



Major World Religions

An Apostolic Perspective

Dorsey L. Burk

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Introduction

Genesis in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible opens with the stories of Creation, Adam and Eve, the fall of man, and the murder of Abel. Sandwiched between the Fall and the first recorded murder is the story of Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God. Their sacrifices appear to be humankind's first record of a religious act.

According to Genesis, Adam and Eve had an intimate relationship with God prior to their disobedience. God's communing and walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden during the cool of the day illustrates this relationship. However, Adam and Eve's disobedience broke that fellowship, for they hid from the presence of God. So the biblical story goes from Adam and Eve hiding from God to their sons bringing sacrifices to Him.

How did the young men know to bring a sacrifice? Who instructed them in the proper worship of God? How long had they been offering sacrifices? The Bible gives no answer to these questions. However, Cain and Abel's sacrifices point to humanity's innate desire or need to worship.

Dictionary.reference.com defines *religion* as:

1. a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.
2. a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects: *the Christian religion; the Buddhist religion.*
3. the body of persons adhering to a particular set of beliefs and practices: *a world council of religions.*

4. the life or state of a monk, nun, etc.: *to enter religion*.
5. the practice of religious beliefs; ritual observance of faith.¹

Some scholars claim *religion* comes from the Latin *religare*, which means “to bind, to have union with, to be tied to.” Consequently, humans throughout history have been seeking union with God. This longing for connection to God, to worship God, is innate in most all human beings.

The author wrote this book to introduce the Bible student to the five major religions of the world: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. In no way is it an exhaustive study. Many other books go into greater depth concerning the religions, such as those that appear in the Recommended References list and in the footnotes.

One thing that sets this book apart from others is that it is written from an Apostolic perspective and includes testimonies of converts to the Apostolic experience and doctrine.

May your study of the world’s major religions affirm your Apostolic understanding of Scripture and solidify your union with God.

¹ Dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion, (accessed September 11, 2012).



Golden Buddha at Golden Temple, Dambulla, Sri Lanka

Photo by Dorsey Burk

BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a religion without a God. It is a human search for nirvana or enlightenment, which when achieved will dispel the illusion of human existence and result in total emptiness or nothingness.

Buddhism had its origins about 2,500 years ago when Siddhartha Gautama [also spelled Gotama] “awakened” or “became enlightened” at the age of thirty-five. *Buddhism* is derived from the Sanskrit *budh*, which means “to awaken.” Thus, Gautama became the Buddha when he “awakened.” Now about 500 million people worldwide follow his teachings.²

² Susan Meredith and Clare Hickman, *The Usborne Encyclopedia of World Religions* (London: Usborne Publishing, 2005), 36.