

Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit

written by Sue Bohlin

24% of American Christians believe in reincarnation, the idea from Eastern religions that there is a merry-go-round of birth/life/death/rebirth, over and over again. This has spawned a fad of “past



lives regression,” discovering aspects of previous incarnations. Wiki-how even offers instructions on “[How to Remember Your Past Lives](#).” There’s a book called *Past Lives of the Rich and Famous*. Supposedly, Whitney Houston’s strong attachment to the gospel came from a moment in a previous life where she saw Jesus hanging on the cross. Liz Taylor used to be a Benedictine abbess in medieval Switzerland. Michael Jackson was the son of a royal courtesan in 100 B.C. Burma. And Marilyn Monroe was captured by a band of gypsies in the 1600s.

Not so fast. The Bible swats down the possibility of reincarnation: “It is appointed for man to die once, and then comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). That means that there are no past lives (but lots of opportunity for self- or demonic deception).

With one notable exception.

Jesus truly did have a past life, a life with no beginning, before He was born as a human being.

Philippians 2 tells us that “He emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” I cannot begin to imagine what it was like to

leave behind aspects of being God when He became one of us. Instead of enjoying omniscience (all-knowing), He limited Himself to only what He would learn experientially and by listening to the Holy Spirit. Instead of enjoying omnipresence (being all places at once), He limited Himself to one place at one time. Instead of enjoying omnipotence (all-powerful), He limited Himself to expressing the Father's will through dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived out, and showed us, what perfect, sinless Adam was like before the Fall.

Recently I've been meditating on the unthinkable sacrifice of leaving behind omniscience and becoming an embryo in Mary's womb. He experienced life as every other baby ever has, first through the muffled filter of His mother's body. Then the shock of emerging from the warm cozy darkness and drawing His first breath of air. For the first time in eternity, God breathed air! He learned what hunger was, and He learned what it was to be dependent on His mother to be fed.

He experienced life as a baby, learning language. He learned to recognize His mother's voice and His earthly father's voice. That prepared Him to learn to recognize His heavenly Father's voice. He grew into a toddler, and the very God who designed the human body to walk, had to learn how to walk Himself. He grew into a boy, and learned to read. The very God who had splintered the language of man at Babel had to learn Hebrew letters and words so He could read the Scriptures that He Himself had breathed through the minds and pens of men hundreds of years before. He learned spiritual truth with a human mind, reading the scrolls with human eyes. He learned the history of mankind and of His own people through the Scriptures.

He submitted Himself to His earthly parents, who had the unimaginable task of teaching Jesus His true identity: "Child, you are the Son of God, born of a virgin birth. Your heavenly Father is Your actual Father. You are the promised Messiah, the long-awaited Anointed One. You are the Savior of the world."

When He hung out in the temple at age twelve, amazing the teachers by His teachable spirit and the questions He asked, He had clearly owned the truth about His true identity: “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)

By the time He was an adult, He had grown in understanding about His previous life in heaven: “And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed” (John 17:5).

Part of the glory of Christmas is remembering that Jesus truly did have a “past life,” which He left behind for a time because He thought we were worth the sacrifice. And reincarnation—that false teaching of false religion—is the counterfeit to the miracle of Christmas: the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.

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Birthday Gifts FROM Jesus

written by Sue Bohlin

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Christmas 2009 will forever be our most memorable, because of the gifts we have received from God this year.

He once again showed His generous heart through the breathtaking gift of one of our donors (Ray and I raise support for our salaries at Probe Ministries) who wanted to see us in a larger home. He thought that the president of a ministry should be able to have people over without feeling cramped the moment they walk in the door. So, a week ago, we moved into a home two and half times bigger than the one we'd lived in for 25 years, the home in which I always assumed we'd live out our days.

As always, God's timing is exquisitely perfect, and He arranged for us to find this home—two blocks from Probe's new offices in the [Hope Center](#); my husband walked to work this morning!—just ten days after it went on the market. We closed in time to host three Christmas parties in this amazing house that is perfect for entertaining.

We moved in five days before the first party. That sounds absolutely nuts, but the Lord's Christmas gift had a "Part Two." One of the reasons He wants us to live in community is because He knows we need other people to "do life" with. And every day, women came over to help me unpack boxes, organize my kitchen and office, hang pictures, and decorate for Christmas. One day as I gave thanks for the lunch one especially productive and energetic friend and I were about to eat, I believe the Lord whispered to my heart, "Tammy is one of My Christmas gifts to you."

And *that* is what's really nuts. . . the idea that the God of the Universe, whose incarnation we celebrate at the core of all the "Xmas" hoopla, would give *me* a Christmas gift.

But that's what grace looks like. It looks like this amazing, lovely home we don't deserve. It looks like a friend giving up her vacation week to make sure my home was ready to bless others. It looks like women coming over to be my hands and feet when post-polio has diminished my strength and energy reserves.

And it looks like God wrapping Himself in flesh to live among us. Happy Birthday, Lord Jesus!

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Did Christianity Borrow From Pagan Religions? - Early Christianity and Other Religions

written by Dr. Daniel Morais and Dr. Michael Gleghorn

The Da Vinci Code and related contemporary non-fiction books make the claim that Christianity was a hodge podge of beliefs taken from other pagan religious traditions. Dr. Daniel Morais and Dr. Michael Gleghorn take a long hard look at this claim and determine that it has very little basis in fact. They demonstrate that the theory that early Christianity was borrowed from other religions does not stand up to rigorous examination.

The Da Vinci Code Deception

In Dan Brown's bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, Leigh Teabing, the fictional royal historian, makes the following claim: "Nothing in Christianity is original. The pre-Christian god Mithras—called the Son of God and the Light of the World—was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days." [{1}](#) Is there any truth to all this? [{2}](#)

The Da Vinci Code claims that Christianity is not rooted in a unique, historical

Jesus who claimed to be the Son of God, was born of a virgin, died, and was resurrected in three days. Instead, it says that early Christians borrowed these ideas from pagan mystery cults like Mithraism, and attributed these characteristics to the historical Jesus who never really said or did any of these things. Did Christianity borrow its history and theology from Mithraism or any other mystery religion?

From about 1890-1940, critical Bible scholars suggested that early Christianity may have borrowed some of its ideas from pagan mystery religions. However, after a barrage of criticism this theory has been largely abandoned in the field of religious studies. Despite its current lack of acceptance by experts, however, this theory continues to be set forth in popular books like *The Da Vinci Code* and other publications. [{3}](#)

What is Mithraism, and what are the mystery cults? The mystery religions were called such because of their use of secret ceremonies and beliefs that were thought to bring their participants salvation. [{4}](#) Ceremonies were usually held in secluded places, at night, away from the public eye. [{5}](#) Different parts of the Mediterranean spawned their own mystery religions. Greece had the cults of Dionysus and Demeter as well as the Orphic mystery cults. Out of Phrygia in Asia Minor came the Cybele and Attis cults. The cult of Isis and Osiris arose in Egypt. Syria and Palestine had the cult of Adonis, while Mithraism originated in Persia, or modern day Iran. [{6}](#)

Dr. Ronald Nash wrote, "One frequently encounters scholars who first use Christian terminology to describe pagan beliefs and practices and then marvel at the awesome parallels they think they have discovered." [{7}](#) However, the theory that Christianity borrowed its beliefs from paganism has now been discarded in large part because it seems likely that if any borrowing of beliefs occurred it would almost certainly have been the other way around. One could be a participant in the mystery cults of Isis or Mithras without giving up his or her previous beliefs, but not so with Christianity. With its roots in Judaism,

Christianity, even in its earliest form, was an extremely exclusivist religion with deep disregard for all that was pagan. [{8}](#)

The Myth of Mithras

Mithraism was probably the most significant of the mystery religions. Mithras was the twin brother of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. Mithras was born when he emerged from a rock. He battled with the sun and then with the primeval bull. When Mithras slew the bull, this became the first act of creation as it created the ground of life for humanity. Like Zoroastrianism, Mithraism believed that the world was a battleground between good and evil and mankind must pick sides. Mithras was the mediator who would assist humans in their struggles with darkness. If man passed his tests, he would eventually be reunited with the good god, but if he failed he would be thrown into a realm of eternal punishment. The Romans associated good and evil with light and darkness, and because of this fact, Mithras became known as the Sun God—not the Son of God. [{9}](#)

The Mithraic religion was constantly changing and adapting itself to the culture. This being the case, the most likely explanation for the myths about Mithras' miraculous birth and his becoming a "savior god" were in all likelihood borrowed from Christianity. [{10}](#) Though the cult started long before Christianity in Iran, there's no evidence of its presence in the Roman Empire during the first century when the original New Testament documents were being written. So this pagan cult could not have influenced the original New Testament manuscripts. But could later copies of the New Testament have been tainted with Mithraism?

Our oldest intact fragments of the New Testament are virtually identical with the Bible we have today and it seems clear that though we don't possess any of the original writings, what we do have are quite accurate representations of the originals. Sir Frederick Kenyon wrote, "The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in

fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written now has been removed.” [{11}](#)

In conclusion, Mithras was the Sun God, not the Son of God, and given the exclusivist nature of Christianity and the fact that Mithraism and Christianity did not overlap during the first century, any similarities between the two religions were most likely due to a later Christian influence on Mithraism and not the other way around.

The Da Vinci Code Dissected

In the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, the Holy Grail expert, Leigh Teabing, claims that the pre-Christian god Mithras was also called the Son of God and the Light of the World. He then goes on to say that Mithras also died, was buried in a rock tomb, and rose again in three days. Brown also claims a parallel with Krishna mythology, according to which the newborn Krishna was, like Jesus, also given gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. [{12}](#) Is there any truth to these pagan/Christian parallels?

As noted earlier, the Romans came to understand the pagan god Mithras as the Sun God (not the Son of God). [{13}](#) If Mithras was understood to be the Sun God, it wouldn't be a wild idea to call him "The Light of the World." However, that specific title does not appear to have been given him in the ancient Roman world. [{14}](#) Also, experts in the Mithraic religion like Franz Cumont and Richard Gordon both assert that there was no death, burial, or resurrection of Mithras. [{15}](#) Dan Brown's source for this misinformation about Mithras being called the "Light of the World" and the "Son of God," as well as his alleged death and resurrection, has eluded many of his critics. It's not certain where he got this information, though it's possible that his source may have been a discredited nineteenth-century historian who also provided no documentation or support for these claims. [{16}](#)

It seems that Dan Brown may have also used this same historian for his allegation that at Krishna's birth, he was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There is no story in Krishna mythology to support this claim.[{17}](#) The Bhagavad-Gita does not mention Krishna's childhood, and the other sources that do were written hundreds of years after the Christian Bible.

Even if all these Mithras/Christ similarities were true, since these two religions hadn't yet overlapped in Rome during the time when the New Testament was being written, Mithraism couldn't have influenced Christian theology. One Mithras expert asserts that "no Mithraic monument can be dated earlier than the end of the first century A.D., and even the more extensive investigation at Pompeii, buried beneath the ashes of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, have not so far produced a single image of the god."[{18}](#)

Most critical Bible scholars no longer believe that Christianity borrowed its core beliefs from the pagan mystery religions like Mithraism. Due to the lack of good evidence this theory has been largely abandoned.[{19}](#)

Sunday or Son Day

Early Christianity and the Bible have been relentlessly attacked on many different levels in the fast-paced thriller *The Da Vinci Code*. In the novel, Langdon claims that "Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans. Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun."[{20}](#)

More than two hundred years before Constantine, some of the earliest Christian writings, which later became part of the New Testament, made it clear that there was a Sabbath on Saturday and a separate "Lord's Day" on Sunday. The reason Christians had a separate "Lord's Day" in addition to the Sabbath was because early Christians wanted to celebrate on Sunday, the day that Jesus had risen from the dead.[{21}](#)

There are many references in the New Testament, written hundreds of years before Constantine, that illustrate the difference between Sunday and the Sabbath day. Shortly after Christ's death, in Acts 20:7 Luke writes about "the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, . . ." This quote from Luke makes it clear that Christians during the first century were already worshipping together on the first day of the week which was Sunday. The apostle Paul refers to making a collection for an offering on Sunday in 1 Corinthians 16:2. And the last book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation, makes reference to Sunday being called the "Lord's Day" in order to distinguish it from the Sabbath (Rev. 1:10).

There are also early Christian writings outside the New Testament that confirm that Christians celebrated the "Lord's Day" on Sunday. The church father Justin Martyr wrote, "And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together to one place of all those who live in cities or in the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits." [{22}](#) Justin Martyr lived during the second century, and had died long before Constantine was born.

The Sabbath has always been Saturday. That has never changed. But Christians usually attend church services on Sunday because that's the day of Christ's resurrection. In other words, Christians didn't "move" the Sabbath to Sunday. They simply chose to gather for corporate worship on Sunday.

Finally, with regard to the claim that Sunday was tied to the worship of a pagan god, it's important to note that *all* the days of the week—whether Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or Sunday—were tied to the worship of one pagan god or another. [{23}](#)

Christmithras

Previously we mentioned that the pagan god Mithras was not called the “Son of God” or the “Light of the World”. He also never died and rose again in three days. But was he born on December 25? According to the myth of Mithras, his birthday was in fact celebrated on December 25. According to this myth, Mithras sprang up full-grown from a rock, carrying a knife and a torch. Shepherds watched his miraculous birth and greeted him with their first fruits, their flocks and their harvests. The cult of Mithras spread throughout the Roman Empire during the second century. In A.D. 274, the Roman emperor Aurelian declared December 25 the Birthday of Sol Invictus (the Unconquerable Sun).[{24}](#)

The Bible never indicates when Jesus was born, and no one today knows with certainty the day of his birth. Since the most likely time for taxation was in the fall or spring, some biblical scholars have suggested that he may have been born then rather than in the winter.[{25}](#) Prior to the fourth century, the Eastern Church celebrated Epiphany (which included the birth of Christ) in January. In the fourth century, the Church in Rome also began celebrating Christ’s birth, and the practice quickly spread throughout Christendom. Eventually, December 25 “became the officially recognized date for Christmas.”[{26}](#)

But why did the church choose to celebrate Christ’s birth on the same day as the pagan Feast of the Unconquerable Sun? One scholar explains it this way: