

Biblical Teaching on the Existence of the Soul

By Malcolm H. Watts

1. At creation, God wrought a special work of creation on man. God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (Gen 2:7). It is literally 'the breath of lives' since man was apparently blessed with something more than animal life. He was made, as Genesis chapter 1 tells us, 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:26,27), and since God is a 'Spirit' (Jn 4:24), this creative act involved the imparting of a spirit, or a soul.

2. Although the word translated 'living soul' can refer to mere animal life, it is also used to denote the spiritual part of man e.g. 'If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if

thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul' (Deut 4:29); 'Hannah answered and said, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit...(I) have poured out my soul before the Lord' (1 Sam 1:15). When used to describe man's higher spiritual nature, it is said to be capable of understanding (Ps 139:14 - 'That my soul knoweth right well'), love (Song 1:7 - 'O thou whom my soul loveth'), and purpose (Ps 77:2 - 'My soul refused to be comforted').

3. The soul, in this higher sense, is the distinguishing feature of man: 'There is a spirit in man'(Job 32:8). Man is composed of two elements: body and soul. 'Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Micah 6:7); 'Fear not them which

kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' (Mt 10:28); 'Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's' (1 Cor 6:20).

4. There have always been those, like the Sadducees, who have denied the

goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?' (Eccles 3:21). Something in man 'departs' at death (Gen 35:18; 1 Kings 17:22; 2 Tim 4:6). What is it? It is the soul or spirit: 'They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus

“At creation, God wrought a special work... man became a living soul ”

existence of the human spirit (Acts 23:8,9). Scripture clearly teaches, however, that all men have spirits. Man's soul, or spirit, is different in nature from his body: 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have'(Lk 24:39). God issues special instructions concerning the spirit (Deut 4:9): the spirit has its own needs (Ps 119:20) and can receive suitable comforts (Ps 116:7). As a result, even if the body is failing, it can be in a blessed state of well-being: 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day' (2 Cor 4:16).

5. At death, the soul or spirit leaves the body. 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it' (Eccles 12:7). Once again, we are confronted with the difference between man and beast. The spirit or life of the beast perishes with its body, but this is not true of man's soul. 'Who knoweth the spirit of man that

receive my spirit' (Acts 7:59; cf Ps 49:15;73:24).

6. The soul is able to live outside the body. Our Lord pointed that out when he drew attention to the fact that God is called 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' years after these patriarchs had died. This, he said, showed that they themselves had survived death, 'for he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him' (Lk 20:38). The apostle Paul emphasizes the same truth when he writes: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ...died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep (that is, whether we are alive or dead), we should live together with him' (1 Thess 5:10). After death the body is said to 'sleep' because it 'rests' in the grave (Matt 27:52; Jn 11:11-14; Acts 13:36), but the soul is very much alive. It is fully conscious and active: 'Blessed (or happy) are the dead which die in the Lord

from henceforth' (Rev 14:13). Moses, who died and was buried in the land of Moab (Deut 34:5,6) appeared in soul on the Mount of Transfiguration and spoke with the Lord Jesus (Lk 9:30,31). The dying thief was told to anticipate entering Paradise (another name for heaven, 2 Cor 12:2,4) the very day in which he was dying. 'Today', Jesus said, 'thou shalt be with me in Paradise' (Lk 23:43. See also: 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21,23).

7. Believers' souls are perfected at death and remain in that state of perfection until the Second Coming (Heb 12:23 - 'the spirits of just -or justified men- made perfect'). Then, when Christ returns, he will bring with him the souls of those who have died - 'them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him'; and he will raise their bodies from their graves - 'the dead in Christ shall rise first'. Our souls being re-united with our bodies, 'we shall ever be with the Lord' (1 Thess 4:14, 16, 17).