

Do You Have an Immortal Soul?

By Eric Snow

Are we humans naturally immortal? Will we live forever, whether it be in heaven or hell? Do the dead even go to heaven or hell right at death? Or rather, is immortality conditional upon continued faith in and obedience to God? What does the Bible teach about where the dead go after they die? When the Bible's text is carefully examined, without reading preconceived ideas or interpretations into it, it reveals that the dead presently aren't alive in heaven or hell, but they remain unconscious until the day they are resurrected. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10 clearly teach that the dead aren't conscious: "For the living know that they will die: But the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might: For there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going." Therefore, nobody goes to heaven or hell at death, but each person lies unconscious in the common grave of humanity until his or her resurrection, excepting for those few Christians translated or "born again" (John 3:5-8) at the first resurrection when Jesus returns (I Cor. 15:45-55; I Thess. 4:14-17).

The Bible Teaches The Doctrine of Conditional Immortality

The technical name for this doctrine is "conditional immortality." People only have eternal life conditionally upon obeying and having faith in God and Jesus as their Savior. According to this teaching, the soul doesn't separate from the body's continued life. The "soul" requires for its continued existence a "body" (the physical, biological organism) and a "spirit" (the life force animating the flesh that God breathed into Adam when creating him, Genesis 2:7). Similarly, a light bulb needs both a functioning filament within a glass (its "body") and electricity flowing through it (its "spirit") to give light from being a functioning whole, i.e., like a "soul." So when the body dies, and the spirit/life force leaves, the soul dies or ceases to exist. Notice Ezekiel 18:4 and 20. Both say, "The soul that sins shall die." Now, after seeing such a text, should we devise/invent a definition for "death" for the "soul" that doesn't refer to its ceasing to be conscious? The "separation from God" interpretation of such texts is a (suddenly invented) definition for "death" that's been read into them because people have assumed the truth of the traditional teaching about the immortality of the soul. So people only have eternal life conditional upon obeying God, and that the unsaved will have no consciousness until their resurrection.

If the word translated "soul," "nephesh" in Hebrew, is examined generally by how it is used elsewhere in the Old Testament, it can't refer to an immortal soul that separates from the body and has continued consciousness. This word does appear in Eze. 18:4. But it also refers to a dead body in Num. 9:6-10 several times and to animals in Genesis 1:21, 24. So when the body dies, nothing conscious leaves the body and goes to heaven or hell then. The "soul" then ceases to exist until the resurrection, when the spirit of man is reunited with the physical body God has just made by resurrecting it. But this "spirit in man" (I Cor. 2:11; Job 32:8) isn't conscious when separate from the body. It records the personality and character of the person who died, but it can't think when not connected to the body. Notice, by the way, how we have a "spirit," a "soul," and a "body." An advocate of the immortal/eternal soul doctrine really should choose between "spirit" and "soul," and not inadvertently assert humans have two immortal parts!

The Dead Aren't Conscious, but "Sleep" in the Grave

Since people only have eternal life conditionally upon having faith in and obeying God, the unsaved won't have consciousness until their resurrection either. Jesus said Lazarus was asleep before resurrecting him (John 11:11-13; cf. Job 14:12). Paul said that if the resurrection

didn't happen, the saved dead were lost, which means they couldn't have been conscious souls living in heaven then: "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (I Cor. 15:16-18). Job said that fathers who die don't know whether their sons are honored or become insignificant (Job 14:20). So dead parents supposedly saved and living in heaven wouldn't know what their offspring on earth are doing. David said in Ps. 6:5: "For there is no mention of Thee in death; in Sheol who will give Thee thanks?" (See also Isaiah 38:18-19 for similar thoughts). So could the saved dead (in heaven or elsewhere) even possibly not be praising God? It would be absurd! The rhetorical question in Ps. 88:10's second line implies the departed spirits aren't praising God. Psalm 115:17 says flatly: "The dead do not praise the Lord." In Psalm 146:4, it says we shouldn't trust in mortal man because, "His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish." Although the word translated "thoughts" here can be translated more narrowly as "plans," the Christian writer Uriah Smith has said that the Hebrew word here refers to "the act of the mind in the process of thinking and reasoning." If so, the dead can't be conscious according to this text either. Therefore, if the saved dead, of whom Paul spoke here, aren't resurrected, then they are unsaved and aren't restored to consciousness.

The Doctrines of the Immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection Aren't Compatible

The doctrines of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection simply aren't compatible (especially as taught in I Cor. 15). After all, if the immortal soul is perfectly happy to live in heaven, why reunite it with the material body? And if the wicked entered hell right after they died and are presently suffering eternal punishing, why pull them out of hell and reunite them with their physical bodies? Would they be thrown right back into hell again after being judged again? Could God have made a mistake the first time around after they died? Does He review His previous decision for error after the millennium ends? What balderdash! Why reencumber spirit bodies (see I Cor. 15:42-45) with gross material flesh again after they have possibly lived in heaven or hell for thousands of years? According to Rev. 20:13, "death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds." The Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11-15 implies those who died before Jesus' return and came up in the second resurrection are all judged at the same time, not piecemeal down through the generations as they died. Paul wrote that if the resurrection didn't happen, the saved dead were lost, which means they couldn't have been conscious souls living in heaven then: "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (I Cor. 15:16-18). If someone is "perished" without a personal resurrection, then he or she isn't alive consciously while dead before it occurs. Paul uses "sleep" here to refer to the state of the dead (as in verse 20 also). So if the saved dead, of whom he's speaking here, aren't resurrected, then they are actually unsaved and aren't restored to consciousness. The resurrection wouldn't be regarded as such a crucial doctrine if we were still conscious after death.

If indeed the dead are fully conscious, the Bible's analogy between death and sleep makes no sense. To say only the "body" sleeps, not the whole "person," in order to explain this away runs again into the problem of the resurrection: If we stay conscious continuously after death automatically when we would go to heaven or hell at death, why have a resurrection at all? Also, if this "spirit/soul" is the real part of the person, and the body superfluous matter to staying conscious, isn't it rather deceiving to call the state of the dead "sleep"? It's hardly "sleep" to suffer conscious misery in hell as the flames supposedly torture the wicked terribly. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection are simply incompatible, although many will illogically labor mightily to square this circle.

The Righteous Dead Aren't in Heaven Now

When the dead enter the great collective grave of mankind, "sheol" in Hebrew, and "hades" in Greek, they aren't conscious of anything. They aren't in heaven, hell, limbo, or

purgatory. When Jesus said this (John 3:13), no man had gone to heaven (i.e., where God's throne is, the third heaven): "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." Even after Christ's resurrection, King David, the man after God's own heart, hadn't ascended to heaven according to Peter (Acts 2:29, 34): "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. . . . For David did not ascend into the heavens." In the same passage, Peter cited David in the Old Testament to prove the Messiah Himself wouldn't ascend to heaven before His resurrection, but His soul would stay briefly in the grave while He was dead (v. 27): "For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." So when the dead enter the great collective grave of mankind, sheol in Hebrew, hades in Greek, they aren't conscious of anything. They aren't in heaven, hell, or purgatory. So when will Christians experience what's described in I John 3:2?: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he [Jesus] appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Notice that this text refers to Jesus' second coming, not to the present. We wouldn't see Jesus right after we die nor, surprisingly enough, do saved Christians go right to heaven!

After all, what do the meek inherit? (Matt. 5:5) They inherit the earth, not heaven! Similarly, doesn't God the Father come down to a new earth in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-3)? So I John 3:2 discusses what happens when Christians will be resurrected (I Cor. 15:51-54) and rise to meet Jesus in the clouds/sky of the earth (I Thess. 4:16-17). That's not an exotic, faraway, "spiritual" location: That's where airplanes fly everyday! Instead of remaining a immortal/eternal soul/spirit, our bodies will be transformed by a resurrection (or translation, if we're alive when Jesus comes) that will give us eternal life (I Cor. 15:48-54). There's no other way we can be saved, meaning, be preserved to live for all eternity. After all, Jesus comes to the earth (Zechariah 14:3-4) from where He prepared a place (i.e., positions in the kingdom of God, cf. Luke 19:11-27; Matt. 25:14-30) for us so "that [when on earth] where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

Can Those Who Died Unsaved Still Get Saved?

Can those who died unsaved still get saved? According to Scripture, unsaved people who die aren't immediately put into an eternal hell fire. Instead, they simply aren't judged until the second resurrection takes place (see Rev. 20:5; cf. I Cor. 15:22-24). This would be true for both babies and adults who were uncalled in this lifetime. Because they weren't called during their first lives on earth (see John 6:44, 65; Acts 2:39; Matt. 13:11-16; Romans 8:28-30), they will get their **first and only chance** (not a "second chance") to be saved after their resurrection at the end of the millennium, after Christ had ruled on earth for a thousand years. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones of the house of Israel provides the clearest passage showing the unsaved dead will be resurrected and then given an opportunity for salvation. Now the Chosen People generally had a dismal history spiritually. Israel was often very disobedient. Israelites born in the pre-Exile period (not just Jewish, of the tribe of Judah only when strictly defined) commonly were violating the First Commandment by being idolaters, just as typical Hindus are today. Most of Israel obviously was not saved back then since so many were so faithless and disobedient that they often used statues while worshiping false gods, such as Baal, Chemosh, Molech, and Dagon. But instead of being thrown into the lake of fire after their resurrection, they are lovingly put back into the land of Israel, as God told Ezekiel (Eze. 37:11-14):

"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.'"

These unsaved Israelites were no more saved than ignorant Buddhists, Hindus, animists, pagans, and Muslims. Indeed, most Israelites didn't have the Holy Spirit, which conditionally gives salvation by its presence (Eph. 4:30; 1:13-14), which only became much more generally available on Pentecost in 31 A.D. after Jesus' resurrection and later ascension to heaven (John 16:7; Acts 1:4-5; 2:2-4). But when they were resurrected, they weren't tossed into hell, but were placed in the Holy Land! Notice that they were resurrected to have physical bodies of flesh (verses 7-10), not bodies composed of spirit, like angels have (Hebrews 1:7) and already saved Christians will receive when Jesus returns (I Cor. 15:42-53).

God will not condemn any who are ignorant during their first lifetimes on earth, but only the willfully knowing wicked who refuse to repent even after their resurrection (Daniel 12:2). After all, if God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30), He has to make His will theoretically possible to fulfill. Likewise, the Lord (II Peter 3:9) "is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Paul also told Timothy that God "desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). So doesn't God want to save everyone? Will God condemn to an eternity of torture in hell fire those who never heard Jesus' name or who never heard the Gospel preached? Would God hurl billions of ignorant Chinese and East Indian peasants to burn in hell for endless trillions of years for a mere mayfly lifetime of sins without an opportunity to escape their dire fates? Would God so fail so colossally to grant them a practical way to gain repentance (Acts 11:18) so they possibly could be saved? Is it fair for God to condemn those who never had a chance to begin with? Can the traditional view justify God's justice to humanity (i.e., construct a convincing theodicy)? Is a brief life of (say) 20, 40, or 70 years of moderate sin fairly punished by trillions and trillions of years of burning torture? And that's merely for starters, the barest preface to a never-ending story of agony. Will God maintain and supervise this a plague spot in His universe for all eternity with evil angels and men suffering for their sins? Or will God totally clean out His universe (see Acts 3:21) in order to restore the conditions that existed before Lucifer (a/k/a Satan) rebelled and Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Wouldn't God ultimately want EVERY living creature still remaining in the created universe (cf. Rev. 5:13) to bless Him and to worship Him?

As indicated by Matt. 12:41-42 (compare 11:21-24), most people aren't judged yet during this lifetime. The pagan inhabitants of Nineveh aren't yet burning eternally in hell. If the immortal soul doctrine is true, then the judgment has to occur at death. Otherwise, the dead are being held in an unconsciousness state instead. How else could presumably unsaved people during their lifetimes, such as the men of Nineveh who heard Jonah and the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon, condemn Jews who rejected Jesus as their Messiah when He visited their villages and towns? It would be most curious for God to resurrect these people who (most likely) never had the Holy Spirit, which is a requirement for salvation (Romans 8:9-11; II Cor. 5:5), and let them condemn others before tossing them all into hell.

Notice that Israel still has a chance at salvation despite having rejected their Messiah to date, according to Paul: "And thus all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26; cf. verses 7, 26). If this generalization wasn't true, how could Paul write it? Could (say) 90% of Israel be lost to hell despite he believed they all would be saved? Although we know some won't be saved, such as Judas Iscariot, it has to be that almost all of them will be, despite they often worshipped false gods using idols during their physical lifetimes.

We shouldn't mistakenly assume that when the dead are "judged" that has to mean "sentencing" rather than "probation." Nor should we equate "sentencing" with "judgment." Someone who is judged or being judged need not at that moment be condemned and sentenced to a particular punishment. A person can have a period of **judging** before a final outcome is determined. For example, Peter says "it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (I Pet. 4:17). Since Christians during this lifetime aren't yet sentenced, "judgment" here

simply can't mean only "sentencing." So we should be wary of assuming this automatically for other texts, such as Hebrews 9:27, but see what the context indicates or what other parts of the Bible teach

Will the Wicked Be Eternally Tortured?

Are the wicked to be eternally tortured? Do the unrepentant disobedient have eternal life also? After all, if each person has an undying, immortal soul or spirit, it has to live forever in the place of punishment if it won't live forever in the place of reward. The Bible teaches that "the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). If that soul "dies," does it actually continue to "live"? The last book of the Old Testament teaches the wicked will be destroyed to nothingness, that they will be ashes underneath the feet of the righteous (Malachi 4:1, 3): "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.' . . . And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the Lord of hosts." Now if the wicked will be like burnt up like waste from grain that will leave nothing behind ("neither root nor branch"), will they still have an intact consciousness? If they will **be**, not just "be like," but "be ashes" that the righteous will literally walk over, will those "ashes" still be feeling their painful misery? Let's turn now to the New Testament. Jesus warned his listeners (Matt. 10:28): "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Are we going to read a creative definition into the word "destroy" here in order to prop up preconceived theology? If the word "destroy" means to ruin something such that it can no longer function, do we assume a "soul" can be "destroyed" yet still function with consciousness? Uriah Smith pointed to the implied analogy made in Christ's statement that undermines a non-literal meaning for the word "destroy": "Whatever killing does to the body, destroying does to the soul." Consider Paul's well known statement (Romans 6:23): "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Do we assume that the opposite of "eternal life" is "death," meaning, "eternal life in hell"? Did Paul intend a complicated, metaphorical meaning here, such as "separation from God"? If a conventional, literal definition of "death" is upheld here or in other similar texts, that is, "cessation of consciousness," the inevitable conclusion is that the wicked are punished by "death," not "endless life in hell," but a state of non-functioning consciousness. Eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46) shouldn't be confused with eternal punishing, since a death that never ends is a punishment that lasts forever.

How to Examine Allegedly Biblical Objections to Conditional Immortality and Annihilation of the Wicked

What objections can those defending the traditional view make against the doctrines of conditional immortality and the annihilation of the wicked? Let's briefly survey some of them. As a general test of the doctrine of conditional immortality, read all the supposedly contrary texts that say "spirit" or "soul." Ask these two questions for each one: 1. Does this text say the soul or spirit can think or is conscious after death? 2. Does this text say the soul or spirit is immortal? For example, do the words of Eccl. 12:7 prove the spirit is immortal or conscious? "The spirit will return to the God who gave it." These texts just don't provide enough evidence to prove what the immortal/eternal soul advocates believe. They read into the Bible's texts what they desire, which is called eisegesis, thus proving absolutely nothing. In some cases, the words translated "spirit" or "soul," mean "life force" (Genesis 2:7; Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46; compare Mark 15:39; I Kings 17:17, 21-22). Then consider whether two different words, "spirit" and "soul," can be used to describe the same supposedly immortal or eternal part of mankind's nature. If we have both body, soul, and spirit, do we have two immortal parts? Do the two survive after and separate from the body after death? Or does just one does? Is it a legitimate practice of good Biblical hermeneutics, or systematic Biblical interpretation, to keep shifting back and forth between the two words? Can someone claim legitimately that the two English words, or the Hebrew and Greek words from which they are translated, have the same meaning?

Do Philippians 1:23 and II Corinthians 5:8 Prove the Dead Are Alive?

Do Phil. 1:23 and II Cor. 5:8 prove Christians go to heaven when they die? Neither text says anything about eternal torment or the immortality of the soul. Both such thoughts have to be read into the texts here. After all, theoretically someone could believe people go to heaven or hell at death, but still affirm that the souls thrown into hell would eventually be completely destroyed, not eternally tortured.

For both texts, the orthodox position's defender assumes that no resurrection happens between the beginning of death and entering the Lord's presence. Yet I Cor. 15:16-18 presupposes that the only way to gain eternal life is from a resurrection. As a matter of hermeneutics, all the texts on a subject should be examined to determine correct doctrines. It's a shoddy interpretive procedure to just pick out a few texts to prop up a favored position chosen beforehand a priori, long before the evidence was examined without bias. Neither Phil. 1:23 nor II Cor. 5:8 say Paul or Christians in general would **immediately** enter the presence of Jesus after their deaths. Rev. 20:5, 11-15 shows that most unsaved people (i.e., excepting those called during their first lifetimes who later refused to practice God's truth) aren't judged until after the millennium ends. They aren't judged at their deaths, dumped into hell now when they die, and later pulled out, judged again, and then thrown back in.

Neither text is clear enough to really accomplish the goal for which they are typically used. For example, neither says we have an immortal soul that's conscious separately from the body. Such thoughts have to be read into the texts in question. It's far easier to conclude that (in the case of Phil. 1:23) that when Paul died, he would have no consciousness of passing time in the grave. So the moment he died would be seemingly instantly followed by the moment of his being resurrected and meeting Jesus in the sky at the Second Coming. If the saved and unsaved have no consciousness or sense of time passing until they come to life again, centuries can pass yet they would be experienced as if they were a single night's sleep. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (428-348 b.c.), despite being a pagan having no knowledge of the Hebrew Bible or of the resurrection, still knew this truth nevertheless: "Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvelous gain. . . . If death is like this, then I call it gain, because the whole of time, if you look at it in this way, can be regarded as no more than one single night" (Apology, 40d-e). If an advocate of conditional immortality asserted that what they describe would happen at the Second Coming (as per I Cor. 15:23 and I Thess. 4:15-17), neither text contradicts him. After all, Paul faithfully anticipated receiving a "crown of righteousness" on the day of Jesus' return (II Tim. 4:6-7), not right after he died. It's necessary to figure out what Paul means based what he wrote elsewhere or to use other passages of Scripture to figure out what these texts mean rather than ideas we may have presupposed on our own from what we've been traditionally taught. The Bible should be used to interpret the Bible, which is an especially important point when interpreting prophecy, but that's another subject.

Do the Parable of the Richman and Lazarus Prove the Dead Are Conscious?

Does the parable of the Richman and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) prove we have immortal souls? Fundamentally it's a poor idea to base doctrine on something clearly allegorical. Christ's analogies that explain spiritual truths shouldn't be used as proof for doctrines beyond their obvious intended spiritual or moral lessons. This parable mainly taught about the duty of the well-off to care for the poor and that those who fully know God's truth should act on it in this life, for after they die it's too late. Unlike Jesus' debate with Sadducees, this passage wasn't primarily intended to teach about what life after death would actually be like. Even in this parable, the rich man wanted Lazarus after he was raised from the dead to go back to warn his brothers (cf. Luke 16:30-31). The rich man says nothing about wanting Lazarus's immortal soul to go on a visit.

The rich man (or "Dives") is also contemplating being thrown into Gehenna or the lake of fire. (Three Greek words are translated "hell" in the King James Version: "Gehenna" refers to a fiery place of punishment for the wicked, but "hades," the common grave of mankind, never does except perhaps in verse 23 of this parable). He's can't be there already: Why does he request

only a tiny amount of water (v. 24), not a Niagara's worth? Notice also this passage says nothing about eternal torment: How long the rich man's suffering will last remains unstated. But now, according to the Bible elsewhere, when are the dead raised anyway? They aren't raised right after they die, since that doesn't happen until Jesus returns (at the earliest). The rich man himself wouldn't be resurrected until at least the end of the millennium, or (much more likely) about 100 years afterwards (Isaiah 65:17, 20), since he wasn't saved before dying. So when the rich man wanted Lazarus to go back, this was impossible. It would require a "time machine." His brothers would have died centuries earlier, so presumably (if equally unsaved) they would be resurrected right when he was. Their course of action in their past lives couldn't now be changed by the actions of resurrected Lazarus or the rich man himself. This raises the whole issue of the incompatibility of the resurrection and the immortal/eternal soul doctrine, since the latter focuses on immediate consequences for one's sins after death, but the former delays it until the general Judgment following the resurrection.

Does I Peter 3:18-20 Show that Jesus Was Alive After His Crucifixion but Before His Resurrection?

Does I Peter 3:18-20 prove Jesus was alive when he was dead? If Jesus had to make a full sacrifice for our sins, then it was necessary that He totally die for us. His state of death shouldn't have differed from what ours will be if His sacrifice was to redeem us from the same fate.

Let's read the full text (I Peter 3:18-20): "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water." Notice that the word "now" in v. 19 (NASB) is in italics, so it wasn't in the original text.

When Jesus did this was in the days of Noah by the Holy Spirit, not during the three days and three nights He was dead. The term "spirits in prison" can refer to ordinary people held in the bondage of sin (see Luke 4:18-20). It need not refer to the fallen angels or people's departed immortal/eternal souls/spirits. When Jesus was "made alive," He had to have been dead completely. It doesn't say, He "continued to live," etc. When He did this preaching, He did it by the Spirit, which meant the job had been delegated. Remember now the old language convention by which what a king, president, or leader does includes what his subordinates do at his request or command. Hence, when Theodore Roosevelt built the Panama Canal, he obviously used many laborers and engineers to actually construct it. But it's still credited to him. King Solomon likewise was said to have built the temple of Jehovah (I Kings 8:2, 14), but Bible itself also says that thousands of laborers worked to construct it (I Kings 7:13-18). Similarly, it's possible that what the Spirit did in preaching was attributed to Jesus, who guides and controls the Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit is sometimes equated with Jesus: "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. 3:17). In Acts 2:31 Jesus was in hades ("hell," KJV), the common grave of mankind, which shouldn't be equated to this "prison."

Does Jesus' statement about Judas prove the wicked would be tortured forever in hell?

According to Mark 14:21, Jesus said: "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Does this text say anything about the soul or spirit being indestructible or immortal or undying or eternal? Obviously not. Such concepts have to be read into this text. To prove those beliefs, other texts would have to be cited. It simply can't bear this kind of weight without far more direct evidence that says the soul/spirit is immortal/eternal/indestructible/undying. Let's reply to this question another way: Would Paul (Romans 9:3) or Moses (Ex. 32:32) want to be roasted in hell's fires for unending trillions of years to save others? That's hard to accept!

Then how would Judas' fate of total destruction such that his consciousness ceases to function be worse than his never being born? Well, Judas will end up in the lake of fire that's described in Rev. 20. Even some intense pain in fire for a given definite period before being destroyed into ashes (Malachi 4:1, 3) is worse than never existing, that is, never feeling pain. But there are other ways Judas would have been better off by never existing. For example, would we want to have such an awful reputation that billions of people would always remember us for betraying the Savior to His executioners? Some will be resurrected to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2). Judas would have an incredible black hole of a reputation for all eternity. Would we want to be one of unrepentant wicked subjected to that punishment, despite that after we've suffered the second death, we would know nothing about what others will think of us throughout eternity?

Furthermore, to have an unpleasant life on earth alone can make it better for someone not to be even born, according to Solomon (Eccl. 6:3-5): "If a man begets a hundred children, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but he does not enjoy life's good things, and also has no burial, I say that an untimely birth [i.e., a miscarriage--EVS] is better off than he. For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered; moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he." How should someone look at Judas Iscariot's life ending as a suicide after he betrayed his Master? Could this also be true of him? Did Judas receive a decent burial after he killed himself? So if an unpleasant life on earth could make it better to not be born, there's no intrinsic need to bring into the balances matters about an unpleasant afterlife to judge whether it would be better for someone not to have been born to begin with.

Can the Living Be Baptized to Save the Dead?

The LDS/Mormon Church mistakenly uses I Cor. 15:29 to support its teachings on baptizing people who are now dead. In their temples zealous Mormons will ritualistically immerse themselves on behalf of others, typically departed relatives. Ironically, it arguably contradicts Alma 34:32-35 in the Book of Mormon. That's no surprise, for Joseph Smith did not remain consistent in his theology while he was an alleged prophet of God. For instance, Doctrine & Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price, which are polytheistic, are worlds apart from the Book of Mormon's more orthodox theology.

But what was Paul driving at in I Cor. 15:29? "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" Notice the general context of the chapter concerned Paul's rebuttal against the skeptical Corinthian Christians who denied the resurrection (v. 12). In order to get eternal life and salvation, we have to be resurrected since Paul didn't teach the immortality/eternity of the soul. The Greek word translated "for" in verse 29, which is "hyper," can mean "in view of," "for the hope of," "instead of," "for the realization of," "over," and "above," not just "for" only. To put in "for the hope of" really makes sense. So Paul meant something like this here: "Why be baptized for the hope (or "in view of") the dead, if you don't think they will be raised? Why were you baptized to begin with, if the dead are not resurrected, since that's the only way to gain eternal life?" Also, note that we are baptized into Christ's death, as a partial reenactment of what He did in His life, as per Rom. 6:3-6 and Col. 2:12-13. Our burial in the water for our sins is a symbolic reenactment of His entombment in the earth for three days and three nights after He bore the world's sins.

Now the Mormon church's motives for baptizing dead people aren't altogether bad. They want to believe those who never even heard about Jesus or those who heard but did little about it can still be saved. As explained already above, the Bible does give the previously uncalled their first chance to be saved in the next life. The vast majority will be saved, but only after they get resurrected in the second resurrection after the millennium ends (as described in the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15). If there's no going to heaven or hell or purgatory right

at death, and no immortal soul and no continued consciousness, then God can save (nearly) the whole world actually, not just potentially.

Can the Virgin Mary Presently Make Appearances on Earth?

So then, is the Virgin Mary presently conscious, in heaven or elsewhere? Can she then visit people on earth? The problem we face here is twofold: 1. Are the dead alive? 2. Can other spirit beings besides God and the holy angels visit people? More generally, can the dead make appearances at séances? But as already explained above, the Bible teaches the dead aren't conscious until the resurrection. No saint, including the Virgin Mary, can hear the prayers of faithful Catholics. So the Virgin Mary couldn't be leaving heaven to visit people. But then, this leads to the second question: Could **other** spirit beings be visiting the dead? And are they good spirit beings . . . or bad ones? Now fakery likely is common in this area. Early in the last century the famous magician Houdini exposed many lying mediums during purported séances they held with him. But if a **real** spirit force really does appear, it's a lying "angel." That is, it's an evil angel, or demon, who is speaking and acting. For example, when King Saul got a purported visit from the judge Samuel when the former went to the "witch" (really, medium) at Endor in I Samuel 28:3-25. Notice that "Samuel" here told Saul in advance a true prediction of his dreadful fate. So not everything a demon says has to be wrong or false in a séance. Compare this demon's way of operating to what God let Satan do in Job 1-2. Hence, not everything the children of Fatima hear from "The Virgin Mary" would be false. But such a spiritual source should be avoided, not relied upon.

What Did the Jews of Jesus' Day Believe about the State of the Dead?

No one should assume that what the Jews of Jesus' day taught about the state of the dead is Biblically accurate. For example, the Pharisees and Sadducees had different views about whether people are resurrected or not. Obviously, both sides couldn't be right! This division proves many first-century Jews had a wrong view of the afterlife. Paul perceived and took advantage of their division on this issue when standing before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council under the Romans (Acts 23:6-7). (He later (Acts 24:20-21) somewhat regretted that he did so!) Acts 23:8 explains the sectarian division among the Jews concerning whether the dead would live again: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both." On the same subject, note that Jesus affirmed the resurrection of the dead when debating with the Sadducees in Luke 20:27-38.

So if Jews in Jesus' time did believe the dead were conscious, they didn't believe what the Bible itself taught in the Old Testament, as explained above. And, as the case of the Sadducees shows, they plainly denied the resurrection of the dead despite Scripture did teach it (Isaiah 26:19; Eze. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:2). So what the Jews believed wasn't necessarily correct, no more than in their (mainstream) view, the Messiah was only a conquering king, not a suffering servant. Just because they knew and know Hebrew doesn't mean their interpretations of their own holy book are automatically reliable and privileged. The beliefs of an ancient Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jew like Philo, who lived in Alexandria in Egypt, may have been influenced by pagan Greek ideas of the immortality of the soul or the state of the dead. The Jewish book Wisdom of Solomon sees an evil fate for the wicked dead, but doesn't apparently believe they'll suffer eternal torment in hell, but just ultimately be total destroyed.

The apocryphal book of Enoch (written apparently around the time period Jesus lived or somewhat before) pictures the (Jewish) dead split into two basic classes, the wicked and the righteous. The righteous have a place of light and a fountain. The wicked are split into three further classes. One set never was judged during their human lifetimes, but their spirits will be separated out for great punishment that will bind them forever. The second group, who complained to God, will be resurrected and punished with torment. The third won't be resurrected to be punished at all, but will just be left alone to lie unconsciously dead for all eternity. The first century A.D. Jewish historian Josephus said the Pharisees believed that all souls were

imperishable. They also thought that the souls of the good people passed into other bodies, but the souls of the evil were punished with "everlasting punishment." Christ's chief critics also believed the "souls have a deathless vigor, and that beneath the earth there are rewards and punishments according as they have been devoted to life to virtue or to vice. For the latter everlasting imprisonment is prescribed; for the former [i.e., the righteous group] capability of coming to life again." This might not mean, however, that eternal punishment was eternal torture, as opposed to merely being dead forever.

The Jewish teachers of the schools of Shammai and Hillel thought those who were partially good and partially evil (i.e., most people!) would be treated differently. The sages of the Shammai school maintained the half evil would go down to hell, and later come back up, being purged and refined from sin by the fires of Gehenna. But those of the Hillel school believed God was so merciful that He wouldn't send such average people down to hell at all. The author of 4 Esdras, an apocryphal book not in the Bible, found it very distressing but self-evident that only a few would be saved. The Pharisees apparently invented a story about the righteous going to Abraham's bosom as a section of sheol, or the common grave of humanity, while the rest of Sheol was reserved for the wicked. But that story doesn't apparently receive coverage in George Foot Moore's multi-volume book "Judaism," which is here the main source about ancient Jewish views of the afterlife besides Scripture.

In general, just because the Jews believe the Old Testament (to them, the Tanakh) teaches a particular doctrine doesn't mean Christians should unthinkingly accept their interpretations of it. They don't have the right day for the Passover (Nisan 14, not Nisan 15), the right day for Pentecost (a Sunday seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread ends, not Sivan 6), or the right view of God's oneness (God is two Beings presently, not one solitary Person). After all, did Jesus uncritically accept their traditional interpretations of Scripture? He criticized them for using various man-made traditions of the oral law to override the written word of God by (see Matt. 15:3-13). Just because they know Hebrew doesn't automatically mean they are correctly interpreting their own holy word. An informed Christian knowing English only, but having the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13), will normally interpret the Old Testament better than the informed Jew knowing both Hebrew and English, but not having the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Let's Celebrate Because the Truth about Death Has Set Us Free!

In conclusion, let's celebrate because the Bible teaches conditional immortality and the annihilation of the wicked! To know our now dead and unsaved relatives and friends can still be saved should warm our hearts. To realize that nobody is presently burning in hell as a mere warm-up for an eternity of terrible torment should cheer our souls. To understand the truth about the state of the dead should melt away our own worries about our own eventual deaths (John 8:32): "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."