

Reincarnation

DEFINITION

The word's root is 'incarnation' and is derived from the Latin 'in carnis', which means "in the flesh." It refers to the belief that one's soul is recycled into another (usually, but not necessarily human) body after death. This would continue until the soul reached a state of perfection. At this point the soul would be absorbed into a universal 'life-force.'

SOCIAL IMPACT

Whether it is a belief supported by a religious faith, or as a product of 'new wave' philosophy, 'reincarnation' is enjoying resurgence in our culture today. Practitioners of 'past-lives therapy' share one thing in common—the lack of responsibility for their conduct (that is, in this life). Their misfortune is more often, then, not due to some sin in a past life. It is also used to explain suffering and injustice (birth defects, mental illness, physical handicaps, sociopaths, etc.). The 'karmic consequences' of past lives is nothing more than an updated version of some religions that have been practiced for centuries (Hinduism, Gnosticism). This resurgence has been helped along by movies like *Heaven Can Wait*, *Jonathan Living Seagull*, *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud*, *Out on a Limb*, etc. Many modern cults are centered on this belief (Scientology, Rosicrucianism, Unity School of Christianity, Hare Krishna, Theosophy, Urantia, Association for Research and Enlightenment, etc.). The Christian might well ask where this will lead the country if the belief becomes widespread?

LOGICAL FLAWS

The following questions beg to be asked:

- What value is there in punishing someone for the sins of a past life that they don't remember?
- If souls are being recycled, then how does one explain the increase in the world population? Where are all the new souls coming from?
- After centuries of soul recycling, why don't we see some improvement in human relations?
- India's culture has included a deep-seated belief in reincarnation for centuries. Is India's caste system an improvement in human relations, or a step backward?

DÉJÀ VU

Most proponents of reincarnation will use déjà vu experiences to bolster their case, but the majority of these experiences are explained as follows:

- The complexity of the brain occasionally allows for an incoming signal from our senses to split and take more than one path through our memory. The first signal finds no memory match and lays down the memory for future recall. The second signal has taken a slightly longer path through the brain and arrives a split second after the first. It 'discovers' the memory laid down by the first signal and the brain responds with the conscious thought that we have seen this before. We did! We saw it about one millisecond earlier.
- Details of our memory frequently fade with time. Sometimes current experiences are matched with similar old, even early childhood, memories. The experiences are not the same, but the old memories have had the specific details rounded off and become more of a generic memory. The new experience may well match the generic memory.

- Hypnosis is sometimes used to gain access to more information on these déjà vu (past life) experiences. The problem with hypnosis is that it doesn't distinguish between past reality and a first person recounting of an old novel, movie, etc. buried in our memory. We may well recall, as personal experience, images we formed from hearing a childhood story.

ERRANT BIBLICAL VIEWS

Some proponents will attempt to bolster their case by making certain claims from scripture. Frequent claims are listed here along with their error in application:

- Ma.11:14 is used to show that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. Yet John claimed otherwise [Jn.1:21] and Luke explained that it was only similar styles that they shared [Lu.1:17].
- Ma.14:2 is used to show that Jesus is the reincarnation of John the Baptist. Christ, however, was an adult when John the Baptist was beheaded.
- Jn.3:1-8 is used to support physical rebirth. If true, it would support reincarnation. Christ clearly teaches that the reference is to 'spiritual' rebirth ("born of the water"—amniotic fluid vs. "born of the Spirit").
- Jn.8:58 is used to support Christ being the reincarnate Abraham. Perhaps the version they quote leaves out the word "Before...."

SCRIPTURAL POSITION

- Job 14:5-20 draws distinctions between a tree which, when cut down, will sprout again with new life is watered and a human life, which will not. It is stated that we are "of few days," that upon death we are "cut down" and "continue not," that our "days are determined" and that beyond this point we "cannot pass." That when "man dieth" he "wasteth away" and "giveth up the ghost," that when "man lieth down" he "riseth not," etc. Job speaks of the laws of nature. Our God is not bound by the laws of nature, and so, may resurrect people from the dead [Jn.11]. God never speaks of giving us multiple chances to live a sinless life. Rather, He requires judgment for the penalty of sin in this life. If God provided multiple chances, there would be no need for Hell.
- Ps.78:39 refers to mortals as a wind that passes away and comes not again.
- Lu.24:43 clearly shows that the thief was not going to be subjected to another reincarnation to improve his Karma (which would be expected since he was a thief).
- Jn.9:13 would have been the perfect time for Christ to explain the consequences of sin in past lives *if* there was such a thing. Okay, I know you shouldn't base an assertion on what the Bible *doesn't* say, so take this one with a grain of salt.
- 2Cor.5:8-10 clearly indicates that only two conditions exist, namely 'present' (in our body), or 'absent' (with the Lord). Once with the Lord we are judged for the things done in the body. Notice vs.10 uses "body," not "bodies."
- Heb.9:27 shows that we only live once. That following our death we stand before God for judgment.