

LESSON NINE: A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO SOME WORLD RELIGIONS¹

Directions: With your child, read the information below and answer the questions. The number of adherents for each religion comes from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations.

I. Introduction

- A. A religion is a system of beliefs which is very important to many of its adherents. They base their lives on it, and, in many cases, are willing to kill and die for it. There are approximately 6.6 billion people alive in the world now. Let's examine the four religions with the most people. Let's also examine Judaism, because Christianity and Islam come from it, and because it is a very well-known religion in Western society.

II. Christianity

- A. With approximately 2.1 billion adherents, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. Most Christians believe in the Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming.

The Incarnation is the belief that God became a human being in the womb of a virgin named Mary. This human being is called Jesus Christ.

There is much disagreement among Christians about the Atonement and what one has to do to go to Heaven. The following, however, is a common Christian way of thinking. The Atonement is the belief that Jesus' death on the cross took away the guilt of all of humanity's sins, thus allowing people who believe in the Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming to go to Heaven.

The Resurrection is the belief that Jesus miraculously came back to life after he died, which proves that what Jesus taught was true, including the teaching that there is life after death.

The Ascension is the belief that Jesus miraculously went up in the sky and, thus, vanished into Heaven. This supposedly explains why Jesus is not walking around the Earth nowadays.

The Second Coming is the time in the future when Jesus will come back to Earth and make everything right. True Christians will experience the eternal bliss of Heaven, and everyone else will be burned alive forever in Hell.

¹ Robert L. Johnson wrote the section on Judaism.

- B. Do you believe in the Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming? Why or why not?

III. Islam

- A. Approximately 1.5 billion people are Muslims, that is adherents of Islam. Most of them believe that the Angel Gabriel gave words from God to a man named Mohammed. Mohammed recited these words in an apparent trance-like state, and people copied them down. Later, these utterances were collected into a book called the Koran. Thus, the Koran is supposedly the perfect teachings of God.

- B. Do you believe that the Angel Gabriel gave words from God to a man named Mohammed? Why or why not?

Do you believe that the Koran is the perfect teachings of God? Why or why not?

IV. Hinduism

- A. Approximately 900 million people are Hindus. Hindus worship many gods.

- B. Do you believe in no gods, one god, or many gods? Why?

V. Buddhism

- A. Approximately 376 million people are Buddhists. Like Hindus, most Buddhists believe in reincarnation, which means that when a creature dies, her or his soul goes into the body of a newly conceived creature, the way one can pour water from one cup to another. The water represents the soul, and the cups represent different bodies. Therefore, a grasshopper can die and be reincarnated as a human being, or a human being can die and be reincarnated as a grasshopper.

- B. Do you believe in reincarnation? Why or why not?

VI. Judaism

- A. Approximately 14 million people are Jews. Judaism teaches that God chose the Jews "to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (KJV Deuteronomy 7:6) and told them that they should have the land of Israel forever. God even supposedly ordered the Jews to kill or drive out everyone in the land of Israel who was not Jewish. (Read Chapter 21 of the Book of Numbers and the entire Book of Joshua for details.)

1. For the record, according to Judaism, the Jews were called Israelites back then, and the Promised Land was called the Land of Canaan.

B. Do you believe that God told the Jews that they are better than everyone else on Earth, and that God ordered the Jews to kill or drive out everyone in the land of Israel who was not Jewish? Why or why not?

VII. Deism

A. Deism is the philosophy that we should base all of our beliefs on reason and that reason leads us to conclude that God exists. There have probably been millions of Deists throughout history from many nations and religious backgrounds.

B. Are you a Deist? Why or why not?