



General

What Year Is It?



Did you know that our concept of time is affected by religion? The calendar we use in Australia is called the Gregorian calendar. It is named for Pope Gregory XIII. This calendar was developed for use by the Christian Church. It marks years as beginning with the birth of Christ. The abbreviation BC means “before Christ”. The abbreviation AD means anno Domini, or “in the year of the Lord”. Today, we often use the term Common Era (CE) instead of AD and before the Common Era (BCE) for BC.

In contrast, the Islamic calendar used in some Islamic countries marks years as beginning with the Hegira, the year that Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. The abbreviation AH means anno Hegirae, or “in the year of the Hegira”. The year AH 1 is the same as AD 622.

Other countries use their own official calendars with different months and years.

Do you think countries should use a calendar rooted in religion? Or should all countries follow a secular (nonreligious) calendar? Write two or three sentences for your answer.

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General

Religions Around the World



These are the ten world religions with the greatest number of followers. Number them from 1 to 10 according to the number of followers each has, with 1 having the most and 10 the least. How many of these religions are you familiar with?

Baha'i: _____

Buddhism: _____

Chinese traditional religion (including Taoism): _____

Christianity: _____

Hinduism: _____

Islam: _____

Jainism: _____

Judaism: _____

Sikhism: _____

Spiritualism: _____

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Hinduism

The Soul



Shankaracharya was a Hindu teacher who founded four great monasteries in India. He once explained that humans are like jars filled with air. Our souls are the air. This air is the same as the air outside the jar. When the jar breaks at death, the inside air joins the outside air.

Think about this description for a minute or two. Then write three or four sentences explaining your reaction to it.

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Hinduism

The Law of Karma



In the Hindu view of the world, souls go through an endless process of death and rebirth. Our actions in this life affect the next life. This is called the law of karma.

In a way, we can look at karma as cause and effect. Every individual action has an effect, either good, neutral or bad. If we live a life of good deeds, good things will eventually happen to us – if not in this life, then in the next one. If we are selfish and narrow-minded, then bad things will happen to us.

In this way of thinking, there are no such things as accidents or luck – either good luck or bad luck. Everything that happens is the result of some action we took either in this life or one in the past.

Think about something unexpected that happened to you recently, either good or bad. Describe the incident. Did you think it was an accident or “just luck”? Would your attitude towards the event change if you thought your own past actions had caused it? Explain.

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Judaism

A Light Unto the Nations

The prophet Isaiah said to the Jewish people, “Be a light unto the nations.” This is one of the responsibilities of being a Jew. To do this, Jews are directed to study and live by the laws of Moses. These laws are the very will of God.



What do you think it means to be a “light” to other nations? Describe someone or something that is a “light” to you.

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Judaism

The Maccabean Revolt

Around 333 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Israel. However, the Jews were allowed to continue practising their own religion.

This ended in 175 BCE when Antiochus IV became king. Antiochus wanted to make Jerusalem a Greek city. He banned Jewish Sabbath observance and scripture study. He built an altar to Zeus in the temple and forced Jews to make sacrifices to Greek gods.

Many Jews accepted the Greek religion in order to maintain peace. But some didn't. Finally, in 167 BCE, a revolt broke out. It was led by Judah Maccabee, son of a priest. Most of the Jewish fighters were farmers, not soldiers. Still, they managed to defeat the Greek army and liberate Jerusalem in 165 BCE.

Judah and his followers reconsecrated the temple. The final step was lighting the lamp in the temple. A special oil was used for this lamp; it took several days to prepare properly. When they went to light the lamp, they found only enough oil for one day. Still, they filled the lamp and lit it. Amazingly, the lamp continued to burn. It burned for eight days – long enough for more oil to be prepared.

This event is still celebrated today in a celebration sometimes known as the Festival of Lights. What is the proper name of this festival?



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Taoism

People, Nature, Tao

The Tao Te Ching, the first book of Taoism, says that humankind follows the earth, the earth follows nature and nature follows the Tao.

In what ways does humankind follow the earth? Do we also fail to follow it? Write two or three sentences for your answer.



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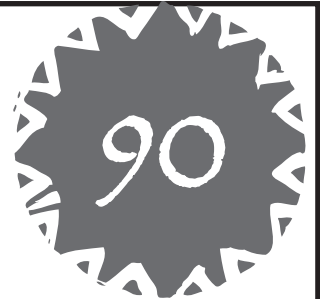
Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha

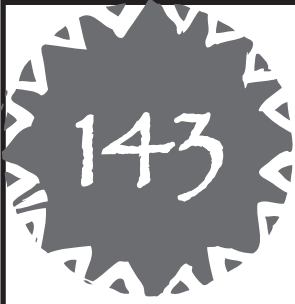
Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born in Nepal in about 563 BCE. He was the son of a king. When Siddhartha was born, his father was told that the boy had two possible futures. He would be either a great king or a great spiritual leader.

Siddhartha's father wanted him to be a king. He gave Siddhartha every luxury and kept him from any sadness. Then a series of carriage rides changed Siddhartha's life. On the first ride, he saw an old person for the first time. He had not known that old age existed. On the next ride, he saw a sick person. He became aware of sickness and disease. Next he saw a corpse, and became aware of death. Finally he saw a holy man who had given up the world for the sake of spiritual things. Siddhartha decided that he, too, would give up the life he knew in order to seek spiritual fulfillment.

Why do you think that seeing old age, sickness and death prompted Siddhartha to leave his life as a prince?



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Christianity

The Imagery of Jesus

In his teaching, Jesus used everyday language. His lessons were based on things his listeners were familiar with. He spoke of shepherds and sheep, of rocky soil and mustard seed. These were all part of daily life in Palestine at that time.

Do you think Jesus' message would have affected people as much if he had spoken in terms of heaven and angels, not rocks and farmers? Explain your answer.

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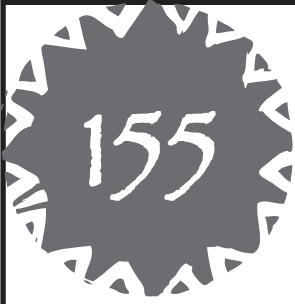
Christianity

The Wild Man of Gerasenes

According to the Gospel of Mark in the Bible, a man near Gerasenes was possessed by an army of demons. The man was a source of fear for the local people. He had been living in a tomb, hitting himself with rocks, and yelling wildly at night. Jesus helped the man transfer his demons onto a flock of pigs, and the pigs ran over a cliff.

Would you have been able to approach a wild man like the one in Gerasenes? What would have kept you away from him? Why do you think Jesus approached him? Write three or four sentences for your answer.

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Islam Muhammad

Muhammad, the founder and most important prophet of Islam, was born in 570 CE in the town of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. His father died a few days before Muhammad was born. When he was six, his mother died, and he was given into his grandfather's care. When

Muhammad was eight, his grandfather also died. His uncle then took over raising Muhammad.

How might life experiences like these affect someone? Write three or four sentences for your answer.

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Islam The Meaning of Muhammad

Stories say that when Muhammad's mother was pregnant, a voice said to her, "You are pregnant with the lord of this people. When he is born, say, 'I put him in the care of the One from the evil of every envier'; then call him Muhammad."

The name Muhammad means "highly praised". Muhammad did, indeed, grow up to be highly praised. When his name is spoken or written, it is customary for Muslims, followers of Islam, to utter the blessing "peace be upon him".

Today, more boys in the world are given the name "Muhammad" than any other name.

Why do you think the name "Muhammad" is so popular today? Write two or three sentences for your answer.

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