

WORLD RELIGIONS - JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM

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WORLD RELIGIONS (PART 1)

Objective

The children receive basic information about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Contents

World religions

- Judaism.
- Christianity.
- Islam.



Introductory
Remarks

The fundamental characteristics of the five world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—will be discussed in Lessons 9 and 10. The aim is to impart a basic understanding about this subject to the children.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will be covered in this lesson. In these religions, the life of every individual person and creature is unique and does not recur. Another characteristic common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is monotheism, the belief in only one God, as opposed to polytheism, the belief in many gods. The belief in the fulfillment of godly promises, and in a redeemer or restorer of the world is also characteristic of these religions.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims do not simply worship their own singular god, but rather all three worship one and the same God. This God is called

- *Yahweh* (YHWH) by the Jews, a name that is not expressed, however; instead God is addressed using the name Adonai (“Lord”). In the Old Testament, one can also find the designations El, Elohim, and El-Shaddai, for example.
- *God* or *Lord* by the Christians in their respective languages. According to Christian doctrine, God is triune: God the Father, God the Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. The word “trinity”, derived from the Latin word for “three”, is used to designate God’s triune nature.
- *Allah* (Arabic for “God”) by Muslims of all languages.

1 **Judaism**

On the one hand, the term “Judaism” is used to designate the Jewish religion, but also the totality of all cultural expressions typical of Jews. The term was originally (since around the first century BC) employed to highlight differences between Jews and Greeks. Only in modern times did the Jews themselves begin using this expression to represent their religion.

The pre-exile Israelite religion is distinguished from the post-exile and present-day Jewish religions.

Until the time of Babylonian exile, the name "Israel" is used. At first this is the name for the community of the twelve tribes in Egypt. Following the division of the kingdom, the name "Israel" is used to denote the northern state. After the deportation of the tribes of the northern kingdom in the year 722 BC, only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained as closed communities, as did the Levites. Now the expression "Jews" was formed from the word "Judah", to designate the original people of God, the Israelites.

Fundamental characteristics are

- the belief in only one God;
- the Torah (the Pentateuch, or first five books of Moses in the Bible), being God's law and an integral part of the covenant between God and his people;
- "Israel" as the people chosen by God and obligated by the Torah.

For faithful Jews today, the fulfillment of the law is still the supreme duty in life, apart from fulfilling the laws of sacrifice, which were connected with the temple in Jerusalem. With the destruction of the temple in the year 70, all temple sacrifice ceased.

The books which we call the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch (or five books of Moses), constitute the foundation of Jewish doctrine. In addition to this there is extensive literature interpreting the Torah (Talmud).

Concerning the future, the Jews believe in

- an end-time, including the return of the Jewish people to the land of their fathers,
- a Messiah as a ruler sent by God,
- the resurrection of the dead for judgment.

The oldest sign of the covenant with God was the Ark of the Covenant. An important symbol of the Jewish religion is the menorah, a seven-armed candlestick. Ten of these golden candlesticks once stood in Solomon's temple. In post-exile Judaism, only one menorah remained in the temple. It stood in front of the curtain to the Holy of Holies. The symbolism of the menorah is characterized by the flowing together of the motif of the tree of life and the concept of God as the life-dispensing light.

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Islam

Since the eighteenth century, the six-pointed Star of David has been the symbol of Jewish congregations.

Today, Judaism is most prevalent in Israel, the USA, and Europe.

Islam (Arabic, literally, “surrender” [to the will of Allah]) is the youngest of the main world religions. It dates back to the proclamation of Muhammad (569–632) who regarded himself as a prophet, as recorded in the Koran.

Initially, Muhammad’s message was apocalyptic in character. He proclaimed the impending world judgment, at which good and evil deeds will be requited.

Muhammad’s ideas were strongly influenced by Judaism and the views of Christian sects in Arabia. He gained his knowledge about these religions through discussions with believers in both religions. Strict monotheism, particularly that of Judaism, as well as the Jewish expectation of the Messiah and the Christian hope for his return, have characterized Muhammad’s views. That is why both Jews and Christians are acknowledged by him as “those who possess the writings” in the Koran. According to Muhammad, their writings are distorted portions of the Koran, which is in heaven and was revealed to him in its complete and perfect state.

The focal point of Islamic belief is the fulfillment of laws. A Muslim is someone who professes the Pillars of Islam—five duties—which are:

- Allah is the only God; Muhammad is his prophet.
- Say a ritual prayer five times a day.
- Support the needy.
- Fast during the month of Ramadan.
- Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in your life.

The main holy place is the Kabah (the Arabic word for “dice”) in Mecca, a cube-shaped structure veiled with an enormous black cloth and containing the holy black stone, which the faithful touch and kiss. The Kabah was already worshipped before Muhammad’s time. Muslims believe that the Abraham of the Bible, whom they call Ibrahim, built the Kabah as the “house of God”.

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Lesson Plan

Lead-In

Discussion

Unlike Christianity, the cornerstone of Islam is not a person, but rather a book, namely the Koran (=“recitation”). With its 114 Surah, it is regarded as the image of the heavenly Koran.

Geographically, Islam covers a vast area. North and East Africa, the Near and Middle East, including the Arabian peninsula, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Caucasus, and many states of the former Soviet Union are primarily Muslim.

Implementation

Question Prompt

Discuss with the children that with Reformation, an additional independent movement had come into being within Christianity, namely the Protestants, through whom new denominations came into being.

Name other Christian churches you have heard of!

■ The Roman Catholic Church, and

■ Orthodox churches

Teacher's Presentation

The terms “denomination” or “confession” are also often used in connection with these large churches. “Confession” is derived from the Latin word *confesio* (i.e., confession or profession). Denominations or confessions are not unique to Christianity, but are also found in other religions. Although they belong to the same religion, the principles of denominations or confessions often diverge gravely.

The origin of the word “religion” is obscure. Often it is traced back to the Latin word *religare*, which means “to bind or link (again)”. Consequently, religion is taken to signify “binding or linking” (in other words, the connection between man and God, a higher, or several, deities). Religions offer answers to questions of life, for example, questions about

■ the origin of the world,

■ the meaning of life, and

■ life after death.

Question Prompt

What religions, other than Christianity, have you already heard of?

Discussion

Supplement the children's answers if necessary.

The following are considered world religions:

- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam
- Buddhism
- Hinduism.

Large parts of the world's population profess these.

Workbook, Exercise 1

Discuss the diagram showing the approximate distribution of the world's religions. Have the children complete the chart.

Teacher's Presentation

Explain that the percentages are only estimates, and that there are also other religions in addition to those shown, but that they will not be dealt with.

Workbook, Text

The children read the individual descriptions of the world religions. Ensure the children understand what they have read by posing questions.

Workbook, Exercise 2

The children do exercise 2.

Discussion

Discuss with the children that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have something in common: followers of these three religions all believe in the same God. Beyond that, there are a great many conceptual differences between them. However, these could not be included in their entirety in the workbook overview.

What is important for us is that we respect people of other beliefs. This means that we do not poke fun at them because of their faith. Our faith is so holy to us that we endeavour to shape our lives according to its principles. The convictions of a Jew or Muslim are just as important to him or her.

Conclusion

Workbook, Exercise 3

The children work on the exercise.

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Notes

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