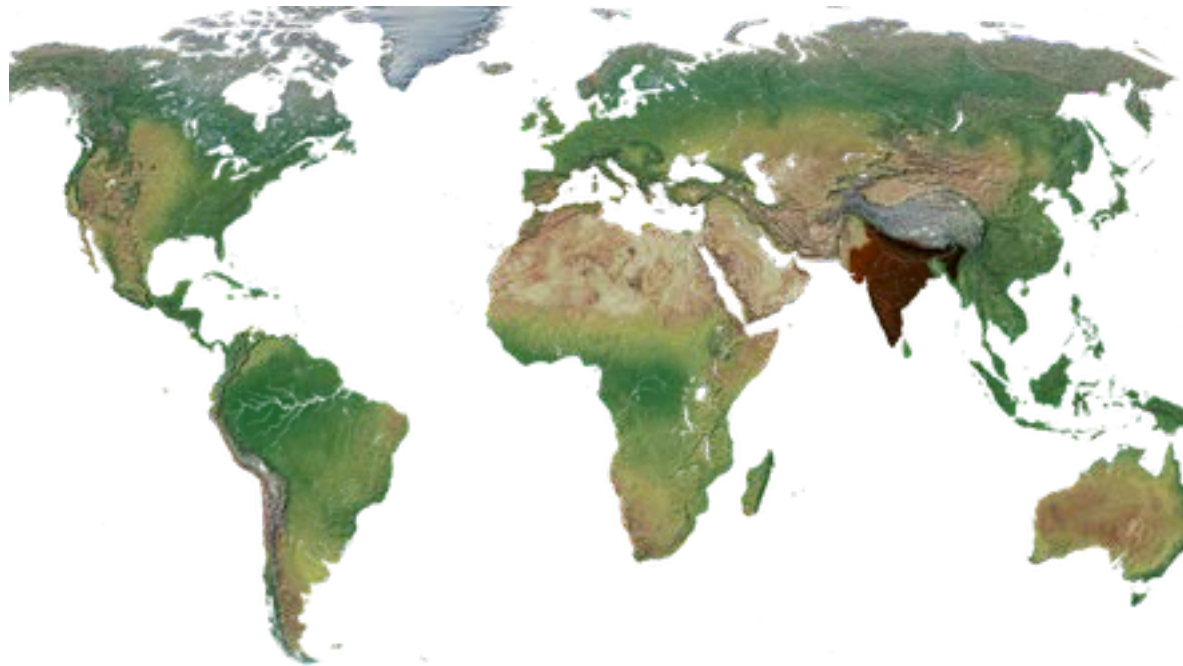
 Origin / First Presence

 Event

 City

 Ruler

# Hinduism



**Date of Establishment:** unclear. Indus Valley Civilization (from c. 3300 BCE); Aryan colonization (from c. 1600 BCE)

**Founder:** none

**Location of Origin:** Indian subcontinent

**Main Areas:** India, Nepal, northern Sri Lanka, and Bali

**Percent of World's Population:** 14% (1.1 billion)

**Main Texts:** Vedas, Dharma Shastras, Epics and Bhagavad Gita, and Puranas

**Main Branches:** Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism

**Main Belief:** a way of life that is inclusive and tolerant of spiritual approaches

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Banaras/Varanasi; Kumbha Mela (Prayag/Allahabad, Haridwar); Sources of the Ganga (Kedarnath, Badrinath)

**Sacred Language:** Sanskrit

**Symbols:** Om/Aum sign

**Religious Authorities:** swami; guru; samnyasin

**Calendar:** lunar and solar

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Diwali; Holi; Navaratra(i); Mahashivaratri; Ganesh Chaturthi; Krishna Janmashtami

**Special Day:** Monday (for Shiva); Tuesdays and Saturdays (to ward off inauspicious astrological influences)

**Main Rites:** Mantra and water oblation at sunrise, midday, and sunset are prescribed

**Main Prayer:** Gayatri Mantra; other short mantras of homage to various deities

**Guide to Conduct:** Dharma Shastras; Yogic Restraints and Observances; Bhagavad Gita's paths to Moksha

**Food Concerns:** beef is forbidden; vegetarianism is widespread

**Distinctive Dress:** women may wear saris and cover their heads at temples; traditional dress for men is the dhotii

**Monasticism:** various organized groups, especially Shankara's lineages

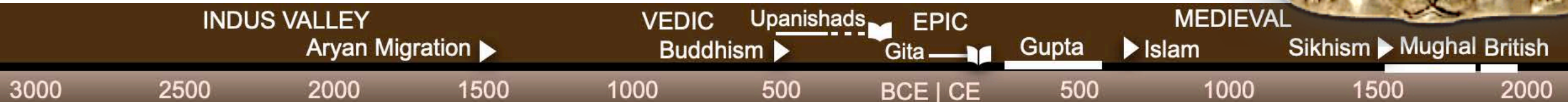
**Religious Building:** temple

**Images and Art:** exuberant use of iconography and painting

**Music:** Vedic and other chants; devotional songs (*bhajan*); classical compositions (*raga*)

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Shankara; Mahatma Gandhi; Swami Vivekananda

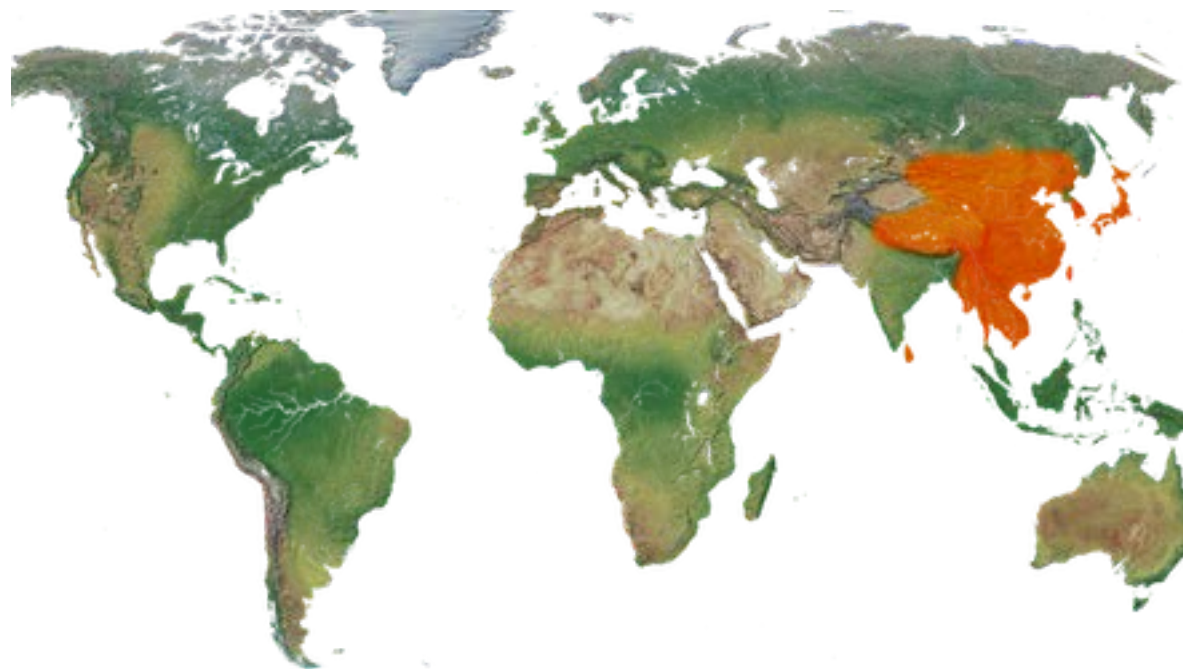
**Main Empires:** Gupta (North India); Chola (South India); Khmer (Cambodia); Majapahit (Indonesia); Maratha (Central and North India); Vijayanagara (South India)







# Buddhism



**Date of Establishment:** (c. 500 BCE); founder's dates are disputed

**Founder:** Siddhartha Gautama

**Location of Origin:** Indian subcontinent

**Main Areas:** Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Tibet, Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, China, India

**Percent of World's Population:** 8-10% (c. 535 million)

**Main Texts:** Tripitaka, Mahayana scriptures, Lotus Sutra, Tibetan Canon

**Main Branches:** Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana

**Main Belief:** The Four Noble Truths with include the Eightfold Path, dealing with the Anatman (no soul/self) doctrine and the ending of sorrow

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Lumbini; Bodhagaya; Sarnath; Kushinagara; Jokang Temple; Temple of the Emerald Buddha; Borobudur; Shwedagon Pagoda; Todaiji Temple

**Sacred Languages:** Pali; Sanskrit; Tibetan; Chinese; Japanese

**Symbols:** Dharma Chakra (eight-spoked wheel); Om/Aum; stupas; svastika; mandala; Buddha images

**Religious Authorities:** the Sangha (mostly monks); Lamas

**Calendar:** lunar and solar

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Vesak (Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana); Full Moon; Kathina Ceremony

**Special Day:** Full Moon and New Moon

**Main Rites:** meditation; keeping the Precepts

**Main Prayer:** The Three Refuges/ Jewels; Om Mani Padme Hum (Vajrayana); Namu Amida Butsu (Japanese Pure Land)

**Guide to Conduct:** Five Precepts; Eight-fold Path; Vinaya Pitaka

**Food Concerns:** vegetarianism is widespread, but not mandatory

**Distinctive Dress:** for monks and nuns: tonsure and saffron robes (Sri Lanka; Thailand) or maroon robes (Myanmar; Tibet).

**Monasticism:** Theravada (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand); Vajrayana (Tibet); Zen (Japan)

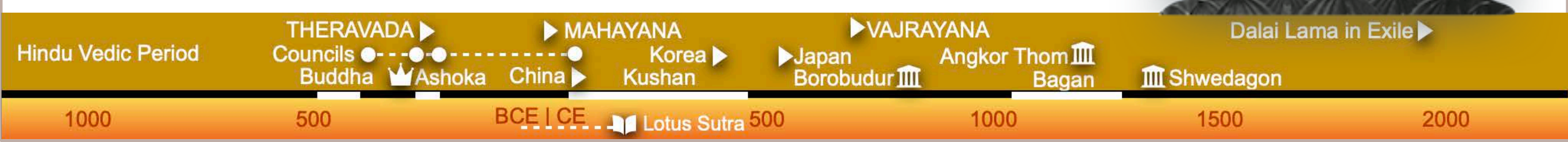
**Religious Building:** stupa, temple, monastery

**Images and Art:** stupas and Buddha images are abundant; Vajrayana (thangka paintings and mandalas)

**Music:** Sutra chanting; horns, drums, and bells in Mahayana and Vajrayana.

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Siddhartha Gautama; Nagarjuna; Bodhidharma; Dalai Lama

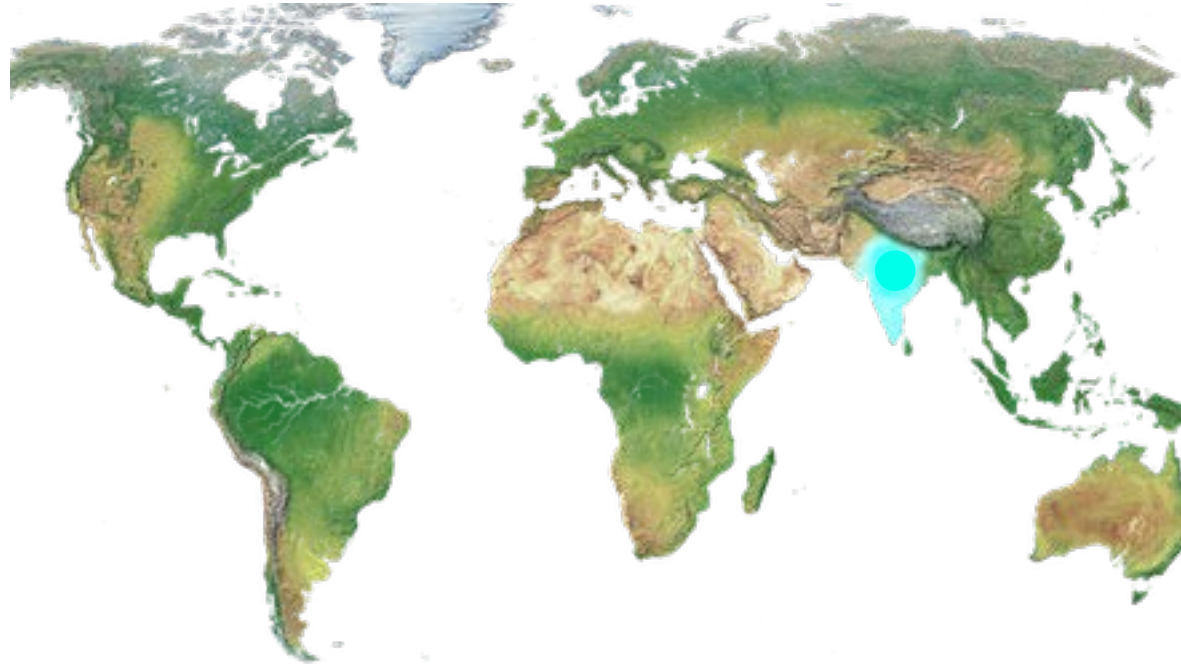
**Main Empires:** Mauryan and Harsha (India); Tang (China); Pagan (Myanmar); Ayutthaya (Thailand)







# Jainism



**Date of Establishment:**  
Uncertain; perhaps 6th century BCE

**Founder:** Adinatha (ancient mythic); Vardhamana, better known as Mahavira, last (24th) Tirthankara of this era (599-527 BCE or later)

**Location of Origin:** Indian subcontinent

**Main Areas:** Throughout India, but mainly northern India

**Percent of World's Population:** 0.064% (c. 5 million)

**Main Texts:** Purvas and Agamas; Kalpa Sutra; Tattvartha Sutra

**Main Branches:** Digambaras (sky-clad); Shvetambaras (white [robe] clad); Sthanakavasis (against temples and image-worship)

**Main Belief:** Freedom of the soul from karma, through the attainment of nirvana

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Shravanabelagola; Shikarji; Palitana temples (Shatrunjaya); Dilwara temples (Mt. Abu); Girnar; Ranakpur

**Sacred Language:** Various Prakrits and Sanskrit

**Symbols:** Svastika; Open Palm; Cosmological Symbol; Tirthankara statues; Shrivatsa

**Religious Authorities:** Monks and Nuns

**Calendar:** mostly lunar, but also solar

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Paryushan (Kalpa Sutra recited); Divali (Festival of Lights); Mahavira's Birthday; Akshaya Tritiya (fasting)

**Special Day:** nothing weekly; Caturmas (4 months in the rainy season has many holy days)

**Main Rites:** Meditation; Following the major or minor ascetic observances, especially ahimsa (non-harming)

**Main Prayer:** Om/Aum; Namaskara (Navkar) Mantra (homage to beings worthy of veneration).

**Guide to Conduct:** The Three Jewels (right faith, knowledge, and conduct); Minor vows (for laypersons); Major vows (for renouncers)

**Food Concerns:** Vegetarianism; Ultimately the goal is to attain physical death through fasting

**Distinctive Dress:** Naked (Digambara monks); White robes (Shvetambara monks and nuns); Some ascetics carry a broom and mouth cloth (to avoid harming small creatures)

**Images and Art:** Images of Tirthankaras and saints (some colossal) are commonplace.

Paintings of Cosmological Schemes and episodes in Tirthankara lives in Jain manuscripts

**Monasticism:** Male and female renouncers (Monks and Nuns) in Digambara and Shvetambara sects

**Religious Building:** Temple

**Music:** Singing of hymns and devotional songs

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** The 24 Jinas or Tirthankaras, especially Mahavira; Umasvati; Hemachandra; Atmaramji; gurus and acharyas (teachers)

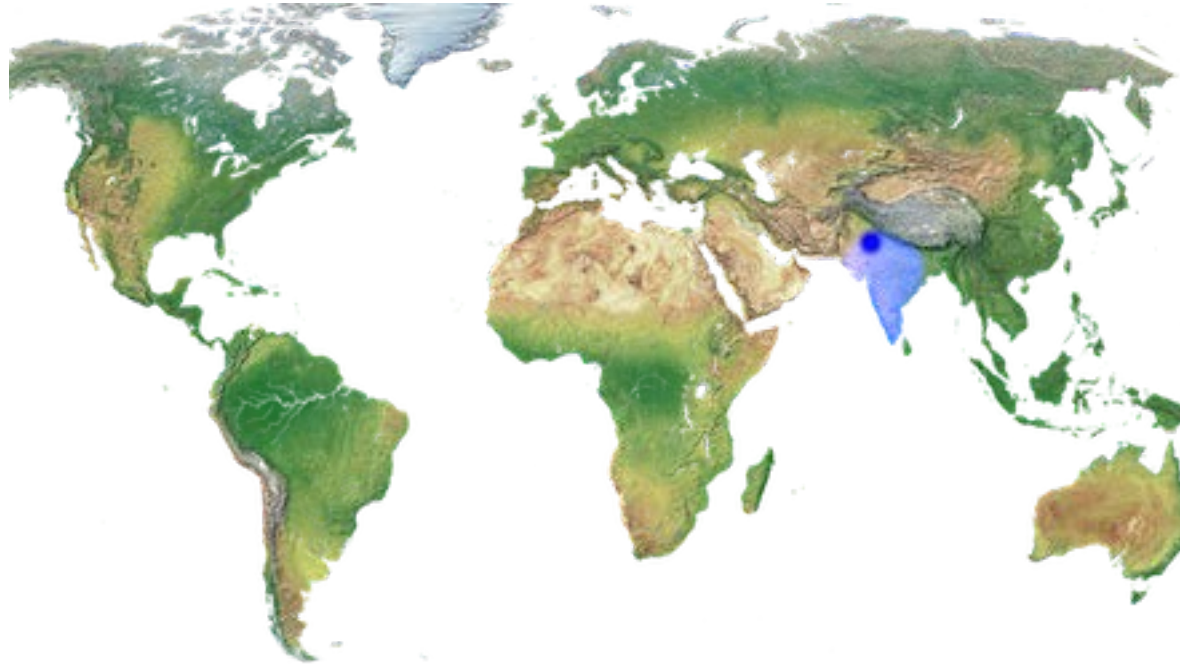
**Main Empires:** Dynasty (c. 2nd century BCE to early 4th century CE); Western Ganga Dynasty (c. 350 to 1000 CE)







# Sikhism



**Date of Establishment:** 1500s CE

**Founder:** Nanak (1469-1539 CE)

**Location of Origin:** Punjab area of Pakistan and northwest India

**Main Areas:** throughout India (with 2/3 in Punjab State); Great Britain, USA, areas of the British Commonwealth, particularly western Canada

**Percent of World's Population:** 0.3% (25 million)

**Main Texts:** Adi Granth (First Book); (also called Guru Granth Sahib); *Dasam Granth* (hymns of

Gobind Singh); Janamsakhis (stories about Nanak)

**Main Branches:** Khalsa; Sahajdharis ("slow adopters")

**Main Belief:** monotheism; devotion to God and selfless action to others are the way to liberation; close to Hinduism in many aspects

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** city of Amritsar, India ("pool of immortality), where the Golden Temple (*Harmandir Sahib*—Abode of God) and Akal Takht are located

**Sacred Language:** Punjabi

**Symbols:** (1) Ik Onkar; (2) Khanda; (3) Nishan Sahib (the Sikh flag); (4) the Five Ks of the Khalsa (uncut hair, dagger, comb, short pants, bracelet; males generally wear turbans)

**Religious Authorities:** The Ten Gurus; Akal Takht (central authority of Sikhism)

**Calendar:** dispute between diaspora and Punjab Sikhs over competing calendars

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** largely follows celebrations on the Hindu calendar, Vaisakhi (new year); Diwali; Gurburbs are distinctly Sikh

**Special Day:** no special weekly day

**Main Rites:** Baptism of the Sword; Path (continuous reading of Adi Granth)

**Main Prayer:** Japji (first part of Adi Granth)

**Guide to Conduct:** Adi Granth, Rehat Maryada; Four Prohibitions; Five Vices; Five Virtues

**Food Concerns:** prohibits meat from ritually killed animals, such as halal and kosher

**Distinctive Dress:** the Five Ks; turban for men

**Monasticism:** Udasis, an ascetic group founded by Nanak's son; rejected by Sikhism

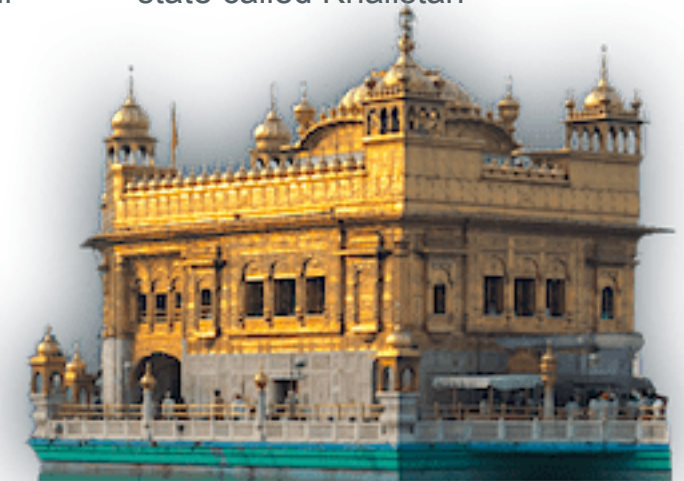
**Religious Building:** gurdwara

**Images and Art:** portraits of the ten gurus; housed images of Hindu deities until reform in 1906

**Music:** hymns from the Adi Granth, with stringed instruments and professional as well as communal singing

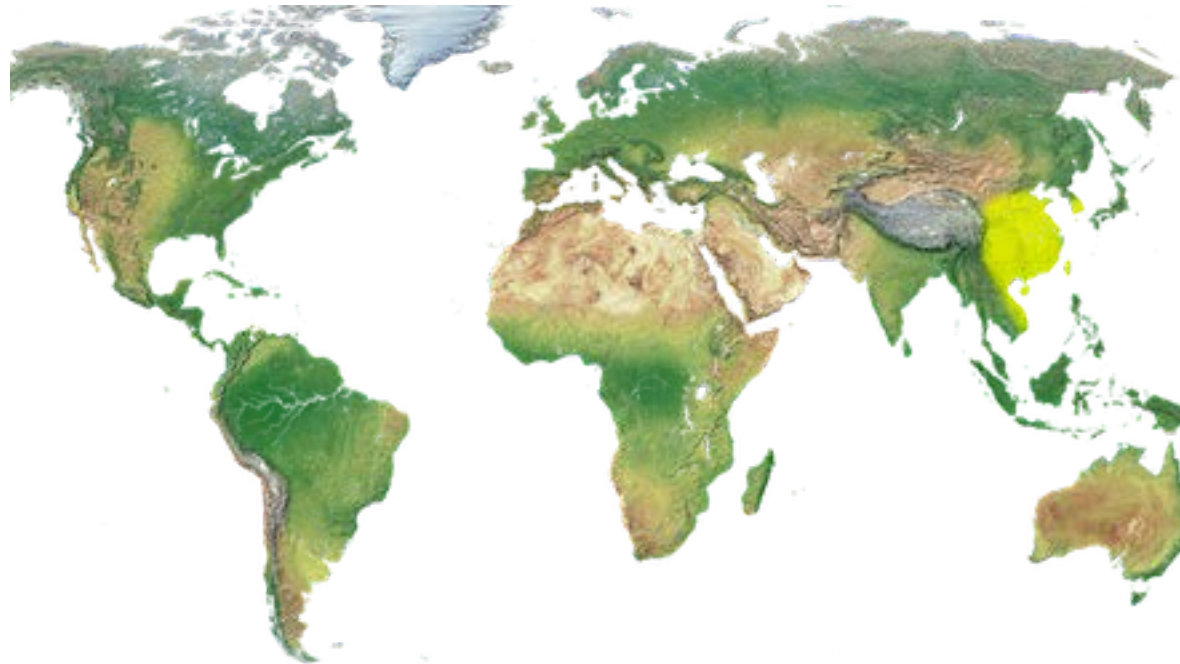
**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Arjan: fifth Guru (built Golden Temple); Gobind Singh (founder of the Khalsa movement); Ranjit Singh (established only Sikh empire)

**Main Empire:** 1799-1849 founded by Ranjit Singh; some Sikhs have ambitions for an independent state called Khalistan





# Confucianism



**Date of Establishment:** c. 500 BCE

**Founder:** Confucius (551?-479 BCE)

**Location of Origin:** China

**Main Areas:** China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia

**Percent of World's Population:** not possible to determine

**Main Texts:** The Analects of Confucius; the Five Classics and the Four Books

**Main Branches:** Mencius (Mengzi); Xunzi; Neo-Confucianism

**Main Belief:** social harmony through self-cultivation and right relationships

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Qufu (family mansion; cemetery); Beijing (imperial palace)

**Primary Language:** Classical Chinese

**Symbols:** nothing official; the Chinese characters for "scholar" (ru), or "humaneness" (ren), or even images of Confucius may be used

**Religious Authorities:** scholar-official; no religious functionaries, just temple caretakers and Confucian ritualists

**Calendar:** primarily lunar; twelve animal signs of the zodiac

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Confucius's Birthday; Qingming (Tomb-Sweeping Day); Chinese New Year

**Special Day:** no special day of the week

**Main Rites:** ancestor veneration; elaborate rites on Confucius's birthday; striving for proper ritual conduct in all aspects of life

**Main Prayer:** none

**Guide to Conduct:** The Five Constants and the Four Virtues, including such values as humaneness, righteousness, and filial piety

**Food Concerns:** none; moderation prescribed for food and drink

**Distinctive Dress:** high quality (e.g., silk) clothes in primary colors for sacrificial rites

**Monasticism:** none

**Religious Building:** temple; ancestral shrine

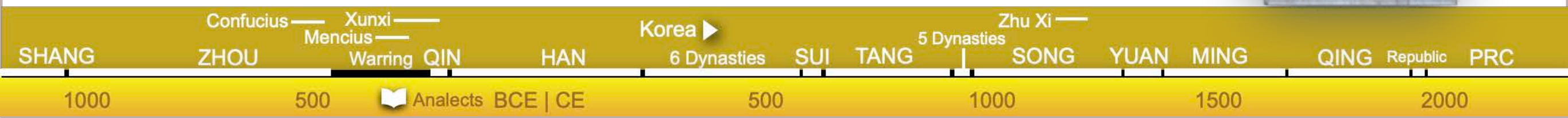
**Images and Art:** calligraphy; natural, asymmetrical rocks; paintings of prominent persons

**Music:** Yauye, a style of classical music and dance performed in

temples and royal courts

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Confucius; Mencius; Xunzi; Zhu Xi

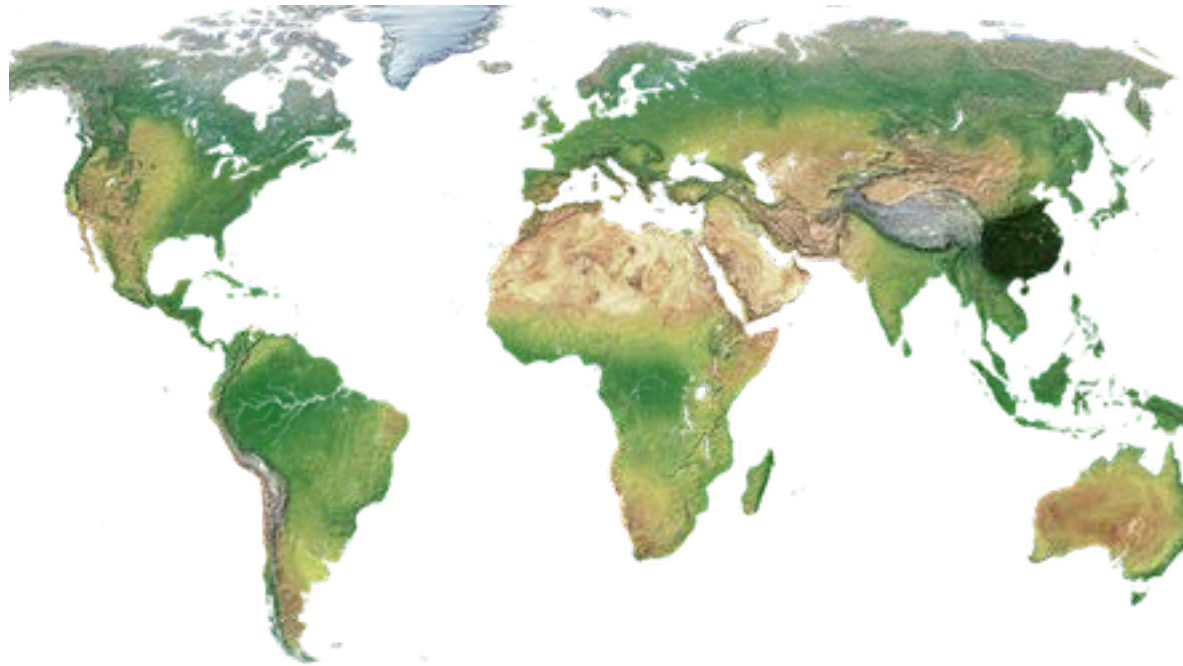
**Main Empire:** Han dynasty; Late Tang dynasty; Song dynasty; influential until the fall of the Qing dynasty; Joseon dynasty (Korea)







# Daoism



**Date of Establishment:** 500c BCE

**Founder:** Laozi (Lao-tzu); Zhuangzi

**Location of Origin:** China

**Main Areas:** China; East Asia and Southeast Asia

**Percent of World's Population:** not possible to determine

**Main Texts:** The Daodejing; The Zhuangzi; the Daozang (Daoist Canon); Yijing

**Main Branches:** Philosophical Daoism (daojia); Religious Daoism (daojiao); Neo-Daoism

**Main Belief:** alignment with the mysterious Way (Dao), through naturalness and uncontrived activity

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** sacred mountains (Wudang, Longhu, Qiyun, Qingcheng) and grottoes; Louguan

**Sacred Language:** Classical Chinese

**Symbols:** The Taijitu (Yin-Yang); Bagua; Chinese characters for Dao and De; dragon; phoenix

**Religious Authorities:** Celestial Masters; Daoists monks; Daoist priests

**Calendar:** lunar and solar

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Chinese New Year; Lantern Festival; Qingming; Hungry Ghost Festival

**Special Day:** no special weekly day

**Main Rites:** The Offering of Thanksgiving and Peace (jiao)

**Main Prayer:** none; but prayer to various Daoists deities

**Guide to Conduct:** The Five or Ten Precepts

**Food Concerns:** food choices to maximize and balance internal energy (qi); ancient texts prescribe avoidance of grain

**Distinctive Dress:** red robes with or without golden embroidery or jade colored robes for priests

**Monasticism:** Quanzhen and Zhengyi; the latter are more priestly than monastic

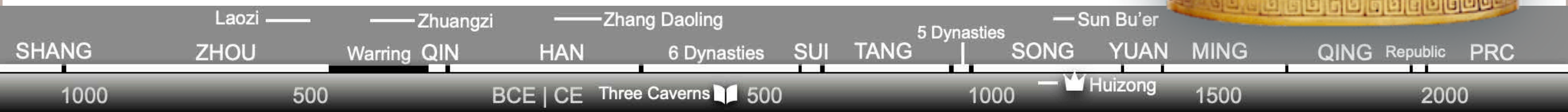
**Religious Building:** temples and monasteries

**Images and Art:** nature painting; depiction of Daoist immortals

**Music:** chanting accompanied by musical instruments (e.g., bells and drums)

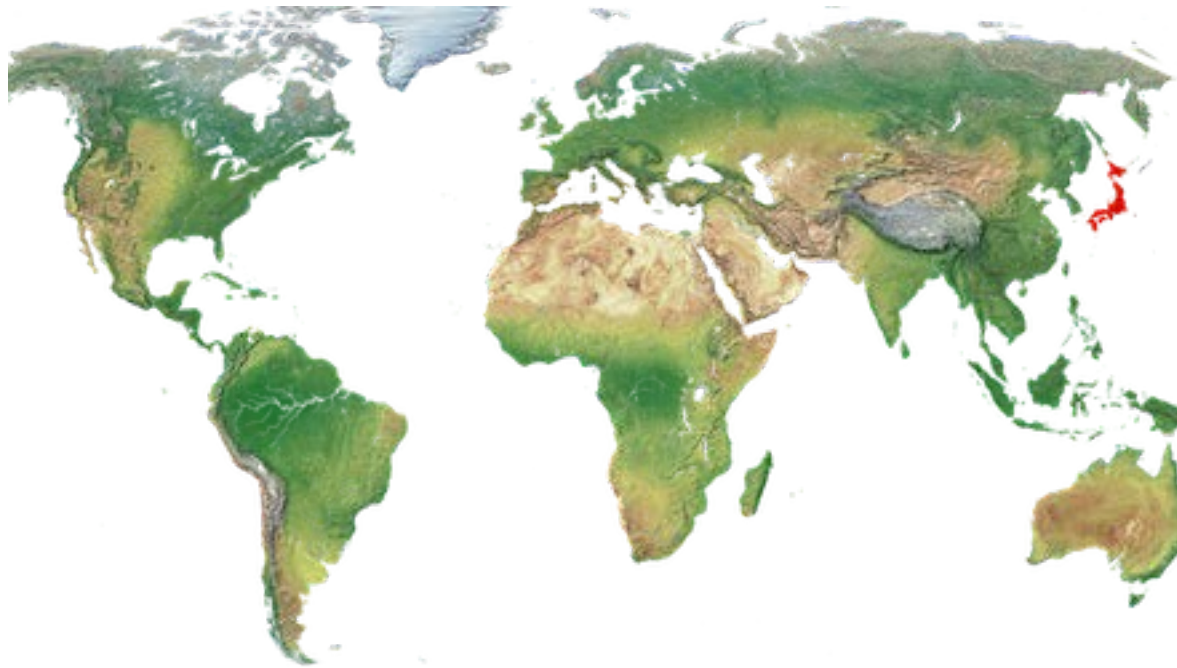
**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Laozi; Zhuangzi; Huizong, Sun Bu'er; Zhang Daoling

**Main Empire:** Yellow Emperor (mythic); Song Dynasty; Ming Dynasty





# Shinto



**Date of Establishment:** obscure origins in Japanese pre-history

**Founder:** no historic founder

**Location of Origin:** Japan

**Main Areas:** Japan

**Percent of World's Population:** 1.2% (c. 90 million)

**Main Texts:** Kojiki; Nihon Shoki

**Main Branches:** many small sects; State Shinto until World War II

**Main Belief:** ritual veneration of the kami; traditionally considered the emperors as divine

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Ise Grand Shrine; Izumo Taisha; Itsukushima Shrine, popularly known as Miyajima

**Sacred Language:** Japanese

**Symbols:** Torii (typically large wooden gate painted red); rising sun; Mt. Fuji; straw rope (shimenawa)

**Religious Authorities:** priest

**Calendar:** traditionally used Chinese lunisolar; Gregorian used since 1873

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** New Year; Shichi-go-san (Seven-Five-Three) children's festival; Hana Matsuri (Flower Festival); Setsubun (for good luck)

**Special Day:** no special weekly day

**Main Rites:** ritual purification, with baths, salt or fire; at a shrine: purification, adoration, food offerings, prayer, ceremonial meal, or rice wine (sake) drink

**Main Prayer:** ritual acts, including silent prayer

**Guide to Conduct:** no moral absolutes; sensitive to the way of the kami

**Food Concerns:** no prohibitions

**Distinctive Dress:** special garments for priests and priestesses

**Monasticism:** None

**Religious Building:** shrine

**Images and Art:** Torii and shrines; kami images not displayed in shrines; Inari kami (fox)

**Music:** flute and drums, accompanied by dance

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Emperor Jimmu (mythic); Emperor Tenmu (Hakuho period); Emperor Kammu (Heian Period); Motoori Norinaga (scholar, Edo Period); Emperor Meiji (for State Shinto)

**Main Empires:** No empires, but supported during the Hakuho, Heian, and Meiji (for State Shinto) periods





# Judaism



**Date of Establishment:** second millennium BCE; Rabbinic Judaism: 200s CE

**Founder:** Abraham, Moses

**Location of Origin:** Middle East

**Main Areas:** Israel and North America

**Percent of World's Population:** 0.2% (15 million)

**Main Texts:** Tanakh (with 3 sections: Torah, Neviim, Ketivim); Mishnah; Talmud

**Main Branches:** Reform, Conservative, Orthodox,

Reconstructionist (in order of size from largest). Orthodox had two traditions from medieval times: Ashkenazi and Sephardic; present Orthodox either Modern or Haredim

**Main Belief:** monotheism; covenant bond of the Jewish people with God (YHWH)

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Temple in Jerusalem (until destroyed in 70 CE); Western Wall of Temple Mount

**Sacred Language:** Hebrew, (Aramaic for gemara in Talmud); Yiddish

**Symbols:** Tetragrammaton; Menorah; Star (Magen) of David

**Religious Authorities:** ancient: Priest (cohen); ancient and modern: rabbi; cantor

**Calendar:** lunar (adjusted to solar cycle); Year 1 = 3761 BCE; date identified by abbreviation AM (*anno Mundi*—year of the World)

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hanukkah, Purim, Pesach, Shavuot

**Special Day:** Sabbath

**Main Rites:** circumcision; bar mitzvah; bat mitzvah; Passover seder; Sitting Shivah

**Main Prayer:** Shema

**Guide to Conduct:** Decalogue (10 Commandments); 613 Commandments (mitzvot) in Torah; Talmud; *Shulchan Aruch*; Responsa

**Food Concerns:** Kosher; leaven prohibited during Passover

**Distinctive Dress:** Kippah, Hasidic/Haredi men (black clothing, various hats, long sides curls); use of tefillin and tallit at prayer

**Monasticism:** None

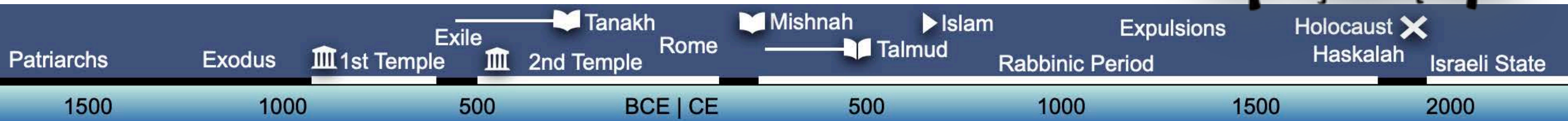
**Religious Building:** Temple (ancient); synagogue (ancient and current)

**Images and Art:** prohibition of images of God

**Music:** priestly music when Temple was standing. Various forms of sung prayers in synagogue, led by a cantor. No musical instruments for Orthodox

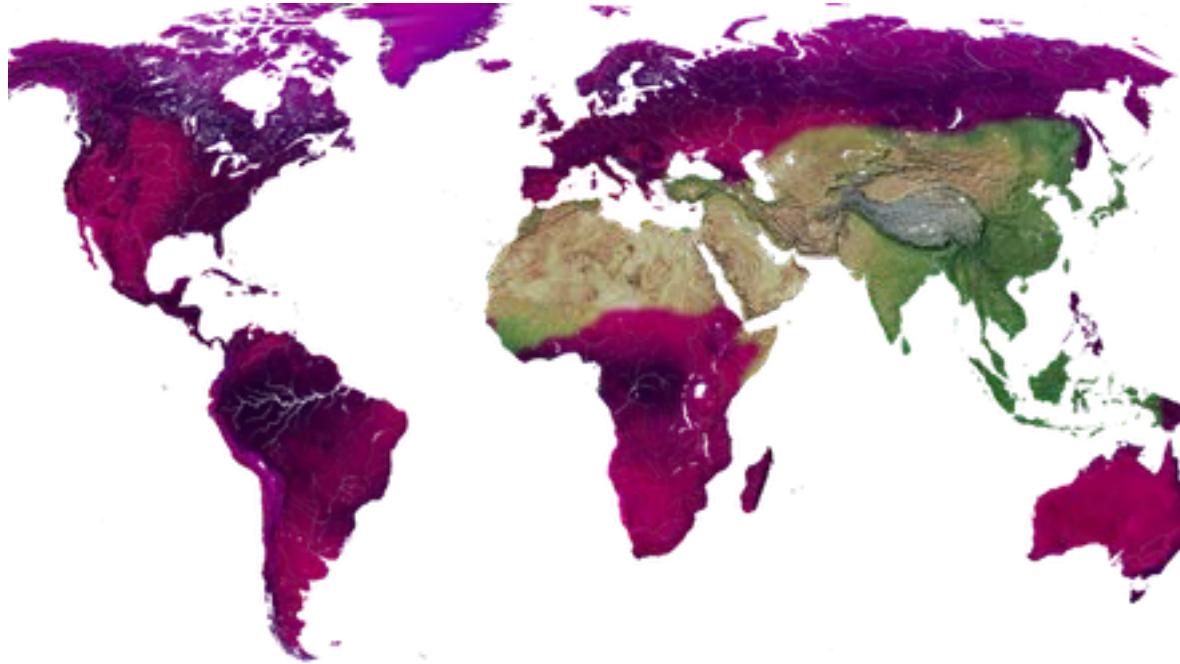
**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Ancient (Abraham, Moses, David); medieval (Rashi, Maimonides); modern (Mendelssohn, Geiger, Hirsch, Herzl)

**Main Empires:** dynasty of David; Maccabees; modern State of Israel





# Christianity



**Date of Establishment:** 1st century CE

**Founder:** Jesus; Paul (primary theologian)

**Location of Origin:** Roman-controlled Palestine

**Main Areas:** Europe, North and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea

**Percent of World's Population:** 32% (2.2 billion)

**Main Texts:** Bible (Old & New Testaments [NT]); Septuagint (LXX)

**Main Branches:** Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant (since 1500s), various eastern churches

**Main Belief:** There is one God, revealed in Jesus who by his death and resurrection brings salvation; Apostles' Creed

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Jerusalem; Vatican City (for Catholics); Hagia Sophia (Istanbul); Saint Basil's Cathedral (Moscow)

**Sacred Language:** Greek and Latin in early days; no sacred language now

**Symbols:** Cross, Chi-Rho, Fish

**Religious Authorities:** Catholic Pope,; Orthodox Patriarch; all have bishops, priests or pastors

**Calendar:** solar; with leap year adjustments; in 1582, Catholics switched from Julian to Gregorian calendar; Orthodox continued with Julian

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Lent, Easter, Christmas (Advent)

**Special Day:** Sunday

**Main Rites:** called Sacraments by Catholics, Mysteries by Orthodox; main ones: baptism and eucharist (since 1200s Catholics count seven)

**Main Prayer:** Lord's Prayer (Our Father); Hail Mary; the Jesus Prayer

**Guide to Conduct:** Beatitudes; Ten Commandments; Deadly Sins; seven virtues and vices

**Food Concerns:** Lenten fast

**Distinctive Dress:** liturgical vestments for clergy and habits for monastics

**Monasticism:** largely Benedictine for Catholics; Basilian for Orthodox; not promoted by most Protestants

**Religious Building:** church; bishop's church is called a cathedral

**Images and Art:** few restrictions; icons used widely; no statues in Orthodoxy; some Protestants reject religious art

**Music:** Gregorian Chant, Protestant hymns, Christmas Carols

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Paul, Constantine, Charlemagne, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther

**Main Empires:** Roman, Byzantine, Carolingian, Russian





# Islam



**Date of Establishment:** 622 CE

**Founder:** Muhammad

**Location of Origin:** central western Arabian Peninsula cities of Mecca (Makkah) and Medina (Madinah)

**Main Areas:** band of land from North Africa, through the Middle East, to India and into China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia

**Percent of World's Population:** 23% (1.8 billion)

**Main Texts:** Quran and Hadith

**Main Branches:** Sunni (85%+); Shia (15%-)

**Main Belief:** Shahadah (Confession) "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger."

**Sacred or Famed Sites:** Kaaba (Mecca); Prophet's mosque (Medina); al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock shrine (Jerusalem); Blue Mosque (Istanbul)

**Sacred Language:** Arabic

**Symbols:** Crescent and Star; the color green

**Religious Authorities:** imam, alim, Sufi sheikh

**Calendar:** Hijri calendar; lunar (10-11 days shorter than solar calendar); Year 1 = 622 CE, year of Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina; date identified by abbreviation AH (*anno hegirae*—year of the Hijrah)

**Sacred Days and Holidays:** Ramadan (ending with Eid al-Fitr); Eid al-Adha, Mawlid,

**Special Day:** Friday noon prayer

**Main Rites:** prayer five times a day; pilgrimage to Mecca once in lifetime; Ramadan fast

**Main Prayers:** done five times a day, with specified postures and recitations, which vary depending on time of day

**Guide to Conduct:** The Five Pillars; Sharia

**Food Concerns:** Halal; fasting during Ramadan

**Distinctive Dress:** various head covering for women (hijab, niqab, burka); for men: turban and skull cap (kufi)

**Monasticism:** none, though ascetic practices in some Sufi orders

**Religious Building:** mosque (masjid)

**Images and Art:** iconoclastic except for geometric designs and calligraphy

**Music:** some forbid all musical instruments; many Sufis embrace music and mystical dance

**Famous Leaders and Thinkers:** Muhammad, the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, Rumi, Suleyman

**Main Empires:** Umayyad (Middle East, North Africa, Spain), Abbasid (Middle East, North Africa), Ottoman (Turkey, Middle East, North Africa), Mughal (India), Safavid (Iran)





# Understanding Our Religious World QUICK FACTS Quick Facts

## QUICK FACT 1 — QUICK FACTS.

This QUICK FACTS guide to world religions is part of a larger digital project that includes eBooks, PowerPoint® and Keynote® slides, maps, audio and video files. Most of the pages here are from individual eBook chapters on major religious traditions.

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