



Southwest Asia's
**Prominent
Religions**

Judaism, Christianity,
and Islam (Sunni & Shia)

Standards

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

c. Compare and contrast the prominent religions in Southwest Asia (Middle East): Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

d. Explain the reason for the division between Sunni and Shia Muslims.



Southwest Asia's
**Prominent
Religions**

Judaism, Christianity,
and Islam (Sunni & Shia)

Monothéism

- Judaism, Christianity, & Islam are prominent religions practiced in Southwest Asia.
 - 90% of the region's population practices Islam, 4% are Christian, and 2% follow Judaism.
- Followers of each practice **monothéism**, a belief in one god.

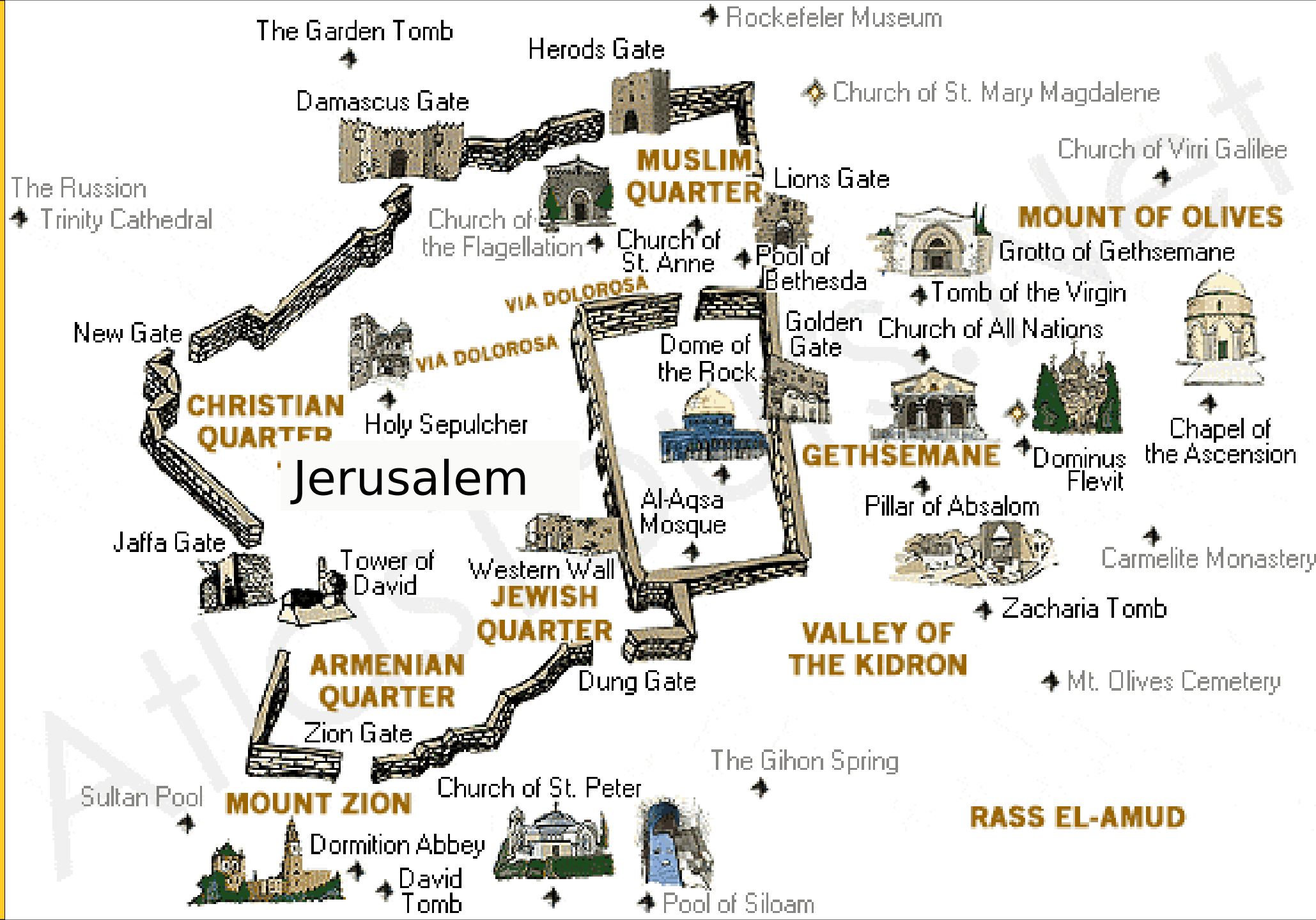
What else do they have in common?

MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST



Similarities

- They all originated in Southwest Asia.
- Each can trace their roots to Abraham as the father of their faith.
- Jerusalem is the holiest city in the world for Jews and Christians, and the third holiest city for Muslims.
- All three have an important messenger, book of teachings, and holidays.





Judaism

Judaism

- Judaism began around **1800 BCE** when God spoke to Abraham.
- Jews believe that they descended from Abraham and Sarah, the first people to worship Yahweh (God).
- Abraham lived in the city of Ur along the Euphrates River (in what is now Iraq).

Abraham's Journey



Moses

- Moses is considered a great prophet (a person who receives messages from God).
 - Moses led Israelites out of Egypt and away from slavery to Israel.
- Jews believe that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, a code of moral law to live by.
 - The Ten Commandments are found in the Jewish holy book called the Torah, which are the written laws of the Jews.

THE TEN

1. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.
YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE
LORD YOUR GOD AND HIM
ONLY SHALL YOU SERVE.

2. YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE
NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD
IN VAIN.

3. REMEMBER TO KEEP HOLY
THE SABBATH DAY.

4. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND
YOUR MOTHER.

5. YOU SHALL NOT KILL.

COMMANDMENTS

6. YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT
ADULTERY.

7. YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

8. YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE
WITNESS.

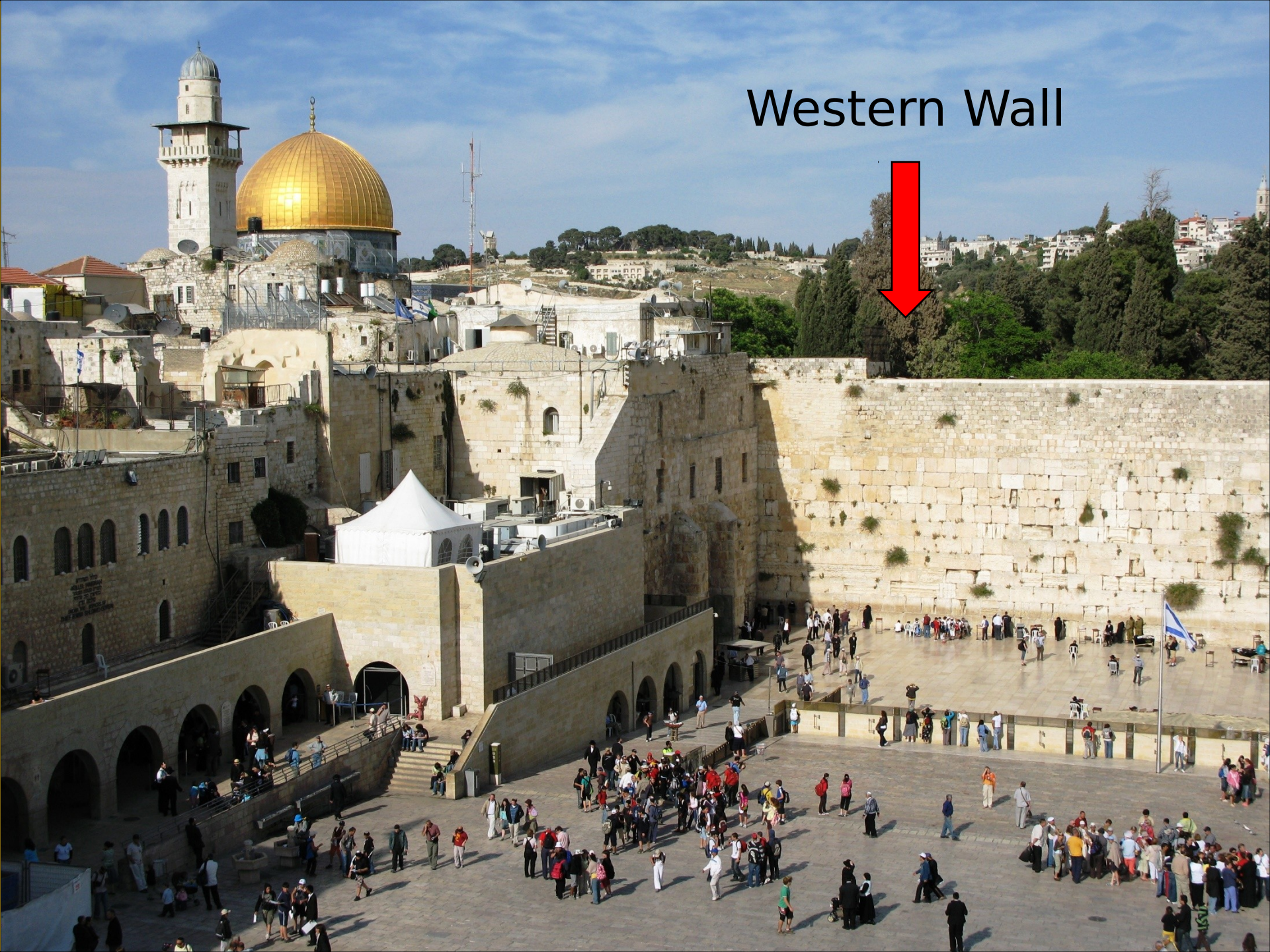
9. YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR
NEIGHBOR'S WIFE.

10. YOU SHALL NOT COVET
YOUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS.

Jerusalem

- The Israelites (now called Hebrews) claimed the city of Jerusalem and built a holy temple there.
- Between 700-500 BCE, Roman invaders captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.
 - Today, the only remaining part of the temple is the Western Wall, known as the Wailing Wall.
 - It is one of the most sacred sites recognized by the Jewish faith.

Western Wall





Prayers &
wishes stuck
into cracks
of the
Western Wall

Diaspora

- Jews were forced out of Israel and moved to many places all over the world.
 - This is called diaspora, or spreading out of Jews.
- The Jewish people did not return to their homeland until the modern state of Israel was created in 1948.

Judaism

- There are over **15 million followers** worldwide.
- Jews worship in synagogues and temples.
- They believe that a messiah (savior) will lead them to the Promised Land.
- Jews believe in justice and righteousness.
 - “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor.”



Hurva Synagogue, Jerusalem

Holy Book

- The sacred book is called the Tanuch, and it is a collection of writings compiled over a period of time.
- There are three parts to the book:
 - 1. Torah** – this is the most sacred part, it contains what Moses delivered to the Israelites
 2. Eight books of psalms and proverbs
 - 3. Talmud** – writings on Jewish law, history, and folklore



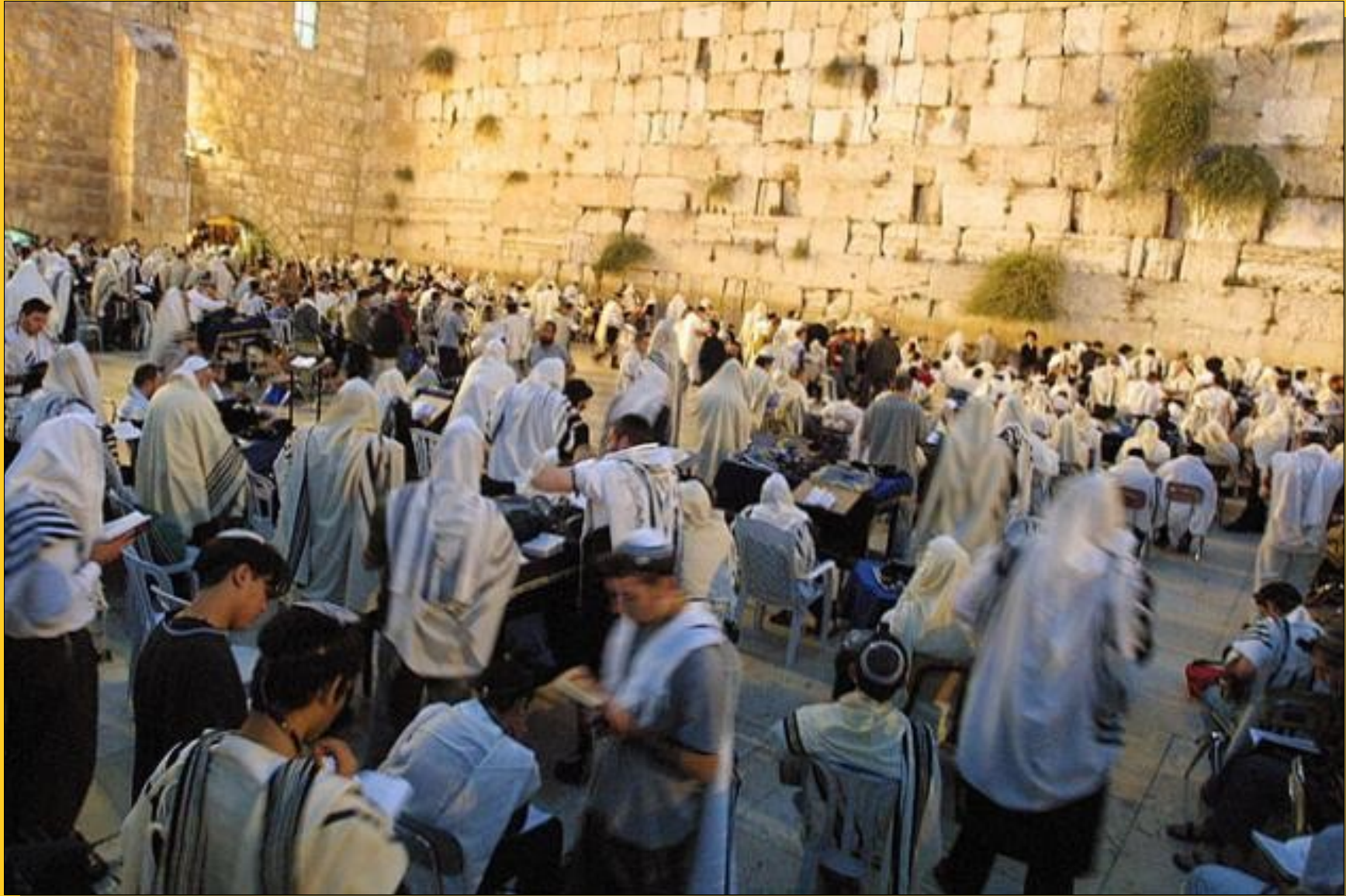
The Torah

Holidays

- **Hanukkah** celebrates a victory where the Jews were able to keep their religion after being captured by Greeks.
 - Jews were able to keep the Temple lit for 8 days despite only having enough lamp oil for 1 day.
- **Passover** celebrates the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt.

Holidays

- **Rosh Hashanah** celebrates the Jewish new year.
- **Yom Kippur** is known as the “Day of Atonement” (asking for forgiveness of sins).
 - It is the holiest day for Jews.
 - No work is allowed on this day and much of the day is spent in synagogue.
 - Many Jews fast during this day.



Prayers at the Western Wall
during Yom Kippur



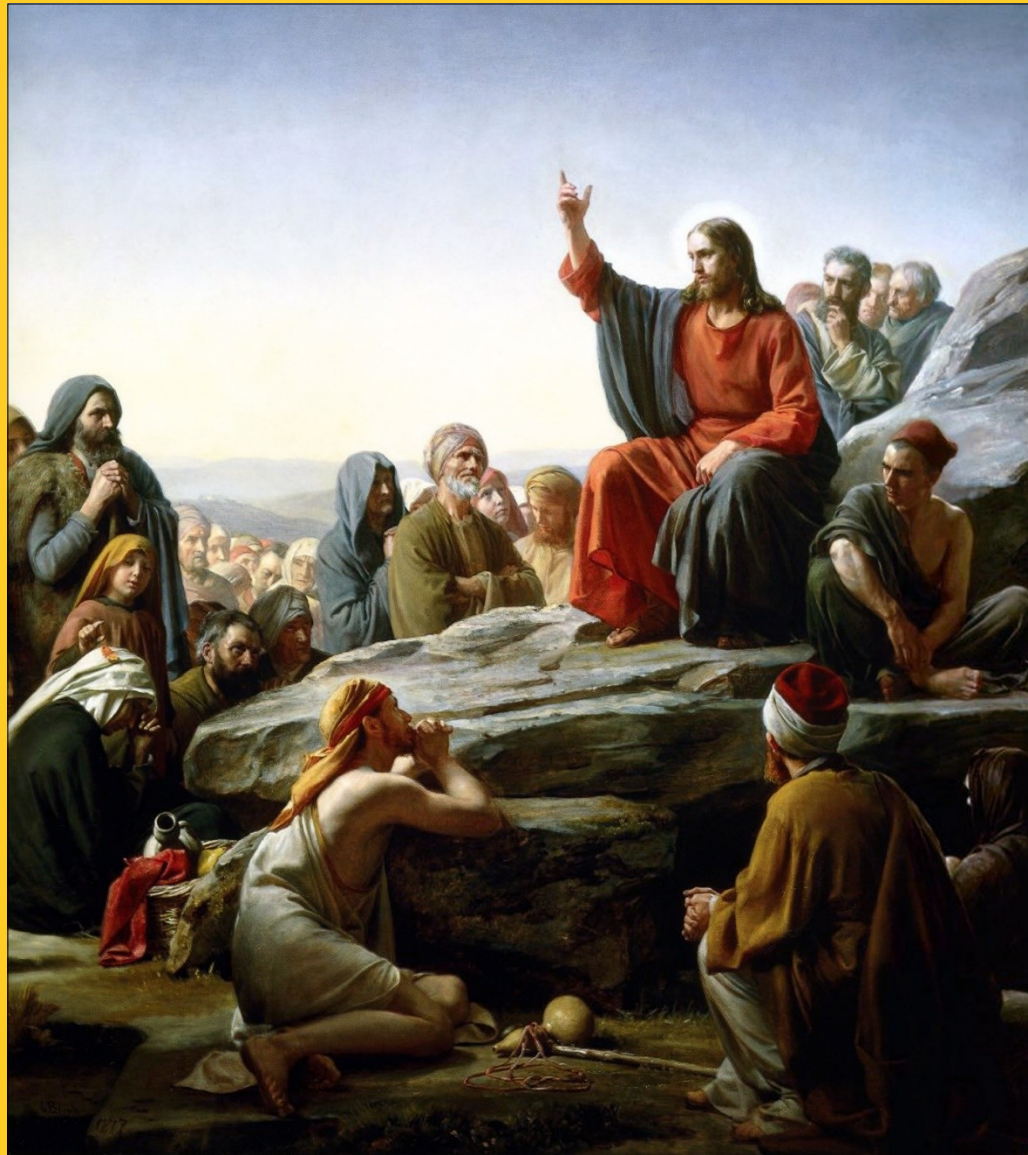
Christianity

Christianity

- Christianity has its roots in Judaism.
- Christians believe in **Jesus**, a carpenter who began to travel and teach new ideas about Judaism around 30 CE.
 - He believed that the old laws of Judaism should be replaced by a simple system based on love and kindness.

Jesus

- Jesus performed miracles and after people saw the results, they became followers.
 - He laid his hands on people and could heal them.
- Jesus used parables (stories that teach lessons) to link his teachings to people's everyday lives.
- Jesus soon gained a large following.



*Sermon on the Mount -
Carl Bloch, 1890*

Messiah

- Jesus was not popular with Jewish leaders.
 - They did not want him to threaten their power and had the Romans arrest him.
 - Jesus was crucified at the age of 33.
- Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven three days later.
 - They saw the Resurrection as a sign that Jesus was the Messiah (or savior).
 - This date, **33 CE**, is the beginning of Christianity.

Christians

- There are about 2.1 billion Christians worldwide.
- Christians are grouped by many denominations.
 - Examples include Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.
- All denominations of Christians follow the teachings of Jesus.
- Christians worship in churches and chapels.

St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City
(Built from 1506-1626 with Michelangelo
among the architects)



Holy Book

- The **Bible** is the main holy book for Christians.
- It consists of:
 1. The Old Testament -- contains the Ten Commandments
 2. The New Testament -- about Jesus and his teachings



Gutenberg Bible - 1450s
(The first printed book)

Holidays

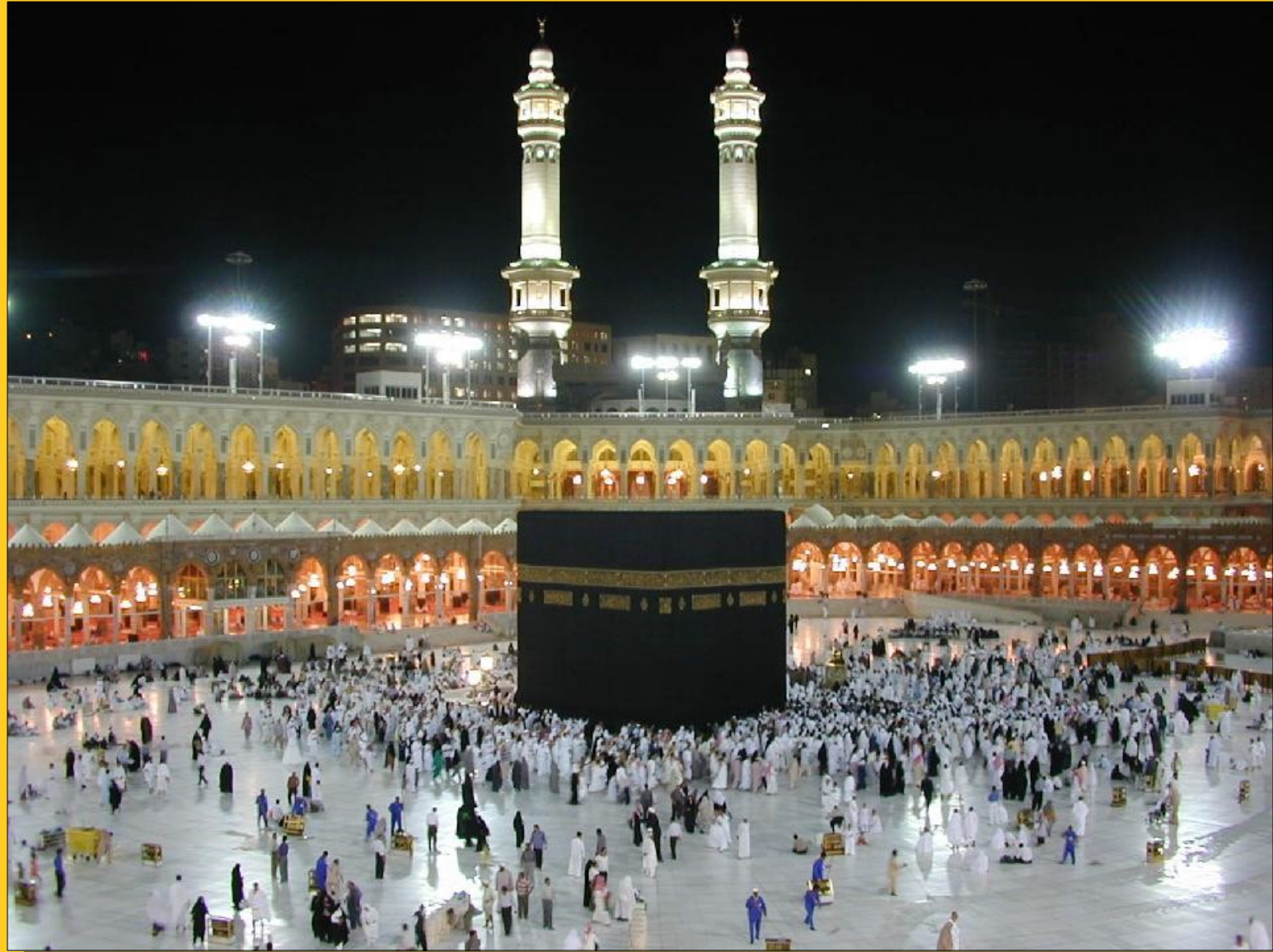
- **Christmas** is the celebration of the birth of Jesus and is observed on December 25th.
- **Easter** celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus.



Islam

Islam

- Islam began around **622 CE** in Southwest Asia.
- In Arabic, *Islam* means “surrender to the will of Allah” (God).
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims, and the founder is **Muhammad**.
- Muslims believe that there is only one god (Allah) and that Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet of Islam.
 - Other prophets include Abraham, Moses, &



The Kaaba at al-Haram Mosque (Mecca, Saudi Arabia) is the center of Islam.

Muhammad

- In 610 CE, Muhammad was an Arab merchant in **Mecca** who was concerned about how rich merchants refused to help the needy.
- He went to meditate on this in the Cave of Hira.
 - While there, Muhammad received a message from the angel Gabriel, the messenger of Allah.
- Muhammad became known as a prophet of Allah, and he continued to receive messages until his death.
 - These messages form the basis of Islam and were eventually written into the **Qur'an** (the Muslim holy book).

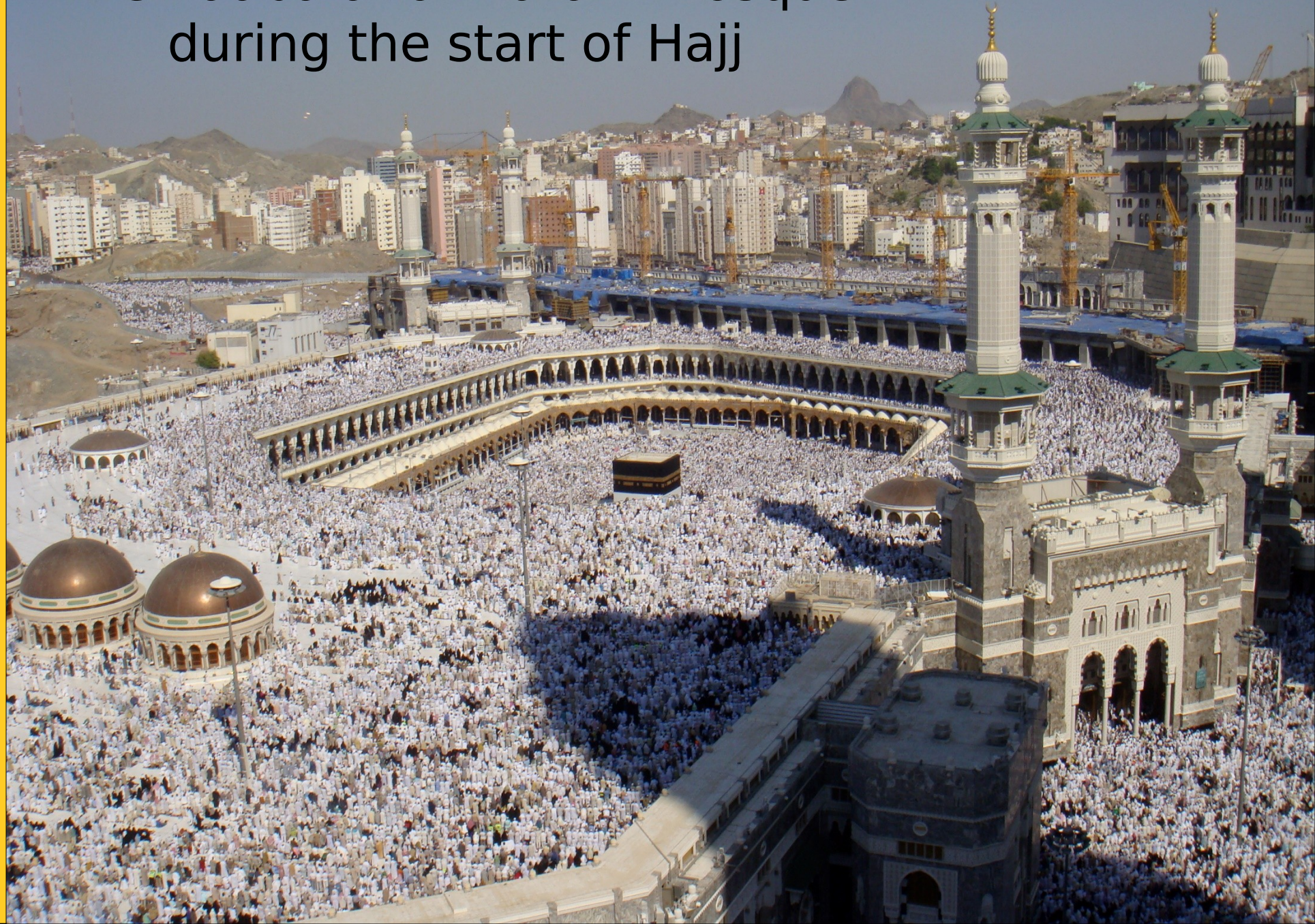
Muhammad

- Eventually, others began to listen to Muhammad's messages and this angered Mecca's rulers.
 - They threatened to kill Muhammad, so he & several hundred of his followers fled to nearby **Medina**.
- Muhammad became a political and spiritual leader in Medina.
 - Eventually, all of the Arabian Peninsula came to accept Muhammad's teachings and turned to Islam.

Followers

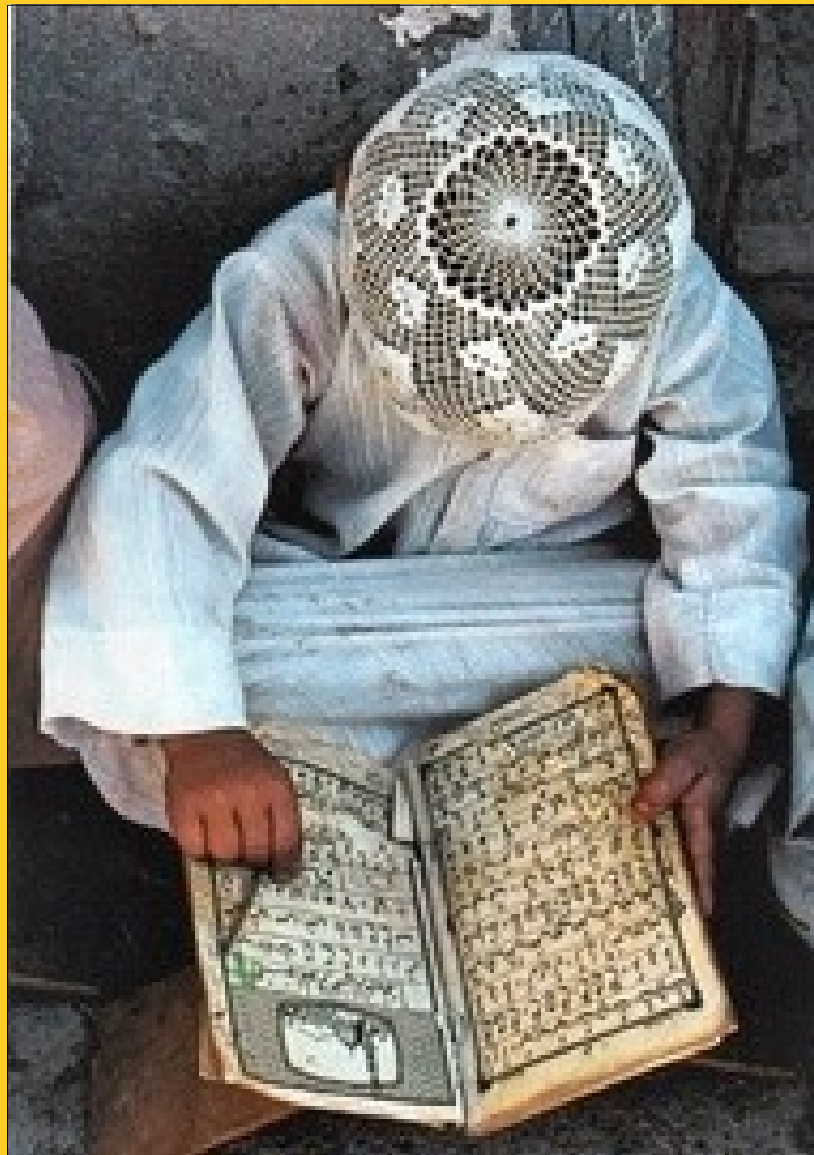
- Muhammad died in 632 CE, but Islam continued to spread.
- Muslim armies conquered empires throughout Southwest Asia, Northern Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula (Europe).
- Today, there are 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide.
- 1 in every 5 people in the world is Muslim.
- It's the second largest religion in the world (behind Christianity).

The Kaaba at al-Haram Mosque during the start of Hajj



Holy Book

- The Muslim holy book is the **Qur'an** (Koran).
- It states how people should live their lives.
- It describes the Five Pillars of Faith (obligations all Muslims must fulfill in their lifetime).



Reading the Qur'an

5 Pillars of Faith

(the main duties of Muslims)

1. Daily prayer,
2. Giving to charity,
3. Belief in and submission to one God (Allah),
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan,
5. and a pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca once in a lifetime.

Five Pillars of Islam

Declaration
of faith

شهادة

Obligatory
prayer

صلاة

Compulsory
giving

زكاة

Fasting in
the month of
Ramadan

صوم

Pilgrimage
to Mecca

حج

Holidays

- **Ramadan** celebrates the time when the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad.
 - It's the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, and lasts for 29-30 days.
 - Muslims fast during daylight hours during this month.
 - Prayer, reading the Qur'an, and charity are important parts of Ramadan.



Boys reading the Qur'an at a mosque during Ramadan

Government

- Unlike the other religions, in Islam the Qur'an gives instructions on how laws should be enacted.
- The governments of Muslim countries follow the Shari'a, or religious law.
 - This creates a theocracy, a type of government in which religious leaders are in control.



Sunni & Shia

The Split

- After Muhammad's death, followers fought over who would be his successor and become the next leader.
- This fight caused Muslims to split into two groups:
 1. Shi'a
 2. Sunni

Shi'a

- Shiites believe that the supreme leader (called the Caliph) **must be a blood relative of Muhammad.**
- Roughly 10% of the world's Muslims are Shi'a.
- This branch of Islam is found mostly in Iran and some parts of Iraq.
 - This is the religion of most Persians (ethnic group in Iran).

Sunni

- Sunnis believe that the supreme leader (Caliph) does **NOT** need to be related to Muhammad.
- This is the major branch of the religion, representing about 90% of the world's Muslim population.