



THE NON-IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

QUEST LESSON G-11

The Problem: This lesson is supplementary to lessons E-10 and E-12. Lesson E-10 answers the question, "Where are the dead?" It is concluded that death is asleep, a state of unconsciousness. The "spirit" of man is the life principle given by God. It is not an immortal, conscious part of man that lives on after the death of the body. The "spirit" of man, as spoken of in Scripture, may also refer to his mind, his capacity to reason, as well as his ability to feel and choose. But such intellectual and emotional faculties are never said to survive the death of the body. In, this sense, the "spirit" is the inner life of man that is totally dependent upon the existence of the body. The "soul" is very often the total personality including the body plus the life principle. In fact, the Greek and Hebrew words for "soul" mean "person," or "life." Animals are spoken of as souls, and, in Scripture, souls can die. Hence the soul is not immortal. Nowhere in the Bible is the "soul" spoken of as a disembodied immortal soul in heaven or hell.

The dead do not have consciousness of any kind; they know nothing, and they feel nothing. People who die do not go to heaven or hell, where they live in a state of consciousness. They go to the grave, where their bodies disintegrate because the life principle has been removed. They are sleeping without any awareness of what is happening on earth or in heaven.

In lesson E-10, section IV the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is discussed. The conclusion is drawn that it is an allegorical sermon illustration designed to demonstrate the danger of covetousness. If taken literally, the parable is an absurdity. Jesus' purpose was not to teach the immortality of the soul, or that souls go to a place of burning at death. Such a teaching would have contradicted what the Bible elsewhere has to say about death.

The Bible clearly emphasizes that the righteous dead are not in heaven, and the wicked dead are not in a place of burning. They are in the dust of the earth waiting for the resurrection day. That day for the righteous will be the second coming of Christ. For the wicked, it will be at the end of the millennium, at which time they will be raised and put to sleep for eternity (lesson E-10, section

Lesson E-12 answers the question, "Where is hell?" In Scripture, hell sometimes means the grave and sometimes the burning of the wicked at the end of the millennium. Never is hell a place of burning for the wicked immediately after death, and never is it a place of eternal burning. Hellfire reduces the wicked to ashes, and they then remain dead for eternity. The meaning of the Bible phrase "everlasting destruction," and the meaning of the word "forever" when the destruction of the wicked is being discussed, are clarified in lesson E-12.

The purpose of the present lesson is to examine fourteen Bible passages that are used as evidence by those who believe in the immortality of the soul. It will be shown that the true meaning of each passage in its Scriptural context rules out any suggestion that the soul is immortal.

Objectives

We shall comment on each of the fourteen passages in turn. They are dealt with more fully in Francis D. Nichol's book, *Answers to Objections*, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1952.

I. Where Did Jesus Say That Both Soul And Body Can Be Destroyed? Matthew 10:28.

Immortal soul advocates use this verse to point out the distinction between soul and body. They argue that the soul is the real self that dwells within the body during life but lives separately from the body after death. The problem from

their view is that this verse proves that the soul, like the body, can be destroyed in hell. If the soul can be destroyed, it is not immortal and it will not suffer eternally in hellfire. The message of the text is that, although we should not fear man who can destroy the body, we should fear God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell, and who will destroy the wicked at the end of time (Revelation 20; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The Greek word for "soul" (psuche) used in Matthew 10:28 means "life." It is the same word that is used four times in Matthew 16:25-26. In the King James Version, it is translated "life" in verse 25 and "soul" in verse 26: "For whosoever will save his life (psuche) shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life (psuche) For my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (psuche)? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (psuche)?" Note how the translators have varied the translation of the same Greek word. Verse 25 indicates that one could lose his soul for Christ's sake. That would not be possible if the soul were an immortal entity within man. The loss of the soul for the immortal soul advocate means going to hell. Obviously, no one goes to hell for Christ's sake. It is possible, however, to lay down one's life for Christ's sake. The translators, who believed in the immortality of the soul, saw the problem in their view and translated the word psuche by "life," even though they translated it as "soul" in verse 26.

The real message of Matthew 16:25-26 is that eternal life will be lost for those who substitute selfish desires for the service of Christ. But eternal life will be given to those who love and serve Christ. The next verse puts the statement into its context: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (verse 27). Matthew 25:46 is parallel. Contrasting the wicked with the righteous, Jesus said: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." "Everlasting punishment" is eternal loss of life, not an eternal life of loss (Matthew 16:25-26). It is not a continuation of life in hell.

Relevance: Matthew 10:28 is thoroughly consistent with Jesus' overall teaching that the "soul" or "life" of the unbeliever will be destroyed eternally. That being the case the soul is not immortal.

II. What Did Paul Mean When He Said That "The Inward Man Is Renewed Day By Day"? 2 Corinthians 4:16.

Believers in the immortality of the soul argue that the inward man is the immortal soul within the body. This text, they say, clearly proves a distinction between soul and body.

Undoubtedly there is a distinction between soul (or spirit) and body in the Bible. If "soul" means "life" or "life principle," as it does in Matthew 10:28, obviously it is something different from the body. The word "soul" in Scripture does not always mean what it does in Genesis 2:7, where "a living soul" is comprised of both body and life principle (breath).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: "... glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). In the New Testament, the "spirit" of man (Greek pneuma) often refers to his mind, as well as his emotions. For example, 1 Corinthians 2:11: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" The "spirit" here is the knowing part of man, his faculty of comprehension, his mind. The Revised Standard Version translates 2 Corinthians 2:13: "... but my mind [pneuma = spirit] could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there." Note also 2 Corinthians 7:13 R.S.V.: "And besides our own comfort we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind [pneuma] has been set at rest by you all."

But in Scripture, the "spirit" or "soul" is never a separate, immortal part of man existing within the body, and living on after the death of the body. Minds and emotions (spirits) do not go on functioning after the body expires (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10), and the "soul" or "life" is lost when the body dies (Matthew 16:25-26). God reserves the righteous for eternal life and reserves the wicked for eternal death (Romans 6:23), but, as our previous studies have demonstrated, there is no continuing, conscious life for any individual after the extinction of the body.

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians that, though he was "absent in body," he was "present in spirit" (1 Corinthians 5:3). Of course, he was not a split personality, having his body in Ephesus while his real self was over in Corinth. He obviously meant what we mean today when we say that we are with someone in spirit. His thoughts, concerns, and prayers were much with the Corinthians, even though his entire person remained in Ephesus.

2 Corinthians 4:16 simply means that the inner spiritual life of man is renewed day by day as he turns to Christ for strength to face life's challenges. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). As we receive His word into our hearts by the Holy Spirit every day (cf. John 16:13), we are renewed spiritually and given the grace to live for Christ. The same spiritual renewal is spoken of in Ephesians 3:16-17: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. "Christ lives out His life through the person who receives His Spirit into the life every day (Galatians 2:20).

Relevance: 2 Corinthians 4:16 does not teach the immortality of the soul. It teaches that our inner spiritual life must be renewed as we come to Christ every day.

III. What Did Jesus And Stephen Mean When They Committed Their Spirits To The Care Of God? Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59.

When Jesus was dying, He prayed, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" Luke 23:46. Stephen prayed similarly when he was being stoned to death, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). The Scriptural background to these prayers goes way back to Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The body plus the breath of life produced a living soul. The word for "breath" in Genesis 2:7 is *neshamah* in the Hebrew original and *pnoe* in the Greek translation (the Septuagint). These words mean "blowing, breath, wind." The breath that God breathed into the inanimate body gave it life. This same breath of life is spoken of in Job 33:4: "The spirit [*ruah*] of God hath made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty hath given me life." The breath of life (*neshamah*) is, therefore, the spirit (*ruah*) that God breathed" into Adam's nostrils. The word *ruah* means "breath, spirit, wind." Referring to himself during life, Job said, "All the while my breath [*neshamah*] is in me, and the spirit [*ruah*] is in my nostrils" (Job 27:3). Once again, the "breath" and the "spirit" are identified. When this "spirit" or "breath" returns to God the individual dies: "If he [God] set his heart upon man, if he gathers unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust" (Job 34:14-15).

The Psalmist expressed the same thought when he described what happens to man in death: "His breath [*ruah* = spirit] goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4).

This explains the description of death as given in Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then shall the dust [body] return to the earth as it was: and the spirit [*ruah* = breath] shall return unto God who gave it. This simply reverses the process as described in Genesis 2:7. Now God takes the life principle back to himself and the dead body disintegrates. The "spirit" or "breath" that goes back to God cannot possibly be man's immortal soul. If that were so the spirit or soul of all humans, righteous and wicked, would go to heaven when they die. No one believes that! Moreover, the Bible teaches that animals have exactly the same breath of life as man, and this also goes back to God when they die: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath [*ruah* = spirit]; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast [in this respect]: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20). The next verse is a rhetorical question that he has already answered. His meaning may be paraphrased like this: "Whoever imagines that the spirit of man goes up to heaven, and the spirit of an animal goes down to the earth?" He has just asserted that such is not the case.

Of course, there are some very vital differences between mankind and animals. Even though they both have the same life principle from God, the distinctions are dramatic. Man was made in the image of God, with a moral nature, and the capacity to have communion with His Creator. Man will face God's judgment and either be translated to heaven or destroyed in hell. None of this applies to animals. Nevertheless, the life principle in man and beast is the same. If that life principle were an immortal soul, we would have to argue that animals have immortal souls; an absurd idea.

In the light of the foregoing, consider Luke 23:46 and Acts 7:59; specifically, the prayers of Jesus and Stephen committing their "spirit" or life principle to God. They knew that they were dying. The life that came from God was being taken from them. That spirit or life principle was the "breath" given to man at creation. If it were an immortal soul, then the soul of

man must have existed prior to creation. This doctrine is acceptable to Mormons, but certainly not to those whose doctrinal understandings are based solely on Scripture.

The day Jesus died His human "spirit," "breath," or life principle went back to God, but He certainly did not go to heaven as a conscious being that Friday afternoon. After His resurrection on the Sunday morning, when He appeared to Mary Magdalene, He instructed: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). Likewise Stephen did not ascend to heaven when the life principle was taken from him. The righteous dead are not made immortal until they are raised at the second advent of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Then they are taken to heaven to be with their Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). Jesus and Stephen were both praying that God would reserve them for eternal life with Him because they trusted wholly in Him. The prayer was answered for Jesus a couple of days later when He rose from the dead. Stephen's prayer will be answered when the saints are raised at the second advent of Jesus.

Relevance: Jesus (as man) and Stephen did not have immortal souls that went to heaven when they died. They trusted God to give them back the breath of life (or life principle) by raising them from the dead. In this sense, they committed their lives into God's care.

IV. What Did The Writer Of The Book Of Hebrews Mean By Saying That Christian Believers Have Come "To The Spirits Of Just Men Made Perfect" (Hebrews 12:23).

The Greek dictionaries define the Greek word translated "spirit" (pneuma) to mean, according to context, (i) a blowing, breathing, wind, breath; (ii) spiritual state; (iii) state of mind, disposition; (iv) spirit beings such as the Holy Spirit, angels, and evil spirits.

Hebrews 12:18-29 is not written for people who are already in heaven, but for Christian believers on this earth who are confronted with the challenges and temptations of everyday life. Paul, who is thought to be the writer, reminds the Hebrew Christians that they have not been confronted with the remarkable experience of seeing God's glory on Mount Sinai, of hearing His mighty voice, and seeing the earth shake as the law was proclaimed (verses 18-21). Now that Christ has died and risen again, the divine love and glory are manifested in other ways.

Verses 22-24 emphasize that Christian believers on earth have come to: (i) "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God"; (ii) "the heavenly Jerusalem" (cf. Galatians 4:26 ff.); (iii) "an innumerable company of angels"; (iv) "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven"; (v) "God the Judge of all"; (vi) "the spirits of just men made perfect"; (vii) "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant"; (viii) the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

Then the instruction is given: "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." (verse 25). Obviously, though some of the things or beings to which believers have come are in heaven and some on earth, the believers themselves remain on earth. If they were in heaven they would not need the intercession of the Mediator, nor would they be instructed not to refuse Christ who is speaking to them from heaven. Moreover, the church of the firstborn is still on this earth. Paul refers elsewhere to his "fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). Jesus instructed His disciples to rejoice "because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Those who are eventually translated to heaven at the second coming of Jesus are those whose names are retained in the book of life (compare Daniel 12:1; Revelation 3:5; 20:12; 21:27, 22:19)

"The spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23) does not refer to disembodied spirits in heaven. In fact, there is no evidence in Scripture that there are any disembodied spirits of humans in heaven. The Hebrew Christians belong to the church of the firstborn on this earth, and have fellowship with those who have been made complete (or "perfect") in Christ (Colossians 2:10). Speaking of Christ's death a little earlier in the same letter to the Hebrews, Paul wrote: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering, he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:12-14). The point is that there is cleansing from sin and present perfection in Christ for those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and who are being progressively sanctified. (See also Romans 8:3-4, 9-10). Such a church of believers who are enjoying the indwelling righteousness of Christ by the Holy Spirit are accurately spoken of as "the spirits of just men

made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23). Their spiritual life has been brought into harmony with the will of God. They have become "servants" or "slaves" of righteousness (Romans 6:18). The "righteousness of the law" is fulfilled in them (Romans 8:4), and Christ, dwelling in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, is their righteousness within. The Hebrew Christians had the privilege of fellowshiping with genuinely born-again believers in the Church of Christ on earth. And Paul wanted the Hebrew Christians themselves to be "just men made perfect" (compare Hebrews 9:14; 10:19-22).

Relevance: Every Christian believer, because of his or her relationship with Christ, may have such a vibrant spiritual life that the phrase, "the spirits of just men made perfect," may apply to his or her experience. This is Christ's ideal for His children.

V. What Did Paul Mean When He Wrote: Of "A Man, Whether In The Body Or Out Of The Body, I Cannot Tell" (2 Corinthians 12:2-3).

First, we should note that Paul was speaking about himself. He was explaining how God had given him "visions or revelations" (verse 1; cf. verses 6-11). His purpose was to convince the Corinthians that he was a genuinely inspired apostle (verse 11). In vision Paul had been caught up into paradise (verse 4), the third heaven (verse 2). Paradise is where God's throne is, and where the tree of life is (Revelation 2:7; 22:2). Paul was not certain whether he was actually in bodily form in heaven, or only there in vision while his body remained on earth.

The point is that Paul was still a human being living on this earth at the time he received his visions and revelations from God. He was not a disembodied spirit whose body had died and whose spirit was now dwelling in heaven. There is no evidence for the immortality of the soul in the passage.

Relevance: The Lord sometimes gives inspired prophets visions and dreams in which they seem to be far away from their earthly place of dwelling. But such revelations do not "prove that man has an immortal soul."

VI. Why Did Jesus Refer To The Dead By Saying, "God Is Not The God Of The Dead, But Of The Living?" (Matthew 22:32).

The whole passage of which this verse is a part (Matthew 22:23-32) is a discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees about the resurrection. They denied that there would be a resurrection of the dead (verse 23). They posed a hypothetical case of a woman who married seven brothers in turn and asked Jesus which of the brothers would be her husband after the resurrection. Jesus' answer focused on the resurrection: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (verse 30). Then he added: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (verses 31-32). Jesus' point was that God is the God of the living because the dead will be raised in the resurrection, not because the dead are living in spirit form in heaven now. Mark introduces the statement with the phrase: "And as touching the dead, that they rise..." (Mark 12:26). Luke quotes Jesus as saying: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him." (Luke 20:37-38).

Francis D. Nichol comments: "But for some reason, the believers in the immortal-soul doctrine believe that 'Moses shewed' and that Christ quoted Moses to show, not that 'the dead are raised,' but that their immortal souls have never died! There have always been those who believed that at death an airy entity leaves the body, who did not therefore believe that there would ever be a bodily resurrection. Belief in the one does not logically necessitate belief in the other. Hence, if Christ simply proved that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were then living as immortal souls in bliss, He did not thereby prove that there would be a resurrection." (Answers to Objections, p. 326).

The last phrase of Luke 20:38 may be translated: "... for to him [God] all are living." God views the things that will be as though they already are. Paul spoke of "God, who quickeneth [makes alive] the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). Paul also wrote: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Romans 14:7-9). The Lord knows which of the dead belong to Him, and these are the ones whom He will raise at the second advent of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 5:28-29).

Relevance: The living believer in Christ need have no fear of death because even after his death Christ is still his Lord, who has a complete record of his faithfulness and plans to raise him on the resurrection day.

VII. What Did Paul Mean When He Wrote: "We Are Confident, I Say, And Willing Rather To Be Absent From The Body, And To Be Present With The Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The immortal soul advocates use this passage (2 Corinthians 5:1-10) to prove that Paul was looking forward to being a disembodied spirit in heaven. The context indicates otherwise. The three possible states to which he refers are: (i) "our earthly house" (verse 1); (ii) the "naked" or "unclothed" state (verses 3-4); (iii) "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (verse 1). The "unclothed" state is, in fact, the intermediate condition between the earthly and heavenly state. In the earthly state, the believer has an earthly body. In the heavenly state he will have an immortal, incorruptible body. But in the "naked," or "unclothed" state he will have no body at all because it has gone back to the dust, and the life principle has been removed by God. As we have seen above, this life principle is not a conscious, immortal entity.

Paul was looking forward to the resurrection of the body at the second advent (Romans 8:11, 22, 23; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:4--44). His focus was not on being a disembodied spirit after death but on being with Christ on each resurrection morning (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Paul wrote: "For to me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:21-23). He does not, however, tell us in this passage when he will be with Christ. As far as the dead person is concerned, the interval between the moment of death and the resurrection at Christ's coming is no time at all. After death, the next thing he knows is that he is in the presence of Christ. Hence, Paul's desire to lay down his burden was not in view of a wish to be a spirit being in heaven after death. It was in view of his wish to be raised to be with Christ on the resurrection day.

Relevance: There is no fear in death for the Christian believer because it is a state of unconsciousness followed by eternity with Christ. Death is rest from labor, and the resurrection is an eternity of restfulness. What greater blessings could the Lord bestow upon us?

VIII. How Do We Answer The Argument That, Since Man Is Made In The Image Of God, And God Is Immortal, Therefore Man Is Immortal? (Genesis 1:26-27).

When man was made in the image of God he was not, therefore, given all of the characteristics of God. God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing). Of course, man does not have, and never did have, these characteristics, even though he was made in God's image. Man was made in the image of God in outward resemblance and in character. (See Exodus 33:22-23; Ezekiel 1:26-28; Genesis 5:1; James 3:9),

Never in Scripture are the words "immortal" or "immortality" used in reference to mankind in his earthly, fallen existence. Christian believers "seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:7). They do not have immortality now; they are looking forward to it. Immortality at the second advent (1 Corinthians 15:51-54) is possible because Christ earned it for us on Calvary (2 Timothy 1:10). By comparison with earthly humans, God "only hath immortality" (1 Timothy 6:16).

Relevance: Every believer has the assurance that Christ will bestow immortality upon him at the second advent.

IX. The Old Testament Speaks Of The Souls Of Dying People Departing. What Does That Mean? Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22.

Genesis 35:18 describes the death of Rachel: "And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni..." The Hebrew word translated "soul" in this verse is nephesh.

1 Kings 17:17-22 describes the death of the widow's son at Zarephath, and Elijah's prayer that resulted in God raising him from the dead. When he died, "there was no breath left in him" (verse 17). The Hebrew word for breath Used in this verse is neshamah. Elijah's prayer to God resulted in the child being raised from the dead: "I pray thee, let this child's soul [nephesh] come into him again. find A Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul [nephesh] of the child came into him again, and he revived (verses 21-22).

The Hebrew word translated "breath" in 1 Kings 17:17, neshamah, according to the Hebrew dictionaries, means "breath, breathing, panting, breathing being, animal, living soul." It is the word used in Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath (neshamah) of life, and man became a living soul." Hence, the life principle that was given to man by God when He created him left the widow's son when he died. Neshamah does not refer to a conscious, immortal part of the child that went on living when he died. It simply refers to the life from God that was taken away from the child at death.

As we have seen, both Genesis 35:18 and 1 Kings 17:21-22 use the Hebrew word nephesh, translated "soul" in the King James Version. Rachel's "soul" left her at death, and the child's "soul" came back into him when Elijah prayed for him. It is important to know what the Hebrew word nephesh means. According to the Hebrew dictionaries, it means: "breath, respiration, life, soul, spirit, mind, living being, creature, a person, self." Never does nephesh refer to a part of an individual that can have a conscious existence independent of the body. Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Volume IX, pp. 617 ff.) has an excellent article on nepheshy as the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word psuche. We quote part of the article for the purpose of clarifying the true meaning of nephesh. (The Hebrew words will be transliterated in brackets):

"The deciding mark of the living creature is breathing, and its cessation means the end of life. Hence the root... in the form of the noun. . . which occurs 755 times in the Hebrew Bible, denotes 'life' or 'living creature'... In 1 Kings 17:17, lack of [neshamah or breath] causes the departure of [nephesh], which returns when the prophet gives the child breath again, for [nephesh] alone is what makes a living creature into a living organism... Yet one should not conclude that the [nephesh] is an immaterial principle that can be abstracted away from its material sub-structure and which can lead to an independent existence. The departure of the [nephesh] is a metaphor for death; a dead man is one who has ceased to breathe...[nephesh] is the usual term for man's total nature, for what he is and not just what he has. ¥ . The [nephesh] is almost always connected with a form. It has no existence apart from the body. Hence, the best translation in many instances is 'person' comprised in corporeal reality. The person can be marked off and counted, Gn. 12:53 46:18; Jos. 10:28; 11:11. Each individual is a [nephesh], and when the texts speak of a single [nephesh] for totality, the totality is viewed as a single person, a 'corporate personality.' Hence, [nephesh] can denote what is most individual in human nature, namely, the ego, and it can become a synonym of the personal pronoun, Gn. 27:25." (pp. 618-620).

In fact, a lifeless body is sometimes spoken of as a nephesh in the Old Testament. It is a dead individual: Numbers 3 9:6, 10; Haggai 2:13.

Summarizing the above, we arrive at these conclusions: (i) the root meaning of the word is "breath"; (ii) because breath is essential to life nephesh came to mean "life"; (iii) because life is enjoyed by each living person nephesh came to apply to an individual; it came to be used for the personal pronoun; (iv) never does nephesh refer to a quality or a part of an individual that exists separate from the body.

Now it is very easy indeed to understand Genesis 35:18 and 1 Kings 17:21-22. Rachel's "soul" (nephesh) that departed when she died was simply her breath or life. She ceased to be a living individual because the life principle had departed.

Just so, the widow's son died when the breath of life left him. When Elijah prayed for the boy, God gave him back his life (nephesh), and once again he became a living, breathing individual.

Relevance: A study of the Hebrew and Greek words for "soul" in Scripture reveals that the word never means a disembodied, conscious entity. A soul is either the total personality, including the body and life principle, or it may refer to the life principle (breath) itself, or to some other aspect of human personality that is always connected to the body. In fact, at times a dead body is spoken of as a "soul," simply because the body represents the person who has expired. Therefore, Rachel and the widow's son died when life departed from them, and the boy was raised up when God gave him life again.

X. Why Does The Book Of Revelation Depict The Souls Of Dead Crying Out For Vindication? (Revelation 6:9-11).

First, it should be pointed out that the book of Revelation is full of prophetic symbolism. No one would wish to conclude, for example, that the four living creatures the 24 elders, or the Lamb, of chapters 4 and 5 appear exactly in heaven as John saw them in vision. God gave John a series of symbolic visions which, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, can be accurately interpreted.

Second, if we are to regard the "souls under the altar" of Revelation 6:9 as literal, we have a strange picture indeed. Why are they congregated under the altar in heaven? Their lot really does not seem to be very pleasant after all; they seem to be very unhappy people in dire need of vindication.

Third, why should these dead martyrs be crying out for God to "avenge" the injustice done to them, if their wicked enemies went to hell at death, as the immortal soul advocates believe? Surely the vengeance against those who killed the martyrs was already being poured out if the immortal souls of the wicked go to hell when they die.

Fourth, it is very important to understand that the "altar" of Revelation 6:9 is not the altar of incense in heaven. It is an allusion to the altar of burnt offering that was in the court of the ancient Israelite sanctuary or temple (Exodus 27:1-8; 29:12-18; 38:1-7). How do we know this? John's vision was of people who had been sacrificed. The only place where Israelites were to offer sacrifices was by the altar of burnt offering in the court of the sanctuary (Leviticus 17:18). In the offering of animal sacrifices, the excess blood was poured at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30). The life (Hebrew nephesh or Greek psuche = "life," or "soul") of the animal was in the blood (Genesis 9:4; Deuteronomy 12:23; Leviticus 17:10-11). When the blood of the animal was poured beneath the altar, that represented life being poured out; the life of Christ poured out for us (Hebrews 10:1-9; Psalm 22:14), and the lives of Christ's people being sacrificed for Him (2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; Hebrews 11:37).

The souls under the altar of Revelation 6:9-11 do not refer to living, conscious, immortal souls of dead people in heaven. These "souls" or "lives" are a symbol of those whose blood was poured out for Christ's sake. Their blood is crying out to God from the ground in a metaphoric sense as the blood of Abel cried out for justice (Genesis 4:10). As we have seen above, the Hebrew and Greek words for "soul" (nephesh and psuche) never refer to a part of man that can have an existence separate from the body.

Relevance: The message of Revelation 6:9-11 is a beautiful symbol of God's continuing concern for those who have laid down their lives for Him. He has a record of the injustice dealt to them, and this record cries out for their vindication. They are judged worthy in heaven and told to "rest yet for a little season" (verse 11). At the second coming of Jesus they will be awakened from the sleep of death and given their eternal inheritance (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

XI. What Did Peter Mean When He Wrote That Christ Preached To The "Spirits In Prison"? 1 Peter 3:18-20.

Those who believe in the immortality of the soul interpret this passage to mean that when Christ died, He went down to hell and preached to the wicked souls who had been destroyed in the flood. Why would Christ do that? To give them another chance? Then they must have been in a place like purgatory and not irrevocably lost at all! Unfortunately for this view, the Bible never teaches that those who die lost are given another chance. Compare what else Peter has to say about the people who were lost in the flood (2 Peter 2:4-9).

Why would Christ preach only to those who were lost in Noah's day? Why didn't He preach to the rest of the lost?

The truth is that the passage is not talking about Christ descending to a place of immortal lost spirits when He died. There is no such place described in Scripture. Death is asleep, and when Jesus died He slept in the grave until the moment of His resurrection. When the wicked were destroyed in the flood, they were put to sleep, reserved "unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9).

The Holy Spirit used Noah as a preacher of righteousness for 120 years (2 Peter 2:5). The "spirits" to whom he preached were living human beings, in prison spiritually because they had forsaken the only true God (cf. Isaiah 42:7; 61:1; Luke 4:18-21). The Scriptures a number of times speak of living humans on this earth as "spirits" (Hebrews 12:23; Numbers 16:22; 27:16). Never in the Bible is a "spirit" (pneuma) the disembodied, immortal spirit of a human being in heaven or hell. The word pneuma means "wind," "breath," "spirit." It was used often in the sense of "person," or in reference to an aspect of personality inseparable from the person. (See 1 Corinthians 16:18; Galatians 6:18; 2 Timothy 4:22; cf. Philippians 4:23).

Relevance: Just as the Holy Spirit plead with people before the flood, so He pleads with us today to be reconciled to Christ (1 Peter 3:18).

XII. Did Jesus Tell The Dying Thief That He Would Be In Paradise That Day? Luke 23:43.

The immortal soul advocates argue that Jesus preached to the spirits in hell after His death (1 Peter 3:18-20; discussed above). But, on the basis of Luke 23:43, they assert that Jesus went to paradise when He died. Exactly where was Jesus after death?

Paradise is heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4; Revelation 2:7; 22:1-2). Jesus did not go to paradise that Friday afternoon of the crucifixion. On the next Sunday morning, after He had risen from the dead, He said to Mary Magdalene: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17).

The punctuation of the text in English and in modern Greek Bibles does not represent the punctuation of the original author. There was no such punctuation in the ancient Greek manuscripts. The correct punctuation of the text is as follows: "Verily I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise." Jesus promised this dying believer that he would be in heaven with Him on the resurrection morning, at His second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:54).

Relevance: Praise the Lord, every believer in Christ can claim the promise made to the dying thief. Even though we should die, we will be raised to be with Christ in paradise.

XIII. If The Soul Is Not Immortal, How Do We Explain That After His Death Samuel Appeared To King Saul? 1 Samuel 28:7-19.

A number of facts establish certainly that this passage does not teach the immortality of the soul:

1. Saul went to the witch of Endor because "the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:6). Because of his persistence in rebellion against God, the Lord withdrew from Saul and left him to the control of evil demons. (Compare 1 Samuel 16:14~16). In conversation with the spirit that the witch called up for him, Saul admitted: "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do" (1 Samuel 28:15).

Had Saul repented of his sin, God would have heard his prayers and delivered him from his enemies. A later Bible writer explained why God allowed Saul's life to be taken: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that

had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" (1 Chronicles 10:13-14).

Since God had departed from Saul and would not answer his prayers, and since God later condemned Saul for going to the witch of Endor, it is inconceivable that God would use the witch to give Saul an inspired message. Since Samuel was a prophet of God during his lifetime, we can assume that the being that appeared to the witch of Endor was not Samuel, but an evil spirit impersonating Samuel. God was not speaking to Saul, and He never speak at the request of mediums controlled by evil spirits.

2. The witch of Endor is described in the King James Version as one having "a familiar spirit" (1 Samuel 28:7). The Hebrew words for "familiar spirit" is ba'alath-'ob. Ba'alath means "mistress." 'Ob means "necromancer," or medium." This is a person Who claims to foretell the future through alleged communication with the dead; a conjurer, wizard, sorcerer. God had specifically commanded that such evil spirit mediums should be put to death in Israel. Anyone consulting spirit mediums was to be cut off from Israel. (See Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11). Saul had previously obeyed the divine commands in this respect by expelling the spirit mediums: "And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land" (1 Samuel 28:3). Are we now to believe that God would speak to Saul through a witch, the very kind of person that He had commanded should not be permitted to live? Such an idea is unthinkable!
3. In response to the witch's incantations, "Samuel" came up, not down (1 Samuel 28:11, 13, 14, 15). If the appearance had been truly Samuel's immortal soul, it would have come down from heaven, not up from the depths of the earth. The evil spirit impersonating Samuel was called Samuel by the Bible writer only because the story is told as the events were perceived by those present.
4. Saul did not see the spirit being. He only had the word of the witch that it was Samuel (verses 13-14). What Saul "perceived" (verse 14) was what he understood, even though he did not see the manifestation. Are we to believe the word of a condemned practicing witch that Samuel was actually present?
5. "Samuel" appeared as an old man bowed with his face to the ground. Do immortal souls retain the bodily appearance they had in old age on earth?
6. "Samuel," told Saul: "...and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (verse 19). The next day, Saul committed suicide (1 Samuel 31:4). If he went to be with Samuel's immortal soul, surely he would have gone to heaven. Do wicked men who are rejected by God and commit suicide go to heaven when they die?

Relevance: Saul turned away from God and consulted a medium of evil demons. Because Saul's life was in the Devils hands, the Devil could predict what would happen the next day. When the evil one is in charge of a life he can destroy it at will. An evil demon impersonating Samuel predicted Saul's eternal doom.

XIV. What Is Meant By Isaiah's Description Of The Destruction Of The Wicked: "Their Worm Shall Not Die, Neither Shall Their Fire Be Quenched"? Isaiah 66:24.

The meaning of "unquenchable" fire that will destroy the wicked is explained in lesson E-12, section III. It is explained there that the fire is unquenchable because, like the fire that burned old Jerusalem, nothing can put it out men it has done its job of consuming the lost (Jeremiah 17:27).

Why does Isaiah speak of the saved in the new earth viewing the "carcasses" of the wicked? (Isaiah 66:24). Note first that he does not describe the saved as viewing disembodied immortal souls suffering in hellfire. The Hebrew word translated "carcasses" means "dead bodies," or "corpses." In Isaiah's description, worms and fire are devouring dead bodies, not immortal souls.

What is meant by the phrase, "for their worm shall not die"? Some would have us believe that the undying worm is the immortal soul. That would be a strange way indeed for the inspired prophet to describe the soul. In the Hebrew poetry

of the text, the "worm" is parallel with the "fire." They are the forces of destruction, not the objects being destroyed. Hence, the meaning of the passage is that, when they are being viewed by the righteous, the dead bodies of the wicked are still in process of being consumed. The simple imperfect tense of the Hebrew verbs suggests the following translation: "... their worm had not died yet, nor had their fire been quenched." At the time at which the dead bodies of the wicked are being viewed by the saved, they have not yet been consumed.

Why does Isaiah depict the saved as viewing the burning of the dead bodies of the wicked? It must be understood that Isaiah's description of the new earth (Isaiah 65:17 66:24) would have been fulfilled in every detail if Israel had not failed in the mission given it by God. Since Israel rejected Christ, and the Christian Church inherited its spiritual blessings and evangelistic program, Isaiah's prophecy must be interpreted in the light of later revelation concerning the new earth state. Whereas Isaiah's new earth for Israel incorporated such things as old age and death (65:20), the final new earth foreseen by John the Revelator contains no suffering, death, or destruction of any kind (Revelation 21:15). And whereas Isaiah's new earth, the righteous would see the dead bodies of the wicked, in John's new earth the wicked have been finally consumed (Revelation 20:14-15). The long life followed by old age and death and the burning of the wicked in Isaiah's prophecy can now be viewed as metaphoric descriptions of the eternal life of the righteous in a world where there is no death and where no wicked person dwells. Before the establishment of the final new earth, the wicked will be reduced to ashes (Malachi 4:1), for their mortal souls will perish. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

Relevance: Praise the Lord that each one of us can have a part in the earth made new where sin, suffering, and death are no more. If we die before Jesus comes again, we will be raised and given immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). If we live until His coming, we will be made immortal beings with the privilege of spending eternity in a universe free from the curse of evil.

Are you willing to commit your life, as Stephen did, to the care of the eternal Life Giver? The Lord pleads with you to turn from fables to the truth of His Word, and to find in Christ your assurance of salvation.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Fallen human beings do not have immortal souls.
 - b. After His death, Jesus preached to souls in hell.
 - c. Jesus did not go to paradise on the day of His death.
 - d. Paul was looking forward to being a disembodied spirit in heaven.
2. Discuss: What difference does it make whether or not you believe in the immortality of the soul?