

# BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

## THE SOUL

The primary meaning of 'soul' in the Bible is a living creature, either man or animal. The word can also convey various characteristics of living beings, such as their individuality, body, mind and breath. The first occurrence of the Hebrew word for 'soul' (*nepes* or *nephesh*) in the Old Testament is found in Genesis 1:20, where it is translated "creature": "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving *creature* that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven". The word occurs next in verse 24, where God makes the terrestrial creatures (*nephesh*). The third occurrence is in Genesis 2:7, where God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life and the man became a "living soul" ('creature', *nephesh*). Some translations render this phrase, "man became a living *animal*". Thus, in the Bible, fishes, birds, land animals and humans are all 'souls' (creatures, or living beings).

### Uses of the word 'soul'

Contrary to ideas conveyed in some concordances (for example, *Strong's*) the phrases 'immortal soul' or 'ever-living soul' are nowhere to be found in Scripture. A careful perusal of the word *nephesh* in the Old Testament (the word occurs about 700 times) and its Greek equivalent *psyche* in the New Testament (which occurs about 180 times) will show the following characteristics of Biblical souls:

- **Souls die:** "Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4; see also Judg. 16:30; Isa. 38:17; Mt. 16:25,26; Lk. 12:19,20)
- **Souls can be hungry:** "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion" (Isa. 29:8; see also Ex. 12:16 [AV mg.]; Lev. 17:10-12; Num. 11:5,6; Prov. 6:30)
- **Souls can be people or animals:** "And 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 [a living soul, mg.], I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so" (Gen. 1:30; see also 9:10,12,15; Num. 31:28; Josh. 10:32; 11:11; Jer. 2:34)
- **Souls breathe:** "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" (Gen. 2:7; see also Job 12:7-10)
- **Souls go to the grave:** "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me" (Ps. 49:15; see also 16:10; Mt. 10:28)

### The soul is not immortal

Although the expressions 'immortal soul' or 'ever-living soul' do not occur anywhere in the Bible, the idea that the soul is released from the body at death and lives forever is found today in many religions, including Christianity. Jesus and the apostles foretold that there would be a departure from the true Christian gospel (for example: Mt. 7:15-20; Acts

20:29,30). Paul wrote that men “shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

The idea of the immortality of the soul came from the myths of ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, myths that were gradually introduced into Christian teaching. Many Bible students and authors on Church history have said that the immortality of the soul is unscriptural, among them Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Edward Gibbon and W. E. Gladstone. People often ask how it is that so many sincere believers and ministers of religion can be wrong in their beliefs about the soul.

Jesus and the apostles said that it would not be the majority who found the Truth, but the minority:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt. 7:13,14; see also Acts 28:22; 1 Cor. 1:26,27; 3:19).

Many people find it comforting to think that they will live on after death, rather than, as the Scripture teaches, that all consciousness and thought ceases when we die:

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun” (Eccl. 9:5,6; see also Ps. 6:5; 146:3,4; Isa. 38:18,19).

Belief in an immortal soul is therefore wishful thinking and a perpetuation of the serpent’s lie to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), which was contrary to what God said.

### **The promised hope**

The true Bible hope is clear and positive, and in keeping with the mercy and justice of God. Paul states, when writing to the Corinthians, that God made man a living soul at Creation, and that this is his “natural body” (1 Cor. 15:42-49). This corruptible, mortal body can be changed to an immortal body in the same way that Jesus was made immortal, by his resurrection and change of body (vv. 50-54). This is a “spiritual [or spirit] body” (v. 44). The spirit body is the same as possessed by the angels and the Lord Jesus Christ, and can be touched, seen and heard; but, unlike the mortal body, which humans have, it will never die:

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:20,21; see also Lk. 20:34-36; 24:30,39-43; Acts 1:3; 1 Jno. 1:1).

When Jesus returns to the earth he will raise the dead, and he will change the bodies of faithful believers to make them immortal so that they can be his helpers in the Kingdom of God shortly to be set up on the earth:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:22-26; see also Job 19:26; Dan. 12:1-3; Jno. 5:28,29; 1 Thess. 4:14-18).

Our souls will truly rejoice and be satisfied with this wonderful outcome!

This leaflet is produced by The Testimony Magazine, The Pines, Ling Common Road, Castle Rising, King’s Lynn, PE31 6AE, to encourage personal and ecclesial study of Bible principles. Further copying for distribution is encouraged.