

Introducing World Religions

Student Essay Questions

Chapter 4 Judaic tradition

1. This chapter begins with Jacob Neusner's statement: "The religion called Judaism should really be called a religious system of Judaisms." What is the difference between calling the material in this chapter "Judaism" and "a religious system of Judaisms?" What are some of the "Judaisms" that belong to the religious system? Under what historical and cultural circumstances did they evolve?
2. Discuss the power of verbal and artistic interpretation. Look at several artistic renditions of the sacrifice of Isaac, and read several translations of Genesis 16 about Abraham, Sarah, and Hājar. Compare and contrast the various textual and artistic interpretations. Do you find any differences in tone conveyed by the translations? What variance of emotion is depicted in the art?
3. Discuss the development of Judaic identity, theology, and ritual practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consider the impact of the European Enlightenment, emancipation, and the Holocaust.

Chapter 5 Christian tradition

1. Name the criteria that biblical scholars developed for interpreting their scriptures. Would these be useful for interpreting texts in any religious tradition? Why or why not? Which do you think are the most important of the criteria?
2. What circumstances led up to the Protestant Reformation? What were some key points of controversy between the early Protestants and Roman Catholics between 1300 and 1600 CE? On what points did Protestants differ among themselves?
3. Review the New Testament accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John, and the last supper Jesus had with his disciples. Then discuss how these events provide the basis for the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist).

Chapter 6 Islamic tradition

1. Summarize the stories of Abraham, Moses, Mary, and Jesus as presented in the Qur'ān. Then compare them to portrayals of the figures as presented in the *Hebrew Bible* (Old Testament) or New Testament.

2. In the early history of Islam, what events led up to the division of Muslims into Sunnī and Shīʿī branches? What distinguishes the two groups today? (Note geographical distribution as well as similarities and differences in belief and practice.)

3. How could one ever prove the objective reality of the imaginal world (as Mullā Ṣadrā wished to do), and verify that human beings have the capacity for creative imagination that involves powerful experiences of light (as al-Suhrawardī claimed)? Could science and religion ever find a meeting ground to discuss and research such mystical things?