World History Name:

Mrs. Barnes Date:

Sources: Mark Kishlansky, *Civilzation in the West,* vol. A; Jackson Spielvogel, *Western Civilization* Block:

**Origins and Rise of Christianity**

Prior to the days of Christ, the Jews living within the Roman Empire were divided. For the most part, the Roman Empire left the Jews alone; they recognized their right to worship one God as they pleased but did require some participation in Roman religious festivals and ceremonies. The Jews themselves were somewhat divided, however. On one end of the spectrum were the *Sadduces*, who lived as Jews but were willing to adopt some elements of Hellenism (the Greek culture spread by Alexander the Great, and the foundation for much of Roman culture). On the other end were the Hasidim. The Hasidim were divided into two main groups: the *Pharisees*, and the *Zealots.* The Pharisees observed strict dietary rules and rituals. They maintained strict separation from Gentiles (literally “the people,” those who were not Jewish). A leader of the Pharisees, Hillel, practiced a movement revolving around peace and love. He did not sponsor any type of violence and did not condone revolts against non-Jews. Hillel’s teaching would ultimately be compiled into the *Talmud*, a text dictating the civil and ceremonial laws of the Jews. The Zealots, however, did support organized resistance and often utilized violence to express their views and attempt to create change. The life and death of Christ would soon become another divisive factor among Jews in the Roman Empire.

The texts we have about the life of Christ were written between the middle of the first and middle of the second centuries. The original texts were written in Greek and include the gospels (accounts of Jesus’ life), epistles (letters), and historical narratives. Over time, Christians, or followers of the teachings of Christ, came to accept 4 gospels (out of roughly 50 originally written). The first three books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are all relatively similar. The book of John, however, varies from the first three. Even though they cover much of the same material, the four gospels differ in order of events, and have different purposes and themes depending on the story the apostles wanted to share. The gospels were designed to portray Jesus in a particular image while explaining the early events of his life.

Jesus of Nazareth was from Galilee, a large region in modern-day Israel and a zealot stronghold around the time of Jesus’ birth. He preached the ideas of peace and love of God and neighbor. His teachings were completely in line with Jewish tradition and custom (similar to that of Hillel, in fact) and he said his goal was not to destroy or harm the teachings of Judaism. He preached for roughly three years in Judea and Galilee and began to draw large crowds. He said that it was not important to observe a strict adherence to the letter of law, but rather, what was important was the transformation of the inner person. God’s command, according to Jesus, was simply to love God and one another. In the Sermon on the Mount, he put forth the ethical teaching of humility, charity, and brotherly love; all of which would become basic tenets of Christian belief and practice. One particularly new idea put forth by Jesus was that of a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one. Jews had long been waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, who would restore the Kingdom of David on earth. Jesus’ heaven was different. After his death, his words and teachings were spread by Paul, known as the “second founder of Christianity.” Paul is responsible for setting the foundation of Christianity based on Jesus’ ideas. He taught that Jesus was a savior-God, the son of God, who had come to earth to save all humans, who were basically sinners as a result of Adam’s original sin of disobedience against God. By his death, Jesus had atoned for the sins of all humans and made it possible for all men and women to experience a new beginning with the potential for individual salvation. By accepting Jesus as their savior, they too could be saved.

Jesus’ teachings, however, did not appeal to all Jews. In fact, he was quite a contentious character. Some Jews believed Jesus to be the Messiah and urged him to lead a revolt against Roman authority in order to re-establish the Kingdom of David. Jesus was, of course, not radical enough for this group. Another group of Jews believed his teachings to be blasphemous and saw his assertion as the “King of the Jews” a serious threat to the status quo. Jesus was gaining negative attention at the empire level as well. The procurator (local legal leader) of Judea, Pontius Pilate, determined Jesus to be a danger to law and order. Since he did not condone any political disturbances, he ordered Jesus be put to death by crucifixion, a common Roman form of executive for slaves, pirates, thieves, and noncitizen troublemakers.

It is this portion of his life, and the events immediately following his death that would change the course of history. Upon his death, disciples of Jesus spread the story that he overcame death, had been resurrected, and ascended to heaven (a common tale among mystery cults of the time). Belief in the resurrection became an essential tenet (principle) to the Christian doctrine. It is here that, for some, Jesus became the *Messiah*, or “anointed one” (“Christ” in Greek).

**Origins and Rise of Islam**

In the era of the Roman Empire, the Arabian Peninsula was dominated by Bedouin nomads who moved constantly to find water and food for their animals. These nomadic tribes were fiercely independent and often times warred against Arabs living in cities. These Arabs, similar to the early Hebrews and Assyrians were a Semitic-speaking people and were polytheistic; there was a supreme God named Allah (Arabic for “God”) who ruled over the other gods. There was no priesthood; all members of the tribe were involved in the practice of faith. Allah was symbolized by a sacred stone, and each tribe had its own stone. All tribes however worshiped a meteorite—the Black Stone, which had been placed in a central shrine called the Ka’ba in the city of Mecca. Mecca was an early sanctuary, or haram, which was a neutral location site designated to resolve issues between warring tribes. Each haram was run by a holy man. Mecca, with its Ka’ba, later grew into a major trading center.

Muhammad (570-632 CE), or Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Abd al-muttalib ibn Hashim, was born in Mecca to a merchant family. Orphaned by the age of 5, he was raised by relatives and later grew up to be a merchant. At the age of 20, he married a wealthy widow and improved his standing in society. It is sometime in his middle years that he began to see visions. He believed that portions of Gods truths had been revealed through Moses and Jesus, but that the final revelations were being given to him, thus making him the last and greatest prophet. In 610 CE, during the month of Ramadan, Muhammad, while praying in the mountains, saw a vision of a man commanding him to recite: “O, Muhammad! Thou art the Messenger of God! Recite!”

Muhammad soon began preaching and ultimately gained a wealth of followers. He struggled initially to find believers in Mecca, and so in 622 CE, he left for the city of Medina. The year of the journey to Mecca by Muhammad and his followers is known in history as the *Hegira*, “departure,” and became year 1 in the official calendar of Islam. His preachings would later be written down into the Qur’an, or Koran, which contained the guidelines by which followers of Allah were to live. Muhammad’s teachings set the basis for the religion known as *Islam*, which means “submission to will of Allah.” Allah is an all-powerful being who created the universe and everything in it. Humans must subject themselves to Allah if they wished to achieve everlasting life. His followers were called *Muslims*, meaning “practitioners of Islam,” or “true believer.”

The Qur’an was offered Arabs a faith founded upon a book. This faith was both within the tradition of and superior to Christianity and Judaism. For Muslims, Allah’s revelation emphasized his power and transcendence. The duty of humans is to worship Allah but Islamic prayers differ greatly from those of Christians or Jews. For Muslims, prayers are of praise, rather than petition. The Qur’an emphasizes the code of ethics and law for Muslims. This ethical code consisted of the Five Pillars of Islam: belief in Allah and Muhammad as the Prophet; standard prayer five times a day and public prayer on Friday at midday to worship Allah; observance of the holy month of *Ramadan* (the ninth month on the Muslim calendar) by fasting from dawn to sunset; making a pilgrimage (known as the *hajj*) to Mecca in one’s lifetime; and giving alms to the poor and unfortunate. The faithful who observed the law were guaranteed a place in eternal paradise.

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Questions—Origins and Rise of Christianity and Islam Block:

1. What are the important dates for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
2. What are the fundamental similarities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
3. What are the fundamental differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
4. What is the view of Jesus in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
5. How is the resurrection of Jesus viewed in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
6. How does one achieve salvation according to: Judaism? Christianity? Islam?
7. How does Judaism view Christianity? How does Judaism view Islam?
8. How does Christianity view Judaism? How does Christianity view Islam?
9. How does Islam view Judaism? How does Islam view Christianity?