

DISCLAIMER

IMPORTANT — Please Read Before Distributing

This document is an informational overview prepared for group study and discussion purposes only. It is intended to provide factual, educational information about the beliefs, practices, and scriptures of various religious groups present in America today.

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- Our Church
- Our Denominational Associations
- The Facilitator who provided this overview document

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We respect and value the diversity of faith in our community. The goal of this document is informed understanding, not judgment.

Religions in America

Beliefs, Scripture, and Path to Heaven

Informational Overview — For Educational and Discussion Purposes Only

This document covers the most prevalent religions in America today — their size, their beliefs about how to get to Heaven, and what scriptures they use. Two religions are covered in greater depth: the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Quick Reference Summary

Religion	% of Americans	How to Get to Heaven	Scripture Used
Protestant	~40%	Faith in Jesus Christ alone	Full Bible — 66 books
Roman Catholic	~19-22%	Faith + Sacraments + moral life + Purgatory possible	Full Bible + 7 extra books = 73 books
Unaffiliated ("Nones")	~28-30%	No shared belief; many don't believe in Heaven	No shared relationship
Latter-day Saints (LDS)	~2%	Faith + good works + baptism + temple ordinances	Bible (KJV) + 3 additional books of scripture
Jewish	~2%	Emphasis on righteous living now, not Heaven	Old Testament only (Tanakh); no New Testament
Muslim	~1%	Faith in Allah + Muhammad as prophet + Five Pillars + righteous deeds	Quran only; Bible considered outdated/corrupted
Buddhist	~1%	Goal is Nirvana, not Heaven — freedom from suffering/rebirth	No Bible; follow the Dharma (Buddha's teachings)
Hindu	~1%	Goal is Moksha — liberation from reincarnation cycle via karma	No Bible; Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita
Seventh-day Adventist	Subset of Protestant	Faith in Jesus Christ; obedience to commandments including Sabbath	Full Bible — 66 books + Ellen White writings (secondary)

Overview of Each Religion

1. Protestant Christians (~40% of Americans)

Includes: Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, nondenominational churches

How to Get to Heaven

Faith alone in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They believe Jesus died for sins and rose again. Most hold that good works follow faith but do not earn salvation.

The Bible

Use the full Bible — 66 books (Old Testament + New Testament). Nothing added, nothing removed.

2. Roman Catholics (~19-22% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven

Faith in Jesus Christ plus participation in the seven sacraments (baptism, confession, communion, etc.) plus living a moral life. Purgatory is a possible step for those not fully purified at death before reaching Heaven.

The Bible

Use the full Bible plus 7 additional books called the Deuterocanon (also called the Apocrypha) — 73 books total. Protestants removed these 7 books during the Reformation.

3. Religiously Unaffiliated — "Nones" (~28-30% of Americans)

Includes: Atheists, agnostics, or those who identify as "nothing in particular"

How to Get to Heaven

No shared belief. Many do not believe in Heaven at all.

The Bible

No shared relationship with the Bible.

4. Latter-day Saints / Mormons (~2% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven

Faith in Jesus Christ plus good works, baptism, and specific temple ordinances. They believe in multiple levels of Heaven (Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial kingdoms).

The Bible

Use the Bible (King James Version) PLUS three additional scriptures — the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. They believe the Bible has translation errors that the other books correct.

5. Jewish Americans (~2% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven

Judaism does not focus on Heaven the way Christianity does. The emphasis is on living righteously according to God's law (the Torah) in this life. Beliefs about the afterlife vary widely among Jewish people.

The Bible

Use only what Christians call the Old Testament — called the Tanakh in Judaism (Torah, Prophets, and Writings). They do not accept the New Testament.

6. Muslims (~1% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven (called Jannah in Islam)

Faith that there is one God (Allah) and that Muhammad is His prophet, plus righteous deeds and following the Five Pillars of Islam: prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, and declaration of faith.

The Bible

Do not use the Bible. Their scripture is the Quran. They believe the Bible was God's word originally but was corrupted over time. The Quran supersedes it.

7. Buddhists (~1% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven

Buddhism does not teach a Heaven in the traditional sense. The goal is Nirvana — freedom from suffering and the cycle of reincarnation.

The Bible

No relationship to the Bible. Their teachings come from the Dharma — the Buddha's teachings.

8. Hindus (~1% of Americans)

How to Get to Heaven

Hinduism teaches reincarnation. The goal is Moksha — liberation from the cycle of rebirth and union with the divine. Good karma across lifetimes moves a person toward this goal.

The Bible

No relationship to the Bible. Their scriptures include the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita.

9. Seventh-day Adventists (Subset of Protestant)

How to Get to Heaven

Faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation — standard Protestant belief. However, they strongly emphasize obedience to God's commandments, including the Saturday Sabbath, as evidence of genuine faith.

The Bible

Use the standard Protestant Bible — 66 books, nothing added, nothing removed. Ellen White's writings are held in high regard as inspired guidance but are considered secondary to the Bible.

In-Depth: Latter-day Saints (Mormons)

Founding

Founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith in upstate New York. Smith claimed the angel Moroni appeared to him and led him to golden plates buried in a hill. He said he translated those plates into the Book of Mormon. He also claimed God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him personally (called the First Vision) and told him all existing churches had gone astray. His mission was to restore the original true church.

Core Beliefs That Differ from Mainstream Christianity

God the Father has a physical body

LDS teaches God is an exalted, perfected Man with flesh and bones. Mainstream Christianity teaches God is a Spirit with no physical body.

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are three separate beings

They are not one God in three persons (the Trinity). This alone places LDS outside what most theologians call orthodox Christianity.

Humans can become gods

A famous LDS teaching: "As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may become." The goal of eternal life is to become like God and rule your own world. Mainstream Christianity considers this heresy.

Pre-mortal existence

LDS teaches every person existed as a spirit child of God before being born on earth. You chose to come to earth to gain a body and be tested.

Three levels of Heaven

Instead of Heaven or Hell, nearly everyone goes to one of three kingdoms: Celestial (highest, for faithful LDS members), Terrestrial (good people who rejected the gospel), or Telesstial (lowest, for the wicked). Very few go to "Outer Darkness" — their version of Hell.

Salvation in LDS Theology

General Salvation

Resurrection for everyone. Jesus's atonement guarantees every person will be resurrected regardless of belief.

Exaltation

The highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, where you live with God and become like Him. This requires faith in Jesus, baptism by LDS authority, temple ordinances, marriage sealed in the temple, and faithful obedience throughout life.

The Temple

Regular LDS meetinghouses are open to everyone. Temples are different — only faithful, tithing-paying members in good standing may enter. Inside, members perform sacred rituals called ordinances:

- Endowments — personal covenants with God
- Celestial Marriage — marriage sealed for "time and all eternity," not just "till death do us part"
- Baptism for the Dead — proxy baptism performed on behalf of deceased ancestors, giving them the chance to accept the gospel in the afterlife. This is why LDS members are famous for genealogy research.

Their Scriptures

The Bible (King James Version only) plus:

- Book of Mormon — history of ancient people in the Americas, believed to have been visited by Jesus after his resurrection
- Doctrine and Covenants — revelations given to Joseph Smith and later prophets
- Pearl of Great Price — includes the Book of Moses, Book of Abraham, and Joseph Smith's own history

They also believe their living prophet (the church president) can receive new revelation from God today.

Lifestyle and Practices

- Word of Wisdom — no alcohol, coffee, tea, or tobacco
- Tithing — required 10% of income
- Missionary work — young men serve 2-year missions (age 18-19), young women may serve 18-month missions, funded by the missionary's own family
- Family Home Evening — Monday nights reserved for family time and religious instruction
- Fast Sunday — first Sunday of each month, members skip two meals and donate the money saved to the poor
- Strong emphasis on family — arguably the central focus of all LDS theology; family relationships are meant to be eternal

Size and Presence

About 17 million members worldwide. Headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. Utah is majority LDS and the culture there is heavily shaped by the church.

How Mainstream Christians View Them

Most evangelical and Catholic theologians do not consider LDS to be Christian in the traditional sense, because of the differences in the nature of God, the Trinity, and salvation. LDS members strongly disagree and consider themselves fully Christian, centered on Jesus Christ. This is one of the ongoing theological debates in American religion.

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In-Depth: Seventh-day Adventists

Founding

Founded in the 1860s in the United States, growing out of the Adventist movement. A key early leader was Ellen G. White, who claimed to receive prophetic visions from God. She wrote extensively, and her writings still guide the church today. The name comes from two core beliefs: they worship on the Seventh day (Saturday) and believe in the Advent — the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Saturday Worship — The Big Distinction

Most Christians worship on Sunday. Adventists worship on Saturday — the biblical Sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday). They believe Sunday worship is not biblical and was changed by the Catholic Church centuries after Christ. They consider Saturday worship a core commandment, not optional. Church services, no work, no secular entertainment — the Sabbath is strictly kept.

The State of the Dead — Soul Sleep

This is one of their most unique teachings. When you die, you do not go immediately to Heaven or Hell. You are in an unconscious "sleep" — no awareness, no experience of time. You stay in this state until the resurrection when Jesus returns. This means no one is in Heaven yet except Jesus. No prayers to saints, no communication with the dead.

Hell — Annihilationism

They do not believe in eternal burning Hell. They believe the wicked are resurrected after the millennium (1,000 years), judged, and then completely destroyed — ceasing to exist entirely. This is called Annihilationism. Hell is real but not eternal conscious torment — it ends.

Ellen G. White — Their Prophet

Ellen White (1827-1915) is considered a prophet who received genuine visions from God. She wrote over 100,000 pages covering health, education, family, and theology. Her major works include *The Great Controversy* and *Steps to Christ*. Most Adventists hold her writings in very high regard — not equal to the Bible, but as inspired guidance.

Health and Diet

Adventists are internationally known for their health practices. They follow Old Testament dietary laws:

- No pork, no shellfish — following Leviticus 11
- Many are vegetarian or vegan — considered the ideal diet
- No alcohol, no tobacco, no caffeine
- Strong emphasis on exercise, rest, and clean living

The famous Blue Zones research — studying populations that live longest on earth — identified Loma Linda, California (a heavily Adventist city) as one of only five places in the world where people regularly live past 100. Kellogg's cereal was actually invented by John Harvey Kellogg, an Adventist, as a health food.

End Times Beliefs

Adventists have a specific and detailed end-times theology:

- Jesus will return visibly and physically
- The dead in Christ are resurrected first
- The righteous live with Jesus in Heaven for 1,000 years (the Millennium)
- After the Millennium, the wicked are resurrected, judged, and destroyed
- God creates a New Earth where the saved live forever — a literal, physical, restored Earth, not a cloudy spirit Heaven

They believe the Sabbath issue will be a central conflict at the very end of days.

Size and Presence

About 22 million members worldwide — larger internationally than in the United States. Heavily concentrated in Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. They operate one of the largest private school and hospital systems in the world.

How Mainstream Christians View Them

Most evangelical and mainline Protestants consider Adventists to be genuine Christians — they affirm the Trinity, the full Bible, and salvation by faith in Jesus. The Saturday worship and Soul Sleep teachings are considered unusual but not heretical by most. Some Christians take issue with the authority given to Ellen White's writings. Overall, Adventists are much closer to mainstream Protestant Christianity than LDS, and most theologians include them within the Christian family.

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Sources

Statistical data in this document was drawn from the following published sources:

1. PRRI — Public Religion Research Institute

2024 PRRI Census of American Religion

<https://prri.org/spotlight/2024-prri-census-of-american-religion/>

2. PRRI — Public Religion Research Institute

2023 PRRI Census of American Religion (County-Level Data)

<https://prri.org/research/census-2023-american-religion/>

3. Pew Research Center

2023-24 Religious Landscape Study — Executive Summary

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-landscape-study-executive-summary/>

4. Gallup

How Religious Are Americans? (2024)

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx>

5. Gallup

Religious Preferences Largely Stable in U.S. Since 2020

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/659339/religious-preferences-largely-stable-2020.aspx>

6. LDS Official Website

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>

7. Seventh-day Adventist Official Website

<https://www.adventist.org>

Theological content for the in-depth sections on Latter-day Saints and Seventh-day Adventists was compiled from the Claude AI knowledge base, which draws from a broad range of published theological, academic, and encyclopedic sources.