

Because of the grief caused by the loss of loved ones in death, and because we all face death, we want to know what happens when a person dies. Over the centuries people have been fascinated by the prospect of knowing what is on the other side of death. Ancient pagan religions were largely based on the belief that death was really a transfer of life from one form or place to another. Today, amongst the Eastern religions there are several theories of soul survival and reincarnation. Then, Spiritism suggests that there is no such thing as death, for only the body wastes away and the spirit lives on. Some claim that they are able to communicate with those who have died.

What happens when a person dies? Our only reliable source of information on this subject is the inspired Word of God, the Bible. To be uncertain of what happens to us at death can be very disturbing. To believe something that is not true and have our hopes based on a lie could leave us susceptible to some of Satan's most dangerous deceptions. In the Bible we find satisfying and meaningful answers to our questions about life and death.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE & DEATH



### 1 What was Satan's first lie?

Satan blatantly contradicted the clear words of God when he said to Eve, "You will not surely die." Genesis 3:4. Since this first lie was spoken, Satan has tried to prove that his words were true. His efforts have been largely successful in the pagan world where death is generally seen as only a transition from one form of life to another.

Christ said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:25,26. The word translated as *LIFE* in verse 25 is the same word as rendered *SOUL* in verse 26. The soul is the whole person.



### 2 What is a person?

God created Adam. We read, "The *LORD* God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Genesis 2:7. In the King James Version of the Bible, the last part of this verse reads, "and man became a living soul." Genesis 2:7. The Bible tells us that person is a living soul or being.



### 4 Is any soul or person immortal?

The word mortal means, subject to death. One who is immortal is not subject to death. Is any person or soul immortal?

In the Bible, people as beings or souls are referred to as mortals. It is clearly stated, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." Ezekiel 18:20. (Also read Ezekiel 18:4.) Jesus Christ said that we should "be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28. Although the words for soul are translated hundreds of times in the Bible there is not a single place where the idea of immortality is connected with the soul. We are subject to death. We do not have an immortal soul.



### 3 What is the soul?

You will notice that the soul was not placed in Adam. Adam was the "living soul" or "living being." The soul is the whole person. The Bible tells us that, rather than having a soul, a person is a soul. The words life, being and person are often used in translating the original words that are also translated as soul. For example, Jesus



### 5 What does the Bible teach about immortality?

Only God is immortal: Paul wrote of God, "who alone is immortal." 1 Timothy 6:15,16.

We are to seek for immortality: We are mortal. (Genesis 6:3; Psalm 146:3; Job 4:17.) However, Paul wrote, "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life." Romans 2:7. (Compare 2 Timothy 1:10.)



## 6 When will believers receive immortality?

When Jesus Christ comes the second time, mortal men and women will receive immortality. It will be at that time that believers will be changed. Paul wrote, "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that has been written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.

Through Jesus Christ there is a wonderful future for us beyond the grave. However, the concept of an immortal soul, so often spoken of at funerals, is not a Bible idea. The wonderful promise of our Lord is that He will raise believers and give them immortality at His second coming.



## 7 What is the spirit?

In the Bible, the word "ruach," which is translated "spirit," means breath 33 times, wind 117 times, and spirit 76 times. When used in the latter sense it means vitality. In Judges 15:19 the word "strength" is "ruach" in the Hebrew. The spirit or breath is not a separate conscious entity within people.

This spirit or "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7) should not be confused with the Holy Spirit, nor with good and evil angels who are also called "spirits." (See Hebrews 1:14.)



## 8 What happens at death?

Solomon wrote, ". . . the dust returns to the

ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7. Remember that the words spirit and breath are interchangeable. The psalmist wrote, ". . . when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust." Psalm 104:29. (Compare Job 27:3.) James wrote, ". . . the body without the spirit is dead." James 2:26.

From these verses we should note *THREE POINTS* . . .

**i. The *BODY* of both the good and evil returns to the dust.** Jesus Christ said that those who have died are in their graves. (John 5:28,29.) They are not in heaven or hell.

**ii. The *SPIRIT* (or breath) of both the good and evil returns to God.** When a person dies, whether that person is a believer or unbeliever, the spirit or breath returns to God. This concept is sometimes misunderstood to mean that the believer goes to be with the Lord after death. However, it should be noted that no distinction is made between believers and unbelievers. In all cases, at death, "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7. Only God has the power to create life and He holds that power exclusively.

Solomon wrote, "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath (or spirit); man has no advantage over the animal . . . All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." Ecclesiastes 3:19,20.

At death, the spirit or breath returns to God and person ceases to be. The psalmist wrote, "When you (God) hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust." Psalm 104:29. "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing." Psalm 146:3,4.

**iii. The *SOUL* (or living person), whether good or evil, ceases to exist:**

The soul goes nowhere at death. Once the breath leaves and the dust returns to the ground from which it was taken, the living person or soul ceases to be.

Suppose that you have some boards and nails. You put these together to make a box. Then, suppose that you no longer need the box. You remove the nails and return the boards to your garage. What happens to the box? Where has it gone? It has gone nowhere. It simply ceases to exist. So it is with the living person or soul at

death. When the breath or spirit leaves and the body returns to the dust the living person or soul ceases to exist.



## 9 Are the righteous who have died praising God?

If the righteous who have died are in God's presence, as a conscious spirit or soul, we would expect them to be praising God. However, the psalmist David, while praying, said, "No-one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from his grave?" Psalm 6:5. (Also read Isaiah 38:18,19.) The psalmist wrote, "It is not the dead who praise the *LORD*, those who go down to silence; it is we who extol the *LORD*, both now and for evermore." Psalm 115:17,18.



## 10 Do those who have died know anything?

"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10.

Words could not be clearer. "The dead know nothing." Ecclesiastes 9:5. The whole Bible teaches that when a person dies that person knows nothing until the resurrection. No wonder Jesus Christ is so anxious to return to raise from the dead His people who have died.



## 11 Can a living person speak with someone who has died?

**What about the story of King Saul and the witch of Endor?** Because of his rebellion and sin, Saul was receiving no messages from God. (1 Samuel 28:6.) The prophet Samuel had died. (See 1 Samuel 28:3.) Although Saul had been the one who "had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land," (1 Samuel 28:3) he was now desperate. He commanded his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go and enquire of her." 1 Samuel 28:7.

They found a woman at Endor. The disguised king said, "Consult a spirit for me... and bring up for me the one I name." 1 Samuel 28:8. The woman enquired, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" 1 Samuel 28:11. Saul said, "Bring up Samuel." 1 Samuel 28:11. A moment later the woman

declared, "I see a spirit (or spirits, or gods) coming up out of the ground... An old man wearing a robe is coming up." 1 Samuel 28:13,14. And "Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?... The *LORD* will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." 1 Samuel 28:15,19.

**This tragic story says nothing about the righteous Samuel coming down from heaven to meet with King Saul.** So this story does not give any support to the idea that at death the believer goes to heaven to be with God. Saul, the witch and the one who appeared as Samuel that all used similar expressions: "bring up," "coming up out of the ground" and "bringing me up." "Coming up out of the ground" is hardly the same as descending out of heaven!

**In the séance the witch described Samuel as "an old man wearing a robe . . . coming up."**

This story gives no support to the idea that at the death of a believer a conscious spirit goes to heaven to be with God. The witch saw "an old man wearing a robe . . . coming up." Some may suggest that this was a resurrection. But the devil does not have the power to raise the dead, and certainly God was not at the call of this wicked woman who was under God's death decree for practicing sorcery. (See Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-13.)

**Scripture tells us that King Saul ended his sinful course by committing suicide.** (See 1 Samuel 31:4.) But the one that the witch brought up had said, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." 1 Samuel 28:19. There is no support in this story for the idea that a conscious spirit goes to be with God upon the death of the believer for the "old man" came up from the earth rather than from heaven, and the wicked Saul is going to "be with" the holy Samuel.

**Why does the story speak of "Samuel" if he wasn't really there?**

The record does not say that Saul "saw" Samuel. He had to enquire of the woman, "What do you see?" 1 Samuel 28:13. A moment later he asked, "What does he look like?" 1 Samuel 28:14. If Samuel was really there, why didn't Saul see him? We read that "Saul knew it was Samuel." 1 Samuel 28:14. The Hebrew word for "knew" means perceived or concluded. The Bible narrative then describes this spiritualistic séance in terms of the suppositions of the witch and Saul.

Those who have died cannot be contacted by the living. Attempts to contact the dead open the way for Satan to deceive and so they are condemned by God.



## 12 How did Jesus speak of death?

Jesus Christ described death as a sleep. He said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replies, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'" John 11:11-14.

Sleep is the most common expression used in the Bible to describe a person who has died. It is a sleep in which the one who has died is unaware of the passing of time or events. The sorrows, hardships and struggles of life are unknown to those who have died. Death is not life in heaven, hell, limbo or purgatory. Death is a rest until the resurrection to receive the rewards.

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## DEATH IS NOT THE END...

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. . . For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words." 1 Thessalonians 4:13,16-18.

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