

To you, what does the scripture mean? Perhaps it's a musty, heavy book you were obliged to read as a kid. Perhaps it's God's word. Maybe it's some amusing stories that have nothing to do with your life. Or it might be something that individuals use to label others as being incorrect or inferior.

As you'll see in these flashes, scripture was none of these things in its early days. Although scripture has always been designed to foster compassion in those who encounter it, it has undergone several alterations throughout time and between cultures.

These chapters take you on a rapid tour through the world's numerous biblical teachings, explaining how they came to be, who distributed them, and what they've been used for - from preserving cultural memory to spreading seeds of faith.

In the following chapters, you'll learn

- Why is ritual so important in biblical interpretation?
- What made Confucius decide to leave the city and build a school for officials; and,
- How the British gave a complicated, diversified devotional system a simple title.

## Chapter 1 - The Israelites developed the earliest version of the Bible based on their suffering and exile.

It's not about a fruit or a serpent in the narrative of Adam and Eve. It's also not about getting expelled from heaven. It's a matter of economics.

Here's why: the agricultural economic system dominated ancient Mesopotamia roughly 5,000 years ago. An upper class seized up to two-thirds of peasants' crops in this system, forcing them into serfdom. Serfs' lives were exceedingly difficult, so they invented the Adam and Eve story to explain their plight. They blamed their predicament on original sin rather than continued elite economic tyranny.

An economic collapse in Mesopotamian city-states sent Israelite peasants into exile in the desert two thousand years later — around three thousand years ago. They proceeded to create their foundation myths there, and they did it in a way that would affect the world in the end.

The main point here is that the Israelites developed the earliest version of the Bible based on their suffering and exile.

The Israelite peasants knew they were going to perish as they escaped into the desert. When they didn't, the Israelites credited their victory – and the fall of the city-states that had exploited them – to Yahweh, the righteous and compassionate deity. They determined that in honor of this deity, their society would be just and equitable as well - the polar opposite. The Israelites overturned the political order of the day by establishing a society centered on social justice.

However, as the Israelites' influence rose over the years, their society began to lose touch with its fundamental beliefs. Its political framework deviated from egalitarian principles. Formal religious education helped to build and perpetuate new hierarchies. The dedication of the Israelites to social justice began to wane.

Eventually, about 600 BCE, the monarch of a neighboring state, Babylon, burned the Israelites' kingdom and holy temples to the ground. Furthermore, he sent them to exile to Babylon, where they were compelled to live under his careful supervision. The Israelites utilized their cultural memory of prior exiles — the horrific period in the desert when they first began worshipping Yahweh — to fight the annihilation of their civilization in exile.

However, culture preservation needs more than just memory; it also necessitates some tools. One of the most efficient strategies for Israelite elites in Mesopotamia was remembering texts — not by reading them, but by singing, chanting, or pronouncing them. Like a jazz player improvising with standards, the most exceptional pupils assimilated religious texts to the point where they could choose portions from their mental storehouse that worked best for the current situation.

They built a new scripture out of the rites and legends of their fallen temples, such as the fall of Adam and Eve. The first five books of the Hebrew Bible would be composed of this material.

## Chapter 2 - Aryan scripture represented their hard-boiled worldview while also providing ritual relief.

Meanwhile, circa 1500 BCE, Aryan nomads from the Caucasus were becoming tired of herding cattle. They wanted to settle down, so they chose modern-day Pakistan's lush Punjab area as their new home. For the individuals who already lived there, this was devastating news. The ex-nomads were rough customers, hard-drinking ruffians who made a living by robbing. Their favored target was peasants.

Their society, however, included a spiritual component. The hymns of their old gods were revealed through visions by Aryan seers known as rishis.

Rishis were not your average holy seers; they also took part in the Aryans' bloody raids. The rishis' violent lifestyle was represented in early Aryan scripture. The gods warned them that conflict was at the center of everything. Danger lurked around every corner, and the only way to change was to destroy it. The Rig Veda is the scripture they created based on these concepts.

The main point here is that the Aryans' scripture represented their hard-boiled worldview while also offering ritual relief.

The Rig Veda brought significance and respect to a life that would otherwise have been dreadful to the Aryans.

How? The solution is RTA, a little word that represents a large notion. The rishis thought that RTA brought the universe's warring parts together. Rta lived outside of linear time, with the rishis' visions relating to the past, present, future, or all times at once. Rta may be found in a variety of places, including within each individual. By the ninth century BCE, the Aryans had polished the notion of the RTA into what Hindus now refer to as the Brahman or universal force.

The Rig Veda has a lot of dread and gloom in it. However, it also provided a means of escaping the celestial cycle of death and rebirth. You may break the cycle and ensure yourself a place in paradise by doing ritual activities, or karma, during the course of your life.

The Rig Veda, like the Israelites' holy book, became inextricably linked to ritual. Listening to ceremonial chanting was the most common way for people to encounter the Veda. In fact, the Aryans revered music as much as they revered the substance of their hymns. This is because chanting gave the words a sensory dimension, making the text more meaningful to those who heard it. In fact, writing – including the literal text of the Veda – came to be seen as contaminating and corrupt.

Importantly, when rishis repeated the hymns as part of their ceremonies, they were returning them to the gods who had created them. The Aryans gained a sense of reverence and gratitude for the world, as well as a philosophy of nonviolence, as a result of this ceremony.

## Chapter 3 - The earliest Chinese scripture was written to assist kings in conducting ethical government.

Let's take a trip to China. The warlike Zhou clan conquered China's first dynasty, the Shang, some three thousand years ago. The Zhou had a unique belief system, believing that the universe was made up of complementary yet conflicting forces. The world was balanced in the middle, between these opposing forces, and its prosperity was contingent on a healthy interaction between them.

The Zhou invoked the Mandate of Heaven to legitimize their defeat of the Shang. They said that the Shang had disrupted the cosmic equilibrium by their corruption and depravity. Ethics arose for the first time in Chinese religion during this period. Politics and religion would become inextricably linked from then on.

The main theme is that the oldest Chinese scripture was created to assist monarchs in governing responsibly.

When the Zhou came to power, they developed a state education system to instruct officials in the proper balance of cosmic forces. The Five Classics became a scripture as a result of the resultant ideals of administration.

The Five Classics are very different from today's religious writings. They entrenched cultural traditions, such as respect for ancestors and artistic performance techniques, in addition to religious activities. This book, like other scriptures of the time, was flexible. It was constantly revised over the ages to reflect the needs of the period.

But it wasn't solely up to the bureaucrats to keep the heaven-earth balance in check. People from all walks of life took part in elaborate dances, wore extravagant costumes, and sang poetry, among other rites. Chinese scripture, like Israelite and Aryan scripture, combines text with physicality to enable people to absorb it more deeply.

However, all things, including agrarian empires, must come to an end at some point. After a barbarian onslaught in 771 BCE, the dynasty began to fall apart. The period known as the Warring States began now. The end outcome would be a unified central state, but establishing it would require centuries of bloodshed and sorrow.

Nobles began to spend less time in war and more time at court as things settled down. They created an etiquette rule based on the Five Classics. The li was a set of ceremonial practices that governed both public and private life. The li became a freshly ordered code of behavior that everyone had to adhere to.

Some academics felt the li had the potential to transform Chinese nobles into a more compassionate rulers. However, some of the li's obligatory respect gestures became absurd, and courtiers began vying to see who could be the most humble!

## Chapter 4 - Throughout history, the ancient text has aided people in forging a shared identity from chaos.

What would you do if you were in the middle of a terrible, unexpected political upheaval? You're not alone if you responded "run away." Many people in China during the Warring States period just gave up and retired. Confucius, a Chinese official, adopted the polar opposite approach. He established a powerful princely institution where they could study how to carry out the Mandate of Heaven and manage the empire morally.

The Analects, a collection of Confucius' teachings, were intended to promote kindness and compassion, ego transcendence, and ceremonial dedication. He preached that community service began with one's own family and grew to embrace the entire planet.

Confucius' goal was to assist Chinese people to comprehend their role in a perplexing world. People in Israel and India were confronted with similar existential threats. People in all three locations increasingly turned to scripture for solutions.

The main point here is that ancient scripture has aided people all over the world in forging a sense of community out of turmoil.

Chinese philosophy developed to explain the particular turmoil of each period. Mencius, a Confucian who lived two centuries after Confucius, maintained that humans may learn heavenly attributes like compassion via practice. His followers, known as Daoists, believed that everyone had the ability to receive heavenly grace. It was a comforting thought for those who had witnessed so much bloodshed and devastation.

Meanwhile, do you recall the Israelite exiles who were compelled to reside in Babylon? Among them was the prophet, Ezekiel. He experienced a vision that startled him soon after moving in. He predicted the Israelites' downfall in it.

The exiles were forced to reflect on their actions that had led them to this tough situation after Ezekiel's apocalypse prophecy. It also compelled people to consider their goals for the future, which included restoration to social equality. They created literature to teach future generations the rites from their destroyed temples in order to ensure that this would happen. Their major spiritual source would be memory, and fresh interpretations of old stories would form the Hebrew Bible.

India was likewise in upheaval, as growing urbanization upset traditional lifestyles. The Upanishads, a new group of texts, arose as a source of solace. The essence of their teaching is that the human ego is divine and inextricably linked to global reality. As a result, rishis - divine interpreters – stopped looking for the divine outside of themselves. They were now looking inside.

The Upanishads, however, did not appeal to everyone. As violence expanded across India, the aristocracy began to reject the Upanishads' upbeat message, accepting that eternal suffering and terror were unavoidable. Despair drove them to abandon metropolitan life and roam in poverty. One of them became known as the Buddha, and you may have heard of him.

## Chapter 5 - In a changing environment, people adapted scripture to meet their needs.

Siddhatta Gotama, the Buddha, a young Indian aristocrat, had always been a dedicated follower of the faith that is now known as Hinduism in English. He was extremely good at yoga, and he eventually established a new type of yoga that focused on channeling compassion toward all living things. He attained enlightenment, or nirvana, by this practice, which freed him from the cycle of karmic reincarnation. It was because of this that he was able to evolve into the Buddha we know today.

What did this imply for his supporters? It was honestly rather soothing. People didn't grow sick or depressed just because they believed in the possibility of enlightenment. However, the knowledge that the cosmic cycle might be halted brought them inner peace. Buddhists were able to cope peacefully with the anguish and suffering brought on by life's changes because of their serenity.

People adapted scripture to meet their needs in a changing society, which is the main lesson here.

Buddhist text served as a means for individuals to confront their own suffering. However, Buddha's teachings were not the only choice available to Indians. Other new texts appeared to soothe people's existential distress. For example, the Mahabharata adopts a practical approach. Its stories are about epic pain that lacks heroic transcendence. What good does that do? It challenges readers to accept uncertainty and encourages them to concentrate on current issues rather than future ones.

China, like the rest of the world, was evolving. The Han Dynasty ascended to power around the year 200 BCE. On the advice of the philosophical elite, the Han emperor founded a Confucianism academy to teach officials. Chinese administrators would be schooled in this same canon for the next two thousand years, until 1911.

As the decades passed, Chinese philosophers and Buddhist academics altered Confucian ideas to make them relevant to current times. Two Buddhist lineages emerged over time. Theravada is a monastic, solitary religion. Mahayana, on the other hand, honors people who graciously remain in the karmic cycle as bodhisattvas, assisting others in attaining nirvana.

Let's go back to the Holy Land, where the Israelites were also dealing with a new political reality: the invasion of colonial power. The increasing Greco-Roman impact on the Israelite faith would have long-term effects. For one point, the Israelite canon was standardized as a result of a popular revolt against Greek-aligned Jerusalem elites. The Torah was the name given to these standardized texts. The Israelites' faith became Judaism after receiving the Torah.

The Torah arrived at just the right time. The Roman emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the remaining Judaic temples to the ground a century later, in 66 CE. All the Jews had now was the Bible.

## Chapter 6 - The Ancient Near East was given new hope by Jesus' message of redemption.

There were two main events in the eventual demolition of the temples in Jerusalem. For starters, it paved the way for the rise of rabbinic Judaism. A rabbinical college was founded, and scribes began modifying the new text, the Torah, to make it more relevant to people in their new reality. Rabbis from the Israelite aristocracy engaged in a lively, continuing reworking of old biblical stories.

The rising popularity of a barefoot peasant from Nazareth was another trend. His followers' scriptures heralded a new covenant, or agreement, between God and humans. Of course, the peasant was Jesus.

The world of Jesus was dominated by Roman governmental brutality. His disciples were famished, homeless, and traumatized as a result of their tough circumstances. Jesus' politics were revolutionary, providing an egalitarian alternative to imperialism's violence. Instead of responding to violence with greater violence, Jesus advised people to turn the other cheek.

The main point here is that Jesus' message of salvation gave the ancient Near East new hope.

The crucifixion of Jesus is depicted in great detail in the Bible. That's odd because none of his followers were present at the time. Nonetheless, they grew convinced that Christ would return soon to establish the Kingdom of God, which would be governed by compassion rather than violence.

Mediterranean elites were becoming more interested in the new religion by the third century. The Bible was both entertaining and inspiring. It didn't always make sense, though. One particular question the scripture couldn't address was whether Jesus was human or divine. For decades, debate raged, and two schools of thought eventually formed. Western Christians thought that Jesus came from God miraculously, whilst Eastern Christians felt that Jesus was just another man who had gained access to the divine.

European Christians began journeying to Jerusalem in the fourth century to attempt to make sense of what they were reading – a pilgrimage that also acted as a way to get away from the barbarians who were constantly burning Christian villages on fire. Augustine, who would go on to become one of the most prominent theologians in the Western world, was one of these pilgrim-refugees. Augustine felt that scripture should be altered to fit its context when he was a young man.

His thoughts worsened as he grew older.

He was the first to express the idea of original sin in writing. He claimed that Adam and Eve's exile from Eden had sentenced humanity to perpetual damnation. Furthermore, Adam's sin is passed along through the sexual act, which occurs when humans seek pleasure in one other rather than in God. Humans have already sinned by virtue of their birth. Augustine's concept instilled shame in Western Christians, which many still bear.

## Chapter 7 - Islam ushered in a more inclusive approach to community harmony.

The last prophet to shock the Middle East wasn't Jesus. A merchant named Mohammed went into a trance in a mountain cave outside of Mecca in the year 610. When he awoke, the first lines of a new Arabic text were spilling forth from his lips.

Mohammed was quite concerned about the current status of the planet. He desired to return to a historic communal way of life, dissatisfied with the fierce competitiveness of the commercial economy of Arabian city-states. Allah, the God who had appeared to him in the

cave, was not a far-off deity. Rather, he told his disciples to "come near" so that he might lead them. Supplicants were encouraged to touch their heads to the ground at the end of each recitation or to abandon their own egos in favor of community religious experience. Islam means "surrender" in Arabic.

The main theme is that Islam has offered a more inclusive perspective on community harmony.

Mohammed was well aware of his audience. He used poetry, Arabia's preferred art form, to convey Allah's word. His words were spoken aloud and subsequently compiled into a revolutionary new text known as the Quran, or "Recitation."

Mohammed escaped an increasingly hostile Mecca in 622 to live among his disciples in Medina, an oasis settlement. Because these early Muslims were short on cash, they used a tried-and-true fundraising strategy: the acquisition raid. Mohammed's message had begun to catch on by the time they had looted enough to return to Mecca for a pilgrimage. Mohammed had unified Arabia by the year of his death, 632.

After that, Islam spread quickly and widely. One explanation for this is that Muslim armies have gone on the offensive. Umar, Mohammed's friend, launched a series of raids on neighboring empires two years after Mohammed's death in order to keep Muslims safe.

However, military expansionism isn't the main cause for Islam's rapid spread. Islam became popular because it offered a more positive alternative to the severe orthodoxy of the other Middle Eastern religions. For Muslims, the political well-being of society in general – including non-Muslims – was of utmost significance. Mohammed believed that Jews and Christians had misread their own scriptures if they believed that only they would be chosen to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Muslim forces were a resounding success: 25 years after Mohammed's death, the Muslims had conquered a vast kingdom that included Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. All they needed to do now was figure out how to govern it.

## Chapter 8 - Scholars read existing scripture to explain why the world was changing so quickly.

Muawiyah, the son of one of Mohammed's competitors, had an exciting year in 661. First, he assassinated Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law and successor to the throne. The Shia, or "Partisans," became Ali's followers.

Muawiyah then established the Umayyad empire, with Damascus as its center. But it was the end of his strategy.

Nobody had any idea how an Islamic dominion was meant to work. There was no mention of jurisprudence in the Quran. Scholars began collecting supposed sayings of Mohammed,



known as hadith, and utilizing them to find out how to administer this new sort of state to solve the issue. Individual hadith interpretation, like that of other text, was entirely dependent on the interpreter.

The main point is that, as the world changed swiftly, academics reinterpreted existing scripture to explain why.

When it comes to running an empire, the act of Islam, or capitulation, isn't really beneficial. Hawkish intellectuals in the Umayyad empire quickly began interpreting the notion of jihad to allow for military expansion, supported by hadith, to assist justify the sometimes unpleasant responsibilities connected with military expansion and control.

Meanwhile, religious intellectuals in India were busily reinterpreting the Bible. But there was nothing new in the Puranas, the new texts. Instead, they were made up of previous literature that had been rewritten in passionate devotion to a certain deity.

Rather than teach or intimidate, the Puranas were written to inspire. Even more, they could be enjoyable. Krishna, the youthful deity, is represented in one source as a cheeky imp who steals butter and disguises himself so that he can sleep with all the ladies in a hamlet in secret. The Puranas democratized Indian religion in a new way by making these stories amusing and accessible.

A comparable inclusive movement led by the Cheng brothers was beginning in China by the eleventh century. As barbarians hounded the dying Song Dynasty, it became clear that political participation benefited everyone, not just the political elite. The Cheng brothers went a step further, claiming that sagehood — the Confucian equivalent of sainthood — was also open to everybody.

However, while India and China progressed toward equality, Europe became more unequal than ever. The ancient aristocracy's riches were being drained by a new class of urban elites, yet peasants were more impoverished than ever. They traveled the countryside in search of work, landless and desperate. The continent's position was becoming increasingly precarious. The pump had been primed for action.

## Chapter 9 - Other than in Christian Europe, mysticism echoed over the world.

Mysticism, like equality, was popular all throughout the world — except in the Christian world.

Sufism arose in Islam as a reaction to the dogmatic belief that the Quran could only be interpreted by theologians descending straight from Mohammed. Sufis had a more instinctive, earthier relationship with their beliefs. They devised meditation techniques that

included chanting and precise bodily alignment to comprehend how Mohammed would have felt when Allah talked to him.

Sufism's appeal stems in part from their idea that revelation is not limited to the past, but is available to anybody who opens themselves up to the text. In the thirteenth century, one Persian poet's graceful and approachable interpretations were extremely famous. Rumi was his name, and his writings aided Sufism's rapid expansion among Muslims of all socioeconomic classes.

The main point is that mysticism spread throughout the world, except for Christian Europe.

Sufism touched a deep part of the Muslim spirit, although the Islamic world as a whole had more pressing concerns than mystic doctrine. The first European crusaders arrived in Jerusalem in 1099, after hundreds of years of coexistence between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. They slaughtered 30,000 people in three days. The Mongols were also attacking Muslim countries from the east at the same time. Scholars of the Quran retaliated by adopting more aggressive interpretations of the Quran. The concept of jihad was revived in reaction to a persistent foreign onslaught, not because of the Quran's intrinsic brutality, as some argue.

In the meantime, a new mysticism had emerged among Jewish peoples. Kabbalah was created in the late thirteenth century by Jews residing in Spain and Provence, based on a profound mystical heritage in rabbinical Judaism. Kabbalists aspired to encounter God via the symbols of scripture, much as Sufis sought to connect with Allah in a way that went beyond speech.

India was not immune to the desire for physical rather than intellectual contact with God. Sikhism began in the fourteenth century when a young boy from Lahore experienced a spiritual awakening. The ineffability of the greatest truth, the universal love of the Divine, and the inherent sadness of human life are all themes in the Sikh faith.

However, Europe defied the trend once more. A push for greater precision and comprehension sprang from Muslim Spain, based on centuries-old medical, mathematical, and scientific theories. The Italian scholar Thomas Aquinas retrospectively baptized Aristotle, contending that theology was a rational type of science, in a heroic attempt to reconcile Christian scripture with logical rationality.

As we'll see, this concept had far-reaching consequences in subsequent generations.

## Chapter 10 - The Protestant Reformation irrevocably altered Christians' attitudes toward scripture.

In Europe, the 16th century was a turbulent time. Geographical and technological discoveries were bringing exciting developments at a breakneck pace. However, there was a new threat when the continent was destroyed by the Black Death.

Many people were confused by the changing life rhythms. Then Martin Luther, a German professor, had a vision. He irrevocably transformed Christendom when he nailed a sheet of paper carrying 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. The only thing Christians need to commune with God, according to one theory, is scripture, not the Church.

It was an opportune message. For one thing, scripture was popular, and because of the printing machine, it was more accessible than ever before. Furthermore, the communities of southern and central Germany had grown prosperous enough to function independently of Rome. The world's first mass movement had arrived at the right time.

The main point here is that the Protestant Reformation irrevocably altered Christians' connection with Scripture.

Despite his vision, Luther remained an elite at the end of the day. He withdrew his remark that everyone could interpret the Bible for himself when peasants audaciously began quoting scripture back at him. He argued that it had always been the aristocracy who had been involved. Everyone else might receive the official interpretation by purchasing a copy of Luther's Catechism.

The cat, however, was out of the bag. Anyone who knew Greek or Latin could now interpret the Bible for himself, and they weren't going to stop. The Catholic Church was in serious difficulties as a result of this. Catholic academics determined at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century that only professionals could interpret the biblical message. This would put a stop to Catholic research for generations.

The Council of Trent also led in nearly continual violent clashes between Catholic and Protestant Europe for the next 30 years. Many Europeans believed that the distinctions between Christian religions were intractable as a result of the tragedy of these battles. If there was a point of agreement, it would have to be found outside of religion.

René Descartes, a French philosopher, arrives barely in time. While hiding from the snow at a Danube inn one night in 1619, he came up with the answer. He recognized that he didn't need scripture any longer. Enlightenment might be attained only via reason. The idea that God had persuaded humanity to believe in him proved his existence. God was true because humanity believed in his existence.

**Chapter 11 - Evidence-based reasoning had a variety of effects on worldwide religious systems.**

If you're asking why people kept bothering with religion while it was causing so much havoc in Europe, you've asked a valid question. In the sixteenth century, the first European atheists appeared. They were Marranos, descended from Spanish Jews compelled to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition. They got alienated from the ritual side of religion after being cut off from their Jewish customs and just paid lip regard to Christian ones. This made it much more difficult to keep the legend alive.

Scientists and philosophers had not abandoned their belief in God. However, they struggled to discover proof of His presence in the Bible. Europeans were increasingly relying on actual facts to create major scientific breakthroughs. Evidence was sufficient to determine if anything was "true." That meant that everything that couldn't be seen was assumed to be untrue.

The main takeaway is that evidence-based reasoning influenced worldwide religious systems in a variety of ways.

European scientists began utilizing logic rather than scripture to support religion in the sixteenth century. Sir Isaac Newton, for one, claimed that physics, planetary motion, and earth movement were proofs of God's presence. This was the first time science, rather than religion, was used to explain Christianity's power.

Christianity's dominance in the West was being eroded in other ways as well. The Founding Fathers of the United States heartily embraced John Locke's view that religion and government should be kept apart. The US Constitution provided the possibility of an inner, private spirituality by explicitly separating religion and state.

The Christian faith was not the only one undergoing reform and rebirth. Islam was also changing. The discovery of gunpowder fueled the military growth of three new Muslim empires: Iran's Safavids, India's Mughals, and the Near East's Ottomans. All three had a definite Islamic bent, which was most likely a reaction to Christian Europe's expanding hegemony.

These three Islamic empires, on the other hand, were no match for Europe's technical and scientific triumphs. As the Ottoman Empire began to disintegrate, reform groups arose, encouraging Muslims to return to the scripture. One of these, led by Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, would lead to a conservative, cloistered view of Islam that would only reach a political apex in the twentieth century.

Chinese theologians, on the other hand, saw Europe's scientific logic and advancement as a continuation of Confucian impartiality and objectivity. Huang Zongzi, a Chinese Enlightenment scholar, even said that European-style evidential study represented a return to a more authentic kind of Confucianism.

However, as we'll see in the last blink, European-style philosophy didn't always mesh well with other religious traditions in the region.

## Chapter 12 - New interpretations of scriptures in the modern day have the potential to reawaken our feeling of empathic sensitivity.

Scripture is a living work of art that is supposed to bring people together and promote compassion. It wasn't supposed to be taken literally in the first place. However, scripture was all that a new generation of religious zealots had. Furthermore, because fundamentalist societies emerge in reaction to a perceived crisis, they see religion as a combative force. When they are questioned, they see it as an assault and become even more adamant about their literal interpretations of the Bible.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant Evangelism began to gain popularity in America. Dreams, signs, miracles, and ecstatic physicality, all based on a literal reading of scripture, were all condemned by Enlightenment intellectuals. It is presently the most widely practiced religion in the US.

The main point here is that modern reinterpretations of scripture have the potential to reawaken our feeling of empathic compassion.

While Americans were discovering new religions, Europeans were generally losing their old ones. In the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche famously predicted the demise of God. Because of their undivided focus on reason, Europeans lost contact with their magical imaginations. Doubt had taken the place of trust. This unpleasant new reality played a role in Europe's most violent century.

Yet history isn't only about Europe; it's also about the rest of the globe. This is primarily due to Europeans' unfortunate attempt to force their ideologies on their colonies.

But by the mid-nineteenth century, Britain had gained control of much of the Indian subcontinent and had given the religion they discovered there a name: Hinduism, which is derived from the term Hindu, which simply means "Indian." There has never been an organized religion called Hinduism before the British. In a variegated mosaic of devotions, people worshiped a plethora of gods. Hinduism has now been interwoven with India's nationalist concept.

Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim leaders discovered that if they accepted a European perspective of religion, colonialists were easier to deal with. They began to compete with one other politically along religious lines for the first time. As a result, violent Hindu and Sikh extremist groups grew to prominence.

Most Muslims found themselves under European colonial administration at the turn of the twentieth century, followed by cruel Western-backed dictatorships. Some have turned to a conservative theology that appears to be frozen in time as a result of their humiliation. Some Muslim philosophers, on the other hand, have continued to debate the text by adapting the holy message of the Quran to modern times.

One of the fundamental aims of scripture since its start, all those millennia ago, has been the fostering of compassion. Unfortunately, compassion is in short supply in today's world. Scripture reinterpretation has the power to reawaken compassion in humanity. However, if we allow literal readings of scripture to halt its progress, it will become obsolete once and for all.

## The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts by Karen Armstrong

When combined with bodily practices, Scripture has always been an art form, aiming to induce a sense of compassion and nostalgia. When appropriately read, it may provide insight into contemporary political and intellectual concerns. Not only are literal readings of scripture useless, but they may also be harmful and deadly.

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