

Table 1: The Two Religions

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Religion of Creation</i>	<i>Religion of Empire</i>
Source of “divine power”	One God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth	Many gods and goddesses
God’s “home”	Beyond and within creation and among people	In a temple near the palace in the royal city
Places of sacred encounter	Earth: mountains, rivers, wilderness; direct encounter; table fellowship; human intimacy	Urban temple, mediated by priestly elite; urban royal rituals
Purpose of human life	Praise God with joy in gratitude for the abundant gift of life	Serve the gods through loyalty to “empire”
Basic social structure	Egalitarian kinship	Hierarchical patronage
Basic economic structure	Gift, barter, collaboration amid abundance	Money, debt, competition amid scarcity
Basic social architecture	Village, small town	Urban, megalopolis
Basic political ideology	God alone reigns	Human king reigns as presence of supreme god
Relationship with unknown “others”	Hospitality; love	Suspicion; violence
Religious “obligations”	Love and praise of God and neighbor expressed in “right relationship” (justice)	Rituals expressing loyalty to “patrons,” both “divine” and human
Relationship with earth / land	Belongs to God; people are “tenants”	Belongs to king and those who can afford to buy it
Relationship with “enemies”	Love them	Destroy them

Some religions simply express our personal preferences, while others are vigorously passed down across the generations as “truth.”

Let’s move from this general definition of “religion” to the specific worlds of the Bible. We may presuppose that the Bible is seeking to encourage and support commitment to one of two religions called “Judaism” and “Christianity.” There are indeed two religions in the Bible vying for the loyalty of listeners and readers. But to label one as “Judaism” and the other as “Christianity” is to miss the central point.

For example, consider the topic of war. Are “Christians” *for* war or *against* war? We know that people using the label “Christian” to identify their religion fall along the spectrum from absolute pacifism to enthusiastic support for “just war.” We’d find a similar spectrum for numerous issues, such as homosexuality, poverty, abortion, the global economy, and so forth. We’d also find “Jews” who are adamant supporters of Israel and justify its defense by any means necessary, while others renounce both nationalism and