

# “What Does Circumcision as a ‘Seal’ Mean?”

Hello, I am writing because I recently had a baby boy. My son was born with a heart defect, and required surgery when he was about a week old (that’s a great story you can read about [here](#).) Since he had to have surgery right after birth, we did not have the opportunity to get him circumcised in the hospital due to the risk of infection. Now he is five months old, and I am having a really hard time deciding whether or not to have him circumcised.

I know that circumcision is not required for salvation, but I know that the New Testament mentions it. I have read Romans 4, where circumcision is called a “sign,” and I understand what this means, but the part where it is called a “seal” is confusing to me. My husband is just not convinced that circumcision is necessary, and my reasons for wanting to have it done are mainly cultural. It would be really nice to hear a biblical perspective on the matter. Thanks!

Thanks for your letter. First, let me say “hearty congratulations” on the birth of your son! My wife and I recently had a baby boy as well, so we can certainly share your joy.

Second, you’re right about physical circumcision not being necessary for salvation. Indeed, to claim such a thing would be completely contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the New Testament (see, for example, Romans 3:27-30; 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 7:18-19; Galatians 2:1-5; 5:6, 11; 6:12-16). Salvation is a gift of God’s grace, which we receive through faith in Christ alone.

Third, as it’s used in Romans 4:11, a “seal” is simply a way of attesting to, or confirming, something. Thus, circumcision

(in this passage) is a “seal” (that is, it attests to, or confirms) the righteousness which Abraham had by faith before he was ever circumcised. Thus, circumcision is essentially a “sign” and a “seal” in the same sense here. The terms are basically synonymous.

Biblically speaking, you are under no obligation whatever to have your son circumcised. Medically speaking, however, there do seem to be certain benefits which may be worth considering with your physician. But that’s a decision for you and your husband.

Shalom in Christ,  
Michael Gleghorn

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## **“When Does a Fetus Receive a Soul?”**

I had a question about the beginning of life. My wife and I have endured two miscarriages so far. The doctor says that there isn’t enough genetic info to create personhood for at least eight days and both of our miscarriages happened before a visible fetus had formed. (One when there was just a gestational sac, another when there was just an endometrium lining). We’ve always believed life begins at conception, of course, and I’ve read a couple articles on this site to that end. But when does a fetus receive a soul? Do we, CAN we know from scripture? It seems obvious that the life cycle is under way when sperm and egg meet, but at what point does the soul become infused in the cells?

Thank you for writing, and I am sorry to hear that you and your wife have had to endure two miscarriages. One of my siblings had to deal with this recently, so I know it is a difficult loss. I pray that God will provide comfort and healing for you and that he would bring compassionate friends into your life who know what you have gone through. I will provide an academic answer to your question, but know that I am sensitive to the circumstance behind your question.

I have received questions about when exactly the soul enters the body before, and I know there are several theories posited by theologians to this end. With that in mind, understand that my training is as a scientist and a bioethicist. I will tell you that the soul is not something that we can detect scientifically because science deals in the realm of the physical, and the soul is in the realm of the spiritual. We can see the physical effects of the spiritual realm, but we cannot actually detect the spiritual. Many have tried to this end with experiments that teeter on verge of ridiculous (the God Helmet comes to mind).

From scripture, especially, looking at Psalm 139 (I recommend reading the whole thing): "O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."

God has a very intimate knowledge of us, and as we see in the next few verses in this Psalm, that knowledge extends to everywhere, including the womb.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?... For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the

depths of the earth.

This is a reference to being made in the womb. Even there God has this intimate knowledge of man. I think this is an important verse for your situation because it is a reminder that God was sovereign over both of these pregnancies, and for whatever reason, they were not to come to fruition. The next verse is even more to this point.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.

I was particularly struck by the "unformed substance" in this verse because you said your babies died when one was a gestational sac and the other when there was just an endometrial lining. And according to this verse, God seems to treat this unformed substance as though it has a soul.

I cannot conclude when a fetus receives a soul, but from scripture, it seems that God's actual mechanism on this is not our concern. The point is that this unformed substance will have/does have/has always had a soul, and we treat it as such. I also think it is reasonable to conclude from general and special revelation (that would be from what we know from observation and from the Bible) that from the time of conception the new clump of cells is a new individual. Your doctor is defining personhood as something that has the full genetic make-up of a person. Before 8 days, the cells have not formed its entire genetic structure, it's still in the process of doing that, however, those cells are also not composed of only your genetics or only your wife's genetics. In fact, there is no other genetic match to those cells, so it is a new genetic entity, and in that sense is a unique, new being.

I think it is tempting in our culture to think of the soul as a physical object that gets infused or sewn into our bodies. According to scripture, it seems to be much more complex than

that; kind of in the sense that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. We are both physical beings and spiritual beings and because of the fall we have a very difficult time understanding or even interacting with the spiritual aspect. Thankfully, Christ provided a way that we could interact with God (who is spirit) again.

I usually try to stick to the question at hand, but I do want to address that if your babies had souls, then where are they now? According to Psalm 139, God is sovereign, which is comforting because you can rest in his sovereign and loving grace knowing that he has taken care of your babies.

Thank you for writing,

Heather Zeiger

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## **“Is There a Demonic Spirit of Homosexuality?”**

**Could people who honestly believe they are gay, possibly be blinded by a demonic spirit of homosexuality? Or could they possibly have a demon of homosexuality in them? I am not saying all are demon possessed, but what is it that makes them truly, honestly believe that they are born this way?**

Having studied both spiritual warfare and the contributing factors to homosexuality, I do not think that a demonic spirit of homosexuality is the definitive explanation for believing one is gay. Yes, deception is an important component to a homosexual orientation; those who experience same-sex attraction unwittingly believe a number of lies about life,

about themselves, about others, and often about God. And where sin and deception are, there is often a demonic presence or element.

In those who feel "different" from childhood, homosexuality comes from emotional and spiritual brokenness. There is a constellation of contributing factors to this brokenness: hurtful relationships with parents and peers, unmet emotional needs, emotional traumas due to abuse, wrong perceptions, warped gender identity. I believe that the enemy of our souls exploits this brokenness and whispers lies to broken people that are very easy to believe because they don't know they're lies. (Lies such as, "You make a lousy boy [or girl]." "You're not like everybody else." "Nobody will accept you." "If you were a better boy/girl, your father/mother would love you more." "The way to get love is through sex." "God made you gay." "You may not like being like this, but you can't change." "You don't deserve anything better.") So in this way, there is probably a demonic element to the development of homosexuality.

In regard to those who experienced a normal heterosexual childhood: some people are so addicted to indulging their flesh that they turn to homosexual behavior in adulthood. In this case, sin grows up from within the darkened human heart, as described in James 1:14-15: "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." There's probably some demonic influence involved in this process as well.

Is there an actual demonic spirit of homosexuality? Probably so. I have heard a few (a very few, and I've been involved in homosexual ministry for 10 years) testimonies of people who experienced something like a net of same-sex lust being dropped on them, or out-of-the-blue, overwhelming homosexual desires coming upon them like a car wreck. I have also heard from people who report having experienced a spirit of sexual

“strangeness” ever since early childhood. In those cases, eventually they recognized the demonic aspect and stood against it. Sometimes, people can dabble in homosexual behavior, and this sin opens the door to demonic oppression. Only repentance, renouncing the door-opening in Jesus’ name, and trusting in Christ, makes the demons leave.

But on the other hand, many gay-identifying individuals have pursued deliverance ministry, seeking to have “the demon of homosexuality” cast out of them—and it didn’t make any difference in their feelings or thoughts, because that wasn’t the cause of their same-gender attraction in the first place. They were seeking an easy fix to a complex problem, but if it’s not the cause of the problem, it won’t work. Romans 12:2 directs us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, which means changing our beliefs and thoughts (which can result in a change of feeling), but this is the work of discipline. Again, no easy fix.

You ask why people honestly believe they are born homosexual. Well, for the same reason you could honestly believe you were born an English speaker. You’ve always spoken English, it’s all you’ve ever known, it’s the most natural thing in the world for you. The reality is that you, like all humans, were born a LANGUAGE speaker, but being an English speaker was shaped by thousands of interactions with your family and your culture. Homosexuals are shaped in similar ways that started at birth. All people are born to be relational, but some people are relationally broken because of thousands of interactions that are a result of living in a fallen world with fallen people. And different people express relational brokenness in different ways. I think of families where one sibling is gay and another deals with chronic rage or depression. Different kinds of brokenness, depending on the personality and perceptions of the individuals.

I hope this helps.

# **“At What Stage of Pregnancy is a Fetus Able to Be Genetically Engineered?”**

I am a high school student wondering about the process [of] genetic screening. I would like to know at what stage of pregnancy a fetus is able to be genetically engineered, or if the process must begin before a child is conceived. I would also like to know whether or not a normal gene has to be cloned from a donor in order to replace a problem gene in another. Any help would be greatly appreciated!

Just to make sure we are on the same page, *genetic engineering* and *genetic screening* are two different, but related things. *Genetic screening* involves testing a person for certain genetic diseases. This test can occur before the embryo is implanted into the womb as in the case of in vitro fertilization (IVF), it can occur during the pregnancy through a procedure call amniocentesis, and it can occur after a baby is born including into adulthood. Often with IVF, embryos are screened and the “best” ones are selected for implantation. Embryos need not just be screened for diseases, they can also be screened for gender and certain genetic markers. In some states pregnant women over 40 may be required to get genetic testing to determine if their baby has Down’s syndrome since the chances of Down’s syndrome increases when the mother is over 40. Most babies after they are born are tested for



certain diseases such as phenylketouria because, if they test positive, the parents need to keep them on a strict diet. Lastly, some couples might want to be genetically screened before they decide to get married. This was practiced in a particular group of American-Jewish people who had a high incidence of Tay-Sachs disease. If both people were carriers, then they may decide not to get married because they would likely have a child that would die from Tay Sachs (they usually die at about age 5).

*Genetic modification* and *genetic engineering* are slightly different. *Modification* is done with plants and with some farm animals (although usually they use hormonal and breeding techniques for reasons outlined below). *Genetic engineering* in humans is still more theoretical than actual. The reason for this has to do with our lack of knowledge regarding the genome.

The theory goes like this: in the lab, we can replace segments of DNA with other segments of DNA in organisms like bacteria. So, what if we do this with human beings: replace unwanted DNA that codes for unwanted traits with DNA that codes for wanted traits. Sounds simple enough. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on your point of view—our genome is *not* that simple. There isn't just one strand of DNA that codes for eye color and another that codes for hair color. Our genes (genes are composed of lots of DNA) are very complex and the functions they code for are interwoven, often coding for multiple things at a time. Also, scientists are finding that DNA doesn't simply code for traits in a letter-to-letter fashion. Rather, there is apparently some interaction between two genes spatially in the genome.

As far as whether a normal gene has to be cloned from another, theoretically one can make segments of DNA in the lab. And scientists have been able to insert these segments into bacterial cells. However, replacement and insertion of a DNA segment in mammalian cells is a very different story, and has

not been successful in laboratory settings to the extent of being able to conduct genetic engineering. I suppose if you wanted to genetically engineer traits into a human being, it would have to be at an early embryonic stage when there are only 6-8 cells to deal with. But even then, it is unclear whether we could use synthesized DNA or if we must receive large segments from a donor. This is very problematic because there is still the issue of expressing (i.e., flipping the “on switch”) of the DNA in the organism.

Thanks for writing. Hope this is helpful.

Heather Zeiger

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## **“Is It a Sin To Mistreat Animals?”**

I know that the Bible does not say whether or not animals go to Heaven. My question is, is it at least a sin in God’s eyes for people to mistreat animals? Does God care that animals suffer?

*[Editor’s Note: Two Probe researchers have responded to this question.]*

From Sue Bohlin:

God shows Himself to be a God of compassion toward animals in Jonah 4:11:

*“Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the*

*difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"*

He also wants us to be, like Himself since He made us in His image, people of compassion toward animals:

*"A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal."  
(Proverbs 12:10a)*

It's helpful to look at some big ideas in scripture:

In Genesis 1:28, God tells Adam and Eve,

*"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

This is the principle of stewardship.

Secondly, the Bible says that all animals belong to God:

*O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions.  
There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great. (Psalm 104:24-25)*

Since all animals belong to God, and God has put their care and management into the hands of people, we can deduce that it is wrong to mistreat something that belongs to God.

So, while the Bible doesn't come out and say it is a sin to mistreat animals, a case can be made that it's wrong.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## About the Author



[Sue Bohlin](#) is an associate speaker with Probe Ministries. She attended the University of Illinois, and has been a Bible teacher and conference speaker for over 30 years. She is a frequent speaker for MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) and Stonecroft Ministries (Christian Women's Connections), and serves on the board and as a small group leader of Living Hope Ministries, a Christ centered outreach to those dealing with unwanted homosexuality. Sue is on the Bible.org Women's Leadership Team and is a regular contributor to [TheTapestryBlog.com](#). She is also a professional calligrapher and the webmistress for Probe Ministries; but most importantly, she is the wife of Dr. Ray Bohlin and the mother of their two grown sons. Her personal website is [suebohlin.com](#).

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From Heather Zeiger:

Thanks for writing. It just so happens that I looked up some verses on this in studying for a discussion on environmentalism and stewardship. I will also tell you that I love animals, and have always had at least one animal, and usually more at one time. I currently have a sweet little cat and a red-eared slider turtle, so the question of animal cruelty is a good question and certainly one I care about.

true that animals are not made in God's image, and therefore, are not capable of sin nor are saved as humans are, so unfortunately I will not likely see my pets in Heaven, although there is some reason to believe that there will be

animals (and plants) in Heaven.

Having said that, animals are part of God's creation, and not only that but are apparently a good part of his creation and something that he cares very much about. Here are some important verses (emphasis mine):

*And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Genesis 1:20-22).*

*"And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:24, 25).*

So it seems that not only did God want animals to be part of creation, but he thought it was good to put them here, and he even blessed them. He also seems to have taken care to make them in an orderly way and specific to their environment (the sea, the land). So while God made man above the animals, and even allowed him to use them for food or clothing, he also made man to be a steward over creation. This means he wanted Adam to care for creation. We see elements of this in God's law when he specifies how the Israelites are to care for both the domestic and wild animals when they enter the Promised Land (Leviticus 25:1-12), and how they are to care for livestock (Deuteronomy 22:1-4, 6, 9, and 25:4). Proverbs 12:10

says that "Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel."

In the New Testament we see that God cares for the birds: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Matthew 6:26.

In short, the answer to your question is yes, cruelty to animals is a sin and yes, God most certainly cares about animal suffering. Man is to be a steward over God's creation. Man is more important to God than the animals, but God obviously expects man to care for creation.

Even when we consider that animals were used for sacrifices, it is not meant to be an enjoyable thing, but...well...a sacrifice. This particular suffering of animals is ordained by God to foreshadow the suffering of Christ. The sacrifice pleases God because it pleases him that man has obeyed God and repented for his sins. For example, 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." There are also places in Deuteronomy and Isaiah that talk about how God desires man's heart more so than the act of sacrifice. The sacrifice is to turn man's heart to God.

I hope this was helpful for you. Always feel free to email us with questions.

Heather Zeiger

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# “We Need Encouragement After Repeated Miscarriages”

Recently, my wife and I suffered our third miscarriage in a little over a year. I am feeling so many emotions right now from anger and frustration to confusion. We have no kids currently, but would like to one day. I am having trouble reconciling these miscarriages and was hoping for some encouragement I guess. Where can I look in the Bible for something that helps?

My hurt aches for you and your wife. I am so very, very sorry for the tsunami of pain and disappointment and grief you and she are experiencing. My husband and I are also in the “Parents Who Have Lost Babies” club. Burying our daughter after nine days of life was devastating to us, but God has greatly redeemed every bit of the pain in the years since then.

I think the encouragement you seek will come from being able to see the bigger picture, one that includes God’s tender love for you and His tears for your pain as He works out His purposes in your life and character. May I suggest a couple of resources that may help? My Probe article “The Value of Suffering” is intensely practical in terms of understanding a biblical view of pain and suffering: [The Value of Suffering](#)

At our last Probe Mind Games conference, where we equip students to be confident in their faith before they get to college, I recorded my teaching session on this subject, which I sensed was very much anointed by God. I pray you find it helpful and comforting: [www.box.net/shared/66gn28bubc](http://www.box.net/shared/66gn28bubc) (It opens with the sound track to the video I show first, Rob Bell’s NOOMA video “Rain.”)

You may also find [Caleb Ministries](#) helpful; they help people

who are in exactly your position.

I send this with the prayer that you and your wife experience the warmth of God's comfort wrapped around your soul like a warm blanket on a cold and rainy day.

Again, I am so sorry for your losses.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“You’ve Got Islam Wrong”**

Dear Rick Rood,

I stumbled upon your [“What is Islam”](#) web page and read it thoroughly. I would like to know how you got that information because it is inaccurate. I would just like to point them out to you so that you may correct them.

*“He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities.”*

**Correction:** Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means “God” in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

*“At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it’s important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. “*

**Correction:** Islam is a pure montheistic religion. The message



of Islam is that "There is no God, but God." How is it not? Please elaborate.

*"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power."*

Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

*"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshipping him."*

Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

*"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so."*

Why is that?

*"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin."*

What kinds? For example?

*"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means 'exertion' or 'struggle' in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of*

*Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or 'holy war.' The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"*

**You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, & to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.**

**There are MANY other mistakes that you have written about Islam. Not to mention that it sounds very bigoted. Please fix your mistakes. Thanks!**

Thanks for your letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. However, I'm afraid that you may have misunderstood certain aspects of Rick's article. Please allow me to try to briefly clarify.

*"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities."*

*Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.*

1. Any good history of the Arab peoples that documents the religious climate immediately preceding the time of Muhammad will confirm that there was indeed a pantheon of deities. Muhammad instituted monotheism in place of a prior Arabic polytheism.

*"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. "*

*Correction: Islam is a pure monotheistic religion. The message of Islam is that "There is no God, but God." How is it not? Please elaborate.*

2. Mr. Rood uses the term "monolithic" – not "monotheistic." I believe that you simply misread him at this point. Islam is certainly monotheistic. He documents what he means by it not being monolithic in his article. [Note: Dictionary.com provides this meaning for *monolithic*: "characterized by massiveness, total uniformity, rigidity, invulnerability, etc."]

*"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power."*

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3. Your third point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, many Muslims hold to what some scholars call "folk Islam." This sort of Islam, often influenced by [animism](#), does often regard these names as having magical power. Similar aberrant beliefs can be found in Judaism, Christianity, and most other world religions. And sometimes Sufi mysticism can tend in this direction as well.

*"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him."*

*Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims*

*appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.*

4. Again, your point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, as I mentioned above, some Muslims would come awfully close to worshipping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshipping the virgin Mary. I'm not saying this is what orthodox Islam teaches, it's simply what sometimes happens in practice.

*"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so."*

*Why is that?*

5. Do you not believe that all things are dictated by the sovereign will of Allah? Does anything happen that is not willed by God? If you reject this doctrine, I think you would be taking a minority view within Islam.

*"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin."*

*What kinds? For example?*

6. Casting stones at a stone pillar representing Satan. This was done by Arab pagans prior to the time of Muhammad.

*"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means 'exertion' or 'struggle' in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or 'holy war.' The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"*

*You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle,"*

*but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, & to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.*

7. As for Jihad, it has historically been understood by most Muslims (and still is today) as Holy War. It can be interpreted, as you say, to mean striving in the cause of Allah to live a pure and righteous life. But many passages in the Quran resist this interpretation (e.g. Suras 4:74-75; 9:5, 14, 29; 47:4; 61:4; etc.).

*The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Altamira Press, rev. ed. 2001) documents many of these points.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“What’s the Difference Between a Prophet and a Clairvoyant?”**

How can I show my friend biblically that clairvoyance, tarot cards, and such are wrong? She seems to think that there is no difference in a prophet and clairvoyant (psychic reading), seeing as they both can predict the future. Can you help me explain the differences?

You might try to get your friend to understand the importance

of making distinctions between prophecy and clairvoyance by pointing out the difference between poisonous mushrooms and safe mushrooms: they can both be eaten, but one kind will kill you! Those who claim to be clairvoyant are either fraudulent, making things up as they read the body-language responses of their customers, or they are being fed information from demons. [For an example of a fraudulent psychic, see our answer to email "[What About Crossing Over's John Edward?](#)"] And Jesus told us that demons lie ("[W]hen he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44).

The biblical standard of a prophet of God is 100% accuracy. This is because the information about future events is coming from God Himself, and He is powerful enough to overcome the limitation of speaking through a fallen, fallible human being. That is a long way from the fuzzy "information" from self-proclaimed psychics and clairvoyants! If anyone is receiving their "power" or information from anyone except God, which would be demonstrated by 100% accuracy in their predictions (and, I would suggest, the mark of Christlikeness in their character and life), it is coming from the dark side—the Evil One. There is no such thing as morally neutral supernatural information or power.

It is a dangerous thing to play around with the occult, as many can testify that this is how they opened the doors to demon oppression in their lives.

We have several articles you may find helpful in showing your friend God's warnings to stay away from the occult:

["What's a Biblical Description of Witchcraft?"](#)

[The World of the Occult](#)

[The Occult Connection](#)

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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See Also:

- [“Is Clairvoyance Wrong?”](#)

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## “You Should Come to Hinduism”

I read your article by Rick Rood about [Hinduism](#). I think the author is lacking in the study of Hinduism. Christianity as I see is very monotonous in the sense that it has only the bible, a single book and the priest would go over and over all his life career as a priest. Whereas Hinduism is like a universe, one would not be able to complete studying the Vedas or puranas in his life time. The Dharma Sastra is very unique and reading that alone would make you understand what is Hindu religion. It does not discriminate any other faith whereas Christianity and Islam does. Hinduism is not a pagan religion as claimed by Christianity and Islam. Hinduism gives you the freedom to start from nursery and once you have reached the upper level you do not need any form of idol. That makes the religion unique from others. The author says “Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose.” What made him think so? In fact, Hinduism has a better understanding and knowledge of the purpose than Christianity or Islam.

An important factor almost universally accepted is that faith in a divine power shapes the destiny of mankind. Sanathana Dharma had famous Saints who had expounded their own specific

philosophy. "Just as a man discards worn out clothes and puts on new clothes, the soul discards worn out bodies and wears new ones." (2.22) Hindus believe that the Atman is eternal it transmigrates from one living thing to another according to its karmic action.

Hinduism speaks of the existence of heavens above and hells below. The former are sun filled, inhabited by gods and innumerable divine souls. The latter are dark worlds (asurya lokas) and populated by all the dark and demonic forces. The individual souls go into these worlds according to their deeds. But they do not stay there permanently till the end of destruction. They go there basically as a consequence of their actions, either to enjoy or to suffer. In either case they learn the lesson and come back to earth to start a new earthly life all over again.

The Hindu concept of reincarnation is alien to western people. It is mostly misunderstood and misinterpreted, partly because of ignorance and partly because of some inherent mental blockage natural to the single minded pursuit of religious faith along rutted paths. It generated a lot of controversy because it directly challenges the western notion of one life, one heaven and the final day of judgment.

Today this fundamental concept of Hinduism is finding many new adherents and believers all over the world. The reasons are many. Firstly, a great mass of evidence is gathering in favour of reincarnation through the personal experiences of many who chanced to remember their past lives and were able to record their experiences in stunning details for the posterity. Secondly, the modern theories of hypnotic regression are gaining acceptance in many parts of the world. There are now many institutions which help interested individuals to remember their past lives as a part of their spiritual awakening. Thirdly, many enlightened psychic masters like Edgar Cayce confirmed beyond doubt that reincarnation is not just a theory or imagination, but a definite reality.



If you look at the personality of an ordinary human being, you will realize that there is a lot in him, that is grosser and denser which cannot be purified and transformed in the shorter time of one life span. What is a hundred years or less than a hundred of life on a scale of millions of years of continuous evolution of life on earth? Does not it sound illogical to say that we would remain static from the evolutionary point of view, while change is the nature of life and every thing else all around us is changing and evolving constantly?

It is very obvious that God did not create the worlds and the beings in His likeness, but in exact opposite to it. If He would have created everything in His true likeness then there would have been no differentiation and no possibility of any movement. Creation would have remained static, without an aim and purpose, offering no scope for movement and change.

It is true that God is hidden in every aspect of His creation. But that which is visible and sensible is not His true self. It is His negative and false self, which tries to compete with Him and fight for its own individuality, and finally, having lost the battle, would move towards Him in total obedience.

Thus the whole drama of creation seems to start with the creation of His individual selves that hide themselves in His negative selves so that a movement away from Him and then again back to Him can be initiated and sustained. The Hindu scriptures describe this process variously with such expressions as: "the true self hides behind the false self, God enters into Prakriti, self becomes enveloped with ignorance." There is more that one can explain but I am afraid there would be no space left to write so I would end here saying it is the open mindedness of the Hindus that the Christians and Muslims took advantage in India that these two religions are surviving there and Cliff Roberston had the chink to say Hindus are living in darkness. There can be 1000 of him trying to convert Hindus into Christianity but millions would be converting to Hinduism in the west. People are beginning to

realize the importance of yoga and the believe in incarnation and Atman in the west so soon I am afraid the churches would see empty congregation and priest and pastors would have to retire. It is not my wish but it is the Karma of the Christians who had dreamt of converting all the Hindus in this world. Come be true to yourself and discover what Hinduism has for all.

Thanks for your kind letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. As you are already well aware, both Hinduism and Christianity are vast, intellectually fascinating, and ancient faiths. But insofar as they have very different views on the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of the cosmos, what happens to a person after death, etc., it is clear that they cannot both be right (although they could both be wrong).

Such complex issues cannot be settled quickly over e-mail. We at Probe are quite convinced that Christianity is true. Our entire website, with over 1,500 written resources, is devoted to explaining why we think this. But we respect your right to disagree.

The Bible is a book of history and there is a huge wealth of evidence from archaeology and extra-biblical historical sources to commend it to us as such. What's more, it claims to be a revelation from the one true God, who created all things. This claim is either true or false. While I believe that there are good reasons for embracing the claim as true, I cannot prove this with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, we must do our best to examine the various claims of the different religions, compare these claims with all the evidence we can find, and attempt to decide which (if any) are actually true.

But here's my point. Suppose that Hinduism is true. What follows from that for me as a Christian? If the material world is ultimately maya, and its reason for being is simply lila, and if all is one, and Atman is Brahman, then (sooner or later) I will realize this and get off the wheel of rebirth.

It may take many lifetimes, but I will eventually realize that all is one, that I am Brahman. Nothing (of eternal consequence) follows from my temporary ignorance.

But now suppose Christianity is true. What follows for those who do not come to Jesus alone for salvation from the holy wrath of God against our sin? Eternal punishment away from the presence of God, the only true and ultimate Source of all that is true, beautiful and good. In light of all the evidence that Christianity is really true (here I must simply refer you to our website), and since we must make some sort of choice regarding these issues, and since absolute certainty may not ultimately be possible, it seems to me that the safest bet is on the God of the Bible. Of course, in the long run, we must each be willing to take personal responsibility for the choice that we make – and be willing to accept the consequences that follow from it.

Wishing you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Could God Have Ordained the Holocaust?”**

I have read an article titled “God, Evil and the Holocaust,” and I have also read an article called “Did God Ordain the Holocaust?” at <http://deoxy.org/godholoc.htm>. Both talk about the Holocaust, but in different terms.

From what I have read on articles on evil and suffering, it really seems to me that there are two views or ways of looking

at evil and suffering. 1) Those who think of suffering or evil as part of the Fall and a way Christians are tested in their faith in God. 2) God intended evil for good (punishment or a necessity) or He is not powerful to intervene or "Why can't he intervene if He loves us so much when the suffering or evil in the world today is too unbearable?"

Honestly, I really trust and agree with the article on the Probe website. I have always and still believe in a God who is loving and merciful and just. Yet, the article in the other website which I have pasted (the link above) does provoke me to think differently about the Holocaust. Is the author of that article's reasoning flawed? Is he correct in saying that God ordained the Holocaust? He does form a good argument out of the bible.

Thanks for your letter. You ask an interesting and important question. The question not only touches on the problem of evil, but also on the nature of Divine sovereignty and human freedom. Concerning the latter issue, please see my previous response to the question, ["Does Calvinism Make People into Choiceless Puppets?"](#) I think this response will be helpful in rounding out the discussion.

For more on the problem of evil, please see Rick Rood's article [The Problem of Evil](#) and my brief e-mail response at ["Is God the Creator of Evil?"](#). Finally, please visit bible.org for a large array of articles and e-mail responses dealing with the problems of suffering and persecution at [www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic\\_id=77](http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=77).

Now for my own brief response. First, I'm personally hesitant to say that we should apply (without any qualification) the OT references cited in the article you mentioned to the suffering of Jewish people in the Holocaust. God did say these things, of course. And He did bring such suffering on His people in the Assyrian invasion of Israel (722 B.C.) and the Babylonian invasion of Judah (605-586 B.C), as well as at other times.

However, in my opinion, God is no longer relating to the world on the basis of the Old Covenant and Mosaic Law. Rather, a New Covenant is now in effect (see Hebrews 8, etc.).

Second, the author of the article you cite seems to deny any human responsibility in the Holocaust. But the Bible clearly affirms a measure of human freedom and moral responsibility (see my e-mail response mentioned earlier). Of course, the Bible is also very clear about God's sovereignty. Ephesians 1:11 describes God as "Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will." A good example of God's sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility can be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus (see Acts 4:27-28).

I think we're forced to conclude that God did at least permit the Holocaust. And some Christian theologians would indeed say that He ordained it (in the same sense in which He has ordained whatever comes to pass). How one understands the details of this is rather controversial among evangelicals and I'll leave you to think through this on your own. Everything which happens in history, some argue, is simply the outworking in time of God's eternal decree. Nevertheless, the Bible also seems to affirm that man has some genuine freedom and is therefore morally responsible for what he does. Thus, the Nazis acted freely in the Holocaust and are morally responsible before God for their sins.

Much more could be written on this subject. For more information, please visit the links above. Also Rick Rood, at the end of his article, lists the following resources for further study:

#### Resources for Further Study:

- Blocker, Henri. *Evil and the Cross*. Tr. by David G. Preston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Briggs, Lauren. *What You Can Say...When You Don't Know What to Say: Reaching Out to Those Who Hurt*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House

Publishers, 1985.

- Carson, D.A. *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.
- Craig, William Lane. *No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990.
- Dobson, James. *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.
- Dunn, Ronald. *When Heaven is Silent: Live by Faith, Not by Sight*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994.
- Feinberg, John S. *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Deserted by God?* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Geisler, Norman L. *The Roots of Evil*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986.
- Lockyer, Herbert. *Dark Threads the Weaver Needs*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1979.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Suffering & God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
- Plantinga, Alvin C. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.

Hope this helps.

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