

## **WHY IS JESUS BETTER THAN OTHER TEACHERS?**

Does Christianity really offer anything which is superior to other religions? Is Jesus Christ superior to other religious or philosophical leaders? Let us look at the claims and fundamental teachings of some of the founders of world religions and philosophical schools to see how they compare with Christ.

### **MOSES**

Being a Jew Himself, Jesus had no argument with Moses, the prophet who brought the Jewish Law and led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage to freedom as an independent nation. Moses and Jesus were prophets of the same God, and Jesus even said that He did not come to abolish the Law (Moses' writings) but to fulfill it ( Matt. 5:17 ). Jesus implies that Moses' words are God's words (cf. 19:4–5 with Gen. 2:24 ). However, in many respects, we find that Jesus is superior to Moses.

#### ***Moses predicted Jesus' coming***

In Deuteronomy 18:15–19 , Moses predicted that God would raise up a Jewish Prophet with a special message from God. Anyone who did not believe this Prophet would be judged by God. This passage has been traditionally interpreted as referring to Messiah. Genesis 3:15 is also understood by many to refer to Jesus as the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

#### ***Jesus had a superior revelation***

“The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” ( John 1:17 ). While Moses set up the moral and social structures which guided the nation, the Law could not save anyone from the penalty of their sins, which is death. As Paul says, “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” ( Rom. 3:20 ). The revelation which came through Jesus, though, was one in which the sins which the Law made known are forgiven, “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24 ). Christ's revelation builds on the foundation of Moses by solving the problem of which the Law made us aware.

#### ***Jesus has a superior position***

Moses is the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, but Jesus was more than a prophet. As the Book of Hebrews says, “Moses was faithful *in* all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son

over His house” ( Heb. 3:5–6 , italics added). While Moses served God, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with the right to rule over all servants.

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### **Moses: The Lawgiver**

Moses is not the founder of Judaism. The Jewish nation began with Abraham (ca. 2000 B.C. ) about 600 years before Moses. Moses was born into a Hebrew family in Egypt and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter to be a prince. After learning of his Hebrew heritage, he killed a man and fled Egypt to become a shepherd until God called him to free his people. He wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), which are known as the Pentateuch or Torah.

#### ***Jesus’ miracles were superior***

Moses certainly performed great miracles of the same kind that Jesus performed, but Christ’s miracles were greater in degree. Moses lifted the bronze serpent to give healing to those who would look, but he never made the blind to see or the deaf to hear. Also, there is nothing in Moses’ ministry to compare with the Resurrection.

#### ***Jesus’ claims were superior to Moses***

Simply put, Moses was not God; Jesus is. Moses never made a claim to be God and did nothing other than fulfill his role as a prophet. Jesus did claim to be God and provided miraculous evidence to prove it.

### MOHAMMED

The founder of Islam, Mohammed, would agree with Jesus and Moses that God is one, that He created the universe, and that He is beyond the universe. In fact there is a great amount of agreement over the events of the first sixteen chapters of Genesis, to the point where Hagar was cast out from Abram’s house. After this, the Bible focuses on Isaac while Islam is concerned with what happened to their forefather Ishmael. The teaching of Mohammed may be summarized in five doctrines. (1) Allah is the one true God. (2) Allah has sent many prophets, including Moses and Jesus, but Mohammed is the last and greatest of all. (3) The Koran is the supreme religious book, taking priority over the Law, the Psalms, and the Injil (Evangel) of Jesus. (4) There are many intermediate beings (angels) between God and us, some of whom are good and others are evil. (5) Each man’s deeds will be weighed on a balance to determine if he will go to heaven or hell in the resurrection. The way to gain salvation includes reciting the Shahadah several times a day (“There is no God but Allah; and Mohammed is his prophet.”), prayer five times a day, a month of fasting each year, almsgiving, and a pilgrimage to Mecca.

But we find that Jesus offers a superior message in many respects.

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## **Mohammed: Prophet of Allah**

Mohammed was born in Mecca in A.D. 570 and died in A.D. 632. Originally named Abu'l Kassim, he was orphaned at an early age and raised by his uncle, who took him on many long journeys with trade caravans. At twenty-five years of age, he married his employer, quit working, and spent his time meditating and reflecting on life. When he was forty, he began having visions accompanied by violent convulsions during which he received his revelation from Allah. Due to persecution, he and his followers fled Mecca to Yathrib, which he renamed Medina, and this is the official beginning of Islam. The next ten years were marked by almost constant fighting to gain new converts and new territory for his religion until Mecca was finally won. His writings are called the Koran, which he claims were dictated to him by the Angel Gabriel.

### ***Jesus offers a better way of salvation***

Unlike the God of Islam, the God of the Bible has reached out to us in a special way by sending His Son to earth to die for our sins. Mohammed offered no sure hope for salvation, only guidelines for how to work our way into Allah's favor. Christ provided all that is needed to get us to heaven in His death. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" ( 1 Peter 3:18 ).

### ***Jesus offers a superior life***

Mohammed spent the last ten years of his life at war. He was a polygamist, exceeding even the number of wives (four) he had prescribed for his religion. It is reported that he also violated his own law by plundering caravans coming to and from Mecca, some of whom were probably coming for their pilgrimage.

### ***Jesus offers superior miracles***

The stories of Mohammed moving the mountain and his military conquests do not compare to the miracles of Christ. The evidence for them is neither as early nor from eyewitnesses. There is no inherent goodness and compassion in them, as we see in Christ's miracles. And none of them can be likened to Jesus' resurrection for its power and uniqueness.

### ***Jesus offers superior claims***

Mohammed never claimed to be God. The doctrine of the Trinity, which explains how Jesus can be God, is misunderstood by Islam as polytheism. Mohammed only claimed to be a prophet, but Jesus claimed to be God. Not only did He make that claim, but He proved it by rising from the dead.

## HINDU GURUS

In the Hindu religion, there are a great number of sects and differences of opinion, so no generalizations apply to all Hindus, but the doctrines mentioned here are foundational to Hinduism. Guru means teacher, and these men are essential to Hinduism because the Hindu scriptures cannot be understood by reading; they must be learned from a guru. These men are considered holy and worshiped even after their deaths. What they teach is that man needs liberation from the endless cycle of reincarnation ( *samsara* ) which is brought on by karma, the effects of all words, deeds, and actions in the present and all former lives. Liberation ( *moksha* ) is obtained when the individual expands his being and consciousness to an infinite level and realizes that atman (the self) is the same as Brahman (the One absolute being from which all else proceeds). In other words, each Hindu must realize that he is God. Such a realization can only be achieved by following one of the following disciplines: (1) Jnana Yoga—salvation by knowledge of the ancient writings and inward meditation, (2) Bhakti Yoga—salvation by devotion to one of the many Hindu deities, (3) Karma Yoga—salvation by works, such as ceremonies, sacrifices, fasting, and pilgrimages, which must be done without thought of their rewards. Each of these methods will to some extent include Raja Yoga, a meditation technique involving control over the body, breathing, and thoughts. This is what Hinduism is ideally. Hinduism as it is actually practiced consists largely of superstition, legendary stories about the gods, occult practices, and demon worship.

The teaching of Jesus Christ is superior to Hinduism in several significant ways.

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### **The Beginnings of Hinduism**

The Hindu religion had its earliest stages about 2000 B.C. The tribes living in the Indus Valley of northern India had a polytheistic religion that was primarily occult. These tribes were later conquered by armies from central Asia who combined their Vedic religion, which emphasized nature more than gods, with that of the Indus Valley tribes. This made a complete chain of gods and goddesses. The final period became more philosophical as writings called the Upanishads began to focus on one single principle to tie all reality together. This pantheistic principle is called Brahman. This period also introduced the idea of reincarnation.

### ***Jesus teaches a superior worldview***

In chapter 3 we discussed the problems with an atheistic worldview and concluded that theism was a superior view. As we said in evaluating pantheism, it is impossible to meaningfully say, “I came to realize I am God,” since God always knew He was God. Yet the claim of godhood is the heart of all Hindu thought and religion.

### ***Jesus is morally superior to the gurus***

Classical Hinduism insists that suffering people be left to suffer because it is their destiny as determined by karma. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” and He defined neighbor as anyone in need of help. John said, “But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” ( 1 John 3:17 ) Also, many, if not most, gurus use their esteemed position to exploit their followers financially and sexually. The Bagwan Sri Rajneesh accumulated dozens of Rolls Royces as gifts from his followers. The Beatles became disenchanted with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi when they learned that he was much more interested in the body of one of the ladies in their party than with the spirits of any of them, and they admitted, “We made a mistake.”

### ***Jesus gives a superior method for spiritual enlightenment***

While the gurus are necessary to understand the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, the Bible can be understood by anyone. There is no esoteric or hidden truth there that must be explained apart from ordinary reasoning. Furthermore, Christian meditation is not an effort to empty the mind, but rather to fill it with the truth of scriptural principles ( Ps. 1 ). Inward meditation is like peeling an onion; you keep tearing off layer after layer until, when you reach the middle, you find that there is nothing there. Meditation on God’s Word begins with contentful sayings and opens up the meaning until it yields contentment of the soul.

### ***Jesus teaches a better way of salvation***

The Hindu is lost in the karmic cycle of reincarnation until he reaches *moksha*, and he is left alone to work his own way out. Jesus promised that we would be saved by faith and could know that our salvation is guaranteed ( Eph. 1:13–14 ; 1 John 5:13 ).

## BUDDHA

Siddhārtha Gautama (Buddha is a title meaning “enlightened one”) developed a religion that is quite different from Judaism and Christianity. Buddhism began as a reformation within Hinduism, which had become a system of speculation and superstition. To correct this, Gautama rejected the rituals and occultism and developed an essentially atheistic religion (though later forms of Buddhism return to the Hindu gods). His basic beliefs are summed up in the Four Noble Truths: (1) Life is suffering, (2) Suffering is caused by desires for pleasure and prosperity, (3) Suffering can be overcome by eliminating desires, (4) Desire can be eliminated by the Eightfold Path. This Path is both a system of religious education and the moral precepts of Buddhism. It includes right knowledge (Four Noble Truths), right intentions, right speech, right conduct (no killing, drinking, stealing, lying, or adultery), right occupation (none which cause suffering), right effort, right mindfulness (denial of the finite self), and right meditation (Raja Yoga). The goal of all Buddhists is not heaven or being with God, for there is no God in Gautama’s teaching. Rather they

seek nirvana, the elimination of all suffering, desires, and the illusion that the self exists. While a more liberal branch of Buddhism now exists which has deified Gautama and thinks of him as a savior (called Mahayana Buddhism), Theravada Buddhism stays closer to Gautama's teachings and maintains that he never claimed divinity. As to being a savior, it is reported that Buddha's last words were, "Buddhas do but point the way; work out your salvation with diligence."

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### **Buddha: The Enlightened One**

Siddhārtha Gautama was born around 560 B.C. to an upper-class family. His early years were very comfortable and sheltered, so he was in his twenties before he realized that there was great suffering in the world. He studied with Hindu masters and practiced asceticism for a time, then realized that both extremes (indulgence and asceticism) were futile. He chose the middle path of meditation. While meditating under a fig tree one day, he is said to have gained enlightenment and reached nirvana. The writings and sayings attributed to Buddha were written about 400 years after his death, so there is no way of knowing how reliable they are. He died of food poisoning about 480 B.C.

As a variant form of Hinduism, Buddhism is subject to all of the criticisms mentioned before, and Jesus' teaching seems superior in these ways also.

#### ***Jesus teaches hope in life***

While Buddhism sees life only as suffering, and selfhood as something to be eradicated, Jesus taught that life is a gift of God to be enjoyed ( John 10:10 ) and that the individual is to be honored supremely ( Matt. 5:22 ). Furthermore, He promised hope in the life to come ( John 14:6 ). Surely this is better than the elimination of desire and self that Gautama taught.

#### ***Jesus teaches a better way of salvation***

The Buddhist also teaches reincarnation as the means of salvation. However, in this form the self or individuality of the soul is eradicated at the end of each life. So even though you live on, it is not you as an individual who has any hope of attaining nirvana. Jesus promised an individual hope to each man as an individual ( John 14:3 ) and said to the thief on the cross beside Him, "Today you shall be with Me in paradise" ( Luke 23:43 ).

#### ***Jesus teaches His own deity***

Again, the last word on the subject is spoken by an empty tomb which proves Jesus' claims to be God in the flesh. Gautama made no such claim and offered no proof that it was the case. He simply wanted to point the way for others to follow him to nirvana.

## SOCRATES

Socrates didn't leave any writings, but Plato, his disciple, wrote a great deal about him, though these accounts may reflect as much Plato's thought as Socrates'. Plato presents Socrates as a man convinced that God has appointed him the task of promoting truth and goodness by making men examine their words and deeds to see if they are true and good. Vice, in his opinion, was merely ignorance, and knowledge led to virtue. He is credited as the first man to recognize a need to develop a systematic approach to discovering truth, though the system itself was finally formulated by Aristotle—a disciple of Plato's. Like Christ, Socrates was condemned to death on the basis of false accusations from authorities who were threatened by his teaching. He could have been acquitted if he had not insisted on making his accusers and judges examine their own statements and lives, which they were unwilling to do. He was content to die, knowing that he had carried out his mission to the end, and that death, whether a dreamless sleep or a wonderful fellowship of great men, was good.

However, Jesus is clearly superior in many respects. For example:

### *Jesus had a superior basis for truth*

Jesus, like Socrates, often used questions to make men examine themselves, but His basis for knowing the truth about men and God was rooted in the fact that He was the all-knowing God. He said of Himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He was, in His very being, the fount from which all truth ultimately flowed. Likewise, as God, He was the absolute goodness by which all other goodness is measured. He once asked a young man to examine his words by saying, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). Jesus was the very truth and good which Socrates wanted to understand.

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### **Socrates: The Father of Reason**

Socrates was born about 470 B.C. when the Greek Empire was flourishing. His parents were wealthy and he was well educated in philosophical matters. He began his campaign to teach truth and right when he heard from the Oracle at Delphi that he was the wisest man in the world. Socrates was sure that this could not be true, but after speaking with many other wise men, he concluded that it must be true because he was the only one who knew that he was not the wisest man in the world.

### *Jesus gave a more certain knowledge of the truth*

While Socrates taught many true principles, he often was left to speculate about many important issues, such as what happens at death. Jesus, on the other hand, gave a sure answer to such questions because He had sure knowledge of man's destination. Where reason (Socrates) has insufficient evidence to make a definite conclusion, revelation (Jesus) gives answers that otherwise would not be known.

***Jesus' death was more noble***

Socrates died for a cause and did so with courage, which is certainly to be commended. However, Jesus died as a substitute for others (Mark 10:45) to pay the penalty that they deserved. Not only did He die for those who were His friends, but also for those who were and would remain His enemies (Rom. 5:6–7). Such a demonstration of love cannot be equaled by any philosopher.

***Jesus' proof of His message is superior***

Rational proofs are good when there is sound evidence for their conclusions. But Socrates cannot support his claim to be sent by God with anything that compares to the miracles of Christ and His resurrection. In these acts there is a superior proof that Jesus' message was authenticated by God as true.

LAO-TZU (TAOISM)

Modern Taoism is a threefold religion of witchcraft, superstition, and polytheism, but it was originally a system of philosophy, and that is how it is being presented to Western culture today. Lao-tzu (if he ever existed) built this system around one principle which explained everything in the universe and guided it all. That principle is called the Tao (pronounced *dow*). There is no simple way to explain the Tao. The world is full of conflicting opposites, like good and evil, male and female, light and dark, yes and no, etc. All oppositions are manifestations of the conflict between yin and yang. But in ultimate reality, yin and yang are completely intertwined and perfectly balanced. That balance is the mystery called the Tao. To understand the Tao is to realize that all opposites are one and that truth lies in contradiction, not in resolution. Taoism goes beyond this to say that man should live in harmony with the Tao. He should enter a life of complete passiveness and reflection on questions like, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "If a tree falls in the forest when no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" One should be at peace with nature and avoid all forms of violence. This system of philosophy has many similarities to Zen Buddhism.

Christ is superior in the freedom that He brings to man.

***Jesus allows man the freedom to be reasonable***

We have said before that it is impossible to meaningfully say, "Reason does not apply to reality," because the statement itself is a reasonable statement about reality (it is either true or false about the way things really are). You would have to use reason to deny that reason is valid! But this is what the Tao does. It says that all truth lies in contradiction: the very thing reason says is impossible. Truth is not only beyond reason, but says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment" (Matt. 22:37–38). The God of the Old



Testament even says, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18). Jesus gives man the freedom to use reason to evaluate truth claims.

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### **Lao-tzu: The Old Master**

Legend has it that Lao-tzu was the keeper of the royal archives before he decided to travel to the unexplored West. As he was going, a gatekeeper persuaded him to write down the great wisdom he had gained in his occupation, so he wrote a book containing 5,000 characters in 81 brief paragraphs which elaborated his philosophy. That book is the *Tao Te Ching*. Though his dates are usually said to be in the sixth century B.C., virtually all the information we have about him is as legendary as this story. It is likely that these legends began developing in the time of the great Taoist philosopher, Chuang Tzu, who lived in the fourth and third centuries B.C. The writing of the *Tao Te Ching* can also be dated to this time. Chuang Tzu’s commentary on the Tao is called the Tao Tsang. It has more than 1,100 volumes and is also considered scripture.

#### ***Jesus allows man the freedom to choose***

Taoism asks man to set his will on the shelf, to give up the power to change things around him. Jesus says that man has a choice, and that his choice makes all the difference in the world. Man has a choice to believe or not believe ( John 3:18 ), to obey or disobey ( 15:14 ), to change the world or be changed by it ( Matt 5:13–16 ).

#### ***Jesus allows man the freedom to be saved***

Taoism offers only a way to resign oneself to the way things are. Christ offers a way to change both who we are and what we are, so that we might know the joys of life. Rather than accepting death as an inevitable end, Christ provides a way to conquer death by His resurrection. Lao-tzu could make no such boast.

So Jesus can be found to be superior to other teachers for many reasons. No other teacher has made the claims to be God that Jesus has. Even when the followers of some prophet deified their teacher, there is no proof given for that claim that can be compared to the fulfillment of prophecy, the sinless and miraculous life, and the Resurrection. No other teacher offered salvation by faith, apart from works, based on what they had already done for us. Most notably though, no religious or philosophical leader has displayed the love for people that Jesus did in dying for the sins of the world (John 15:13; Rom.5:6–8). Jesus is truly worthy of supreme devotion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Geisler, N. L., & Brooks, R. M. (1990). *When skeptics ask* (Page 128). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.