

World Religions

Course Guide

plus

Earn College Credit with the DSST® Exam

by

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and Laura Luna

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World Religions Course Guide

First Printing 2012; Revised 2014, 2016, 2018, April 2019

Printed in the United States of America

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About the Authors

Cheri and Laura partnered in authoring this Course Guide to provide students an engaging and age-appropriate resource to earn both high school and college credit.

Cheri Frame is the founder of Credits Before College and certified as a Career Direct® Consultant. She and her husband Tim live in Minnesota and homeschooled their three children K-12. They lived in Papua, Indonesia for one of those years to serve with Mission Aviation Fellowship. This experience inspired the mission behind Credits Before College: To help students earn a debt-free college degree. Through her research and planning, all three of their children graduated college early and debt-free – not through financial aid or scholarships, but by being smart about how they earned credits. As a speaker, author, and consultant, Cheri specializes in advising families on preparing for high school, graduating college debt-free, and choosing a career. **CreditsBeforeCollege.com**

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"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints . . ." – Ephesians 1:17-18

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In Their Own Words

The World Religions guide was a fabulous tool for my daughter. The guide was very helpful. It included the primary information on the major world religions and utilizes tools to accommodate different learning styles. From creating murals to field trips, reading and studying to watching helpful videos, she was inspired to learn and to remember. She passed the DSST with flying colors; she was well prepared due to the content of the World Religions Guide. She enjoyed learning about the different religions using the model in this guide.

~ Sue L., Parent

Thank you for providing us with the World Religions Course Guide. It gave us a platform for growth, producing conversations in our home. I feel the faith of our children is being strengthened because we have had the opportunity to answer and field their questions and doubts.

~ Kelly M., Parent

The World Religions study has been quite enlightening. It was so interesting to "connect the dots" and see how ancient cultures and beliefs have pervaded into today's worship practices. We were surprised how similar some religions are that one would never have placed side by side. Learning the history and significance of each belief system explained how religion was used politically, as well as spiritually, to control populations and answer life's most pressing questions. As Christians, we realized what a blessing it is that we are allowed and encouraged to connect with our God directly and not have to speak to our Creator via incarnations or symbols. The Bible that God gave us has all the answers. So many other religions are very noble and seeking, but the exposure to all truly solidified for us the true uniqueness of Christ's message and life.

~ Rebecca and Brandon R., Parents

Studying World Religions has been eye-opening and valuable to our family. We have had conversations that I know that we wouldn't have had otherwise. It has taken some of the mystery out of "other options"; options that our children will have more exposure to and may be curious about when they are not under our roof. What better time to study, reflect, wrestle, bring darkness to light, and let The Truth surface? This is another way that can ground our children in their beliefs and the truth of The Bible and the one and only true God.

~ Jane, Parent

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Course Overview	6
Parent/Educator Notes	8
Field Trips, Movies, and More	12
Introduction	19
Unit 1 – Judaism.....	23
Unit 1 – Judaism Review Questions.....	31
Unit 2 – Christianity	35
Unit 2 – Christianity Review Questions.....	41
Unit 3 – Islam	47
Unit 3 – Islam Review Questions	55
Unit 4 – Native Religions.....	59
Unit 4 – Native Religions Review Questions.....	63
Unit 5 – Hinduism	65
Unit 5 – Hinduism Review Questions.....	77
Unit 6 – Buddhism.....	81
Unit 6 – Buddhism Review Questions.....	87
Unit 7 – Confucianism.....	91
Unit 7 – Confucianism Review Questions	99
Unit 8 – Taoism and Shintoism	101
Unit 8 – Taoism Review Questions	105
Unit 8 – Shintoism Review Questions.....	107
Unit 9 – Miscellaneous Review	109
Unit 9 – Miscellaneous Review Questions.....	113
Appendix	115
Learning Styles	116
Active Learning Skills.....	117
6 Steps to Credit-by-Exam Prep	118
Earning College Credit with DSST Exams	120
Test-Specific Resources.....	121
Answer Key for Review Questions	123

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COURSE OVERVIEW

The United States is truly a melting pot of people, faiths, and cultures. We encourage you, the parent, to ground your students in the truths of your faith before launching them into college or career. This study of the World's Major Religions is designed to help students understand the tenants of each faith, encourage them to think critically, and make them more aware of how different faiths impact their surroundings.

This Course Guide is written for students in grades 7-12. Each lesson includes targeted review questions that prepare students for the Introduction to World Religions DSST® exam. Parent involvement is strongly encouraged, but minimal preparation time is required.

Features

- Written from a Biblical worldview
- One-semester course for grades 7-12
- Requires minimal parent/educator prep time
- Students can earn both high school and college credit
- This student workbook becomes a comprehensive study guide
- Links to interesting and relevant videos, along with movie suggestions to enhance learning and appeal to visual and audio learners
- Can be used individually, homeschool co-op, classroom, or study group

Required Companion Text

***The Kingfisher Book of Religions* by T. Barnes ISBN 978-0753451991**

This companion text was chosen for several reasons:

Relevant The text approaches the subject as a social science at an age-appropriate level.

Engaging The text is visually appealing and has a great readability factor (not too cluttered with a good use of white space). Pictures really do speak a thousand words and information in this book is presented through text, charts, pictures, and graphs.

Affordable At the time of this printing, used copies of this book were available online for less than \$10.

Why Study World Religions?

Comparative Study

A comparative study involves a systematic process comparing two or more items, with an eye toward identifying points that the items hold in common and citing areas where they differ. This is the approach taken in this Course Guide. No matter the religion, adherence to that faith often includes belief in a common doctrine (teachings or principles) and participation in activities or behaviors that are common to those who follow that system of belief. There are eight major religions that will be studied in this Guide. Elements that will be compared include: where and by whom was the religion founded; core beliefs; God(s); methods or practices of worship; texts and laws; and views of life after death.

Critical Thinking, Faith, and Religion

When asked the question “Do you believe in God?” more than 9 in 10 Americans answer “yes”. However, *who* they say God is differs based on their religious beliefs. Belief in God and identifying with a religion are not the same. For some, religion is a faith or belief in God, a God who is their creator, who is alive and continues to personally care for them. For others, religion is a belief in a higher being or spirit that controls events. Yet for others, religion is a set of laws and rituals that guide their actions.

Four Killer Questions

Bill Jack of Worldview Academy suggests four “killer questions” to help anyone think critically. These questions go back all the way to Socrates.

1. *What do you mean by that?* In other words, define your terms.
2. *Where do you get your information?*
3. *How do you know that is true?*
4. *What if you are wrong?*

These four killer questions are powerful to spark meaningful conversation and encourage yourself, and others, to think critically. Use them wisely, be prepared for some interesting conversations, and have fun!

PARENT/EDUCATOR NOTES

Lesson Planning Take these ideas into consideration:

- Students should plan an hour each day to complete the course in a semester.
- Plan out the year by penciling in target dates in the *Course Schedule*. Assign dates to each chapter based on your schedule, anticipated holiday breaks, etc. A course completion plan will help students meet expectations and allow them to adjust their calendars to match yours, work ahead, or get caught up.
- The Units are grouped with the monotheistic religions first, followed by the polytheistic religions. However, Units can be completed in any order. Consider studying the Unit before attending a field trip.
- To complete the course in a semester, schedule one unit per week. Christianity and Hinduism which have more questions. Allow two weeks for these Units.
- Use the NOTES column to include dates for field trips, videos you will watch together, additional reading or projects you may assign.
- Schedule 2-4 weeks at the end of this course for DSST test prep.

Optional Resources

Easy Readers The easy readers from the children's section of the library can be used as a supplement. They are easy to read in one sitting, are filled with engaging pictures, and will repeat or fill in gaps of your primary text. Suggestions: [DK World Religions](#) ISBN 9780756617721 and the series [World Beliefs and Cultures](#) by Sue Penney.

Study of World History The study of World Religions is often a study of World History. Since many religions originated in the same geographical region, there are similarities among some of the religions as followers of those faiths intermingled. Consider studying World Religions as a complement to the study of World History. If you are including a Bible study in your academics as well, consider studying the Old Testament. Combining these three subjects makes for a comprehensive unit study that helps students link the information and bring the study of the ancient world to life.

Surprised by Faith by Dr. Don Bierle My own (Cheri) faith was strongly impacted by this easy-to-read book. Dr. Bierle, once a skeptic, details the scientific and historical accuracy of the Bible in a compelling and easy-to-read format.

Self-Directed Learning This Course Guide is written to the student, with week-by-week lesson plans and directions. Parents are encouraged to take an active role in their students' learning. Consider these suggestions:

- Consider removing the *Answer Key* at the back of this Course Guide to encourage your student to first complete the answers using the learning resources provided.
- Read the Kingfisher Text. It is short and will allow you to engage in dinner table discussion with your student.
- Help equip your student to have meaningful discussions with those of other faiths. Discuss with your student the truths and beliefs of each religion.

Answering your apologetic questions: Probe.org

- Suggested movies and video links are included in this Course Guide. Have them available to watch together.
- Arrange field trips where applicable. Suggested resources are included in this Course Guide.
- Be mindful of the course calendar. Encourage students to follow a study schedule, developing strong time management skills.

Study Skills and Learning Styles

- Practicing study skills is an important component of this course. Work alongside your students to foster academic and time management skills until they demonstrate they are self-directed.
- Before beginning, students are asked to complete an online learning styles assessment. The link is available on the course website (noted above). Help students understand and work within their primary learning style and consistently implement techniques that capitalize on their strengths. "*Study Smarter, Not Harder.*" If your student's primary learning style means he is more engaged with information when presented in video format, consider assigning the videos.
- Requiring students to take notes on their reading, highlight the major concepts in this Guide, and write their own comments in the margins. While this might be a new skill for some students, as the year progresses, improvement in students' skills should be noticed. Refer to the Appendix for more resources.

Motivating Students Identify your students' motivational style.

Motivating Students: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/cft/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>

Earn College Credit with CLEP and DSST Exams

Study it once, study it well, and earn college credit. Adding CLEP and DSST as a final exam to a high school course allows students to accelerate the first two years of college, by testing out of introductory-level college courses. This can save a significant amount of both time and money. Students gain confidence in their academic ability and are motivated by their achievement. Taking a CLEP or DSST test is like eating Pringles. You might not stop at just one! Teach your student to follow these time-tested steps.

Read in this Course Guide: **6 Steps to Credit-by-Exam**. Review test-day identification requirements at GetCollegeCredit.com. Plan ahead since processing can take several weeks.

Facilitating a DSST Co-op Class or Study Group

Students often enjoy the camaraderie that can happen in a study group. As the coordinating educator/parent, your role can be to simply *facilitate*, not necessarily *teach*. You provide the motivation and accountability (and maybe a plate of cookies) and let the text, this Course Guide, and the suggested resources provide the teaching.

General Suggestions

- Choose a regular day and time to meet. Once a week for 60-90 minutes is suggested.
- Discuss methods of Note Taking and Learning Styles and encourage students to incorporate them in all their studies. Make time for students to share their study tips with their peers who have the same learning style.
- Ask students to arrive to the study group with their work completed. Use classroom time to hold students accountable for completion, reinforce key concepts, and encourage learning by engaging all students with classroom activities that encourage learning outside of the classroom. This allows for informed discussion, clarification of information, and test-content to be emphasized in class. Read more: Flipped classroom: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu//cft/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom>
- Review chapter questions together; discuss and look up answers to any open questions. Break into smaller groups of 2-3 to encourage everyone's participation. Catch struggling students early to help them get on track.
- Take 10-20 minutes to watch a relevant video.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Unit	Additional Notes
		Introduction	
		Unit 1: Judaism	
		Unit 2: Christianity (2 weeks)	
		Unit 3: Islam	
		Unit 4: Native Religions	
		Unit 5: Hinduism (2 weeks)	
		Unit 6: Buddhism	
		Unit 7: Confucianism	
		Unit 8: Taoism and Shintoism Unit 9: Miscellaneous Review	
		DSST Exam Prep 6 Steps to Credit-by-Exam Prep	

Semester 12-16 weeks

UNIT 1 – JUDAISM

- Read the Unit Summary and begin answering the Review Questions
 - Read the Kingfisher text, taking notes as you read
 - Continue completing the Review Questions
 - Parent Discussion Field Trips Websites and Videos
 - Complete and correct all the Review Questions
 - Create a Mural
-

SUMMARY

Judaism is a cultural system of Jewish law, a custom, and a religion practiced by both individuals, and community as a whole. Through thousands of years of suffering, persecution, dispersion, and occasional victory, the Jews retained their religion and their sense of being God’s chosen people. Modern Judaism incorporates not just those who live in the Jewish nation of Israel, or are Jewish by heritage, but also those who hold to the religious beliefs once only held by Jews.

PLACE OF ORIGIN Ancient Mesopotamia, which was located in what is now southern Iraq. It was between two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. In fact, the word Mesopotamia is Greek, meaning "the land between the rivers". It is widely considered to be the cradle of civilization.

FOUNDER Abraham in 1300 BC.

HISTORY In ancient times, monotheism was uncommon. Tradition included belief in and worship of many gods. Abraham was a nomad married to Sarah when God spoke to him and asked Abraham to leave his home and country. God promised Abraham to make him a father of many nations. But as the years passed, Abraham questioned God's promise as Sarah continued to be without child. Approaching old age, Abraham took matters into his own hands and took Hagar, Sarah's maid servant, as his second wife. Hagar bore Abraham a son, named Ishmael. Shortly thereafter, however, Sarah bore Abraham a son, named Isaac. Having fulfilled her marital duty and realized God's promise, Sarah demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham did so. Ishmael becomes the father of the Arab race. His descendants would be the Muslims (Islam).

The lineage of the Jewish race is followed down through Isaac. Isaac had sons Jacob and Esau. Jacob had 12 sons, for whom the 12 tribes were named. The tribes grew and prospered. During a time of famine, they relocated to Egypt, but eventually were enslaved by the Pharaoh. After years of bondage, Moses, is called by God to lead His people out of Egypt. This is known as The Exodus. The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert during which time God established the nation of Israel (named for Abraham's grandson Jacob, whom God renamed Israel). Set apart as His Chosen, God gave them the terms of His covenant with them, the Ten Commandments, revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. Many more religious and ethical guidelines are written in the Torah ("The Law"). Many of these guidelines (*mitzvah*) emphasized ritual purity and the importance of remaining set apart from the surrounding polytheistic cultures.

After 40 years, the Israelites were allowed to enter the Promised Land, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. Upon settling, King Solomon was instructed by God to build a temple like no other. It took seven years to complete the Temple and in 827 BC, King Solomon dedicated it and brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Temple. For the next 410 years, the Jewish people would bring daily offerings, and here the nation would gather three times a year to "see and to be seen by the face of God." Solomon's reign was a golden era. The Land of Israel developed into a great center of commerce. The Jews lived in peace and happiness.

At the end of King Solomon's life, he was guilty of indiscretions and God told him he would be punished. After Solomon's death, the ten northern tribes refused to accept Solomon's son as their king resulting in a civil war. In 796 BC, the country was divided into two kingdoms: The Kingdom of Israel in the north consisting of ten tribes, and the southern Kingdom of Judah (containing Jerusalem) made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Hosea was a prophet in Israel in the 8th century BC and author of the book of prophecies bearing his name. One of the earliest Old Testament writers, he is one of the Twelve Prophets of the Jewish Hebrew Bible. He is often seen as a *prophet of doom*, but underneath his message of destruction is a promise of restoration. God repeatedly sent prophets to admonish the Jews for turning back to their idolatrous ways, but they refused to change.

As a result, God did not provide either kingdom with the peace and security that the united kingdom had enjoyed under Solomon's reign. The ten tribes of Israel were conquered and taken captive by the Assyrian Empire. As was the Assyrian custom, the conquered tribes were scattered across the empire to assimilate them and their descendants among the Assyrian people. These are "the ten lost tribes of Israel."

Years later, Judah (where the name Jews is derived) was conquered by Babylon and taken into captivity. The Jewish Diaspora from Israel began in 586 BC with the conquest of Judah and the destruction of the First Temple. The Babylonian ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, allowed the Jews to remain in a unified community in Babylon even though they were in captivity.

During this time, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were God's prophets speaking and writing of both judgment and restoration for God's people. In 538 BC, Babylon was overthrown by the Persian Empire. After 70 years in captivity, the Persian Cyrus the Great gave the Jews permission to return to Judea.

Ezra, one of the Old Testament scribes, led a group of Judean exiles living in Babylon to their home city of Jerusalem where he enforced observance of the Torah (the Law of Moses) and enforced the dissolution of marriages between Jews and non-Jews. Nehemiah, a Jewish nobleman (cup bearer) in the service of the King of Persia, was appointed the task of rebuilding the city's walls. Upon completion, he had Ezra read the Torah to the assembled Israelites, and the people and priests entered into a covenant to keep the law and separate themselves from all other peoples.

Author's Note: This is a fascinating time in history. To read more:
www.danielrevelationbiblestudies.com/Seg2Dan3.htm

CHIEF AIM OF JUDAISM The central religious belief of Judaism is that there is only one God. Yahweh, as they called Him, formed a covenant with the Jews, who in return, offered their obedience through the Law.

CORE BELIEFS Monotheism (belief in one god) was uncommon during this time. Jewish identity arises primarily from belonging to an ancient people and upholding its traditions and Laws.

Holidays: Rituals and festivals are established to celebrate God's historical and continuing provision. Jews of all movements celebrate many special days throughout the year and throughout each person's life. Major religious holidays include Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. Hanukkah, historically a minor holiday, has become more prominent in the last century for Jews who live in areas that celebrate Christmas. The Sabbath, a day of rest and worship at a synagogue, is observed each Saturday. In Judaism, all days begin at sunset, so all holidays begin at sundown and end at sundown.

MAIN GOD As a monotheistic religion, their faith is in one God. In Scripture, God is given many names; they are regarded by many religious Jews not as names, but as titles highlighting different aspects of YHWH and the various “roles” of God.

Elohim (god, or authority)

El (mighty one)

El Shaddai (almighty)

Adonai (master)

Elyon (highest)

Avinu (our father)

BRANCHES OR DENOMINATIONS Divisions within Judaism, known as *movements*, have developed in modern times as varying responses to secularism and modernity.

Orthodox Judaism is the most conservative group, retaining nearly all traditional rituals and practices. From the time they get up in the morning until they go to bed at night, Orthodox Jews observe God's commandments concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more. It is the largest group within Judaism and is divided into Modern Orthodox and Hasidic.

Hasidic Judaism is a branch of Orthodox Judaism founded in the 18th century. It was founded by Israel ben Eliezer, who became known as Israel Baal Shem Tov, as a reaction against overly legalistic Judaism. Hasidic Judaism is more mystical and includes beliefs in prophetic dreams, miracles, and spiritual healing.

Conservative Judaism lies in the middle of the spectrum, taking a moderate approach in its application of Judaism to the modern world. The term *conservative* was meant to signify that Jews should attempt to *conserve* Jewish tradition, rather than reform or abandon it. It was founded by Rabbi Zacharias Frankel.

Reform Judaism is at the other end of the spectrum. Adherents retain their Jewish identity and some traditions but take a liberal approach to many Jewish beliefs and practices. They do not accept the Talmud as authoritative, rather as a historical document. In general, Reform Judaism maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in the surrounding culture. Founded by Moses Mendelssohn, a German Jewish philosopher, who was noted for encouraging the Jews to leave their ghettos and live within the larger society.

Reconstruction Judaism is a modern American-based Jewish movement founded by Mordecai Kaplan in the 1920's. The movement views Judaism as progressively evolving in a modern culture. The Law is not considered binding but is treated as a valuable cultural remnant that should be upheld unless there is reason for the contrary.

OTHER IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS

Kabbalah originally developed within the Jewish teachings but is now outside of mainstream Judaism. It forms the foundations of mystical religious interpretation including the occult. The Zohar is their primary text.

Zionism was founded by Theodor Herzl. It is a movement that supports Jews upholding their Jewish identity and advocates the return of Jews to Israel. It opposes the assimilation (blending) of Jews into other societies.

Sephardic Jews are the Jews of Spain, Portugal, North Africa, the Middle East, and their descendants. The term essentially means *Spanish*. The first Jewish congregation in North America was the Sephardic Jews. They were founded in 1684 in what is now New York and are still active.

TEXTS/SCRIPTURES

1. The Hebrew Bible contains:
 - The Pentateuch or the Torah – the Five Books of Moses (the first five books in the Old Testament.)
 - The Prophets – the writings of the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) as well as 12 minor prophets.
 - The Ketuvim (or writings) – a collection of 12 other books including the Psalms, Song of Songs and the Book of Ruth.
2. The Talmud (meaning instruction or learning) is the central text to mainstream Judaism. The Talmud is the basis for all codes of rabbinic law. It contains the opinions of thousands of rabbis on a variety of subjects, including law, ethics, philosophy, customs, history, and theology. It includes:
 - The Mishnah – the first written recording of the Oral Torah of the Jewish people. Following the loss of many Jewish teachers, it was decided to secure Judaism's Oral Laws by writing them down into what is known as The Mishnah.
 - The Gemara – Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah between 200-500 CE were compiled as the Gemara.
3. The Haggadah is the Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover meal, called the Seder meal.

METHODS/PLACES OF WORSHIP Jerusalem became Judaism's holiest city in 1005 BC when David established it as the capital of Israel, and his son King Solomon built the First Temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed. It was later destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The temple was rebuilt and later destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

The synagogue is a local center of worship and Rabbis are the spiritual teachers. The Sabbath is the day of rest, developed during their time in Babylonian captivity.

WAY TO SALVATION Salvation is not a Jewish concept, as it implies a focus on the afterlife, which is not a significant focus of Judaism. Judaism has no concept of 'hell' or eternal damnation. Jews believe that God expects you to do the best you have with what you have, including upbringing, innate abilities, and the situations you find yourself in. Judaism is about being good to be good and to have a healthy relationship with God, man, and oneself - not to be saved. You have the power to perfect yourself. The role of Jewish law is to provide tools to learn how to do that and teaches the values that one ought to acquire. This view distinguishes itself from Christianity, which views Jesus as a needed Savior.

UNIT 1 – JUDAISM REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Is Judaism: Polytheistic, Animistic, or Monotheistic? Define that term.
2. What is a rabbi?
3. What is the Sabbath? When it is recognized?
4. What are the Laws of Kashrut?
5. What does kosher mean?
6. What foods are non-kosher?
7. What is a Chevra Kiddisha?
8. What is the largest group of Jews worldwide?
9. Who enslaved the Jews in Egypt?

10. How long did the Jews wander in the desert?

11. Define the following Jewish holidays:

Rosh Hashanah:

Yom Kippur:

Shavuot:

Passover (Pesach):

Hanukkah:

Sabbath:

Purim:

12. What are the Jews in Spain and Southern Europe called?

13. Who build the first temple in Jerusalem? When and who destroyed it?
Who destroyed the second temple?