

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

THE BREATH OF LIFE

The first mention of "the breath of life" (*neshamah chayim*) is found in Genesis 2:7. There we are told that it was breathed directly into the nostrils of the man whom God had created, and this resulted in man becoming a living soul (*chayah nephesh*). Thus, the first truth we learn of "the breath of life" is that it is a direct emanation from God. The study and the understanding of this term is therefore of the utmost importance, since it is this breath of life that gives life to everyone of us and makes us living souls.

In considering the two aspects of a living man that constitute him a living soul, we note first that there is a body. This was created out of something already in existence, the dust or soil of the earth. A man may love his body, care for it, protect it, and nurture it; and it is good if he does. Yet, it is just so much soil; and at death, it will return to the soil from which it was taken. Since God could, if He so desired, raise up from stones children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:9), we must not consider ourselves to be of such great value. God could duplicate each one of us a thousandfold. And while it is true, we are of more value than many sparrows; but how much is a sparrow worth?

The second thing that makes man a living soul is "the breath of life." This is spoken of in Scripture as being God's gift to man. Man is not this "breath"; it is God's gift to him. When we read in Scripture of "the breath of the LORD," we are reading of the same breath that made man a living soul. Man was once without it, yet, he was man; and before it was given to him, it was residing in the fulness of the Deity Himself. After it entered into man and became a part of him, it still belonged to the LORD and is regarded by God as being His own breath.

In the phrase "breath of life," we need to recognize that "of" is the sign of the genitive; and here it is the genitive of apposition, a figure of speech in which the second noun defines the first. We should, therefore, understand this as telling us that God breathed into man's nostrils the breath, that is to say, life. Thus, it was actually life that God breathed into man, and this constituted him a living soul.

In studying the Hebrew words to discover the nature of man, we will find three words appearing again and again. These are *neshama* which means "breath," *chaiyim* which means "life," and *ruach* which means "spirit." These three words are all used of the same thing. They are not used of three different things, but set forth the same thing by using three terms. The breath that God breathed into man is his life, and this life is man's spirit.

All one needs to do is compare Gen. 2:1 with Eccl. 12:1 and he will discover that "the breath of life" which God gave to man is one and the same with man's spirit, which, when a man dies, must return unto God Who gave it. And while this "spirit" is sometimes spoken of as belonging to man, it remains always God's spirit and must return to Him.

The most positive help in identifying the breath of life (*neshamah chaiyam*) with man's spirit (*ruach*) is found in the book of Job. I trust the reader knows that Job is Hebrew poetry, and that in Hebrew poetry the rhythm is not achieved by a repetition of sounds, but by a repetition of sentiments and ideas. This is called parallelism. In this we find passages of two clauses in which the second clause is identical with the first, but expressed in different words. Note this in the following passages.

All the while my breath (*neshama*) is in me, and the spirit (*ruach*) of God is in my nostrils. Job 27:3.

The spirit (*ruach*) of God hath made me, and the breath (*neshamah*) of the Almighty hath given me life. Job 33:4.

But there is a spirit (*ruach*) in man: and the inspiration (*neshamah*) of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Job 32:8.

If He set His heart upon man, if He gather unto Himself His spirit (*ruach*), and (even) His breath (*neshamah*); All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. Job 34:14, 15.

Thus saith the LORD. . . He that giveth breath (*neshamah*) unto the people upon it, and spirit (*ruach*) to them that walk therein. Isa. 42:5.

An examination of all passages that bear upon the subject will show that "breath" (*neshamah*), "life" (*chaiyim*), and "spirit" (*ruach*) are different designations of the same principle; and they are not the names of three different things. Do not stumble over this fact. If the Eskimo requires 600 texts to describe snow, do not think it strange if the Hebrew used five or six to describe the life principle in man.

"But why is 'spirit' called 'breath'?" someone is sure to ask. The question is a proper one and, in its answer, we will find much truth.

In the Word of God, there are certain things that we could never understand if God had not made them plain by the use of figures. These figures become illustrations of things that are imperceptible to the senses; therefore, man lacks the faculties for entering into them.

Take, for example, the matter of death. The divine figure or illustration of death is sleep. Man can know nothing of death since he has never experienced it; but he does know much about sleep, which he has experienced many times. Thus, God has chosen the figure of sleep to picture death to us. Death is not sleep, no more than sleep is death. But sleep is the name given to and is the figure of death, and the reality is often called by the name of the figure.

This is true also of the soul. The divine figure and illustration of the soul is the blood. (See Gen. 9:4, 5 where the word "life" is *nephesh*.) It is not that the soul is the blood, but that blood is the divinely chosen figure to make the soul comprehensible to us.

Then there is the subject of our study, the breath of life or spirit of man. This is beyond the comprehension of any of our senses, so God has seen fit to use the breath as a divine figure or illustration. And if we wonder why the breath should be chosen as a figure and ask what we are to learn from this, we will need to begin with the familiar, man's breath, and work to the unfamiliar, man's spirit. Thus, we begin with the figure and work up to the fact.

Consider a goldfish bowl containing water and fish. The bowl of water is the world in which those fish live. Each fish is constantly drawing in the water and expelling it, even as man inhales and exhales the air he breathes. When the water is drawn into the gills of the fish, it is at no time cut off from the water in the bowl, for it ever remains a part of it.

Now let us go from the fish in the bowl to man upon the earth. This planet, *on* which we live is covered with a coat of air *in* which we live and *by* which we live. We actually live at the bottom of a great invisible ocean; but the ocean is one of air, not of water. The atmosphere that covers the globe is a unit; and if any part of it is separated from the whole, it will become poisonous and destroy the creatures that live in it. This air is constantly entering into and going out of every living being or soul; and, thus, it unites every living soul upon the earth. How plain it becomes, then, that **if God should gather unto Himself His spirit, even His breath, all flesh would perish together** (Job 34:14, 15). Even as Paul declared it: ". . . **seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all these things**" (Acts 17:25).

God has given one air to all men, but all that a man can personally have of it is just what his needs require. No man can draw in from the atmosphere, say that this breath is his own and that he is going to keep it. Let him try this and in a few seconds his whole system will rebel and expel his breath in spite of himself. When a man draws in breath from the air, it is never cut off from the atmosphere as a whole.

As already stated, the breath is God's figure or illustration of the life or the spirit of man. The source of every man's spirit or life is God, just as the source of every creature's breath is the atmosphere. Man's spirit or life is a direct emanation from God Himself, and it flows from God to every living soul. Each one has that portion of life or spirit from God which he needs for his purposes. All things that live, live only in and by His life. Life has no other source but God. He originates and sustains life in all by giving it out of Himself. This was the explicit testimony of Paul to the men of Athens in Acts 17:28: "**For in Him we live, and move, and have our being**" (our existence).

During the few brief moments that man's breath is in his body, he has every right to call it "his breath," even though it remains a part of and is never severed from the air as a whole. Likewise, during the days or years that the spirit or life from God may be in man, he has every right to call it "his spirit" or "his life," even though it is never severed from and remains a part of the life of God. But when man's breath leaves his lungs, it must return to the air from which it came; even so, when man's spirit or life leaves the man, it must return unto God Who gave it. "**Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it**" (Eccl. 12:7).

In making the study of man's spirit, we must guard against two errors. That spirit which God loans to man for a time is not the Holy Spirit. This is made plain by the qualifying word "Holy." Also, we must never forget that man's spirit is not a spirit being. Before man came into possession of "the breath of life," which is fully identified in Scripture as being "man's spirit," it was a part of the divine nature, residing in God's fullness. When it returns to Him, it will again be a part of His nature and will find its place in His fullness.

Man's spirit has no personality, no individuality, no separate existence. All these things are attributes of the man, and they are the result of life or spirit entering into him and making him a living soul. Many there are who think that, in death, man becomes a "disembodied spirit"; but this is an idea that has no basis in the Word of God.

The central idea of Pantheism is that God is in everyone and everything. There is a definite element of truth in this, and we may not deny truth itself. But the great error of Pantheism is that everything is God and that there is no personal God. This is a deadly error. God's spirit or life is in every living thing, but we cannot find God by looking into things. He is to be found only in His Son Jesus Christ.

END ISSUE NO. SB078