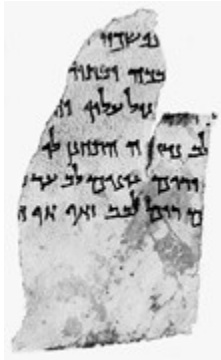


REINCARNATION IN JUDAISM

By [Kevin Williams](#)

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From time to time in Jewish history, there was an insistent belief that their prophets were reborn. Evidence of this can be found in the Hebrew scriptures, the Dead Sea Scrolls, early Christian and Jewish Gnostic writings, the New Testament, and the writings of ancient historians. At the time of Jesus, there were many competing ideas concerning death and what happens afterward. Greek and Neo-Platonic concepts of reincarnation, Persian resurrection, ancient Hebrew ideas of "She'ol", beliefs in no afterlife at all, and religions and philosophies from other sources, all



existed among the Jews in those days

The origin of resurrection in Jewish and Christian doctrine began with the Babylonian exile, a period when the Jews in Israel were conquered and taken captive to Babylon. Later, in 539 B.C., Babylon itself was conquered by the Persians who installed a Zoroastrian theocracy throughout the defeated Babylonian empire. It was then that the Zoroastrian religion and its doctrine of resurrection began exerting a tremendous influence on Judaism. Christianity, in turn, inherited the concept of resurrection from Judaism. In fact, it was the Zoroastrian religion that was the source of resurrection, the belief in angels (including that of Satan), the afterlife, rewards and punishments, the soul's immortality, and the Last Judgment.

Before the influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism, the Jews believed in "Sheol," a pit beneath the Earth where people went after death. As time went on, many Jews greatly resisted the imposition of Zoroastrianism masquerading as Judaism.

Whatever the Persian governors and priests were doing in Jerusalem in the name of

Judaism, caused a great schism. A sect of purists, called the Sadducees, which was made up of over 97% of the population, rose up.

They rejected all Persian concepts such as resurrection, angels, or spirits. The Sadducees did not emphasize life after death at all according to the New Testament (Matt. 22:23)

The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote that the Pharisees, the Jewish sect that founded rabbinic Judaism to which Paul once belonged, believed in reincarnation. He writes that the Pharisees believed the souls of evil men are punished after death. The souls of good men are "removed into other bodies" and they will "have power to revive and live again." Josephus records that the Essenes of the Dead Sea Scrolls lived "the same kind of life" as the followers of Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher who taught reincarnation. According to Josephus, the Essenes believed that the soul is both immortal and preexistent, necessary for tenets for belief in reincarnation.

Because Israel was located at a strategic crossroad where several continents come together, Jews in those days were exposed to many religions and philosophies. Some Jews were Gnostics of the Platonic tradition and were believers in "transmigration," a form of reincarnation held by the Greeks. Other Jews held to the Persian concept of resurrection. Jewish ideas included the concept that people could live again without knowing exactly the manners by which this could happen.

Today, believers in traditional Judaism firmly believed that death was not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife, and leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion.

Today, it is possible, for example, for an Orthodox Jew to believe the

"resurrection" refers to a time when souls of the righteous dead go to a place similar to the Christian heaven. It is also possible for an Orthodox Jew today to believe the "resurrection" refers to the reincarnation of a soul through many lifetimes.

In the Talmud, "gilgul neshamot" (i.e., reincarnation) is constantly mentioned. The term literally means "the judgment of the revolutions of the souls." Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel (1604-1657), one of the most revered Rabbis in Israel, states in his book entitled Nishmat Hayyim:

"The belief or the doctrine of the transmigration of souls is a firm and infallible dogma accepted by the whole assemblage of our church with one accord, so that there is none to be found who would dare to deny it... Indeed, there is a great number of sages in Israel who hold firm to this doctrine so that they made it a dogma, a fundamental point of our religion. We are therefore in duty bound to obey and to accept this dogma with acclamation... as the truth of it has been incontestably demonstrated by the Zohar, and all books of the Kabalists." (Nishmat Hayyim)

Reincarnation has been a belief for thousands of years for orthodox Jews. The Zohar is a book of great authority among Kabbalistic Jews. It states the following:

"All souls are subject to revolutions. Men do not know the way they have been judged in all time." (Zohar II, 199b)

That is, in their "revolutions" they lose all memory of the actions that led to their being judged.

Another Kabbalistic book, the Kether Malkuth states:

"If she, the soul, be pure, then she shall obtain favor ... but if she has been defiled, then she shall wander for a time in pain and despair... until the days of her purification." (Kether Malkuth)

How can the soul be defiled before birth? Where does the soul wander if not on this or some other world until the days of her purification? The rabbis explained this verse to mean that the defiled soul wanders down from paradise through many births until the soul regained its purity.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, it was considered the greatest archeological discovery ever found. It revealed never before known information about the Jewish sects at the beginning of the transformation of a small sect of Jews that later developed into Christianity. Two years earlier, in 1945, early Christian Gnostic writings were discovered which also provided important details about the early sects of Christianity. Together, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic discoveries yielded more information in particular concerning Jewish and early Christian mystic belief and practice of divine union (i.e., attaining a perfect human-divine unity).

In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the Jewish mystical tradition of divine union went back to the first, perhaps even the third, century B.C.E. Jewish mysticism has its origins in Greek mysticism, a system of belief which included reincarnation. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of the hymns found are similar to the Hekhaloth hymns of the Jewish mystics.

One text of hymns gives us clear evidence of Jewish mysticism. The text is called "Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice." Fragments of 1 Enoch, which is considered the oldest text of Jewish mysticism, were also found with the Scrolls.

Since evidence shows Jewish mysticism existed in the third century B.C.E., as Enoch indicates, then it would certainly have existed in first-century Israel. As stated earlier, the ideas of divine union and reincarnation can both be found in early Christianity. One may easily conclude it was the key to the very heart of Jesus' message.

One particular Dead Sea Scroll entitled "I IQ Melchizedek Text" which contains a sermon called "The Last Jubilee", mentions reincarnation. This scroll is about the "last days" during which time it says, a "Melchizedek redivivus" (revived, reincarnate) will appear and destroy Belial (Satan) and lead the children of God to eternal forgiveness. Below are parts of this message from this scroll, parts of which are unreadable. The unreadable parts will be denoted by this (...) symbol. Here is it's message:

"When, therefore, the scriptures speaks of a day of atonement ... What is meant, ... is that ... by a day on which all the children of Light and all who have cast their lot with the cause of righteousness will achieve forgiveness of their sins, whereas the wicked will reap their desserts and be brought to an end. There is a further reference to this final judgment in the continuation of the verse from the Psalter . . . the allusion is to Belial and the spirits of his ilk -- that is to ... defy God's statutes in order to perfect justice ... King ... Melchizedek ... will execute upon them God's avenging judgment, and ... deliver the just from the hands of Belial and all those spirits of his ilk.

"With all the angels of righteousness at his aid, he will blast the council of Belial to destruction ... the eminence in question being the destination of all who are indeed children of God ...

It will be from Belial ... that men will turn away in rebellion, and there

will be a reestablishment of the reign of righteousness, perversity being confounded by the judgments of God.

"This is what scripture implies in the words, 'Who says to Zion, your God has not claimed his Kingdom!' The term Zion there denoting the total congregation of the 'sons of righteousness' that is, those who maintain the covenant and turn away from the popular trend, and your God signifying the King of Righteousness, alias Melchizedek Redivivus, who will destroy Belial.

Our text speaks also of sounding a loud trumpet blast throughout the land on the tenth day of the seventh month. As applied to the last days, this refers to the fanfare which will then be sounded before the Messianic King." (The Last Jubilee)

As was mentioned earlier, Melchizedek was the High Priest described in the Bible who sounds remarkably like an incarnation of Jesus. It was also mentioned how some early Christians believed Melchizedek to be an early incarnation of Jesus. If the above message of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be believed, then the passage is very likely referring to the coming of a Messiah who will be a reincarnation of Melchizedek.

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun ... Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account." - [Ecclesiastes 1:9; 3:15](#))