

“Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.’ Then His disciples said, ‘Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.’ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead.’”

Sleep is used to describe death because a person who is sleeping soundly is like a person who is in the grave: unconscious, unproductive and unaware of the passing of time.

Why is there a need for a resurrection, judgment or putting on of immortality?

Hebrews 9:27 states, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” Considering this verse in the context of others we’ve seen reveals a sequence of events. After a person dies, he or she is in the grave awaiting a resurrection. When the person is resurrected, there will be a time of judgment.

Jesus spoke of a time to come when those who have died will be given life, and He also describes a time of judgment: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29).

The apostle Paul says there is a time to come when we who are mortal will “put on” immortality: “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53).

His point is that we do not yet have immortality. A change must take place so that we can “put on” immortality.

Why would any of this be necessary if we are immortal souls? What is the point of a resurrection if a person never really dies? Why would there be a need for a future day of judgment if we go to our reward at the moment of death? Why must this mortal “put on immortality” if we’re already immortal?

The obvious answer is that the teaching about the immortal soul is wrong. A person who dies is in the grave—unconscious and not aware of the passing of time—awaiting the resurrection.

If our loved ones don’t move on to a “better place” when they die, is there no consolation about the fate of the dead?

Something better to come

One of the best-known scriptures in the Bible says that God’s ultimate purpose for mankind is to give us something we do not yet have: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have *everlasting life*” (John 3:16, emphasis added throughout).

In fact, in Titus 1:2 Paul writes that he lived “*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.*”

None of us has eternal life yet, but it is the gift God is preparing to give to us. If this life is mortal and temporary, when and how will He grant that gift? To learn more about God’s purpose and plan for you, read the related articles in this section.

The false teaching of the immortality of the soul obscures an understanding of God’s awesome and incredible plan to grant the gift of eternal life. When we strip it away, we can discover that the truth of the Bible reveals the real hope we have in this life and beyond.

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What Is a Soul?

You might be surprised to find out that the common belief that man has (or is) an immortal soul is not a teaching that comes from the Bible.

Death is a reality of life, though it’s never pleasant to consider. Death can be devastating, separating us from family and friends. We want to believe that something better awaits a loved one who has died—that he or she has gone to a “better place.”

What happens after death is a mystery, complicated by the belief most people have that death doesn’t really mean the end of life. Most Christians and non-Christians alike assume that when a good person dies, his or her soul immediately departs for heaven (or some eternal reward), and when an evil person dies, he or she goes to the burning fires of hell (or some place of eternal punishing) to be tormented for eternity.

That belief is based on the false premise that each of us



is an immortal soul living in a physical body, and when the body dies, the soul continues to live. If that were true, then the soul would need some place to go when the body dies—which brings us to the common conceptions of heaven and hell.

The truth is a completely different scenario. When we understand what life and death are all about, we can know that something much better does await those who have died—but it probably isn't what you thought. The Bible reveals that the soul is not immortal and at death a person goes neither to heaven nor to hell.

The gift of life and warning of death

In Genesis 2:7 we read, “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 being.”

Notice that the passage doesn't say Adam was *given* a soul or that some form of life called a “soul” was put *within* him. It says that he *became* a living being (*nephesh* in Hebrew).

People are living beings, miraculously given the gift of life by God through creation. Experience and Scripture tell us that everyone's life ends in death. But then what?

Shortly after he was created, Adam was warned that his life would be taken away if he disobeyed God by eating the fruit of a particular tree in the Garden of Eden: “But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

What did God mean when He warned Adam that he would “die”?

Not long after being warned, Adam and Eve ate of that very tree and were told, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). There is no indication that their bodies would die but that “they” (spiritual souls) would continue to live in some other form, place or dimension.

Origin of the teaching of immortality

It was, in fact, Satan (represented as a serpent) who lied to Eve, telling her that if she ate the fruit of the tree she would not die: “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:4-5).

In deceiving Eve, Satan attempted to diminish God's authority by claiming that defiance of His instruction would not result in death, but that she, like God, would have the ability to decide what is right and wrong. Satan also implied that she, like God, would not die. In other words, Satan introduced the concept of the immortal soul.

Satan's deception has become the standard teaching of Christianity, borrowed from the beliefs of ancient pagans. The online edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

“Egypt affords at a very early date the most abundant evidence of an extremely vivid and intense belief in a future life. Offerings of provisions of all sorts to the spirits of the departed, elaborate funeral ceremonies, and the wonderfully skillful mummification of the bodies of the deceased, all bear witness to the strength of the Egyptians' convictions of the reality of the next life” (article “Immortality”).

The same article also says that in the fourth century B.C. the Greek philosopher Plato popularized the teaching of the immortality of the soul:

“It is, however, in the hands of his [Socrates'] great pupil Plato that the doctrine attained its most elaborate philosophical exposition and defence. ... For Plato, the soul is a being quite distinct from the body, related to it as the pilot to the ship, the charioteer to the chariot. The rational soul is the proper soul of man. It is a Divine element, and it is this which is immortal.”

In *Phaedo* Plato claimed, “The soul, whose inseparable attribute is life, will never admit life's opposite, death.

Thus the soul is shown to be immortal, and since immortal, indestructible” (*Plato the Teacher: Being Selections From the Apology, Euthydemus, Protagoras, Symposium, Phaedrus, Republic and Phaedo of Plato*, 1897, p. 449). Writing of death, he further reasoned, “Is this [death] anything but the separation of soul and body? ... Being dead is the attainment of this separation when the soul exists in [it]self, and is parted from the body” (pp. 425-426).

No source other than Plato's own logic is given for this belief. What is almost universally believed and taught is not from the Bible but is based on the reasoning of this pagan Greek philosopher who lived hundreds of years before Jesus' birth.

The soul that sins will die

In a prophetic message given in Ezekiel 18, God emphasizes that He will bless and preserve those who live righteously (verses 5-9). And in verse 4 He states emphatically: “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.”

The word translated “soul(s)” four times in this verse is the same Hebrew word (*nephesh*) translated “living being” in Genesis 2:17. When God withdraws life, the “living being” becomes a “dead being”—just as God had warned Adam.

We can also see in the Bible the condition of a soul that is no longer living. Solomon declared in Ecclesiastes 9:5, “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing.” In the same context Solomon stated, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

In other words, Solomon urges us to make the most of our lives because after we die there is no longer any consciousness, awareness, knowledge or productivity.

Jesus referred to death as a form of sleep. Notice the exchange between Jesus and the disciples in John 11:11-14: