

MYANMAR

Weigh In

1

Seasons in Myanmar are classified by the monsoon cycle. A monsoon is the name for a major wind system caused by the climatic effects of the Indian Ocean. Reversing its direction once a year, a monsoon can result in either abundant rain or drought, depending on the direction of the winds.

Myanmar is the leading producer of the highest quality jade (a green-coloured precious stone), providing approximately 95 percent of the world's supply. Most jade is found in northern Myanmar, along a route referred to as the "Jade Tract."

3

The government of Myanmar strongly prefers that all its citizens follow Buddhism to create "national unity." Known for violating the basic human rights of the country's inhabitants, governing officials often initially target Christians in their efforts to convert them to Buddhism.

In 1989, after a violent military coup, the government of Myanmar suddenly changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar. Yet, many people living within this country reject the new name and still refer to their nation as Burma. On many maps, "Burma" is often written in brackets to reflect this.

2

(1) Monsoons are an integral part of the climatic system of Myanmar. The monsoon rains are relied upon to grow crops, raise cattle, collect water, and generate power, which provides 47 percent of the nation's electricity. What effect would an erratic monsoon cycle have on the people of Myanmar? What aspects of life would become difficult if the monsoons were late, early, too wet or too dry?

(2) The majority of Myanmar's jade mines are owned and operated by the government. Citizens typically only have access to the waste that these companies dump. These sites are dangerous and, often, any substantial finds made by citizens are taken away from them. Despite the dangers, hundreds of thousands of people have flocked to these mines in hopes of attaining a better life. Theorize what would influence people to take such desperate measures in their search for the precious stones.

(3) Christians are not only persecuted by the government, but also by members of their own communities. Often, they have challenges finding jobs, receiving promotions and, at times, are even denied access to shared resources like water. What would you do if, no matter how hard you worked or how much education you received, you were always passed over for decent jobs because you followed Jesus? How would that affect your family? What feelings would arise in you?

4

(4) A coup is a sudden, violent and unlawful seizure of power from a preexisting government. There have been multiple coups in the country's history, making it a politically charged nation. Take some time to research one of these coups, and some of the contributing factors that led to the conflicts. In your opinion, was the coup a justified response on behalf of the military? Why or why not?

Way Out

Approximately 80 percent of Myanmar's population strictly adheres to Buddhism. With Christianity representing only six percent of the country's overall population, proper Bible training is hard to come by. To combat this rising issue, VOMC partners with credible ministries in Myanmar to facilitate projects that equip believers for evangelism and discipleship. One such project supports an in-country seminary, and a second project provides seminary students the opportunity to train with pastors in various villages. This gives the students practical ways to apply what they have learned in seminary while also receiving mentorship and support as they serve local churches. To view the scope of VOMC's International Ministry projects, please visit our website at www.vomcanada.com.

One Way

The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to reach "nirvana," an end to the cycle of life's suffering and rebirth. Buddhists long for peace and an escape from suffering. Since it is unknown if they had ever repaid for all of their bad deeds, there is no assurance that they will reach nirvana during their lifetimes, causing them to repeat the rebirth cycle numerous times. The only way to reach nirvana is by good behaviour, spiritual and physical labour, and meditation. This, in turn, means each person must be their own saviour.

The Bible teaches that salvation cannot be found within ourselves, but only through the provision of Jesus Christ. No number of good deeds or spiritual practices can save a person eternally (Acts 4:12). Although Jesus never promised a life here on earth without suffering, His followers have the assurance of everlasting life in heaven after death. Christians never have to worry about paying for each committed sin or the threat of being barred from heaven because they forgot about a mistake that was made in the past. Rather, Jesus fully paid the penalty for all their sins through His perfect sacrifice on the cross. With this assurance, Christians are able to freely experience the love of Christ and live with the joyful expectation of their eternal home.

Recommended Reads:
"Ann Judson" by Sharon James (adult);
"Return of the White Book" by Rebecca Davis (children).

Sources: *Understanding the Times – A Survey of Competing Worldviews* by Dr. Jeff Myers and Dr. David A. Noebel;
<https://www.gemsociety.org/article/jade-sources/>; <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/monsoon/>;
<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/buddhism/>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/22/myanmar-militarys-lucrative-jade-industry>;
<https://operationworld.org/locations/myanmar/>; <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Myanmar-Media-Advocacy-Dossier-ODI-2023.pdf>