

Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic Faiths

Is There a Connection?

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1. Today we will talk about Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest religions.
2. Although perhaps as few as 200,000 people practice Zoroastrianism today, almost all of them in India, many scholars believe its lasting influence can be seen in the beliefs and practices of billions of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

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1. Zoroastrianism arose from the teachings of a person called "Zarathustra," known as "Zoroaster" after the Greek rendering of his name.
2. Most scholars believe Zoroaster was an actual person who lived in what is now the mountainous region of eastern Iran, but there is uncertainty about when he lived.
3. Some scholars believe Zoroaster lived from around 628 B.C. to 551 B.C.
5. Others believe he may have lived as early as 1200 BC or even earlier.

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1. The writings of Zoroaster and his followers were collected in a series of books called the *Avesta*, only a small portion of which has survived.
2. What remains includes a number of hymns called "Gathas."

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1. Zoroaster was born into a world that worshiped multiple gods, similar to Hindu gods today.
2. Some of those gods, like Hindu gods, bore the title "*Ahura*" or "Lord" and were seen as responsible for the world's stability.
3. Zoroaster became a priest serving one or more of these positive gods.

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1. Other gods were responsible for instability and trouble.
2. Indra, an important god, was responsible for both war and bad weather.

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1. When Zoroaster was about 30 years old, he went to a river to draw water for the daily ritual sacrifice.
2. While drawing the water, Zoroaster had a vision that led him to conclude that Lord Mazda, the god of wisdom, was **“the sovereign, lawmaker, supreme judge, master of day and night, the center of nature, and the inventor of moral law.”** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 83.
3. From his vision, Zoroaster concluded that Lord Mazda is **“self-created”** and **“beyond human conception.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 71.
4. **“Because Mazda was holy, eternal, just, omniscient, the primeval being, creator of all and the origin of all goodness, Zoroaster chose him as the sole God.”** *Id.* at 21.

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1. Zoroaster taught that six other gods being worshipped at the time had been created by Lord Mazda and were subject to his control.
2. Each of these subordinate spirits or angels, called the “Holy Immortals,” **“has a specific character and an assigned sphere to act on behalf, or as an agent, of Ahura Mazda.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 75.

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1. Zoroastrians believe that only the spirit world existed for 3,000 years after its creation by Lord Mazda.
2. Lord Mazda then created the earth and populated it with plants and useful animals such as cattle, dogs, foxes and goats.
3. The first man and woman, “Mashya” and “Mashyana,” came from the plants.
4. Their fifteen sets of twins, each including one boy and one girl, became the ancestors of all the world’s races.

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1. Lord Mazda created a perfect world, without darkness, hardship, sickness or evil.
2. But Zoroaster recognized that the earth of his day was filled with difficult to scale mountains and **“sin, violence, falsehood, dust, dirt, disease, death, and decay.”** Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* at 11.

3. Since Zoroaster did not believe that the hardship and evil he saw around him could be attributed to Lord Mazda, he concluded **“that there must also be a wicked deity who had inspired the cruelty”** that existed in the world. *Id.* at 10.
4. He concluded that *Angra Mainyu*, the Hostile Spirit, is **“the destructive personification (and creator) of evil, the harbinger of death, disease and lies.”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 85.
5. The Hostile Spirit created not only the rugged mountains and valleys but such things as scorpions, worms, ants, and flies that made life difficult.
6. He also created the darkness that shrouds the earth at night.
7. The snake, one of Hostile Spirit’s creations, is his symbol.
8. Although not created, *Angra Mainyu*, the Hostile Spirit, is not eternal and will ultimately succumb to Lord Mazda and the forces of good.

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1. Zoroaster taught that just as the Holy Immortals were subordinate to Lord Mazda, other existing gods called *daevas* or demons that created misery and disease had decided **“to fight alongside the Hostile Spirit”** and were subordinate to him. Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* at 11.
2. Even **“[t]he ancient god Indra was reduced to the rank of demon.”** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 82.
3. **“The world, instead of being a Paradise, became a battlefield of conflict between good and evil,”** with Lord Mazda and the Holy Immortals on one side and the Hostile Spirit and the demons on the other. Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 91.
4. **“Zoroastrian teachings are highly ethical in nature and center on the concept that human beings are involved in a constant struggle between good (light) and evil (darkness).”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 85.

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1. **“The duty of each individual is to side with the good so that evil will be ultimately vanquished and the good will triumph to reign supreme.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 91.
2. The earliest known Zoroastrian creed states: **“I declare myself a Mazda worshipper, a supporter of Zarathustra, hostile to the Daevas, fond of Ahura’s teaching, a praiser of the [Holy Immortals], a worshipper of the [Holy Immortals].”** *Id.* at 63.

3. Zoroaster **“taught a doctrine of free will, and of individual responsibility for all actions.”** *Id.* at 41.

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1. Zoroastrians believe that the soul leaves the body three days after death and then goes to the “Bridge of Judgment.”
2. The souls of the righteous cross the bridge to the House of Song, a place of beauty and light where they will see Lord Mazda.
3. Entry to the House of Song is based entirely on **“good works done on earth; status or authority in the worldly existence would confer no benefit or advantage in the heavenly.”** Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 99.
4. The souls of the wicked will fall into the House of Lies under the bridge, where they will be subjected to foul smells, odious food, and severe overcrowding.

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1. Zoroastrians foresee a period in which the Hostile Spirit will terrorize the world and life on earth will become even more difficult.
2. **“[T]he sun and the moon will show signs; there will be frightful earthquakes and terrible storms. Wars and battles will greatly increase and many soldiers will be slain.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 95.
3. Into this chaos will come a savior, born to a virgin magically impregnated with the seed of Zoroaster.
4. The savior will be called “Saoshyant,” meaning “One Who Will Bring Benefit.”

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1. Upon the appearance of Saoshyant , the souls of both the righteous and the wicked dead will rejoin their bodies and the **“earth and sea will give up their dead and all will be gathered before the judgment seat.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 94.
2. The living and resurrected dead will be judged on **“the merits and demerits of each individual”** as recorded in a book of life. Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 95.
3. After a great battle, won by the forces of Lord Mazda, the resurrected wicked and the Hostile Spirit, whose symbol was the snake, will die in a river of molten metal, the wicked for the second time.
4. With the Hostile Spirit gone, a perfect earth, with no more night and no more snakes, will be restored for the righteous to live forever with Lord Mazda.

5. Karen Armstrong describes Zoroastrianism teachings about the end of time this way: **“Then the cosmos would be restored to its original perfection. Mountains and valleys would be leveled into a great plain, where gods and humans could live side by side, worshipping Lord Mazda forever. There would be no more death. Human beings would be like deities, free from sickness, old age, and mortality.”** Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* at 12.

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1. Traditional Christian teachings about the return of Jesus in the last days are, in many respects, identical to what Zoroastrian teaches.
2. According to the *Gospel of Matthew*, before the return of Jesus, born to the Virgin Mary, there will be **“famines and earthquakes in various places.”** *Matthew* 24:7.
3. **“[T]he sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”** *Matthew* 24:29.
4. *Revelation* teaches that when Jesus returns, both the sea and the graves will **“g[i]ve up their dead.”** *Revelation* 20:13.
5. **“All who are in their graves will hear [Jesus’] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”** *John* 5:28 - 29.
6. The resurrected dead will be **“judged according to what they had done as recorded in the book.”** *Revelation* 20:13.

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1. Those whose names are not **“found written in the book of life”** will be **“thrown into a fiery lake of burning sulfur”** and experience a **“second death.”** *Revelation* 20:15; 21:8.
2. This **“second death”** will occur for **“the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars.”** *Revelation* 21:8.
3. Satan, the **“ancient serpent”** who had been terrorizing the world, will also be thrown into the **“lake of burning sulfur.”** *Revelation* 12:9; 20:10.
4. With Satan gone, **“[t]here will no more night”** and **“[n]o longer will there be any curse”** on the earth. *Revelation* 22:3, 5.1.
5. **“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”** *Isaiah* 40:4 – 5.
6. **“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”** *Revelation* 21:4.

7. From that point forward, “[n]othing impure will ever enter [the earth].”
Revelation 21:26.

8. As one author writes: “[Zoroaster’s] theological conception of the world is so close to that of Christianity that one wonders if the church Fathers hadn’t read the *Gathas* or even copied them.” Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 85.

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1. It is, of course, possible that these remarkable parallels between what Christians expect at the end of time and the teachings of Zoroastrianism are simply coincidences or maybe Zoroastrianism borrowed its teachings from Christianity.

2. But one author writes: “It is quite clear that the similarities long predate Christianity; it is not Christianity that informed Mazdaism [Zoroastrianism] but the reverse.” Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 334 n. 14.

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1. There is no doubt that Jews and Christians had the opportunity to learn about the teachings of Zoroaster.

2. In 586 B.C., Babylonia captured the Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish elite to Babylon.

3. As one author states: “It is, of course, common knowledge that the Jewish people came into close contact with Zoroastrianism during their exile in Babylon.” Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 96.

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1. In 539 B.C., while the Jews were in exile in Babylon, Babylonia was captured by Persia, led by Cyrus the Great, who practiced Zoroastrianism at his court.

2. Cyrus decreed that the Jews were free to go home and agreed to pay for the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and return the treasures of the temple looted by the Babylonians. *Ezra 4:5, 6.*

3. In 537 B.C., thousands returned home while thousands more stayed in Babylon.

4. For two hundred years, Israel was ruled by the Persians.

5. “The Jews thus had plenty of time to become acquainted with Mazdaism.” Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 246.

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1. Most scholars believe one of the Jews exiled to Babylon was an unnamed prophet, dubbed “Second Isaiah,” who wrote chapters 40 to 55 of the *Book of Isaiah*.

2. Those chapters contain many of the most important writings in the Hebrew Scriptures about the nature of God and the expectations of a Messiah.
3. It was Second Isaiah who wrote about the coming of the Messiah in terms identical to those of Zoroastrianism: **“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”** *Isaiah* 40:4 – 5.
4. Second Isaiah set out to demonstrate that **“Yahweh was not just the god of Israel (both as land and people), but of all lands and nations.”** Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* at 179.
5. Many of the writings of Second Isaiah are directed at proving that the idols Jews had seen in Babylon and elsewhere are false gods.
6. But it seems likely that Second Isaiah also set out to prove that Lord Mazda, the god of Cyrus the Great, was a false god.
7. Second Isaiah wrote: **“I am [Yahweh], and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”** *Isaiah* 45:5.
8. This stirring proclamation of monotheism is included in a statement that Yahweh, the God of Israel, made to **“his anointed, to Cyrus”** the Great of Persia. *Isaiah* 45:1.
9. Second Isaiah was explaining to his Jewish readers how the God of Israel was also the God of even Cyrus the Great because Yahweh had been able to cause Cyrus to **“rebuild my city and set my exiles free.”** *Isaiah* 45:13.
10. By calling Cyrus **“anointed,”** God was literally calling him a messiah, an “anointed one,” which God calls a **“title of honor.”** *Isaiah* 45:4.

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1. In Babylon and upon their return, the Jews had probably heard a statement used by Zoroastrians to describe Lord Mazda: **“A great god is [Lord] Mazda, who made the earth and yon heaven, and made man.”** Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 121.
2. That statement was carved on the “Behistun Inscription” created by Darius I, the Persian king whose decrees led to the completion of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. *Ezra* 6:14, 15.
3. Second Isaiah quotes Yahweh as telling Cyrus: **“It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshalled their starry hosts.”** *Isaiah* 45:12.
4. It is likely that Second Isaiah was telling Cyrus and the Jewish people that it was Yahweh who had done what the Zoroastrians attributed to Lord Mazda.

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1. Finally, to prove that Lord Mazda, like the idols, was not a real God, Second Isaiah quotes Yahweh as telling Cyrus: **“I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I the LORD, do all these things.”** *Isaiah 45:7.*
2. As the Jews had learned, Lord Mazda could not **“do all these things.”**
3. He did not create darkness and disaster, which were control by the Hostile Spirit.
4. The God of Israel was therefore the only true God, even though Cyrus had not yet acknowledged that because he still worshipped Lord Mazda.

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1. Most Christians today reject Second Isaiah’s statement that evil in the world is created by the same God who created them.
2. Instead, many accept the idea articulated by Zoroaster that evil is created by a powerful enemy of God, who will eventually be destroyed.
3. It may come as a surprise that the idea of Satan as the author of evil entered Judaism after Jewish writers had become familiar with Zoroastrianism ideas of the Hostile Spirit.
4. As one author notes: **“Indeed, a principle of evil, for example in the form of Belial, Satan, or the devil, began to appear only in the latest Biblical works and in the other Second Temple literature.”** Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* at 166.
5. Prior to the exile, God, and **not** Satan, was viewed as the source of both good and evil.
6. By the time of the New Testament, the Zoroastrian conception of the source of evil had completely replaced this traditional Jewish view.
7. As one recent author colorfully states: **“The Devil’s birth certificate was filled out by an Iranian prophet.”** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 85.

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1. Another author, writing in 1924 and looking at the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures written before the exile, says: **“It is easy to perceive . . . why the Jews had no Devil. They had nothing for him to do. The Lord did it all. He perpetrated the evil as well as achieved the good.”** Graves, *Biography of Satan* at 44.
2. For example, the author of *Lamentations*, lamenting the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Babylonians says: **“Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has**

not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" *Lamentations* 3:37 - 38.

3. In Jewish writings before the exile, **"neither Satan nor the demons were enemies of God, but in fact his servants."** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 233.

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1. The account of Job opens in what Karen Armstrong describes as God's **"divine assembly."** Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* at 201.

2. Satan had just come back from **"roaming through the earth."** *Job* 1:6 - 7.

3. To see if Job were as righteous as God thought he was, Satan suggested that God test Job by **"stretch[ing] out your hand and strik[ing] everything he has."** *Job* 1:11.

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1. With express permission from God, Satan left the heavenly meeting and orchestrated events that killed Job's family, his servants and his livestock, but, as God had demanded, did not harm Job. *Job* 1:12 - 19.

2. Job had no doubt that God was the source of his misery, saying: **"The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me."** *Job* 6:4.

3. But Job **"did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."** *Job* 1:22.

4. He said: **"Shall we accept good from God, and not troubles?"** *Job* 2:10.

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1. In *Second Kings*, the prophet Micaiah reported on another meeting of God's heavenly assembly.

2. In this one, God asked for suggestions to entice Israel's King Ahab to go into a battle with a neighboring country so that he would be killed. *2 Kings* 22:20.

3. One **"spirit"** in attendance volunteered to go to the prophets advising Ahab and, as a **"lying spirit,"** falsely tell those prophets that God would support Ahab in the battle. *2 Kings* 22:21 - 22.

4. God responded: **"Go and do it."** *2 Kings* 22:22.

5. Based on this false advice authorized by God, Ahab went into battle and, as God had wanted, was killed. *2 Kings* 22:29 - 37.

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1. Just as the Hebrew Scriptures written before the exile show that Satan acted under the control of God, the “evil spirits” also acted under the control of God.
2. For example, *1 Samuel* 16:14 states: **“Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.”**
3. Looking at the descriptions of God’s exclusive control of evil, suffering and deception written before the exile, one recent author states: **“In its submission to the supreme will, the theology of the Old Testament allows for only one pole in the universe, and the Devil never does anything that is out of harmony with the Creator. Satan is not the Devil: he is the suffering desired by the will of God.”** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 237.

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1. After their return from exile, Jews began to accept the teachings of Second Isaiah that the God of Israel is the only God in the universe.
2. But as one author has stated, such strict monotheism, **“regardless of its ultimate truth, was hard to handle. A God who was all-powerful, author of blessings and curses, good and evil, was not easy to get close to.”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 166.
3. As a result, after their exposure to Persian views of opposing forces of good and evil, Jewish authors began finding it more and more difficult **“to accept a God who is the author of both good and evil.”** *Id.* at 67.
4. That was the same dilemma that had led Zoroaster to conclude that the Hostile Spirit and not Lord Mazda was responsible for evil.
5. And Jewish writers gradually began to portray Satan not as the obedient servant of God as they had before the exile but as an independent force for evil and suffering, similar to the Hostile Spirit of Zoroastrianism.

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1. Probably the most dramatic evidence of this change comes from two nearly identical stories in the Bible, one written before the Jews had contact with the ideas of Zoroaster and one after.
2. In the first version, likely written in the seventh and eighth centuries B.C., *Second Samuel* tells the story in which **“the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.’ So he said to Joab and the army commanders with him, ‘Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men.”** *2 Samuel* 24:1.

3. But conducting a census except under certain circumstances was against Jewish law. *Exodus* 30:11 - 16.
4. So when David actually conducted the census that God had requested, God got angry and sent a plague that killed 70 thousand people. *2 Samuel* 24:15.
5. David could not understand why God was killing the people of Israel for a violation of Jewish law that he alone had committed: **“When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.’”** *2 Samuel* 24:17.
6. But David did not question God’s right to punish him for doing what God had requested.

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1. *First Chronicles*, written after the exile, tells the same story found in *Second Samuel* of the ill-fated census conducted by David, resulting in the same plague and the same 70 thousand dead. *1 Chronicles* 21.
2. However, in the *First Chronicles* version, **“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, ‘Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan.’”** *1 Chronicles* 21:1.
3. In the pre-exile version in *Second Samuel*, God punishes Israel for an act that David undertook at God’s request, which makes God seem to be arbitrary and destructive.
4. In the post-exile version of the story in *First Chronicles*, God punishes Israel because David succumbed to the temptations of Satan, now acting independently of God, a view more in tune with current Christian views of Satan as God’s **“personal adversary in the ultimate battle between good and evil.”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 1.

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1. Similar modifications of other Biblical stories are reflected in *Jubilees*, a Jewish book written after the exile that **“presents itself as a revelation given to Moses and rehearses all the history of Genesis down to the time of Moses.”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 353.
2. The book of *Jubilees* is included in the Old Testament of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, but for Jews and most other Christians it is considered *pseudepigrapha*.
3. *Jubilees* retells some of the earliest stories in the Bible in ways that show the changing view of God and Satan.

4. One of the stories modified by *Jubilees* is originally found in *Exodus*, in which God was **“about to kill”** either Moses or his son because the intended victim was not circumcised. *Exodus* 4:24.
5. In the *Jubilees* version of this story, it is the evil *Mastema*, whose name is related to the word “Satan,” **“rather than God, who goes after Moses, intending to kill him.”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 103.
6. The modification seeks to explain difficult to understand actions previously attributed to God by attributing them to an independently operating Satan.
7. Like the Hostile Spirit of Zoroastrianism, Satan had become **“the cosmic scapegoat, saving God from blame for evil.”** *Id.* at 176.

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1. Similarly, *Jubilees* modified the famous story in *Genesis* in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. *Genesis* 22:2.
2. By the time of the writing of *Jubilees*, it had become difficult to believe that the God who had created the universe would order anyone, let alone Abraham, to kill his own son.
3. So the writers changed the story to fit their new beliefs that Satan and not God was the source of evil.
4. In the *Jubilees* version, **“it is Mastema—not the Lord—who commands Abraham to kill his son, Isaac.”** Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* at 54.
5. Many scholars believe the explanation for the gradual change in the source of evil from God to Satan after the exile is the influence of the teachings of Zoroaster.

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1. The book of *Jubilees* was one of the most numerous books found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.
2. Many scholars believe that a strict Jewish group called the Essenes lived at Qumran at the time of Jesus and hid the Dead Sea Scrolls.
3. Much of the writing in the Dead Sea Scrolls is attributed to the Essenes and focuses on conflicts between God and Satan or other names for an independent source of evil.
4. **“The appealing Zoroastrian doctrine that light stood for goodness and darkness for evil”** became the focus of the writings of the Essenes. Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* at 81.

5. In terms recalling Zoroastrian doctrine, the *Essene Manual of Discipline* found at Qumran describes a war between the Spirit of Light and the Spirit of Darkness and an ultimate end-time when the battle will be won by the forces of light.
6. The Essenes also believed **“that there will be a Judgment Day and a burning up of the world, and that the wicked will be eternally punished.”**
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5867-essenes#anchor20>
7. One expert finds the similarity in the beliefs and practices described in the Dead Sea Scrolls to those of Zoroastrianism to be **“quite striking”** and concludes that **“coincidence is not a likely explanation.”** Davies, *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls* at 88.

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1. Second Isaiah, just after the exile, had written that God **“form[s] the light and create[s] darkness.”** *Isaiah* 45:7.
2. But the New Testament, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, reflects the fundamental Zoroastrian idea that God is the author of only light and has to overcome the darkness.
3. For example, according to the first chapter of *John*: **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** *John* 1:4, 5.
4. *John* 3:19 repeats this Zoroastrian idea about Jesus: **“Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”**

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1. Based on the Dead Sea Scrolls and other writings of the first century B.C., it is clear that by the time of Jesus, **“[d]evils [had] infected Judaism.”** Messadie, *A History of the Devil* at 234.
2. Consequently, in the New Testament, **“disease-making demons were subordinated to an arch demon”** as they are in Zoroastrianism and not subordinated to God as they had been before the exile. Turner, *The History of Hell* at 63.
3. So Paul, shown here falling off his horse, blamed a messenger of Satan for giving him a **“thorn in the flesh.”** *2 Corinthians* 12:7.
4. Paul blamed Satan for **“false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.”** *2 Corinthians* 11:13.

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1. Paul also said: **“[F]or Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.”** *2 Corinthians* 11:14-15.

2. We again see the Zoroastrian image of God as light and Satan as darkness.
3. As one author writes, the authors of the New Testament, **“drawing on Zoroastrianism, speak of a cosmic battle between opposing principles and pray for the total victory of light over darkness.”** Prothero, *God is Not One* at 296.
4. This view of a cosmic battle between Christians and Satan is most clearly set out in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** *Ephesians* 6:12.

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1. Zoroastrianism also may have influenced the Jewish conception of the afterlife, which in turn influenced Christian views.
2. The earliest writings of the Hebrew Scriptures do not mention a belief in life after death.
3. As one author has stated: **“But in so far as the relevant material can be sifted, the pre-Exilic doctrine was that no one who died had awakened to a full, permanent consciousness.”** Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 122.
4. Because of that, Sadducees, who looked only to the Pentateuch for their beliefs, rejected the idea of resurrection of the dead. *Matthew* 22:23.
5. The *Book of Isaiah* includes the earliest Biblical statement of this belief: **“But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”** *Isaiah* 26:19.
6. Most scholars date this passage to during or after the Babylonian exile, when Jewish writers learned of the Zoroastrian views of the resurrection of the dead upon the arrival of Saoshyant, the savior born of a virgin. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* at 561.
7. But even this description of resurrection says nothing about a final judgment or a connection of resurrection to the coming of a savior.

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1. The first mention in the Hebrew Scriptures of a final judgment is in the *Book of Daniel*: **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”** *Daniel* 12:2.
2. The idea that everyone would be resurrected so that they could obtain their just rewards and punishments, a key aspect of the teachings of Zoroaster, **“is totally missing from any of previous references in the Hebrew Bible”** Segal, *Life after Death* at 263.

3. The *Book of Daniel*, written in about 164 B.C., expressly states that Daniel, who made the reported prophecies, had been among those exiled to Babylon. *Daniel* 1:3 – 7.
4. The *Book of Daniel* includes at nineteen Persian words, reflecting the influence of Persian thought at the time.
5. Perhaps the author of *Daniel* was acknowledging that the idea of a final judgment had its roots in Persian beliefs learned during the exile.

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1. Christians today, based on the writings of the New Testament, associate the resurrection of the dead with the coming of a savior at the end of time, a basic teaching of Zoroastrianism.
2. However, nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures associates the resurrection of the dead with the coming of the Messiah.
3. The earliest known Jewish connection between the expected Messiah and resurrection of the dead is included in a Dead Sea Scroll named “4Q521” that was written in the first century B.C., just before the time of Jesus.
4. It says that a coming Messiah will sit on the **“throne of the eternal kingdom”** and **“will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live; he will proclaim good news to the poor.”** www.textexcavation.com/qumran4q521.html.
5. This description echoes the words of *Isaiah* 61:1 that the Messiah would **“preach good news to the poor,”** but adds the connection between the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.
6. Many scholars think that the Jewish association of their expected Messiah with resurrection of the dead at the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls was connected to the teachings of Zoroaster, who predicted a savior who would **“be born of a virgin, bring about the resurrection of the dead, and make humankind immortal.”** Wray, *The Birth of Satan* at 87.

Slide 41

1. The **“Magi from the east”** who came to see the baby Jesus in Bethlehem were almost certainly Zoroastrians. *Matthew* 2:1 – 12.
2. Some scholars have speculated that the writer of *Matthew* included this visit in his account of the Nativity to show the connection between Jesus and the prophecies of Zoroaster, which by the time of Jesus were well known among Jews.
3. According to this view, Jesus, born of a virgin, was the savior promised by Zoroaster whose presence would lead to a resurrection of the dead.

Slide 42

1. We have not said anything about the influence of Zoroastrianism on Islam.
2. There is no doubt that Muhammad respected the teachings of Zoroastrianism.
3. In one verse, the *Quran* includes Zoroastrians (called “Magians”) along with Jews and Christians as people God respects. *Quran* 22:17.

Slide 43

1. For Zoroastrians, fire is a symbol of purity and they worship in fire temples, like this one in Iran.
2. Since the time of Zoroaster, Zoroastrians have prayed five times a day, facing the fire.
3. Many scholars believe the requirement that Muslims pray five times a day, which is not expressly set out in the *Quran*, is related to the teachings of Zoroastrianism.

Slide 44

1. Islam teaches that the soul of the deceased is taken to a bridge called *As-Siraat* that leads to paradise on the other side.
2. **“This bridge is described as being sharper than a sword and thinner than a strand of hair.”** Dodge, *The Understanding Islam Book* at 156.
3. The righteous will be escorted to paradise by an angel and the wicked will fall from the bridge into hell. *Id.*
4. Those whose good and bad deeds are evenly matched go to an intermediate state called “*Barzakh*” or “The Heights.”
5. As you can see here, Islam teaches that hell is redemptive and does not always last forever. *Quran* 78:21 - 30.

Slide 45

1. Zoroastrianism teaches that after death the soul travels to a bridge **“which spans the abyss of hell and leads to paradise on the other side.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 92.
2. If the record of the soul’s life on earth is balanced in favor of good thoughts and deeds, the bridge is wide and the soul is escorted to paradise by a **“fair maiden.”** *Id.*
3. If the record shows the opposite, the bridge presents itself as a knife’s edge and the soul falls into hell. *Id.*

4. **“If the good and evil deeds done in life exactly balance, then the soul remains in an intermediate place called *hamestagan*.”** *Id.*
5. Like Islam, Zoroastrianism teaches that hell is redemptive and does not last forever. Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* at 101.
6. Like Zoroastrianism, the *Quran* teaches that that people in hell are given bad food and suffer foul odors. *Quran* 56:43; 88:6-7.

Slide 46

1. One writer states that it is **“hardly conceivable that some of the characteristic ideas and practices in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam came into being without Zoroastrian influence.”** Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith* at 97.
2. Substantial evidence seems to support that conclusion.
3. Are the Abrahamic faiths suspect because they may draw upon concepts and images of Zoroastrianism?
4. I don't think so.
5. As the writer of *Ecclesiastes* said more than two thousand years ago: **“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”** *Ecclesiastes* 1:9.
6. New religious beliefs do not spring forth out of nothingness, but instead draw upon existing beliefs.
7. The earliest writings of the Hebrew Scriptures drew upon the teachings of the Canaanite religions, which in turn drew on teachings of earlier Mesopotamian religions.
8. The teachings of the New Testament draw upon the Hebrew Scriptures.
9. People can best understand and accept new ideas that are similar to what they already believe.
10. In explaining the divine, we inevitably draw upon the wisdom of those who have gone before, adapting their views to our own evolving understanding of truth.
11. The *Gospel of John* describes Jesus in terms of *logos*, a concept from Greek philosophy familiar to the readers of the time. *John* 1:1.
12. The Apostle Paul explicitly called upon Greek philosophy in trying to explain Jesus to the Greeks. *Acts* 17:23.

13. Adapting the religious beliefs of others to help explain one's own understandings can properly be seen as the result of a continuing search for truth, as human beings seek to describe the divine within the limits of their humanity.

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