

Hartford Bible Students

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Do We Possess a Soul?

The most common belief of all religions is that people possess souls and at death their consciousness in the form of that soul departs from the body to abide in either a heavenly paradise or a place of eternal punishment. But this erroneous concept was adopted from pagan philosophy. The soul is not a separate entity. It does not go anywhere when we die.

We Are a Living Soul

When we were created, we did not receive a soul, but we became a living soul — a living being. And when we die, the life we had ceases. In the Old Testament the word spirit is from the Hebrew word *ruach* or breath — the spark of life supported by breathing. When the breath stops, the spirit of life ends. “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” — Genesis 2:7

The Old Testament Teaching on the Soul

The idea of an immortal soul has always been contrary to the Israelite faith and is nowhere found in the Old Testament. In confirmation of this fact, The Jewish Encyclopedia (1941, Vol. 6, pp. 564, 566) states: “The belief that the soul continues in existence after the dissolution of the body is... nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture... belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent...”

The Hebrew word translated “soul” is *nephesh*, which simply means a breathing creature. Vine’s

Complete Expository Dictionary defines *nephesh* as “the essence of life, the act of breathing, taking breath... The Hebrew system of thought does not include the combination... of the ‘body’ and ‘soul’ [as separate entities].”

In fact, the Hebrew phrase *nephesh caiyah*, meaning living soul, applies not only to man but to all of God’s living creatures. “To every beast of the earth and to every fowl of the air and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth wherein there is life...” “They have all one breath.” (Genesis 1:30; Ecclesiastes 3:19) And all are considered by God as souls, living creatures. King David said of death: “His breath [Hebrew—*ruach*] goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish.” (Psalm 146:4)

If immortal, the thoughts of a man would not perish but would go on to another state of being. Solomon said: “There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10) The dead are not conscious, for both the body and the mind of a man cease to exist at death. “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know not anything...” Ecclesiastes 9:5

The Soul is Not Immortal

Although the Scriptures do not support the thought that the soul is immortal, they do abound with hope of a resurrection from death in due time. “God will redeem my soul [that sentient being which had been alive] from the grave [sheol—the condition of death].” Psalm 49:15

When Jesus “poured out his soul unto death,” he made “his soul [life, being] an offering for sin.”

(Isaiah 53:12, 10) This was necessary, because it was Adam's life (soul) that was sentenced to death, and the promise to mankind is a redemption of the soul from the power of death. (Psalm 49:15)

As Paul expressed: "As by a man comes death, by a man also comes the resurrection of the dead; for as all in Adam die, even so shall all in Christ be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:21-23)

Everlasting Life

The majority of mankind, who do not consecrate their lives to God in this present time, will be raised to life in the kingdom on earth under Christ and the Church's supervision. Those human souls of mankind who are faithful and obedient will receive everlasting life on earth:

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Isaiah 35:10 (KJV), "And the ransomed (Jesus ransomed all mankind) of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Immortality

Immortality itself is a heavenly reward only for faithful Christians who have consecrated their lives to God in this present time:

Romans 2:7 (ESV), "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life".

2 Peter 1:4 (KJV), "Whereby are given unto us (consecrated Christians) exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature (immortality) having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

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