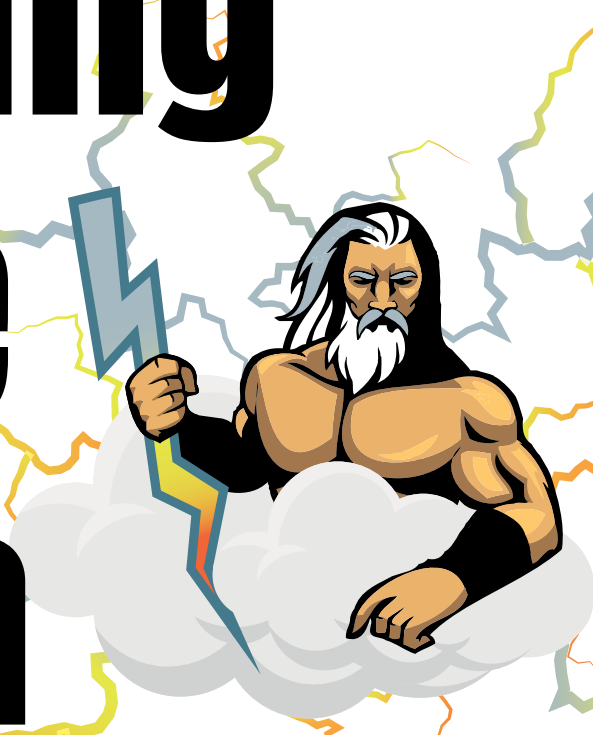


Giving Life to a Fairytale

The Mystery of Death

Randy Barber



Preface

Being true to Scripture means to truly endeavor to discover what the God of the Bible is saying to us. “Exegesis” comes from the Greek *εξηγισθαι* and is defined as “reading out of.” It means to read out of Scripture the meaning God wants us to have. The opposite is “Eisegesis” which comes from the Greek *εισηγισθαι* and is defined as “reading into.” It means reading a text with an opinion, or reading one’s own meaning into the text. It means that one is trying to make the Bible say what they want it to say, rather than what God wants it to say. May we all become true students of God’s Word, and endeavor to find the exact message God wants us to have. Pray for God’s leading as you read.

Randy Barber

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The mystery of death

Does it matter what I believe? Is truth important, or does it matter if I believe a lie? And how far does the ripple effect of that lie go? How many parts of my life, or someone else's life, does that lie touch? When it comes to the Bible as the Word of God, does it matter if I understand it correctly?

In a recent study of the book of Revelation, one person asked, "Why is it important for me to understand the prophetic events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ? Does my life depend on a correct understanding?" And my answer back was, "It should always matter if we understand the Bible correctly." If we get the Second Coming wrong, it could affect our belief in the Resurrection. And why is it important to understand the Resurrection correctly? Because Jesus warned in Matthew 24 that those would come who would "*deceive, if possible, even the elect.*" So it's very important to test every belief by Scripture. Not a single one of us would deliberately choose to be deceived. Truth is always important.

To understand the purpose for the Resurrection at Christ's Second Coming, one must understand "The Mystery of Death" first. So, welcome to the hottest topic in Christianity today. There is no topic more controversial than this one. And if we get it wrong, it will impact every other part of our lives.

People say all kinds of things about death. "You go straight to heaven when you die."—"You might go straight to hell when you die."—"There is no after-life, this is all you get."—"At death you pass into another of many life-cycles."—"You sleep at death, waiting for the Resurrection." So who's right, and why is there so much confusion about this topic?

Giving life to a fairytale

We all know what a fairytale is. We heard them when we were children—Santa Claus; the Easter Bunny; Dr Seuss—and then at some point we found that those fairytales were not real. Have you heard the tale called “The Buried Moon?” Joseph Jacobs collected English folklore in the mid 1800s and included it in one of his books on fairytales. And there have even been songs written about “The Buried Moon.” Here’s the fairytale—

“Once upon a time the land was filled with bogs. When the moon shone it was safe to walk, but when she did not, evil bog monsters came out. One day the moon, hearing of this, pulled a black cloak over her yellow hair and went to see for herself. She fell into a pool and was caught by a snag. She saw a man coming toward the pool and fought to be free until the hood fell off. The light helped the man make his way to safety and scared off the bog monsters. Her struggle to be free caused the hood to fall back over her head, and the monsters came out of the darkness, trapping her under a big stone, and the light of the moon was gone. The people wondered what had happened until the man she had rescued remembered and told what he had seen. A wise woman sent them into the bog to find the moon. They did as the woman said, and freed the moon. And from that time on the moon has shone brighter over the bog-lands than anywhere else, and the evil bog monsters were chased from the land.”

Now, none of us are going to read that and believe it actually happened. It’s a fairytale. It’s make believe. But you would be surprised how many early Anglos did believe it, causing hundreds to begin the practice of Moon Worship in the bogs of England. K. M. Briggs, in *Fairytales in English Tradition*, page 45, says that “myths and fairytales, over time, can eventually find their way into accepted thought.”

Many of today's fairytales have evolved from centuries-old stories that have appeared, with variations, in multiple cultures around the world. The history of the fairytale dates back thousands of years, and a myth can evolve into a legend, where the narrative is perceived by both the teller and the hearer as being grounded in historical truth.

Greek mythology is a set of stories about the gods, goddesses, heroes and rituals of ancient Greece, and these myths became part of their religious practice. The most popular mythological figures include Greek gods like Zeus and Apollo, Greek goddesses like Aphrodite and Athena, Titans like Atlas, and Greek heroes like Hercules. One of the most popular Greek myths involves the creation of man, and I'm going to tell you about a fairytale that has had far more impact on the human race than "The Buried Moon" ever did. So listen to a fairytale that has literally changed the whole world—

"The supreme god Zeus, with his son Dionysus ruled the heavenly abode. The Titans were envious of the divine immortal nature of the gods, and during an absence of Zeus to a far part of the heavens, the Titans conspired to capture Dionysus and eat his body in order to steal his immortality. This they did with violence. The mortal had been infused with the immortal, which achieved their eternal survival. But when Zeus returned, he was furious. With a thunderbolt he reduced the Titans to ashes. After drifting to earth the ashes sprang forth becoming the race of humans. And thus, humanity has been infused with immortality."

Now imagine, actually believing that a person is part mortal (subject to death) and part immortal (not subject to death) from a fairytale like this. But that is exactly what has happened, and millions of people have accepted it as a fact today. I want you to remember the phrase, "humanity has been infused with immortality," and let's explore this fairytale a little further.

The historian Pausanias (AD 143-176) wrote a 10 volume journal entitled *Descriptions of Greece* in which he recorded the customs, historical events, legends, and fairytales from the people of Greece. Sir James Frazer wrote, "Without Pausanias the ruins of Greece would for the most part be a maze without a clue, a riddle without an answer." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 9, page 212). Of Pausanias, researcher Daniel Knauft wrote, "Among his discoveries Pausanias seems to have found the fountainhead of folklore that would eventually form the basis for the Greek philosophical thought on the nature and destiny of man." (Daniel Knauft, *Search for the Immortal Soul*, page 33).

Pausanias records the mythological story of man's origin which later found its way into the cult of Orphism, dating to the 6th century BC. "Basic to Orphism is the Greek concept of the dual nature of man. Orphism taught that the soul was imprisoned in the body." (*Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. 21, page 86). And Orphism's dual nature of man came from the fairytale of Zeus and Dionysus. "Orphism developed an elaborate cosmogony that focused on the killing and eating of Dionysus, son of Zeus by the Titans, and Zeus's subsequent destruction of the Titans, from whose ashes arose the human race, part Dionysiac (immortal) and part Titan (mortal)." (*Academic American Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, page 448).

"By the time of Plato a construct of man's nature, through the process of reason, had matured. Human nature, according to Plato and Greek philosophy, is a body/soul dichotomy. In Greek culture death was the release; at this climactic moment the soul was being freed to achieve its true life." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 8, page 1012).

So how much of this ancient Greek fairytale has infiltrated Christianity? "We are influenced by the Greek, Platonic idea that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament." (*Eerdman's International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, page 812).

Now, are you ready for this? "It was through Plato that the Greek doctrine of the soul was passed on to Christian theology.

Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine all learned in the school of Plato.” (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 11, page 742). So does that mean that the “Immortality of the Soul,” which is taught today from Christian pulpits everywhere, is not supported from the Bible?

What is the “Immortality of the Soul?” It’s the belief that man consists of two parts—a body, and an immortal soul that cannot die. And most denominations today teach that the soul goes straight to heaven or hell at death. But is that what the Bible teaches? *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible*, London and Worthing, page 32, says, “The Greek thinkers tended to think of man as an immortal soul imprisoned in a body. This emphasis is the opposite of that of the Bible, but has found a wide place in Christian thought.” Did you notice, “This emphasis is the opposite of that of the Bible?” So is it possible that this belief did not come from God, but from a fairytale?

What does the Bible teach?

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 reads, “*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.*” The word “forgotten” here comes from the Hebrew *shakach* which means “to cause to forget,” as in losing one’s memory. A more literal way of saying this is, “*for their memory is gone.*” Psalm 146:4 says, “*His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*” Job 14:21 says, “*His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; they are brought low, and he does not perceive it.*” Psalm 115:17 says, “*The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence.*” Psalm 6:5 says, “*For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?*”

Someone says, “Ya, but that’s just talking about the body. The soul has gone to be with Jesus.” Notice Ecclesiastes 9:10, “*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.*” Job 14:10 continues this thought, “*But man dies and*

is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As the river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep." The King James Version Concordance describes death as a sleep 60 times in the Bible—

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|----------------|--|
| Deut. 31:16 | "Thou (Moses) shalt sleep with thy fathers." |
| 2 Sam. 7:12 | "Thou (David) shalt sleep with thy fathers." |
| 1 Kings 1:21 | "The king shall sleep with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 2:10 | "So David slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 11:21 | "David slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 11:43 | "Solomon slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 14:20 | "He (Jeroboam) slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 14:31 | "Rehoboam slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 15:8 | "Abijam slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 15:24 | "Asa slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 16:6 | "Baasha slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 16:28 | "Omri slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 22:40 | "Ahab slept with his fathers." |
| 1 Kings 22:50 | "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 8:24 | "Joram slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 10:35 | "Jehu slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 13:9 | "Jehoahaz slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 14:16 | "Jehoash slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 14:22 | "The King slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 14:29 | "Jeroboam slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 15:7 | "Azariah slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 15:22 | "Menahem slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 15:38 | "Jotham slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 16:20 | "Ahaz slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 20:21 | "Hezekiah slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 21:18 | "Manasseh slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Kings 24:6 | "Jehoiakim slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 9:31 | "Solomon slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 12:16 | "Rehoboam slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 14:1 | "Abijah slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 16:13 | "Asa slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 21:1 | "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers." |
| 2 Chron. 26:2 | "The king slept with his fathers." |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 2 Chron. 26:23 | “Uzziah slept with his fathers.” |
| 2 Chron. 27:9 | “Uzziah slept with his fathers.” |
| 2 Chron. 28:27 | “Ahaz slept with his fathers.” |
| 2 Chron. 32:33 | “Hezekiah slept with his fathers.” |
| 2 Chron. 33:20 | “Manasseh slept with his fathers.” |
| Job 3:13 | “I should have slept.” |
| Job 7:21 | “Now I shall sleep in the dust.” |
| Job 14:12 | “Nor be raised out of their sleep.” |
| Psalms 13:3 | “Lest I sleep the sleep of death.” |
| Psalms 76:5 | “They have slept their sleep.” |
| Psalms 76:6 | “Cast into a dead sleep.” |
| Psalms 90:5 | “they are as a sleep.” |
| Jer. 51:39 | “Sleep a perpetual sleep.” |
| Jer. 51:57 | “Sleep a perpetual sleep.” |
| Dan 12:2 | “Them that sleep in the dust of the earth.” |
| Matt 27:52 | “The saints which slept arose.” |
| Mark 5:39 | “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” |
| John 11:11 | “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” |
| Acts 7:60 | “And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” |
| Acts 13:36 | “David fell on sleep.” |
| 1 Cor. 11:30 | “And many sleep.” |
| 1 Cor. 15:6 | “But some are fallen asleep.” |
| 1 Cor. 15:18 | “Which are fallen asleep in Christ.” |
| 1 Thes. 4:13 | “Concerning them which are asleep.” |
| 1 Thes. 4:14 | “them also which sleep.” |
| 1 Thes. 4:15 | “Shall not prevent them which are asleep.” |
| 2 Peter 3:4 | “Since the fathers fell asleep.” |

Am I saying that you should only read the King James Version? No, I'm not saying that. But if you enter “sleep” into a newer translation concordance, you will not find nearly as many because they have changed the word “sleep” to “rest.” It means the same thing. From Deuteronomy 31:16 to 2 Peter 3:4 you will find “death as a sleep” 60 times. And because “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*” (2 Timothy 3:16), the true seeker will have to acknowledge that it is God who is speaking here.

While pastoring in Seattle many years ago, I received a phone call one morning asking if I would come to a certain address at two

o'clock that same day. I wrote down the address, and knocked on the door promptly at two. Inside I was greeted by twenty-two ladies who were part of a ladies Bible study group. They said they had one simple question for me, and that question was, "If we go to heaven when we die, what is the purpose of the Resurrection?" That's a great question, and I will attempt to answer it in this book.

What about the Resurrection?

"Resurrection" is mentioned 45 times in the Bible. John 5:28-29 says, "...all who are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth..." Acts 24:15 says, "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."

The first time we see the Resurrection mentioned in Scripture is in Job 14:12-14. Verse 12 reads, "So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep." Here death is likened to a sleep. When you sleep at night you are not aware of the passing of time. Job continues to describe death as a sleep in verse 13, "Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me." Here is the first clear reference to a Resurrection. But notice verse 14, "If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change comes." In other words, "I will not live again until I am changed." And when does that change take place? Paul answers that question in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." The saved will receive immortality when the trumpet sounds at Christ's Second Coming. The Bible clearly teaches the Resurrection, not the Immortality of the Soul.

The theme of the Resurrection runs like a continuous thread through both the Old and New Testaments. For example, Isaiah

26:19 says, “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” Daniel 12:2 says, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The New Testament carries the same Resurrection theme. We just read John 5:28-29 where it says, “...all who are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth...” And Acts 24:15 says, “there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.”

L. P. Jacks, editor of *The British Quarterly Review*, after intense study of the New Testament, came to this conclusion, “The central theme of the New Testament, as it emerged before me in the course of this reading, is immortality—not immortality of everyone, but of the believers in Christ as risen from the dead.” (*The Confessions of an Octogenarian*, page 229).

What is the “soul” or “spirit”?

Many people today believe that something, a “soul” or “spirit” lives on after a person dies and goes directly to heaven, hell, or somewhere in between at death. Our English words “soul” and “spirit” occur a total of 1,677 times in the text from which our Bible was translated. They are translated from five Hebrew-Aramaic words and three Greek words. The most commonly used of these words are *nephesh* (754 times); *ruwach* (389 times); *psuche* (105 times); and *pneuma* (385 times), for a total of 1,633. Of this number the KJV translates *nephesh* as “soul” 472 times; *psuche* as “soul” 58 times; *ruwach* as “spirit” 237 times; and *pneuma* as “spirit” 286 times. And it’s my belief that the best way to explain what these words mean is to let the Bible interpret itself.

Genesis 2:7 says, “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 soul” (*nephesh*). So as you can see from the text, the combination of a body plus the breath of God equals a living soul. And what we should conclude from this is, we do not have a soul—we are a soul. As long as we have a body and the breath

that God gave us, we are a living soul. Take away the breath and we are no longer a living soul. Psalm 104:29 says, “*You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.*”

You may be thinking, but what about Ecclesiastes 3:21? “*Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animals, which goes down to the earth.*” Doesn’t that teach that the “spirit” of man returns to God? “Spirit” here comes from the Hebrew “*ruwach*,” which can be translated “breath, or hot wind.” Job 27:3 says, “*All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit (ruwach) of God is in my nostrils.*” In this case “spirit” is the breath that returns to God. Remember, body plus the breath of God equals a “living soul.” The “soul” is a way of referencing the whole human organism. A “soul” is a combination of a body and the spark of life that comes from God. We do not have a soul—we are a soul.

A. E. Garvie states in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, page 872, “A contrast between soul and spirit may be recognized; while the latter (spirit) is the universal principle imparting life from the Creator, the former (soul) is the individual organism possessed of life in the creature.” Reichenbach, in his book, *Is Man the Phoenix?*, page 54, wrote, “The doctrine that man as a person does not die...is apparently contrary to the teaching of Scripture... There is no hint that the only thing spoken about is the destruction of the physical organism, and that the real person, the soul, does not die but lives on.” Donald Bloesch, in *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol 2, page 188 wrote, “There is no inherent immortality of the soul. The person who dies, even the one who dies in Christ, undergoes the death of both body and soul.” Anthony Hoekema, in his book, *The Bible and The Future*, page 90 wrote, “We cannot point to any inherent quality in man or in any aspect of man which makes him indestructible.”

Can a soul die?

The “Immortality of the Soul” teaches that the soul cannot die, just like the fairytale. So, can a soul die? What does God say?

Ezekiel 18:20 plainly says, “*The soul who sins shall die.*” James 5:20 says, “*He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death.*” Acts 3:23 reads, “*Every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*” One can easily see that the soul is not something that lives on after death, but rather is subject to death. We do not have a soul—we are a soul.

But just a minute. If the “soul” is immortal, it cannot die. And here’s where the problem comes in. The immortal soul found its way into Christian thought from Greek mythology a long time ago. “Plato remained to the end a dualist. It is he, and his followers, who most of all are responsible for imposing this ‘religious’ anthropology on Western thought.” (Body and Soul, *The Westminster Press*, 1956, page 41). *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible* (cited earlier) says, “This emphasis is *the opposite of that of the Bible*, but has found a wide place in Christian thought.” Notice what Dr. Andres Nygren says, “In the Platonic, Hellenistic view, immortality is a native possession of the human soul. But such a doctrine is in line with the Fall. It is man’s attempt to make himself like God. It is an assault on God’s divinity.” (Dr. Andres Nygren, President of the Lutheran World Federation, *The Westminster Press*, 1953, page 281). What does Dr. Nygren mean when he says the Immortality of the Soul “is in line with the Fall?” Where did this “no death lie” originate? Actually we find its origin as far back in time as we are able to travel. In the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 3:1-4, we see the Devil take the form of a serpent and appear to Eve. Read verses 1-4 with me, “...and he said to the woman, *Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. Then the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die.*”

Here we see the first recorded lie ever told. God said, “If you do it you will die.” The Devil said, “You won’t die,” and he’s been telling that same lie ever since. He even has the Christian world

believing it, and this is what Dr. Nygren means when he says the Immortality of the Soul “is in line with the Fall.” Reason with me for a moment. The Bible says God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). But it also says the Devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). If God said something, wouldn’t you expect the Devil to say the opposite? And who are you going to believe? The inspiration for this Greek fairytale comes from none other than the father of lies himself.

“Somewhere in Christian faith there must have been some opening through which the foreign doctrine could penetrate. Accordingly, from the Biblical standpoint, it is God alone who possesses immortality. The opinion that we men are immortal because our soul is an indestructible, divine essence is, once and for all, irreconcilable with the Biblical view of God and man.” (*The Westminster Press*, 1954, page 106).

In the entire Bible there is not one single statement concerning the soul’s immortality, nor does the Bible ever speak of the eternal life of the wicked. In fact 1 John 3:15 says plainly, “*no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*” How can a murderer live and burn forever if eternal life is not abiding in him? Then what does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches “Conditional Immortality.” It means those who are saved will receive immortality at Christ’s return, and not before. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:14-16 that “*Christ alone has immortality.*” We are not immortal now, but we will be changed from mortal to immortal if we are saved when Christ returns at His Second Coming. Then what about eternal torment? What about an eternal burning hell? We’ll get to that shortly.

What about the thief on the cross?

The Bible calls David a man after God’s own heart. David had such a repentance experience with God that we would all expect to see him in heaven. Yet Acts 2:34 says, “*For David is not ascended into the heavens,*” and 1 Kings 2:10 tells us that he is asleep with his fathers.

In order for a deceased person to be in heaven or hell now, they would have to receive their reward at death. That is exactly what the Devil would like us to believe with his no-death lie. But Jesus tells us in Revelation 22:12, *“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”* This statement of Christ’s would be totally meaningless if everyone had his or her reward prior to His Second Coming. Those who fall asleep in Christ remain in an unconscious state, oblivious to the passing of time, waiting for the voice of their Saviour on the Resurrection morning.

This always brings up the question, “What about the thief on the cross? Isn’t he in heaven now? Jesus promised him paradise that day.” Let’s read the account in Luke 23:42, *“Then he (the thief) said to Jesus, 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.”*

It seems pretty clear from reading the text that Christ and the thief both went to heaven that day. But did they really go to heaven that day? Did Jesus go to heaven that Friday when He was crucified? No He did not. John 20:15-17 tells us that Mary Magdalene met Him in the garden on Sunday after His resurrection, and Jesus still had not ascended to heaven. Read this with me in verse 17, *“Jesus said to her, 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.”* So on the third day after His death, Jesus had not yet ascended to heaven.

Did the thief go to heaven that Friday? No he did not. John 19:31-33 tells us, *“Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not brake His legs.”* The thief’s legs were broken because he was not dead. They were broken so that he could not walk away after he was taken down from the

cross at the end of the day. They didn't break Jesus' legs because He was already dead.

The Jews did not allow the victim to remain on the cross over the Sabbath, so just before the day ended (at sunset) their legs were broken. According to custom, the victim was then dragged to the city dump where they were left to die. We are told that in some cases the one being crucified could live on the cross for up to a week or more. They usually died of infection, thirst, and exposure. So as the sun set, and the day ended that Friday, our thief was taken down from the cross with smashed knee caps so that he couldn't get up and walk away before he died.

If Jesus didn't go to heaven that Friday (as He said He didn't in John 20:17), and if the thief didn't die before the day ended at sunset, why did Jesus say, "*Today you will be with Me in paradise?*" Was He playing a trick on the thief? Was He telling him something that He didn't really plan to follow through on? Not at all. Jesus promised the thief salvation that day, and I know he will be in heaven.

The problem here is a very simple one to see through. The book of Luke was written in *koine* (or common) Greek, and the common Greek of that day used no punctuation. It did not use periods or commas as the English language uses. Translation of the King James Version was completed in AD 1611. When the Greek manuscripts were translated into English, the translators had to insert the punctuation where they felt it belonged. The problem here is one of a comma. Right now the text reads, "*Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.*" If we move the comma to where it should be, the text would read, "*Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with Me in paradise.*" In order to be consistent with everything else He taught on death, I believe Jesus was saying, "I promise you today, you will be with Me in paradise."

Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:18, "*Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*" Paul also wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are*

alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” We can be certain that when the trumpet sounds on Resurrection morning, the thief and all other believers who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour, will experience the fulfillment of this promise, to be with Him in paradise.

What about hell fire?

There are numerous questions we need to find answers to when dealing with the subject of hell fire. Does the Bible teach that the wicked will be destroyed? Yes it does. Matthew 13:40 says, *“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world.”* Verse 41 continues, *“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* In numerous places the Bible teaches that God will have to destroy those who choose to live in rebellion. Yes, hell fire is a Biblical fact.

Are the wicked burning now? Not according to the Bible. Job 21:30 says, *“For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.”* This is consistent with everything else we’ve studied from God’s Word, *“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing.”* (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Earlier we read from Revelation 22:12 which states, *“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every one according to his work.”* The reward, whether eternal life or eternal death, will be given by the Lord at His coming, at the end of the world—not at death.

Will the lake of fire burn forever? Once again, the Bible says “No.” Please hear me out before you push the panic button on this one. Malachi 4:1 says, *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”* Psalms 37:10 says, *“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you*

will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.” And then verse 20 says, *“But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.”* Malachi 4:3 says, *“You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts.”* The problem in understanding hell fire is not an inconsistency in what the Bible teaches, but rather in understanding the Biblical terminology of “forever” and “eternal.”

What about those verses that talk about “eternal” fire and “everlasting” punishment? The Greek word “*aeon*” and the Hebrew “*olam*” are translated “forever,” “eternal,” and “everlasting”—and they mean “age lasting” or “lasting for an age.” And it is clear that today’s English does not accurately reflect the Biblical meaning. In today’s English all three words imply unlimited duration. In the Bible, all three words mean “age lasting” and are determined by the person or thing they describe. For example, the ancient Greek contains numerous examples of Emperors being described as “*aeon*.” This meant that they were to reign “eternally” —“forever.” In the case of Tiberius Caesar, “*aeon*” describes a period of 23 years, from the time of his ascent to the throne, to his death—“age lasting.” You have to remember that early kings were worshipped and treated like gods, so it was only natural for people to say they would rule forever.

1 Samuel 1:22 says that Samuel was to serve the Lord “forever” (*olam*). But verse 28 says he will serve the Lord “*as long as he lives*”—“age lasting.” Exodus 21:6 describes a servant who would serve his master “forever” (*olam*), meaning “*as long as he lives*”—“age lasting.” Isaiah 34:10 tells of when God destroyed the Edomites, and says, *“The smoke thereof shall go up forever”* (*olam*). In English today we would say that the fire has to still be burning for the smoke to continue up “forever.” But that’s not what the Bible writer was saying. He meant that the result of the fire (smoke is the result of fire) would be “forever,” to convey the idea of complete destruction and desolation. The expression does not describe a process which goes on “forever,” but an act whose results are forever.

Matthew 25:41, “*Then shall He also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*” Is the fire “eternal”? Does the fire never stop burning? Remember Malachi 4:1, “*And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.*” Verse 3 says, “*They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts.*” What does “everlasting” mean here? It means “age lasting.” The wicked will burn as long as there is something to burn, and then the fire goes out. The fire is eternal in its effect, not in its duration. In other words, the effect of the fire will be everlasting, not the fire itself.

What about eternal life? The saved receive “eternal” life “*aeon*”—life to which there is no end. That “age” never comes to an end, so it still means “age lasting.” The lost receive “eternal” damnation “*aeon*”—death to which there is no end. This is the “second death” spoken of in Revelation 20:14. That “age” never comes to an end. So to the Bible mind “forever,” “eternal,” and “everlasting” do not always mean endless existence. And the Bible is consistent all the way through—“*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing.*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Imagine all of this starting with a fairytale, and the master-mind behind it, did it to discredit God and bring confusion to God’s people. He did it to reinforce his original lie from Eden (Genesis 3:4). After all, if he can make God look like a harsh being who burns some people forever with no end, then he has accomplished his purpose.

I’m sure that someone must be thinking by now, “But Pastor Barber, you haven’t read everything the Bible has to say on this subject. You have said nothing about the Rich Man and Lazarus.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Let’s read the narrative recorded in Luke 16:19-31, “*There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with*

the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us. Then he said, I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, No, Father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he said to him, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Should we accept the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus as a literal description of hell, or as a parable? If we accept it literally, as many Christians today do, some problems immediately confront us. First, if it is to be taken literally, those saved in heaven can see and communicate with those lost in hell. Second, those in hell would have physical bodies (fingers, tongues, eyes), which is in conflict with what those who teach this believe. Obviously, even the staunchest believer in eternal torment would reject this literal application. Heaven would be more of a hell than hell itself if the saved could watch and talk to their loved ones burning forever in the eternal flames.

When Christ taught in parables, He always used a story to relay an object lesson, and the details of the story were often unrelated to that object lesson. For example, the parable of the Ten Virgins had nothing whatever to do with ten literal virgins. The parable of the Lost Coin had nothing to do with money. The parable of the Lost Sheep had nothing to do with real sheep.

And so it is with the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Jesus intended to state the simple truth that we determine our eternal destiny in this life before we die. Do not try to make the parable say something that Christ never intended it to say. And remember, the purpose of this parable was to teach an object lesson, not to contradict or distort everything else the Bible says on the subject of death and hell.

Is the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus a parable? An increasing number of theologians are coming to that conclusion today. A. H. Strong in his book, *Systematic Theology*, page 1056 wrote, "We grant that the material images used in Scripture to set forth the sufferings of the lost are to be spiritually and not literally interpreted." An almost identical story is recorded in the Talmud and other Jewish books of Christ's day. It is believed that the Jews inherited it as part of their mythology from Plato (427 BC) and other Greek philosophers. I believe that Jesus took a story they already had, changed the names to Abraham and Lazarus to fit the mindset of His audience, and then used this parable to show the Jews just how silly some of their own mythological teachings had become. A few weeks later He actually raised Lazarus from the dead, but the Jews still didn't accept Him as the Messiah.

Many commentators and scholars consider the Rich Man and Lazarus to be a parable. Why? First, because it occurs at the end of a connected chain of six parables in Luke 15-16. Second, because the same story is found in the *Gemara Babylonicum* which contains much fiction and mythology, and was written many years earlier while the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. Whitby, Doddridge, Lightfoot, Bloomfield, Gill and John Wesley are just a few who view this as a parable. Daniel Whitby wrote, "That this is only a parable and not a real history of what was actually done is evident, first because we find this very parable in the *Gemara Babylonicum*. Second, from the circumstances of the story itself. No one believes that communication can possibly take place between heaven and hell." (L. C. Brown, *Rich Man and Lazarus*, 1842, page 6).

Where did the idea of an eternally burning hell originate? Certainly not from the Bible. The Biblical word “hell” comes from the Hebrew *sheol* in the Old Testament, which means “grave, or pit.” A good example of this is found in Psalms 16:10. In the New Testament, three Greek words are translated “hell.” The first of these is *hades*, which means “grave or place of the dead.” A good example would be Revelation 20:14. The second is *geenna*, (Matthew 5:22). It comes from the Valley of Hinnom, *gehenna* (Jerusalem garbage dump) meaning “burning place” where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned. The third is *tartaroo* (2 Peter 2:4), which simply means “deep place or darkness.”

So where did the popular concept of death and hell come from? In Eden God said, “*If you sin you will die.*” He did not say, “If you sin I will burn you forever.” The Devil, on the other hand, who counterfeits every truth of God, said “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). And the Devil has perpetrated his counterfeit right down to our day. His first real success (after Eve) was when he tricked the Jews, just before the time of Christ, into accepting his no-death lie through Plato and Greek mythology. Robert McAfee Brown, *Handbook of Christian Theology*, 1958, page 183 says, “The immortality of the soul came into the stream of historic Christian faith chiefly through the Greek tributary.”

Shawn Boonstra, in his book, *Draining the Styx*, pages 58-59 tells how the Jews were exposed to pagan cultures—from Egypt to Canaan, and from Babylon to Rome—and how these cultures conquered and quite literally ruled over them. The Greek influence which continued far into the Roman Empire brought on a most notable shift in Jewish thinking by introducing dualistic philosophy into mainstream Jewish life shortly before the time of Christ. And Boonstra says, “Even now, much of the way we think as citizens of the Western world was shaped by those Greek philosophers.” Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, Yale University Press, 1988, page 18, say, “Those Jews influenced by Greek ideas, [believed] at death angels approached and greeted the soul and invited it to mount a chariot which

traveled to a far-off place.” McDannell and Lang called this “a heaven of philosophers contemplating abstract ideas.” Boonstra says, “It is difficult to remain immersed in an influential pagan culture for long and not pick up its concepts and attitudes.” (*Draining the Styx*, page 60).

Most of the Apostolic fathers were faithful to Conditional Immortality. Clement believed that immortality was a gift to be given by God at the end of the world. Ignatius saw death as a sleep. Barnabas believed the wicked would suffer eternal death. Hermes believed the wicked would be terminated. Justin Martyr believed man to be a candidate for immortality. Irenaeus believed that eternal life is given by God, and that the wicked await eternal loss when they will cease to exist. And it was not until Augustine’s time that this truth began to be corrupted, and the Immortality of the Soul began to infiltrate the early Christian Church. Athenegoras (AD 188) used the term “immortal soul” for the first time. Tertullian carried the lie farther when he reasoned, “Since all souls are immortal, the punishment of the wicked must be eternal.” It was not until Augustine’s time (4th Century AD) that the idea of conscious torment for the wicked became universally accepted, and soon the Devil’s lie became the dominant unchallenged belief of the church as it slipped into the Dark Ages.

William Tyndale, answering Sir Thomas More’s dialogue, wrote, “Putting them [departed souls] in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments where with Christ and Paul prove the resurrection... The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did ever live. And the pope joined the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together. Things so contrary that they cannot agree.” (William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, Book 4, Chapter 2, pages 180-181).

In 1513, the Roman Church, emerging from the Dark Ages passed a law (a Bull) against those who were suggesting that the human soul is not immortal. The very fact that the Church felt they needed to take such action reveals that a growing number of believers were discovering the Biblical truth about death. Among those was Martin Luther.

Luther wrote of death as a “sleep” on many occasions. Between death and resurrection, Luther pictured the deceased as having no consciousness of anything. One of Luther’s most tender statements says, “For just as one who falls asleep and reaches morning unexpectedly when he awakes, without knowing what has happened to him, so we shall suddenly rise on the last day without knowing how we have come into death and through death. We shall sleep until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, ‘Doctor Martin, get up!’ then I shall rise in a moment and be happy with Him forever.” (Quoted by T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope*, page 37).

Again Tyndale wrote, “If the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good a case as the angels? And then what cause is there of the resurrection.” (*Parkers 1850 Reprint*, Book 4, page 180).

It’s not easy for us to admit that we’ve been wrong. Some of you are experiencing these feelings right now. No matter how much proof I give you, you still find yourself wanting to cling to your old ideas. It’s just as difficult for most churches, after so many centuries, to admit that they have been wrong. Pause right now and pray that God will guide you into truth through His Holy Spirit as you continue to read.

What about out-of-body experiences?

As I took a seat in Ruth’s living room, she began to relate an experience that she had just had while in the hospital. She said, “It became increasingly hard for me to breath. I knew that I was dying. All of a sudden I began to travel through this long tunnel that had a bright light at the other end. As I neared the end of the tunnel I looked back and saw my dead body lying motionless on the hospital bed.” I asked, “Ruth, if you had truly died as you thought, why did you bother to come back?” She replied, “I don’t know. Maybe God was not ready for me yet.”

A recent study by Ian Stevensen indicates that approximately ten percent of people who have a close brush with death have

an out-of-body experience. (Ian Stevensen, Research into the Evidence of Man's Survival After Death, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, Vol. 165, No. 3, 1977, page 155). Now if the soul truly lives on, as those who believe in the Immortality of the Soul teach, why doesn't everyone experience the same thing? Why is it that only about one tenth of near-death cases report an out-of-body experience?

A number of years ago my grandfather died while in the hospital. The doctors shocked his heart and brought him back, only to have him slip away again a few minutes later. Again they brought him back, and again he slipped away. This happened several times, and after his condition stabilized, they took him to surgery and installed a pacemaker in his chest that kept him alive for a number of years. After his operation I informed him that he had actually died several times, and I asked him what it was like. He had no recollection of anything. He saw nothing. He felt nothing. He saw neither the glories of heaven nor the horrors of hell during those moments when He was clinically dead. If the soul is immortal, why didn't he have an out-of-body sensation of some kind?

Many people today use out-of-body experiences to try to prove life after death prior to the Resurrection. But I believe that there are logical explanations for out-of-body experiences that are compatible with the Bible's teaching, "*For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.*"

Did you know that out-of-body experiences are not limited to persons having a close brush with death? For example, Aldous Huxley, after taking the drug mescaline wrote, "My body seemed to have disassociated itself almost completely from my mind...It was odd, of course, to feel that 'I' was not the same as these arms and legs 'out there'..." (Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, Harper 1956, page 52).

Dr. Timothy Leary, after eating certain Mexican mushrooms wrote, "I realized that I had died, that I Timothy Leary...could look back and see my body in bed." (John Kobler, "The Dangerous Magic of LSD," *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov 2, 1963, page 31). Of

course Dr. Leary had not died. He was hallucinating from the psychedelic mushrooms.

Sanford M. Unger wrote of one person who took LSD, “My ideas of space were strange beyond description. I could see myself from head to foot as well as the sofa on which I was lying...” (Sanford M. Unger, *Mescaline, LSD, Psilocybin and Personality Change, Psychiatry*, Vol. 26, May 1963, page 113). Am I proposing that all those who have had an out-of-body experience have been on drugs? Not at all. Dr. Jack Provonsha, in his book, *Is Death For Real?*, reports that a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the blood can, in some instances, produce the same out-of-body sensation.

L. J. Meduna administered thirty percent carbon dioxide to a large number of subjects and reported, “We definitely can see that the form-constants in mescal (mescaline) vision...are present in the sensory alterations produced by CO₂.” (L. J. Meduna, *Carbon Dioxide Therapy*, Thomas, 1958, page 50).

A typical response by subjects on carbon dioxide was, “I felt as though I was looking down at myself, as though I was way out there in space...I felt sort of separated.” (Ibid page 42). Dr. Provonsha says of the carbon dioxide research, “Again, as with the drugs and near-death, there were reports of caves, tunnels, visions of other persons, luminaries, reliving of the past, etc.” (Jack W. Provonsha, M.D., Ph.D., *Is Death For Real?*, 1981, page 26).

It appears to me that when respiration slows down, as when a person nears death, and the body becomes over-charged with carbon dioxide, the person may begin to experience a hallucinatory effect much like that of drugs. Dr. Provonsha says, “During the dying process, when there is organ-system suspension as in cardiac arrest, fairly profound modifications would take place at the level of cellular metabolism—including the buildup of carbon dioxide due to the failure of circulation...Carbon Dioxide accumulation along with other metabolites could will be sufficient to produce the observed effects.”

Elizabeth Hillstrom, a physiological psychologist at Wheaton College, suggests that out-of-body experiences have a plausible

physiological basis. She said, “Nearly all NDE (near death experience) visionaries, medieval as well as modern, experience the sensation of drifting away from their bodies.” Hillstrom says this may occur because “parts of the brain are shutting down. The sense of touch and gravity is lost and, not surprisingly, the Visionary feels as if he or she is floating out of the body.” (Rodney Clapp, Rumors of Heaven, *Christianity Today*, Oct. 7, 1988, page 19).

While pastoring in Seattle I visited with Dr. Melvin Morse, a pediatrician who is doing research into out-of-body experiences in children. He told me of one researcher, Dr. W. Penfield, who found that there are “neuronal connections (in the brain) that, when electrically stimulated, produce the sensation of being outside the physical body. One man suffering from temporal lobe seizures, on electrical stimulation exclaimed ‘Oh, God, I am leaving my body.’” (Penfield, W., *The Role of the Temporal Cortex in Certain Psychological Phenomena*, *Journal of Mental Science*, 1955, Vol. 101, page 457).

There are too many similarities between near-death visions, drug and carbon dioxide visions, and Penfield’s research. To say an out-of-body sensation, in connection with a near-death experience, is proof of the Immortality of the Soul, is to be narrow minded and naive. To me, a near-death experience is just that, a NEAR-death experience. It is not proof of what happens after death.

Many of you are familiar with Alex Malarkey’s story entitled, “The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven.” It was written by Alex and his father and published in 2010. It detailed his near-death experience where he claimed to, among other things, leave his body and float above the accident; see his father’s body fly out of the car and be caught by an angel; be taken to heaven by a tall angel to meet Jesus; and much more. The book sold over one million copies and caused Alex to become a spiritual hero to many people. And anyone familiar with Alex’s story knows what happened next. Alex’s mother began hinting that the book had been embellished by the publisher, and on January 13, 2015, Alex himself admitted in a letter that the entire story was a fabrication.

“I did not die. I did not go to heaven. I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention.”

I know that I can trust what God tells me. I do not know that I can trust anything else. If He tells me there is no life-after-death prior to the Resurrection, then I choose to believe Him, and everything else must revolve around that fact. And remember what God said, “*The dead know nothing.*” God deals with us through His Word, the Bible. Satan deals with us through our emotions and our senses. Do not go by feeling. Go by the fact of the Word of God.

I do know that the Lord gave John and Paul (and others I’m sure) a vision of the glories of heaven. I do believe that it is possible that He could give the same vision to someone today as well. I would never rule that out. Some near-death visions (and I stress visions) could be from God. But also we must never forget that Satan is a supernatural being capable of working miracles (Revelation 16:14). If Dr. Penfield could give someone the sensation of an out-of-body experience by stimulating the brain, why couldn’t the Devil do the same thing? In reality, out-of-body experiences are very similar to the occult phenomenon of astral projection.

What about talking with the dead?

Some people today believe that Christ and Lucifer were created brothers in heaven. They believe that Christ chose the good and Lucifer chose evil, and that’s how this world got into the mess it’s in. That sort of thinking has absolutely no foundation in Scripture. John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:16-17, and Hebrews 1:1-2 all tell us that Jesus Christ is truly God, and that He created everything. Nehemiah 9 tells us that the same Lord who did the creating (verse 6), is the same Lord who led Israel and gave them the Ten Commandments (verse 13). Psalm 90:1-2 tells us that the same Lord who did the creating has existed from eternity (see also Psalm 93:2). Jesus Christ is not a created being like the angels, but He is and always was truly God. The same Jesus who loved us so

much that He chose to become one of us (through His incarnation) so as to save us, is the same God who existed from eternity and the same God who created us in the beginning.

Now I realize that we have just caused a circuit overload for the skeptic. If a person does not have a belief and faith in the Bible as God's inspired Word, then all that I've said thus far is meaningless. I cannot prove God to the skeptic, but I know that He's there, and it's exciting to me to hear the skeptics finally admit that they really knew He was there all along as well.

Jesus Christ is a member of the Godhead who has existed from eternity. But where did the Devil come from? Ezekiel 28:13-19 tells us that Lucifer was created perfect in the beginning. He was the covering cherub (angel) until sin was found in him. Isaiah 14:12-17 tells us that because of his sin he was cast out of heaven. Revelation 12:7-9 confirms this by saying, "*And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*"

Did God create a devil? No. A mother does not give birth to a murderer. All created beings have been given the power of choice, and it's possible for one to become a murderer by his or her own choice sometime later in life. God did not create a devil. God created a perfect angel (Ezekiel 28:15) who, by his own unfortunate choice, turned himself into a devil. It must have been difficult for the Creator to have to cast Lucifer and the angels who sympathized with him out of heaven (2 Peter 2:4), but He did. And one day soon He will also have to destroy them in the lake of fire at the end of this world (Revelation 20:9).

The Devil has devoted himself to one purpose since being cast out of heaven. That purpose is to discredit God in every possible way, and to take as many of us with him to destruction as he can. Revelation 12:9 says he "*deceives the whole world.*" Matthew 24:24 says he's out to "*deceive the very elect (if possible).*" 1 Peter 5:8 says, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks*

about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Revelation 12:12 says, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth...for the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

In order to hurt God, Satan has counterfeited every truth that God has given us. He has twisted God’s words to change their meaning and the effect they would have on the human heart. The Bible calls him the father of lies (John 8:44). He has lied and distorted God’s Word in every way possible. He is out to deceive you and me. We must be willing to test all of our beliefs by the Word of God. If our beliefs do not stack up with what the Bible says in every way, we must recognize the Devil’s counterfeits, and be willing to let go of those beliefs immediately. Our only safety is in following God’s truths implicitly.

God told us that when a man dies, he knows nothing; he ceases to exist; he sleeps unconsciously in the grave until called forth at the Resurrection. The Devil, through his lie in Eden, said just the opposite (as we should expect him to). What did the Devil stand to gain by telling his no-death lie in the first place? That should be very easy for us to understand. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says, *“And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”* Satan is a fallen angel who still has supernatural power. He changed himself into a serpent to deceive Eve in Eden, and he can transform himself into any form he chooses today. Reason with me. If he could masquerade as a dead loved one, he could communicate his brand of truth (or lies) directly to anyone who would allow him to speak to them. His task of deceiving the human race would be that much easier. Most Christians accept spiritism, Ouija Boards, and séances as coming from the occult. They recognize the occult as being from the Devil, and they want nothing to do with it. Yet these very same Christians accept the teaching of the Immortality of the Soul. This deceptive teaching is nothing less than the Devil’s watered-down version of the occult.

While pastoring in Seattle, I become acquainted with a lady we’ll call Betty. Betty considered herself a Christian, attended a popular church in her neighborhood, and claimed

supreme allegiance to God. Yet, through a paperback book from the drugstore, she became acquainted with the teachings of Metaphysics (occult spiritism under the guise of Christianity). Metaphysics teaches that Christ was a psychic and that He came to this earth to teach His disciples (and all of us) to be psychic. It teaches the Immortality of the Soul, and that it's possible to contact our dead loved ones for instruction and advice. It rejects the need for a Saviour from sin, and teaches that Jesus was not God but just a good man.

One day Betty saw an advertisement for a Metaphysical church on the church page of the local newspaper. She attended (they sang religious hymns) and she was hooked. Through those meetings she learned to communicate with her dead husband (or so she thought). He instructed her in spiritual matters and in the details of her daily life. Soon he began to appear to her in her apartment, and because her former church had taught that when a person dies, they don't really die, she believed that this was all from God. But God has instructed us very clearly in Deuteronomy 18:9-12 that attempting to speak with the dead is an abomination to Him. That's because you are not really speaking with the dead, but with evil spirits masquerading as the dead. Ephesians 6:12 says, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age..."*

During the first months he would only converse with her at certain times, usually when she requested it. But as things progressed he began appearing at will, sometimes many times a day. Betty told me that it wasn't long before he was even telling her which religious TV programs she could and could not watch. If she insisted on watching a program that he advised her not to watch, he would get very angry with her.

Over the years Betty actually became a spirit medium. She would get messages directly from the spirit world with instructions as to where the messages were to be delivered. I asked her if she had finally figured out who those messages were really coming from. She said, "Oh yes, I now know they are from the Devil." I asked her if she wanted to be free from all of this. She didn't. I

read James 4:7 to her, “*Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” The only safe ground is in believing what God says, and committing one’s life completely to Him. Satan can’t touch you if you are completely committed to Jesus.

Betty’s refusal to submit to God made her situation at that point hopeless. I prayed a prayer of protection for her and myself, and began to leave. But before I could get out of the door, she looked at me and said, “You have a very pretty wife,” and she then proceeded to describe my wife down to a tee. She described the clothes she was wearing that day, as well as the color, length, and style of her hair. She described her interests and attitudes, all without ever meeting her in person. You’re right; I was gone! The Devil was testing my interest level to see if he could hook me as well.

My older brother Gary died in a truck accident in 1966. A number of years after his death, I had the opportunity to talk at length with the family of his former girlfriend. They told me of a Christmas visit they had made to relatives, where one of the grandchildren had received an Ouija Board as a gift. Everyone, except Rhonda (Gary’s girlfriend) asked the Ouija Board questions and were amazed as it spelled out the answers. Rhonda said that it was only after much coaxing that she took her seat before the board. To each and every question she asked, the Ouija Board would begin to spell the name of my brother. As soon as she saw “Gary” in response to any question, she would remove her hands from the board and cease to play. The relatives gathered around and encouraged her to let the board complete its answer. After much persuasion she continued and this is the message she received: “Gary’s death had a great effect on your life.” The family told me that Gary had not been discussed that day nor for many months prior to that day. I believe the Devil was testing their curiosity level, just as he did with Betty in an effort to gain control of their minds.

“In the year 1848, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Fox and their two youngest children, Margaret, age 15, and Kate, age 12, lived in Hydesville, near Rochester, New York. Soon after moving into

their house, they were disturbed by strange knocking sounds. At first they thought it was mice or rats, or maybe the windows rattling in the wind. But on the night of March 31, 1848, after making sure the windows were tight, Kate thought she detected that the knocking imitated, or replied to, noises they made in the room. So she snapped her fingers several times and said out loud, 'Here, old Splitfoot, do as I do.' Immediately there came the same number of sharp distinct taps in reply. This scared the girls nearly out of their wits, and they didn't want to continue any more conversation with 'old Splitfoot.' But the mother was interested. She worked out a code of knocks and was soon getting intelligent messages. One of the first things old Splitfoot told her was that a man had been murdered in this house years before and that his body was buried in the cellar. They dug down, and sure enough, they found the skeleton! Some people say it is trickery. Some say it is done by the spirits of the dead. You and I need never be deceived. We know that Satan is using his demons to do these things." (Eric B. Hare, *Make God First*, page 371).

Two men, one who believed in soul-sleep, the other who believed in the Immortality of the Soul, were debating what happens to a person at death. The first man said that when people die they know nothing until resurrected by Christ. The second man disagreed sharply and said the soul never dies but goes directly to heaven or hell upon the death of the body. The debate continued for some time when the first man reasoned, "If I'm wrong, I've lost nothing. If you're wrong, you've accepted spiritism and the occult." Dear readers, have nothing to do with anybody who tells you the departed dead can communicate with you or appear to you. The Bible says clearly, "*The dead know nothing.*"

What about the New Age Movement?

In this book we've been discussing the first recorded lie ever told. Let's read it again in Genesis 3:4, "*Then the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die.*" Through the first medium in recorded history (the serpent), the Devil held the first séance

in history, and told the first lie in history. And that lie has been woven right into the very fabric of Christianity and is told and retold every day, in every part of this world. That first lie actually has two parts to it. We've only discussed the first part thus far. That's the part that says, "When you die, you don't really die." It's time now to consider the second, equally deceptive, part of that lie. Genesis 3:4-5 says, "*And the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and ye will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"

Many Christians today are being taken in by the same old lie that deceived Eve in Eden. The Bible tells us that Satan is out to deceive the world, and we must expect that his last deception will be just as clever as his first. He is even now trying to merge Christianity with Occult Spiritism through the New Age Movement, which is a conglomeration of such philosophies as Transcendental Meditation, Zen, Eastern Healing, Astrology, Hypnosis, Evolution, Humanism, Pantheism, and yes, enough Christianity to make it plausible. Warner Erhard, one of the founders of New Age, said, "Kneel to your own self. Honor and worship your own being. God dwells within you as You!" (George Leonard, *The Silent Pulse*, Bantam, 1981, page 105).

Most of us are familiar with Shirley MacLaine's role in the New Age. She said, "We already know everything. The knowingness of our divinity is the highest intelligence, and to be what we already know is free will. Free will is simply the enactment of the realization you are God, a realization that you are divine. Free will is making everything accessible to you." (William Goldstein, *Life on the Astral Plane*, *Publishers Weekly*, March 1983, page 46).

The New Age Movement teaches that man is God. It teaches that all our problems could be solved if we could only get in touch with the deity that's already within us. Wasn't that Lucifer's problem in heaven? Wasn't he cast out of heaven because he wanted to be like God? (Isaiah 14:4). Man is not God, nor will he ever be. Hebrews 2:6-7 says, "*What is man that You are mindful of him... You made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands.*"

(see also Psalm 8:4-6). Isaiah 66:22-23 says that we will all worship God (not ourselves) throughout eternity. Lucifer was intrigued with the thought of being like God. Now he has to satisfy himself with playing out his fantasy on the human race.

Channeling is a New Age phenomenon where the channeler claims to communicate with those who have died. Friends, channeling is nothing more, nothing less, than an occult séance with a different name. God instructed Israel in Deuteronomy 18:9-12, *“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord...”* When one reads God’s Word, and hears what God is saying, it becomes abundantly clear that the New Age Movement is nothing more than old occult spiritism in a new dress.

Some of your questions answered

What did Jesus say about death?

I’m often asked what Jesus taught about death. Jesus put the Resurrection in the future tense when He said in John 11:25, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”*

Jesus likened death to a sleep in John chapter 11. In verse 11 He says, *“Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up. Then His disciples said, Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.”* In verse 14 Jesus responded, *“Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe.”* Verse 17 says Lazarus had been dead for four days, and verse 39 says there was already a stench. Then verses 43 and 44 tell how Jesus spoke and raised Lazarus from the dead. And Scripture is clear that Lazarus was typical of what will happen to all believers in Christ when the trumpet sounds and the archangel shouts at Christ’s Second Coming.

John 5:28-29 says, "...all who are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth..." Acts 24:15 says, "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." What Jesus taught would be completely meaningless if the soul is immortal and goes directly to heaven or hell at death.

Departing to be with Christ

In Philippians 1:23 Paul says, "*For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.*" Those who use this text to try and prove life-after-death prior to the Resurrection are simply grasping at straws. In the first place, this text says nothing about a "soul" or "spirit" departing. Paul was a prisoner who knew he would soon be martyred. He welcomed death to end his earthly suffering, but he also knew that his churches still needed him. This is the "*hard-pressed between the two*" that he found himself in.

Paul clearly taught that those who die in Christ will be resurrected at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23). He also taught that in death one is as in a sleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). One who sleeps is not conscious of the passing of time. To them it's as a split second and they will rise and be with Christ. Be careful that you are not making Paul say something that he isn't saying.

Souls under the alter

I have heard radio and TV preachers use Revelation 6:9-10 to support the teaching that the soul is conscious after death. Let's read it together, "*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the alter 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?*"

Do these verses prove the Immortality of the Soul? Not at all. First, one must remember that Revelation uses much Old Testament imagery. Genesis 4:9-10 says, "*Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know. Am I my*

brother's keeper? And He (God) said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Now we all know that blood cannot speak. We also know that we do not have a soul—we are a soul. What John saw in vision were Christian martyrs symbolically crying out to God for justice. The four horsemen which open the first four seals are symbolism, and the souls crying out from under the altar are symbolism as well.

Caught up to paradise

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul makes the statement, *"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... and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."*

I am amazed today how many people, even ministers, use these verses to try to prove life-after-death prior to the Resurrection. If you read the verse before them (the first verse of the chapter) you will see that Paul is not talking about death, but rather about "visions and revelations." Paul (speaking of himself) was given a vision of heaven. Oh that we would be better Bible students and read the verses before and after the verse we are studying, and then see how it fits into the big picture of what the rest of the Bible says on that subject.

Absent from the body

It is always important to look for the context while reading the Bible. A very good example of this is found in 2 Corinthians 5:8, *"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."* Does this text prove the Immortality of the Soul?

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-9, Paul is dealing with three possible states. 1) "Our earthly house" which is quite obviously our mortal earthly body. 2) "A building of God" (our heavenly house) which must be the immortal body. 3) Being "found naked" which would be that state between these two bodies known as death. The change from the "earthly house" (mortal body) to the "heavenly

house” (immortal body) is the change that takes place at the Resurrection. (See 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 and Philippians 3:20-21). Remember, Paul’s theology must be consistent if he was truly inspired by God.

Saul and the Witch of Endor

1 Samuel 28:3-19 tells the story of how King Saul went to visit a witch (spirit medium) in an endeavor to speak with Samuel, God’s prophet, who had died. Verse 14 says that the form of a man came forward that Saul “perceived” to be Samuel. Was it truly Samuel that Saul was talking to? (Remember Betty).

In the first place, Deuteronomy 18:9-14 says that those who seek to speak with the dead are an abomination to God, because God knows that the dead “*know nothing*.” Secondly, God is not going to work hand in hand with a spirit medium from the occult. So who did Saul counsel with if it wasn’t Samuel? By now the answer to this question should be very easy for any of us to answer. Saul was conversing with the Devil or one of his demons, not Samuel. A careful reading of the story will reveal that God had departed from Saul and was no longer speaking to him or leading him.

Spirits in prison

I’m sure that someone must be thinking, “But Pastor, what about the spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3:18-20?” Do these verses teach, as some people believe, that somewhere there is a holding tank, possibly a purgatory, where the wicked are waiting for their second chance? 1 Peter 3:18-20 says, “*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 made alive by the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.*”

Do these verses mean that Christ went down into the center of the earth, while His body was in the tomb, and preached a

second chance to those who were destroyed in the flood? No. That would be inconsistent with everything else the Bible teaches on this subject. First of all, Ecclesiastes 9:5 says, “*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing.*” Secondly, Isaiah 38:18 says, “*Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.*”

In 1 Peter 3 Christ was “made alive” *zoopoieo* in the Greek, by the Spirit. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit, “*by whom also He went and preached.*” If you notice, Christ did not do the preaching. The Holy Spirit did the preaching to those who lived before the flood. But now, who are the spirits in prison? In Psalm 142:7 David prayed, “*Bring my soul out of prison.*” Isaiah prophesied of Christ’s ministry in Isaiah 42:7, where he foretold that Christ would come “*To open the blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.*” The “*spirits in prison*” are those who sit in spiritual darkness in the prison house of sin. 1 Peter 3:18-20 becomes clear when studied properly, and is now consistent with everything else we’ve studied on this subject.

Dr. B. H. Carroll, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, says of 1 Peter 3:18-20, “When He [Christ] preached to them [the spirits in prison], they were not disembodied. Christ preached through the Holy Spirit to the Antediluvians who lived before the flood while the ark was being prepared. The very same Holy Spirit, when Christ’s body died, made it alive in the resurrection.”

Worm does not die, and fire is not quenched

In Mark 9:48 Jesus referred to the same judgment fires as those described in Isaiah 66:24, where we read, “*And they [the righteous] shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.*” Here we are told that the “worm” and “fire” are working, not upon disembodied spirits, but upon bodies—dead bodies. The word “hell” used in Mark 9:48 is from the Greek word *gehenna*, or *geenna*. This term is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *hinnom*, the name of the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem, “used as a place to cast carcasses of animals and malefactors, which

were consumed by fire constantly kept burning.” (See Liddell and Scott’s Greek Lexicon).

Christ pointed to the Valley of Hinnom to teach His hearers the fate awaiting the wicked. Certainly no Jew who heard His words could possibly understand Him to say that wicked, disembodied souls would suffer endlessly. They saw in Hinnom dead bodies being devoured by flames, or if the flames did not reach them, then by worms, those ever-present agents of destruction and disintegration. The fact that the fires of Hinnom were always kept burning—were “not quenched”—was the surest proof that whatever was cast into them would be consumed. To declare that a fire is kept ever burning and that whatever is cast into it lives forever, is to go contrary to the evidence of our senses and of Scripture. Reread the section “What About Hell Fire?”

In English grammar the present perfect tense is used to express actions happening at the time of speaking, in an incomplete period of time. An incomplete period is one that includes the present moment, that will be completed some time in the future. If the action happened in a completed period of time (one that does not include the time of speaking), the past simple tense is used. (See *The Grammaring Guide to English Grammar* by Peter Simon).

In Mark 9 Jesus is speaking in the present of an action that has not yet been completed. It’s called an incomplete perfect. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord declared to the ancient Jews, “*I will kindle a fire ... and it shall not be quenched*” (Jeremiah 17:27). The Septuagint, (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the same Greek root for “quenched” as is used in Mark 9:48. In 2 Chronicles 36:19-21, we read of this prophecy’s literal fulfillment when the Babylonians put the torch to the city of Jerusalem. Is that fire still burning? Are those Jewish “palaces” ever consuming, but never quite consumed? No they are not. Then why should anyone wish to take Christ’s statement in Mark 9 and force from it the conclusion that the judgment fire will never end, and then build upon this conclusion that the wicked will be ever consuming but never quite consumed, and then finally conclude from this that the wicked have immortal souls?

Summary

I talked with a woman recently who said, “I don’t care what you say, my mother is in heaven right now!” I thought for a careful moment and then replied, “It’s not a matter of what I say. It matters what God says, and it’s God who inspired the Bible.” She then timidly admitted, “But I *want* to believe she’s in heaven.”

I understand what it means to want something badly. It’s an emotional thing. But emotions have nothing to do with it. I want world peace, so does that mean if I want it bad enough that it has to happen? I want to believe that my grandchildren will grow up in a world of peace and love. So I know what it’s like to want something with all your heart, but just wanting it does not mean that it will be a reality. God has promised to give me what’s best for me, and I have to bring my wants in line with His predetermined plans for me. Emotionally wanting something does not mean that it has to happen that way. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 10:28 that utter destruction includes both “body and soul.” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 802 states that the soul “does not continue to exist independently of the body, but dies with it.”

For centuries people have tried to scare others into going to church out of fear of burning forever. If this is your motive for being a Christian, then your motive is wrong. No one is going to be scared into the kingdom of heaven. We will be there because we have a love relationship with Jesus, or we won’t be there at all.

Fear is from the Devil. Anger is from the Devil. Through his no-death lie, he has managed to make many people both fear God and be angry with Him. They are angry with Him because they believe He will burn lost souls throughout eternity, which is what makes them fear Him. 1 John 4:18 says, “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.*” 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear.*” If our hearts are right with Him we do not need to fear the hereafter. We can safely trust ourselves (and our departed loved ones) to His loving care. We need not fear death.

A two-thousand-year-old mummy was discovered during excavations by Lord Lindsay. As he unwrapped the mummy, he

found a flower bulb in the man's hand. Knowing that the bulb had been dormant for two thousand years, Lindsay wondered what would happen if he planted it. So he took the bulb and planted it in sunny soil and watered it well. To his surprise the bulb grew into a beautiful flower. S. H. Bradford wrote this poem about Lindsay's discovery—

Two thousand years ago a flower
Bloomed lightly in a far-off land.
Two thousand years ago its root
Was placed within a dead man's hand.

Before the Saviour came to earth,
That man had lived and loved and died.
And ever in that far-off time
The flower had spread its perfume wide.

Suns rose and set—years came and went,
The dead hand kept its treasure well;
Nations were born and turned to dust
While life was hidden in that shell.

The shrivelled hand is robbed at last,
The root is buried in the earth,
When lo! the life long hidden there
Into a glorious flower burst forth.

Just such a plant as that which grew
From such a root when buried low,
Just such a flower in Egypt bloomed
And died two-thousand years ago.

Then will not He who watched the root
And kept the life within its shell,
When those He loves are laid to rest
Watch o'er their buried dust as well?

And will not He from neath the sod
Cause something glorious to arise?
Though it sleeps through countless years,
Yet from that buried dust shall rise.

Just such a face as greets you now,
Just such a form as here we bear,
Only more glorious to arise,
To meet the Saviour in the air.

Then will I lay me down in peace
When called to leave this vale of tears;
For in my flesh shall I see God
Even though I sleep two thousand years.

Dear Reader, I encourage you to be honest with yourself, honest with one another, honest in your study of God's Word, and honest in your relationship with God. Don't try to make the Bible fit the theology of your life, but rather make your life fit the theology of the Bible. Don't try to make the Bible fit the way you want to believe, but rather bring your life into conformity with the Bible.

– Try Bible study on the internet:

Voice Of Hope Bible Lessons

url: voiceofhopebiblelessons-randybarber.com

The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology acknowledges that “there are plenty of communications attributed to deceiving spirits.”

Brenda Crenshaw, a Los Angeles psychic said, “There are spirits who are impersonators who will come through a medium to make claims that are not true.”

Sir Arthur Canon Doyle, speaking of the spirits of the dead with whom he professed to communicate, confessed, “We have unhappily, to deal with absolute coldblooded lying on the part of wicked or mischievous intelligences.”

After experimenting with the occult, G. K. Chesterton said, “The only thing I will say with complete confidence about that mystic and invisible power is that it tells lies.”