Reflections Across Religions: A Historical Examination of Common Themes in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity

Jason Heckert

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/graduatetheses

Part of the History of Religion Commons, and the Islamic World and Near East History Commons

Recommended Citation

Heckert, Jason, "Reflections Across Religions: A Historical Examination of Common Themes in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity" (2023). Graduate Theses. 150.
https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/graduatetheses/150
May, 2023

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Jason Heckert entitled “Reflections Across Religions: A Historical Examination of Common Themes in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity.”

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

____________________________________
Gregory D. Bell, Thesis Adviser

____________________________________
David Pretty, Committee Member

____________________________________
Joseph E. Lee, Committee Member

____________________________________
Takita Sumter, Dean,
College of Arts and Sciences

____________________________________
Jack DeRochi, Dean,
Graduate School
REFLECTIONS ACROSS RELIGIONS: A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF COMMON THEMES IN ZOROASTRIANISM, JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
Of the
College of Arts & Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the
Requirements for the Degree
Of
Master of Arts
In History
Winthrop University

May, 2023

By

Jason Heckert
Abstract
In the sixth century BCE, the largest empire in the world at the time, the Persian Empire, adopted a monotheistic religion that was based on the teachings of a prophet named Zoroaster. As one of the world’s oldest religions, Zoroastrianism impacted the beliefs and traditions of Judaism and early Christianity. Similarities among these religions include the ideas of hierarchy among good and evil spirits, actions on earth determining one’s place in an afterlife, apocalyptic themes, and dualism. Zoroastrian beliefs found their way into early Christian culture. The remnants of Zoroastrianism in mainstream Christianity underscores the influence of that ancient Persian faith.
Acknowledgements

From a professional standpoint, I would like to thank the entire history department at Winthrop for all of their advice, kindness and general helpfulness. Even those who I did not get a chance to personally interact with, the history department always made me feel welcome. I’d like to extend the same gratitude to the staff at Dacus Library who, in some cases, fought tooth and nail to get the books I needed. I would also like to thank the staff at UNCG for their help when I was an undergrad and their guidance. Lastly, I extend my warmest and truest thanks to Dr. Pretty, Dr. Lee and, of course, Dr. Bell. This paper would not have been possible without your support- and in Dr. Bell’s case- constant reminders that I was capable and listening to me complain.

From a personal standpoint, I must thank my parents, Kevin and Francesca Heckert and my brother, Karl Heckert. They have all dealt with me at my very worst-listened as I ranted and raved about things that they had no context for and still told me at the end that I could do it. To Danielle Elizabeth Weaver, you are my person and there is no chance this paper would have been written if I hadn’t known you. To Kareem Solh, Kelly Cousins and the entire Swinson Clan thank you for helping me through the literal worst times in my life. Your strength, kindness and warmth will always be in my heart.

To Norman and DJ, thank you for always being there to protect me.

To Kane and Sosa, thank you for healing my broken heart.

To Kozmo and Lucy, I love you two more then words can ever express. Thank you for keeping me here and loving me when I didn’t think I deserved it.

I hope I make you all proud.
### Table of Contents

Abstract  
Acknowledgements  
Introduction  
Chapter 1: Judaism as the bridge from which Zoroastrian ideas travel to become Christian ones  
Chapter 2: Direct Transfers of Zoroastrian ideas to Christianity  
Chapter 3: Mapping out Movements: Jews in their Exile to the Third Council of Constantinople  
Conclusion  
Appendix A: Holy Scripture  
Appendix B: Glossary  
Appendix C: Breakdown of the Divine  
Appendix D: Common Prayers  
Appendix E: Timeline  
Bibliography
Introduction

Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion, is rarely grouped together with Judaism and Christianity. The ties between Judaism and Christianity are obvious, but less clear are connections to Zoroastrianism. Upon closer examination the links between the two Abrahamic religions and Zoroastrianism are vast. Whether it comes through Judaism or not, the influence of Zoroastrianism on early Christian groups highlights a substantial connection between the three religions. These connections are not ephemeral, nor are they as clear cut as a diamond. The ties between the three religions are complex, although on the surface they do overlap in some shared beliefs, rituals, and more. By mapping out the movements of Zoroastrianism within the Persian Empires up to the death of the last Sassanid king and likewise determining when Judaism and, later on, early Christian groups crossed paths, this connection can begin to be seen. The physical movements of Zoroastrians, specifically, is but one of the ways these ties can be mapped. Along with surface level similarities and physical movements comes the unintended similarities in militarism and politics.

While Judaism and Christianity continue to be relevant and known in the modern world, general audiences know less about the Zoroastrian faith, which has only recently began making a comeback. Some contextual background is in order. The eldest of the three religions, Zoroastrianism, was founded by Zarathustra, called Zoroaster by the Greeks and Romans.1 Zoroaster probably lived during the turn of the second millennium BCE, although some scholars still believe he was much more recent, living as late as the 600s BCE and even within a lifetime of Cyrus the Great, who ruled in Persia from 559 –

530 BCE. Even before he had a revelation, Zoroaster was a priest who was well acquainted with the role of a holy man—especially the remarkable sort he was going to become. When he had his first revelation, through the god Ahura Mazdā, it was of the entirety of the universe. He saw that the truth of the universe was the fight of good versus evil with the eventual winning of good. This tension between evil and good would become the basic foundation of Zoroastrian belief. As an ethical religion, Zoroastrianism preached the importance of doing good. Each morally right and good act served as a blow against evil. Evil, as well as good, was personified. Zoroaster saw that while Ahura Mazdā was the embodiment of all good, he had a counterpart, namely Angra Mainyu. What likely stood out about Zoroaster’s revelation to the people around him was that he proclaimed a belief in one god over all others. During Zoroaster’s lifetime, most religions were polytheistic. Preaching a monotheistic faith would have seemed extremely odd to a majority of people at the time.

Even though the Zoroastrian religion reflected the world that produced it, there was clearly some overlap among the three faiths. The belief in a single god, for example, may be common today, but in the days of Zoroaster or even Moses it was not. It made much more sense to divide the many roles of the universe to various personifications. In The World of Myth: An Anthology, David A. Leeming explains the etiological aspect of myths such as “the movement of the sun across the sky and the changing of the seasons…” Leeming claims that these beliefs “served as the basis for rituals by which

2. Zoroaster, much like Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu have varied spellings to their names. For simplicities sake, unless embedded in a quote, this text will keep to one variation throughout.
the ways of humanity and those of nature could be psychologically reconciled.”

Regardless, many consider Zoroastrianism to be the world’s oldest monotheistic religion. Even so, aspects of Zoroastrianism still contained concepts embedded in the religions of the world that Zoroaster was born into including reverence of fire and water.

Although the Zoroastrian faith is sometimes viewed as polytheistic or at least dualistic due to the weight it puts on the conflict between good and evil, Ahura Mazda was seen as inherently good, and therefore the universe was inherently good, too. Doing good was vital to those who practiced the Zoroastrian faith. For example, several aspects of the divine, called the Spenta Mainyu, were so important as they were seen as just below Ahura Mazda. The Spenta Mainyu, which comprised six unique beings, originated with the older Zoroastrian faith. Zoroaster saw them in his revelation. These beings, which will be discussed in more detail below, personified important aspects of ethics. These aspects were things that Zoroastrians ought to live by. However, as Ahura Mazda had an evil counterpart, so did the Spenta Mainyu. Referred to as Deavas, these evil beings were akin to demons who sowed discord and disorder on the planet. In the Zoroastrian faith, this fight between good and evil boils down to asha (truth, existence, right) and drug (lies, deceit and wrongdoing).

Judaism is not as easily broken down as in Zoroastrianism. The Jews cite Abraham as their founder, as he was the one to create a covenant with God.  A part of this covenant, God gave land to Abraham and his followers, and they were to remain

---

8. For clarification, when the Judeo-Christian god is being referenced, they will be referred to as ‘God’ or ‘Yahweh.’ Whereas when referring to a deity in general, they will be referred to as ‘god’ or ‘goddess.’
devoted to God, following God’s laws. According to Genesis 12:1-2, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” Abraham, who like Zoroaster had a god singled out to him, would be the basis of an entire religion- or so the story goes.

Another important figure in early Judaism is Moses, who led the Jewish peoples out of Egypt, where they had been enslaved. It was Moses who received the Ten Commandments, which clarified the basic laws that the Jewish community were expected to follow.

There is some overlap between Judaism and Zoroastrianism even at this basic level. One could look at it as a moral religion, like Zoroastrianism, based off several of the Ten Commandments. In fact, God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, and fire was an important symbol of purity with the power to cleanse in the Zoroastrian faith. Whereas in Zoroastrianism there is a focus on doing good in order to strike blows against evil, Judaism puts more emphasis on worshipping God and the importance of following God’s law. Ahura Mazdā personifies goodness—he is good—so in the Zoroastrian faith, a good act is an act of worship. In comparison, for Jews worshipping God is in and of itself a morally good act, but they also must follow God’s laws. While Zoroastrians believe there is a separate, evil being, distinct from Ahura Mazdā, for Jews God is not merciful. In Exodus, God says he will curse families up through the fourth generation if they do not keep their covenant with him. God does not become the ‘merciful’ God Christians are more familiar with until much later.

9. See Appendix A.
10. NRSV Bible, Exodus 20:5.
Zoroastrian beliefs were very much a part of the Persian community that the Jewish people would interact with after the fall of the Neo-Babylonian empire to Cyrus the Great’s newly established Achaemenid Empire in the 500s. While it is certain that the royals of the Achaemenid empire held Ahura Mazda and his teachings in high regard, Matt Waters points out that there is “no evidence that the Achaemenids forcibly compelled worship of Ahuramazda among their subjects.”\textsuperscript{11} Earlier in \textit{Ancient Persia}, Waters also points out how unlikely it is that the Jews would have been the only group to be aided in reconstruction of their destroyed temple.\textsuperscript{12} He is dancing around the idea that the Achaemenid royals, and to some degree their Persian population, were Zoroastrian but did not force it upon their conquered peoples and lands.

After their defeat at the hands of the New-Babylonian Empire and the destruction of their Temple in 586, the Jews had been subjected to many injustices. Even during captivity, the Jews called God Yahweh. The potential influence of Zoroastrianism, or at least Persian culture, is noticeable in that Jews would begin to use other names for God around the same time they would begin interacting with the Achaemenid Empire-towards the end of the Babylonian captivity.

Finally, there is Christianity. Christianity came about after the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth in the first half of the first century CE. Early Christian groups, who believed Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God and the long awaited for Messiah, formed soon after his death. Many of these early Christian groups started off as a branch of Judaism. Christianity would go on to become more and more popular, to the point of


becoming the legal religion of Rome in 380, thus ending centuries of polytheistic history in the Roman Empire. Part of the reason behind Christianity’s rise was in what it promised. In exchange for recognizing the divinity of Jesus, followers would receive paradise after death.\textsuperscript{13}

A number of scholars have written about the history of the Zoroastrian faith. J.H. Moulton wrote a book, \textit{Early Zoroastrianism} in 1913, and R.C Zaehner wrote a variety of works on the subject in the 1960s and 1970s, including \textit{The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism}, which is one of the first definitive books written on the topic since the second world war. Zaehner also wrote \textit{Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma} (1972), \textit{Our Savage God: the perverse use of Eastern thought} (1974), and a wonderful overview of the topic in \textit{The Teachings of the Magi: a compendium of Zoroastrian beliefs} (1976). But the most influential modern author on the subject has to be Mary Boyce, who wrote a three-volume \textit{History of Zoroastrianism} starting in 1975. Boyce’s books, though flawed, offer the foundation of our modern understanding of the Zoroastrian faith as it was back in antiquity.

A number of scholars do a nice job of introducing these faiths by writing about the historical context in which they were written. Early works include R. Ghirshman’s \textit{Iran: From the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest} (1954) and Richard N. Frye, who offers a couple good histories of the region in \textit{The Heritage of Persia} (1963) and \textit{The History of Ancient Iran} (1984). A notable modern scholarly work is G. Gnoll’s \textit{Zoroaster in History} (2000). While Elton L. Daniel’s \textit{History of Iran} (2001) looks at the entirety of Iranian history and so is focused on ties between ancient and modern Iran, the sections

\textsuperscript{13} Jason T. Eberl, \textit{The Routledge Guidebook to Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae} (London: Routledge, 2016), 242.
that explore Iranian history offer a nice overview of the broader themes of ancient Iran, including Mesopotamia and Iranian culture as provided by writers like Herodotus. Daniel’s view on the Avestan peoples and his suggestion of when/where Zoroaster came from is not entirely in step with other historians on the subject. Following Daniel, Michael Axworthy wrote *A History of Iran* in 2008. In this work, Axworthy seeks to give a general introduction to Iran and its history and understand how the people of that region had an impact on the world stage in antiquity. There is a lot of focus on war and religion. The first two chapters focus on war and religion, but also touch on Zoroastrianism, Judaism and other early religions. Axworthy also addresses a number of updates of Boyce’s work. Since he goes through the span of Iranian history only the beginning is useful.

Much has been written about the Zoroastrian faith and its influence on other early monotheistic faiths such as Judaism and Christianity. Not only providing a foundation for understanding the basic religions in his book *Living Religions of the World* (1956), Frederick Spiegelberg also seeks to show the interconnectedness of religions including Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism. David A. Leeming’s book *The World of Myth-An Anthology* (2019) is also helpful for similar reasons, breaking down Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity -and others- in a simplistic way in order to see the similarities.

Another author, James Barr, focuses on the debate over whether or not Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism and Christianity. However, his book *The Question of Religious Influence: The case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity* (1985) focuses more on the debate than an actual understanding of the links between these faiths. Much more thorough is J.K. Choksy’s *Hagiography and Monotheism* (2003). In
this work, Choksy writes about prophets and monotheism of various Abrahamic religions and their relationship to Zoroastrianism. Recently, Paul C. Dilley produced a book, *Religious Intercrossing in Late Antique Eurasia: Loss, Corruption, and Canon Formation* (2013) that focuses on another prophet, Mani, the founder of Manicheism, and his role in bringing together the faiths of Eurasia and the Near East. While this is beyond the scope of this thesis, Dilley does tie the Zoroastrian faith to Christianity and Judaism.

Others concentrate on Judaism and Christianity. Looking at the social history of the early Christian movement from the perspective of Paul in *The First Urban Christians* (2003), Wayne A. Meeks is more interested in connections among urban movements instead of connections between Judaism and Christianity. Daniel Boyarin’s *Borderlines* (2004) focuses more on the differences between Christianity and Judaism, often looking at the violence that arose when the two groups interacted. Soon after Boyarin’s *Borderlines*, Dale C. Allison, Jr., wrote *Resurrecting Jesus* (2005), and he argues that scholars have misunderstood the “Jesus quest.” Allison’s “Jesus quest” as it focuses on the debate regarding whether or not the resurrection ought to be counted as a historical event argues that it should not be counted as such. This viewpoint, if Glenn B. Siniscalchi’s review is accurate, is apparently not a popular one. 14

There is also the collection of essays, *Peoples of the Old Testament* (1973), edited by D. J. Wiseman. The collection provides summaries of the peoples living in the middle east during the Old Testament, including the Hebrews, Canaanites, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and more. Admittedly some of this book will not be used but the

---

ability of the various authors to connect the Old Testament writings with other non-religious primary sources in order to explain who’s who is very helpful.

A variety of authors write on specific themes associated with ancient religions. For example, Bernard J. Bamberger wrote *Fallen Angels* in 1951. His writing on angels, the hierarchy, and its connection to both the divine and the infernal is important and relevant. Bamberger focuses on good versus evil, and his work influenced later authors such as Elain Pagels, whose *The Origin of Satan* (1995) explores the viewpoints of various early Christians and the social history of the period. Another author that follows and responds to Bamberger is Alice K. Turner. In *The History of Hell* (1993), Turner looks at the concept of Hell in different ancient religions, but also notes ties between early Christianity and the Zoroastrian faith.

Other authors focus more on Satan in Late Antiquity. In *The History of the Devil* (1990), Paul Carus goes over different cultures’ interpretations of the Devil and includes how the various beliefs overlapped. In particular, Carus includes a section on Zoroastrianism that touches on how beliefs changed during and after Zoroaster’s life. Carus also provides an idea on the timeline for early Zoroastrian beliefs. Derek K. Brown wrote an article, “Devil in the Details,” in 2011 that looks at how the figure of Satan was portrayed and used in various Judeo-Christian texts. In *Satan in Dialogue with God* (2015), authors Mohammad Zarasi, Abdollatif Ahmadi Ramchahi, and Imam Kanani personify Satan and provide a characterization of theological figures such as Satan, Michael, and Adam. Finally, Gary A. Anderson and M.E. Stone published a collection of essays that focus on Adam and Eve and the role of Satan in that story.
For a more secular viewpoint, Kaveh Farrokh’s *The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians* (2017). His focus on the military aspects of the Sassanid Empire, as well as the cultural aspects within the military provides an interesting viewpoint. Especially when compared to Christian-dominated empires of late antiquity up to the early Middle Ages. In Joseph Lynch’s *Early Christianity- A Brief History* (2010), Lynch explains how the conversion of Constantine impact the rest of Rome as the emperor also served as the Pontifex maximus of Rome. Lynch’s work is aimed to provide a thematic overview of the first several hundred years of Christianity’s existence up to the birth of Islam. While Islam is beyond the scope of this paper, the context in which Lynch writes helps to elucidate the shape in which Christian Europe will form. F.E. Peters’ *Harvest of Hellenism* (1970) as a source is dubious for a few reasons but can be helpful in pointing to the right direction. Peters work covers the time from Alexander the Great to around the Council of Nicaea. The issues with it range from not citing outside sources to not clearly citing primary sources. The possibility that he was able to write the entire book without consulting a single secondary source does not look great. His work will mostly be used as a very large timeline.

In regard to primary sources, there are several spanning over the three religions being examined that will be used. The most obvious being the Christian Bible, specifically the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This will be used in tandem with the Apocrypha, the Literal Standard Version. Both of these are in physical print form but are translations into English. Due to the issues of a text as old as the Bible being translated, and the number of times it has been translated, when the need arises text from the NRSV will be compared to the New Living Translation (NLT) and the English
Standard Version (ESV) for differences. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which also has multiple versions will have a similar problem. However, based off various recommendations, this paper will use the translation by Vanderkam and Flint which also offers explanations on the text.

For Judaism, there is *The Essential Talmud* in the Dacus Library in addition to the Penguin Classic’s edition of *The Talmud: A Selection*, which will be used for comparisons to the Christian Bible and for the Mishnah and Gemara. The issue there is the length of time required to utilize the text being confined to the library’s limits and that it is also a translated text. For this one, however, the translation’s accuracy will only be so accurate.

Also, for Zoroastrianism, their holy text the Avesta will be equally as challenging. The Zend Avesta, as translated by Mills, Darmesteter, and Hope will be used for this study. Unfortunately, unlike the NRSV, the Zend Avesta does not include any explanation or examination of the text. Therefore, interpreting it will be difficult and depend on what others have written about it. The Zend Avesta, probably more than the Jewish Talmud, will have the least accurate translation. Another copy, also translated by L. H. Mills but edited by Z. Bey does come equipped with a glossary but it aids little in understanding the sacred text just as is.

These religious texts will help answer the bulk of my research question, specifically as it pertains to which beliefs that bridged over to the early Christian cult through Judaism from Zoroastrianism and which just jumped from Zoroastrianism to early Christians.
Aside from religious texts, the Penguin Classic’s version of Herodotus *The Histories* will be used. *The Histories* will also have the translation issue and only interpretations to go off of. Kent’s *Old Persian*, found through a pdf online, will be used as needed for comparisons and explanations of Zoroastrian and other Persian texts. While Kent’s work is an explanation of old Persian grammar, it can be helpful in deciphering meanings of the translated works. These sources, *The Histories* and *Old Persian* will be helpful in putting the religious texts into a historical basis. By providing the actual facts and history, as far as those two texts can do so, it will frame my argument with a historical basis.

On the topic of Zoroastrianism, early Christianity, and Judaism, there are several intertwining factors that require further study in order to properly separate, identify and analyze the influence of Zoroastrian belief on other early monotheistic religions. The ties between Zoroastrianism and early Christianity, both with and without Judaism as a bridge between them, is one such factor. As a bridge between Zoroastrianism and early Christianity, Judaism would be examined to see which ideas possibly transferred from Zoroastrianism through Judaism into the nascent Christian faith. These ideas would be things that were included in the Old Testament and especially the Torah as well as other holy works. Additionally, some ideas do not seem to have had a place in Judaism but appeared in the early Christian cult. This would include ideas that would be considered apocryphal to Jewish belief. Some of the themes that will be examined include the hierarchy of good and evil spirits such as angels and demons. This examination will include similarities and differences among the different faiths in their portrayal of good spirits and what they represent. This will be done with evil spirits, as well. It will be
noted when a concept can be found in all three religions and when ideas appear to go
directly from Zoroastrianism to Christianity. A comparison will also be made between
good Zoroastrian spirits and Christian heavenly virtues.

Another theme that will be explored is religious symbolism among the
religions. There are some common symbols including the herding of sheep and cows. Of
course, fire was a symbol of goodness and/or purity in all three faiths. Their respective
eschatology, which is the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final
destiny of the soul and of humankind, will also be looked at. Eschatology will be
examined separately, as apocalyptic themes are common in Zoroastrianism, Christianity,
and Judaism around the time of Christ. Other common themes that will be addressed
include monotheism vs. dualism, ethics/beliefs of each, and the pervasiveness of
prophets.

Another pragmatic angle of inquiry will be to map out the movements of these
early peoples, noting where Zoroastrians crossed paths with Jews and early Christians.
For this, historical figures like Persian Emperor Darius I and others will be studied. The
Persians and other governments also created laws to address other religions. Finally, the
issue of what was considered canon will be addressed. Things considered non-canonical
today may well have been accepted in Antiquity.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to better understand the influence
Zoroastrianism on early Christianity, using both a distinctly religious-based primary
source textual approach and a secular one. The impact of Zoroastrianism on early
Christian groups, whether it came through Judaism or directly affected the Christian
community, underscores that there was a substantial and overlapping relationship among
the three religions. The ties between the three religions are complicated, although there are some noticeable shared symbolism, beliefs, and rituals. By following the evolution of Zoroastrianism within Persian culture up to the death of the last Sassanid king in the mid-600s CE and likewise determining when Judaism and early Christian followers joined the narrative, these complex links can begin to be understood. Along with surface level similarities and physical movements comes the unintended similarities in militarism and politics.
Chapter One: Judaism as the bridge from which Zoroastrian ideas travel to become Christian ones.

There is a lot of overlap among the Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian faiths. The purpose of this chapter is to look at basic themes that are common to the three faiths. Ideas about how many gods to worship, the concept of prophets & saviors, symbolism of the divine and the end of all things are all shared among these three religions. With room for small differences among them, the overlapping themes can be extricated easily through the aforementioned religions’ holy texts and histories.

More often than not, Zoroastrianism is considered to be the world’s first monotheistic religion. However, that does not necessarily mean it began as a monotheistic religion. Indeed, it did not. The religion which would come to be known as Zoroastrianism started as an Indo-Iranian polytheistic religion. It began with a group of nomadic tribesmen who lived “on the broad Asian steppes, stretching from the lower Volga eastward to the boundary of Kazakhstan” in an area that is currently a part of modern Iran. In her introduction to Zoroastrianism: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices Mary Boyce suggests that “there are elements in living Zoroastrianism which go back, it seems, to Indo-European times.” These proto-Zoroastrians worshipped a multitude of gods but the main three would be Mithra, Varuna and Ahura Mazda. Mithra and Varuna, respectively associated with water or fire, became “deeply venerated, and grew to be great gods” for the ancient Indo-Iranian peoples. Mithra, who also represented the idea of “loyalty,” and Varuna, who represented “truth,” would be joined

by Ahura Mazda, a third part of the triumvirate representing “wisdom” and/or the “law.”

The worship of these gods would change over time, until Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism, had his experience with Ahura Mazda. The exact years in which Zoroaster lived is difficult to determine. Boyce suggests he lived “between 1400 and 1200 B.C.” or even earlier, “between 1700 and 1500 B.C.” An older work, by Andrew Robert Burn, *Persia and the Greeks: the Defence of the West, c.546 – 478 B.C.*, suggests that Zoroaster was born around 595 or 597 B.C.E., roughly 258 years before the birth of Alexander the Great. In the introduction to the *Pahlavi Texts- Marvels of Zoroastrianism* as translated by E. W. West, the birth of Zoroaster is put in the ninth millennium BCE. The ancient Greeks, Aristotle and Eudoxus, offered an alternative, placing Zoroaster’s life some 6,000 years before Plato. This Aristotelian estimate would put Zoroaster’s birth around 6,400 BCE, which, at the very least, is farther back in Antiquity, as Boyce and West suggest.

Little is known about Zoroaster, but some of the stories may have some basis in reality. According to legend, Zoroaster’s father was Pourushaspa and he was a member of the Spitaman family. More importantly, he was a holy man. In the Gathas, Zoroaster describes himself as a “‘zaotar’, that is, a fully qualified priest…” The Gathas are a collection of “seventeen great hymns which he [Zoroaster] composed and which have

---

been faithfully preserved by his community.” 24 While they are not a holy text in the same way the bible or the Talmud, the Gathas are similar in that they are “passionate utterances, many of them addressed directly to God…” 25

In his vision, one of the things that Zoroaster was shown was the truth of a single god who was above all others, and this god was called Ahura Mazda. This puts an end to the previous concept of three primary gods and launches the idea that the Zoroastrian faith would be monotheistic; however, it is hard to determine when monotheism actually became relevant in Zoroastrianism. If it happened during his life and was not a later interpolation, then did it predate the Hebrew concept of a single God? Finding any kind of scholarly source citing when Abraham made his covenant with God is difficult. One source suggests it was 430 years before the Jews lived in Egypt. 26 However if this includes the years the Jews lived in Egypt or whether it starts when the Israelites arrived in Egypt is unclear. Regardless, it could be suggested that Zoroaster lived before Abraham as Jews are not mentioned in Zoroastrian texts. The point of this is that the stories of Zoroaster, and therefore Zoroastrian monotheism, probably predated Abrahamic Jewish culture and monotheism. It likely occurred earlier than the Jews began worshipping a single god through Abraham’s pact with Yahweh.

In Zoroastrianism, the infinite one God Ahura Mazda, who is good, created the finite universe where humans reside. In this created universe, there is Spenta Mainyu, who is the “Holy Spirit” or the “good” creative energy in opposition to the evil Angra Mainyu. Spenta Mainyu is the medium through with good enters the universe. Also

representing good are the Amesha Spenta, which are emanations of Ahura Mazda. These include Spenta Mainyu (the holy creative spirit), Vohu Manah (good purpose), Asha Vahishta (best righteousness or truth), Spenta Armaiti (holy devotion), Khshathra Vairya (desirable dominion), Haurvatat (health or wholeness), and Ameretat (long life or immortality). In Zoroastrianism there are also the daevas, which are similar to demons. These serve Angra Mainyu. These evil forces are in opposition to the Amesha Spenta. Ahura Mazda is both a part and separate from the rest. At the end of time, good will conquer evil, as Ahura Mazda, who created the universe, is good.

Despite having dualistic undertones, the Zoroastrian faith was certainly a monotheistic religion. Some historians and other religious experts argue that Zoroastrianism is more of a dualistic religion then a monotheistic religion. For example, Dr. John Wilson, a missionary for the church of Scotland who only had translations of some holy texts but not the Gathas or Old Avestan prayers, argued that “Zoroastrian teaching [is] that good and evil were two First Principles,” going so far as to declare “such ‘dualism’ to be ‘both monstrous and supremely unreasonable…a dogma, according to which God is robbed of his essential and peculiar glory.’” Scholar Jenny Rose, who remarks on Wilson’s words with remarkable constraint, explains that Wilson’s argument was based entirely on extant holy texts available when Wilson was writing in the 1800s and not the actual practices of Zoroastrians. However, there are two main reasons why Zoroastrianism is not and should not be considered a dualistic religion. The first is that

27. Directly translated, the Spenta Mainyu are as follows Vohu Manah is “Good Purpose.” Asha Vahishta is “Best Righteousness.” Spenta Armaiti is “Holy Devotion.” Khshathra Vairya “Desirable Dominion.” Haurvatat is “Health,” and Ameretat is “Long Life.”
29. Rose, Zoroastrianism, 205.
30. Roughly around 1843 when John Wilson’s book was published.
Zoroastrians did not consider themselves to be dualistic. In their minds, they worship one god, namely Ahura Mazda. Second, the definition of dualism lends credence to the monotheism of the Zoroastrian faith. A basic definition of dualism is “a doctrine that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing principles one of which is good and the other evil.”

Zoroastrians believe in the supremacy of Ahura Mazda. While there is the idea that a god, Angra Mainyu, created the finite universe, Ahura Mazda is the supreme god and is infinite. These are not two gods on equal footing. The belief in two supreme opposed powers does not complement Zoroastrian tenets of belief. Nor does the idea that the two beings caused the world to exist work with Zoroastrian beliefs. Angra Mainyu is only associated with the creation of evil and darkness in the world. Ahura Mazda was the original creator, and Angra Mainyu spoiled that perfection. Zoroastrianism simply cannot be a dualistic religion as a single god, Ahura Mazda, is behind all creation. Zoroastrians do not venerate Angra Mainyu, who is literally an afterthought. They do not pray to him, and if anything, curse his name.

The people who would come to be known as Jews began as a polytheistic cult. This group came from ancient Mesopotamia. According to Jewish tradition, and by extension Christian tradition, the beginnings of Judaism came from Abraham’s covenant with God. Abraham had been one of the ancient Israelites who worshipped a pantheon of gods – different from those worshipped by the Indo-Iranians. This included gods like Tammuz who represented the “seasonal dying and rebirth of vegetation.”

32. Marc Rosenstein, Turning Points in Jewish History (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 2.
33. Rosenstein, Turning Points, 3.
gods, Yahweh was the name of the god who made a covenant with Abraham. Yahweh was a complicated deity, and archeological evidence is scanty. It seems Yahweh was a god of fertility and war, and in return for his kindness, the Israelites agreed to not worship other gods. This covenant with Yahweh would eventually replace the pantheon of deities worshipped in that region. Some would be adopted as minor figures within Judaism, but they would not be as venerated as had been done in Zoroastrianism. In both cases, an ancient people in the Middle East who worshipped a large collection of Gods had a specific prophet who had a one-on-one experience with a god from their pantheon, and this individual would convince them of the god’s singular divinity above all others.

Christianity, as already seen, finds its earliest roots in Judaism. By the birth of Christ, Judaism had been a monotheistic religion for potentially 1200 to 1800 years. Christianity’s beginnings, then, were slightly unique to Zoroastrianism and Judaism in that Christianity started with the intention of worshipping a single god. However, if Christian origins are considered Jewish, then its roots would be linked to the founding of Judaism. That said, Zoroastrianism and Judaism became monotheistic religions while Christianity started that way.

Painting with a broad stroke, there are a number of similarities among the three religions. First, there is the idea of a savior. Then there is a shared symbolism of the divine and the infernal, including images of fire, water, numbers, and animals. Finally, all three religions are eschatological.

Jesus was considered a savior, and, since Jesus was himself Jewish, the idea of a savior was also relevant in Judaism. However, it is probable that the idea originally came from...
from Zoroastrianism. While it is difficult to say which religion incorporated the idea first, but, due to the antiquity of the Zoroastrian faith, it would make sense that the concept of a savior began there. Whether it had its beginnings in Zoroastrianism or Judaism, the idea of a savior definitely predated Christ. Zoroaster, like Jesus, was not actively trying to abolish “the religion of his ancestors, he did seek to reform it…”

Saviors, and prophets, are unique people within religions. While a prophet utters divinely inspired revelations, is gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight, foretells the future, or is an effective spokesperson for a cause, a savior is someone who saves others from danger or destruction or someone who brings salvation. Saviors, who have some amount of divinity either in them or shown to them, are meant to point people in the direction of the divine or explain what direction the divine wishes them go to in order to lead others.

Prophets were complex characters in all three faiths. According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, “the gods were also believed to communicate their will through oracles, that is, in human language through the mouth of an inspired person,” namely a prophet. In another sense, prophets were teachers. As teachers, prophets served as a mouthpiece of their god, conveying an understanding of their god’s divine message. Zoroastrians considered their founder, Zoroaster, a prophet, and this makes sense, as he taught “to anyone who would listen” about the basic tenets of the reformed

39. Cohn, Cosmos, Chaos, 78.
religion. Another potential prophet in Zoroastrianism would be Mani, who lived in the 200s CE. Mani, would go on to found another religion Manichaeism, so whether he was a prophet in Zoroastrianism is not clear, though he is considered a prophet by his religion.\textsuperscript{40} Mani was certainly influential in the Parthian and Sassanian Persian Empires, both of which were Zoroastrian. Then there is the Zoroastrian Book of Arda Viraf, which describes a journey through heaven and hell. This text, which was written down much later, in the 800s or even 900s CE, may be based on an earlier oral tradition. While some nineteenth-century scholars doubt the veracity of this account,\textsuperscript{41} it does contain a prophetic vision. It is similar, in some ways, to Dante Alighieri’s \textit{Divine Comedy}.

Judaism, and by extension Christianity, has a number of prophets. Current Christian canon lists seventeen prophets from the Old Testament. There are other pseudo apocryphal prophets such as Enoch. Jewish canon, according to the Tanakh claims nearly fifty prophets. The “Nevi’im” in the Tanakh lists the minor prophets by name. The major prophets are split among the books of Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, Isiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These prophets focus on themes of divine judgement, predicting savior-like figures, and paradise on earth. Many of the same things Zoroaster spoke of in his Gathas.\textsuperscript{42} So while the number of prophets may differ from Judaism to Christianity, these prophets generally explored the same themes and topics.

One of the overlapping themes among the prophets of all three religions is the idea of a coming apocalypse. Embedded within the Gathas is the feeling “that the end of

\textsuperscript{40} Michael Axworthy, \textit{A History of Iran: Empire of the Mind} (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 49.


\textsuperscript{42} See Appendix B.
the world was imminent.”\textsuperscript{43} Zoroaster apparently felt the end of the world was coming soon, but not within his lifetime. Likewise, the Jews awaited a savior to free them from Roman authority, and Jesus himself spoke of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus apostles seem to have believed the world would likely end in their lifetimes. Notably, the New Testament also ends on a prediction of the end of the world through Revelations.

Saviors, and by extension prophets, are unique people within religions. While a prophet utters divinely inspired revelations, is gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight, foretells the future, or is an effective spokesperson for a cause, a savior is someone who saves others from danger or destruction or someone who brings salvation.\textsuperscript{44} Saviors, who have some amount of divinity either in them or shown to them, are meant to point people in the direction of the divine or explain what direction the divine wishes them go to in order to lead others. On the one hand, prophets such as Moses or Muhammed are, in the most basic sense, teachers. Saviors, on the other hand, are ones who are usually spoken about by the prophets as foretold spiritual beings who will bring safety and security to their people.

In the case of Zoroastrianism, a man called Saoshyant was the foretold savior. According to the Zoroastrian tradition, Saoshyant would be born from Zoroaster, whose seed will be kept safe in a lake.\textsuperscript{45} When the time is right, a maiden will enter the lake and become pregnant. This child will be the savior of all the world’s people. He will herald in

\textsuperscript{43} Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians}, 42.
\textsuperscript{44} https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prophet; https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/savior#:~:text=%3A%20one%20that%20saves%20from%20danger,specifically%2C%20capitalized%20%3A%20jesus%20sense%201.
\textsuperscript{45} Rose, \textit{Zoroastrianism}, 110.
a new beginning in which all peoples might join the good in paradise above with Ahura Mazda. What makes this somewhat complicated is that many of the Avestan texts are lost including the ones that mention the Saoshyant. Later, during the Achaemenid period, some details were added to this belief in the coming of Saoshyant. There would actually be three saviors, namely (1) “Ukhšyat-ereta, or ‘He who makes righteousness grow,’” (2) “Ukhšyat-nemah, or ‘He who makes reverence grow,’” and (3) “Astvat-ereta, or ‘He who embodies righteousness.’” Astvat-ereta was considered the most divine, and was the Saoshyant par excellence. For those familiar with Judaism and Christianity, the Zoroastrian savior traits should sound vaguely familiar.

In Judaism, the savior, or messiah, is described as an “ideal future king.” The term messiah is related to the Hebrew term for king and when the ‘messiah’ is being referenced in the works of the prophets they are referring to an idealized, kingly figure. In Isaiah 9, for example, a child is foretold who will be from the “throne of David” and reign over a kingdom of “endless peace.” Later in Isaiah 11, the messiah is described as being incredibly wise beyond his years and not judging “by what his eyes see.” Christians, of course, see these prophecies as predicting the coming of Jesus. In Revelations, Jesus is predicted to return to help marshal in the apocalypse, just as Saoshyant was anticipated in Zoroastrianism. There are clearly shared themes of messianic wisdom and even divinity among Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.

46. West, Pahlavi Texts, xix.
50. NRSV Bible, Isaiah 9: 7.
51. NRSV Bible, Isaiah 11: 3.
Many of these religions share symbolism of the divine and the infernal. Because it springs from Judaism, the symbolism in Christianity should, logically, be an extension of Jewish symbolism in many aspects. However, Zoroastrian symbolism is also shared in many ways with Jewish and then Christian symbolism. One shared theme among the religions is their perception of natural phenomena such as storms and the elements.

Zoroastrianism, for example, deifies basic elements with fire and water being of the utmost importance. Beginning with fire, it is believed that fire was one of the earliest of Ahura Mazda’s creations when making the universe.\textsuperscript{52} Called “Atar,” fire to Zoroastrians is a vital part of Ahura Mazda’s creation, representing purification.\textsuperscript{53} Fire is just as important as water, which is also seen as divinely pure. Both fire and water are therefore associated with purification.

Fire is also closely associated with the idea of \textit{asha}, which is difficult to translate directly into English. The Yasna, or the collected Avesta texts, so Zoroastrian spiritual writings, defines \textit{asha} as “a fundamental concept of Zoroastrianism; there is no adequate translation, although the following are often used: World-order, Truth, Right, righteousness, holiness…”\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps a simpler definition for \textit{asha} could be moral goodness. In the Gathas, Zoroaster named fire as special among all of Ahura Mazda’s creations. In one of his dedications to Ahura Mazda, Zoroaster praised fire as being able to burn away the sins and shames of men and direct them towards Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Actions, the three most basic goals of Zoroastrianism.\textsuperscript{55} When the proto-Zoroastrians lived on the Russian steppes as Indo-Iranians, maintaining a continual

\textsuperscript{52} Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians}, 12.
\textsuperscript{53} Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians}, 12.
\textsuperscript{54} See Appendix B for definition of Yasna.
\textsuperscript{55} See Appendix A Part III: “To Ahura and the Fire.”
fire was imperative. Fire was “the source of warmth in the bitter winters, and the means of which cooking the meat which… was the staple of their diet. In ancient times, when it was a labour to light a fire, it was prudent to keep a hearth fire always burning…”\textsuperscript{56} It makes sense then that the concept of moral goodness would become intertwined with fire. Keeping a fire lit would be a prime example of a morally good act. Judaism and Christianity, to some degree, also share in the importance they give to keeping a fire going- though to a less extreme degree. In Leviticus 6: 8-13, Moses receives instructions on how to perform “the ritual of the burnt offering” which includes “a perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall never go out.”\textsuperscript{57}

The idea of fire and its importance can be found in Judaism and Christianity. The very beginning of the Bible has some variation of the line: “Let there be light.” What is fire if not light? Using this line of thinking, in all three religions, light or fire is one of the earliest creations. For Christians Jews, light is the very first thing God creates. For Zoroastrians, they believe the creation of fire came with Asha Vahishta, one of the Amesha Spenta and the most powerful of beings directly under Ahura Mazda.\textsuperscript{58}

Fire is also a way that God interacts with people on earth, whether the message offers instructions or warnings. In Exodus, when God instructs Moses to go to the Pharoah of Egypt and tell him to free the Israelites, He is literally a burning bush. God, in this form, came to earth as an “angel of the LORD…in a flame of fire out of a bush; he [Moses] looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.” \textsuperscript{59} Here, God

\textsuperscript{56} Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians}, 4.
\textsuperscript{57} NRSV Bible Leviticus 6: 8-13.
\textsuperscript{58} Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians}, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{59} NRSV Bible Exodus 3 1-2.
appears as fire in harmless rays of light which make the ground it shines on holy. The connection here between fire and the divine is clear.

Fire, however, can also be a symbol of danger or a threat in all three religions. Zoroastrians view fire as akin to order and moral rightness, and it purifies. It destroys the material world and perhaps literally consumes evil as it purifies. One’s sins are burned away. At the end of days, Zoroastrians believe, “Airyman, the Yazata of friendship and healing, together with Atar, fire, will melt all the metal in the mountains, and this will flow in a glowing river over the earth. All mankind must pass through this river, and…

‘for him who is righteous it will seem like warm milk, and for him who is wicked, it will seem as if he is walking in the flesh through molten metal.’” The molten metal then is supposed to fall into the abode of Angra Mainyu, killing him and “burning up the last vestige of wickedness in the universe.”

Often in the Tanakh and the Old Testament, fire is used as punishment. While Zoroastrians use of fire as a warning of what wickedness will begot in the end times, the Judeo-Christian tradition has fire as warning in this life. For example, as a penalty “If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity; and they shall be burned to death…” To be burnt alive is a repeated punishment in Leviticus. However, there is also its connection with hell as an almost-eternal punishment until the end of days. Christians usually equate fire to Lucifer and hell. It is less so with Judaism, but there is the constant presence of fire as divine whereas in the New Testament fire makes a

---

60. NRSV Bible Exodus 3:5 “Then he said, “come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”
63. NRSV 20:14 and Tanakh 20:14.
64. See Appendix A Part V.
repeated appearance as a descriptor for hell and punishment. Matthew, Mark, and Luke
all include a section dedicated to fire and hell. These three, more or less, include the same
story of Jesus with various additions or omissions. In “The Gospel According to
Matthew,” Jesus warns the Galileans of the sin of anger. “But I say to you that if you are
angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother
or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to
the hell of fire.”65

Much like fire, water in Zoroastrianism is a symbol for purification and is
associated with one of Ahura Mazda’s Amesha Spenta, specifically Haurvatat the
archangel of healing.66 Zoroastrianism places high importance on cleanliness and purity,
as things like “dirt and disease, rust, tarnish, mould, stench, blight, decay – is the work of
Angra Mainyu and his legions.”67 They have numerous rituals of purification and, even
as far back to their pagan roots thought of water as purifying. It was during such a ritual
that Zoroaster had his interaction with Ahura Mazda and the other Amesha Spenta.

There are a variety of Zoroastrian water purification rites. One such purification
rite is for women during menstruation. As any flow of blood was considered a “great
source of uncleanness,” women during their periods were “ritually unclean.” They had to
be “segregated and forbidden to engage in normal activities.”68 One way for women to
become ritually clean after their cycle was done was to take part in “successive triple
cleanings with cattle-urine, sand, and finally water…”69 Men could also perform the

65. NRSV Bible Matthew 5:22.
67. Boyce, Zoroastrians, 43.
68. Boyce, Zoroastrians, 45.
69. Boyce, Zoroastrians, 45.
same ceremony if they needed to become ritually clean. Water was considered too holy to use directly as a source of purification which was why they started the triple cleansing with cattle urine. The saying ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness’ is true for Zoroastrians.

Water plays an important role in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well, and it is also associated with purification. As in Zoroastrianism, water was an early creation by God in Genesis. It existed as part of a void before being shaped into the oceans.⁷⁰ Judaism has its rules on cleanliness directly related to things like death and disease. Leviticus includes multiple rules about when a man or woman must clean themselves with water. In the Tanakh, Leviticus 15 includes the various times a man and a woman will become unclean through discharge and must wash with water to become clean. As with Zoroastrianism, Jewish women have additional rules for their menstruation cycle, which is associated with impurity.

The most well-known form of Christian purification is the practice of baptism. John the Baptist baptized Jesus. Water is the central element in this ritual wherein a holy man will bless someone by dunking them in water or by pouring water over their head. Though it is mentioned in the New Testament, baptism did not become a central tenet of the early Christian community until around 200 CE.⁷¹ However, earlier records from The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, also called the Didache, includes instructions on how a baptism should be performed including the prayer to be used and the need to fast prior to

---

⁷⁰ Tanakh Genesis 1:1-2 “When God began to create heaven and earth- the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water...” Genesis 1:6 – 7 “God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.’ God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse.”

the ritual.⁷² For Christians, however, the water represents a spiritual cleanliness, which is similar to Zoroastrian belief, whereas in Judaism baptism is more of a physical process. In Peter’s first letter, written “to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia…”⁷³ he explains that the water of baptism saves the person who is baptized but it is “not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.”⁷⁴ Come judgement day, Jesus will only save the baptized.

Numerological symbology is also shared among the three faiths. The number three, for example, is a key symbol in all three religions. In Zoroastrianism, prior to Zoroaster’s revelation, the pagan form of the religion worshipped three main gods: Ahura Mazda, Mithra, and Varuna.⁷⁵ Varuna and Mithra were gods of concepts like “loyalty and truth” while Ahura Mazda, who was above the other two, was the god of wisdom.⁷⁶ In Zoroastrianism, often there is also a mention of things or ideas being split into three forms. Burj, a being in charge of the waters, is split into three forms including “the form of a man, the form of a bull, and the form of a horse.”⁷⁷ The Zoroastrian savior, Saošhyant, has three forms.⁷⁸ Zoroaster included a code of ethics “to live by […] good thoughts, good words and good deeds.”⁷⁹

⁷³. NSRV Bible 1st Peter 1:1.
⁷⁴. NRSV Bible 1st Peter 3:21-22.
⁷⁹. Boyce, Zoroastrians, 24. This three-fold pact was the same that Iranian priests swore, presumably before Zoroaster had his revelation.
In Judaism, three represents truth. When two values are in opposition, three brings them together. There is the legal presumption, or Chazakah, that once something is done three times, then it is considered a permanent thing. The number three therefore represents unity and permanence in Judaism. In the Mishnah, Shimon the Righteous said that Judaism, “stands on three things: Torah, the service of G-d, and deeds of kindness.” In the Tanakh, God is often referred to as the ‘God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob’ or some variation therein. This pattern is seen in the Apocrypha as well, specifically in the Book of Judith, which is part of the Universal Deuterocanon. Judith 8:26 says “Remember all the things which he did to Abraham, and all the things in which he tried Isaac, and all the things which happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia of Syria…”

In Christianity, the number three is clearly important. There is the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of the three are meant to reflect a different aspect of the same divinity. Jesus was resurrected after three days.

Finally, all three faiths have final day of judgement when the world comes to an end. In Zoroastrianism, the apocalypse is called frasho-kereti, which translates to “end of the present state of the world, the Last Day.” In Zoroastrianism, it is more a new beginning than an end, as the frasho-kereti is about returning the world to the perfect state it was in prior to the creation of Angra Mainyu. In Judaism, humans will live in this same world after judgement. “Old Testament eschatology is a worldly hope. The OT does

80. Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian), “The Significance of the Number Three” as found on http://www.betemunah.org/three.html#:~:text=The%20number%20three%20expresses%20connection.%20According%20to%20Jewish,For%20example%3A%20The%20Amida%20is%20repeated%20three%20times, accessed March 30, 2023.
83. Boyce, Zoroastrians, xx.
not scorn, ignore, or abandon the kind of life which human beings experience in this world in favor of speculation concerning some other, better place or form of existence, to be hoped for after death or achieved before death through meditation and spiritual exercises." In Christianity, the end of the New Testament includes Revelation or the Book of Revelation. This is the only canonical apocalyptic book and it therefore plays a large role in Christian eschatology.

In all three faiths, there is the idea of a savior coming to herald in the end of days. There is a promise that someone will come and bring back the proper rule to their respective kingdoms. Zoroaster promised that a future king will come to Iran and restore the right religion and rule to the country. This was the aforementioned Saoshyant. Judaism is much the same in the promise of a future king coming to Israel to give the Jews back that which is theirs by divine right. When it comes to the end of days, Zoroastrians believe the world will return to perfection, both in a spiritual and a physical way. Judaism believes the world humans inhabit now will become better and Christians believe the world to come will be better after this one has been destroyed.

86. This also relates to why Jesus is referred to as the King of Jews or the King of the Israelites.
Chapter 2: Direct Transfers from Zoroastrianism to Christianity

While there clearly are commonalities among the Zoroastrian faith, Judaism, and Christianity, the purpose of this chapter is to look at Zoroastrian ideas and practices that the early Christian community adopted directly. Oddly, not everything that became a part of Christian canon had an initial place in Judaism or stayed within Jewish traditions. Some things have roots in Zoroastrianism and jump directly to Christianity without having the same impact on Judaism. Key areas of transition include good and evil ethical beliefs, angelic and demonic hierarchies, ideas about death, and the coming day of judgment. All of these topics have their roots in Zoroastrianism, although some of these early Christian beliefs were further developed or seemingly reappear under Popes like Gregory I and theologians like Thomas Aquinas.

Both early Christians and Zoroastrians were concerned with good and evil, in particular the tension between good and evil. Both faiths believe that how one conducts oneself in their day-to-day life makes a difference. For Zoroastrians this fight is predetermined, to an extent. However, Zoroastrians know their actions contribute to that predetermined end so they continue to strive to do good in their lives. This idea of goodness and order is personified in Ahura Mazdā, and to a similar degree, the Christian God. The philosophical term for this is Moral Absolutism, which “asserts that there are certain universal moral principals by which all peoples’ actions may be judged.” Or, in other words, there is a kind of ethical dualism. In this context, in Zoroastrianism there is the belief in a strict dichotomy of good and evil without shades of gray.

Zoroastrians believe the forces of good will eventually defeat evil, and they believe that they serve on the side of good. Of course, any person can make bad decisions or act in an evil way, and these evil actions would lead to more evil in the universe. On the one hand, the belief in the fight happening at every moment of the day is completely different from praying to a god, but this tension between good and evil is a fundamental aspect of both the Zoroastrian faith and Christianity. They believe what they’re doing will be worth it in the next world. Judaism, on the other hand, has many rules and protocols to follow, but not necessarily of an ethical sort. Their rules guide them in this life but it is not as much as out of an expectation to where they will go next, but to live the way God wants them to live. In Judaism, the point is to practice the commandments of God, many of which are ethical, but they do this in order to maintain their covenant with God as God’s chosen people. In other words, by following the Ten Commandments, Jews also live a lifestyle based on ethics, but they are not doing it for the same reasons as Christians and Zoroastrians.

Both Christians and Zoroastrians have ethical guidelines they follow to earn a reward or fight against evil. For the Zoroastrians, this is done through Spenta Mainyu, who is the “Holy Spirit” or the “good” creative energy in opposition to the evil Angra Mainyu. Spenta Mainyu is similar to the idea of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, as this is the creative energy of good, or the medium through with good enters the universe. Also representing good are the Amesha Spenta, which are emanations of Ahura Mazda. These include (1) Spenta Mainyu (the holy creative spirit) (2) Vohu Manah (good purpose), (3) Asha Vahishta (best righteousness or truth), (4) Spenta Armaiti (holy devotion), (5) Khshathra Vairya (desirable dominion), (6) Haurvatat (health or wholeness), (7)
Ameretat (long life or immortality). Ahura Mazda is both a part and separate from the rest. These seven beings represent both the ideals people should live by and warnings for what sins should be avoided. Since there is an opposite evil in tension with anything good, in Zoroastrianism there are also the daevas, which are similar to demons. They serve Angra Mainyu. They have their own group of ‘evil’ Amesha Spentas, which are in tension with the seven good emanations coming from Ahura Mazda. Some of these line-up with the good emanations of Ahura Mazda, but some do not. They include Aka Manah (evil purpose; opposite of good purpose), Druj (falsehood—the opposite of righteousness or truth), and the ‘evil’ archangels Tauru, Zairicha, Khudad, and Murdad, among others.

Groupings of seven like these are reflected in Christianity in a variety of ways. For example, there are the Seven Heavenly Virtues and the Seven Deadly Sins. Although there is no direct link between Zoroastrian thought and the Seven Deadly Sins, this list of sins is strikingly similar to the concept of the daevas and their corresponding Amesha Spenta. The Christian sins, of course, correspond to a list of complimentary virtues and therefore may well predate the early Christian church. In the fifth century CE, Pope Gregory the Great provided an early form of the list of Seven Deadly Sins, although he does not mention specifically a list of corresponding virtues. This list of sins would then go on to be defended by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* and included the following: Chastity instead of Lust, Temperance instead of Gluttony, Charity or

---

88. Directly translated, the Spenta Mainyu are as follows Vohu Manah is “Good Purpose.” Asha Vahishta is “Best Righteousness.” Spenta Armaiti is “Holy Devotion.” Khshathra Vairya “Desirable Dominion.” Haurvatat is “Health,” and Ameretat is “Long Life.”
Generosity instead of Greed, Diligence instead of Sloth, Patience instead of Wrath, Gratitude or Kindness instead of Envy and Humility instead of Pride. These virtues and sins do not exactly line up with the Spenta Mainyu or their opposites, but they are both structurally and ideologically similar.

There is another way these seven personifications are reflected in Christianity and arguably a step into Judaism as well, namely the seven archangels. While the names of angels and demons can be found in Christian and Jewish scripture in a handful of places, they are usually referred to simply as “an angel of the lord.” There is not a corresponding angelic or demonic hierarchy explicitly described within the canonical works of the Christian bible; however, Pope Gregory the Great again provides a list of archangels that is often cited and Thomas Aquinas reaffirms this list, talking about it in some detail. There are actually multiple lists of archangels and demons, although Gregory’s and Aquinas’ lists are considered the most reliable. The earliest reference to the seven archangels comes from Enoch I. This list includes Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Zerachiel, Gabriel, and Remiel. Pope Gregory’s list includes Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel but replaces Raguel with Simiel, Zerachiel with Orifiel, and Remiel with Zachariel.

In Christianity, there is also a corresponding list of demons that reflect the evil spenta mainyu in Zoroastrian thought, although it is harder to compare because there is not one definitive list of archangels and princes of hell. Nor is a full list of the evil spenta mainyu known in the Zoroastrian faith. Only a handful of the names are known and there

91. See Genesis 16:9, Numbers 22:24, Judges 2:4, 2 Samuel 24:16 in NRSV.
is debate on which balances out with which Spenta Mainyu. That said, the following is a list of archdemons and their equivalent deadly sin: (1) Lucifer, the archdemon of Pride, (2) Mammon, the archdemon of Avarice, (3) Asmodeus, the archdemon of Lechery, (4) Satan, the archdemon of Anger, (5) Beelsebub, the archdemon of Gluttony, (6) Leviathan, the archdemon of Envy, and (7) Belphegor, the archdemon of Sloth. It’s curious that both in the Zoroastrian and Christian hierarchies, a list of angels (or good spirits) is consistent, but there is ambiguity when it comes to the demons (evil).

Intriguingly, both in Zoroastrianism and in Christianity, evil tempts prophetic figures and even Jesus himself. In fact, evil beings tempted both Jesus and Zoroaster. The devil, also referred to as Satan, tempted Jesus, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Satan promises Jesus dominion over the Earth if he turns from God; however, Jesus denies him over and over again until Satan gives up. Angels help Jesus recover after his ordeal. Already, there are some interesting correlations between the Christian angels who help Jesus and the purpose of the various emanations of good in the Zoroastrian faith. In addition, Jesus’ temptation is mirrored, somewhat, in the Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts. In these spiritual texts, enemies disguised as the spenta mainyu and priests from outside the Zoroastrian faith who despised Zoroaster subsequently tempted Zoroaster many times. During their respective ordeals, both Jesus and Zoroaster were isolated (in the desert in Jesus’ case) and lacked food. It seems the

---

97. See Notes 102 – 104.
actions of these human enemies of Zoroaster were just the result of Angra Mainyu’s influence and manipulation.

There are some differences between the temptations. On the one hand, for Zoroaster, it was a slow-going process. Daevas and Angra Mainyu caused regular people to unintentionally tempt Zoroaster, though many demons did seem to approach and tempt him. For example, the demon Aresh, the demonic embodiment of envy, conversed with Zoroaster.99 Jesus’ temptation, on the other hand, was quite dramatic. As Pagels describes in *The Origin of Satan*, after being baptized, Satanic forces immediately took Jesus and threw him into the wilderness for forty days. During this time, Jesus was tempted to worship Satan.100 However, even after the angels came and nursed Jesus back to health, Satan and his forces continued to try to destroy Jesus.

Given the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Christianity when it comes to tensions between good and evil, it comes at no surprise that there is also some overlap in how they treated the dead. While all three faiths—Zoroastrian, Judaic, and Christian—agreed that the dead were impure to some degree or another, there are some tenets of the Zoroastrian faith that appear to have directly affected early Christian ideas about the dead. For Zoroastrians, the body has become impure once it has breathed its last. Once a person dies, only trained professionals are meant to interact with the body. These professionals would leave the deceased body to be taken care of by the elements. This meant that the professionals would leave the body exposed so that passing scavengers

might pick the body clean, leaving nothing but the bones to be bleached by the sun.\textsuperscript{101} They also believed that “the sun’s rays will help lead the dead into paradise.”\textsuperscript{102} It seems the light of the sun purified the bones, making them clean. When only the bones remain, they were taken and buried in a small casket to wait until “frasho-kereti,” which is the Zoroastrian term for the final judgment.

Being certain of a dualistic universe, Zoroastrians believe that the dead were firmly in the domain of Angra Mainyu and the daevas, or the evil god, and that the deceased body radiated an amount of evil because of it. On the one hand, Zoroastrians believed that the best way to avoid contaminating oneself was, for one thing, to let professionals handle the body. In other words, Zoroastrians paid knowledgeable people who had experience working with the dead. These professionals brought the body and laid it out on a non-plant, non-soil covered surface where scavengers could feast upon the human remains. Since the dead bodies were associated with evil, Zoroastrians would not bury the dead nor would they allow for the dead to touch the life-giving earth. Indeed, Zoroastrians considered the earth related to one of the emanations of the good God, namely Spenta Armaiti and, therefore, should be considered holy.\textsuperscript{103} Even their kings, who often were entombed, were not buried within the earth.\textsuperscript{104}

Christians, on the other hand, would bury their dead. However, they practiced burial for similar reasons to the Zoroastrians, who laid out their dead above ground. Both peoples, Zoroastrians and Christians alike, were concerned about the world to come,

\textsuperscript{101} Mary Boyce, \emph{Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices} (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.
\textsuperscript{102} Mary Boyce, \emph{Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices} (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.
\textsuperscript{103} Mary Boyce, \emph{Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices} (London: Routledge, 2002), 24 “Armait…guardian of the enduring, fertile earth.”
\textsuperscript{104} Mary Boyce, \emph{Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices} (London: Routledge, 2002), 52.
believing that they needed to ensure the physical remains—either the body itself in the case of the Christians or just the bones for the Zoroastrians—were there to be revived upon the entering of the new perfect world to come.

Jews, while sharing the practice of burying their dead and viewing the dead as dirty, saw the practice of burial as more practical than anything else. Their focus, as stated before, is on maintaining their covenant with God in this world. While Jews were expected to act in a certain way while alive, their end goal was not to achieve paradise. As long as they keep their covenant with God, they will stay his chosen people and thus receive his protection. Jews also did not focus on the final judgement or any judgment of soul after death. Christians and Zoroastrians do.

In the interim before the final judgment, Zoroastrians thought souls had a particular path to heaven or hell. Zoroastrians believed that upon death, a soul must attempt the “Chinvatō Peretu,” or the Bridge of the Separator. Initially it was believed by ancient proto-Zoroastrians that only princes, warriors, and priests could attain paradise after death.  This changed after Zoroaster’s revelation and a hope began to blossom that people who were truly good and did good in life could earn paradise. Actions like following Zoroaster’s Good thoughts, good words, and good acts and following the ideals of the Spenta Mainyu would help keep one from falling into despair— or essentially Hell. It was the actions one did while alive that determined where they went after death.

From the very start, however, Christians had firm ideas about paradise including a belief that the kingdom of heaven would be coming soon. They thought the world was ending potentially during their lifetimes, so they took action now. However, even as

Christianity developed, peoples’ actions during life were considered when God decided where the dead go. In Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, he talks about the path to paradise while discussing how and why Jesus of Nazareth was born and resurrected. According to Aquinas, the sacraments, including baptism and communion, played a role in where dead Christians would spend their afterlife. Ironically, both these religions, Christianity and the Zoroastrianism, at a very early point in their establishment believed children were incapable of achieving paradise after death. Here their shared belief is not in the proper way to dispose of a body, but in why they should dispose of a corpse a certain way.

With so many correlations between Christianity and Zoroastrianism with the treatment of death, it comes as no surprise that both faiths had similar ideas about the last judgment. Actually, a belief in Judgment Day and the idea of a final resurrection are both shared among all three faiths. Christians, especially the early Christians were obsessed with the Final Judgement and Resurrection. After all, Jesus was likely an apocalyptic Jewish preacher! It was not just Paul who had interest in it. At its earliest point, early Christian groups could be described as an apocalyptic cult. They strongly believed that the foretold of end times were upon them. They thought—and still do—that Jesus was the savior promised to them in the Old Testament.

Looking at the role of a savior figure in the Zoroastrian faith immediately is reminiscent of the Christian apocalypse. The Zoroastrian savior is called Saoshyant. This Saoshyant will initiate the final days of judgment. Given the tension between good and evil in Zoroastrian belief, the Saoshyant will come from a lake region and as a

---

warrior (he will have a weapon called the Verethragna), he will work with several of the emanations of Ahura Mazda to vanquish the Angra Mainyu and his evil creations. The world will be made perfect, kind of like the coming of the kingdom of heaven on earth in Judaism and Christianity. In the final battle, all the metals found in hills and mountains will melt and pour onto the earth like a river, but righteous people will go unharmed. Saoshyant then resurrects the dead, and their bodies will be restored and perfect. Their souls will be cleansed and all will be one with God for all eternity.\footnote{108. The story of the Saoshyant can be found in the Gathas, the Bundahishm, and a medieval collection of texts compiled in the eleventh century called the Denkard. The Gathas can be found in Dinshaw Jamshed and Rabindranath Tagore, The Divine Songs of Zarathustra (London: Macmillan, 1924); D. Agostini, S. Thrope, S. Shaked, and G. Strousma, The Bundahism: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Athravan Ashem, The Denkard of Zoroastrianism, v. 1 and 2 (Lulu.com, 2020).}

Jesus also has an interesting overlap with Zoroastrian belief in the coming day of judgment. The three wise men who visited Jesus when he was a young child were actually Magi. They may have been Zoroastrian priests who came to see if this king of the Jews would also become the man Zoroaster promised to lead them into paradise.

Therefore, the final judgment is an overlapping theme found in both Christianity and the Zoroastrian faith. Zoroastrian thought contains the idea that God or Ahura Mazdā judge damned and/or lost souls to see if they have earned paradise after their punishment. On the one hand, for Christians the souls who are not immediately deemed pious will have to suffer on earth as it is destroyed. For Christians, there is the assumption that all souls can eventually be forgiven of their sins and brought to paradise—specifically through the “redemptive sacrifice of Christ and the sacraments of the church…” \footnote{109. Jason T. Eberl, The Routledge Guidebook to Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae (London: Routledge, 2016), 121.} On the other hand, Zoroastrians believed that the pure will be taken to
paradise with Ahura Mazda after crossing a river of molten metal to prove their piety. The ones who do not make it across the river do not make it to paradise. This river of molten metal will then pour into the earth and down into hell, destroying Angra Mainyu and all the wickedness remaining in the universe. In both religions, at the end of time evil will be vanquished by a savior, and the faithful will be raised from the dead and judged before God. The kingdom of God will reign supreme. The biggest difference between the two religions, then, in their ideas of final Judgement is that Christians believe that everyone can eventually be forgiven for their sins while in Zoroastrianism the truly wicked will not.

Among the shared beliefs of a final judgement in Christianity and Zoroastrian is the idea of a savior. The final judgement, for Christians, is explored in John’s Revelation. Despite it being a very complicated work, on par with reading the Zoroastrian Gathas without proper context, there are several mentioned overlaps. Such as being led by a divine figure. For the Zoroastrians, it will be the Saoshyant and Christians have the return of Christ. While they are two different figures as Jesus is closer to Zoroaster in terms of founding a religion, he is alike the Saoshyant in the way of being a messiah-like figure. An even closer similarity between the two at the end of times is the belief of the resurrection of the dead. Zoroastrians, as has already been mentioned, have their burial practices which are designed in such a way to ensure that the deceased’s remains are set up to be ready for the eventual resurrection of the dead. The same can be said for the remains of dead Christians- they are buried whole for the eventual resurrection.

Another similarity between the two is the mention of a lamb. In Zoroastrianism, their version of the book of Revelations is the Zand-i Vohuman Yasht. In it, Zoroaster, who is narrating a conversation with Ahura Mazdā, mentions “the wolf age will pass away and the lamb age will enter.” Often, throughout the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb of God. More specifically, in Revelations, a Lamb is said to be the only being which can open a scroll to begin the apocalypse and bring onto the next age. In both religions the lamb is representative of the next age - one which will be marked by peace.

Another notable comparison between the two texts is both mention a disruption of natural cycles on earth. Both specifically mention the sun a number of times. The Zand-i Vohuman Yasht mentions that the sun will lose its power and show signs of the end of the millennium. By the turn of the millennium the sun will be steady again and there will be some kind of eternal light. Revelations does include in several places the sun going dark, such as in Revelations 6:12. However, there is also a direct mentions that an angel will pour his bowl of incense over the sun which will allow its rays to burn humanity. This direct reference to a divine figure hurting humanity is not in the Zoroastrian equivalent, which is not surprising. There is likely no place in Zoroastrian holy texts that has a person being harmed by a figure on Ahura Mazda’s side. It would be unusual for Ahura Mazda, who is only capable of doing good things, to harm someone.

Whereas the Old Testament God has literally killed almost the entire population of the planet, slaid innocent Egyptian firstborn sons, and destroyed two cities he deemed to

111. Also known as the A Bahman Yasht or the Zand-i Wahman Yasht.
112. Zand-i Vohuman Yasht ch viii, line 3.
113. Zand-i Vohuman Yasht ch. Iv line 16, ch. vi line 4, ch. 2 line 31, ch.3 line 4.
be too sinful. It is within the realm of believability that God of the New Testament would harm, or allow harm, to come to humanity since he allowed his son to be tortured and crucified.

Having looked at Zoroastrian ideas and practices that the early Christian community adopted directly, especially good and evil ethical beliefs, angelic and demonic hierarchies, ideas about death, and the coming day of judgment, it is clear that there is overlap between these two ancient religious faiths. Core tenets of Christianity including Revelations and the need to do good deeds can be seen as reflections of Zoroastrian thought.
Chapter 3: Mapping out Movements- Jews in their exile to the third council of Constantinople.

Up until now, mostly scriptural and religious texts have been used to examine the similarities between Zoroastrians and early Christians. Jewish thought and belief, as has been seen, played a very large role in constructing a bridge between the two. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the historical context and how the cultures that were there at the time influenced these three faiths. Where the Jews moved during this pivotal period of over a thousand years will show how and why Zoroastrianism made its imprint both on Jews and their religious descendant- the early Christians. These movements and subsequent cultural interaction must be explored in order to capture why the Jews would have adopted similar beliefs and practices to Zoroastrians, and eventually then the early Christians. Whether it was for political or spiritual reasons, ancient governments actually used these religions to promote their own cultural identities.

Although among Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity the Zoroastrian religion may be the first to turn to monotheism, it was Jewish rulers who first began to use their monotheism to unite their culture both spiritually and politically. In the 700s and 600s BCE, Hezekiah was the king of Judah. During this period, an extremely violent Assyrian Empire was active in the region. In order to keep the Assyrians at bay, Hezekiah introduced a policy of worshipping Yahweh as the only God. It was at this time that many of the oldest books of the Old Testament were written down, especially the books that told of the famous Kings David and Solomon, who first ruled a united Jewish peoples and built the Jewish Temple (Solomon’s Temple). Hezekiah also oversaw some massive building projects including the Siloam Tunnel, which ensured a
supply of fresh water in the city, and the construction of some massive city walls to defend Jerusalem from invaders. These were reminiscent of the descriptions of building projects of David and Solomon that were written down during Hezekiah’s reign. The prophet Isaiah is associated with Hezekiah, and Isaiah is often quoted as prophesizing the coming of Jesus. All of this was done in the face of Assyrian aggression as a seeming policy to unify the Jews politically and militarily through a common faith and belief in God.

While probably not the first interaction between Jews and Zoroastrians, an early significant interaction between the groups was during Cyrus the Great’s successful invasion of Babylon in 539 BCE. At the time, Persia was expanding, having just conquered neighboring Lydia and deposing the regionally powerful king of Medes, named Astyages. The Persians were careful how they acted when they attacked. In fact, as preparation for the Persian invasion, many of the idols and statues of Babylonian gods were spirited away to the capital, Babylon, “as a precaution against an imminent Persian attack,” but Cyrus would go on to celebrate the return of those cities’ gods to their respective homes. It seems Cyrus leveraged Babylonian fears to promote his own cultural agenda by calling their king “unstable and impious.”

Cyrus’ actions seem to be part of a larger Persian policy of compassion towards conquered subjects. Cyrus’ treatment of the Babylonians provides a good example of how this policy played out. Rather than smash Babylonian idols and statues, the Persians

---

117. For an overview of Hezekiah’s reign, see Robb Andrew Young, Hezekiah in History and Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
119. Waters, Ancient Persia, 44.
120. Waters, Ancient Persia, 44-45.
returned these religious objects to their original temples and let the Babylonians continue
to worship their own gods as they saw fit:

When I [Cyrus] entered Babilani [Babylon] as a friend and when I established the
seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing,
Marduk, the great lord, induced the magnanimous inhabitants of Babilani to love
me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him.... As to the region from as far as
Assura and Susa, Akkade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-turnu, Der as well as
the region of the Gutians, I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the
Tigris the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which
used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also
gathered all their former inhabitants and returned them to their habitations.
Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods
of Kiengir and Akkade whom [the Babylonian King] Nabonidus had brought into
Babilani to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their former temples,
the places which make them happy.121

In fact, Marduk was the Babylonian’s chief god, so Cyrus was respecting their culture
and faith when he referenced him. Rather than massacre and destroy, the Persians
accepted and respected conquered peoples.

This cultural and political compassion was founded on Zoroastrian principles. It
was outward facing in that it affected how Persians interacted with other groups, but it
was also inward facing. Persians came together through their faith and culture. The
Amesha Spenta, which are emanations of the Ahura Mazda, included Vohu Manah, or
good purpose, Asha Vahishta (best righteousness or truth), and Haurvatat (health or
wholeness).122 In this context, the Persians even banned slavery. In Zoroastrianism,
humans are not children or slaves of God, but work alongside Ahura Mazda. Their

121. “Kurash (Cyrus) the Great: The Decree of Return for the Jews, 539 BCE,” Ancient History
Sourcebook, Fordham University, accessed March 28, 2023,
https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/539cyrus1.asp. This excerpt can also be found in The Sacred
Books and Early Literature of the East, V. 1: Babylonia and Assyria, Charles F. Horne, ed., (New York:
Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917), 460-462. For a comparison between the Hebrew Bible and the
Christian Old Testament, see Appendix A, IV.
122. See Chapter Two.
conscience and Vohu Manah keep them on the right course, and if Ahura Mazda does not
lord over humans, then how can humans command one another? In the Gathas, which
are Zoroastrian holy texts, Ahura Mazda does not appreciate castes or privileges
according to class or social rank. In Yasna 32.15, Zoroaster said “finally the oppressed
shall rise up and defeat those who have deprived them of freedom, and the liberated
people with gifts of wholeness and immortality shall enjoy freedom in the abode of good
mind (real paradise).” In Yasna 31.18, Zoroaster again suggests opposing violence and
uses terms that mean to “correct and teach” [Sazdum] aggressors rather than harm them
through violence. 123 Clearly these religious values can be seen in the broader Persian
policy of compassion toward conquered peoples.

Cyrus the Great treated the Jewish communities that the Babylonians had
enslaved in the same way. According to the Tanakh, or the Hebrew Bible, Cyrus told the
Jews:

‘All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord, the God of heaven, has given to me, and
he has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up,
and may his God be with him! Let everyone who has survived, in whatever place
he may have dwelt, be assisted by the people of that place with silver, gold, and
goods, together with free will offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.’ Then
the family heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites—everyone,
that is, whom God had inspired to do so—prepared to go up to build the house of
the Lord in Jerusalem. All their neighbors gave them help in every way, with
silver, gold, goods, and cattle, and with many precious gifts besides all their free-
will offerings. King Cyrus, too, had the utensils of the house of the Lord brought
forth which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and placed in the
house of his god. 124

62. This article can be found online at https://fezana.org/the-gathas-a-reanalysis/. The Yasna are sacred
liturgical texts of the Avesta, or scripture, in the Zoroastrian faith.
124. Ezra 1: 1-8. The Book of Ezra is found in the Tanakh, or the Hebrew Bible. “Kurash (Cyrus) the
Great: The Decree of Return for the Jews, 539 BCE.” Ancient History Sourcebook, Fordham University,
As with other peoples, in Babylon, Cyrus supported the Jewish community. The Persians respected the Jewish people and their faith, helped them move back to their homeland, and helped them rebuild their temple. Seeing as God promised them the Holy Land as a part of their covenant, not to mention the importance of the Temple of Solomon, Cyrus actions must have been meaningful. He even returned “the utensils of the house of the Lord”—in other words, the items that would be kept in the holiest section of the Temple.

The Jews appear to have appreciated Cyrus’ policy of tolerance, which was integral to the Persian cultural identity rooted in the Zoroastrian faith, but these accounts might overlook some hesitancy on the part of the Jews. Both of these events are described as being momentous and wonderful—the work of God who still favored and loved them—although both allude to fear of what their neighbors may do. However, in *Turning Points in Jewish History* Marc Rosenstein points out that when Cyrus took over and expanded the Achaemenid Empire into Babylon and Judah, the Jews in exile were not in a huge rush to move back to their homeland. In fact, “It took more than twenty years from Cyrus’s decree for the Jews to build and dedicate a Temple in Jerusalem.”

There may be reasons why the Jews were hesitant to return and why the religious texts do not reflect reality. Perhaps the Jews did not want to go back because they were comfortable where they were in Babylon. Though dispersed, some may not have minded their new homes. Further, those who remained in Judah were poor and did not have the means or education for a return. They might not have been interested in a cultural revival. The point being that Jews, for whatever reason, were not immediately ready to

---

return to Judah. They were not ready to attempt a cultural revival in Jerusalem. This period of time as part of the Achaemenid Empire was, at the very least, better for the Jews compared to what was to come.

After the Persian Achaemenid Empire fell to Alexander the Great, who invaded Persian territory in the 330s BCE, and as Greek soldiers poured into the region, Hellenistic influence spread and profoundly affected ancient Middle Eastern cultures including the Judaic and Zoroastrian faiths. While it is not the focus of this paper, historians do talk about Hellenism and the impact it had on the region. F.E. Peters mentions Hellenistic influence on “the Parthian Shah of Iran and the Jewish High Priest in Jerusalem” as being strong enough that they declared “themselves ‘Philhellenes.’” However, another historian, Michael Axworthy, argues that Alexander’s influence on Persia was not long lasting. Nor was Alexander some welcome and enlightened conqueror, Peters saw him. Indeed, Zoroastrians had a “very negative” view of him. The most damning point Axworthy makes is that “In later Zoroastrian writings Alexander is the only human to share with Ahriman [the name of the evil God] the title guzastag-meaning “accursed.” So Alexander had an immediate impact on Judaism and Zoroastrianism, introducing Hellenistic (or Greek) culture to the region; however, his impact was arguably neither long lasting nor a good one. It’s impact on Christianity would not be seen until much later, perhaps in the form of its pageantry.

126. Rosenstein, Turning Points, 88.
130. Axworthy, A History of Iran, 30.
131. Peters, The Harvest of Hellenism, 64.
After Alexander’s death, his empire would be split among his generals, but Hellenistic (or Greek) culture would carry on mutually with Persian culture. Persia and the lands under the Achaemenid empire would go on to be ruled by Seleucus Nicator, whose name is attached to the subsequent Seleucid Empire, and this region was ruled in a “grand Persian rather than a Greek style.”\textsuperscript{132} This implies a continued reign of Zoroastrian ideals. That, however, would not endure under the Seleucids. They were Greek, after all. The Seleucids continued their Hellenistic practices of focusing on expansion and the west, employing the belief that to be like them—being Hellenistic or Greek—was the right way to be.

This tension between Hellenistic and Zoroastrian influence continued in Judea, which was under Seleucid control. As historian Rosenstein explains:

There were two hierarchies of leadership in Judea during this period: the hereditary high priesthood supplemented by its attendant bureaucracy—which the ruling powers recognized as the “official” leadership—and oligarchs who had amassed wealth and power as landowners, merchants, and tax collection contractors for the king. While the priesthood was committed to the Temple cult and Torah law, the oligarchs tended to embrace Hellenistic culture (not surprisingly, given the Hellenistic rulers’ favor of locals who adopted their culture).\textsuperscript{133}

Along with this visible power struggle between politics and religion, there was also “internal struggles” between various factions in Judea who “would ally themselves with either the [Egyptian Hellenistic] Ptolemaic or the Seleucid kingdom, betting on the success of their particular patron.”\textsuperscript{134}

Alexander the Great’s general, Ptolemy I Soter, founded the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, which was clearly Hellenized. If the treatment of the Jews living under their rule

\textsuperscript{132} Axworthy, \textit{A History of Iran}, 30.
\textsuperscript{133} Rosenstein, \textit{Turning Points}, 99 – 110.
\textsuperscript{134} Rosenstein, \textit{Turning Points}, 100.
is compared between the Ptolemaic dynasty and the Seleucids, Ptolemaic Egypt wins by a smidgen. This is because, even if Jews held the lowest status, they still made contributions to things like the military and culture, especially in Alexandria.¹³⁵ In comparison, the Jews living under the Seleucids were so unhappy that they staged a rebellion upon hearing that King Antiochus IV had died in 171 BCE. The rebellion did not end well for the Jews as King Antiochus IV, whose death rumors had been highly exaggerated, went on to severely punish them. This included a flat-out suppression of “the Jewish religion itself: converting the Temple into a pagan shrine, plundering the Temple treasury, and prohibiting essential Jewish practices…”¹³⁶ The attempt at Jewish suppression by the Seleucids would end up resulting in a true revolt by the Jews, also known as the Maccabean Revolt, which, of course, would be successful.

There was another group called the Parthians who ruled in the Middle East after Alexander the Great’s conquest. The Parthians were more accepting and supportive of Jewish culture. Mithridates II the Great (r. 124 – 91 BCE) was able to “consolidate and stabilize Parthian rule…subduing enemies in both east and west.”¹³⁷ The Parthians were much more of a spiritual successor to the Achaemenids then to the Seleucids. They continued the Persian tradition of letting the various people under their rule practice whatever religion they wanted without fear of political reprisals or violence. Also, like the Achaemenids, Jewish tradition recorded the Parthians “as tolerant and friendly toward the Jews.”¹³⁸ Since the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Zoroastrian had lingered,

¹³⁵ Ann Ellis Hanson “The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt” 4.
¹³⁶ Marc Rosenstein, Turning Points in Jewish History (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 100.
¹³⁷ Axworthy, A History of Iran, 33.
¹³⁸ Axworthy, A History of Iran, 34.
and under the Parthians it was the religion of the leaders. In a way, Zoroastrianism was a
common faith among the ruling class and the ruled in Achaemenid Persia and in Parthia,
much the same way that Judaism was the religion of Judea. It was only the Seleucids who
preferred the Hellenistic tradition over the ethical rules of Ahura Mazda. Indeed, since
the time that the Jews were given their freedom under Cyrus the Great through the time
of Jesus—a period of some 500 years—the only group which had shown them kindness
and fairness to a significant degree was the Zoroastrians. Western Hellenistic cultures,
such as that of Alexander the Great and those established in the wake of his conquest, had
been cruel to both Jews and Zoroastrians over that same period.

Religious belief was clearly tied to cultural and political identity in Antiquity, and
this would continue among the power struggles of the second and first centuries BCE. It
was in the mid-second century BCE that Judas Maccabeus launched a successful
Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucids. The Seleucid emperor, Antiochus IV, had
conquered Ptolemaic Egypt, but struggled against a new powerful empire from the
west—the Roman Empire. This period of time seems to have been rife with power
struggles between the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Romans.139 At the time, Antiochus IV
attacked the Jewish kingdom, sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and repressed the
Jewish population. All of this led to the Maccabees leading a rebellion and unifying the
Kingdom of Judah under a single Jewish ruler. This was called the Hasmonean Dynasty.
Around 110 BCE, the Maccabees kicked out the Seleucids entirely and began to rule in
their own right. All of this was due to Seleucid suppression of Jewish culture and
religion and it sparked a reassertion of Jewish identity under the Maccabees.

The Romans, who had played a small role in the rise of the Hasmonean Dynasty in the Kingdom of Judah, added a new culture in the mix, and they had a more Hellenistic outlook. Infighting in Judah among the Hasmonean factions would eventually bring the Roman General Pompey to Jerusalem in 67 BCE.\(^\text{140}\) Exploiting the political and cultural divisions in the region, the Romans asserted themselves and made the Kingdom of Judah a client state. Initially, the Jewish peoples accepted Roman influence and authority, but they did retain some authority in their homeland. “[C]alm largely prevailed in Roman-ruled Judea. Rome granted a degree of autonomy. The Temple cult functioned. There were no serious rebellions (only a few minor episodes).”\(^\text{141}\) However, Jews had a reputation for being “unassimilable” among Romans.\(^\text{142}\) Some Roman emperors like Tiberius and Claudius would take “normal repressive steps against the Jews…”\(^\text{143}\) Those two specifically would also have Jews deported from Rome and, on one occasion the expulsion of Jews was done to ingrati ate the emperors to the Roman people.\(^\text{144}\) It might be pointed out that Rome was treating Jews as practically any other government in world history had—as a pawn to be exploited or blamed as the need arose. Further, the only dominant power that had outright been kind to Jews had been the Achaemenids, a Zoroastrian regime. This would imply close ties between the Persian Achaemenid and Jewish cultures up to and probably past the birth of Christ. It also suggests that the Romans were acting in a broader historical context. They were initially tolerant, as the Persians had been, but eventually acted like other Hellenistic cultures.

\(^{140}\) Rosenstein, *Turning Points*, 101.
\(^{141}\) Rosenstein, *Turning Points*, 113.
\(^{142}\) Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, 513.
\(^{143}\) Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, 513.
\(^{144}\) Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, 513.
Soon after Jesus of Nazareth’s death, which probably occurred around 33 CE, his message was being spread around the Holy Land and even being dispersed across parts of the Roman Empire. While early Christianity—the Jesus Movement—was considered a cult and, to some degree, anathema to orthodox Judaism, the time of the exact split between the two cannot be known. According to Classical historian Mary Beard in *SPQR*, “when it became clearly separated from Judaism is impossible to say.” Jesus was a Jew, so during his lifetime there was no separation. In the decades after his death, there was debate over whether early followers of Jesus had to follow Jewish law or not. On the one hand, James the Just led the early Christian movement out of Jerusalem from the time of Jesus’ death to his own death in the 60s CE, and James was certainly for following Jewish law. On the other hand, Paul evangelized among gentile (Greek and Roman) communities, and he seemed to question whether new converts had to follow Jewish law. But there is no clear break between Judaism and the early Christians, as both religions were quite similar. Therefore, to some degree, the message of Jesus would begin to spread around the Roman Empire and probably beyond.

Jesus’ message was certainly heard in particular places mentioned in the New Testament such as Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia. All of these are in either modern day Greece or Turkey. There is nothing to say that it would not have gone beyond that to the Jews dispersed among Egypt or the Parthian empire. Of course, the eventual shift to the Parthian empire would

---

147. Beard guesses that by 200 CE “there were around 200,000 Christians in the Roman Empire…” 517.
cause Jews to interact with the prominent religion of that area— the Zoroastrians. While the Romans were persecuting the Christians on and off again for centuries, the Parthians continued the Achaemenid’s traditions when it came to its conquered peoples. These traditions of tolerance and compassion of course reflected Zoroastrian moral values. Axworthy describes the Parthian rule as “a relatively light touch, assimilating the practices of previous rulers and being content to tolerate the variety of religious, linguistic, and cultural patterns of their subject provinces.”  

Politically and militarily there was constant tension between the Romans, who were a pagan empire that contained significant Jewish and Christian minority populations, and the Parthians and their immediate successors, the Sassanid Persians, both of which were Zoroastrian. Between the foundation of the Roman Empire to the birth and death of Christ to the reign of Macrinus in 218 CE, Rome and the Parthian empire were fighting one another on and off. During the reign of the Parthian ruler Artabanus IV (r. 213-224 CE), whose name means “Truth of Banus,” as *arta* is the word for “truth” in the Zoroastrian faith, the Romans were kept at bay, but the effort seems to have weakened the Parthian monarchy. The issues snowballed, “exacerbating a falling-off of the authority of the monarchy.”  

The Sassanian rulers, Ardashir I and his son, Shapur, defeated Artabanus IV and established a Persian Empire that would adopt the Zoroastrian faith and last for over four centuries. There is a rock carving of the Sassanian

---

victory that portrays Ahura Mazda giving Ardashir the kingship over a Zoroastrian fire altar.\textsuperscript{150}

By the time that Christianity was accepted and legalized in Rome under the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, therefore, the Parthian Empire had given way to the Sassanid Empire. It would be under Sassanian rule until Islam would replace Zoroastrianism as the main religion of Persia. Well before the advent of Islam, Christianity would become the official religion of the Roman Empire and had settled doctrinal questions about the Christian faith including agreeing on the Nicene Creed statement about the nature of the God (as the Trinity) in 325 CE. Over this time, the Christians clearly distinguished themselves from their Jewish counterparts, although they did maintain their Jewish heritage (they adopted the Old Testament, after all). And they did this while the Zoroastrian faith became the state religion of the Sassanian Persian Empire, which was the enemy of the Romans.

While Christianity did not become official religion of the Roman Empire until later, under Constantine the Great it became acceptable to be Christian in the Roman Empire. In fact, it helped to be Christian if one wanted to get ahead in society. When he fought to become the sole emperor of the Roman Empire, Constantine promoted the Christian faith. He won a decisive victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 after dreaming about and then seeing a vision of the cross. When the various Christian bishops could not agree on the nature of God, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in 325 and had them create a statement of their faith. While he may well have had a personal

spiritual conversion, Constantine also used Christian faith to bring together the Roman
people and give them a cultural identity—a Christian identity—that would unify them.

The aforementioned Nicene Creed helped define Christian belief, but also helped
distinguish the Christians just as Rome began to turn towards Christianity. The first
formal meeting of Christian leadership with a Roman Pope at the helm was in fact under
Emperor Constantine at Nicaea in 325 CE. As noted, of the various things decided at
the meeting, the most important was the establishment of a creed elucidating the nature of
the Trinity—and therefore God—in what would come to be known as the Nicene
Creed. According to Peter L’Huiller: “the primary task of the fathers was to make the
Trinitarian doctrine of the Church very precise in the face of the Arian heresy.”
The Trinity included the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and Arians asserted that the Father
“begot” the Son. In other words, the Son was created and was not co-eternal with the
Father. In a way, Arianism is reminiscent of Ahura Mazda creating the universe
including a good god and a bad god.

Along with the Creed and the establishment of the rules of the Trinity, the
Council of Nicaea established the importance of baptism. Of course, John the Baptist is a
key figure in the gospels, and Jesus’ baptism is a key event. At Nicaea, the council of
bishops certainly took baptism seriously and were concerned about this spiritual washing
being used too liberally on recent converts. In Canon Two, it says:

> Whether by necessity or by the weight of human frailties, several things have
> come about contrary to the general order of the Church. Thus, spiritual washing
> has been given and, along with this baptism, the episcopate or the priesthood has

151. https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/fofc/ecumenical_councils/0
152. See Appendix A Part V for the Nicene Creed.
153. Peter L’Huiller, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four
been given to men who have only recently received from pagan life to the faith and have not been sufficiently instructed.\

Like with Christian baptism, water is important in Zoroastrianism, as it is associated with one of Ahura Mazda’s Amesha Spenta, namely Haurvatat the archangel of healing.\textsuperscript{156}

Water was considered too holy to use directly as a source of purification in some instances, and there is a clear connection between Zoroastrianism and Christianity here. But it goes beyond this because at the Council of Nicaea, Christian doctrine was being combined with Roman political and cultural identity.

Tension and controversy both within the Christian community and between Persia and Rome continued right up until the advent of Islam. For example, the Third Council of Constantinople, held in 680-681 CE, addressed both political and spiritual concerns by defining Jesus as having two energies and two wills, both divine and human. The impetus for the council was a war between Rome and Persia. Roman Emperor Heraclius had conquered areas that were formerly Persian where Zoroastrian influence pervaded the culture. Zoroaster had a will which was entirely devoted to the divine influence of Ahura Mazda, and this influenced Christians, especially in recently conquered Syria and Egypt, that Jesus had single will, which made him fully divine. In a way, Third Council of Constantinople was an attempt to explain the various ways that God was perceived while ensuring that Jesus was understood to be both human and divine. Like the different emanations of Ahura Mazda, Jesus was divine. At the Council of Nicaea, the bishops had clarified that the Son \textit{was} co- eternal with the Father. But Jesus was also a physical being—he had a body. The idea that Jesus was fully divine, and therefore not both

\textsuperscript{155} L’Huiller, \textit{The Church of the Ancient Councils}, 33.
\textsuperscript{156} Mary Boyce, \textit{Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices} (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.
physical and spiritual, was problematic. How else could he have suffered, died, and been resurrected for the sins of all people? One compromise being discussed at the time of the Council of Constantinople was that Christ had two natures—he was divine and human—but only one energy. Another compromise was Jesus had one will, and there was therefore no tension between the parts of him that were physical and divine. The underlying concern was the lingering influence of Zoroastrian thought on this issue, and Rome had just retaken lands from the Persians. In the end, the bishops at the Council of Constantinople determined that Jesus had two energies and two wills, but his human will was subject to his divine will, which was all-powerful.157

In conclusion, the three main religions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity, influenced one another as the peoples who practiced these faiths interacted with one another. Looking at the larger historical context, it is clear that none of these religions were practiced in a vacuum, and that they affected one another again and again over time. It is also curious to see how, starting with King Hezekiah of Judah in around 700 BCE, monotheism was used as a way to culturally, but also politically and militarily, bring people together. This was what Cyrus the Great seemed to do with Zoroastrianism in the 500s BCE. Alexander the Great spread Hellenistic culture across the known world, but Zoroastrian and Persian identity remained intact, despite Greek and later Roman aggression. And Constantine did the same thing with Christianity around three centuries after the death of Jesus. Faith became religious identity, but it also became a way to identify as a culture and bring people together.

Conclusion

It seems clear that there is a lot of overlap between Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism. It does not matter whether or not one believes in the divinity of Christ, the commandments as declared by Moses, or the eventual triumph of good over evil as proclaimed by Zoroaster. The facts are that these three religions and the real people who practiced them are so intertwined in one another’s story that to disentangle them would be practically impossible. It’s a true Gordian Knot.

Both the Zoroastrian faith and Judaism had ancient origins. These two religions started out as polytheistic and pagan, but transformed into two dynamic, yet related faiths. If Zoroaster and Abraham were real people, then Zoroastrianism became monotheistic first followed by Judaism. If monotheism actually was implemented to politically and military unify the cultures, then Judaism may well have been the first to adopt monotheism under Hezekiah. Either way, monotheism was common to all three faiths and would have ripple effects for centuries. That corner of the world would have looked completely different if not for the ethical boundaries and rules imposed from Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. Likewise, the idea that faith in one God could bring people together profoundly shaped the ancient world. Hezekiah brought the Jewish people together through their faith in one God, and Cyrus similarly used the Zoroastrian faith to unify Persia. The same thing happened again later under the Parthians and Sassanians. This idea was in place when Alexander the Great brought Hellenism to the Ancient Middle East when he conquered Persia. Christianity unified the Roman world in the 300s. Christianity remains the largest religion in the world today.
The Zoroastrians, Jews, and early Christians all influenced one another during Antiquity. There is clear overlap and crossover beliefs and practices among all three. Maybe the most obvious rule is one that has not yet been mentioned in this thesis: The Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12 says “Do to others what you want them to do to you.” In Leviticus 19:18, it says “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Zoroastrian scripture, Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29, recommends “Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others.”
Appendix A: Holy Scripture

Part I. The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20 1 – 14

God spoke all these words, saying: I the LORD am your God who bought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.
You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.
Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your god: you shall not do any work—
you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.
Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor’s house: you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

The Ten Commandments (NRSV)
Exodus 20: 1- 17

“Then God spoke all these words,
2 ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me.
4 ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.
7 ‘You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
8 ‘Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; and therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.
12 ‘Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
13 ‘You shall not murder.
14 ‘You shall not commit adultery.
15 ‘You shall not steal.
16 ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
17 ‘You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Part II. Prophesizing the Messiah

The Jewish Bible- Tanakh The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS translation according to the traditional Hebrew Text, 1985

Isaiah 9: 5 – 6

For a child has been born to us,
A son has been given us.
And authority has settled on his shoulders.
He has been named
“The Mighty God is planning grace;
The Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler”—
In token of abundant authority
And of peace without limit
Upon David’s throne and kingdom,
That it may be firmly established
In justice and in equity
Now and evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of Hosts
Shall bring this to pass.

Isaiah 9:6 - 7 (NRSV)
For a child has been born for us,
A son given to us;
Authority rests upon his shoulders;
And he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
And there shall be endless peace
For the throne of David and his
Kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
With justice and with righteousness
From time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Part III. Praising Fire- Zoroastrian Gatha 36 “To Ahura and the Fire”

1. We would approach You two, O (Ye) primeval ones in the house of this Thy holy Fire, O Ahura Mazda, Thou most bounteous Spirit! Who brings pollutions to this (Thy flame) him wilt Thou cover with pollutions (in his turn). 2. But as the most friendly do Thou give us zeal, O Fire of the Lord! and approach us, and with the loving blessing of the most friendly, with the praise of the most adored. Yea, may'st thou approach to aid us in this our greatest (undertaking) among the efforts of our zeal.

3. The Fire of Ahura Mazda art thou verily; yea, the most bounteous one of His Spirit, wherefore Thine is the most potent of all names (for grace), O Fire of the Lord! 4. And therefore we would approach Thee, (O Ahura!) with the help of Thy Good Mind (which Thou dost implant within us), with Thy (good) Righteousness, and with the actions and the words inculcated by Thy good wisdom!

5. We therefore bow before Thee, and we direct our prayers to Thee with confessions of our guilt, O Ahura Mazda! with all the good thoughts (which Thou dost inspire), with all the words well said, and the deeds well done, with these would we approach Thee. 6. And to Thy most beauteous body do we make our deep acknowledgments, O Ahura Mazda! to those stars (which are Thy body); and to that one, the highest of the high, [such as the sun was called]!

Part IV. Comparing Ezra in the Tanakh and the Christian Bible

Tanakh
Ezra 1:1-4
“In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the LORD roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:
“Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD GOD of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building HIM a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people- may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the LORD GOD of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let
people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods and livestock besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem.”
Ezra 1: 7 –9
“King Cyrus of Persia released the vessels of the LORD’s house which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his god. These King Cyrus of Persia released through the office of Mithredath the treasurer, who gave an inventory of them to Sheshbazzar, the Prince of Judah.”

Ezra 1: 11
“…in all 5,400 gold and silver vessels. Sheshbazzar brought all these back when the exiles came back from Babylon to Jerusalem.”

Ezra 3: 1 – 4
“When the seventh month arrived – the Israelites being settled in their towns- the entre people assembled as one man in Jerusalem…[they] set to and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burn offerings upon it as is written in the Teachings of Moses, the man of God. They set up the altar on its site because they were in fear of the peoples of the land…”

Ezra 4: 1 – 7
“When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD GOD of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the chiefs of the clans and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, since we too worship your God, having offered sacrifices to Him since the time of King Esarhaddon of Assyria, who brought us here. Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs of the clans of Israel answered them, ‘It is not for you and us to build a House to our God, but we alone will built it to the LORD GOD of Israel, in accord with the charge that the king, King Cyrus of Persia, laid upon us.’ Thereupon the people of the land undermined the resolve of the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build. They bribed ministers in order to thwart their plans all the years of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, at the start of his reign, they drew up an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.”

Bible- New Revised Standard Version
Ezra 1:1 – 8
“In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared:
‘Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people- may their God be with them!- are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel- he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.”
“The heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites—everyone whose spirit God had stirred—got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. All their neighbors aided them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with animals, and with valuable gifts, besides all that was freely offered. King Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. King Cyrus of Persia had them released into the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.”

Ezra 2:68 – 69

“As soon as they came to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of families made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. According to their resources they gave to the building fund sixty-one thousand darices of gold, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly robes.”

Part V - The Nicene Creed

From the Encyclopedia Britannica

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess on Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.
Appendix B: Glossary

Common Terms and definitions

- agiary: Parsi term for a Zoroastrian place of worship, a fire temple.

- Ahuna Vairya/Ahunvar: the holiest Zoroastrian prayer, equivalent to the Lord’s Prayer in Christianity.

- akabir: Arabic plural, ‘great ones’, used for elders or leading men.

- Amesha Spenta: ‘Holy Immortal’, a term for one of the divine beings of Zoroastrianism, evoked by God; often used especially of the six greatest among them.

- anjoman: ‘assembly’, a gathering or council of local Zoroastrians.

- asha: ‘order, truth, justice’, a principal which governs the world.

- ashavan: ‘righteous, true, just.’

- atakhsh/atash: ‘fire’


- Atakhsh i Varahram/ Atash Bahram: ‘Victorious Fire’, a sacred fire of the highest grade.

- atash-zohr: ‘offering to fire.’

- Avesta: the sacred books of the Zoroastrians.

- Avestan: The Iranian language spoken by Zoroaster, in which the Avesta is composed.

- barashnom: ritual ablution, part of a prolonged rite of purification.

- baresman/barsom: bundle of twigs held by the officiating priest at acts of worship.

- behdin: ‘the good religion’ i.e., Zoroastrianism; also ‘of the good religion’ i.e., a Zoroastrian.

- Dadgah: a sacred fire of the third grade.

- daeva/dev: an evil god, abjured by Zoroaster; later, a demon.

- dakhma: ‘grave’; later a place of exposure for the dead, a ‘tower of silence.’

- dastur: one in authority, a high priest.
-drug: ‘disorder, falsehood’, a principle opposed to asha.

-frasho-kereti/frashegird: end of the present state of the world, the Last Day.

-fravashi/fravahr/fravard: a spirit which has pre-existed this life and will survive after death; often a synonym for the soul.

-gahambar: one of six holy days of obligation enjoined on his community by Zoroaster.

-Gathas: the hymns composed by Zoroaster.

-getig: ‘physical, tangible, corporeal’ (opposed to menog).

-haoma/hom: the sacred plant crushed for its juice at the main Zoroastrian act of worship.

-herbad/ervad: name for a Zoroastrian priest; in modern usage one less highly qualified than a mobad.

-kavi/kay: title of Vishtaspa, Zoroaster’s royal patron, and of others of his dynasty.

-khrafstra: ‘noxious creature’, held to belong to the world of evil.

-khvarenah: ‘divine grace’; also, the divine being who personifies this.

-kusti: ‘sacred cord’, worn as girdle by Zoroastrians.

-magus (plural, magi): Latin form of Old Persian magu, ‘priest.’

-menog: ‘spiritual, intangible’ (opposed to getig).

-mobad: leading priest; in modern usage one more highly qualified than a herbad.

-No Ruz: ‘New Day’, the holiest day of the Zoroastrian devotional year, and the seventh feast of obligation.

-Pahlavi: the language of the later Zoroastrian books.

-Saoshyant: the coming World Savior.

-spenta: ‘holy, furthering, increasing’, an adjective which characterizes the good creation.

-Staota Yesnya: the central and oldest part of the yasna.

-urvan: ‘soul.’
-Vahram fire: see Atakhsh i Varahram.


-Visperad: ‘(Service of) All the Masters’, solemnized especially at the gahambars and No Ruz.

-yasht: a hymn to an individual divinity.

-yasna: ‘act of worship,’ the main Zoroastrian religious service.

-Yasna Haptanhaiti: ‘Yasna of Seven Chapters’, part of the Staota Yesna.

-yazata/yazad: ‘worthy of worship’, one of the Zoroastrian terms for a divine being evoked by God.


-zand: translation of the Avesta, with commentary, in a vernacular.
Appendix C: Breakdown of the Divine

Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu/Amesha Spenta

Spenta Mainyu
- Vohu Mano/Vohuman/Vohumanah – Good mind or good thought. Presides over cattle.
- Asha Vahishta/Ardwahisht – Literally highest asha, presiding over asha (order), fire and righteousness.
- Khshathra Vairya/ Shahrewar/ Kshatha Vairy – Literally Desirable Dominion, Presides over metals and rulership/governance.
- Spenta Armaiti/ Spandarmad/ Aramaiti – Literally Holy devotion, presides over the earth (plants), holy matrimony, harmony, truth, wisdom, and goodness.
- Haurvatat/Hordad – Literally “Perfection or Health” presides over water and salvation.
- Ameretat/Amurdad – Literally “Immortality” presides over the Earth (people).
- Ahura Mazda/Armzad – Chief among them.

God and his archangels
From *A Dictionary of Angels including the Fallen*

The Seven Archangels According to Various Sources and Authorities
*Enoch 1* ( Ethiopic Enoch)
(the earliest reference to the 7)
1. Uriel
2. Raphael
3. Raguel (Ruhl, Ruad, Rua)
4. Michael
5. Zerachiel (Araqael)
6. Gabriel
7. Remiel (Jeremiel, Jerahmeel)

Gregory the Great
1. Michael
2. Gabriel
3. Raphael
4. Uriel
5. Simiel
6. Orifiel
7. Zachariel

Pseudo-Dionysius
1. Michael
2. Gabriel
3. Raphael
4. Uriel
5. Chamuel
6. Jophiel
7. Zadkiel

1. Pride
2. Gluttony
3. Lust
4. Covetousness (Greed)
5. Sloth
6. Envy
7. Anger (Wrath)

1. Faith
2. Hope
3. Charity
4. Prudence
5. Justice
6. Temperance
7. Fortitude
Appendix D: Common Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer
The Matthean Version
Our Father who art in heaven, 
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, 
and forgive us our trespasses, 
as we forgive those who trespass against us, 
and lead us not into temptation, 
but deliver us from evil.

Ashem Vohu (invocation of Asha)
Holiness (Asha) is the best of all good: 
It is also happiness 
Happy the man who is holy with perfect holiness!

Ahunwar (akin to the Lord’s prayer)
The will of the Lord is the law of righteousness. 
The gifts of Vohu-man to the deeds done in this world for Mada. 
He who relieves the poor makes Ahura king.
Appendix E: Timeline

‡-From Turning Points in Jewish History Rosenstein, Marc.. Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Dates for timeline between 2350-1200 BCE are approximate. The Term “Dominance” refers to cultural/political influence in the area of Canaan.
§-From SPQR- Entries in [square brackets] refer to events in classical Greek History.
¤-From Suetonius’ 12 Caesars.

2350 BCE – 2000 BCE Dominance of the Akkadian Empire, based in Mesopotamia. ‡
2000 BCE – 1900 BCE Gutian invasion from Persia, political instability†
>1900 BCE The Code of Eshnunna is composed: an early Babylonian code of Criminal law and damages. ‡
1900 BCE – 1800 BCE Dominance of the Ur dynasty, based in Mesopotamia; migration of Hurrians from Mitanni, northern Mesopotamia. ‡
1800 BCE – 1750 BCE Dominance of Babylon: King Hammurabi ‡
1800 BCE – 1200 BCE Range of dates that have been suggested for when Abraham might have lived. ‡
~1790 BCE King Hammurabi of Babylonia promulgates a detailed legal code. ‡
1720 BCE – 1550 BCE Dominance of the Hyksos (based in Nile Delta) ‡
~1600 BCE – 1100 BCE Mycenaean civilization in Greece ‡
~1500 BCE – 1200 BCE Approximate time when Zoroaster lived.
1550 BCE – 1295 BCE Dominance of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty ‡
~1500 BCE Rise of Phoenician civilization along Lebanon/Canaan coast‡
~1300 BCE Rise of Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia‡
1295 BCE – 1186 BCE Nineteenth Dynasty in Egypt‡
~1250 BCE – 1200 BCE Period generally suggested for the Exodus‡
  God reveals the Torah at Mount Sinai (traditional date). ‡
1209 BCE The first mention of “Israel” in an extra-biblical text- in an inscription in the funerary temple of Pharoah Merneptah, in Thebes, celebrating an Egyptian victory over rebellions by Israel and other nations. ‡
~1200 BCE Transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age, with the spread of iron-working technology ‡
1186 BCE – 1069 BCE Twentieth Dynasty in Egypt‡
1115 BCE Tiglath-Pileser I establishes the second Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia and begins a period of expansion and development. ‡
1100 BCE The Mycenaean civilization in Greece declines. ‡
1090 BCE The Egyptian central government declines in strength under the Twenty-First Dynasty‡
~1020 BCE Saul is anointed as king. ‡
~1000 BCE David is anointed as King of Judah in Hebron‡
~993 BCE David is acclaimed as king of all Israel ‡
943 BCE Ashur-dan II establishes the Neo-Assyrian Empire, to dominate the region for three centuries. ‡
~940 BCE David dies; Solomon is anointed as king. ‡
~920 BCE Solomon dies; the kingdom is divided into Israel (ten northern tribes) and Judah. ‡
~900–609 BCE Neo-Assyrian Empire†
830s BCE: Earliest reference to Persians in written texts (the annals of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III) †
753 BCE: Rome’s Regal Period begins. §
Traditional date of Rome’s foundation. §
728 BCE Hezekiah accedes to the throne of Judah (2 Kings 18) ‡
722 BCE The Assyrians destroy the Kingdom of Israel; the ten tribes are exiled/dissolved. ‡
714 BCE Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria is quashed (2 Kings 18). ‡
705 BCE Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem but suddenly and inexplicably lifts the siege and departs (2 Kings 19). ‡
697 BCE: Manasseh succeeds his father Hezekiah as king and does “that which was displeasing to the Lord” (2 Kings 21) ‡
~640 BCE: Cyrus, King of Parsumash, pays obeisance to Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria. †
642 BCE Amon succeeds his father Manasseh as king and continues his policies (2 Kings 21) ‡
640 BCE Josiah succeeds his father Amon as king; he does “what was pleasing to the Lord, and he followed all the ways of his ancestor David” (2 Kings 22). §
~640 – 550 BCE Height of Median Power†
~626 – 539 BCE Neo-Babylonian Empire†
624 BCE Josiah begins the repair and remodeling of the Temple, during which a scroll is found. Its contents (unknown to us) engender a national project of soul-searching, suppression of idolatry, a public ceremony of renewal of the covenant, and a restoration of Passover observance. Many scholars believe that the scroll ‘found’ in the Temple was the biblical book of Deuteronomy, which may have been composed for the occasion (2 Kings 22-23) ‡
~622 BCE The High Priest under King Josiah finds a “book of the law” in the Temple (2 Kings 22); many scholars date the assembly of the Torah’s laws to this period. ‡
612 BCE Sack of Nineveh and fall of Assyria (until 609). †
609 BCE Josiah is killed in battle (against Egypt) his son Jehoahaz succeeds him but reigns for only three months; the Pharaoh deposes and imprisons him, placing his brother Jehoiakim on the throne (2 Kings 23: 28 – 37). ‡
~600 BCE Draco composes the first Greek legal code, the Draconian constitution, in Athens. ‡
597 BCE Jehoiakim dies. His successor, his son Jehoiachin, is deposed and exiled by the Babylonians, who place another son of Josiah, Zedekiah, on the throne (2 Kings 24). ‡
Beginning of the Babylonian Exile
588 BCE Zedekiah rebels against Babylonia; Jerusalem is besieged (2 Kings 25) ‡
586 BCE The walls are breached; the king is captured, blinded, and exiled; the temple is burned The Babylonians appoint a local Jewish governor, Gedaliah, who is soon assassinated by the remnants of the Judean royal family (2 Kings 25). ‡
Jerusalem is destroyed, generating a second wave of exiles. ‡
582 BCE A Rebellion against Gedaliah, who had been appointed governor by the Babylonians and who was assassinated by members of the Davidic royal family, leads to a third wave of exile. ‡

Birth of Pythagoras on Samos §

550 – 530 BCE Reign of Cyrus the Great
550 BCE Cyrus the Great defeats Astyages, King of the Medes †
540s BCE Cyrus conquers Lydia †
539 BCE Cyrus conquers Babylon †
538 BCE End of the Babylonian Exile
530 BCE – 522 BCE Reign of Cambyses II
530 BCE Death of Cyrus in battle and succession of Cambyses†
530s? – 510s BCE Main construction at Pasargadae †
525 BCE – 522 BCE Cambyses invades Egypt. †
522 BCE Death of Cambyses in April, reign of Bardiya (6 months) and the usurpation of Darius I. †
522 BCE – 486 BCE Reign of Darius I the Great
520 BCE – 519 BCE Engravings of Bisitun relief and inscription †
510s BCE Founding of Persepolis †
510s BCE Darius I’s campaigns into Europe (Scythians) and India. †
509 BCE End of Rome’s Regal Period. §

Foundation of the Roman Republic. §

499 BCE – 493 BCE Ionia revolt. †
499 BCE – 449 BCE Greco-Persian Wars
494 BCE First secession of the plebians §
‘Conflict of the Orders’ until 287 BCE. §

490 BCE Battle of Marathon †
486 BCE Death of Darius I and accession of Xerxes; revolt in Egypt. †
485 BCE – 465 BCE Reign of Xerxes I
484 BCE Revolt in Babylonia †
480 BCE – 479 BCE Xerxes’ invasion of Greece †
465 BCE – 424 BCE Reign of Artaxerxes I
465 BCE Assassination of Xerxes and accession of Artaxerxes I †
464/463 BCE – 454 BCE Egyptian Revolt †
451 BCE – 450 BCE ‘The Decemvirate’ §
~450 BCE The Twelve Tables, the first codification of Roman law, is enacted. ‡
424 BCE – 404 BCE Reign of Darius II
424 BCE Death of Artaxerxes I; accession and assignation of Xerxes II †
423 BCE Accession of Darius II †
408 BCE Cyrus the younger dispatched to Anatolia with a special command. †
405 BCE Death of Darius II; accession of Artaxerxes II †
404 BCE – 358 BCE Reign of Artaxerxes II
401 BCE War of the Brothers: Cyrus the younger revolts against Artaxerxes II, Battle of Cunaxa †
401 BCE – 343/342 BCE Egypt in revolt and effectively outside of Achaemenid control. †
387/386 BCE King’s Peace (Peace of Antalcidas) imposed upon Greece. †
359 BCE Death of Artaxerxes II and accession of Artaxerxes III †
358 BCE – 338 BCE Reign of Artaxerxes III
356 BCE Birth of Alexander the Great
343/342 BCE Artaxerxes III reconquest of Egypt †
343 BCE – 341 BCE 1st Samnite Wars §
341 BCE Beginning of Latin War §
   Wars in Italy §
338 BCE – 336 BCE Reign of Artaxerxes IV
338 BCE Death of Artaxerxes III and accession of Artaxerxes IV (Arses) †
   Latin League Dissolved, End of Latin War. §
336 BCE – 330 BCE Reign of Darius III
336 BCE Artaxerxes IV assassinated; accession of Darius III †
334 BCE Alexander, King of Macedon, invades the Persian Empire; Battle of Granicus †
333 BCE Battle of Issus; Much of Darius III’s family captured at Damascus †
331 BCE Battle of Guagamela; Alexander welcomed into Babylon and Susa, invades Fars †
330 BCE End of Empire: Burning of Persepolis terrace and death of Darius III †
330 BCE – 329 BCE Reign of Artaxerxes V
320s BCE Alexander campaigns in eastern Iran and India, adding the eastern domains of the Achaemenid empire and consolidating his conquests; Alexander dies in 323 in Babylon. †
326 BCE Debt enslavement in Rome is abolished §
   2nd Samnite War until 304. §
323 BCE Death of Alexander the Great
312 BCE – 63 BCE The Seleucid Empire
312 BCE Construction of Rome’s first aqueduct. §
298 BCE – 290 BCE The 3rd Samnite War. §
247 BCE – 224 CE Parthian Empire
218 BCE Hannibal crosses the Alps §
133 BCE Conclusion of war in Iberia, most of which Rome now controls. §
   Attalus of Pergamum bequeaths his kingdom to Rome §
100 BCE Birth of Julius Caesar ♠
91 BCE – 89 BCE Social war in Rome §
89 BCE Rome grants citizenship to Italians §
88 BCE – 86 BCE Roman Civil War §
73 BCE – 71 BCE revolt of Spartacus §
70 BCE Pompey’s first consulship. §
67 BCE Pompey’s command against the pirates. §
63 BCE Cicero’s speeches Against Catiline 1 – 4. §
   Pompey captures Jerusalem §
49 BCE Caesar crosses the Rubicon §
   The Senate decrees that Caesar must dismiss his army and disallows the tribunes’ veto ♠
   Roman Civil Wars, 49 – 31 BCE §
   Caesar vs. Pompey §
48 BCE Cicero returns to Rome §
Battle of Pharsalus; death of Pompey in Egypt. §
46 BCE Caesar’s Triumph §
January 44 BCE Julius Caesar is voted dictator perpetus §
March 15 44 BCE Caesar’s assassination §
43 BCE Cicero assassinated §
Formation of the Triumvirate of Octavian, Anthony, and Lepidus. §
42 BCE Battle of Philippi: The Triumvirate defeats Brutus and Cassius §
31 BCE Battle of Actium, Octavian v. Mark Antony §
30 BCE Suicide of Antony and Cleopatra; Egypt becomes a Roman province §
The Rule of the Emperors Period §
The Julio-Claudian dynasty, 31 BCE – 68 BCE §
Octavian/ Augustus 31 BCE – 14 CE §
29 BCE Octavian returns to Italy and celebrates a triple triumph §
27 BCE Octavian takes the title Augustus §
19 BCE Parthian standards lost at Carrhae and returned to Rome. §
4 BCE Augustus formally adopts Tiberius §

9 CE Battle of the Teutoburg Forest §
14 – 37 CE Reign of Tiberius §
17 CE Cn. Calpurnius Piso made governor of Syria. □
19 CE Expulsion of Jews from Rome. Death of Germanicus □
20 CE Trial and Suicide of Calpurnius Piso □
26 – 36 CE Pontius Pilate governor of Judea §
33 CE Traditional date for Crucifixion of Jesus §
37 CE – 41 CE Reign of Gaius (Caligula) §
40 CE Jewish embassies to Caligula §
41 CE – 54 CE Reign of Claudius §
54 CE – 68 CE Reign of Nero §
64 CE Great Fire at Rome §
Traditional date for St. Peter’s crucifixion in Rome §
65 CE Traditional date for St. Paul’s beheading in Rome §
66 CE – 73/74 CE 1st Jewish revolt. §
66 – 67 CE Nero tours Greece; Vespasian sent to command the Roman forces in Judea □
68 CE Suicide of Nero §
69 CE Civil War: “The Year of the Four Emperors” §
The Flavian dynasty 69 CE – 96 CE. §
Vespasian 69 – 79. §
(July 1st) Vespasian proclaimed as emperor by the army in Egypt, followed by the armies in Judea, Syria and Moesia (July-August). □
70 CE Destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem §
71 CE Judaean triumph of Vespasian and Titus □
73/74 CE First Jewish Revolt ends with the fall of Masada §
~75 CE Josephus begins to circulate the Jewish War. §
93/94 CE Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities §
98 CE – 117 CE Reign of Trajan §
113 CE Trajan invades Parthia §
   Trajan’s Campaigns in the East, 113 – 117 CE §
120s CE Suetonius’ *Twelve Caesars* §
224 CE – 651 CE Sasanian Empire
313 CE Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire.
325 CE 1st Nicene Council
610 CE Muhammad’s vision
Bibliography
Primary Sources


Gaius Suetonius Tranquilus the twelve Caesars translated by Robert Graves


The Selections of Zadspram Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram Translated by E.W. West Edited by Joseph H. Peterson 1995.


Secondary Sources


Hinson, E. Gelnn. “Historical and Theological Perspectives on Satan.”


1983 ‘Jews in Iran.’


“The literature of the most ancient Iranians’1996.


Stroumsa, G. (1986) “‘Seal of the Prophets’: the nature of the Manichean metaphor.”


