

### WHAT HAPPENS AT DEATH

#### Sharing

1. Are you fearful of dying? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
  - Explain: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you lost a loved one or a very close friend to death? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No
  - Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever attended a funeral? What did the pastor, rabbi or priest say had become of the deceased upon taking their final breath?
  - Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Studying

4. Around our world, approximately 250,000 people die each day. That's 91,000,000 people each year. Furthermore, each person who is now alive on this earth, also will die (unless Jesus comes first!). The question important to everyone is, 'What happens when we die?'
5. The subject of death is often misunderstood, even by Christians. The popular belief that we go to heaven when we die descended from paganism and has no Biblical basis.
6. A recent poll in the United States showed that an overwhelming majority, 85%, of people were confident that they would go to heaven when they died. Obviously, Satan was instrumental in orchestrating a worldwide belief in immortality of the soul. He began in the Garden of Eden with a lie. He told Eve to go ahead and eat the fruit and she would not die as God had said! People are still believing the lie—that their soul is immortal and they will never die.
7. Satan kept the belief alive through every false system of worship he could devise among men. Belief in an "immortal soul" in some form or another was commonplace among heathen nations long prior to Christianity. The pagan Greek and Roman philosophers speculated about the "soul," as did ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, and Chinese.

Belief in the immortality of the soul was an important aspect of ancient teachings by the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. 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, Classics Club edition, 1969, p. 93).

Socrates explained that the immortal soul, once freed from the body, is rewarded according to good deeds or punished for evil. Socrates lived 470-399 **B.C.**, **so his view of the soul predated Christianity.**

Plato (428-348 **B.C.**) saw man's existence as divided into the material and spiritual 'ideal' realms. In Plato's reasoning, man is meant to attain goodness and return to the ideal through the experiences of the **transmigration of the soul.** So, these worldly, secular philosophers expounded on the idea of the immortal soul, in opposition to the teachings of God's Word.

8. How the doctrine of the immortal soul entered the Christian church.

Origen (185-254) was a Christian scholar, theologian, distinguished writer and was an admirer of Plato. He based his belief in the immortality of the soul on Plato's philosophy that, at death, the soul would depart to an everlasting reward or everlasting eternal fire and punishment. (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, 1995, p. 240). Satan used Origen's writings to bring the Christian church's emerging doctrines into opposition to the truth of God.

Later Augustine (354-430) (a contemporary of Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin for the church) also was heavily influenced by Plato's philosophies. Satan used Augustine's writings about the immortality of the soul to discredit God's truth and profoundly influence the formation of early church doctrines. For Augustine death meant the destruction of the body, but the conscious soul would continue to live in either a blissful state with God or an agonizing state of separation from God. (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1995, p. 245.)

The influence of pagan philosophers Plato and Socrates on the church fathers, Origen and Augustine, were diabolical and designed to mislead and confuse people until Jesus comes. Socrates and Plato were frequently regarded as divinely inspired pre-Christian saints ..." (1991, p. 103). So the early church's doctrines reflected non-Biblical belief in immortality of the soul. Here are some dates when church councils declared dogmas (required beliefs for salvation) reflecting the belief in immortality of the soul:

- In 310 AD prayers for the dead were formally adopted by the church.
- In 375 AD veneration of angels and dead saints began.
- In 432 the worship of Mary was instituted
- In 593 the doctrine of purgatory was adopted.
- In 993 the canonization of dead saints was introduced.

Centuries later Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) crystallized the doctrine that the soul is a conscious intellect and cannot be destroyed and the doctrine was adopted by the church.

9. A few centuries later the leaders of the Protestant Reformation generally accepted these traditional views, so the immortality of the soul doctrine became entrenched in traditional Protestant teaching. Today, many good Christians firmly believe in immortality of the soul—totally ignorant of the origin of their belief.
10. Here is a summary of the pagan belief: At death, the soul immediately goes to heaven to be in the presence of the Lord. The body is placed in the grave and decomposes. At the rapture the souls who have gone to heaven, now return with Jesus so that their souls may be reunited with their now glorified, resurrected bodies. At the same time, those who are alive when Christ returns are simply transformed into their glorified bodies.
11. The immortality of the soul is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ who called death a 'sleep.' There was a home in Bethany a couple miles from Jerusalem that Jesus often visited. It was the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha. One day Jesus and His disciples received an urgent message that Lazarus was very sick. Two days later, Jesus started for the home of His friends saying to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." John 11:11.
- The disciples were pleased (John 11:12) saying that if he sleeps he will awaken and be well.
  - Read John 11:14 "Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." When Jesus arrived in Bethany Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (John 11:17). When Jesus met Martha He told her that her brother would rise again. Martha replied, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. "Then Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..." John 11:24-26.

- Jesus subsequently raised Lazarus from the dead. Had Lazarus already gone to heaven at death, wouldn't it have been terrible of Jesus to call him back into this world of sin only to eventually die again!
12. Jesus, Himself, called death a '**sleep**.' Does a dead person have any conscious thoughts?
- Read Psalm 115:17 "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence."
  - Read Psalm 146:4 "His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish."
  - Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13 "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."
  - Read Daniel 12:2 "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."
13. Does it really matter if we believe that we go to heaven when we die (immortality of the soul) or that we sleep until we are awakened in the resurrection by the second coming of Jesus (soul sleep)?
14. Let's contrast the two beliefs about death and consider their impact on true believers of God's Word:
- **Immortality:** If saved, conscious state forever; doomed to forever observing from afar all the pain and suffering of loved ones left behind on earth but being unable to do anything about it—this would make heaven unbearable.
  - **Immortality:** If lost, conscious state forever in an ever-burning hell fire as punishment.
  - **Immortality:** The "authority" for this belief is myth, superstition, fables, stories of alleged death-bed visions or conversations with 'departed souls', mysticism, ancient pagan religions, ancient pagan philosophers and writings of early church fathers.
  - **Mortal:** Saved or lost, unconscious state until the resurrection; Time between death and the resurrection passes as time does during sleep. We are unaware of events around us until we are awakened when Jesus comes.
  - **Mortal:** Saved, or lost, we 'sleep' unmindful of what is passing on this earth; there is no ever-burning hell fire into which the wicked are plunged. Final rewards for people are reserved until the judgment.
  - **Mortal:** The "authority" for this belief is the written Word of God.
15. What act of God made man a living soul?
- Read 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* (Heb. *nephesh*). The living soul was not put into the man; the breath of life was put into him. The man, formed of the earth, is a combination of **body plus breath**.
  - Others besides man had the breath of life: Genesis 1:21 "And God created great whales, and every *living creature* (Heb. *nephesh*) that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly."
16. What happens to the breath or spirit when a person dies?
- Read Ecclesiastes 12:7 "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit (Heb. *ruach*) shall return unto God who gave it." (*ruach* is translated interchangeably with the word spirit in the Old Testament.)
  - If breath plus a body equals a living soul then a body minus the breath equals death.
  - Read Psalm 104:29,30 "You take their breath, they die and return to their dust."

- Read Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul who sins shall die.” This makes it very clear that souls (body plus breath) DO die.
17. The most powerful words of all come from Jesus Himself: “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; **and I will raise him up at the last day**” (John 6:40). Notice that Jesus made no mention of taking us to heaven when we die!
18. God alone has immortality!
- Read 1 Timothy 6:16 “Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, or can see, to who be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”
19. The only way to receive immortality is through Jesus Christ and we will receive immortality when He comes.
- John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
  - Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; at the last trumpet. 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, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”
20. What about the thief on the cross; didn’t he go to heaven with Jesus when he died? You will recall that the thief turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Luke 23:42-43.
- Punctuation marks weren’t added to the Bible for several centuries after it was written. The comma was misplaced to accommodate Jerome’s belief of immortality of the soul in his Latin translation.
  - Christ wasn’t in heaven that day. He was crucified on Friday, rested in the tomb on the Sabbath and arose early on the first day of the week where He was met by Mary who apparently wanted to hug Him. But Jesus said, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.” John 20:17
  - This text should rightly read, “I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” Luke 23:43.
21. The Bible tells us that God will put an end to death and to sin. He can do this because He holds the keys to hades and death. Everything, even death, is under God’s control.
- Read Revelation 20:14 “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”
  - Read Revelation 1:17 “. . . I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen! And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”
22. Jesus told His disciples that all would be raised from the grave.
- Read John 5:28,29 “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.”
  - If people went to either heaven or hell at death, there would be no need for the resurrection of either the righteous or unrighteous.
  - Read Revelation 22:12 “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to give to every one according to his works.”
  - When we die, we sleep in the grave and rest from our labors and troubles until Jesus comes to resurrect us and reunite us with all of those who have accepted His sacrifice on their behalf.

## Applying this lesson

23. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul was pagan in origin and has no Scriptural basis.
- After studying this lesson I clearly understand the origin of the belief in immortality of the soul.
  - A check mark at left indicates that I will no longer believe this false doctrine.
24. The Hebrew word *nephesh* is used interchangeably and synonymously for both “breath” and “spirit.”
- I understand that I may translate Ecclesiastes 12:7 as “The breath will return to God who gave it.”
  - A check mark at left indicates that I understand that a body without breath is dead; there is no ‘living soul’ that goes somewhere into a nether world.
25. This lesson makes it crystal clear that Jesus called death a ‘sleep’ and that when we die we have no conscious thoughts. Our next conscious thought will be when Jesus comes and resurrects us.
- I understand that the righteous dead will ‘sleep’ without knowledge of passing time and will be raised when Jesus comes.
  - A check mark at left indicates that I accept the Biblical teaching that dead people know nothing, nor will they know anything until the resurrection.