

Unit Three Vocabulary Terms

Judaism

Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760) A charismatic faith healer, mystic, and teacher (whose given name was Israel ben Eliezer) who is generally regarded as the founder of the Hasidic movement.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah A rite of passage for adolescents in Judaism, the *Bar Mitzvah* (for boys age 13) and the *Bat Mitzvah* (for girls age 12–13) signal their coming of age and the beginning of adult responsibility.

Covenant A biblical concept that describes the relationship between God and the Jews in contractual terms often thought of as an eternal bond between the Creator and the descendants of the ancient Israelites.

Dead Sea Scrolls Religious literature hidden in caves near the shores of the Dead Sea (2nd c. BCE – 1st c. CE)

Diaspora a Greek word that refers to Jewish communities that live outside of the historical land of Israel.

Election The belief that the biblical God “chose” the people of Israel for some special purpose; this concept is related to the idea of the Covenant between God and the people of Israel and it entails the belief that the Jews’ relationship with God obliges them to conform to His laws and to fulfill His purposes in the world.

Eschatological Any belief in an “end-time” of the current world era, or of the world, or of the universe by divine judgment, destruction, and/or restoration.

Ethical monotheism A core concept of the Abrahamic religions that asserts that the world was created and is governed by only one transcendent Being, whose ethical attributes provide an ideal model for human behavior.

Exodus The escape (or departure) of Israelite slaves from Egypt described in the Hebrew Bible (c. 1250 B.C.E.)

Halacha/Halakha An authoritative formulation of traditional Jewish law.

Hasidism A popular movement within eighteenth-century Eastern European Judaism, Hasidism stressed the need for spiritual restoration and deepened individual piety. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Hasidic movement spawned a number of distinctive communities that have physically separated themselves from the rest of the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds, and who are often recognized by their attire and their devotion to a lineage of hereditary spiritual leaders (called rabbis or rebbes).

Holocaust The genocidal destruction of approximately 6 million European Jews by the government of Nazi Germany during World War II. This mass slaughter is called the *Shoah* (whirlwind, destruction, or calamity) in Hebrew.

Kabbalah One of the dominant forms of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalistic texts begin to appear in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Luria, Isaac A sixteenth-century mystic who settled in Safed (Israel) and gathered around him a community of disciples. Lurianic mysticism seeks to explain the mystery surrounding both the creation of the world and its redemption from sin.

Maimonides A twelfth-century philosopher and rabbinic scholar whose codification of Jewish beliefs and religious practices set the standard for both in subsequent centuries.

Messiah “Anointed One” an idea that appears in late and post-biblical texts regarding a future redeemer of Israel who will usher in a new era of Jewish sovereignty and transform the world.

Mitzvot Literally translated, the Hebrew word *mitzvot* means “commandments,” and it refers to 613 commandments that the biblical God imparted to the Israelites in the Torah (i.e., the first five books of the Hebrew Bible).

Moses The legendary leader and prophet who led the Israelite slaves out of Egypt. Moses serves as a mediator between the people of Israel and God in the Torah, and is later viewed as Israel’s greatest prophet. Traditionally God imparted to Moses the Ten Declarations (“Ten Commandments”) and the teachings that later became the Torah (called the “Five Books of Moses” in Orthodox traditions).

Omniscience The divine attribute of total and eternal knowledge.

Omnipotence The divine attribute of total and eternal power.

Pesach An early spring harvest festival that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, Pesach (better known as “Passover” in English) is celebrated for seven days in Israel and eight days in the Diaspora. The first two nights are celebrated within a family setting.

Rosh Hashanah the Jewish New Year, it is celebrated for two days in the fall (on the first day of the month of Tishri) and accompanied by the blowing of a ram’s horn (a *shofar*, in Hebrew). It signals the beginning of the “ten days of repentance” that culminates with Yom Kippur.

Seder a ritualized meal, observed on the first two nights of Pesach, that recalls the Exodus from Egypt.

Shavuot A later spring harvest festival that is celebrated for two days, and is associated with the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Along with Pesach and Sukkot it was one of the “pilgrimage” festivals in ancient times.

Siddur The prayer book that is used on weekdays and on the Sabbath.

Sukkot A fall harvest festival that is associated with huts (in Hebrew, **sukkot**) in which the ancient Israelites sought shelter during the Exodus. It is celebrated for seven days in Israel (eight days in the Diaspora). During that time Jews take their meals, and if possible sleep, in huts that are partly open to the sky.

Synagogue Jewish house of worship. The focal point of synagogues is the Ark, a large cabinet where scrolls of the Torah are stored.

Talmud A multivolume work of commentary on the laws of the Torah and on the teachings of the entire Hebrew Bible, composed in two stages: the Mishnah (edited in approximately 200

C.E.) and the Gemara (edited, in its Babylonian version, around 500 C.E.). Traditionally, Jews refer to the Talmud as the “Oral Torah,” and many regard it as an extension of sacred scripture.

Tanakh An acronym standing for the entire Hebrew Bible: **T**orah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible); **N**evi'im (or “Prophets,” which includes works of both prophecy and history); and **K**hetuvim (or “Writings,” miscellaneous works of both poetry and prose). Taken together, the twenty-four books that make up this collection constitute the core “scripture” of Judaism.

Theodicy “Law of God” or “Divine Justice,” a particularly vexing issue for monotheistic traditions often referred to as “the problem of evil.” Theodicies attempt to understand or explain why God, who is described as all-knowing (omniscient), all-loving (omnibenevolent), and all-powerful (omnipotent), allows evil or apparently innocent human suffering to occur.

Transcendence The divine attribute of being above and beyond anything human beings can know or imagine.

YHWH The Tetragrammaton or “the four letters,” four consonants that constitute the most sacred name associated with the God of Israel. Only the High Priest knew the exact pronunciation of this name, according to ancient Jewish tradition, but after the destruction of the Second Temple the precise vocalization of these letters was lost—only to be recovered with the future arrival of the Messiah. Because it is considered too sacred to utter aloud, pious Jews replace the word “Yahweh” with the term “Adonai” or “my Lord.”

Yom Kippur Referred to as the “Day of Atonement,” it is the most solemn of all of the fast days in the Jewish religious calendar.

Zionism A modern political philosophy that asserts a belief in Jewish national identity and in the necessity of resuming national life within the historic Land of Israel.

Zohar A Kabbalistic or mystical interpretation of the biblical book of Genesis (c. 1280 C.E.)

Christianity

Apostle In the New Testament, Jesus’ disciples, sent out to preach and baptize, are called *apostles* (Greek *apostolos*, “one who is sent out”). Paul of Tarsus and some other early Christian leaders also claimed this title. Because of their close association with Jesus, the apostles were accorded a place of honor in the early Church.

Apostolic succession According to this Roman Catholic and Orthodox doctrine, the spiritual authority conferred by Jesus on the apostles has been transmitted through an unbroken line of bishops, who are their successors.

Baptism Performed by immersion in water or a sprinkling with water, baptism is a sacrament in which an individual is cleansed of sin and admitted into the Church.

Bishop Responsible for supervising other priests and their congregations within specific regions known as *dioceses*, bishops (from the Greek *episkopos* “overseer”) are regarded by Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians as successors of the apostles.

Calvin, John (1509–1564) One of the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation, Calvin is notable for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his emphasis on the absolute power of

God, the absolute depravity of human nature, and the absolute dependence of human beings on divine grace for salvation.

Canon authoritative collection of writings or “scripture.” The Bible is the basic canon for Christianity, although the contents of biblical canons vary; i.e., the Protestant Bible or canon contains 66 books, the Roman Catholic Bible or canon contains 73 books, the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible or canon contains 81 books.

Christmas An annual holiday commemorating the birth of Jesus, Christmas is observed by Western Christians on December 25. While many Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on this date, others observe the holiday on January 7.

Church In the broadest sense, “Church” refers to the universal community of Christians, but the term can also refer to a particular tradition within Christianity (such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Lutheran Church) or to an individual congregation of Christians.

Easter An annual holiday commemorating the resurrection of Christ, Easter is a “moveable feast” whose date changes from year to year, though it is always celebrated in spring (as early as March 22 and as late as May 8).

Eucharist Also known as the Lord’s Supper and Holy Communion, the Eucharist is a sacrament celebrated with consecrated bread and wine in commemoration of Jesus’ “Last Supper” with his disciples.

Evangelicalism A 19th century Protestant movement that stresses the importance of the conversion experience, the Bible as the only reliable authority in matters of faith, and the missionary imperative or worldwide preaching of the gospel. In recent decades, evangelicalism has become a major force for the spread of Christianity worldwide.

Fundamentalism Originating in the early 1900s, a movement in American Protestantism that was dedicated to defending doctrines that its founders identified as being “fundamental” to “the Christian faith” against perceived threats posed by modern culture and the growth of science. Usage of the term has expanded to include certain non-Christian groups as well.

Gnosticism A broad category of religious thinkers, texts, and movements in the ancient world that emphasized the salvific nature of hidden or secret knowledge (*gnosis*) said to have been imparted to an elect few. Gnostics, whether Jewish, Christian or pagan, taught that material reality was inherently evil and corrupt and that salvation came by liberating the soul or spirit from the physical body. Gnostic Christians like the Docetists claimed that Jesus was not a physical human being but was instead a pure spirit that merely appeared to be “flesh and blood.”

Gospel In its most general sense, “gospel” means the “good news” (from Old English *godspel*, which translates the Greek *evangelion*) about Jesus Christ. The New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are proclamations of the good news concerning the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many other gospels (some considered Gnostic) not included in the New Testament canon circulated amongst early Christian communities in antiquity.

Grace Derived from the Latin *gratia* (a “gift” or “love”), grace refers to God’s love for humanity, expressed in Jesus Christ and through the sacraments.

Icons Painted images of Christ and the saints used extensively in Eastern Orthodox and related traditions.

Inquisition The investigation and suppression of heresy by the Roman Catholic Church, the Inquisition began in the twelfth century and was formally concluded in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Kingdom of God God's rule or dominion over the universe and human affairs. The kingdom of God is one of the primary themes in the teaching of Jesus.

Liturgy From the Greek *leitourgia*, "a work of the people" in honor of God, liturgy refers to the basic order of worship in Christian churches (or in Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Zoroastrian temples, etc.). It generally consists of prescribed prayers, readings or recitations, and other rituals.

Logos The Greek term *logos* has a range of meanings including "word," "rational principle," "reason/logic," or "divine reason." The Gospel of John uses *logos* in the sense of the "divine reason" to describe the process through which God created and sustains the universe. In Johannine literature, the *logos* is equated with Jesus Christ, cf. "the Word [*logos*] became flesh and lived among us" (Gospel of John 1:14).

Lord's Prayer A prayer attributed to Jesus, the Lord's Prayer serves as a model of prayer for Christians. Also known as the "Our Father" (since it begins with these words), its most familiar form is found in the Gospel of Matthew (6:9–13).

Luther, Martin (1483–1536) A German Augustinian monk who criticized Roman Catholic doctrines (particularly that the seven-part sacramental system was salvific in nature) and practices (especially the sale of indulgences) in his "Ninety-Five Theses" (1517). Luther was the original leader and one of the seminal thinkers of the Protestant Reformation.

Messiah In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "messiah" ("anointed one") refers to anyone who has been set apart by God for some special purpose, in particular, the liberation of the Jewish people from oppression; Isaiah 45.1 refers to Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, as "the Lord's messiah." In Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth is identified as the Messiah.

Nicene Creed A profession of faith formulated by the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), the Nicene Creed articulates the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Original Sin doctrine formulated by Augustine in the fourth century, the doctrine of Original Sin states that the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (often referred to as "the Fall" in Christian literature) affected all of humanity such that all human beings are born with an inherently sinful nature. Following Augustine, Protestant Reformers like Luther and Calvin suggested that human beings are incapable of not sinning, (even one's "best" actions are motivated by secretly selfish desires) and therefore stand in need of divine redemption.

Orthodox Church Also known as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church is the Eastern branch of Christianity that separated from the Western branch (the Roman Catholic Church) in 1054.

Parable According to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus made extensive use of parables—short, fictional, symbolic stories that use the language and imagery of everyday life to illustrate moral and religious ideas.

Paul of Tarsus A first-century apostle who founded churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. Paul authored the earliest New Testament literature; many of the letters, or epistles, found in the New Testament are attributed to Paul.

Pentecost A holiday celebrated by Christians in commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus as described in the second chapter of the New Testament book called The Acts of the Apostles.

Pentecostalism A 19th century movement that emphasizes the importance of spiritual renewal and the experience of God through baptism in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostalism is a primarily Protestant movement that has become popular throughout the world in recent decades.

Protestant Christianity One of the three main branches of Christianity (along with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy), Protestantism began in the sixteenth century as a reaction against medieval Roman Catholic doctrines and practices.

Purgatory in Roman Catholicism, purgatory is an intermediate state between earthly life and heaven in which the debt for unconfessed sin is expiated.

Roman Catholic Church One of the three major traditions within Christianity (along with Orthodoxy and Protestantism), the Roman Catholic Church, which recognizes the primacy of the bishop of Rome, or pope, has historically been the dominant church in the West.

rosary Taking its name from the Latin *rosarium*, “garland of roses,” the rosary is a traditional form of Roman Catholic devotion in which practitioners make use of a string of beads in reciting prayers.

Sacraments The sacraments are rituals in which material elements such as bread, wine, water, and oil serve as visible symbols of an invisible grace conveyed to recipients. The seven-part sacramental system in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions includes baptism, Eucharist/Communion, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, penance, and anointing the sick. Protestant traditions recognize the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist/Communion/Lord’s Supper.

Saint A saint is a holy person (Latin, *Sanctus*). Veneration of the saints and belief in their intercession on behalf of the living is an important feature of Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches of Christianity.

Scholasticism Represented by figures such as Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, and William of Ockham, scholasticism was the medieval effort to reconcile faith and reason using the philosophy of Aristotle.

Sin The violation of God’s will in thought, word, or deed.

Synoptic Gospels “viewing together,” the Gospels of Mark (c. 70), Matthew (c. 80), and Luke (c. 90) which share similar content derived from an earlier written source or sources. The Synoptic Gospels differ in writing style and content from the Gospel of John (c. 90-100).

Transubstantiation According to this Roman Catholic doctrine, the bread and wine consecrated by a priest celebrating the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ. Protestant traditions reject transubstantiation in favor of a symbolic rendering of the “body and blood” (bread and wine) consecrated during the Eucharist/Communion/Lord’s Supper ceremony.

Trinity According to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, God is a single divine being consisting of or in three “persons,” Father, Son and Holy Spirit/Ghost.

Islam

adhan The call to prayer.

Aisha A beloved wife of Muhammad who is known for transmitting many *hadiths*.

Allah The Arabic term for God.

caliph Leader of the Muslim community after death of Muhammad.

dhikr Recollection or Remembrance. In the Sufi context, the practice to recall or remember God.

hadith Literary tradition recording the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

hajj The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Hijra The migration of the early Muslim community from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.; the Islamic calendar dates from this year (621 CE).

imam Prayer leader; in the Shi’a tradition, one of the leaders of the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Islam Literally “submission”; specifically, the religious tradition based on the revealed Qur’an as Word of God.

Jahiliyya The “age of ignorance,” the period of history before the revelation of the Qur’an.

jihad Lit. “Striving” or “Exertion”; the “greater” *jihad* is the internal struggle to become a better Muslim; the “lesser” *jihad* is associated with armed or military conflict in defense of the faith.

Mecca The city in which Muhammad was born; place of pilgrimage for Muslims.

Medina The city to which Muhammad and his early followers migrated to escape persecution in Mecca.

miraj Muhammad’s Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and from there to heaven, where he met with God.

mosque Place of prayer, from the Arabic term *masjid*.

muezzin The person who calls the *adhan*.

Muhammad The prophet who received the revelation of the Qur'an from God. The final prophet in a long line of prophets sent by God to humanity.

Qur'an The holy text of Muslims; the Word of God as revealed to Muhammad.

Ramadan The month in which Muslims must fast daily from dawn until dusk; the fast is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and commemorates the first revelation received by Muhammad.

salat The five daily prayers, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

sawm The mandatory fast during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan; one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

shahadah The declaration of faith: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God"; the first of the Five Pillars of Islam.

shari'ah Lit. "The way to the water hole"; specifically, Islamic law.

shaykh A title sometimes used for someone with a high degree of religious learning.

Shi'a One of the two major branches of Islam. The Shi'a believed that Ali should have succeeded as leader of the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad.

shirk Lit. "Association," the sin of idolatry: worshiping or associating anything other than God with God, often identified in Islamic literature as the worst sin.

Sufi A follower of the mystical traditions of Islam.

Sufism Mystical traditions focusing on the believer's personal experience of God with the goal of uniting with God.

Sunnah Lit. "Way of Life" or "custom"; specifically refers to the model for living set by the exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad. An important source of religious authority for Muslims.

Sunni One of the two main branches of Islam. The Sunnis believed that the Muslim community should decide on a successor to lead after the death of Muhammad.

surah Chapter of the Qur'an; there are 114 *surahs* in the Qur'an.

umma The worldwide Muslim community.

zakat Regulated almsgiving; one of the Five Pillars of Islam.