



# Birthplace of Three Religions

## MAIN IDEA

Southwest Asia was the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Today, these three religions continue to attract believers and influence world events.

## TERMS & NAMES

Abraham

Judaism

Jesus

Christianity

Muhammad

Islam

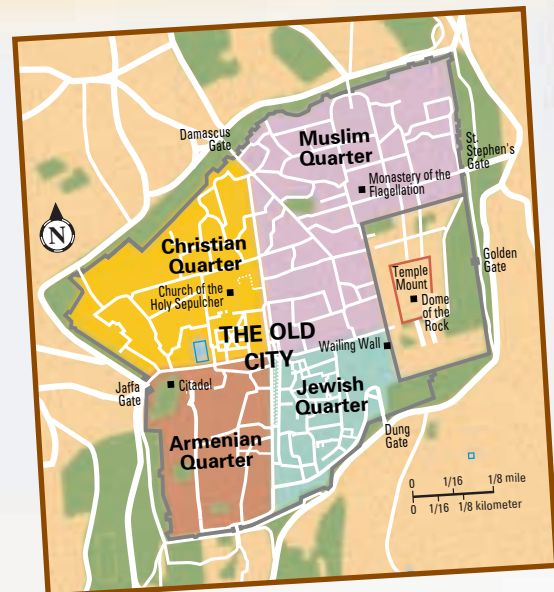
Muslim

Qur'an

## DATELINE

**JERUSALEM, JUNE 10, 1967**—The third war between Arab States and Israel ended today—after just six days of fighting. Israeli forces have gained control of Jerusalem's Old City, which has been in the hands of the Arabs since the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

The Old City includes sites sacred to three religions. Muslims revere the Dome of the Rock, built over the rock from which Muhammad made a night journey to heaven. The Wailing Wall, all that remains of the ancient Temple of Solomon, is sacred to the Jews. The Christian Church of the Holy Sepulcher marks the spot where Jesus Christ is believed to have been buried after his crucifixion.



**Location** • This map of Jerusalem's Old City section shows the location of many sacred sites. ▲

## Three Religions

Jews, Christians, and Muslims have been fighting over Jerusalem and other areas of Southwest Asia for centuries. Each of these religious groups got its start in this region. All three religions share common traits. Each was first led by a single person and reveres a set of sacred writings. Each believes there is only one god, a belief called monotheism. The Sumerians and Egyptians believed in many gods, a belief called polytheism.



**Movement** • Abraham led his household into the land of Canaan. ▲



**Place** • The Wailing Wall is all that remains of Solomon's Temple. ▲

## Abraham and the Origin of Judaism

The Hebrew people were the first monotheists. They believed in a god they called Yahweh. According to the Hebrew scripture, Yahweh spoke to a man named **Abraham**. Abraham was from the city of Ur, in southeastern Mesopotamia. Yahweh told Abraham to leave his native land. Abraham obeyed and settled in Canaan, which is now in the land of Israel. Abraham's descendants are known as Jews, and their religious belief is called **Judaism**.

### Vocabulary

**scripture:**  
sacred writing

**How Judaism Adapted over Time** The story of Judaism is the story of exile. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians from southern Mesopotamia destroyed the First Temple built by the Jews in Jerusalem. The Jews were exiled to Babylon. They continued to worship by praying and reading their holy texts.

### Vocabulary

**exile:**  
forced removal  
from one's native  
country

About 50 years later, the Persians took control of Mesopotamia. The Persian ruler Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple. Much later, the Jews came under Roman control. The Jews revolted against Rome in A.D. 66. Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed in the struggle.

Although the Temple was never rebuilt, Judaism did not die out. Jewish teachers and religious leaders encouraged their people to replace worship in the Temple with prayer, study, and good deeds. For the next 1,800 years, most Jews lived outside Jerusalem. They hoped that Jerusalem might once again become the home of Judaism.

## Jesus and the Birth of Christianity

Sometime during the years 8 to 4 B.C., a Jewish boy named **Jesus** was born in Bethlehem, a small town in ancient Palestine. (See the map on page 233.) The story of his life is told in the four Gospels, part of the Christian scripture collected in the Bible. The first of the Gospels was written about 30 years after Jesus died.

**Early Life** According to the Gospels, Jesus grew up in Galilee, a region in northern Palestine. His father trained him to be a carpenter.





**Culture** • This famous painting, *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, shows Jesus with his disciples shortly before his death. ◀

### Vocabulary

**baptize:**  
to purify and admit into a new way of life

**disciple:**  
a follower of the teachings of another

When he was about 30, his cousin John the Baptist baptized him. For the next three years, he traveled around the countryside, preaching a religion of love and forgiveness and performing miracles. People flocked to hear his words. Disciples gathered around him.

The Jewish people believed that someday a Messiah, or savior, would come to lead them out of exile. Some people believed Jesus was the Messiah. He came to be called Christ, the Greek word for *messiah*. Those who believed in him and his teachings were called Christians.

### Vocabulary

**crucify:**  
to put to death by fastening the hands and feet to a cross

**resurrect:**  
to bring back to life

**Final Days** Some government and religious leaders considered Jesus's teachings and his large following a threat to their own power. When Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover, the authorities decided to get rid of him. Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 disciples who were closest to Jesus, betrayed him to the authorities. Jesus was arrested. After a brief trial, he was crucified and died. He was put into a tomb. After three days, according to his disciples, he was resurrected and later went up into heaven.

**Place** • Many Christians believe Jesus was buried at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. ▼

**Beginnings of Christianity** Jesus's disciples spread his teachings and their belief that he was the Messiah promised in Jewish scripture. From its roots in Judaism, a new religion developed called **Christianity**. It is based on the life and teachings of Jesus. Eventually, the new religion spread to other parts of the world. Today, only a small number of Christians live in Southwest Asia, the region where Christianity began. (See the Unit Atlas map on page 205.)



## Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam

Less than 600 years after Christ's death, a third monotheistic religion arose in Southwest Asia. A man named **Muhammad** (mu•HAM•ihd) was born in Mecca (MEHK•uh) about A.D. 570.



He is the founder of **Islam**, a religion whose followers believe there is one god and that Muhammad is his prophet. A believer in Islam is called a **Muslim**.

One day about A.D. 610, according to Muslim beliefs, when Muhammad was alone, he heard a voice commanding him: "Recite in the name of your Lord who created! He created man from that which clings. Recite; and thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He who has taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not."

**Place** • The Sultan of Morocco donated this copy of the Qur'an to the city of Jerusalem. ▼



**Muhammad's Teachings** Muhammad believed that the command came from the angel Gabriel, who was revealing to him the will of God. For the next 22 years, Gabriel continued to send revelations to Muhammad. Later, the revelations were collected into the **Qur'an** (keh•RAN), the sacred text of Islam. Muhammad told other people about the divine messages he received. He criticized the wealthy people of Mecca for turning their backs on the poor and needy. He encouraged them to reject their wicked ways and to worship the one true God.

The leaders of Mecca thought Muhammad's teachings threatened their traditions and businesses. Some plotted to kill him. In 622, Muhammad and a group of followers escaped to the nearby city of Medina (muh•DEE•nuh), where they were welcomed. Muslims date the beginning of their calendar from this important year in their history.

### Vocabulary

**prophet:**  
a person who speaks through divine inspiration

### Reading Social Studies

**B. Comparing**  
What did the founders of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have in common?

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

### Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) Abraham (b) Judaism (c) Jesus (d) Christianity  
(e) Muhammad (f) Islam (g) Muslim (h) Qur'an

### Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a time line like this one to write important dates in the early history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

586 B.C. | | | | | A.D. 622

### Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** What do Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have in common?  
**(b)** What role did Jesus's disciples play in establishing Christianity?  
**(c)** What does the Qur'an contain?

### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Making Inferences

Why do you think Judaism was able to flourish in exile for so many centuries?

#### Think About

- ♦ religious beliefs
- ♦ the role of religious leaders and teachers

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Suppose that you have just seen and heard one of the religious leaders mentioned in this section. Write a **letter** to a friend describing your experience.