

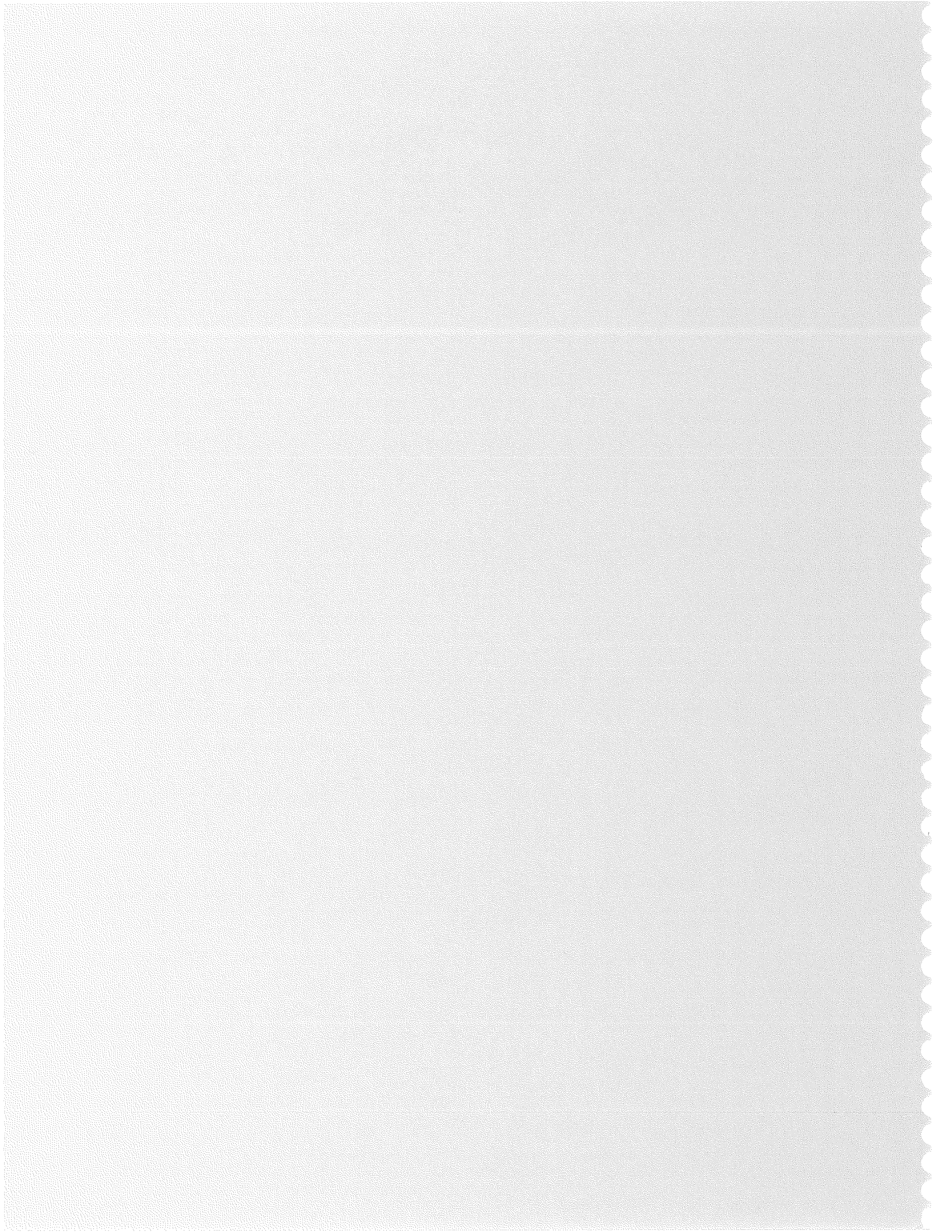
Study Guide

An Introduction to World Religions

Rev. Robert O. Balza, Sr.



Congregational
Assistant Program



An Introduction to World Religions

Study Guide

by
Rev. Robert O. Balza, Sr.

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An Introduction to World Religions

Opening Devotion

Psalm 115

Leader: Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory,

Student(s): because of your love and faithfulness.

Leader: Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"

Student(s): Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Leader: But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

Student(s): They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see;

Leader: they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk;

Student(s): nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

Leader: Those who make them will be like them,

Student(s): and so will all who trust in them.

Leader: O house of Israel, trust in the Lord—

Student(s): He is their help and shield.

Leader: O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord—

Student(s): he is their help and shield.

Leader: You who fear him, trust in the Lord—

Student(s): He is their help and shield.

Course Introduction

This brief course in world religions will help participants learn the basic concepts of several major world religions. It will also offer an opportunity to speak directly with an adherent of a non-Christian religion.

Goals

- Gain an understanding of the theology of a few of the largest non-Christian world religions, especially those present in this area
- Gain a deeper appreciation of the Gospel blessings we enjoy
- Meet and interview an adherent of a world religion
- Gain credit as part of the CSI program

Course Outline

Lessons	Homework Assignments
1. Introduction/worldviews	Bahai'
2. Animism	Judaism
3. Hinduism	Confucianism
4. Buddhism	Sikhism
5. Islam	Interview
Report on interviews	

Helpful Books

- Halverson, Dean. **The Illustrated Guide to World Religions**. Bethany House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI. 2003
- Kolb, Erwin J. **How To Respond to Judaism**. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. 1995.
- Ridenour, Fritz. **So What's The Difference?** Regal Books: Ventura, CA. 2001
- Vos, Johannes. **A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World**. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI. 1965
- Thompson, David C. **What In The World Is Going On?** Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI. 2010
- Wendland, Ernst. **Of Other Gods and Other Spirits**. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI. 1977
- Wilkinson, Philip. **Religions**. Dorling Kindersley Limited: London. 2008

Lesson 1

What is religion? Write down your own definition.

Agree or disagree. Everyone in the world is religious.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." **Psalm 14:1**

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. **Romans 1:20**

Features common in almost all world religions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Five Main categories of world religions

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Ten Largest Religions in the World

	Religion	Adherents
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

What makes a religion Christian or not?

- A) _____
- B) _____

Christian Religions	Non-Christian (Non-American)	Non-Christian (American origin)
Roman Catholicism	Buddhism	Mormonism
Eastern Orthodoxy	Hinduism	Jehovah's Witnesses
Reformed Churches	Islam (Muslims)	Christian Science
Lutheran Churches	Judaism	Native American spiritism
	Taoism	

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

An Overview of Major Worldviews

What is a worldview?

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:8

■ BIBLICAL (CHRISTIAN) WORLDVIEW

- Prime reality =
- Source of knowledge and truth =
- Origin of the universe =
- The nature of man =
- The problem of evil =
- The future =

■ NATURALISM (MATERIALISM)

- Prime reality =
- Source of knowledge and truth =
- Origin of the universe =
- The nature of man =
- The problem of evil =
- The future =

■ SECULAR HUMANISM

- Prime reality =
- Source of knowledge and truth =
- Origin of the universe =
- The nature of man =
- The problem of evil =
- The future =

■ POSTMODERNISM

- Prime reality =
- Source of knowledge and truth =
- Origin of the universe =
- The nature of man =
- The problem of evil =
- The future =

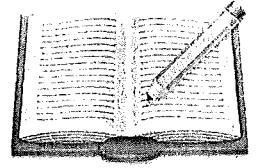
■ SPIRITISM

- Prime reality =
- Source of knowledge and truth =
- Origin of the universe =
- The nature of man =
- The problem of evil =
- The future =

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,
and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

Lesson 1 Assignment: **Report on Baha'i**



Prepare a Report on the Baha'i religion, using these guidelines:

- 2-3 pages in length, single spaced
- Address as many of the following questions/issues as possible:

History/Organization

- Who founded this faith and when/where?
- Where are they headquartered? Or are there any holy places?
- What sort of religious institution or organization do they have?
- A brief summary of the history of this faith

Sacred texts or guiding documents

- Are there any sacred texts, and where did they come from?

Doctrines

- What are some of the main doctrines or beliefs of this faith system?
- What is this faith's concept of a divine being (god or goddess)?
- Into which main category of world religion does Baha'i fit – and why?
- How do they regard Jesus?
- What is their concept of salvation? How do adherents experience a happy eternity?
- What sort of ethical doctrines do they have?

Practices

- How do they encounter or experience the divine?
- What are some habits, practices or worship activities of this faith?

Presence

- Are there adherents/activity/worship centers in this area?

Resources

- What resources did you consult to get your information?

Please turn in a printed copy of your report.

Please keep reports to 2 pages or less. Try not to copy/paste from the internet. Use your words.

Lesson 2

An Introduction to Animism

Opening Devotion

Goals

- Gain an understanding of animism in its ancient form so that we may witness to the Hmong and others in our midst
- Gain an understanding of some of the new forms of animism that have invaded our modern world.

Helpful Books on Animism

- Fadiman, Anne. The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down. Farrar, Strauss and Girard: New York. 1997.
- Halverson, Dean. The Illustrated Guide to World Religions. Bethany House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI. 2003
- Wendland, Ernst. Of Other Gods and Other Spirits. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI. 1974

Basic Facts about Animism

8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____

Expressions of Animism

What are some ancient forms of animism?

What are some modern forms of it?

Animistic Beliefs

What do animists believe about God?

Animists may believe in either

_____ or

_____ spirit beings.

What is a soul/spirit?

What can it do?

How is it controlled?

How is it contacted?

a) _____

b) _____

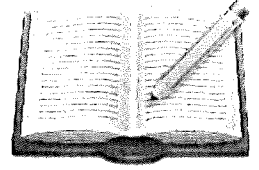
Why is Animism so attractive?

1. _____

2. _____

Lesson 2 Assignment

Report on Judaism



Prepare a Report on the Jewish religion, using these guidelines:

- 2 pages or so in length, single spaced
- Address as many of the following questions/issues as possible:

History/Organization

- What are the three main branches of Judaism, and how do they differ?
- What is Zionism?

Sacred texts or guiding documents

- What sacred texts do Jewish people use today?

Doctrines

- What are the Jewish concepts of God?
- What about Messianic hopes in the three branches of Judaism?
- How do they regard Jesus?
- What is their concept of salvation?
- Which is more important in the Jewish mind – deeds or creeds?

Practices

- List five of the most important annual Jewish holidays – what they are, when they are held, and what they commemorate
- What is a bar mitzvah – its purpose and observance?
- What are some habits, practices or worship activities of this faith?

Synagogue Services

- What are the main elements of a synagogue service?
- Who are the leaders of the services?
- How are they similar and different from Christian worship services?

Presence

- Is there a Jewish synagogue/temple in this area? What is it and where is it?

Resources

- What resources did you consult to get your information?

You will be asked to hand in a printed copy of your report at the start of next week's class.

Please keep reports to 2 pages or less. Try not to copy/paste from the internet. Use your words.

Lesson 3

An Introduction to Hinduism

Opening Devotion

Goals

- Gain an understanding of the ancient religion of Hinduism which is being brought to our neighborhoods by Indian students and physicians
- To be able to identify Hindu ideas and understand how they differ from the truth of Holy Scripture.

Helpful Books on Hinduism

- Ridenour, Fritz. So What's The Difference? Regal Books: Ventura, CA. 2001.
- Halverson, Dean. The Illustrated Guide to World Religions. Bethany House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI. 2003
- Wilkinson, Philip. Religions. Dorling Kindersley Limited, London. 2008
- Vos, Johannes. A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI. 1965

Facts about Hinduism

Adherents: _____

Where is Hinduism most popular? _____

How many adherents in North America?

“many gods and many ways to god”

History of Hinduism

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Development</u>
_____	polytheistic and ritualistic tribal religion
_____	Priesthood developed to perform the complex rituals
_____	reform/revolt to emphasize new gods and meditation over rituals
_____	development of mythical stories of the incarnation of deities

A Religion of many “gods”

Category	Deity Name	Description	Notes
ONE REALITY			
TRIMURTI (three manifestations of Brahman)			
AVATARS (ten mythical incarnations of Vishnu)	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
	6		
	7		
	8		
	9		
	10		
Millions of other gods			

The Hindu Holy Books

WRITINGS	PURPOSE/CONTENT	NOTES
	to give priests instructions on how to perform rituals (4 vedas with 4 parts in each; one part is the “mantras”)	The “OT of the Hindus” Written prior to 600 BC
	Expounds the ideas of the Brahman and the many gods Mystical interpretations of the verses	The “NT of the Hindus” Written 800-300BC
	Epic mythical stories of the avatars	Bhagavad-Gita is very popular today; main character is Krishna

Religious Concepts Common to Hinduism

Brahman =

Brahman/Atman unity =

Law of Karma =

Samsara =

Moksha (liberation) =

Karma marga =

Jhana marga =

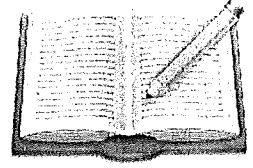
Bhakti marga =

Hindu Customs and Practices

CUSTOM/PRACTICE	NOTES

Lesson 3 Assignment

Report on Confucianism



Prepare a Report on Confucianism, using these guidelines:

- 2 pages or so in length, single spaced
- Address as many of the following questions/issues as possible:

Basic Facts about Confucianism

- How many adherents?
- Where is it found and popular?
- Who was Confucius? When and where did he live?

How Does Confucianism Influence our World?

- What are some of the precepts of Confucianism that are influencing the world in which we live?

Doctrines/Worldview

- What is the Confucian view of God? (monotheist, polytheist, what?)
- What in yin-yang?
- What is “Jen”?
- What is the goal of Jen?
- What is the foundation of Jen?
- What is the process of Jen?
- What is Tai-Chi?
- What about ancestor worship?

Confucian Writings (Holy Books)

- List some of the main writings of Confucianism with a word or two about each

Resources

- What resources did you consult to get your information?

Please turn in a printed copy of your report.

Please keep reports to 2 pages or less. Try not to copy/paste from the internet. Use your words.

Lesson 4

An Introduction to Buddhism

Opening Devotion

Goals

- Gain an understanding of Buddhist teaching and practices
- Understand how Buddhism differs from Christianity

Helpful Books on Hinduism

- Ridenour, Fritz. So What's The Difference? Regal Books: Ventura, CA. 2001.
- Halverson, Dean. The Illustrated Guide to World Religions. Bethany House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI. 2003
- Wilkinson, Philip. Religions. Dorling Kindersley Limited, London. 2008
- Vos, Johannes. A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI. 1965

Facts about Buddhism

Adherents: _____

Where is Hinduism most popular? _____

The Buddha

Original name of the Buddha _____

Dates: _____

How he became the Buddha:

Teachings Common to All Buddhists

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____

Four Truths of Buddhism

1. Life is _____.
2. The origin of the pain of life is _____.
3. The pain of life can be ended by _____.
4. The way to deliverance from pain (achievement of nirvana) is _____.

Buddhism's Eight-Fold Path

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____

Resources for following the path and shaping good karma are:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Two Main Branches of Buddhism

	Theraveda	Mahayana
Nickname		
Concept of divine being		
Way of Salvation		
View of Buddha		

Tantra Buddhism

Dalai Lama

Location

Buddhist Sacred Writings

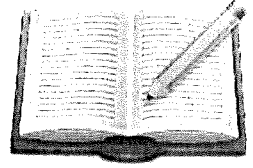
TRIPITAKA	SUTRAS

Buddhism and Christianity

1. Buddhism assumes _____ is at the root of our problem
2. The solution to the problem is _____.
3. No clear idea of the _____.
4. The goal is _____.
5. The best we can hope for is _____.

Lesson 4 Assignment

Report on Sikhism



Prepare a Report on Sikhism, using these guidelines:

- 2 pages or so in length, single spaced
- Address as many of the following questions/issues as possible:

Basic Facts about Sikhism

- How many adherents?
- Where is it found and popular?
- Who was the founder?

How Does Sikhism Influence our World?

- What are some of the precepts of Sikhism that are influencing the world in which we live?

Doctrines/Worldview

- What is the Sikh view of God? (monotheist, polytheist, what is their god's name?)
- What is a guru?
- What is "karma"?
- What is the "khalsa"?

Sikh worship

- What is their worship like?

Resources

- What resources did you consult to get your information?

Please turn in a printed copy of your report.

Please keep reports to 2 pages or less. Try not to copy/paste from the internet. Use your words.

Lesson 5

An Introduction to Islam

Opening Devotion

Goals

- Gain an understanding of Islamic teaching and practices
- Understand how Islam differs from Christianity

Helpful Books on Islam

- Braswell, George W. What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2000.
- Ehlke, Roland Cap. Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI 2004.
- Halverson, Dean. The Illustrated Guide to World Religions. Bethany House Publishers: Grand Rapids, MI. 2003
- Wilkinson, Philip. Religions. Dorling Kindersley Limited, London. 2008
- Saal, William J. Reaching Muslims for Christ Moody Press: Chicago, IL 1993

Facts about Islam

Adherents: _____

What does the word "Islam" mean?

Why is Islam one of the world's fastest growing religions?

The Mission and Militarism of Islam

What is the mission of Islam

What is jihad and how is that part of the Muslim mission?

The Prophet Muhammed

Dates: _____; Birthplace: _____

Visions:

Persecution: How did he end up in Medina?

What was his relationship with Jews and Christians?

How do Muslims view Muhammed?

Three Holiest Places In Islam

What are the three holiest places in Islam and why?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Islam's Sacred Writings

A. _____

B. _____

Notes on the Quran

1. Agree or disagree: We can benefit from reading the Koran or, for that matter, from reading the sacred writings of other religions.
2. How would you try to convince a Muslim friend that the Bible alone reveals the true God? Where would you start?

Major Faith Elements of Islam

Islam has both beliefs and obligations

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Islam's Five Pillars

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Jesus in Islam

1. Jesus is considered a _____, but not a _____ (or God).
2. The best "use" of Jesus, then, is as an example of sinless life.

Suppose you are talking to a Muslim. He is willing to grant that Jesus is a sinless prophet.

How could you use that statement to witness to him?

The Way of Salvation in Islam

1. Islam teaches that:

- Each person is ultimately responsible for _____.
- Each person must live in such a way that _____.

Since a person, according to Islam, is basically good and capable of obeying the law of Allah, those who wish to have a positive eternal experience must work at it.

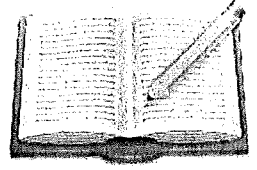
The Sects of Islam

	Sunni (80% of Islam)	Shiite (20%)
Split Over		
Muhammed's Successor		
Authority		

Islam and Christianity Notes

Lesson 5 Assignment

Interview Report



Be prepared to submit your interview in writing

- Use the interview guidelines and interview form provided.
- Address as many of the questions on the interview as possible

Be ready to share your experience in class

- Who did you interview?
- How did you decide on that person?
- What were some of the most interesting things you learned?
- Did you share your faith in any way?
- What insights did you glean?

Please turn in a printed copy of your report.

If you cannot find someone to interview, this is an alternate assignment:

- Read all or a portion of one of the sacred writings of a world religion (such as a Veda, a Mantra, Upanishads, a Ching, the Talmud, the Tripitaka, the Quran, etc.)
- Write up a page or two with your impressions of what you read
 - What did you read?
 - Did you understand it?
 - Did it add to your understanding of that world religion?

Please turn in a printed copy of your report.

