

Was reincarnation removed from the Bible?

Many people claim that a certain council took the teaching of reincarnation out of the Bible. Although the majority cannot name the specific council, they most frequently refer to the Second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) and the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).

In reality, though, at that time there were already many manuscripts in existence spread throughout the Roman Empire, which makes it difficult to imagine how someone could have collected all the extant copies in order to have all of them "corrected". Today there are many surviving manuscripts from the time before the councils, whose text accurately corresponds to the currently accepted text of the Bible. (See: [Selection of ancient manuscripts of the New Testament](#))

There are also thousands of quotations of the New Testament in the writings of the Church Fathers from before the fourth century, which corroborate the reliability of the text of the Bible.

The two councils' course of events is well documented by historians, and the records show that the subject of reincarnation was not addressed at all. Although the teaching of pre-existence (the existence of the soul before conception) was condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553) in response to the teaching of Origen, the teaching of successive reincarnations is a separate matter and was not dealt with by the council. While many people think that Origen believed in reincarnation, he himself refutes this teaching in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (XIII.1):: "...In this place it does not appear to me that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, lest I should fall into the dogma of transmigration¹, which is foreign to the church of God, and not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures...". Several church fathers and early Christian authors confirm this opinion (e.g. Irenaeus: Against Heresies 2:33:1-2, Tertullian: Apology 48, Gregory of Nyssa: The Making of Man 28:3, etc.).

If reincarnation was really taken out of the Bible, it is not enough to assume that such passages were deleted from the Bible. The New Testament is interwoven with passages which speak about the fundamental Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection and our own resurrection. All these passages referring to the teaching of resurrection (e.g. John 5:28-29), the last judgment (e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 24:15), eternal life and eternal condemnation (e.g. Matthew 25:46) would have to have been inserted, because the teaching of the last judgment clearly contradicts the idea of repeated reincarnations, through which people get a second, third (and so on) chance.

One passage in particular (Hebrews 9:27) clearly excludes the doctrine of reincarnation:

... and inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment ...

The oldest extant manuscript containing this clear statement is Papyrus 46, a document written in the second century AD, long before the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. Since the Enlightenment the Bible has ceased to be the exclusive privilege of the clergy. Today's critical Bible scholarship (e.g. archeology, textual studies) would not be at all interested in keeping silent on reincarnation if there were even a trace of this teaching in the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. Additionally, there are surely many scholars who would relish the fame resulting from such a sensation.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 raised the hopes of many that evidence for the belief in reincarnation would finally be unearthed. However, the biblical manuscripts found there have been closely examined and published in English. They are now publicly available to everyone who wants to read them. They comprise the writings of a Jewish community, whose concept of the after-life corresponds to the teaching of the Old Testament that physical death is final and is the end of life on earth (e.g. 2Samuel 12:23; 1Kings 2:1-2; Genesis 25:8) and that the righteous will rise and be with God in eternity (e.g. Daniel 12:2-3).

Finally, we want to encourage everyone who is searching for the truth and is in any doubt regarding

the authenticity of the Bible, to start reading it for yourself with an open heart. We believe and have also personally experienced that, if we are open to listen to them, the words of Jesus can touch us very deeply and can shape our life and our way of thinking.

Footnotes:

1. transmigration: when the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, comes back to Earth in a newborn body – a concept identical to reincarnation

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Last modified: 9th December 2011