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How Would You Share the Gospel with an Animist or Buddhist?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about good ways to share the gospel with an animist or Buddhist, whether the mark of the beast could be a microchip, and whether a Christian could take the mark unwittingly.

- * What are some good ways to share the gospel with an animist or Buddhist?
- * Do you think the mark of the beast could be a microchip and that a Christian could actually take the mark unwittingly?

Transcript

#STRask How Would You Share the Gospel with an Animist or Buddhist? #STRask How Would You Share the Gospel with an Animist or Buddhist? This is Amy Hall and Greg Koukl and you're listening to the #STRask podcast. Hello, Greg. Hey, Amy.

Welcome listeners. We love having you here. We're going to start today with a question from Adam.

Greg mentioned he had spent some time living in Southeast Asia. I was wondering what are some good ways of sharing the gospel with the animist/Buddhis and what types of arguments are we likely to face? Well, the reason I'm pausing a little bit is because I actually never engaged that. I didn't engage Buddhism as such.

I didn't engage Animism as such. And by the way, these are two very different enterprises. But I lived in Southeast Asia.

I actually lived in Thailand. And we had a staff house in Bangkok we'd visit, but I lived mostly what they called the Chung Wat, which is the provinces. I was out near the Cambodian border working in a refugee camp.

And I lived in a village, a small village of a few thousand people, maybe five or six

thousand people. But I never engaged those issues directly. However, let me make this distinction about the culture.

In that culture, Buddhism is the religion of the nation. It is the official religion of the country. They have religious freedom, but that is the king is the guardian of Buddhism in that nation.

So even though there is a monarchy and it's separate from the government proper, but still there's a lot of loyalty regarding the king and respect, obviously. And the king is the guardian of Buddhism. Now, though Buddhism is the official, in a certain sense, religion of the country, it is not the visceral religion of the people, the visceral.

In other words, the religion that really drives them is animism. That is a belief in spirits who have power to accomplish things, either good or bad. And so in animism, what one does is goes through exercises or adopts certain fetishes that are meant to manage the spirit.

So the Cambodian kids, this is true in Cambodia as well as in Thailand, but the Khmer kids would wear keys. They get a lost key and they'd wear it around their neck. Their parents would put it on a string and they'd wear it around their neck, or they'd put a red string around their wrist.

What's that? Or tattoos. And these were spirit fetishes. These were attempts to fool spirits or keep spirits away.

All Thai children had nicknames. So they had long names that were hard to pronounce. That was their official name, but they were given nicknames like gop, which would be frog or knit, which is little or knit-noi little bit.

They're diminutive. And the idea was if you give your child a name that makes the child look unattractive to the spirits, the spirits won't mess with your child. So you have all of these things interlaced into the day-to-day culture that are really animistic.

And that's what that's the heart, I think, that really drives the people. So there's a mixture of two different religions, animism and Buddhism. Neither, by the way, are which are theistic.

So when people say, "Well, all religion deals with God and God loves everybody and blah, blah, blah, this is not the case. Animism has no interest in God." And neither does Buddhism. Buddhism is a non-theistic religion.

What I know about dealing with animists is that I had friends that had been missionaries for multiple generations, the Morris family, up in what's called the Golden Triangle. It's where far north of Thailand, where you have Burma and Thailand and Laos all coming together. All three countries kind of meeting close, and then China was just north of it.

And these are all animistic tribal peoples. And so they're working with the tribal, so they have to deal with the animism. And one of the ways that they dealt with it is to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is more powerful than the evil spirits, than the unholy spirits.

And so there were different ways that they would accomplish that, but they would also preach the gospel. And so what they were doing is preaching the gospel as an alternative view to their view, which gospel, which good news, provided the liberation from the spiritual forces that they were trying to manipulate to keep them at bay. And so they were speaking the gospel directly in the context of that animistic worldview.

Now, so that's very general the way that was done. And now when you talk about Buddhists, I have no interaction with Buddhists, so I have no sense about what works best with them. There is a sense, obviously, in every single case, offering the Christian view of reality, in its basic sense, the evil of man, here's why you see all this evil.

Why is there suffering? They're suffering because the world's broken. And Buddhism is about suffering. Some people say, well, religion is all about loving one another.

Well, Christianity is not about loving one another. Christianity is about forgiveness when we don't love. Islam is not about loving one another.

It's about submission to Allah. Buddhism isn't about loving. It's about suffering and avoiding suffering.

I see you just go right down the list. People just romanticize religion when it turns out. Animism isn't about love.

It's about controlling spirits. And so in any of these systems, though, when we communicate is contrary and opposed to that system, is this is the way the world actually is. And if you are trying to deal with suffering, you need to understand what causes suffering.

Now Buddhism says desire causes suffering and unmet needs. So we have to desire not to desire kind of thing, which creates its own problems, it seems to me. But the message we have is that's not the solution.

The solution is forgiveness and the new birth and resurrection. And so we can trust the gospel with the false understanding of reality and let the gospel do its work. I love that, Greg.

I didn't know what you were going to say. I don't really know much about animism or Buddhism, but it struck me as you were talking that one thing you can do with any system of thought is look for the part that is most different from the gospel. So you mentioned Greg, the idea of being enslaved to these superstitious rituals and things and

highlighting how the gospel frees you from that.

You know, it's funny. There's a, you know, the story about where Jesus heals or he exercises the legion of demons from the guy. And you know, this is the guy who's in the graveyard and he's he's shackled and he keeps breaking them and and obviously is demonized.

And so Jesus frees him. And then what do the people do? The people tell him to leave. And I never understood this.

But when I read Peace Child, it became clear to me that Don Richardson. Yes, that was about a tribe. I think it was Papua New Guinea.

Correct. And what I finally understood was that because their whole lives were centered around appeasing the spirits, the fact that Jesus would stir things up was very threatening because now there's so there's so much fear because everything's out of order and they have no way to appease these demons. I don't know if that's what's going on, but I think that could be why they were straining an announcement swallowing a camel, it seems to me because what this demonstrated, there's a way to be free from this, you know, right.

So that so that would be the difference there. And then in, you know, freeing people from that slavery to the spirits. And in Buddhism, you brought up the idea that you in suffering by by getting rid of your desires.

Well, you also have to, from what I understand, and I have a very basic understanding, but any ties that of love that you have are getting in the way of you becoming one with everything. And so their, their highest goal is to become one and to not have any of these individual ties, even of love. So the idea of individual love and, and the Trinity and the love within the Trinity, these, this might be a place where you can find the biggest difference between Christianity and Buddhism and the goal of either being with God, still as yourself, as separate beings, but with love between you, as opposed to becoming one with the universe where there's no individuals and there's no, there's no desires at all.

So if you can find the place that is farthest away from the gospel so that they understand the difference, I think that would be a great place to start. You know, it seems to me I read somewhere and I don't take this as fact. I'll probably check, I made a note to check it out, but the word nirvana means extinction.

And I think in, in both in Hinduism, Buddhism, it means extinction of want and suffering because of the extinction of the self, the losing of the self, the loss of self into the fullness of what is. Okay. The great one, Atene becomes Brahman kind of idea and Hinduism.

In fact, in Buddhism, as I recall, there, there is no stability of the self at all. There, there

is no real self. And I can't tell you more about that, but it's a, that's also part of the, the confusion there, you know, so, it's interesting.

People think nirvana is just their word for heaven. Well, it's only heaven in the sense that it's the ultimate end of everything, but it's very different from what we understand heaven to be and what heaven actually is. And that is places where conscious beings are in eternal friendship with a loving father.

Okay. That's all, that's, that's heaven. Nirvana is extinction.

You disappear. Big difference. That's the same view.

Atheists have, by the way. That when you die, that's it. That's curious, isn't it? Yeah.

And if you don't know what, whatever religion you're talking to someone about, start asking them questions. What is most important to you? What is the goal? What do you think the goal of life is? Where are you headed? Where are you trying to get? What's, what's important to you in your worldview? Any of these questions can draw out where the differences are between that and Christianity. And incidentally, when you're asking those questions, Amy, and I'm thinking now because I'm writing another book on this, broadly on the same issue, is that what you are editing wonderfully with me is that, that when you ask questions of clarification, gathering information, there is no risk whatsoever for you.

You are showing an interest in another person's view, and you're trying to get a very, very clear view as much as you possibly can of what that view entails in its entirety, all of these different aspects. And one thing you're going to find is, excuse me, when you begin asking these questions, you're going to get some answers, but most people have not done anything like a thorough assessment of their own views. And so you're getting hit a lot of silence as well.

Okay, Greg, we're going to switch gears pretty hard here. This one, this one comes from C4, the truth. Do you think a microchip could be the mark of the beast? Do you think a born-again believer could actually take the mark unwittingly? Or will it be obvious to believers that this, that, wait, will it be obvious to believers that it is the mark of Revelation 13? Well, that's a tough one to answer because when you go to, let's see, that would be Revelation 13.

Okay. And let me just go there because, of course, this isn't a question about 666. That's Revelation 13.

It talks about the mark of the beast. So what, let me just go there and see what it says here, just so I've got an accurate starting point. Whoa, Revelation 13.

I remember Revelation 13 is about this because it's the unlucky number, right? So isn't

that the dragon and the beast and Revelation 11, you got two there, one one. That's the, that's the two witnesses. This is the way I keep track of things.

They worship the dragon, they open a blast from these against God. Okay. He deceives those, the beast deceives those who are on the dwell on the earth.

It's giving him the breath of, okay, here at the end of that chapter, he provides that no one be able to spy or sell except the one who has the mark, causes all to be given a mark on the right hand or on the forehead and he provides no one will be able to buy or sell except one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom, let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast for the numbers that of a man and his number 666. So that's the famous 666.

It seems pretty clear from reading the passage that he says that is the starting point of calculating the real number. If you have wisdom, you can figure out how the 666 in somehow represents what he's talking about. Okay.

Now just an observation about that verse and also the mark of the beast. I mean this, I was tutored in my first three years as a Christian under Hal Lindsey. It was been in his home many times.

I even taught in his place. As even as a new Christian when he didn't show up for the Bible study. And of course, this is all part of that pre tribulation, pre-millennial, a kind of characterization of the book revelation.

Now I still hold to some of that stuff, but I don't hold to the pre tribulation view, the rapture view, not the issue. But I have no firm conviction about what any of this means, especially chapter 13. Because it could mean a lot of different things, you can take it very straightforward as a character as a description of something is going to happen.

In that there is some particular mark that is taken in which dictates whether a person can buy or sell, etc. By the way, I think that's a very fair way of taking the text. I just think we have to be careful because there's so much stuff in here that's odd and symbolic because it's a certain type of literature apocalyptic that we just have to not hold on to that with too strong a grip.

If you take it at face value, is it possible that the way this 666 thing works out is that it's a chip that could be on your forehead or on your palm or hand? Yeah, I think that's possible. It seems like this is the kind of technology that would fit one characterization of those passages. But I don't know if that's the accurate way of putting it.

I do know that historically, as Christians have looked at these passages, it is not unusual for different generations to be completely convinced that it is their generation will see these details. And they had reasons for that. I remember almost 50 years ago, so a bit of

Christian, almost 49 years.

And it was actually 48 years ago right now that I joined that community that Hellenzi was part of and started sitting under the teaching. And the community was fabulous. The Jesus Christ lighten powerhouse, it was called, actually lived there in Westlake Village.

And it was great for me as a building as foundation as a Christian. However, we were all kind of in a rapture rush. All of us single guys wanted to get married so that the rapture wouldn't beat us to the altar.

Right? Yeah. Really, it was like any second we're going to disappear. I remember jokingly in the day of my wedding.

I'm bidding goodbye, heading off my honeymoon and I'm saying to the crowd, I hope the rapture doesn't happen tonight. It's just making a joke. But here now, 50 years later, and it hasn't happened.

And so it doesn't mean it won't. It doesn't mean the view is wrong, necessarily. But I'm just simply saying it's not unusual for people to interpret the circumstances of their day in light of the book of Revelation and then conclude the temporal immediacy of the second coming of Christ.

So that's why I want to be careful even with my assessment. Question was, is it possible? The answer is, yeah, it's possible. It makes perfect sense.

That doesn't mean that that's what this passage is referring to. And I want to respond to the idea that, do you think a born again believer could actually take the mark unwittingly? Or will it be obvious to believers that this is the mark of Revelation 13? I do not think there's a chance that you could do something that will destroy your salvation and unwittingly take some sort of a mark that will mark you as the beast. I agree.

As being the beasts, not being the beast. So, and one thing I want to point out is before this chapter, there are a couple times, I'm looking right now at Revelation 7, 4, and I heard, oh, sorry, not not 4. Let me see. Where does this start here? So this is 7 starting in verse 3. Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond servants of our God on their foreheads.

So here we have two contrasting ideas, those who are sealed on their foreheads in God and those who are sealed on their foreheads in the beast. And the sealing on the foreheads by God happens before any talk of a mark of a beast. And here in chapter 9, again, let's see, they were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

So this is why I tend to think the seal is not something physical probably because it's contrasting with God sealing us on our foreheads. I don't really think there's going to be

a physical mark that he's going to put on us. I think it's just him claiming his ownership over us.

Now, there could be things that we, that people will do as their fathers, the devil, rather than God, there could be things that they do to go along with the world in their rebellion against God that could have to do with not being able to buy our cell. Even really to people, even people who claim to be Christians. I mean, we have that going on today, obviously.

Sure. Yeah. But I think as long as our goal is to remain faithful in whatever position we're in, we're not, we're not going to be fooled into doing something that betrays God in a way that affects our salvation.

That's just not possible. We are sealed on our foreheads in God. He is our owner.

He is our father. That cannot be changed. So just don't worry about looking for this mark of the beast.

Just worry about being faithful in every situation you find yourself in. And I think that is the safe way to go. I agree with that, Amy.

I think it's a great, I'd forgotten about these passages that give the contrast to the, the seal that God has placed on his own. Okay. I just want to offer this thought though, because I don't think the seal that God has placed on his own is a physical seal.

It is an identification that God has made on these people that they are his. However, the substitute or the counterfeit may still be physical. So it may turn out to be whatever, but the contrast is the most important thing.

Those who are sealed by God will not be sealed by the beast. That's the key. However, you understand these notions, whether they're metaphoric or physical or metaphoric and physical depending.

In either case, they are contrasting concepts. There are those who are sealed by God and those who are sealed by the beast. And if you're sealed by God, you're not going to be sealed by the beast accidentally.

And all that sealing happens before any of the talk of the beast. So you don't have to worry about that. But you do have to be faithful.

You do have to be watchful. Be on the alert. The alert Peter says, because the temptation when we suffer is to be, will be to do what is wrong.

And that's what Peter's warning against. When you suffer, do what is right be on the alert because your brethren are suffering in the same way you are for doing what is right. Incidentally, this is not the first place where the concept of being sealed comes up

in the New Testament, in Ephesians chapter one, it says that we are sealed in the Holy Spirit.

And then chapter four, I think it refers to that sealing and it says until the day of redemption. So we're sealed in the Holy Spirit when we believe and that sealing is until the day of redemption. So that would carry us through whatever apocalyptic period is in view here and whatever interpretation one has about how the apocalypse plays itself out.

We are still sealed. Now this in Revelation 7 may be referring to a different sealing than the Christians have. Nevertheless, even apart from Revelation 7, we have the Ephesians testament that we are sealed in the Holy Spirit when we believe until the day of redemption.

So as long as we have these bigger picture ideas in place, we can argue about and look at these different ideas in Revelation. But if we understand the framework of all of this, we understand who we are in Christ as adopted children, that Jesus is coming back, that there will be a judgment and that those who have their names in the book of life through faith are the ones who will be saved. And those are the key ideas here.

Well, thank you, Greg. And thank you, Adam, and see for the truth. We love hearing from you.

Send us your questions on Twitter with the hashtag #STRSK. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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