

Summary: Birthplace of Three Religions

The Birth of Judaism and Christianity

Three major religions began in Southwest Asia. Believers in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all consider this area holy. These religions share some common traits. All started with one leader. All have sacred writings. Unlike the Sumerians and Egyptians who believed in polytheism, Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship just one God. This belief is called monotheism. Because all three religions began in the same area, their followers have been fighting over the region for many years.

The Hebrew people were the first monotheists. They called their god Yahweh, and Abraham was their leader. He and his people settled in Canaan, which is now part of Israel. Abraham's people are called Jews and their religion is called Judaism. Long ago, the Jews were exiled from Canaan. For 1,800 years, the Jews waited and hoped for a chance to return to their homeland.

While the Romans ruled Palestine, a new religion began. The leader was a Jew named Jesus. Some people thought he was the Messiah, the leader who would lead the Jews out of exile. For this reason, Jesus was given the name Christ, which means "messiah." Many people followed Jesus, and they were called Christians. Others were afraid Jesus had too much power. Roman leaders had Jesus killed. But according to Jesus' followers, Jesus returned to life. His disciples spread the Christian religion. Today, few Christians live in Southwest Asia. Even so, Christians consider the land of Jesus' birth a holy place.

The Prophet of Islam

Less than 600 years after Christ's death, another leader was born in Mecca. His name was Muhammad. He founded a third monotheistic religion called Islam. The sacred writings of Islam are the Qur'an, and followers of Islam are called Muslims. As with Jesus, some people feared that Muhammad's teachings threatened their power. They planned to kill Muhammad. He and some followers fled to the city of Medina. There they were safe.

Before You Read

Find and circle the vocabulary words in the lesson. Underline the word part that is the same in both words.

polytheism *noun*, a belief in many gods

monotheism *noun*, a belief in one God

After You Read

REVIEW In what part of the world did Judaism, Christianity, and Islam start? Draw a box around the sentence that includes the answer to this question.

REVIEW What is a believer of Islam called? Highlight the sentence that includes the answer to this question.