

“You Don’t Really Understand Buddhism”

I read your article on [Buddhism](#). Interesting.

I am always glad to see one of a specific faith take the time to look into the historical and mythical backgrounds of another faith. It is heartening that men and women of learning still lend their efforts to religion.

I have no specific faith, so I am not “countering” your arguments. However, you say that Buddhism and Christianity “...are so different, they cannot both be right at the same time, nor can the two be blended together. “

Truly? Or can they not be tied together on dogma? Dogma, the rules of law which “make” a religion what it is, that is, what is distinct and different from another, are often the chains which bind its followers to religious stagnation.

I have studied many religious faiths. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, and a smattering of Judaism. Dogmas differ, the underlying quest for peace and self-knowledge are not.

You say, “When witnessing to a Buddhist, ask him this: ‘Do you have tangible proof of what occurs after death?’”

I will ask you a question, as in a way I am witnessing you: “If Buddha and Jesus had met, would they not have been the best and longest of friends?”

Religion has become another camp within which we hide. Go make a Buddhist friend. You might be greatly surprised what you will find there. Someone who looks much like you.

Thank you for your reply. I enjoy interacting with those who are honestly seeking to discover spiritual truths for their

lives.

Allow me to address some of your challenges. You stated, "Go make a Buddhist friend. You might greatly be surprised what you will find there. Someone who looks much like you." The Lotus Sutra states, "Whatever words are uttered should be chosen with care. The words we speak should always be words of sympathy and wisdom." The Bible states in the book of Proverbs, "The one who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame." Let us therefore not have many words of false presumptions pass between us. I come from an island that is 80% Buddhist. My entire family clan has held to Buddhist teachings for hundreds of years. My parents and cousins remain in the Buddhist faith. I grew up under the teachings of the Buddhist temples near my house. I have been a member of the Young Buddhist Association. Therefore, I have many Buddhist friends including my own family members. I realize they look a lot like me, thank you very much. I am not driven to argue with them, only to share with them the greatest truth given by God to mankind.

I am not sure what Buddhist tradition you are familiar with. You are correct that Christianity and Buddhism differ on dogma. What exactly you mean and how you are using the term dogma I am not sure. If you look at the two theologies, they both cannot be right at the same time since they are contradictory on the very basics. Most schools of Theravada Buddhism teach there is no God. Christianity is based totally on a relationship with God. According to Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, two opposites cannot be true in a relationship with one another at the same time. You cannot have a God and not have a God and say both are true. That is absurd. So the theologies go much farther than terms and definitions. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are hundreds of Buddha incarnations. The ultimate reality is impersonal, non-feeling, and non-being. In Christianity, the ultimate is a personal being. Once again applying Aristotle's law of non-

contradiction, the two in a relationship cannot be true at the same time.

Yes, both religions claim peace as a product. However, even in this they are very different. In Buddhism peace is the ultimate goal. It comes as the result of eliminating all desires. In Christianity, peace is one of the fruits but not the ultimate goal. The Christian's goal is a relationship with the God of the universe who loves and cares for his creation and He has reached out to us to make this possible. The Buddhist quest for peace is self-focused. One attains peace through meditation, good works, and pure knowledge. In Buddhism we are driven to discipline ourselves to think correctly, behave correctly, etc... with the ultimate goal to rid ourselves of all desires. Although Buddhism teaches to not harm others and do good, salvation is found by the individual as he focuses on himself and one's attaining enlightenment and elimination of all desire. In Christianity, one focuses on Jesus Christ, being filled and empowered by His Spirit. Yes, we do work of self discipline, and becoming a godly person, but it comes as a result of a personal relationship with God and a desire to honor God. Christianity never seeks to eliminate all desire, the ultimate goal in Buddhism; Christianity seeks to build within each believer, pure desires that honor God. So even in our understanding of peace we differ in the definition and the quest for peace in significant ways.

Thank you for your response. I look forward to hearing from you.

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See Also Probe Answers Our E-mail:

- [I Would Become A Christian Except that It's Based on Lies and Deception](#)
- [I Want to Know More About Buddhism, but Your Christianity is Garbage](#)

A Short Look at Six World Religions – Understand the Beliefs of Non-Christians

An overview of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses from a conservative Christian perspective.

Islam

There are three monotheistic religions in the world, religions that teach that there is only one God: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The term "Islam" means "submission" to the will of God, and the person who submits is called a "Muslim."

The founder of Islam is Muhammad, who was born in 570 A.D. At age 40 he claimed to begin receiving revelations from a spirit being he believed was the angel Gabriel. These later were recorded and became the Qur'an, Islam's holy book.

There are Six Articles of Faith that all Muslims hold to. The first is that "there is no God but Allah." The second Article of Faith is belief in a hierarchy of angels, of which the archangel Gabriel is the highest. Each Muslim is assigned two angels, one to record his good deeds and the other to record the bad deeds. At the bottom of the angelic hierarchy are the jinn, from which we get the word "genie." They are a Muslim version of demons.

The third Article of Faith is belief in 104 holy books, with the Koran as the final revelation. The fourth is belief in the prophets. According to the Qur'an, God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message that there is only one God. 124,000 prophets have been sent, most of them unknown but some of them biblical characters, including Jesus. Muhammed, though, is the prophet for all times, the "Seal of the Prophets."

The fifth Article of Faith is belief in predestination. All things, both good and evil, are the direct result of the will of Allah. Islam is a very fatalistic religion.

The sixth Article of Faith is the day of judgment. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad will be rewarded with Paradise; those whose bad deeds outweigh their good will be judged to hell. Islam is a religion of human works. The Bible tells us, though, that we can never earn God's acceptance on the basis of our deeds.

There are Five Pillars of Islam, obligations every Muslim must keep. The first is reciting the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger." The second is prayer: 17 cycles of prayer, spread out over five times of prayer each day. They must wash in a prescribed manner before they kneel down and face toward Mecca.

The third pillar is almsgiving, 2.5% of one's income for the poor. The fourth pillar is fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan. Muslims must forego food, water and sex during daylight hours. The fifth pillar is making the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.

Sometimes you will hear people say that Allah is another name for the God of the Bible. Is it the same? "Allah" is the Arabic name for God, and Arab Christians use the name Allah to describe the God of the Bible. Mohammed taught that there is one true God who is the same God that Jews and Christians

("the People of the Book") worship. He began Islam on the foundation of the God of the Bible. We can say that in principle, we worship the same God. Islam began on the foundation of belief in the one true God to combat the pagan polytheism of the area. However, Mohammed departed from this foundation, and we differ in our understanding of how God has fully revealed Himself. In the Qur'an, Allah is a distant spiritual being, but Yahweh is a Father to His children. Allah does not love wrongdoers, but God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Allah has predetermined everything about life; the God of the Bible invites us to share our hearts with Him.

Hinduism

Hinduism may seem like an alien religion of people on the other side of the world, but it has infiltrated our culture in all sorts of ways. You're probably familiar with most of the basic Hindu concepts without even realizing it. Have you seen the *Star Wars* movies? They are filled with Hindu ideas. Ever watch *Dharma and Greg* on TV? "Dharma" is an important Hindu term for moral duty. 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation, which is a Hindu concept. Transcendental Meditation is thinly disguised Hinduism. George Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" invokes a Hindu chant. New Age philosophy is Hinduism wrapped in Western garb.

Hinduism is tremendously diverse. It encompasses those who believe in one reality, Brahman, as well as those who believe in many gods—as many as 330 million! Some Hindus believe the universe is real; most believe it is illusion, or *maya*. (This world view isn't consistent with reality. You won't find Hindus meditating on railroad tracks, for instance.) Some believe Brahman and the universe are one; others see them as two distinct realities.

Despite the diversity within Hinduism, there are five major beliefs of this religion. The first is that ultimate reality,

called Brahman, is an impersonal oneness. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Yoda tells Luke that everything—the tree, the rock, etc.—is all part of “The Force.” This is monism: the belief that all is one. Nothing is distinct and separate from anything else.

Another Hindu belief is that just as the air in an open jar is identical to the air around the jar, we extend from and are one with Brahman. All is one, all is god—and that means that we are god. In her book and movie “Out on a Limb,” Shirley MacLaine relates a time when she stood on a beach, embracing this concept and declaring, “I am god! I am god!” It’s a very Hindu concept.

Humanity’s primary problem, according to Hinduism, is that we have forgotten we are divine. The consequence is that we are subject to the Law of Karma, another important Hindu belief. This is the moral equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect. You always reap what you sow. There is no grace, there is no forgiveness, there is never any escape from consequences. It’s a very heavy burden to carry. Not only that, but Hinduism says that the consequences of our choices, both bad karma and good karma, follow us from lifetime to lifetime. This is another Hindu concept: samsara, the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth, also known as reincarnation. A person’s karma determines the kind of body—whether human, animal, or insect—into which he or she is incarnated in the next lifetime.

The final major Hindu concept is liberation from the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. One can only get off the reincarnation merry-go-round by realizing that the idea of the individual self is an illusion, and only the oneness of Brahman is real. There is no heaven, though—only losing one’s identity in the universal oneness.

Praise God that through the Lord Jesus, Christianity offers hope, forgiveness, grace, and a personal relationship with a

personal God in heaven. Jesus means there's a point to life.

Buddhism

Buddhism does not believe in a personal God. It does not have worship, prayer, or praise of a divine being. It offers no redemption, no forgiveness, no hope of heaven, and no final judgment. Buddhism is more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

In his essay "De Futilitate," C.S. Lewis called Buddhism "a heresy of Hinduism." Buddhism was founded by a Hindu, Siddhartha Gautama, during the sixth century B.C. After being profoundly impacted by seeing four kinds of suffering in one day, Siddhartha committed himself to finding the source of suffering and how to eliminate it. One day he sat down under a fig tree and vowed not to rise again until he had attained enlightenment. After some time, he did so and became the Buddha, which means "enlightened one." He started teaching the "The Four Noble Truths," the most basic of Buddhist teachings.

The First Noble Truth is that life consists of suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that we suffer because we desire those things that are impermanent. This is absolutely central to Buddhism: the belief that desire is the cause of all suffering.

The Third Noble Truth is that the way to liberate oneself from suffering is by eliminating all desire. (Unfortunately, it's a self-defeating premise: if you set a goal to eliminate desire, then you desire to eliminate desire.) The Fourth Noble Truth is that desire can be eliminated by following the Eight-Fold path.

In the Eight-Fold Path, the first two steps are foundational to all the others. Step one is Right Understanding, where one sees the universe as impermanent and illusory and believes that the individual does not actually exist. If you ever hear

someone say, "The world is an illusion, and so am I. I don't really exist," they're probably exploring Buddhism. (You might want to pinch them and see what they do.) Right Thought means renouncing all attachment to the desires and thoughts of oneself, even as he recognizes that the self doesn't exist.

Other parts of the Eight-Fold path are Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Meditation. Ethical conduct is very important in Buddhism. There are commands to refrain from the taking of any life (that includes ants and roaches in your house), stealing, immorality, lying, and drinking.

The Eight-Fold Path is a set of steps that describe not only a good life but one which will move the follower toward Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism. Nirvana is not heaven; it is a state of extinction, where one's essence—which does not actually exist in the first place—is extinguished like a candle flame, marking the end of desire and thus the end of suffering.

One of the important concepts in Buddhism is samsara, a cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It differs from the Hindu concept of reincarnation in that Buddhism teaches there is no self to continue from one life to the next. Another important concept is karma, the belief that you reap what you sow, and your karma follows you through the cycles of samsara. Note the inherent inconsistency here: there is no self to continue from one life to the next, but one's karma does?!

Buddhism says there are many paths to the top of the mountain, so there are many ways to God. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."

Judaism

Both Christianity and Judaism have their roots in Old Testament faith. But Christianity is really a sister, rather

than a daughter, to Judaism, which is the religion developed by rabbis from 200 B.C. on.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., that spelled the end of sacrifices and the priesthood. Instead of being guided by prophets, priests and kings, the Jewish people turned to rabbis as their authorities on matters of laws and practice.

There was basically one kind of Judaism until the eighteenth century when the Age of Enlightenment swept through Europe. That's when the three major branches of Judaism arose.

That one basic kind of Judaism is what is now called "Orthodox Judaism." It has a strong emphasis on tradition and strict observance of the Law of Moses.

Reform Judaism began in Germany at the time of the Enlightenment. Reform Judaism is the humanistic branch. In fact, there are many Reform Jews who don't believe in God at all. For them, Judaism is a way of life and culture with a connection to one's ancestors that is about legacy, not faith.

The middle-ground branch, seeking to find moderate ground between the two extremes of the Orthodox and Reform branches, is Conservative Judaism.

If there is any religious principle that Judaism explicitly affirms and teaches, it is the unity of God. You may have heard of the *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6:4^{3/4} "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This one all-important principle is the reason so many Jewish people have a hard time understanding Christianity, which they see as a religion of three gods, not one God in three Persons.

The Old Testament is the Scripture of Judaism. Many Jews, though, do not consider the Old Testament to be the Word of God or inspired, although they do give it respect as a part of Jewish tradition and history.

There are some lifestyle practices that set people apart as distinctively Jewish. Traditional Jews, usually Orthodox but including some from other branches, observe the Sabbath. This means abstaining from work, driving, and lighting a fire from Friday night to Saturday night. Orthodox Jews also keep kosher, which means keeping the Old Testament dietary laws. The most well known is the prohibition against mixing meat and milk at the same meal, although many people are also aware that most Jewish people do not eat pork or shellfish.

It is difficult for Jewish people to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah because it is not considered a Jewish thing to do. In fact, they see "Jewish Christian" as an oxymoron. For many, being Jewish equals "Not Christian." But there's another big reason it is so hard for Jewish people to come to faith in Christ. They don't see a need for "salvation," because there is nothing to be saved from. If there is a God, then Jewish people already have a special relationship with Him as His chosen people. Jesus is superfluous for Jews.

If you know someone who is Jewish, pray that God will cause the scales to fall from the eyes of their heart and they will see the truth: that there's nothing more Jewish or more godly than submitting in faith to one who was, and is, the very Son of God, and who proved His love for them by dying in their place on the cross.

Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses

Have you ever answered your door to find a couple of nicely-dressed people asking to talk to you about spiritual things? Chances are they were either Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. Since both groups send many missionaries not only into American homes but to foreign countries, it makes sense to cover them in a discussion of world religions.

Many people think of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses as Christians in slightly different denominations, but this is

not the case. To put it bluntly, both religions teach another gospel and another Jesus. They are cults, not Christian denominations.

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith, a teenage boy in New York. He claimed that he was visited by first God the Father and the Son, and then by the angel Moroni, who gave him golden plates, which he translated into the Book of Mormon. He said that Christianity had been corrupted since the death of the last apostle, and God appointed him to restore the truth. But Joseph Smith provided nine different versions of these events, which set the tone for the rest of his teachings.

Deuteronomy 18:22 gives God's standards for His prophets: 100% accuracy. Joseph Smith wrote a lot of prophecies, many of which never came true. He was a false prophet, and the religion he founded is not from God.

Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ and salvation by grace. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses was founded by Charles Taze Russell, another false prophet. His Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has produced a prodigious amount of literature. It has prophesied the return of Christ in 1914, 1925, and 1975. Again, by God's standards, the representatives of the Watchtower Society are false prophets.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the basics of the Christian faith. They deny the Trinity. They believe there is one singular God, Jehovah. Jesus is actually the created being Michael the Archangel, and who became flesh at the incarnation. The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. Like Mormons, they deny the existence of hell and eternal

punishment.

Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace. And they teach that salvation is only found in their organizations.

What do you do if they come to your door? First, don't do anything without sending up a prayer of dependence on God. If you are not well-grounded in your own beliefs, unless you know not only what you believe but why it's true, then you should probably politely refuse to talk to them, and work on your own understanding of your faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are very successful at drawing in church-goers who can't recognize false teaching because they don't know what's true.

If you do know the Bible and what you believe, then prayerfully and humbly answer their questions and comments by showing them what the Bible says. And pray that God's Spirit will show them the truth. He is grieved that people for whom Jesus died are so deceived.

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The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective

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



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

Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

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

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

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

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

imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through discipline and good works.

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

Evidences for Reincarnation

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

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

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied

under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

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

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

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one's subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, “Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they

talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived.”[\[5\]](#) Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

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

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

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

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

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we

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

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

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

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

Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation

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

sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

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

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

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

Another passage is Matthew 11 where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in 2 Kings 2, Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in Matthew 17 Elijah appears with Moses on the

Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

Reincarnation and Resurrection

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

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

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

First, Christ's resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was

able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

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

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

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

Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today*,

February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.

4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.

5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.

6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*, (New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.

7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.

8. Thomas Sugue, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.