

Exploring the religion of zoroastrianism religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Zoroastrianism is said to be the oldest revealed religion in the world and holds a firm place in being one of the most interesting studies of the world's religions. Such significance can be attributed to the influences on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Little is known about the earliest days of Zoroastrianism after its establishment by Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster in western culture) but during the 6th century BCE and 7th century CE Zoroastrianism was the most influential religion in three consecutive Persian Empires (known as Iran) . It's downfall in Persia followed the Arab invasions and resulted in a small minority establishing a group in north-west India in the 10th century CE.

Body Paragraph 1:

Zarathustra was a Persian prophet who thought he had envisioned the sight of God – Ahura Mazda- the create of all that was good and who alone is to be worshipped. This is a change from past Indo-Persian polytheism and is known to be the first non-biblical monotheist. Their sacred book of law, the Avesta is collection of sacred writing compiled over many centuries and was not completed until the Sassanid dynasty. It consists hymns ascribed to Zarathustra- the Gathas- invocation and rituals to be used at festivals, hymns of praise and spells against demons and prescriptions for purification. The concept of God involves the use of both monotheism and dualism. In his visions Zarathustra was taken up to the heavens where “ Ahura Mazda revealed that he had an opponent, Aura Mainyu, the spirit and promoter of evil. ” It was from this vision that Zarathustra was given the task of inviting all of mankind to choose between good and evil. Zoroaster taught man they he must partake in the cosmic struggle because of his capacity of free

choice. In turn making Zoroastrianism an ethical religion due to the importance of choosing good over evil. It is believed in Zoroastrianism that humans are free to decide between right and wrong, light and dark, and truth and lie and ultimately their choices would affect their destiny for all eternity. Afterlife in Zoroastrian culture is decided by the balance of the words, good and evil deed and thoughts throughout one's life. Generally this idea is not absolute, however there is exception for human weakness, this means faults are not registered or weight forever on the scales. Two means of obliterating them; confession and the transfer of "supererogatory merits". The ideology of monotheism, heaven, hell, angelology, the messiah, the resurrection of the body was influential on Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Body 2:

Zoroastrianism was the most influential Religion upon Persia for three successive Empires – the first lead by Cyrus the Young of the Archaemenian Family from 549 BCE -331 BCE. Kings of the Archaemenian Empire are known to have been very self-righteous Zoroastrians and ruled politically in unity with the Law of Asha – truth and righteousness. Cyrus was generally care-free and thus no imposition was made upon his people to practise Zoroastrian ways. Beneficiary particularly to the Jews – whom Cyrus allowed to return to the Holy Land from exile in Babylon – this impacted them greatly and influenced post-Exilic Judaism [Boyce, M: 1977: p211]. According to Xenophon and Plutarch [Xenophon and Plutarch in Lawless: 1994: 211], Cyrus worshipped Mithra, Anahita and Ahura-Mazda with inscriptions dating back to Cyrus the Young indicate that many of his building projects were under their protection.

Darius the Great was also very religious and showed the same general acceptance during his reign, attributing him being king to that of Ahura Mazda" By the favour of Ahura-Mazda I am king; Ahura-Mazda bestowed the kingship upon me...by the favour of Ahura-Mazda these countries showed respect toward my law...Ahura-Mazda bore me aid until I got possession of this kingdom." [Behistan Inscription in Lawless, J (1991) p. 207]. Ahura-Mazda was also proclaimed responsible for helping create Darius' building projects at Susa, Persepolis and his tomb at Naqshi-eRustan.

Following Darius to the throne was his son Xerxes who, like Darius before him attributed his ascension to the throne and building projects to Ahura-Mazda. A rather controversial tablet at Persepolis indicates that Xerxes claims that he destroyed sanctuaries of " false gods"[Kent in Lawless (1994) p208];

" Among these countries there was (a place) where previously false gods were worshipped. Afterwards, by the favour of Ahura-Mazda, I destroyed that sanctuary of the demons (daevas) and I made proclamation: " The Demons shall not be worshipped!' Where previously the demons were worshipped there I worshipped Ahura-Mazda and Arta reverently"

The inscription according to Kent has worried scholars and there are suggestions that Xerxes localized Zoroastrianism.

Next in line after the rule of the Archaemenians was the Seleucids and Arcasids; Zoroastrianism became self-sufficient during their rule. The Parthian Arcasids overthrew the Seleucids and ruled for a much longer

period than the Archaemenians, however doing so with a less centralised
<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-religion-of-zoroastrianism-religion-essay/>

rule. A series of changes began from the Arcasids rule this included; Gathering of Zoroastrian texts from all provinces and The Vendidad (Laws Against Demons) is established.

What continued was the tradition of tolerance towards other religions and also governed the law of Asha like past rulers. The final Empire to hold Zoroastrianism as its main religion was the Sasanians. The Sasanians – around 224 CE – 7th Century- were ruled by Ardashir, and during his reign important developments were made- A single Zoroastrian church was created under the control of Persia, the Zoroastrian calendar was reformed; the older calendar had 360 days, the new calendar was a 365 day calendar; the core of the Avesta was able to be written down. By the end of the Sasanian period the authoritarian Zoroastrian church-state was immensely wealthy, until the Islamic conquests of the 7th century that is...

Body paragraph 3:

The Islamic Arabs invaded and conquered Persia in the 7th century; this had a disastrous effect on Zoroastrianism that surpassed that of Alexander the Great's conquest. Numerous libraries were burned to the ground and to a great extent so was Persia's cultural heritage. Zoroastrians were treated like dhimmis (People of the Book) at the hands of the Arab invaders – this meant, that they were allowed to retain their religious practises, but had to pay extra taxes as a result. Social humiliations and other laws were implemented to make life so difficult for those who practised Zoroastrianism that they would, as a result convert to Islam. This tactic was successful as over time many Persians did convert and thus making Zoroastrianism a minority

religion. More successive attack from the Turks, Mongols and Islamists
<https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-religion-of-zoroastrianism-religion-essay/>

destroyed more religious texts and Zoroastrianism declined further into obscurity.

Conclusion:

Zoroastrianism is said to be the oldest revealed religion in the world and holds a firm place in being one of the most interesting studies of the world's religions. Such significance can be attributed to the influences on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Little is known about the earliest days of Zoroastrianism after its establishment by Iranian prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster in western culture) but during the 6th century BCE and 7th century CE Zoroastrianism was the most influential religion in three consecutive Persian Empires (known as Iran) . It's downfall in Persia followed the Arab invasions and resulted in a small minority establishing a group in north-west India in the 10th century CE.