

JESUS FOR BUDDHISTS

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- 6.1 The Bible's Message For Buddhists
- 6.2 Christianity And Buddhism: Similarities
- 6.3 The Difficulties Of Buddhism
 - 6.3.1 The Question Of Authority In Buddhism
 - 6.3.2 The Concept Of Truth In Buddhism
 - 6.3.3 Buddha Versus Jesus
 - 6.3.4 Buddhism And A Personal God
 - 6.3.5 Nirvana And The Bible
 - 6.3.6 Predestination And Buddhism
 - 6.3.7 The Problem Of Sin In Buddhism
 - 6.3.8 The Problem Of Suffering In Buddhism
 - 6.3.9 "The spirits in prison"
- 6.4 Conclusions: What Buddhism Lacks

6.1 The Bible's Message for Buddhists

The Bible is divided into two main sections – the New Testament and the Old Testament. To follow this booklet you will need a full Bible with both sections.

Please open your New Testament at its first book, the Gospel of Matthew. Gospel means 'good news'. Matthew was a government official who became a disciple of Jesus and followed him in his travels. The first chapter and the first verse is Matthew 1:1 (when you see pairs of numbers like this the first number tells the chapter, the second number the verse). This is the beginning of Matthew's explanation of the Gospel. We read "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham". It's not quite what we would expect. Matthew says Jesus is the descendant of David and Abraham. David lived 3000 years ago and was a famous king of Israel. Abraham lived 4000 years ago and was the ancestor of both the Jewish people and the Arab people. Matthew tells us that the fact is that Jesus is descended from both David and Abraham.

Paul was another disciple of Jesus. He originally was an enemy of the Christian church and persecuted the believers, but Jesus appeared to him in a vision and converted him to become a Christian. He saw the Gospel the same way as Matthew. Please see Galatians 3:8: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'." The Gospel is what was promised to Abraham. So, if we can understand what God promised to Abraham, we can understand what the

Gospel is. We need to go back to the Old Testament, and see what God told Abraham. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, 17:8 "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession and I will be their God." God promised Abraham that he and his children would live forever on this earth. Eternal life is an important idea that comes up in the Old Testament. Note this- because the essential message of the Bible is the same all the way through. How could Abraham live forever? Please see Genesis 22:17,18 "in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." God promised Abraham that he was going to have a son who would be the source of blessing for the whole world. The way to understand the Bible is to see how the Bible interprets itself. These words we have just read are quoted in the New Testament- in Acts 3:25,26. Let's go there and find the interpretation "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your descendant all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." So, who is the descendant of Abraham? The descendant mentioned in Acts 3:25 is Jesus. And what are the blessings he would bring for men and women of the whole world? The blessings of forgiveness of sins and salvation. Let's go further. To Galatians 3:16 "Now to Abraham and his descendant were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to descendants,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your descendant,' who is Christ." So, the descendant of Abraham was one man, singular, Jesus. But how could that one man become so many, as many as the stars in the sky? Let's read Galatians 3:27-29 "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." So, Paul is saying in Galatians 3:29 that only those who have been baptised into Christ have a part in these promises which God made to Abraham. To be baptised is to take part in a ceremony in which someone who believes in Jesus goes under the surface of the water in a river, bath, or swimming pool to act out the burial of Christ. By performing this ceremony the believer is showing that he wants to be like Christ, and when he comes out of the water he has now become a Christian. Only if we are baptised will we be one of those descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky who will receive what God promised - eternal life here on earth. This is why we must be baptised if we are going to be saved. Paul said that his hope was " the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). As he faced death, this was his hope- the hope of Israel.

Baptism

What is baptism, then? It isn't sprinkling. The New Testament is written in Greek, and the word translated 'baptism' means really to dip. It was used about a ship sinking, being submerged, or a piece of cloth being dyed from one colour to another by immersing it. Have a look at Matthew 3:13-16 "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptised by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when He had been baptised, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him." Jesus went down into" the water and came " up out of it" . He was baptised as an adult, not as a baby; by dipping, not sprinkling. That's why it was done in a river. And if He was baptised, so should we be. This dipping and rising up signifies the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that we have decided to make His death and resurrection our own. This is why it has to be by

immersion, not by sprinkling. Have a look at Romans 6:3-5 "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." This is why we appeal to you to be baptised- make it your aim in life, to accept Jesus Christ!

By being baptised into Jesus, we become part of Him, and therefore the promises apply to us. Therefore when He returns, we will be resurrected, judged and then, if we have lived faithfully according to God's word, we will be given the eternal life which He now has. Then we will live for ever in God's Kingdom here on earth. If you believe this, then life has a new meaning. Whatever material problems we have, we will realise that they are only temporary, and when Christ returns He will give us a new and eternal life. This is why in the Bible and in Christ there is real HOPE. The hope ahead is so great that our present problems do not seem so great.

Our Representative

But how can it be, that this man Jesus can save us? He was our representative, and this is why we must be baptised into His death and resurrection; because He was just like us. Have a look at Heb. 2:14-18 "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." Notice in passing that the devil is not an animal or a dragon. It is used here as a personification for sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), but here we read that 'the devil' "has the power of death". We need to struggle against our own natures, not against an invisible being outside of ourselves. Verse 14 says the same thing several times- He, Himself, likewise, partook, the same nature as us. Yet most 'Christian' groups teach that there are three Gods in a trinity, and one of them was Jesus. But this isn't what the Bible says. And according to Hebrews, it is very important we get our understanding of Jesus right. He was exactly of our nature. The writer stresses it 4 times! He was tempted like us.

And how are we tempted? By our own human nature. Have a look at James 1:13-15 "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." This means

that Jesus had our human nature. God can't be tempted, it says, but Jesus was tempted, Hebrews says. So Jesus wasn't God Himself. He was a man, the Son of God by birth, the descendant of David and Abraham through Mary. Likewise, God can't be born; but Jesus was born. God can't die; but Jesus died. We cannot see God; but men saw and handled Jesus. Jesus didn't exist before His birth, either. He was the son of God through Mary. Have a look at Lk. 1:31-35 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow

you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” Notice all those future tenses! He will be the Son of God, Mary will conceive in her womb- this is where Jesus began, although the idea, the logos of Jesus, had always been with God from the beginning. Notice that Mary was just an ordinary woman. Jesus was the descendant of Abraham and David, and this could only have been because his mother was their descendant. If Jesus was God, then Mary is the mother of God, and she wasn't an ordinary woman. If as the Bible teaches Jesus was the Son of God and also "son of man", the descendant of Abraham and David through Mary, it is evident that Mary was an ordinary woman. So it's all or nothing- a system of true belief, or a system of wrong belief. It is important to believe the right thing, because doctrine affects how we live. Have a look at Heb. 4:15,16 “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Because Jesus was of our nature, therefore we can pray with confidence through Him to God. We don't need a human priest, church building or pastor to make our prayers acceptable.

So can I just summarise the things we have written about:

1- There is only one God, not a 'trinity'

2- Jesus is the Son of God, not God Himself; He didn't exist before He was born. He had all our temptations and human experiences, but He never sinned. He gave His life for us in a painful death, but then, because He never sinned, God resurrected Him from the dead.

3- Through baptism into Christ by the dipping in water of an adult, we share His death and resurrection

4- so when Jesus Christ returns we will be resurrected, judged and given eternal life in His Kingdom- which will be based here on this earth. This Kingdom will be like the world was in the garden of Eden, when God first created man- and even better. All the problems which are now on earth- war, famine, sadness, even death itself, will be finally ended- for ever.

5- After death we are unconscious- 'hell' means just 'the grave'.

6- The soul is not immortal; we are made of dust and return to the dust. The spirit is the power of life within us, which God takes back when we die. We don't go on existing in any conscious form after death.

7- 'Satan' is a symbol for the evil human desires inside us, against which we must struggle; it is not the name of a dragon or monster that exists. God is 100% powerful; He doesn't share His power with 'satan'. All our problems come from God, not satan, and therefore there is a positive spiritual purpose to them.

8- By reading the Bible for ourselves we can find the true way to God.

I do appeal to you, to study these things, and give yourself no rest until you have come to surely know the true Gospel. I do so hope you will study our free Bible study course; and set yourself the aim, to be baptised one day, by dipping in water. Then you will surely have the hope of eternal life. OK we can't imagine eternal life. I can only suggest we imagine a long, long line, with no end, stretching on into the distance; and we in this life are just a few millimetres at the start of it. This

really is our hope, if we are baptised into Jesus and live in Him. I plead with you, to take all this seriously, and not treat it as mere religion, as just something ordinary.

6.2.

Christianity and Buddhism: Similarities

‘Buddhism’ means to be an awakened one, with the implication that humanity is asleep. With this agrees the New Testament: “Awake, you who sleep, and Christ shall give you light” (Eph. 5:14). But is Jesus who gives light, not a stirring up of ones self power.

According to the Third Noble Truth, that of the extinction of suffering, the cure of life's disharmony lies in overcoming selfish craving. The Fourth Noble Truth, that of the Path that leads to the Extinction of Suffering, explains how this cure can be effected. Our release from this bondage can be accomplished by means of the " Eightfold Path," by which a man is totally remade and left a different being, cured of life's crippling disabilities. The first step of the eightfold path is right understanding.

Right understanding is required in Christianity too. Jesus said that He Himself was “the truth” (Jn. 14:6). True Christianity places tremendous emphasis upon faith. But faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Faith is, of course, faith in something. Therefore correct understanding of the Bible’s message is essential to true faith. Faith isn’t just a fuzzy feeling of hopefulness. The Bible also concerns itself with the extinction of suffering- but the solution is the radical transformation of this world and of human nature itself, by God’s direct intervention through His Son, Jesus. Paul wrote that he earnestly wished to be different; he could see the life he fain would live, the life he and you and me had always wanted...but whenever he wanted to do good, evil was present with him. He found a law within himself that whenever he wanted to do good, evil was present with him. His answer to this dilemma was in Jesus. “Who shall deliver me?” he asks, having rejected the Buddhist idea of self-improvement as impossible. The answer, he said, was in Jesus Christ, who although He had our nature, overcame its desires. He Himself was therefore raised from death, and became the author of eternal life (Heb. 5:9). Jesus, because He was human [and not God Himself] was thereby our representative [not our substitute, be it noted]. By identifying with His death and resurrection through baptism, we can be counted by God right now as if we are perfect, and then when Jesus returns, we will be made perfect in very nature like He is. I challenge every Buddhist: Has your use of the eightfold path lead you to moral perfection, to the conquest of the sinful tendencies that are within you? To a woman, to a man, you must answer ‘No, not yet’. That is, if you are honest. And I would challenge you further, that there is no Buddhist who has ever attained to moral perfection. Human nature cannot be self-improved; it needs God’s action to change. His offer of perfection is through our faith in His love- a love that will count us as perfect, just as even human love does not take cognisance of the faults it recognises in the one loved. The whole groaning of the natural creation will be resolved by the revelation of the Son of God, Jesus, to forcibly change the whole of creation, to release it from the curse that came upon it in the garden of Eden (Rom. 8:19-23).

The “fourth step” of Buddhism is right action, or behaviour. We must understand our behaviour, reflect upon what we have done, and improve ourselves in accordance with the five precepts: do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not be unchaste, and do not drink intoxicants.

The need for discipline, law and regime is also found in the Bible. But the motive for this human effort is our receipt of grace. We are under the law of grace (Eph. 2:8). The grace of God teaches us that we should, e.g., deny ungodly lusts (Tit. 2:11-12). The grace of God, the fact that for nothing but faith He will accept us and count us as righteous, as perfect as His Son is perfect...this is what motivates us. Not the thought that if we do enough we will be good enough or will become perfect. It is my observation that most religions [including apostate Christianity] stress so much doing acts of obedience to laws. There is no legal code that can save, Paul argues in Romans. There was a legal code in the Old Testament to teach humanity that salvation just isn't possible through a law. And therefore, on our knees, we must accept the pure grace of the salvation that is in this perfect man, Jesus. And associate and identify ourselves with it through baptism into Him. This wondrous concept of grace which there is in Christianity contrasts sharply with the Buddhist understanding of punna, merit, which results from the practice of certain deeds (dana).

Buddhists commonly liken their idea of karma to a seed, which is planted and develops into a plant. The works of a man in his life are seen to control who he becomes in the next life. But the Bible takes a different angle. What we sow is not actually the plant that comes out of the ground (1 Cor. 15:35-49). It is sown a seed. But Paul goes on to say that for those in Christ, they will rise out of the earth to be given a new body. Yes, what we sow we will reap, our actions now have eternal consequences at judgement day, but the gift of the new body through resurrection is a gift through God's grace.

The final step of Buddhism's "Eightfold Path" is right concentration, or right absorption, which is substantially the same as the series of techniques involved in Hinduism's fourth path, raja yoga, or the way to God through psychological exercises.

Concentration upon Divine principles is of course taught by the Bible too. But because our mind wanders, because our humanity stops and interferes with that concentration, every Buddhist and Christian would have to admit some sort of defeat here. This is why the way to God is not merely through psychological exercises, but through Jesus Christ. He is the only way to the Father (Jn. 14:6). This is why we pray to God through Jesus- because He is our representative, He was a man like us, and yet He never sinned.

6.3 The Difficulties of Buddhism

6.3.1 The Question of Authority In Buddhism

Much of the Buddhist scriptures and sayings attributed to Gautama were written about four hundred years after his death. By the time they were written, Buddhism had split into many sects. What do we have then? Even the best scholars are not sure of the accuracy of the Buddhist scriptures. In Christianity, however, we have an accurate historical account written by eyewitnesses to Jesus and the events surrounding His life.

This explains why Buddhism is so divided in its teachings- there is no solid basis for authority, and therefore interpretations are likewise going to vary drastically. They also have evolved over time, away from their evident roots in Hinduism, because of this lack of authority. And this also explains the wide breadth of beliefs within Buddhism. Thus in history we can see that Buddhism split into two divisions, Hinayana and Mahayana. Hinayana, which was propagated by Buddha, was an agnostic religion with no God, while Mahayana evolved with the concept of a divine saviour.

The sheer volume of the Buddhist sacred writings is such that no ordinary Buddhist can sensibly be expected to read them. Initially, the writings were divided into three groups: Vinaya-pitaka, Sutta-pitaka and the Abhidhamma-pitaka. And yet later, this categorisation had to be amended to allow for the inclusion of new writings, even though the Buddha was dead. Buddhism to this day is deeply divided over that is in fact canonical- hence, the whole religion has no basis of authority. Thus the compilers of the Tibetan canon included translations of commentaries produced by Indian Buddhists, even though by Indian Buddhist standards those words are not canonical. The Chinese Buddhist tradition selected items for inclusion in the Canon on a totally different basis to the other Buddhist traditions; and the criteria for selection varied over time. Thus a book could be canonical in one century but not in another. Various councils were held to debate and decide which writings were to be canonical and which weren't. "Research by modern scholarship has introduced serious reservations about the claims found in the accounts of the councils. It is highly questionable whether the monks who were present as the council had access to all the sermons of the Buddha. The texts themselves speak of disciples who refused to endorse the sermons...preferring instead to adhere to the form in which they had memorised them"⁽¹⁾. The circumstances in which the 'true' gathering of teachings took place are not known. Around the Christian era, the suttas of early Buddhism began to be supplemented by new works. They too claimed the authority of the Buddha, who had lived centuries beforehand, even though their teaching was different to that which they replaced. All these are reflections of the simple fact that Buddhism has no basis for authority. It is clear enough from an historical analysis of the Buddhist canon that the introduction of writing opened up the Buddhist canon to the possibility of continuing revelation, whereby roughly from the 1st century onwards Buddhism experienced a large increase in its Scriptures, all claiming to be the original words of Buddha, even though they were mutually contradictory ⁽²⁾.

There is no single, easily accessible document that can be read and interpreted by the lay person for themselves in order to find truth. Indeed, earlier, lay access to the sacred writings was granted for only a few selected texts. It reminds one of how the Catholic church denied lay people access to the Bible texts, and insisted on keeping them in Latin rather than the language of the people. Thus apostate Christianity and Buddhism have the same basic similarities as all false religions- power is kept by the leaders of the religion. Buddhist Monks, Catholic priests- it's the same sad story. A Buddhist's guru (Tibetan- lama) chooses which deity the believer is to relate to. There is no personal relationship between the one God and human beings, those whom He has made in His own image, and with whom He passionately strives for a relationship. The New Testament teaches that Christian believers are all priests (1 Pet. 2:5). We are all to study and respond to and teach God's word. The Buddha himself only gave a limited range of his teachings to lay people. The Lord Jesus spoke His truths before crowds, in language which could be understood and benefited from by both the illiterate and the intellectual. The Buddhist writings are chanted to ward off bad fortune, touched to bring good luck, placed in a temple to make it holy...they are worshipped, but not really studied. The Bible is so different. There we have the words of a personal, living God who reaches out to us through His word. And we can see that word made flesh, the principles all lived out in reality, in the person of His Son (Jn. 1:14). And we can respond to God's word by talking back to Him in prayer, offered in the name of our representative Jesus. God's word is a living word, able to penetrate into the very texture of human personality (Heb. 4:12-14 RV). Yes, it is black print on white paper; but it is so much more than this. It is somehow alive, in the sense that it conveys to us the intentions and desires of the living God.

Buddhism sees karma as only one influence. One can make gifts for the benefit of relatives and friends [which gifts are the way Buddhist priests get an income, strangely enough], and these can influence their fortune in their next life. But again, on what basis? Why believe this? It is an

appealing idea, but where is the evidence for this? There is none. There is not even a reliable canon of writings to justify it. When Buddhism tells us that there are 26 forms of heavenly rebirths, and that life in the lowest heaven is 9 million human years, and 84,000 “aeons” in the highest one...well, why not 10 million years? Why not 27 forms of rebirth, etc? How can one take these statements as “truth” when they are supposed sayings of a man who lived almost 2,500 years ago, which were passed down by word of mouth, with much debate as to what he actually said...with no documented evidence? Can one live their life around ideas which are so nebulous?

The Bible, By Contrast...

The Buddhist often simply assumes that his writings are right and the Bible wrong; but this is to start with a presupposition, and then seek evidence to support it. The way Old Testament Bible prophecies were so accurately fulfilled in Jesus is just too much to put down to chance. To say that the Bible has been changed by the Jews hardly seems likely - both Old and New Testaments are full of criticisms of the Jews. The texts of both Testaments have been in the possession of both Jews and Christians, so they would both have had to agree if the texts were indeed to be tampered with. For 200 years before the time of Jesus, the Hebrew Old Testament existed in Greek translation as the Septuagint, and this would have had to be changed along with the Hebrew texts, if indeed the Old Testament was changed by Christians as Christianity’s critics requires. Critics of the Bible can give no dates, no places, no names, responsible for the changing of the Bible texts which they assume happened. Their presupposition that the Bible must be wrong because it disproves the Buddhist sacred writings therefore drives them to make assumptions and claims which totally lack evidence. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal how the texts have lost virtually nothing through the generations of recopying - these manuscripts were of the Old Testament, dating from the 2nd century BC. Their correspondence with later manuscripts is exact! The Codex Alexandrinus contains the entire Septuagint and also New Testament, written on vellum dating back to at least the 4th century AD; and the Codex Siniaticus contains the New Testament written in at least the 3rd century. The Codex Vaticanus dates from the 4th century. And yet these three different manuscripts are all in substantial agreement! The first two are housed in the British Museum, London; and the third in the Vatican. So there is no way that it can be said that the text of the New Testament has been changed over at least 17 centuries! It is therefore no argument to say that over time, a manuscript must inevitably change. On this basis, we could expect the Buddhist writings to have changed too. There are at least 24,000 ancient New Testament manuscripts available for analysis - far more than for the Buddhist writings. The next most well supported book, Homer's Iliad, has only 643. And there are original fragments of John dating back to 120 AD, and of Matthew to 65 AD. The few variant readings do not affect in any way the sense of the text; and none of the variant readings contradicts anything written elsewhere in the New Testament. There were many many variant readings in the Buddhist sacred writings- because “for about 300 years after the Buddha’s death, all texts were transmitted orally” ⁽³⁾. What the Buddha said was written down by various people, interpreted, and to this day there is a huge debate as to what is canonical Buddhist literature and what isn’t. The oldest original Buddhist writings that survive go back only to the 6th century AD- a marked contrast with the Bible texts. One is left wondering whether we did have the original text, and whether it hadn’t been tampered with. And this question must afflict every intellectually honest Buddhist.

Notes

(1) Ulrich Pagel, *The Sacred Writings Of Buddhism* in Peter Harvey, *Buddhism*, p. 32 (London: Continuum, 2001).

(2) For evidence of these statements see E. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959) and Conze E., Horner I.B., Snellgrove D. and Waley A., *Buddhist Texts Through The Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954).

(3) Peter Harvey, *Buddhism*, p. 51 (London: Continuum, 2001).

6.3.2 The Concept of Truth In Buddhism

One Buddhist apologist has written: "Christianity is likewise authoritarian and dictatorial -- " you must believe this or you will be condemned" -- whereas Buddhism tends to be more liberal and allows people to believe more or less whatever they like. Christians ban certain teachings as heretical, evil and harmful, but in general terms, Buddhists assert that anyone can believe anything they wish and that there is some merit in any belief system which has some spiritual views and respects the rights of an individual, as long as it does not harm others".

This idea that one can believe anything is a result of Buddhism actually having no solid basis upon which to believe anything. And one wonders whether believing "whatever they like" includes Fascism and Satanism... again, there seems so little attention paid to the implications of what is being said. If there is right and wrong, then immediately there is thrown up the question of truth and error, and therefore and thereby, the whole question of authority. The sheer range of beliefs within Buddhism indicates how there is no basis for ultimate Truth within the religion. Consider all the different forms of Buddhism: Zen, Theravada, Soka-gakkai; Tibetan Buddhism; Pure Land Buddhism etc.

While in Christianity a person has one and only one chance of being saved, Buddhism's teachings on rebirth mean that a person has an infinite number of opportunities to attain Nirvana. This also implies that everyone will eventually be liberated. The absoluteness of the issues involved in rejecting or accepting Jesus as the Son of God impart a verve and vitality to human life. Buddhism teaches that it is all a matter of time; we may be reincarnated as animals or bad people but in the end, the cycle leads to Nirvana. This means that evil men like Adolf Hitler will eventually reach 'Nirvana'; there is no responsibility for human action because we are merely reincarnated beings. The Bible and the teaching which is in Jesus radically transforms human life in practice. How we live now is related to how we will be judged. What we sow is what we will reap at judgement day (Gal. 6:8). For those who know God's ways and are responsible to Him, all that they do will in some sense be judged. This inevitably leads us to watch our behaviour. How we live becomes crucially important. There is no second chance. Now is the today of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2); today, if we will hear God's voice and not harden our heart (Heb. 3:7-15), we can "work out our salvation" (Phil 2:12). If we are simply passing through a cycle, and will in the ultimate end up in Nirvana, there is little motivation to change now. We will always tend to go for the lowest level; we are satisficers, minimalists, when it comes to spiritual endeavour. Both human experience and the Bible's view of human nature lead us to these conclusions; and yet Buddhism denies them.

Buddhism seems to me to be a 'designer religion' - you can believe as you like, and extract from the vast range of Buddhist writings what is convenient for you. Buddhism holds that different types of teaching and guidance are going to be appropriate to different beings, seeing we are all at different stages in the endless cycle of development. This means that there is no such thing as revealed truth.

We are left wandering and uncertain. God's word is truth, Jesus taught (Jn. 17:17). We all balk at the enormity of this claim- that the Bible is the Truth. All I can do is invite you to systematically read it for yourself. It has been observed that "even straightforward teachings in moral matters can be modified, sometimes intensified, sometimes relaxed in the course of teaching and transmission" (1). This means there is no such concept as truth, therefore no understanding of right and wrong, and no concept of sin. The varying Buddhist views over time and geography regarding meat eating and violence are examples of the intellectual and moral crisis of Buddhism. In passing, note that the Pali Canon reveals that Buddha himself ate meat, but his later disciples saw that his teachings about re-incarnation meant that to eat an animal was to take a human life, and therefore it was outlawed. Who has the right to modify moral standards? If there are no inspired Scriptures, the basis for authority can only be the monks. The lack of uniform morality in Buddhism contrasts strongly with the one universal standard for the Christian- "the law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:21??). By this I understand we are to ask constantly and with relentless, piercing honesty: What would Jesus do or say or feel, in this or that situation which I meet in my life? For He was and is our representative, and His life of suffering, and the fact He had our human nature, enables us to know with confidence that He has been in our shoes, in essence. True Christians are as it were in a personality cult behind this man Jesus. This explains the tremendous unity which is possible amongst true Christians. He was not merely a teacher, an ideas man, as Buddha was. He was the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14), His life was and is the express articulation of all He and His Father have taught in their words.

Notes

(1) Stewart MacFarlane, "Making Moral Decisions" in Peter Harvey, *Buddhism*, p. 183 (London: Continuum, 2001).

6.3.3 Buddha Versus Jesus

Buddha was born a prince, an heir to his father's throne, but when he was born, the fortune tellers told the father that he was an unusual child, destined either to unite all of India into one kingdom, or, if he forsook the world, to become a world redeemer. Because of this, the child was brought up completely sheltered from all forms of misery in the world, and he was given all of the pleasures that the world could offer. He was to be shielded from any contact with sickness, decrepitude, or death.

All this contrasts sharply with the Lord Jesus. He was born in a stable for animals, His parents offered the poor person's offering for Him at birth, He was a working man, a carpenter, and He died the death of a criminal, in the degrading torture of crucifixion, a form of death reserved only for slaves and the lowest of society. Yet because of the lowness of His humiliation, He was therefore so highly exalted (Phil. 2:5-11). Because He was of our nature, therefore He was able to know fully our human experience, and on this basis we can ask God for forgiveness confidently (Heb. 4:15,16). Although Jesus was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Buddha is a 'Saviour' only in the sense that he shows men how to save themselves, by actually following to the end the Path trodden and shown by him. According to the Bible, there is none truly just, not one (Rom. 3:10). All have been "concluded under sin" (Rom. 3:22) (Gal 3:22). Mankind therefore cannot save himself. Just consider Paul's passion in Rom. 7:15-25 "For what I am doing I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but

sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

Surely you feel an echo of yourself here? The answer to this cry from the heart is in Jesus Christ- not in human beings saving themselves. ‘Jesus’ means saviour. Either Buddha or Jesus is our Saviour. Some Buddhists claim that Christianity is compatible with Buddhism. Yet clearly it isn’t. Where is Buddha now? Is he saved? What does that salvation mean for him? Is there any evidence that he conquered death? Seeing that sin brings death, how then did Buddha conquer sin and death? Did Buddha ever sin? The Buddhist is always nervous about these questions because he or she chooses not to face up to the real implications of the concept of sin- which scarcely exists in Buddhism.

A positive karma is seen to have the power of purification or punya. But it is surely apparent that the power of self-cleansing is not within us. What is required is the blood of Jesus to purify us (1 Jn 1:7). He, as our representative, with all our pain and our hunger as humans, never sinned, and was resurrected to eternal life. And we have the hope of sharing the salvation He now experiences, as a result of His death purifying us in that God forgives us our sins because of Him.

6.3.4 Buddhism And A Personal God

Buddha denied the existence of a personal God but was monistic in his view of the Absolute as an impersonal force made up of all living things. The Bible teaches of a God who rules the universe, and cares for man in a personal way. Psalm 46:10 states: " Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted among the earth" .

Buddha claimed to be the one who shows the way to Nirvana, to a time of future bliss. Jesus claimed to be the way to God (Jn. 14:6). There is a subtle difference. Jesus pointed us towards a living relationship with the one personal, Almighty God. Buddha offered a philosophy intended to give the follower the highest level of personal happiness. This, surely, is nothing but selfish. Buddhism is all about self power. This effectively leaves God out of it. He has no part to play, no power. We are alone with ourselves, and yet it is surely evident that humanity of itself cannot save itself. The Bible teaches that God is the source of all power, and that this power, or Spirit, created and sustains everything. And it is this Spirit power which through His word, the Bible, can transform human life in practice. There are times when the heart of man becomes so evil that he himself cannot even fathom how evil it is (Jer. 17:9). If we look within, there is simply not enough positive self power within us to transform ourselves. This is why Buddhists, if they are intellectually honest and objective in their self examination, will have to die disappointed men and women. Jesus Christ is described as “the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), to whom all power in Heaven and earth has now been delegated by God (Mat 28:18). God through Him has the power to change lives. It is not in any man who walks on earth to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23). We can’t transform ourselves unaided. And this accords with the honest self-examination of every human being.

The personal God of the Bible, the Father of the Lord Jesus, is seeking to glorify the things of His Name- that is, the principles which make up His own personal attributes. Buddhism is almost obsessed with seeking to alleviate human suffering, just as, say, mistaken Christian groups like Pentecostals teach false doctrines like ‘name it and claim it’, offering personal material benefit from their religion. This is what makes standard religions all seem so essentially selfish. But the true message of the Bible is that this one true personal God seeks to glorify His Name, His true and righteous characteristics, in a community of eternally redeemed men and women.

6.3.5 Nirvana And The Bible

What happens after we die is a normal question. Buddhism is very weak about this. Even Buddha himself was not certain what lay beyond death. He left no clear teaching on Nirvana or eternity. What he did leave are philosophical speculations. Today the body of Buddha lies in a grave in Kusinara, at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. The facts of life after death still remain an unsolved mystery in Buddhism.

I believe that Jesus died and resurrected as my representative. Because I have been baptised into Him, on this understanding, I therefore have the hope of resurrection and eternal life with Him, by His Father’s grace, at His return. The Bible does not offer any hope of an ‘immortal soul’ surviving after death. Because the only hope we have is in Christ, and the pattern that we see in Him was of a real man dying and then rising again. Not as a disembodied spirit, not as an abstraction, but as a real, tangible person.

Buddhists claim that Nirvana cannot be concretely expressed as it is inexpressible. There is therefore no concrete understanding of what they are aiming for. There is no clearly defined “hope”. The Bible offers a very definite hope through the work of Jesus- the Kingdom of God, to be established here on earth when Jesus returns.

Buddhism has a very low view of humanity, seeing the human person as a cluster of unsatisfactory forces. The Lord Jesus gave tremendous emphasis to the value and meaning of persons. He told a parable of where He as the good shepherd went and searched for one lost sheep whilst 99 were left to fend for themselves. The individual matters so much to Him. The Bible says that men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be recognisable in the future Kingdom of God (Mat 8:11/Luke 13:28). We, personally, will live for ever in the Kingdom of God. Buddhism claims that the Buddha-nature (Japanese bussho) is sunyata, empty of self. We will be effectively nobody in nirvana. The meaning and value of persons is thus devalued in Buddhism. The Bible teaches a resurrection after the pattern of Jesus. He was resurrected, and the person who came out of the grave was still essentially the same personality who died. And so it will be in the resurrection of all those in Christ. This is an especial comfort at times of death...that the true Christian who has died will be resurrected, and those of us in Christ will see him or her again and live eternally together. The change of nature that will be effected at the judgement seat of Christ is a radical change, unlike the endless cyclical development which characterises Buddhism. In passing I would note that it is important to have a correct understanding of human nature. Stalin, Hitler, the Khmer Rouge etc. all perpetrated the most awful things predicated on faulty understandings of what it is. Buddhists believe that evil arises from ignorance. This is partly true, but the Bible teaches what we surely already know from honest introspection: that wars and fighting’s arise from within the human mind (James 4:1), we are tempted by our own evil desires which are within us (James 1:13-15). In passing, note that the common idea of the devil as a personal being is not taught in the Bible. Satan,

the adversary, is basically a personification of the evil desires which reside within our natures. More literature about this is available from the publishers.

The power and possibility of new life is tied closely with the Lord Jesus. Life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel about Him (2 Tim. 1:10). In Jesus is life, the life of men (Jn. 1:4). This is because the result of sin is death- real, meaningful death. But Jesus didn't sin. And yet He died, for us. And therefore for all those baptised into His death and resurrection, and living in Him by faith, there is the hope of resurrection as He rose from the dead, to eternal life. Buddhism teaches that when a person dies, their craving for life, impelled by their karma, causes a supposed "stream of consciousness" to go on and live somewhere else. This is pure supposition. From where does a dead body get life? It seems that this is just another wild, desperate, blind hope that humans have come up with to escape from the awful permanence of death.

The Buddhist belief in re-incarnation has led them to suppose that how one is at the point of death is vitally important, and therefore monks chant near a dying person from the 'Book of the dead'. And yet salvation cannot be within man nor monks. One speculation has given birth to another. There is no evidence for reincarnation, nor any grounds even for faith in such a suggestion. And so the error has been compounded by then using other people, i.e. monks, to ensure that the dying person has a god reincarnation. How we live is what God will judge. Truly does the Bible say that no man can by any means redeem his brother (Ps. 49:7). The Ullambana festival, in which sutras are recited in order to enable a better re-birth, imply that human salvation is dependent upon others, upon mere words. Surely you want something more real than this...?

Consider the concrete, real descriptions of the Biblical equivalent to Nirvana- i.e., the Kingdom of God on earth:

Those who follow Christ in this life will be "kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). They will have differing degrees of responsibility (Lk. 19:17). Christ will share his rulership over the earth with them (Rev. 2:27; 2 Tim. 2:12). "A king (Jesus) shall reign in righteousness, and princes (the believers) shall rule in judgement" (Is. 32:1; Ps. 45:16).

Christ is to reign on David's re-established throne (Lk. 1:32,33), i.e. he will have David's place and position of rulership, which was in Jerusalem. As Christ will reign from Jerusalem, this will be the capital of the future kingdom. Nations "will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16).

This annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem is also prophesied in Is. 2:2,3: "In the last days, the mountain (kingdom - Dan. 2:35,44) of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains (i.e. God's kingdom will be exalted above the kingdoms of men)...and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways...for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem". This appears to be a picture of the early days of the kingdom, as people spread the knowledge of Christ's reign to others, and they go up to the "mountain" of God's kingdom, which will be slowly spreading world-wide. Here we have a picture of real enthusiasm in religious worship.

Instead of the confusion and unfairness created by man's legal systems and administration of justice, there will be one universal legal code - "the law, and the word of the Lord", which will be pronounced by Christ from Jerusalem. "All nations shall flow unto" these teaching sessions,

implying that this common desire to find the true knowledge of God will lessen the natural friction between nations, as it does between individuals who dedicate themselves to gaining such knowledge in this life.

This description of all the nations flowing unto Jerusalem is similar to the picture presented in Is. 60:5, where the Jews “flow together” along with the Gentiles (non-Jews) to worship God in Jerusalem. This connects perfectly with the kingdom prophecy of Zech. 8:20-23.

“There shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go continually (A.V. mg. - cf. Zech. 14:16 ‘year by year’) to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem...ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you”.

This creates the picture of the Jewish people being made “the head, and not the tail” of the nations, due to their repentance and obedience (Deut. 28:13). The Jewish basis of God’s plan of salvation will then be appreciated by everyone. The ignorance of this amongst contemporary Christianity will then be abruptly ended. People will then enthusiastically discuss these things, so that they can tell the Jews, “we have heard that God is with you”. Conversation will then revolve around spiritual things, rather than the vanity which fill the world’s present thinking.

Given this greater commitment to godliness, it is not surprising that Christ “shall judge among the nations...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is. 2:4). The absolute authority of Christ and total justice of his arbitration in disputes will result in the nations changing their military hardware into agricultural machinery, and abandoning all military training. “In his days shall the righteous flourish” (Ps. 72:7) - spirituality will then be exalted, and respect will be paid to those who reflect God’s characteristics of love, mercy, justice etc. Contrast this with the present exaltation of the proud, self-assertive and selfishly ambitious.

The beating of “swords into plowshares” will be part of a much greater agricultural change which will come upon the earth. As a result of Adam’s sin, the ground was cursed for his sake (Gen. 3:17-19), with the result that great effort is presently needed to get food from it. In the kingdom “there shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the (once barren) mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like (the crops of) Lebanon” (Ps. 72:16). “The plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine” (Am. 9:13), such will be the improved fertility of the earth, and the reduction of the curse on the ground pronounced in Eden.

Such immense agricultural enterprise will involve many people. The kingdom prophecies give the impression that people will return to a self-sufficient, agricultural lifestyle.

“They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid” (Mic. 4:4).

This self-sufficiency will overcome the abuses which are inherent in any system of employment of labour for cash. Spending a lifetime working to make others rich will then be a thing of the past.

“They shall build houses, and inhabit them (themselves); and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat...mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain...” (Is. 65:21-23).

Isaiah 35:1-7 contains a matchless prophecy of how infertile land will be changed, resulting in an aura of joy and happiness almost oozing from the land, due to the easier and more spiritual way of life of those who work it: “The wilderness...shall be glad...the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall...rejoice even with joy and singing...for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool”. Even the natural aggression between the animals will be removed: “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together”, and children will be able to play with snakes (Is. 65:25; 11:6-8).

In the same way as the curse which was placed upon the natural creation will be greatly reduced, so that which was placed on mankind will also be lessened. Thus Rev. 20:2,3 speaks in symbolic language of the devil (sin and its effects) being “bound”, or restrained, during the Millennium. Life-spans will be increased, so that if someone dies at 100 years old, they will be considered but a child (Is. 65:20). Women will experience less sorrow in childbirth (Is. 65:23). “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Is. 35:5,6). This will be due to the miraculous spirit gifts again being possessed (cf. Heb. 6:5).

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that the Kingdom of God should not be seen as a tropical island paradise, which the righteous will enjoy in a similar way to which men enjoy sunbathing amidst the glories of nature. The fundamental purpose of the Kingdom of God is to give glory to God, until the earth is full of glory to Him “as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). This is God’s ultimate aim: “As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21). Glory to God means that the inhabitants of the earth will appreciate, praise and copy His righteous attributes; because the world will be in this state, God will allow the physical earth to reflect this, too. Thus “the meek shall inherit the earth (in the kingdom), and shall delight themselves in the abundance of (spiritual) peace” (Ps. 37:11), rather than in enjoying the easy life. Those “which do hunger and thirst after righteousness...shall be filled” with it in the kingdom (Mt. 5:6). In passing, Buddhism seems incredibly centred on humans- not on God. I would submit that Biblical Christianity reveals far more of Divine generosity, and thereby the imperative to a life based around praise and thankfulness to God, than any other religion.

Just the thought of possessing eternal life in the kingdom is often used as a ‘carrot’ to induce people to an interest in Christianity. However, our possession of it then, will almost be incidental to the real reason for our being in the kingdom - which is to glorify God. In what time may remain to us after our baptism, our appreciation of this should continually develop. To the writer, just ten years of living in the joy of absolute perfection and good conscience with God would be worth all the trauma of this life. That this glorious state will last for ever simply blows the mind, taking us beyond the limits of human comprehension.

Even when viewed in slightly more physical terms, being in the Kingdom of God should be our supreme motivation to despise worldly advantages and materialism. Instead of taking excessive thought for the immediate future, Jesus advised: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:30-34). Everything which we can now imagine and strive for is incomparable to the ultimate fulfilment of being in God’s kingdom.

We need to seek “(God’s) righteousness”, i.e. to try to develop a love of God’s character, which means that we want to be in God’s kingdom because righteousness will be glorified there, because we want to be completely morally perfect rather than just because we, personally, want to escape death and live an easy life for eternity. And not just because we want to escape present suffering, which seems to be what Buddhism is obsessed with. Buddhism claims that the world is periodically brought into being and then after many millions of years it is destroyed and the cycle begins again. The good news of the coming Kingdom of God on earth is that the earth will not be destroyed (Ecc. 1:4), because it is God’s purpose to populate it with immortal beings who lived out brief lives of probation on the planet in this our time of opportunity. There is a tremendous urgency, therefore, to our position. Now is the today of salvation, Paul says (2 Cor. 6:2), today we must hear God’s voice, for tomorrow may be too late (Heb. 3:12-13). The physical world is vitally important to the loving God who created it. We can perceive the beauty in it which reflects design and purpose. Only the good news of the coming Kingdom on earth makes sense of what this purpose is. Most people perceive there is some purpose in it, but fail to see what purpose. The world was created “very good” according to the Bible (Gen. 1:31). And any observation of this beautiful creation in which we live would confirm that. It is the Buddhist idea of reincarnation and endless cycles of existence which leads them to insist that the earth is not made “very good” at all. To describe the world as “beginningless” is to really deny creation, to deny design and purpose in creation; it is to deny God. It is really another form of evolution, which is yet another theory of human origin, which lacks any concrete evidence. The coming of the Kingdom of God at the return of Jesus means that the Christian view of history is that time proceeds in a linear way, from beginning to end. We know where we came from, and to where we go. The Buddhist view of time as cyclical means that there is no purpose, no end, no beginning, and therefore no real imperative to live life today with any sense of direction and responsibility towards God. This is why there is so much ‘emptiness’ in Buddhism. Even in nirvana , we will be sunyata, empty of self; the Buddhist tantras teach that all deities of the pantheon are manifestations of this sunyata , emptiness. And in this sense, they lack ultimate existence. The concept of emptiness has been taken to such an extent that it effectively denies not only the existence of God, but also of any real personal existence in the future. Jesus once was present at the grave of a believer, and the dead man’s sister could rejoice that she would see her brother again at the resurrection, in the last day (Jn. 11:23-27). This is the hope that is in Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11:25). To imply that existence doesn’t exist is just playing with words, just as a drunk man may feel existence is suspended for him. Yet reality calls. We are alive, we are real, and so is God and so is Jesus and so is their purpose with this earth.

6.3.6 Predestination And Buddhism

Buddhists believe that human destiny is individually determined by our past personal actions, thoughts and words (karma) which act as causes of our future happiness and misery.

There are many sound Biblical reasons for rejecting this kind of philosophy.

- It makes a nonsense of the whole concept of obedience to God. We are continually told in the Bible that we must keep God’s commands, and by doing so we can give Him pleasure or displeasure. This concept of commandments is meaningless if God is forcing us to be obedient. Christ offers salvation “unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

- Hebrews 11 shows that God’s intervention in our lives and ultimate granting of salvation is related to our faith. The many Biblical examples of praying to God for deliverance in time of trouble are

meaningless if everything is totally predestined. Likewise the idea of salvation being the result of our faith in Christ is also made meaningless.

- Baptism is a pre-requisite for salvation (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:3- 5). However, salvation was made possible on account of the work of Christ (2 Tim. 1:10), not through the abstract concept of predestination. We must consciously choose to associate ourselves with Him, which we do through baptism. Romans 6:15-17 speaks of us changing masters at baptism, from a life of sin to one of obedience. "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are". This language of yielding oneself clearly implies freewill as opposed to unconditional predestination. The yielding is through obeying from the heart the doctrines of the Gospel (Rom. 6:17).

- There is no point in God speaking forth His word, if we are ultimately predestined anyway. There is also no point in preaching; yet the Bible, both in command and by recording examples of this, shows that it is through the preaching of the word that men and women come to salvation. "The word of...salvation" (Acts 13:26) has to go forth to men.

- We will be judged according to our works (Rev. 22:12). Why, if our freewill actions are unimportant in relation to salvation? Paul said that the Jews judged themselves to be unworthy of eternal life by their rejection of the word of God (Acts 13:46). They were judging themselves - God was not preventing them. If we say that God is predestining some people to salvation and others to condemnation, then God is effectively forcing people to be sinners, in the same way as He supposedly forces people to be righteous. Because of Adam's sin, "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). This is why men die, as a punishment for sin (Rom. 6:23), not because God forced them to be sinners at some point in time before Adam's sin.

- 1 Cor. 10 and many other passages hold up the example of those in the past who once had a relationship with God, but then fell away, as being warnings to believers. The fact that it is possible to 'fall from grace' (Gal. 5:4) means that there cannot be a 'once saved always saved' system of salvation, nor can it be that we all eventually mature into nirvana. Only by continuing to hold true doctrine can we be saved (1 Tim. 4:16).

- Jesus clearly taught that understanding God's word is dependent to some degree upon our freewill effort. "Whoso readeth, let him understand" (Mt. 24:15). Thus we let ourselves understand the word - we are not forced to. There is a parallel between this and the oft repeated words of Jesus: "He that hath ears to hear...let him hear", or understand. Having ears to hear therefore equates with reading God's word. Because God's spirit is so supremely manifested through His word to the extent that Jesus could say that His inspired words "are spirit" (Jn. 6:63), it is impossible that God's spirit would work on a man, apart from His word, in order to force the man to be obedient to the word.

- "Whosoever will" can "take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17), through responding to the word of life found in the Gospel. Here surely is freewill rather than predestination irrespective of our personal desire for salvation. Likewise Acts 2:21: "Whosoever shall call on (himself) the name of the Lord shall be saved" through being baptised into that name.

Jesus forgives our sins, but Buddhism says you can never escape the consequences of your karma. The forgiveness that is in Jesus is therefore some radical and something felt by the person receiving it. There is the joy of a good conscience, with all the power this gives to live a graceful and forgiving life of love. Human life at present is somehow pointless if each re-birth is but a samsara, a 'wandering on', in the baseless belief [for we have shown that Buddhism has no basis of authority]

that one day we will reach Nirvana. And yet according to some Buddhist traditions, Nirvana itself will never be reached, for we must pass through infinite worlds in our development cycle ⁽¹⁾. Jesus offered us a one time re-birth through baptism in water and spiritual renewing in Him (Jn. 3:3-5), the result of which will be that we will enter the Kingdom of God on earth when He returns. The rebirth which Jesus offers is a rebirth to life; whereas all Buddhists rebirths end finally in death. Jesus offers a real, tangible, eternal Kingdom of God on this earth. With Jerusalem as its eternal capital. Yes, the Jerusalem we know and can locate today. Ask a Buddhist to define Nirvana, and they have no real idea. The “further shore...island amidst the flood...cave of shelter...beyond the realm of reason”. It is impossible to put meaning into these words, and the result is that Buddhism offers no definable nor understandable hope, nor direction to which we should be heading. The Bible doctrine of the Kingdom of God is so different.

Buddhism's cyclic view of existence means that history has no meaning and this makes Buddhists fatalistic and indifferent. The Bible continually builds upon itself. Historical events in Israel's history are full of meaning. Let me give an example:

Paul explains in 1 Cor. 10:1,2, that our passing through the waters of baptism is like Israel passing through the waters of the Red Sea. They were baptised “in the cloud and in the sea” - there was water on both sides of them, and above them in the cloud. A kind of parable can be developed from this, with many lessons for us. Israel had been slaves in Egypt, living a pointless life, working hard in their slavery and serving the idols of Egypt. Through their experience of life they cried to God to find some way of escape, although they probably had no idea how He would answer them. In reply God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and then through the wilderness, to enter the Promised Land. Israel in Egypt were like all who come to baptism; we are led, as it were, to the shores of the Red Sea. Once we pass through the water, we will not immediately be in the Promised Land of the Kingdom, we will join the rest of the believers in walking through the wilderness. God led Israel through the wilderness by an Angel, who was constantly with them by day and night. So, too, each of us has an Angel encamping around us, leading us through our lives towards salvation (Ps. 34:7; Heb. 1:14).

Israel were fed each day with manna, which Jesus interprets in John 6 as both Himself, and God's Word. If they had not eaten it they would soon have died in that wilderness - there was no other food there to eat. For this reason we cannot commend to you strongly enough the “Bible Companion” reading tables, whereby you read the Bible each day, getting the whole context of passages as you read through, and especially, feeding on Christ, whom you will find “in all the scriptures”. A copy of this plan is available free from the publishers. It is vital to make space in our daily routine, preferably at the same time each day, to read those chapters and reflect on them.

Notes

(1) Williams, P. *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1989.

6.3. 7 The Problem of Sin In Buddhism

We have earlier commented how Buddhism fails to address the problem of sin. It denies that human wilfulness is the root problem of wrong behaviour, and by doing so takes the focus away from what every honest human being knows is our essential problem. Buddhism discounts the whole issue of origins, dismissing the Biblical record of creation: “The aim of Buddhism is to develop wisdom and compassion and thereby attain Nirvana. Knowing how the universe began can contribute nothing to

this task". This means that the focus is only upon the present. Yet take a read through the Bible. It starts with the record of creation, and the entire Bible is filled with allusion back to the early chapters. There is a far greater internal harmony within the Bible than within Buddhist writings. The fact that God is and was creator was what inspired the faith and prayers of men like David and Jeremiah. The New Testament speaks of a new creation being worked out in men and women, after the pattern of the physical creation, in order to make men and women into the image of Jesus Christ, the one we are to follow. Buddhism claims to focus upon understanding; and yet by discounting origins, understanding can never be reached. And because origins are overlooked, the whole problem of sin has been ignored- even though this is the essential reason for suffering. Buddhism sees all existence as cyclic- no beginning, no end. Therefore the question of origins is ignored, with the result that God is not seen as creator. Yet if there was no personal designer and creator, we are left to believe in evolution, as many Buddhists do. It cannot be, even within the paradigm of human science, that matter came from nothing. There had to be a beginning. Theories of evolution only throw the questions one stage further back- where did the beginning and the evident design within creation come from? Existence isn't just cyclical- it began, some place, some time. And was begun by some being. The very concepts of good and evil must have begun somewhere. Concepts have not just always existed. The Buddhist has to shut her or his mind to these difficulties. Yet in the Bible there is real and credible explanation. And there is in the Bible the clear teaching that Jesus is the "author" of eternal life (Acts 3:15), just as God was the beginner of natural life.

6.3.8 The Problem of Suffering In Buddhism

Buddhism has so focused on getting relief from suffering that it has ended up assuming that if God exists then He created suffering, and therefore their 'Great Brahma' was very limited in understanding to have created such a mess. And therefore Buddha's teachings, which are the way out of suffering ultimately, are far superior than those of the 'god' who created suffering. Can Buddhists not see what is going on here? A man, Buddha, is setting himself up above God. Effectively, Buddhism has reduced God to an ignorant force, merely because they lack the faith to accept that suffering is used by Him in ways which we are too limited to fully understand. In short, Buddhism lacks any dimension of faith . It seems to be yet another humanly designed religion which, as it were, is placed on the shop shelf in the hope desperate, hurt people may buy it. Faith is belief in what you cannot see, and according to Jesus and the Bible, faith is the essential quality our currently invisible creator seeks for in us (Heb. 11:1). For Buddhists, devotion to buddhas and bodhisattvas is channelled by the use of artefacts like images and temples. Why? Simply because Buddhism offers humanity a short cut around what is essential for a true relationship with God, namely, faith. In this Buddhism has many similarities with Catholicism- Catholic rosary beads are in principle similar to the mani religion wheels of Buddhism. The question arises as to whether you want mere religion, or... a real and dynamic relationship with your creator, the one, personal, Almighty God who seeks above all else a relationship with you, and to eternally save you into His Kingdom. Likewise the way in Sri Lanka, Buddhist kings have always protected the relic of Buddha's tooth is similar to the way in which supposed nails from the cross are venerated by Roman Catholics. The practice of Buddhist pilgrimages to places where Buddha is known to have been, or to some object connected with him, is akin to Catholic pilgrimages to Lourdes and other supposedly holy places. Stupas believed to contain relics of the Buddha are found all over Asia, just as the Catholic church has established shrines throughout Europe and the Middle East. My friends, this is all just mere religion. It isn't for me, and I plead with you to rise up to something more real and true.

Buddhism has correctly diagnosed the problem of humanity. "Subject to decay, disease, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, the desire comes to them: `O, that we were not subject

to these things!' 'O, that these things were not before us!' But this cannot be got by mere desiring; and not to get what one desires, is suffering". But Buddhism looks to humanity itself for a solution, when the problem is humanity itself. We of ourselves just can't solve it. The Bible offers the answer through Jesus Christ, a man like us, whose conception and being God intervened in, with the result that in Him we see a perfect man, who has opened up the way to escape all the problems of our humanity in that He conquered the power of sin. And sin according to the Bible is the root source of all our sufferings. Buddhism seems to say that we suffer because we suffer, we are as we are because that's how we are. No explanation is given of why this all is, and therefore I submit that the answers Buddhism gives are also irrelevant. For it seeks to tackle a problem which it doesn't understand. And worse than this, Buddhism's inability to define where suffering comes from has led it to concluding that the creation was created out of some kind of ignorance of perfection. The Bible describes God as creating everything "very good"- but it was humanity, through Adam and Eve, which spoils it. And yet God's intention is to bring the earth back to this "very good" state through the descendant of Eve, the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely nobody can reflect upon the wonder of creation and seriously conclude that this is the work of an ignorant force? Surely the goodness of the creator is seen in His creation? Admittedly, the problem of a marred creation occurs, but the Biblical account of the fall and of earth's redemption through Christ makes perfect sense of this. Buddhism criticises creation because it is so obsessed with the suffering human condition as the ultimate evil; and it offers no concrete explanation of how this state of suffering came into being. Yet Buddhism has to conclude that creation or existence itself is the cause of our problems, not us: "Buddhists believe in a universe of continuous creation and destruction (flux, impermanence) which is the root cause of pain, loss and separation". Yet to blame creation is meaningless. It's like blaming the problem on the problem. It's a circular argument- which springs out of an inability to face up to human sinfulness as the root cause of problems. Indeed, Buddhism has so devalued the concept of sin that there is little room for any drawing of a clear line between right and wrong. The ordinary Buddhist faces no externally imposed sanctions for transgression of Buddhist precepts- because there is no real sense of right and wrong. Response to e.g. adultery is that a man will die young in his next life, or be reborn with a small penis. Yet we must ask who makes these decisions, and from where does the power derive that causes all this to happen? If there is no Almighty, personal God, then this question remains unanswered by Buddhism. Many offences are merely an inattention to deportment and decorum, and acknowledgement of them is all that is required. Yet the Bible teaches that sin is a real and felt offence against God, and the forgiveness it requires is only realisable through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The feeling of grace, of being forgiven, is what binds a man back in grateful and humble devotion to his God and his Lord, Jesus. This isn't possible in Buddhism.

The Buddhist obsession with escaping suffering and getting a good life has led them to think that any person born deformed is suffering the result of past evil actions in a previous life. But when confronted with a man born blind, Jesus said that this man was not in that position because he had sinned (Jn. 9:2-3). This is a direct contradiction between Christianity and Buddhism. For some Buddhists to imply that all religions led to the same end is ridiculous. There are crucial differences between Christianity and Buddhism.

Rebirth being possible as a man or an animal, Buddhism sees man as merely an animal. Whilst the Bible says that man is mortal as animals are mortal (Ecc. 3:25-27; 9:5,6), it clearly teaches that we are made in the image of the real and corporeal God who created us. Because we are in God's image, we must respect each other (James 3:9-10), and give to God whatever has God's image (Mark 12:16-17), i.e., our very own bodies. If animals and plants are the incarnations of people, and murder is wrong, then it follows that Buddhists should never kill animals nor plants. And yet they

do. And they have never given a satisfactory explanation of this massive contradiction in their belief system. It makes so much more sense to believe what the Bible says, that God has created animals and plants to be eaten and received by us with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

6.3.9 “The spirits in prison”

1 Pet. 3:18-21 is sometimes used to ‘prove’ that we can exist in the form of disembodied spirits, and thus the essential differences between true Christianity and Buddhism are minimized:

“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (ASV).

“He went”

Firstly, we need to remove any misunderstanding which arises from the phrase “he went”. Contemporary Greek literature often used such expressions in a redundant sense. Eph. 2:17 speaks of the Lord Jesus ‘coming’ and preaching peace to us. But this doesn’t mean that He Himself in person came up to us and preached. Indeed, the language of going, coming or moving is often used in relation to the preaching of a person- e.g. Mt. 9:13: “*but go* and learn what that meaneth”. The Lord didn’t intend that they literally went away somewhere. Likewise Dan. 12:4 and Hab. 2:2 bid those who understand God’s word to “run”- not literally, but in response to the word preached. God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He ‘preaches’ to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to “go, tell Ebed-melech...” a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn’t have literally left prison to do so- but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord’s word has as it were experienced the Lord ‘going’ to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could ‘go’ to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time.

Preaching In The Spirit

We seek to understand how Christ could preach in his spirit. He was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in [Gk. ‘through, on account of’] the spirit”. The Lord was raised “according to the spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4). Why was Christ resurrected? Because of His sinless life and character, i.e. His “spirit” of a holy life. In this lies the connection between the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus. He was raised by the Father because of His spirit of holiness, his holy spirit of life. We too will be raised to eternal life on account of our spirit of life which we are now developing: “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). This passage shows that the spirit of Christ is the same spirit that is to dwell in us. This doesn’t mean we are disembodied spirits, but rather that our way / spirit of life must be that of Jesus. 1 Pet. 4:1 makes the same point- we are to arm ourselves with the same mind / spirit that was in Christ as He suffered on the cross. If our Spirit and that of Christ coincide and are one, then we have the witness that we are truly God’s children (Rom. 8:16). It was through *this* same spirit that Christ witnessed to imprisoned humanity, especially at the time of Noah, as Peter shows. The

spirit of Christ was in all the prophets, and this was the essence of their witness. “The testimony [preaching] of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” in the sense that the preaching of the prophets was in essence the preaching of Jesus insofar as they had His Spirit in their message.

There is an undoubted theme throughout 1 Peter 3 and 4 of the opposition between the “flesh” (that which is external, the appearance of things) and the “spirit”, that which is internal, which is of God.

Being dead to sins	Should live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24)
Not the outward adorning	But the hidden man... a quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:3,4)
Put to death in the flesh	But quickened by the spirit (1 Pet. 3:18)
Baptism is not a washing of the flesh	But the answer of a good conscience / spirit (1 Pet. 3:21)
Don't live in the flesh	But to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2)
Judged by men in the flesh [outwardly]	Live to God in the spirit (1 Pet. 4:6)

The spirit by which Jesus was quickened is thus paralleled with our spirit of living to God, a quiet spirit, a life of righteousness, of good conscience etc. His Spirit is to be our spirit- we are to be of the “same mind / spirit” with Him, sharing the mind which He had especially during His time of dying (1 Pet. 4:1). And this is exactly the point of Phil. 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” at the time of His death. Notice that the Spirit of Jesus is epitomized by the mindset which He displayed during His death. It is this very mind / spirit which is to be in us. It is therefore in this sense that *through His death* the Lord Jesus preached ‘in spirit’ to those whom He had never met.

In this sense, it was the spiritually minded lifestyle of Noah which was his witness to the world of his day. Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:19 that Christ through His Spirit preached to the people of Noah’s day. In 2 Pet. 2:5 he says that Noah was a preacher of, or [Gk.] ‘by’ righteousness to the people around him. Yet in 1 Pet. 3:19 Peter says that Christ preached to those same people through His Spirit. The resolution surely is that although Noah had never met the Lord Jesus, he lived according to the same Godly spirit as did Jesus; and this was his witness to his world. There is ultimately only one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). The same spirit of holiness which was in Jesus was likewise thus in Noah. “The Spirit”, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are all equated in Rom. 8:9.

“The spirits in prison”

Biblically, a man or woman is identified with their spirit in the sense of their mind or way of life. Heb. 12:23 speaks of the spirits of just men, with whom the believer ought to associate. This means that we ought to identify ourselves with the way of life, the spirit of life, of “just men” of the past. God is “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22; 27:16) in the sense that He is the God of all humanity. So “spirits in prison” can refer to people who, in their spiritual lives, are imprisoned. Immediately the mind goes to Is. 42:2,7, which in speaking of the preaching of Jesus, prophecies that He would release the spiritually imprisoned- not so much by direct didactic teaching, but by the spirit of His personality and example. So the “prison” is simply the prison of the human mind, which the mental example of Jesus can open up.

We obviously ask *why* ordinary people should be described in this passage as “spirits”. The context is speaking of the witness of Jesus to people through His Spirit or way of life as manifested in His people. The *spirit* within His people appeals to the imprisoned *spirit* or heart / mind of their audience. We appeal to the *heart*, the spirit, by our witness- not merely to the intellect. The spirit of Christ within us appeals to the imprisoned spirit within others.

The “spirits in prison” were once [“aforetime”] disobedient (1 Pet. 3:20). The same two Greek words translated “aforetime” and “disobedient” occur in Rom. 11:30 about all of us, who “in times past [s.w. “aforetime”] have not believed [s.w. “disobedient”]. This is surely one of the many times when Peter’s phrasing is so similar to Paul’s that he is surely alluding to him; and thus Peter is making the point that although the witness of the spirit of Christ was, in his context, specifically to Noah’s generation, it is also the witness which we all receive from those with the spirit of Christ at any time. Peter has just spoken of how disobedient [s.w.] people are converted by the witness of a spiritual, Christ-centred way of life (1 Pet. 3:1). Peter is writing against a background of “the last days”, of which Noah’s generation is a clear type. Just as they were witnessed to by the spirit of Christ in Noah, so will the generation of the last days have a like witness. God’s patience “waited” in Noah’s time; the Greek implies to wait *for* something. It is also translated “expect”. God was waiting for and expecting a response from Noah’s witness; and in this we see the essential hopefulness of God. He hoped against hope for response; and none came. The Spirit of Christ and of God has always been His witness to all generations. The question arises as to why Peter chose to especially focus upon the example of Noah out of all the generations. Perhaps this was because Noah’s generation is a type of the last days, in which Peter believed he was living. And therefore this entire study has a great relevance to our day; for the crucial witness of the last days is through the spirit of Christ in us witnessing to an increasingly self-imprisoned world.

6.4. Conclusion: What Buddhism Lacks

Buddhism lacks the power to transform. The purpose of Jesus Christ and the doctrines about Him which are found in the Bible was to radically transform human life in practice. There is a real basis for authority in Christianity- the Bible. Buddhism lacks this. All you can do is to read the Bible for yourself. Pray to the one true God for guidance, that He will bring you closer to Himself. Consider the real possibility that you could be baptised into the death and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I urge you to give yourself no rest about these matters. Apply to us for free literature and a free Bible study manual, which will enable you to systematically study the Bible in your own home at your own place. May God bless you.