

Understanding Reincarnation

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is the belief of Western religions stemming from Hinduism and Buddhism.

Variations exist in different religions but generally, it means that after death the soul inhabits another body and carries with it karma or the result of what happened in the former life.

Souls inhabit as many bodies as it takes to become perfect and attain release from the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara). In other words, each new life reaps what it sowed in the former life until released from the cycle.

According to one American survey, about one in four Americans believe in reincarnation, one in three college students and one in five persons who attend church regularly. It's the belief among popular American stars such as Shirley MacLaine, Glenn Ford, Anne Francis, Sylvester Stallone, General George Patton, Henry Ford, Mark Twain and John Denver.

Let me answer some important questions about reincarnation.

What Religions Teach Reincarnation?

The Eastern religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sikhism and Hare Krishna teach reincarnation. It took form in new Western religions such as Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity, Theosophical Society and New Age. One big difference with the West is that souls only go into human bodies. Unlike the Easterners, the Westerners can't accept souls going into the body of a worm, roach, rat, snake, monkey. The ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Plotinus taught reincarnation as do the famous modern philosophers of religion Geddis MacGregor and John Hick.

How Do Reincarnationists Argue for Their Belief?

Reincarnationists give three lines of argument for their belief: immortality of the soul, evidence of past lives, and that reincarnation achieves justice.

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First, Plato believed the soul immortal

it existed before birth and continues to exist after we die. But others believe eventually the soul will be either absorbed into the World Soul as a wave returns into the sea or annihilated in nirvana. “Christians” who believe in reincarnation think that if a person trusts in Christ that at death he will go immediately into God’s presence without further lives.

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Next, they appeal to psychological evidences of past lives

They claim phobias, abnormal tendencies, sexual identity confusion, birthmarks, déjà vu, past life memories, deformities and inherited diseases are a carryover from their former life. Reincarnation is like the cycles of nature as vegetation comes to life in the spring and dies in the fall.

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Third, they claim reincarnation achieves justice

“Christian” Reincarnationists feel an eternal Hell incompatible with God’s love. Further, it’s cruel, harsh, unjust punishment for a finite amount of sin. But if our sufferings can work off the bad deeds committed in our former life, it removes the damnation of Hell. It relieves God’s responsibility for our sufferings. It protects our freedom by giving us more lives to accept Christ--his love it not forced upon us. And it assures everyone’s eventual salvation. Besides, it’s unjust for innocent Christ to pay for our sins, unjust when we don’t pay for them, and unjust for us to pay for Adam’s sin.

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Plato couldn’t know the soul is immortal. But even supposing the soul immortal, there’s no empirical evidence it takes on multiple bodies. Souls may inhabit only one body, as theists believe. Unknown to ancient peoples, hereditary and environmental factors can best explain cultural influence, hypnotic suggestion, forgotten childhood memories and fears, defective genes and diseases, and the earth’s tilt that causes the seasons.

Further, reincarnation doesn't solve the problem of justice; it merely pushes it back to the first bad act and can give no explanation why it occurred. Besides, the impersonal law of karma is an act-consequence process devoid of moral content. It's very unjust to punish someone for actions in a former life when they haven't a clue as to what the actions were or how to rectify them.

Doesn't the Bible Teach Reincarnation?

Reincarnationists claim three main biblical proof texts. In Matthew 11:14, Jesus said John the Baptizer had already come or been reincarnated in the form of Elijah. In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus that unless he was born the second time he would not see the kingdom of God. And in John 9:1-3, Jesus claimed the man born blind has not sinned nor his parents so he had to have sinned in a former life. These are clear Bible teachings and it's wrong of Christians to distort or deny that they teach reincarnation.

Reincarnationists overlook numerous facts. **First**, it's known that Jews of Jesus day believed in resurrection, not reincarnation (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:28; John 11:24; 1 Cor. 15). **Second** true interpretation doesn't snatch phrases out of context and impose on them a different meaning. **Third**, many practical and biblical teachings we'll discuss shortly show reincarnation simply unacceptable.

Now let's look at these texts carefully

Jesus didn't say John came in the form of Elijah but in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Actually, Elijah never died, so he couldn't have returned in another body (2 Kings 2:11). And when the Jews asked John if he was Elijah, he promptly and emphatically denied it (John 1:21).

When Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again (John 3:1-8), he meant spiritual birth as plain in verse 8 contrasting the physical birth with the spiritual. Moreover, we are never said to be born repeatedly, but born once physically and then the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

In John 9:1-3, Jesus said the purpose of this man's blindness was so that he could heal him to glorify God. The glory of the Creator and our Life Giver transcends everything else. The blind unconscious force Reincarnationists call god is no basis for either life or ethics, and reduces us to animals fighting for survival in a meaningless world.

Why Do Bible Believing Christians Reject Reincarnation?

Christians reject reincarnation for practical reasons

(1) Reincarnation has no moral basis or way to tell good from evil. It doesn't matter ultimately if you give persons a drink of water or slit their throats. Pantheistic systems may encourage voluntary rules of expediency such as don't steal, lie or kill. But an impersonal force has no such ethical standards. Without some absolute right, nothing can be actually right or wrong.

(2) It has no social compassion. India's streets, littered with poor, crippled, maimed, homeless, starving people, if helped would only extend their sufferings to the next life.

(3) It has no scientific basis. We know when a male sperm penetrates a female egg that a new individual develops with both body and soul who never existed before.

(4) It shows no evidence of moral progress. If reincarnation were correct, we should see improvement. Instead, we've gone from fighting with sticks and stones to ballistic missiles with atomic warheads—human hatred, cruelty, and barbarism are alive and well.

(5) It requires either an infinite regress of lives or a first life with free will. But we know an eternal regress of time is impossible or we would not be here at its end today. And, to acknowledge a first life with free will is what theists believe.

But Christians not only have practical reasons for rejecting reincarnation, but biblical reasons as well.

(1) Unlike non-Christian religions, our Creator has come into our world as the God-man and Lord Jesus Christ demonstrating supernatural evidence (Gen. 1; John 1:1-3, 14; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:16). This immediately voids all subjective imaginations, myths, guesses, preferences and claims to authority in other religions—what the real God says is final and every man will one day bow the knee. (Phil. 2:10).

(2) At death, the soul passes into the spirit world awaiting the resurrection (2 Cor. 5:8).

(3) At the resurrection, the soul receives its new permanent incorruptible body making us a soul-body unity (1 Cor. 15).

(4) Human beings die only once followed by judgment (Heb. 9:27).

(5) The one judgment is final not a series of judgments of each life (Luke. 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:9). Grace is God's forgiveness and gift of salvation as opposed to the law of karma that is self-effort (Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9).

(6) The end of reincarnation is absorption into universal energy or annihilation while Christian resurrection is eternal joy and love with the Lord and his redeemed servants that biblical Christians find eternally better (Rev. 21: 1-4).

Pantheistic systems (monism) are utterly opposed to Christian theism and offer none of the Christian advantages. And some "so-called Christians" are very mixed up or likely aren't Christians at all. God decides what's just as based upon his holy nature. Apart from the biblical God, there's no basis for justice, truth, love, or life after death. Only Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

If you don't know Jesus as Savior or Lord, won't you pray, Lord, I'm a sinner unacceptable to you and unfit for a perfect Heaven. Lord, I trust you now to transform me by your Holy Spirit into a child of God and be my Lord and Guide until I go to be with You or You come for me. Amen. Show love to unbelievers & help them come to know the Savior who alone is life eternal.

Bob Jones