

What Does The Bible Say About Reincarnation?

My definition of reincarnation is when a person dies their spirit comes out of their body and is reborn into another body of a human, animal, fish, bug, plant, etc. It seems that if a person led a good life, they are reborn as something better than what they were, and if they were bad they are reborn as something worse. Whatever that “better” or “worse” thing may be is undefined, and who knows, maybe cows are better than humans, so if you’re a real good person, maybe you’ll be lucky enough to be reborn as a cow. No wonder so many Hindus and Buddhists are vegetarian (at least they don’t eat beef); they might be eating Uncle Fred or some other family member!

Resurrection is a biblical principle, but I’ve met Christians (or at least one guy who claimed to be a Christian) who believed in reincarnation as well... I was surprised that he actually had a piece of scripture to back up what he said, and even more surprised that others who also believe in reincarnation use the same parts of scripture to back up their belief:

Was Elijah Reincarnated As John the Baptist?

Mark 9:13 – “But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.”

Matthew 11:14 – “And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.”

[this is Elias] – John was Elijah? The answer is no, as you will see from John 1:21. Jesus was saying, “don’t keep looking for Elijah to come, John was a prophet who had the Spirit of God with him like Elijah and he prepared the way for me.” John may be the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6, and it is believed by many (but not proven until it actually happens) that Elijah will be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

The Spirit of Elijah

Luke 1:17 – “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias...”

[spirit] – G4151: the literal spirit, as angels, demons, and God are spirits. The “spirit” of Elijah was the Spirit of God that was with Elijah, not Elijah’s spirit that was in John. In order for Elijah to be reincarnated as John, Elijah would have to be dead, but he is alive in Heaven. After all, Elijah went up into heaven (2Ki 2:11) just like Enoch (Gen 5:24) and neither of them died. This verse should be understood that John had the same authority and level of impact as Elijah through the power of the spirit of God. However, note that unlike Elijah, John did no miracles, but was called the greatest of the prophets (Matt 11:11).

John the Baptist WASN'T Elijah

John 1:21 – “And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.”

[I am not] – Elijah was alive and well for a thousand years or so in heaven at this time. The Jews expected Elijah to descend from heaven to prepare the way for God (Mal 4:5-6). John and Elijah were both alive at the same time; that would have made it impossible for Elijah to be reincarnated into John. John, the author of this gospel and former disciple of John the Baptist, saw Elijah appear before him (Matt 17, Mark 9, & Luke 9) and there was no confusion of him being John the Baptist.

Men Die Once, Then They're Judged

Hebrews 9:27 – “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”

[appointed unto men once to die] – After a man dies, he waits to be resurrected and judged according to what he did during his ONE life time at the “great white throne judgment” (Rev 20:11-14). If a man doesn't turn from evil before death, he isn't reborn as a lower life form, but he is resurrected as an immortal man and thrown in the lake of fire where he burns forever. His immortality keeps him from being destroyed, but not from the endless pain.

Reincarnation Escapes Punishment in Hell

Mark 9:43-48 – “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:” (also verses 44-48).

[to go into hell] – Note that Jesus did not say, “It would be better than to be reborn as a worm, snake, maggot, etc” but, “It would be better than to go into hell”. How disappointing it must be for people who judge themselves as good people who have hopes of becoming a bird, horse, lion, alien, or who knows, but end up burning in hell instead! Yikes!

3 Men Who WEREN'T Reincarnated

Luke 16:23-24 – “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” (Refere to Luke 16:19-31 for context)

[he... Abraham... Lazarus] – The rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham were all in Sheol (NOT REINCARNATED).

[I am tormented in this flame] – Being reborn as an insect would be mercy compared to being in hell for even a short moment. Unfortunately, Hell is where the wicked dead go while they await the even more terrible white throne judgment and the lake of fire of Revelation 20:11-14. Abraham and Lazarus were in a safe place, often called Abraham's Bosom by some or paradise (Luke 23:43), waiting for Jesus to lead them as captives to heaven (Eph 4:8) where the righteous dead currently go after death (Rev 6:9) and wait for the resurrection of the just (Acts 24:15).

Lazarus Resurrected, Not Reincarnated

John 11:24-25 – “Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:”

[I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection] – Not only Martha, but many Jews believed that God would bring them back to life at the last day as Jesus taught. Imagine that Lazarus was already reincarnated as a squirrel by the time Jesus resurrected him, then he was suddenly brought back to his body. How bizarre must that be?

[I am the resurrection] – Not “I am reincarnation”. Our hope in Jesus is to be resurrected as He was (Col 2:12), not to be reincarnated as a holy cow or some spiritual entity.

Why We Can't Believe In Resurrection AND Reincarnation

A man will be resurrected as a man for all eternity, just as Jesus was resurrected as a man. Resurrection is only something that happens to the bodies of dead people; their spirits never die. If a person had several “past lives” as human beings, which body is resurrected? Are they all resurrected and judged? What if some past lives were good and some bad? Would the past bodies be in part cast into the lake of fire and in part into heaven? After being resurrected and made immortal, would the reincarnation process stop in that person? Assuming reincarnation is true, if a man dies and is reborn as a cat, what happens to him during the resurrection? Does his spirit leave the cat and go back to his human body?

Would you agree with me that reincarnation is not an idea that can work together with resurrection? I'm sure someone could fill all of the loop holes with many theories and it would be really detailed and complicating, but there would be no scriptural truth in it.

If you find any errors or room for improvement with this article, please tell me so that I can make the necessary changes. Thank you!