

STUDY GUIDE

WHAT ABOUT: Other Religions (Week 4)

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Genesis 11.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. 2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 The Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. 7 "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (NASB)

Some important questions

Immanuel Kant, 18th century philosopher questioned whether there can be a search for pure logic and reasoning outside of a divine, moral code. His research and observation suggested that it was impossible. He posited that mankind is on a quest to answer these types of questions: *How can I know what is real? How do I decide what is right? What is it I should be living for?*

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you think most people you know are asking questions like this?

Religion is....

religion is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe - Random House Dictionary, 2011.

Whether atheist, Christian, Buddhist or agnostic, we are all religious. When Christians talk about other religions it often becomes a debate about which religion is superior. But, this discussion should not be about superiority but truth. So the proposition is this:

This is not question about which philosophy, religion or set of beliefs is superior; it is a question about which is true.

Babel.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, we see mankind's attempt to reach God and become like Him. Throughout history thousands of religions have developed and many have different ideas of God and how we get to know him or her, depending on the religion, of course. However, in the 21st Century, most religions fall into one of two camps: eastern asceticism or western legalism.

Eastern Ascetic religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism suggest that the way to find "heaven" or "nirvana" is through mediation and a detachment from the physical world. Through mediation and acts like yoga, they teach that eventually your true spirit can escape the cycle of reincarnation and become one with the ultimate spirit. This is a generalization, but it does capture the essence of these religions.

Western legalistic religions like Judaism, Islam and Mormonism suggest that there are practices that we must do in order to be good enough to earn God's favor. By living by a certain moral code and

by completing certain rituals, one can “work” their way to God and salvation.

Questions for Reflection

2. In your own words, define religion.
3. Why are there so many religions?

For further study on world religions, we suggest visiting websites of each; at first, do not study a religion from a source written by an outsider. Study the religion from resources written by those who practice it. For instance, <http://www.pbs.org/edens/thailand/buddhism.htm> is a good site for a simple introduction to Buddhism.

Christianity is....

In other religions, man “does something” to see God, earn favor with God, find heaven or become like God. **Christianity is something entirely different.** Regardless of what you have been taught or what you have experienced in the past, becoming a Christian has nothing to do with your activity. The Scripture teaches us that God became a Man to live and die for us so that we might have communion with God. John puts it this way:

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. 9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word*

became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NASB)

This EXPLODED the running religions of the 1st century. The Jews taught that we find favor with God by obeying His laws. The gnostics taught that some esoteric revelation was the way to salvation. The message of Christianity is that God took on flesh...that Divine Reason (Logos) came in the form of a Man in Jesus and that He embodied the Truth. Further, Christianity teaches that it does not matter who you are because becoming a Christian is a spiritual act done by God: *12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Questions for Reflection

4. In your own words, how does one become a Christian?
5. How do you think most people describe Christianity?

Rest for the weary.

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. - Matthew 11:28

Jesus says that when we come to him, we must do so in humility, understanding our own shortcomings.

Questions for Reflection

6. Do you see your need for Jesus?

No categories.

If you ask most people in 21st Century America to describe a Christian, they might use words like “conservative,” “Republican,” “self-righteous,” or “narrow - minded.” There are many reasons for that. Some if it is deserved but often it is simply that culture has misrepresented the church as a whole. The Bible, rather than listing things that people are to do, tells Christians WHO they are:

1 Peter 2: 9 ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ... 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens (foreigners) and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The 1st Century Christians were known for things like this:

1. They didn't go to the bloodiest - gladiatorial fests in Rome because of their barbaric nature. These festivals were very popular and in many ways, "the place to be seen."
2. They didn't serve in war to advance Caesars conquests.
3. They stood against abortion and infanticide
4. They used women in leadership in different ways than the rest of the culture, teaching that woman had equal value to God.
5. They were against sex outside of marriage.
6. They gave radically to the poor, way beyond Greeks and Romans of the same time period.
7. They were against same sex practice.
8. They mixed races and classes together, which was unheard of in the 1st Century.
9. They believed that Christ was the only way to God.

No one had ever seen a group of people like this and the pagan cultures did in fact praise the name of God on account of the good deeds of the first Christians. Christians serve and give and "do what is right" NOT to earn favor but BECAUSE they have been given unmerited favor (GRACE) by God. That is the Christian message. it is not western legalism or eastern asceticism.

Questions for Reflection

7. Look back at the list above. Do you see a pattern in these characteristics? No. 1 is a conservative thought isn't it? No. 2 is a liberal one. No. 3? Conservative. No. 4? Conservative. And so on!