

THE END TIMES

Bible Report Quarterly

Spring 2003: Issue Number 24

Shedding Light on Dark Age Doctrines

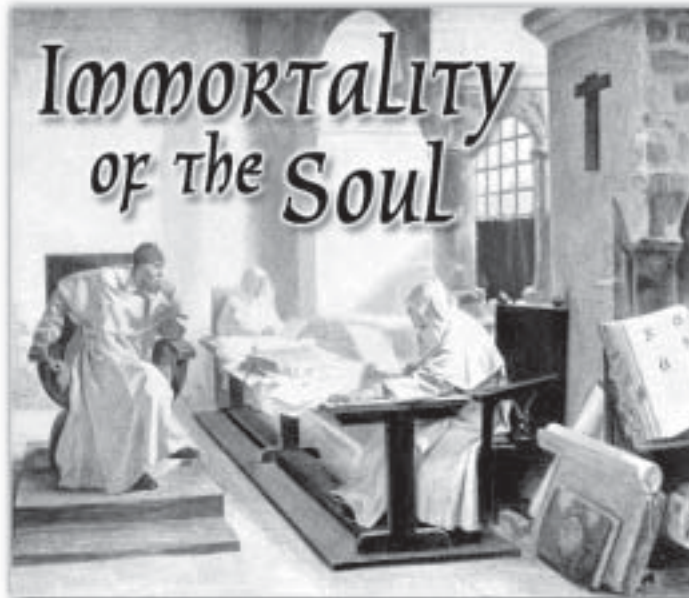
The Dark Ages were a time of opulent religious excesses and severe violations of justice. During this time the Bible was shrouded in dead languages and kept from the people. Bible translators were burned alive and anyone who would dare seek to own or study a Bible would receive the same fate. It is estimated that 50 million people were murdered as a result of the oppressive church/state system which developed during the Dark Ages.

Certain doctrines held as sacred and foundational were forged of compromise and political ambition common during this fearsome period in church history. Doctrines were believed, not because of conviction, but because of coercion. It was not until the time of the end—this time in which we are now living—that Christians have had the privilege of searching the Scriptures to examine doctrine without fear of reprisal. The study of the *immortal soul* is the object of consideration in this issue—to seek its origins and to discover whether there is any Scriptural foundation for this doctrine.

POPULAR PHILOSOPHY EVOLVES INTO DOCTRINE

There is a longing hope within men that death does not end all existence; that somehow and somewhere, the life now begun will have a continuation. The most common belief of all religions is that people possess souls, and at death their consciousness in the form of that soul departs from the body to abide in either a paradise or a place of punishment.

The concept of the immortal soul was introduced into man's thinking at the earliest beginnings of human history. The ancient Egyptians practiced elaborate ceremonies to prepare pharaohs for the afterlife. Immortality of the soul was an important aspect of ancient thought espoused by Greek philosophers. Plato, in *Phaedo*, presents Socrates' explanation



of death: “*Is it not the separation of soul and body? And to be dead is the completion of this; when the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and body is released from the soul, what is this but death?*” (*Five Great Dialogues*, 1969, p. 93) Socrates lived ca. 470-399 B.C. and Plato ca. 428-348 B.C., and so their views predated Christianity.

Plato continued to refine the philosophy of the immortal soul, making it the more seductive and acceptable to the cultured class of his day. He taught that each man contained a fragment of

deity, and that this would prevent him from ever dying. He also taught that the soul existed before the body which it inhabited, and which it would survive.

The popularity of this philosophy spread, and by about A.D. 200 it was mixed with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1992, p. 1037) notes that Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254), an early and influential church theologian, was greatly affected by Plato: “*Speculation about the soul in the subapostolic church was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. This is seen in Origen’s acceptance of Plato’s doctrine of the preexistence of the soul as pure mind...*”

Origen was the first person to attempt to organize Christian doctrine and Platonic philosophy into a systematic theology. He wrote: “*...The soul, having a substance and life of its own, shall after its departure from the world, be rewarded according to its deserts, being destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness... or to be delivered up to eternal fire and punishments...*” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, 1995, p. 240) Origen’s views caused great controversy within the church.

Augustine, another influential Christian theologian and admirer of Platonic philosophy, profoundly affected Christian thinking. Richard Tarnas in writing *The Passion of the Western Mind* (1991, p. 103) points to this influence: “*...It was*

Augustine's formulation of Christian Platonism that was to permeate virtually all of medieval Christian thought in the West. So enthusiastic was the Christian integration of the Greek spirit that Socrates and Plato were frequently regarded as divinely inspired pre-Christian saints..."

Like Plato, Augustine proposed that God breathed a little of His deity into Adam and that this entity would never die. Although strenuously contested as error by many of the honorable church leaders, Augustine's view won out, and the error became fixed as a foundation doctrine from the sixth century to the nineteenth when Bible study began to be tolerated.

THE HISTORICAL JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (1960, Vol. 2, p. 812) states: "We are influenced always more or less by the Greek, Platonic idea that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament." In confirmation of this, The Jewish Encyclopedia (1941, Vol. VI pp. 564, 566) states: "The belief that the soul continues in existence after the dissolution of the body is... speculation... nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture... The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent..."

So, what does the Old Testament teach about the soul? The Hebrew word translated "soul" is *nephesh*, which simply means a breathing creature. Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (1985, p. 237, 238) defines *nephesh* as "the essence of life, the act of breathing, taking breath... The Hebrew system of thought does not include the combination... of the 'body' and 'soul' [as separate entities] which are really Greek and Latin in origin."

The Hebrew words *nephesh caiyah* mean living soul and apply not only to man but to all of God's living creatures. "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." Notice that in the margin against the word *life* appears the words "Hebrew: a living soul." Thus, all differences between the lower and higher souls are not because the lower animals have a different *breath* or *spirit of life*, for "they have all one breath" (Eccl. 3:19) and all are considered by God as *souls*—living creatures.

DEFINING THE SOUL AND SPIRIT

"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." (Genesis 2:7) When Adam's body was formed of the elements of the earth, he had eyes, ears, and a brain, but so far no ability to see, hear or think. Then God breathed into his

nostrils the *breath of life*. Notice, the Bible does not say that God breathed into his nostrils a *soul*.

The word *spirit* is, in the Old Testament, from the Hebrew word *ruach*. Its signification primarily is *breath*; and hence we have the expression "breath of life," or "spirit of life," because the spark of life once started is supported by breathing. When the breath stops, the spirit of life ends. The result of the breath of life having been breathed into Adam was that he "**became a living soul.**" Adam's lifeless body was now animated with sense perception—he was now a sentient being.

Many reverse this scriptural statement, and instead of speaking of man as *being* a soul, they speak of him as *having* a soul—a very different thought. This reversal of scripture perpetuates the original deception which Satan slyly presented to Eve—that God was lying and that she and Adam would *not* die if they disobeyed. Thus, Satan was the first to inject the teaching of the immortality of the soul into human thought.

DOES THE SOUL DIE?

Because of inherited sin, the death of the physical body is inevitable, but what about the soul? If we attribute to the soul immortality (a condition in which death is impossible) then even God could not destroy it. But the Scriptures plainly state

that God *is* able to destroy the soul. Matt. 10:28

God told Adam and Eve (two living souls) that they would *surely die* if they disobeyed Him. (Gen. 2:17) It is the soul, the sentient being, the will or mind of a man which is responsible for sin, and it is the soul which is to bear the penalty of sin. That penalty is distinctly stated to be death. "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Rom. 6:23) "*The soul that sinneth it shall die.*" Ezek. 18:4

From this standpoint we can see that Adam was created *mortal*—in a condition in which death was a possibility. Had Adam remained obedient he would have continued living forever, everlastingly, and yet all the while he would have been *mortal*, liable to death if he became disobedient.

Because he was *not immortal* God's threat, that if he disobeyed he should die, meant something. It meant the loss of the spark or *breath of life*, without which the body would return to dust and the living *soul* would cease. Had Adam been *immortal*, God's sentence would have been an empty threat. But because Adam *was mortal*, liable to death, he died because of his disobedience.

WHAT IS THE DEATH STATE?

King David said of death: "*His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish.*" (Psa. 146:4) If immortal, the thoughts of a man would not perish, but would go on to another state of being. Solomon said: "*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.*" The dead are not conscious, for both the body and the

Although strenuously contested as error by many of the honorable church leaders, Augustine's view won out, and the error became fixed as a foundation doctrine from the sixth century to the nineteenth when Bible study began to be tolerated.

mind of a man cease to exist at death. “*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know not anything...*” Eccl. 9:10, 5

The Apostle Paul describes death as *sleep*. “*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [dead], that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope... For the Lord himself shall descend [at his second coming] from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ shall rise first.*” (1Thess. 4:13, 16) If the dead were conscious, then they would have no need to be raised.

HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE

Although the Scriptures do not support the thought that the soul is immortal, they do abound with the hope of a resurrection from death in due time. “*God will redeem my soul [that sentient being which had been alive] from the grave [sheol—the condition of death].*” Psa. 49:15

When Jesus “*poured out his soul [being] unto death,*” he made “*his soul an offering for sin*” and became our ransom-price. (Isa. 53:12,10) This was necessary, because it was Adam’s life (*soul*) that was sentenced to death, and the promise to mankind is a redemption of the *soul* from the power of death. Therefore, Jesus’ life (*soul*) was poured out in death. The penalty of Adam’s sin was death (everlasting) and when Jesus took his place he became subject to that penalty—eternal death. Jesus, as a man, then, in order to redeem man had to give up forever his *human* existence.

The Bible declares that as all of Adam’s race share by heredity in his death penalty, so they all shall, in God’s kingdom, be permitted to share in recovery from the power of the grave as they learn of and accept Christ. As Paul expressed: “*As by a man comes death, by a man also comes the resurrection of the dead; for as all in Adam die, even so shall all in Christ be made alive.*” 1Cor. 15:21-23

IMMORTALITY BROUGHT TO LIGHT

The Apostle Paul explains that the term *immortality* had no application before the resurrection of Jesus other than to his Father who alone possessed the divine nature. Our Lord received *immortality* at his resurrection as a reward for his faithful obedience “*unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God hath highly exalted him [to the promised divine nature, at his resurrection], and given him a name that is above every name [Jehovah’s name excepted].*” 1Cor. 15:27; Heb. 12:3,2; 2Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:8,9

Paul declares that Jesus “*abolished death [broke its hold on man] and brought [1] life and [2] immortality to light through the gospel.*” (2Tim. 1:10) This shows that: (1) *life*, perfect, lasting life is separate and distinct from (2) *immortality*, indestructibility.

In addition, it shows that neither of these great blessings had been disclosed or made accessible previous to the gospel.

OFFER OF EVERLASTING LIFE: PERFECT HUMANITY

During God’s Kingdom on earth, His plan of salvation for Adam’s race is to offer *everlasting life* to *all* through the precious blood of the Lamb. Adam’s race will be offered *restitution* (Acts 3:19-21) to perfect *human* life—the same life that Adam possessed before his fall from grace. Restitution in its ultimate sense will bring the restored ones not only out of the grave, but also out of their sick and dying condition.

By the close of God’s thousand-year Kingdom, all the obedient of mankind shall have attained all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by Christ. Then, armed with complete knowledge and experience, all will be fully able, as individuals, to stand the test of obedience. They will be granted *life everlasting* (not *immortal* life) here upon the earth as long as they remain obedient.

THE OFFER OF IMMORTALITY: A NEW CREATION

God purposes not only to give the world of mankind *life everlasting*, but to give the faithful followers of Jesus a higher kind of life—*immortality*, the *divine nature*. *Immortality is brought to light* for this special class only, the church, which, by God’s wonderful favor, is now being called, tested, and selected to be *joint-heirs* with Christ. This inherent life is referred to by our Lord: “*As the Father hath life in himself [immortality] so hath he given unto the Son*

that he should have life in himself [immortality]....” (John 5:26) Paul tells Christians to *seek* this gift from Christ and that they will *put on* immortality, implying that they did not already have it inherently. Rom. 2:5-7; 1Cor. 15:51-55

The hope of Christ’s church is that she will share in his glory, honor and immortality if faithful. Of her *resurrection* it is stated: “*It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption [immortality]... it is sown a natural [animal] body; it is raised a spiritual body.*” 1Cor. 15:42-44; see also Eph. 3:6; Rev. 2:10

Having removed the mixture of the Greek philosophy of the immortal soul, we can see the beauty of the Bible doctrine of the resurrection. The God that formed man in the beginning will, by His infinite power, form him again from the dust of the ground. The breath of life will be rekindled, and each human being will receive again his own mind and memory. By His mighty power, God will raise the church with immortal spiritual bodies to reign with Christ and bring this newly created world of mankind up to everlasting life. “*The Spirit [Christ] and the Bride say Come... And whosoever will [of the resurrected world of mankind], let him take the water of [everlasting] life freely.*” Rev. 22:17

