

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in a Nutshell

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Session Outline

Jan 16 – What’s in a Name?

- What is Religion? How do we decide what is a “religion” and what is not? Is hockey a religion? Buddhism? How do we define religion in a way that includes all religions in the history of human civilization? How does one study “religion”? This lecture will introduce you to the history of these questions, and to contemporary theory in the study of religion.

Jan 23 – From the Babylonian Conquest to 9/11: Histories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

- Most people find history a little dull. Packing 2500 years of history into a two-hour session will be anything but dull. Fasten your seatbelts! We need to account for how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam started out as very small, tribal, and local movements but became massive global religions that shaped the course of history.

Jan 30 –Theologies and Practices of Judaism

- I lied when I implied above that we’ll confine “history” to just one of our sessions. The problem is that theological ideas and religious practices not only have their own histories, but always develop under the influence of historical events. They never just drop out of heaven in neatly wrapped packages. In this lecture, we’ll look at the core theological ideas and Holy Days of Judaism and a selection of Jewish debates about practice.

Feb 6 – Theologies and Practices of Christianity

- What’s the Trinity and how did Christians come up with it? What do incarnation and Immaculate Conception refer to? What’s in the New Testament? Do all Christians celebrate Christmas? Do they really eat the body of Christ? What’s the difference between Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians?

Feb 13 – Theologies and Practices of Islam

- Do Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians? Do Muslims really fast for a whole month? What is jihad? What’s the difference between a burka and a hijab? Where did the Qur’an come from and what is in it? What is Shari’ah and how do Muslims decide what is “legal”? What is the difference between Sunni, Shi’a, and Sufi Muslims?

Feb 20 – Latter-day Saints and Baha’is

- Everyone knows these religions are *living religions*, not dead religions. But people normally think that “living religion” just means there are living people who still follow it. In truth, living religion means that the religion is still changing, still developing, still alive. In this final session, we will look at two new groups (new religions?) that have grown out of Christianity and Islam.