

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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STRAVER:**

Chapter four introduces the world's major religions. The most long-lasting legacies of second wave civilizations were not their states or empires, but their cultural and religious traditions. These have lasted to the present day. And they have spread far beyond the civilizations where they began. So chapter four turns the historical spotlight on those Eurasian sacred traditions, Confucianism and Taoism in China, Hinduism and Buddhism in India, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity in the Middle East, and Greek rationalism in the Mediterranean world. All of these were products of second wave civilizations.

Now, religion presents students of history with no end of challenges. First, of course, the core of religion is the interior experience of an unseen world, which is inaccessible to historians who are limited to evidence that's available here and now. And so we focus in this book largely on the external expression of religion, beliefs, practices, ethical and moral values, and the role of religion in supporting, and sometimes challenging, prevailing social and political systems. But while we can neither prove nor disprove the truth of inner experience, we need to recognize its power to motivate and inspire both individuals and whole communities.

Another issue involves the question of change. Believers generally think of their faiths as taking part in eternity or at least reflecting ancient practice. Historians, on the other hand, recognize that religion, like all things human, changes over time. This can lead to misunderstanding and tension between scholars and believers.

And finally there is the issue of comparison. Chapter four invites you to look for similarities and differences in the historical development of various religious or cultural traditions. The ancient Hindu sacred text, known as the Vedas, declares that truth is one, the wise call it by many names.

But what about you? When you have finished chapter four, do you find yourself more impressed by the differences or the commonalities among these religious traditions?