

The Road Well Traveled

Jesus said that the road to life was narrow, and few there were that find it. He also mentioned another road; a popular well-traveled thoroughfare; the road to destruction.

A few years back, a book was published that was to become a bestseller in secular as well as Christian circles. The title of the book was *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck. Dr. Peck, a psychiatrist, used insights gained from his practice, and melded them with what he called "spirituality" to delineate a Path of spiritual enlightenment. By the title of his book, we can surmise that he believed that his path to mental and spiritual wholeness was the narrow road to life which few would travel. No disrespect intended to Dr. Peck or his many fans but, after reading the book, I reach a different conclusion, and believe that Dr. Peck's road is well worn indeed (potholed even!) with the footsteps of myriads of spiritual pilgrims down through the ages.

This work is liberally sprinkled with spiritual-sounding words and phrases, and the path spelled out in the book is, indeed, a religious path; but can it really be said to be the narrow road of which Jesus spoke? Peck's road more resembles the mystic path of the eastern religions than it does Christianity, yet the book has been widely read and even highly acclaimed by Christians, though it truly teaches quite a different gospel from the one "once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). How is it that even Christians are seduced by Peck's offer of a new road? Sadly, many Christians are not discerning about books that contain Christian-sounding language and can be purchased at Christian bookstores.

Peck talks about God (though he *does* apologize for referring to God in a masculine gender!!), Jesus Christ, spiritual growth, love, and quotes Scripture often to make his points. What, then, is that "path", the "road" offered by Peck to lead one to salvation? It is the road of self examination, self discipline, and hard work to overcome your problems and "evolve" into a higher spirituality. It is WORKS, ladies and gents, and works is NOT an uncommon path for men and women to take to a higher spirituality; indeed, it is the most common path of all! It is NOT the road less traveled, but that well-worn road to destruction.

Peck's definition of original sin is, you might guess, LAZINESS; and his view of salvation is "to become all that you can be." I don't find these teachings in my Bible, do you? Peck stands the concept of grace on its head, inferring that the path of working and

striving he has laid out is really the path of "grace." Huh? I don't get it. Listen to Peck's statements about grace on p.306 of the book: "I have interpreted Christ's saying, 'many are called but few are chosen,' to mean that very few choose to heed the call of grace because of the difficulties involved . . . Essentially, I have been saying that grace is earned. And I know this to be true." Grace EARNED? How is this possible considering that the very word grace means UNMERITED (unearned) favor? It is astounding to me that such statements about grace would not send off alarm bells for any Christian reading them. How is it that we can *merit* grace? Peck says,

"Everyone wants to be loved. But first we must make ourselves lovable. We must prepare ourselves to be loved . . . when we nurture ourselves and others without a primary concern of finding reward, then we will have become lovable, and the reward of being loved, which we have not sought, will find us. So it is with human love and so it is with God's love" (p. 309). How very sad these words are to me; how empty and how tiresome. We can not make ourselves lovable and we all know it! Thank God that Christ died for the UNGODLY, not the lovable (Rom. 5:6)! But Peck is not unusual in that he uses "believer-friendly" words and phrases to seduce the unwary.

Not to pick on Dr. Peck, but his "road less traveled" turns out to be just another Christian counterfeit. The world abounds with such counterfeits. They do not *openly* advocate "dumping Christ and Christianity," for such a position would lead to much resistance. Generally, what they *do* is to very subtly warp the gospel to remove all of it's saving power. Yes, you are saved by faith in Christ Jesus AND: keeping the law of Moses, wearing holy underwear, participating in secret rites, avoiding alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, colas, eggs, etc., or by meeting on the "right" day, refusing blood transfusions (or some other medical/theological "no-no"), giving tithes, alms, or expected "donations" in the proper amounts, working out your karma, developing your "IAMness," following the "right" guru, etc., ad nauseum. Phew! By the time you're done with YOUR part of the bargain, it would be very easy to forget just what it was that Jesus did for you!

The June 15, 1992 *Watchtower** has, on the cover, a picture of Jesus with the words, "A RANSOM IN EXCHANGE FOR MANY." Sounds pretty Christian, doesn't it? Jesus, they teach, has provided a ransom sacrifice to take care of our sin problem; and,

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yet, out of the other side of their mouths, something entirely different is preached.

Here is the WTBS** understanding of salvation. . . sin is inherited and causes death. To be saved is to escape physical death by living forever on paradise earth. Adam was created as a perfect man to live forever, but he blew it! Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) believe and teach that mankind is out of God's favor and cannot save himself. Here is where Jesus does his part. By being born a man and living a perfect life in obedience to God, he provides a ransom for the human race by "balancing out" Adam's sin; thus giving us the chance to live forever. In their view, *death* is the only thing we need to be saved from.

Just how are we saved by this ransom? Jesus' ransom pays for our inherited "Adamic sin," which then allows OBEDIENT mankind to progress to human perfection. However, how many sins did Adam commit before he was considered DISOBEDIENT and forfeited his right to life. Since only OBEDIENT mankind will progress to human perfection, how many of us do you suppose would make it? Sinless perfection is OBEDIENCE — one sin would make us DISOBEDIENT, and all our previously done good works would be for naught; just as any goodness Adam possessed before his act of disobedience was nullified by his fall.

Since salvation by our own human efforts will never save any-



one, why does this "salvation by works" road appeal to so many? Because whether it is M. Scott Peck offering us the diligent path of self examination and striving to earn God's grace or the WTBS offering us the path of "magazine sales for God" to show our "obedience," striving and working seems so right! It seems so *spiritual*, doesn't it? Human beings know that they are on the "outs" with God, and they feel the need to "do all they can" to fix it. But friends, it never can be "fixed" that way.

What, then, is the Christian position on the ransom sacrifice? First of all, Jesus did not give his life as a ransom for Adam in some "one-to-one correspondence" but, as the Bible teaches, He gave His life a ransom for *many* (1Tim. 2:6). JWs picture Jesus as "balancing out" the sins of Adam, as if there really merely were an equality there, man for man; but is this Biblical? What correspondence did Jesus, Himself, give the ransom? He said that He was the good shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). Is that any kind of equal deal? Is the shepherd's life worth the same as a sheep? Of course not! The shepherd's life is worth *all* the sheep and more. There is *no* correspondence at all! What would we think of a human shepherd whose sheep were about to be taken off and slaughtered, but who decided to ransom his sheep's life by giving up his own? We'd likely say to him: "You're nuts, bud...you have been out in the sun too long! Let those sheep die, man. . . get some new ones! You can't *die* for sheep!" Wouldn't we? By the same token, JWs

cannot picture God coming down to earth to lay down His blessed, incomparable life for mankind; but the glorious truth is that He *did* (Jn. 10:18)!

Reading in the New Testament book of Romans, chapter five does compare Adam and Christ, but it is hardly showing a correspondence between two equals; it is cataloging the great CONTRAST that there is between them. What is Paul, the writer of Romans, trying to teach us here? He tells us that we have been born into the Adam family, born into sin and helplessness, with him as our family head, with his sinful nature as our inheritance. Adam's name is at the head of the great column of fallen mankind, and we are doomed to sin and death by his headship. But now, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are being offered the incredible chance to switch family heads (to have our names placed in Christ's column), and have his righteousness credited to our account, instead of the unrighteousness that was deposited into our accounts by Adam's transgression!!! What an unbelievable offer of *grace*!

There will be those whose sense of justice will protest and cause them to opine that this way of redemption is just too easy on our part! Why, indeed, shouldn't we have to earn our righteousness before God? Well, think about it this way for a moment . . . what did you or I do to "earn" being born into Adam's sinful line? Nothing—just as we did not "earn" our natural birth, with all the attending misery of that sin nature so, too, we are not asked to "earn" our rebirth into God's family. It does not violate God's standard of justice to allow us to be born again, by our choice, into the family headship of His Son.

Paul says we receive the "abundance of grace" (1Timothy 1:14). In the Old Testament, Isaiah 53 states this good news that, "God has laid on Him [Christ] the iniquity of us *all*." And certainly, it is not merely this *inherited*, Adamic sin that we need to be saved from. Isaiah 59:2 reminds us that, "*your* iniquities have separated you from your God; *your* sins have hidden his face from you, so that He will not hear." Romans 1:29-32 lists the "hit parade" of personal sins; those sins which have separated us from God and condemned us to both physical and spiritual death. Some of these sins are greed, envy, malice, deceit, slander, murder, gossip, disobedience to parents . . . *Disobedience to parents???* C'mon . . . that's not a biggie, is it? This is Paul's message in Romans; the sins that seem trivial to us are worthy of death, right up there with murder and sexual sin—which condemns even the "Pharisees" among us, doesn't it? We are *all* under sin; legally, we are *all* condemned to die, no matter how small we may see our sins to be (Romans 3:23)!

Romans 3:10-18 says that we are all useless. What does it mean that we have become "useless"? Have you ever had a key made at the hardware store? It has to be made just so in order to open the lock. If the new key is off by just a fraction, it won't open the lock—it's USELESS! It may look pretty good but, if it's off *at all*, you may as well throw it away. That's us. We're useless . . . we're flawed! We just don't fit the lock. Now you may be more flawed than me or vice versa, but it really doesn't matter because we are all useless, throwaway keys. But here is what we say to ourselves as human beings . . . "OK, so I don't fit the lock, but I'm really not such a bad key . . . look how much shinier I am than that other key over there." The function of any key is to open the lock. If it does not function properly, it is useless! All of us fall short, and how much prettier we may be than some other hapless key is not even an issue and is, in fact, just vanity.

Now the keyhole is the law . . . it shows us just how very useless we are (Rom. 3:20). But Jesus is the perfect key . . . His righteousness "fits" the law (Gal. 3:23-25). God offers us Jesus' righteousness as a free gift to all who will just take it through faith in Jesus (Rom. 6:23). There is no other way to open the lock and gain eternal life, but by faith. There are many people who just refuse to accept this gift of righteousness from God . . . they keep trying to fix themselves so they can open the lock for themselves. Paul's words about his fellow Jews at Romans 10:1-4 applies to such folks as well: "They have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to

everyone who believes." They do good works in their flesh, and may even preach about the ransom sacrifice of Jesus; yet, they keep on trying to ransom themselves, with just a little help from God. This is futile. Jesus said that He was the door and if anyone tried to get in another way they were a thief and a robber (Jn 10:1).

Could salvation come as some sort of combo "faith-plus-works" deal or the infamous "Jesus-plus" plan? No way. Romans 3:28 states that we are "justified by faith, apart from the works of the law." Ephesians 2:8-9 states that, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." We all know the difference between a gift and a wage. Have you ever been offered a "gift" to hostess a Tupperware party? We all go along with the terminology to be polite, but we know in our hearts that such a "gift" is no gift at all. We have to EARN it!

In John 6:28-29, when the people asked Jesus what works God requires of men, Jesus told them that the "work of God" was to "believe in the One that He had sent." Why didn't He mention that we must make ourselves lovable, perform baptisms for the dead, or fill out time cards and attend meetings?

The Christian view of justification is to be declared legally righteous by God, as a gift, solely on the basis of our faith in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus, apart from the works of the law (Romans 3:24 and Romans 5:6-9).

But wait just a minute, Joy! Didn't James say that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac (James 2:21)? Yes, he did say that. Just what did he mean by it? We must realize that words may have more than one meaning in Scripture just as in our everyday speech, and the meaning must then be determined by the context. Does the word "justify" or "justification" always have the meaning of being declared righteous in the legal sense before God? No. Biblically, the term "justify" can also have the meaning of "prove" or "vindicate" as at Matthew 11:19 where it says that, "Wisdom is justified by her children." This verse means that the results of a given action *vindicates* or *proves* the wisdom of that course of action.

And notice that, in the context of this passage in James, he is speaking of men showing *each other* their faith; nobody is showing *God* anything here. God knows the heart (Psalm 44:21). Just as love in the heart is invisible without outward expression of word or deed, so faith without works of righteousness is invisible, except to God. Dead, for all practical purposes. But, back to Abraham, James 2:21 refers back to Genesis 22:9; yet, though, it was here that Abraham proved his inward faith by his outward actions. He had been justified in the legal sense (or declared righteous before God) for many years already at this point. We find this legal justification recorded at Genesis 15:6, where God saw that Abraham "believed God, and counted this belief as righteousness." Abraham WAS, from that time on, righteous before God just on the basis of his faith; his *proof* was offered *seven chapters later*! Paul speaks of this in Romans, the fourth chapter, correcting the faulty view that Abraham was justified by his works. I find this *very interesting*. He says in verse two, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, *but not before God*." Who, then, *could* Abraham boast before? *Other men only!!!* (I'll show you and you show me. . .)

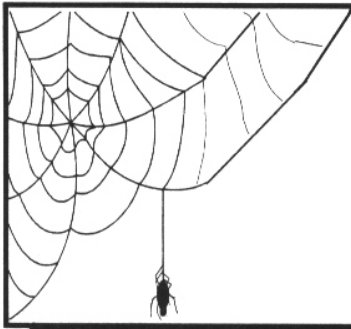
There is, of course, nothing wrong in "doing things for God" out of love and gratitude to Him, as long as we recognize that we are not earning our salvation by so doing. Christians are not saved by good works but are saved *to do* good works (Eph. 2:8-10). And back to Dr. Peck, there is also nothing inherently wrong with self improvement in a limited sense. Indeed, a proper self examination may bring you to the end of your efforts, and can be the U-TURN onto the road to life. But, when working on yourself or your "issues" becomes your religion, and your "salvation" is to "become all that you can be," you have gotten yourself on the wrong road, friend. Ω

Love to all,

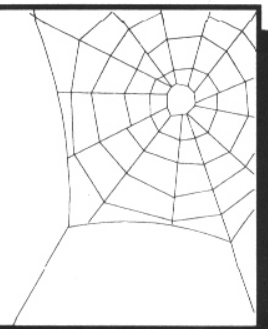
Joy

*Watchtower (The bi-weekly publication of the Jehovah's Witnesses)
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"AND ALONG CAME A SPIDER"



Does the Bible Teach Reincarnation? How New-Agers Use the Bible.

By Richard G. Howe

Introduction

No doubt, some in our society today find the doctrine of reincarnation to be strange, at best; and false, at worst. In Christian circles, especially, reincarnation is looked upon as heretical. Many Christians, without being able to articulate the subtle differences between other faiths that embrace reincarnation and their own Christian faith, nevertheless sense an incompatibility. But there are those who do believe that reincarnation is true. There are even those who believe that reincarnation is compatible with Christianity. Some even suggest that reincarnation used to be taught within Christian circles and that it is tacitly in the Bible.

Joe Fisher is the author of the book *The Case for Reincarnation* (New York: Bantam New Age Books, 1985). In it he defends, from a variety of angles, the doctrine of reincarnation. In this issue I want to respond to one of those angles.

Fisher's arguments are not unlike the way many New Agers try to use the Bible to defend a New Age view of reality. Interestingly, in chapter seven entitled "The Lost Chord of Christianity," Fisher seeks to advance the notion that the doctrine of reincarnation is compatible with the Bible. Fisher's arguments and conclusions are not uncommon within New Age circles. To the frustration of many Christians, New Agers often try to argue that their New Age beliefs are compatible with the Bible.

While admitting that there is a disparity between reincarnation and present day Christianity, Fisher argues that this should not be, and once was not, the case. In chapter seven of his book, Fisher defends the thesis that reincarnation was a doctrine of the early Christian church. In the first section of this chapter, he asserts that reincarnation was accepted and taught by early church fathers and treasured by "Christian Gnostics." (p. 66) He discusses Origen's beliefs and Constantine's role in sowing the "seeds of reincarnation's banishment." (p. 67)

My concern here is not so much whether reincarnation is true or false (though I believe it to be false), but whether reincarnation was originally a Biblical doctrine as Fisher asserts. My argument is that the Bible in no way teaches reincarnation, neither explicitly nor implicitly. Therefore, it behooves us to examine Fisher's treatment of the biblical testimony to see if his arguments are sound.

A Critique of Fisher's Argument Rebirth vs. Reincarnation

Fisher begins his argument with a fallacy of circular reasoning in the first paragraph of the section "Biblical Testimony." Consider his first two sentences:

"Confirmation that reincarnation is the lost chord of Christianity . . . can be found in the pages of the Bible. While the Old and New Testaments hardly trumpet the belief from the rooftops, there are numerous references to rebirth in both books." (p. 71)

While no Christian would argue that there are references to rebirth in the Bible, it does not follow that these references to rebirth

are a confirmation of reincarnation. Fisher has not made his case that the doctrine of rebirth in the Bible and the notion of rebirth in the doctrine of reincarnation are the same. To merely assume they are the same is to beg the question.

Indeed, the Biblical doctrine of rebirth and the notion of rebirth in the doctrine of reincarnation most certainly are not the same thing. In reincarnation, rebirth is a physical event in which a soul is born into one body after another. But, according to the Bible, rebirth is a spiritual event in which a lost man (i.e. one who is morally separated from God by sin) is given a new relationship with God on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17) It is clearly contrasted with physical birth by Jesus in His dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3:1-12. (See also Titus 3:5; John 1:12-13; Ephesians 2:4-6; 4:24.)

Jesus on Reincarnation

Fisher claims that several of the most explicit statements about reincarnation are made by Jesus Christ. (p. 72) The first of these is Jesus' affirmation of His own preexistence when He said: "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Fisher employs a non-sequitur that is common among reincarnationists. (A non-sequitur is when the conclusion of an argument does not logically follow from the premises of the argument.) Fisher erroneously concludes that since Jesus preexisted, therefore, He must have been reincarnated. But preexistence does not necessitate reincarnation. Some religions, e.g., Mormonism, accept preexistence and yet deny reincarnation.

A more thorough examination of the Bible reveals that the reason Jesus Christ was preexistent is because He is God and, therefore, eternal. (Cf. John 1:1, 14; Micah 5:2; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 1:11) Indeed, His claim "I am" is a direct affirmation of Deity, and the Jews understood it as such. (John 8:58) This expression was well recognized by the Jews because this was the name God gave to Himself. (Exodus 3:14)

Another of Jesus' supposed "explicit statements" according to Fisher, involves Jesus' refusal to challenge the disciples' thinking regarding the man born blind in John 9:1-3. The verses read: "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was born 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.'"

Fisher asserts that the disciples clearly were attributing prenatal existence to the blind man. (p. 72) But why is it problematic that the disciples attributed prenatal existence to him? Is prenatal existence something that those who reject reincarnation should reject? Certainly not. "Prenatal" only means "before birth." Could it be the case that humans exist before birth if the doctrine of reincarnation is not true? Definitely, yes. Everyone exists prenatally in the womb before they are born.

The disciples thought that the man was born blind either be-

cause of his own sins or the sins of his parents. (Exodus 20:5) Among the various views of the Jews at that time was the belief that one could sin in the womb. Genesis 25:22 was quoted to support this. Since, in general, sin was regarded to be a direct cause of physical maladies, then it was not unusual to ask whose sin caused the man's blindness.² This perfectly explains the text. But Fisher doesn't stop there. He shifts concepts in the middle of his argument. Consider these statements:

"Although the disciples were clearly attributing prenatal existence to the blind man, Christ does nothing to correct or dispel this presupposition as he goes on to prepare a salve that restores the man's sight. By refusing to challenge the disciples' thinking, Jesus acknowledges the fact of preexistence with its undeniable implication of reincarnation." (p. 72)

Notice the change. He moves from "prenatal existence" to "preexistence." The difference is critical. Prenatal means nothing more than 'before birth.' Certainly, everyone has existed in the womb before birth. This fact has nothing to do with reincarnation. 'Preexistence' means 'to exist before the conception of the body in the womb.' The shift is subtle and tragic. Fisher concludes, from the fact that humans exist in the womb before birth, that we must have existed before our conception. But this does not follow. On the basis of prenatal existence, we can conclude nothing about preexistence.

Furthermore, as has already been shown, reincarnation most certainly is not an undeniable implication of preexistence. For a person to exist before his body exists does not necessarily entail his existence after his body dissolves, much less does it entail reincarnation into another body.

Far from being an "explicit statement," Jesus' response to the disciples actually flies in the face of reincarnation dogma. For, if the man had actually been reincarnated, then his "sin" would most certainly have been the cause of his blindness. According to reincarnation, what you do in one life affects your state in a subsequent life. Thus, what your state is in this life will have everything to do with what you did in a previous life. This is the Law of Karma. In the preface to Fisher's book, the Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism states: "It [reincarnation] is related to the theory of interdependent origination and to the *law of cause and effect*." (emphasis added) Thus, if it were the case that the man had been reincarnated from a previous existence, then Jesus could not have argued that his blindness was not the man's own fault. But, since Jesus argued that the man was not to blame for his own blindness, then it must be the case that the man was not reincarnated.

The last of Jesus' supposed statements of reincarnation, according to Fisher, involves the relationship of John the Baptist to the prophet Elijah. I will deal with that argument at the end.

Paul on Reincarnation

Next, Fisher deals with Paul's statement in Galatians 6:7: "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Fisher says that Paul here "hints strongly at rebirth because one life is plainly insufficient for a perfect balancing of accounts." (p. 72) But the truth is that a "balancing of accounts" is not even the issue of this verse. The verse says that one will reap what one sows, not that there is some sort of balancing of accounts.

Furthermore, there is no reason to think that Paul is "hinting" at anything. It is clear that Paul is quite unambiguous on this mat-

ter. He goes on to say in verse eight: "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."

In no uncertain terms, Paul declares his belief in resurrection, not reincarnation: "... knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you." (2 Corinthians 4:14) "... So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." (1 Corinthians 15:42) "... But, if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." (Romans 8:11)

Another statement from Paul that Fisher examines is from Romans 9. Surprisingly, Fisher quotes references to Jacob and Esau as examples of rebirth. The verses read: "For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, ... As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Romans 9:11, 13; Malachi 1:2, 3)

Is the implication here that God could not love someone before that person was born unless that person preexisted? (Even though, as I've argued above, preexistence is not necessarily related to reincarnation.) Whether that is true, Fisher never defends nor even addresses. But, there is no need to appeal to a doctrine of preexistence or reincarnation to explain God's prior love for persons. If

God is an eternal being (i.e., if God transcends time and space), then it is possible for Him to act toward those things that are future. If God is beyond time then it would be possible for Him to love someone who does not yet exist.³

Furthermore, far from supporting reincarnation, the verses actually are quite contrary to it. How could it be said about anyone who had preexisted and then reincarnated that he had not done any good or evil? The fact that Jacob and Esau had not done any good or evil must be because they never existed until their birth.

The Case of John the Baptist

There are several verses that reincarnationists appeal to in order to argue that John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah. For example: "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. Then Jesus answered and said unto them, 'But I say unto you that Elijah has come already; Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.'" (Matthew 11:13-14; 17:11-13)

On the surface, these verses may seem to allow for the belief that John the Baptist was, indeed, the reincarnation of Elijah. However, upon closer examination, this conclusion will not stand for at least two main reasons. First, there are logical problems with the position (in light of other things we know from the Bible about Elijah); and second, there are textual problems in which Fisher ignores relevant verses that contradict his views and explain the true meaning of these verses.

1) Logical Problems

The first logical problem with Fisher's view that John the Baptist is Elijah reincarnated is that it is impossible for John the Baptist (or anyone else) to be Elijah reincarnated, for Elijah never did "disincarnate" in the first place. The fact of the matter is that Elijah could never reincarnate because he never died.

Then it happened, "... as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and sepa-

(Continued on page 11)





Jehovah's Witnesses often argue "online" (on computer bulletin board systems, my screen name is CULTSRUS@aol.com) that they do believe in the resurrection but that the body never rises. This "post" (electronic message) was developed from Duane Magnani's material: "Another Jesus" (which we highly recommend). It was aptly titled:

XEROX PEOPLE

G

reetings,

In light of the discussions regarding the Biblical teaching on the resurrection of Jesus, I thought we now should look at the WTBS* teaching on the resurrection through a Q&A format. We will let their own literature answer the question from their perspective.

- 1) Q. Does the very person who died rise up from death?
A. "...it is the individual, the 'soul,' with the same personality, that is brought back to life." (*Awake!*, 9/22/55, p.6)
- 2) Q. What makes up a "person?" What exactly is an individual soul?
A. "The 'soul' is the person, including both personality and organism." (*WT*,** 12/1/73, p.726)
- 3) Q. What is "death?" What happens when the body dies?
A. "It is the functioning of the organism or body that expresses the personality. The dead body, without 'spirit' or life force, or without the breath that sustains the life force, has no personality, no activity (Gen. 7:22; Jas. 2:26; Eccl. 9:5,10). It is therefore no longer a living soul. The soul has died, ceased to exist." (*WT*, 12/1/73, p.726)

"...Adam ceased to be 'a breather' or a soul, and went back to the lifeless dust from which he had been taken. It was the reverse of the creation process. No part of him lived on. He went completely into non-existence." (*Good News To Make You Happy*, 1976, p.89)

"This personality is dependent upon the body and therefore it ceases to exist when the body dies." (*Awake!*, 9/22/55, p.7)

"When Jesus Christ died, he could no longer mention his heavenly Father, praising Him. Jesus was dead, he was unconscious, out of existence. Death did not mean a transition to another life for Jesus; rather, nonexistence." (*Awake!*, 7/22/79, p.27)

- 4) Q. What is a life pattern?

A. "The life pattern is the personal life-long record of the creature built up by his thoughts and by the experiences in the life he has lived resulting from certain habits, leanings, mental abilities, memories and history. It is also a register of the individual's intellectual growth and his characteristics, all of which make up one's personality." (*Make Sure Of All Things*, 1953, p.311)

- 5) Q. Is the life pattern of personality physical?

A. "Each one develops his own personality pattern, and this is stored up in each one's brain, also in the blood to some extent." (*WT*, 4/15/63, p.242)

"The tiny cell that is formed by the uniting of the sperm and the egg has the potential of becoming a person different from any other person that has ever lived. Within this cell there is, in effect, a pattern of what the person to develop will be like. This pattern becomes part of the body of the human that develops." (*WT*, 4/15/73, p.249)

"...recent medical research has indicated in a realistic way how blood transfusions may damage the individual's personality. According to one authority: 'The blood in any person is in reality the person himself. It includes hereditary taints, disease susceptibilities, poisons due to personal living, eating and drinking habits.' Transfusing blood, then, may amount to transfusing TAINTED PERSONALITY TRAITS. (Emphasis added.) How great the danger may become if the blood is taken from blood banks to which criminals and other derelicts of society have contributed!" (*WT*, 5/15/62, p.302)

- 6) Q. Will the very physical person that died, or any physical part of it, be resurrected?

A. "What will be resurrected? The body? No, for it has disintegrated and its atoms have become parts of other living things, which, in turn, may become part of other living things." (*WT*, 6/1/59, p.346)

- 7) Q. Will there be a resurrection of the physical life pattern or "personality" that was part of the body?

A. "This personality is dependent upon the body and therefore it ceases to exist when the body dies." (*Awake!*, 9/22/55, p.7)

- 8) Q. What is a resurrection?

A. "Resurrection involves a reactivating of the life pattern of the individual..." (*Reasoning From The Scriptures*, 1985, p.333)

"Resurrection is a restoration to life of the nonexistent dead." (*Make Sure Of All Things*, 1953, p.311)

- 9) Q. Does God "retain" a copy of the life pattern?

A. "...which life pattern God has retained in his memory." (*Reasoning From The Scriptures*, 1985, p.333)

"It is the reactivating of the life pattern of the creature, a transcription of which is on record with God, and is referred to as being in his memory." (*Make Sure of All Things*, 1953, p.311)

- 10) Q. After the person's death, is the original life pattern "preserved" by God?

A. "The factors combining to make the life pattern are like the sounds recorded on a blank phonograph record that stands for the brain, primarily. At the same time God is having a master disc made of the same life pattern on his marvelous memory. At death the phonograph record is broken as it were, and what was recorded thereon would be forever lost were it not for the duplicate recording made by God. In the resurrection God makes a blank record, a human body, and then stamps on its brain the life pattern he has recorded." (*Awake!*, 9/22/55, p.7)

At this point I will give the WT answers to the above questions and finish with a few comments.

1. The individual with the same personality is brought back to life.
2. A person is a body AND personality (life pattern).
3. Death is the cessation of existence.
4. The life pattern is the personality.
5. The life pattern of personality is physical.

6. Neither the physical body, nor any physical part of it will be resurrected.
7. The physical life pattern ceases to exist when the body dies.
8. Resurrection is a reactivation or restoration of the life pattern.
9. God retains a copy of the life pattern.
10. Even the ORIGINAL life pattern ceases to exist; the original is forever lost, but God has a copy.

Soooo, . . .

11. a. The original life pattern went out of existence.
b. God retained a "duplicate" in His memory.
c. God makes a brand new, never-existed-before body, and stamps a copy of His duplicate copy of the life pattern into its brain.
12. Since the original body and life pattern are not to be resurrected, is the ORIGINAL PERSON to be resurrected? No!!!
13. If there is no hope for the resurrection of what died - the ORIGINAL PHYSICAL BODY with the ORIGINAL LIFE PATTERN - is there any hope for the original "person" who dies? NO!!! (See question 12 again.)
14. According to the definition of "resurrection" a person must die before that person can "stand up again."

"The word 'resurrection' (Greek an-as-tas-is) occurs some 40 times in the Christian Greek Scriptures. It means standing up again to life. In order to rise again to life, a person must be dead, for life is the opposite of death." (WT, 12/15/81, p16-17).

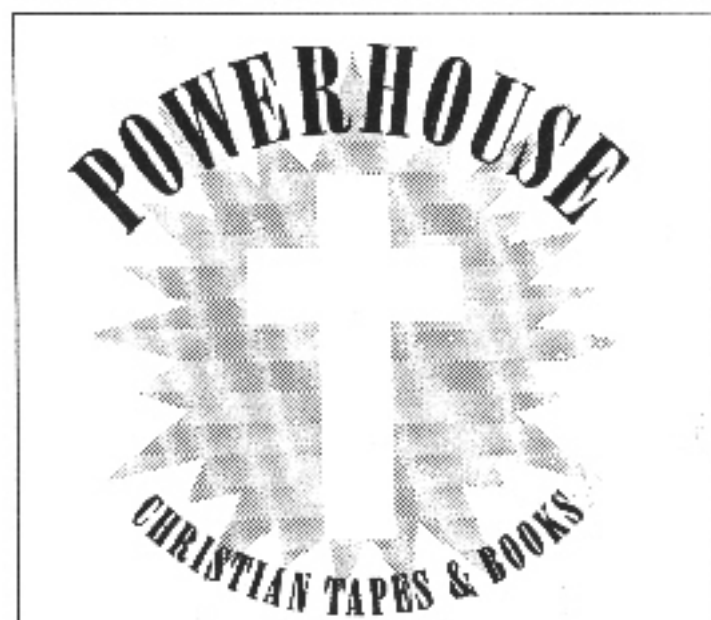
Must God raise the "person" that died for that VERY PERSON to rise from the dead? Yes.

Conclusion:

- A. In order to be a resurrection, it must have lived before.
- B. The newly created body, with a copy of the memories stamped on its brain, never lived before. It is not the original, the original ceased to exist.
- C. Since it did not live before, it is not resurrected. It is a copy or "xerox." The original person who worked diligently for the rewards will not receive them for they have ceased to exist, but not to worry. Their xerox copy will take their place and enjoy their rewards. Ω

*Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

**Watchtower (The bi-weekly magazine of the Jehovah's Witnesses)



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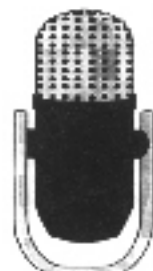
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Tina's Story

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). Being raised a Roman Catholic, I was taught that Roman Catholicism was the truth and the only way to heaven.

I was the youngest of two children, born to two wonderful, hard-working, devout, Roman Catholic parents. Our biggest loves in life were our Slovak heritage and the Catholic Church. We truly lived and breathed our Catholic faith. As Catholics, we alone had all the special things from God, such as the seven sacraments, Mary, the Saints, statues, purgatory, indulgences, miracles, Mass and, above all, we had the Pope with his infallibility to direct us. I knew I could rely upon his infallibility because we had been taught that Jesus had left Peter in charge as the first Pope, and that any succeeding Pope was just like Jesus talking to us!

Never having read the Bible, I had no idea that, in Apostolic times Jerusalem, not Rome, was the "headquarters" of the early church, and James, not Peter, was the head of that church (Acts 15). Catholics are taught that they cannot understand the Bible without the Church's interpretation. Since we were encouraged *not* to read the Bible, I did not read it. I was fearful that there must be some untruths in it, and I might be led astray. And besides, I reasoned, Bible reading was something Protestants did, and I knew that they didn't have the truth! I realize that today, the Catholic Church does allow Bible reading and even has Bible-study classes, but this was not true in former times. In fact, I have learned that,

"The Bible was first officially forbidden to the people by the Church of Rome and placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books* by the Council of Valencia (a cathedral city in southeastern Spain) in the year 1229, with the following decree: 'We prohibit also the permitting of the laity to have the books of the Old and New Testaments, unless anyone should wish, from a feeling of devotion, to have a Psalter or breviary for divine service, or the hours of the blessed Mary. But we strictly forbid them to have the above-mentioned books in the vulgar tongue.'" (from *Roman Catholicism* by Loraine Boettner, p.97).

As a Catholic, the word "mystery" was used whenever something could not be explained to me. I have to say now that it is a "mystery" to me how Catholics that do study the Bible can believe both the Bible and Catholic doctrines at the same time, because I have not found our "special" Catholic teachings in the Bible at all. But I have gotten ahead of myself.

The man I married was not Catholic, and I didn't insist that he become one, because he promised that I could raise my children as Catholics, and that was what really mattered to me at the time. The children came: two boys and a girl. I found out that it isn't easy to raise children in a faith not shared by your spouse. But my husband, not having any religious convictions of his own, never interfered in any way. When he did go to Church, he went with us. I hoped, though, that my children would marry within the faith so they could pray and share together as a family.

In 1985, my youngest son was the first to marry, and he married a Catholic girl, which I thought was wonderful. So far, so good.

Then, in 1990, my daughter married a non-Catholic, and did not get married in the Catholic Church. To make matters worse, I knew this man had spent some time as a Jehovah's Witness (hereafter JW's), and so, I was very fearful of the influence he might have on her beliefs. My worst fears were confirmed when she informed me that they were attending a Kingdom Hall. I knew I

would lose her if something wasn't done immediately, but what could I do? Where could I go for help? Of course, I went to my priest. What a disappointment I felt when it turned out that he knew nothing about the JW's and could only advise me to pray for them.

In my frustration, I called everyone seeking advice. My son and daughter-in-law in Nebraska provided me with my lifeline. They gave me a number that they had found in their local paper that advertised help for families with loved ones caught up in the JW's. I called and was given the number of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. as people in our area who would be willing to help me. This led me to two wonderful and caring people who I will always love and keep in my prayers, Don and Joy Veinot. When I told them I was a Catholic, they did not refuse to help me, but gave me the help I needed right where I was. The first thing I had to do was dust off my Catholic Bible. (I surely never could use a Protestant one!) I was sent material on the JW's that pointed out the numerous problems in that organization, including their false prophecies. I also read several books by David Reed, a former JW elder. I eagerly dug into the Scriptures, desperately seeking to find truths to share with my daughter and her husband, not realizing that these very same Scriptures were beginning to speak to me about my need for salvation. With all I knew about God, I didn't know Him personally! Little did I know that, as I was reading, little Scriptural seeds were being planted in my own head. It was so strange for me to hear Don tell me to pray to Jesus. He kept telling me that. I remember the day I decided to take his advice. Until that time, I had been very confused about exactly who to pray to. Should I pray to Mary, her mother Anne, St. Theresa? I had never even thought of praying to Jesus.

Don and Joy advised me to proceed very carefully with my daughter and her husband, and gave me very specific advice about how to go about talking to them about the things I had learned about the WTBS*. The Society has an emotional, "fear-based" hold on its members that must be broken with gentleness and care. As most cults do, the WTBS warns its new devotees that family members, guided by Satan, will attempt to pull them away from the group, so if the situation is not handled with care, the relationship can be lost, or greatly damaged by reckless reaction to their involvement. It took two months (which seemed like an eternity) to present the right information to them. The day they walked away from the JW's, all I could say was, "Thank you, Jesus!" I was very thankful and, in the back of my mind, I hoped that my daughter would come back to the Catholic Church. Little did I know that, as my own search continued, I would leave the Catholic Church myself.

Meanwhile, in 1993, my oldest son married a Protestant girl and was married out of the Catholic Church. I was really in a confused state at this time and, to add to my confusion; in 1994, my first grandchild was born and I realized that this child was not going to be baptized or raised as a Catholic. Now I felt compelled to prove that the Catholic Church was the one, true church.

Deanna and Terry, the ones who had left the JW's, were meeting with Don and Joy to answer the questions they still had, and doing a Bible study with them. I was very happy they were doing this but I was, of course, still hoping that Deanna would come "home" to Catholicism. I began seeing a wonderful change in her, but she was *not* talking as a Catholic! She explained to me how truly easy it was to go to heaven and that salvation was a *gift* from God purely on the basis of His grace and through faith alone, not works (Eph. 2:8-9). I thought, "What is going on? Has she forgotten everything she learned as a Catholic? She should know that if you work real hard, you might be lucky and find yourself in purgatory! What's this 'gift' stuff?"

I continued my research to prove the truth of Catholicism to myself and my family, but it was not working out as I had planned.

I discovered that many of the doctrines that I thought had been liberalized or discarded were still official "Church" teaching, though not as emphasized as they had been in my youth. For instance, I now had to accept that if my two children that had left the Catholic Church did not return, they would be condemned to hell, no matter if they believed in Jesus or not! My unbaptized infant granddaughter would be condemned to forever circle around hell in a place called limbo if she were to die in childhood. This became a major stumbling block to me with my Catholic faith. Why would God punish an innocent baby for the decisions of her parents? Was it not Jesus who said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14)? It seemed to me that limbo makes a mockery of Jesus' love for these innocents. My doubts scared me, because I had never even thought to question what I had been taught before, or to compare the "Church's" teaching with what the Scriptures teach as I was now doing. This had been my life for 52 years and I did not want to learn what I was learning. But I plunged ahead because there was no going back now.

The next thing to hit me right between the eyes was the Ten Commandments. I found they were a little bit different in the Bible than the way they had been taught to me. In Catholicism, the tenth commandment is broken up into two commandments, while the second commandment is skipped over as though it weren't even there. In fact, in the Catechism, it isn't there! What *is* the second commandment? "You shall not make for yourselves a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third generation of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex 20:4, Dt. 5:8). I really struggled with this because, if I was to believe that commandment and obey it, how could I continue my prayers to Mary and all the saints and surround myself with all the beautiful statues I was taught to venerate? It was so painful for me to deal with the fact that my search to prove the truth of Catholicism was, instead, leading me away from the religion I loved so much. One thing led to another as my belief system unraveled.

I searched the Scriptures like crazy to prove that Peter was the first Pope, but the Scriptures make no mention of a Pope. Peter, himself, was referred to as an Apostle, and as an elder, and he was a married man (1Pet. 1:1, 1Pet 5:1, Matt. 8:14)! Although I had been taught that Peter himself was the rock upon which Jesus would build the church, I found, in the context of the passage, that Jesus was *the* Rock upon which the church would be built. No man can take the place of Jesus, for He is the perfect God-man. From all the research that I did, none of the Popes qualify to fill His shoes, and we have no need of a Pope, since Jesus left us the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us (John 16:13). I realized that following a man, such as the Pope, is really no different than following men like the leaders of the WTBS. We don't need them to come between the Father and us.

Also, since Scripture says over and over again that Jesus died for our sins, why does the Catholic Church insist on sacrificing Him over and over again at every mass? I had never considered this as a Catholic. I would look at the host in complete adoration, believing that the priest was somehow changing it into the actual body and

blood of Christ. Yet, the Scriptures say He died to sin, once for all. Christ is not received through ritual, Christ is received into the heart of the believer through prayer, and is present within those who invite Him in through His Spirit (Rev. 3:20, Romans 8:8-11).

I also discovered that Scripture teaches that only prayers directed to God through His Son will be heard and answered, and that there is only one mediator between God and men, and that is Jesus (1Tim 2:5, John 14:6). As a Catholic, so much of my prayer time was directed to Mary and the special saints I had adopted. I now know that I had been misled in this. I found out that two doctrines related to Mary had been instituted only a relatively short time ago. The doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception," teaching that Mary was conceived without sin from the moment of her conception just as Jesus had been, was not adopted until 1854. The "Assumption of Mary," which teaches that Mary was taken bodily up into heaven just as Jesus had been, was not taught officially until 1950! If these doctrines of Mary are true, why are they not mentioned in the Bible? The Bible **never** places Mary on any kind of equal footing with Jesus Christ, yet I had given more devotion to her than to Him!

"So now I have to worry
about being stuck in
purgatory, with two kids
going to Hell, an
unbaptized
granddaughter, a
Catholic son whose only
hope was to end up in
purgatory with me, and a
non-Catholic husband
who showed no interest
in being converted."

Purgatory was another teaching that worried me a great deal. According to Catholicism, the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fires of Hell. The only way to Heaven is to attain a state of Christian perfection. I knew that I wasn't perfect, but I had hoped for a shot at purgatory. Yet, in order to get out of purgatory, I would need prayers and masses said for me. Who would do this for me? With two kids out of the Church, and a non-Catholic husband, that would leave only my youngest son to do all the praying. So now I have to worry about being stuck in purgatory, with two kids going to Hell, an unbaptized granddaughter, a Catholic son whose only hope was to end up in purgatory with me, and a non-Catholic husband who showed no interest in being converted. Here I believed this doctrine enough to scare me half to death, but in my research I found out that it was not taught officially in Catholicism until 1439! I couldn't believe it! The fact is that purgatory is not mentioned in Scripture, and Jesus said in John 5:24, "He who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me *has* everlasting life, and shall *not* come into judgment, but *has passed* from death to life." What

wonderful news!

"Roman Catholicism is often described as a religion of fear" (from *Roman Catholicism* by Loraine Boettner, p.221). I know the fears are real, because I lived it! I lived in fear of the priest, the confessional, the consequences of missing mass, death, and of the judgment of an angry God. You name it, I feared it. I found out that my fear was not brought about by what God taught in Scripture, but by Catholic Tradition—things not taught in Scripture but manufactured by men. The Scriptures clearly teach that we are to abide by the Word of God and not by the traditions of men (Mark 7:8). I had to make my choice between God and tradition, and I chose God.

It was not easy for me to come to the truth. I searched every aspect I could find to prove that Catholicism was the truth after all, but I could not find it. My faith and love for my church was so strong, I would have given my life for her, but I knew I had to leave her. With the grief I felt, it was like a death in the family.

Yet, I will never forget the morning I awoke and knew my struggles were over. I felt like I was about to start a new journey. I

(Continued on page 11)

Watchtower Society watchers are amazed anew by the brazenness of this organization to change truth when it becomes outdated. Those of us who engage in missionary efforts to Jehovah's Witnesses have been saying for years that there would soon have to be an "adjustment" of their teaching regarding the 1914 generation. Why? Because, as former JW elder and author David Reed pointed out in his address to the Witnesses Now For Jesus convention in October, 1995, this old prophecy had outlived its shelf life, was still hanging around long after its freshness "sale date," and was beginning to stink.

In brief, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has been teaching for many years that 1914 is a crucial and pivotal date, marking the invisible return of Christ. They have taught for many years that the

They also changed their understanding of the parable of the "sheep and the goats." They have been teaching for 72 years that this judgment was already in progress, and that Jesus was separating the sheep and the goats through the door to door work. If you responded positively to the message presented by the Witnesses at your door, you were a sheep. If not, you were obviously a goat. But now, the Oct. 15, 1995 *Watchtower* teaches that this judgment is future, and that the separation of the sheep and the goats has not even begun!

Well, what's the problem? Shouldn't religious organizations be allowed to change their understanding of the scriptures? No—not when they claim that their understanding of the Scriptures, their interpretation, comes directly from God, as does the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society! In the Feb. 1, 1938 *Watchtower*, p.35, they state that, "The Lord revealed to his people the

NEW LIGHT UPDATE!

generation of people who had been alive when these events transpired in 1914 would not die or pass away before Armageddon. In fact, every *Awake!* magazine since 1982 has proclaimed that this now-failed prophecy was "The Creator's Promise." (See *Awake!* magazine's purpose statement.)

Watchtower watchers thought that, perhaps, they would buy more time for their rapidly rotting prophecy by simply choosing a new date for Christ's return, thus eliminating the need to count time from 1914. They could have bought 20 more years if they had changed it to 1934; 30 more, if 1944; etc., and the Watchtower Society can always seem to create "Biblical" reasons from thin air to validate such "adjustments." Invisible presences can be moved around a bit without too much inconvenience. This solution also has historical precedence: they had already changed the date for Christ's "invisible presence" from 1874 to 1914, after the failed 1874 prophecy faded into the hazy past.

They did not change the 1914 date, however; instead, they changed the meaning of the word "generation," from the number of years in a person's natural lifespan, to an indeterminate length of time. In other words, "the end," or Armageddon, does not anymore necessarily have to arrive while those who were alive in 1914 are still living.

meaning of the parable of the sheep and the goats. . ." Why would God reveal to his people something that wasn't true?

And concerning the teaching of "this generation," David Reed points out that the Watchtower Society claims in the May 15, 1984 issue of the *Watchtower* (p.6-7) that "*Jehovah's prophetic word* through Christ Jesus is: 'This generation [of 1914] will by no means pass away until all things occur'." If *God Himself*, through Christ Jesus, has given His word that "this generation" of people who witnessed the events of 1914 "will by no means" die until all things occur, His word cannot be changed just because things didn't work out as He thought they would and that generation *has* all but passed from the scene. This is the *Creator's promise* after all! God knows both the correct interpretation and the future. He doesn't lie or make mistakes, break His promises, or get caught by surprise.

Now is the time for Christians to confront Jehovah's Witnesses about this latest false prophecy before it fades from their memory. Many Witnesses are upset by this change, knowing in their hearts that truth from God does not change. Please, Christian, care enough to speak to them about this. I highly recommend David Reed's latest booklet on this issue as a way of preparing yourself to discuss this issue with the next JW who comes to your door.

Joy Veinot

Tina (Continued from page 9)

knew, though, that I would not be alone because Jesus Christ would be with me. I had one last thing to do before beginning my new journey, and that was to rid my house of all the statues and holy articles that I had been taught to venerate. Since my house could have passed for a mini St. Peter's Basilica, it took some doing to collect them all, but it was done; and I can now direct my prayers to the one and only mediator between God and men, the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the grace of God, I have been reborn. My heart and soul

belong to the Lord, and I no longer fear an angry God. I know now, through Scripture, that none of us can live a sinless life; and so He sent His Son to die in our place as the perfect sacrifice. One sacrifice, once for all. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The truth is Jesus, and He is the only way to Heaven. Ω

Tina Ehrhardt

*Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

Reincarnation(Continued from page 5)

rated the two of them [Elijah and Elisha]; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." (2 Kings 2:11)

Whatever else might be said about reincarnation, one thing that seems certain is that death is a prerequisite for it. My argument here maintains that Elijah's soul never did leave his physical body. It is entirely consistent with the Bible's doctrine of the afterlife to maintain that what happened to Elijah was that his body was transformed into an incorruptible, albeit physical, body. Thus, John the Baptist could not be the reincarnation of Elijah because Elijah still has his own original physical body.

A second logical problem for Fisher's view is found in Mark 9:2, 4 which took place after the time of John the Baptist's death: "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves and He was transfigured before them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus."

The reincarnationist is hard pressed to explain how Elijah could have appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration if he, beforehand, had already reincarnated into John the Baptist. Are we to suppose that after reincarnating into John the Baptist he then reincarnated back into Elijah? It would seem that a more reasonable position would be to reject the notion that John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah.

2) Textual Problems

Several relevant texts pose problems for Fisher's view that John the Baptist is Elijah reincarnated. First, John the Baptist explicitly denied being Elijah when asked. John 1:19-21 says:

"Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.'"

Neither should we entertain the notion that because the priests and Levites asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah they, therefore, considered it a possibility that he was Elijah reincarnated. It was perfectly within the realm of possibility, in their worldview, that John the Baptist was, literally, Elijah returned from heaven. Thus, even if John the Baptist admitted to being Elijah, there is no reason to suppose that any reincarnation took place.

A second reference that nullifies Fisher's view does so by clarifying the relationship of John the Baptist with Elijah. If John the Baptist is not Elijah reincarnated how, then, are we to understand verses such as these from Matthew 11 and 17? How are we to reconcile Jesus' claim that John the Baptist is Elijah with John's denial that he is Elijah?

There is no doubt that John the Baptist "is Elijah who is to come," but this claim about John the Baptist is not without qualifications. Notice Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah "if you are willing to receive it." In what sense, then, was John the Baptist Elijah? Whatever the sense, it had to be a way in which the disciples needed to be "willing to receive it." The answer is revealed in the scripture itself. Luke 1:17 tells us exactly in what sense John the Baptist is Elijah: "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah. . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (emphasis added)

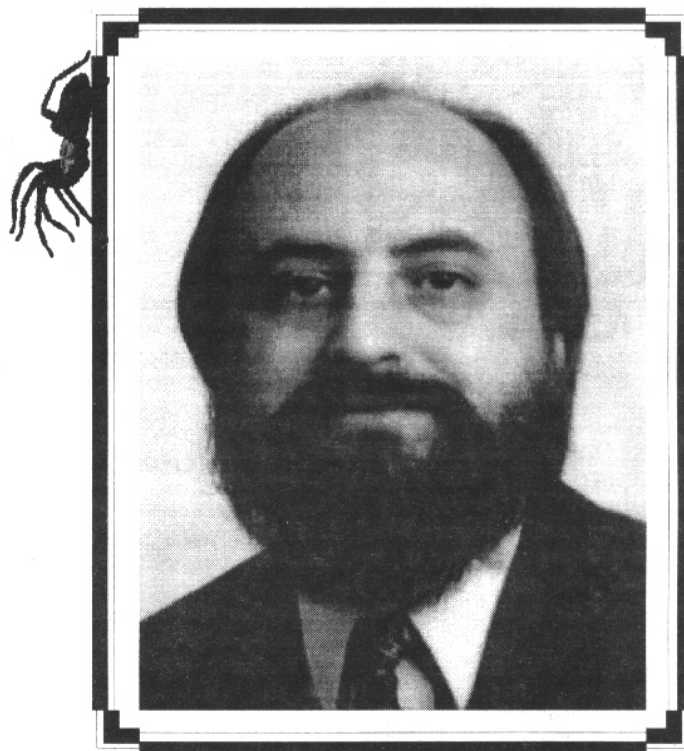
The sense in which John the Baptist is Elijah had everything to do with the mission and ministry John the Baptist was given to fulfill. That mission was to prepare the nation Israel for the coming of

her Messiah. That was why Jesus said "if you are willing to receive it." It was imperative that the disciples and the whole nation know and make ready for the Messiah. Thus, Jesus was in no way teaching that John the Baptist was the reincarnated Elijah but, rather, that John the Baptist was fulfilling the ministry of Elijah by being the forerunner of Israel's Messiah.

Conclusion

My argument in this issue has not been to show that reincarnation is a false doctrine. Rather, I have argued that the Bible does not assume nor declare the doctrine of reincarnation.⁴ Instead, it offers the hope of the resurrection. Jesus himself said in John 5:26-29: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." Ω

Endnotes: 1) All page numbers refer to Fisher's book unless otherwise noted. 2) See William Barclay, *The Gospel According to John*, The Westminster Press, 1975, Vol.2, pp. 37-38. 3) For a defense of this notion, see Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann's article "Eternity" in *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, August 1981, p.429-458. 4) For further Christian critique of reincarnation see: Mark Albrecht, *Reincarnation: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982); Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986); Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Immortality: The Other Side of Death* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992); and Robert A. Morey, *Reincarnation and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1980).



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