

FAITH TRADITIONS OF THE WORLD



Shepherds Global Classroom exists to equip the body of Christ by providing curriculum for rising Christian leaders around the world. We aim to multiply indigenous training programs by placing a 20-course curriculum tool into the hands of spiritual trainers in every country of the world.

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COURSE OVERVIEW

CULTS THAT IDENTIFY WITH CHRISTIANITY	NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS	DIVERGENT CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS
Mormonism	Hinduism	Seventh-Day Adventism
Jehovah's Witnesses	Buddhism	Roman Catholicism
Iglesia ni Cristo	Taoism	Eastern Orthodoxy
Eastern Lightning	Islam	Prosperity Theology
Apocalyptic cults	Judaism	
	New Age Religion	
	Nature Religions	
	Voodoo	

Course Description

This course explains the basic beliefs and histories of 17 selected cults and religious traditions, contrasting them with historic Protestant Christianity and evaluating their doctrines and practices by the Bible. The student will be prepared to respond to the errors of wrong religions and to protect Christians from error.

Course Objectives

1. To help Christians understand the basic doctrines of some of the most influential cults and religious traditions.
2. To help Christians understand why certain false doctrines are harmful.
3. To equip pastors to protect their congregations from the influence of cults.
4. To train Christians with biblical answers to religious errors.
5. To give practical directions for evangelizing members of other religious traditions.

Explanations and Directions for Class Leaders

Where scriptures are listed in parenthesis or within the main text, the class should read those scriptures before proceeding.

The lessons about religious groups (Lessons 3-19) generally follow the pattern described in the following directions. The first two lessons are on special topics.

These directions describe how the class can be taught with the highest level of quality. The class leader must keep this standard for students who desire to have a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom. For other kinds of groups who are not able to meet these requirements, a teacher may adapt the requirements to their ability, and give a different certificate.

We estimate that each lesson will take two hours to cover well. If the group meets for a shorter time, the lesson can be divided for two meetings.

Order of Group Activities

1. Gospel conversation reports (Estimated time: 20 minutes, if there are several reports)

Students who have finished a conversation assignment from a previous lesson should report. They should simply tell the story of their conversation. Other students may offer suggestions for the future. Do not allow students to be too critical of the one reporting.

2. Class review time (Estimated time: 5-10 minutes)

The class leader should ask the review questions for the previous lesson, then a few review questions from other lessons already covered. The purpose is to build students' long-term memory and correct misunderstandings they may have. The review questions help them remember the most important facts. The instructor can make the course very effective by using the review questions. Review questions are found at the end of this course.

3. First Encounter

Someone should read the paragraph entitled "First Encounter." This should be done without much comment or discussion. The stories are mostly without conclusions in order to create curiosity about the group being studied. In a few cases, the testimony at the end of the lesson is about the same person mentioned in the First Encounter.

4. Scripture Study - Part 1 (Estimated time: 15 minutes)

Read the assigned passage aloud together. Several students could take turns reading verses. Then have a few minutes of silence for students to write a summary paragraph and a list of

statements (specific instructions are in each lesson). After they write, let several students tell what they wrote so that each can learn from the others.

5. **Religious group study** (Estimated time: 40 minutes)

Study the information provided about the religious group. The leader or another person in the group could read and explain the material to the group. Different students could read and explain the quotations in the margins.

Discussion questions and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points. The class leader should ask the question and give the students time to discuss the answer. There will be several of these in each lesson.

The ***bold and italicized*** text refutes the wrong teachings and practices of the religious group. After reading the facts about the religious group, go back and read the explanations and scriptures given.

6. **Using the *Handbook of Doctrine*** (Estimated time: 20 minutes)

The *Handbook of Doctrine* is a section of material in this course printed after the lessons. At this point in the lesson, look at the topics of the *Handbook of Doctrine* listed under this section. Students should read the scriptures together and make sure they understand how the verses prove a point. Every student should show that he is able to prove a point from the scripture. Some points are used in several lessons. It is not necessary to repeat practice of the same points if the students seem to be learning well.

7. **Evangelism** (Estimated time: 10 minutes)

This section provides some practical things to remember when talking to members of the particular religious group. In some lessons this section is combined with the “Using the *Handbook of Doctrine*” section.

8. **A Testimony**

Someone should read the section of material entitled “A Testimony.” The testimonies are all real cases, though sometimes the names have been changed.

9. **Scripture Study - Part 2** (Estimated time: 20 minutes)

At the end of the study session, read the assigned scripture passage again. Wait a few minutes for each student to write a paragraph explaining the message the passage has for a member of the religious group they studied. Let several students share with the group what they wrote.

10. Assignment

Always conclude the lesson time by reminding the students to schedule an opportunity for a gospel presentation. Students should have conversations with members of the religious group being studied, if possible. They should try to present the gospel and other Christian truth. If it is not possible for them to find a member of that particular religious group, they should find someone else who would be interested in hearing the material. They should describe the basic beliefs of the religion, then give the biblical response. They should prepare to tell the class about their conversations.

Each student should report conversations about 10 different religions through the course. The written report of each conversation should describe characteristics of the religion that are important for an evangelist to know. In the report, the student should explain what he presented in the conversation, and how the other person responded. The report of each conversation should be two pages long. The instructor should explain this assignment several times during the first few lessons. Good papers written by the students could be shown to the group as examples.

The 10 conversations and writing assignments are the primary assignments of this course. A form is printed near the end of this book for the instructor to use for keeping records.

11. Recommended Resources

If students wish to learn more about any religious group they should look at the Recommended Resources near the back of the book to see available resources.

LESSON 1

ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

In this course we examine the characteristic beliefs of many religious groups. It is important to first explain essential Christianity before discussing erroneous beliefs. What is true Christianity? What fundamental doctrines are essential to Christian theology and help us to determine the credibility of a religious group?

ESSENTIAL HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY

There is one Christianity and one true church because there is only one God and one true gospel. The church is built on one foundation: the truth revealed in (1) the ministry of the apostles and (2) the life, ministry, message, and atonement of Jesus Christ. There is one foundation and one worldwide church.

The unity of the universal church does not mean that one organization is the whole church. No single organization fulfills God's purpose for the church everywhere in the world. Jesus told his apostles not to expect all Christians to be in the same organization (Mark 9:38-39). An organization that claims to be the entire church of God on earth should not be trusted.

The unity of the universal church means that all local churches must hold to the doctrines of Christianity that were essential at the beginning of the New Testament church. During the first few centuries, the church wrote the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed to state the doctrines that have been essential to Christianity from the beginning. A creed is a statement of foundational Christian beliefs.

Doctrines about the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the atonement of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith are foundational to original Christianity.

This course is not designed to defend a particular denomination. Doctrines defended in this course include Trinitarian doctrines as expressed in the historical Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian creeds of early Christianity; the absolute authority of the Bible; and the evangelical doctrines of grace, faith, and salvation.

ESSENTIAL POINTS OF THE GOSPEL

The following points are essentials of the gospel. It is possible for a person to be saved without fully understanding them. However, denial of any of these points takes away the foundation of the gospel. A person or organization that denies any of these essentials will tend to develop another gospel, trusting a false means of salvation.

When you share the gospel with someone, certain points will be especially important because of errors that he believes already. For example, if he believes that salvation is only through a certain organization, he will believe that the organization's membership requirements are necessary for salvation. He needs to know that a person individually receives forgiveness and comes into direct relationship with God.

1. God created man in his own image so that he could have relationship with him (Genesis 1:27, Acts 17:24-28).

This truth shows the purpose of our existence and the goal of salvation. This truth is contradicted by religions that do not believe in a God with personality who loves all people. This truth shows the real problem with the world; people are not in relationship with God.

» What if a person did not believe that God loves him?

2. The first people sinned and became separated from God (Genesis 3:3-6, 8, Isaiah 59:2).

This shows the origin of sin and the reason for the world's condition. The world has suffering and sorrow because of sin. There is still joy and purpose because of God's design, but the world is not like God planned it to be.

» What if a person did not believe that sin is the real problem with the world?

3. Each of us has committed sin against God (Romans 3:10, 23).

Each person is guilty of willful sin against God. There is not a person who has always done what is right.

» What if a person thinks he can justify the things he has done?

4. Every person who does not find mercy will be judged by God and be condemned to eternal punishment (Hebrews 9:27, Romans 14:12, Revelation 20:12).

This shows the seriousness and urgency of every individual's need for salvation.

» What if a person does not believe that there is a righteous God who will judge his sins?

5. A person cannot do anything to pay for the sins he has committed against God (Romans 3:20, Ephesians 2:4-9).

Good works and gifts cannot pay for sin because sin is against an infinite God and because everything already belongs to him.

» What if a person believes that he must make himself worthy of forgiveness?

6. There must be a basis for forgiveness because sin is serious and God is just (Romans 3:25-26).

God wants to forgive, but if he forgave without a basis, sin would seem trivial, and God would seem unjust.

» Why was the death of Christ necessary?

7. Jesus, the Son of God, lived a perfect life and died as a sacrifice so we may be forgiven, be made righteous before a holy God, and have eternal life (John 3:16, Romans 5:8-9, 1 Peter 2:22, 24).

Because Jesus is the Son of God, his sacrifice has infinite value and provides a basis for forgiveness of anyone in the world. If he were just a man, his sacrifice would have limited value. If he were not God, he would not be able to completely save us, and we must find another way of salvation.

» Why do some religions teach that people must be saved by works?

8. Jesus rose physically from the dead, proving his identity as the Son of God and demonstrating his power to give eternal life (John 11:25-26, John 20:24-28, Romans 1:4, Revelation 1:18).

Cults that deny the resurrection of Jesus usually also deny his deity and the sufficiency of his sacrifice for salvation. Then they invent another means of salvation.

» What are the things that we know because Jesus rose from the dead?

9. The sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 2:2).

Salvation is by *grace*, through *faith*, in Jesus Christ *alone*, and not by good works. Many religions teach that a person can partially earn his salvation. This puts people under the control of a religious organization that tells them what to do to be saved.

» Why do some people think that they cannot be saved without their religious organization?

10. God saves every person who admits he is a sinner, repents of his sin, and believes the gospel (Mark 1:15, 1 John 1:9).

No human organization has the right to add to the requirements for salvation or to offer a different means of salvation.

- » What kind of person has the right to believe that he is saved?

11. Repentance means that a person is sorry for his sins and willing to quit his sins (Isaiah 55:7, Ezekiel 18:30, Ezekiel 33:9-16, Matthew 3:8).

Repentance does not mean that a person must make his life perfect before God will accept him. Only God can deliver the unbeliever from the power of his sins. Repentance does mean that a person is sorry enough for his sins that he is ready to turn from them. If a person is not willing to turn away from his sins, he cannot be saved.

- » Why can't a person be forgiven without repentance?

12. A repentant, believing sinner receives salvation when he asks God to save him (Romans 10:13, Acts 2:21).

Every person has access to God's mercy because of Jesus. No institution or human agent is necessary for a person to receive God's forgiveness. A person receives it individually and begins a direct relationship with God.

- » How do we know that a person can become a Christian in a moment of time?

LESSON 2

UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

- » Why does religious conflict exist? Is religious conflict necessary, or can it be avoided?
- » After brief discussion about these questions, the class should look up the following scripture references: 1 Timothy 3:15, Jude 1:3; Matthew 16:6, 12; Titus 1:9; and 1 Peter 3:15. Discuss briefly what these verses imply about religious conflict.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that a problem with the Samaritans' worship was that they did not know whom they worshipped (John 4:22). A man's concept of God is his most important characteristic and certainly the foundation of his entire religion. There can be no more serious error than to be wrong about what God is like.

It is impossible to worship God without believing something about him. If a person has the wrong concept of God, he will honor characteristics that God does not have and fail to honor the characteristics that God does have. The worshipper's own character will change to match the character that he thinks God has.

A person cannot put his faith in Jesus for salvation without believing something about him. If a person believes the wrong things about Jesus, he has a doctrine that does not support the gospel. He may believe a false gospel that cannot save him.

The church has the responsibility to establish truth. The Apostle Paul said that the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). To establish truth, the church has the responsibility to explain and defend it. The Apostle Jude tells us that when people are teaching wrong doctrines, we are to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

False doctrine is like a disease that spreads its results (2 Timothy 2:17). False doctrine is compared to yeast, which gradually affects a loaf of bread (Matthew 16:6).

God calls pastors to be leaders in the defense of truth. Paul said to Titus that a pastor is supposed give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it

(Titus 1:9). He also said that because of deceivers, whole families were being taken away from the truth (Titus 1:10-11).

This course is not about the doctrines that divide different Christian churches into categories such as Methodist, Baptist, or Pentecostal. These churches generally agree on the essential biblical doctrines referenced in the *Handbook of Doctrine* in the back of this course. Instead, this course looks at religious groups that deny doctrines that are the foundation of the Christian faith.

In this lesson we will study eight important ways Christians should prepare for facing religious conflict. They must:

1. Personally experience salvation.
2. Become established in biblical doctrine.
3. Understand the danger of error.
4. Understand cult members.
5. Understand the origins of false religions.
6. Share the gospel.
7. Demonstrate the church.
8. Depend on the Holy Spirit.

PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE SALVATION

- » Why is it important for a person to be saved before he gets into religious arguments?

If a person has not personally experienced the grace of God,

1. He will lack spiritual understanding of truth.
2. He will not have the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in his efforts.
3. He will have the wrong motives for religious conflict.

BECOME ESTABLISHED IN BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

Understanding foundational Christian doctrine enables a believer to stand firm in the faith, even when faced with false teaching (Ephesians 4:14). Study of biblical doctrine also prepares a believer to actively influence others by refuting false teaching and explaining truth. This is why, as false teaching is explained throughout this course, it is shown in contrast to God's truth. As you use the scriptures and doctrines taught in the *Handbook of Doctrine* to refute the deception of false teachers, your faith will be strengthened.

Every believer should read and study all of God's Word (2 Timothy 3:15-17). It is the sword God has provided for spiritual victory (Ephesians 6:17).

Systematically studying doctrines of the Christian faith is also an important way to become established spiritually. *Christian Beliefs* is the first doctrines course offered by Shepherds Global Classroom, but other doctrinal courses are also available.

It is essential for new believers to become established in right doctrine, but serious disciples of Jesus continue to pursue growth in God's truth throughout their lives (Philippians 1:9).

UNDERSTAND THE DANGER OF ERROR

We must prepare to argue against religious errors. Religious errors have serious results because:

1. Not every religion tells you to believe in God and go to heaven.

Some religions do not believe in a supreme God who is a person (Buddhism). Millions of religious people do not believe they can go to a heaven where they will continue to exist as a person (Buddhists and most Hindus).

2. Some religions produce bad character and evil actions.

Religion has sometimes justified mankind's worst actions, such as Hitler's murder of millions of Jews. Religion motivates Islamic terrorists to murder thousands of people.

3. Religious opinion is not a matter of personal taste.

A person should not choose his religious opinions like he chooses his favorite candy. Every religion claims to define reality. If people are real, and if the universe is real, and if God is real, then some religions are wrong in the way they explain reality. For example, if there is a supreme God who will judge the world, then people who worship spirits and let spirits control their lives (animism and Voodoo) will not be prepared for the judgment. A person should not just choose the religion he prefers, but the one that fits reality.

4. It matters how a person describes God.

If a person is talking about something that is not real, it doesn't matter how he describes it. But if God is real, some ideas about him are right, and some are wrong. Just as it would be wrong for some statements to be made about you, some statements are wrong about God, because he is real. Because Jesus is God and should be worshipped, it would be a terrible mistake to say that he is only a man, like many religions do.

5. A person's eternal destiny depends on the truth.

When people are trusting something for salvation that cannot really save them, we must try to change their minds before they are lost forever.

- » Review the list of five reasons that religious errors have serious results. See how many reasons you can remember without looking at the page.

The house of a wealthy man was on fire. Inside were many valuable things that he wanted to save. When men came to help, they were afraid to go inside the burning building. The homeowner quickly gave them all plastic raincoats. He told them that the coats were specially designed to protect them from the fire. Trusting him, they entered the building and tried to bring out the things he wanted. Some of them died because the coats could not protect them. Their faith did not save them because they believed something that was not true.

God is real, and heaven and hell are real. There will be a final judgment on all sin, and every person will go to either heaven or hell for eternity. If a person has a religion that causes him to trust the wrong thing, the results will be terrible and eternal. His religion will not save him if it is not true. That's why there must be religious argument.

UNDERSTAND CULT MEMBERS

It is important to understand how cult members think and feel. If we ignore their needs, we may fail to offer the gospel in a way that gets their attention.

Think about how you first came into the church. It probably was not because someone beat you in an argument. Therefore, we should not think that we will convert one trapped in false beliefs only by beating him in an argument.

Reason is important as a means of proving truth, but reason alone does not change a person's commitments.

This section provides some characteristics of people who have chosen to join a religious cult. These characteristics do not necessarily describe someone whose religion is part of his culture.

- » What do you know about people who have joined a cult? What characteristics do they usually have?

1. The cult member believes his leaders are the only source of truth.

He may think he is getting his beliefs from the teachings of the founder and from the cult's scriptures, but he interprets those by what the leaders tell him. That's how he can ignore contradictions in the cult's writings and revelations.

Cult leaders teach unique doctrines that are not found elsewhere for the purpose of becoming the only source of truth for their members. They provide a final authority, either written or living, that supersedes the Bible in practice, even if they claim to believe the Bible.

2. The cult member distrusts the Christian church in general.

Cult members are taught that Christian churches are apostate, do not have the truth, and do not have God's blessing. Cult leaders may constantly ridicule Christian churches. In contrast, real Christian churches acknowledge that other churches also have the truth that is necessary for a person to know God and get to heaven.

Some cult leaders keep up a steady flow of new revelation, so their people think they are the primary source of truth.

3. The cult member is ignorant of church history and tradition.

Cult members have little knowledge of how the church has faced issues of the past. They do not understand how the Bible was preserved. They do not know what doctrines are the foundation of the gospel and essential to Christianity. They think the church has been wrong on its most important doctrines for most of its history. They do not realize that by rejecting the foundational doctrines they have become part of a new religion.

4. The cult member expects persecution and conflict.

If you argue with a cult member, he assumes that you are deceived, ignorant, following wrong motives, and maybe controlled by Satan.

Cult members expect to be persecuted by other religious people. If someone treats them rudely, that confirms to them that they are right.

5. The cult member has beliefs that contradict each other.

It's as though the cult member keeps his beliefs in several different compartments. He does not compare beliefs from one compartment to beliefs in another. He is surprised when people point out the contradictions, and he does not feel the need to resolve them.

6. The cult member was convinced by experience more than by reason.

Cult members seem to use reasoning when they present their doctrines to outsiders. However, their reasoning is based on a blind trust of the cult. The reasons are contrived to support what they already believe.

He accepted the cult because he felt loved and accepted by the members, or because of the way he felt in their worship time, or because of a personal spiritual experience. After he entered a relationship with the cult, he began accepting their teachings without evaluating them. When outsiders argue with the doctrines, he feels that they just don't understand what he experienced. He thinks if he could get them past the arguments and into the experience, they would be convinced.

7. The cult member believes a different gospel.

To get people to be loyal, a cult can't be unique only in minor doctrines; it must be unique in something essential. That's why a cult's distinctive doctrines include a different gospel. Cult members believe that salvation is only through the cult.

8. The cult member is spiritually unsatisfied.

Because he is not saved, he does not have assurance of forgiveness; he does not have victory over the power of sin; he does not have the joy that comes from a relationship with God; and he does not have true Christian fellowship with his fellow cult members. He needs to hear the gospel.

UNDERSTAND THE ORIGINS OF FALSE RELIGIONS

» Where do false religions come from?

To think that a false religion comes only from a profit motive, from false experience, or from demons is to misunderstand the complexity of religion. In responding to false religions, we must understand several elements of their origins.

1. Human reasoning

False religions are often developed and explained by intelligent people who reason about religious beliefs without God's revelation and guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-9).

2. Personal profit motive

Not all religious teachers are sincere. The Bible teaches that false doctrines are taught by people who have violated their consciences, have rejected truth, and are hypocritical (1 Timothy 1:5-6, 19, 1 Timothy 4:2). Some religious leaders have become wealthy with their false doctrines (2 Peter 2:1-3).

3. Spiritual blindness

People who are not in relationship with God are spiritually blinded. Not only do they lack spiritual perception, but even their natural perceptions are not right (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

4. Rejection of truth

The Holy Spirit is faithful to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11). The person who rejects truth is making a willful choice. Therefore, persuasion and explanation are not enough to change his mind. The Bible says that a person who persists

in error on essential doctrines should be rejected from the church because he is committing sin (Titus 3:10-11).

5. Spiritual experience

False religion is not just empty ritual. Demons are involved in false worship. The Bible tells us that people who worship idols are worshipping demons (1 Corinthians 10:20-21). That means that people in false religions may have spiritual experiences.

6. False revelation

The doctrines of false religions are not all of human invention. The Bible tells us that there are doctrines that come from demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

- » There are at least six factors that can contribute to the formation of a false religion. How many of these can you recall without looking back at the text?

General Characteristics of Cults¹

- The group displays zealous and unquestioning commitment to its human leader, and regards his belief system and practices as absolute truth.
- Question, doubt, and dissent are discouraged, or even punished.
- The group uses mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, and ecstatic worship).
- Leaders dictate how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must sometimes get permission to date, marry or change jobs. Leaders prescribe what to wear, where to live, and whether or not members should have children).
- The group claims a special, exalted status for itself, its leader, and its members (for example, the leader is considered to be a special being or the Messiah).
- The leader is not accountable to any authorities.
- The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt to control members.
- Submission to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter their personal goals.
- The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
- The group is preoccupied with making money.

1 Adapted from <https://www.apologeticsindex.org/268-characteristics-of-cults>. Accessed June 3, 2020.

- Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts to the group and group-related activities.
- Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.

SHARE THE GOSPEL

It's good to learn the special characteristics of a cult and how to refute the errors. However, it is most important to share the gospel.

To gain a chance to share the gospel, don't waste time arguing about minor points. Don't offend the cult member by arguing about historical facts about his cult that you cannot prove. Focus on points that are essential to the gospel, and don't let him avoid those points without answering.

When the conversation is over, it is most important that they have heard the message of how to be saved. Arguments about other things will not save them even if you argue better than they do.

When talking to a cult member, it is important for a Christian to show honesty and concern for the person. The Christian should be like a person who is concerned about a friend. A Christian should be angry only the way a friend is angry for a person who is being harmed. If the cult member sees you as an enemy, he will refuse to be convinced. If the discussion feels like a competition, he will refuse to be defeated.

A Christian must show love, acceptance, genuine concern, and openness to truth—showing that he sincerely wants to understand.

DEMONSTRATE THE CHURCH

A healthy local church is the ultimate victory over cult influence in a community.

Evangelism of cult members cannot be done only by individuals persuading individuals. A person does not usually change his religion without thinking about the community of faith he will leave and the one he will enter. If a cult member begins to be attracted by the witness of an individual Christian, he wants to see the community of faith that the Christian represents. He wants to see how the faith is really lived out. He assumes that the message he is hearing has already created a community of faith that he will enter if he is converted.

That means that the nature of the local church is absolutely important. To be attractive to a person who is considering switching from a different community of faith, the local church must have certain characteristics.

- » What are the characteristics of a church that could attract people away from a cult?

Characteristics of an Attractive Local Church

- The members show that their relationship with God is real and satisfying. (The cult member does not have a relationship with God.)
 - The church presents doctrines both as a description of reality and as terms for the relationship with God. (The cult's doctrines contradict each other and do not bring a person to God.)
 - The church demonstrates that they enjoy worshipping God. (The cult's worship is human, fleshly, and demonic.)
 - Church members show purpose for life with the perspective of eternity. (Cults claim to work for eternal priorities. The church must show how to live today with eternity's values.)
 - The church shows the priority of ministry instead of worldly goals. (Cults call for commitment to ministry, but their leaders have worldly goals.)
 - The message of the church satisfies deep spiritual needs. (The cult does not have the gospel that meets spiritual needs.)
 - The church is a family of faith that loves and cares for its members. (The cult may claim to take care of its members but cannot have true Christian fellowship.)
- » What are specific actions you would expect to see at a church that has the characteristics listed?

DEPEND ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Always remember that only the Holy Spirit can cause sinners to know their guilt, understand truth, and desire God. An evangelist cannot be effective unless he is guided and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

- » How would you describe the difference between a person who depends on the Holy Spirit and a person who does not?

LESSON 3

MORMONISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

John met them the first time as he was going through a park on his way home. They were two young men dressed in black pants and white shirts, wearing name tags. They were friendly and wanted to talk to him about their religion. John listened and did not ask many questions. They seemed to be from a normal church and seemed to say the same things he had heard in church. They said they were from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also called Mormons.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Isaiah 41 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage tell us about God? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

MORMONISM

Origin and History

Mormonism started with a man named Joseph Smith. Joseph claimed that one day in 1820, he prayed that God would show him which church was right. While praying, he saw a vision. He saw two men in white robes, who were Jesus and God the Father. God told him that none of the churches were right and that their beliefs were abominations.

- » What are some things that are biblically wrong with this vision?

Joseph claimed a later vision that showed him where to dig up some golden plates with writing on them. He translated this writing with the help of magic eyeglasses and published it as the *Book of Mormon*. Nobody else ever saw the plates or spectacles since the angel took them back to heaven for safekeeping.

Joseph was a member of the Masonic lodge and copied the secret rituals of Mormonism from the manuals of Masonry, including the blood oaths, passwords, and secret handshake.

The Bible says that the Apostles did not have a secret religion, but were open with everything they believed, see 2 Corinthians 4:2 and 2 Timothy 2:2.

The Mormon church was organized in New York in 1830. In 1839, they moved first to Nauvoo, Illinois, then to Missouri. Smith said that Missouri was the Promised Land for the Mormons, and that the temple would be built in Independence, Missouri.² The temple was never built, and the Mormons moved again. Smith made many prophecies that never came true.

The Bible says that if a person's prophecy does not come true, he is not to be trusted as a prophet, see Deuteronomy 18:22.

Smith said, "I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from him; but the Latter-Day Saints never ran away from me yet."³

Joseph attacked and destroyed the printing press of a newspaper that denounced his polygamy. While Joseph was in jail waiting for trial, a mob attacked the jail and killed Joseph and his brother Hiram.

The Bible says that a pastor should not be arrogant, quick-tempered, or violent, see Titus 1:7.

Smith had named his son as his successor, but after Smith's death the majority of the movement followed Brigham Young and moved to Salt Lake City, leaving the "promised land."

Mormons believe that real Christianity ended with the death of the apostles and did not exist on the earth again until Smith started the Mormon church.

- » What are some early events in the Mormon church that should make us doubt that it is true Christianity restored on the earth?

Present Influence

There are many different Mormon denominations that have split off of the original movement started by Joseph Smith. Some of them are very small.

2 Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 57

3 Joseph Smith, "26 May 1844 (Sunday Morning)," in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, accessed July 19, 2024, <https://rsc.byu.edu/words-joseph-smith/26-may-1844-sunday-morning>.

The largest church of Mormons has its headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah and claims a worldwide membership of nearly 17 million.⁴ They publish materials in 188 languages.

They have almost 55,000 full-time missionaries. The missionaries are usually young adults who volunteer for 1½ or 2 years. They can be sent anywhere that Mormons have ministry in the world without being able to choose. They work without any salary.

Difficult Mormon Doctrines

Polygamy

Joseph Smith claimed that polygamy was commanded by God as the way for men to become gods after death, the ultimate goal of every Mormon. Men were supposed to have many wives for eternity, so they could populate new worlds the same way that God populated the earth.⁵

The Bible says that a pastor should have only one wife, see Titus 1:6.

Smith married 27 wives. The youngest was 14 years old. Several of them were already married to other men, but Smith said that previous marriages were not valid if they were done outside of Mormonism. The leader after Smith, Brigham Young, had 57 wives and 165 children.

The Bible says that a person who marries a divorced person commits adultery, see Matthew 5:32.

Smith said that polygamy was God's everlasting covenant, and that it was established before the foundation of the world. Later apostles of the Mormon church said that polygamy is the only way to reach godhood⁶ and would never be changed.

The Mormons continued to practice polygamy until 1890, when the United States government threatened to confiscate the church's land because they were breaking the law. At that time, Mormon prophet Woodruff claimed to receive a revelation from God that polygamy was finished.

- » Most Mormons do not practice polygamy now. Why is the history of their polygamy still a problem for their credibility?

4 All statistics from "Facts and Statistics | Worldwide Statistics," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

5 Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 132

6 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Volume 11, 269

Racism

According to Mormon doctrine, every human was a spirit in heaven before being born. There was a war in heaven, and those who did not fight their best for God were cursed with dark skins. The men quoted in this paragraph were all presidents of the Mormon church and are still considered prophets of God by the Mormons. Joseph Smith said that if dark people believe the Mormon doctrines and do right, their skins will get lighter after several generations. Brigham Young said black skin and flat noses are the curse of Cain. He said it is an eternal principle from God that a man with African blood cannot hold the priesthood. He also said that black slavery is a divine institution. Joseph Fielding Smith said that black people are getting what they deserve in the world because of what their spirits did before they were born. David McKay said that the discrimination of the church against the Negro did not start with man but with God.

The Bible says that in Christ there are not distinctions of nationality and ethnicity, see Galatians 3:28.

In Mormonism, every male member is supposed to become a priest. For most of their history, Mormons did not allow black men to be priests, which meant they were not really members. In 1978, the Mormon church claimed to get a new revelation that changed everything they had said about black people from the beginning, and they now allow black men to become priests.⁷



A statue of the angel Moroni is at the top of every Mormon temple.

- » The Mormons claim to accept black people on equal terms with other races. Why is the history of their racism still a problem for their credibility?

Underwear

All Mormon members are required to wear special clothing under their outer clothing. The special clothing is white and covers most of the body. It is supposed to provide them spiritual protection. It represents their promise to be faithful to the church. They are supposed to wear it day and night.

Heretical Mormon Doctrines

Every Mormon member must believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the *Book of Mormon* is another Testament of Christ, equal to the Bible in authority. They also have a book of revelations called *The Doctrine and Covenants* that they believe is inspired

⁷ Image by ErikaWittlieb from Pixabay, retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/moroni-angel-statue-prophet-mormon-1467937/>.

just like the Bible. They believe the Bible is not enough to establish their most important doctrines.

Mormons claim that their religion is true Christianity. Many of their doctrines contradict the biblical, historic doctrines that support the gospel. It is difficult to find out the heresies when talking to Mormon members because many of them do not know what their prophets taught.

The Mormon church believes that God was once a man like us, but developed until he became God as he is now.⁸ They believe that God the Father has a physical body. He has many wives. His children are born first as spirits, then are sent to the earth to be born as humans.

Mormons say they believe that Jesus was born from a virgin, but the Mormon church teaches that God the Father made Mary pregnant the natural way using his body.

The Bible says that the virgin Mary conceived a child by the Holy Spirit, see Luke 1:34-35 and Matthew 1:18. The Bible also says that God is spirit, John 4:24.

Mormons believe that before Jesus was born on earth, he was a spirit, like other angels; he was not God.

The Bible says that Jesus is the Word of God and that he was God even before he came to be born on earth, see John 1:1-2, 14.

Mormons believe that the Holy Spirit and Jesus are beings separate from the Father, and that they are not equal to the Father. They do not believe in a Trinity.

» In a few words, how would you explain the problem with the Mormon's view of God?

Mormons believe that a male Mormon can grow to be just like God. They believe that many have done this already, so that there are many gods. Apostle Lorenzo Snow said, "As man is, God once was; and as God is, man may become."

"As positively as language could say it, the Old Testament affirms that God is the eternal one, without beginning or end, transcending the limitations of time."

W.T. Purkiser

God, Man, and Salvation

Joseph Smith said, “Here then is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God the same as all Gods have done before you.”

Mormons believe that only a few people will go to an eternal hell. Mormons say that most people will be given a chance to accept Mormonism after death. Faithful Mormons will go to the highest level of heaven.

The Bible says that many people will be sent to hell with the devil and demons, see Matthew 25:41.

Mormons believe that salvation is a reward given for a life of faithful service to God. Mormons do not claim to have personal assurance of salvation.

The Bible says that salvation is a gift of God, not earned by works, see Ephesians 2:8-9.

Mormons believe that all other churches are Satanic, and that there is no salvation except through the Mormon church. No real unity is possible between Mormons and Christians.

- » Why is unity between Christians and Mormons impossible? Give several reasons.

Mormon Tactics

Mormons ask people to pray that God will show them if the book of Mormon is true and if Joseph Smith was a prophet. Many people claim to feel a burning in their heart as an answer to that prayer. They think that the burning feeling confirms that Mormonism is true. The feeling does not confirm to them that they are personally saved.

The Bible says that we should not believe a different gospel even if an angel tells it, see Galatians 1:8.

Mormons claim to believe the Bible, but the Bible contradicts their doctrines. They say that the Bible has errors because of mistakes in copying and translations. They say that further revelation was needed because of errors in the Bible. For a Mormon, the highest authority is the revelation of Joseph

“Holy scripture contains everything necessary for salvation. Anything that is not included in the Bible, and cannot be proved from it, must not be made an article of the Faith or a requirement for salvation. We consider those canonical books of the Old and New Testament—whose authority has never been doubted in the Church—to be holy scripture.”

Adapted from Articles of Religion of the Church of England

Smith. Because they believe he was a prophet of God, they accept all the beliefs of Mormonism that contradict the Bible.

Jesus said that heaven and earth would pass away, but his words would not pass away, Matthew 24:35. He said that nothing of God's Word would be lost before it was all fulfilled, see Matthew 5:18. Peter said that the Word of God remains forever, see 1 Peter 1:25. God expects us to trust his Word instead of looking for new revelation.

Mormons use the same words used by Christians, but they mean different things. They say that Jesus is the son of God, but they don't mean that He is God. They say that the Holy Spirit is the third member of the Godhead, but they don't believe in the Trinity.

They say that Jesus was born of a virgin, but they believe that God the Father has a physical body and used it to impregnate Mary in the natural way.

They say that Jesus suffered and died as an atonement for our sins, and that we can pray to be forgiven, but they believe that heaven is a reward for a faithful life.

Mormons claim to be real Christianity. They claim that all other churches are false. But if a person understands and believes all the doctrines of Mormonism, he does not believe the scriptural gospel and is not a Christian.

"I believe in... Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost."

The Apostles' Creed

(Written in the first century to summarize the apostles' doctrine)

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

USING THE HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE

- » The doctrines in the following list are all denied by Mormons. Look at the *Handbook of Doctrine* to see the importance of each doctrine and the evidence for it. Make sure you understand how the verses referenced prove the doctrine.

1. The Bible is sufficient for doctrine.
2. There is only one God.
3. God the Father is not a man.
4. God has never changed.
5. Jesus is God.
7. The Holy Spirit is God.
8. God is a Trinity.

9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.
13. The unsaved will suffer eternal punishment.

EVANGELISM

It may seem impossible to change the mind of a Mormon, but the fact is that thousands of Mormons leave the Mormon church every year.

Try to show the Mormon that his most important beliefs are contrary to the gospel. Use the evidence provided in the *Handbook of Doctrine*. Provide this evidence for anyone who seems to be getting interested in Mormonism.

Do not agree to pray that God will show you if Mormonism is right. You should never ask God to show you something if you already know the truth. Praying like that gives Satan the opportunity to give you an experience that will confuse you.

Mormons do not have personal assurance of salvation. Many of them live in fear that their life will not be accepted by God. Make sure that you share the gospel with them and tell them how they can have assurance of salvation. That is more important than anything else you can tell them.

You may not see the results of your interaction. The Mormon may not tell you at the end of the conversation that he has changed his mind. However, you don't know the long-term effects of the conversation. The Holy Spirit will continue to use the truth that you gave.

A TESTIMONY

Joanna grew up in the Mormon church and participated in everything they did. She was considered a good example of a Mormon girl. When she left home to attend the University of Idaho, she was invited to attend a Christian Bible study. She went with the hope that she could persuade someone to convert to Mormonism. In the Bible study, she learned things about God from the Bible that she had never realized. She also saw that the Christians there had a relationship with God like she had never had. She left the Mormon church and is living for God even though her family and most of her Mormon friends rejected her. God gave her a new Christian family and more friends than before. Joanna says, "To those who have left the Mormon church and are thinking about giving up on God altogether, don't... God still has a purpose for you."

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Isaiah 41 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Mormonism. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Throughout this course you will be having conversations with followers of the various religions and cults you are studying. You will need to have conversations with members of at least 10 different religious groups. You should present the gospel and other Christian truth.

If it is not possible for you to find a member of the religious group you are studying in a particular lesson, you should find someone else who would be interested in hearing the material.

After your conversation, you will give two reports.

1. You will write a 2-page report and turn this in to your class leader. In it you should describe the basic beliefs of the religious group, a biblical response to the beliefs, your conversation with the unbeliever, and their response to what you said.
2. You will tell your classmates about the conversation when you meet for class.

The 10 conversations and writing assignments are the primary assignments of this course.

LESSON 4

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

FIRST ENCOUNTER

They knocked on Samuel's door and offered him a copy of *Awake* magazine. The visitors were a woman with two of her children. They were well-dressed and friendly. The magazine's cover article was about how to help children do better in school. The woman read a verse of scripture, made a comment on it, and then asked Samuel if he would be interested in being visited for a Bible study. Samuel said he would think about it.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Hebrews 1 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

History

Charles Russell started Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1881 to publish his distinctive teachings. The organization changed its name to Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

Russell wrote a six-volume set of scripture studies. He said that people would be better off to read his books without the Bible than to read the Bible without his books. He said that if a person stopped reading his books and read only the Bible, he would be in darkness within two years, but if he would read only his books without the Bible, he would be in the light.

The Bible says that God's Word is a light that guides us, see Psalm 119:105. The Holy Spirit teaches followers of Christ even if we have no human teacher; see 1 John 2:27.

Doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses have been changed many times.

Leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses have made many prophecies that did not come true. For example, the second leader, Rutherford, predicted that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be resurrected in 1925 and live in a luxurious house that he prepared for them. They did not come, but he lived in the house himself.

The Bible says that if a person's prophecy does not come true, he is not to be trusted as a prophet, see Deuteronomy 18:22.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all other churches are Satanic, and that there is no salvation except through their organization.

Jesus told the disciples that not all servants of God would be in the same organization, see Luke 9:49-50. Salvation is found only through Jesus, not any organization, see Acts 4:10, 12.

- » What are some things you can see already that indicate that the Jehovah's Witnesses are not scriptural Christianity?

Present Influence

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they work in 239 countries and publish in over 900 languages. They have printed around 40 billion pieces of literature.⁹ They have nearly 118,000 congregations, and a membership of more than 8 million active members.¹⁰

Headquarters for the Jehovah's Witnesses are in Brooklyn, New York.

Difficult Doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in government elections or hold any government office, because they believe they are separate from the kingdoms of this world.

In the Bible, men like Nehemiah, Mordecai, and Daniel served God but also worked for heathen nations, see Nehemiah 1:11-2:1; Esther 8:2, Esther 10:3; and Daniel 6:1-3.

They do not serve in the military and do not believe that war is ever right.

They do not celebrate any holidays, whether national holidays, Christian holidays, or birthdays, because they believe that all the celebrations follow pagan customs.

They do not accept blood transfusions, even to save life, because of the scriptures that forbid the eating of blood.

They do not pay tithe, and their pastors do not get salaries.

The Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe a person can be saved immediately by putting his faith in Christ. They believe he must join their organization, learn their doctrines, and begin

9 "What Is the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society?" Jehovah's Witnesses, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/watchtower-society/>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

10 "Fast Facts—Worldwide," Jehovah's Witnesses, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/worldwide/>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

practicing their requirements. Salvation is a process, and the moment when one can know he is saved is not definite.

In the New Testament, people became Christians in the moment when they repented and put their faith in Christ, see Acts 2:41 and Acts 8:26-39. This is possible because we are saved by grace and not by works.

Every member is required to turn in monthly reports of witnessing activity. A member who does not turn in reports is taken from the list of active members and is not considered saved.

The Bible says that God has a list in heaven of those who are saved, see Luke 10:20 and Revelation 21:27. That list does not belong to an earthly organization.

» According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, how is a person saved?

Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept the cross as a Christian symbol, and believe that Jesus died on a stake.

They say that the doctrine of the Trinity should be rejected because it is illogical and impossible to understand, as if there should not be anything in God's nature that is beyond our understanding.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not God, but an impersonal force that comes from God, comparable to the power of electricity.

They claim to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but they believe that only his spirit rose, not his body.

» Why should these doctrines be called "difficult doctrines"?

The most serious doctrinal error of the Jehovah's Witnesses is denying the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be real Christianity. They claim that all other churches are false. But if a person understands and believes all the

"I believe in... one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, Very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father.... And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified."

The Nicene Creed

(written by the church in A.D. 325)

doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses, he does not believe the scriptural gospel and is not a Christian.

Tactics of Jehovah's Witnesses

A person who is interested in joining the Witnesses goes through a Bible study for several months. He has to make changes in his life to follow what he is learning. Then he is baptized and becomes a "publisher," and is supposed to distribute literature from the organization.

On average, publishers spend 10,000 hours witnessing before gaining one new member.¹¹

Each member buys printed materials from the organization to distribute.

They do not call their congregations churches. They believe all churches are Satanic. They call their buildings "Kingdom Halls."

The New Testament is written to churches, see Revelation 1:4 and 1 Corinthians 14:33.

They try to prove their doctrines by scripture to people who trust the Bible without knowing much about it. They have published their own version of the Bible, called *The New World Translation*, with changes that support their doctrine. They changed many verses that imply the deity of Christ. This version was not produced by real biblical language scholars.

They say Jesus is Son of God and Savior of the world, and that he made salvation possible. They believe Jesus was the first thing God created, but that he was merely a perfect man, and not God.

- » In Colossians 1:16-17, the New World Translation added the word "other," so that the verses say that Jesus created all other things, is before all other things, and for him all other things exist. Why do you think the Jehovah's Witnesses added that word?
- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

"The Resurrection was and is the vindication of Jesus. By it the identity of Jesus and the truth of his mission were forever established."

Willard Taylor

God, Man, and Salvation

11 Calculated from figures reported in "2022 Grand Totals," Jehovah's Witnesses, <https://www.jw.org/finder?wtlocale=E&pub=syr22>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

USING THE *HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE*

- » The doctrines in the list below are all denied by Jehovah's Witnesses. Look at the *Handbook of Doctrine* to see the importance of each doctrine and the evidence for it. Make sure you understand how the verses referenced prove the doctrine.

5. Jesus is God.
6. Jesus rose bodily from the dead.
7. The Holy Spirit is God.
8. God is a Trinity.
9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.
13. The unsaved will suffer eternal punishment.

EVANGELISM

Do not treat Jehovah's Witnesses rudely. Because they believe they are persecuted for the truth, they expect evangelical Christians to treat them badly. Instead, show the love of Christ and a genuine concern for them. This is probably the most effective way to win them to Christ.

Don't argue about smaller issues, like celebration of holidays or serving in the military. It is much more important to talk about the basics of the gospel and assurance of salvation.

The priority is to share the gospel. Jehovah's Witnesses do not have assurance of salvation and a personal relationship with God.

A TESTIMONY

Paul was raised a Jehovah's Witness, and many of his relatives are still in the cult. As an adult he drifted away from the organization, but still believed they were right. His wife became a Christian, and he decided to prove to her that the Jehovah's Witnesses were right. In his study he found that they had made many false prophecies. He began to read the Bible and realized that Jesus is God, and not an angel like he had been taught. He read the verse where Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and realized that what he needed was not just religious beliefs, but a relationship with Jesus.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Hebrews 1 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a Jehovah's Witness. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 5

IGLESIA NI CRISTO

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Mark was a Roman Catholic and had once been a priest, but left the priesthood. One day he was starting a new job. As a man was showing him how to do the job, Mark found out that he was a member of Iglesia ni Cristo. Mark said, “I just hold to Jesus; He is my God.” The man said to him that Jesus was not God, and that his pastor could prove from the Bible that Jesus was only a mediator. They showed Mark many scriptures, and he was confused. They convinced him that Jesus is not God.

“At the heart of the Christian faith is the declaration that our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man for our salvation.”

Willard Taylor

God, Man, and Salvation

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Revelation 1 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage tell us about Christ? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

IGLESIA NI CRISTO

Origin and Influence

The name of this organization is translated “Church of Christ.” There are other organizations that use the same words in their name.

Iglesia ni Cristo was started in the Philippines in 1914 by Felix Manalo, a former Seventh-Day Adventist. At his death, his son became the leader, then a grandson after him.

Iglesia has nearly 7,000 congregations in 164 countries.¹² Most are in the Philippines. It is the largest professed Christian organization in the Philippines except for the Roman Catholic Church.

Iglesia ni Cristo works for community improvement. The cult is very involved in politics and tells its members who to vote for in elections. The church's approval is sought by political leaders. Iglesia supported the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Iglesia is a wealthy organization that emphasizes elaborate church buildings.¹³ Iglesia built the largest indoor domed auditorium in the world. Though many of its members are poor, many of the leaders are professionals such as doctors or lawyers.



Iglesia owns radio stations. It publishes two magazines, *Pasugo* and *God's Message*. The magazines constantly attack Roman Catholics and evangelical churches.

Many of Iglesia's converts are former Roman Catholics who already believed the Bible is true but did not have good knowledge of the Bible. Iglesia members show them Bible verses that convince them to give up the doctrines they had been taught.

Iglesia has congregations in major cities around the world. Most Iglesia converts outside of the Philippines are Filipinos who have immigrated to those countries.

» Why are most of the converts to Iglesia from the Roman Catholic Church?

Doctrine of the Church and the Atonement

The most important belief of Iglesia is that it is the true church, restored by Felix Manalo. This doctrine is so emphasized that Iglesia's gospel seems to be comprised of the doctrine of their church and its origin.

Followers of Iglesia believe that Felix Manalo was God's last special messenger. They believe Manalo is specifically mentioned several times in biblical prophecy, such as Isaiah 41:9-10, Isaiah 43:5-7, Isaiah 46:11, and Revelation 7:2-3.

¹² "About Us," Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ), <https://iglesianicristo.net/about-us/>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

¹³ Image: "8651Iglesia Ni Cristo churches Malolos City 09" by Judgefloro, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:8651Iglesia_Ni_Cristo_churches_Malolos_City_09.jpg, public domain.

Isaiah 41:9-10 is about the specially anointed servant of God. Christians believe that this passage refers to Jesus, the Messiah, but followers of Iglesia say that it refers to Felix Manalo. They say that the phrase “ends of the earth” means the last times of the earth. They believe Manalo fulfilled that prophecy because he registered his church on the same day that World War I began, which they call the beginning of the last times of the earth. The term *ends of the earth* in the Bible actually means a place that is geographically distant.

In Isaiah 46:11, God said that he would call for a bird of prey from a distant country of the East that would accomplish his purpose. Christian scholars have usually understood this verse to refer to God’s use of foreign powers to punish Israel, which is consistent with the symbol of a bird of prey. Iglesia believes that the ministry of Felix Manalo was predicted by that verse.

Followers of Iglesia believe that the Christian church became apostate soon after the death of the apostles. They believe that all churches except their own are apostate, and that Manalo restored the truth that was lost after the apostles died.

- » How would you answer the claim of Iglesia, that Manalo fulfilled specific Bible prophecies? Look at the verses they use and consider their contexts.

Iglesia has a unique doctrine of the atonement. It is based on the Old Testament command that a person should not be punished for another person’s crime. The teachers of Iglesia say that Jesus did not die for the sins of others because that would have violated God’s law. But, because the Bible says that the church is the body of Christ, if a person joins the church he is not another person, but part of Christ. Therefore, Jesus was not dying for anyone else when he died for those who are in the church. This doctrine of the atonement makes their church absolutely necessary for salvation, because they are the only true church.

- » Explain how Iglesia claims that Jesus died only for the members of their church.

Many of Iglesia’s hymns are about the church. Their belief that they are the only true church can be seen in this example from one of their songs entitled “One Truth, One Faith”:

One truth, one faith,
One Church, where we found grace
One hope inside
The one true Church of Christ.¹⁴

Other Beliefs and Practices

Leaders of Iglesia are very zealous to convert people to their religion. They urge their people to work at spreading the message of the church.

¹⁴ Lyrics for “One Truth, One Faith,” from <https://incmedia.org/one-truth-one-faith/>, accessed March 16, 2023.

Men and women are seated on separate sides of the sanctuary during worship services. The door is locked at starting time.

Subjects emphasized in their hymns are the church, enduring the hardships of life, and prayers for forgiveness. They pray that God would help them to keep the commandments and become worthy of receiving forgiveness.

Leaders of Iglesia claim that the Bible is the source of their beliefs. Their usual style of teaching is to use many verses throughout the Bible that seem unrelated. They use a variety of versions of the Bible and may quote from six different versions in one sermon. They try to answer any question with scripture. Many of their members claim that they were persuaded to join by the cult's use of scripture.

Iglesia does not believe in the Trinity or in the deity of Christ or the Holy Spirit.

Members of Iglesia constantly attack the doctrine of the deity of Christ in their publications. They teach that Jesus was a special man but was not God. They say that if a person thinks that Christ is God, he really does not know Christ and is not saved.

They believe that at death the soul dies and will not continue to exist unless God resurrects and recreates the person. They do not believe in hell.

They do not believe that a person is saved by putting his trust in Christ after hearing the gospel preached or reading the Bible. They believe that salvation is a process. According to Iglesia ni Cristo, a person must join the church and keep the church's requirements in order to be saved.

However, they do not guarantee that a person is saved by church membership. They believe a person will lose his salvation if he does not live right. Because of these doctrines, many of their members are in fear that they are not saved.

» Why does Iglesia ni Cristo not offer immediate assurance of salvation?

Iglesia ni Cristo claims to be real Christianity. It claims that all other churches are false. But if a person understands and believes all of Iglesia's doctrines, he does not believe the scriptural gospel and is not a Christian.

"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly man."

The Chalcedonian Creed

(written by the church in A.D. 451)

USING THE *HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE*

- » Because Iglesia ni Cristo claims to believe the Bible, the Bible can be used to respond to their doctrines. Use the following doctrinal sections from the *Handbook of Doctrine* to respond to this cult.

5. Jesus is God.
7. The Holy Spirit is God.
8. God is a Trinity.
9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.
13. The unsaved will suffer eternal punishment.

EVANGELISM

You may have noticed that the doctrines of Iglesia ni Cristo are very similar to the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Their members live in fear that they are not yet saved.

It is important to emphasize basic gospel truth. Remember that you are talking to people who are depending on the doctrine that they will be saved by being in the right church. Emphasize the scriptures that teach personal assurance of salvation. Show them that unless they can put their trust in Christ for salvation, they can never know for sure that they are saved.

A TESTIMONY

Miguel was a minister in Iglesia ni Cristo. As he became acquainted with many other pastors in the church, he was disappointed to find that they did not live by the standard of holy living that they preached. They preached to their people that they must live pure and righteous lives. It seemed to Miguel that the worse a preacher lived, the stronger he preached about righteous living. Miguel said that many of the pastors want to leave the organization but do not know how to do it. They are afraid of persecution. Miguel made the decision to leave the organization and hold to biblical doctrine.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Revelation 1 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Iglesia ni Cristo. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 6

EASTERN LIGHTNING

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Shang Hui was a pastor in China. He began to hear of people leaving the church to join the Church of Almighty God. Even his parents had joined them. When he met the cult members, they said, “God’s name was Jehovah, but then it was Jesus on earth. God can do a new thing again, and be another Christ on the earth.” Shang was confused by their teachings. He was discouraged in his ministry because the cult was growing so rapidly.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read 2 Timothy 3 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage tell us about false Christian religions? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

EASTERN LIGHTNING

Origin and Influence

The official name for the cult called Eastern Lightning is Church of Almighty God. The religion was started in 1989 in China. Membership estimates range from 100,000 to 1,000,000.

Eastern Lightning believes that God revealed himself during Old Testament times as Jehovah, then came to the earth as Jesus, and has now come to earth in the form of a woman who calls herself Lightning Deng. Her real name was originally Yang Xiangbin. Deng does not appear publicly, and it is not publicly known what she looks like or where she is. The visible leader of the cult is Zhao Weishan, who may be Yang’s husband.

The Bible says we should not believe it when people say the Messiah is hidden on earth, see Luke 17:23.

Eastern Lightning claims that the Bible is now out of date, and that new revelation is necessary. The cult has published several books, including *Lightning from the Orient*, which

claims to be revelation from God to the female Christ. The books speak to Christians and threaten them with detailed punishments.

Jesus said that his words would never pass away, see Mark 13:31.

Eastern Lightning teaches that the name of Jesus is now obsolete and powerless, and that Deng is now the Christ.

Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies about the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah. Therefore, a new messiah is not needed, see Luke 24:44, Matthew 16:16 and Matthew 24:4-5.

They predicted the end of the world for December 21, 2012.

- » What are some things you see already that show that this organization is not Christian?

Activities and Strategy

Eastern Lightning especially targets Christian churches, even selecting the strongest Christians.

Stories are told of people who had been in Christian ministries leaving the church to join them. Cult members pretend to join churches, then offer Christian pastors large amounts of money if they will convert. The cult is less interested in people of other religions or sects.

The Bible speaks of those who hate what is good, see 2 Timothy 3:3.

The cult uses prostitution to attract potential converts. People who join are separated from their spouses and are required to engage in sexual activities.

Christians maintain purity and protect marriage commitments, see Ephesians 5:3, Hebrews 13:4.

Members of Eastern Lightning have been known to use torture, kidnapping, and murder to accomplish their purposes. They physically attack leaders of Christian organizations. They refuse to let a convert leave their membership.

“This revelation [of the Bible] is now complete. God will add nothing more to it, because it contains everything necessary for men, both in reference to this world and that which is to come, and he has denounced the heaviest judgments against those who shall add to it or diminish anything from it.”

Adam Clarke

Christian Theology

The Bible says that a Christian is to be gentle, obeying the law, and not violent, see Titus 3:1-2.

If a person seems interested in joining, they give gifts, but they threaten violence if a person does not convert. Cult members tell stories of people receiving fatal diseases from God for resisting the cult. They also try to get Christians into sexual sin, then blackmail them.

Wisdom from God is peaceable, merciful, and pure, James 3:17.

Cult participants claim that they are falsely accused of violence, but many Christians and missionaries in China have witnessed their actions.

Members are required to give everything they have to the cult. They are encouraged to leave their families and live with the cult and work at spreading the message.

Eastern Lightning has started expanding the organization in several other countries. They start by giving printed material to people at Chinese churches.

- » How are the actions of the true church contrasted with the actions of Eastern Lightning?

Beliefs

Followers of Eastern Lightning acknowledge that Christ died for our sins, but do not believe a person can be saved by Christ without their organization. To be saved, one must give up his faith in Jesus and instead follow Deng, the female Christ. They deny the resurrection and the second return of Christ.

They believe that anyone who does not accept the message of Deng (the female Christ) will be condemned by God.

The Bible predicted people who would resist truth and try to divide the church, see Jude 1:17-19.

“Jesus descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and dead.”

The Apostles' Creed

Now the responsibility of man is to follow the female Christ, and only if he forsakes his faith in Jesus Christ, tears his Bible in public, calls himself a “son of the devil,” is “conquered” by fully submitting himself to the spoken words of the female Christ

and thus becomes a “victorious one,” can he enter the Kingdom that will be established on the earth by the female Christ.¹⁵

- » How do we know that Jesus Christ and the Word of God are still necessary for the Christian?

The Church of Almighty God (Eastern Lightning) claims to be real Christianity. It claims that all other churches are false. But if a person understands and believes all the doctrines of Eastern Lightning, he does not believe the scriptural gospel and is not a Christian.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

USING THE *HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE*

- » The doctrines in the list below are all denied by Eastern Lightning. Look at the *Handbook of Doctrine* to see the importance of each doctrine and the evidence for it. Make sure you understand how the verses referenced prove the doctrine.

5. Jesus is God.
7. The Holy Spirit is God.
8. God is a Trinity.
9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.

“The pivotal proposition of atonement teaching is that the death of Christ is the procuring, enabling cause of salvation. Christ’s death makes our salvation possible.”

Thomas Oden

The Word of Life

EVANGELISM

Even though the violent, immoral, and deceptive strategies of this cult make them seem like a terrorist organization, many of their followers do not know about the leaders’ activities. Especially in countries other than China, people impressed by the cult may not believe the accusations against them. Therefore, it is important for a Christian to be able to respond to their doctrines.

It is not possible for a person who fully participates in the cult and believes their doctrines to be a Christian. Therefore, they have a spiritual hunger that is not satisfied. The priority of a Christian should be to share the gospel with them.

15 “The Development and Beliefs of the Eastern Lightning Cult”, China For Jesus, accessed November 1, 2023, http://www.chinaforjesus.com/EL_development.htm.

Many people join Eastern Lightning because of fear. We must preach that faithfulness to the truth is more important than any earthly condition. We also know that the kingdom of God will triumph.

SPECIAL WARNING: DON'T LEAVE HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY

Christianity from ancient times until now has had a great variety of beliefs. However, the foundational doctrines about the nature of God and the nature of Christ were established and defended by the church in all ages. Early councils that represented all churches wrote statements of biblical doctrine, and all gospel-preaching churches have considered these doctrines necessary. Biblical churches look very different from one another, and disagree on many things, but they agree on certain essentials.

Some cults say that all churches but their own are wrong on the essential doctrines and are not truly Christian. They disagree not just on small doctrines, but on the doctrines that are necessary to the gospel. They deny the things that distinguished Christians from other religions. A cult that denies essential Christianity is another religion and should not claim to be Christian.

When a cult says that it is right and that all other churches are wrong, we need to realize what they are implying. They are saying that the ancient councils that represented all churches were wrong. They are saying that the millions of Christians who lived in all ages were wrong. They are saying that the godly people you know who are examples of Christ are wrong. They are saying that all the men and women around the world who love God, pray, worship, testify to the grace of God, suffer persecution, follow the Bible, and share the gospel are all wrong. The cult says that all these were wrong on even the basic truth that makes a person a Christian.

If the cult is right, God did not choose to guide his church in essential gospel truth for centuries. If the cult is right, it is strange that sincere, godly people everywhere still reject their doctrines. It is true that religious organizations may become worldly, powerful, and rich and not really be interested in truth, but godly and spiritual people in churches everywhere hold to essential biblical truth.

A TESTIMONY

Lia joined the Eastern Lightning cult because she thought they were Christians, but soon realized they didn't believe in the Bible or Jesus. She decided to leave, but they beat her legs with an iron bar, so she could not walk. They said they would kill her if she left. Later she did escape with the help of a Christian. She is now in a church and seeking God's help. She is still crippled from the injuries from Eastern Lightning.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read 2 Timothy 3 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Eastern Lightning. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Try to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. This cult may not exist in the country where you are studying. If not, present the material to someone else and get their response. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 7

APOCALYPTIC CULTS

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Peter was on his way to visit a church when he saw the huge sign: “Judgment Day, May 21, 2011. The Bible guarantees it!” Peter wondered what he should do if the message were true. It seemed that there would be no reason to send his children to school, or finish building his house, or pay back money he had borrowed. He wondered if he should donate all of his money to help spread the message.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Mark 13 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What are the warnings that Jesus gave in this passage? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

APOCALYPTIC CULTS

Introduction to Apocalyptic Cults

There are hundreds of apocalyptic cults. They have great variety and many different names. Often they are started by a person who claims to have new revelation about the future. Some of them last only a short time, with a few members, and others become large. Some of the organizations covered in other sections of this course have characteristics of apocalyptic cults. For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have several times made prophecies to motivate their members, but the prophecies did not come true.

Why Apocalyptic Cults Exist

Many people have a feeling that the world is coming to a time of crisis that will change everything we have known to be normal. The crisis may be described in terms of economics, ecology, war, politics, or cultural change.

Many new novels and films describe a fictional apocalypse that occurs through a worldwide plague, or nuclear war, or a giant meteor striking the earth. In these stories, most of the

people on the earth are killed, and the people who survive enter an era where life is completely different from anything they have known.

Because of this fear and expectancy, people are looking for answers about how to face the future. Some people are looking for religious explanations. They become interested in the message of an apocalyptic cult. An apocalyptic cult is started by a person who claims to be a prophet with new revelation. Apocalyptic cults try to meet people's emotional and spiritual needs by explaining the condition of the world and what we should be doing to prepare.

Apocalyptic cults have existed in all ages. A professed prophet named Montanus lived in the second century of the church and made predictions about the soon coming of the kingdom of God and the end of the world's system. All through the history of the church have been people who claimed to know the time when Christ would return to set up his kingdom and judge the wicked. Millions of people have been deceived and disappointed.

» What examples of apocalyptic cults have you seen or heard about?

The leaders of apocalyptic cults do not respond to the crises of the era in a biblical way, though they claim to be Christians and use the Bible. Below are some characteristics of most apocalyptic cults.

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Cults

1. They set dates for specific predictions.

They may predict the second coming of the Lord.

Jesus said that nobody knows the time of his return, see Matthew 24:36.

They may predict the end of the world's governments. They may predict a disaster that will destroy the wicked people of the world. They may give a specific time when this is supposed to happen. When it fails to happen, they say that their prediction meant something different. They may set a new date. They usually make many smaller predictions that also do not come true.

“Yes, I believe that this world, as we know it, will come to an end. When, I do not know, but all history is pointing toward a climactic event when everything now seen will be purified by fire. This is not fanciful imagination but the clear and repeated testimony of the Bible.”

Billy Graham

The Bible says that if a person's prophecy does not come true, he is not to be trusted as a prophet, see Deuteronomy 18:22.

2. They have new interpretations of scripture.

They give new meaning to certain phrases in scripture that nobody ever thought of before. The meaning is something that cannot be proved from scripture itself. The professed prophet claims that the interpretation was given to him by revelation, which makes it new revelation and not interpretation. This is misuse of the Bible because they say the Bible teaches their ideas, but really they are depending on new revelation to add meaning to the Bible that was not there already. The people who believe the message are the ones who have already decided to trust the prophet. They are not following the authority of the Bible but the authority of the cult leader.

The Bible says that scripture is not for individuals to give their own meaning. God inspired and controlled the writing process so that it means what God wanted to say, see 2 Peter 1:20-21.

3. They require unchristian actions.

They call for behavior from their members that has never been typical of Christianity. They may require a separation from society and normal life. They have a hostile attitude against those who are enemies and may even encourage violence. They may use force against their members and their families. When they get into trouble for their actions, they call it persecution. They believe that God will intervene miraculously in response to their radical faith. Some of the apocalyptic cults have ended in suicide.

Titus 3:1-5 contrasts the behavior that should be typical of a Christian with the behavior of sinners.

4. They separate their members from other relationships.

Some apocalyptic cults require their members to give everything they have to the organization. The members live together in a compound and separate from any friends and relatives who are not in the cult. They may be taught to consider all outsiders to be enemies. The followers are ultimately disappointed because the fellowship is not based on truth and cannot be true Christian fellowship.

Jesus prayed that we would be in the world but be different from it as he is, see John 17:14-16.

» This question introduces the next section: What harm is done by apocalyptic cults?

Effects of the Apocalyptic Cults

The apocalyptic cults are destructive in several ways.

1. They attract people from Christian churches to false doctrine.
2. They disappoint their followers and cause them to lose their faith completely.
3. They claim to be Christians, but have unchristian behavior which mars Christ's reputation.
4. They cause people to doubt the scriptures about God's kingdom and the return of Christ.

The Christian Response to the World's Crisis

The Bible speaks to times like these. Scriptures like the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation were written in times of an uncertain future, chaos in society, international war, and persecution. They were times that tested the faith of the people who believed in God. It seemed that everything was out of control and that everything good could be destroyed.

The great theme of prophetic scriptures is that God is in control and will eventually establish his kingdom and reward the righteous.¹⁶ The Bible affirms that times will be difficult and that evil may seem to rule for a time. Believers are called to hold their faith in

God and live faithfully in spite of the world's conditions. Just as those scriptures applied to those times, they apply to any other times when faith is similarly tested.

The book of 2 Thessalonians was written to Christians who were expecting Jesus' return and God's judgment day to occur soon. They were hearing from people who claimed to know that the events had already happened (2 Thessalonians 2:2). They were confused about what they ought to be doing.

The Apostle Paul described some events that would take place shortly before the return of Christ, including the rule of a person called "the man of lawlessness" and "the son of destruction" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

**"Jesus shall come again,
with glory, to judge
both the quick and the
dead: whose kingdom
shall have no end."**

The Nicene Creed

¹⁶ Daniel 2:44, Daniel 4:34, Daniel 6:26, Daniel 7:27, Revelation 1:7, Revelation 6:15-17, Revelation 11:15, Revelation 17:14, Revelation 19:11-21.

What is especially important for us is to see Paul's concluding directions to the believers in 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17. He told them to be established and to keep following what they had been taught. They were not to leave the basic principles of the Christian life because of any events that might be coming. In verse 17 he prays that God would establish them in every good word and work.

Even if the end of the world is near, it is not a time for us to leave the principles of Christian living. The things that have always been the most important will be the most important all the way to the end. We are to evangelize the lost, hold to true doctrine, live holy lives, fellowship with believers, do good to others, and show love to all people.

- » What are the most important things to remember if we are living in apocalyptic times?
- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

The first priority when talking to a member of an apocalyptic cult is to make sure that he really understands the gospel. You may assume that a cult member believes the doctrines of Christianity and has only added some distinctive prophecies, but the cult may actually contradict essential doctrines.

Next it is important to point out how the cult has separated from historic Christianity. Point out the actions and teachings that would never have been accepted by the godly people of the church through the centuries.

Point out the fact that Matthew 24:36 tells us that the time of Christ's return is not revealed.

Point out that their interpretation of prophetic scriptures is based only on their trust of the leader and not on normal principles of interpretation.

Point out that Deuteronomy 18:22 tells us that a person is not to be trusted as a prophet if even one of his prophecies is false.

A TESTIMONY

Dorcas was raised in a Jehovah's Witness family. As a child she believed that the teachings in the Kingdom Hall came straight from God. One night the leaders called a special meeting. They announced that Armageddon would occur in 1975. That was seven years away. Dorcas cried that night in fear of what would happen to her family when Armageddon came. For the next few years her family and others worked hard for the cult. They believed that not much time remained. The cult's magazines printed pictures of children, adults, and old people being destroyed in Armageddon. On the last day of 1975, many people went to bed

expecting the end to come that night. Dorcas awoke the next morning amazed that everything was still the same. Her parents didn't talk about the prophecy again. Dorcas eventually stopped going to the cult's meetings, but did not know where to find the truth. Years later Dorcas met a man who explained salvation to her, and she was saved.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Mark 13 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of an apocalyptic cult. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 8

HINDUISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Amit was raised in a Hindu family and participated in all the religious customs. As a child he prayed every day. He was sincere but felt a spiritual emptiness. Amit read Hindu writings to try to understand his own religion better. He was taught that beliefs don't matter because all religions are ways to God. He wanted to find real truth that would lead him to God, but wondered if truth like that really existed.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Isaiah 46 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What contrast does the passage make between God and idols? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

HINDUISM

Introduction to Hinduism

The religion of Hinduism began in India earlier than any history can determine. Hinduism has no individual founder and no organization that contains all followers. There are more than a billion Hindus,¹⁷ but they have a great variety of beliefs. Many Hindus practice only some of the Hindu religious customs.

Hindus believe that their religion originates from ancient Indian writings called *Vedas*. The *Vedas* are made up of hundreds of volumes.

There is no doctrinal statement that represents universal Hindu belief about deity. Most Hindus

“The idea of God as infinitely wise is at the root of all truth. It is a datum of belief necessary to the soundness of all other beliefs about God.”

A.W. Tozer

The Knowledge of the Holy

17 “Religion: Hinduism,” Joshua Project, <https://joshuaproject.net/religions/5>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

believe in many gods who have personality and do both good and evil. Hindus use many idols that represent the gods and spirits that they worship.

Jesus said we are to worship only the one true God, see Luke 4:8.

Some Hindus worship one god as supreme. Some Hindus call the supreme god *Shiva*; other Hindus have other names and descriptions of their supreme god. *Shiva* has a wife and children. *Shiva* does both good and evil. Some call *Shiva* the creator, but they do not mean that the world was created at a particular time.

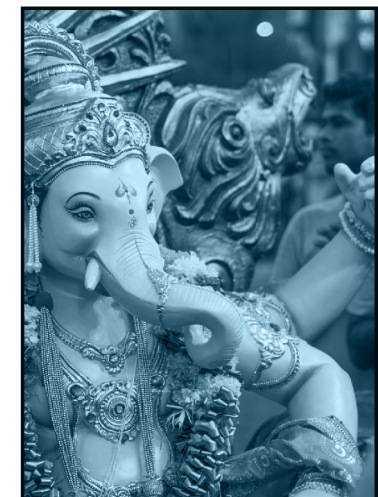
Even when Hindus talk about a supreme god, they do not mean the same thing that Christians mean when they refer to God. Christians believe that God is the ultimate reality and personal Creator of the world. Hindus say that they believe in one god, but it is not a god that thinks or communicates, except through the various gods who have taken physical form.

The prophet Jeremiah said that God created by his power; and all false gods will perish, see Jeremiah 10:9-12. God communicates with people and tells us who he is, see Isaiah 46:9-10.

Hindus believe that there is an ultimate, impersonal reality that originated the world. Some Hindus call the ultimate reality Brahman. They believe that everything that exists is part of Brahman. They believe that Brahman is the soul or essential self in every living thing. They may even say that they believe in only one god, but what they mean is that everything that exists is one, and it is god.

Genesis 1 says that God created everything by his command. He is distinct from the things he made, see Genesis 1:1.

Hindus believe that any great leader who benefits people might later become a god. Every person is a manifestation of Brahman, but a god is a person who manifested Brahman more than others.¹⁸



“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

The Apostles’ Creed

- » What are some differences between the Christian and Hindu concepts of God?

18 Image by Ganesh Chaturti from Unsplash, retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/Mawa0oZ3YKs>.

Hindus claim to be tolerant of all religions. They have a saying that “All truth is one.” They say that there are many paths to the goal, even though different religions have very different concepts of the life a person should live and the goal he should try to reach. They don’t mean that “all truth is one” in the sense that all the truths in various religions are rationally consistent with each other. They mean that all truth is an expression of the ultimate reality that cannot be put into statements.

The Apostle Paul said a primary responsibility of a pastor is to teach true doctrine, see Titus 1:9. All religion is not the same, see 1 Timothy 1:3-6.

Christians believe that even though God is greater than we can understand, he has revealed some true statements about himself. If a religion contradicts the truth God has revealed about himself, that religion is wrong.

Some Hindus believe that Jesus was a person who practiced the principles of Hinduism and was a great teacher like others who have lived in other times. They do not believe he is the unique Son of God.

Hindus believe in endless cycles of time, with no beginning, no ending, and no events that change things permanently.

Hindus believe in reincarnation. They believe it is the rebirth of a person’s essential self into various life forms, many times.

The Bible says that people die once then go to judgment before God, see Hebrews 9:27.

Hindus believe in karma. According to the concept of karma, a person receives good and bad consequences for his actions in this life and the next. Karma is a natural law of the universe, not based on laws imposed by any god, and not regulated by any god.

The Christian obeys the law of God and has a personal relationship with God, see John 14:15. The Bible tells us that Christ will judge all people by his righteous standard, see Acts 17:31, 2 Corinthians 5:10, James 4:12.

A person is guilty if he does something that harms himself or others. He can balance wrong actions with good actions to get better consequences. But, there is no forgiveness.

“The Christian believes in man, the infinite worth of the human individual, and the priceless potential to be realized through the redeeming grace of God.”

W.T. Purkiser

Exploring Our Christian Faith

The Hindu's ultimate goal is to find release from the cycle of reincarnation in an eternal condition called nirvana. Some Hindus define this condition as an eternal existence of the self, while others see it as absorption into Brahman, like a drop of water falling into the sea. Many Hindus believe that the person ceases to exist as a conscious individual when he is absorbed into Brahman.

The goal of the Christian is to live eternally in a personal relationship with God in heaven, see Revelation 21:3.

- » What are some differences between the Hindu concept of nirvana and the Christian concept of heaven?

Hindu Lifestyle

According to Hindu belief, those who fully renounce the world are not to produce, prepare, or store food. They must beg for their food every day. Some depend on relatives; others go from house to house to beg. The best examples of Hindu followers do not work to support themselves.

The Bible says that a person should not depend on others and refuse to work, see 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

Many Hindus are vegetarians. Among those who eat meat, most do not eat beef because cows are revered. Food is often offered to idols before it is eaten, even in homes.

The Bible says that all meat may be eaten, see 1 Timothy 4:3-4.

Hindus have very elaborate temple art and architecture, costumes, and personal adornments with religious significance.

Hindus believe that they should care equally about every form of life. They believe a person should care about a suffering dog the same as he would care about his son. They believe that no relationship should make a person have emotions about someone's need. They believe that to care for someone because of a relationship is a wrong motivation. They believe that Brahman has no emotions about anything, having no sorrow and no joy. A Hindu is supposed to try to reach that level.

When Hindus talk about caring equally about everyone, they may sound like they have the same idea as Christians. Actually it is not the same at all. Christians believe they should love others as they love themselves. Hindus believe you should not have concern about others or yourself.

For a Hindu, to meditate means to have complete control over your own mind, so that no thought comes without your permission. Their worship is designed to empty the mind. That

is why they use repetitious sounds and words and exercises. The purpose of meditation is to think about nothing. Yoga began as a Hindu system of exercises for clearing the mind.

Hindus pray to gods as a way to focus the mind. If a Hindu achieves total focus, he will no longer need gods and will not need to pray. They do not pray directly to Brahman.

» Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

Because Hindus do not believe the Bible, using proof texts to refute their beliefs will not change their mind. Instead, present the biblical gospel in a way that addresses their need. The Christian's personal testimony of relationship with God helps to touch the Hindu's need to know God.

God, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, is a person who thinks and speaks, in contrast to the Hindu Brahman.

God is righteous and loving, with no evil side to his nature. He can always be trusted, in contrast to the Hindu gods who have selfish motives and conflicts in their own character.

God loves mankind and created us with the purpose of living in relationship with him. He has a design for our lives and a plan for us to live in heaven with him eternally. Each of us can personally know God as Father.

People are individually separated from God because they have sinned against his will. Every person will be judged individually by God for sin. This is different from the Hindu concept of impersonal karma that operates as a law of nature.

Jesus came as the incarnation of God to die as a sacrifice for our sins so that we can be forgiven. Each person can come into relationship with God by asking for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice.

By forgiveness we come into personal relationship with the God who loves us and has promised to adopt us as his children, rather than worshipping distant, uncaring gods who have made no promises to us.

A TESTIMONY

When Amit first met a Christian, he was offended at the idea that there is only one way to God. When he read the parables of Jesus in the Bible, he was amazed at how they applied to his life. As he researched the accuracy of the Bible, he believed that the Bible has been well preserved from its original writing. One day he saw a film about the crucifixion of Jesus

and made the decision to put his faith in Christ. Amit says, “If Christianity is merely one of many equally valid religions, then the sacrifices I made, including the loss of my family’s peace, were senseless. I was comfortable in my Hindu faith and enjoyed an active prayer life; I only gradually felt a void and stubbornly resisted God’s call from within the church. It was truth and love that finally forced me to accept Christ as Lord.”

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Isaiah 46 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a Hindu. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 9

BUDDHISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Yeo grew up in a Buddhist family in the Philippines. He remembers times when it was not safe to go to the marketplace because Muslims were killing Buddhists for their religion. Yeo sometimes went with his mother to the Buddhist temple to burn incense. One day his sister was sick and dying. A doctor was there but could not help. Yeo's mother prayed frantically for Buddha to help her.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Genesis 3 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage tell us about God, man, sin, and the world? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

BUDDHISM

Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism was developed by Siddhartha Gautama. Nothing was written about the life of Siddhartha Gautama until 400 years after his death, so details about his life are not certain.

Gautama was born at around 563 B.C. He was the son of a king of a small part of India. As a young man he escaped his keepers to get out and see the world. He saw people in poverty and disease, and concluded that life is essentially sorrow and suffering.

Gautama had an experience which he said enlightened him about the nature of reality. The word *Buddha* means “enlightened.” Gautama is often called “the Buddha.”

The Bible tells us not to trust a message from a spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ, see 1 John 4:3. The enlightenment that Gautama received was false.

Present Influence

Today there are many different sects of Buddhism. They are not united in a worldwide organization.

Writings considered holy scriptures by Buddhists would fill thousands of volumes. Therefore, each sect focuses on certain ones, rather than trying to study them all.

- » How does a Christian view the Bible differently from the way a Buddhist views his scriptures?

The number of professing Buddhists in the world who purposely follow Buddhist teachings is at least 350 million. More than a billion people would call themselves Buddhists just because they have been taught Buddhism, and they are not loyal to a different religion.

Many people call themselves Buddhists because they follow some of the advice of Buddhist writings. They may not understand the foundational doctrines of Buddhism nor participate in organized groups.

Beliefs about Deity and Time

Buddhists do not believe in a supreme God who is a person. Instead, they believe in an ultimate reality that is the total of everything that exists. Therefore, Buddhists meditate, but they do not pray, because they do not believe that there is a God who speaks and listens. Buddhists have writings that are called prayers, but they do not address anyone. No gods of any kind are important in Buddhism.

It is a great privilege for Christians to pray in confidence that God hears, see Matthew 6:6-8 and 1 John 5:14-15.

Buddhists believe in endless cycles of time, with no beginning, no ending, and no events that change things permanently.

The Bible says there are key events, and that time will not always continue as it is now, see 2 Peter 3:10.

**“God is indeed there.
He is there as He is here and
everywhere, not confined to
a tree or stone, but free in the
universe, near to everything,
next to everyone, and through
Jesus Christ accessible
to every loving heart.”**

A.W. Tozer

The Knowledge of the Holy

Reincarnation and Nirvana

Gautama and most of the people of his culture already believed in reincarnation before he developed his new religion. Reincarnation means that after a person dies he is born again as another person or a creature such as an animal or insect. By reincarnation a person lives many lives.

Buddhists believe that if a person's good deeds (good karma) exceed his bad deeds (bad karma), he can be born into a better life the next time.

The Bible says that our works do not earn acceptance with God or pay for our sins, see Romans 3:20.

According to Gautama, a person's conscious self is not reborn. Only some of the material that he was made of is used to make a new creature. That means death in one life is really the end of a personality.

Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe on him, see John 10:27-28.

Sometimes people like the concept of reincarnation, but because life is so miserable, Gautama felt that living many lives is not a good thing. He believed that a person should have the goal of escaping the cycle of reincarnation.

A serious Buddhist follows the Buddhist way of life in order to rid himself of all desires. If he succeeds, he will not desire or enjoy anything or any human relationship.

For the Christian, human relationships are very important and bring joy, see 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

“On its very first pages, the Bible rejects both philosophical pantheism (the teaching that God and the total universe are identical) and deism (the theory that God started the universe operating and left it to its own impersonal laws thereafter). God is not identified with his universe. It is his handiwork. On the other hand, the universe could not exist apart from God's creative and sustaining power.”

W.T. Purkiser

God, Man, and Salvation

“I believe in... one Lord Jesus Christ... by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven... and was made man and was crucified for us.”

The Nicene Creed

A Buddhist believes that when he dies, he will enter nirvana instead of being born as another living thing. This is the ultimate goal of a committed Buddhist. Sometimes people assume that nirvana is like the Christian concept of heaven. But nirvana means nothingness, the end of self, like the blowing out of a candle. If a person reaches nirvana, he no longer exists as a thinking being.

In original Buddhism, a person did not have the possibility of reaching nirvana at the end of his present life unless he was a Buddhist monk. A woman did not have the possibility of reaching nirvana until being born again as a man and becoming a monk.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

The beliefs that Gautama taught after his enlightenment are summarized in the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

1. Life is full of sorrow and suffering with no real happiness.
2. Suffering is the result of desires, because nothing we desire is permanent.
3. Detachment from all desires is the way to escape suffering.
4. The eight principles of Buddhist ethics for life take a person toward detachment from all desires and to nirvana.

» Is there anything in the four noble truths that a Christian can agree with?

According to Gautama, all suffering comes because of desires. If a person could desire nothing, he would not suffer. To be a committed Buddhist, one must learn to take pleasure in nothing.

The story is told of a Buddhist monk named Sangamaji. He became a monk and left his family to spend all of his time wandering and meditating. Once his wife found him, laid their child in front of him, and begged him to help support them. Sangamaji sat without answering until she left. Gautama said that this man had reached the goal of Buddhism because he felt no joy when the wife came or sorrow when she left.

Christians commit to marriage as a relationship that brings joy, see Ephesians 5:28.

» How is the Buddhist concept of a perfect life different from the Christian concept?

The Lifestyle of Buddhism

Buddhism emphasizes a life of virtue. Buddhists believe that an action is virtuous if it benefits yourself and others, and does not harm anyone. A person's intentions are considered more important than the actual results of his action.

The mental and spiritual exercises Buddhists practice are designed to help a person move from self-centeredness. Buddhists believe that all anxiety comes from caring too much about self. They want to forget self and love all conscious creatures (creatures that have minds). The problem is that without relationship with God, there is not a basis for selflessness and love.¹⁹

- » Why can a person not be truly selfless and loving without a relationship with God?

Many people who call themselves Buddhists have grown up in a culture of Buddhism and have never seriously considered anything else. The assumptions of the religion seem to them the only reality. The rituals are part of their daily lives.



Typically, people who convert to Buddhism from another religion are attracted by the religion's philosophy of life. They do not join because they want to seek nirvana. They join because Buddhism seems to offer a life that is free from anxiety and conflict. Many people feel that in Buddhism they find freedom from stress and that their life is more orderly than before.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM/USING THE *HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE*

Because Buddhists do not profess to be Christians and do not recognize the Bible as the final authority, it is not enough just to show them that their beliefs are not consistent with the Bible. They already know that the Bible supports a religion different from their own.

It is still important and effective to share the gospel. When you are in a conversation with a Buddhist, tell him you would like to explain the foundation of your beliefs. Share the gospel simply. Even though the Buddhist does not claim to believe the Bible, God's truth has power because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

You should also share your testimony. Tell how the gospel brought you into relationship with God, brought you forgiveness and deliverance from sin, and gave meaning to your life.

Beyond the basics of the gospel presentation and personal testimony, you can speak to the special needs of the Buddhist with the truth of the gospel. Buddhism struggles to explain the suffering and sorrow of life. It fails to explain the reality of good things and the joy that exists. The teachings of Buddhism deny the importance of everything that seems important in life,

¹⁹ Image by Honey Kochphon Onshawee from Pixabay, retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/buddhists-monks-meditate-thailand-453393/>.

including human relationships. It is a religion without a personal God who has relationship with his worshippers. It provides neither eternal life nor significant individual destiny.

Suffering

The Buddhist believes that suffering is meaningless and unreal. This is an unsatisfying explanation.

Christianity explains the condition of suffering in the world. The world was created perfect by God, but man sinned and brought a curse on the world. This explains why there is aging, sickness, and death. Sin is also demonstrated in the continued evil actions of people.

Happiness

The Buddhist believes that there is no real happiness in life, and we should therefore desire nothing. This contradicts the experiences of joy and pleasure people have, especially in personal relationships.

The fact that the world was created by God explains why there is still much joy and pleasure in life, even though the world is not perfect like God originally designed it.

Like Buddhists, Christians realize that earthly things are not permanent. We should not live as if we will keep what we have here forever. However, a Christian can enjoy life because he knows he will live forever with God. Though things are not permanent, they are real, and our choices have eternal results. This gives purpose and significance to human life.

Relationships with Others

If fully lived out, the teachings of Buddhism would lead one away from relationships because relationships are considered meaningless. But human nature has a deep need for committed relationships.

God has created us for relationships with other human beings. We desire to be valued by others. We desire to make commitments to others. Relationships are especially significant because we know that all people are specially created as eternal beings with eternal destinies.

Relationship with God

Buddhism is a religion without a God. But each of us has a deep need to know God and worship him.

God designed us to live in relationship with him. A person is never fulfilled and satisfied until he is in a personal relationship with God. The relationship with our Creator will be eternal, and heaven is the place where we will live with God.

Forgiveness for Sins

Buddhism has no concept of forgiveness for sins. There is no one to hold man accountable for doing wrong, and there is nothing that can atone for wrongs done. Because of these things, Buddhists have no assurance of forgiveness.

The Bible shows us that every person is guilty and needs to be forgiven of sin. Because Jesus made atonement for us, we are assured that we can be forgiven.

Use the following sections from the *Handbook of Doctrine* to share with a Buddhist:

- 9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
- 11. We receive salvation by faith.
- 12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.

A TESTIMONY

Yeo's mother prayed desperately for Buddha to heal her dying daughter, but it seemed that there was no help. Then she remembered a Christian missionary named Wong who was preaching nearby. She sent Yeo to bring him. When Wong arrived, he said, "Don't pray to Buddha; pray to Jesus." Wong began to pray, and the girl was healed. Yeo's mother became a Christian that day, and Yeo became a Christian later.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Genesis 3 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a Buddhist. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 10

TAOISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

James grew up in a Taoist family in Malaysia. His family had idols and an altar for worshipping ancestors. James was afraid of the idols, but made offerings to them because he was afraid they would punish him if he didn't. He had heard of Jesus, but thought that Jesus was a god only for Westerners.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Psalm 16 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage say that God does for his people? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

TAOISM

Introduction to Taoism

Taoism may have been started by a book called *Tao Te Ching* written by a Chinese man named Laozi sometime before 350 B.C. It is not certain whether Laozi was an individual or if the writings were collected from several writers. The writings of a man named Zhuangzi also influenced the religion.

Taoism is also called Daoism.

The collection of scriptures for Taoism includes more than 1,000 books. The collection is called the *Tao Zang*.

Taoism's practices and concepts have been influenced by Confucianism and aspects of local Chinese religions and culture. Taoist practices vary widely from one place to another.²⁰



20 Image by Julian Tong from Unsplash, retrieved from https://unsplash.com/photos/ng7f_jtgbCc.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Taoists because many people practice it individually and because it is blended with a variety of religions. It has been estimated that there are 400 million Taoists in China. Taoism exists among Chinese populations in various parts of the world, such as Singapore and Taiwan. There are also many in Vietnam and Korea.

A variety of schools and monasteries for Taoism exist, not united in one organization. Taoists practice rituals that are intended to influence gods and spirits. Many Taoist monasteries require their monks to be vegetarians. Rituals can include sacrifices of pigs, ducks, or fruit. Sometimes special paper with pictures is burned, with the idea that the thing in the picture becomes a real thing in the spirit world, creating something for spirits to use.

The Bible tells us not to do things that people in other religions do to influence the spirit world, see Deuteronomy 18:10-12. God is a person, and he is our Father; and we can talk to him, see Matthew 6:7-9.

- » How should a Christian be involved in the spirit world?

Different groups of Taoists believe in different groups of gods. They pray to and interact with gods, spirits, and ancestors.

The Bible says that those who follow other gods will find sorrow instead of the things they want, see Psalm 16:4.

They practice fortune-telling and various forms of divination. Some believe in mediums, a person through whom spirits communicate. In China and other places where there are many Taoists, they have several parades each year. Participants perform in costumes that represent various gods or spirits. The participant is considered to be possessed by the god or spirit he is representing.

Some religions consider spirit possession of a person to be a good thing, but the Bible shows that a person used by a spirit is a slave and needs deliverance, see Acts 16:16-18.

**“We believe in one God
the Father All-sovereign,
maker of heaven and
earth, and of all things
visible and invisible.”**

The Nicene Creed

**“It is this independent
one who deals intimately
with creation, this infinite
one who sponsors and
nurtures finitude at every
level, this immense one
who cares about the
whole cosmos and the
smallest sparrow, this
eternal one who gives and
sustains time and
temporal flow.”**

Thomas Oden

The Living God

The god who rules the world is called Yu-huang, the Jade Emperor. According to legend he was a man born to an emperor, who grew to be the god he is now. He rules over all other gods and spirits. Though Yu-huang is the ruling god, above him is another god, uninvolved with the world, who has absolute qualities. Yuan-shih T'ien-tsun is called the First Principal, and is believed to be without beginning or end, existing before all else. He is believed to be self-existing, limitless, changeless, invisible, with all virtues, present everywhere, and the source of all truth.

» What is missing in the Taoist's concept of God?

Tao is the Taoist term for the reality that includes and sustains everything that exists. The term *Tao* is also translated as “the way” because it refers to the way that things are sustained and reshaped.

The Bible says that Jesus is the one who created and sustains everything, see Colossians 1:16-17.

Taoists believe that the Tao cannot be explained or understood. They say that the Tao is not anything that can be said about the Tao.

We cannot understand everything about God because he is infinite, but he has revealed truth about himself. Jesus came to show us what God is like, see John 1:18 and John 14:6-9.

» How does Christian theology differ from Taoist's statements about the Tao? Can we understand God?

Taoists believe that all opposites are illusions or simply complementing aspects of reality.²¹ The goal of the Taoist is to bring himself into harmony with the forces of the universe. His purpose is to improve his health and lengthen his life. A Taoist believes a person can become immortal if he fits into the forces of the universe perfectly. Taoists believe some people have achieved this and should be worshipped as gods. Taoists believe Jesus was a person who was spiritually advanced and showed the way for people to become gods.

The Bible tells us that we must not worship anyone but God; see Matthew 4:10 and Revelation 22:8-9.



The “Yin and Yang” diagram illustrates the Taoist concept that all opposites such as good and evil are really just different sides of reality.

21 Image: “Traditional yin and yang with dots”, by Klem, retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traditional_yin_and_yang_with_dots.png.

Like Buddhists and Hindus, Taoists believe in endless cycles of time, with no beginning, no ending, and no events that change things permanently. Unlike Hinduism and Buddhism, Taoists do not believe in the system of reincarnation, karma, and nirvana.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

Because Taoists do not believe the Bible, using proof texts to refute their beliefs will not change their mind. Instead, present the biblical gospel in a way that addresses their need. The Christian's personal testimony of relationship with God helps to touch the Taoist's need to know God.

We can agree with some of the ethics of Taoism. They teach that people should love others, be gentle, give up selfishness, avoid judging others, and not follow after riches.

They believe that the Tao is the source of all things and is present in all things. We believe that God is the Creator of all and is present everywhere. The difference is that we believe that God is a being with a mind and purpose, and we can be in relationship with him.

They believe that the Tao takes care of all beings. We believe that God is involved in his creation and takes care of it, but he does it consciously, as a Father who loves us.

The Taoists believe that there must be a god with absolute qualities who knows all things, is everywhere, and has all virtues. This corresponds to the Christian belief in God, and we can share with them that he is the God who created man in his own image for the sake of relationship. Explain that the God that we cannot reach has reached out to us with the incarnation of Christ. Explain that we are separated from him by sin but can come into relationship with him because of Jesus.

Christians believe that the eternal, absolute God has spoken and provided the Bible as a written form of his message to man. Offer to share the gospel with the Taoist, so he can decide whether or not to believe that it is a message from God.

A CONFUSING VARIETY

- » A student should read and explain this section. As a group, list the branches of these religions that you have heard of.

There are many branches of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism with different names. For example, Falun Gong is a religion based on all three, but especially Buddhism. Like Falun Gong, a religious movement can begin with an individual teacher who changes some things

and teaches his own way of practicing the religion. This can happen easily because these religions do not have a clear statement of their fundamental beliefs.

The followers of the branches of Eastern religions have much in common and do not consider their own branch to be the only true religion. They borrow details from other religious groups.

Some branches emphasize physical health or ways of responding to the stress of life. Many people practice the mental and physical exercises for practical benefit and do not think much about religious beliefs. They may even think that what they do is not a religion. However, the practices are based on theology and cosmology that contradict biblical truth.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Psalm 16 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for the Taoist. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 11

ISLAM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Daniel was a champion heavy-weight boxer. On a visit to Turkey he heard the Islamic call to prayer, and it interested him greatly. He began to study Islam and felt that it was the right religion for him. He had claimed to be Christian before but was convinced that there are mistakes in the Bible.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read 1 John 1 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage say about the believer’s relationship with God? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

ISLAM

Origin of Islam

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with approximately 1.9 billion followers.²² Entire nations are ruled by the principles of Islam. The word *Islam* means “submission,” referring to submission to Allah. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim. The word *Muslim* means “one who submits.” Muslims call themselves “believers,” and they call people who are not Muslims “infidels” (unbelievers).

Muhammad was the founder of the religion of Islam. He lived A.D. 570-632.

Muhammad claimed to receive revelations. Many people wrote about his revelations, and these were collected to form the Qur’an long after his death. The Qur’an is divided into sections called *Sura*.

- » How is the origin of the Qur’an different from the origin of the Bible?

Muhammad’s religion was distinct from most of the religions around him because it was monotheistic and against idol worship. He knew about Judaism and Christianity, but rejected them.

22 Joshua Project, “Religion: Islam,” <https://joshuaproject.net/religions/6>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

Muhammad came from a poor family, but married a rich widow. After she died, he married 12 more wives. According to the Qur'an, men are limited to four wives.

When Muhammad gained enough followers, he took control of the city of Medina, now located in the modern nation of Saudi Arabia. After several battles, he took control of Mecca, and moved there. He and his followers attacked and conquered areas around them. They eventually conquered several nations and forced the people to become Muslims.

Most Muslims today are not violent. They try to live in peace with their non-Muslim neighbors. However, there are commands to violence in the Qur'an. The Qur'an commands Muslims to attack and kill idol worshippers.²³ The Qur'an says that people who fight against Islam should be killed or have their hands and feet cut off.²⁴ Radical Islamists take those commands seriously. Muhammad destroyed Jewish villages, killing the men and selling their families into slavery.

- » How was the spread of Islam different from the spread of Christianity?

Beliefs of Islam

The most repeated belief of Islam, called the *shahada* is: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."

Muslims believe that Allah is the only God, the Creator of the world. They believe he is the one who gave revelation to biblical individuals such as Noah, Abraham, and Moses.

Muslims do not believe in a Trinity or that any incarnation of God is possible.

- » How is the Muslim's view of Muhammad different from the Christian's view of Christ?

Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet from God who did miracles, was the Messiah, and was sinless. They do not believe that he died on the cross, but that he was taken up by Allah when the Jews tried to kill him.²⁵ They do not believe he was the Son of God or an incarnation of God.²⁶ They do not believe he is the Savior of the world.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

The Apostles' Creed

23 Sura 9:5

24 Sura 5:33

25 Sura 4:157-158

26 Sura 9:30-31, 18:4-5

Muslims believe that the Bible is from God, but they believe that if there are contradictions between it and their holy book, the Qur'an, the Qur'an is the final authority because it is the last revelation. They believe that a later revelation can contradict a previous one.²⁷

The Bible says that God's Word will never pass away but stands forever; see Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:25.

Muslims believe that salvation is earned by fulfilling certain obligations called the Five Pillars of Islam. The Five Pillars of Islam are:

1. *Shahada*: sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith
2. *Salat*: performing ritual prayers five times each day
3. *Zakat*: giving alms to the poor
4. *Sawm*: fasting during the month of Ramadan
5. *Hajj*: taking a pilgrimage to Mecca once during one's lifetime

Difficult Doctrines of Islam

To see what kind of lifestyle Muslims believe in, we can look at the nations that are controlled by Islamic law. Islamic law is called *Sharia* law. Many Arab countries follow *Sharia* law to some extent. Islamic law does not allow freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, or freedom of the press as the western world understands and practices such freedoms.²⁸



In some Islamic societies a person can be killed for converting to Christianity or for attempting to evangelize other people. However, most of the time a person is killed because of a mob, not because of an official action of the state.

According to *Sharia* law, a man can divorce his wife instantly for any reason. A woman cannot divorce without her husband's agreement. Men are allowed to beat their wives, according to the Qur'an.²⁹ A man can be married to four wives.³⁰ A woman can be killed

"I am as fully convinced today that the scriptures are of God as that the sun shines. And this conviction (as every good gift) comes from the Father of lights."

John Wesley

(letter in 1747)

27 Sura 2:106, 13:39

28 Image by Juan Camilo Guarin P from Unsplash, retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/njEXjDmYn8w>.

29 Sura 4:34

30 Sura 4:3

by her relatives if she does not follow Islamic requirements. In some countries women are not allowed to drive cars, go to school, or appear in public without their faces covered. A woman may be beaten publicly if she breaks the rules.

Christians are told to be gentle with their wives, see 1 Peter 3:7. A man is supposed to love his wife as much as himself, see Ephesians 5:28-29.

Muslims believe that right and wrong come only from the will of Allah. Allah could change what is right if he chose, because his will is what matters rather than an unchangeable character.

The Bible tells us that God is good and is the source of everything good. God never changes, see James 1:17.

The Qur'an does not say that people are created in Allah's image. Allah is said to be transcendent and unknowable and totally different.

Humans are created in the image of God. Therefore, we can understand some things about the nature of God and can have a relationship with him, see Genesis 1:27.

Muslims do not expect to have a personal relationship with Allah. Allah is called "all-loving," but otherwise it is never stated in the Qur'an that he loves people. The Qur'an frequently states that Allah is forgiving and merciful to those who become believers in Islam. People are to repent and ask to be spared judgment with the hope that Allah is merciful, but there is no salvation experience or assurance of forgiveness.

The Bible promises us that God forgives the one who confesses and believes, see 1 John 1:9.

- » How is a Christian's relationship with God different from a Muslim's relationship with Allah?

The benefits of Islam are offered mostly to men, and the Qur'an addresses every issue from the perspective of men. Women are only property of men. The Islamic paradise after death is for men, with women provided there for their pleasure.³¹

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

"The good news is that God through Christ has done what the law could not do: sent his Son as an offering for sin. Christ expiated sin by his own sacrificial death."

Thomas Oden

The Word of Life

EVANGELISM

It is not enough just to prove Christian doctrines from the Bible, because Muslims believe that the Qur'an replaces the Bible as the highest authority.

We can agree with certain important Islamic beliefs. Christians agree that there is one God who created the world. Christians agree that there is a final judgment, and that every person will be sent either to heaven or hell.

Other important truths should be shown in the Bible. Muslims believe that the Bible is from God but is superseded by the Qur'an. However, you can make the point that certain truths are so basic that they cannot change. Also, historical facts cannot change.

God made humans in his image (Genesis 1:27). He loves them and wants to be in relationship with them.

Christians agree with Islam that Jesus was the Messiah and sinless. Show that he promised to give eternal life to those who believed in him (John 10:28), he promised to raise the dead by his voice (John 5:28-29), and said that nobody comes to the Father except by him (John 14:6).

Show from scripture that he was more than just a sinless man; See *Handbook of Doctrine* for

5. Jesus is God.

He could not have been a good man and a prophet of God unless his claims about himself were true. Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God, but he has to be either who he claimed to be and able to give eternal life, or he was a wicked or self-deceived man who caused people to put their faith in him.

Jesus came to show the love of God. He showed that God loves every person, including women and people of low class. People are not separated from God because of their gender or social class. People are separated from God only by their sin, and God offers forgiveness. God invites the sinner to be forgiven and to enter a personal relationship with him.

A TESTIMONY

Jalal lived in Saudia Arabia. As a boy he was faithful to the Islamic religion. He memorized large sections of the Qur'an and helped at the mosque. When he was 16 years old, he wanted to join a holy war and fight for Islam, but his parents said he was too young. Later he found a job and became busy and began to neglect religion. He got into a problem and wanted to pray for help, but was afraid that Allah was angry at him for his neglect of religion. He prayed to Jesus for help, and the problem was solved two days later. He also had a dream and saw Jesus showing people the way to heaven. He put his faith in Christ for salvation.

Jalal says, “I feel love in my heart, and I am very happy to know Jesus. When I was a Muslim, I could never imagine that the Christians were right. After that, I found out how much God loves me, and I became a Christian. Yes, he loves me, he loves you, and he loves the whole world. Jesus Christ loved us, and he still does. And don’t forget in the last day nobody can save us, only Jesus Christ.”

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read 1 John 1 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Islam. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 12

JUDAISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Hans was a German who moved to America. At college he made friends who were Jews. He became familiar with the history of the Jews and learned that millions of them had been killed by Germans under Hitler. He felt ashamed of being a German, and wondered if he should join Judaism to partly repay what his country had done.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. If you did not know about Jesus, what could you see that this passage says about the person called the “Servant”? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

JUDAISM

Judaism is more closely related to Christianity than any other religion that does not claim to be Christian. Judaism claims to worship the God of ancient Israel, the God of the Old Testament, which is the same God worshipped in Christianity. The scriptures of Judaism are the Old Testament in the Christian Bible.

Followers of Judaism believe the Old Testament, but they do not understand the most important truths in the Old Testament about the Messiah, see John 5:39-40, 2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

Modern Judaism originated from the religion and history of ancient Israel as described in the Old Testament. Practices and beliefs have adapted through the centuries and are not identical to the original ones.

“It is the nature of God’s love to choose. It chooses not in order to exclude others but in order to provide a bridgehead from which God’s love for all mankind might be made known. God’s love was especially manifested to Israel in order that it might be demonstrated to all.”

W.T. Purkiser

God, Man, and Salvation

There are about 14 million followers of Judaism. Almost half of them live in the nation of Israel.

Judaism is the primary religion of the nation of Israel, and most followers of Judaism are ethnically Jews, whether they live in Israel or elsewhere. To say someone is a Jew usually identifies his religion and his ethnicity, and sometimes his nationality.

However, definitions are difficult. Most followers of Judaism are of Jewish ethnicity, but people have converted to Judaism from other ethnic groups. Judaism is a national religion, but 25% of the people in Israel are not Jews, in religion or ethnicity. Many Jews do not live in Israel, and some who live in Israel do not practice any religion seriously. A person who is ethnically a Jew, whether in Israel or anywhere else, may be a convert to a different religion, or even be an atheist.

- » Explain what a Jew is, first with an ethnic definition, then with a religious definition.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF JUDAISM

Hebrew Scriptures

Torah is a Hebrew word that means teaching, direction, or law. The word is used most specifically to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament. It is sometimes used more broadly to refer to the Hebrew Bible, which is the Old Testament in Protestant Christian Bibles. The term *Torah* has been used even more broadly to include explanations of the Hebrew scriptures written by early Jewish scholars.

Jews have very high reverence for the scriptures inspired by God. In ancient times the Torah (referring to the five books) was copied with very careful practices that prevented errors. The scrolls containing the Torah were treated with great reverence.

The *Talmud* is a collection of the writings of ancient Jewish rabbis. Printed in book form, it is more than 6,000 pages. Judaism depends on the *Talmud* for authority for their traditions and practices.

Circumcision

Genesis 17:9-14 is the record of God's command to Abraham that all males in his household would be circumcised. Circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. Israelites referred to people of other nations as "the Uncircumcised"—people who did not have God's law or covenant. In modern times, many people who are not Jews practice circumcision as a medical procedure, but the Jews still consider it a religious practice.

Sabbath

The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath commemorates the day that God rested from his work after the six days of creation (Genesis 2:2-3). God said that people are to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). The Jews developed many restrictions for the Sabbath to apply the principle of resting from work. Jews who follow the Sabbath restrictions strictly do not do any business or any work on the Sabbath if it can possibly be avoided. They attempt to make modern applications of ancient Sabbath restrictions. For example, ancient Jews were not supposed to start a fire in their house on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3), though they could keep a fire going if it were started previously. Some modern Jews will not turn on electric lights or heat on the Sabbath, but they will use lights and heat that were turned on previously.

JUDAISM AND THE GOSPEL

The nation of Israel in general rejected Jesus as Messiah. Jews who believed in Jesus were the first members of the Christian church, then the spread of the gospel brought Gentiles into the church.

God desires that all Jews be saved, see Romans 9:31, Romans 10:1, and Romans 11:1.

Today there are organizations such as Jews for Jesus who try to keep the Jewish heritage while becoming Christians. They are called “Messianic Jews” because they accept Jesus as the Messiah while continuing to identify themselves as Jews. They are not part of the religion of Judaism.

Judaism is the religion of the Jews who tried to keep the religion of the Old Testament while rejecting Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament hopes. There are three main groups within modern Judaism: Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, and Conservative Judaism.

Over the centuries, Judaism has continued to develop its traditions, while keeping many traditions from ancient times. Many Jews follow traditions of dress that make them recognizable as Jews. They also follow the Old Testament restrictions of diet, like abstinence from eating pork.

Christians are free from the Old Testament requirements of special days and diet because those things were symbols of Christ, and now he has fulfilled them, see Colossians 2:16-17.

In Judaism, salvation does not occur as an individual conversion experience. Jews believe they can live in a blessed, covenant relationship with God by following his commandments. Salvation means deliverance from situations of oppression or conditions that keep them

from serving God as they should. Salvation is more of a national or group matter than an individual matter.

» What is the concept of salvation in Judaism?

According to biblical Christianity, salvation means personal deliverance from sin. Anyone who is saved is saved by grace through faith, whether he is a Jew or a Gentile. Everyone has sinned and needs forgiveness. Salvation is not achieved by keeping the details of the Old Testament law, but by finding grace through faith. No person is justified by keeping the law, because everyone has already sinned and broken the law (Romans 3:20-23).

Christianity is the continuation and fulfillment of the religion of Israel as revealed in the Old Testament. God is the God of the Jews and Gentiles both, and has the same plan of salvation for all (Romans 3:29-30).



The prophets of Israel predicted the coming of Jesus. The essence of Old Testament faith was relationship with God, made possible by his forgiveness and grace. Therefore, Christians claim the writings of the Old Testament as their heritage.³² Christians follow the example of those who were in right relationship to God all the way back to the beginning of mankind. In a sense, the true Jew is the one who received God's work of grace in his heart (Romans 2:28-29). The blessing of Abraham is available for Gentiles (Galatians 3:14).

» Why is it true to say that Christianity is not a new religion?

There is no single organization for all followers of Judaism, no single statement of beliefs that they all hold, and no final authority for doctrine that all recognize. Some of their organizations are very conservative, with a high view of the authority of scripture, and trying to hold the ancient traditions and beliefs. More liberal Jewish organizations have adapted their beliefs and practices to make them fit modern culture, choosing what they want to keep from tradition and scripture.

Judaism does not believe that God is a Trinity or that an incarnation has happened. Jews believe that Jesus was a controversial teacher who was not the Messiah and not God.

32 Image by nellyaltenburger from Pixabay, retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/torah-scroll-israel-jewish-4299038/>.

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be Almighty God, see Isaiah 9:6. The New Testament declares that Jesus is the God the Son and the Messiah, see Romans 1:1-4.

The expectation that a Messiah will come is central to Judaism. They do not believe that the Messiah has come yet. They believe that the Messiah will not be an incarnation of God, but a specially anointed man, who will bring peace to the world.

Conservative Jews believe that the Messiah will be a literal person. Liberal Jews are more likely to consider the Messiah a figurative expression for the agent of peace, which could be some group or organization.

- » Describe Judaism's concept of a messiah.

The Bible tells us that the time will come when Israel will accept Christ. (See Romans 11:23-26.) The Apostle Paul said that right now the gospel is spreading among the Gentiles, and the Jews are mostly blind to the gospel. But he goes on to say, "All Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). That doesn't mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but as a nation they have rejected Jesus, and as a nation they will repent and accept him. Even now, many individual Jews are being converted.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

Some Jews are prejudiced against Christianity because Jews have sometimes been severely persecuted by professed Christians in the past. We can try to help them realize certain truths about the persecution. First, Jesus never encouraged persecution, and professed Christians who hate others are not following his example. Persecution is political as well as religious, and motivated by reasons that are opposed to the principles of Christianity. The best way for a Jew to be convinced that Christians are not his enemies is for Christians to show the love of Christ.

A Jew's religion is strongly connected to his extended family, a way of life, and an ancient heritage. A Jew may think that he would lose everything that matters if he converted to another religion. The Christian should show that Jesus is the natural fulfillment of the Jewish religion. He is the Messiah they expected. He provided the salvation described in the Old Testament.

"In Romans 9:3-4 Paul essentially says that 'Christ was in human terms a Jew but in fact God.'"

**Adapted from
Willard Taylor**

God, Man, and Salvation

The fact that Jesus is the Messiah is demonstrated by his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Examples are the prediction that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and that he would be of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). It is even more important to show from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 that he accomplished the salvation that was expected of the Messiah. Jesus did not yet fulfill the Messianic prophecy of world peace, but it is reasonable that salvation from sin must come first because war comes from the sinful hearts of people.

It is important to share the gospel and emphasize that a person who is saved comes into a personal relationship with God. Jews believe in God but do not have a personal relationship with him.

It is possible to explain the gospel using only the Old Testament. All people have sinned against God (Psalm 143:2). Sin separates people from God (Isaiah 59:2). The Messiah suffered and died as a sacrifice for our sins (Isaiah 53:5). God promises to forgive and cleanse the one who repents and believes (Isaiah 1:16-18).

Psalm 51 is a prayer of repentance and faith. David prayed for forgiveness and cleansing. This is a prayer inspired by the Spirit of God, which tells us that God offers forgiveness this way. If a person believes that God has provided Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, he can pray this prayer in faith and receive God's grace.

A TESTIMONY

David is a Jewish man whose family came from Germany. His grandparents all died in the Nazi prison camps. He says that the Jews felt that they were being killed by the Christian world because the churches of Germany and in the rest of the world let it happen. His parents told him to never look at a cross because it represented death. Every day his school bus passed a church with a cross, and he tried not to look at it. One day a Jewish friend tried to give him a New Testament, but he refused, saying that it was not for Jews. Later another friend showed him verses in the Old Testament and in the New Testament that he had never seen before. David had many questions about why the world is like it is, and he began to see the answers in the Bible. He came to faith that Jesus is the Messiah.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Isaiah 52:13–53:12 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Judaism. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 13

NEW AGE RELIGION

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Ethan was raised a Roman Catholic, but dropped out of the church when he became an adult. He lived for pleasure for years, but began to feel that he urgently needed to find the purpose of life. A friend got him started using drugs, and Ethan felt that he got a new view of the universe and himself. He also began to hear voices giving him directions.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Psalm 19 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage show us about the effects of God's truth? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

NEW AGE RELIGION

Introduction to the New Age Religion

The New Age religion has a variety of groups, organizations, and individuals. New Age followers are not united under a certain name or statement of beliefs. Some seem very religious, and others seem to be scientific instead of religious. They would not all say that they are part of a New Age religion, but they all share certain characteristics.³³

New Age followers believe in human potential to solve all problems. They believe that a person can develop into a being with powers far beyond what is now considered normal. They believe that all the answers are within



Stonehenge, an ancient stone monument in England, is the site of various religious activities.

33 Image by Dyana Wing So from Unsplash, retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/NxvP54MX4no>.

us. They believe that the purpose of education is not to tell us what is true but to show us how to open our own potential.

The Bible says the heart is truly deceitful and wicked until it is changed by God. A person cannot find the answers to life within. The problems are within, see Jeremiah 17:9.

» What Christian doctrine about man does the New Age ignore?

To unlock human potential, New Agers look for ancient wisdom in pagan religions and occultic practices. They practice astrology, spiritism, and all kinds of divination. New Age followers interact with the supernatural using all forms of magic. They try to communicate with spirits and people who have lived in the past. They practice channeling, when the spirit of a person who lived in the past temporarily takes over the body and voice of a living person.

People reject God and seek other sources of supernatural help because they do not want to repent of sin. A person who needs guidance and power should seek God, see Isaiah 8:19.

They do not believe that any religion has all truth. They believe that all religions are essentially the same, but have different beliefs and practices that are helpful. Even if certain beliefs contradict each other, they think both may be true in a nonrational way. They reject any claim that a doctrine is absolutely true. They do not believe any doctrine can be true in the sense that conflicting doctrines would be false. New Agers tolerate any religious group except those that claim to have truth that *everyone* should believe. They reject Christianity because it claims to be right and says that other religions are wrong.

The Bible pronounces judgment on those who do not distinguish evil from good and reject a standard of right and wrong, see Isaiah 5:20.

» What other religions would the New Age not like?

New Agers accept the supernatural without any principle for distinguishing between good powers and evil powers. They tend to believe that all spirit involvement is good.

“Sometimes it is argued that we live under a different culture and what is right or wrong now has changed because of changing times.... Amidst the welter of human change stands a rock of eternal truth which is the Word of God and its standard that changes not.”

Leslie Wilcox

Profiles in Wesleyan Theology, Volume 3

There are evil spirits involved in the world, and they are already condemned to eternal punishment. People who follow them will share their punishment, see Matthew 25:41.

New Age followers do not distinguish themselves from other religions. They think that some religions share many of their beliefs, especially Eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. They also like nature religions, which interact with spirits in nature (see Lesson 14).

New Agers deny the reality of death. They think that death is simply when a person passes to a different level of existence. Some say that life after death is almost the same as this natural life. Many of them believe in reincarnation and the principle of karma, as in Hinduism. Instead of seeing reincarnation as a bad thing, as Hindus and Buddhists do, New Agers think it is good to live many times. Some of them think they know who they were in a previous life.

The New Age view of God is pantheistic. This means New Agers believe that all reality is one essence, and that everything together is God. Every object and every person is part of God. They do not believe that God is a person who thinks or speaks, and they deny that God is the Creator.

» Would a follower of the New Age pray?

New Age followers believe that Jesus was a man who knew how to use special powers and tried to teach others to do the same. They believe that Jesus did not care about ethical standards and did not judge anyone's wrongdoing.

New Agers do not believe in the reality of sin, because they do not believe in a God who sets a standard and judges. They believe that the evil in the world is just a need of knowledge and adjustment so that everything can be in harmony. New Age justifies all kinds of sinful perversion.

God invites people to find the real solution—forgiveness and cleansing, see Isaiah 1:18.

New Agers reject the biblical concept of salvation. They do not believe that sin is real but believe the solution to human problems is development of spiritual awareness and spiritual powers.

“The devil is to make you idolize yourselves; to make you wiser in your own eyes than God himself and all the oracles of God. In order to do this, he must not appear in his own shape. That would frustrate his design. Instead, he uses all his skill to make you deny his existence till he has you secure in his own place.”

John Wesley

“A Caution Against Bigotry”

New Age followers believe that humanity is entering a special era when people who understand New Age principles will change all of society. They believe there will be peace and economic security for everyone.

The Bible warns us not to expect peace and security in a society that is not submitted to God, see 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

- » What does the New Age believe instead of the biblical concept of salvation?

Recognizing New Age Representatives

There are many things that help identify a group, organization, or author as New Age. Some examples are:

- Vegetarianism for religious or philosophical reasons
- Mystical health methods that cannot be scientifically explained
- References to karma
- Use of terms about living in oneness with nature or the cosmos
- Meditation as a means of nonrational understanding
- Use of terms about unlimited human potential
- Strange types of psychological or mystical energy and power
- Communication with the dead or with spirits
- Use of various things for divination
- Astrology
- Witchcraft and wicca
- Religious involvement with nature
- Interest in pyramids and crystals
- Interest in UFOs and beings that are not from earth
- Trust in spirit guides and higher beings
- Concepts and practices derived from Eastern religions

- » What examples of New Age practices have you seen or heard about?

The Christian Response

There is nothing new about the New Age religion. Isaiah 47:10-14 is addressed to a specific nation that practiced all kinds of sorcery, and it sounds just like the New Age. The people looked for special wisdom while practicing wickedness. They tried to be gods. They invented many methods of creating spiritual power.

The Bible forbids every kind of magic and sorcery, not because it is not real, but because it is evil and opposes the power of God (Leviticus 19:26, 31, Leviticus 20:6, Deuteronomy 18:9-12). God commanded the nation of Israel to execute witches (Exodus 22:18, Leviticus

20:27). Christians today do not have the responsibility of executing anyone, but the command shows God's absolute judgment of that sin. In the New Testament, when people were converted to Christ they destroyed their books of magic (Acts 19:19).

People reject God but still seek spiritual power. God's power is greater, and he uses his power for those who trust him, but he does not put his power into people's control. A person who seeks power and knowledge through magical methods is trying to find it while rejecting God. Interaction with spirits and the search for power leads a person into deeper evil.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

"I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come."

The Nicene Creed

EVANGELISM

It is a priority to share the gospel with a follower of the New Age. Don't get caught in arguments that keep you from sharing the gospel. He may think that he is familiar with churches, and he has rejected church, but he may not really understand what the gospel is.

Jesus demonstrated great power to heal, prophesy, and discern truth. He was greater than any New Age leader. He is not an example of someone who developed himself and used spiritual forces from nature. Jesus was submitted to the Father and believed in absolute truth. He was in conflict with those who denied the truth of God's authority, sin, and judgment.

Christians believe in a new age that is coming with the kingdom of God. It will be the end of all suffering, and will bring peace and prosperity. Only those who are in right relationship with God can enter that new age.

A TESTIMONY

Ethan tried to follow the voices he was hearing. They told him that he was Christ, the Son of God, but he resisted the delusion. Sometimes he felt supernatural power and knowledge. Some of his friends told him there was no conflict between believing in Jesus and believing in Buddha or something else. He began to feel that the thing that gave him power was trying to possess him. He met a group of Christians who became his friends. He began to understand that he could not trust all of the voices he was hearing. Sometimes God was speaking to him, but sometimes evil spirits were trying to take him the wrong direction. He learned to test ideas with solid truth. He found that real relationship with Christ was more satisfying than all of the experiences he had been through.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Psalm 19 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of the New Age. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 14

NATURE RELIGIONS

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Miri was a small child in a village in Papua New Guinea. He had few toys but sometimes played with the skull of his grandfather. The skull was kept in the house as a way of respecting their ancestor and also to keep away evil spirits.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Psalm 147 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage say about God’s involvement with creation? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

NATURE RELIGIONS

A nature religion is a religious belief system or worldview that is typical of most primitive cultures, and is the basis for religious practice in most primitive societies. Many beliefs and practices of nature religions can also be found among worshippers in other major world religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Voodooism, and Roman Catholicism. Many people in the New Age religion study nature religions to find ways to interact with the supernatural.

Nature religion has sometimes been called animism. *Animism* is a term that emphasizes the belief that the elements of nature have spirits. This includes animals, trees, mountains, and rivers. Animists believe that they must acknowledge and interact with those spirits to succeed at raising food, building houses, and staying healthy.

Animists believe in spirits that stay in certain places, but God has all power in every place, see 1 Kings 20:28.

**“God is uncreated,
necessary, one, infinite,
immense, eternal being,
the life of all that lives.”**

Thomas Oden

The Living God

Animists also believe in spirits that are not necessarily attached to a material body or location. They may also believe that the spirits of their ancestors are involved in the world and in their lives.

Animists may not call their beliefs a religion. Animism is just reality to them. Animism in general has no authoritative scripture and no written doctrine.

- » What similarities do you see between nature religions and other religions we have studied?

In nature religions, humans are not distinct from the world, but part of it, with no special status.

God puts special value on humans and gives them special care, see Matthew 10:31.

Those who practice nature religions have special words, items, or actions to interact with the spirits. These customs are different in different societies. The customs are supposed to help them avoid antagonizing spirits, and possibly get good responses from them. A person may carry with him an object that is supposed to have power. Often, an animist cannot explain why a custom is practiced.

“It is the sovereign power of God that makes providence and miracles completely at home in the biblical world. God can never be excluded from His creation.”

W.T. Purkiser

God, Man, and Salvation

God wants us to get rid of anything that is used for depending on spirits for help. If we have those things, we are not completely trusting God, see Acts 19:19.

Animists may believe there are ways for a person to gain power from an object or other person. They believe a person must be careful not to be affected by harmful power from particular objects or places.

Most practices that are called superstitions come from animist concepts. A superstition is the idea that a person must follow certain practices because particular objects, actions, or places have spiritual power. Christians are not superstitious, even though they know that evil supernatural powers are real, because they trust the supreme power of God.

- » Why does the Bible tell us not to use the things that are part of superstition?

Animists believe that the world is full of spiritual danger, and that they must be careful not to offend the spirits of nature or of their ancestors. Their life is guided by constant fear. Sometimes people think that primitive societies are happy and without worries until missionaries come with organized religion, but that is not true. Primitive people who do not

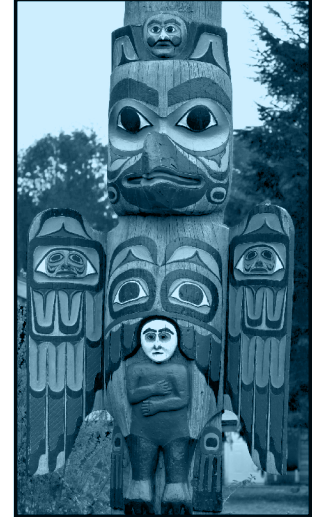
have the gospel live in slavery to fear of spirits. The gospel comes as a wonderful message of deliverance. They learn that they can serve a God who loves them and not have to fear the spirits.

The Bible tells us many times that we do not have to fear because we can trust God, see Isaiah 41:10.

People who follow nature religions may have religious specialists who are considered experts in dealing with matters of the spirits. Each culture has its own name for these religious specialists.³⁴

Animists may believe in a supreme God who created, but they do not pray to him because they think having contact with him is impossible. They think that the spirits around them are the ones they must deal with for results in their lives.

The attempt to interact with spirits often leads animists into interaction with demons.



» Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

Many animists already believe in a supreme God, but do not believe they have access to him or that he is interested in them. The gospel tells them that God loves them and demonstrated his love by sending Jesus.

Many animists think that they have offended a spiritual being: God, their relatives who became divine, or someone else. The gospel explains that God is ready to forgive our sins so we can come into relationship with him.

Animists live in fear of spirits. We can assure them that if they come to know God, they are under his protection and can deal with him instead of with spirits.

“And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son.”

The Nicene Creed

34 Image by Bruce Warrington from Unsplash, retrieved from <https://unsplash.com/photos/8Or5Z9-sH0Q>.

A TESTIMONY

Hato was a chief of a tribe in Papua New Guinea. He had lived in fear of spirits and ancestors. The villages were often at war with each other. A missionary came to live in his village. Hato saw how the missionary trusted God during a crisis when the missionary's sons were in danger. Hato made the decision to serve God instead of the spirits.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Psalm 147 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for the animist. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 15

VOODOO

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Sarah visited a Voodoo shop to ask questions. The man said that Voodoo is not in conflict with Catholicism and that a person can be Catholic and practice Voodoo as well. He said that spirits help people, but people should pay the spirits back by allowing the spirits to possess them.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Psalm 145 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage say about the power and goodness of God? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

VOODOO

Introduction to Voodoo

Voodoo originated in African nature religions, but beliefs and practices from those have been mixed with features from other sources. Many modern practitioners prefer the term *Vodun*.

According to Voodoo, there is a God, but people cannot reach him for help. Instead, people can interact with the spirits who are involved in the world.

The Bible tells us that God is very near to every one of us, and we can find him, see Acts 17:27.

“Jesus ascended into heaven, he sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from there he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.”

The Athanasian Creed

- » What other religion does this sound like?

Those who practice Voodoo are actually worshipping Satan and evil spirits. Many acknowledge that they are serving Satan.

Voodoo practice is not always recognized by outsiders because it often uses Roman Catholic rituals, images, and saint names. Voodoo worshippers also use crosses and other Christian symbols. Statistics for Voodoo are difficult to find because many Voodoo participants are also involved with other religions, including Christianity.

It is impossible to serve God and worship other spirits also, see 1 Corinthians 10:20-22.

Sometimes people that call themselves Christians but are not truly converted do not see the conflict between Voodoo and Christianity. A person who attends church may also go to a Voodoo witch doctor for help with some problem. A businessman may ask for magic to help him sell more merchandise. A parent may go to get help for a sick child.

- » Why is it impossible for a Voodoo worshipper to also be a real Christian?

Voodoo worshippers interact with spirits by using altars, offerings, dances, and ceremonies. They also pray to ancestors.

The spirits (*loa*) are divided into five nations, and numerous families of individuals with the same surnames. Certain spirits or families of spirits are associated with certain aspects of life, like agriculture, the military, or love. This is similar to the way Roman Catholics have assigned saints to various aspects of life.

Priests and priestesses in the religion lead worship events and can be hired to do sorcery or protect from sorcery. They may have a congregation that they lead in worship regularly and provide with other spiritual services. There are other sorcerers called *bokor* who may or may not be priests, and are more associated with evil sorcery. For example, a *bokor* can be hired to put a curse on someone.³⁵

“We should remember that as God dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness. As the Holy Spirit possesses the souls of good men, so the evil spirit possesses the souls of the wicked. Therefore, the Apostle calls him ‘the god of this world;’ from the uncontrolled power he has over worldly men.”

John Wesley

“A Caution Against Bigotry”

35 Image by Stephen Gibson, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52352524591>, public domain.

A man named Simon was a sorcerer with power, but God's power was greater; see Acts 8:9-13.

Voodoo religion has no central organization or authority. Each priest or priestess has preferred practices. Every Voodoo worshipper is in a Voodoo family.

As Christians, we are in a spiritual family, with brothers and sisters who share life with us and help with practical needs, see James 2:15-16 and Galatians 6:10.

Voodoo services are usually on Friday or Saturday night. A Voodoo service includes verses read in honor of various spirits associated with the family, many songs, and prayers. Worshipers use drums, tambourines, and flutes in their services which can last all night. During a Voodoo service, spirits take possession of various worshippers, speaking and acting through them. To become possessed by a spirit is an important goal in Voodoo worship. It is believed that special benefits come to the families of those possessed this way. Sometimes the spirits give advice or cures.



A witch doctor's office

The Holy Spirit gives direction in the church and can be trusted because he is God, see Acts 13:2, Acts 15:28 and Galatians 3:5.

» Why should a Christian not look for help from spirits?

In special Voodoo ceremonies there are sacrifices of chickens or pigs and drinking and splattering of blood. A priestess may bite the head from a chicken. Worshipers may dance around a fire or around a tree. They sing and pray for the spirits to enter them. They put out food for the spirits. They draw diagrams on the floor that are supposed to control spirit power. They use snakes in ceremonies. Sometimes they wear white. Sometimes they paint their faces, using various colors, but especially white.

Sometimes supernatural power is demonstrated. Some claim to have been healed by the spirits. They try to drive away a spirit that is causing a sickness. Some can bite burning wood and hold the live coals in their mouths.

Sometimes a small doll is used to represent a person to be cursed. Pins or knives may be stuck into the doll. People have died from curses, but true Christians have testified that Voodoo curses could not harm them.

In a worshipper's own house, he may have an altar to the spirits and ancestors. The altar may hold pictures and statues of spirits, and things enjoyed by them such as flowers, candles, perfume, or food. A white candle and a glass of water could be a simple offering.

Some Voodoo practitioners wear objects that are supposed to protect them from harmful spirits. They also put them on their children and babies.

They believe that after death a soul inhabits some aspect of nature like a tree.

Some Voodoo worshippers are possessed and dominated by demons all the time. Some become insane, violent, and self-destructive.

A person possessed by demons has fear and insanity, and does harm to himself, see Mark 5:2-5.

» Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM

Voodoo worshippers do not have a relationship with God or assurance of salvation. That means they have a spiritual need that can be addressed by the gospel. A Christian can share the gospel and his own testimony of conversion and what it means for him to live in relationship with God.

Voodoo worshippers live with fear. They do not serve a God who loves them. They expect both good and evil actions from the spirits. They have to pay the Voodoo priest for every religious service done for them. In some countries people are in slavery to the Voodoo leaders.

A person who chooses to worship the spirits does it because he thinks he needs their help and protection. The results are the same as the pursuit of any sin; the good that the person is trying to get fades away, and the sin destroys everything that is good in his life, including family relationships.

A person who rejects the gospel wants to continue in sin and keep control over his life instead of giving control to God. However, a person in relationship with evil spirits loses control over himself and is in slavery.

The gospel is a message of deliverance from evil powers. It is an offer of forgiveness. It is an offer of relationship with God who loves us and cares for us.

A TESTIMONY

Jacques was a Voodoo witch doctor in Haiti. He had killed many people with curses. He lived with several women. One day a missionary told him that the spirits he served would someday destroy him. Later Jacques asked the missionary to come and pray for him. Jacques repented and destroyed all of his Voodoo equipment.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Psalm 145 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Voodoo. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 16

UNDERSTANDING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

Lydia was puzzled to see many people on her street going to church every Saturday. She asked her neighbors about it, and they told her that Saturday is the right day for rest and worship. They explained that on Saturday they did not do business or shopping or much entertainment. Lydia thought that they must have a religion very different from other churches, but they seemed to believe the same things about God and salvation.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

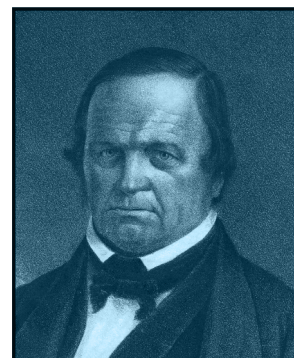
- » Read 1 Timothy 1 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage say about teaching doctrine? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

Origin of Seventh-Day Adventism

In the 1830s, William Miller,³⁶ a Baptist preacher, began to preach that Jesus would be returning soon. His followers were called Millerites for several years. In 1844, the Millerites predicted the return of Christ on October 22, 1844. Thousands of people were convinced. Many of the Millerites left the movement after Jesus did not appear. Hiram Edson claimed to receive a revelation that on that date Jesus began a new ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Those who stayed with the movement became the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

There are other churches that emphasize that Saturday is the correct day for Christian worship. There were also others before this



William Miller

36 Image: "William Miller", by J. H. Bufford Lithography Company, retrieved from the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.80.107.

organization that taught that doctrine, but the Seventh-Day Adventists are the largest and most influential.

Present Influence

In December 2020, the Seventh-Day Adventists claimed to have over 92,000 churches and over 21 million members. They worked in 212 countries and ministered in 535 languages. They had 229 hospitals and 9,400 schools.³⁷

The Doctrine of Seventh-Day Adventists

Adventists believe in basic Christian doctrines about God such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. They also believe in the final authority of the Bible, and salvation by grace through faith.

Adventists say they believe that a person is not saved by good works, but that a true Christian will live a life of obedience to God after conversion. They believe that the law of God shows Christians how they are to live, and that a Christian should live in victory over sin. They believe that a person will lose his salvation if he does not continue to live for God.

Adventists are right that sin breaks our relationship with God. Jesus said that we remain in a relationship of love with him by keeping his commandments, see John 15:10.

The main organization of Adventists does not believe in salvation by works. However, there are individuals and groups of Adventists that have emphasized the law so much that they seem to say that obeying the law is the means of salvation. If a person expects to be accepted by God because of his works, he is not putting his faith in the grace provided by Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

- » What is the right view of works? How do we explain that we are saved by grace even though it is necessary to live in obedience to God?

Adventists believe that man is not inherently immortal. At death people go into an unconscious condition until they are resurrected. At the resurrection, those who are saved will receive eternal life. Those who are not saved will be resurrected for judgment then destroyed in the lake of fire. They believe that Satan and the other demons will also be destroyed completely. There is no eternal punishment.

Jesus said there would be everlasting punishment, see Matthew 25:46, Revelation 20:10, 15.

37 "Seventh-Day Adventist World Church Statistics 2021." Seventh-day Adventist Church, February 14, 2022. <https://www.adventist.org/statistics>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

Adventists believe that Christians should keep certain Old Testament rules for diet. They believe that the dietary rules were for the sake of health. They claim that Adventists tend to live longer than other people.

All meat is permissible for the Christian, according to 1 Timothy 4:4.

Adventists are most known for their doctrine of the Sabbath. They believe that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is the right day for Christian rest and worship. They believe that churches that worship on Sunday have followed a pagan custom.

Attitude toward Other Churches

Adventists believe that they are the faithful “remnant,” the ones who still keep the commandments of God in a world of compromised Christianity. They believe that Babylon in biblical prophecy refers to apostate religious organizations and their allies in the world’s system.

They believe that there are real Christians in the various Christian denominations who are obeying God as far as they understand, but do not understand all that he requires. In the last days before the coming of the Lord, everyone will come to a crisis and have to receive light and walk in it or be destroyed in God’s judgment.

Sunday worshippers who do not accept the truth will eventually accept the “mark of the beast.”

Adventists recognize that various people in church history were true Christians and used by God, like the Reformation leaders. They also read and quote from theologians and biblical scholars that are not Adventists.

- » How would you describe the Adventist’s attitude toward other churches?

The Importance of Prophecy

Adventists believe that prophecy is a gift for the church, needed for continual guidance. Their most important prophet was Ellen White. She began to prophecy in 1844. She wrote more than 2,000 visions. Her visions and other writings make 80 books. Adventists encourage their members to read her writings regularly.

“[Fanaticism] in general may be defined thus: A religious madness arising from some falsely imagined influence or inspiration of God; at least, from expecting something from God which ought not to be expected from him.”

**Adapted from
John Wesley**

“The Nature of Enthusiasm”

Adventists believe that the Bible is the final authority, and that all prophecy must be tested by scripture. Ellen White herself said that her book entitled *Testimonies* would not be needed if people would follow the scripture closely enough. She said that her writings were not intended to reveal anything not implied in the Bible.³⁸

Adventists still publish and distribute Ellen White's books as the best explanation of their doctrine. They quote her constantly in their publications. They do not claim that her writing is an authority comparable to the Bible.

Much of Ellen White's writing expresses opinions that are not in the Bible, and gives explanation of scripture that depends on new revelation rather than normal interpretation. There is a danger that Adventists give too much authority to writings other than the Bible, and do not let the Bible have the supreme authority.

» What is the proper use of the writings of pastors and teachers?

The Adventists' focus on end-time prophecy is shown in their church's name, which refers to the coming of the Lord. They emphasize detailed interpretation of end-time biblical prophecy, including many obscure passages of scripture. Adventists emphasize the role of visions and miracles in their modern ministry.

The Issue of the Seventh Day

The Adventists begin their Sabbath on Friday evening at sunset and end it on Saturday at sunset, like the Jews do.

The Seventh-Day Adventists believe that worship on Sunday instead of Saturday is the mark of the beast described in the book of Revelation.

The mark of the beast in the book of Revelation does not seem anything like worshipping on a particular day, see Revelation 13:16-17.

They believe the time will come when the world will try to require Sunday worship and will persecute those who try to maintain observance of Saturday as the Sabbath. They believe that right now there are true Christians who are in churches that worship on Sunday, but at some time in the future they will have to change to the truth of the Saturday Sabbath or lose their souls for resisting the truth. They believe that when the crisis comes all true Christians will be faithful to the Saturday Sabbath even if it means death, and anyone who keeps Sunday as the Lord's Day is not a Christian.

There is no indication in the book of Revelation that a day of the week is the issue. Instead, the issue is the worship of a person who is not God.

38 Ellen White, *Testimonies*, Volume 5, 664-665

Consider the implications of the Adventists' beliefs. If they are right, almost all of the Christian church has been wrong from the first century. Almost none of the millions of godly, spiritual Christians who ever lived realized that they were following the "mark of the beast," and apparently God never showed this to them. This is not a minor doctrine that was lost, but one so important that according to Adventists, in the last days a person will lose his soul if he is wrong.

Sunday is the day for worship for Christians in every nation of the world. Millions of Christians around the world gather to worship God and listen to his Word. They testify to his love and grace and commit to serve him. Millions of them suffer severe persecution for their commitment to God. Can we really believe that they are following a Satanic doctrine and will someday lose their souls if they are not convinced of the Saturday Sabbath?

- » Think of all the godly examples that have been a blessing to your life. Is it possible to believe that they all will be lost unless they change their mind on this issue?

Adventists claim that Sunday worship began at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. The fact is that the decisions of the council did not create any new doctrines. They were establishing the doctrines that they believed were from the apostles.

Christians began keeping Sunday as the Lord's Day so early that we cannot find the beginning date. The *Didache* was written at the beginning of the second century of the church but represents first century traditions and teachings. It is a summary of the teaching of the apostles. It was used in churches everywhere. The *Didache* says that Christians should meet on the Lord's Day for communion. This writing was not trying to teach anything new, but review established doctrine, which means that this practice was already common, and that most Christians already knew it was a doctrine of the apostles.

The Epistle of Barnabas was written near the end of the first century. It is not scripture, but was used as devotional material in the churches. It calls Sunday the "eighth day," the day when Jesus rose from the dead. It says that Christians celebrate the eighth day.

We do not find a place in the Bible where it is explained that the Sabbath is switched to Sunday. Instead we find commands that a person is not to be judged about Sabbath observance (Colossians 2:16-17, Romans 14:5-6).

We also find that the New Testament Christians were to give offerings on Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), they met for services on Sunday (Acts 20:7), and they were calling Sunday the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

**"On the Lord's Day,
gather yourselves
together and break
bread, give thanks,
but first confess your
sins so that your
sacrifice may be pure."**

Didache

(from the second century church)

The Jewish Sabbath is not a requirement for Christians, but the principle of the day of rest is a creation principle for all time. Therefore, a Christian should seek to avoid work or business on Sunday and should instead rest and worship God.

Summary of the Issue of the Seventh Day

1. There is no indication in the book of Revelation that the “mark of the beast” refers to the issue of which day of the week is for worship.
 2. It is unrealistic to believe that almost all of the Christians in all times and all places have been wrong on a doctrine that could cause them to lose their souls.
 3. The Bible tells us not to judge others regarding Sabbath observance.
 4. Worship on Sunday was already established in the first century as the doctrine of the apostles.
 5. New Testament Christians met on Sunday and called it the Lord’s Day.
- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM/USING THE HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE

We should not say that a person is not a Christian because he is a Seventh-Day Adventist. It is possible that a person who believes all of the Adventist doctrines has been saved. The problem in fellowshiping with some Adventists is not that we reject them but that they reject us.

We agree with the Adventists that a Christian lives in obedience to God. We do not agree with churches that teach that because we are saved by grace it is not important to live in victory over sin.

Some Adventists seem to believe that a person is saved by works rather than by grace. Some seem to believe that if a person is not keeping Old Testament requirements he is not saved, even if he is sincerely following the Bible as he understands it. Those Adventists do not understand the scriptural gospel. For those Adventists, use the following points from the *Handbook of Doctrine*:

9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.

You can respond to the Sabbath issue with the sections in this lesson about “The Issue of the Seventh Day.”

If an Adventist truly believes that the teachings of the Bible are sufficient for salvation without any other revelation, that is good. If an Adventist seems to think that other revelations, such as those of Ellen White, are necessary, you should show him the scriptures referenced in the *Handbook of Doctrine*, in section

1. The Bible is sufficient for doctrine.

A TESTIMONY

Benjamin was a member of the Seventh-Day Adventists for 12 years. He studied their doctrines and read the writings of Ellen White. His main concern was to know how a person is saved and sanctified. He says that Adventist doctrine teaches that we are saved by keeping the commandments. He read Galatians 5:4, which says that if we are trying to be justified by the law we do not have Christ. He said that Adventists also seem to say that the gospel will change in the last days, and people who do not keep the right Sabbath cannot be saved, even if sincere people were saved without keeping the Sabbath before. Benjamin still believes that we must obey God, but he left the Adventists because he believes they have a gospel of works.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read 1 Timothy 1 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for the follower of Seventh-Day Adventism. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 17

UNDERSTANDING ROMAN CATHOLICISM

FIRST ENCOUNTER

During her childhood, Hannah prayed that God would lead her to a church where she would feel accepted. As a young adult she visited a Catholic church for mass. Many of the Roman Catholic customs seemed strange to her. She liked the fact that they practiced the same worship customs all over the world. She began to feel that it is a wonderful miracle that the mass becomes the body and blood of Jesus every time, so that people can be in contact with Jesus.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Titus 2 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does the passage say about Christian living? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Origin of Roman Catholicism

The worldwide leader of Roman Catholicism is called the pope. The headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church is in Rome.

The term *Catholic* means “universal” or “complete.” The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the complete church of God and that all other churches are false.

Catholicism claims to be the original church established by Christ. Catholics claim that the first pope was Peter, and that there has always been a successor of Peter as pope of the Catholic

“The church is apostolic, as being still ruled by the apostolical authority living in the writings of the apostles, that authority being the standard.”

William Pope

Compendium of Christian Theology III

church. They believe that their group of leaders called “Cardinals” are the successors of the apostles and have the same authority as the original apostles.

Roman Catholicism is similar to Eastern Orthodoxy in beliefs and religious ceremonies.

Influence

The Roman Catholic Church is one worldwide organization. As of 2021, there are more than 1.37 billion Catholic members.³⁹ The populations of many nations are mostly Catholic. In those countries, the Catholic religion is part of their culture. There are millions of people who profess to be Catholic but only occasionally participate in religious activities.

The Catholic church is very wealthy and politically powerful. In earlier centuries, the church many times used armies to force nations to submit to the church. In countries controlled by Catholicism, many people were tortured and killed because they did not agree with Catholic doctrines.

- » This question introduces the following section. What have you seen of the religious practices of Roman Catholicism?

Beliefs of Roman Catholicism

The worship style of Catholicism is very formal. Catholics have many large cathedrals around the world that are known for their great architecture. Cathedrals are decorated with pictures and statues of saints from history. Priests normally have special robes. The worship activities are done mostly by the priests, with little participation from the congregation.

The people of many cultures became Catholic while keeping the religious practices of their previous religion. Formerly pagan idols were at times given the names of Catholic saints. The ceremonies of Catholicism were mixed with the ceremonies of an idolatrous religion or a nature religion.

The Catholic church’s beliefs about God are consistent with basic Christian doctrines such as the

“Christ suffered in our place to satisfy the radical requirement of the holiness of God, so as to remove the obstacle to the pardon and reconciliation of the guilty. What the holiness of God required, the love of God provided in the cross.”

Thomas Oden

The Word of Life

39 “The Numeric State of the Catholic Church Up to 2023,” <https://zenit.org/2023/03/06/the-numeric-state-of-the-catholic-church-up-to-2023/>, accessed on April 11, 2023.

Trinity, the deity, death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Christ, and the deity of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic church claims that the church has the authority to explain what the Bible means, even if the church's interpretation seems to be different from what the Bible says. Catholics also include other writings, known as the Apocrypha, in their Bible (as scripture) that are not included in the Bible by other churches.

» What is the right view of the authority of the church in relation to the Bible?

Catholics believe that the pope is the representative of Christ on earth. They believe that when he makes official decisions about religion, he cannot make a mistake. This authority comes from their tradition and not from the Bible. Many popes in the past have been wicked men, guilty even of murder.

Both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism select historical people to recognize as saints. Many of the saints have status in the church similar to gods. People pray to them for help. Certain saints are supposed to be interested in certain aspects of life or in certain occupations, so sailors, farmers, and teachers have special saints, called patron saints, to whom they pray. In some places, the saints took the place of pagan deities. People consider God and even Jesus distant and unconcerned about them, so they pray to saints instead.

In Hebrews 4:16, God invites us to confidently come to him in prayer. We do not have merit in ourselves, but Jesus has given us access to God's presence by the atonement, Ephesians 2:13.

Roman Catholics are accused of idolatry because they pray to saints using pictures and statues of them.

To make an image for prayer and worship is idolatry. The Bible forbids idolatry, see Exodus 20:4-5 and 1 John 5:21. When a sinner repents and comes into relationship with God he rejects idols, see 1 Thessalonians 1:9. Never does the Bible say that the Christian should pray to anyone but God or use an image for worship.

Objects that were used by saints are kept in the churches for honor. Sometimes bodily remains such as teeth or bones are kept in the church. People come to kneel and pray to the saints represented by the bones.

Roman Catholic priests are not allowed to marry.

Mary (the mother of Jesus) is especially honored. The doctrine of the **Immaculate Conception** teaches that Mary was born without a sinful nature and never committed sin. Many Catholics pray to Mary more than to God. They feel that Jesus will listen to Mary and be influenced by her. Mary has become a mediator between the worshipper and Christ.

According to 1 Timothy 2:5, Jesus is the only mediator between God and man. Jesus has all compassion, and we do not need anyone to influence him to care about us, see John 11:35.

- » What is the correct Christian view of Mary?

Both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy teach the doctrine of **transubstantiation**. This is the belief that during communion, the bread and wine are transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus, so the worshipper can receive them for salvation. Therefore, they believe that the bread and wine are sacred.

Roman Catholics believe that salvation depends not only on the atonement of Christ but on being part of the Catholic church, receiving communion, and doing good works.

Catholics do not preach a gospel message that a sinner can repent of his sins, put his faith in Christ, and receive assurance of salvation. Instead, a person must faithfully follow the directions of the priest and hope for salvation.

Many Catholics continue to live in open sin. They expect that they will remain Catholics until they die, then spend time in purgatory, then go to heaven.

The Bible says that an evidence that a person is a Christian is that he lives a righteous life, see 1 John 3:7-8.

Purgatory and Indulgences

Roman Catholics believe that after death a person must suffer punishment for sins before entering heaven. This is called the doctrine of purgatory. They believe that sin must have punishment even if it has been forgiven. Therefore, even a faithful Catholic expects to spend some time in purgatory for the sins he has committed. Careless sinners expect that they

“A true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in his mercy, fears him with a son’s reverence, and loves him with all his soul. He worships God in spirit and in truth, in everything gives him thanks; calls upon him with his heart as well as his lips, at all times and in all places; honors his holy name and his word, and serves him truly all the days of his life.”

“I disclaim all common swearers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards; all whoremongers, liars, cheats, extortioners; briefly, all that live in open sin. These are no Protestants; they are not Christians at all.”

John Wesley

“Letter to a Roman Catholic”

will spend time in purgatory after death, then be allowed into heaven. They believe that the fire of purgatory causes pain greater than any pain experienced in life.

Jesus suffered so we would not have to be punished for sin, see Isaiah 53:5. Catholics deny that the sacrifice of Christ was sufficient for us to be forgiven and not be punished for sin.

They believe that Christians should pray for dead people and give offerings to the church for them, so God will forgive their sins sooner and let them out of purgatory.

The Bible nowhere tells us that we should pray for the dead. Instead, it implies that nothing can be done for sinners who have died without salvation, see Luke 16:23-26.

Catholics believe that the church has an accumulation of extra merit from Christ and the saints. The pope can give this merit to people to help them get forgiveness. This merit can be given to living people or dead people who are in purgatory.

The idea that merit from saints is added to merit from Christ to help sinners is a terrible doctrine. Human works do not bring any merit for forgiveness, see Ephesians 2:8-9. A believer is forgiven completely on the basis of grace, and not by the works of anyone, see Romans 4:5-8.

- » How does the doctrine of purgatory affect the lifestyle of those who believe it?

The distinctive doctrines of Catholicism do not depend on scripture. Their doctrine is based mostly on the tradition of the church.

- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM/USING THE HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE

Roman Catholics believe the foundational Christian truths of the Trinity and the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

There are many Catholics who have put their faith in Christ for salvation, but the message of the gospel is not clear in Catholicism. Many Catholics have not experienced repentance, forgiveness, and assurance of salvation, and are not living in relationship with God. Therefore, it is important for a Christian to share the gospel. The essentials of the gospel that are neglected in Catholicism can be proved with the following sections from the *Handbook of Doctrine*:

9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.

10. Only God should be worshipped.

11. We receive salvation by faith.
12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.

Because Roman Catholics have added traditions that they consider essential to Christianity, a Christian should show them the scriptures cited in the *Handbook of Doctrine* in the section

1. The Bible is sufficient for doctrine.

A TESTIMONY

Bartholomew became a Roman Catholic priest after several years of study. He served as a parish priest in California and later served as a chaplain in the navy. His mother became an evangelical Christian. He saw a wonderful change in her and had many conversations with her about her conversion. She persuaded him to depend on the Bible as the final authority for his beliefs. He began to realize that many important doctrines of Catholicism are contrary to the Bible. He left the Roman Catholic Church. He eventually understood that salvation is through the work of Christ and not by works or by the church sacraments.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Titus 2 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a Roman Catholic. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 18

UNDERSTANDING EASTERN ORTHODOXY

FIRST ENCOUNTER

As Jonathan became familiar with Eastern Orthodoxy, he was impressed at how they had endured persecution from Muslims and Communists in many countries. Their heroes are not pastors of large churches or music leaders. Their heroes are martyrs. Jonathan thinks that if persecution becomes worse everywhere, Eastern Orthodox believers are the ones who will endure.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read 1 Thessalonians 1 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What happened at the time when these people became Christians? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy

The word *Orthodox* comes from Greek words that mean “right worship.” The Eastern Orthodox Church believes that it is the true church with the doctrines and practices that provide the right worship of God.

Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism officially separated in A.D. 1054. Each claims to be the original church founded by Jesus and the apostles. Each claims to be God’s church on the earth and the one with true doctrine, based on the tradition of the early Christians. They believe many of the same doctrines. Their worship would look much alike to someone not familiar with them.

Eastern Orthodoxy has 15 self-governing church organizations. They are divided geographically. In some nations the church uses the nation’s name to form a church name such as

Russian Orthodox Church or Serbian Orthodox Church. Others of the 15 include the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Church of Cyprus.

Each church organization is ruled by a patriarch or archbishop. The Patriarch of Constantinople is considered the highest position of the 15 leaders. The ancient city of Constantinople is now Istanbul, Turkey. The Patriarch of Constantinople does not have authority over the other church organizations, but they all honor him as the highest.

Estimates of the number of Eastern Orthodox believers range from 225 million to 300 million. It is the second largest Christian organization in the world, after Roman Catholicism.

In many nations of Eastern Europe, the majority of the population considers itself Eastern Orthodox, and there are also large numbers of Eastern Orthodox believers in several countries of the Middle East.

» What Eastern Orthodox churches are you familiar with?

Beliefs of Eastern Orthodoxy

The Eastern Orthodox Church believes basic Christian doctrines about God, such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Eastern Orthodoxy relies heavily on the tradition of the church. To prove a doctrine, their leaders are as likely to quote from early church leaders as to quote from the Bible. They teach that the Bible is the authority for their doctrine, but that the Bible must be interpreted by the church.

Orthodoxy has developed a complex system of beliefs and practices that are based on tradition. The church claims that it has the authority to teach what is necessary to salvation, even if it is beyond what is taught in scripture. Eastern Orthodox followers believe that their traditions do not contradict the Bible.

The worship style of Orthodox churches is very formal. They have many large cathedrals around the world that are known for their great architecture. Cathedrals are decorated with pictures and statues of saints from history. Priests often have special robes.

“Now as the church of Jesus Christ is formed on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, the doctrines of this Christian church must be sought for in the sacred scriptures.”

Adam Clarke

Christian Theology

The worship activities are done mostly by the priests, with little participation from the congregation.⁴⁰

The people of many cultures became Orthodox while keeping the religious practices of their previous religion. Formerly pagan idols were given the names of Christian saints. The ceremonies of the church were mixed with the ceremonies of an idolatrous religion or a nature religion, or even witchcraft.

Many Orthodox followers consider God, and even Jesus, distant and unconcerned about them, so they pray to saints instead.

The Holy Spirit helps us to pray in a way that will be accepted by God, see Romans 8:26-27. We should have confidence that God hears and responds to our prayers. A person who prays must believe that God responds to prayer, or that person does not have the faith that pleases God, see Hebrews 11:6.

Pictures and statues of saints are provided in the churches so people can pray to them. Objects that were used by saints are kept in the churches for honor. Sometimes bodily remains such as teeth or bones are kept in the church. People come to kneel and pray to the saints represented by the bones.

- » What is idolatry? Are some of the practices of Eastern Orthodoxy idolatry?



Mary is especially honored in Eastern Orthodoxy. Many followers of Orthodoxy pray to Mary more than to God. They feel that Jesus will listen to Mary and be influenced by her. Mary has become a mediator between the worshipper and Christ. Unlike Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy does not believe that Mary was born with a human nature that was different from all others and always free from sin.

Prayer to Jesus is a mark of Christians everywhere, see 1 Corinthians 1:2. Christians also pray to God the Father, see 1 Peter 1:17. The Bible also talks about communication with the Holy Spirit, see 2 Corinthians 13:14. The Bible never tells us we should pray to Mary or any other person except God.

⁴⁰ Image by Freddy Torres from Pixabay, retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/architecture-church-kiev-religion-2166264/>.

Both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy teach **transubstantiation**, the belief that during communion, the bread and wine are transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus, so that the worshipper can receive them for salvation.

When Jesus showed the disciples how to do communion, he was still alive and present with them, see 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Therefore, when he said, “This is my body,” he meant that the bread was a symbol of his body. Today, communion should be considered the same as when Jesus instituted it.

Unlike the Roman Catholics, those in the Eastern Orthodox Church do not believe in purgatory. They also do not believe in a pope who has the authority of Christ over the worldwide church. They reject the Roman Catholic pope and do not have a leader of their own to whom they give similar authority.

Orthodox priests are allowed to marry, but only an unmarried priest can become a bishop.

Eastern Orthodoxy teaches the doctrine of **theosis** as the process of salvation. In *theosis* a believer is gradually transformed to become like God, having his same nature of holy perfection. This is accomplished by grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. The process is not complete until after death. Those in the Eastern Orthodox Church say that in receiving this holy perfection, we become gods, but they do not mean that we are infinite like God.

The Bible says that every believer shares the nature of God, see 2 Peter 1:3-4. We do not have to wait until after death to have his nature.

They believe that Christ has defeated sin for us, but each Christian must receive the power of the Holy Spirit to progress in his personal victory over sin and impurity.

The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that a Christian is justified in Christ, which means that the believer is forgiven of the sins he has already committed and made actually righteous in his living. It does not mean that a person is counted innocent while he continues to sin, and it does not mean that if a person goes back to the former life he is still justified. The believer depends on the power of the Holy Spirit to live righteously every day. This is also good theology if a person remembers that God accepts him because of Jesus and not because his works are good.

“The atonement encompasses all sins whatever, original as well as actual, past and future, great or small, in time or eternity.”

Thomas Oden

The Word of Life

Many followers of Eastern Orthodoxy believe the gospel and experience the grace of God. However, the church does not clearly preach a gospel message that a sinner must repent of

his sins and put his faith in Christ to receive immediate assurance of salvation. Therefore, of the millions of Orthodox members, most continue to live in open sin while they practice the religious customs. Most of them do not understand how to be saved.

- » What are some good things about Eastern Orthodox theology?
- » Now go back and read the ***bold and italicized*** text and each scripture.

EVANGELISM/USING THE *HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE*

The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches the foundational Christian truths of the Trinity and the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

There are some Orthodox worshippers who have put their faith in Christ for salvation, but the message of the gospel is not clear in the church teaching. Most have not experienced repentance, forgiveness, and assurance of salvation, and are not living in relationship with God. Therefore, it is important for a Christian to share the gospel. The essentials of the gospel that are neglected in Orthodoxy can be proved with the following sections from the *Handbook of Doctrine*:

- 9. Salvation is only by the atonement of Christ.
- 10. Only God should be worshipped.
- 11. We receive salvation by faith.
- 12. We can have personal assurance of salvation.

Because Eastern Orthodoxy has added traditions that they consider essential to Christianity, a Christian should show them the scriptures cited in the *Handbook of Doctrine* in the section

- 1. The Bible is sufficient for doctrine.

A TESTIMONY

John was raised in an Orthodox family in Rumania. His grandparents were leaders in the church. He was baptized and married in the church but did not attend services often. The priest never talked to him about his sins. John did not have a Bible, and the priest never told him he should read a Bible. As a young man he joined the communist party. He was sent by the communists to watch Baptist worship services. He was supposed to ask them why they were Baptists instead of orthodox. In the services, he realized he had never repented of his sins. He made the decision to repent and become a real follower of Jesus. He was pressured by his family and by the communist party to give up his new faith. He was encouraged by spending time reading the Bible. After his family saw the change in his life, many of them

became believers also. John says that the biggest difference between Eastern Orthodoxy and evangelical Christianity is that evangelicals emphasize the new birth.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read 1 Thessalonians 1 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for a follower of Eastern Orthodoxy. Several students can share what they wrote.

OPTIONAL READING: ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Oriental Orthodox Churches are distinct from the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Oriental Orthodoxy has six church organizations: Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Malankara Syrian, Syriac, and Armenian Apostolic. Each organization is led by a patriarch. Each organization is governed independent of the others. The patriarch of the Coptic Church is the pope of all Oriental Orthodoxy, but does not have authority over the others, except to lead meetings of representatives from the six organizations.

In the countries of Armenia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, Oriental Orthodox Christians are the largest religious group. In certain Muslim countries where Christians are a small percentage of the population, such as Egypt, Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon, Oriental Orthodox Christians are a high percentage of the Christians. They have been severely persecuted for centuries in Muslim countries.

Oriental Orthodoxy became distinct from other Christian churches because of a doctrinal disagreement in A.D. 451.

They separated because of theological disagreement over the nature of Christ. At that time there was one main church organization that represented Christianity. The church had not yet divided into the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Few churches had left the main church by this time.

The Council of Chalcedon, intended to represent all Christianity, made the decision that it is right to believe that Christ had two natures, the human and the divine. Some churches rejected this decision because it seemed to say that Christ was two persons in one. They believed that his nature came from both human and divine natures, but was just one nature. They believed they were holding the original beliefs of Christianity. Other issues were involved, including political issues, but the theological issue was the most important.

Within a few years after the council, bishops who disagreed with the council's decision were expelled from the church. The Oriental Orthodox Churches were formed after that time.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

LESSON 19

UNDERSTANDING PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

FIRST ENCOUNTER

James watched a church service on television. The church was taking an offering for a special project. A preacher at the church prayed for a blessing for everyone who gave money for the project. The preacher promised that the givers would receive back from God one hundred times as much as they gave. James wondered if he should make an online donation for the project.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 1

- » Read Matthew 6:25-34 aloud together. Each student should write a paragraph that summarizes this scripture passage. What does this passage teach about the way God provides for our needs? Each student should write a list of statements. As a group, discuss what you have written.

GOD’S BLESSINGS FOR HUMANITY

God blesses his creation (Genesis 1:22, 28). God created the first people and put them in a perfect environment to provide everything they needed (Genesis 2:8-9). Before the first humans sinned, work was pleasant, and there was no physical suffering or aging or death (Genesis 3:17-19). God’s design of life for humanity at creation shows us that he wants to provide everything we need.

When Jesus was on earth, he demonstrated the love of God. By healing diseases and feeding hungry people, he showed that God cares about our physical needs. At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus showed God’s compassion when he wept for the grieving family (John 11:35) then raised Lazarus from the dead.

The Apostle John wrote that he wanted believers to prosper and be healthy (3 John 1:2).

In the passage you read at the beginning of this lesson, Jesus said that just as God provides for the sparrows and makes flowers beautiful he will provide for his children (Matthew

6:25-34). He said that the children of God should not worry about their needs. A believer should make the kingdom of God a higher priority than even personal needs.

» A student should read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 for the group.

God wants his children to be content rather than seeking to be rich. This passage warns us not to love money, because the love of money causes every kind of evil. The Apostle Paul wrote that we should be content if our basic needs are met. He said that those who try to be rich fall into temptations and wrong desires. A person who loves money will find much sorrow.

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

Suffering is the result of sin, though an individual's suffering is not justly measured out to him as a result of his own sin. Suffering is not fairly distributed in this life. We suffer, not only because of our own sin, but because of the sins of others.

God created a perfect world and never intended that sickness, aging, and death should exist. He will ultimately restore a perfect world. The atonement of Christ provided for the eventual, complete restoration of all creation.

Not all of the benefits of the atonement are received completely right now. God has an order of priorities that he follows. Since suffering is the result of sin, sin must be dealt with first. If God were to suddenly take away all suffering, people would not see the harmfulness of sin. Suffering shows the evil of sin and the need for repentance.

By creating people as free creatures, God shows his priorities. God hates sin, but he considers it important for people to freely make choices. God wants people to do right because they choose to, not because they are forced to. God wants to save people in cooperation with their choice, so he appeals to their wills while allowing suffering to show the results of sin. As people see God's goodness in a suffering world, they see that they should repent of sin and obey God.

God is dealing with the sin problem first, and that takes time because he has given people free will. The sin of the world cannot be removed in a moment because people must individually decide. Those who repent will eventually enter God's new world, where there will be no suffering. Those who are unwilling to leave their sin will never be delivered from suffering.

God's power is not limited, but he has an order of priorities. To save people as willing, penitent believers, he must deal with sin first rather than with suffering. Sometimes God heals, but total healing for all people is not guaranteed in the present. That is why we continue

to age and deteriorate physically. We must wait in faith until the ultimate redemption of the body (Romans 8:23).

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PROSPERITY

» What are some ways that God provides for the needs of people?

Sometimes God provides in an unusual, miraculous way. For example, he dropped special food from the sky for the people of Israel (Exodus 16:14-15). Jesus miraculously multiplied bread and fish for crowds on two occasions (Mark 6:34-44, Mark 8:1-9). However, God has established usual ways to bring blessings to people.

1. **God blesses work.** Work was part of the perfect life God designed for the first people (Genesis 2:15). Scripture says that we profit from work (Proverbs 14:23). A person should work to have resources to share with others (Ephesians 4:28). The Bible often criticizes the lazy person (Proverbs 6:9, Proverbs 10:26, Proverbs 20:4). The church should not support a person who is not willing to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). A person who is able to work should not expect God to provide his needs without work.
2. **God blesses business.** The biblical description of a virtuous woman includes the detail that she does business for profit (Proverbs 31:16, 24). God is pleased by honest business but hates dishonesty (Proverbs 11:1). God is not pleased by business that is unfair to people who are in difficult situations (Proverbs 22:16, Amos 8:4-8).
3. **God blesses property.** The prophet Micah said that God's blessing on a nation included safe personal property (Micah 4:4). Many times God promised to bless land and farm animals that belonged to his children (Deuteronomy 28:4). It is good for a person to develop property so that it makes a profit.
4. **God blesses the church family.** God plans for the church to take care of its people like members of a family. Believers should help those who are in the family of faith (Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 5:3). The church is one of the ways that God meets the needs of believers.
5. **God blesses sacrificial giving.** The Apostle Paul promised a church that God would provide their needs because they had given sacrificially so that he could minister to others (Philippians 4:14-19). Jesus said that a widow's small offering counted as a great one because she gave sacrificially (Mark 12:43-44). Each person in the church should contribute to the ministry of the church and look for ways to help others in the spiritual family.

6. **God blesses routine giving.** The Old Testament system of tithes and offerings shows us that a believer should regularly give 10% of his income *and* additional offerings. God promised financial blessing to the people who gave tithe (Malachi 3:10).
7. **God blesses support for pastors.** God intended for pastors to be supported by their ministries (1 Corinthians 9:14). Believers should give to support their pastors (Galatians 6:6). A pastor should be willing to work when necessary (Acts 20:34). A pastor should be motivated by love and not by money (1 Peter 5:2). Many teachers of false doctrine are motivated by a desire for money (Titus 1:11, 2 Peter 2:3). It is wrong to buy or sell God's blessings for money (Acts 8:20).

FALSE PROSPERITY TEACHERS

The Bible warns us of preachers who have a false message that is attractive to people (2 Timothy 4:1-4). False prosperity teachers share several common characteristics:

1. They attract unbelievers by appealing to worldly goals instead of calling for repentance.
2. They do not give a realistic Christian view of human suffering.
3. They have a proud attitude that is disrespectful to other churches, older Christians, and even God.
4. They make promises that God does not make, leading to disappointment and loss of faith.

Sometimes false prosperity teachers gain attention with unusual doctrines and talented preaching. They claim to demonstrate miracles and revelations that other churches do not have. They want to be honored as religious celebrities.

They emphasize new revelation, and many of their doctrines are not found in the Bible. They claim to learn these new doctrines from conversations with God.

They are most known for their teachings about faith, emphasizing that every person can have health and wealth if he learns how to use faith. They promise that every person can be healed. They say it is God's plan for every Christian to be rich.

They claim that many miracles happen in their ministry, but there is not good evidence that many miracles are real. They claim to provide directions so that every believer can be rich, but only the leaders get rich—from the donations of their followers.

The crowds of people following these teachers are not wealthy, nor are they experiencing total health. Instead, they are hopeful people, led by unproven success stories.

Many new churches with false prosperity teaching have started in countries around the world. Some of them imitate American teachers on television. Some use books and videos from false prosperity preachers in America. Some false prosperity teachers start churches in other countries and take the offerings for themselves instead of using the money to bless the local congregations.

FALSE PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

False prosperity teachers have developed false theology to support their ideas.

False prosperity teachers say that faith is the impersonal power and substance of the universe. They believe that faith is a power people can use just as God uses it.

False prosperity teachers think man can use faith without depending on God and without trying to know God's will. In contrast, Jesus said for us to pray for the Father's will to be done (Matthew 6:10). The Bible tells us that faith leads us to trust God and seek the reward that he gives (Hebrews 11:6).

False prosperity teachers say that God does not own the earth or rule over it. They teach that God gave authority over the earth to man, and man gave it to Satan. They say that God cannot do anything in the earth unless people give him permission. In contrast, the Bible says that the earth and everything in it belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). The Bible says that God is the Judge of the whole earth and takes action in the earth (1 Samuel 2:10).

Their doctrines about faith are based on doctrines of God that are different from historical Christianity. For example, they teach that God the Father is a physical man. They believe that people are physical copies of God. They believe that because people are copies of God, they should be able to do what God does.

The Bible says that God is Spirit (John 4:24) and not a man (Numbers 23:19). Jesus is the unique Son of God who accomplished our salvation (John 3:16). But the false prosperity teachers say that God is a man like us and that Jesus is no different from us.

“But whoever says in the Spirit, ‘Give me money,’ or something else like this, you must not listen to him. But if he tells you to give for the sake of others who are in need, let no one judge him.”

Didache

(from the second century church)

Kenneth Copeland said about Adam,

Adam was the copy, looked just like [God]. If you stood Adam up beside God, they look exactly alike. If you stood Jesus and Adam side-by-side, they would look and sound exactly alike.⁴¹

He was not a little like God. He was not almost like God. He was not subordinate to God even... Adam is as much like God as you could get, just the same as Jesus.⁴²

Kenneth Hagin said, "Every man who has been born again is an incarnation, and Christianity is a miracle. The believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth."⁴³

Benny Hinn said, "Don't tell me you have Jesus. You are everything he was and everything he is and ever he shall be."⁴⁴

Morris Cerullo said, "And when we stand up here, brother, you're not looking at Morris Cerullo, you're looking at God. You're looking at Jesus."⁴⁵

God says,

...I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose," (Isaiah 46:9-10).

"Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is in essence, an insult to his character.... A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God. 'You thought,' said the Lord to the wicked man in Psalm 50:21, 'that I was one like yourself.'"

Adapted from A.W. Tozer

The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

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- 41 Kenneth Copeland, "The Authority of the Believer IV" (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1987), audiotape #01-0304, side 1.
 - 42 Kenneth Copeland, "Following the Faith of Abraham," (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985), audiotape side 1.
 - 43 Kenneth Hagin, "The Incarnation," *The Word of Faith* # 13, 12 (December, 1980), 14.
 - 44 Benny Hinn, "Our Position in Christ #2 - The Word Made Flesh," (Orlando, FL: Orlando Christian Center, 1991), audiotape #A031190-2, side 2.
 - 45 Morris Cerullo, "The Endtime Manifestation of the Sons of God," audiotape 1.

But the false prosperity teachers say that God does not have authority in the earth any longer.

Kenneth Copeland said,

He [God] has to have a man that is like that first one [Adam]. It's got to be a man. He's got to be all man. He cannot be a God and come storming in here with attributes and dignities that are not common to man. He can't do that. It's not legal.⁴⁶

He didn't use anything not common to man to get his job done.⁴⁷

Copeland also said, "He [God] can't go back to the dust of the earth and make another man. He don't own the dust of the earth anymore."

Frederick Price said,

Now this is a shocker! But God has to be given permission to work in this earth realm on behalf of man... Yes! You are in control! So if man has control, who no longer has it? God... When God gave Adam dominion, that meant God no longer had dominion. So God cannot do anything in this earth unless we let him. And the way we let him or give him permission is through prayer.⁴⁸

The theology of the false prosperity teachers contradicts the Bible and the basic beliefs of Christianity established from the beginning.

"How strange it is that people professing Christianity can suppose that with a worldly spirit, worldly companions, and their lives governed by worldly maxims, they can be in the favor of God or ever get to the kingdom of heaven!"

Adam Clarke

BIBLICAL CORRECTIONS

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers to correct a misunderstanding that they had about the Christian life (see 1 Corinthians 4:8-13). Many of them had been poor before becoming Christians. They thought that because they became children of God, with faith and spiritual gifts, they could begin to have wealth and status in the world. Paul told them that even the apostles suffered poverty and had low status in the world. Though they had great faith and

46 Kenneth Copeland, "The Incarnation," (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1985), audiotope #01-0402, side 1.

47 Copeland, "The Incarnation."

48 Frederick Price, "Prayer: Do You Know What Prayer Is... and How to Pray?" *The Word Study Bible* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1990), 1178.

spiritual gifts, they sometimes were hungry, homeless, and worked to support themselves. Faith is not a guarantee of wealth.

In another passage, Paul explained that all creation is still suffering the results of the curse on sin (see Romans 8:22-23). All living creatures suffer and struggle to survive. He said that even Christians still suffer physically and are waiting for the time when their bodies will be redeemed. Though we are saved from sin, we do not yet experience the full healing provided in the atonement. We still experience sickness, aging, and death because we are not in heaven yet. Sometimes God heals, but we are not guaranteed that we can live free from all physical problems.

The Apostle James rebuked people who loved the things of the world and prayed for things to satisfy their own desires (James 4:3). The Apostle Paul was sad about Demas who left the ministry because he loved the things of the world (2 Timothy 4:10). Apparently, James and Paul both understood that faith is not a guarantee of wealth.

Hebrews 11 records the lives of many heroes of faith. They accomplished great things because they believed the promises of God and obeyed God. They endured hard times because of their faithfulness to God. Many of them were homeless and lacked food and clothing (Hebrews 11:37-38). They did not suffer these things because they had no faith, but because they had faith. They were willing to lose everything in the world for the sake of their relationship with God.

- » What is some biblical evidence that faith does not guarantee wealth?

The biblical gospel is a message of hope to the person who knows that he is guilty of sin and wants forgiveness and peace with God. A relationship with God begins with repentance and submission of our will. The Christian lives in daily obedience, humility, and surrender to God's will. God invites us to bring all needs to him in prayer, but we must accept his will in every situation. God promises that everything is under his control and that he will work everything for our good (Romans 8:28-29), but he does not promise to take away all suffering immediately (Romans 8:16-18, 1 Peter 1:6).

The Lord's Prayer is an example of a Christian attitude. This is in contrast to the attitude of the false prosperity teachers who claim power and honor for themselves. In this prayer we find that the priority is the kingdom and glory of God, and everything is to be submitted to his will (see Matthew 6:9-13).

- » How should a Christian's attitude about healing and money be different from the attitude the false prosperity teachers show?

A TESTIMONY

A church in Santo Domingo needed to make their building larger. They prayed for God to provide. They also asked a mission organization to help. The people of the congregation gave their own money sacrificially. They also gave their time and work for the building project. God blessed their commitment and sacrifice, and the building was completed.

SCRIPTURE STUDY – PART 2

- » Now read Matthew 6:25-34 again. Each student should write a paragraph explaining the message this passage has for someone who is following a false prosperity teacher. Several students can share what they wrote.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY LESSON

Remember to find an opportunity to present the gospel to someone from this religious group. False prosperity teachers are found in various churches, but their messages are similar. Prepare to share with your classmates about the conversation you have had. Write your 2-page written report and turn it in to your class leader.

HANDBOOK OF DOCTRINE

This handbook provides biblical support for some of the doctrines that are often denied by false religions. The handbook is not designed to include all Christian doctrines, and not all important doctrines are covered here.

1. THE BIBLE IS SUFFICIENT FOR DOCTRINE.

Why it Matters

Some religions that claim to be Christian depend on new revelation for their most important doctrines. They claim that the Bible does not contain everything that is essential for doctrine. But the Bible claims that its message is sufficient, so that if a person follows it completely, he is saved.

Scriptural Proof

“But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void” (Luke 16:17). This mark written above certain Hebrew letters had no meaning and was just decorative. The point of this verse is that God’s Word is preserved.

“You have been born again... through the living and abiding word of God.... The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23-25). God’s Word will never fail, and it presents the gospel. Therefore, the gospel will not be found in doctrines that are outside of scripture, or contrary to scripture.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31). Jesus said that his words would not be lost.

“From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).

“All scripture is breathed out by God... that the man of God may be complete” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). There is enough in the Bible to make a person exactly what God wants him to be.

2. THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.

Why it Matters

As Creator and Father, God deserves worship. He requires us to give him loyalty that is not divided with any other being. He says that he is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, Deuteronomy 5:9, Deuteronomy 6:15). God is angry when others are given the worship that only he deserves (Deuteronomy 32:16, 21). When a religion teaches that there is more than one god, or that man can become a god, the result is to take from God some of the glory that belongs only to him.

Scriptural Proof

“Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (Isaiah 43:10).

“I am the first, and I am the last; besides me there is no god” (Isaiah 44:6).

“Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any” (Isaiah 44:8).

See also Isaiah 45:5, 6, 14, 21-22, and Isaiah 46:9 for proof that there is no other God.

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:3-4). God is not just the God of this earth, but the God and Creator of the universe.

3. GOD THE FATHER IS NOT A MAN.

Why it Matters

The reason some religions say that God is a man is to exalt man to be comparable to God. This takes away from the glory of God. See the verses about the jealousy of God under “There is only one God” above.

Scriptural Proof

“God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind” (Numbers 23:19).

“I am God and not a man” (Hosea 11:9).

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (Romans 1:22-23). To make God like an image of man is idolatry.

“And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven’” (Matthew 16:17). The Father is not flesh and blood, according to Jesus’ statement.

“God is spirit” (John 4:24).

4. GOD HAS NEVER CHANGED.

Why it Matters

False religions have different reasons for saying that God can change. They may want to say he was a man like us, which exalts man to the level of God. They may want to say that there are both good and evil in God, or that God can make mistakes.

Scriptural Proof

“I the LORD do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

“From everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2).

“The Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).

5. JESUS IS GOD.

Why it Matters

1. Because Jesus is God his sacrificial death is of infinite value — enough for forgiveness of the sins of the world.
2. Because he is God, he has the power to save us; he is the way, the truth, and the life.
3. Because he is God, we should worship him as we worship the Father.

If a religion says that Jesus was created by God or that He was a man and not God, they take from him the worship he deserves. They also believe a different gospel instead of putting their faith completely in Jesus for salvation.

Scriptural Proof

“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

“Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

“The Father... has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” (John 5:22-23).

Jesus created all things, and everything belongs to him (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus is the complete image of God and maintains the universe by his own power (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus is the “First and the Last” a title that God claims for himself (Revelation 1:8, 13, 17, Isaiah 44:6).

Other references where Jesus is called God: John 1:1, 14, Acts 20:28, Titus 2:13, Isaiah 9:6, 1 Timothy 3:16, and John 14:9.

Verses that show that Jesus has the attributes of God: Matthew 18:20, Matthew 28:20, Philippians 3:21, Hebrews 13:8, John 2:24-25, and Micah 5:2.

Verses that show that Jesus is worshipped just as the Father is worshipped: Hebrews 1:6, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Philippians 2:9-11 (like Isaiah 45:22-23), Revelation 1:6, Revelation 5:12-13, and John 17:5 (see Isaiah 42:8, Isaiah 48:11).

6. JESUS ROSE BODILY FROM THE DEAD.

Why it Matters

From the first days of the church, the resurrection was a necessary part of the gospel. The Apostles preached that it proved that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. His resurrection proves that his gospel can save and give us eternal life.

Scriptural Proof

Jesus predicted his own physical resurrection: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... He was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:19-21).

Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection: “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).

Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:27).

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 tells us that Jesus was raised the same way the Christians will be raised. The entire chapter shows the necessity of the physical resurrection of Christ for Christianity. If Christ was not raised, then we have no hope of being raised, and our gospel is therefore vain (15:17). If Christ is not raised, then we will not be raised, and we are miserable without an eternal hope (15:19).

The Apostles preached the resurrection as an essential part of the gospel (Acts 2:31-32, Acts 3:15, Acts 4:10, Acts 10:40-41, Acts 13:30-37, Acts 17:31, and Acts 26:8, 23).

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD.

Why it Matters

A religion that denies the deity of the Holy Spirit usually denies the Trinity and the deity of Christ. A person who does not believe that the Holy Spirit is God will not worship him and give him the reverence he deserves.

Scriptural Proof

The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:4 and 2 Corinthians 3:17).

The Holy Spirit has the knowledge that only God has: He understands God completely (1 Corinthians 2:10-11) and he prophesied in ancient times (1 Peter 1:10-11, 2 Peter 1:21).

The Holy Spirit is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7).

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ and is present with every believer (Romans 8:9).

The Holy Spirit does what only God could do (Luke 24:49, John 16:8-11, Ephesians 3:16, Galatians 5:22-23).

The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed (Luke 12:10).

8. GOD IS A TRINITY.

Why it Matters

People who deny the Trinity usually deny that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God, and do not worship them. The worst mistake a person can make is to either worship someone who is not God, or fail to worship someone who is God. A religion that denies that Jesus is God will develop a new gospel.

Scriptural Proof

The doctrine of the Trinity comes from three facts.

1. The Bible says that there is only one God.
2. The Bible speaks of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit as God.
3. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from one another and interact with each other as persons.

For scriptural evidence of the first two facts, see the sections in this handbook entitled “There is Only One God,” “Jesus is God,” and “The Holy Spirit is God.”

For evidence that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interact with each other and with believers as persons, see John chapters 14-16. In John 14, see verses 10-13, 16, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28, and 31. In John 15, see verses 1-2, 9, 10, 15, 23-24, and 26. In John 16, see verses 7, 10, 13-16, 26-28, and 32.

9. SALVATION IS ONLY BY THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

Why it Matters

False religions give the wrong directions for a person to seek the mercy of God. There is only one way to be saved.

Scriptural Proof

“There is no other name under heaven given... by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

“All who believe... are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22, 24).

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Romans 5:9).

“The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

10. ONLY GOD SHOULD BE WORSHIPPED.

Why it Matters

If a person worships something other than God, he is the enemy of God and under the power of Satan. It is not possible to worship God properly and also worship anyone else. It is wrong to worship human leaders, saints, or Mary. It is wrong to pray to spirits and to obey them.

Scriptural Proof

God told his people to bow to no image of anything (Exodus 20:4-5). Therefore we know it is wrong to worship any object.

Satan tempted Jesus to bow to him, but Jesus said that it is written that we should worship and serve only God (Matthew 4:10). Therefore we know it is wrong to worship Satan.

Apostle Paul said that to worship devils is to provoke God to anger and jealousy (1 Corinthians 10:20-22). Therefore we know it is wrong to worship spirits that are against God.

Apostle Paul said that people are deceived who worship angels (Colossians 2:18). Therefore we know it is wrong to worship angels.

Apostle Peter told Cornelius not to worship him because he was also a man (Acts 10:25-26). Therefore we know it is wrong to worship a human being.

11. WE RECEIVE SALVATION BY FAITH.

Why it Matters

Because salvation is completely provided by the atonement of Christ, people cannot do anything to earn their salvation, even partially. No human organization can keep salvation from a person by setting other requirements.

Scriptural Proof

“By works of the law no human being will be justified” (Romans 3:20).

“One is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28).

“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace” (Romans 4:16).

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God... not a result of works” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

12. WE CAN HAVE PERSONAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

Why it Matters

Because salvation is the free gift of God, received by faith, a person can know that he is saved. If a person confesses his sins to God, and believes God’s promise to forgive on the basis of Christ’s atonement, that person can believe that he is saved. God also gives the witness of his Spirit that we are saved. False religions usually keep people in fear.

Scriptural Proof

“I write these things to you... that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

“We may have confidence for the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17).

“You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:15-16).

13. THE UNSAVED WILL SUFFER ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

Why it Matters

If a religion denies the reality of eternal punishment, it lowers the significance of human choices and lowers respect for the law of God. Jesus spoke about hell many times, showing the importance of the doctrine.

Scriptural Proof

Jesus told about a rich man who was in the fires of hell after death (Luke 16:24).

“The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night” (Revelation 14:11).

“Undergoing a punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7).

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41).

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

REVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are for the lessons that cover religious groups.

At the beginning of a class session, the teacher should review with some of these questions. Each question can be answered with one sentence. These questions will help the students remember the most important details about each religious group.

LESSON 3 - MORMONISM

1. What do Mormons think of other churches?
2. What do Mormons believe about the history of Christianity?
3. Who do Mormons believe Jesus was before his birth?
4. What is the ultimate goal of a Mormon?
5. What is the highest authority for a Mormon?

LESSON 4 - JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

1. What do Jehovah's Witnesses think of other churches?
2. What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe about the Holy Spirit?
3. What false beliefs about Jesus are taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses?
4. What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe a person must do to be saved?

LESSON 5 - IGLESIA NI CRISTO

1. What is the translated name of Iglesia ni Cristo?
2. What large cult is similar to Iglesia ni Cristo in doctrine?
3. What is the most important belief of Iglesia ni Cristo?
4. What does Iglesia ni Cristo teach about Jesus?

5. According to Iglesia ni Cristo, what two things must a person do to be saved?

LESSON 6 - EASTERN LIGHTNING

1. What is the official name of the cult called Eastern Lightning?
2. What does Eastern Lightning teach about Jesus?
3. According to Eastern Lightning, how is a person saved?

LESSON 7 - APOCALYPTIC CULTS

1. How do apocalyptic cults try to meet people's emotional and spiritual needs?
2. How do apocalyptic cults misuse the Bible?
3. What is the great theme of prophetic scriptures from the Bible?
4. How are apocalyptic cults destructive?

LESSON 8 - HINDUISM

1. What is Brahman, according to Hindus?
2. How is the moral character of the gods of Hinduism different than the moral character of the one true God?
3. What is the ultimate goal of a Hindu?
4. What is the Hindu view of Jesus?

LESSON 9 - BUDDHISM

1. Name and define the ultimate goal of the Buddhist.
2. What do Buddhists believe in instead of God?
3. What explanation do Buddhists have for suffering in life?
4. Why do Buddhists practice mental and spiritual exercises?

LESSON 10 - TAOISM

1. To whom do Taoists pray?
2. Who are the supreme gods in Taoism?
3. What is the goal of the Taoist?
4. According to Taoism, who is Jesus?

LESSON 11 - ISLAM

1. Name the god, the prophet, and the holy book of Islam.
2. What false beliefs about Jesus do Muslims hold?
3. What do Muslims believe about the Bible?
4. What do Muslims believe about salvation?

LESSON 12 - JUDAISM

1. What scriptures do Judaism and Christianity have in common?
2. Who was Jesus, according to Judaism?
3. What kind of Messiah is expected by Judaism?
4. What is the concept of salvation in Judaism?

LESSON 13 - NEW AGE

1. How do New Agers view other religions?
2. What is the New Age concept of God?
3. How do New Age followers interact with the supernatural?
4. What do New Age followers believe about Jesus?
5. What do New Age followers believe about sin?
6. What do New Age followers believe about salvation?

LESSON 14 – NATURE RELIGIONS

1. Are the beliefs and practices of nature religions restricted to one particular religion? Explain.
2. How do those who practice nature religions interact with spirits?
3. Why do animists not pray to God?
4. What is a superstition?
5. Why are Christians not superstitious?

LESSON 15 - VODOO

1. Whom do Voodoo practitioners worship?
2. What is the goal of a worshipper during a Voodoo worship service?
3. From what church does the Voodoo religion borrow rituals, images, and saint names?
4. What are some examples of things used in Voodoo ceremonies?

LESSON 16 - UNDERSTANDING SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

1. What is the primary doctrine that distinguishes Adventists from other churches?
2. What is the Adventist view of God?
3. What is the Adventist view of salvation?
4. What do Adventists believe will happen to people at the resurrection?

LESSON 17 - UNDERSTANDING ROMAN CATHOLICISM

1. What does Roman Catholicism claim with its name?
2. Why are Roman Catholics accused of idolatry?
3. What do Roman Catholics believe about God?
4. What is the Roman Catholic view of salvation?
5. What is the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory?

LESSON 18 - UNDERSTANDING EASTERN ORTHODOXY

1. What does the name of the Eastern Orthodox Church claim?
2. What does the Eastern Orthodox Church believe about God?
3. Why do followers of Eastern Orthodoxy pray to saints?
4. What does the Eastern Orthodox Church teach about the Bible?
5. According to the teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy what happens in *theosis*?

LESSON 19 - UNDERSTANDING PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

1. Name four common characteristics of false prosperity teachers.
2. According to false prosperity theology, what is faith?
3. According to false prosperity theology, who is God?
4. According to false prosperity theology, what are people?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

To study more about the topics discussed in this text, please see the following resources.

Evangelism

Coleman, Robert. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Ada: Revell, 2010.

Comfort, Ray. *Hell's Best-Kept Secret*. New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2004.

Little, Paul. *How to Give Away Your Faith*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2019.

Mormonism

Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults: The Definitive Work on the Subject*. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2019.

Geisler, Norman and William Nix. *From God to Us Revised and Expanded: How We Got Our Bible*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012.

The books recommended for the lessons on the Jehovah's Witnesses, Iglesia ni Cristo, and Eastern Lightning are also relevant to this lesson.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Carlson, Ron and Ed Decker. *Fast Facts on False Teachings*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.

The books recommended for the lessons on Mormonism, Iglesia ni Cristo, and Eastern Lightning are also relevant to this lesson.

Iglesia ni Cristo

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates the Evidence for the Resurrection*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

McDowell, Josh and Bob Hostetler. *Beyond Belief to Convictions*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002

The books recommended for the lessons on Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Eastern Lightning are also relevant for this lesson.

Eastern Lightning

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Hattaway, Paul. *China's Christian Martyrs*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007.

The books recommended for the lessons on Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Iglesia ni Cristo are also relevant to this lesson.

Apocalyptic Cults

Bird, Mark, Allan Brown, Philip Brown, Ben Durr, Stephen Gibson, Daniel Glick, Richard Miles, and Larry Smith. *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*. Cincinnati: Revivalist Press, 2006.

Ladd, Eldon. *The Blessed Hope*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Hinduism

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

The books recommended for the lessons on Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Judaism are also relevant for this lesson.

Buddhism

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for a Creator: A Journalist Investigates Scientific Evidence that Points toward God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

The books recommended for the lessons on Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, and Judaism are also relevant for this lesson.

Taoism

Geisler, Norman. *Christian Apologetics*. Ada: Baker Academic, 2013.

The books recommended for the lessons on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism are also relevant for this lesson.

Islam

Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2002.

The books recommended for the lessons on Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Judaism are also relevant for this lesson.

Judaism

McDowell, Josh. *More than a Carpenter*. Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2009.

Kaiser, Walter C. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

The books recommended for the lessons on Jehovah's Witnesses and Iglesia ni Cristo are also relevant for this lesson.

The website for Jews for Jesus provides evidence for Christianity and answers for objections, especially for Jews, at <https://jewsforjesus.org>.

Another ministry that provides articles and information is Chosen People Ministries, at <https://www.chosenpeople.com>.

New Age Religion

Geisler, Norman and Ronald M. Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*. Ada: Baker Books, 1990.

Chesterton, G.K. *The Everlasting Man*. Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2013.

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015.

The books recommended for the lessons on Jehovah's Witnesses, Iglesia ni Cristo, and Eastern Lightning are also relevant to this lesson.

Nature Religions

Richardson, Don. *Peace Child*. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2005.

Richardson, Don. *Eternity in Their Hearts*. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2006.

Voodoo

Spurgeon, Charles and Robert Hall. *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*. Edmonds: YWAM Publishing, 1993.

Middleton, David. *Victory Over the Forces of Darkness*. Salem: Allegheny Publications, 2010.

Seventh-Day Adventism

Carson, D. A. *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000.

Catholicism

Noll, Mark. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. Ada: Baker Academic, 2012.

The book recommended for the lesson on Eastern Orthodoxy is also relevant to this lesson.

Eastern Orthodoxy

Gonzalez, Justo. *A History of Christian Thought, Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

The book recommended for the lesson on Roman Catholicism is also relevant to this lesson.

False Prosperity Theology

Hanegraaff, Hank. *Christianity in Crisis*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012.

Gibson, Stephen. *Prosperity Prophets*. Salem: Allegheny Publications, 2006.

Sider, Ronald. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*. Ada: Baker Books, 2005.

RECORD OF ASSIGNMENTS

STUDENT NAME _____

On the table below, initial when each written report has been submitted. All assignments must be successfully completed in order to receive a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

	CONVERSATION DATE	RELIGIOUS GROUP DISCUSSED	WRITTEN REPORT SUBMITTED
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SHEPHERDS GLOBAL CLASSROOM COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS COURSES

Christian Beliefs

This is a systematic theology course, describing the Christian doctrines about the Bible, God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and last things.

Romans

This course teaches the theology of salvation and missions as explained in the book of Romans, discussing several issues that have been controversial in the church.

Eschatology

This course teaches the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation along with other sections of prophetic scripture and emphasizes essential doctrines such as the return of Christ, the final judgment, and the eternal kingdom of God.

Doctrine and Practice of the Holy Life

This course gives a biblical description of the holy life that God expects and empowers for a Christian.

Doctrine and Practice of the Church

This course explains God's design and plan for the church and biblical subjects such as church membership, baptism, communion, tithe, and spiritual leadership.

BIBLE SURVEY COURSES

Exploring the Old Testament

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 39 books of the Old Testament.

Exploring the New Testament

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 27 books of the New Testament.

Principles of Biblical Interpretation

This course teaches the principles and methods of interpreting the Bible properly in order to guide our life and relationship with God.

EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP COURSES

Introduction to Apologetics

This course teaches the scientific, historical, and philosophical basis for a Christian worldview, and shows how the Christian faith is consistent with reason and reality.

Faith Traditions of the World

This course gives the evangelical believer an understanding of the teachings and proper responses to 17 religious groups.

Biblical Evangelism and Discipleship

This course presents the biblical principles that guide evangelism methods. It describes forms of evangelism and provides lessons to use in discipling new converts.

Spiritual Formation

In this course students learn to have the attitudes of Jesus, to relate to God the way Jesus related to his Father, to humble ourselves as Jesus did, to practice the spiritual and personal disciplines of Jesus, to endure suffering as Jesus did, and to engage in the Christian community (the Church) formed by Jesus.

Practical Christian Living

This course applies scriptural principles to the use of money, relationships, the environment, relations with the government, human rights, and other areas of practical living.

Christian Marriage and Family

This course gives a Christian perspective on human development through the stages of life and applies scriptural principles to family roles and relationships.

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COURSES

Ministry Leadership

This course emphasizes Christian character while teaching leaders to guide organizations through the process of discovering values, realizing purpose, sharing vision, setting goals, planning strategy, taking action, and experiencing achievement.

The Life and Ministry of Jesus

This course studies the life of Jesus as a model for ministry and leadership in the 21st century.

Principles of Communication

This course teaches the theology of communication, methods for effective speaking, and methods for preparing and presenting biblical sermons.

Introduction to Christian Worship

This course explains how worship impacts all aspects of the believer's life and gives principles that should guide individual and congregational practices of worship.

CHURCH HISTORY COURSES

Survey of Church History I

This course describes how the church fulfilled its mission and protected essential doctrine through the period from the early church to the Reformation.

Survey of Church History II

This course describes how the church expanded and faced challenges through the period from the Reformation to modern times.