

TRUTH IN THE TEST TUBE 712

How Many Lifetimes Do We Live? (Second in SERIES of 3)

VOICE: Professor, was I someone else, before I became me?

PROF.: It sounds as if you've been reading New Age ideas.

VOICE: Yes, so I'm wondering: How many times does a human live? How many lifetimes do I have?

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

VOICE: Professor, since our last conversation, I've been reading some New Age ideas. One word that occurs often is “karma.” The Oxford Dictionaries define it as “the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.”¹

PROF.: Yes, the concept of karma is based on the idea of reincarnation, the belief that people have multiple lives. The word “reincarnation” is derived from Latin words meaning “entering flesh again.” New Agers believe that after a person dies, he or she is reborn for additional lifetimes on Earth. Allegedly everyone is rewarded or punished in this lifetime for things they did in a previous life or lives. And what they do presently, influences what happens in multiple future lifetimes.

VOICE: According to Wikipedia, some New Age believers say reincarnation is “endless...unless one gains spiritual insights that [end] this cycle leading to *liberation*.” That school of thought considers liberation or *release* from the cycle of reincarnations “as the ultimate spiritual goal...”

The article adds, “However, the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain traditions have differed, since ancient times, in their assumptions and in their details on *what* incarnates, *how* reincarnation occurs and *what leads* to liberation.”²

PROF.: Some writings about karma and reincarnation mention “past-lives *therapy*.” That's an attempt to cure current fears and phobias by using hypnosis, attempting to discover what a person did in a past life. For example, Dr. Ronald Wong Jue [JOO-ee] says someone with a vanity problem may have led a previous Cleopatra-type life. After being treated like a queen all her life, she continues to think she's superior to everyone else. And he speculates that people who are now victims of violent crimes, were exploiters³ in past lives.

VOICE: In that interpretation, hypnosis could hypothetically relieve the fears and phobias that people brought with them from previous lifetimes.

1 <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/karma>

2 Wikipedia article on Reincarnation, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation>

3 People who hurt or cheat other people.

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PROF.: But the idea of repeated lives on Earth contradicts the information God has provided in the Bible.

The Bible warns us that God's worst enemy, Satan the devil, is “a liar and the father of lies.” “Father of lies” is an idiom that means he is *the ultimate* liar, with superlative skill in deceiving people.

Satan and all the angels once lived in heaven. But he challenged God's authority. The prophet Isaiah reports him saying, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High.”⁴ So when Satan rebelled, God threw him out of heaven. God allowed him to take one-third of the angels with him.

VOICE: So God kept two-thirds of the angel servants – twice as many angels as he allowed the devil to take with him.

PROF.: God placed the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, in an ideal environment in the Garden of Eden. God had given them permission to eat the fruit from every tree in the Garden, with one exception. So Satan deceived Eve into eating that one “forbidden fruit.”

People enjoy having their egos flattered with the thought that they are God. So the devil told Eve that this one disobedience would make her “be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁵ Instead, it caused her and Adam to be expelled from Eden.

Today, Satan has multiple strategies to deceive people. He convinces some people that there is no God. He convinces others that God will not punish them for their evil actions. He has another strategy for people who reject those lies. He deceives them into thinking that, if a time of judgment even exists, it will be *after several more lifetimes*. So they can ignore God during this present life.

VOICE: God reveals in the Bible, “...man is destined to die *once*, and after that to face judgment...”⁶ Everyone is guilty of sins, breaking God's commands. And the Bible tells us, “The wages of sin is death” – eternal separation from God and living forever in a place of torment that God “prepared for the devil and his angels.”⁷

One of Satan's most effective tools to get people to join him in the lake of fire, is the lie of reincarnation. A person who dies without asking God to forgive him, will discover that he has missed his only opportunity.

4 Isaiah 14:14.

5 Genesis 3:5.

6 Hebrews 9:27.

7 Matthew 25:41.

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- PROF.: To get the facts, let's turn to the Bible. There the "true and living God" elaborates on the previous statement that "...man is destined to die *once*, and after that to face judgment..." God inspired the Apostle Paul to inform Christians in Rome, "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written, "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God".' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God." ⁸
- VOICE: That idea of reaping what we sow, sounds very much like karma. Both the Bible and New Age claim that every person will be rewarded or punished, based on the way he lived during his years on Earth.
- PROF.: There is a superficial resemblance. But as we explore the subject more deeply, we see a 180-degree difference relating to our eternal destiny. The very next verse clarifies, "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap *eternal life*." ⁹
- VOICE: I see what you mean. New Age thinking says the highest goal is to pass out of existence. But the Bible offers not only eternal existence but eternal *life*, in a paradise where followers of Christ will live forever. Those worldviews really are 180 degrees apart.
- PROF.: God inspired the Apostle Paul to write another time, "For 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, whether good or bad." ¹⁰ New Age thinkers deny that there are moral absolutes, any genuine right or wrong. Therefore God cannot hold us responsible for "good or bad" actions. New Age writer Marilyn Ferguson claims that the methods of New Age philosophy "lead to the realization...there will be no ultimate answers."
- VOICE: "No ultimate answers." No absolute standards.
- PROF.: New Age beliefs contradict the Bible on several extremely important points. First, New Agers believe the ultimate goal is to pass out of existence; Christ taught that his followers would have the privilege of living forever in heaven.
Second, many New Age believers contradict the Bible on how many lifetimes people have, how much time we have to determine what we will experience in the after-life. New Agers think they have multiple lifetimes; Christians understand that there is one life on Earth, followed by eternity in either a place of ultimate reward or ultimate punishment.
- VOICE: I have a question about "eternal life." How does that fit in with the Bible's statement that "...man is destined to *die once*..."? Is he saying that there is one relatively short existence on Earth, followed by an infinitely long life somewhere else?

⁸ Romans 14:10b-12.

⁹ Galatians 6:8.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 5:10.

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PROF.: Yes. The rest of the verse says, "...man is destined to die once, and after that *to face judgment...*" Everyone who is prepared, will go to *heaven* for eternity. Others will be in *a much less desirable place* forever. Jesus himself described the place as "...hell, where the fire does not go out."¹¹ A few verses later, he adds, "...where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."¹²

VOICE: Doesn't the Bible say that this "lake of fire" is also a place of "outer darkness"?¹³

PROF.: Yes, in the book of Revelation.

VOICE: But fire produces light. So how can a "lake of fire" be "outer darkness"?

PROF.: The twenty-first chapter of the last book in the Bible clarifies that it is "the fiery lake of burning sulfur."¹⁴ Sulfur produces almost no light when it burns.

But sulfur has an additional property that will make hell even more tormenting. When it burns, it releases fumes of sulfur dioxide gas, SO₂. They irritate the eyes, nose and other body parts that it touches. And that will continue forever!

VOICE: Well, Professor, you've answered the question I asked at the beginning of our conversation: "Was I someone else, before I became me?"

PROF.: Emphatically no! You are a unique individual, valuable to God. After your one and only lifetime on Earth, you will be yourself in heaven through all eternity.

You will be "an improved you" – with no aches, pains, deformities or temptations. God inspired two Biblical writers to describe the situation as "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."¹⁵

VOICE: Sometimes I think of the conditions in which my great grandfather lived a century ago, and compare them to the technological advances that we have. If I project that idea further, to imagine a similar "leap forward" during the next century, will that give me a realistic idea of what heaven will be like?

PROF.: It will be a *start* in the right direction, but the reality will be something "no mind has conceived."

If we can have that, why would anyone want either to pass out of existence, or to reincarnate back to Earth repeatedly?

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11 Mark 9:44b.

12 Mark 9:48.

13 Matthew 8:12, 13:42, & 25:23.

14 Revelation 21:8b.

15 I Corinthians 2:9.