

A Compilation of articles on the Cults written by Pat Zukeran
Compiled by David Cox

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Dr. Patrick Zukeran



Dr. Patrick Zukeran, former Probe staffer, is the founder and Executive Director of Evidence and Answers, a research and teaching ministry specializing in Christian apologetics, the defense of the Christian faith. He is the host of the radio show Evidence and Answers (www.evidenceandanswers.org). Pat is the author of several

books including *The Apologetics of Jesus* co-authored with Norman Geisler; *God, Eternity, and Spirituality* (ed.); and *Unless I See . . . Is There Enough Evidence to Believe?* Pat is a popular conference speaker and he also serves as an adjunct faculty for several colleges and institutes worldwide. He earned a B.A. from Point Loma Nazarene University, a Master of Theology (Th.M.) from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Doctorate of Ministry (D.Min.) in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary. Pat lives in Honolulu, Hawaii and can be reached at pat@evidenceandanswers.org.

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Further information about Probe's materials and ministry may be obtained by contacting us at:

Probe Ministries
2001 W. Plano Parkway, Suite 2000
Plano TX 75075
(972) 941-4565
info@probe.org
www.probe.org

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[Dr. Patrick Zukeran, May 27, 2003](#)

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran compares the beliefs of several modern cults against a conservative biblical worldview. This analysis makes it readily apparent that cults are not representing a scriptural view of true Christianity.

Challenge of the Cults

This church is growing so rapidly, sociologist Rodney Stark predicts that by the year 2080, it will become the most important world religion to emerge since the rise of Islam. [1](#) What church is Dr. Stark describing? It is not a Christian church but the

Mormon Church, an organization labeled as a cult. The rise of the Mormon Church represents the growing challenge facing the church, the kingdom of the cults.

What is a cult? The greatest authority on the cults, the late Dr. Walter Martin, described a cult as "A group of people gathered around a specific person's misinterpretation of the Bible."^{2} Cults are groups that claim to be in harmony with Christianity but deny foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the unique deity of Jesus Christ.

In [Matthew 7:15-17](#), Jesus gives us a warning about the coming of the cults. He states, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." What Jesus was warning was that cultists will look, act, and sound like Christians. However, that is only in external appearance. One can parade as a true believer for a time, but eventually one's words, actions, and especially one's beliefs—their "fruit"—will give one away as a counterfeit.

The growth of the cults can be attributed to several factors. First, it is a fulfillment of the warning given by Jesus and the apostles. In [Matthew 24:23-26](#), Jesus warns us that as His return draws near, there will be an increase in false prophets who will ensnare many in their false teachings. In [2 Peter 2:1-3](#), Peter warns us that false teachers will arise from within the church.

The second factor in the growth of the cults is the breakdown of the family. Cults provide the family atmosphere many from broken homes long for; the cult leader often takes the place of a father figure.

Finally, we can attribute the growth of the cults to the failure of the church. As my mentor repeatedly stated, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." The cults thrive because Christians are lacking in biblical and theological understanding. Dr. Martin stated, "The rise of the cults is directly proportional to the fluctuating emphasis which the church has placed on the teachings of biblical doctrine to Christian laymen. To be sure, few pastors, teachers, and evangelists defend adequately their beliefs, but most of them — and most of the average Christian laymen — are hard put to confront and refute a well-trained cultist of almost any variety."^{3} If the church engaged in solid and in-depth Bible teaching, the cults would not flourish as they do today.

Doctrinal Character of the Cults

How do you know if a religious group is a cult? Jesus said that you will know false prophets by their fruits. In stating this he was not only speaking of their words and actions but of their doctrinal beliefs as well. Cults deviate from biblical Christianity in several key areas of doctrine.

Cults promote false teaching on the nature of God. The Bible teaches there is one God revealed in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The central feature that distinguishes cults from biblical Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. All cults have a distorted view of this doctrine. For example, the Jehovah's

Witnesses condemn the doctrine of the Trinity, and Mormons teach tritheism, three gods who make up the godhead.

Second, cults teach a false view of Jesus. The Bible teaches that Christ is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. This has been called the *hypostatic union*. In [2 Corinthians 11:4](#), Paul warned about false teachers teaching another Jesus. A modern-day example of false teaching is Christian Science which teaches that Jesus was not God but a man who displayed the Christ idea. He neither died for sins, nor was He resurrected.

Third is a false teaching on salvation. All cults have a works-oriented Gospel. The death of Christ is believed to give followers the *potential* to be saved. So after believing in Christ, one must serve the organization to attain salvation. Salvation is found in the organization and one is never really sure if one has done enough to be worthy of salvation. In the International Church of Christ, for example, disciples are scrutinized by their discipler daily to determine if they performed as worthy disciples. Failure to meet the standards may result in discipline. Disciples can never be certain they have done enough for salvation.

Fourth, there is extra-biblical revelation and the denial of the sole authority of the Bible. Cults claim that extra revelation is given to the leader whose words are seen as inspired by God and equal to the Bible. If there is a conflict between the Bible and the leader's words, the latter takes precedence. So in reality, the leader's writings take precedence over the Bible. When interacting with cultists, I often hear them claim their teachings are consistent with the Bible. However, when I point out where their teachings deviate from the Bible, they eventually claim the Bible to be in error. In most cases, cultists claim the Bible has somehow been corrupted by the church.

Sociological Structure of the Cults

Not only do cults deviate doctrinally from biblical Christianity, they have distinctive sociological characteristics. The first is authoritarianism. The leader or organization exercises complete control over a follower's life. The words of the leadership are ultimate and often considered divinely inspired. Going against the leadership is equivalent to going against the commands of God.

The second characteristic is an elitist mentality. Most cults believe they are the true church and the only ones who will be saved. This is because the group believes they have new revelation or understanding that gives them superior standing.

Third is isolationism. Due to their elitist mentality, cultists believe those who do not agree with them are deceived or under the influence of Satan. Therefore, many feel their members must be protected from the outside world, and physical or psychological barriers are created. Members are prohibited from communicating with those outside the organization who do not agree with the teachings of the group.

Fourth, there is closed-mindedness and the discouragement of individual thinking. Because of its authoritarian nature, leaders are the only ones thought to be able to properly interpret the Bible. All members are to turn to the organization for biblical

interpretation and advice on life decisions. Therefore, individual thinking and questioning is discouraged. There is an unwillingness to dialogue and consider other viewpoints.

Fifth is a legalistic lifestyle. As mentioned earlier, salvation is not based on grace; cults teach a works-oriented gospel. This leads to a lifestyle of legalism. Followers must live up to the group's standards in order to attain or maintain their membership and hope for eternal life. Followers are required to faithfully serve, and attend meetings, studies, and services. As a result, there is tremendous pressure to live up to the requirements of the organization.

Finally there is a difficult exit process. Since salvation is found in the organization, leaving the organization is considered by many to be leaving God. All former members who leave cults are shunned by members which often includes members of their own family. Many are warned that if they leave, they will be condemned to hell, or seduced by Satan. Many ex-members are harassed by the organization even after they leave. Exiting members often end up distrusting any religious organization and end up feeling isolated and alone.

Life in the cults is marked by fear of judgment, pressure, and legalism. This is a far cry from what we are taught in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles taught that the new life in Christ is one of grace, love, and freedom from the law. In [Matthew 11:28](#), Jesus said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." The peace and rest promised by Christ is seldom experienced by those in the cults.

Cultic Methodology

When you receive a knock on your door in the mornings, who do you assume it to be? A salesman? A Girl Scout selling cookies? For many of us, we assume it to be a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon missionary looking to tell us about his or her organization. One of the reasons cults have grown is their methodology.

The methods cults use to win converts are moral deception, aggressive proselytizing, and Scripture twisting. By moral deception I mean cults use Christian terminology to win converts. For example, New Agers use the term *born again* to support reincarnation. Mormons use terms like the *Trinity* and *salvation by grace* but these terms have different meanings than what the Bible teaches. Therefore, many untrained Christians are deceived into believing these groups are actually Christian.

Aggressive proselytizing is another method of the cults. Although many Christian groups use aggressive evangelism, they do so out of a love for God and a desire to see others come to know Christ. Many cultists proselytize for much the same reasons but added to this is the desire to win God's approval. They work *for* grace rather than *from* grace. The cults require their members to evangelize. Many groups hold their members accountable for the number of hours they spend witnessing for the organization. Many members feel guilty if a day or so goes by without them proselytizing.

Scripture twisting is another method of the cults. Cultists quote verses in the Bible that support their position, but skip over the verses that do not. Often, there is gross misinterpretation of Scripture so that contradictory verses will better fall in line with their views.

For example, Jehovah's Witness and Mormons try to use verses to show Jesus is a created being. However, their position is easily shown to be incorrect when you explain the context and correct meaning of the terms. Also, when you show additional verses that contradict their position, they are often surprised and realize they have never seen those verses before or that the organization's explanations of those verses are unable to be supported.

To successfully engage in conversation and effectively witness to those in the cults, Christians must be prepared in the following ways. First Peter 3:15 states that we must always be "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We must be prepared by knowing the word of God through diligent study of it. Second, we must be prepared to overcome our fears and lovingly reach out to cult members, exercising the fruits of patience and gentleness as we share the truth.

Danger of the Cults

The rise of the cults pose a serious challenge to the church because they present several dangers to the church and families involved. First, there is a spiritual danger. First Timothy 4:1 states "...that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Ultimately the spirit behind all lies and deception is the devil, so the ultimate force behind the cults is the evil one.

[Galatians 1:8](#) states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." The false gospel of the cults cannot lead anyone to salvation. There are eternal consequences for false beliefs. For this reason Jesus and the apostles are very harsh on false teachers.

There is also a psychological danger. The mind controlling techniques used by the organizations can cause immense damage mentally and emotionally. Living under the pressure, guilt, and dependence on the organization has proven to have tremendous negative effects on individuals.

Third, there is domestic danger. Individuals are taught that loyalty to the organization is equivalent to allegiance with God. Therefore, loyalty to the organization supercedes loyalty to family. Thus, if a family member begins conducting himself in a way the organization does not approve of, the cult will often separate the family from the individual member. Isolation can be emotional or physical. Numerous families have been separated as a result.

In some cases there is a physical danger. The teachings of David Koresh cost the Branch Davidians their lives. Hobart Freeman taught that believers did not need

medicine for illnesses, and told his followers to throw all theirs away. As a result, he and fifty-two of his members died from curable conditions.

In light of this threat, what are Christians called to do? First, we are called to study and know the Word of God. Paul writes to Timothy and all saints saying, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Christians should master the Bible so that they will not be deceived by any false teaching. Second, Titus commands us to be able to confront and refute false teachers. Finally, in [Acts 20](#), Paul exhorts the leaders of the church to protect their flock from the false teachers that will prey upon the sheep. Every Christian is called to know the truth so well they can confront false teaching, and protect their church and family from it.

Notes

1. Richard Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper Collins Publishing Inc. 1999), p. XVI.
2. Walter Martin & Hank Hannegraph, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, Mich.: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 17.
3. Norman Geisler, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), p. 15.

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1. Bowman, Robert. *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1989.
2. _____. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1989.
3. Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning From the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.

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[Dr. Patrick Zukeran, August 30, 2014](#)

Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. • Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.

History of the Watch Tower

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one **may** be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

False Prophecies of the Watch Tower

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause JWs to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, *Watch Tower* article on page 197, which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using [Deuteronomy 18:20-22](#). A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty ([Rev. 16:14](#)), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in [Hebrews 11](#) to the condition of human perfection." This proved to be another false prophecy.

The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it." Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word "Jehovah," is available here:• [JW-False Prophecies](#))

The Name of God

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is "Jehovah." They say the term "God," is merely a title, and that the real name for God is "Jehovah." In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, "Jehovah," one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name "Jehovah" and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term "Jehovah" is actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word "Jehovah" comes from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the

context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means "Lord." In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o, and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word "Jehovah." Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah." Let's now look at what other scholars say about the name "Jehovah."

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: "Jehovah" — False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

Encyclopedia Americana: "Jehovah" — erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

Encyclopedia Britannica: The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

The Jewish Encyclopedia: "Jehovah" — a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

The New Jewish Encyclopedia: It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 680, vol. 7, "the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date."

Therefore, for Jehovah's Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name "Jehovah" and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JW's realize what the authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ's crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it

was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn't in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in [Luke 24:36-43](#), Jesus clearly states in verse 39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In [John 20:24-27](#), Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In [John 2:19-21](#) Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See [Acts 2:26-27](#), another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite [1 Peter 3:18](#) and [1 Cor. 15:44-50](#) to back up their belief. In [1 Peter 3:18](#) we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit." This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. [Romans 8:11](#) states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised *as* a spirit but *by* the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to [1 Cor. 15:50](#), "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.(14) They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body ([Luke 24:39](#)). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to [1 Cor 15:39](#), "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another.... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies." Christ's glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" [Colossians 2:9](#). The verb "dwells" in the Greek is *katoikei*, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also [1 Timothy 2:5](#), "There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus." The verb "is," is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah's Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force—much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah's Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth*, they state, "As for the `Holy Spirit,' the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person but God's active force."(15)

In their magazine *Why Should You Believe in the Trinity?* they state, "To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations."(16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In [Acts 5](#) Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in 5:3, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?" Peter later states in the next verse, "You have not lied to men but to God." Here the Holy Spirit is called "God" with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses' Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, "Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?" The answer is "No." You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In [Acts 13:2](#) the Holy Spirit speaks, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, `Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

[Ephesians 4:30](#) states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

Notes

1. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
3. *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-80.
5. *Live Forever*, pp. 350-55.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-84.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.
8. "Jehovah," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973 ed.
9. *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 16., 1972 ed.
10. "Yahweh," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 12, 1993 ed.

11. "Jehovah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1904 ed.
12. "Jehovah," *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1962 ed.
13. *Live Forever*, pp. 143-45.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-46.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

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3. The Lives of Muhammad and Jesus

Dr. Pat Zukeran explores the radical differences between Muhammad and Jesus, and the implications of following their examples and teachings.

Muhammad and Jesus are the founders of the two largest religions in the world and two of the most influential people in the history of the world. Both men serve not only as founders but also the ideal models whose lives are to be emulated by all their followers. What kind of lives did they live? What example did they leave behind, and how is their example impacting our world today?

This work will examine the lives of both men. In my research I have relied on what is considered by Muslims to be some of the most authoritative historical sources on the life of Muhammad. The first source is the Qur'an, the inspired text of Islam. Second is the Hadith, a record of the many sayings and the life events of Muhammad. The most recognized collection is by Ismail Sahih Bukhari, written in 870. Third is the first and most authoritative biography of Muhammad, written by Ibn Ishaq nearly 150 years after Muhammad's death.

In examining the life of Jesus, I relied primarily on the New Testament. The four Gospels are biographies of His life. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written prior to AD 70, and John was written in AD 95. The letters of the New Testament written by His disciples also serve as a historical source. Most were written prior to AD 70 while some, like 1 Corinthians, were written as early as AD 55.

Muslims believe that Muhammad is the perfect example to follow in all aspects of life. The Qur'an states that in Muhammad, "Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern and excellent model of conduct" (Surah 33:21). It also states that Muhammad demonstrates "an excellent standard of character" (Surah 68:4).

The Qur'an also emphasizes that obedience to Muhammad's teachings is equivalent to obeying Allah, as evidenced when Surah 4:80 states that "he who obeys the Apostle, obeys Allah." Moreover, Surah 4:115 also reflects how highly Muslims revere Muhammad as it explains the fate of one who disobeys: "If anyone contends with the Apostle even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of faith, we shall leave him in the path he has chosen, and land him in Hell—what an evil refuge."

Muslims are called to imitate Muhammad in all aspects of their lives, even in their daily activities. Islamic scholar John Esposito writes, "Muslims look to Muhammad's

example for guidance in all aspects of life: how to treat friends as well as enemies, what to eat and drink, how to make love and war. . . . His impact on Muslim life cannot be overestimated, since he served as both religious and political head of Medina: prophet of God, ruler, military commander, chief judge, lawgiver. . . . Traditions of the Prophet provide guidance for personal hygiene, dress, eating, marriage, treatment of wives, diplomacy, and warfare.”{1}

Christians are not called to copy Christ in all aspects of their lives as Muslims do Muhammad. Rather, Christians are called to reflect the character, mindset, and attitude of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philipians. 2:5, 1 Peter 2:21). Christ focused on the inner transformation of the heart and mind of the individual which would result in righteous living (Matthew 5:8, 6:21, 15:8, 18).

When making decisions in their lives, Muslims will ask, “What would Muhammad do?” while Christians ask, “What would Jesus do?” Since these two men serve as models of perfect conduct for their followers to imitate, it is important to learn what kind of lives they lived. This work will present a brief overview and highlight key events in the lives of each person as we explore that which can be learned from their examples.

The Call of Muhammad and Jesus

Muhammad and Jesus lived remarkable yet radically different lives. Muhammad was born in AD 570. His family was part of the Quraysh tribe, which oversaw the Mecca temple where the deities of Arabia were worshipped. His father died when he was very young, and his mother died when he was six. He was raised by his grandfather and later by his uncle. At the age of twenty-five, he married Khadija, his employer, who was fifteen years his elder.

At the age of forty, Muhammad received his first visitation from the angel Gabriel. According to Ibn Ishaq, the giving and receiving of the revelation was quite violent in nature. Gabriel came to Muhammad and ordered him to read his message. Being illiterate, Muhammad asked Gabriel, “What shall I read?” It is then Gabriel pressed Muhammad so hard that Muhammad thought he was going to die. This was repeated three times until Muhammad read the following message from Gabriel: “Read in the name of thy Lord who created, who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent, who taught by the pen, taught that which they knew not unto men.” After this the angel Gabriel departed.{2}

Muhammad was terrified by this incident. Bukhari records that Muhammad returned home trembling and sought to hide under a blanket. His first thought was that he had come under demonic influence.{3} In fact, he was so troubled that he became suicidal. Ishaq records that since Muhammad did not want anyone in his tribe to discover that he was possessed, he resolved to go to the top of a mountain and commit suicide.{4} However, his wife and her cousin Waraqa, an Ebionite Christian, encouraged him that he was not possessed but rather a prophet of God.{5} Through their encouragement, he came to believe that he had received a divine message from Allah.

Prior to his encounter with Gabriel and throughout his life, Muhammad struggled with demonic possession. Ishaq records an incident during Muhammad's childhood when his foster parents, al-Harith and Halima, were raising him. One day while behind the tents, two men clothed in white threw Muhammad to the ground, opened up his belly, and searched through it. His foster father felt the boy might have suffered a stroke. Halima, his foster mother who had nursed Muhammad, believed a demon had possessed him.[{6}](#)

Another account of Muhammad's struggle with demon possession occurred a few years after his prophetic calling when Muhammad believed he received a revelation allowing Muslims to worship the three gods of the Quraysh. However, he later admitted that Satan possessed him when he uttered those verses.[{7}](#) Allah eventually forgave Muhammad but gave him a stern warning recorded in Surah 17:73-75. Also another time after his prophetic calling Muhammad fell under the spell of a Jewish magician named Labid for one year.[{8}](#)

In contrast, biblical prophets and apostles clearly understood their visions were from God rather than Satan or demons. Although some were frightened by their vision of God or the angels before them, they were not violently handled. Instead they were given an assuring introduction such as "Do not be afraid" ([Luke 1:13, 28-30, 2:10, Isa. 6:6-7, Revelation 1:17](#)). Jesus' birth was miraculous, and He understood His mission from His childhood ([Luke 2:41-52](#)). Throughout His life, Jesus clearly distinguished between God's message and Satan's. During His temptation in the desert, He did not struggle with possession but instead defeated Satan's attacks using the word of God. Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated authority over the demonic realm, and the demons were terrified of Him ([Matthew 8:16, Luke 8:26-39](#)). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated Satan and the demonic hosts. Paul states that Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him" ([Colossians 2:15](#)).

The contrast is readily apparent. One man struggled from demonic presence in his life; the other conquered the devil.

The Warrior and the Rabbi

At the beginning of their mission, both Muhammad and Jesus began preaching in their home territory, and both were persecuted for their message. However, the two responded very differently to their opposition. Muhammad resorted to the use of force while Jesus pursued the path of peace.

Muhammad began preaching in Mecca. During his thirteen years preaching in Mecca he preached a message of tolerance towards other religions as he sought to win the favor of the people. It is at this time that several passages teaching tolerance of the Jews and Christians were recorded (Surah 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17). However, as the persecution grew, he fled to Medina in 622. This event is one of the most important events in Islam known as the *Hijira*. In Medina he gained a following and became the leader of the city. It is in Medina as his power grew that his message transformed to one of intolerance of unbelievers. Moreover, he began to encourage the use of

military force. Earlier Suras of tolerance were abrogated by the new revelations exhorting Muslims to Jihad against unbelievers.

To sustain his growing army and impress the Quraysh in Mecca of his growing power, he raided commercial caravans on their way to Mecca. He received revelations endorsing his raids to attack unbelievers and seize their valuables (Surah 8:38-45 & 60-65, 22:39-40, 2:244, 4:95-97). Bukhari records that on his first raid at Al-Abwa, Muhammad was asked if it was permissible to attack at night since doing so would endanger the lives of the women and children traveling with the caravans.

Muhammad replied, "They (women and children) are from them (the opposition)." In other words, he permitted the killing or capture of women and children during the raids.[{9}](#) The booty collected from the raids was distributed among his men.

These raids incited the Meccans to war against Muhammad. Four major battles were fought between Muhammad and the Quraysh armies of Mecca. In 624 the two armies met at Badr where Muhammad defeated the armies of Mecca. This victory instilled confidence in Muhammad of his calling. He believed Allah fought for him to bring about victory (Surah 3:123-125, 8:9, 12-13).

A year later the Meccan army returned and engaged Muhammad's army at Uhud, a mountain near Mecca. This time Muhammad was defeated, and his army retreated to Medina. Muhammad was bloodied in the battle and he vowed revenge on his enemies.[{10}](#)

In the spring of 627, the Jews of Medina plotted with the army of Mecca against Muhammad. Hearing of this plot, Muhammad dug a trench around the city of Medina. The Meccan army laid siege to the city but were unable to capture the city and returned to Mecca. After the retreat of the Meccan army, Muhammad sought to deal with the Jews of Medina who had plotted against him. Ibn Ishaq records that Muhammad "went out to the market of Medina and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought to him in batches." Ishaq records that the estimates of those killed were six to seven hundred; others estimate the numbers to be as high as eight to nine hundred.[{11}](#)

After the Siege of Medina, a peace treaty was signed between the two armies. However, the treaty was soon violated, and in 630 Muhammad gathered an army of ten thousand and marched on the city of Mecca. Seeing their hopeless situation, the Meccans surrendered to Muhammad. Muhammad ordered his men to enter the city and fight only those who resisted. He also had a list of those who were to be killed even if they sought refuge in the Ka'bah Temple. Most on the list were those considered apostates.[{12}](#) Muhammad rode his camel to the Ka'bah and cleared the temple of all its idols and burned them. Along with these major conflicts were other raids and battles as Muhammad spread his religion. Ibn Ishaq records that in all Muhammad participated in twenty-seven battles, personally fighting in nine of them.[{13}](#)

Islam spread throughout the Middle East through the sword. Muhammad sent messengers throughout Arabia and neighboring countries, ordering them to convert

to Islam or suffer the consequences. Those who did not submit to his rule were attacked and forced to pay a tax called a Jizya to Muhammad. In Surah 9, Muhammad gave instructions to his men on dealing with unbelievers:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (Surah 9:29).

In this passage, unbelievers are given three options: to convert to Islam, to pay the tax, or to prepare for battle. Today, fundamentalist Muslims who seek to follow the example of Muhammad and follow the literal teachings of the Qur'an view *jihad* (holy war) as a military conflict for the cause of Islam. These believe that jihad will be waged worldwide against all unbelievers until the world comes under the rule of the House of Islam.

In contrast to Muhammad, Jesus preached, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus praised those who make peace by teaching, "Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). During His earthly ministry, Christ never engaged in military conflict. Instead, He spread His message through preaching, teaching and accomplishing miracles. His mission culminated in His death on the cross for the sins of mankind and His resurrection from the dead.

Christ's disciples followed the example of Christ. Christianity was spread through the preaching of gospel message. Christ's disciples did not die on the battlefield as mighty warriors but were instead martyred for proclaiming the name of Christ. Today, Christianity is spread through the preaching, teaching, and humanitarian aid in the name of Christ. One leader was a man of the sword; one was a man of peace.

Facing Their Critics

Both Muhammad and Jesus faced sharp criticism for their message and lifestyle. However, the two men dealt very differently with their critics. There were times Muhammad forgave his critics, but there were also many times he exacted revenge on those who criticized him. Jesus, on the other hand, responded in love to those who were critical of Him.

Ibn Ishaq records several of Muhammad's dealings with those who criticized him. On one occasion, a Jewish Poet named Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf composed a poem that was critical of Muslim women. Muhammad asked, "Who will rid me of Ibnu'l-Ashraf?" A young man named Muhammad Maslama volunteered to kill the poet. Maslama's plan, which Muhammad endorsed, was to deceive the poet and lure him into a trap. After luring Ka'b into meeting, Maslama and his companions stabbed him to death and presented his dead body to Muhammad who then praised the men.^{14} After the assassination of Ka'b, Muhammad ordered his men to "kill any Jew that falls into your Power."^{15} The first victim of that decree was Ibn Sunayna, a Jewish merchant.

Another poet killed by Muhammad was a man named Abu Afak, who was nearly one hundred years old. He had written poems mocking Muhammad. Muhammad asked, "Who will deal with this rascal for me?" A young man named Salim bin Umayr volunteered and killed the old man while he was sleeping.[{16}](#) A female poet named Asma bint Marwan was infuriated by the murder of Afak and wrote verses condemning Muhammad's men. Hearing of her criticism, Muhammad asked, "Who will rid me of Marwan's daughter?" Umar bin Adiy al-Khatami volunteered and killed her and her unborn child that night. Umar was worried that he had committed a sin, but Muhammad reassured him saying, "Two goats won't butt their heads about her."[{17}](#) On another occasion Ishaq records that Muhammad killed two girls who wrote satirical songs about him.[{18}](#)

Muslims today take seriously any criticism against Muhammad. Many respond peacefully to the criticism but many responses are much harsher. A death *fatwa* (religious ruling) was declared against Salman Rushdie, author of the fictional novel *The Satanic Verses*. Moreover, in early 2006, riots, many of which were violent, broke out worldwide over Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad. Many who reacted violently believed they responded in a manner exemplifying Muhammad's example.

In contrast to Muhammad, Christ never exacted revenge on those who criticized Him. Christ taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." ([Matthew 5:43-48](#))

This does not mean Christ passively ignored those who opposed His teachings. Christ often sharply rebuked those who spoke out against Him ([Matthew 12:22-32](#)), or He pointed out their error ([Matthew 7:37-50](#), [9:10-12](#), [12:9-14](#)), or He allowed his character to speak for itself ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). When Jesus was beaten and mocked, He was silent and in the end prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies. Like Muhammad, Christ had the power to take revenge. Before He was taken away by the mob to stand an illegal trial He told Peter that He could call "twelve legions of angels" to destroy His enemies at hand. However, Christ chose to forgive and even love those who hated Him.

One leader chose the sword of vengeance while the other taught us to overcome evil with good.

Treatment of Women

Muhammad's view of women is reflected in his personal relationships and his teachings revealed in the Qur'an and Hadith. Muhammad remained loyal to his first wife Kadhija and did not take any other wives until after her death. They had been married for 25 years. Islamic historians record that Muhammad married eleven to thirteen wives. The Qur'an allows a man to marry up to four wives (Surah 4:3); however, Muhammad received a special revelation from Allah that he may have more (Surah 33:50). Muhammad's marriages have been a source of criticism of his moral character. However, Muslim historians state that Muhammad's marriages were not

immoral but instead followed the normal practices of the culture. Many of his marriages were to solidify political alliances and to provide and protect the widows of his men who had fallen in battle.^{19} Here is a brief overview of the circumstances regarding the marriages to some of his more prominent wives.

After the death of Kadhija, Muhammad chose a young girl named Aisha, who was Muhammad's favorite wife. He married her when she was seven and consummated the marriage when she was nine.^{20} At the time, Muhammad was in his fifties. Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's first and loyal followers who eventually became the first Caliph (spiritual leader) after the death of Muhammad. In his final moments, Muhammad died in the arms of Aisha.

One of his most controversial marriages was to Zaynab bint Jahsh, the wife of his adopted son Zayd bin Haritha. Zayd was unhappy in the marriage and knowing of Muhammad's interest in his wife, sought to divorce her. Initially Muhammad discouraged Zayd (Surah 33:37). However, the marriage worsened, and they divorced. Soon after Muhammad married Zaynab. Arabs considered this marriage equal to incest and criticized Muhammad. However, he received a revelation justifying his action (Surah 33:37).

Ibn Ishaq records the story of another wife Safiya. Safiya was the wife of Kinana al-Rabi, the leader of Jews living at the Khaybar oasis. Muhammad attacked this settlement. Ishaq records, "We met the workers of Khaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets."^{21} Muhammad and his men killed 93 men during the raid. Muhammad then sought to obtain the riches in the city. Muhammad ordered his men to torture Kinana so that he would reveal the location of hidden treasure. Ishaq writes that Muhammad ordered his men to "Torture him until you extract what he has," so he kindled a fire with flint and steel on his chest until he was nearly dead. Then the apostle delivered him to Muhammad b. Maslama and he struck off his head, in revenge for his brother Mahmud."^{22} After Kinana's death Muhammad took his wife Safiya and married her.^{23}

Muhammad's relationships with his wives were often a source of sorrow and struggle for him. On one occasion, Muhammad threatened to divorce his wives because one of them disclosed a secret to one of his consorts. This caused some of his wives to join together against him. Muhammad then received a revelation rebuking them, saying Allah and Gabriel would back him up. Allah would allow him to divorce them and Allah would provide "consorts better than you."^{24} On another occasion, Muhammad's wives continued to irritate him by asking for money. In exasperation, he gave them the choice of divorcing him and seeking worldly pleasure or remaining with him.^{25}

Muhammad's teachings regarding women give us insight into his attitude that he did not view women as equals to men. First, it appears that Muhammad viewed women as less intelligent than men. In Surah 2:282, Muhammad taught that the testimony of a woman is worth half that of a man. Moreover, the Hadith also echoes Muhammad's belief in the "deficiency" or inferiority of women's intelligence. Bukhari gives this account:

Once Allah's Apostle went out to Musalla (to offer prayer) of Id-al-Adha or Al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by a woman and said, "O woman! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women). . . . I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence."[{26}](#)

Also, the *Hadith* further reinforces this teaching the inadequacy of a woman's intellect as follows:

The Prophet said, "Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?" The women said, "Yes." He said, "This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind."[{27}](#)

These passages teach that women are considered to have a "deficiency" of the mind, which leads us to conclude that they are inferior to men. Second, Muhammad appears to teach that women have less value than men. This is evidenced in passages such as Surah 4:11 which states that a son's inheritance is to be twice that of a daughter's. Also, men are allowed up to four wives, and sex with slave girls is also allowed (Surah 4:3). Third, Muhammad's teachings lead one to conclude that women are less spiritual than men. One reason is that women are not able to pray during their menstrual cycles: "'Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion.'"[{28}](#) Moreover, women are spiritually deficient to men because, although prayers are an important part of Islam, a man's prayers will be canceled if a woman walks in front of a man while he is praying. Aisha wrote the following:

The things which annul the prayers were mentioned before me. They said, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people)." I said, "You have made us (i.e. women) dogs." I saw the Prophet praying while I used to lie in my bed between him and the Qibla [Ed. note: the direction that should be faced for prayer]. Whenever I was in need of something, I would slip away for I disliked to face him."[{29}](#)

Finally, Muhammad's teachings reveal that wives were to live in subjection to their husbands or face physical and spiritual discipline. Muhammad taught, "Your wives are as a tilth [Ed. note: a measure of the quality of soil] for you; so approach your tilth when or how you will" (Surah 2:223). Chapter four of the Qur'an taught men to "beat [their wives] (lightly)" if their wives were guilty of "disloyalty," "ill conduct," or "refusing to share their beds" (Surah 4:34). There may also be spiritual consequences for a woman's lack of subservience as the Hadith states that "If a husband calls his wife to his bed (i.e. to have sexual relation), and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning."[{30}](#)

Moreover, the spiritual consequences of wives who were not subservient to their husbands is seen in a passage which records when Muhammad looked into the

bowels of hell and stated that the majority in hell were women who, although they believed in God, were there because they were ungrateful to their husbands.[{31}](#)

Thus, based on these passages, not only is a woman's physical well-being dependent on her husband, but her eternal destiny is also connected to her subjection to her husband.

From these passages we can conclude that Muhammad did not view women as equals to men. They had a "deficiency" of the mind; thus, their testimony was only worth half that of a man's. They were less valuable; thus, sons received a double portion of inheritance than daughters, and men could have multiple wives or sexual partners. They were less spiritual because of their inability to pray during menses and the fact that they would cancel out the prayers of a man simply by walking in front of him. Finally, the physical and spiritual well-being of a woman was not within her own power, but instead was dependent upon her submission to her husband.

In contrast, Jesus never married; however, He valued women, and several were a very important part of his ministry. Several traveled with Jesus and ministered to Him and His disciples ([Luke 8:1-3](#)). Jesus often praised women for their example of love and faith in the Lord ([Mark 5:21-34](#), [Luke 7:36-50](#), [21:1-4](#)). In [Luke 7:36-50](#), Jesus praised a sinful woman as being a person of greater faith than the men who were present! Jesus spent time with and taught women ([Luke 10:38-42](#)). The women were at the cross, and in His dying moments Jesus made sure His mother was taken care of ([John 19:25-27](#)). The women were also the first ones entrusted with the message of His resurrection. Jesus' treatment of women showed that He viewed women as important and equal in value to men.

Jesus' disciples reflected the attitude of Christ in their teachings. Peter exhorted husbands to honor their wives and treat them as co-heirs of eternal life ([1 Peter 3:7](#)). Paul stated in [Galatians 3:28](#), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Paul also exhorted husbands to "love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her" ([Ephesians 5:25](#).)

Muhammad and Jesus were considerably different in the way they treated and valued women. Muhammad's relationship with his wives and consorts and his teachings reflect his attitude toward women. Today, in nations where Islamic law is enforced, women struggle for equal rights. In contrast, Jesus valued women, and the teachings of the New Testament have been the foundation for [improving the status of women throughout the world](#).

Muhammad, Jews, and Christians

Jews believe that God presented special revelation to them through the prophets and the Old Testament. When writing the book of Deuteronomy, Moses prophesied that God would raise up another prophet similar to himself who would speak God's words and bring deliverance to the nation. [Deuteronomy 18: 15](#) and [18](#) state, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your

brothers—it is to him you shall listen— . . . I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

Christians believe that this prophet of whom Moses and the other prophets wrote is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the predicted Messiah who fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. Muslims believe that the prophet Moses spoke of was Muhammad and that there are New Testament prophecies such as [John 14:16](#) that predict the coming of Muhammad. Islam claims that God’s revelation began with the Jews, was built upon by the Christians, and culminates with Islam. Since Muslims believe there is a connection between the three, it is important to explore the relationship of Muhammad to the Jews and the Christians.

Early in his preaching, Muhammad appealed to the Jews and Christians, hoping to win their acceptance. He believed that he was a prophet in the lines of the Old and New Testament prophets and apostles. Various Surahs were written during this period, teaching tolerance of Christians and Jews (Surah 2:62, 5:69, 22:17). In harmony with Jewish teachings, Muhammad taught that pork was forbidden, and he taught followers to pray facing Jerusalem.[{32}](#) Muhammad even challenged the Jews and Christians to look in their writings for confirmation of his teachings (Surah 10:92).

However, the Jews and Christians rejected his message, and he became hostile towards them. He received revelation denouncing the Christians and Jews for rejecting his message (Surah 5:12-16). In Surah 3:110 he calls the Jews and Christians (“People of the Book”) “perverted transgressors.” Coming to the realization the Jews would not acknowledge his prophetic call, Muhammad ordered Muslims to turn from Jerusalem and face Mecca when praying (Surah 2:143-150). Muhammad chastised Jews and Christians for distorting previous revelation and called them to return to the true teachings of scripture (Surah 5:14-16).

After winning control over Mecca and Arabia, Muhammad received a revelation to fight against the Jews and Christians until they accepted paying taxes and living as second-class citizens (Surah 9:29). Muhammad taught that Jews and Christians rejected his message due to their perversion and rebellion to the truth. Therefore, Muhammad announced that the Jews and Christians were accursed (Surah 5:12-16).

According to Bukhari, Muhammad’s final moments were spent in the arms of his youngest wife Aisha. His final words were, “May Allah curse the Jews and Christians, for they built the places of worship at the graves of the prophets.”[{33}](#) Islamic eschatology teaches that Jesus will return, break crosses, slaughter the Christians and the Jews, and establish Islam as the true religion.[{34}](#)

Muhammad’s example influences the attitude that Muslims display towards Jews and Christians. Throughout Islamic history, Muslims have had conflict with the Jews and Christians. Non-Muslims in Islamic countries continue to face discrimination and, in many cases, persecution.

What was the relationship of Christ to the Jews? The apostle John writes of Jesus that "He came to His own, and his own people did not receive him" ([John 1:11](#)). Jesus came to save His people but was rejected by them. However, He never stopped reaching out to them in love and, in the end, cried over the city of Jerusalem, knowing the judgment that was coming upon them ([Matthew 23:37](#)). Paul reflects the heart of Christ saying, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" ([Romans 9:3](#)). Jesus and His disciples gave their lives for the lost, including the Jewish nation that rejected their message.

Christians continue to follow the example of Christ and preach the Gospel message to the Jews and non-Christians throughout the world. There have been times when Christians were guilty of the misuse of force; however, Christians can refer to the teachings of the New Testament and the example of Christ and the disciples to show clearly such use of force to spread Christianity is contrary to Christ's example and teaching. Muhammad cursed the Jews and Christians while Christ gave His life to save both Jews and non-Jews who were lost.

Conclusion

This article focused on the lives of Muhammad and Jesus. Both serve as the founders and exemplary models of their religion. We have seen that they lived radically different lives. Their examples influenced their early followers and continue to influence followers today.

Both men lived remarkable yet radically different lives. Muhammad's call reflects the struggle he had with the demonic forces while Christ conquered Satan, sin, and death. Muhammad was a warrior and chose the way of the sword while Christ was a rabbi who gave His life to rescue mankind from sin and death. Muhammad exacted revenge on his critics while Christ reached out to the lost, even those who rejected Him. Muhammad's treatment and teaching on women stand in stark contrast to Christ. It is apparent that the lives and teachings of both men were significantly different.

It is important that we understand the lives they lived and realize the implications of their teachings and examples for our present situation. I encourage every person to examine the lives of both men and consider the implications of following their examples. Following the path of Muhammad leads one down the road of the sword. Following in the footsteps of Christ will lead one to righteousness and eternal life.

For it is Christ who claimed to be the divine Son of God, and He is the only one who confirmed His claims through His sinless, miraculous life, death, and resurrection from the dead. Even the Qur'an affirms the miraculous birth, sinless life, and miracles of Christ. Even the Qur'an teaches that He did not die but was raised to heaven. So even in the Qur'an, Jesus performs greater works than Muhammad. I encourage all Muslims to study the life of Jesus in the Bible. Muhammad even encouraged Muslims to study the Bible (Surah 10:94, 2:136, 4:163, 5:56, 5:68, 35:31). I believe once you study the life of Christ you will inevitably realize this was indeed was more than a

prophet, He was the Son of God, the author of eternal life.^{35} (For more, please read my article "[Jesus in the Qur'an](#)").

Notes

1. John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), 13-14.
2. Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1955), 106.
3. Hadith, ed. Sahih Bukhari, vol. 1, bk. 1, no. 3. This translation can be found online at the Univ. of Southern California's Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at <http://tinyurl.com/p2ujny>.
4. Ishaq, 106.
5. Ibid., 107.
6. Ibid., 71-72.
7. Ibid., 165-66; Qur'an 22:52, 53:19-23.
8. Ibid., 240. Guillaume's footnote states Muhammad was under the spell for one year.
9. Bukhari, vol. 4, bk. 52, no. 256.
10. Ishaq, 382.
11. Ibid., 464.
12. Ibid., 550.
13. Ibid., 659-60.
14. Ibid., 367-68.
15. Ibid., 369.
16. Ibid., 675.
17. Ibid., 675-76.
18. Ibid., 551.
19. Esposito, 19-20.
20. Bukhari, vol. 5, bk. 58, no. 234, and vol. 7, bk. 62, no. 65.
21. Ishaq, 511.
22. Ibid., 515.
23. Ibid., 511.
24. Surah 66:1-5 and Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, Verse 274.
25. Surah 33:28-29 and Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, Verse 309.
26. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 6, No. 301, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
27. Bukhari, Vol. 3, Bk. 48, No. 826, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
28. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 6, No. 30, narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri.
29. Bukhari, Vol. 1, Bk. 9, no. 490, narrated by 'Aisha.
30. Bukhari, Vol. 4, Bk. 54, No.460.
31. See note 26.
32. Bukhari, vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 13.
33. Bukhari, vol. 1, bk. 8, no. 427.
34. F. E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 390.

35. For more please read my article, "Jesus in the Qur'an," Probe, 2008, probe.org/jesus-in-the-quran/.

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4. The Pagan Connection: Did Christianity Borrow from the Mystery Religions?

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the myths from mystery religions which are sometimes argued to be the source of our Gospel accounts of Jesus. He finds that any such connection is extremely weak and does not detract from the reliability of the gospel message.

One of the popular ideas being promoted today especially on the internet is the idea that the miracle stories of Jesus were borrowed from ancient pagan myths. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy write in their book *The Laughing Jesus*, "Each mystery religion taught its own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, who was known by different names in different places. In Egypt, where the mysteries began, he was Osiris. In Greece he became Dionysus, in Asia Minor he is known as Attis, in Syria he is Adonis, in Persia he is Mithras, in Alexandria he is Serapis, to name a few."[1](#)

Proponents of this idea point out that there are several parallels between these pagan myths and the story of Jesus Christ. Parallels including a virgin birth, a divine Son of God, the god dying for mankind, resurrection from the dead, and others are cited. Skeptics allege that Christianity did not present any unique teaching, but borrowed the majority of its tenets from the mystery religions.

Indeed, some of the alleged parallels appear to be quite striking. One example is the god Mithras. This myth teaches that Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave, that he was a traveling teacher with twelve disciples, promised his disciples eternal life, and sacrificed himself for the world. The god Dionysius miraculously turns water into wine. The Egyptian god Osiris is killed and then resurrects from the dead.

This position was taught in the nineteenth century by the History of Religions School, but by the mid-twentieth century this view was shown to be false and it was abandoned even by those who believed Christianity was purely a natural religion.[2](#) Ron Nash wrote, "During a period of time running roughly from about 1890 to 1940, scholars often alleged that primitive Christianity had been heavily influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, the pagan religions, or other movements in the Hellenistic world. Largely as a result of a series of scholarly books and articles written in rebuttal, allegations of early Christianity's dependence on its Hellenistic environment began to appear much less frequently in the publications of Bible scholars and classical scholars. Today most Bible scholars regard the question as a dead issue."[3](#)

Despite the fact that many of the arguments were rejected, this theory has once again emerged through the popular writings of skeptics.

What makes Christianity unique among the world religions is that it is a historical faith based on the historical person of Christ who lived a miraculous life. In what follows,

we will examine Christianity to see if it teaches a unique Savior or if it is simply a copy of these pagan myths.

Fallacies of the Theory

There are several flaws with the theory that Christianity isn't unique. New Testament scholars Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Dan Wallace point out several fallacies. The first is the *composite* fallacy. Proponents of this view lump together pagan religions as if they are one religion when making comparisons to Christianity. An attempt is made to show strong parallels by combining features from various religions.[{4}](#) However, when the individual myths themselves are studied, the reader soon finds major differences and very little commonality.

A second fallacy is a fallacy of *terminology*. Christian terms are used to describe pagan beliefs, and then it is concluded that there are parallel origins and meanings. Although the terms used are the same, however, there are big differences between Christian and pagan practices and definitions.[{5}](#)

A third fallacy is the *chronological* fallacy. Supporters of the theory incorrectly assume that Christianity borrowed many of its ideas from the mystery religions, but the evidence reveals it was actually the other way around. There is no archaeological evidence that mystery religions were in Palestine in the first century A.D. Jews and early Christians loathed syncretism with other religions. They were uncompromisingly monotheistic while Greeks were polytheistic. Christians also strongly defended the uniqueness of Christ ([Acts 4:12](#)). Although Christians encountered pagan religions, they opposed any adopting of foreign beliefs.[{6}](#) Ron Nash stated, "The uncompromising monotheism and the exclusiveness that the early church preached and practiced make the possibility of any pagan inroads . . . unlikely if not impossible."[{7}](#)

Fourth is the *intentional* fallacy. Christianity has a linear view of history. History is moving in a purposeful direction. There is a purpose for mankind's existence; history is moving in a direction to fulfill God's plan for the ages. The mystery religions have a cyclical view of history. History continues in a never ending cycle or repetition often linked with the vegetation cycle.[{8}](#)

Christianity gains its source from Judaism, not Greek mythology. Jesus, Paul, and the apostles appeal to the Old Testament, and you find direct teachings and fulfillments in the New Testament. Teachings such as one God, blood atonement for sin, salvation by grace, sinfulness of mankind, bodily resurrection, are sourced in Judaism and foreign to Greek mythology. The idea of resurrection was not taught in any Greek mythological work prior to the late second century A.D.[{9}](#)

Legends of the Mystery Religions

As noted above, critics of Christianity point to several parallels between Christianity and the myths of the mystery religions. However, a brief study of the legends reveals that there are few if any parallels to the life of Jesus Christ. Historians acknowledge that there are several variations to many of these myths and that they also evolved

and changed under the influence of Roman culture and, later, Christianity. Historical research indicates that it was not until the third century A.D. that Christianity and the mystery religions came into real contact with one another.[{10}](#) A brief overview of some of the most popular myths reveals the lack of resemblance with Christianity.

In the matter of death and resurrection, major differences are seen between Christianity and pagan myths. First, none of the resurrections in these myths involve the God of the universe dying a voluntary death for His creation. Only Jesus died for sins; the death of other gods was due to hunting accidents, emasculation, and other calamities. The gods in these stories die by compulsion, not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in self-giving love.[{11}](#)

Second, Jesus died once for all ([Heb. 7:27, 9:25-28](#)), while pagan gods repeat the death and rebirth cycle yearly with the seasons.

Third, Jesus' death was not a defeat but a triumph. The New Testament's mood of victory and joy ([1 Cor. 15:50-57](#) and [Col. 2:13-15](#)) stands in contrast to the mood of pagan myths which is dark and sorrowful over the fate of their gods.

Finally, Jesus' death was an actual event in history. Christianity insists on and defends the historical credibility of the Gospel accounts while the pagan cults make no such attempt.[{12}](#)

A popular myth that some believe parallels the resurrection of Christ is the story of Osiris. The cult of the gods Osiris and his wife Isis originated in Egypt. According to the legend, Osiris' wicked brother Set murdered him and sank his coffin to the bottom of the Nile. Isis recovered the coffin and returned it to Egypt. However, Set discovered the body, cut it into fourteen pieces, and threw the pieces into the Nile. Isis collected thirteen of the body parts and bandaged the body, making the first mummy. Osiris was transformed and became the ruler of the underworld, and exists in a state of semi-consciousness.

This legend hardly parallels the resurrection of Christ. Osiris is not resurrected from death to life. Instead he is changed into another form and lives in the underworld in a zombie state. Christ rose physically from the grave, conquering sin and death. The body that was on the cross was raised in glory.

Resurrection Parallels

Two other popular myths compared to Christianity are those of Mithras and Attis.

There is a belief that the story of Mithras contains a death and resurrection. However, there is no teaching in early Mithraism of neither his death nor his resurrection. Ron Nash stated, "Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god and no place for any concept of rebirth — at least during its early stages. . . . Moreover, Mithraism was basically a military cult. Therefore, one must be skeptical about suggestions that it appealed to nonmilitary people like the early Christians."[{13}](#)

Moreover, Mithraism flowered after Christianity, not before, so Christianity could not have copied from it. The timing is incorrect to have influenced the development of

first-century Christianity. It is most likely the reverse: Christianity influenced Mithraism. Edwin Yamauchi, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Persia and Mithraism states, "The earnest mithraea are dated to the early second century. There are a handful of inscriptions that date to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after A.D. 140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That's basically what's wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity."[{14}](#)

The legend of Attis was popular in the Hellenistic world. According to this legend, Cybele, also known as the mother goddess, fell in love with a young Phrygian shepherd named Attis. However, he was unfaithful to her so she caused him to go mad. In his insanity, he castrated himself and died. Cybele mourned greatly (which caused death to enter into the world). She preserved Attis' dead body, allowing his hair to grow and little finger to move. In some versions, Attis returns to life in the form of an evergreen tree. However, there is no bodily resurrection to life. All versions teach that Attis remained dead. Any account of a resurrection of Attis does not appear till a hundred and fifty years after Christ.[{15}](#)

To sum up, the claim that Christianity adopted its resurrection account from the pagan mystery religions is false. There are very few parallels to the resurrection of Christ. The idea of a physical resurrection to glory is foreign to these religions, and the stories of dying a rising gods do not appear till well after Christianity.

Myths of a Virgin Birth

Let us now look-at the alleged parallels between virgin births in the mystery religions and the virgin birth of Christ. Parallels quickly break down when the facts are analyzed. In the pagan myths, the gods lust after women, take on human form, and enter into physical relationships. Also, the offspring that are produced are half human and half divine beings in contrast to Christ who is fully human and fully divine, the creator of the universe who existed from eternity past.

The alleged parallels to the virgin birth are found in the legends of Dionysus and Mithras. Dionysus is the god of wine. In this story, Zeus disguised as a man had relations with Semele and she became pregnant. In a jealous rage, Hera, Zeus' wife, attempted to burn Semele. Zeus rescued the fetus and sewed it into his thigh until the offspring, Dionysus, was born. The birth of Dionysus was the result of a sexual union of Zeus, in the form of a man, and Semele. This cannot be considered a virgin birth.

One of the popular cults of the later Roman Empire was the cult of Mithra which originated in Persia. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race.[{16}](#) The birth of Mithra from a rock, born fully grown, hardly parallels the virgin birth of Christ.

New Testament scholar. Raymond Brown states that alleged virgin parallels “consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives, a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary.”^{17}

The Gospel of Luke teaches that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and through the power of the Most High she became pregnant. Mary had no physical relationship with a man or a deity who became a man.

Our study of the mystery religions reveals very few parallels with Christianity. For this reason, the theory that Christianity copied its major tenets from the mystery religions should be rejected.

Notes

1. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Laughing Jesus* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 55-56.
2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications: 2006), 221.
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), 167.
4. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 223-4.
5. *Ibid.*, 224-6.
6. *Ibid.*, 231-234.
7. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 168.
8. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, 221.
9. Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing, 1997), 34.
10. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 129.
11. Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL :InterVarsity Press, 1984),53.
12. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 171-172.
13. *Ibid.*, 144.
14. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 169.
15. *Ibid.*, 177.
16. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 144.
17. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 182.

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5. The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.

· *This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of "mana," or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions. Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all ([Isaiah 43:10](#)). He condemns the

use of magic, witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

Themes in Animism

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, "does it work?" To achieve their goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambre, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number "4" in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced "shee" in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is considered very unlucky.[1](#)

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God's relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. [1 John 4:16-18](#) says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . ." Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

Gods in Animism

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man's first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into polytheism.[\[2\]](#) This would concur with Paul's timeline of man's rejection of God that he lays out in [Romans 1](#).

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual

knowledge and worship.^{3} Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.) Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe ([Colossians 1:16-17](#)). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him ([Isaiah 43:10](#)). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Spirits and Ancestors

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.^{4}

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One's happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one's descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to [Hebrews 9:27](#) upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In [Luke 16](#), the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Basic Practices in Animism

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying "God bless you" after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and

certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one's path portending bad luck) may predict one's future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses, and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others. They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are "little people," such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying "amen" or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person of a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

Overcoming Animism

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. [Isaiah 43:10](#) states, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. [Deuteronomy 18:10](#) commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. [Colossians 2:15](#) says that He "disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God's hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust'" ([Ps. 91:1](#)). When tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999), 157.
2. Norman Anderson. *The World's Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

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6. Avatar: New Technology, Old Message

James Cameron's hit movie *Avatar* presents dazzling new animation technology and special effects yet an old message and a familiar story: when mankind embraces the pantheist worldview, there will result a oneness with nature. This enlightened union will lead to a life of peace and paradise upon the planet. The title of the movie itself gives its message away—an avatar in Hinduism is an incarnation or the descent of a deity to earth.

One of the most popular gods to appear as an avatar is Vishnu, the preserver god and one of the three main gods in the Hindu Pantheon. There are ten famous manifestations of Vishnu in the sacred writings of Hinduism [Jonathan Smith, ed. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 96.].

In this movie the alien race, the blue-skinned Na'Vi, live in a forest paradise. Although they are technologically primitive, they are superior in their understanding of true reality and nature itself. They live an enlightened existence for they are in communion with Eywa, the "All Mother." Eywa is not a personal being, as with the Christian view of God, but an impersonal force made up of all things. Her force is concentrated in a large sacred tree in the middle of the sacred forest. The Na'Vi become one with Eywa when they attach their pony tails to one of her vines. In one scene, the hero of the movie attempts to warn Eywa of the battle soon to come and asks for her help. However, he is told by his alien wife that Eywa is neutral and does not get involved in issues of justice. In the movie, death is encountered several times and the message is that at death, one's immaterial essence becomes one with Eywa. This is a clear presentation of the pantheist worldview and follows the same theme of such movies as *Pocahontas*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *Fern Gully*.

The conflict occurs when humans arrive on the planet and they, in contrast to the Na'Vi, are ignorant of Eywa and destroy the forest for monetary reasons. The army is portrayed as evil as they attempt to seize the sacred forest by force and mine the valuable minerals under the sacred tree. With primitive weapons, the alien beings defeat the well-armed humans and rescue their planet from destruction.

This movie is an evangelistic call for mankind to embrace the pantheistic worldview and attain oneness with the universe. As a result, peace will come and a harmonic

paradise will be created. However, we must seriously question this message of hope. Pantheism is embraced in several countries. We must ask ourselves, have these countries attained a harmonic paradise? One nation that embraces the pantheistic worldview is India. Few would confidently state that Hinduism has brought a beautiful paradise in that nation.

Another important facet of pantheism is that nature takes precedence over human life. In India and Nepal, I have witnessed cows, monkeys, and even rats receiving better care than humans—and many are even worshipped while human beings remain secondary. Pantheism also denies the reality of this physical world and promotes the belief that the spirit world represents true reality. Thus, it in fact denies true reality. Finally, pantheism denies our humanity because it fails to acknowledge our individuality and sin nature. As a result, true transformation of human nature cannot occur through pantheism.

One of the valuable messages in *Avatar* is the value of caring for nature. This is one of the reasons many are attracted to this movie. The popularity of this pantheistic message points out a shortcoming of the Christian church in modern times. As Christians, we are taught in Genesis to care for creation and not exploit it. However, unlike pantheism, we do not worship nature; instead, we are called to be stewards of what God created. We are to value what God has created and use the earth's resources responsibly, not in a destructive, uncaring manner. We are to develop technology to improve our lives and use it in a manner that reflects care for the creation around us. Scripture provides a clear exhortation to the church to articulate the biblical view of the environment.

Avatar is another apologetic for pantheism, perhaps the favorite worldview of Hollywood. However, it presents a false hope for peace and paradise. The Christian message of hope must be proclaimed in a compelling manner if we hope to gain the attention of our culture. The challenge before us is to demonstrate that Christianity offers the true message of hope. First, the miraculous, sinless life of Christ and His resurrection demonstrates He is the Creator, not an impersonal force. The true message of eternal life and forgiveness of sin is found in Christ alone. This message must be defended. Second, the biblical principles of responsible use of technology and care for the environment must be demonstrated.

Finally, creation is in a fallen state as the Bible teaches. [Romans 8:20-21](#) states, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Creation and mankind await the day nature will be restored fully and the curse of sin will be taken away. This will happen not as a result of embracing the false ideas of pantheism but with the coming of the king of creation, Jesus Christ. Since God will restore creation, we should move in the direction of God's future restoration and carefully manage and restore areas we have destroyed.

7. Confucius – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Patrick Zukeran considers the teachings of the greatest Eastern philosopher from a Christian perspective, analyzing their commonalities and differences.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

The Life of Confucius

Born in 550 B.C., Confucius is considered the greatest of all Eastern philosophers. His teachings are foundational to Asian cultures. His writings, *The Five Classics*, a collection of ancient Chinese literature, and *The Four Books*, a collection of his and his disciples' teachings, were for centuries the standard curriculum for Chinese education.

Confucius' teachings and biography were written many years after his death and were edited by his disciples. Although historians present various accounts of his life, there are some basic facts about which we are reasonably sure. From these basic facts, it is possible to outline the major events of his life.

Confucius lived during the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 256 B.C.) He was born in northern China in the Lu province into a family of humble circumstances. His father died at a young age. Confucius began studying under the village tutor and, at the age of fifteen, devoted his life to study. He married at twenty but soon divorced his wife and had an aloof relationship with his son and daughter. In his twenties, he became a teacher and gathered a group of loyal disciples.

At this time, the land was divided among feudal lords. The moral and social order was in a state of decay. Confucius sought a way to restore both cultural and political order. He believed that reform would be accomplished by educating the leaders in the classics and his philosophy. He therefore sought a political position of influence, from which he could implement his principles.

When Confucius was fifty years old, tradition teaches that the Duke of Lu appointed him to a cabinet position. Several historians believe he eventually ascended to higher positions of public office. Due to political disagreements and internal conflicts, he resigned his post at fifty-five and left the province of Lu. He then traveled from state to state for thirteen years, seeking to persuade political leaders to adopt his teachings. Although many lords respected him, no one gave him a position. Discouraged by the lack of response, he devoted his final years to teaching and writing. Before his death in 479 B.C., he expressed his discouragement and disillusionment regarding his career.

However, his disciples were able to gain significant positions in government after his death. They modified his teachings and added their own insights and centuries such that Confucianism later shaped Chinese culture by becoming the official religion of China. The values he espoused of education, family loyalty, work ethic, value of traditions, conformity to traditional standards, honoring of ancestors, and unquestioning obedience to superiors remain entrenched in Asian culture.

There is much to appreciate regarding the life and teachings of Confucius. Christians would agree with his philosophy of ethics, government responsibility, and social conduct on several points. These similarities provide bridges upon which we can build meaningful dialogue with those in East Asian Cultures. These values make East Asian people open to the message of Christ. Despite the similarities in ethics, there are some major differences between Christianity and Confucianism that are important to identify. This work will highlight these differences and provide ways we can effectively share Christ with those in East Asian cultures.

The Metaphysics of Confucius

Confucianism, as its founder taught, is not a religion in the traditional sense; rather, it is an ethical code. Chinese culture was steeped in the religion of animism, a belief that gods and spirits dwelt in natural formations. Along with an animistic worldview, there was a belief in ancestor worship. The spirits of the dead needed to be honored and cared for by the living family members.

However, Confucius avoided spiritual issues in his teachings. Although he believed in spirits and the supernatural, he did not feel the need to devote extensive efforts in teaching about them. Rather, he was humanistic and rationalistic in his outlook. According to David Noss, author of *A History of the World's Religions*, Confucius' "position on matters of faith was this: whatever seemed contrary to common sense in popular tradition and whatever did not serve any discoverable social purpose, he regarded coldly."^{1} The answer to the cultural and social problems was found in humanity itself, not in anything supernatural. This is further exhibited in the following three references:

- 1) A disciple of Confucius wrote, "The master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits"^{2}
- 2) Confucius himself stated, "To devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity, and while respecting the spirits, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."^{3}
- 3) In the Waley translation of the *Analects*, Confucius stated, "Our master's views concerning culture and the outward insignia of goodness, we are permitted to hear; but about man's nature and the ways of heaven, he will not tell us anything at all."^{4}

In the Confucian system a divine being does not have a significant role; his philosophy is man-centered and relies on self-effort. Man is sufficient to attain the ideal character through education, self-effort, and self-reflection. His system articulated the proper conduct in relationships, ceremony, and government. The core problem of mankind according to Confucius is that people are not educated and do not know how to conduct themselves properly in their societal roles. The chief goal of life is to become educated and live a moral life.

However, Confucius acknowledges a supreme power which established the moral order of the universe. This he refers to as the "Mandate of Heaven." The "Mandate of Heaven" may also refer to fate and events occurring in life which are beyond the

control of the individual. The just rule and the virtuous man live in accord with this moral order. This is the moral order that lies behind the Confucian ethical system. One must be careful not to violate the will of heaven. Confucius wrote, "He who put himself in the wrong with Heaven has no means of expiation left."^{5} Some scholars believe the uses of the term reveals that Confucius was referring at times to a supreme being.^{6} After his death, Confucianism evolved, combining with Chinese traditional religions and Buddhism to add a spiritual component.

In contrast, Christianity is God-centered. It is built on a relationship with a personal God who is involved in the world. Confucius focused on life here on this earth. Jesus focused on life in eternity. For Jesus, what happens in eternity has ramifications for life here on earth. In [Matthew 6:19](#) Jesus stated, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal." Here we see a contrast in the perspectives of Jesus and Confucius.

The Ethics of Confucius

Three key principles are emphasized in the teachings of Confucius: the principle of Li, the principle of Jen, and the principle of Chun-Tzu. The term Li has several meanings which are often translated as propriety, reverence, courtesy, ritual, or the ideal standard of conduct. It is what Confucius believed to be the ideal standard of religious, moral, and social conduct.

The second key concept is the principle of Jen. It is the fundamental virtue of Confucian teaching. Jen is the virtue of goodness and benevolence. It is expressed through recognition of value and concern in others regardless of their rank or class. In the *Analects*, Confucius summarizes the principle of Jen in this statement often called the silver rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you."^{7} Li provides the structure for social interaction; Jen makes it a moral system.

The third important concept is that of Chun-Tzu, the idea of the true gentleman. It is the man who lives by the highest ethical standards. The gentleman displays five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence.^{8} His relationships are described as follows: as a son he is always loyal, as a father he is just and kind, as an official he is loyal and faithful, as a husband he is righteous and just, and as a friend, he is faithful and tactful.^{9} If all men lived by the principles of Li and Jen and strove to the character of the true gentlemen, justice, and harmony would rule the empire.

The Christian would find himself in agreement with many of Confucius' ethical principles and virtues. A Christian would also agree with many of the character qualities of the true gentleman and seek to develop those qualities.

What accounts for the similarity in ethics in Confucianism and other religious systems is that which Paul states in [Romans 2](#): within every man there exists a God-given conscience or natural law that guides our moral conduct. This is because we are

created in the image of God, and thus we reflect His character. However, similarity in ethical codes does not mean the religions are the same.

The key difference can be identified by examining the silver rule of Confucius in contrast with the greatest commandment of Christ. Confucian law is summarized by the silver rule; however, Jesus summarizes his teachings this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" ([Matthew 22:38](#).) Confucius believed that in order to truly achieve the principles of Li, Jen, and the character of the true gentleman, one must look within oneself. Jesus takes His teaching a step further. All His principles revolve first around a relationship with God. We only truly love our fellow man and live the righteous life God calls us to after our nature is transformed by the work of God's Holy Spirit which comes to indwell all who trust in Christ.

Nature of Man

The Confucian philosophy is built on the foundational belief in the goodness of human nature.^{10} The *Analects* state, "The Master said, 'Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it was at our side.'"^{11} He further taught that all individuals are capable of attaining the highest virtue. He stated, "Has anyone ever managed to do Good with his whole might even as long as the space of a single day? I think not. Yet I for my part have never seen anyone give up such an attempt because he had not the strength to go on."^{12} In other words, all individuals are capable through self-effort to attain the ideal goodness.

Confucian disciple Mencius further develops this stating, "Man's nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward."^{13} This innate goodness can be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and discipline. Study in the six arts, which include ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics, develop one's character.

However, despite man being naturally good, Confucius faced reality honestly. He questioned whether it was possible to ever truly attain to the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness."^{14} He said of himself, "As to being a divine sage or even a good man, far be it from me to make any such claim."^{15} He further stated, "The master said, the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them."^{16} However, if man by nature is good, why can we not attain that which should be natural to us?

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God and was thus originally good. However, because of the fall in [Genesis 3](#), man is now sinful and in rebellion toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God, and he is driven to please himself. Paul states in [Romans 7:18](#), "I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out." As Confucius observed, no man is able to live up to the standards of the "True Gentleman" or God's commands because man's nature is sinful and in need of transformation.

According to the Bible, good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One's nature is transformed because God's Spirit indwells an individual. Although the Christian is not capable of living out the principles of God's law flawlessly, he is not left to live a holy life on his own strength. God provides man the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to enable man to live in obedience to God's law.

Relationships

Central to Confucius' teaching are relationships and social roles. There are five great relationships.[{17}](#) If these attitudes are practiced, there will be harmony among all:

1. Kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son
2. Gentility in the eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger
3. Righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife
4. Humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors
5. Benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects

The most important relationship is the family as it is the basic unit of all humanity. Consistent with the pantheistic world view, he did not believe in an individual self or soul. Rather, roles and relationships define a person. The goal of living is to achieve harmony by acting appropriately within those roles and relationships because the harmony of relationships within the family can extend into the life of the community and the world. The way individuals relate to their family members influences how they treat members of the community. This, in turn, affects relationships beyond the community. Thus, harmonious family relationships lead to harmonious relationships in the community. If there is discord in the family, this will likewise carry over into the community.

In the family unit, the father is the key figure. He must be a good example to his sons. It is the son's duty to obey without questioning and honor his father even after his father's death. When the father dies, obedience is then given to the oldest brother. Confucius stated, "Meng I Tzu asked about the treatment of parents. The Master said, 'Never disobey! . . . While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to ritual.'" [{18}](#)

Confucius taught that government should be for the people. Feudal lords are to be responsive to the needs of the people they govern. If the rulers lived by the highest principles, the people would then follow, and there would be reform from the greatest to the least. The duty of those in subordinate positions is to be unquestioningly loyal to their superior. Confucius stated, "It is said that if good people work for a country for a hundred years, it is possible to overcome violence and eliminate killing. This saying is indeed true." [{19}](#) Confucius believed that a good society would be achieved through education.

There are points of agreement between Confucius and the Bible. Confucius believed the virtues he espoused are lived out in relationships. The same is true for Christianity; our relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with one another. The truth of the Christian life is lived out in a community, not in isolation. The family is the key social unit, and the father is the leader of the family. However, Christianity takes relationships one step further than Confucius. Not only can we have the five relationships espoused by Confucius, we can also have a personal relationship with God. It is from this connection that our earthly relationships find their greatest meaning.

A Final Critique

There is much in the teachings of Confucius that I have found commendable. His moral values often parallel those taught in the Bible. As previously mentioned, the Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God, and, therefore, we reflect His moral character. His moral law code is embedded on our hearts ([Rom. 2](#)). Most people of Asian descent may not be strict adherents to Confucianism, but they are all influenced by his philosophy. Anyone seeking to serve in Asian cultures would find it worthwhile to read his works. Confucianism is very adaptable and fluid in its structure. That has been a weakness, but it has also a strength of the system since it allows Confucianism to join other inclusive religious systems. There are several significant differences, and, I believe, deficiencies within Confucian philosophy.

First, Confucianism falls short as a comprehensive life view because it fails to address several key issues. The Confucian system does not answer the key questions such as, Why does the universe exist? How do we explain its origin? What is the meaning of mankind's existence in the universe? What happens after death? These are universal questions that must be addressed. Man is a spiritual being, and this philosophy leaves one spiritually void. The Bible teaches that God has set eternity in the heart of men ([Eccl. 3:11](#).) The longing for spiritual answers is a universal need. For this reason, Confucian philosophy eventually combined with Chinese Folk religion and Buddhism. Nonetheless, it still fails to provide complete answers.

Second, Confucius taught there was an overarching morality and will called the "Mandate of Heaven" which guided the universe. The Mandate of Heaven is the moral order established by heaven. Some believe Confucius was referring to an impersonal force; others believe he was referring to a personal being. In either case, Confucius felt the heavens (or the one in heaven) do not communicate with people. Confucius stated, "Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby, the hundred creatures, each after its kind, are born thereby. Heaven does no speaking!"[\[20\]](#) in contrast, the Bible teaches that we can have a relationship with the one who established the moral order. God is involved with creation and has made the way for a relationship with Him possible through His son ([Jn. 3:16](#)). The creator of all things has communicated with us through His Word and His Son. He also invites us to commune with Him in prayer and intimate fellowship. The imagery of the Shepherd and His sheep found in [Psalm 23](#) and [John 10](#) reflect His desire for a close relationship with us.

Third, Confucius built his philosophy on the belief that man is basically good. However, despite this, Confucius honestly admitted that no one had attained the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness."^{21} He said of himself, "...the Ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them."^{22} If man is good by nature, we must ask why we cannot attain what should be natural to us.

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God but fallen in sin and rebellious toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God and please himself. Paul states in [Romans 7:18](#), "I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out." Good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God and God's Spirit transforms one's nature through the indwelling and enabling power of His Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Confucius teaches many valuable ethical principles that are consistent with Biblical teaching. This offers Christians a good way to build bridges with many in East Asian cultures. However, the spiritual void in Confucianism is a great weakness; however, it provides a wonderful opportunity to present the case for Christianity.

Christianity offers a comprehensive life view, for it explains the nature of God, our relationship to Him, the origin of creation, and what happens after death. In Confucian teaching, one cannot communicate with the creator, but in Christianity, the Creator invites us and makes the way possible for a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus. Finally, true transformation of one's nature will not occur through education, but rather through the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer in Christ.

Notes

1. David Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 298.
2. *Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 7:20.
3. *Analects* 6:20
4. *Analects* 5:12
5. *Analects* 3:13.
6. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 1 (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57-8.
7. *Analects* 15:23.
8. *Analects* 17:6.

9. Noss, 297.
10. Stephen Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), 80.
11. *Analects* 7:9.
12. *Analects* 4:6.
13. Mencius XI:2, trans. David Hinton, (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 197.
14. *Analects* 4:6
15. *Analects* 7:33.
16. *Analects* 14:30.
17. Noss, 293.
18. *Analects* 2:5.
19. *Analects* 13:11.
20. *Analects* 17:19.
22. *Analects* 4:6.
22. *Analects* 14:30.

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8. Islam Day in Hawaii – Misinterpreting Tolerance

May 20, 2009

On May 6, 2009, the Hawaii State Senate overwhelmingly passed a bill by a 22-3 vote to recognize September 24th, 2009 as Islam Day. The reason for this bill was to recognize "the rich religious, scientific, cultural and artistic contributions that Islam and the Islamic world have made. It does not call for any spending or organized celebration of Islam Day."[1](#)

Democrat Senator Will Espero presented his reason for this bill stating, "We are a state of tolerance. We understand that people have different beliefs. We may not all agree on every single item and issue out there, but to say and highlight the negativity of the Islamic people is an insult to the majority of believers who are good law-abiding citizens of the world."[2](#)

Two Republican senators opposed the bill, stating their reasons. Republican Senator Fred Hemmings said, "I recall radical Islamists around the world cheering the horrors of 9/11. That is the day all civilized people of all religions should remember."[3](#) Republican Senator Sam Slom stated, "I don't think there's any country in the history of the world that has been more tolerant than the United States of America, and because of that tolerance, we've looked the other way a lot of times, and many thousands of our citizens have been killed by terrorists."[4](#)

How should we approach this issue as believers in Christ? I believe there are two points we should be very concerned about. First, I agree with Sen. Will Espero that the majority of Muslims are peaceful, law-abiding citizens. However, I do not believe Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace. The teachings of Islam's sacred works and its history reveal this to be the case.

Throughout the Qur'an Muslims are commanded to spread Islam through the use of force. When Muhammad first began preaching his message, he did teach tolerance of Jews and Christians as he attempted to win converts from these religions. Sura 2:256 teaches that there is to be "no compulsion in religion." However, as he grew in power and the Jews and Christians rejected his message, these commands were later abrogated by later commands to fight against unbelievers in holy war.

Sura 9:5 teaches, "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers

and practice regular charity, then open the way for them, for Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful.”

Sura 9:29 states, “Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the last day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His messenger and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the Jizyah (tax) with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.”

The Qur’an teaches holy war against unbelievers. Muhammad also represents the perfect model for Muslims to copy. Muslims are called to imitate him in all aspects of life. Islamic scholar John Esposito writes,

“Muslims look to Muhammad’s example for guidance in all aspects of life: how to treat friends as well as enemies, what to eat and drink, how to make love and war His impact on Muslim life cannot be overestimated, since he served as both religious and political head of Medina: prophet of God, ruler, military commander, chief judge, lawgiver Traditions of the Prophet provide guidance for personal hygiene, dress, eating, marriage, treatment of wives, diplomacy, and warfare.”[{5}](#)

What kind of leader and model was Muhammad? He was a warrior. The history of Islam records his raids on caravans, battles, and the merciless killing of those who disagreed with him. The first biography of Muhammad states he fought twenty-seven battles in which thousands were killed.[{6}](#) His successors followed in his footsteps, spreading Islam through jihad attacking the countries of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Many of these countries posed no threat to Muslims nor were they aggressive towards Islam. For example, Egypt was not aggressive towards Islam, yet they were attacked and the Muslims killed over four million Egyptians. The nations of Europe posed no threat yet Islam invaded Europe and nearly conquered Europe until Charles Martel repulsed them in 732 A.D.

Most Muslims are peaceful but the religion of Islam is not a religion of tolerance and peace. In reading some of the authoritative sources of Islam, the Qur’an, the Hadith (sayings and actions of Muhammad), and the earliest biography of Muhammad, one will soon realize this to be the case. Therefore, it is dangerous to tolerate a religion that promotes intolerance and the use of force on unbelievers. Observe the history of Islam when they became the majority and instilled Sharia Law in a country. Once Sharia Law is instituted, they do not tolerate other faiths. In passing this bill, the leaders of Hawaii send the unbalanced message that we will honor this religion and its values, yet ignore the dangers it poses. I believe the leaders of Hawaii do not know what this religion teaches, and its history. It is dangerous then to honor a religion that poses such a threat to our nation and civilization.

Second, there is a misunderstanding of tolerance. Senators state tolerance as a reason to honor Islam. However, true tolerance has moral guidelines and limits. A tolerant society should not tolerate pedophiles or the abuse of women or racial discrimination. Tolerance does not mean all religions and values are equal and true, and therefore should be allowed to permeate a culture. However, this appears to be

the definition the leaders of Hawaii are going by. True tolerance has its limits; it does not tolerate all beliefs. Should we tolerate racism and groups like the KKK that promote this belief? Would we in the name of tolerance have a KKK day? What about Nazism? What about the Taliban?

If we are to tolerate all beliefs as equally valid and true and worthy of recognition, we will end up allowing groups like these to permeate our culture. Philosopher Karl Popper states, "If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them." [\[7\]](#) Unlimited tolerance with no moral guidelines will eventually lead to the downfall of our civilization as we allow false ideologies to destroy the moral foundations of our nation.

I ask the leaders of Hawaii to study the religion of Islam and its history from its beginning to what is occurring now in Europe. I believe Islam represents one of the great threats to western civilization and if we do not stand against its ideas, we may soon succumb to its tyranny.

For more information please see www.evidenceandanswers.org.

Notes

1. "Hawaii Lawmakers Pass Bill to Create 'Islam Day'" Fox News.Com, 6 May 2009, www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/05/06/hawaii-lawmakers-pass-create-islam-day/.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), 13-14.
6. Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1955), 659-60.
7. Brad Stetson & Joseph Conti, *The Truth About Tolerance* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 144.

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Dr. Zukeran clearly lays out the differences between a biblical view of Jesus and the view brought forth in the Qura'n. He makes a strong case that the biblical reports are supported by historical fact while the Muslim writings were created to strengthen their case. Looking at the birth, the life and the death of Christ he highlights the distinct differences and the case for a Christian view over an Islamic view.

The Debate

Islam and Christianity both recognize Jesus as a significant historical figure. However, they teach contrary doctrines regarding the nature and person of Jesus Christ. Christians have taught from the beginning that Jesus is the divine Son of God. This was not a doctrine invented centuries after the life of Christ as some allege, but was taught from the beginning by Christ Himself and the church. There is strong evidence that the New Testament was written in the first century, and there are numerous verses proclaiming the deity of Christ ([Matt. 1:23](#); [Mark 2:1-12](#); [John 1:1](#)). Old

Testament prophecies regarding the nature of the Messiah proclaimed that He would be human as well as divine ([Isaiah 7:14](#); [9:6](#)). Even non-Christian Roman historical works, such as the writings of Pliny the Younger (AD 112) and Celsus (AD 177), acknowledge that the Christians worshipped Christ as God.

Muslims reject the biblical teaching that Christ is the divine Son of God. Islam builds upon the teachings of the Qur'an, which is considered perfect and without error. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a significant prophet but not the divine Son of God. Muslims reject the doctrine of the Trinity, and, therefore, worshipping Jesus as God is considered *shirk*, or blasphemy (Sura 5:72)

Islam teaches that Jesus Himself never claimed to be the Son of God. Sura 9:30 states, "The Jews call Ezra a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be upon them: how they are deluded away from the truth!" The assertion that God stands against those who believe in the deity of Christ is in contradiction with the Bible. Sura 5:116-117 states:

And behold! God will say [i.e. on the Day of Judgment]: "Oh Jesus, the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden. Never did I say to them anything except what You commanded me to say: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them while I lived among them. When You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things."

Chapter five of the Qur'an asserts that Christianity taught the worship of Mary as a god. From this passage and others, many Muslims have incorrectly concluded that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the Father, the Son, and Mary. In fact, the New Testament never taught the worship of Mary. Instead it clearly taught that one must worship the Lord God alone ([Matt. 4:10](#)). The biblical doctrine of the Trinity never included Mary. The chapter further states that Jesus Himself clearly denied claiming to be the Son of God and would not accept the worship of others. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and received worship ([Jn. 8](#); [Matt. 14:33](#); [28:17](#)). Sura 5:75 states:

Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how God makes His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!

The Qur'an emphatically teaches that Jesus was a prophet and not the divine Son of God. Those who believe Jesus is divine are "deluded."

The Apostle John, writing in AD 90, states in chapter one of his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The

Apostle Paul, writing his letter to the Colossians in AD 60, states in chapter 2:9, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

It is apparent that Christianity and Islam teach contrary views of Christ and, therefore, cannot both be true at the same time. In this article I will investigate what the Qur'an teaches regarding the life of Christ and compare it with the Gospels. Since they teach contrary views, I will examine to see whether the Bible or the Qur'an has the greater weight of evidence to support its teachings on the nature of Christ.

Infancy Narratives of Christ in the Qur'an

What does the Qur'an teach regarding the childhood years of Christ? Not only do the Bible and the Qur'an teach contrary views regarding the nature of Christ, they also record contrary accounts of His early life. The Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the time of Caesar Augustus and the reign of King Herod over Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a stable because there were no rooms available for Mary and Joseph. On the eve of His birth, shepherds, who were told of his birth by angels, visited him. Later, wise men from the East came and worshipped the child. Herod, threatened by the announcement of a newborn king, sought to kill the child. Joseph fled from Herod, traveled to Egypt, and, after Herod's death, returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The Gospels rely on eyewitness accounts for their source of information.

The Qur'an includes stories regarding the birth and childhood of Christ, but it relies on very questionable sources that are not eyewitness accounts. First, the Qur'an teaches that Jesus was born in the desert under a palm tree. Sura 19 teaches that Mary, feeling the pangs of childbirth, seized the trunk of a palm tree and desired at that moment to die. However, the baby Jesus speaks to her from beneath saying, "Grieve not; for your Lord has provided a rivulet beneath you. And shake towards yourself the trunk of the palm tree: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat drink and cool [your] eye" (Sura 19: 24-25).

This story parallels an account from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, which is dated to the early seventh century AD (between AD 600 and 625).^{1} New Testament scholar Dan Wallace dates this Gospel even later to the eighth to ninth century AD.^{2} Wallace's date would push back the date of the Qur'an to several generations after Muhammad. In chapter 20 of this apocryphal work, Joseph and Mary are fleeing to Egypt and come to rest under a tall palm tree. Mary longs to eat the fruit of a palm tree and Joseph states their need for water. It is then the infant Jesus speaks to the palm tree:

Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: "O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit." And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed. And after they had gathered all its fruit, it remained bent down, waiting the order to rise from Him who had commanded it to stoop. Then Jesus said to it: "Raise thyself, O palm tree, and be strong, and be the companion of my trees, which are in the

paradise of my Father; and open from thy roots a vein of water which has been hid in the earth, and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from thee." And it rose up immediately, and at its root there began to come forth a spring of water exceedingly clear and cool and sparkling. And when they saw the spring of water, they rejoiced with great joy, and were satisfied, themselves and all their cattle and their beasts. Wherefore they gave thanks to God.

Historians and textual scholars such as F. F. Bruce have concluded that Muhammad incorporated this story from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*.^{3}

Another infant narrative from the Qur'an teaches that not long after Jesus' birth, Mary presents the infant to her people, several of whom question her regarding the baby. In her defense she points to the infant, which confuses the people since the child is only an infant. Then to everyone's surprise, the newborn Jesus speaks saying:

I am indeed a servant of Allah, He has given me revelation and made me a Prophet; And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. [He] has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life [again]. Such was (Prophet) Jesus, the son of Mary. A saying of truth, concerning what they doubt (Sura 19:30-33).

This account teaches that shortly after his birth, Jesus spoke, proclaiming His calling as the prophet of Allah, and defending the innocence of His mother Mary. The source of this story is another pseudo-gospel, the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*.^{4} According to Wallace, this apocryphal work was written in the fifth or sixth century AD.^{5} This work states:

We have found it recorded in the book of Josephus the Chief Priest, who was in the time of Christ (and men say that he was Caiaphas), that this man said that Jesus spake when He was in the cradle, and said to Mary His Mother, "Verily I am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word which thou hast borne, according as the angel Gabriel gave thee the good news; and My Father hath sent Me for the salvation of the world."

Here we see the parallels between the Qur'an and this apocryphal work. This work specifically mentions the infant Jesus speaking from his cradle, declaring His calling from God.

A third account in the Qur'an records Jesus making birds out of clay and then bringing them to life. Sura 3:49 states:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what you eat and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you, if you did believe.

This story of Christ breathing life into clay birds has no parallel in the Gospels. Instead, this story comes from another apocryphal work, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Historical evidence indicates this Gospel was not written by Thomas;

moreover, it was not even written in the lifetime of the apostles. The earliest manuscript of this Gospel dates from the sixth century AD., but most scholars date this work in the late second century.^{6} New Testament scholar Wilhelm Schneemelcher writes that the author was most likely not Jewish but a Gentile Christian. He asserts the fact that “the author was of gentile Christian origin may be assumed with certainty, since his work betrays no knowledge of things Jewish.”^{7}

Another account of Jesus in this *Infancy Gospel* reveals a capricious child who inflicts painful revenge several times on those who cross him in a manner he does not like. Fred Lapham states, “[M]any of the stories in the earlier part of the work are morally offensive and indefensible, showing the growing Jesus to be cruel, callous, and vindictive, and exercising power without regard for the consequences.”^{8} This account portrays a young Jesus contrary to that in the Gospels. A vengeful and bad-tempered Jesus would be contrary to the description given in Luke which states that he was “filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him” (Lk. 2:40). Also, a child of the character portrayed in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* would not likely be described as growing in “wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2:52).

There are several concerns regarding the accounts of Christ in the Qur’an. First, the infancy accounts of Christ contradict the Gospels. The Qur’an teaches that Jesus was born in the desert under a palm tree while the New Testament Gospels teach that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in a stable (Lk. 2:7). The infancy narratives in the Qur’an teach that Jesus performed miracles in his infancy and childhood. However, John 2:11 states that Jesus’ first miracle was performed in Cana of Galilee at the beginning of His ministry. Since the Qur’an and the Bible present contrary accounts of the life of Christ, both cannot be true at the same time.

What Does the Historical Evidence Support?

The historical evidence strongly confirms the New Testament Gospel accounts. First of all, two of these authors—Matthew and John—were eyewitnesses. Meanwhile, Mark and Luke derived their facts from the apostles themselves. There are numerous facts that support this to be the case. The internal evidence, archaeology, manuscript evidence, quotes from the early Church Fathers, and ancient non-Christian historical works affirm the first century date and historical accuracy of the gospels.^{9}

Muhammad wrote the Qur’an nearly six centuries after the life of Christ. Unlike the Gospel writers who relied on eyewitness sources, Islam’s defense is that the angel Gabriel revealed the information to Muhammad. However, the parallels to Gnostic apocryphal works reveal that Muhammad’s sources came from a mixture of Christian fables and Gnostic works that were prevalent in Arabia at that time.

Muhammad no doubt had interaction with Christians. There were several Christian communities in Arabia, and he would have also met Christian traders traveling in caravans along the trade routes. Also his first wife, Khadija, had a cousin named Waraqa who was a Christian.^{10} These Christian and Gnostic “Christian” sources told Muhammad stories from the New Testament and also the fables and apocryphal

stories spreading at that time. Since Muhammad was illiterate, he was not able to read and research these sources for himself; instead he relied on second or third hand accounts told to him. As he retold the stories, some of the details were changed due to an incorrect telling, a lapse in memory, or a desire for them to better fit his belief system.

In creating the Qur'an, Muhammad does recount some biblical stories, but he also relies on apocryphal sources written centuries after the eyewitnesses. These works present a Gnostic refashioning of Christ and have shown to be unhistorical in nature. Since they were not derived from apostolic sources and presented a false view of Christ, they were never considered part of inspired Scripture. The evidence strongly favors the New Testament Gospel accounts over the Qur'an. Since the Qur'an presents stories contrary to the Gospels, its historical accuracy and inspiration comes into question. Also, if Muhammad recorded false stories regarding the infant life of Christ, one must also question his understanding of the nature of Christ as well.

In citing apocryphal works as unreliable, one may fairly question whether the Bible quotes apocryphal works. Indeed, there are occasions where the Bible does quote from uninspired sources. One of the most questioned are Jude's references to the *Assumption of Moses* (Jude 9) and the *Book of Enoch* (Jude 14-15). However, these two references do not present a theological or historical problem since they do not present any teaching contrary to biblical revelation. So, although Jude does quote uninspired sources, there is no reason to reject the inspiration of Jude. Although the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch* are apocryphal works, Jude is referencing portions that are true and consistent with other areas of the Bible. Therefore, this does not affect either the doctrine of inspiration or the integrity of Jude's book.

In contrast, the birth and infancy account of Christ in the Qur'an is problematic since it both contradicts the New Testament Gospels and presents a contrary view regarding the nature of Christ. Therefore, unlike Jude, it is inconsistent with the New Testament, and we must decide whether it is the Qur'an or the Gospels that are in error.

The Life of Christ

The Qur'an speaks on five aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God but rejects the deity of Christ. However, it does affirm that Christ lived a remarkable life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 3:42-47; 19:16-21). The Qur'an affirms the prophetic call of Christ. It also affirms that Christ performed many miracles. The Qur'an affirms that Christ was sinless (Sura 19:16-21). However, it rejects the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and instead teaches that Christ did not suffer physical death but God raised Him up to heaven (Sura 4:158).

What is significant to realize is that, comparing Jesus to Muhammad in the Qur'an, Jesus performs greater works than Muhammad. First, according to the Qur'an, Christ is born of a virgin while there is nothing miraculous regarding the birth of Muhammad. Second, the Qur'an teaches that Christ accomplished many miracles, but

Muhammad does not perform any in the Qur'an. The Qur'an teaches that true prophets of God are confirmed by miracles. It teaches that previous prophets Moses and Jesus were confirmed as prophets by their miracles (Sura 7:106-8; 116-119; 5:113). However, when the people ask Muhammad to do so, he refuses, stating that the Jews witnessed miracles from the prophets but remained in unbelief (Sura 28:47-51; 17:90-95). If, according to the Qur'an, God confirmed His prophets through miracles, a question remains as to why He would not confirm Muhammad with the same "seal" of the prophets. This certainly was within God's ability to accomplish.

Contemporary Muslim author Isma'il Al-Faruqi claims that "Muslims do not claim any miracles for Muhammad. In their view, what proves Muhammad's prophethood is the sublime beauty and greatness of the revelation itself, the Holy Qur'an, not any inexplicable breaches of natural law which confound human reason."[11](#) Muslim scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali admitted that Muhammad did not perform any miracle "in the sense of a reversing of Nature."[12](#)

Muslim apologists point to the miracle accounts of Muhammad in the *Hadith*, a record of the sayings of Muhammad. However, the Qur'an is the inspired book of God, and the *Hadith* does not carry the authority of the Qur'an. The *Hadith* was written nearly one to two centuries after the life of Muhammad. Since this follows the pattern historians such as A.N. Sherwin-White have identified of miracle accounts that appear two generations after the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, the alleged miracle accounts in the *Hadith* stand in question. Moreover, the *Hadith* accounts seem to also go against the spirit of Muhammad in the Qur'an who repeatedly refused to perform miracles (3:181-84; 4:153; 6:8-9). It is also significant to note that many Muslim scholars such as Sahih Bukhari, who is considered to be the most reliable collector of the sayings in the *Hadith*, believed the vast majority of the miracle stories to be false.[13](#)

When pressed to defend the miracles of Muhammad, some point to Muhammad's night journey in Sura 19 in which he claims to have been transported to Jerusalem and then ascended to heaven on the back of a mule (Sura 17:1). There is no reason to take this passage as referring to a literal trip to heaven as even many Muslim scholars do not take it as such. The noted translator of the Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, comments on this passage, noting that "it opens with the mystic Vision of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet; he is transported from the Sacred Mosque (of Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) at night and shown some of the Signs of God."[14](#) Even according to one of the earliest Islamic traditions, Muhammad's wife A'isha reported that "the apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night."[15](#) Further, even if this were to be understood as a miracle claim, there is no evidence presented to test its authenticity. Since it lacks testability, it has no apologetic value.[16](#)

Another miracle is the prophecy of victory at the Battle of Badr (Sura 3:123; 8:17). However, it is a stretch to call this a supernatural miracle. It is common that generals will predict victory over an enemy army to inspire his troops. Also, Muhammad did not prophesy his defeat at the Battle of Uhud a year later.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach that God confirms His messengers through miracles. The Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles have the testimony of miracles but this is lacking in the testimony of Muhammad. The miracle testimony of Christ affirms that He was more than a prophet.

The Resurrection

The Qur'an rejects the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because Muslims believe that Allah would not allow His prophet to die such a shameful kind of death. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross. Sura 4:157-159 states:

That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God';—But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:— Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is exalted in power, wise;—And there is none of the people of the Book but must believe in him before his death; And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross but escaped death and was taken up to heaven. The phrase "God raised him up unto Himself" is understood to teach that Jesus was taken up alive to heaven, never experiencing death. Based on the phrase, "it was made to appear to them," orthodox Muslims have traditionally interpreted this to mean that God made someone else look like Jesus, and this person was crucified instead of Christ. There are various views regarding the identity of this substitute. Candidates include Judas, Simon of Cyrene, or a teen age boy.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus predicted His death and resurrection ([Matt. 26:2](#); [Mk. 10:33](#); [14:8](#); [Jn. 2:19](#)). The Bible records the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is central to the preaching of the apostles and to Christianity. The Qur'an and the Gospels cannot be true at the same time since they present contradictory accounts. One must examine the historical evidence and determine which account the evidence supports.

There is strong evidence to support the historicity of the Gospels and the fact that they were written by first century eyewitnesses or their close associates.[{17}](#) We also have thousands of ancient manuscripts dated as early as the beginning of the second century, confirming that the Gospels have been accurately preserved.[{18}](#) There are also several non-Christian Roman and Jewish historical works that affirm both the death of Christ and that Christians believed He had risen from the dead. These include the writings of Tacitus, Thallus, Lucian, Josephus, and the Jewish Talmud.[{19}](#) Finally, the preaching of the death and resurrection of Christ began just days after His death on the cross, and has been continuously preached since then for over two thousand years. This account was proclaimed from the beginning, not generations after the resurrection.

The Qur'an's account is not built on historical evidence but rather a commitment to Muslim theology. There is little historical evidence to support the Qur'an in its denial

of the crucifixion and resurrection and its assertion that someone else took Jesus' place on the cross. To support their view, Muslims often appeal to the "Lost Gospels." These are the Gnostic Gospels such as the *Gospel of Judas* and others. However, these have proven to be non-apostolic works, written centuries after the life of the apostles. They are not regarded as historically accurate and were written by Gnostics attempting to refashion Jesus in their image.[{20}](#)

The death and resurrection of Christ is one of the most reliably recorded events in ancient history. The historical evidence strongly favors the Gospel account. Therefore, the Qur'an would be in error, and its inspiration must, therefore, be questioned.

Conclusion

As we have studied, the Qur'an and the Bible present contrary views on the nature and life of Christ. The Qur'an rejects the deity of Christ and the death and resurrection of Christ. The Qur'an presents stories regarding the infancy of Christ that are contrary to the New Testament and rely on Gnostic apocryphal works as its source. The Qur'an rejects major doctrines and events recorded in the Bible. Since the historical evidence upholds the Gospels, the perfection and inspiration of the Qur'an is in question since its teachings contradict major doctrines and events taught in the New Testament.

That being said, from a survey of the Qur'an, one should realize that even in the Qur'an, Jesus is greater than Muhammad. First, Jesus' titles in the Qur'an are greater. Despite rejecting the deity of Christ, the Qur'an gives Jesus several honorary titles. He is given the titles of Messiah, the Word of God, the Spirit of God (Sura 4:169-71), the Speech of Truth (Sura 19:34-35), a Sign unto Men, and Mercy from God (Sura 19:21). Although these titles may refer to deity in Christian theology, Muslims do not equate these titles in the same way.

Second, Jesus' miracles in the Qur'an are greater, for the Qur'an affirms several miraculous aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 19:16-21; 3:37-45). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ performed miracles (Sura 3:37-45; 43: 63-65). The Qur'an also affirms the prophethood of Christ (19:29-31). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ did not die but was raised up to heaven by God (4:158; 19:33). In contrast, according to the Qur'an, there is very little, if anything, supernatural regarding the life of Muhammad.

Even in the Qur'an, Jesus lived a life that is much more extraordinary than Muhammad. Since this is evident in the Qur'an, it would be wise for all Muslims to study the life of Jesus in the Bible. Not only is the Bible an accurate historical record, but it is a text that Muhammad encouraged Muslims to study (Sura 10:94; 2:136; 4:163; 5:56; 5:68; 35:31). Muhammad believed the Bible in the sixth century AD was accurate. We have many ancient New Testaments that predate the sixth century. Examples include the Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 250), Codex Vaticanus (AD 325 – 350), Codex Sinaiticus (AD 340), Codex Alexandrinus (AD 450), the Latin Vulgate (fourth century AD), and Syriac New Testament (AD 508). From these we can be

assured that we have accurate copies of the New Testament that predate the sixth century.

I encourage all Muslims, therefore, to read the New Testament and learn what it says about Jesus Christ. One will soon discover that He was more than a prophet; He was indeed the unique Son Of God.

Notes

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3. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 172-73.
4. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'an* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1905), ch. 4, section 3.
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6. Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, CA.: Polebridge Press, 1995), 91-92.
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8. Fred Lapham, *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 130.
9. See Patrick Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels," Probe Ministries, 2004, probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels
10. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1967), 83.
11. Isma'il Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1984), 20, quoted in Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 105.
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14. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "Introduction to Sura XVII," in *Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, n.d.) 691.
15. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 183.
16. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 2nd ed., 164.
17. Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels."
18. Ibid.
19. Patrick Zukeran, "Jesus in Ancient Non-Christian Sources," Evidence and Answers, bit.ly/18XCiME
20. Patrick Zukeran. "Discerning Fact from Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*," Evidence and Answers, evidenceandanswers.org/articles/DaVinciCodeA1.pdf

10. Judaism Viewed from a Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides an overview of Judaism from an orthodox Christian perspective, including basic beliefs and practices and some suggestions for sharing one's faith with a Jewish friend.

Judaism Today

Throughout the last several decades, the eyes of the world have frequently focused on the tiny nation of Israel. What is the significance of this nation and her religion?

The focus of this article is the religion of the Jews. When studying Judaism, however, we must understand that there is a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Many Jews do not embrace Judaism, but consider themselves to be secular, atheistic, or agnostic.

The term *Judaism* is often used to identify the faith of modern Jews as well as Old Testament Jews. For our purposes, the term is used to refer to the religion of the rabbis established around 200 B.C. and crystallized in A.D. 70. At this time, developments in rabbinic Judaism took place that distinguished it from the Old Testament faith. New institutions arose such as the synagogue (the house of worship and study), the office of rabbi (a leader holding religious authority), and the *yeshivot* (religious academies for training rabbis). One of the greatest changes came with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Sacrifices and the priesthood came to an end, and the rabbis became the authorities on spiritual and legal matters.

Since the eighteenth century, three main branches of Judaism developed: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. Orthodox Judaism upholds the divine inspiration of the Old Testament—giving greater authority to the first five books—and recognizes the Talmud as authoritative for interpreting the Jewish law. This branch continues to observe the traditional Jewish laws as practiced for centuries. An ultra orthodox sect within this branch is the Hasidic movement. This sect adheres strictly to the Law of Moses, and is a separatist group.

Reform Judaism is the liberal wing. It was founded by Abraham Geiger in Germany in the eighteenth century (1810-1874). Geiger was influenced by the Enlightenment, and so viewed reason and science as authoritative. He rejected belief in revelation, messianic hope, and the promise of land. This branch seeks to modernize what are considered outmoded ways of thinking. The primary focus of Reform Judaism is the ethical teachings of the Jewish Law.

Conservative Judaism is considered the intermediate position between Orthodox and Reform. It was founded in the nineteenth century in Germany by Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875). Conservatives seek to practice the Law and the traditions, but cautiously reinterpret the Law and adapt their practices to contemporary culture.

The existence of these and numerous other sects means a wide variety of beliefs within Judaism. In addition, as a result of the Enlightenment and the Holocaust, secularization among the Jews is increasing rapidly. Because of the wide variety of beliefs within Judaism, it is difficult today to define what makes a person Jewish.

Nonetheless, according to the Old Testament, Jews are the descendants of Abraham. It is these people to whom God has made special promises and who will have a prominent role in redeeming the world.

Basic Beliefs of Judaism

Do Christians and followers of Judaism worship the same God? What is Judaism's understanding of Jesus? Let's take a look at some basic Jewish beliefs as compared with Christian ones.

Both religions believe in the Old Testament, the ethical teachings of the Law, and a hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, they differ on some important fundamental doctrines.

Judaism rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and teaches a unified monotheism based on [Deuteronomy 6:4](#).

The main Scripture in Judaism is the Old Testament. Views of divine inspiration vary between the different branches. Orthodox and Conservative schools view the Pentateuch as the most inspired part, the Prophets and Writings less so. Another important book is the Talmud which includes the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah consists of legal rulings, and was compiled around A.D. 200. The Gemara elaborates on the discussions of the Mishnah, and was compiled around A.D. 550. Most Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, consider the Talmud useful for giving instruction for life but not divinely inspired.

Judaism teaches that man is created in the image of God but without original sin. Study of the Torah can overcome our inclination to evil.

A proper relationship with God comes through repentance, prayer, and obedience to the Law. Jews do not feel they need "salvation" but assume a standing with God through their heritage. Conservative and Reform Jews view salvation as the betterment of self and society.

The Orthodox school holds to a bodily resurrection at death. The Conservative school teaches the immortality of the soul. The Reform school generally has no teaching regarding life after death.

Central to Jewish hope is the Messiah. Orthodox Jews anticipate a personal Messiah, while Reform and Conservative Jews view the messianic concept as the ideal of establishing justice by human effort. A key dividing point between Judaism and Christianity, of course, is their views of Jesus. Judaism recognizes Jesus as a moral teacher, but rejects His claims to deity as a creation of the early church. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit eternal life.

From our brief survey, then, it is clear that Judaism and Christianity differ significantly on major doctrines. The two do not worship the same God. They also differ in salvation theology. Judaism is works-oriented and rejects the atoning work of Christ and His divine nature. Christianity proclaims faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on

the cross. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit the hope of eternal life.

The Practices of Judaism

Jewish festivals and holidays are an integral part of Judaism. They memorialize key events in the history of the Jewish people and honor their unique heritage. Here are some important Jewish festivals.

The most significant is Passover, the first observance of which is recorded in [Exodus 12](#). Jews continue to commemorate God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. Passover is observed in March or April and lasts a week.

Seven weeks after Passover comes Pentecost, which observes the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The festival of Tabernacles occurs in the fall. This festival commemorates the forty years of wandering in the desert when the Israelites lived in tabernacles or booths. The ceremony includes prayer for rain and the reading of the Torah.

Rosh ha-Shanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year. This joyful festival occurs in September or October and marks the beginning of a ten-day period known as the High Holy Days. Rosh ha-Shanah climaxes on the tenth day which is called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is a solemn day when Jews fast, attend the synagogue, and recite prayers asking God for forgiveness of their sins.

Hannukah is celebrated in November or December and lasts eight days. It honors the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian armies of Antiochus Epiphanes and the rededication of the second Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C. The lighting of the eight-branched menorah is the main feature of this celebration. When Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1948, the menorah became a national symbol.

Purim is a minor holiday celebrated in February or March and commemorates the deliverance of the Jews by God told in the story of Esther.

Not only are the holidays important, but the celebration of events in the life cycle are as well. Circumcision on the eighth day for boys is one. Another is the Bar Mitzvah for boys and Bat Mitzvah for girls which celebrates the thirteenth birthday. Third is the Jewish wedding. Finally, there is the funeral service and mourning for seven days.

These Jewish practices, especially those surrounding the holidays, not only play a key role in the life of the Jewish people, but are significant to the church as well. Major events in the life of Christ and the church in Acts occurred on these days. Christ died on the Passover, and the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. Also, the symbolisms and rituals enacted at these festivals foreshadow what was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

Witnessing to the Jews

How do we share Christ with our Jewish neighbors? Before preaching the gospel, it would be wise to first build friendships with Jews and learn from them. Second, we

should understand the Jewish perception of Christians and Christianity. For a Jewish person to become a Christian means to reject his or her heritage and distinctiveness; in other words, many equate it to becoming a gentile. This is difficult, for many harbor resentment for mistreatment by Christians and gentile nations.

After building trust, encourage them to read their own Scriptures. Many grow up reciting passages of the Old Testament but not *studying* the Old Testament or the messianic prophecies.

There are many messianic passages to which one could refer. One frequently used passage is [Isaiah 53](#) which describes the suffering servant who takes on the sins of the people. Most Jews have been taught that this is the nation of Israel. However, the context and content of the passage make it clear it is not. A careful study soon reveals that Jesus Christ fits the description of this servant.

Another passage is the prophecy of the seventy sevens in [Daniel 9](#). When properly calculated, the prophecy predicts the Messiah to enter Jerusalem and be crucified in AD 33. Put this date together with [Isaiah 53](#), and who else fits the description but Jesus? Here are two passages that can open the mind of a Jewish friend to begin investigating further the prophecies and the life of Jesus. As you continue to talk, encourage them to read the Gospel of Matthew which was written for the Jews.

There are also many images in the Old Testament and in Jewish festivals that point to Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb is a good example. The lamb was sacrificed and its blood was painted on the doorframe to identify and protect the Israelites from the Angel of Death. In [Numbers 9](#), the Passover lamb was to be without blemish, and none of its bones were to be broken when sacrificed ([Numbers 9:12](#)). This is a foreshadowing of Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God who lived a sinless life. His blood was shed and covers the believer delivering us from sin and death. [John 19:33](#) records that the Romans were about to break the legs of the criminals, but finding Christ already dead, they did not break his bones. In every way, Christ meets the requirements for the perfect sacrifice.

These passages and symbols reveal that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Be sure to explain that not only must one acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but that one must put all one's faith in His atoning work of sacrifice to be brought into a right relationship with God.

Promises for the Chosen

Are the Jews God's chosen people? What is their role in God's plan for the world? To answer these questions, we must first look at the covenants God established with Israel which are the foundation of His redemption plan.

The first is the Abrahamic Covenant found in [Genesis 12](#). This pledge includes the promises that Abraham will be a father of a great nation; that his descendents will own the land of Canaan forever; that those who bless Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses it will be cursed; and that the world would be blessed through Israel. Israel was to be a light to the world. Through their special relationship with God, and

as they lived in obedience to His law, the nations would take notice of this people and come to learn about their God. However, Israel was not able to live in obedience to God and did not fulfill this call.

The second pledge is the Land Covenant in [Deuteronomy 30](#). In this covenant, the promise of the land of Palestine is reaffirmed to Israel. Added to this is a warning that if the Israelites do not obey God's law, they will be scattered from the land and regathered when they return to the Lord.

The third covenant is the Davidic Covenant in [2 Samuel 7:11](#). This promise states that a descendant of David would establish an eternal rule of peace and righteousness. This forms the basis of Israel's hope in a future messiah who will deliver Israel from the rule of the gentiles and bring the Abrahamic Covenant to completion.

Finally, there is the New Covenant found in [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#): "The time is coming," declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Israel was unable to obey God's law because they depended on their strength to live the law. What was needed was a new heart and empowerment to live the law. This pledge provides this, and guarantees that there will be a time when Israel as a nation will turn to her Messiah.

Several aspects of these covenants have been fulfilled. Abraham's descendants have become a nation. Christ was a descendant of David and fulfilled the old law making it possible for all men to know God. However, other promises are yet to be fulfilled. Israel doesn't yet possess the promised land in peace, and a Davidic Kingdom hasn't been established in Jerusalem.

Despite Israel's failure and rejection of their Messiah, however, God is faithful, and He will fulfill His promises at the appointed time.

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11. Mormon Doctrine of Jesus: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran looks at a Mormon view of Jesus, comparing it to an authentic Christian perspective. He finds that the Mormon view is not supported by the biblical text.

Jesus a Procreated Being?

The Mormon Church claims to have restored the true teachings of Jesus. In this article, we will compare the Mormon doctrine of Jesus to the New Testament.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, God the Son, is eternal and has no beginning. However, Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a procreated being, the literal offspring of God the Father and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon theology, God the Father, Elohim, dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies so that they too may one day ascend to godhood as their parents did. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. The *Doctrine and Covenants*, one of the four sacred books of Mormonism states, "Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father."^{1} The *Gospel Principles*, which is the manual of the Mormon Church, states, "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ."^{2} James Talmage, one of the early apostles of the church wrote, "[A]mong the spirit-children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors."^{3}

According to the Mormon view, Jesus is not unique from the rest of mankind. He is simply the firstborn spirit child. The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, "The difference between Jesus and other offspring of Elohim is one of degree not of kind."^{4} That is why Mormons refer to Jesus as elder brother. James Talmage wrote, "Human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh. . . . There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of mankind."^{5}

Mormon doctrine deviates significantly from the Bible, which teaches that Jesus is eternal and not procreated. Although Mormons teach that Jesus is eternal, what they mean is that He existed as a spirit child prior to His incarnation. Being an offspring of Elohim means He was created at some point in time.

To support their view, Mormons appeal to [John 3:16](#), which states Jesus is the "only begotten." The Greek word used there is *monogenes*, which means "unique" or "one of a kind." It does not mean procreated, but emphasizes uniqueness.

Mormons also appeal to [Colossians 1:15](#), which calls Christ the "Firstborn over all creation." The Greek word for firstborn is *prototokos*, meaning "first in rank, preeminent one." It carries the idea of positional supremacy. Christ is the firstborn in the sense that He is preeminent over all creation. Renowned Greek scholar, the late F.F. Bruce, wrote on how the term was used during the time in which Paul wrote. "The word firstborn had long since ceased to be used exclusively in its literal sense, just as prime (from the Latin word *primus*—first) with us. The Prime Minister is not the first minister we have had; he is the most preeminent. . . . Similarly, firstborn came to denote (among the ancients) not priority in time but preeminence in rank."[6](#) [Psalm 89:27](#) in the Septuagint calls David the firstborn. We all know David is not the first-born son in his family, nor is he the first king of Israel. "Firstborn" here is a title of preeminence.

These Bible verses do not support the teaching that Jesus is a procreated being. The Bible further teaches Jesus is an eternal being. He had no beginning.

[Colossians 1:17](#) states, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Christ as the eternal Son of God existed before all creation. Since Christ is "before all things," He did not depend on anyone or anything for His creation or existence.

[John 1:1](#) shows Jesus is eternal and has no beginning. John wrote, "In the beginning *was* the word." Scripture indicates that the universe was not created in time, but that time itself was created along with the universe.[7](#) In other words, time was not already in existence when God created the world. The world was created with time rather than in time. Back before the beginning mentioned in [Genesis 1:1](#) and [John 1:1](#) lay a *beginningless* eternity.[8](#) The verb *was* is in the imperfect tense, indicating continued existence. So Jesus did not come into existence at some point in eternity past, He always existed. There has never been a point where He was not in existence.

In [John 8:58](#) Jesus tells the religious leaders, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Jesus is identifying Himself as the eternal God, quoting the words from [Exodus 3:14](#). For this reason the Jews were seeking to stone Him for the crime of blasphemy. The words "I am" or "Yahweh" in the Hebrew language is the verb, to be. This name conveys the meaning of eternal self-existence. Yahweh, whom Jesus is identifying with, is eternal and beyond the realm of time. Abraham came to exist at a point in time, but Jesus never had a beginning. He is uncreated and eternal. Since the Bible teaches the eternal nature of Christ, He cannot be a procreated being as Mormon doctrine teaches.

Lucifer and Jesus

According to Mormon theology, God the Father lives on a planet with His spirit wives procreating spirit children who await physical bodies to inhabit. As we learned earlier, Jesus is the first son born to Elohim. God the Father had numerous other offspring, which included Lucifer. This makes him a spirit brother of Jesus and of all human beings. Mormon theologian LeGrand Richards writes, "Satan was just as much a man

in the spirit world, as were those spirits who have been given bodies through birth in this world.”{9}

Mormonism teaches that Jesus and Lucifer were involved in planning mankind’s eternal destiny. In order to attain godhood like our heavenly parents, the spirit children needed to leave the presence of their heavenly Father, inhabit a physical body, and live a worthy life. Elohim knew that mankind would sin and thus require a savior to pay for sin and show us how to return to our heavenly father. At the heavenly council, Jesus and Lucifer proposed their plans. Lucifer offered to go to earth and be the savior but he wanted to force everyone to be saved and do everything himself. Jesus desired to give man the freedom of choice. The Father chose Jesus’ plan. Angered by the decision, Lucifer persuaded one third of the spirit children to rebel and a war in heaven took place between Satan’s forces and Jesus and His followers. Lucifer was defeated, cast out of heaven, and denied the right to inhabit mortal bodies.{10} Without the ability to attain physical bodies, exaltation to the Celestial kingdom is impossible. He became known as Satan and his followers became the demons who now exist on earth as spirits opposing God’s work.

Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, “The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind.”{11}

The Bible teaches that Jesus is not the spirit brother of Lucifer or of human beings. Lucifer is an angel and part of the created order. [Ezekiel 28:13-19](#) reveals that Lucifer, in contrast to Jesus, is a created cherub angel. [Colossians 1:16](#) tells us that Christ is the Creator of all things, including the angelic realm. The words “thrones”, “dominions”, “principalities” and “powers” were used by rabbinical Jews to describe different orders of angels. In Colossae, there was a problem of worshipping angels. Christ had been degraded to their level. Paul’s argument here is that Christ is superior to the angels for Christ created them. Lucifer falls into this category of a created angel, thus making him a created being. [Hebrews 1:4](#) also reinforces the fact that Jesus, being God the Son, is superior in nature to the angels. Christ is Creator, while Lucifer is creature, two totally different classes and they cannot be spirit brothers as Mormonism teaches.

The Incarnation of Christ

The Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from biblical teaching regarding the preincarnate life of Christ. It also deviates in its teaching on the incarnation of Jesus. Mormonism teaches that Jesus’ incarnation was the result of sexual relations between the flesh and bone Heavenly Father and Mary. Jesus is the only earthly offspring so conceived. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, “Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers.”{12}

He also writes, “God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being;

He was born in the same personal, real and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about this paternity; He was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events, for He is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says.”{13}

James Talmage wrote, “Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh.”{14}

Mormon theology teaches that the Father was the main person involved in Mary’s conception, not the Holy Spirit. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “Christ is not the Son of the Holy Ghost, but of the Father.”{15} Mormon Historian Stephen Robinson states, “Mary was in some unspecified manner made pregnant by God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”{16} Dr. Robinson attempts to remain faithful to Mormon theology and the Bible, but his attempt falls short.

The Bible makes it clear: Jesus was conceived as the result of a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, not a physical union with the Father. [John 4:24](#) says that God is spirit. He is not a resurrected man.

[Luke 1:35](#) states, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The Holy Spirit’s supernatural work in Mary’s body enabled Christ—eternal God—to take on human nature. Jesus thus had a dual nature. He was fully God and fully man. Mormons reject this teaching.

Stephen Robinson writes, the “unbiblical doctrine of the two natures in Christ was added to historic Christianity by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.”{17} This might be a consistent conclusion for Mormonism, but it is contrary to the Bible. Throughout the Gospels Jesus showed His humanity: He was hungry, He got tired, and His human body experienced death. However, He also revealed His divinity, demonstrating omnipotence ([Colossians 1:17](#)), omniscience ([John 2:25](#)), eternity ([John 1:1](#)), and omnipresence ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

There is a wide separation between the Mormon doctrine of the incarnation of Christ and what the Bible teaches.

The Atoning Work of Christ

Another key area in which Mormon theology deviates from biblical teaching is their view of the atoning work of Christ. To understand this, we must understand the Mormon view of the fall. According to Mormon theology, Adam was given two conflicting commands by God: one to become mortal and the other not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; out of which mortality, children, and death would result. Adam chose to eat of the fruit for it was the only way salvation could come to mankind.{18} As a result of the fall, Adam and Eve left their purely spiritual state and became physical beings. Mortality and child bearing would provide the way to exaltation and godhood. Man then inherited a dual nature, one physical and the other spiritual.{19}

Jesus' death is believed to have atoned for only Adam's sin, leaving us responsible for our sins.^{20} Adam's act brought mortality and death. The result of Jesus' atonement is that all humankind will be resurrected. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "Unconditional salvation, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected."^{21} The Second Article of Faith states, "We believe that men are responsible for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."^{22}

In Mormon theology, there is a distinction between general salvation—resurrection for all, and individual salvation which refers to exaltation. Mormonism teaches that that we have all attained universal resurrection as a result of Jesus' death, but we must now earn our own place in heaven by doing all we can do.

Mormonism teaches there are three levels of heaven: telestial is the lowest level, the terrestrial, and celestial. The resurrection of Christ allows non-Mormons entrance to the telestial or terrestrial kingdom. All Mormons desire the celestial level where they attain exaltation to godhood. Attaining to this level depends on their life here on earth. The Mormon Church and Joseph Smith play the major roles in achieving exaltation. The *Gospel Principles* tell us that Jesus "became our savior and He did His part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part and become worthy of exaltation."^{23}

The Bible does not equate salvation with resurrection. Jesus' death provides atonement for all of humanity ([Isaiah 53:6](#)), but salvation is contingent on one's response to Christ's atoning work. Salvation applies only to those who accept Christ's work on the cross. It is not universal as in Mormonism.

All mankind will be resurrected, but it is at the resurrection that some will be condemned to hell and others to eternal life in God's presence ([Rev. 20:11-15](#)). Those who reject Christ will not be saved ([John 3:18](#)). So resurrection is not equated with salvation.

Finally, individual salvation is by faith alone, not by works. ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)) It is through faith in Jesus alone that one receives the full measure of the gift of salvation. The Bible does not teach three levels of glorification. There is only eternal life with Christ, or eternal separation from God.

Jesus the Polygamist?

As we have studied, the Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from the Jesus of the Bible in several key areas. Another unique teaching of Mormonism on the life of Christ is in regards to His marital state. Mormonism teaches that while on earth, Jesus was married to at least three women. Although Mormons today try to distance themselves from this teaching, it is clearly a part of their historical record. Orson Hyde, one of the original Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church and who was ordained by Joseph Smith, cites the gospel of John when he writes, "Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, and He told them what to do. Now there was actually a marriage; and if Jesus was not the bridegroom on that occasion, please tell who was.

I shall say here, that before the Savior died, He looked upon his own natural children as we look upon ours."[{24}](#)

Mormonism teaches that Jesus was not only married, but He had a family. In a speech given by Hyde in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, he exclaimed, "I discover that some of the Eastern papers represent me as a great blasphemer, because I said, in my lecture on marriage, at our last conference, that Jesus Christ was married at Cana of Galilee, that Mary, Martha, and others were His wives, and that He begat children. All that I have to say in reply to that charge is this—they worship a Savior that is too pure and holy to fulfil the commands of his Father. I worship one that is just pure and holy enough 'to fulfil all righteousness;' not only the righteous law of baptism, but the still more righteous and important law 'to multiply and replenish the earth.' Startle not at this! For even the Father Himself honored that law by coming down to Mary, without a natural body, and begetting a Son; and if Jesus begat children, He only 'did that which He had seen His Father do.'" [{25}](#)

This would be consistent with Mormon theology, since marriage is a requirement for exaltation to godhood.[{26}](#)

According to the New Testament, there is no evidence to indicate that Jesus was married or that He had children. It is even more inconceivable that He would enter into a polygamous relationship, for it was not God's intended will for marriage. ([Genesis 2:24](#), [Matthew 19:5](#), and [1 Timothy 3](#))

Our study reveals that the Jesus of Mormonism is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Mormon view of Jesus teaches that He was not eternally God, that He was procreated as the first spirit child of the Father, He is a spirit brother of Lucifer, and was begotten of the Father through physical relations with Mary. For these reasons, we cannot consider the Mormon teachings on Christ to be consistent with the New Testament.

Notes

1. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21-23.
2. *Gospel Principles*, 11.
3. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 425.
4. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21
5. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 426.
6. F.F. Bruce, *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 126.
7. Harold Kuhn, "Creation," in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. Henry. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.), 61, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
8. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1983), 996, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
9. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret

- Publishing Company), 277.
10. *Gospel Principles*, 16-17.
 11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 193.
 12. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 546-547.
 13. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 742.
 14. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 466.
 15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1975), 1:18-20.
 16. Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 135.
 17. Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 78.
 18. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 47.
 19. "Church News" in *Deseret News*, July 31, 1965, 7.
 20. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, 98
 21. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 669.
 22. *Articles of Faith* 2.
 23. *Gospel Principles*, 19.
 24. *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, 89.
 25. *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 210.
 26. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132.

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12. The Origin of Man's Religions: Evolutionary Artifact or Remnants of Knowing Our Creator

Dr. Zukeran examines different theories on the origin of different religions. Are they made up from different experiences and dominant myths in a region or are they remnants of memories from a common Creator and a common fall from grace? He presents examples of how beginning from the remnant in a culture has been an effective way of introducing the gospel in a culture.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Is It Psychological?

What is the origin of man's religion? Why does every culture in the world worship some divine being? Anthropologists and historians have studied this question, and presently there are three primary theories: the subjective theory, the evolutionary theory, and the theory of original monotheism.

The subjective theory teaches that religion originates with man. Humans have a psychological need for a transcendent being that provides meaning and hope to their existence in this vast impersonal universe. Adherents of this view believe that this religious makeup exists below our conscious awareness. Cultures have various views of reality according to their experience, but the awareness and desire for religion is a universal phenomenon. They therefore conclude that this disposition lies in our subconscious. In other words, our beliefs about a transcendent being are not the result of external realities or interactions with such a being. Rather, these beliefs derive from our psyches.

These feelings are expressed in more concrete terms through symbols and attitudes, not through a set of defined belief systems. As a culture progresses, these symbols and attitudes are developed into a set of beliefs and practices.

Several proponents were important in promoting this theory. Friedrich Schleiermacher believed that religion began with a feeling of dependence. This led to a need for an object to depend on which resulted in the idea of God. Ludwig Feuerbach taught that the concept of God is really a picture of an idealized person. Sigmund Freud believed that God derived from the basic human need for a father image. The idealized father figure becomes our image of God. [1](#)

The subjective theory may teach us about human nature, but it does not adequately explain the origin of religion or where this universal desire to know and understand God comes from. Dr. Winfried Corduan writes, "I may carry in my subconscious mind an abstract representation of God, but I cannot on that basis conclude that there is no independently existing, objective being that is God. God may have created me with that idea so that I can relate to God." {2} Every effect has a cause. What is the cause of this powerful desire for a relationship with God? If we are the products of a divine creator, that would explain this universal drive in all mankind to know Him because He placed this desire within us.

The Bible provides answers to the questions the subjective theory cannot answer. [Genesis 1](#) states that we are created in the image of God. Therefore, we were created in the image of God with the intent to have a relationship with Him. [Romans 1:20](#) states that all men have ingrained in their hearts a knowledge of God. Chapter 2 states that our conscience testifies that a moral law giver exists. The desire for God is a basic part of human nature.

Darwinian Theory of Religion

The second theory regarding the origin of religion is the evolutionary approach. This is the most popular view that is taught or implied in the study of religion. Proponents of this theory believe, as in the subjective theory, that religion originates with man. Religion is the result of an evolutionary process in human culture.

In the most primitive period of a culture, the most basic form of religion begins with an innate feeling that a spiritual force exists. This force is impersonal and pervades all of creation. It is called *mana*, derived from the name given to it by the inhabitants of Melanesia. Mana may be concentrated more intensely in some areas and objects more than others. A magnificent tree, or unique rock, or a certain animal may contain a higher concentration of mana.

The goal is to manipulate this force so that one may attain a desired outcome. Objects such as sticks or dolls, called *fetishes*, may contain the force and be used or worshipped.

The next stage is animism. At this stage, the force is visualized as personal spirits. Animism teaches that a spirit or spiritual force lies behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

There are two categories of spirits: nature spirits and ancestor spirits. Nature spirits have a human form and inhabit natural objects such as plants, rocks, or lakes. Ancestral spirits are the spirits of the ancestors. Both categories of spirits are limited in knowledge, power, and presence. One must maintain a favorable relationship with the spirits or else suffer their wrath.

The next stage is polytheism. Cultures progress from belief in finite spirits to the worship of gods. From polytheism a culture evolves to henotheism, which is belief in many gods but worship directed to only one of them. The final stage is monotheism, the worship of one God.

There are several problems with this theory. The first is that these stages of development have never actually been observed. There is no record of a culture moving in sequence from the *mana* stage to the monotheistic stage as described in the evolutionary model. With *mana* and animism, evolutionary proponents expect that cultures in these stages would be free of the notion of any gods. However, this is not the case. Animistic cultures have gods, and most have a belief in a supreme being. Finally, there is evidence that indicates religions actually develop in the opposite direction from the evolutionary model.

For these reasons the evolutionary and subjective theories do not provide an adequate explanation for the origin of religion. Does history or even the Bible provide us with a better answer?

Original Monotheism

The third model for the origin of religion is original monotheism. This theory teaches that religion originates with God disclosing Himself to man. The first form religion takes is monotheism, and it deviates from there. Dr. Winfried Corduan identifies nine characteristics of man's first form of religion.

- God is a personal God.
- He is referred to with masculine grammar and qualities.
- God is believed to live in the sky.
- He has great knowledge and power.
- He created the world.
- God is the author of standards of good and evil.
- Human beings are God's creatures and are expected to live by his standards.
- Human beings have become alienated from God by disobeying his standards.
- Lastly, God has provided a method of overcoming the alienation. Originally this involved sacrificing animals on an altar of uncut stone. {3}

Studies of world cultures have revealed that each one has a vestige of monotheistic beliefs which are described by Dr. Corduan's nine qualifications. Cultures that are very primitive provide some of the strongest proof of original monotheism.

Anthropologists Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt, author of the 4000 page treatise, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, and, more recently, Don Richardson, author of *Eternity in Their Hearts*, documented this fact in the hundreds of cultures they studied. They discovered that the religion of some of the most ancient cultures were monotheistic and practiced little or no form of animism or magic. In almost every culture around the world, the religion of a particular culture began with a concept of a masculine, creator God who lives in the heavens. He provided a moral law by which the people would enter into a relationship with him. This relationship was broken when the people were disobedient, and as the relationship deteriorated, the people distanced

themselves from the creator and their knowledge of him faded. As the civilization moved further away, they began to worship other lesser gods. In their search to survive in a world filled with spiritual forces, they desired power to manipulate the forces, and thus there was an increase in the use of magic.

This theory fits very well with what is revealed in Scripture. Genesis teaches us that God created man and that man lived according to his knowledge of God and His laws. However, from Adam's first act of disobedience, mankind continued his sinful path away from God. Paul summarizes this history in [Romans 1](#). The theory of original monotheism is the most consistent with Scripture and appears to have strong historical support.

Examples of Original Monotheism

Here are just a few examples. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* states that the Chinese culture before Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, 2600 years before Christ, worshipped Shang Ti. They understood Him to be the creator and law-giver. They believed that He was never to be represented by an idol. When the Zhou Dynasty controlled China during the years 1066-770 B.C., the worship of Shang Ti was replaced by the worship of heaven itself, and eventually three other religions were spawned in China.

In a region north of Calcutta, India, there lived the Santal people. They were found worshipping elements of nature. However, before these practices developed, they worshipped Thakur Jiu, the genuine God who created all things. Although they knew Thakur Jiu was the true God, the tribe forsook worshipping Him and began entering into spiritism and the worship of lesser gods who ruled over some aspect of creation.

In Ethiopia, the Gedeo people number in the millions and live in different tribes. These people sacrifice to evil spirits out of fear. However, behind this practice is an older belief in Magano, the one omnipotent creator.

The Incas in South America also have this same belief. Alfred Metraux, author of *History of the Incas*, discovered the Inca's originally worshipped Viracocha, the Lord, the omnipotent creator of all things. Worship of Inti, the Sun God, and other gods are only recent departures from this monotheistic belief.

These examples follow Paul's description in [Romans 1](#) where he states that men departed from worship of the creator to the worship of the creation.

Original Monotheism and the Missionary Revolution

If original monotheism is true, it should impact our strategy for missions. [{4}](#) In fact, this theory has had a tremendous impact on evangelistic strategies throughout the world.

Don Richardson's book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, illustrates how this theory shaped the missionary effort in China and Korea. In ancient China, the Lord of the Heavens was referred to as Shang Ti. In Korea, he was referred to as Hananim.

Over the centuries, the Chinese departed from the worship of Shang Ti and adopted the beliefs of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that taught the worship of ancestors and the Buddha. However, even after two thousand years, the Chinese still mentioned the name of Shang Ti.

The first Christian missionaries to China arrived in the eighth century A.D. In the years that followed, instead of capitalizing on the residual monotheistic witness already in the land, missionaries imposed a completely foreign name to the God of the heavens. They emphasized that the God of the Bible is foreign and completely distinct from any God the Chinese had ever heard of before. As Don Richardson writes, "Those who took this position completely misunderstood the real situation."^{5} Roman Catholic missionaries adopted new terms like Tien Ju, Master of Heaven or Tien Laoye for God in the Chinese language.

When Protestant missionaries arrived, they debated as to whether they should use Shang Ti or another term for the Almighty. Some argued that there should be a new name for a new thing. Those who chose to use Shang Ti did not take advantage of the full meaning behind the term. As a result, Protestant missionaries did not have as great an impact in China as they were to have in Korea.

In 1884, Protestant missionaries entered Korea. After studying the culture, they believed that Hananim was the residual witness of God. As these missionaries began to preach utilizing this remnant witness, their message was enthusiastically received. Instead of introducing a foreign God from the west, they were reintroducing the natives to the Lord of their ancestors whom they were interested to know. The Catholic missionaries who had been in Korea for decades were still employing designations for God from Chinese phrases like Tien Ju. As a result, the Korean people responded to the message from the Protestant missionaries and Christianity spread throughout the country at an explosive rate.

Paul writes in [Acts 14](#), "In the past he (God) let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony." (vv. 16-17) The fact that all cultures have this remnant witness has had—and should continue to have—an impact on the missionary movement all over the world.

Notes

1. See Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 22-23.
2. Ibid., 24.
3. Ibid., 33.
4. Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura: Calif.: Regal Books, 1984), 33-71.
5. Ibid., 67.

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13. Buddhism: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Patrick Zukeran gives a brief overview of the basic beliefs of Buddhism, covering the doctrine of salvation, eternal state, the founder, and a comparison to Christianity.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

For centuries, Buddhism has been the dominant religion of the Eastern world. With the rise of the Asian population in the United States, Buddhism has had a tremendous impact on this country as well. Presently, there are an estimated 300 million Buddhists in the world and 500 thousand in the United States.^{1} It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii, and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California, Jerry Brown,^{2} Tina Turner, Phil Jackson (coach of the Los Angeles Lakers), Richard Gere, and Steven Seagal. The Dalai Lama has become a prominent spiritual figure for many throughout the world.

The Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. The founder was Siddhartha Gautama. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama since no biography was recorded until five hundred years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different—and even contradictory—accounts of Gautama’s life.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in approximately 560 B.C. in northern India. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler over a district near the Himalayas which is today the country of Nepal. Suddhodana sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth.

Despite his father’s efforts, however, Gautama one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls. He saw four things that forever changed his life: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and an ascetic. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering.

Gautama left his family and traveled the country seeking wisdom. He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self-realization but merely weakened the mind and body.

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the *Bohdi* tree (meaning, “tree of wisdom”), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called *nirvana*. Gautama then became known as *Buddha*, the “enlightened one.” He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world.

As he began his teaching ministry, he gained a quick audience with the people of India since many had become disillusioned with Hinduism. By the time of his death at age 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India.

Expansion and Development of Buddhism

Buddhism remained mostly in India for three centuries until King Ashoka, who ruled India from 274-232 B.C., converted to Buddhism. Ashoka sent missionaries throughout the world, and Buddhism spread to all of Asia.

Even before its expansion, two distinct branches developed, a conservative and a liberal school of thought. The conservative school is labeled Theravada, and it became the dominant form of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Thus, it is also called Southern Buddhism. Southern Buddhism has remained closer to the original form of Buddhism. This school follows the Pali Canon of scripture, which, although written centuries after Gautamas death, contains the most accurate recording of his teachings.

The liberal school is Mahayana Buddhism, which traveled to the north into China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet, and is also called Northern Buddhism. As it spread north, it adopted and incorporated beliefs and practices from the local religions of the land. The two branches of Buddhism are so different they appear to be two different religions rather than two branches of the same tree. Here are a few differences.

Theravada Buddhism sees Buddha as a man. Gautama never claimed to be deity, but rather a "way shower." Mahayana Buddhism, however, worships Buddha as a manifestation of the divine Buddha essence. Since Gautama, many other manifestations or *bodhisattvas* have appeared. An example is Tibetan Buddhism, which worships the spiritual leader the Dalai Lama as a bodhisattva.

Theravada adheres to the Pali Canon and Buddhas earliest teachings. Since Mahayana believes there have been many manifestations, this branch incorporates many other texts written by the bodhisattvas as part of their canon.

Theravada teaches that each person must attain salvation through their own effort, and this requires one to relinquish earthly desires and live a monastic life. Therefore, only those few who have chosen this lifestyle will attain nirvana. Mahayana teaches that salvation comes through the grace of the bodhisattvas and so many may attain salvation.

Divine beings do not have a place in Theravada. The primary focus is on the individual attaining enlightenment, and a divine being, or speculations of such, only hinders the process. Therefore, several sects of this branch are atheistic. Mahayana, on the other hand, has many diverse views of God since this branch is inclusive, and has adopted the beliefs and practices of various religions. Many schools are pantheistic in their worldview while others are animistic. Buddha is worshipped as a divine being. Some schools pay homage to a particular bodhisattva sent to their people. Other schools have a mixture of gods whom they worship. For example, Japanese Buddhism blended with Shintoism and includes worship of the Shinto gods with the teachings and worship of Buddha.

When speaking with a Buddhist, it is important to understand what branch of Buddhism they are talking about. The two branches are dramatically different. Even within Mahayana Buddhism, the sects can be as different as Theravada is to Mahayana.

The Way of Salvation

The main question Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, sought to answer was, "Why is there pain and suffering?" His belief in reincarnation (the belief that after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower form of life according to his good or bad deeds) prompted a second question that also needed to be answered: "How does one break this rebirth cycle?" The basic teachings of Buddhism, therefore, focus on what Gautama believed to be the answer to these questions. These basic tenets are found in the Four Noble Truths and in the Eight-fold Path. Let us begin with the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means to encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.

The Second Noble Truth relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance.

The Third Noble Truth is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the extinguishing of all desire by following the Eight-fold path. "The Eight-fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving."^{3}

Here are the eight steps in following the Eight-fold path. The first is the Right View. One must accept the Four Noble Truths. Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty, and must harm no living creature. Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk. Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing.

Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one. Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained. Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow. The eighth is the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self-effort one can attain the eternal state of nirvana.

In Buddhism, one's path to nirvana relies on the effort and discipline of the individual. By contrast, Jesus taught our goal is not a state of non-conscious being, but an eternal relationship with God. There is nothing one can do to earn a right relationship with God. Instead, we must receive His gift of grace, the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ and this restores our relationship with our creator.

Karma, Samsara, and Nirvana

Three important concepts in understanding Buddhism are *karma*, *samsara*, and *nirvana*.

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Karma refers to the law of cause and effect in a person's life, reaping what one has sown. Buddhists believe that every person must go through a process of birth and rebirth until he reaches the state of *nirvana* in which he breaks this cycle. According to the law of karma, "You are what you are and do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations."^{4} For a Buddhist, what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in this present life. Unlike Hindus, Buddha believed that a person can break the rebirth cycle no matter what class he is born into.

The second key concept is the law of *samsara* or *transmigration*. This is one of the most perplexing and difficult concepts in Buddhism to understand. The law of Samsara holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddha taught that people do not have individual souls. The existence of an individual self or ego is an illusion. There is no eternal substance of a person, which goes through the rebirth cycle. What is it then that goes through the cycle if not the individual soul? What goes through the rebirth cycle is only a set of feelings, impressions, present moments, and the karma that is passed on. "In other words, as one process leads to another, ... so one's human personality in one existence is the direct cause of the type of individuality which appears in the next."^{5} The new individual in the next life will not be exactly the same person, but there will be several similarities. Just how close in identity they will be is not known.

The third key concept is *nirvana*. The term means "the blowing out" of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven, but rather an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering; a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end. Although to our Western minds this may sound like annihilation, Buddhists would object to such a notion. Gautama never gave an exact description of nirvana, but his closest reply was this. "There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill."^{6}

In contrast to the idea of reincarnation, the Bible teaches in [Hebrews 9:27](#) that "man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment." A major diverging point between Buddhism and Christianity is that the Bible refutes the idea of reincarnation. The Bible also teaches that in the eternal state, we are fully conscious and glorified individuals whose relationship with God comes to its perfect maturity.

Jesus and Gautama

There is much I admire in the life and teachings of Gautama. Being raised in the Japanese Buddhist culture, I appreciate the ethical teachings, the arts, and

architecture influenced by Buddhism. As I studied the life and teachings of Gautama and of Jesus, I discovered some dramatic differences.

First, Buddha did not claim to be divine. Theravada remains true to his teaching that he was just a man. The idea that he was divine was developed in Mahayana Buddhism 700 years after his death. Furthermore, Northern Buddhism teaches that there have been other manifestations of the Buddha or bodhisattvas and some believe Jesus to be one as well. However, Jesus did not claim to be one of many manifestations of God; He claimed to be the one and only Son of God. This teaching was not the creation of his followers but a principle He taught from the beginning of His ministry. In fact, the salvation He preached was dependent on understanding His divine nature.

Second, Buddha claimed to be a way shower. He showed the way to nirvana, but it was up to each follower to find his or her own path. Christ did not come to show the way; He claimed to *be* the way. While Buddhism teaches that salvation comes through Buddhas teachings, Christ taught salvation is found in *Him*. When Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life" ([John 14:6](#)), He was saying He alone is the one who can give eternal life, for He is the source of truth and life. Not only did He make the way possible, He promises to forever be with and empower all who follow Him to live the life that pleases God.

Third, Buddha taught that the way to eliminate suffering and attain enlightenment was to eliminate all desire. Christ taught that one should not eliminate all desire but that one must have the right desire. He stated, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied." Christ taught that we should desire to know Him above all other wants.

Fourth, Buddha performed no miracles in his lifetime. Christ affirmed His claims to be divine through the miracles He performed. He demonstrated authority over every realm of creation: the spiritual realm, nature, sickness, and death. These miracles confirmed the claims that He was more than a good teacher, but God incarnate.

Finally, Buddha is buried in a grave in Kusinara at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. Christ, however, is alive. He alone conquered sin and the grave. His death paid the price for sin, and His resurrection makes it possible for all people to enter into a personal and eternal relationship with God.

After a comparative study, I came to realize Buddha was a great teacher who lived a noble life, but Christ is the unique revelation of God who is to be worshipped as our eternal Lord and Savior.

Notes

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2. Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House 1985), p. 261.
3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, (1977) p. 35

4. Davis Taylor and Clark Offner, *The World's Religions*, Norman Anderson, ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975), p. 174.
5. John Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 182.
6. Taylor and Offner, *The World's Religions*, p. 177.

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14. The World of the Occult : A Christian Worldview Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran explains why Christians need to be wise and discerning concerning the occult, both recognizing its power and danger, and not going overboard either.



. This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Occult Overview

In a popular TV show, the heroine calls upon spirits, spells, and magic to defeat demonic beings. In another show, teen-age witches use their white magic to defeat evil warlocks and spirits. Such popular shows deal with the world of the occult. The occult has thrived since the beginning of civilization. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the prophets of God confronted the problem of the occult.

The term *occult* is derived from the Latin word "occultus," which means to cover up, hide, or those things which are hidden or secret. A brief definition of the occult is the practice of attaining supernatural knowledge or powers apart from the God of the Bible. Through these practices occultists seek to influence the present or future circumstances, of their lives or the lives of others.

Why is there such an interest in the occult? Experts point to several factors. The first is disillusionment with the church and organized religion. The second factor is curiosity. There is an attraction to the occult that appeals to our interest in the unseen. Many begin with "harmless" dabbling, but this can often lead to more. Third, there is the quest for power. People want control over the future, spirits, or over other individuals.

There are three primary categories of the occult world: divination, magick, and spiritism. Divination is the attempt to foretell the future and thereby shape our lives accordingly. The divination arts include astrology, zodiac charts, crystal balls, tarot cards, palm reading, psychics, numerology, and horoscopes.

The second category is magick or paganism. Those in magick attempt to control the present by ceremonies, charms, and spells. The magick arts include witchcraft, white magic, black magic, sorcery, Satanism, black mass, and witch doctors.

Then there is spiritism. Those involved in spiritism attempt to communicate with the dead and receive information or help from them. Spiritism involves ouija boards, sances, necromancy, and ghosts.

The world of the occult not only brings a false message, but a dangerous one as well. Experiences with the occult drive us away from God and bring us into contact with the demonic realm. Jesus said the Devil is "a liar and the father of lies." ([John 8:44](#))

In dealing with the demonic, you cannot expect them to deal in truth. The Devil and his legion only seek to "steal, kill, and destroy." ([John 10:10](#)) For this reason, [Deuteronomy 18](#) labels the practices of witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and necromancy as detestable to the Lord. It was these practices that brought judgment on the Canaanites and expelled them from the land. God did not want such teachings to infiltrate any culture. The church must not only present the danger of the occult, but the message of life and victory found in Jesus Christ over the principalities of darkness.

Dangers of the Occult

"What's wrong with joining the Vampire Club or attending a sance?" your child may ask. For some, exposure to the occult via fantasy games, the media, or music may lead to greater involvement in a dangerous world.

The primary danger of the occult is that it is a path away from God that can bring us into contact with the demonic realm. The demonic forces seek to deceive and destroy individuals. Therefore, contact with the demonic breeds numerous problems.

First, cult experts and psychologists have documented the connection between occult involvement and psychological and emotional disorders. Participants spend numerous hours studying, practicing, and playing games that involve conjuring demons, sacrificing creatures in cruel rituals, controlling sinister forces, and casting spells to disable and kill their enemies. This can affect a person's spiritual, mental, and emotional state.

Second, there is the danger of spirit possession. The occult arts often require one to empty one's mind and invite foreign spirits to control his or her intellect and body. For example, in operating a ouija board, participants are asked to empty their minds to allow other forces to guide them as they attempt to attain messages. In other games, participants are encouraged to call upon a spirit being to help guide them. These techniques open the door for spirit possession.

Third, there is the danger of violence to oneself and others. Many cases of violence and suicides are connected to the occult. Dr. Thomas Redecki, a psychiatrist and chairman of the National Coalition on Television Violence, has given expert testimony at a number of murder trials that were connected to fantasy role-playing games. He states, "I've found multiple instances of attitudes, values and perceptions of reality that were strongly influenced by an immersion in these games. When someone spends 15 to 30 hours a week dreaming of how to go out and kill your opponents and steal treasure, it's not surprising that the desire to act it out in real life occurs."[{1}](#)

Real cases include the famous black occultist Aleister Crowley. He ended up in an insane asylum for six months after attempting to conjure up the Devil. Not only that, his children died and his wives went insane or drank themselves to death.[{2}](#) In Florida, a group of three teenagers were charged with bludgeoning to death the parents of a fourth girl in their group. These teenagers were involved in the fantasy role-playing game *Vampire*.[{3}](#)

There is no benefit that comes from dabbling in the occult. God's Word tells us to avoid the occult because it can be addicting and harmful. Instead, [Philippians 4](#) says to spend our time dwelling on what is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, and praiseworthy. What we focus on affects our actions and outlook on life. Therefore, we should dwell on what builds the mind, body, and spirit.

Investigating Occult Phenomena

Can seers foretell future events? Can mediums really talk to the dead? How do you explain psychic phenomenon? Dealing with the occult calls for a balanced approach. The biblical worldview acknowledges both the physical and spiritual realms. There are physical beings but also spiritual beings of good and evil. We cannot ignore the supernatural, but we should not be obsessed with it either. C.S. Lewis commented, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." [\[4\]](#) Lewis' call, as well as ours, is for a balanced approach.

There are numerous claims of supernatural occurrences in the occult world. However, not all occult phenomena should be attributed to the supernatural. There have been cases where people have quickly attributed unexplained events to the demonic, only to later discover other natural explanations. This often causes embarrassment and hurts the individual or group's credibility. We must be careful to investigate all possible explanations.

Most occult phenomena are mere trickery. Techniques such as sleight of hand, physical or mechanical deception, luck or mathematical probability, and body reading can explain many accounts. For example, Jewish psychic Uri Geller was believed to have supernatural powers such as the ability to move or bend objects from a distance with his mind. He even managed to fool scientists with his feats. However, his alleged powers were eventually shown to be false when magician James Randi performed the same feats, exposing the charlatan's tricks.

Other phenomena can be attributed to psychological factors. For example, someone demonstrating many personalities and speaking in different voices may have a multiple personality disorder that should be treated with medication. Unusual changes in personality or the fear of objects or names may be due to some kind of chemical imbalance. One should be careful and investigate these possibilities before concluding occult powers at work or demon possession.

The fourth explanation can be attributed to our sin nature. [James 1:14](#) states, "but each one is tempted when, by his own desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Too often Christians are quick to attribute bad habits and conflicts to the demonic and fail to take responsibility for their actions. For example, addiction to pornography is the result of yielding to our sin nature, not necessarily satanic activity.

Before ascribing events and difficulties to the demonic realm, we must first determine if it is consistent with demonic activity as described in the Bible and cannot be explained naturally. Then we can consider the possibility that it is demonic.

Witnessing to Those in the Occult

What should you do if you discover a friend or child involved in the occult? In witnessing to occultists, we must understand that they view Christians as intolerant and mean-spirited. They feel misunderstood, and quick condemnation often causes the person to retreat and delve further into the occult. Many people enter occult organizations because the church and their peers have rejected them. So, in witnessing, we must remember to be firm, but loving and sensitive as well.

I remember one situation at a Six Flags amusement park. While waiting in line, two Christian men noticed a student wearing a shirt promoting a band with clear connections to the occult. In a very condescending manner they questioned the young boy as to why he would wear such a shirt. "I like their music," was the response. To which the men rebuked him harshly. Soon a short and heated argument ensued. The boy was left feeling angry and condemned while the two Christian men congratulated one another on a fine job of "witnessing." Such incidents unfortunately are too common. The first step in witnessing is demonstrating gentleness and respect.

Second, do some research in the area so that you know what you are talking about. People in the occult do not view their activity as dangerous and consider others' warnings as naive and misinformed. Therefore, being able to point to specific examples of concern goes a lot further than generalized accusations. If you are not able to find information, sit down and patiently listen to the person explain why and how he got involved. As you listen, ask questions that would cause the person to examine his beliefs. Listening always goes a long way in any kind of witnessing.

Third, point out the danger of addiction that can be the result of spending numerous amounts of time and money on occult activities. [1 Corinthians 6:12](#) warns us not to "be mastered by anything." Addiction to the occult leads to bondage, but God's truth sets us free.

Fourth, know what the Bible says about the occult. Point out that the nature of the Adversary is to deceive and destroy. God's nature is truth and love. Dwelling on the false teachings of the occult can distort one's view of reality. This message ultimately leads to ruin, while God's truth leads to life. Share God's message of love and demonstrate it in your actions.

Finally, present the message of life, truth, and hope found in Christ. The occult only offers a false message that brings destruction because the force behind it is the father of lies. The deception of the occult leads to bondage, but truth sets you free. In engaging the world of the occult, Christians need not be afraid for we have authority over the demonic through Christ who triumphed over all powers and authorities by the cross. ([Colossians 1:15](#))

Deliverance from the Occult

If you have been dabbling in the occult or know someone who wants to come out of it, what should you do? First, permanent deliverance and restoration begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you have not trusted Christ, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior is the first step. When this happens, you are set free from the Kingdom of Darkness and are now under the authority of the Kingdom of Light. [1 Peter 2:9](#) states that it is Christ who "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Second, recognize and confess your sin of involvement in the occult. Then accept God's forgiveness by faith. [1 John 1:9](#) states, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Third, remove all occult objects. This example was set for us in [Acts 19:19-20](#). Those who had come to Christ burned their objects publicly. Having occult items around such as game boards, cards, and statues may provide a source of temptation to return. Removing all such objects helps avoid facing that temptation and dealing with memories.

Fourth, break off all medium contacts and occult associations. Spirit guides and friends in the occult will encourage you to abandon your trust in Christ and return to participating in the occult. One must courageously trust that Christ will protect you from demonic retaliation and provide new friends who will encourage you in the Lord.

Fifth, if you are finding the transition difficult, seek a Christian counselor with knowledge in this area. Only a Christian counselor understands that healing comes when we deal with not only the physical, mental, and emotional aspect, but the spiritual as well.

Sixth, join a fellowship of Christians who will pray and care for you. Also, strive to grow in your new walk with Jesus Christ. You have been filling your mind with the teachings of the occult and now you must, as Paul says in [Romans 12](#), "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This comes by filling your mind with God's truth and fellowshiping with Him.

In seeking deliverance from the occult, we cannot stop halfway. We must be committed to turning from our sin and following Christ with all our heart. Believers must heed Paul's exhortation to put on the spiritual armor of God. In [Ephesians 6](#), Paul reminds us that, "Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Only Christians who come in the authority of Christ can engage the world of the occult and those protected by His armor can resist the Adversary and be delivered from the occult.

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15. Martial Arts – A Christian View

Dr. Zukeran looks at the popular activity of marital arts from a biblical worldview perspective. • He determines that Christians may safely participate in martial arts as long as they distance themselves from the Eastern philosophical ideas associated with most forms of martial arts.

The Origins and Popularity of the Martial Arts

Gliding across the Pacific, the Asian martial arts have become part of the mainstream of American culture. Today there are an estimated two to three million practitioners in the United States, 40 percent of which are children between the ages of 7 and 14.^{1} The martial arts industry generates annual revenue topping the \$1 billion mark.

Why this rise in popularity? For one thing, people today are interested in and more willing to accept Eastern ideas. What was once considered “foreign” is now embraced as old, and thus “tried and true.” Advocates extol the physical benefits and self-discipline that result from its practices. Movies further popularize martial arts with films such as *Enter the Dragon*, *Rush Hour*, and the Oscar winning *Crouching Tiger-Hidden Dragon*. The rise in crime also has people seeking to learn ways to protect themselves and their loved ones.

There are few written records regarding the origin of martial arts. These are interwoven with myths or verbal traditions that make it difficult to accurately trace the record. Archaeological evidence indicates that the martial arts may have begun as early as 2000 BC in the Fertile Crescent.^{2} From there it traveled eastward to India and China.

The father of the Asian martial arts according to the most popular tradition is an Indian Buddhist Monk named Bodhidharma who arrived in China in the late fifth century A.D. Settling in a monastery in the Songshan Mountains located in the Kingdom of Wei, he developed a series of mind-body exercises designed to improve the health of the monks and assist them in meditation. Based on the movements of different real and mythological animals and incorporating concepts from Taoism and Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma taught a style of combat known as Shao-lin gung fu. Gradually, Shao-lin gung fu migrated from the temples to the Chinese populace. It was adapted and refined as it spread across the country and eventually, to the world.

Martial arts have been very popular among Christians. Scot Conway, founder of the Christian Martial Arts Foundation, estimates between 50 and 70 percent of American martial artists — and roughly 20 percent of all instructors — consider themselves Christians.^{3} But other Christians argue that the philosophy of Asian martial arts is wholly incompatible with biblical teaching. They point to the origin of Eastern mysticism as reason for Christians to avoid any level of participation. Still others say Jesus’ exhortation to “turn the other cheek” shows that using force is wrong.

How should a discerning Christian respond? Can we participate in the martial arts and be consistent with our biblical convictions?

Differences in the Martial Arts

Should Christians participate in the martial arts? In order to make an informed decision, it is helpful to recognize that there are two basic categories for martial arts. It is important to note that the division is not rigid; in some cases, values from one type may be blended or subtly integrated into the other. But for simplicity and clarity, we will use the two main groups.

One type, called "internal" or "soft" martial art, focuses on inner spiritual development, balance, form, and mental awareness. This soft art emphasizes two principles — that the mind dictates action and that the opponent's own force is used to defeat him or her.^{4} Students are taught Taoist and Buddhist philosophical principles such as the "chi" force and the "yin and yang" concept. Through breath control, soft art practitioners seek to "collect, cultivate, and store" this chi force which is located in the body. Some believe they can use the chi force to strike down opponents from a distance. Examples of internal or soft martial arts include the Chinese Tai-chi Chuan and the Japanese Aikido.

The second category of martial arts is called the "external" or "hard" art. This type teaches that physical reactions precede mental reaction. It also promotes the idea that an opponent's force should be met with an equal but opposite force. While the hard martial art system also uses breath control like the soft arts, the emphasis is on developing strength and quickness through the use of straight and linear body motions.^{5} The hard arts include certain forms of Chinese kung fu, and Shao Lin boxing. The Japanese arts were adapted from Chinese kung fu. The hard arts include Ju-jitsu, Judo, Karate, Ninjitsu, and Kendo. The Korean martial arts include Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do.

While there are religious concepts in the martial arts, few schools would qualify as religious movements, and few seek to meet the religious needs of the student. However, a little exposure to Eastern mysticism may lead to greater involvement in the future. So as a general rule, Christians should avoid the internal or soft martial arts because of the concentration on the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. Several schools even utilize the occult techniques of meditation and altering consciousness. External or hard martial arts, on the other hand, concentrate primarily on physical training. These physical lessons usually do not conflict with our biblical convictions.

Before joining a dojo or martial arts gym, one needs to know the worldview of the instructor. Even some hard martial arts teachers incorporate Eastern ideas and occult practices into their styles. Look for instructors who teach the physical movements but exclude the Eastern ideas.

Eastern Concepts in the Martial Arts

Since martial arts are traditionally based on the Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, several key concepts can be prominent in the classes. Let's look at three of them.

The concept of "chi" or "ki" is central in some martial arts. Chi is believed to be the impersonal life energy that flows throughout the universe and pulses through the human body. By harnessing the chi in individuals, martial artists believe they can perform at higher levels of ability or can release chi power resulting in devastating effects. Chi is controlled through specialized breathing techniques, gymnastics, and meditation.

Another common martial arts teaching is the Taoist (pronounced "dow-ist") concept of yin and yang, that nature consists of conflicting elements which function in perfect balance to one another. As mankind should live in harmony with the Tao, so the martial artist must strike hard with firmness at times, but at other times accept the energy of the opponent, then reroute the energy, causing the opponent to defeat himself. This redirection allows a relatively gentle resolution, and brings one into harmony with the opponent and the flow of nature.

A Christian must also avoid the practice of Eastern meditation. The goal of this type of meditation is to empty one's mind, alter one's consciousness, or unite with the impersonal divine. Scott Shaw writes, "Meditation is a sacred process. It is the method used by the spiritual warrior to calm the mind and to connect the body and mind with the infinite."⁶ This greater awareness supposedly enables the martial artist to increase his or her performance. In many schools, the combined use of Eastern meditation and the chi are essential to mastering the art. (Not all martial arts use meditation for this purpose. Some use it to focus on the lesson or task at hand such as picturing the action in your mind before physically carrying it out.)

But the mysticism of Taoism and Buddhism is not compatible with Christianity; neither is Eastern meditation the same as biblical meditation. The Bible does not teach altering our consciousness or emptying our minds. Instead, the goal of Scriptural meditation is to *fill* our minds with God's Word. ([Psalm 1:2](#)) Another danger of Eastern meditation is that it can open our minds to the occult, a practice the Bible prohibits. The Bible does not teach the Eastern idea of chi, that there is an impersonal life energy of the universe within us. Rather, the Bible says that each individual has an eternal soul that will either go to heaven or to hell based on whether or not they have a relationship with Christ.

Self Defense or Turn the Other Cheek?

Besides concerns about the role of Eastern religion in the martial arts, some people think martial arts encourages violence. Martial arts teach fighting, and so are contrary to the Bible's instructions about pacifism. Is there ever a time when Christians can use force?

Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure another person. Many interpret Jesus' teaching in [Matthew 5:38-48](#), where he states, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also . . .", to mean never use violence. This is exemplified in the life of Christ who suffered silently and did not retaliate while enduring torture even unto death.

Despite these arguments, the proper interpretation of the [Matthew 5](#) passage does not teach pacifism. In Jewish culture, to be struck or slapped on the cheek was an insult ([2 Corinthians 11:20](#)). Jesus was teaching that when a disciple is insulted for being a follower of Christ, the disciple should not retaliate with force. However, being insulted is a very different situation from being attacked by a mugger or your wife being attacked by a rapist.

In the Gospels, Christ did not resist violent attacks because of His unique mission to be the sacrifice for our sins. However, in the Old Testament, the preincarnate Christ judged wicked nations with the sword. ([Judges 6:11-16](#)). Not only did He smite His enemies, He aided Israel in being an instrument of judgment as well. Revelation predicts the glorified Christ coming to judge the nations with a sword. Also in the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples did not teach military leaders to withdraw from the military (e.g., [Matthew 8:8-13](#), [Luke 3:14](#)). In [Romans 13](#), Paul writes that the government has the right to "bear the sword." In other words, a righteous government can use capital punishment when an offender is worthy of death.

Therefore, complete pacifism is not the spirit of Christian teaching. In fact, the most loving thing to do when a friend or family member is attacked by a harmful foe is to risk one's life and use force to restrain the enemy. If a man is attacking a child, or a woman is being raped, it would be morally wrong not to sacrifice your life and restrain the assailant even with deadly force if necessary.

The Bible allows a Christian to use self-defense and force when confronted with a criminal act. Force may not be used for revenge or out of unjust anger. Christians who engage in the martial arts should have a clear understanding of this. The use of martial arts must be for self-defense and protecting loved ones from acts of evil. One should never use their fighting system to instigate combat or seek revenge.

Should Christians Participate in the Martial Arts?

To summarize what I have covered so far, I believe that the physical aspect of martial arts can be separated from the Eastern religious and philosophical teachings. Also, I believe the Bible teaches us that there is a time when we are called to use force, even deadly force to halt acts of evil.

Here are some practical guidelines if one is deciding to participate in the martial arts or if one is selecting a school. First, a person should check his or her motives. One should not engage in martial arts if one's motives include becoming a tough guy, showing off, or gaining revenge. Parents should make it clear to their children that the martial arts are never to be used for affectation or for instigating conflicts. Unworthy motives are detrimental to one's walk with the Lord and witness to others. Positive reasons include physical conditioning, discipline, and self-defense. Develop parameters for limiting the use of force. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Force is used in defensive purposes only.

Generally speaking, Christians should avoid the soft or internal form of martial arts because they tend to emphasize Eastern philosophical and religious ideas. External or hard martial arts emphasize the physical training. However, it would be wise to be on guard because many instructors of external martial arts may incorporate Eastern mysticism in to their system. Also, one should be careful to avoid the possibility of being enticed to learn about Eastern spirituality as they advance.

Find out the worldview of the instructor. The role of religion in the martial arts depends mostly on the instructor, so choosing a proper instructor is the most

important factor. Some instructors claim to teach the physical aspect only. However, as students advance, instructors begin to incorporate Eastern religious ideas to help students attain a higher level of performance. Observe advanced classes to see if they incorporate Eastern practices. There is also helpful information through Christian organizations such as Karate for Christ and the Christian Martial Arts Foundation.

The Christian life involves caring for the nurture and growth of our mind, spirit, and our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I have benefited greatly from my time in the martial arts. It has provided me great exercise, discipline, and opportunities to witness for Christ. There were times in my life when I had to use force to restrain hostile persons or protect loved ones. I believe that the martial arts can be beneficial to Christians who are informed and mature.

Notes

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16. Alternative Medicine – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran applies a biblical worldview perspective as he assesses the rise of alternative medicine in the mainstream of American culture. He points out the types that are purely fraud and those which may be useful for some people.

• *This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

The Rise of Alternative Medicine

Alternative medicine has blazed its way into the mainstream of American culture while also making significant gains in the medical community. Nearly half of all U.S. adults now participate in some kind of alternative therapy.^{1} A recent study showed that Americans spend almost \$30 billion a year on alternative treatments.^{2}

Alternative medicine remains a controversial issue. Do these medicines actually work? Do these alternative therapies embrace an Eastern religious system? Should Christians be involved with alternative treatments? How do we evaluate a particular practice that is unconventional?

The sudden rise of alternative medicine can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction with conventional medical practices. Modern methods have mainly focused on the physical symptoms. However, we are spiritual, social and emotional creatures as well. Healing improves when all of these components are addressed. Conventional medicine has also been criticized for its impersonal approach. Overworked doctors may spend only a few minutes diagnosing the problem without much follow-up.

The main reason people may be flocking to alternative medicine is that it offers hope when conventional medicine has failed. The frightened and discouraged look there as a last resort. Many therapists profess to heal cancer or know the secret to prolonged youth. For example, Hollywood guru Deepak Chopra writes that his therapies can take us to ". . . a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply." Through his methods we can ". . . become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal,

creativity, joy, fulfillment, and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist and are not even entertained as a philosophy.”^{3} These are attractive temptations to those without hope.

As discerning individuals, we must not be enticed by such claims. The Bible teaches that we live in a fallen world. Despite our best efforts people get sick, and sometimes they die. When faced with a serious illness, we first must accept the consequences of the Fall. God can heal any time He chooses using whatever method He wills. However, He does not work contrary to His nature or revealed truth. If an apparent healing leads someone to embrace teachings contrary to Scripture, we should question whether that healing came from God.

So when the test results are bad, we should not panic in fear, but trust God’s sovereignty and control over our lives. We should seek wise counsel from doctors and our pastors. Then, if an alternative medicine is recommended, we should make sure it has been medically tested and does not promote a false teaching or false hope. In dealing with illness, we can honor God or we can blemish our testimony. In the following sections, let us consider how to wisely evaluate alternative medicines.

Getting a Handle on Alternative Medicines

Today there are hundreds of therapies labeled “alternative medicine,” but what exactly does that mean? A broad definition would be any therapy that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment of our culture. There are several characteristics of alternative medicine. For example, these therapies are not practiced in hospitals or physicians’ offices. They focus on natural methods of healing with an emphasis on preventing disease. They are also more likely to treat chronic ailments after conventional medicine has failed.

Alternative medicine originates from the traditions of ancient cultures, particularly China and India. For instance, 370 different healing drugs were used in Mesopotamia while 600 were common in India. The Chinese had 2000 herbs, metals, and minerals as ingredients in 16,000 different preparations.^{4} Despite the variety, many historians agree that these ancient medical practices had little success in actually curing disease. The real effects are still under scrutiny today including comparisons with the strides made by modern medicine. Despite the shortfalls of conventional medicine, we live longer and are healthier than people of long ago.

Ancient alternative medicine was greatly influenced by Eastern religions. That is why today’s users of so-called “rediscovered” alternative medicines can still see those religious concepts interwoven with the treatments. Many alternative medicine proponents approach holistic health from a pantheistic worldview. Central to pantheism is the idea of monism—the idea that everything in the universe is one ultimate reality. If all is one, then man is divine. Since we are divine, we are without sin. Sin is merely an illusion that creates false guilt. This guilt is what leads to illness.

Deepak Chopra writes, “. . . the seeds of God are inside us. . . . When we make the journey of the spirit, we water these divine seeds. . . . In the eyes of the spirit, everyone is innocent, in all senses of the word. Because you are innocent, you have not done anything that merits punishment or divine wrath.”[\[5\]](#)

Some advocates of alternative medicine would point out that the biblical view of health is also considered holistic. Indeed, God made man a complex being with physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, and He cares about every aspect of our personhood. (You can see these aspects in [Hebrews 4:12](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#).) Contrary to pantheism, the Bible teaches God is a personal being and we are His created beings. We were meant for a personal relationship with Him, but we are separated from this by sin. Biblical health begins with a right relationship with a personal God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather than ignoring sin, it must be dealt with through repentance and restoration. Finally, a Christian must acknowledge that God may have a purpose for suffering, and that there is value to yielding to His plan.

Should a Christian Use Alternative Medicine?

When it comes to selecting an alternative therapy, there is a smorgasbord of choices. How can a Christian discern an acceptable alternative medicine from one that is unacceptable? In making a decision, it is helpful to identify the different alternative medicines. The authors of *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not?*[\[6\]](#) give five categories of alternative therapies.

The first category is *complementary* therapies. These deal with lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise and stress. The next category is *scientifically unproven* therapies. These have undergone scientific research, but with little evidence for their effectiveness. Herbal remedies would be an example of scientifically unproven therapies.

A third category is *scientifically questionable* therapies. These are therapies which contradict basic scientific principles or that cannot be easily verified. An example is Chinese acupuncture that teaches a contradictory understanding to what is known about human physiology. A fourth category is *life energy* therapies. These assume life energy called “Chi” or “Prana” that can be manipulated using a variety of techniques. Maybe you have heard of “[Reiki](#)” and therapeutic touch. The final category of therapies is *quackery* and *fraud*. These are therapies that have been shown to have no reasonable benefit.

Before deciding to use an alternative medicine, a Christian should consider first under which category the particular therapy falls. Generally speaking, complementary therapies provide important insights into maintaining good health. Scientifically unproven and questionable therapy must be studied and decisions made on a case-by-case basis. Many of the proofs for alternative medicine are based on controversial interpretations of scientific theories or testimonies of users.[\[7\]](#) The wisest approach is to only use cures endorsed by sound medical research and controlled testing. Christians should avoid therapies that fall under the life energy and fraud categories.

Consult your physician and pharmacist. Too often individuals will engage in alternative treatments without informing their physician. Proponents of alternative medicine try to discourage their clients from using conventional medical methods, claiming their way to be the best. This can be a dangerous concept. An alternative therapist may prescribe approaches contrary to your doctor's recommendation, or give you medicines that may react negatively with your prescribed medications.

Finally, be a wise steward. Don't spend your resources on therapies that have been proved ineffective or questionable. Watch out for practitioners of a false religious system. In my pastoral experience, I have witnessed Christians turn to shamans and Chinese folk medicine when diagnosed with a serious illness. In all cases the alternative therapy did not help the situation and cost the family monetarily. More importantly, it impaired their witness for Christ. Make your lifestyle, especially the way you handle illness, a testimony for Christ.

Life Energy Therapies

As mentioned earlier, there are five categories of alternative medicines. Christians should avoid *life energy* and *quackery* and *fraud* therapies.

Let us take a careful look at life energy therapies. Although there are over 60 different names for these therapies, they are all based on six fundamental principles.^{8} Practitioners believe that life energy flows throughout the universe. There are numerous names for this impersonal energy. Traditional Chinese medicine calls this energy "Chi" while Indian Ayurvedic medicine titles it "Prana." Some Christians mistakenly equate this with the Holy Spirit. The two are not the same.

Life energy therapists believe that humans are composed of energy surrounded by a material body. Life energy therapy directs this energy so that it flows throughout the body unhindered. Disease is believed to be the result of an imbalance or blockage in the energy flow. Traditional Chinese medicine describes an elaborate system of channels within the body called meridians. To cure an illness, the body must be manipulated to restore the flow of energy through the meridians.

Traditional Chinese and Indian practitioners believe they can determine one's energy flow by looking at the skin color, symptoms, tongue, and pulse. Therapeutic touch practitioners say they can sense the energy flow by moving their hands above the skin. Supposedly there are now high tech machines that can measure this energy flow. Many of these machines, for example the Vegatest and its spin-offs, have been deemed fraudulent and are illegal.^{9}

It is said that life energy can be re-directed to treat an offending illness. Life energy therapists believe they can adjust the flow of energy through physical manipulation or invisible transfer from healer to patient. In traditional Chinese medicine, needles are used to unplug holes or stimulate the flow of this energy. Massage, exercise, and herbs are also believed to restore Chi as are breathing and meditation techniques.

Miracles are believed to occur by altering the life energy. This is the message presented in *Star Wars*. In the movie, the Jedi masters could control the life energy,

or Force, to perform miraculous feats. The concept of God and energy are used interchangeably. From this we can conclude that life energy is, in essence, God. Since we are energy, we are divine because we are of the same essence as the Divine.

Christians should avoid therapists who expound life energy therapy. Many ideas are built on a pantheistic worldview, causing these therapies to embrace or at least acknowledge Eastern mysticism. Also, their teachings have drifted far from objective knowledge of the human body. Finally, God is not an impersonal force, and He cannot be manipulated by formulas or healing rituals. God will not heal through any practice that is contrary to His Word.

Herbal Treatments

Wherever you look, it seems like there is an infomercial or ad for herbal products. According to a 1998 study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, between 1990 and 1997, there was a 380 percent rise in herbal remedies and a 130 percent increase in high dose vitamin use in the US.^{10} Current estimates say 60-72 million Americans use herbal supplements.^{11} Many herbal treatments make remarkable claims of healing cancer, arthritis, depression, and other illnesses. What are we to make of the herbal craze?

Be discerning if you choose to use herbs. *Natural* does not guarantee *safe*. There are many natural herbs that can produce dangerous, and even deadly, side effects. Be wary of the marketing hype. Despite the ads, the truth of the matter is that research has concluded that the effectiveness of herbal use is questionable at best. You also need to consider quality control. Unlike prescription and non-prescription drugs that are tightly regulated by the FDA, no organization is directly responsible for monitoring the quality or concentrations of herbal products. Be skeptical of "a pill for every ill" mentality. Finally, be sure to avoid anyone who claims to have a secret formula, especially if he reports to have been persecuted by the American Medical Association or Federal Drug Administration. Avoid any retailer, radio ad, or person who is bent on selling his product as a cure-all.

Some herbal treatments are costly and provide no enhancement. However, some herbal supplements *have* shown some promising benefits. Herbal treatments may prove to be helpful additions to conventional treatments. Herbs like ginseng have shown to be beneficial for Type 2 diabetes, for example. Herbal preparations are sometimes less potent in dosage than prescriptions drugs and may be less toxic.

It is important to thoroughly research the product you are considering using. Inform your doctor and pharmacist. They know your medical history and can alert you to any potentially dangerous interactions between herbs and pharmaceutical drugs. Be leery of thinking that if taking a little is good, a heavier dose must be even better. Find out whether the herbs are for long or short term. Check the quality of the product and be aware of the possible side effects. Don't assume that if the product has been used for a while, even for centuries, it must be better.

There is no biblical admonition forbidding the use of herbal products. However, Christians should approach the herbal market from an informed perspective. Some excellent books on the subject are *The American Pharmaceutical Association Practical Guide to Natural Medicines* and *Alternative Medicine: A Christian Handbook*. Excellent Web sites include herbalgram.com and naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com/.

In times of health and especially in dealing with illness, our goal is always to honor the Lord.

Notes

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4. Dónal O'Mathúna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2001) p. 31.
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9. Paul Reisser, Dale Mabe and Robert Velarde, *Examining Alternative Medicine* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 85-86.
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17. Examining the Book of Mormon – A Christian View

The book of Mormon needs to be evaluated by the light of scripture and its purported evidence for its reliability. Dr. Pat Zukeran shows that the bad character of the book's witnesses, the lack of archaeological support, and internal errors reveal it to be the flawed work of man, not God.

The Mormon Story

Some people believe the *Book of Mormon* is a new revelation from God given to Joseph Smith. Mormons recognize it as divinely inspired and equal in authority to the Bible, but others have reason to doubt its claims.

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt wrote in 1851, "The *Book of Mormon* claims to be a divinely inspired record. . . . This book must be either true or false. . . . If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever planned upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . . . If true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it."[{1}](#)

In this article, we will take a look at internal and external evidences for the *Book of Mormon* to see if it should be considered inspired writing.

The *Book of Mormon* is said to be a record of two ancient Jewish civilizations that migrated to America. The Jaredites left Babylonia during the building of the Tower of Babel in approximately 2,250 B.C. After establishing a civilization in America that lasted two thousand years. They eventually succumbed to corruption and apostasy and were judged by God and destroyed.

The second group of Jews left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. before the Babylonian exile during the reign of King Zedekiah. This group crossed the Pacific and landed on the west coast of South America. Lehi and his son Nephi led these righteous Jews. This group eventually divided into two warring camps, the Nephites and the Lamenites and spread throughout North and South America. The Lamenites were cursed with dark skin because of their evil deeds and were the forefathers of the American Indians.[{2}](#)

Latter-day Saints believe that during the end of the 4th century A.D. the Nephite prophet general Mormon and his son Moroni, compiled the records of these two civilizations using the Reformed Egyptian language and recorded them on gold plates. Moroni hid the plates in the hills of Cumorah near Palmyra, New York to be revealed at a later time. The Lamenites eventually destroyed the Nephites in 421 A.D. on the Hill Cumorah. The Lamenite civilizations continued to degenerate and had forgotten their Jewish history. When Columbus found them centuries later, they had become as the *Book of Mormon* describes them, a "filthy and a loathsome people." (*Book of Mormon* 5:15)

Does the *Book of Mormon* qualify as divinely inspired scripture? In determining the answer, we will take a critical look at several key issues. First we will look at the nature in which Joseph Smith received his revelations. Second, we will investigate the character of the author and the key witnesses. Third, since the *Book of Mormon* claims to be a historical work, we will see if there is evidence to support this claim. Finally, since the *Book of Mormon* says it is the most perfect book ever written, we will examine it to see if it contains any false precepts. Let's examine the Book to see if it is an inspired ancient historical record or a nineteenth century product.

Origin of the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons believe Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 as a glorified resurrected being, and delivered to him the golden plates from their hiding place in the Cumorah hills. Using an occult seer stone, Smith translated the history of the Lamenites and Nephites into the *Book of Mormon*.^{3}

In studying the origin of the *Book of Mormon*, we must first investigate the issue of the canon of scripture. Christians believe the canon is closed with the 66 books of the Bible. There are no more revelations outside these books. Here are some reasons why.

First the authority to write the Holy Scripture was given to the Old Testament prophets of God and the New Testament Apostles of Christ. The last apostle died at the end of the first century A.D. and there has not been anyone who fulfills the qualifications for apostleship since then.

Second, the canon is confirmed to be closed by Judaism, Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church. According to the writings of eye witnesses—Emma Smith (one of Joseph Smith's wives), William Smith (his brother), and David Whitmer (one of the three key witnesses), Smith used a common occult practice of crystal gazing.

In 1877 David Whitmer wrote,

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the *Book of Mormon* was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the *Book of Mormon* was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man."^{4}

Emma Smith wrote to her children, "In writing for your father, I frequently wrote day after day. . . . He sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us."^{5} So according to these accounts, Joseph Smith received his revelations word for word and used a seer stone.

By contrast, the Bible was not given to us in a word for word dictation form, nor is there a case of any biblical writer using an occult object to receive revelations from God. Mormons point to the use of the Urim and Thummim but their purpose was quite different. The Urim and Thummim were used for a time by the Aaronic priests only to gain answers of Yes or No from God to particular questions. Lots were cast to discern God's will, not to receive content for revelation. Finally, we must understand, the Aaronic priesthood and its practices are replaced by the finished work of Christ ([Hebrews 7:12](#)). Occult methods, such as crystal gazing, are forbidden in the Bible ([Deuteronomy 18:9-14](#), [Leviticus 19:26, 31](#)). Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie even denounces using objects to gain new revelation. He condemns Hiram Page, one of the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon* for using a seer stone to gain new revelations. Joseph Smith obtained his revelations contrary to the method of inspiration received by the biblical Prophets and Apostles.

Character of the 11 Witnesses

Joseph Smith claims that after he translated the plates, he returned them to the angel Moroni. Therefore, there is no way to verify the veracity of the plates or Smith's translation. Smith's only defense of his account is the eleven men who signed statements claiming to have seen the golden plates. Therefore, the credibility of Smith's account rests on the testimony of these eleven witnesses. There are three key witnesses who claim to have seen the angel show the golden plates to them. The remaining eight allege to have seen the plates but not the angel. The LDS church asserts these men never denied their testimony. However, when we examine the lives of the witnesses, we find they were untrustworthy, wavering, and gullible witnesses.

Six of the eleven witnesses, including the three key witnesses were eventually excommunicated from the church. Former Mormon President Ezra Taft Benson summed up the legacy of the eleven witnesses this way. "Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* left the church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell—one even helped plot his death. . . . The wolves among our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made a similar statement [in 1949]."[\[6\]](#)

Let us first examine the character of the three key witnesses since their testimony is the most important. In a letter dated December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith stated this about the three key witnesses and John Whitmer, one of the eight. "John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are too mean to mention."[\[7\]](#)

Martin Harris' testimony shows him to be a gullible and unstable man. He changed his religious conviction approximately thirteen times. He had joined several Christian denominations and other cult groups that include the Universalists, Strangites, and the Shakers. [\[8\]](#)(Ankerberg, 196) In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith gave revelations in which he denounces Martin Harris and calls him a "wicked man."[\[9\]](#) The Mormon leaders published an article in the *Elder's Journal*, a Mormon publication edited by Joseph Smith, in which they accused Harris guilty of "swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, with every species of debauchery. . ." (*Elders Journal*,

August, 1838, 59).[{10}](#) Here the leaders of the Mormon Church strongly criticize the character of Harris.

Oliver Cowdery was also shown to be a very gullible man. He was led astray by Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses who himself claimed to have divine revelations from his own seer stone. Although Joseph Smith denounced Hiram as a false teacher, Smith stated "to our grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive. . . . Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he obtained certain 'revelations' . . . all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God's House, . . ."[{11}](#) Despite Smith's condemnation, Oliver Cowdery joined Page's movement. Not only was he a gullible man, he was also indicted on several accounts of fraudulent business practices. The Mormon Church in a letter wrote, "During the career of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer's bogus money business, it got abroad into the world that they were engaged in it. . . . We have evidence of a very strong character that you are at this very time engaged with a gang of counterfeiters, coiners, and blacklegs . . ."[{12}](#) Cowdery was eventually excommunicated and he later joined the Methodist Church.

David Whitmer wrote, "God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to 'separate myself from among the Latter-day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.'" In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. . . . About the same time that I came out, the Spirit of God moved upon quite a number of the brethren who came out, with their families, all of the eight witnesses who were then living (except the three Smiths) came out; . . ."[{13}](#) Here David Whitmer denounced the Mormon Church and encouraged people to follow his example and the example of the other witnesses and leave the church.

Joseph Smith in response attacked the character of David Whitmer. Smith stated, "God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job . . . this poor man who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer, to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel: and this ass not being of the same kind as Balaam's . . . he brays out cursing instead of blessings. Poor ass!"[{14}](#)

The character and life of the eleven witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* are very different from the Apostles of Christ. None of the Apostles wavered in their defense of Christ, even though all suffered and most died for their faith. The Apostles remained consistent in their teaching and never fell into any type of apostasy. Their lives were marked by honesty and integrity. They were never indicted for any criminal activity except for preaching Christ. The character of the *Book of Mormon's* eleven witnesses does not strengthen Smith's defense but cast further doubt on its authenticity.

Archaeology and the *Book of Mormon*

According to the *Book of Mormon*, Jews migrated from the Middle East to Central and South America and established great civilizations on the continents of North and South America. The *Book of Mormon* states that large cities were built so that by 322 A.D. "The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings and the people

were as numerous almost as it were the sand of the sea." (Mormon 1:7) Thirty-eight cities are specifically mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Also in the final battle between the Nephites and Lamenites, 230,000 Nephites were killed near the hills of Cumorah in New York.

With such a vast population and cities, one would expect to find numerous archaeological evidences to substantiate such large civilizations. However, there is no evidence to validate the claims of the *Book of Mormon*. Despite expeditions financed by the Mormon Church, archaeologists have concluded the *Book of Mormon* is not historical but a work of fiction.

The Smithsonian Institute in a letter to the Mormon Church states, "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of Mormon* in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian Archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book."[15](#)

The National Geographic Society writes, "With regard to the cities mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*, neither representatives of the National Geographic Society nor archaeologists connected with any other institution of equal prestige have ever used the *Book of Mormon* in locating historic ruins in Middle America or elsewhere."[16](#)

Even Mormon archaeologists admit there is no conclusive evidence. Dr. Hugh Nibley, a Mormon apologist, states in his book *Since Cumorah* that no real archaeological proof for the Nephite civilization exists. He writes regarding the Nephites, "All that we have to go on to date is a written history . . . there is nothing whatever that an anthropologist or archaeologist as such can say about the *Book of Mormon*."[17](#)

Dee Green, professor of anthropology at Weber State University and a respected Mormon scholar states, "The first myth we must eliminate is that *Book of Mormon* archaeology exists . . . no *Book of Mormon* location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are. It would seem that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but . . . years of such an approach has left us empty-handed."[18](#)

Another prominent Mormon scholar is B.H. Roberts. He was described as one of the most valiant writers and speakers in defense of the *Book of Mormon*. However, after years of research he concluded at the end of his life that the *Book of Mormon* was a fictional work created by Joseph Smith. He wrote, "the evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America."[19](#)

Another prominent defender of the *Book of Mormon* was Thomas Ferguson, who was president of the New World Archaeological Foundation, which was funded by Brigham Young University and the Mormon Church. He hoped to discover archaeological support for the *Book of Mormon*. In 1962 he announced, "Powerful

evidences sustaining the book are accumulating.”{20} However, after years of research and many fruitless expeditions, his original hopes were shattered.{21} He eventually wrote,

With all these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that anyone, from Joseph Smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a *Book of Mormon* geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date there is no *Book of Mormon* geography. I, for one, would be happy if Dee were wrong.{22}

In contrast, biblical archaeology has provided thousands of discoveries that have confirmed biblical references. Hundreds of ancient civilizations, artifacts, historical records and inscriptions have been discovered that prove the historical accuracy of the Bible. Archaeological discoveries confirming biblical accounts have been acknowledged by Christians as well as skeptics. Foremost Middle East archaeologist Dr. William Albright wrote, “Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.”{23} When asked if archaeology confirms the accuracy of the New Testament, scholar John McCray states, “Oh, there is no question that the credibility of the New Testament is enhanced.”{24} A historical faith should have historical proofs. Historical research has led both Christians and skeptics to affirm the historicity of the Bible. However, historical research has proven damaging for the *Book of Mormon*.

Errors in the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons claim the *Book of Mormon* is the most perfect book ever written. Joseph Smith stated, “I told the brethren that the *Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than any other book.”{25}

Is Joseph Smith’s claim true? Errors in the *Book of Mormon* should cause one to question its divine inspiration.

In studying the *Book of Mormon*, one soon finds numerous historical, geographical, and scientific errors. First, in Mormon 9:32 the *Book of Mormon* claims to have been written in Reformed Egyptian, but Egyptologists say this language does not exist. Second, in Alma 7:10, Jerusalem is called a land or country when it is a city. In Alma 46:15 the saved in America take on the name Christian in 73 B.C. In the Bible, believers are not called Christian until 50 A.D. in Acts 11:3. Nephi 17:7 teaches that leprosy occurred in America in 34 A.D. but no cases of leprosy here are known until 1758. Mormon 9:2 and other references teach that the Indians had official records, scrolls, and other writings, but historical research shows no such records were kept. (Mormon 5:23, 3 Nephi 9:18, 12:18)

Not only are there historical errors, but there are false teachings as well. Alma 24:16 teaches that burying swords deep in the earth will keep them bright. Basic science

proves that burying steel objects causes decay and rust. 2 Nephi 13:24 teaches that baldness is caused by sin. Other absurdities include the teaching that God curses Indians with dark skin and anyone who marries an Indian will be cursed (2 Nephi 5:21 Jacob 3:3-9, Mormon 5:15-17, Alma 3:6-10). However, when Indians accept the Mormon teaching, they will become white and delightsome. (2 Nephi 30:5-7)

There appear to be internal contradictions also. In 3 Nephi 9:18, Jesus allegedly preached to the Nephites who fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. with concepts communicated in the Greek language. But the Nephites are said to have written and spoken in Reformed Egyptian. Therefore, they would have no knowledge of Greek since Alexander, who lived in the 4th century, had not Hellenized the world yet. Jesus preaching to the non-Greek Nephites declaring, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," would have not made any sense. Moreover, Joseph Smith and the Mormons claim the gold plates from which the *Book of Mormon* was translated had no Greek or Latin in them.^{26} However, Alpha and Omega are Greek, not Egyptian terms. Even stranger is that the French word "adieu" is used as a farewell in Jacob 7:27.

In contrast to the *Book of Mormon*, the Bible proves to be historically accurate and internally consistent. It also does not have the absurd teachings that we find in the *Book of Mormon*. The evidence appears to point to the fact that the *Book of Mormon* is not an ancient historical text, but an 18th century work created by Joseph Smith.

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Dr. Patrick Zukeran, former Probe staffer, is the founder and Executive Director of Evidence and Answers, a research and teaching ministry specializing in Christian apologetics, the defense of the Christian faith. He is the host of the radio show Evidence and Answers (www.evidenceandanswers.org). Pat is the author of several books including *The Apologetics of Jesus* co-authored with Norman Geisler; *God, Eternity, and Spirituality* (ed.); and *Unless I See . . . Is There Enough Evidence to Believe?* Pat is a popular conference speaker and he also serves as an adjunct faculty for several colleges and institutes worldwide. He earned a B.A. from Point Loma Nazarene University, a Master of Theology (Th.M.) from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Doctorate of Ministry (D.Min.) in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary. Pat lives in Honolulu, Hawaii and can be reached at pat@evidenceandanswers.org.

About Probe Ministries

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Probe Ministries
2001 W. Plano Parkway, Suite 2000
Plano TX 75075
(972) 941-4565

18. A Christian Student of Islam Responds to the Sept. 11 Attacks

The events of Sept. 11 have left the nation stunned, and horrified. We all can empathize with Mayor Giuliani when he said, "I can't believe they would do this to our city!" The events have also left us with many questions. Following is a brief response to a couple of the most obvious questions most of us are asking.

1) Do acts like those perpetrated on Sept. 11 find any justification in Muslim theology?

This is an important question, and one which would probably be answered in different ways by different muslim groups and leaders. First, there is no question that there are passages in the Qur'an and in the Hadith (sayings traditionally attributed to Muhammad) which endorse the concept of "jihad." I am not going to quote them here. But any reader can look up the following references in the Koran (2:244; 3:195; 4:95; 9:5; 47:4), or passages in the Hadith collected by Al-Bukhari. It is no secret that the early spread of Islam was due in great measure to the carrying out of these injunctions by muslim forces. And today, extremist groups within the muslim world appeal to such passages as justification for their violent actions.

Jihad basically means "struggle" or "exertion," and refers to efforts aimed at defending or advancing the cause of Islam in the world. Many muslims consider jihad to be a sixth basic obligation, in addition to the traditional five pillars of Islam. Jihad, however, is not limited to the popular concept of "holy war." One muslim writer describes four types of jihad: that waged by the heart (the individual muslim's internal spiritual and moral struggle against evil, often called the "greater jihad"), that waged by the tongue (speaking in behalf of Islam), by the hand (setting forth a good example for Islam), and by the sword (armed conflict with the enemies of Islam, the "lesser jihad"). (See the book entitled *Jihad: A Commitment to Universal Peace*, by Michael A. Boisard, p. 24.)

It must be noted, however, that the Koran itself places some limits on the practice of jihad: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression" (2:190-193). Theoretically, then, "holy war" must be seen as justified by the "oppression" and "injustice" of the "enemies of Islam." While many, perhaps most, muslims may condemn the actions carried out on Sept. 11, the extremists who do not can be expected to justify them on the grounds that in their eyes they were retribution for "injustice and oppression" against Islam.

2) What should our response be, as Christians, to these events?

This is not an easy or simple matter, for as Christians we find ourselves to be citizens of two kingdoms—one temporal and political, and the other spiritual and eternal. We

must keep this in mind, as we prayerfully shape our response. Here are one Christian's thoughts.

First, we must pray. Pray for the more moderate leaders in the muslim world. Pray that they will see the folly of endorsing these acts of terror. Pray that their voice will be heard, and that they will find the courage to distance themselves from the extremist groups. We must pray also for those who are committed to violence, that God will frustrate their plans. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan, that can succeed against the Lord" ([Prov. 21:30](#)).

We must pray for the leaders of our country, and of other countries that join with us ([I Tim. 2:1-3](#)). God has entrusted to government the responsibility of rewarding righteousness and punishing evil, and this includes the right to "bear the sword" or use military power in defense against evil ([Rom. 13:1-5](#)). We must pray for wisdom and courage on the part of our leaders, and that any military response will be shaped by the principles of the "just war" theory that has guided Christian thought since the time of St. Augustine. Any response must be "proportionate" and aimed at crippling the aggressor's ability to wage war, not at inflicting needless suffering on the innocent. As Christian citizens we should not only be prepared to pray for and support our government's response, but if called upon to serve in her defense.

Second, as Christian disciples, we must individually and personally turn to God at this time of great need. We must follow the example of the psalmist who said, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" ([Ps. 56:3-4](#)) It is only human to experience fear at a time such as this. But we must bring our fears to God, and rest on his almighty arm. Remember God's great and precious promises: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" ([Isa. 41:10](#))! We must draw near to God in personal repentance and faith, turning away from trust in any false "gods," for He alone is "our refuge and strength," our "ever-present help in trouble" ([Ps. 46:1](#)). We must be alert as well to opportunities to help others who are in search of a spiritual anchor in times of crisis. We can help by listening to people's concerns, by offering to pray for them or help in some practical way. We should not pretend that we are unaffected by the events that are unfolding; but we can let it be known that we are finding hope and peace as we lean on our faithful God.

As followers of Christ, we must remember that at the level of our personal attitude and of our personal relationships, we are called not to hate but to love our enemies ([Luke 6:27-28](#)), not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good ([Rom. 12:17, 21](#)). Many will allow these awful events to justify their own hatred and bigotry. We must not. While supporting the righteous actions of our government and of our military, we can at the same time ask God to lead us in showing love toward those in our personal circle of influence, whom others may be tempted to hate.

May God be gracious to us in protecting our land and our people. May He give wisdom and courage to our leaders, and to people of good will in every country. May

He frustrate the plans of those who would spread terror. As He did in the days of Joseph, may He take that which is meant for evil and use it for good. May his goodness, justice, and faithfulness be magnified in all his works, and in us as his people. Amen.

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19. Mormon Doctrine of God: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the Mormon doctrine of God from a Christian perspective. • Is their view of God consistent with the biblical view?

Monotheism or Polytheism?

The Mormons consider themselves to be Christian, but many question this claim. In this article we will investigate the teaching of Mormonism regarding the doctrine of God and compare it with Biblical teaching.

Mormon doctrine is derived from four primary sources. The first is the Bible; the second are the sacred texts of Mormonism, the *Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The third comes from the writings of the founder of the church Joseph Smith, and the fourth is the writings of church leaders, especially the church presidents who are considered to be inspired prophets of God. In regard to the God of the Bible, Stephen Robinson, chairman of the Department of Ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University, writes, "The Latter-day Saints (should) be considered worshipers of the one true God."[{1}](#) He also states, "The Latter-day Saints accept unequivocally all the biblical teachings on the nature of God."[{2}](#)

Christianity has taught monotheism from its foundation, the belief in the existence of one God. Mormonism believes in the existence of a plurality of gods. According to Mormonism, there are an infinite number of planets like earth in the universe, each with their god or gods who were once men who have evolved into godhood. Mormon theologian and Apostle Bruce McConkie states, "[A] plurality of gods exist . . . there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods."[{3}](#)

Joseph Smith wrote, "In the beginning, the head of the gods called a council of the gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and (the) people in it."[{4}](#)

The *Pearl of Great Price* states in the Book of Abraham, "And they (the gods) said: let there be light and there was light. And they (the gods) comprehended the light, . . . and the gods called the light Day and the darkness they called Night. . . ." In these two chapters, the plural designation "gods" is used over fifty times.

Although they believe that numerous gods exist, Mormons consider themselves to be monotheists because they focus their worship exclusively on the Godhead of this earth. With this being the case, a more accurate description of Mormon practice is *henotheism*, a form of polytheism that stresses a central deity.

The Bible clearly teaches monotheism. This truth is taught in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Isaiah writes about God, "Before me there was no god formed, nor will there be one after me." There was no god created before or any to come for there is only one God. Later he adds, "You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock: I know not one." God knows of no other, not because God is limited in knowledge, but because there is no other like Him in existence.

Doctrine of the Trinity

Christians and Mormons share many similar theological terms. We both refer to God, salvation, and heaven. However, the words often have radically different meanings. Such is the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. Biblical Christianity teaches there is one God eternally coexisting in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As we will see, the Mormon view of the Godhead is quite different.

The Mormons reject the traditional Christian view of the Trinity as being in error. Joseph Smith wrote,

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God [anyhow]—three in one and one in three. . . It is curious organization All are crammed into one God according to sectarianism (Christian faith). It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster. (Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 372)

Church president James Talmage stated, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as distinct in persons and individualities as are any three personages in mortality."[5](#)

Mormons believe that there are an infinite number of planets, each with their own god or gods. On this earth, there are three separate gods, God the Father or Elohim, Jehovah or Jesus the son, and the Holy Ghost who make up the Godhead. Instead of Trinitarian, *tritheistic* would be a better word to describe Mormon belief. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "There are three Gods— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."[6](#) He further explains that, "[T]hree separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a god, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only gods we worship."[7](#)

Jesus is believed by Mormons to be the literal offspring of the Father. The Mormon Church teaches that "Jesus Christ is the son of Elohim both as (a) spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed his mission in the flesh. . . ."[8](#)

The Bible teaches that there is only one true God, not three separate gods. [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) states, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." God has revealed Himself in three coeternal and coequal persons of the same substance or essence, however, distinct in subsistence. The Bible reveals that all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have the attributes of deity. All three have existed for

eternity, took part in creation, and play a role in salvation. The whole, undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three Persons.[{9}](#)

God Was Once a Man

As we discussed earlier, Mormon theology teaches that there is a plurality of gods. All gods were once mortal men on other planets who, through obedience to the commands of their God, attained exaltation or godhood. All Mormon men have the potential of attaining godhood as well. God's progression from man to God is clearly stated throughout Mormon literature. Joseph Smith wrote:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. . . . He was once a man like us; yea that God himself, the Father dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . . .
[{10}](#)

Brigham Young, the second president taught "[T]hat God the Father was once a man on another planet who 'passed the ordeal we are now passing through. . .'"[{11}](#) The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, "God is a glorified and perfected man, a personage of flesh and bones. Inside his tangible body is an eternal spirit." (130:22)

Jesus is believed to have been a mortal man who attained godhood and showed that all men can do the same. The goal of every Mormon man is to achieve exaltation to godhood. Bruce McConkie states, "That exaltation which the saints of all ages have so devoutly sought is godhood itself."[{12}](#) Joseph Smith exhorted all Mormon men to strive for this goal. He stated,

Here then, is eternal life— to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you. . . .[{13}](#)

The Mormon Church teaches that if a couple marries according to Mormon ceremony, and each lives an obedient life, they may attain godhood at the resurrection. The *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches,

[Y]e shall come forth in the first resurrection; . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . (and you) shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to (their) exaltation." (132)

The passage concludes, "Then they shall be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting because they continue. . . . Then they shall be gods because they have all power, and the angels are subject to them." (132:20)

The Bible teaches that God has always been God. [Psalm 90](#) states, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God." God did not evolve from mortal man. [Isaiah 43](#) reveals, "Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me." This verse destroys any hope of any man thinking he may become a god.

Celestial Parenthood

In Mormon theology, there are three levels of heaven, terrestrial, tellesial, and celestial. It teaches that almost everyone will make it to the first level, terrestrial, but Mormons seek entrance to celestial heaven, because there they are exalted to godhood. Once a man is exalted to godhood, he and his wife will reproduce offspring for eternity. These spirit children will in turn inhabit physical bodies and have the opportunity to become gods as well. This privilege is reserved for those who go through the sacred marriage ceremony in the Temple and live in obedience to Mormon teachings.

As we discussed previously, the Mormon book *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches that Mormons who marry within the context of the church, and remain obedient, shall be resurrected together. They shall then inherit thrones and kingdoms and are then declared gods because they will then rule together for eternity. Church president James Talmage adds, “[W]e are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring . . . and the spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.”[{14}](#)

God the Father is, therefore, believed to be married to God the Mother, and together they are producing spirit children. Bruce McConkie states, “An exalted and glorified man of holiness could not be a Father unless a woman of like glory, perfection, and holiness was associated with him as a Mother. The begetting of children makes a man a father and a woman a mother whether we are dealing with man in his mortal or immortal state.”[{15}](#)

All men and women are thus the offspring of this heavenly union. James Talmage wrote, “God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title ‘Elohim,’ is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the spirits of the human race.”[{16}](#)

The Bible teaches that God the Father is not married. [Isaiah 46:9](#) states, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God; and there is none like me.” The Bible teaches that men and women who receive Christ as their savior will be glorified and live eternally in the presence of God. However, they will never be equal to God, nor will they be married. If marriage were essential to attain exaltation, it seems strange that Paul would write in [1 Corinthians 7](#), “It is good for a man not to marry.” When Jesus was questioned about the state of marriage in eternity he said, “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they will be like the angels in heaven.” The covenant of marriage is for our earthly existence only. The Bible does not teach a doctrine of celestial parenthood.

God is a Physical Being

Christianity teaches that God is immaterial. Mormonism teaches that God has a physical body. The Mormon *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s, the Son also. . . .”[{17}](#) Brigham Young

wrote, "We cannot believe for a moment that God is destitute of body, parts, passions, or attributes."[{18}](#)

Although [John 4:24](#) clearly teaches that God is spirit, Mormons like Bruce McConkie teach that this is a mistranslation of the text. He writes:

False creeds teach that God is a spirit essence that fills the immensity of space. . . . In a vain attempt to support this doctrine, formulated by councils in the early days of the great apostasy, it is common for apologists to point to the statement in the KJV Bible, which says, "God is a Spirit." The fact is that this passage is mistranslated: instead the correct statement, quoted in context reads: "For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth."[{19}](#)

However, there is no justification for McConkie's translation. The KJV translation of "God is a spirit" is misleading; modern translators are more accurate rendering the passage "God is spirit." The Greek construction and word order place the emphasis on the essential character of God; thus the essence of true worship must be on God's terms and in accord with his nature.[{20}](#) Jesus further taught in [Luke 24:36-43](#), "[A] spirit does not have flesh and bones." [1 Timothy 1:17](#) states, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God." God is invisible because He is immaterial. [1 John 4:12](#) and [John 1:18](#) tell us that no one has seen God. The second of the Ten Commandments forbids anyone from making an image of God, partially because nothing physical could accurately reflect God, who is immaterial. If God created the universe, as the Bible teaches, He could not be a physical being.

Scripture often uses anthropomorphic language, attributing human characteristics to God to help describe God's activities. [Psalm 17](#) pleads, "Keep me (Lord) as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings." Mormons have used this kind of language to prove that God has a physical body. In doing so they ignore the use of figurative language. God no more has a physical eye than He has wings and feathers.

God also revealed Himself in temporary physical forms that men could understand called theophanies. Examples are the burning bush, the fiery cloud in Exodus, and the unique incarnation of Christ. God the Son humbled Himself and took on human form. He was not a pre-existent spirit-being, waiting for a body, as the Mormons teach. [John 1](#) reveals that the Son was God from eternity and became a man to redeem humanity. We must conclude, based on our study of the doctrine of God, that Mormonism and traditional Christianity are indeed two different religions.

Notes

1. Stephen Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 65; quoted in John Ankerberg, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 99.
2. *Ibid.*, 103.
3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 576-577.
4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret

- Book Company, 1976), 349; quoted in Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 220.
5. James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 37.
 6. McConkie, 317.
 7. McConkie, 576.
 8. Talmage, 421.
 9. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 54.
 10. Smith, 321.
 11. Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 29.
 12. McConkie, 321.
 13. Smith, p. 345-347. Also quoted in McConkie, 321.
 14. Talmage, 426.
 15. McConkie, 516.
 16. Talmage, 421.
 17. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:22.
 - 18, Young, 29.
 19. McConkie, 218.
 20. *Expositors Bible Commentary*.

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20. The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective

Can reincarnation be true? Dr. Pat Zukeran examines evidence for this Eastern belief and compares it to the Biblical concept of resurrection.



. This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

Many cultures throughout the world have long held to the concept of reincarnation. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that one in four Americans believed in reincarnation. Reincarnation literally means, "to come again in the flesh." World religions author Geoffrey Parrinder defines reincarnation as "the belief that the soul or some power passes after death into another body."[1](#)

Reincarnation is a major facet of the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many sects have variant views of reincarnation. Here is a general summary of the basic principles. Most hold to a pantheistic view of God. Pantheism comes from the Greek *pan* meaning "all" and concept of *theism* meaning "God." In Pantheism, God is an impersonal force made up of all things; the universe is God and God is the universe. All created beings are an extension of or an emanation from God.

Living things possess a physical body and an immaterial entity called the soul, life force, or Jiva. At death, the life force separates from the body and takes a new physical form. The law of karma determines what form the individual will take. This law teaches that one's thoughts, words, and deeds have an ethical consequence, fixing one's lot in future existences.[2](#) Our present state is the result of actions and intentions performed in a previous life. The amount of good or bad karma attained in our present life will determine if one returns in a higher or a lower form of existence.

One will endure hundreds, even millions of reincarnations, either evolving into a higher or lower form of life to work off the debt of karma. This cycle of reincarnation is called the *law of samsara*. Eventually one hopes to work off all bad karma and free oneself from the reincarnation cycle and attain unity with the divine. This freeing from the cycle of reincarnation is called *moksha*. The soul is viewed as imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body

can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through discipline and good works.

Much of the reincarnation teaching in the West is adapted from the teachings in the eastern religions. Is there evidence that proves reincarnation to be true? We will examine these next.

Evidences for Reincarnation

Leading reincarnation researcher Dr. Ian Stephenson, head of the department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believes there is compelling evidence for reincarnation. Proponents give five proofs: hypnotic regression, déjà vu, Xenoglossy, birthmarks, and the Bible.

The first proof is hypnotic regression. Reincarnation proponents cite examples of individuals giving vivid and accurate descriptions of people, places, and events the individual could not have previously known. Today there is a small branch of psychology that practice past life therapy, the belief that one's present problems are the result of problems from a previous life.

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

" . . .although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors. In their study, hypnotized subjects correctly recalled twice as many items as did un hypnotized members of a control group but also made three times as many mistakes. During hypnosis, you are creating memories."[3](#)

Fourth, studies have shown that under hypnosis, patients are easily influenced by leading questions. In the process of hypnosis, the patient is asked to release control of his or her consciousness and body. Hans Holzer states, "Generally women are easier to hypnotize than men. But there are exceptions even among women, who may have difficulty letting go control over their bodies and personalities, something essential if genuine hypnosis is to take place."[4](#) In this state, memories can be altered by the cues from the hypnotist. For these reasons, many law courts do not consider testimony under hypnosis reliable evidence.

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one's

subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, "Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived." [{5}](#) Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

At best, the evidence from hypnotic regress can only suggest a possibility of reincarnation, but it does not conclusively prove it.

Déjà vu refers to a distinct feeling you have been to a place or performed an event before, while engaged in something that is presently happening. Reincarnation proponents attribute this to a previous life. However, researchers give alternate explanations. In our subconscious, we often relate a present event with a past one that the conscious mind does not remember. Since the two events are similar we often fuse the events together in our minds, thus creating an impression that we have experienced this before. Other researchers have shown that the data that enters the eye is sometimes delayed for a microsecond on its way to the brain. This leads one to think that they have seen the data before.

Xenoglossy is the sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation advocates attribute this as the language one spoke in a previous life. However, cryptoamnesia can account for this phenomenon. In cryptoamnesia, an individual forgets information that was learned earlier and recalls it at a later time, not knowing its source. It is possible that one can hear foreign terms through the media or as a child and recall these when prompted.

The fourth proof is the appearance of unique birthmarks that are similar to those possessed by a deceased individual. However, it is difficult to show any connection to reincarnation. Similarity does not prove sameness.

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we must entertain the possibility of demonic possession where a foreign spirit takes control of the person as demonstrated several times throughout the New Testament. Demonic spirits have existed for thousands of years and are not limited by time and space. The information they possess can be injected into a person's mind during possession. Eastern meditation techniques allow for this possibility. Dr. Bro writes of Edgar Cayce, the father of the New Age movement, "Cayce's power came without equipment, in quiet. He appeared to empty himself, to hollow out his consciousness as a receptacle, a conduit." [{6}](#)

Even reincarnation advocates believe that many cases of past life recall can be attributed to possession. They confess that it is difficult to determine whether a past life recall is the result of reincarnation or possession. William de Arteaga states, "In reference to the demonic counterfeit hypothesis, we can safely say that for many past life visions it is the most solidly verified hypothesis of all." [{7}](#)

Edgar Cayce stated, "That's what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power. . . ." [\[8\]](#)

Although the evidence can be interpreted to support reincarnation, it cannot conclusively prove it.

Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation

Although reincarnation proponents cite the Bible as proof of their claim, the Bible refutes the idea. It teaches that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. [Hebrews 9:26b-27](#) states, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . ." The focus here is on the sacrificial work of Christ. Instead of the continual animal sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

In the same way as Christ, who appeared only once, man is destined to die once. Just as there is finality in Christ's sacrifice, there is finality in man's physical death. After that, the soul faces the judgment before God to determine one's eternal destiny. Once judgment is delivered, Scripture gives no evidence that sins can be atoned for in another time of living on earth ([Rev. 20:11-15](#); [Luke 16:19-31](#); [Matt. 25:31-46](#)).

The passage often appealed to by those who support reincarnation is [John 9:1-3](#), which states, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" Reincarnation proponents claim that in this passage the disciples are attributing the man's blindness as the result of bad karma from a previous existence.

However, Jewish theology attributed birth defects to two factors. Prenatal sin committed by the baby after conception, but before birth, or sin committed by the parents. [Genesis 25:22](#), the struggle of Jacob and Esau in Rachel's womb, was interpreted as a conflict that resulted from prenatal sin. [Exodus 20:5](#) states that the parents' sin often had repercussions on their offspring. However, in the passage in [John 9:1-3](#), Jesus refutes any connection between the man's defects and any previous sins, thus putting an end to any concept of karma.

Another passage is [Matthew 11](#) where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in [2 Kings 2](#), Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in [Matthew 17](#) Elijah appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

Reincarnation and Resurrection

The Bible teaches that what happens after death is a resurrection, not reincarnation. First Corinthians 15 is one of the clearest passages on what happens to the human soul after death. Like the reincarnation proponents, we agree that the immaterial component of man separates from the body at death and survives eternally. We both agree that the soul inhabits another bodily form.

The major difference is this: reincarnation proponents believe that the soul inhabits many bodily forms in an evolutionary progress toward union with the divine. This can happen over millions of years or in a shorter period. The Bible teaches in [Hebrews 9:26b-27](#), as previously discussed, that we live once, die once and then enter into an eternal state.

Our eternal state is described in [1 Corinthians 15](#). Verse 20 states, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." By "firstfruits" Paul was drawing on the imagery found in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were prior to the main harvest and served as an example and an assurance of the harvest that was coming. So Christ's resurrection is a precursor and a guarantee of the believer's resurrection. His resurrection greatly differs from the reincarnation model.

First, Christ's resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

Paul describes the glorified body as having a different kind of flesh from the earthly body. He states, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. . . ." The new body will be imperishable and immortal. It will be a spiritual body that is designed for life in heaven. The glorified body will not suffer the effects of sin or the effects of time, sickness, or pain.

The unrighteous, however, enter a state of eternal torment immediately after death. [Luke 16:19-31](#) demonstrates this point. In this example the unrighteous wealthy man enters hell immediately at death. In [Matthew 25](#) the goats enter a state of eternal punishment with no hope of escape.

In summary, these are the differences. First, reincarnation teaches that the migration of the soul occurs over many lifetimes while resurrection occurs once. Second, reincarnation teaches we inhabit many different bodies while resurrection teaches we inhabit only one body on earth and a glorified immortal body in heaven that resembles our earthly one. Third, reincarnation teaches we are in an evolutionary progress to union with God while resurrection teaches we arrive at our ultimate state immediately at death. The Bible does not support reincarnation and it must not be confused with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is very different.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today*, February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.
4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.
5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.
6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*, (New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.
7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.
8. Thomas Sague, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

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21. Jehovah's Witnesses and the Trinity: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides Christians with a biblical perspective on countering the false teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the nature of God and the Trinity. • Countering these non-Christian views will enable you to get to the heart of the matter in sharing Christ with members of this cult.

The Trinity

In another essay ([Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses](#)) I discussed effective evangelistic strategies when sharing the faith with Jehovah's Witnesses. We covered some effective techniques such as the Witnesses' record of false prophecy, the name "Jehovah", the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. In this essay I would like to teach you how to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, a truth clearly denied by Jehovah's Witnesses. Before we can defend this doctrine, however, we must have a clear understanding of the Trinity. Too many Christians lack a solid understanding of the Triune nature of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the belief that there is one God who has revealed Himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons make up the one true God. These three persons are of the same substance, equal in power and glory. It is important we understand this doctrine because the wrong Jesus or the wrong God cannot save us from eternal death. Paul makes a clear warning of this in [2 Corinthians 11:4](#).

The Bible clearly states that there is only one God. [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) states, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." [Isaiah 44:6](#) states, "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me." Clearly, these verses reveal that there is only one God. Yet, there are three separate persons in the Bible who are called God and have the characteristics only God can have. The Trinity is a difficult concept to

grasp, because we are finite beings trying to explain an infinite God who is beyond our understanding.

Let's take a look at some verses that back up our doctrine of the Trinity. The Father is obviously called God as seen throughout the Bible. No one will argue that point. So there is one member of the Trinity, the Father. Jesus the Son, is a separate person but He is also called God. [John 1:1](#) says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." [Titus 2:13](#) says, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." So here we see clearly, the Son is also called God.

The Holy Spirit is also a separate person, and He is also called God. First, let us understand, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is a person and has the characteristics of a person. He can be grieved ([Eph. 4:30](#)), He speaks ([Acts 13:2](#)), and He can be lied to ([Act 5:3-4](#)). In [Acts 5:3-4](#) the Holy Spirit is called God, "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?...You have not lied to men, but to God.'"

So we see clearly that there are three persons in the Bible, and all three are called God. Yet, we must remember, there is only one God according to the verses we looked at [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) and [Isaiah 44:6](#). Therefore, we come to the conclusion that the Trinity is made up of three separate persons who are the one true God. At this point we need to look at verses Jehovah's Witnesses use to attempt to disprove the Trinity and learn how to refute these arguments. Then we will look at the best verses to use in demonstrating the truth of the Trinity to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Bible

I run in to many Christians who tell me, "The Jehovah's Witnesses know their Bible so well, and they've got so many verses memorized." The truth is, they don't know their Bible well, it's just that we Christians are lacking in our Bible knowledge. When it comes to the Trinity, Witnesses only know about 8 verses to defend their view. We'll be studying the main verses they use to try to disprove the Trinity.

In one approach they attempt to show that Jesus cannot be God because He was created. The verse they use here is [Colossians 1:15](#), "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Here the Witnesses say Christ is the *first-born* which they say means, "first created being of God." Therefore, they conclude Jesus cannot be God since He was created.

The key to understanding this verse is understanding the term *first-born*, what does it mean? The Greek word for "first created" is the word *Protoktioti*. If Paul wanted to say Christ was the first created being, he would have used this word but he does not. He uses another term, *Prototokos*. Paul is referring to the Jewish use of the word *first-born* which not only means first one born but also is used as a title of sovereignty and pre-eminence.

Here's an example of the meaning of the word. In [Psalm 89:27](#) God says of David, "I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." Let's take a

good look and see how first-born is used here. Is David the first-born son of Jesse? No, he is the eighth and youngest son of Jesse. Then how is it that David is the first-born? In the Old Testament use of the word, he is first-born in that he is pre-eminent or sovereign of all the kings of the earth.

Now stick that usage of *first-born* into the context of [Colossians 1:15](#), and it fits perfectly. Not only that, have the Witnesses read on with you to verse 18. Verse 18 shows that Paul is clearly talking about the pre-eminence of Christ for he says, "He is also the head of the body" and "the first-born" for the purpose, "that in everything he might be pre-eminent." If we were to replace *first-born* in verse 18 with the term *pre-eminent*, it would fit perfectly in the context. However, if we replaced it with *first created*, it would not fit in that context.

Another verse the Witnesses use to show Jesus was created is [Revelation 3:14](#), "And to the angel of Laodicea write: 'The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Beginning of the creation of God...'" Here the faithful witness is Jesus and He is called, "The Beginning of the creation."

The Greek word for beginning is *arche*, which is used in many ways. It is used to mean "origin or source of, or ruler," but not first creation. Turn with the Witness to [Revelation 21:6](#). In these two verses, Jehovah calls Himself the beginning. Does that mean Jehovah was created? No. Therefore, the Witnesses use of the term *beginning*, is incorrect.

Jesus was never created. [John 1:1](#) states, "In the beginning was the Word" Jesus was with God from eternity past; Jesus has no beginning because He is the eternal God.

Is Jesus Inferior to God?

Is Jesus inferior to God? Another way the Witnesses try to disprove the deity of Christ is to show that Christ is inferior in nature to God. The verses they use here are [John 14:28](#) and [1 Corinthians 11:3](#).

[John 14:28](#) reads, "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." They will ask you, "How can Jesus be equal to God if here He states 'the Father is greater than I'?"

The term *greater* refers to position, not nature. The term *better* refers to nature. Here is a good example I use in illustrating this passage. The President is greater than you or I, correct? Yes, as Chief Executive Officer of the United States he is greater than you or I. The Jehovah's Witness will agree. But, is the President *better* than you or I? What I mean is, is there anything about the President that makes him a superior being to you or me? No.

You see, *greater* refers to position, not nature. We see in [Philippians 2:6-8](#), that Christ though He was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself and submitted Himself to the Father and took on the form of a servant. Though Jesus emptied Himself, He was always in nature God and

equal to the Father in nature. If Jesus wanted to say He was inferior to God in nature, He would have said, "The Father is better than I."

Here is an example of the use of the term *better* in [Hebrews 1:4](#) (NAS); it says speaking of Jesus, "having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." The NI V reads, "So he became as much superior to the angels...." Here we see that Jesus is a being superior to the angels, so the term *better*, is used. Remember, in explaining this verse, the term *greater* refers to position, not nature.

Another verse the Witnesses will use is [1 Corinthians 11:3](#), "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." Here they say since the head of Christ is God, Jesus must be inferior to God.

Once again you use the same concept of equal in nature, but Christ submitted Himself to the Father. Here the principle of headship and submission established by God is displayed both in marriage and in the Trinity. Now show the Jehovah's Witnesses that in this passage, the head of the woman is man. "Does this mean that the husband is a superior being to his wife?" The answer is obviously, "No." The husband is greater than his wife by way of position but not by nature. The same applies to the Father and the Son. The Father is greater by position, but not better by nature.

Remember when you're Witnessing, you are not there to win an argument, but to show them the error of their ways in a loving and Christ-like manner, but also you are not to be afraid to boldly defend the faith.

Proving the Deity of Christ

One of the best defenses is a good offense. When defending the Trinity to Witnesses, take charge of the conversation. Don't let the Witnesses run you in circles. You pick the topic and keep them on the topic you choose, instead of having them ask you all the questions, you have some questions ready for them to answer.

The best way to do this, when they appear at your doorstep, is ask them, "What organization are you with?" They will reply, "We are Jehovah's Witnesses." Then ask them, "Whom do you say is the God of the Apostles?" They will reply, "Jehovah." You then reply, "How do you explain the fact that Jesus is the God of the Apostles?" They will be surprised and say, "No, that's not true, where do you find that?" Here you have taken over the conversation. Now, stay in charge of the conversation and don't let them break off on another tangent.

Next, you turn to the first text [John 20:28](#), where Thomas, after seeing the resurrected Lord, proclaims to Jesus, "My Lord and My God." Here, Thomas calls Jesus *God*. The Witnesses have two responses to this. One, they may say, "Well, Thomas was so surprised at seeing Jesus that he shouted, 'My Lord and My God,' in surprise just as we shout, 'Oh, my God,' when we're surprised." There's a problem with that. Thomas was a devout Jew and never would have shouted "my God" in

surprise for that would be blasphemy for a Jew. A second response they have is, Thomas looked at Jesus and said, "My Lord," then looked to heaven and said, "My God." There's a problem with that too because the context does not say that. If you look at the passage, Thomas says, "My Lord and My God" to Jesus. So Thomas saw clearly that Jesus was God.

The next verse to turn them to is [John 1:1](#). Now here the Witnesses will think you're falling into their trap for they have a different translation. Their translation says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was **a** god."

Well, the first thing to do is to show them that *both* translations can't be right. Someone is wrong. Ask them, "If we were to go to the local library here, we would find over thirty translations of the Bible. How many would translate it your way?" The truth is only one would, theirs. Then ask them, "Are you willing to say all the translators for the past centuries have been wrong and only yours is correct?" If they're honest, they'll think about it. Others will say, "Yes, ours is the only true translation."

It is then you say, "Let's say your translation is correct and mine is wrong, you still have a problem. How many gods do you have in that verse?" Then you take their Bible and count the number of gods with them. Say, "Well, here is one God with a capital **G**, what kind of god is He?" They'll say, "A true god." Then you go on and say, "Here's another god with a small **g**, what kind of god is He?" They must say, "a true god." Then you ask them, "How many gods do you have?" This is where they get stuck for they must either say two gods and be polytheists or deny their translation. These are two great verses to use when witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Alpha and the Omega

As I have witnessed to many Jehovah's Witnesses, I have found some verses that work most effectively in proving the deity of Christ. Here are two of my favorite combination of verses.

The first verse is [Revelation 1:8](#). I am reading from the Jehovah's Witness Bible, and it reads, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Jehovah God. Ask the Witness, "What does Alpha and Omega mean?" They'll reply, "The beginning and the end." Then ask them, "How many Alphas and Omegas can you have?" They'll answer, "Only one." Make sure you get this point across, there is only one Alpha and Omega.

Then turn to [Revelation 22:12-13](#) which says, "Look I am coming quickly, and the reward I give is with me....I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Ask the Witnesses, "Who do you say the Alpha and Omega is?" They will say, "Jehovah." Now take a careful look. The Alpha and Omega in verse twelve is coming quickly. Let's see who is speaking in verse twelve.

Look at verse sixteen, "I Jesus, sent my angel to bear witness to you people of these things for the congregations. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." It is Jesus speaking in verse twelve. If there is any doubt go to verse 20 which says, "He that bears witness of these things says, 'Yes; I am coming quickly'

Amen come Lord Jesus." So it is clear that the Alpha and the Omega in verse twelve is Jesus. Here is a strong proof text that Jesus is God because both Jehovah and Jesus are called the Alpha and the Omega.

Another pair of verses that are effective when used together are [Isaiah 44:6](#) and [Revelation 1:17-18](#). [Isaiah 44:6](#) says, "This is what Jehovah has said, 'The king of Israel and the Repurchaser of him, Jehovah of armies, I am the first and I am the last.'" Ask the Witnesses how many firsts and lasts can you have? It's obvious to anyone you can only have one first and one last. Ask them, "Who is the first and the last?" They will say, "Jehovah." Now turn to [Revelation 1:17-18](#) which says, "Do not be fearful; I am the First and the Last, and the living one; and I became dead but look! I am living forever." Who is speaking here? Obviously, it is Jesus for He died but is now alive, and guess what? He is called the First and the Last. Here again we see Jesus is God.

These are my favorite verses, and I have never had Witnesses refute these arguments. Remember, the Witnesses at your door won't convert right then and there. The key is to get them to start thinking and questioning the organization, and down the road, maybe in several years, they will seek answers and that will lead them out of the organization. Don't give up or be discouraged when sharing with Witnesses. Though they may be rude and show no signs that they are thinking, the Word of God is powerful and is working in their hearts even if we can't see it.

Remember Dr. Walter Martin (author of *Kingdom of the Cults*) went fifteen years without a convert, but he never gave up. Today we know of hundreds he pulled out of the organization. Continue to study the Word, and God bless you as you defend the faith.

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