

**ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS ON THE SOUL
SLEEP OF THE DEAD
Part 1**

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*"...for while you believe that the soul is created and yet is made immortal by God according to the doctrine of Plato..." "Josephus' discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades."
Kregal publications Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 49501. (1981).*

The above statement comes from the writings of Flavious Josephus, he was a first century Jewish historian who was contemporary with the Apostle Paul. He makes the bold admission that the belief that man has an immortal soul is not the doctrine of the Bible but the doctrine of the Pagan Greek philosopher Plato. This statement is found in Josephus' writings in his 'Discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades'. There are some verses in the Bible that seem to teach this idea that man has an immortal-soul. Immortal-soulism can be read into these verses if that is the belief of the reader. But Immortal-soulism was not the belief of the Bible writers. The Bible does not teach Plato's Pagan Greek belief that man has an immortal soul or that man is conscious in death. These verses that seem to teach this need to be examined in the light of the beliefs of the original writers and not according to the doctrine of Plato.

The doctrine of Immortal-soulism teaches that all human beings have an immortal soul that lives inside of the mortal body. The immortal soul is supposed to be a spirit whose existence is conscious, and independent of the body. The immortal soul is supposed to be able to see, hear and think so that when the brain dies at death these senses continue on as normal. Those who believe this doctrine are unable to explain how brain damage causes memory loss, blindness, deafness, and mental dementias, etc.

Contrary to this the bible doctrine of soul sleep teaches that brain damage causes the loss of certain senses and when the brain ceases to function at death all the senses are lost. They are not regained until the resurrection of the body on the last day at the second coming of Christ.

Immortal-soulism views the body as a prison. At the death of the body the soul is thought to be released from its prison to allow it to travel to heaven to praise God. Contrary to this the bible teaches that man has a mortal soul that lives in a mortal body temple and that the dead do not praise God.

1 Corinth 6:19 *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you..."*
Far from being a prison the bible says the body is a temple of God.

1 Corinth 15:26 *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."*
Far from being a friend the bible describes death as an enemy that God will destroy.

Psalms 115:17 *"The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence."*

Temples are made for the worship of God. In death none of us will be able to praise God because the body temple in which we praise God is gone. We are unconscious in the grave awaiting the resurrection of a new body temple. After God made Adam on the sixth day of creation He said all things were very good (Genesis 1:31). This would not be the case if the body were a gaol that trapped the soul. And that it took the entrance of sin and death into the world to free us. This pagan Greek thought is foreign to the bible.

These verses listed below are often quoted to support the belief in conscious existence after death. These will be examined one at a time here.

Acts 7:58-60 The martyrdom of Stephen the deacon.

Luke 23:42-43 Christ's answer to the thief on the cross.

2 Corinth 5:1-9 Absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Philippians 1:20-24 Paul's desire to leave this world and be with Christ.

Revelation 6:9-10 Souls under the altar

1 Peter 3:18-20 Spirits in prison.

Acts 7:58-60

The martyrdom of Stephen the deacon.

Acts 7:58-60 “When they had driven him [Stephen the deacon] out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning **Stephen** as he called on the Lord and said, **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”** 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”** Having said this, **he fell asleep.** NASB

Here we have the record of the murder of the first Christian. Many people who read this record of the martyrdom of Stephen the deacon suppose that because he calls on the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit that it means that Stephen went to heaven in the form of a ghost as soon as he died. It is of interest to note that Jesus made a similar comment when he died.

Luke 23:46 “And **Jesus**, crying out with a loud voice, said, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”** Having said this, **He breathed His last.**” NASB

If Stephen went to heaven in God's presence at the moment of his death then exactly the same thing should have happened to Jesus. They both asked God to receive their spirit and both immediately died. So did Jesus go to heaven as a ghost to be in the Fathers presence at the moment of His death?

Luke 23:42-43

Christ's answer to the thief on the cross.

Luke 23:42-43 “...**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.’**”

Two thieves were taken to Calvary and were crucified along with Christ. One of the thieves said to Jesus ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ He did not ask to go to heaven when he died. He asked to be remembered when Jesus returns to this earth with His Kingdom. An event that is still in the future. To this request Jesus replied ‘you will be with me in Paradise’. Many Christians infer that the thief and Jesus both went to Paradise that day. This cannot be because we know for sure that Jesus did *not* go to paradise that day.

Mark 15:43-45 “**Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marvelled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.**”

Jesus died on the day of His crucifixion which was so unusual as to cause Pilate to investigate the matter due to astonishment. But we must answer the question. Did Jesus and the thief go to Paradise on the day of the crucifixion? The answer is found in the gospel of John. He records that on Sunday morning just after His resurrection from the dead Jesus is met in the garden by Mary who in astonishment clings to Him.

John 20:17 “...**do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.**”

Clearly neither Jesus nor the thief went into Paradise on the day of the crucifixion. On the third day after the crucifixion Jesus had not gone to Paradise to be in the Fathers presence. How then do we understand the words of Christ when He said ‘**assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.**’ Simple, Jesus did not say this. The original Greek language that the New Testament was written in did not have punctuation marks. Punctuation marks were not added until the 9th century. Bible translators added punctuation where they saw fit. The added comma inserted in the wrong place makes the words of Jesus appear to say that both He and the thief went to paradise on the day of the crucifixion. The Bible translators should have put the comma in front of the word “today” not before it. What Jesus said was this:-

Luke 23:43 “**And Jesus said to him assuredly I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise**”

“I say to you today” was a common Hebrew idiom. This expression can be found in

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS ON THE SOUL SLEEP OF THE DEAD

Deuteronomy 30:18 "*I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed...*".

Acts 20:26 "*Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.*"

Luke 23:43 "Jesus said "*I tell you today, you will be with Me in Paradise*".

Like Jesus neither the thief nor Stephen went to heaven on the day of their deaths but like Jesus will have to wait for the resurrection from the grave.

What and where is Paradise?

The word Paradise occurs three times in the Bible. Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Revelation 2:7

2 Corinthians 12:2,4 "*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven... 'how he was caught up into Paradise*

Paul was caught up, in vision, to a place he called the third heaven which in verse four he expressly affirmed to be Paradise. The first heaven is the atmosphere; the second heaven is outer space and the third heaven is God's dwelling place..

Revelation 2:7 "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

Paradise or the third heaven is clearly where the tree of life is. And in Revelation 21&22 in the description of the New Jerusalem we read:-

Revelation 22:1-2 "*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month.*"

This tree of life grows in the midst of the paradise of God, the New Jerusalem, on the banks of the river of life, which proceeds from the throne of God. That is the paradise of the New Testament- the third heaven, where the tree of life is, and where God maintains His throne. Whoever, therefore goes to paradise goes into the presence of God Himself. Paradise is not under the earth in Hades, as some believe.

2 Corinth 5:1-9

Absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

2 Corinth 5:1-9 "*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed [Physical death], we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens [An immortal body]. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven [An immortal body]. If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked [Dead without a body]. For we who are in this tent [Mortal body] groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed [Dead without a body] , but further clothed, [with an immortal body] that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing [Transformation from mortal flesh to immortal flesh] is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the [mortal] body we are absent from the Lord [Living here on earth]. For we walk by faith [Believing and doing what God tells us], not by sight. We are confident, yes well pleased rather to be absent from the [mortal] body and to be present with the Lord [In heaven, not unclothed without a body but clothed with an immortal body]."*

There is nothing in this passage that teaches that man is conscious in death or has life as a disembodied spirit. To the contrary, Paul wants to be in heaven with an immortal body. The expression "*absent from the body... present with the Lord*" is one of the most commonly used statements made by Paul to try and prove that death is only a change of life for the believer – simply a transition, with the soul of the saint passing out of the body and going straight into the Lord's presence. This is because the accepted view of the Immortal - soulist is that the 'dead in Christ' are not dead at all. However the mortal body does not contain an immortal soul that is released by death and then flies away to heaven. That is thinly disguised Platonism. It must be noted that when Paul wrote his epistles, the Platonic philosophy of an immortal-soul had not yet penetrated the infant Christian church. This

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS ON THE SOUL SLEEP OF THE DEAD

doctrine did not enter the church until nearly AD 200. None of the Apostles believed in it and when Paul wrote these words in AD 58 none of his early Christian readers would have read Immortal-soulism into it.

It is interesting that Paul who was a tent maker (Acts 18:1-3) should refer to his body a tent. A tent and a body are similar in several respects – the materials of both are made of earthly elements, they are transient dwelling places, and may be taken down and moved at any time.

Speaking of death Paul says that if our tent or body is destroyed we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So the hope of the believer is to be given a new body. One made by God, not of this creation, an eternal immortal body in the heavens. This body is given to Christians at the resurrection at the Second Advent of Christ. This body is also the same type of body as the one given to Christ at His resurrection.

1 Corinth 15: 42-49 “...so also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption...it is sown in a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life giving spirit...The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second man is the Lord from heaven...And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man.”

The new body given to Christians at the resurrection is called a Spiritual body, one that is incorruptible, is one that will not grow old, decay or deteriorate. The Spiritual body that Christ was raised with and which we will be raised with is not an immaterial ghost or spirit as is clearly indicated when Jesus, after His resurrection, showed Himself to His disciples.

Luke 24:36-43 “Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? ‘Behold My hands and my feet that it is I myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have’. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marvelled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate it in their presence.”

Whatever this immortal, incorruptible, spiritual body is, it is clear that it has flesh and bones and has a stomach to hold food. This is the existence that Paul longed for when he said, “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.” Paul clearly says that he does not want to be naked. That is, he does not want to be dead or without a body. He wants to be clothed with the glorified immortal body that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

‘While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.’ That is while we live here on earth in this mortal corruptible state we are not in the presence of Christ.

“We are confident, yes well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” That is to be absent from this mortal body and to be clothed with the new immortal body made without hands eternal in the heavens and be in the presence of Christ. Paul is not saying that he wants to be dead and be a ghost in the presence of Christ. He mentioned twice that he did not want to be unclothed, that is dead without a body. His desire was to be clothed with immortality with a glorified body and be in the presence of Christ. There is nothing in this passage that says that man is conscious in death or that man has an immortal soul. It is conceded that if man had never sinned against God in the Garden of Eden he would have reached this eternal state without having passed through the experience of death. Then the notion of an inner immortal soul would never have come into being. It was in fact the second lie taught by Satan the devil in order to sustain the first lie – ‘You will not surely die’ Genesis 3:4. When man should fall in death, the original lie would be obvious, unless man could be persuaded that there is some invisible medium or entity (soul or spirit) through which he continues to live. Hence, such a theory was imperative, and was introduced into and through paganism, and became widely believed.

Philippians 1:20-24
Paul's desire to leave this world and be with Christ.

Philippians 1:20-24. "...Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit for my labour; yet what shall I choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."

Paul was in a dilemma; facing two alternatives he did not know which was best. To live or to die. "For me to live and to die is gain." he wrote. But whichever one I choose Christ will be magnified in my body whether by life or death. Paul had been beaten eight times and stoned once. He had been in perils of waters, robbers, the Jews, false Christians, the heathen, perils in the city, the wilderness, and in the sea and had been in weariness, pain, sickness, hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness (2 Corinth 11:23-27). He had a desire to end this mortal life with its trials and tribulations. He could well say that to die is gain and then be at rest in a state of unconscious sleep in the grave. Like Job in the Old Testament he could say 'O that you would hide me in the grave' (Job 14:13). But the cause of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel were his greatest joy in life. It's little wonder that with these two alternatives Paul was unable to decide which was the better choice.

Unable to make up his mind Paul now adds a third alternative, *'having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.'* Better than what? Better than the other two choices: (living on earth or dying). The word translated 'depart' is the Greek word 'analuō'. It means to depart immediately like a ship being loosed from its moorings and setting sail. This third choice cannot mean death but some event by which he could be in the immediate presence of Christ. That event is called 'Translation'. Paul wanted to be translated physically either at the Second Advent of Christ or by a special translation as was Enoch or Elijah. Unable to make up his mind this third choice ended all indecision. 'Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.' That is to remain alive in this mortal condition and to oversee the churches. He did not live to see the fulfilment of his hearts desire; he suffered a martyr's death instead. But he 'died in faith' waiting for the 'crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge', shall give him 'on that day', and not to him only but 'to all them who have loved His appearing'. (2 Tim 4:8).

There is nothing in this passage that refers to mans consciousness in death or to the Platonic Greek concept of an immortal soul. These ideas have to be believed first and then read into the verses but they cannot be gotten from them.

Revelation 6:9-10
Souls under the altar

Revelation 6:9,10 "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying 'how long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed."

Some believe that the saved live in heaven under an altar. This is a rather strange idea of paradise. This is not a literal event but is a part of a vision that uses symbolic language. In Genesis 4:10 God said to Cain after he had murdered his brother: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." The saints' cry to God in the same way the blood of Abel cried from the ground. It's not real. The altar here is probably a picture of the bronze altar in the outer courtyard of the Hebrew sanctuary, and the martyrs may be thought of as sacrifices presented to God. As the blood of the victims was poured out at the base of the altar (see Lev 4:7), and the life (soul) of the flesh is in the blood (see Lev 17:11), so the souls of those who had been martyred may be thought of as being beneath the altar. Since the altar of sacrifice was not in the temple, but in the outer court, it is clear that the scene portrayed here takes place not in the heavenly temple but on the earth which was symbolised by the outer court of the temple. Later Jewish tradition set forth the idea that Israel's dead were buried under the altar and therefore were interred under the throne of glory. These souls are not the disembodied spirits of departed martyrs. In this same vision the first four seals are the four horsemen of the apocalypse; a white, red, black and pale horse all with warlike riders. These do not literally exist in heaven. Likewise the souls under the altar in the fifth seal do not literally exist either. They are only figurative representations. In this case the symbolisation is presented to encourage those who faced martyrdom and death with the assurance that despite the seeming triumph of the enemy God's people will eventually be vindicated.

1Peter 3:18-20 **Spirits in prison.**

1 Peter 3:18-20 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but being made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formally were disobedient, when once Divine long suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, ***eight souls***, were saved through water.”

This passage teaches that Christ died for the salvation of us all. The Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit that preached to the people before the flood in the days of Noah. Eight souls or eight flesh and blood people accepted the preaching of the Spirit through Noah and were saved by being on the ark.

It is commonly held that this passage teaches that during the interval between Christ's death and resurrection that His 'immortal soul' or spirit descended into hades, the prison of the living dead, and preached the gospel to the wicked spirits of those who died before the flood to give them a second chance at obtaining salvation 2400 years after their deaths.

This interpretation must be rejected. Why preach the gospel to those who are lost when the bible is quite clear that after a person dies there is no second chance. (See Hebrews 9:27) And why would Christ just single out the wicked before the flood and not give the lost of other generation's equal opportunity. This false interpretation claims that the dead are alive and can be preached to (although only the wicked who drowned in the flood), and can benefit from that preaching and can repent and be saved. This interpretation would validate the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

Christ was dead while He was in the tomb. He was not alive under the earth preaching the gospel to only *one* generation of the wicked, as some believe. The major theme all through the Bible is that the saviour died for the salvation of humanity. To say that His death was not really death but a different phase of existence destroys the core of the gospel message. Christ's body and His mortal soul were both put into the grave. On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter said of Christ:

Acts 2:27 “you will not abandon ***me*** to the ***grave***, nor will you let your ***Holy One*** see decay. NIV.

Acts 2:27 “you will not leave my ***soul*** in ***hades***, nor will you allow your ***Holy one*** to see corruption. NKJV

According to Peter the ***soul*** of Christ was put into the grave or hades. But it was not there long enough to see corruption or decay. Note that the soul of Christ is paralleled with holy one. It was Christ Himself that was asleep in the tomb to await the resurrection. Christ said of Himself in the Revelation 1:18 “I am He who lives, ***and was dead***, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen...” Christ Himself was dead in the tomb both body and soul. But on the third day He was made alive or resurrected by the Spirit. Also note that Peter says that eight ***souls*** were saved from destruction because they got on board Noah's ark. Peter uses the word 'soul' both here and at Pentecost to describe the entire living person, body and spirit together. These eight souls survived the flood and lived as flesh and blood human beings in the New World.

Christ, through the spirit did preach to spirits in prison but not during the interval between His death and resurrection. The text says that it was by the Spirit of God that raised Him from the dead that He preached to the people before the flood. Christ, through the Spirit, preached to them in the days of Noah just before the flood, before their deaths while they still had an opportunity to be saved. The phrase, '***he went and preached***' should be understood to mean '***by the ministry of Noah***'. According to the Apostle Peter, Noah was a preacher of Righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). The Spirit of God preached through Noah to warn the world of its doom, and to offer salvation. Even though the apostle Peter says that Christ did the preaching through the Spirit Peter explains that all of the prophets had the Spirit of Christ in them.

1 Peter 1:10-11 “Of this salvation, the prophets have inquired, and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the ***Spirit of Christ was in them*** was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

All of the prophets had the Spirit of Christ in them to enable them to preach the truth. Therefore Noah had the Spirit of Christ in him when he preached before the flood. This is what Peter means when he said that Christ through the Spirit preached to the people before the flood.

Why are the people before the flood called 'spirits in prison'? They are called spirits but they are not called disembodied spirits. They are physical people with ***mortal*** spirits. Eg *Numbers 16:22* “ O God, the God of

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS ON THE SOUL SLEEP OF THE DEAD

the spirits of all flesh...” Spirits here clearly means all flesh, man and beast, not in a disembodied state. They are described as being in prison because they are not saved. They were in the prison house of sin. Christ said that His mission was to “Preach the gospel to the poor and to proclaim *liberty* to the captives. See Luke 4:18. In Hebrews 2:15 the mission of Christ is stated to be “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” It’s clear that all humanity are ‘spirits in prison’ before they accept the gospel. This type of language sounds bizarre to us in our culture, but it must be remembered that Peter wrote in the first century and in a culture and language completely different from our own.

It is clear that the above verses that are used to support the idea of mans natural immortality after death do not teach that belief. The doctrine of mans natural immortality has to be believed first and then read into the text.