

## **LIFE AFTER DEATH - IMMORTAL BODY OR DISEMBODIED IMMORTAL?**

**C**entral to the Roman Catholic faith is the belief that man possesses an immortal soul, which at death leaves the body and departs to heaven or hell. This belief is unscriptural and negates fundamental doctrines of the Bible concerning death and the death state, the second coming of Christ, resurrection, judgement and the kingdom of God on earth.

“Nephesh” is the Hebrew word translated soul in the Old Testament and it occurs about 750 times. “Psuche” is the Greek word translated soul in the New Testament and it occurs 105 times. However, nephesh and psuche are not only or always translated “soul.” They have in fact, been translated into over 40 different words, and careful study of these applications reveals that the primary meaning is “life” and “creature” i.e. living creature. Many Scriptures could be quoted where “soul” simply means this. This includes the various aspects in which a living creature may be contemplated, such as body, mind, heart, emotions, appetite etc. For this reason, nephesh and psuche are quite flexible in their meaning and a great variety of applications are given.

When God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils, he became a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7) i.e. a living breathing creature. Prior to this, he was a lifeless, breathless creature i.e. a dead soul. It is significant to note that Gen. 2:7 does not say that God breathed into Adam’s nostrils an immortal soul, but many read that into it.

The word “life” in the statement that God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils, and the word “living” in the phrase “living soul,” both come from the Hebrew word “chay.” “Living soul” in Hebrew is therefore chay nephesh, and, significantly enough, Scripture not only applies this description to man, but also to all species of living creatures in creation. This can be seen in Gen. 1:20, 21, 24. 2:19 etc.

So then, whatever the “life” was that was breathed into man, all other living creatures in creation have it as well. And, if “living soul” means possessing an immortal soul, then all beasts, birds and insects must possess an immortal soul as well!

### **SOULS ARE MORTAL**

**I**t is worthy of notice that on the hundreds of occasions where nephesh and psuche occur, not once is the word “immortal” or “deathless” found in connection with them as qualifying terms. Quite the opposite is

the case. In 326 of the places in the Old Testament where nephesh occurs, the soul is said to be subject to death. And in 45 of the 105 places where psuche occurs in the New Testament, the soul is said to be subject to death and destruction. Ezk. 18:4 for example, is quite explicit: “The soul that sins shall die.” Also Matt. 10:28: “Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The doctrine of the immortality (deathlessness and indestructibility) of the soul contradicts Bible teaching.

The account of the creation of man in Gen. 2:7 says God formed man out of the dust of the ground and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, causing him to become a living soul. Prior to the dust being formed into man, and prior to the breath of life being breathed into his nostrils, he was not conscious; he did not pre-exist in some immaterial state. Man did not come from heaven but out of the earth.

At death, according to Gen. 3:19, man returns to the ground: “For out of it you were taken, for you are dust and you shall return to dust.” We are taught here that the death state is the same as the dust state from which man was originally made, i.e. a non-existent unconscious state. Man’s death is the reversal of his creation!

In order for man to live, the breath of life had to be breathed into his nostrils, and as long as he continued to breathe the breath of life, he remained a living soul. At death breathing ceases; the breath of life is withdrawn and returns to God who gave it. Ps. 146:4 puts it like this: “When his breath departs he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

The same process of death experienced by man applies to all other breathing creatures in creation. Ps. 104:29 says God “takes away their breath; they die, and return to their dust.” In view of this it is not surprising to read in Ecc. 3:18-20 that men and animals all have the same breath and die in the same way. Also see Ps. 49. In this respect, man has no pre-eminence over animals (Ecc. 3:19).

In passing, it should be pointed out that in Ps. 146:4 and 104:29 where reference is made to man’s “breath” departing at death and of the “breath” of animals being taken away by God: the Hebrew word for breath on these occasions is “ruach.” It basically means breath, especially God’s life-imparting and miracle-working breath, and it is elsewhere translated “spirit.” For example: Ecc. 12:7: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.” Also Ecc. 8:8: “No man has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death ...”

In some places where Hebrew parallelisms occur, the words breath and spirit run parallel with each other. For example, Job says: “My breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3). And Job 34:14-15 says: if God “gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust.”

Death could be likened to unplugging a T.V. set. When power flows through the set it is alive, producing voices, images and movement. But when it is switched off or unplugged, the power is withdrawn and taken away from the set and returns to the national grid, resulting in no voices or movement. The set hasn’t gone anywhere, neither have any of its internal parts; the power that activated all its parts has simply been withdrawn. In order for the set to come alive, the power must return, and until it does, it remains dead.

The same applies to humans at death. Many Scriptures teach that death is an unconscious, inactive state. “In death there is no remembrance” (Ps. 6:5); “His breath goes forth; he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Ps. 146:4); “The living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything” (Ecc. 9:4-6, 10).

In view of the unconscious state of death, it is not surprising that some Scriptures refer to it as a “sleep” or “rest.” Ps. 13:3. Isa. 57:1-2. Dan. 12:13. Jn. 11:11-14. Act. 7:60. 13:36. 1 Cor. 11:30. 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51. 1 Thes. 4:13-15.

Death is called a “sleep” because there shall be an awakening and a rising up from the grave at the resurrection. “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Man has pre-eminence over animals in this respect.

If the dead are not really dead, but their immortal soul has gone to glory and joy unspeakable in heaven to be in the divine presence praising God, why is there so much sadness and grief when death occurs? The answer is because the strength of natural instinct can never be overcome by theological fiction! Men will never practically believe the occurrence of death to be the commencement of life, when they see it to be the end of all they ever knew or felt of life!

### **LIFE AFTER DEATH EXPERIENCES**

**T**o offset what has been said, some would make reference to various claims that have been made of life after death experiences, involving voices, feelings of exhilaration and light at the end of a tunnel etc. But

what these people overlook is the fact that none of the people who have had these experiences were really dead in the full clinical sense of the word. As all physicians agree; a person isn't dead when the heart stops or when breathing ceases. A person is dead when the brain cells have died and there is no possibility of revival. Oxygen still remains in the brain cells for several minutes after the heart stops beating and breathing ceases, during which period the mental machinery is still alive. The electrical impulses in the brain are still quite capable of creating pictures and visions. It is all very subjective of course but very real to the one experiencing it.

If cases could be cited in which identity survived the destruction of the brain, the case would stand differently. Such, however, is never the case. Those who claim life after death experiences have all been revived before the brain cells died. They were not really dead at all in the true sense of the word!

Similar tunnel effects experienced by those who are dying are experienced by fighter pilots when subjected to high G forces as a result of massive acceleration. The blood drains from their brain and they black out. Sensations that are associated with the blackout nearly always include a tunnelling of the vision down to a central point where you just have light ahead of you. Lack of blood flow causes this and cardiac arrest has the same effect. The sudden rush of blood and oxygen to the brain as a result of revival, can also cause various physical and subjective experiences. To base a doctrine on life after death on such subjective experiences would be a deception.

### **THE DEAD DO NOT PRAISE GOD**

**I**t should be evident then, that if death is an unconscious state, those who have died are not in heaven praising and worshipping God. Psalm 115:17 plainly declares that “the dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.” For this reason the Psalmist said: “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being” (Ps. 104: 33). When King Hezekiah was dying he prayed to God for an extension of life saying: “For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you: ... The living, the living, he shall praise you as I do this day ...” (Isa. 38:18-19).

Except for Jesus, no man has ascended to heaven (Jn. 3:13). King David certainly hasn't ascended to heaven (Act. 2:29, 34). All the heroes of faith in Biblical times have “died in faith not having received the

promises ... God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:13, 40).

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul contradicts this teaching. It basically teaches that we do not really die and therefore negates death. Let’s face it: if the dead are not dead, but have gone somewhere else, they are still alive. They have merely had a change of state; they have changed a place of “temporal” for a place of eternal abode. The word “death,” therefore, in its original Biblical meaning, has no real application to man. It is no longer the antithesis of life. It no longer means the cessation of life, but simply a change of habitation or state.

“A man die? No, impossible! he may go out of the body, but he cannot die.” This is the popular traditional sentiment of the world’s philosophical wisdom. It is the modern equivalent of the serpent’s lie and is a poisonous root that has caused many false and mischievous doctrines in Christendom. It is a reversal and contradiction of the divine decree. God imposed death as a punishment for sin and a curse, but man doesn’t want to accept it as that. So what has he done? He has changed it into a blessing and time of joy by convincing himself that those who have died are in a better place than what they were. How ingeniously they have neutralized the Word of God by this doctrine!

It is surely significant that the first lie recorded in the Bible relates to, and contradicts the very issue of life and death. God had plainly warned Adam and Eve that death would be the result of disobedience. But the serpent contradicted this and said: “You shall not die.” This lie has been perpetuated in all the creeds of paganism and Christendom which state that man, in view of his “immortal soul,” does not really die. And, like the serpent, it is subtle, because it gives the impression of believing in death by agreeing that the body is dead, but in actual fact it is a deceit because it does not believe that the body is the real person, and therefore the person is not really dead at all.

According to the Bible, those who die are not alive, as we read in Isa. 38:1: “You shall die and not live.” Death and life are opposites! Death is the end of life and of conscious existence.

When man was first created, he was given access to the tree of life, but as a result of sin, he was expelled from the garden of Eden “lest he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). It is evident from this that man was not created with inherent immortality in the form of an immortal soul. It would be nonsense for God to prevent access to the tree of life so that man could not live forever, if he possessed an immortal soul that would live forever anyway!

It is evident that if Adam and Eve had continued to have access to the tree of life, they would have lived forever as physical bodily beings. This is very significant, because it teaches us that God's purpose was for man to live forever in a physical bodily state, not an immaterial disembodied state, as is taught in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

This therefore implies that if God wants those who die to live again, He will have to bring them back from the dust of death and the grave, and form them into physical beings again. According to Scripture, this and this alone, is the divine purpose and solution to death, and it is called "resurrection."

### **IMMORTALITY DEPENDS ON RESURRECTION**

**A**fter being told that man does not possess an immortal soul that immediately departs to heaven at death, many imagine that this involves a denial of future hope and reward. This reveals the extent to which life after death is based upon, and depends upon the immortality of the soul by those who believe it. In fact, the hope of life after death to some people revolves so completely around the immortality of the soul, they place little importance on resurrection of the body. So much so, that they regard those who don't believe in the immortality of the soul and whose only hope is in resurrection, as being "annihilationists."

Such people obviously do not see the second coming of Christ and resurrection as a great hope or consolation. It does not seem to occur to them that there is a "blessed hope" in the Gospel which does not need or depend upon the immortality of the soul, and which in fact, is totally foreign to it. It is evident from this therefore, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul has the effect of negating and rendering superfluous the second coming of Christ and resurrection of the dead.

The fact that man is wholly mortal and at death returns to the same unconscious state in the dust that he was in when first created, establishes the doctrine of the resurrection on the firm foundation of necessity; for in this view, life after death is only possible by resurrection. The true Christian faith does not involve two hopes: one at death and the other at Christ's second coming. There is only "one hope" (Eph. 4:4). This means that without resurrection at Christ's return, there is no hope of life after death. No wonder it is listed among the first principles of the doctrine of Christ in Heb. 6:1-2.

This is why Paul states in 2 Tim. 2:16-18 that the false teachers in his day who were denying future resurrection, were overthrowing the

Christian faith. But how could denial of resurrection overthrow the faith if our soul is immortal and goes to be with Christ at death? Whether resurrected or not, we would be in heaven with Christ anyway!

But if man does not possess an immortal soul, and his faith in life after death is based entirely on resurrection, then denial of resurrection would be a disaster - fatal; it would undermine and overthrow his faith and leave him without a hope. Paul's statement therefore clearly reveals that his hope in future life lay in resurrection, not an immortal soul.

It is certainly evident in 1 Cor. 15 where Paul majors on the doctrine of resurrection, that he believed there was no other hope besides this. In v18 he says that without resurrection all who belong to Christ and die would "have perished." But if man has an immortal soul that goes to heaven at death, how could it be said that he has perished if his body is not resurrected? In view of resurrection of the body being the only hope of life after death, no wonder it is such a major theme in Scripture. Many verses could be quoted.

### **A PROMISE NOT A POSSESSION**

**I**mmortality then, is a promise, not a present possession. It is a hope, not a present realization. As mentioned before: the expressions "immortal soul" or "immortality of the soul" are foreign to Scripture. They are unbiblical. There are no verses in the Bible where the words immortal or immortality are associated with the soul.

The word "immortal" only occurs once in the Bible and it occurs in relation to God (1 Tim. 1:17). "Immortality" occurs 5 times; once in relation to God (1 Tim. 6:15-16), and 4 times in relation to those who belong to Christ (Rom. 2:7. 1 Cor. 15:53, 54. 2 Tim. 1:10). In each of these places, the theory of the immortality of the soul is not mentioned and supported. Let's have a quick look at these 4 verses.

The reference in Rom. 2:7 says eternal life will be given to "those who by patient continuance in well doing seek for ... immortality." Here, immortality is clearly not presented as a present possession, but something that has to be sought by patient continuance in well doing. It is obviously not an existing condition possessed by all, but a conditional gift to be bestowed in the future. Verse 16 confirms that it will be bestowed at the second coming of Christ.

The references to the word immortality in 1 Cor. 15:53-54 also teach that it is not something now possessed, but something that will be "put on" at resurrection. It is made clear in these verses that immortality is not

possible until our body is changed. It will only be when our mortal, corruptible body has been changed into an immortal, incorruptible body at Christ's return, that death will be swallowed up in victory. Until then, all who have died will remain dead ("asleep").

Throughout 1 Cor. 15 which deals specifically with the subject of life after death, Paul associates immortality with a physical, material "body." His whole concept of immortality has nothing to do with some vague, invisible, immaterial soul or spirit. An immortal body, not a disembodied immortal is the gospel he preached and the hope he taught.

Immortality therefore is not something we inherit from birth whether we want it or not, or like it or not. It is, as we read in Rom. 6:23, a gift from God through the atoning sacrifice of Christ who will bestow it when he returns. But if everyone already possesses an immortal soul, why the need for Christ to bestow eternal life when he returns? And if everyone possesses immortality already, both the believers and unbelievers, righteous and wicked; this means that all without exception will live forever in some place or other. It is at this point that the bizarre nature of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul becomes particularly apparent.

If the wicked have an immortal soul and live eternally in hell, they must have eternal life! But Rom. 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Or, as we read in Ps. 145:20: "The Lord preserves all them that love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy." Here are 2 opposites: eternal life and death; preservation and destruction. The one cannot be the other. That which is destroyed no longer exists. That which is preserved exists as long as the preservation continues. "Eternal life" and "death" cannot, by any form of twisting of words, mean the same thing. "Eternal life" means continued existence and "death" means discontinued existence.

The Roman Catholic church and many others in Christendom have completely confused and contradicted this simple concept in order to uphold the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They have assigned eternal life to saint and sinner alike. Both saints and sinners live forever!

This indiscriminate distribution of eternal life contradicts all that Scripture affirms on the subject. The concept of an immortal sinner is contradiction. 1 Jn. 3:15 says: "No murderer has eternal life abiding in him." But human philosophy has furnished him with eternal life by giving him an immortal soul!

According to this doctrine then, eternal life ceases to be a special gift of God bestowed on the basis of faith in the atoning work of Christ. It becomes something freely and indiscriminately bestowed on all men,

murderers included. Any doctrine which gives eternal life to sinners and murderers must be rejected as the most serious violation possible of the purpose and promises of God.

If the wicked have eternal life, it would no longer constitute the reward of the righteous. In that case, instead of eternal life being seen as the reward, only the happiness enjoyed by the righteous during their eternal life could be seen as the reward, not the eternal life itself. This concept which the doctrine of the immortality of the soul forces upon us, is completely contrary to the teaching of Scripture on the subject of eternal life.

### **PAGAN PHILOSOPHY**

**W**ithout a divine revelation, it would not be easy or natural to believe in resurrection. It would in fact seem foolish and ridiculous to believe that a person whose corpse is rotting or whose skeleton is disintegrating into dust could be brought back to life and life forever as a physical bodily being.

For this reason, those in ancient times who did not know God's revelation or power, and who did not want to accept that death is a reality, adopted the philosophy of the immortality of the soul.

From time immemorial, the pagan nations had adopted this philosophy in an attempt to take the sting or pain out of death. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans etc all believed it. This was the pagan's doctrine of life after death, and it was finally adopted and superimposed upon the Christian faith by the apostate Roman Catholic church, and later adopted by other churches.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul gives all these churches a common denominator with all the non-Christian religions of the world. No wonder the apostle Paul issued the warning to "beware lest anyone make a prey of you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

According to the apostle Paul, the sting will never be taken out of death until resurrection of the body at Christ's second coming (1 Cor. 15:51-55). The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is therefore not only a false doctrine but also a false hope and comfort.

When writing to the Christians at Thessalonica concerning those who had died, he told them that they should "sorrow not like others who have no hope." He then went on to tell them that "the Lord Himself shall

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first ...Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

This is very significant. Paul did not say that Christians should comfort the bereaved with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. No! He said they should comfort them with the doctrine of resurrection of the body at Christ’s return!

The pagan mind, especially of the Greeks, found the doctrine of the resurrection of the body hard to accept because they had been indoctrinated with the philosophy that the body, being material, was just a cumbersome, burdensome shell; and it was an advantage to shake it off in death. They believed that this view of life after death was superior, and that resurrection of the body would be a retrograde step - too materialistic and earth bound. They much preferred to believe in something ethereal and nebulous. The more intangible, indefinable and mysterious it was, the more they liked it, and the more “spiritual” they regarded it.

For this reason, “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked” (Act. 17:32). The preaching of Jesus and resurrection was “strange” to them (v18).

Although those in Christendom today would not be prepared to admit it, their reasons for majoring on the immortality of the soul more than on resurrection of the body are very similar to the Greek philosophers.

## **JESUS BROUGHT IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT**

**I**t is evident in the New Testament that Christ’s resurrection is the very keystone to the arch of Christianity. The special significance of his resurrection can only be appreciated when it is realized that he is the first man in history to be raised from the dead to life everlasting - the first man to experience immortality by becoming an immortal body.

When it is understood that in death a person is a helpless, unconscious corpse; and that from Adam to Christ death reigned and triumphed over all men, holding them captive in this state; then Christ’s reappearance from the grave to eternal life becomes an astounding victory and breakthrough. Without his resurrection, there would be no breakthrough from mortality to immortality, making immortality impossible for all men. (1 Cor. 15:16-18).

But Christ’s resurrection is robbed of its power and importance and almost rendered superfluous when it is believed that up until that time, and afterwards, men didn’t really die anyway, but lived on without a body,

without their own or Christ's resurrection being necessary.

If man possesses an immortal soul that lives on after death, Christ would have lived on whether his body was resurrected or not. And if we are expected to believe that our dead friends live on as immortal souls after death, without being able to see them in a body, then why couldn't Christ's friends have believed and preached that he lived on when his body died on the cross, without having to see him in a body? Why were they so depressed and despondent until he appeared to them in his body?

Being the first man to rise from death to immortality, Jesus has, as we read in 1 Tim. 1:10: "Brought life and immortality to light." It is evident from this that up until Christ's resurrection, no man had witnessed or experienced immortality. If immortality had been experienced by all who died prior to Christ's resurrection, it could hardly be said that he brought immortality to light.

In the resurrection of Jesus, immortality was "brought to light" by being displayed and demonstrated for the first time in a man. For the first time in history, people witnessed in the resurrection body of Jesus, the immortality promised by God to man. Christ is therefore referred to in 1 Cor. 15:23 as the "first fruits" of those who have died, and those who belong to him will be made like him at his coming.

As first fruits on a tree are a sample or specimen of the crop that will follow, the immortal body of Jesus is a sample of the immortality that all his true followers will experience when he comes. He will change their body and fashion it like his glorious body, causing them to be like him (Plp. 3:20-21. 1 Jn. 3:2). This is the true doctrine of immortality taught in the Bible.

## NEGATES JUDGEMENT

**N**ot only does the doctrine of the immortality of the soul negate death, resurrection and the second coming of Christ, but also judgement.

Let's face it: if immortal souls are consigned to their reward at death, some ascending to bliss in heaven, and others descending to blisters in hell, what would be the point in having a judgement at Christ's second coming? Judgement would have already taken place for those who had died! Rewarding and punishing people first, then judging them afterwards, would be a very back to front procedure, not at all consistent with divine justice.

Heb. 9:27 plainly says: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement." Immortal souls do not spend time in heaven or

hell during the interim period between death and judgement! Rewarding and punishing during the interim period would be a judgement in itself, so what would be the point of having another judgement at Christ's return?

In human courts, a second judgement only occurs as a result of a retrial due to doubts being raised concerning the correctness of the verdict at the first trial. Surely no one believes that at death some immortal souls might have been mistakenly sent to heaven instead of hell or to hell instead of heaven, and therefore must be brought back into their bodies to appear before the judgement seat of Christ to be re-assessed!

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul makes a mockery of the doctrine of judgement at Christ's return. It eliminates the need for judgement along with Christ's return and the resurrection, not to mention God's kingdom on earth. As things stand, according to this pernicious doctrine, the saints would live on eternally in God's kingdom in heaven whether Christ returned to raise and judge the dead or not.

No wonder the apostle Paul said that any doctrine which negates the future resurrection at Christ's coming overthrows the true Christian faith.

One reformer who could see the ramifications of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul penned these words: "The dogma of the immortal soul in sinful flesh has eaten out the marrow and fatness, the flesh and sinew, of the doctrine of Christ; and has left behind only an ill-conditioned and ulcerated skeleton of Christianity, whose dry bones rattle in the winds of doctrine that are blowing around us, chopping and changing to every point of the compass."

## OBJECTIONS

**W**e have seen that the Bible teaches that man is wholly mortal and does not possess an immortal soul that lives on after death. At death man enters into an unconscious state called a "sleep." His only hope of life after death is a physical resurrection at the second coming of Christ. Immortality is promised not possessed.

However, certain statements are made in the Bible which are regarded by some as teaching the immortality of the soul and attention will now be given to them. We will start in the Old Testament then work through to the New Testament to the gospels, epistles and the book of Revelation.

Gen. 35:18 is first on the list which refers to Rachel's death in terms of her soul departing. As pointed out before, the word soul is quite an elastic word and has a variety of meanings. One of the primary meanings

is “life.” It has, in fact, been translated life 114 times in the Old Testament and 40 times in the New Testament, and this is the significance of soul in Gen. 35:18. Reference to Rachel’s soul departing simply means her life was ebbing away. She was breathing her last, getting weaker and weaker. The New English Bible captures the sense by translating it in these words: “with her last breath as she was dying.” The Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: “At the moment when she breathed her last, for she was dying...”

Elsewhere this same process of death is expressed in the Authorised Version as “giving up the ghost,” which literally means to breathe out or expire. (“Ghost” is an old English word which means “gust” i.e. breath, blow or spirit. Giving up the ghost is the same as giving up the spirit).

It is interesting to note that in Job 11:20 and Jer. 15:9 where the phrase “gave up the ghost” occurs, the Hebrew word for ghost is nephesh, which is the same word elsewhere translated “soul.” This confirms that the giving up, or departing of the soul simply means to breathe out the breath of life; to expire and die.

If the giving “up” of the ghost or soul means the departure to heaven of an immortal soul, what are we to make of Job 11:20 which says this is also the destiny of the wicked? Do the souls of the wicked go to heaven also?

Gen. 25:8 says “Abraham gave up the ghost and died.” If this means his immortal soul went up to heaven, then the same must apply to his carnal, ungodly “wild ass” of a son Ishmael, whose death is recorded in exactly the same terms in Gen. 25:17. In Job 14:10 we read: “Man dies and wastes away: yea, man gives up the ghost, and where is he?” In the following verses Job answers the question by stating that dead men are asleep in the earth.

While we are on the subject of breathing out, an interesting statement is made in 1 Kng. 10:5. It says that “there was no more spirit” in the queen of Sheba when she saw all of Solomon’s wisdom, wealth and power. This statement of course, has nothing to do with an immortal soul leaving her body! Some modern translations capture the sense by rendering it like this: “it left her breathless.” In other words, she was flabbergasted; speechless.

Likewise, Josh. 5:1 tells us that when the enemies of Israel heard about the miracles and wonders the Lord had performed for Israel, “their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them anymore.” Once again, this has nothing to do with immortal souls leaving their bodies. Today the experience would be described as the wind being taken out of their sails; they were breathless; limp. They were astounded and flabbergasted.

We now turn to 1 Kng. 17:21-22 which provides another example of soul signifying life. It relates to Elijah restoring to life a child who had died. The Authorised Version records the incident in these words: “And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, and said: O lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.”

Elijah was simply asking the Lord to give the breath or spirit of life back to the lad again to revive him and cause him to live. In fact, the death of the lad is referred to in v17 in these words: “There was no more breath in him.” The New English Bible therefore translates v21 like this: “Elijah breathed deeply upon the child three times and called on the Lord, ‘O Lord my God, let the breath of life, I pray return to the body of this child...’” The translators of the New English Bible clearly recognized that the Hebrew word “nephesh,” translated “soul” in the Authorised Version signified life in this case.

The same applies in Lk. 8:55. When Jesus prayed for a dead girl to be restored to life, it is recorded that “her spirit came again and she arose.” The “spirit” refers to the breath of life which caused her to breathe again.

In connection with these examples, 2 Kng. 4:34 is worth mentioning. It refers to an occasion when Elisha went to pray for a young lad who had died. The verse says he “lay upon the child and put his mouth upon his mouth.” This is reminiscent of the Lord breathing the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils. Being the Lord’s prophet and possessing the power of the Holy Spirit, Elisha was able to breathe the spirit of life into the child as did Elijah before him.

## **SAMUEL’S APPEARANCE AFTER DEATH**

**L**et us now turn to 1 Sam. 28 which refers to Samuel making an appearance after his death. This happened as a result of king Saul, an apostate king of Israel, visiting a witch at Endor, (a spiritualist medium). Saul wanted her to try and contact the prophet Samuel who had died some time before. Saul had failed to get answers from God to his prayers so he hoped to be able to contact Samuel. Being apostate, Saul had false ideas about the death state. Like the pagans, he believed in the immortality of the soul, and therefore did not believe that those who had died were really dead.

Now, because they believed immortal souls or spirits were immaterial and therefore invisible, having neither body nor parts, they did not expect

to see anything or hear a verbal voice. Mediums generally claimed to receive a message inside their head without an audible voice being heard.

Well, when the witch attempted to contact Samuel, the whole of hell broke loose, and it is hard to understand why anyone would quote the incident as proof of the immortality of the soul. The witch actually saw Samuel himself - "an old man wrapped in a robe," coming up out of the earth where he had been buried and it freaked her out. She had never witnessed anything like this before.

Samuel then spoke to Saul and said: "Why have you disturbed me to bring me up?" Two points should be noted here. The first is that Samuel was not in heaven. If he was, he would have said: "Why have you brought me down." But he didn't; he said "Why have you disturbed me to bring me up" i.e. up out of the grave from which he was seen emerging.

The second point is that the word "disturbed" is a word used in relation to interrupting sleep. Prior to coming up out of the grave, Samuel was not conscious, but in an unconscious sleep. Many Scriptures teach that this is the state of the dead. Because of the apostasy and rebellion of Saul and his sons, Samuel went on to tell Saul that he and his sons were going to be killed. This is how Samuel put it: "Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me." This is a significant statement. Death would cause Saul and his sons to join Samuel. It is evident from this that Samuel would not be in heaven, for it would be ridiculous to imagine that an apostate rebel like Saul would be going there.

The fact of the matter is that both the righteous and wicked are buried in the earth and remain there until the resurrection and judgement. Jesus will judge both "the living and dead," (which clearly implies the dead are not living!) The Bible teaches this time and time again and Samuel's words confirm it.

Now, the witch clearly did not have the power to cause Samuel to appear from the grave, and she clearly did not expect this to happen. Only God has the power to do this and it is evident that He intervened here, either by temporarily raising Samuel from the dead, or by creating a vision of it, in order to pronounce judgement on Saul and his sons.

And if anyone finds it objectionable that God would temporarily raise Samuel from the dead, attention should be drawn to the fact that He has done this on other occasions. There are examples in both the Old and New Testament of people being raised from the dead for a temporary extension of life. Admittedly, not as short an extension as Samuel, but a temporary extension nevertheless.

But let us not miss the main point: the incident regarding the

appearance of Samuel has got nothing to do with immortal souls and does not even remotely support such a concept. It relates to resurrection from the dead - revival from the unconscious sleep state of the dead.

Regarding the possibility that God created a vision of Samuel; we are reminded of the scene of Christ's transfiguration when Moses and Elijah long after their death appeared and spoke to him. It is recorded in Matt. 17:9 that Jesus told his disciples that it was a "vision."

Strangely enough, those who believe that there is life after death as an immortal soul, sometimes quote the transfiguration scene as proof. But there is no reference here to disembodied spirits, but bodily beings. Neither are they seen in heaven but on earth. Heb. 11 clearly teaches that Moses and all other Old Testament characters "have died in faith not having received the promises..."

### **"NOT ABLE TO KILL THE SOUL"**

**S**o much then for references in the Old Testament. Let us now turn to the gospels in the New Testament. Quoting Jesus, Matt. 10:28 says: "And fear not those who can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." This statement is regarded by many as proof positive that the soul is immortal and indestructible. But the next statement disproves this. It says: "But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." It is affirmed here that the soul can be destroyed.

The question is: What is meant by the word soul in this verse? As pointed out before, one of the primary meanings is life, and this seems to be the significance here. Looked at in this light, Jesus was teaching that men may have authority and control over a Christian's body, and be able to put it to death, but they do not have authority and control over life. Only God has the authority and control of both the body and life, because He is the source of life and no one can take it away from Him. He is able to give life back to those of His people who die, and He is able to kill and deprive of life forever those who are His enemies. They will be cast into the lake of fire and never be resurrected to life again.

According to Col. 3:3 the "life" of a Christian is "hid with Christ in God." Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" - "the resurrection and the life." At his second coming he will resurrect all in the grave who belong to him and give them eternal life. As Col. 3:4 says: "When Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory." The power over our life is therefore in Christ's control and no man can destroy

it or deprive us of it. In the words of Lk. 12:4: “Be not afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.”

### **“NOT THE GOD OF THE DEAD”**

**A** statement made by Jesus, recorded in Lk. 20:38 is also regarded as teaching the immortality of the soul. This is what he said; “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.” Many see in this statement evidence that people live on in the presence of God in a disembodied state after the death of their body.

However, as the saying goes: “A text without a context is a pretext.” In its context, the statement forms part of a conversation between Jesus and the Saducees in relation to resurrection of the body. The passage has nothing to do with immortal souls or disembodied existence in heaven or any other place.

The Saducees denied resurrection and any other form of life after death, and tried to make a mockery of it by putting a silly hypothetical question to Jesus. Jesus therefore set out to prove that there will be life after death through resurrection. He said: “Now, that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Here Jesus points out that long after the death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God was nevertheless referred to as being their God. Jesus then concludes by saying: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.”

The passage has got nothing to do with immortal souls. Christ’s argument for the resurrection of the dead is destroyed the moment we say that he was teaching that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive and never really died. How could God’s purpose to raise these men from the dead be proved by asserting that they were still alive and never really died? Christ’s argument requires that they are dead in order to be subjects of resurrection. As pointed out before, Heb. 11 clearly affirms that “these all died in faith...” The essence then, of Jesus’ argument is this: God is a God of living people, not dead people, for the dead cannot praise the Lord. Therefore, the fact that he is referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, long after they had died, implies He must intend to raise them from the dead. So sure and certain is His purpose to do this, it is as good as done! They are as good as being alive already, for in His omniscient mind which sees the end from the beginning, they “live unto Him.”

## HE WHO BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL LIFE

**L**et us now consider the references in the gospel of John to Jesus saying that those who believe in him “have” eternal life. These statements are interpreted by some to mean that believers already possess eternal life and it is concluded that this refers to the immortal soul.

But, as pointed out previously: If, as is commonly believed, everyone is born with an immortal soul, then everyone, good and bad, has eternal life whether they believe in Christ or not. Therefore, Christ’s promise would not be offering any more than what people possess already, making his promise empty and superfluous.

If man is born with immortality which would be the case if he has an immortal soul, he doesn’t need to be born again or need Christ in order to live forever.

When Jesus said that he who believes in him “hath eternal life,” he was speaking prospectively. This is evident from the fact that after saying this he said: “and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40, 54). Resurrection to eternal life is so sure and certain for the true believer, that it is as good as done, and therefore Jesus speaks of it in terms of being accomplished.

It is quite common in Scripture for God’s future purposes to be referred to as an accomplished fact due to their certainty of fulfilment. For example, God said to Abraham, before he had any children, “unto thy seed I have (not “will”) given this land” (Gen. 15:18). Later, before Isaac was born, God said: “I have made you a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5). The apostle Paul comments on this in Rom. 4:17 and says: “God, who quickens the dead, speaks of things that do not exist as if they already exist.”

Because God intended to “quicken” and rejuvenate Abraham and Sarah’s reproductive powers, enabling them to produce a child in their old age, He spoke of it as being an accomplished fact. And, because God intends to quicken the dead who belong to Christ at the resurrection, and give them eternal life, Jesus refers to it as an accomplished fact. For those who belong to Him, it is as good as done.

When the believers are raised from the dead to eternal life, they shall, in the words of Jesus: “never die” - “never see death” (Jn. 8:51. 11:26). Unfortunately, even these statements are sometimes regarded as teaching the immortality of the soul. But to give them this application causes a contradiction of Scripture. For example: in Rev. 2:10 Jesus exhorts his church to be “faithful unto death.” Martyrdom was impending. Some were

going to die for their faith. In view of this, the words of Jesus recorded in John's gospel, that believers shall "never die" must relate to their hope of eternal life after resurrection. If not, it involves a contradiction. Not only that, but if Jesus said that his followers would "never die" due to possessing an immortal soul, then what is the big deal, because those who don't follow Jesus are also supposed to have an immortal soul and don't die either, according to tradition!

There is also another way of looking at the words "never die." They could be understood in the light of another statement made by Jesus in relation to Jairus' daughter who died. Jesus said: "The damsel is not dead but sleeps" (Mk. 5:35-39). Because Jesus intended to raise her from the dead and restore her life, he preferred to not refer to her as being dead, but asleep. As far as he was concerned, she never died; she was just asleep.

The same applied to Lazarus. In Jn. 11:4 we read that Jesus said his friend's sickness "is not unto death." However, the record goes on to say that he did die. But Jesus said to his disciples: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep" (v11). The word "death" has a finality about it which is not appropriate to those who will be raised from the dead. For this reason Scripture prefers to not use the word in relation to those who will be raised, but uses the word sleep instead.

## **GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN**

**O**n another occasion Jesus said: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). This promise is often interpreted to mean that the immortal souls of the righteous go to heaven at death. But the statement itself makes no mention of where, when and how the reward will be bestowed. Just because it is in heaven, does not necessarily mean the righteous have to ascend into heaven to receive it. For example, if a child is told there are some lollies kept up in the cupboard as a reward for good behaviour, that does not mean he has to climb up there to get them himself. They will be brought down for him when the time arrives for him to be rewarded.

And so it is with our reward in heaven. Listen to the words of Jesus recorded in Rev. 22:12: "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according to his works." We learn from this that we do not ascend to heaven to receive the reward but that Jesus descends from heaven to give us the reward. This is confirmed in other places. For example, Matt. 16:27: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels and then shall he reward every man according to

his works.” Lk. 14:14: “And you shall be rewarded at the resurrection of the just.” 2 Tim. 4:8: “And now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give on that day; and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing.” 1 Pet. 5:4: “And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.”

It is evident from these and many other verses that the second coming of Christ and resurrection is the blessed hope of the true Christian faith. Without it, there would be no reward. Without it, there would be no eternal life. Without the resurrection all who die would remain dead in their graves. The doctrine of immortal souls going to heaven is a false hope. True, many who believe in the immortality of the soul give lip service to the second coming and resurrection, but in reality they do not need these events. Whether Christ comes to raise the dead or not, they believe that they have eternal life in heaven anyway.

## MANY MANSIONS

One of the most popular texts quoted to support the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is Jn. 14:1-3, and it is frequently quoted at funerals for this reason. It records the words of Jesus, saying: “Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house are many mansions (abiding places, rooms) if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” The traditional view of this among the churches in Christendom is that Jesus was promising to prepare a place in heaven for the immortal souls of those who die belonging to him. However, it should be noted that the word “soul” does not occur in the text let alone “immortal soul.” And neither is it stated that those who go there, do so the moment they die, before Christ returns to earth to raise and judge the dead.

Quite the opposite! If we read on and finish what Jesus said instead of stopping half way through, we find that he went on to say: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Jesus clearly states here that those who belong to him will not get to be with him until he “comes again,” referring of course, to his second coming. When he comes he will receive his friends to himself so that where he is, they can be also. He also referred to this on another occasion, recorded in Matt. 24:30-31: “... and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his

angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the horizon to the other.”

This event involving the gathering up of the saints at the second coming of Christ is sometimes called “the Rapture.” 1 Thes. 4:16-17 also relates to it: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

According to Rev. 21, the city of God, which is the “tabernacle” or “house” of God, will descend to earth at the coming of Christ. The saints will be caught up into this city to meet Jesus as he descends. It will be their eternal home. From this centre, which will hover over Zion and the land of Israel and which will constitute the new Jerusalem, Christ and the saints will reign over the earth.

### **CARRIED INTO ABRAHAM’S BOSOM**

**A**nother principle passage which is regarded as teaching the immortality of the soul is one that records a story told by Jesus about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. It is recorded in Lk. 16. The story says: “The beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame...”

It is a mystery how anyone can imagine that this story supports the disembodied state of immortal souls. How could something that is immaterial be carried by angels? How could something that is disembodied have eyes, a bosom, a finger and a tongue which could be cooled by water? The story is clearly talking about bodies not a disembodied state.

The story goes on to say that the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brethren, to testify to them lest they should end up in the same place of torment. Are we to understand this request to mean that the rich man wanted the immaterial and invisible soul of Lazarus to float invisibly alongside the brethren and whisper the message in their ears? By no means! Listen to Abraham’s revealing reply: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (v31).

This statement is very significant. It is the key to the correct interpretation of the whole story. The statement “though one rose from the dead” refers to Lazarus. Lazarus was alive as a result of resurrection. He was an immortal body not a disembodied immortal. The reference to resurrection in v31 is the story’s own interpretation of v22 which states that Lazarus “died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” The word “and” i.e. “died and was carried” - bridges an unspecified period of time. Lazarus died, then at some unspecified time afterwards, he was resurrected and taken by the angels to be with Abraham.

The expression “Abraham’s bosom” alludes to the posture of the Jews at table. They reclined on couches and sometimes those who were near and dear to them lay next to them with their head resting on their bosom (chest). John did this at supper with Jesus (Jn. 13:23-25).

To the Jew, Abraham was esteemed very highly and to be next to him with head resting on his bosom would be a high honour. For the same reason, Jesus’ close relationship with his Father is described in Jn. 1:18 as being “in the bosom of his Father.” And Jesus’ care and love for his followers is referred to in Isa. 40:11 in terms of carrying them “in his bosom.”

The true Christian and Jewish hope is to be united with Abraham and receive with him the promised inheritance. Referring to this time, Jesus said: “Many shall come from the east and west (gathered by angels) and shall recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” But he goes on to say that others shall be cast out into outer darkness, causing weeping and gnashing of teeth. The rich man in the story in Lk. 16 obviously fits into this category.

Like Lazarus, the rich man “died and was buried.” He was also resurrected. This is signified in the statement that “in hell (Grk “hades” i.e. the grave where he was “buried”), he lifted up his eyes.” When dead men die and are buried, their eyes are closed. To open the eyes afterwards requires resurrection, and this is obviously what is signified. But, instead of ending up at table with Abraham up in the city of God, he was “afar off” separated by a great gulf and in “torments.”

The whole story is one of the many parables that Jesus gave, and spiritual discernment needs to be exercised to properly interpret it. Much more could be said about it but not now. Sufficient has been said to show that it does not teach or support the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

## **“YOU SHALL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE”**

**A**nother very popular text which is regarded as teaching the immortality of the soul is the one that narrates Christ’s discussion with the thief on the cross recorded in Lk. 24:42-43.

The thief said to Jesus: “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The Authorised Version records Jesus’ reply in these words: “Verily I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise.”

This is commonly interpreted to mean that on that very day when Jesus and the thief died, they went to heaven. But there are problems with this view. Jesus did not go to heaven that day! He previously said: “The son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” On the day that Jesus died and during the following two days, he was in a tomb in the earth, not in heaven. He was not awake and conscious but asleep and unconscious, as is clearly implied in 1 Cor. 15:20 which states he was “the first fruits of them that slept.” When he died, he was asleep!

After his resurrection, three days after his death on the cross, Jesus said to Mary: “I have not yet ascended to my Father” (Jn. 20:17). This clinches it: Jesus did not go to heaven on the day he died.

Strangely enough, many of those who contend that Jesus went to heaven when he died, also contend, on the basis of a statement in 1 Pet. 3:18-19 that he went and preached to disembodied spirits (immortal souls) in hell. So they have him in three places at the same time: heaven, hell and the tomb, involving contradiction and confusion.

Eph. 4:9-10 teaches that Jesus “descended first” before he ascended i.e. he went into the tomb before heaven. This teaches that the Jesus who descended into the tomb was the Jesus who ascended to heaven. Seeing that the Jesus who descended was a physical bodily being, the Jesus who ascended must have been the same. The Jesus who rose from the dead and ascended to heaven certainly was a physical tangible being, and it is clearly this ascension to heaven to which Eph. 4:9-10 refers. Scripture knows of no other type of ascension. This rules out the notion of a disembodied Jesus ascending to heaven.

1 Cor. 15:3-4 presents the order of events as: death, burial, resurrection. One would search Scripture in vain to find a reference to Jesus ascending to heaven before his body was buried or before it was resurrected. Act. 2:31 says his “soul” lay dead in the grave on the day of his crucifixion. It was not in heaven. The thief was laid to rest also, like all other dead men.

So then, if the Authorised Version translation is correct, Jesus’ words:

“Today you will be with me in paradise” would have to mean that paradise is in hell i.e. the grave, because that’s where Jesus was that day. The merit and accuracy of this translation or punctuation obviously needs to be seriously questioned at this point.

It is important to realize that there were no commas in the Greek manuscripts when the New Testament was originally written. The punctuation has been added by the English translators, and they, not being inspired, put commas where they thought they should be. In many cases their decision was determined by their doctrinal prejudices.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the verse under consideration depends entirely on punctuation. It is determined by whether the comma is placed before or after the word “today.” If it is placed before, it reads: “Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise.” But if it is placed after, it reads: “Truly I tell you today, you shall be with me in paradise.” Many believe that this is the correct punctuation. This is not tinkering with the text and is in accord with the New Testament adverb “today,” for out of its 221 uses, in no less than 170 the comma is placed after the adverb, not before.

In the Old Testament the rule is the same. For instance: Deu. 8:19: “I testify against you this day.” Many other examples like this could be quoted.

Not only is this punctuation consistent with the usage of the word “today” elsewhere in Scripture, but more importantly it is consistent with the doctrinal teaching of the Bible which does not support the concept of people ascending to heaven the day they die.

By putting the comma after the word “today,” the word “today” is made solemn and emphatic. By saying to the thief: “Truly I say to you today,” Jesus was stressing the time of his promise, not the time he would be in paradise. The thief asked Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus, in his reply, virtually says: “Let me assure you this very day - this day of seeming hopelessness and despair - this day that we hang, nailed to a cross full of pain and agony- this day that we are going to die - let me assure you that you will be with me in paradise when I come in my kingdom.”

It is important to remember that the promise given by Jesus to the repentant thief was a direct reply to his question or request. The thief did not say: “Lord, remember my soul when your soul ascends to heaven.” No! The thief did not have a going to heaven at death in mind but a coming from heaven of the Lord at his return, at which time he will raise the dead and establish his kingdom. The thief said: “Lord, remember me

when you come into your kingdom.” He gave expression to the one true hope of the gospel which Jesus and his apostles preached, not the false and vain hope taught in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

### SPIRITS IN PRISON

**O**n the basis of a statement in 1 Pet. 3:18-19, some believe that when Jesus died, his spirit went and preached to other disembodied spirits in hell. The passage reads like this: “For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened (made alive) by the Spirit, by which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.”

As pointed out before, the problem with the traditional interpretation of this Scripture is that it means Jesus did not really die on the cross, for dead men cannot preach! It also involves a contradiction because, as we have seen, tradition also maintains that the spirit of Jesus went to heaven when he died. This is maintained on the basis of his promise to the thief on the cross, and also his dying statement on the cross: “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” Tradition therefore affirms in one breath that Jesus went to heaven and then in the next breath that he went to hell. Both views are wrong! Jesus went to a tomb!

A careful reading of 1 Pet. 3:18-19 reveals that the preaching to the spirits in prison took place after Christ’s resurrection, not while his body lay dead in the tomb. It says he was put to death in the flesh, but made alive again by the Spirit, by which (i.e. by the Holy Spirit) he also went and preached to the spirits in prison. It does not say that Jesus went and preached “as” a spirit, but “by” the Spirit. The statement is simply saying that by the same Spirit power of God which raised him from the dead, Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison.

So then, in order to identify the “spirits in prison,” we need to focus attention on the preaching work of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Jesus.

After his resurrection, Jesus did not, of course, personally preach himself, but he did so by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. To hear them was to hear him! They were his representatives - his “body,” doing his work in response to direction from him as their “head.” For this reason Paul said: “I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not wrought by me to make the Gentiles obedient.”

When preaching takes place, the message is not aimed at penetrating the arms or legs of people, but their spirit; it is the spirit that is converted

i.e. as Eph. 4:23 puts it: “The spirit of the mind.” (Like the word “soul,” spirit is quite a flexible word and is given a variety of applications in Scripture. In quite a few instances it relates to the deep inner regions of the mind, and also sometimes relates to the attitude or disposition of the mind).

Seeing that preaching is always aimed at the “inner man” of people - the spirit of their mind, we can reasonably conclude that the “spirits,” to whom the preaching was directed in 1 Pet. 3:19 relates to the minds of certain people, and the “prison” they were in, must be interpreted in this light.

An old hymn which many of the traditional churches sing, unwittingly provides a clue to the significance of this. It says: “Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound by sin.” This is simply giving expression to the fact that prior to the mind being enlightened by the preaching of the gospel, it is locked away - bound and imprisoned by sin, alias the devil. It is imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance, having no faith in God and no hope in His kingdom, and unable to release and free itself in praise and thanksgiving to God for His salvation in Christ. The words: “Set my spirit free that I might praise Thee,” as expressed in another song, are therefore quite relevant.

The gospel is preached to set people’s spirit free from a prison of unbelief and until they hear it, their spirits are in “prison.” Those who know the Scriptures will be aware of the fact that there are a number of verses in which the words “prison” and “prisoners” are used in a metaphorical sense to describe the spiritual state or position of those who are alienated from God in their mind, and have no hope.

For example, Isa. 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

Jesus quoted this at the commencement of his preaching ministry to the Jews, and it had nothing to do with criminals in gaol! The preaching work of Jesus to the gentiles by the Holy Spirit through the apostles after his resurrection is referred to in the same terms. For example Isa. 42:7 refers to the Holy Spirit being upon him causing him to be a light to the gentiles, “to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.”

In passing it should be pointed out that the Greek word “phulakee,” translated “prison” in 1 Pet. 3, is used almost 50 times in the New Testament. But it is never used to relate to some place in the deep regions

of the earth where disembodied spirits are supposed to be!

1 Pet. 3:20 goes on to say that in times past, in Noah's day, imprisoned spirits were disobedient and were not saved, because only Noah and his family - eight souls, survived the flood.

According to 2 Pet. 2:5, Noah preached to his contemporaries, who were of course, bound by sin, but they did not respond and were therefore not spared from the judgement. This acted as a warning to all succeeding generations, and Peter refers to it for that reason.

Tradition reads 1 Pet. 3:20 to mean that the spirits in prison to whom Christ preached were the same spirits (immortal souls) of those who died in Noah's day. But if they were disobedient and refused to listen to Noah's preaching, why should they be given a second chance? And why give a second chance to just those who died in Noah's day? What about those who died in Abraham's, Moses' day etc? Why not give them and everyone else in every generation a second chance?!

This interpretation of giving the dead a second chance, led to the false doctrine of purgatory, which is contrary to the Word of God. It is a pernicious doctrine, and much more could be said about it.

The principle of interpretation that I have applied to 1 Pet. 3:20 is illustrated in 1 Pet. 2:9-10. Addressing his contemporary first century generation of gentile Christians, Peter says: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood..." He then goes on to say: "who in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God." Peter is actually quoting words uttered over 700 years before by the prophet Hosea in relation to the gentiles who lived contemporary with him (Hos. 2:23). Also see Rom. 9:24-25. At that time, and indeed right through to the time of Peter, the gentiles were not the people of God. But it would clearly be wrong to conclude that the people to whom Peter was writing were the same generation of gentiles that lived 700 years before in the time of Hosea.

In the same way, when Peter talks about the gentiles of his own time (spirits in prison) being preached to, and then says: "who formerly were disobedient... in the days of Noah," he is not implying that the generation of gentiles that lived contemporary with Noah was the same group of gentiles to whom the gospel was being preached after the resurrection of Jesus.

Another statement made by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:6 has also been misconstrued to support the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. In this statement Peter refers to the gospel being preached to "those who are dead." But Peter does not say the gospel was preached to them "when they were dead." He is not talking about the gospel being preached to

dead people. He is simply stating that those who are now dead once had the gospel preached to them.

A similar expression occurs in Ruth 1:8 where Naomi said to Ruth: “The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” The “dead” with whom Ruth had dealt kindly was her husband, Naomi’s son, who was now dead. While he was alive, Ruth was a good wife to him and dealt kindly with him. This is what Naomi was referring to when she said: “You have dealt kindly with the dead” i.e. with him who is now dead. No one would read this to mean that Ruth was a good wife to him while he was dead. Likewise, we should not try and read 1 Pet. 4:6 to mean that the gospel was preached to dead people!

### OUT OF THE BODY

**L**et us move on now to some statements made in the writings of the apostle Paul which have been misconstrued to support the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. To start with, in 2 Cor. 12:1-4 Paul says: “I knew a man in Christ, (i.e. Paul himself) whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows; such an one was caught up into paradise and heard indescribable words.”

According to the book of Revelation, paradise is the garden city of God which is coming to earth when Christ returns. This is evident from the fact that Rev. 22:1-2 refers to the tree of life being in the midst of the city, and Rev. 2:7 refers to it being in the midst of paradise. From this it is a natural deduction that paradise is the city of God.

Paul’s reference to not knowing if he was caught up there in the body or out of the body, is regarded by many as proof that we can live outside the body in a disembodied immaterial state, and don’t need a body to have conscious existence. But, if the body cannot live without the so-called immortal soul or spirit, (“the body without the spirit is dead” according to Jam. 2:26), then Paul would have died if his spirit left his body! And if he died and came back to life would he not have known it? Of course he would. So why would he say: “Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell.” It is hard to believe that he would not know whether or not he died.

It should be evident from this that Paul is not talking about an immortal soul leaving the body and taking a trip to heaven. The key to what he is talking about is indicated in the first verse where he refers to receiving visions and revelations of the lord, and he repeats it in v7. This is the context in which the statement about being caught up into paradise

must be interpreted.

Paul is simply saying that he was given a vision or revelation of paradise and it was so vivid and real that it was like being there in person. It was so real that he couldn't tell whether he was actually taken there in person, or whether his mind and thoughts were projected there beyond the geographical location of his body. In other words: Paul could not tell whether the vision was subjective or objective.

Compare Peter's experience. When he was released from prison by an angel, we are told in Act. 12:9 that he did not know that what was happening was real - he did not know that he really was physically walking out; he thought he was dreaming or seeing a vision. But v11 says that when Peter "came to himself," i.e. when he realized what had happened, he knew it was a real physical experience.

As we know, God has created the mind of man with the unique ability to be projected beyond the present physical senses and environment of the body, to other places upon and above the earth. The ability of our thoughts, particularly in vivid dreams or deep meditation, to travel to other places, can make us feel like we have left the body.

Some people, under anaesthetic, have dreamed that they are hovering over their body, looking down on it. People who lack the ability to concentrate are sometimes said to have a "wandering mind." Or, it might be said of someone who fails to pay attention, that his mind is in other places. But none of these expressions mean that a part of the brain has physically left the body and gone on a journey!

## **A DESIRE TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST**

**A**nother statement made by the apostle Paul which some regard as teaching the immortality of the soul is in Plp. 1:23: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

This is commonly interpreted to mean that the moment Paul died, his immortal soul or spirit would be in heaven with Christ. However, it should be noted that Paul makes no reference to "soul" or "spirit;" the words do not occur here. Neither does Paul actually say that he would be with Christ the moment he departed or died. As it stands, the statement merely expresses a sequence of events, without indicating whether or not there would be an interval between the two events. Depart (die) first; then be with Christ; but whether immediately after departing, or some time after departing, Paul does not say. The same applies to the statement in Heb.

9:27: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement.” On the surface this statement might be taken to mean that judgement takes place immediately after death. In actual fact, it takes place at the second coming of Christ. For many people, this will be hundreds and even thousands of years after they died. But, because death is a sleep - an unconscious state during which there is no awareness of the passing of time, the next conscious moment after death will be in the presence of Jesus at the judgement. It will seem like they died one minute and were alive the next - just like going to sleep at night and waking up in the morning, not being aware of the hours that have passed. (Compare the word “awake” in Ps. 17:15. Dan. 12:2).

Attention was also directed earlier to a statement in Lk. 16 which also gives the impression that there is no interval between death and judgement. Verse 6 says “The beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” In essence, this is no different from Paul’s statement in Plp. 1:23 that he desired to depart and to be with Christ. As we have seen, the beggar did not go to “Abraham’s bosom” until he was raised from the dead, and the same applies to Paul. He will not be with Christ until he is raised from the dead. And this will not take place until Christ returns to the earth. Paul, who knew the Scriptures well, knew that when he died he would be asleep in the grave where time stood still. He knew that his next conscious moment would be in the presence of Jesus. For this reason he could say that he had a desire to depart and to be with Christ. The whole weight of Biblical testimony especially in Paul’s writings, is that those who die belonging to Christ will not see him until he comes again and raises them from the dead, and Paul’s statement in Plp. 1:23 does not contradict this teaching.

Take for example 2 Tim. 4:1-8 in which Paul speaks about Jesus judging the living and dead at his appearing and kingdom. Paul goes on to say that his “departure (death) is at hand,” and that “there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing.”

Paul talks here about his death in terms of a “departure” but makes it quite clear that he did not expect to immediately ascend to heaven in a disembodied state. No! his whole hope lay in the coming and appearing of Jesus from heaven. It would not be until that day that Paul would receive his crown.

It is clearly a mistake to assume that when Paul refers to his departure that he meant ascending to heaven. Quite the opposite is the case. Death involves a descent not ascent, for it involves departing from the land of

the living and descending into the grave to await resurrection.

The words “depart” and “death” are sometimes used synonymously in Scripture. For example Lk. 2:26 records Simeon saying that the Lord told him he would not see “death” before seeing Christ. After he had seen Christ, he said: “Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.”

Significantly enough, the Greek word “*analuo*” which is translated “depart” in Plp. 1:23 only occurs in one other place in the New Testament, in Lk. 12:36 where it is rendered “return”: “And be ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding.” Here the word refers to the second coming of Christ.

“*Analuo*” literally means to “unloose.” Jesus’ return will be an unloosing from heaven. Death also is an unloosing from life and involves a journey to the grave. All who die “return” to the dust from which they came.

On the 22 occasions that *analuo* occurs in the Greek Old Testament, it always signifies “return.” For example, Josh. 22:8: “Return with much riches to your tents” etc.

In view of this there is considerable merit in the Emphatic Diaglott’s translation of Plp. 1:23 which reads: “I have an earnest desire for the returning, and being with Christ, since it is very much to be preferred.”

## TO DIE IS GAIN

**I**t is natural to wonder why Paul would have a desire to die and be in a sleep state while waiting for Christ to return. How could this be “gain” to him as we read in Plp. 1:21 where he says: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” How could it be a gain to Paul to die?

The answer is quite simple: At the time of penning those words, Paul was in prison, and during his life he experienced much suffering. In v16 he refers to “affliction in my bonds” and mentions suffering conflict in verses 29-30. A long list of the kind of trials, troubles and hardships he experienced as a result of being an apostle of Christ, is presented in detail in 2 Cor. 11:23-29. To remain alive meant trouble and anxiety. Death brought rest and relief. “To die is gain.”

Referring to the same kind of situation, Rev. 14:13 puts it like this: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, ...that they may rest from their labours.”

Job also sought relief from his suffering, but not by ascending to heaven as a disembodied immortal. No! His plea to God was: “O that you

would hide me in the grave... until your wrath be past, and then remember me when it is the appointed time” (Job 14:13). In the following verses it is evident that by “appointed time” Job had in mind the resurrection. Job, like Paul, would have been happy to die and sleep peacefully without any more suffering until the day of resurrection and reward.

Again in Ecc. 4:1-3 reference is made to those who were oppressed and afflicted. Solomon says: “Those who had already died were more fortunate than those who were still alive.” Death, to them, was “gain.”

However, although Paul knew he could rest and avoid much suffering and affliction if he died, he also knew it would be to the disadvantage and detriment of the church to not have him around. Being the unselfish person he was, having such a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of the church, he went on to say: “Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And fully believing this, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith” (Plp. 1:24-25).

### **ABSENT FROM THE BODY**

**T**he last passage to consider in Paul’s writings which is sometimes quoted to promote the concept of the immortality of the soul, is 2 Cor. 5. In this passage Paul says that: “While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” He then goes on to say: “We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

The phrase “absent from the body” is of course regarded by tradition as referring to the departure of the immortal soul from the body at death, in order to be “present with the Lord” in heaven, without a body. But a careful consideration of these statements in their context reveals that the subject in hand is not disembodied immortals ascending to heaven at death, but immortal bodies on earth as a result of Jesus descending from heaven to raise the dead.

Starting at 2 Cor. 5:1 reference is made to the “earthly house” or “tabernacle” (i.e. tent) we live in, which in time dissolves, i.e. dies and corrupts away. This is then contrasted with the “eternal” “building” or “house” reserved in heaven in Christ which God has provided for us to live in.

As in other Scriptures, the “house” or “tabernacle” is a metaphorical reference to our body. For example, in Ecc. 12:3 “keepers of the house” refers to the arms which serve and protect the body. In 2 Pet. 1:13-14 Peter says: “I think it is right, as long as I am in this tabernacle (i.e. while

my body is alive) to stir you up... knowing that shortly I must put off my tabernacle (i.e. die or “decease” v15).

In 2 Cor. 5 a contrast is made between our present mortal body and our future immortality which is “hid with Christ in God” in heaven, and which will be bestowed when he returns to earth. Our present mortal body, like a tent, is only a temporary habitation. Our future immortal body, like a building, will be permanent, “eternal.” Because our immortal body or eternal house can only be conferred through power from heaven coming upon us, it is referred to as being in heaven, and coming from heaven. Heaven is the source of immortality. It is not inherent.

2 Cor. 5:2 continues: “For in this (i.e. in our present temporary body or house) we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is (coming) from heaven.”

It is important to note that Paul speaks of our “house which is from heaven.” He does not say that it is a house we ascend to in heaven where we will dwell as immaterial entities and have a disembodied existence. No! He says the house will be brought to us from heaven and shall be clothed upon us. The statement in v4 is more explicit. It says: “We shall be clothed upon so that mortality might be swallowed up by life” i.e. swallowed up by eternal life. This statement is clearly an echo of another statement of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:54 where, speaking about the resurrection he says: “Death is swallowed up in victory,” i.e. due to our mortal body putting on immortality. Without a doubt, this relates to the new immortal body with which we shall be clothed at the resurrection at Christ’s second coming.

Being “unclothed” is a metaphorical expression relating to the death, decay and disintegration into dust of our mortal corruptible body. As we saw in 2 Pet. 1:14, Peter, when referring to his forthcoming death, said: “I must put off my tabernacle.”

Being “clothed upon” signifies being invested with a new immortal, incorruptible body at the resurrection. It is put like this in 1 Cor. 15:53-54: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Paul’s reference in 2 Cor. 5:2 to “groaning, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house,” parallels with his reference in Rom. 8:23 to Christians groaning within themselves for “the redemption of their body.” The redemption of the body, of course, takes place at the resurrection when the saints will be clothed with an immortal body or “house.”

It is evident from the expressions used by Paul in 2 Cor. 5 such as “clothed upon” and “house” that he is talking about a material body, not

something immaterial. The words “soul” or “spirit” do not occur in the passage, and no hint is given of any such thing leaving the body at death to live in heaven. Blind doctrinal prejudice reads such things into this passage but they are not there.

That Paul had in mind the period of the second coming of Christ is further indicated in 2 Cor. 5:10 where he says: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad.”

If Paul’s desire was to leave behind the mortal body and depart to heaven as a disembodied immortal, and if he used the expression “unclothed” to signify this, why did he emphasize three times that his desire to be unclothed was that he might be “clothed upon,” and not remain unclothed? This only makes sense when it is understood that he was expressing a desire to discard his weak mortal corruptible body and have it replaced with an immortal incorruptible body.

Nowhere in 2 Cor. 5 does Paul express a desire for disembodiment. In v3 he indicates that he did not want to be left “naked” i.e. without a body. In connection with this word “naked,” Paul, in 1 Cor. 15:37 likens those who are dead in the grave waiting to rise to a new immortal body, to a “naked grain” in the ground to which God “gives it a body” i.e. makes it a full-bodied plant when it sprouts.

Paul’s reference in 2 Cor. 5:4 to “groaning” while we live in our present mortal “tent,” is no doubt because of the weaknesses and anxieties that are experienced by it. And when he says his desire is “not that we would be unclothed (i.e. die and dissolve into dust) but be clothed upon (i.e. be bestowed with an immortal body in the blinking of an eye at Christ’s return), Paul is expressing hope that he might be among those he refers to in 1 Thes. 4 who will remain alive (remain “clothed”) to witness Christ’s return, and therefore not die (i.e. not be “unclothed” and not become “naked”), but rather be “clothed upon” with immortality in the blinking of an eye (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

These verses quickly dispose of the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which, in contrast, desires to be unclothed from the body, not clothed upon.

The words “tent” and “house” involve a dwelling, and of course a tenant. The “tenant” is the “inner man” - “the spirit of the mind” - the character and personality which is never forgotten by God, but is, as we read in Mal. 3:16, written and recorded in God’s “book of remembrance.” At the return of Christ, the character and personality will be re-created by

divine power and clothed with a permanent habitation - an immortal “building” or body.

It is in the light and context of all this that Paul’s much misunderstood statement in 2 Cor. 5:6 appears: “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (for we walk by faith, not by sight): we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

It is clear from the context that the “body” from which Paul desired to be “absent” was the present natural mortal body. His desire was to discard it and have it replaced at Christ’s return with a spiritual immortal body. According to 1 Cor. 15:44: “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

Therefore, as long as we are at home in the mortal body, Christ has obviously not returned. He is not present with us in person, but in heaven, and we are therefore “absent” from him, physically speaking. And, as Paul says in his parenthetical statement in 2 Cor. 5:7, this time of absence is a time during which we walk by faith and not by sight. However, when the Lord returns and fashions our mortal body like his glorious immortal body (Plp. 3:21), our faith will be turned into sight for we shall see him face to face and “be like him” (1 Jn. 3:2).

When the immortal nature is bestowed upon the saints, they will be absent from the old mortal body for it will have been discarded. They will be present with the Lord in his kingdom on earth in their new immortal bodies. No wonder Paul says: “We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (v8).

Paul then says: “Therefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted by him” (v9).

It should be evident that the word “present” here cannot relate to immortal souls being in the presence of the Lord in heaven, neither can it relate to immortal bodies being in the presence of the Lord in his kingdom on earth. It is a foregone conclusion that for immortal souls to be in the presence of the Lord in heaven, or for immortal bodies to be in his presence in his kingdom on earth, they would have to be accepted by him. So why would Paul express a hope that those who are present with the Lord, be it in heaven or earth, might be accepted by him if they are already accepted and immortal?

This consideration seems to force upon us the conclusion that the word “present” in this particular verse refers to those who are in attendance among those living in mortal bodies just prior to Christ’s -

return, and “absent” would refer to those who were out of sight due to being dead and buried.

When Jesus returns, many saints will be alive and many will be dead, but all will have made it their aim in life to be accepted by the Lord, whether they are dead or alive at his return. This seems to be the significance of Paul’s statement about making it our ambition, that, “whether present or absent, we may be accepted by him.”

His very next statement in v10 is consistent with this: “For we must all (i.e. the living and dead) appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.”

### SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR

**T**he final passage to consider in the New Testament which is sometimes quoted in support of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is Rev. 6:9 which refers to John seeing the souls of those who were slain “under the altar.” But there are a number of difficulties with the traditional interpretation of this:

1. These souls are referred to in Rev. 20:4 as being beheaded. How could a disembodied spirit have a head?

2. Rev. 6:11 says white robes were given to the souls. How could spirits without bodies wear robes? How could John see them if they are immaterial?

3. The altar represents an altar of sacrifice where victims have been slain. Such an altar could hardly exist in heaven, and there is no reference to it being in heaven. The souls are depicted under the altar, just as victims slain upon an altar would pour out their blood beneath it, and fall by its side. It would be incongruous for saints to be slain and fall in heaven! The only altar we read about in heaven is the altar of incense (8:3), but it would not be correct to represent victims slain under such an altar, because an incense altar was never used in this way.

4. If the souls are saints in a disembodied state in heaven, why are they shut up and confined under the altar, and why are they told to “rest”? It is generally believed and taught that immortals freely walk the streets of gold in heaven and float on clouds actively playing harps and singing.

5. Verse 11 depicts the souls crying with a loud voice for vengeance to be inflicted upon the enemy who killed them. Is it conceivable that souls in heaven, basking in the joy and glory of God, would be so preoccupied with vengeance being inflicted on their enemies, that they

would be unhappy and dissatisfied until it was inflicted? Would they not rather rejoice that they had been killed and hastened into the presence of God in heaven, at whose right hand there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore? It is generally taught and believed that there is no sorrow or sadness, crying or tears in heaven. In view of this, it is difficult to see the souls crying out under the altar in Rev. 6:9 as representing a scene in heaven.

6. Verse 11 plainly says the souls were killed. No distinction is made between body and soul. It does not say that just the body was killed. It is clearly the souls themselves who are referred to as being killed. This being the case, the souls are obviously neither immortal nor immaterial.

So then, what are we to make of the souls under the altar. For a start, we come back to the fact already established that one of the primary meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words translated "soul" is "life." And, because the life is in the blood, the same words sometimes relate to blood. For example, we read in Deu. 12:23 that "the blood is the life." The word "life" here comes from *nephesh*, translated "soul" elsewhere. Hence, Deu. 12:23 could read: "The blood is the soul." Reference is actually made to "the blood of the souls" in Jer. 2:34 (Authorised Version). Ps. 72:14 also refers to souls having blood, and in Isa. 53:12 we read that Jesus, in his sacrifice, "poured out his soul unto death."

In view of this, it is believed that the souls under the altar either refers to the blood of the slain, or the bodies themselves whose blood had been shed, or both. It was common for the enemy to leave the bodies of those they killed, lying in their blood exposed on the ground, unburied, as an act of contempt (Ps. 79:2-3. Rev. 11:8).

Of particular significance is the fact that the blood from Israel's sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar at Jerusalem (Ex. 29:12. Lev. 4:7). The blood was not, of course, poured out at the base of the altar of incense inside the temple, but at the base of the altar of burnt offerings outside the temple.

Regarding the altar at Jerusalem: The word of prophecy teaches that there will be a Jewish temple and altar at Jerusalem in the end time: (Dan. 12:11. Joel 1:9, 13-16. 2:17. 2 Thes. 2:4. Rev. 11:1-2). As in the past, when Zechariah was slain between the altar and the temple, some end-time Jewish Christians will suffer a similar fate when the anti-god "beast" invades Israel. If Pilate had no scruples about mixing the blood of Jews he killed with the sacrifices on the altar (Lk. 13:1), the beast would have no compunction killing Christ's witnesses at the altar as an act of contempt towards the altar and the witnesses. Reference is certainly made in Rev.

11:7-8 to the beast killing witnesses in Jerusalem and leaving their dead bodies lying on the ground. If the man of sin (beast) deliberately desecrates the temple by sitting in it (2 Thes. 2), he would have no scruples about desecrating the altar by sacrificing humans upon it.

By leaving dead bodies lying unburied upon the ground or by shedding their blood at the altar, the beast will intend to bring ignominy, shame and contempt upon Christ's witnesses. But, as far as Jesus is concerned, being their Lord, the witnesses are at his feet i.e. in submission under his control. In Heb. 13:10 Jesus is referred to as our altar, because it is through him that we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. Therefore, when our service to God results in being killed and our blood being shed, it is poured out, as it were, at the foot of the altar.

The concept of a Christian's life being offered up, as on an altar, as a sacrifice in Christ's service, is conveyed in several Scriptures: (Rom. 12:1. Plp. 2:17. 3:8-11. 2 Tim. 4:6).

Some may wonder how blood or dead bodies could cry out to the Lord as depicted in Rev. 6:10. The answer is: in the same way that the blood of Abel could cry to God from the ground as we read in Gen. 4:10 and Heb. 12:24. Abel's blood is obviously personified, and in a book like Revelation where there is so much symbology and metaphor, such personification is not surprising. For example: in Rev. 6:8 death is depicted riding a horse. How could anyone dead let alone death itself, ride a horse? The answer is: in the same way that blood or dead bodies can be depicted crying out and being clothed with robes! Anything is possible in symbolic vision. Even birds and beasts are depicted speaking in Revelation, and wages are referred to as crying out in Jam. 5:4. Such statements are clearly expected to be spiritually discerned and not to be taken literally at face value.

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