

Modern Christianity Astray From The Bible

Popular Church Tradition Explored

The Teaching of Immortal Souls Ascending to Heaven upon Death

There may be no doctrine where *Modern Christianity* has gone further astray from the Bible than the teaching that the souls of Christians depart from the body and ascend to heaven upon death. Recognizing the sensitivity of the subject, we propose that this widely held belief is not Scriptural. Although there are a few denominations today that would agree with our proposition, the vast majority of churches believe *going to heaven* is ‘the’ hope of every Christian. However, history will reveal that students of the Bible in past generations also challenged what is now a widespread belief, now common among *Modern Christianity*.

While our proposition may surprise some, it may be even more startling to realize the Bible plainly teaches the exact opposite of this popular church doctrine. The Word of God states that no one, except the Lord Jesus Christ, has gone to heaven.

We will use very little of our own words that the direct testimony of the Bible would be given free course. We invite a deep inspection of the verses we set forth, and a consideration of the context of the Scriptures to be correctly represented. We would do the same.

THE FAITHFUL DO NOT GO TO HEAVEN UPON DEATH

John 3:11-15 “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*”

- **NIV:** “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man” *John 3:13*

Acts 2:29-35 “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, *that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.* Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; *He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.* Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. *For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.*”

- **NIV:** “He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay... For David did not ascend to heaven...” *Acts 2:31-34*

The above quotations need little explanation. The Bible states that not even king David, described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), ascended into heaven after death. Jesus is the only exception.

John 8:20-22 "These words spake Jesus in the temple, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come. Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: *whither I go, ye cannot come.* Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, *Whither I go, ye cannot come.*"

John 13:31-33 "Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: *and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.*"

If Christians do not go to heaven at death, as all of the above references affirm, what is the state of the dead? This is reasonable and logical question. The answer is not left to chance, but is also plainly stated in the Bible.

THE DEAD ARE ASLEEP, NOT IN HEAVEN

Acts 13:34-37 "As concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. *For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.*"

John 11:11-14, 39-44 "These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend *Lazarus sleepeth*; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. *Howbeit Jesus spake of his death*: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, *Lazarus is dead...* Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: *for he hath been dead four days.* Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place *where the dead was laid.* And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.* Jesus saith unto them, *Loose him, and let him go.*"

1 Kings 15:7-8 "Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. *And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead.*" (ABIJAM WAS AN EVIL KING)

1 Kings 15:23-24 "The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. *And Asa slept with*

his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.” (ASA WAS A RIGHTEOUS KING)

- Whether evil or righteous, upon death these men “slept with their fathers”

1Kings 2:10 *So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.*

1Kings 11:43 *And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.*

1Kings 14:20 *Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers*

1Kings 14:31 *And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers*

1Kings 16:6 *So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah:*

1Kings 16:28 *So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria:*

1Kings 22:40 *So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.*

1Kings 22:50 *And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers*

2Kings 8:24 *And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers*

2Kings 10:35 *And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria.*

2Kings 13:9 *And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria:*

2Kings 13:13 *And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne:*

2Kings 14:16 *And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria*

2Kings 14:29 *And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel;*

2Kings 15:7 *So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers*

2Kings 15:22 *And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned*

2Kings 15:38 *And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers*

2Kings 16:20 *And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers*

2Kings 20:21 *And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned*

2Kings 21:18 *And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried*

2Kings 24:6 *So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned*

1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20, 51 “After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, *but some are fallen asleep... Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished... But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept... Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”*

2 Peter 3:4 “And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? *for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”*

Luke 8:52 “And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, *Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.”* (*Job 7:21; Psa. 13:3; Jer. 51:39-40, 57; 1Cor. 11:30*).

- Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation, wrote: “For just as one who falls asleep and reaches morning unexpectedly when he awakes, without knowing what has happened to him, so we shall suddenly rise on the last day without knowing how we have come into death and through death. We shall sleep, until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, Doctor Martin, get up! Then I shall rise in a moment and be happy with Him forever.” *Conditionalist Faith, vol. 2*

Acts 7:57-60 “Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid

down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. *And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*"

- The "spirit" is the sustaining power of God, as described in the opening verses of the Bible (Genesis 1:1-3; Psalm 104:30), and is necessary for all life. Thus, when a man dies it is referred to in Ecclesiastes 12:7—"*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*"

Job 27:3-4 "*All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.*" *(breath and spirit are often the same Hebrew word and used interchangeably. Such is required for life.)

Genesis 6:17 "*And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.*"

Joshua 11:10-11 "*And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire.*"

Psalm 146:1-4 "*Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*" (Psa 104:29)

- This is the state of the dead: "thoughts perish" and a man returns to the dust of the earth. Death is further describe elsewhere as without love, hate or envy (Ecc. 9:5-10), and a place of silence (Psa. 115:17). Created from the dust of the earth, enlightened men and women have always understood they would return to same cessation of life—

Genesis 3:19 "*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*"

Genesis 2:7 "*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.*" (NIV "man became a living being")

1 Kings 2:1-2 "*Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man*"

Joshua 23:14 "*And, behold, this day I (Joshua) am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.*"

To add strength to the teaching that Christ was the only man to ever ascend to heaven (John 3:11-15; Acts 2:29-35), the Bible declares the Lord Jesus Christ to be the first to rise from the dead.

CHRIST WAS THE FIRST TO RISE FROM THE DEAD

Colossians 1:18-19 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, *the firstborn from the dead*; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell”

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the *firstfruits of them that slept*. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 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.*”

Acts 26:22-23 “I (Paul) continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: *That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*”

Revelation 1:5-6 “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, *and the first begotten of the dead*, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Romans 8:29-30 “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, *that he might be the firstborn among many brethren*. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

It is only honest to conclude that no one who lived before Christ died and went to heaven. This means all of the faithful died and fell asleep: Abraham, David, Daniel, Job, Noah... etc.

THE RESURRECTION INVOLVES A PHYSICAL BODY

When Christ was resurrected from the grave it was his actual physical body that arose from the dead. The Bible teaches no other form of resurrection.

Luke 24:39-43 “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for *a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.”

1 Corinthians 15:35, 40-50 “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?... *There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: (NIV: “heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies”)* but the glory of the celestial is one, and the

glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, * The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” (Adam was created from the dust, thus a revival of the new man in Christ—Daniel 12:1-3)

1 Corinthians 15:51-55 “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Isaiah 26:19 “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Job 19:26 “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:”

Philippians 3:20-21 “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.”

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, * but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” * 1 Cor 15:50-55

RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT ONLY AT CHRIST'S RETURN

The commonly taught theory that when one dies they immediately go to heaven also opposes the multitude of Bible references that teach judgment will only be administered at the return of Christ to the earth.

Daniel 12:2-3 “*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise * shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*” * 1 Cor 15:40-50 Natural man also created from the dust—Gen 2:7

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 “*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*”

Luke 20:34-36 “*And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.*”

1 Timothy 4:1 “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*”

Revelation 11:16-18 “*And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*”

John 5:24-29 “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*”

John 11:23-25 “Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, *I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”

John 6:39-40 “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: *and I will raise him up at the last day.*”

Acts 17:30-32 “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because *he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness* by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.*”

REWARD OF FAITHFUL GIVEN AT CHRIST’S RETURN

If judgment does not occur until the return of Christ from heaven, then the reward of the righteous must also coincide with that same event. Again, the Bible supports this conclusion.

Colossians 3:1-4 “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and *your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*”

1 Peter 5:3-4 “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*”

2 Timothy 4:8 “Henceforth there is *laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*”

Matthew 25:31-33 “*When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*”

1 John 2:28-29 “And now, little children, abide in him; that, *when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.* If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.”

1 John 3:1-3 “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we*

know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

Revelation 22:10-12 *“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”*

1 Peter 1:3-7 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”*

Hebrews 11:32-40 *“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”*

The above quotation requires the reward for all the faithful—in every generation—to occur simultaneously at the resurrection (1Thessalonians 4:15). The doctrine of the resurrection was the teaching of the apostles:

- Acts 4:2 *“Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”*
- Acts 17:18 *“Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”*
- Acts 23:6 *“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”*

- Acts 24:14-15 **“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”**
- Acts 24:21 **“Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.”**
- 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 **“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”**
- Philippians 3:10-11 **“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”**
- 2 Timothy 2:15-18 **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”**
- Revelation 20:6 **“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”**

We have intentionally used very few of our own words so the clarity of the multitude of Bible references we have presented can speak loudly. The fact that Jesus is the only man who has ever ascended into heaven is also rooted in a very important Bible principle.

On the Day of Atonement, recorded in Leviticus 16, only one man—the high priest—entered into the Most Holy place of the Tabernacle (one time a year) to take away the sins of the people. In the Book of Hebrews the apostle says this foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ (calling them “figures” or types: Hebrews 9:9, 24; 10:1). Notice how this coincides with all of the doctrines we have put forth:

Hebrews 9:24-28 “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation

of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, *but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation*"

If all men entered into heaven—the *holy place*—it would collapse the “figure” or foreshadow in the Law of Moses on the Day of Atonement. Like the high priest in the Law of Moses, Jesus Christ is in heaven as a “mediator” between God and man (1Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8; 9:15; 12:24).

IMMORTAL SOUL

Genesis 3:2-4 “And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die*"

While some will admit that the body goes into the grave, they claim the “immortal soul” continues to live and ascends to heaven upon death. This teaching is objectionable to students of the Bible, who demand only direct instruction from the Word of God. For example, the phrase “immortal soul” never appears in the Bible. In fact, those two words do not even appear together in the same verse.

It is also imperative to recognize that the idea of an immortal soul or spirit ascending to heaven is not consistent with the pattern of Scripture. Every resurrection in the Bible involves a physical body (1Kings 17:17-22; 2Kings 4:32-35; 13:20-21; Luke 7:11-15; 8:41-55; Matthew 27:50-53; John 11:1-44; Acts 9:36-41; 20:9-10). There are no exceptions.

Christ himself displayed the marks of his crucifixion to the disciples, proving the same body put to death was resurrected (Luke 24:39). Later, he was physically taken up from their midst and into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

Genesis 3:17-19 “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, *till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*”

Genesis 3:22-24 “And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

From the very beginning of the Bible we find that because of sin man is sent forth from the garden that he would not “live forever.” Thus, the terms of eternal life are conditional.

Immortality is a thing that we must “seek” (Rom. 2:7) and “put on” as a changed nature at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53-54). It is not inherent to man. When we use words or phrases that are not found in the Bible—such as “*immortal soul*”—it leads to confusion and error.

1 Peter 4:11 “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”

1 Corinthians 2:4 “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”

1 Corinthians 2:13 “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

1 Thessalonians 2:4-5 “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness”

The concept of the immortality of the soul dates back to pagan beliefs and was used predominantly by such Greek philosophers as Socrates and Plato. Socrates drank hemlock to release his soul to be with the gods. Plato is well-known for his writing entitled “*Phaedo*” or “*On the Immortality of the Soul*”—

- **Encyclopedia Americana (Article on Immortality): “The views of the Greeks, and especially the views of Plato, have had a profound and incalculable influence on Christian thought.”—Vol. 14**

In the Bible the word *soul* simply means *a body of life with its various functions*. A simple overview of the application of “soul” in Scripture will allow the Bible to become its own dictionary in defining the meaning of the word—

Souls Born—

“(Zilpah) bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls”—Gen. 46:18

“the sons of Joseph... born unto him in Egypt, were two souls”—Gen. 46:27

“all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls”—Exo. 1:5

Souls are People—

“In the days of Noah... eight souls are saved by water”—1Pet. 3:20

“all in the ship were threescore and sixteen souls”—Acts 27:37

Souls Sin—

“If a soul shall sin through ignorance”—Lev. 4:2

“for the sin of my soul”—Mic. 6:7

“the soul that sinneth it shall die”—Eze. 18:4

Souls Die—

“the soul that sinneth it shall die”—Eze. 18:20

“he spareth not their soul from death”—Psa. 78:50

“my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death”—Mat. 26:38

“shall save a soul from death”—Jam. 5:20

“none can keep alive his own soul”—Psa. 22:29
“he hath poured out his soul unto death”—Isa. 53:12

Souls Destroyed—

”they smote all the souls... with the edge of the sword”—Jos. 11:11
“every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed”—Acts 3:23
“able to destroy both soul and body”—Mat. 10:28

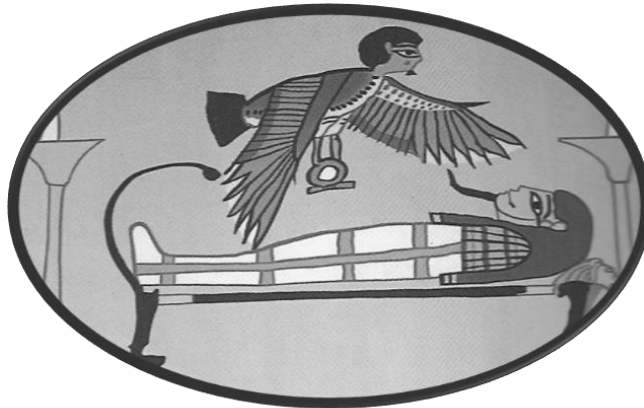
- **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:** “SOUL has various shades of meaning in the Old Testament, which may be summarized as follows: soul, living, being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion. Nephesh or Soul can only denote the individual life with a material organization or body.”

It is worthy to note the Hebrew word translated “soul” (*nephesh*) is also translated “dead” (Lev 19:28, 21:1 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:11), and even “dead body” (Num 9:6-10; Hag 2:13). Any reputable Bible concordance will support this conclusion.

- **Parkhurst’s Hebrew Lexicon** notes: “As a noun, *nephesh* hath been supposed to signify the spiritual part of a man, or what we commonly call his soul. I must, for myself, confess that I can find no passage where it hath undoubtedly this meaning.”
- The **Catholic** pamphlet **Some Bible Beliefs Have To Be Wrong** admits: “Thus, whereas the Bible does not, it is true, speak of the immortality of the human soul—a concept which it does not have in our sense of the word—it does speak of the immortality of the human person. And in our language, this means the immortality of the human soul.” *page 10*

Plato, drawing on the words of his teacher Socrates, considered the soul as the essence of a person. The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that the soul was the core essence of a being. Like Plato’s *Phaedo*, Aristotle wrote *De Anima*, or “*On the Soul*.”

LIFE AFTER DEATH: Egypt. The *ba*, or personality of the dead person hovers over the mummy. It appears as a bird. Its job is to help the dead body rejoin its spirit, or *ka*, so it can live in the next world—*The Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, pg. 100



IMMORTAL SOUL IN POPULAR CHURCH TEACHING

With pagan philosophy making its way into church teaching, a great controversy arose concerning the immortality of the soul. In fact, the Catholic Church, with its teaching of “purgatory,” and selling of “indulgences”—*non-Biblical words*—emphasized the doctrine of the immortal soul and stated that all who denied such were “heretics.” The Catholic practice of selling indulgences brought the subject of the *immortal soul* to the forefront for Bible students everywhere.

- To combat the growing trend of those protesting Catholic theology—largely borrowed from pagan worship—**Pope Leo X, December 19, 1513** issued a Papal Bull (*Apostolici Regimis*) condemning all who challenged the church teaching concerning the immortality of the soul—**“we do condemn and reprobate all who assert that the intelligent soul is mortal.”** The Bull also decreed: **“all who adhere to the like erroneous assertions shall be shunned and punished as heretics.”** (*H. J. Schroeder, Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils, 1937, pp. 483, 487*).

Among other things, the doctrine of Purgatory and the immortal soul as taught by the Catholic clergy helped ignite the Protestant Reformation. This was brought to a head by the selling of indulgences by the Catholic clergy as a means to generate money for the building of St. Peter’s in Rome. History is easily accessed demonstrating those who challenged the teaching of the “immortal soul” in past generations.

IMMORTAL SOUL AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

In response to Catholic teaching and the selling of indulgences, on **October 31, 1517 Martin Luther** nailed his famous **95 Theses** on the church door in Wittenberg. Among several things, Luther condemned the selling of indulgences for the salvation of souls and ridiculed the church’s scheme to generate money and power.

In his **1520** published **Defence of 41** of his propositions, **Martin Luther** stated the following (*Proposition 27*)—

- **“I permit the Pope to establish articles of faith for himself and for his own faithful—such are: That the bread and wine are transubstantiated in the sacrament; that the essence of God neither generates nor is generated; that the soul is the substantial form of the human body; that he (the pope) is emperor of the world and king of heaven, and earthly god; that the soul is immortal; and all these endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals—in order that such as his faith is, such may be his gospel, such also his faithful, and such his church...”**—Martin Luther, Article 27, Weimar edition of Luther’s Works, vol. 7, pp. 131, 132 (Dec. 1, 1520)
- **Martin Luther (1493-1546) wrote: “A man who lies asleep is much like one who is dead. Therefore the ancient sages said, ‘Sleep is the brother of Death.’ So, also, death and life are pictured and signified in the revolutions and transformations of day and night, and of all creatures. Sleep is verily a death, and equally death is a**

sleep. Our death is nothing but a night's sleep. In sleep all weariness passes away, and we rise again in the morning joyous, fresh and strong. So at the last day shall we arise from our graves as if we had only slept a night, be fresh and strong, bathe our eyes, and all weakness, corruption, and dishonour shall vanish from us forever"—*Tischreden, Vol. 1, page 193*

William Tyndale (1484-1536), who translated the Bible into English from the original Hebrew and Greek, wrote—

- “The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly-minded pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to stablish it.”—William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (Parker's 1850 reprint, bk. 4, ch. 4, pp. 180-181)
- “And ye, in putting them (the souls) in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection.... And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be) And then what cause is there of the resurrection?”—William Tyndale (pp. 180, above)

Tyndale was apprehended by the Catholic authorities and ultimately strangled and burned at the stake. Luther spent his life on the run, fearing for his life from the Catholic powers.

John Frith (1503-1533), an associate of Tyndale, wrote—

- “Notwithstanding, let me grant it him that some are already in hell and some in heaven, which thing he shall never be able to prove by the Scriptures, yea, and which plainly destroy the resurrection, and taketh away the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul do prove that we shall rise...and as touching this point where they rest, I dare be bold to say that they are in the hand of God” *An Answer to John Fisher, A Disputacyon of Purgatorie* (1530)

HELL AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED

The *modern Christian* concept of hell is dependent upon the false teaching of the immortality of the soul. Furthermore, the doctrine of “purgatory” advanced by the Catholic Church has only clouded the Biblical teaching of death.

Although many Bible students have concluded the word “hell” is generally misrepresented by the Authorized Version (KJV), we provide an example by quoting an earlier reference—

Acts 2:25-36 “For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: *Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* Thou hast made known

to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; *He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.* This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

The New International Version (NIV) translates Acts 2:27—“because you will not abandon me to *the grave*, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

The NIV translates Acts 2:31, “he was not abandoned to *the grave*.”

- The above reference proves two things: the *soul* was the physical body of Christ, and Jesus was physically *resurrected* from *the grave*. Accordingly, the NIV and other translations have “hell” correctly translated as “the grave.” In fact, the same word translated “hell” (Greek *hades*) in the above reference is also translated “grave” in the following:

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; *We shall not all sleep*, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave (hades), where is thy victory?*”—1 Corinthians 15:50-55.

The word commonly translated “hell” in the King James Version of the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *sheol*. The word is translated both “hell” and “grave” throughout the Bible, as any reputable Concordance will show. We provide the example below—

Isaiah 14:11 “Thy pomp is brought down to *the grave (sheol)*, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.”

Isaiah 14:15 “Yet thou shalt be brought down to *hell (sheol)*, to the sides of the pit.”

NIV translates, “brought down to *the grave*” (Isa. 14:15)

In both verses the Hebrew word *sheol* is translated two different ways; “the grave” (v 11) and “hell” (v15). The original Hebrew meaning of *sheol* represents “an unseen state, pit or grave.” The reference below is a clear example of the meaning of this word—

Jonah 1:17-2:2 “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God *out of the fish's belly*, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; *out of the belly of hell* cried I, and thou heardest my voice.”

NIV—“From the depths of *the grave* I called for help, and you listened to my cry” (Jonah 2:2)

Obviously Jonah was not in a fiery torment for wicked souls, but in “an unseen” place; that is, the belly of a fish, which is called “the belly of hell” (*sheol*). This very event was a foreshadow of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 12:40 “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”

It is true, that some denominations have accurately recognized the true meaning of the word “hell” over the past century and have abandoned their former position.

There is another word in the New Testament translated “hell,” which is borne from references in the Old Testament, and has caused much confusion among *modern Christianity*. The Greek word *Gehenna* is often referred to in the context of *hell fire*. *Gehenna* is known as the Valley of Hinnom in the Old Testament. It was a place where idolatrous sacrifices—*especially human*—took place. Later it became a place where garbage was dumped, criminals were burned, and dead animals were discarded.

Jeremiah 32:35 “And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the *Valley of the son of Hinnom*, to cause their sons and their daughters to *pass through the fire* unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

Jeremiah 7:30-31 “For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the LORD: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the *Valley of the son of Hinnom*, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.”

2 Kings 17:16-17 “And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. *And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire*, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.” (2Kings 16:3-4)

- FUNK AND WAGNALLS ENCYCLOPEDIA, page 3926—“*Gehenna* (Gr. *Geena*; Heb. *Ge Hinnom*), the *Valley of Hinnom* near Jerusalem where Solomon built ‘an high place’ for Moloch, according to 1Kings 11:70. Because some of the Israelites are supposed to have sacrificed their children to Moloch there, the valley came to be regarded as a place of abomination. In a later period it was made a place for dumping refuse, and perpetual fires were maintained to prevent pestilence. *Consequently, in the New Testament Gehenna became synonymous with hell.*”
- ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA, Vol. 14—“*Much confusion and misunderstanding has been caused through the early translators of the Bible persistently rendering the Hebrew ‘sheol’ and the Greek ‘hades’ and ‘Gehenna’ by the word ‘hell.’* The simple

transliteration of these words by the translators of the Revised Edition of the Bible has not sufficed to appreciably clear up this confusion and misconception.”

The literal place of *Gehenna* is often used to represent a place of judgment in Scripture.

Matthew 5:21-22 “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be *in danger of the judgment*: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be *in danger of the judgment*: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be *in danger of hell fire (GeHenna)*.”

A continued reading of this chapter (23-26) will disclose that Christ was using a comparison between offenders being punished by governmental authorities and those who will be punished by the Lord at the Judgment Seat. Roman authorities would cast criminals into Gehenna, and therefore by using the comparison, Jesus emphasized the serious judgment against those who hated their brethren without a cause.

Mark 9:43-44 “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go *into hell, into the fire (Gehenna) that never shall be quenched*: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”

Again, the Lord is not using literal language—i.e. the physical dismemberment of one’s hand—but is exhorting us to remove the cause of stumbling in our lives. Likewise, the reference to *hell fire* is not to be taken literally. Rather, the lesson is that temporary struggles are but minor when compared to eternal life. The fact that this reference emphasizes “judgment” is significant, for “fire” is used in this application throughout the Bible (see: Zep. 3:8; Lam. 2:3-4; Nah. 1:1-6; Isa. 31:9...etc.). Egypt, for example, is styled the “iron furnace,” because it represented a place of oppression (Deu. 4:20; 1Kin. 8:51; Jer. 11:4).

Jude 7 “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*.”

Many familiar with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah will know it was completely destroyed by fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24). However, the two cities are not still burning with fire today. Therefore, we are to understand the “judgment” had “eternal” consequences, not that the literal “fire” was to go on perpetually. The word “eternal” is a result, not a process.

Hebrews 6:1-2 “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, *and of eternal judgment*.”

Here is another example of a result, not a perpetual process. Obviously this verse does not mean that “judgment” of the saints is to take place through eternity. It is one single judgment with permanent consequences. The below reference is another example—

Hebrews 9:11-12 “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, *having obtained eternal redemption for us.*”

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 “Who shall be *punished with everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) *in that day.*”

The above reference provides further evidence that we must reason within the Bible’s own language, allowing the Word of God to interpret itself. It is unwise to apply modern vernacular or definitions to Scriptural terms. It is “destruction” and not torment that will be the fate of those rejected at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This judgment will have “everlasting” consequences. This is why “fire,” with its consuming and complete effects of annihilation represents “everlasting” consequences.

Jeremiah 7:20 “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; *and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.*”

The anger of God toward His rebellious people is styled “fury” that “shall burn” and “not be quenched.” This reference, as well as the one below certainly represents metaphorical language, not a literal event. See Mark 9:43-48.

Jeremiah 17:27 “But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; *then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.*”

To help solidify this principle of the Scriptural application of metaphors, we supply the reference below—

Matthew 11:20-24 “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *at the day of judgment*, than for you. And thou, *Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell (hades)*: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom *in the day of judgment*, than for thee.”

Obviously Capernaum was never literally in “heaven,” nor was it literally cast into “hell.” Again, the context has to do with “judgment.” By understanding this fundamental Bible method of instruction seemingly difficult references come into proper focus. The Book of Revelation is an excellent example of this:

Revelation 1:1 “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and *signified* it by his angel unto his servant John”

The word “signified” means to *give by symbol*, as represented by alternate translations. It is generally acknowledged that the Book of Revelation employs significant “symbolic” language. We must remember this when we read certain verses—

Revelation 14:9-11 “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be *tormented with fire and brimstone* in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

To begin to apply a proper interpretation of this section of Scripture the student of the Word must, in justice to God and himself, identify: the work of the third angel; the worship of the beast and his image; and the mark in the forehead and hand. To apply this verse literally would result in the Lamb and his holy angels being “in hell” with the rejected; for this is said to take place in their “presence.” In fact, Revelation 9:17 states that fire and brimstone issue forth from the mouth of the horse! Again, we suggest the implication is “judgment,” in keeping with the context of both the chapters we have noted (Rev. 14 and 9).

Revelation 20:12-15 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were *judged* out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were *judged* every man according to their works. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.* This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

To apply this verse literally would mean “hell”—a supposed place of fiery torments for rebellious souls—is cast into “the lake of fire.” How can this be, since *hell* “IS” considered “the lake of fire,” according to popular theology? To answer this and other questions, we hope we have provided the basis for reasoning regarding this and other references to the word “hell.” It is not our intent to address every reference where the word “hell” appears, but simply provide the foundation for sound Bible interpretation.

DIFFICULT REFERENCES

The *modern Christian* concept of souls going to heaven at death is generally based upon a few Bible references there appear to support the teaching. An honest reader of the Word of God will deal with them directly, and be genuine with the conclusion of each reference.

Luke 23:42-43 “And he (thief on the cross) said unto Jesus, Lord, *remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou *be with me in paradise.*”

1. It is important to distinctly note this reference never mentions “souls” or “heaven.” So, from the outset we must be willing to admit the popular teaching of this verse is based on preconceived ideas, which are not Biblical.
2. The thief asked to be remembered by the Lord when he came in his “kingdom,” implying a future event. In proper context the Bible states the resurrection and reward of the faithful will coincide with the coming of Christ to establish his kingdom. **2Timothy 4:1 “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom...(v 8) Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”** The subject of “the Kingdom” is considered in a separate study.
3. Other translations, such as Bullinger and Rotherham, place the comma after the word “today,” — “to thee I say this day” — implying declaration was made that day, not the reward. This is the only responsible conclusion, since Jesus himself would go into the grave for “three days” before he would be resurrected, then ascend to heaven “forty days” later (Acts 1:3).
4. “Paradise” is the same word Greek word appearing in the Book of Revelation: **Revelation 2:7 “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”** There is little dispute this refers back to the initial creation recorded in Genesis 2:8-9, which relates to the earth not heaven. Again, the subject of “the Kingdom” and inheritance of “the earth” is considered in a separate study.

Luke 16:20-21 “And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores”

1. The previous parable begins in similar language, “there was a certain rich man, which had a steward...” (v 1). The issue was “the Pharisees, who were covetous” (v 14). It is often overlooked that this was a parable. While the record does not state specifically that it was a “parable,” it must be admitted that only 11 of the 24 recorded in Luke are directly prefaced with the language that they are “parables.” Only by the parabolic mode did Jesus teach (Mark 4:34), and often simply stated that the “kingdom” of God was “like unto...” (Matthew 13:1-58).
2. It is quite important to recognize that this and other parables were directed at the false positions of the Pharisees (Matthew 21:45; Luke 20:19). Christ warned in a parable concerning the “leaven” of bread: “beware” of the “doctrine of the Pharisees” (Matthew 16:11-12). They followed “tradition” rather than Scriptures (Mark 7:1-8). The teaching of the Pharisees is well recorded by *Josephus* in his discourse on *Hades*, where he states in direct terms the teaching of the Pharisees was to be received into eternal bliss, which they called “the bosom of Abraham.”
3. That this is a parable is evident by the fact that Abraham himself is dead and has not yet received any reward (Hebrews 11:8, 13, 39-40; Genesis 25:8; Joshua 24:2). And once again, this account never mentions “souls” or disembodied spirits, but rather speaks of physical members of the body: eyes, finger, and tongue v.23-24).

2 Corinthians 5:8 “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

1. Recognizing we are repeating the point, it is vital to remember the context of this chapter speaks nothing of so-called “immortal souls” ascending to heaven. The use of this verse to support such a doctrine is based upon pre-conceived ideas that are foreign to Bible language.
2. This verse is also often misquoted as “*to be absent from the body IS to be present with the Lord.*” Over and over again, the apostle Paul taught a period of “sleep” before resurrection to judgment and admission into life eternal (1Corinthians 15:1-55; 1Thessalonians 4:13-14; 2Timothy 4:1-8; 2Corinthians 4:14).
3. The importance of the first point cannot be stressed enough, because this chapter teaches the exact opposite of supposed disembodied “souls.” In fact, verse 10 of this very chapter states: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.” Note the word “his” is italicized, meaning it is not in the original Greek. All will receive the things “done in body” ...etc. In other words, it is a physical, bodily judgment.
4. The context is about the change from “mortality” (v 4), called our “earthly house” (v 1) in which we “groan” (v 2), desiring to be “clothed” with immortality, or our “house which is from heaven” (v 2). This will happen, says Paul, when we are “present with the Lord” (v 8), which will occur at his return for “judgment” (v 10). We have previously referenced the numerous Bible quotes that prove this will only take place at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and resurrection. In harmony with this teaching, Paul taught: “When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” Colossians 3:4.
5. The apostle represents “mortality” as a condition wherein we “groan” (v 2, 4). This is consistent with his words in Romans 8:23, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.” 1Corinthians 15:44 refers to both a “natural body” and a “spiritual body.”

Although there may be other references cited in efforts to prove the concept of the immortal soul, we sincerely hope we have demonstrated that such verses are often misquoted and based upon pre-conceived ideas that are not Biblical. The apostle Peter warned:

2 Peter 3:15-18 “And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.”