

**Our Daily Bread Christian University**  
This course was developed by  
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Our Daily Bread Ministries.*



Perhaps the most crucial tension in accelerated globalization is the varying views of God and salvation. It is here that followers of the various religions touch upon the question closest to the heart: What is going to happen to me after I die?

### The Hindu View of Salvation

Hindus see themselves and their gods as manifestations of an inexpressibly great and impersonal Brahman. They see themselves as extensions of God rather than as unique and distinct image-bearers of Brahman. They see time as a repeating, endless cycle. History, therefore, is not on a timeline toward a goal.

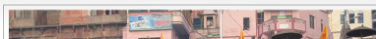
Hindus accordingly do not speak of a personal salvation from sin or an expectation of conscious everlasting bliss. Salvation for them is liberation from a potentially endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They live under the ongoing law of karma, the Hindu doctrine of retribution. If you do wrong you will pay—if not in this life, in your next reincarnation. If you are good, you will be reincarnated on a higher level. If not, on a lower level.

The only way to escape this endless cycle is to walk the “threefold path” of (1) works—careful observance of Hindu rites and ceremonies, (2) knowledge—coming to the realization that we are not real, personal entities but only manifestations of Brahman, the one reality, and (3) devotion—ardent worship of one of the Hindu deities accompanied by loving relationships with family, superiors, co-workers, and friends.

The goal is such a perfect union with the impersonal, indefinable Brahman that it results in the loss of the illusion of self-consciousness. Because these concepts are difficult to grasp, it is usually the more sophisticated and philosophically minded Hindu who makes a serious effort to walk this threefold path.



By 23 dingen voor musea from Nederland (Dhiva Natasid) (CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://realincarnations.org/>) licensed by via GFDL via Wikimedia Commons.



**Most Hindus hope simply for a better reincarnation in their next life.**





Most Hindus find a degree of comfort in the worship of their god, accepting an eternity of births, deaths, and rebirths. Their hope is a better reincarnation in their next life.

### The Buddhist View of Salvation

Buddhism, like Hinduism, seeks for liberation from life as we know it. It does not offer forgiveness or individual resurrection. Although it is divided into many sects—from the practical atheism of Theravada Buddhism to the theism of Pure Land Buddhism—it is a pantheistic religion in all its forms. Everything and everyone is a manifestation of one impersonal, ultimate reality.

Buddhism is similar to Hinduism in that it teaches repeated births, deaths, and rebirths. It also teaches the principle that personal conduct in this life determines the nature of the next rebirth.

The ultimate goal of following the Buddha’s “Four Noble Truths” (see Lesson Four) is to reach the state of nirvana. This state is often described as “a blowing out,” like what we do to the flame on a candle. Others use the word *nothingness*. The Buddhists who seem to adhere most closely to the teachings of the Buddha undeniably equate nirvana with nothingness.

Not all Buddhists, however, want to think in terms of complete extinction. Many express anticipation of continued consciousness beyond this life. What that ultimate life is like is not clear. Some affirm a paradox—that in the nothingness of nirvana they will attain a fullness that is unattainable in our present three-dimensional world.

### The Islamic View of Salvation

Muslims believe in a personal God, a bodily resurrection of the dead, individual judgment, and two destinies—heaven for some, hell for others.

While the Koran itself says little about the intermediate state between death and resurrection, other Islamic literature goes into much detail. The soul that leaves the body at death is quickly returned to it. In the grave an angel asks, “Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your prophet?” If the answer is “God, Islam, and Muhammad,” the person is given a window

#### The Buddhist View of Salvation

Four Noble Truths  
and the eight-fold path



Nirvana  
“Nothingness”



By Helmut Pflüger (CC BY 2.0) (http://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Prayer.jpg) via Wikimedia Commons

into heaven and can savor its delightful scent. If the soul gives the wrong answer, it feels the hot winds of hell. Some Muslims believe that this state continues until the day of resurrection. Others believe that this experience is followed by a deep sleep until the awakening on the last day. On the final day, all will be judged by God and assigned to heaven or hell.

Muslims also have varying concepts of heaven and hell. Some take the Koranic descriptions of heaven literally and view it as a place of sensual delights. Most, however, see heaven's greatest pleasure as being near God.

The same differences abound in the Muslim concepts of hell. Some take the Koranic descriptions literally and view it as unbelievably terrible. Others take these portraits as symbolic and point to other passages in the Koran that give a less frightening picture and leave open the possibility that the punishment will not last forever.

The Koran does not see human nature as sinful. Instead, it teaches that people are basically good. Muslims believe that people sometimes sin because they are weak and forgetful, not because they are bad. Their sins, therefore, do not greatly displease God. He knows that because humans are mere creatures they will sin sometimes. But if He chooses to show favor to individuals, He will forgive them just as they are. And if He decides to withhold His favor, He will not forgive. Because human sinfulness is not the issue, there's no need to be redeemed and born again.

### *The Islamic View of Salvation*

**“I hope it is God’s will to receive me into heaven.”**

To be saved, a Muslim must affirm that God is one, view Muhammad as the greatest of all the prophets, accept the Koran as inspired revelation, believe that God decrees everything that happens, recite the Islamic confession, heed the calls to prayer, keep the fasts, give alms, and make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca. Some Muslims also require belief in jihad (or holy war).

Those who try to hold these beliefs and live up to the ritualistic requirements of Islam live in a degree of uncertainty. They hope their good deeds will outweigh their sins. They are not certain, however, about their fate. They can only say, “I hope it is God’s will to receive me into heaven.”

### **The Judeo-Christian View of Salvation**



The Bible's teaching about salvation is rooted in the grace and love of a God who uses the principle of "a life for a life" to solve the problem of human sin. The Old and New Testament Scriptures emphasize the offensiveness of human sin in the eyes of a holy, loving God. They say that because of God's absolute, uncompromising purity, He cannot casually forgive us. This explains why the God of whom 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love," went to such extreme and self-sacrificing lengths to solve the sin problem and make salvation available to those who trust Him.

**How the God of the Bible sees us.** The God of the Bible is slow to become angry, but because He is so perfect in love and purity, He is deeply grieved when He sees people break His rules and do harm to one another. The Scriptures teach that He has placed within all people an innate sense of right and wrong. In the Old Testament, He gave commands and prohibitions to follow. The New Testament record goes even further by giving us a perfect example to follow in Jesus.

But we, by nature, as members of a fallen race, continually fail to do what we know we should do, and we do things we know we should not do. The Bible indicates that we are inclined to make idols of success and happiness instead of making God and His will our primary aim. Old and New Testament Scriptures repeatedly describe human societies as marked by greed, dishonesty, sexual immorality, cruelty, and self-centeredness.

In the New Testament Gospels, a compassionate and merciful Jesus diagnosed the malady as a corruption of human nature when He said, "From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly" (Mark 7:21-22). This means that people are sin-sick and need a cure. Their thoughts, words, and actions are a foul odor to a God who made people to love Him and one another. This view of human nature explains why the Bible so often speaks of God's wrath! God is too good and loving to ignore the need for justice and mercy. Both Old and New Testaments describe all people as guilty sinners in the presence of the Holy One, the moral Judge of all. Therefore, we need to be forgiven before we can relate to Him. And we need to be changed on the inside before we can truly love Him and one another.

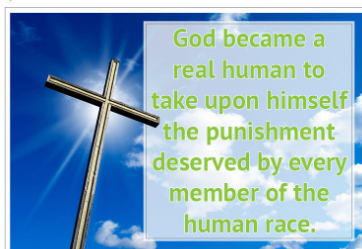
**What the God of the Bible cannot do.** According to the Bible,



God cannot just overlook human weakness and sin. Even parents can't overlook the sins of their children or they will reap a bitter harvest. And judges who don't punish criminals do an injustice to humanity and to God.

Therefore God, the supreme Lawgiver, Judge, and Ruler of all, cannot be casual about our sins. His laws are not simple rules He thought up. They flow from His inner nature. He can no more make stealing, adultery, and murder right than He can create two adjacent mountains without a valley between them. His laws are written into the very fabric of the universe. When humans carelessly or rebelliously break them they destroy themselves. For the God of the Bible to forgive without satisfying the demands of His holy nature would be impossible.

#### What the God of the Bible Did

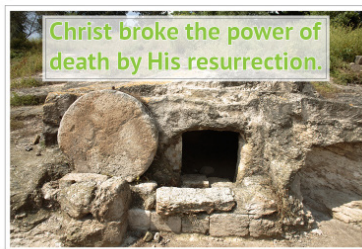


**What the God of the Bible did.** God could have acted consistently with His holy nature by punishing and banning all humans from His presence. But in addition to calling Him the "Holy One," the Bible also says that God is love. And in love He acted to remedy the problem by offering His own Son as the sacrifice and payment for human sin.

Christians believe that Jesus, as the God-man, lived the sinless life humans did not live and died the death they deserved to die. God, in the person of His own Son and Messiah, experienced on the cross the desolation of hell and entered the chamber of death. The New Testament writer Paul proclaimed the message that "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Followers of Christ point out that this offer of forgiveness was extremely costly to God. According to the New Testament, it was God who suffered and died on the cross. This can only be understood by a recognition that the God of the Bible exists as a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

#### What the God of the Bible Did



The New Testament does not describe God as a first party punishing Jesus (the second party) for people's sins. It does not portray God as putting the price for human sin on an innocent substitute. Instead, the three-in-one God, in the person of Jesus, became a real human to take upon Himself the punishment deserved by every member of the human race.



In the union of the Godhead, all three persons suffered when the Son in human flesh experienced the desolation of hell while on the cross.

Followers of Christ therefore do not believe that a loving and holy God has been unjust in forgiving even the worst sinner who comes to Him for salvation. They express deep gratefulness for His overflowing kindness. Christians point out that a wrongdoer never has a right to demand forgiveness. It can come only through the generosity of the one offended. The God of the Bible did what He did through sheer grace. Christians say they cannot comprehend such love but can only marvel at it and give themselves to Christ in loving obedience, worship, and service.

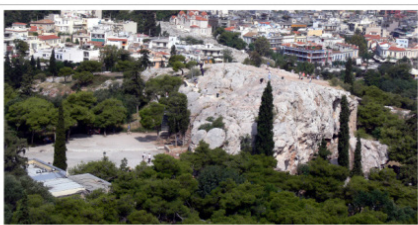
The good news of the Bible does not stop here. The One who died to pay the price for the sin of every person who ever lived broke the power of death by His resurrection. The New Testament describes Him as being alive—a living Savior of all who will acknowledge their sins and entrust themselves to Him. The apostle Paul wrote, “If, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!” (Romans 5:10).

Those who accept the God and Christ of the Bible claim the assurance that one day Jesus “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

This is the essence of what Christians call the good news of Christ.

### **Back to the Beginning**

First-century Christian faith was born in a pluralistic world. Those who accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord lived among neighbors and family who were either Jewish or members of a wide variety of pagan religions. This didn’t change until AD 312, when Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the state religion. This led to a long period of human history during which the world was divided into Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim nations. Even when Western democracies established the principle of “separation of church and state,” they were seen as “Christian” nations. But that is no longer true. We now live in a global world culture that is even more



Athens Areopagus



pluralistic than the one faced by the first followers of Christ.

We would do well to learn from the apostle Paul. While visiting Athens, he was disturbed by all the idols he saw. But instead of attacking or ridiculing idolatry, he “reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17). In conversation with non-Christian philosophers, he was courteous and respectful in acknowledging their openness to a variety of religions (v.22). He favorably quoted one of their own poets (v.28), and was observant enough to see the questions they had about “an unknown god.” He was willing to share his own conviction that Jesus, in rising from the dead, had answered many questions about who God is and what we must do to be accepted by Him. In Paul’s case, some accepted his line of reasoning, and others did not.

In a world of many religious perspectives, it is impossible to avoid honest differences of convictions. For the sake of intellectual and spiritual integrity, people must be free to consider the evidence for God. What none of us can afford is the kind of religious intolerance that seeks to impose its beliefs on others.

The apostle Paul gave followers of Christ a good model for expressing our convictions without crossing the boundaries of intolerance and disrespect. To a young pastor named Timothy, Paul wrote, “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).