

## Biblical Evaluation of Reincarnation

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

- *Does the Bible teach or allow for reincarnation?*
- *Why have so many people had reincarnational experiences?*
- *What is the best explanation for an experience from a previous life?*

Definition: "Reincarnation" is the belief that living creatures experience "rebirth of the soul in another body" ("Webster's New World College Dictionary," 1999, p. 1208).

In a more common sense, reincarnation is the movement of the human spirit (although many would also include animals) from one bodily human life of a previous time to that of another bodily human life of a later time. The purpose of this is for the spirit to work its way back to its original home, namely, oneness with the universe. The view assumes:

- (1) Pantheism--The world view of Hinduism, Buddhism, and the New Age, which believes the universe is spiritual, everything is God, and God is everything.
- (2) The law of Karma--The sum total of the actions of a person.
- (3) All religions are essentially the same.
- (4) Nirvana--Heaven or enlightenment is not a place but a state of being.
- (5) Social moral evolution--Technological advance proves our movement toward moral purity. The problem is ignorance. Hitler was stupid not sinful.

### What Reincarnationalists Claim about the Bible

Reincarnation originated in Hinduism (in India), which taught that animals and humans all possess spirits (or souls), which were and will be in other bodies in other lives. This view is held with various modifications by some today in the New Age Movement. Many western believers in reincarnation say that the Bible also teaches this belief. Here are their main arguments and the problem with each:

(1) **Luke 17:21**--Jesus said, *the kingdom of God is in you*, just as pantheist reincarnationists do.

Problem--In Luke 17:21 Jesus said, *the kingdom of God is in your midst*, referring to Himself, not the pantheistic spirit god universe.

(2) **Matthew 11:14**--Jesus claimed John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah.

Problem--John the Baptist came *in the spirit and power of Elijah* (Luke 1:12), representing the prophetic mission of Elijah (Malachi 4:5) not as a reincarnation of Elijah (John 1:19-23). Elijah did not die (2 Kings 2:11). Therefore his spirit was unavailable for reincarnation. After John the Baptist, Elijah himself was still intact, appearing with Moses at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-3).

(3) **John 3:3**--Jesus taught being born again as do the reincarnationists.

Problem--Jesus taught a spiritual rebirth not a transfer of the spirit to another physical body (John 3:6-7).

(4) **Hebrews 7:1-3**--Jesus was a reincarnation of Melchizedek and the angel of the Lord.

Problem--Preincarnation is not reincarnation. Jesus appeared throughout history before His incarnation in Mary.

(5) **Galatians 6:6-10**--Paul taught that whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. That reaping is in the next reincarnated life.

Problem--Paul is a Jewish Christian writing to Jews and Greeks--neither backgrounds had anything to do with Hindu reincarnation. Paul says we reap in this life and in eternal life (heaven or hell).

## What the Bible Teaches vs. Reincarnation

Not only does the Bible not assume or teach reincarnation, its teachings strictly and pointedly contradict it.

(1) **1 Samuel 28:15**--After Samuel died (verse 3), God allowed a medium to summon him back from the dead to speak with Saul. Samuel was the same person in a similar but nonphysical form--not a floating spirit waiting to reincarnate a new body.

(2) **Matthew 17:1-3**--Moses had died (about 1500 B.C.), and Elijah was taken up without death in the 800s B.C. Both were with Christ (in the 30s A.D.), not as spirits reincarnated into other bodies but as exactly the same people in a bodily form.

(3) **Luke 16:19-31**--Here Christ tells the story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus, describing exactly what happens at death and after death, and there is no possibility of reincarnation.

(4) **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**--At the coming of Christ for His church (the Rapture), the dead and the living believers are taken up into an eternal body. The dead are still the same as on earth and come with Christ to this resurrection.

(5) **1 Corinthians 15:54**--In preparation for eternal life, this mortal body must put on immortality, not another life via reincarnation.

(6) **Hebrews 9:27**--*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.*

(7) **Romans 3:23**--*All have sinned*, therefore, reincarnations will never get you to nirvana.

## Is There a Basis for Reincarnation Outside of the Bible?

(1) Reincarnation is verified not by reasonable deduction but by experience. Experience is a bad test for truth. Experiences can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

(2) The biblical teaching about Satan and demons adequately explains these experiences (Ephesians 6:11-12; Matthew 24:43-45; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; John 8:44; and 1 Peter 5:8). Demons who have known or possessed people in the past can possess people in the present and convey knowledge of those people from the past.

(3) If my suffering in life is due to a bad previous life but I cannot with any certainty examine that life, how do I know to improve on it? How can I fix it if I don't know what's wrong with it? I may just be making it worse.

(4) With reincarnation, I seem to be doomed to endless cycles of running from karma, since I cannot solve my problem of self-evil. This works' system (denied in the Bible in Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5) can only lead to the frustration of futility.

(5) We must start with the theory of reincarnation to verify it. Not only is that circular reasoning, but it assumes the non-provable eastern pantheistic mindset. So we must first have faith **that** it is true. The Bible makes the opposite claim, namely, for us to believe in the God it describes because He is an undeniable being, verifiable from the natural world and our own conscience (Romans 1:18-20; 2:15).

(6) Ignorance is not an explanation for evil. Many evil people are intelligent. If Hitler was so stupid, how could he rise to power in one of the most highly educated countries in the world? Jesus said, ... *whatever goes into the man from the outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach ... that which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts ...* (Mark 7:18-23).

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *Does the Bible teach or allow for reincarnation?*

**A:** No. The Bible specifically denies what reincarnation teaches (Hebrews 9:27-28).

**Q:** *Why have so many people had reincarnational experiences?*

**A:** People have had experiences and interpreted them with the theory of reincarnation. To say they are *reincarnation experiences* is circular reasoning, since it assumes what they are claiming to prove.

**Q:** *What is the best explanation for experiences from a previous life?*

**A:** Many explanations are possible--coincidence, unrecalled stored memories, the brain's tendency to complete stories, as with dreams. But some are clearly the result of demonic activity, which gets a person to believe in a theory that takes them further from God.