

# The Bible & Other Faiths

Today we live in a world full of religions and faiths. In the UK, the National Statistics Office lists the main religions as Christian (71%), Muslim (2.8%), Hindu (1%), Sikh (0.6%), Jewish (0.5%), Buddhist (0.3%). Under “other”, the main groups were Spiritualists, Pagans, Jain, Wicca, Rastafarian, Bahà'ì and Zoroastrian. (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954>)

We also live in a society that is increasingly influenced by syncretism – the “blending” together of various beliefs and practises. For example: Time Magazine, Sunday August 22, 2010, article heading, “Training Pastors, Rabbis and Imans Together” (<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2010951,00.html>) which describes how one Methodist College has expanded its training programmes.

In this study we will be looking at what the Bible has to say about other faiths, and how we should respond to them. We are being guided in this series by Eph 4 v 15 – we must speak the truth, but always in love.

## One God?

The Bible comes from a worldview, a perspective or belief, in one God. It is mono-theistic. This is seen in giving God the position of Creator. There are also repeated references to God being the one and only:

- Deut 4:35        besides Him there is no other
- Deut 32:39        there is no god beside me
- 2 Sam 7:22        no God but you (same in 1 Chron 17:20)
- Ps 83:18 you alone are the Most High
- Ps 86:10 you alone are Gog

We then have the explicit claim built into the 10 Commandments. In the first and second commandment we are told there is no other God, and you are to have no other gods nor any graven images. (Deut 5:6-10)

Following this in Deut 6:4-5 are the words that encapsulate the heart of what it means to be people of God: the LORD is one, love him with all you are and all you have.

## Other “gods”?

Yet alongside this there is the acknowledgement that there are other beliefs. Even in the Commandments, “no other gods besides me” implies the possibility of other “gods”.

Other religious beliefs are referred to in the Bible. There are references to idols, and to other gods – Torrey lists 28 mentioned by name including:

- Ashtoreth (Jg 2:13, 1 Kgs 11:33)
- Baal (Jdg 2:11-13, Jdg 6:25)
- Chemosh (Num 21:29, 1 Kgs 11:33)
- Dagon (Jdg 16:23, 1 Sam 5:1-3)
- Nebo (Isa 46:1)

Worship of these “deities” is clearly forbidden:

- Isa 42:8        I give my glory to no other
- 1 Jn 5:21 Keep yourselves from idols

Sometimes the Bible reminds us of the stupidity of worshipping an object we have made:

- **Hab 2:18-19** What use is a carved idol after its craftsman carves it? It is *only* a cast image, a teacher of lies. For the one who crafts its shape trusts in it and makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood: Wake up! or to mute stone: Come alive! Can it teach? Look! It may be plated with gold and silver, yet there is no breath in it at all. OT – just wood? Spiritual entities?
- **Isa 44:10-20** – this passage reminds us of the foolishness of worshipping something you have made with your own hands.

Yet we are also told in 1 Cor 10:20-21 that when things are offered to these idols they are offered to demons (that is, to evil spiritual beings).

### Talking to people of other faiths

One example of how to share your faith with people who have another faith is given to us in Acts 17. Paul is at Athens. Here are some key points from that encounter:

Paul Acknowledges their position: v22

Paul is confident in his own faith: v23

- There is one God: v24-28
- He calls people to get right with this one God (repent): v30
- He warns that this is the God who will judge us: v31

His proof for the validity of his faith is the resurrection of Jesus: v31

He continues to talk with those who are interested and want to hear more: v32

It would be helpful to read this passage again thinking about how Paul presented the truth, and how he did that in love.

### Exclusivity of the gospel?

One thing we cannot get away from is the clear exclusive claims of the Bible.

- Acts 4:12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which men can be saved
- John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### Conclusion

If we are to take the exclusive claims of the gospel seriously, and if we genuinely love people of other faiths, we will share with them the truth we have found in the Bible. The Bible claims that all others beliefs are a false hope, a false way. Jesus is presented as the only hope for all people, regardless of their background.

At the same time we need to treat all people with respect, presenting the message of the Bible, not attacking or speaking against other faiths. We offer the invitation to hear what we have discovered, in the hope that all people will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.