

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DENOMINATIONS?

Sharing

1. Just for fun, how many different religious denominations can you name in 60 seconds? _____
2. If there is one Christian God and one Christian Bible, should there be so many Christian denominations?
 - Explain: _____
3. Do you think it matters which church you attend so long as you attend one of them? _____
4. Have you ever known of anyone who has said, 'Every church has different teachings but all claim to have the truth. Since I don't know which church is right, I'm not going to any of them!' ___ Yes ___ No
5. There are two billion people in the world who claim to be Christians. There are over 38,000 denominations. Do you believe it is possible for one church to be the 'true' church? ___ Yes ___ No
 - Explain: _____

Studying

6. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of _____ shall not prevail against it."
 - It is obvious from Jesus own words that He intended to have a church on earth that was His own.
 - It obviously would be a church that was filled with His truth as He taught it while on earth.
7. What is truth? If the Word of God says it, then we must believe it! Read the following verses:
 - John 17:17 "Your word is truth."
 - Psalm 119:89 "Your Word, O Lord, is eternal, it stands firm in the heavens."
 - Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away."
 - 1 Peter 1:25 "But the Word of the Lord stands forever."
8. So, if Jesus said that He would have a church on earth that nothing could prevail against, and if He said that His Word is truth and will stand forever, how did we get so many denominations in the world today? God foresaw that Satan would try to destroy His church and His people. He saw that Satan would attempt to create a counterfeit for each Biblical truth until His church would appear to be dead. In restoring His light to the world, many denominations would arise, each have a piece of His truth restored.
9. The multitude of denominations now covering the earth was no surprise to God. Before His last apostle, John, died, Jesus revealed to him in vision what would happen to His Christian church on earth; how truth would appear to 'die' as the church accepted Satan's counterfeits in place of truth. But the vision showed that Satan will not triumph over God's church and, regardless of Satan's attempts to destroy it, Jesus' true church will prevail and go triumphant into His kingdom when He returns.
10. John's vision is found In Revelation, chapter 6, where Jesus uses prophetic symbols to help us understand and visualize a panoramic view of Christianity and Satan's attacks on it.
11. Background of the vision: In Revelation 5, John sees in vision a 'Being' holding a scroll sealed with seven seals that nobody can open. Then a 'Lamb' (Jesus) came and took the scroll and opened the seals.

12. Revelation 6 presents four horsemen, each riding a different color horse. They burst out of the scroll as each seal is opened by the Lamb. Through the symbolism of these four horses and their riders four eras of Christianity, spanning approximately 400 years, are revealed.
13. The first horse and rider that exploded from the seal into the world was depicted as white and described the period of Christian history from its beginning in 27 AD to about 100 AD. The color white represented the purity of the original teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles.
 - Revelation 6:1,2 “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals. . . And behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer.”
 - The white horse and rider symbolized the initial purity and undiluted truth of Christianity. It’s doctrines—straight from the mouth of Jesus Christ—were uncorrupted. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, each Christian was filled with the unselfish love of Christ. It was a triumphant and powerful Christianity that spread throughout the world like wildfire. In fact, the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1:23).
 - The devil came dramatically against this first Christian church leading it into the second era of Christian history.
14. The second era of the Christian church began when a second horse and rider blazed into the world at the opening of the second seal. It’s rider and horse were red. This described the period of Christian history from 100 AD to about 323 AD. This represented the persecuted church.
 - Revelation 6:4 “Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.”
 - The second era of Christianity was bloodstained. Satan saw that he could not destroy the first pure church of Jesus Christ, so he raised up a vicious persecution against it. Pagan Roman emperors like Decius and Diocletian ordered Christians to be torn apart by lions as entertainment and burned them at the stake. The early Roman author, Tertullian, said that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the gospel. No matter how many were killed, others took their place.
 - Satan saw that the more he persecuted Christians the more courageous they became and the more the church grew. So, he changed tactics, leading the Christian church into the third era.
15. The third rider and horse burst forth from the third seal into the world and they were depicted as black. This describes the period of Christian history from 323 AD to about 536 AD. This represented the compromised church.
 - Revelation 6:5 “So I looked and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand (*the scales represented the oppressive balance of church and state*). And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, a quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine (*indicating a famine for the word of God; the symbolism indicates that no amount of money could purchase the truth of the gospel*).
 - This third era was shrouded in blackness of sin, apostasy, error and compromise - the very opposite of the light of the gospel. The church became popular, worldly, and finally totally corrupt when church and state united. The black horse represented the era when millions of pagans, with their false practices and teachings, came into the church. The word of God was replaced by tradition. Pagan gods were renamed with Biblical names. Church dogma replaced the requirements of God. This resulted in the persecution (*represented by the sword*) of true, Bible-believing Christians.

- Daniel 8:12 spoke about this time in these words: "...He cast truth down to the ground. He did all this, and prospered."
 - Satan could not persecute the gospel out of existence so he orchestrated counterfeit compromises. He succeeded to such an extent that spiritual death of the church occurred.
16. He fourth horse and rider blazed from the fourth seal and it was colorless, described as pale. This described the period of Christian history from 536 AD to the present time.
- Revelation 6:8 "So I looked and behold a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, with hunger, and with death, and by the beasts of the earth."
 - During this period the Bible was forbidden by law to the common people. The church organized into councils and human dogmas took the place of Biblical truth. The Ten Commandments were rearranged, omitting the law against bowing down to idols to avoid offending the pagans—the images they bowed to were simply renamed with Bible names. The pagans worshiped the goddess Isis. The statue was simply renamed 'Virgin Mary' to placate the Christians. Tradition and human works, indulgences and penances, now substituted for God's grace. Priests were forbidden to marry, contradicting Scripture and given the power of the church to forgive sins, again contradicting Scripture. Sunday was substituted for Sabbath because the pagans, for centuries, had worshiped the sun on the first day of the week. Sprinkling was substituted for Bible baptism. Pagan doctrines of an immortal soul and an ever-burning hell were 'Christianized' (the pagans now had a destination (heaven) to send the 'souls' that they formerly thought floated in nether land). The pagan practice of rote 'prayers,' sentences repeated over and over using small stones to count the number of times they were repeated, entered the Christian church in 1214 when St. Dominic was given the rosary vision in an apparition by the Virgin Mary in the church of Proville. In 1569, Pope Pius V officially established the devotion to the rosary. "Christianity became an established religion in the Roman Empire and took the place of Paganism...Christianity as it existed in the Dark Ages might be termed 'Baptized Paganism.'" (Church History, Century 2, Ch. 2, Sec. 7.) For all intents and purposes, the Christian church was dead. All who would not go along were persecuted and killed.
 - Satan must have been very happy. But would God's truth be trodden down forever?
17. God would bring about a reformation. The light of truth would be brought back into the world. But it would be brought back slowly as God's people could handle it. When you go through a long, dark tunnel and suddenly come into the light, it blinds you. So God would restore His truth over time.
- Proverb 4:18 "But the path of the just is like the shining _____ that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day."
18. In the period before the Reformation began, from around 1000 to 1600 AD, we find many brave men at tempting to correct the heresies brought into the church by the pagans; heresies mentioned in question 12 that were contradictory to the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the apostles. Keep in mind that there was no other official Christian church on earth at this time—there were small groups of persecuted Christians hiding in various places as the Catholic Inquisition had begun in 1232. Queen Mary, known as 'Bloody Mary,' ascended the English throne in 1555 and began to systematically burn every Protestant she could find at the stake.
19. The reformers' did not intentionally raise up a new denominations. The early Christian church, by 107 AD when Bishop Ignatius was martyred in Rome, was referred to as the Catholic church. (The word catholic means universal.) The goal of each of the reformers was to attempt to correct their Catholic church's doctrine where it deviated from Scripture. But as they began their work of reform, they gathered followers grew into a denomination. Most of them are still present today.

20. One of the earliest reformers was Peter Waldo. In the late 1100's he began to preach on the streets of Lyon without permission from the church. Waldo and his followers preached faithfulness to the Bible. The Waldensians hid in mountain villages and copied by hand portions of the scripture and then, hiding it in their clothing, distributed it to anyone who they thought would read it and be saved. From these faithful people, little lights of truth from the Bible began to shine all over Europe. ➡ Knowledge of the Scriptures restored.
21. Then along came a man from the Czech Republic, a priest named John Huss. He said, "My mind is chained by the Bible. Obedience to God is my motto!" Huss spurred a revival all through the Slovakian regions. He was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. The pages of John Wycliff's hand-copied Bible was used for kindling. As he was being prepared for execution he said "In 100 years God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed." ➡ Knowledge of the necessity for obedience to God restored.
22. Huss' prophecy came true. Almost exactly 100 years later, on Halloween in 1517, another priest named Martin Luther, in a little parish in Wittenberg, Germany, struggled with how to be saved in God's kingdom. His study of the book of Romans shook the world. For nearly 1500 years people had been taught that they were saved by works. Luther brought back the precious truth that salvation is only possible by the blood of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. ➡ Knowledge of salvation by grace alone restored.
 - Where did all the denominations come from? As each reformer arose, the group of people who followed them adopted their teachings, but studied no further. In the examples above, the Waldensians, the Hussites and the Lutherans formed groups apart from the Catholic church but each group believed they were following a man of God and therefore needed no further study. No group was able, at that time, to absorb all of the truth God intended to restore to the world.
 - Even Jesus' disciples didn't have all the truth. In John 16:12 Jesus said to His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." We must never believe that we know all truth and have no need to continue to search the Scriptures.
23. God then raised up a great man in Geneva, Switzerland. John Calvin broke from the Catholic church in 1530 and began teaching the importance of personal Christian growth through Bible study and prayer. His followers became Presbyterians. ➡ Knowledge of necessity for Christian growth restored.
24. A man named Petr Chelcicky, in the 1400s taught a literal interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. So his followers, named 'Anabaptists' for their belief in baptism by immersion, also were pacifists. This group broke away from the Catholic church and were bitterly persecuted, not only by the Catholics, but also by many Protestants who thought their stand on baptism foolish. Many paid with their lives for their beliefs. The Amish and Mennonite denominations had their roots in the Anabaptist movement. ➡ Knowledge of baptism by immersion restored.
25. John and Charles Wesley in the 1700s played a role in the reformation by leading a revival in the Church of England with a call to holy living. Because of their strict adherence to the Common Book of Prayer and their emphasis on holiness they were nicknamed 'Methodists.' ➡ Knowledge of holiness restored.
26. In the 1800s God raised up William Miller, a Baptist layman in the United States to restore the truth about the Second Coming of Jesus. Most of the world believed that there would be a long 1000-year period of peace that would precede Jesus' return. From a 10-year study of Biblical prophecy, Miller concluded that Jesus' return would be literal in the clouds of heaven; that the dead would be raised and the righteous living would be caught up to meet Him in the air. Thousands of people from all faiths and creeds accepted this Bible truth. ➡ Knowledge of Second Coming restored.
 - The falling of the stars in 1833 brought the entire world's attention to the truth of the second coming. See Matthew 24:29 and Luke 21:25. It was preached simultaneously in many other countries by men that God raised up at the same time as Miller to preach in America. The message of the soon coming of the Lord was preached to the whole world.

BIBLE BREAKTHROUGH

PROGRAM 7: WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DENOMINATIONS?

PAGE 5

27. In the 1800s the small group of people who remained to study together following the great disappointment of 1844 when Jesus didn't return as Miller had preached, became the nucleus of Bible-studying Christians who took the name Seventh-day Adventists in 1863. ➡ Knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead and healthful living were restored.
28. It took 400 years from the white horse period to the end of the pale horse period of Revelation 6, for the world to become enshrouded in spiritual darkness. It then took 400 years for God to restore the truth to the world in a period of history known as the Reformation. God brought back light gradually so that it might be accepted by all who would listen.
29. Satan is very clever. For every truth of God he has a substitute. If he can convince men to believe his substitute doctrine, he can keep them from being saved—which is his goal for each person.

Greatest issues	Satan's Counterfeit	God's Truth
Authority	Church councils	God's Word
Prayer	Images/beads	Holy Spirit
Salvation	Human Works	Christ's Grace
Intercession	Priest	Christ
Worship	Sunday	Sabbath
Death	Immortal Soul	Sleep
Baptism	Sprinkling	Immersion
Health	Laws Abolished	Laws Eternal

Applying this lesson

30. Understanding that God looked down through the centuries and saw exactly what Satan would do to His church should give each of us confidence that God knows the future and is in control of the events of this world. God foresaw the future apostasy of the church but He had a plan for restoring truth to His people.
- After studying this lesson I understand how so many denominations came to be on this earth. I also understand how God slowly restored truth to His people.
 - ___ A check mark at left indicates that I now understand why so many denominations exist and how God used them to restore pieces of His truth to His people.
31. Satan is a master counterfeiter! I now understand how many of the pure doctrines of the Bible have been meshed with paganism. I also see that many people have no idea that many of their beliefs are derived from idolatry and paganism.
- I now understand that there may be doctrines in my church that have been handed down through the centuries that stemmed directly from Satan's counterfeiting of God's pure truth.
 - ___ A check mark at left indicates that I will examine the beliefs of my church in light of Scripture and make a decision based on solely on Biblical truth.
 - ___ A check mark at left indicates that I want to follow Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word and commit my life totally to Him.