

Reincarnation

In 1889 Joseph Rudyard Kipling (the author who penned *The Jungle Book*) wrote *The Ballad of East and West* that began with this familiar saying: "East is East & West is West & Never the Twain Shall Meet."

As The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (2002) indicates, by this saying Kipling meant that "The culture of the West (Europe and the Americas) will always be very different from that of the East (Asia)"; however, with the invention of airplanes and the internet, this prophecy proved to be false.

A 2005 (George) Gallup poll indicates that more than one out of four (27% of) U.S. citizens believe in the idea of reincarnation, indicating that East has indeed met West. Why? Because reincarnation is primarily a tenet of Buddhism and especially Hinduism.

What's really disturbing is that most of these citizens are young Catholics and Protestants. So, while some folks may laugh this off as too silly to bother with, there are thousands who are daily falling for this and other ideologies found in Eastern and anti-Christ religions. So...

After all the bygone centuries of Western unbelief in such philosophies, why the sudden popularity of Eastern influences? Well...

It all seems to have primarily begun after World War II, perhaps with soldiers bringing back much of what they learned about in their various tours of service in Asia.

Since the glorification of materialism failed to create any real satisfaction, and with all the religious, social, and secular revolts against authority having laid the groundwork for the acceptance of anything that strips away authority from the proper source, people (with the help of these religions) began to find their authority within themselves. In other words...

Movements that deify man and make a god of self readily find acceptance in our Western culture.

When man turns from truth, he invariably turns to fables (2 Tim. 4:4). Our society is obsessed with occultism and anything that's supposed to be secretive knowledge; the psychics, self-proclaimed prophets, and such like never had a more fertile field in which to do their deceptive work. Well...

Let's define "reincarnation."

Reincarnation comes from the Latin "re" which means "again" and "incarnere" which comes from two other Latin terms: "in" and "caro," meaning "in flesh"; so, even though "reincarnation" literally means "a coming again in flesh," it isn't always limited to coming back in a fleshly form.

Generally speaking, man keeps recycling from one form of life to another form of life, usually evolving from a lower state to a higher one; however, according to the Hindu version of reincarnation, one may actually devolve and return here as a rock, mineral, tree, or even a cockroach. But...

Since this isn't too appealing to us Westerners, people here in the U.S. usually emphasize "biological evolution"; they contend that the soul evolves through many, perhaps even thousands, of lives until it finally arrives at a union with "divine essence." I.e....

We keep coming back until we finally get it right—there will be no failures; another way of putting this is that everyone will eventually work off his "karmic debt." So...

What's Karma?

Karma literally means "doing, deeds, action, or work"; through the process of time the term came to mean both the action and the fruit of the action. Simply stated, Karma is an impersonal force in the universe that causes one to build up credits and debits through his behavior. So...

We determine the quality and status in the next incarnation by our action in this incarnation. If we do badly this time around, then the next time we'll suffer for it; but if we do well in this life, then we'll be elevated in the next. And...

Reincarnationists often say that this is exactly what the Bible means by "you reap what you sow"; but, no, this is not biblical, for in Christ we reap benefits far beyond what we deserve (Luke 17:10).

There's one more term we should touch on before we get more into what the Bible says—Nirvana.

What's Nirvana?

Some reincarnationists believe this refers to reaching external extinction, while others believe it refers to the attainment of oneness with the universe.

Still others believe it refers to paying off one's karmic debt to be liberated from this world-purgatory in order to reach the ultimate state of God-consciousness or divine essence. Anyway...

Since many members of Christendom believe in reincarnation (esp. Catholics and Protestants), they must make the Bible support their belief in it; but, ironically, they cannot agree among themselves if the Bible does for sure teach reincarnation.

Shirley MacLaine's personal psychic, Keven Ryerson, who played a prominent role in Shirley's 1983 TV special and her 1983 book, Out On A Limb, declared that it was once in the Bible, but "the Council of Nicea voted to strike the teaching of reincarnation from the Bible" (p. 151).

David, a prominent character in her book, also told her how it was common knowledge that "proper interpretations were struck from [the Bible] during an Ecumenical Council meeting of the Catholic Church in Constantinople sometime around AD 553, called the Council of Nicea. The Council voted to strike those teachings from the Bible in order to solidify Church control." You know...

It would seem that her psychics and others in tune to the psychic data bank of cosmic history could do a better job of getting their facts straight.

In the first place, the council that met in AD 553 was not called the Council of Nicea, but the Fifth Ecumenical Council known as Constantinople II. And...

Secondly, neither of the councils mentioned dealt with the subject of reincarnation. The only issue discussed that could even be thought related to reincarnation was the belief in the pre-existence of the soul; it wasn't that they had experienced previous incarnations, but only that one had existed prior to birth (somewhat like the Mormons believe). Well...

Let's briefly consider the four primary passages which reincarnationists use in an effort to show that there's at least some hint or suggestion of reincarnation in the Bible.

One passage often used by reincarnationists is John 9:1-3: "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'" You know...

Since this man was born blind, I can see how that someone who doesn't know what I'm getting ready to tell you about concerning Jewish thinking might believe that the disciples' question indicates that they believed in reincarnation. However...

F. F. Bruce in his comments on John quoted a rabbinical commentary called the Genesis Rabba wherein the rabbis state their belief that sin can be committed within the womb; an example of this is believed to be the conflict between Esau and Jacob that resulted from some prebirth sin (Genesis 25:22).

Think about this: Jesus seldom (if ever) let an opportunity slip by Him to teach on important issues, and the Lord had the perfect chance right here to talk about karma, but instead He specifically denounced the idea that one's state in this life is predicated upon something (such as sin) in his or anyone else's (such as his parents') former life. So...

Whose sin caused blindness in this man? Jesus made it clear that it was no one's sin that caused this malady.

Another passage reincarnationists seize upon is Matthew 17:11-13 where Jesus said to His disciples that "'Elijah is coming first.... But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.' ... Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist," probably because they had already heard Him speak of that back in 11:14. But there are at least three problems with this passage supporting reincarnation.

Luke 1:17a explains how John came as Elijah when the angel said to Zacharias, "'he will go before Jesus in the spirit and power of Elijah,'" meaning not that he would have Elijah's literal spirit, but that he would have the same type of spirit or character as the great Elijah. Also...

When John was asked point-blank if he was Elijah, he said he wasn't (John 1:21). Did he lie? And besides that...

On the Mt. of Transfiguration, why didn't Elijah appear as John the Baptist if he had migrated into John's form?

Another passage is John 3:3 where Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." They use this verse to suggest that Jesus indicated that reincarnation is the only possible way to attain spiritual perfection and/or admission into the kingdom of God. But there are at least three problems with this passage supporting reincarnation.

Jesus didn't say a man must be born again and again and again; I doubt there's ever been a reincarnationist who believed that there was someone who made it to "perfection" by being re-born only once. Furthermore...

The Greek term for "again" can mean either "again," "anew," or even "from above" according to my Bible's margin as well as my interlinears; because Nicodemus obviously took it in the usual sense of merely "again," Jesus explained to him that He meant it in a more important way.

In verses 5-6 Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." I.e., Jesus rejected the idea of a physical rebirth and explained man's need for a spiritual rebirth in order to be admitted into God's kingdom; so in verse 7, using the same word for "again" meaning "from above," He said, "Do not marvel that I said to you 'You must be born again.'" On top of that...

If one reads on even further to verse 14, he discovers that Jesus was referring to something that would need to occur *before* one died—he'd need to accept Jesus' death in his place to be saved; i.e., this rebirth wasn't something that one had to physically die to achieve, but (in point of fact) if he did die physically first, then he could NOT achieve it. See, it's about grace, something karma doesn't allow for in the least. Well...

One more passage reincarnationists use in an attempt to prove that the Bible speaks of karma is Galatians 6:7 where Paul spoke of how that "whatever a man sows that he will also reap"; i.e., they say that whatever we do in this life will affect how we come back in our next earthly life. But...

The very next verse shows that rebirth into this earthly realm isn't what Paul had in mind at all; rather, he had "eternal life" (a life with no death or rebirth) versus eternal separation from God in mind: "FOR he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." Besides...

The law of sowing and reaping in this passage is a law of a personal God, not a law of an impersonal force known as karma; this is why Paul began this passage by saying that "God [not karma] is not mocked" (v. 7).

There are a couple of other passages that reincarnationists use in an attempt to prove that the Bible speaks of karma, but as with all the passages we've dealt with so far they ignore the context. So...

Let's consider numerous consequences of reincarnationism.

The doctrine of reincarnation in all its ramifications is simply a system of self-deification and universalism; in fact, reincarnationist John Hick argued that God lets none be lost.

This system solves no problems and offers no justice; it has no place for grace or forgiveness because the karmic law is one of strict full payment for wrong-doing, ultimately meaning that the sacrifice of Christ is useless because we'll have as many chances as we need to become perfect or to meld back into our eternal state of being part of the pantheistic god. In fact...

Reincarnationism says that to alleviate any of the suffering, pain, and heartache about us would be to interfere with that soul paying off its karmic debt, making it carry it on over to its next life.

Think about this: One spouse might put the other one through much shame and heartache by an adulterous affair and then be told by the adulterer that he/she deserved that suffering because of something he/she had done in his/her previous life! So...

Not only does reincarnation undermine the very death of Christ for mankind's salvation through grace, but it even affects one's understanding of morality and motivation for moral living; i.e., an extreme application of reincarnationist convictions leads one to adopt a detached stand to crime and every social plague. Why? Because reincarnationists simply consider all of this to be normal debts that are being paid by their victims. So the other side of this coin is that reincarnationism provides an excuse for those committing sin!

Still another consequence of reincarnationism is that it removes man's free-will; i.e., if man is governed by events of his past life, then that hinders his freedom of choice in his present life.

Another consequence is that if souls migrate from one form (whether human, animal, or even mineral), then even rocks have souls or spirits; perhaps now we know why there are so many nature worshippers—they're worshipping the other members of their divine essence.

Let's ask some very pertinent questions concerning reincarnationism and karma at this point.

If, as stout reincarnationists believe, everyone is a reincarnation from a previous life because all souls existed from forever past, then why is the world population increasing and not decreasing as souls become perfected and (re)assimilated into pantheistic godhood? In fact...

Since each soul is progressively purified of evil through its many reincarnations, why isn't the world becoming a better place to live in with each succeeding generation?

If a person doesn't know why he's suffering, how can he avoid the same suffering in the future if he can't correct his mistakes? I.e., how can progress be made without an understanding of the past cause of one's present suffering?

For reincarnationists who claim to be Christians, I ask you, "Where are you in relation to Jesus' resurrection and how that He did not migrate to another body?" Incidentally...

Did you know that "Christian" reincarnationists even believe that Jesus was reincarnated into Melchizedek at one point based on Hebrews 7:2-3?

Doesn't reincarnation sound like the same lie that Satan told Eve: "You shall not surely die?" Well...

As we begin to wind down our thoughts, let's consider some other passages of Scripture.

Job 16:22 reads, "When a few years are finished, I shall go the way of no return."

Speaking of one's death, Solomon said, "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). The spirit returns to God; it doesn't enter another body for another life (cf. Acts 7:59).

In Second Corinthians 5:8 Paul said that (for faithful saints) to be "absent from the body" meant "to be present with the Lord," then in verse 10 he said that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body [not bodies], whether good or bad" (NIV).

Philippians 1:21 & 23-24 have Paul saying, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ... I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ ... [or] to remain in the flesh [which] is more needful for you." If reincarnation is true, why was death a "gain" to Paul? He didn't say he had a desire to depart and return in his next body, but to be with Christ. And lastly...

The coffin nail of reincarnationism is found in Hebrews 9:27 where the Bible flatly states that "it is appointed for men to die once, [and] after this judgment." Man dies once and faces judgment; he doesn't die many times and face many judgments.