

Section 1

LIFE

Living Soul

Popular ideas about life after death center around the concept that a person's identity, consciousness, or soul continues to exist after the death of their body. This idea has been very popular throughout history, especially among Egyptian theology and Greek philosophy. Most religious and philosophical views about the afterlife suggest that this existence takes place in a spiritual realm, not a physical one.

But what does the Bible have to say about life after death? To get the proper understanding of life and death, we need to start in the beginning. I am convinced that our understanding of the events in Genesis will shape our understanding of everything else that follows, and if we neglect the foundation of Genesis, then we will have difficulty understanding anything else that follows. Genesis means "beginning", and it was given as a foundation for our

faith. The first few chapters of Genesis explain the origin of life, the cause of death, and the need for salvation.

It is important for us to know how life began, so we can better understand how life ends. Look at how the Bible describes the creation of man:

“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 being [nephesh].”ⁱ

The Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ [nephesh] translated above as “*living being*” can also be translated “*soul*”, which is exactly how the King James Version translates it.

The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words defines nephesh as “a breathing creature”ⁱⁱ, and it goes on to describe it as any appetite, beast, body, creature, desire, life, lust, man, mind, mortality, person, pleasure, or self. The basic idea is that a nephesh is a body with the breath of life, but it also refers to the natural desires of that body.

We are familiar with this usage of the word soul in phrases like, “*there was not a soul in the place*”, indicating that not a single person was there. Another familiar phrase is, “*I won't tell a soul*”, indicating that you won't tell anyone. We also use phrases like, “*I am baring my soul to you*”, indicating that you are sharing your deepest desires and innermost thoughts to someone.

The previously mentioned verse in Genesis describes the creation of Adam, and it is universally agreed upon by the

ⁱ Genesis 2:7 (New King James Version)

ⁱⁱ Strong, J. (1996). *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

early Church Fathers that the soul of Adam was directly created by God. However, there are some disagreements about the origin of the souls that have been born since Adam. There are three main theories about the origin of the soul: creationism, traducianism, and pre-existence.

Creationism teaches that God creates a soul for each body at conception. This means that every time an embryo is formed in a womb, God actively creates a soul and breathes life into the person. Creationism seems to have been the predominant belief in Eastern Christianity, while traducianism was more dominant in the West.

Traducianism teaches that a person's soul is derived from the souls of his or her parents. This teaching is based on the idea that Adam's soul was created directly by God, then Eve's soul was brought forth out from Adam, and when Adam and Eve conceived Cain and Abel, their souls were derived from the combination of Adam and Eve. This theory seems to help explain the transmission of original sin.

Both creationism and traducianism explain that the individual human soul comes into existence at conception. However, the pre-existence theory teaches that every individual soul existed before conception, and enters the body sometime before birth. Some adherents to this theory believe the soul is also eternal.

It is important to note that Greek Philosophy, Hinduism, and Mormonism all affirm the pre-existence of the soul, while it is commonly denied in both Christianity and Judaism throughout history.

Hindus and Mormons also affirm the belief in the

immortality of the soul, and not just pre-existence but also the eternal existence of the soul. This means that every person has existed eternally with God or as a god.

According to Hinduism, Krishna said, "Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be."ⁱ

The idea that we have an immortal soul plays well into the Hindu belief in reincarnation. They believe that every person continues on an endless cycle of death and rebirth until they reach the final point of liberation. Their desire is to end the cycle, and cease to exist. To them, salvation is the end of life, but for those who believe the Bible, salvation is the gift of eternal life.

Similar to Hinduism, the Mormon Doctrine and Covenants states, "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be."ⁱⁱ The Mormons believe that we are co-eternal with God, and that our soul has always existed with God. If we are immortal beings that exist eternally, then the Mormons are correct to say we were not created.

When you say that humans have an immortal soul, you are essentially saying that we are gods. This doctrine is completely unbiblical, and has no place in Christian thought. The Bible plainly tells us that only God is immortal.

"...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone has immortality,**

ⁱ Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. (2001). Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Deluxe. Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

ⁱⁱ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (2013). The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”ⁱ

This is why it is so important for us to understand the Biblical account of creation. The Bible tells us that man was created and that he *“became a living soul”*. We did not exist eternally in an incorporeal state before putting on flesh, just to live a short earthly existence and later return to life without a body. The Bible tells us that we were created with a body and did not exist prior to the formation of our flesh.

By saying we have an immortal soul, we are robbing Yeshua of his glory and exalting ourselves as equals with Christ! He is the only pre-existent soul to put on flesh, we were created in flesh, but He descended from heaven and put on flesh and dwelt among us for a time. This is one of the glorious mysteries about the nature of the Messiah, and by claiming that we share in his pre-existence, we diminish Him. Listen to the way Paul describes the nature of the Messiah.

“...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”ⁱⁱ

The Mormons have no problem with the idea of an

ⁱ 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

ⁱⁱ Philippians 2:6-11

immortal soul, because they consider themselves to be co-eternal with Christ. Their theology leads them to believe that they can be gods too someday. However, if we take seriously the Biblical account of creation, then we cannot conclude that we are anything more than created beings.

It is also interesting to note that humans are not the only creation the Bible calls “nephesh”. Several verses in Genesis refer to the creation of other creatures and specifically uses the word nephesh to describe them.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures [nephesh], and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens’ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing [nephesh] that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was goodⁱ... Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature [nephesh] according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kindⁱⁱ ... Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life [nephesh], I have given every green herb for foodⁱⁱⁱ ... Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature [nephesh], that was its name.’^{iv}

Many people mistakenly teach that only humans have a soul, and that animals do not, but according to the Bible everything that has the breath of life is a living soul. Simply put, a soul is a living creature. This stands in contrast with...

ⁱ Genesis 1:20,21

ⁱⁱ Genesis 1:24

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 1:30

^{iv} Genesis 2:19