

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHAT IS THE SOUL?

In any study of the human soul, one should begin by recognizing and admitting that whatever this quality is that is called "soul," it is something that was attributed to animal life four times before it was used of man. This pertinent fact is covered up in the *King James Version*, due to the fact that its translators were completely committed to the Platonic theory of man's nature, which made the true and real man to be a separable soul, which for some reason had been united to a body. These "learned men" approached the work of translating the Bible thoroughly saturated with the Greek view of human nature in general and the soul in particular. They fully believed that the soul was a person dwelling within the human body.

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. It is found 754 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, and it is translated at least thirty-three different ways in the *King James Version*. This seems to have been done in order to try to make the Word square with the ideas of men who carried Plato's philosophy into their work of translating; and when they could not square it, they confused it. When they came to the first occurrence of *nephesh* (Gen. 1:20), which certainly attributes the quality of soul to lower forms of life, they either omitted it or else translated it "life." There are two words in this passage, *chayah* and *nephesh*; and we cannot say today which one was ignored and which one was translated "life." However, from this first occurrence of the word *nephesh*, we learn that God called the living and moving things of the sea "living souls" before He applied this term to man. Anyone who possesses a copy of *Young's Analytical Concordance* can discover for himself, that when Moses in Gen. 1:20,21, 24, and 30 speaks of the nature of the lower creatures, and when in Gen. 2:5 he speaks of the nature of man, he uses identical Hebrew terms of both one and the other.

The study of the word *nephesh* is not an easy one, but some have made it. We have examined with care every passage in which this word is found, marked them in our Bibles, considered their contexts, and tried to arrive at some true Biblical understanding of this very important word. Our studies are not yet finished, and they never will be in this life; but one thing we know for certain is that the translators of the *King James Version* gave us a rewrite of their own when they came upon the word *nephesh*. In rendering it, they used such terms as "life," "soul," "dead," "appetite," "lust," "mortally," and "fish," (fish?).

The Greek word for "soul" is *psuche*. It occurs 105 times and is translated seven different ways: "soul," "life," "mind," "heart," "you," "heartily," and "us." I do not believe that any honest Bible exegete would even try to defend all this confusing and unfaithful treatment of these Hebrew and Greek words. So we have reason to thank God that, in the study of Scripture, the language barrier has been broken; and we can go to the original words that God used. Every occurrence of *nephesh* will be found listed beginning with page 829 of *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance*, and every occurrence of *psuche* will be found on page 807 of *The Englishman's Greek Concordance*.

From the five occurrences of *nephesh* in Genesis 1 and 2, we will know that man can claim no preeminence over the beast so far as being a living soul is concerned. Furthermore, we will see at once the utter absurdity of supposing that the soul apart from the body is the real man. We will know that the soul is not an entity that can do all that man does and be all that he is.

The soul, according to many, can see without eyes, can reason and think without a brain, can walk without legs, and speak without tongue, teeth, or vocal chords; All these abilities are attributed to something men say is the soul. And while all this is in harmony with Plato's philosophy, it is not taught in the Word of God.

Those who make a full study of the word *nephesh* will have to admit that its most important occurrence is the one where it is first used in connection with man. In Genesis 2:7 we are told: "**And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.**"

This passage, if believed, actually separates the Biblicist from the Platonist. It denies the Platonic philosophy in its totality. Here we must choose between the Word of God and the ideas of Plato. And the reader should recognize in advance that if he chooses the Word of God, it will put him outside the mainstream of what is called "orthodox theology."

It is, therefore, the opening testimony of the Bible that the whole man as a living sentient being is a soul. At one point he was only a body made of soil; and as created by God, he had every organ that the body has now. He had a brain, eyes, ears, nose, hands, and feet. But the brain could not reason, the nose could not smell, the eyes could not see, the ears could not hear. Man, as created, lacked no organ; but he needed yet something from God to make these operative, to make him a living soul. He needed "**the breath of life,**" and this he received by a divine operation from the Creator who had made him. As a result, he became something that he was not before. He became a living soul. Before God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, he was only a beautifully fashioned and wonderfully organized portion of the soil of the ground, a lifeless figure. In his origin he was only dust; but in the perfection to which the second work of God brought him, he became a living soul. We must believe this, since God Himself tells us of it.

The truth that one learns from Genesis 2:7 is reaffirmed in the New Testament where Paul declares: "**And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul**" (1 Cor. 15: 45). The simplicity of the account of creation can be demonstrated in the following manner: **A.** The LORD God formed man of the dust of the earth; **B.** He breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life; **C.** The man became a living soul. Thus, act A plus act B resulted in **C.** There is no record of the creation of the soul in the Bible. It was the whole man that became a living soul and not some separable part of him.

What man became and what man is as a living soul depends for its continuance upon God. If the breath of life is withdrawn, man will become a dead soul. He will sink back into the soil from which he came, and nothing but resurrection can bring him out of this state. When this is understood, the fact of resurrection from the dead becomes one of supreme importance.

Any attempt to provide a one-sentence definition of the soul is simply trying to define the indefinable. However, an enormous amount of truth

concerning it can be gained by considering all that God has said about it and from all the uses made of it by the Spirit of God.

From God's Word we know that "soul" is attributed to all animal life, and that "soul" is what the man made of the soil became when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. We know that man remains a living soul as long as the breath of life is in him, and he becomes a dead soul when it is taken from him. These are basic truths and they cannot be denied by texts taken from other places in Scripture. God's Word does not contradict itself. The study of every occurrence of *nephesh* and *psuche* must begin with these fundamental truths in mind, since they are the first that God revealed. And if we would arrive at God's Truth concerning the soul, we must at the very outset of our studies purge our minds as far as possible of the entire Platonic theory concerning souls and their nature. We must give God a clean slate to write upon.

The soul of man is not the man himself. It is not another entity, a second person, or another ethereal man existing within an outer man. It is not something that is immortal. It dies when the man dies, as it is declared in the classic passage of Ezekiel 18:4: "**Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul (*nephesh*) that sinneth, it shall die.**" A million arguments can be found in theological books for "the immortality of the soul"; but when we search the Word, we fail to find even one passage that declares it. Many texts are brought forward which are supposed to imply this, but none can be found that declares it. In fact, the very opposite is asserted in the Scriptures, a fact that the translators have successfully concealed. Leviticus 24:17, 18 states in the Hebrew: "**He that kills the soul of a man shall surely be put to death; and he that kills the soul of a beast shall make it good, soul for soul.**" This is what God says; and even as Abraham believed God, I, too, believe God.

There is no detachable part of man that survives physical death. The Bible states nothing of the immortality of a detached and independent soul, or of our future state as one of disembodied blessedness. The idea that the soul is a detachable part or substance, capable of existing independently of the body, is an idea adopted from Greek philosophy and incorporated into Christian thought by the so-called church fathers. This started in the third century and was fully developed by the thirteenth century. The Reformation did nothing to clear this up; so today in Reformed Theology, we find a mixture of Greek and Biblical ideas, with the Greek ideas predominating.

And so for centuries, Platonic philosophy has been propagated under the Christian label.

Let no one think that the writer, in coming to the conclusions already set forth, has failed to consider such passages as 1 Kings 17:21,22 and Matt. 10:28. No passage has been neglected or ignored in search of the truth. Any interpretation of these passages must be in complete harmony with the Biblical definition of the soul and with all other truth revealed concerning it. Furthermore, Matt. 10:28 shows that the soul is subject to destruction; and we must remember that if man cannot kill a soul, then the command of God with its severe penalty recorded in Numbers 35:30 is about the same as if our government should make it punishable by death for any man to interfere with the rising of the sun.

Many passages that relate to the soul are worthy of being dealt with at length, and this will be done in later issues of these Bible-study leaflets.

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