

“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

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.

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

“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 (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 montheistic 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."

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.

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 worshiping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshiping 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?"](#)

"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 Robertson had the cheek 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 belief in incarnation and Atman in the west so soon I am afraid the churches would see empty congregation and priests 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.

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.

Michael Gleghorn

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“My Besetting Sin Makes Me Doubt My Salvation”

I am almost 70 years old and undoubtedly nearing “the end of the road.” I came to faith in Jesus Christ over thirty years ago but have consistently been plagued by a “betting sin” that I seem not to be able to have consiseant victory over. I fall, confess, repent, and have “victory” for awhile, and then fall again. This continual struggle has led me to sometimes doubt my salvation, and I am troubled that perhaps the Lord has grown weary of my shallow commitment and has given up on me. What can I do?? I have recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer and I am in terror of dying and finding myself in hell. Please help!

I am so glad you wrote! You are not alone. I think this secret fear plagues millions of Christ-followers. And I also think that the core of this fear is not knowing how huge is His love for us, and His deep understanding of our broken humanity (Ps. 103:14—“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”).

Our flesh, the part of us that operates independently from God and in our own strength, is hopelessly corrupted and unredeemable. But even though we can operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, in dependence on Christ, the same way that we can fly in an airplane that is dependent on the laws of aerodynamics to get and stay off the ground, eventually we return to our default position of fleshliness.

God knows this, and He understands it! And He loves us anyway. Consider the strong encouragement from Romans 8. The chapter opens with the astonishing statement that is a sure shame-killer: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." NO condemnation! The Lord has not "grown weary of your shallow commitment," brother. He understands your weakness and looks forward to the time when you are no longer fettered by the flesh that pulls you down like spiritual gravity.

But then consider the end of the chapter:

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The Lord Jesus died for you and, far from condemning you, intercedes for you this very day!

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nothing can separate us from Jesus' love. Nothing has the power to keep Him from loving us, and nothing has the power to keep us from being loved!

36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE

SLAUGHTERED.” 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

God has pronounced you a conquerer through Christ, and is working to transform you into who He says you are. Even on the days when it doesn't much feel like it. He is still at work!

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Including our sin. Including our brokenness. Including our weak humanity.

And including besetting sins, which He allows us to struggle with so that we will turn to Him in dependence and trust. Recently I was blessed to attend a banquet for a ministry that helps people deal with unwanted same-sex attraction. The star of the evening was Jesus, who showed up in testimony after testimony of changed lives. Every person who spoke, uncoached except by the Holy Spirit, said in one way or another that they are now at the point where they can see that their struggle is a blessing because it forces them to depend on Christ with a desperation they never would have known otherwise. And that dependence on Christ has taken them to a place of intimacy with the Living Lord they didn't know was possible.

God is honored in our struggles, even when we slip and fall but continue to repent and get up again. It's all about teaching us to enter more deeply into relationship with Him, a relationship of love and friendship and affection and appreciation. I hope I have begun to reframe your struggle in a way that enables you to go to Him for help rather than

hiding from the only One who has the power to help you stand against your flesh.

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue Bohlin

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“Did Christianity Come From the Pagan Story of Nimrod and Ishtar?”

I am reading a book by Pastor David Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*. In this book he tells of the “true legend” (his words) of Nimrod’s wife, how she was conceived by a sunbeam, whose son was killed and raised up after 40 days, and the celebration of Ishtar. I just read your article “[Did Christianity Borrow From Pagan Religions?](#)” about whether Christianity borrowed from other pagan religions, but this one wasn’t there and I wondered if you might know anything about it?

My question is. how did this story get around when Christ was not born yet? I have had someone actually tell me that Christianity copied this story. While I don’t believe it for a minute, I do want to have a defense for it and to file it away in the proper perspective.

[Editor’s Note: It is unclear whether or not the above account of Dr. Jeremiah’s work is indeed accurate. Following is simply a response to the greater issue with guidelines for discernment in such matters.] I have not actually heard of

this story before, so I cannot really comment on the details. There are, however, some general principles to bear in mind when evaluating such claims.

First, we need to establish that this really was a story that was told in the ancient world. For that we need to know what the original source of the story was. Was this story recorded on ancient clay tablets or written on the walls of a temple, etc.? If so, where are these tablets housed today? Where is this temple?

If the story is recorded by an ancient historian, then which historian is it? Where can we find this work for ourselves? When did the historian write his account? Where did he get his information from, etc? Does the historian claim the account actually occurred, or does he refer to it as a myth? And so on, and so forth.

Once one begins to ask such questions, one sometimes finds that the story hasn't been related correctly, or that it dates to after the time of Jesus and early Christianity, or that the details of the story are very different from what Christians claim about the life of Christ, etc.

All of this is important. If we cannot find any ancient record of the story, then maybe the story really isn't ancient after all. Maybe somebody invented the story more recently. If the story is ancient, but dates to after the time of Christ, then it's quite possible that the story actually copied early Christian beliefs—and not vice versa. Copying can work both ways, after all. Maybe this story copied from the early Christians.

Finally, if there is an ancient record of the story, and if it is prior to the time of Christ, then we have to ask whether early Christians actually borrowed the story. And this is often extremely unlikely. In the first place, the details of the stories are often so different that it would be absurd to

say that one borrowed from another. Second, it's highly unlikely that the early Christians (who were, after all, predominantly monotheistic Jews) would borrow religious concepts from pagan myths. Jews typically regarded such myths as perverse, morally repugnant, and idolatrous. It's very difficult to believe that they would borrow from such myths to describe the life of Christ.

So let's take the story related in Jeremiah's book. Was Jesus conceived by a sunbeam? Was He raised after 40 days? The answer to both questions is "No." Also, how was Nimrod's son supposedly killed? My guess is that it wasn't by crucifixion, a practice developed much later by the Romans. These are some of the questions we would want to ask to determine if it is reasonable to believe that Christianity borrowed ideas from a pagan religion. And you can see the point. Even if this story circulated before the time of Christ, it's a very different story than the Christians were telling about Jesus, making borrowing at least highly suspect.

In addition, we have plenty of good historical evidence for the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Not only do we have all of the New Testament documents (e.g. different Gospels, letters, etc.), we also have ancient evidence for Jesus from non-Christian sources. See [my article](#) by that title. But what good historical evidence do we really have for Nimrod's son? I'm guessing we don't have much of anything, quite honestly. This makes the events of Jesus' life much different from those of Nimrod's alleged son. In the one case, we have good historical evidence for Jesus, but we do not have equally good historical evidence for Nimrod's son.

These are just some of the issues that one must carefully investigate and consider before the charge of Christians borrowing from pagan religions can be seriously sustained. And once one begins to carefully investigate these matters, the charge of borrowing becomes less and less plausible. I honestly don't think we have anything to fear or worry about

in these charges.

I hope this information is helpful. Shalom in our true Lord Jesus Christ!

Michael Gleghorn

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“Why Did the Jews Not Say God’s Name Aloud When He Never Said Not To?”

Today I read an article on your website where a question was asked, [“If Jehovah Isn’t the Real Name of God, What Is?”](#) Jimmy Williams explained that even prior to Christ, it was Jewish tradition to substitute Adonai for the Tetragrammaton due to their ancient practice of not uttering the sacred name of God. However, this tradition was man’s tradition, the Jews’ tradition. Am I correct in saying that it was not God’s tradition? Did God ever command man not to vocalize his name? If He didn’t want us to call on him by his name, why did He even mention His name to Moses? Why did he tell Moses what to say when inquired of who sent him if He didn’t want people to know His name and use it? The Bible reveals to us that the Pharisees were corrupt even before Christ, so why do we carry on their tradition if we are followers of Christ? If He gave us His name in the ancient texts, what right does man have in taking it away?

You ask a very good question! On the one hand, you are quite correct in noting that God never explicitly commanded man not

to vocalize His name. This was, as you observe, part of Jewish tradition—and not the commandment of God.

So why did this tradition arise? Largely because of one of God's commandments! In Exodus 20:7 (one of the Ten Commandments) we read the following: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

It was because the Jews were so concerned not to misuse the name of God that this tradition arose. The Jews wanted to be absolutely certain that they did not misuse the name of the Lord and so they read Adonai in place of YHWH. Thus, there was a good motive behind the tradition, even though the practice was never explicitly commanded by God. God's command was not to misuse His name—and clearly one can reverently speak (or pray) the name of the Lord in a way that does not constitute misuse. However, as we readily discern even in our own day, many people are only all too ready to misuse the name of the Lord. And this, I think, is partly why this Jewish tradition arose. It provides a "fence around the Law," which keeps people from violating God's commandment. But constructing the fence itself was never actually commanded by God.

I hope this is helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:

- ["If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?"](#)
 - ["Is It Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?"](#)
 - ["Jehovah Is the Only Name of God!"](#)

“Were Those Who Fell Away Ever Saved or Did They Lose Salvation?”

In referencing II Thess. 2:3, II Timothy 3:1-8 regarding the apostasy of professing church (Body of Christ?) and falling away at the end time by seducing spirits, how does that correlate with Hebrews 6: 4-6? Are these people believers or not? Are they saved and God's elect or not? ...Are they eternally lost because they cannot crucify Christ again and put Him to an open shame? I was taught (once saved, always saved). Please enlighten, as I am puzzled. Thank you for your time and information.

Thanks for your letter. These are complicated questions and good Christian people (including scholars) often disagree about the details. I personally lean toward the view that the true believer is eternally secure in her relationship with Christ. But not all Christians (indeed, not all evangelical Christians) hold this view. Some believe that a genuine Christian can indeed fall away and be lost. Hebrews 6:4-6 is a passage often cited in this regard. But notice that, strictly speaking, this passage does not say that a true believer can lose her salvation. What it says is that if such a person falls away (i.e., commits willful apostasy) it is impossible to renew that person again to repentance. This may mean that the person has sinned so grievously, and their heart has been so hardened in the process, that they simply will not repent. But their failure to repent does not necessarily mean that they are therefore eternally lost. Thus, I personally do not see this passage as decisive in this debate.

Ultimately, one must weigh all of the biblical evidence pertaining to this issue. It is my view that the evidence, considered in its entirety, is more consistent with the eternal security of the believer, than with the notion that one of God's elect might ultimately fall away and be eternally lost. Here, it seems to me, that Romans 8:28-39 and John 6:35-40 are particularly strong promises regarding the security of the believer.

Hope this helps. Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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