

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

- d. Psalm 110:1-2—"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: *rule* thou in the midst of thine enemies." (This is a clear prophecy about Jesus. See Heb. 1:13. Note that Jesus is to *rule* while he is at the right hand of God in heaven. He is sitting in his Father's throne, which is also the throne of David. How can anyone say that no one is now sitting on the throne of David?)
- e. Acts 10:36—"Jesus Christ: (he is *Lord* of all:)"
"Hail to the *King* we love so well!
Hail! Immanuel!
Glory and honor and majesty,
Wisdom and power be unto thee,
Now and evermore;—
King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
All hail, Immanuel!
(D. R. Van Sickle)

VI. QUESTIONS ABOUT "SPIRIT" AND "SOUL"

By Wilbur Fields

1. Is there any difference between *spirit* and *soul*?
2. What are the words which are translated as *spirit* and *soul*?
3. What does the word *spirit* mean and refer to?
4. Does man have a *spirit*?
5. Can the spirit of man exist apart from his body?
6. What does the word *soul* mean?
7. What is the relation of soul to spirit?
8. Is the soul immortal?

Question 1—Is there any difference between *spirit* and *soul*? Or are they two names for the same thing?

There surely is a difference between them. Otherwise Paul could not have written in I Thessalonians 5:23: "Your whole *spirit* and *soul* and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Neither could he have written in Hebrews 4:12 that the word of God pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.

Question 2—What are the words which are translated as *spirit* and *soul*?

Words translated *spirit* are *ruach* (a Hebrew word in the Old Testament), and *pneuma* (a Greek word in the New Testament.)

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These two words have almost identical meanings. (Another Hebrew word which is translated *spirit* a few times is *neshamah*, which means "breathing" or "breath.")

Words translated *soul* are *nephesh* (Hebrew), and *psuche* (Greek). These words also have almost identical significance.

Don't let these Greek and Hebrew words scare you. Wherever they may be used in the remaining questions, they will be explained.

Question 3—What does the word *spirit* mean and refer to?

- a. The word "spirit" (in both Greek and Hebrew) means "wind" or "breath." See Gen. 8:1 and John 3:8 for examples of this.
- b. Then sometimes it signifies anger or fury, as in the expression, "the *blast* of thy nostrils." (Job 4:9). It is used this way in II Thess. 2:8.
- c. Then *spirit* refers to mental or moral qualities in general, as in Ex. 28:3, "spirit of wisdom," and Ezek. 11:9, "a new spirit."
- d. The word "spirit" is applied to apparitions (or ghosts). See Luke 24:37.
- e. The word applies to the life-principle, applying alike to God, who is spirit (John 4:24), to angels who are ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14), and to man's life-principle.

Question 4—Does man have a "spirit"?

Emphatically he does.

- a. Zechariah 12:1—"The Lord formeth the *spirit* of man within him."
- b. Numbers 16:22—"O God, the God of the *spirits* of all flesh."
- c. James 2:26—"As the body without the *spirit* is dead."
- d. Job 32:8—"There is a *spirit* in man: and the inspiration of the almighty gives them understanding."
- e. Man is a creature to whom life has been imparted by God's spirit. Our life is only a result of God's breath (spirit) upon us. Our spirit and breath is God's breath. Job 34:14—"If he (God) set his heart upon man to gather unto himself his *spirit* and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." See also Isa. 2:22.

Question 5—Can the spirit of a man exist apart from his body?

Yes.

- a. Hebrews 12:23—"Ye are come to the "*spirits* of just men made perfect." (Even Paul the apostle never considered he was perfect on earth. Phil. 3:12. But Christians have come into fellowship with the spirits of saints who are dead to earth, but made perfect before God.)

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- b. I Pet. 3:19—"He (Christ) went and preached unto the *spirits* in prison." (These "spirits in prison" were the people who had been disobedient to the word of God in the time of Noah.)
- c. Acts 7:59—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Stephen was dying as he spoke these words.)
- d. Ecclesiastes 12:7—At death, "then shall the dust (our bodies) return to the earth as it was; and the *spirit* shall return unto God who gave it." (There is something within man that the gravedigger cannot bury. It is the spirit of man.)
- e. Numerous other Scriptures go along with this teaching that the real person can exist apart from his body. Note II Peter 1:13-14: "As long as I am in this *body*, knowing that shortly, I must put off this tabernacle (or body)." Also II Cor. 5:9, "We labor, that whether present or *absent* (from the body) we may be accepted of him." (There is more on this subject under question 8 in this article.)

Question 6—What does the word *soul* mean?

This word has many meanings and applications. It cannot be adequately defined by just one definition, unless a very broad definition is given.

The Hebrew word *nephesh* (translated "soul") is found 754 times in the Old Testament (according to Young's Concordance), and is translated 35 different ways. It is translated "soul" 428 times (in the King James version), "life" 119 times, "person" 30 times, "self" 19 times, "heart" 15 times, "mind" 15 times, "creature" 9 times, "dead body" 8 times, and 27 other ways not more than five times each. In one place (Isa. 19:10) it is even rendered (and obviously well) as "fish."

It is a common error to take a meaning of *nephesh* which it has in some references, and then to argue that that is its meaning always. For example, some say that *nephesh* just means the "person himself." One writer arguing for this view says that when God created man, the combination of the body and the breath of life BECAME a living soul. "Only as these are brought together do we have a living breathing being or person. The Bible use of the word "soul" makes it clear that this, and *only* this, is its meaning." We agree that the Bible uses the word *nephesh* (or soul) to mean the "person himself." But it is just plain wrong to say that that is its only meaning.

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Likewise some say that the *soul* is the animal life which is in the blood. It is a fact that the word *nephesh* (soul) has this meaning in many references. But this is NOT its only meaning.

Some interpreters (especially those who believe in soul sleeping and annihilation) refer to the references (there are very few of them) where the word *nephesh* (soul) refers to a dead body, and then try to imply that that is what the word "soul" means in other references.

In an effort to determine what the word *nephesh* (or soul) refers to in the Bible, I have gone over all its occurrences, plus the 103 occurrences of *psuche* (soul) in the New Testament. In most cases we can tell by the context what the word refers to. For example if a Scripture passage speaks about laying up words in your heart and *soul*, we naturally interpret the word soul to mean "mind" in that reference, as indeed it does in several references.

My survey of all the occurrences of *nephesh* and *psuche* leads me to this conclusion: *Nephesh* (soul) *refers to any and all of the manifestations of life, both human and animal, material, mental, or emotional, both in the body and out of the body.* (That is a broad definition, if you ever read one.)

I do not claim my analysis is infallible. For in many cases the word *nephesh* can have more than one significance in one reference. But here is a list of some of the most frequent applications of the word *nephesh*, as they appeared to me:

- (1) Approximately 215 times in the O.T. *nephesh* refers to a person or the person himself. Certainly a whole person is a manifestation of life. Deut. 10:22; Gen. 12:5. Compare Acts 2:41.
- (2) Approximately 195 times it refers to the animal life which is in the blood, or just to "life." See Gen. 19:20; Lev. 17:11; Deut. 12:23. Animals have *nephesh* as well as humans. Prov. 12:10; Gen. 1:20, 30. Note—If the *nephesh* is *in* the blood, manifestly it cannot always mean "the person himself."
- (3) Approximately 115 times it refers to man's deep innermost nature. Ps. 103:1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." See also Deut. 11:13; Song 1:7.
- (4) Approximately 53 times *nephesh* apparently means emotions or feelings. I Sam. 30:6; I Sam. 2:33 (where it is rendered "heart"); Zech 11:8.

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- (5) About 18 times it means "mind" (and is translated that way 15 times). Deut. 11:18; Gen. 23:8.
- (6) About 17 times it means "appetite." Prov. 23:2; Deut. 12:15; Micah 7:1.
- (7) Fourteen or more times it refers to God's nature, being, and feelings. Lev. 26:11; Ps. 11:5; Gen. 1:21.
- (8) It means "creature" at least 12 times. Gen. 1:21.
- (9) It means "affection" approximately 9 times. Ezekiel 23:18; Gen. 34:3.
- (10) In eight references it is rendered "dead body." Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:6; 9:6,7,10; 19:11, 13. Haggai 2:13. The fact that a dead body could be called *nephesh* would seem to be due to the fact that the body becomes so closely identified with the person, that the body itself comes to be spoken of as the person. We still today speak about burying people when they die, although we do not mean to imply that we have buried the person's spirit, mind, feelings, etc.
- (11) In contrast to the use of *nephesh* to describe a dead body, in several references it refers to the life-principle, or spirit, which can depart from the body and exist apart from the body. In such references the word *soul* is almost synonymous with *spirit*. Note these references:

Gen. 35:18—"And it came to pass as her *soul* was in departing——."

I Kings 17:21,22—"Elijah cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this child's *soul* come unto him again——and the *soul* of the child came into him again." (If the soul cannot exist apart from the body, how could it have come back into him again?)

Prov. 23:14—"Thou shalt beat him (thy son) with the rod and shalt deliver his *soul* from hell." (The word "hell" in this reference refers to Sheol, the unseen world, the abode of the dead.) Punishing a child will not save him from dying and going into the unseen world. Hence this verse must refer to some place besides the grave where the soul can go into a place of security, if he has been chastised as a youth and directed to live in the right way.

See also Psalm 16:10 and Isa. 38:17.

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(12) *Nephesh* means "pleasure" in about 4 cases. Ps. 105:22.

There are a few other meanings of the word *nephesh* in the O.T., each used only a few times.

A study of the 103 occurrences of *psuche* (soul) in the New Testament indicates that it has a significance practically identical with *nephesh* in the O.T. *Psuche* is translated as "soul" 58 times, "life" 40 times, "mind" 3 times, "heart" once, and "heartily" once.

Besides the references in the Old Testament which show that the *soul* can live on after death and does not require a body to have identity, these New Testament references confirm the same:

- (1) Matt. 10:28—"Fear not them which can kill the body, but are not able to kill the *soul*." This verse could have no meaning if the soul ceased to exist at physical death.
- (2) Luke 12:20—"This night thy *soul* shall be required of thee."
- (3) Rev. 6:9; 20:4—In these verses John tells about seeing the *souls* of them that had been slain.
- (4) Rev. 18:13—"merchandise—of slaves and souls of men." Manifestly the word "soul" in this verse does not mean "persons;" for it is contrasted with slaves, who are living beings up for sale.
- (5) See also Acts 2:27, 31, where Christ's soul is said not to have been left in Hades. His *soul* here is almost synonymous with his *spirit*, which he commended unto God when he died. Luke 23:46.
- (6) I Peter 4:19.

In summing up the meaning of "soul," let us repeat again. The word *soul* refers to any and all of the manifestations of life, both human and animal, material, mental, or emotional, both in the body and out of the body. It is a very inclusive word.

Question 7—What is the relation of soul to spirit?

- (1) Sometimes the two words mean practically the same thing. The *spirit* can be called soul because the soul is the manifestation of the life produced by the spirit. Thus it is used in Acts 2:27; Rev. 6:9; 20:4; I Kings 17:21-22; Luke 12:20.

Don DeWalt correctly says, "The *soul*, or *life* in the blood of man is never called *spirit*. But the eternal invisible *spirit* is sometimes called *soul* or *life*." (From YOU AND ME AND GOD.)

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- (2) Man IS not a spirit (as God is), but he HAS a spirit. Man both IS and HAS a soul, which can be surrendered, as Elijah said in I Kings 19:4, "O Lord, take away my life (nephesh)."
- (3) When the word *soul* refers to animal creatures, or to the life which is in the blood, it has little or no relation to *spirit*.
- (4) The soul, or life manifested, is the result of the inbreathing of the divine spirit. The soul is the sum of all the personal manifestations of the life which springs from the spirit. It is our personal identity, and will be preserved at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Question 8—Is the soul immortal?

As you can understand by what has been said in this article, if by *soul* we refer to animal life or something similar, of course the soul is not immortal and can die. The word soul often means "the person himself," and when used with this meaning, anyone would admit that the soul will die.

However, in those references where the word *soul* is practically synonymous with *spirit*, we would expect to find the soul continuing a conscious existence after physical death, and we do find just that.

We have avoided using the term "immortal soul" because the Scriptures do not use that particular expression, and we desire to speak where the Scriptures speak and be silent where they are silent.

However, this does not cancel out the precious hope of the child of God that when he is absent from the body, he will be at home with the Lord. II Cor. 5:8-9. This cannot refer to our existence after the resurrection, for we shall have a body then. I Cor. 15:44. At death our spirit leaves the body. Then while we are *absent from the body*, we may be present with the Lord (if we have been saved by accepting Christ).

A similar thought is given in Phil. 1:23, where Paul expressed himself as being in a strait (or quandry), desiring both to remain on earth so he could help the Philippians develop in their faith, and a "desire to *depart and to be with Christ*, which is far better." If there is no conscious existence after physical death until the resurrection, this verse does not make much sense. If that were the case, Paul just as well have been patient, for no one will see Christ until the resurrection, and we shall all see Him at the same time.

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We prefer to hold the belief that Stephen evidently held. When Stephen was being stoned to death, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He expected to go where Jesus was, and so do I. Acts 7:55-59.

The Scriptural teaching that we may depart and be with the Lord is one of the greatest comforts of the gospels to the Christian. We thrill to know that we are only two or three heartbeats away from the Lord.

Besides this hope of the future life, there is the ever-present hope that the Lord Jesus may come this day, even before we die.

Both of these hopes are most precious to those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, "who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." I Thess. 5:10.

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