

REINCARNATION

SECOND IN A SERIES ON COUNTERFEITS OF BIBLICAL SALVATION

With the influx of immigrants from the Far East, many Americans are becoming aware of a long-lived counterfeit salvation: reincarnation.

The concept, usually associated with Asian religions, has penetrated the thinking of many Westerners, most notably through the New Age movement. Recent polls reveal that approximately 25 percent of Americans believe in some form of reincarnation. This startling figure includes the millions of new citizens who have brought their religious concepts with them.

Reincarnation, or rebirth, sees humans (and also some animals) involved in never-ending cycles of life through transmigration of a never-dying soul. At best—if one has been of good moral character—one moves up the reincarnation ladder to a higher form of existence in the next life. The ultimate objective

of all reincarnation is fusion with “ultimate reality,” that is, with God.

Basic in all forms of reincarnation is the notion that humans are able to improve their previous existences without divine involvement. Absent is the concept of a saviour who will become the substitute for one’s guilt and sin. The immortal soul needs no salvation.

Reincarnation had its origin in India about 1000 B.C. It was known among the ancient Greek philosophers. “Plato, in the 5th-4th century B.C., believed in an immortal soul that participates in frequent reincarnations.”¹ Belief in the pre-existence of souls in Jewish and early Chris-

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tian literature "exhibited influences from Platonic thought."²

After appearance in the 18th-century Western world, reincarnation was popularized through the Asian-oriented occult movement known as Theosophy, founded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891).³ Theosophic thought is alive and well in our century, as is documented in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946) and observed in the New Age Movement.

Basic to all views of reincarnation is "a monistic [the view that reality is constituted of one principle], mystical, occult world view that promotes the essential divinity of humanity, [and] denies the notion of a sovereign personal God."⁴ As in much liberal theology, God is perceived only as "ultimate reality."⁵

Reincarnation thus contradicts the biblical doctrine of salvation, which asserts that humanity has fallen into sin and is unable to rescue itself; that God provides atonement for sin; forgiveness for sin brings freedom from guilt, and the gift of justification by grace through faith is freely provided by Jesus Christ. With a concept of reality centered on an eternal soul, the reincarnationist doesn't need the once-for-all substitutionary death of Jesus

Christ, the God-man; His mediation as humanity's High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, nor an inheritance in the biblical everlasting kingdom.

Standing squarely astride the pathway of reincarnation is an unequivocal truth: "It is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27, NASB).—Condensed from Gerhard F. Hasel, "Salvation in Scripture," in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3:2 (1992). □

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²S. Kent Brown, "Souls, Pre-existence of," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:161.

³C. T. J., "Theosophy," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1980), 18:276-280.

⁴R. M. Enroth, "Reincarnation," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 926.

⁵Typical for a giant among the liberal theologians of the 20th century in conceptualizing God as "Ultimate Reality," is Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963).

