

## Interesting Questions And Answers About Hell

**Is hell in the Bible?** Yes, Jesus mentions it in Matthew 10:28 NLT. “Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” And alludes to it again in Matthew 25:41 NLT. “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.’” Verse 46 adds, “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”

**When does hell begin?** Some Jewish rabbis and popular Christian authors like Rob Bell say it begins now on earth as a consequence of our sinful choices. The Bible doesn't minimize the consequences of breaking God's laws and covenant (Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 28; Ezekiel 18:20; Hebrews 10:31), but re:hell the Bible is more specific. Allowing Jesus to define the fires of hell He referred to in the Gospels, in the last book of the Bible, The Revelation of Jesus, in chapter 20:9 the fires of hell fall down from heaven after the Second Coming of Jesus, after the Millennium, and after the “2nd Resurrection” or Resurrection of the Wicked (cf. Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29) culminating in a “lake of fire.” Revelation 20:10 NLT says, “Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet.” Additionally re:the wicked Revelation 20:15 adds, “And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

**What about texts which declare the wicked will burn forever?** Revelation 20:10 NLT states, “There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Revelation 14:11 adds, “The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name.” Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 are direct quotes or references to Old Testament verses. See if you can hear the similarity between Revelation's “forever” and the “forever” judgement Isaiah prophesied for Israel's enemy Edom in Isaiah 34:8-10. “For it is the day of the LORD's revenge, the year when Edom will be paid back for all it did to Israel. The streams of Edom will be filled with burning pitch, and the ground will be covered with fire. This judgment on Edom will never end; the smoke of its burning will rise forever.” “Forever” in the Revelation quotes actually refers to the final and thorough destruction of a rebellious enemy nation as long as it exists. We know this is true because there is no nation currently on fire in the Middle East where Edom once was.

The same can be said about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24 cf. Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6) as well as Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied the same fate for unfaithful Jerusalem in Jeremiah 17:27 NLT. "But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames." Another version says Jerusalem will be destroyed with an "unquenchable fire." Yet, Jerusalem is not burning today. It was however "On August 14 of that year, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard and an official of the Babylonian king, arrived in Jerusalem. He burned down the Temple of the LORD, the royal palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He destroyed all the important buildings in the city" - 2 Kings 25:8-9 NLT.

Forever in the Bible means as long as a nation exists or person lives. In the Old Testament, a slave was to serve his master forever (Exodus 21:6). In other words, as long as he lives. Hannah brought her son Samuel to the temple "forever." But 1 Samuel 1:28 clearly defines forever to mean, "he will belong to the LORD his whole life." Jonah even uses the word "forever" to describe his experience in the belly of the whale (Jonah 2:6) but according to Jesus in Matthew 12:40, Jonah's "forever" only lasted three days. The consequences of our choices are eternal or forever or never ending but not the covenant curses or torment of the wicked because God is love (1 John 4:8). If He wasn't, and "forever" meant burning the wicked throughout eternity for the sins they committed during their few decades on earth, God would be worse than Adolph Hitler! Instead, John 3:16 NLT says, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." This verse says if you don't believe in Jesus, you will perish. It doesn't say if you don't believe you will burn forever. Romans 6:23 NLT says "The wages of sin is death" not eternal torment. Evangelical Christian scholars like John Stott, and Clark Pinnock and Philip Edgecumbe Hughes and Edward William Fudge have changed their minds regarding eternal torment in hell. Theologians in Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches are studying these truths about hell today.

**What's the significance of ashes in the Bible?** Fasting, wearing sackcloth, and placing ashes on the head were ways of demonstrating grief or repentance (Job 16:15; 1 Chronicles 21:16; Daniel 9:3). But ashes also remind us that eventually death will die, evil will end, and hell won't last forever because ashes are all that's left after the fire consumes. 2 Peter 2:6 NLT says, "God condemned the

cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people.” Ezekiel 28:17-18 NLT says of Satan, “I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All who knew you are appalled at your fate. You have come to a terrible end, and you will exist no more.” Isaiah 47:14 NKJV says, “Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before!” Malachi 4:1 NLT reminds us, “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.” Psalm 37:10 NLT says, “Soon the wicked will disappear. Though you look for them, they will be gone.” Verse 20 adds, “But the wicked will die. The LORD's enemies are like flowers in a field—they will disappear like smoke.” Verse 36 concludes, “But when I looked again, they were gone! Though I searched for them, I could not find them!” Which is the same thing the Old Testament prophet Obadiah meant in Obadiah 16, “They shall be as though they had never been.”

**Does Jesus teach the immortality of the body and soul?** “Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” - Matthew 10:28 NLT. Actually, Jesus teaches in this text that the soul is not naturally immortal. It can and will be destroyed in hell. The word “life” [ψυχή psuchē] above has been translated “soul” in the text, but in forty other texts it has been translated “life.” For example, Jesus said, “If you try to hang on to your life [ψυχή psuchē], you will lose it. But if you give up your life [ψυχή psuchē] for my sake, you will save it.” - Matthew 16:25 NLT.

“Psuchē” could not mean soul in this instance, or people could be said to lose their soul for Christ's sake. If you insert the word “life” instead of “soul” the comparison Jesus is making becomes clearer and consistent with what the rest of the Bible says about death. The contrast is between one who can take the physical life, and He who can take away eternal life.

Jesus says something similar in Luke 12:4-5 NLT. “Dear friends, don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. But I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell.”

In other words, the word “soul” here means not only life, but also eternal life. Men can only kill the body and take away the physical life. But God can cast into hell

and take away eternal life. Not only will their bodies be destroyed in that fire, but also their lives will be snuffed out for all eternity.

Matthew 25:46 adds, "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life." It is helpful to note that Jesus did not say that the wicked would suffer "eternal punishing." He said "eternal punishment." What is the punishment for sin? 2 Thessalonians 1:9 NLT says, "9 They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power."

The punishment is destruction, and it is of eternal duration because there will be no resurrection from that destruction. Paul says, "the wages of sin is death." - Romans 6:23.

John describes that destruction as "the second death" - Revelation 21:8 NLT. "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

**What does Jesus mean then that their worm dies not and the fire is not quenched?** Mark 9:43-44 NLT is thought provoking. "43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands 'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.' The KJV uses worm. "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." - Mark 9:43-44 KJV

In this verse, the word "hell" is translated from the Greek word "Gehenna," which is another name for the Valley of Hinnom outside the walls of Jerusalem. There the refuse and dead bodies of animals were cast into an ever-smoldering fire to be consumed. Worms and maggots fed on what might escape the flames. Isaiah 14:11 NLT connects worms and maggots with the grave. "Your might and power were buried with you. The sound of the harp in your palace has ceased. Now maggots are your sheet, and worms your blanket."

Gehenna symbolized a place of total destruction. With the fires of Gehenna burning before their eyes, Jesus could not have spoken a more graphic word to the Pharisees to describe the final total destruction of sinners. Today, Gehenna is a park and not burning. Tourists in buses drive by it every day.

It is illogical to cite Mark 9:43-44 to support the immortality of the soul because the fire and worms were working, not upon disembodied souls, but bodies. Christ said, the “whole body” would be cast into hell.” - Matthew 5:30.

Additionally, only dead bodies were cast into the Valley of Hinnom. Why would Jesus use dead bodies cast into flames to illustrate live bodies or souls in conscious torment?

In Isaiah 66:24, the same Gehenna kind of picture of hell is presented with the unquenchable flame and the destroying worms. But in this case, the word “carcasses” (KJV) or “dead bodies” (NLT) is used, underscoring the fact that the fire consumes dead bodies, not disembodied souls. “24 And as they go out, they will see the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me. For the worms that devour them will never die, and the fire that burns them will never go out. All who pass by will view them with utter horror.” - Isaiah 66:24 (NLT)

But again, “unquenchable” fires do go out after they have consumed what fuels them. Jerusalem burned with unquenchable fire. “Then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames” (Jeremiah 17:27 NLT) yet it was totally destroyed. “Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value” (2 Chronicles 36:19-21 NLT).

Jesus would not teach something as important as how people are saved or lost in the New Testament differently than the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah said of this Gehenna type flame, “They cannot save themselves from the flame” - Isaiah 47:14 NLT. Yet, he also said in the same verse, “Their hearth is no place to sit for warmth.” Or as the KJV says, “There shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before it.”

So the unquenchable fire will go out after it has finished its work. Ask a fireman if they have seen an “unquenchable fire.” They will tell you it is a fire they cannot put out, but eventually it will go out, once it has consumed the fuel it is burning. It does not continue to burn with no end. The flames and worms and maggots of Gehenna represent the total annihilation and obliteration of sin and sinners leaving nothing behind. Worms (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/c/common-earthworm/>) and maggots (<https://www.reference.com/>

[pets-animals/long-maggots-live-9ead8d003e77b4b1?qo=contentSimilarQuestions](https://www.quora.com/pets-animals/long-maggots-live-9ead8d003e77b4b1?qo=contentSimilarQuestions)) do die too.

**Didn't the thief on the cross die and go to heaven not hell?** “And Jesus replied, ‘I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise’” - Luke 23:43 NLT. Some have assumed from this verse that souls go to their reward immediately after death. But notice two things wrong with this assumption. First, even though Jesus told the thief, “You will be with me in paradise” three days later He told Mary that He had not yet ascended to His Father. Jesus saith unto her, “17 "Don't cling to me for I haven't yet ascended to the Father” - John 20:17 NLT.

His Father is in Paradise. Here is the evidence. Revelation 2:7 NLT says “the tree of life” is “in the paradise of God” and Revelation 22:1-2 NLT describes the tree of life by the side of the river of life which flows, in turn, from the throne of God. “Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

So there is no question about Paradise being where the Father's throne is located. The question is: How could Jesus tell the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise that day, when He did not go there until three days later?

In the second place, Jesus and the thief did not even die on the same day. When the soldiers came just before sunset to take the bodies off the cross, Jesus was already dead (John 19:32-34). The thieves were very much alive, and their legs were broken to hasten death and to prevent them from escaping. They undoubtedly lived on past sunset into the hours of the Sabbath and possibly longer. So how could Jesus assure the thief of being with Him in Paradise that day when they did not both die on “that day”?

The apparent contradictions clear up when we consider that the punctuation of Luke 23:43 was added by uninspired men when our English Bible was translated. They placed a comma before the word “today” when in reality it should have been placed after “today.” Then the verse would correctly read, “Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

In other words, Jesus was saying, “I give you the assurance today, when it seems I can save no man; today when my own disciples have forsaken me and I'm dying as a criminal dies—yet I assure you of salvation right now.”

Also, the thief did not ask to be taken to Paradise then. He asked, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And that’s exactly when he will be remembered and taken into that Kingdom. When Jesus comes again. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NLT says, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians [dead in Christ] who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.”

**Does the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 teach eternal torment in hell?** It’s important to notice this is a parable. It is the fifth in a series of parables (preceded by the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, and the unjust steward). Each feature of the parable is not to be taken literally. For example, we do not all have wool and four feet like a sheep. We are not metal like a silver coin. Here are five reasons why it could not possibly be literal: One, the beggar died and was taken by the angel’s to Abraham’s bosom. No one believes that Abraham’s literal bosom is the abode of the righteous dead. It is a figurative or parabolic expression. Interestingly, many Christians believe this part of the parable is symbolic too. But inconsistently say the rest of the parable is literal.

Two, Luke 16:22 NLT says, “22 “Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham.” But if the righteous die and go to heaven with angels, why does Jesus say in Matthew 24:30-31 that takes place at his return? “And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.”

Three, in the parable Jesus shares, heaven and hell were separated by a gulf and yet the persons in each could converse with each other. There are probably few individuals in the world who believe that this will be literally true of the saved and the lost.

Four, the rich man was in hell with a body. He had eyes, a tongue, etc. How did his body get into hellfire instead of the grave? Does anyone teach that the bodies of the wicked go into hell as soon as they die?

Five, the request for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and come through the flames to cool the rich man's tongue is obviously not literal. How much moisture would be left and how much relief would it give?

Taking the parable literally raises more questions than it answers. Heaven would be a terrible place if we beheld the constant, ever suffering of our friends. So why did Jesus use this story? What lessons was he trying to teach?

The rich man represented the Jews because only a Jew would pray to "father Abraham." The beggars symbolized the Gentiles who were counted unworthy to receive the truth. In Matthew 15:27, the Canaanite woman acknowledged that her people were beggars at the table of the Jews. Christ probably chose the name Lazarus to use because later he would actually raise Lazarus from the dead. And the climatic point of the entire parable is found in verse 31: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And sure enough, they didn't believe even when one named Lazarus was raised before them.

Additionally, the Jews (especially the Pharisees) believed riches were a sign of God's favor and poverty a sign of His displeasure. But in the story Jesus tells, the rich man who the Jews thought was blessed of God ends up in hell and the poor man in heaven. Jesus reversed the expected outcome. Riches gained by greed, dishonesty, or oppressing the poor are not a sign of God's favor at all. The parable describes a great gulf fixed. The decisions made in this life determine our eternal destiny. Let's choose Jesus today!

**What does Paul mean by "absent from the body present with the Lord?"** In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, Paul contrasts the earthly perishable body subject to sickness, diseases, and death with the glorious, eternal, immortal body which God has prepared for us in the heavens. The expression "absent from the body" means absent from the mortal body with its earthly infirmities.

The expression "present with the Lord" means present in the the glorious immortal body that we shall receive at Christ's return. Paul wouldn't say something differently in 2 Corinthians than he did in 1 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 5:4 NLT says, "While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life."

When will our dying bodies be swallowed and we be with the Lord? Hear the similarity and even the use of the same word “swallowed” in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 to connect the context. “But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

When does Paul say that happens? A few verses before that 1 Corinthians 15:23 NLT says, “All will be raised when He [Jesus] comes back.” He says the same thing in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 NLT, “And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.”

**What does Paul mean when he says, “To live is Christ to die is gain?”** The NLT says it this way in Philippians 1:21-23, “For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.”

The Bible does not contradict itself. If it sounds like it does, the misunderstanding is ours. The context of Philippians 1 helps us understand when Paul would “go and be with Christ.” Philippians 1:6 NLT says, “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” And after these verses Philippians 3:20-21 NLT adds, “But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own.”

The context before and after the verse in question clarifies that Paul had the return of Jesus in mind the entire time he said what he did about departing and being with the Lord. Until Christ returns, it is only by faith that we “dwell in heavenly places.” Ephesians 2:4-6 NLT says, “But God is so rich in mercy, and

he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.”

To Paul, death is a sleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:15 NLT says, “15 We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.” The KJV of the same verse says it this way: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.” The Greek word there is κοιμάω koimaō or sleep. Paul knew that death is like sleep and that when he says “I long to go and be with Christ” that in reality the next thing he would know after death would be “being with Christ.”

Jesus meant the same thing in John 11:12-14 NLT. “The disciples said, ‘Lord, if he is sleeping, he will soon get better!’ They thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died. So he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.””

**So who were the spirits in prison?** “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. So he went and preached to the spirits in prison—those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood” - 1 Peter 3:18-20 NLT.

There has been considerable misunderstanding of these verses of Scripture. It has been preached that Christ actually descended into the lower regions of the earth and preached to lost souls that were imprisoned in some purgatory or limbo. But this is not what the text actually says. First of all, notice how Christ preached to those spirits in prison. He did it by the Spirit, and that word is capitalized in your Bible. It actually refers to the Holy Spirit. So whatever Christ did in preaching during this period of time, He did it through or by the Holy Spirit.

With that in view, let’s ask this: When was the preaching done? The answer is plainly given in verse 20, “When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing.” So, the preaching was actually done

while the ark was being built—during the preaching of Noah to the antediluvian world.

Now, one more question: To whom was the preaching done? The text says here “To the spirits in prison.” Throughout the Bible, we find this terminology used in describing those who are bound in the prison house of sin. David prayed, “Bring me out of prison so I can thank you. The godly will crowd around me, for you are good to me” - Psalm 142:7 NLT. Paul spoke of his experience in these words: “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” - Romans 7:23 KJV.

What Peter is telling us here is that Christ through the Holy Spirit was present while Noah preached; Christ was there through the Holy Spirit to speak conviction to their hearts and appeal to them to come into the ark. There is nothing in the Bible that indicates that Jesus departed from the body during the time He was dead to go to any subterranean place to minister to wicked spirits. The angel’s recap in Luke 24:6 NLT simply says, “The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.” The question about the spirits in prison are answered in the context of the verses themselves. He preached by the Holy Spirit, He did it while the ark was being prepared, and He did it to the spirits in prison or to those individuals whose sinful lives were bound in the prison house of sin.

### **What do the souls crying out with a loud voice under the altar mean?**

“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them” - Revelation 6:9-11 NLT.

Personification is a common Biblical method of describing situations with symbolic language. In Genesis 4:10, after Cain killed Abel, the Lord said to Cain, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!” Was Abel’s blood really speaking? No, not literally. The language communicates God’s faithful loving, tender concern for His martyr Abel and Cain’s accountability for the sinful act. Same thing in Hebrews 12:24 NLT where

the blood of Jesus, “Speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.” The blood of Jesus is “speaking” symbolically in Genesis 4, Hebrews 12, and Revelation 6.

**Does Paul’s benediction including spirit and soul and body in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 indicate an endorsement of the immortality of the soul?**

If it does, it would represent something altogether different than what he has previously said in 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 5, 2 Timothy 4, and Philippians 1. The verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 NLT says, “Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.”

Generally the Bible seems to speak of a twofold division in man, either body and soul, or body and spirit. Previously, we read Matthew 10:28 NLT which says, “28 “Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” That’s body and soul.

1 Corinthians 5:3 NLT adds, “Even though I am not with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit.” That’s body and spirit.

But in this case, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul uses a three fold division. Why? He is making sure that no part of his converts’ lives is left untouched by God’s power. Jesus saves (1 Thessalonians 1:10), sanctifies (1 Thessalonians 3:13), and glorifies (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

For what its worth, it is possible to also see special significance in the threefold division. By “spirit” (πνεῦμα pneuma) may be understood the higher principle of thought and mind that man has been given to communicate with God by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:16 NLT says, “16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.”

By soul (ψυχή psuchē), when distinguished from spirit, may be understood as that part of man’s heart that finds expression through emotions and desires. Psalm 40:8 NLT says, “8 I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart.”

The meaning of body (σῶμα sōma) seems evident. Our bodies are God’s temple. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?”

But how will God communicate with us if our mind isn't stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3) and our hearts aren't open to the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14)? No wonder Paul says, "May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again."

**What about the appearance of the prophet Samuel?** 1 Samuel 28 describes Saul's encounter with the witch of Endor. This spiritualistic séance has been cited as evidence for life after death. However, there are points to the contrary: Mediums and those who consult spirits of the dead had been sentenced to death and banned from the land (verse 3). God had left Saul and would not communicate with him (verse 15). So why would God start communicating with Saul after He left him? And if God did change His mind about communicating with Saul, why would He communicate in this way after God's repeated warnings not to (Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14)?

Samuel was supposedly "brought up." Other expressions: "ascending out of the earth," "Cometh up," and "Bring ... up." But is this where the righteous dead are —down in the earth? Not according to those who believe in the immortal soul...

Samuel is described as "an old man covered with a mantle." Is this the way immortal souls appear? And where did the soul get the body? Aren't they supposed to be disembodied? Was there a resurrection? If not, can Satan raise the dead?

The apparition of Samuel told Saul in 1 Samuel 28:19 NLT, "You and your sons will be here with me. Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." Why would the wicked Saul and the righteous Samuel go to the same place?

The truth is we wrestle not against flesh and blood but "against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world" - Ephesians 6:12 NLT. Ecclesiastes 9:5 NLT adds, "The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing." So if the dead know nothing but Samuel was talking to Saul, who but a "mighty power in this dark world" was Saul really talking to?

The enormity of Saul's sin is revealed in these words, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it" - 1 Chronicles 10:13 NLT

If this passage illustrates the existence of hell and immortality of the soul, it also represents a significant departure from the way the Bible communicates about both. And puts the interpreter in the unenviable position of God changing his mind to sanction witchcraft to teach truth.

**Did Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus at the Transfiguration?** Yes! Moses died. God buried Him. Deuteronomy 34:5-6 NLT says, “So Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, just as the LORD had said. The LORD buried him in a valley near Beth-peor in Moab, but to this day no one knows the exact place.” Then, Jude 9 NLT describes what happened next. “9 But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels [archangel: means “commander in chief”] did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (This took place when Michael was arguing with the devil about Moses’ body.)”

Satan, ever the accuser of God’s people (Revelation 12:10), may have resisted the raising of Moses to eternal life on the grounds of Moses’ sin at Meribah (Deuteronomy 32:51) and his murder of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) since Jesus had not yet died on the cross for Moses’ sins. But Michael [Jesus] disagreed. And took the resurrected Moses and his body to heaven. His death and resurrection is a fitting representation of the “dead in Christ” who will rise when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Daniel 12:1-3 NLT says the same thing would happen at the time of the end. “At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.”

But Elijah did not die first before going to heaven. He was translated and taken to heaven by a chariot and whirlwind. 2 Kings 2:11 NLT says, “As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven.” Elijah represents the second category of people going to heaven when Jesus returns. Those “who are alive and remain” (1 Thessalonians

4:17). Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-11 as living witnesses to the divinity of Jesus (a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him!" verse 5 NLT) and the reality of eternal life for the dead in Christ and those who will be alive and remain when Jesus returns.

After the cross in Luke 24:44 NLT Jesus says of Moses and prophets like Elijah, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets."

But before the cross, Moses and Elijah were the ones telling Jesus that the suffering on the cross would be worth it! Matthew 17:3 NLT says, "Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus." What were they talking about? Verse 12 gives us a clue. "And in the same way they will also make the Son of Man suffer." They were reminding Jesus that everyone like Moses and Elijah, that have died in Christ like Moses, or will be alive and remain like Elijah, will be reunited with Jesus after His death, resurrection, and return. Imagine how encouraging it would be for Jesus to remember that! Isn't that encouraging for us as well (1 Thessalonians 4:18)?

**Does Genesis 2:7 describe the origin of an immortal soul?** If it does, Hollywood is right and All Dogs Go to Heaven with immortal souls too because the first four uses of נֶפֶשׁ nephesh translated soul in Genesis 2:7 KJV previously describe animals: Genesis 1:20 (sea life), Genesis 1:21 (great sea life), Genesis 1:24 (land creatures), and Genesis 1:30 (birds and land creatures). The same word is also used to describe the animals that were saved on Noah's ark. Genesis 9:8-11 KJV says, "And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature (נֶפֶשׁ nephesh) that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

Instead, isn't it more consistent with the creation story of man recorded in Genesis to translate נֶפֶשׁ nephesh as living person (NLT) when applying the same word for soul in animals to man in Genesis 2:7 so that body + breath of God = a living being (RSV)?

Which is what Genesis 12:4-5 NLT does after that too. “4 So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people (נַפְשׁוֹ nephesh) he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan.”

The KJV of Genesis 12:4-5 says it this way, “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls (נַפְשׁוֹ nephesh) that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.” Same thing in Genesis 36:6 and Leviticus 4:2.

Satan’s first lie in the Garden of Eden was about death (Genesis 3:4) so its not surprising that people have been confused about it since creation. The doctrine of the immortal soul has been called a characteristic of paganism and from its earliest adoption led to ancestor worship in the far east, Egyptian pharaohs being mummified in pyramids hoping to cross over the River Styx to the after life, and human sacrifices. But it wasn’t until Socrates introduced the immortality of the soul in 470 BC that it began to be seriously considered within Greek Hellenism.

After Socrates, Plato called the body “the prison of the soul” and taught death as the “liberation of the soul.” Aristotle shared similar views which permeated their way into the popular thinking of the Hellenistic Jews of Jesus’ day (cf. Luke 16:19-31). Three hundred years after that, the dualistic doctrine of the immortality of the soul appeared in the writings of Athenagoras, Tertulian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustin. But it wasn’t fully embraced until Thomas Aquinas popularized it in the thirteenth century AD that the dogma of the immortality of the soul was proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church in December 1513. Most Protestant Christian churches followed suit but not all. Some early church fathers such as Justin the Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp rejected this doctrine. Luther was ambivalent but a number of well-known modern Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Oscar Cullmann also believe the immortal soul is not found in Scripture.

Instead, the Bible says man is mortal i.e. subject to death (Job 4:17). We seek for immortality (Romans 2:7). But we do not “put on immortality” until Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

The Bible uses the word soul 1,600 times but never once uses immortal soul. Only God is naturally immortal (1 Timothy 6:15-16). Jesus said both the body and soul would be destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28). Ezekiel 18:4 KJV says something similar using the same word from Genesis 2:7 “Behold, all souls (נִפְשׁוֹת nephesh) are mine; as the soul (נַפְשׁוֹ nephesh ) of the father, so also the soul (נַפְשׁוֹ nephesh) of the son is mine: the soul (נַפְשׁוֹ nephesh) that sinneth, it shall die.”

Daniel 12:13 says it this way, “13 "As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you.”

**But does Genesis 2:7 describe the origin of an immortal spirit God puts in man?** No, Scripture simply has no record of such an idea. In Genesis 2:7 KJV when the lifeless form of man was infused with the divine breath of life (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah), man became a living being (נִפְשׁוֹ nephesh). “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah); and man became a living soul (נִפְשׁוֹ nephesh).”

The same thought appears in Job 33:4 NLT “For the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah) of the Almighty gives me life.” Imparted to man, the breath is equivalent to his life. No wonder Isaiah 2:22 NLT says, “22 Don't put your trust in mere humans. They are as frail as breath (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah). What good are they?”

But at death, there is no more breath left. 1 Kings 17:17 KJV says, “And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah) left in him.”

The breath of God in Genesis 2:7 is the second ingredient in the creation of man. Body + Breath = Being. The confusion between breath and spirit of God comes from the mistaken notion of the immortality of the soul and because people don't realize the breath of God is the same as the spirit of God. Job 27:3-4 equates the two. “All the while my breath (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah) is in me, and the spirit (רוּחַ ruwach) of God is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.” This verse is not adding a third ingredient to the creation of man. There is no Body + Breath + Immortal Spirit = Being. Job is not disagreeing with Genesis. No, Hebrew parallelism is simply using them interchangeably.

After death, nowhere does Scripture say the breath of life takes on a life of its own and becomes a thinking living immortal spirit. Instead, that breath / spirit returns to God and your thoughts and everything else perish. Psalm 146:3-4 KJV says, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath (רוּחַ ruwach) goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

Death is simply creation in reverse. The body returns to the dust of the earth. The breath of life or spirit of God goes back to God who gave it. Scripture does not describe the creation of an immortal spirit that exists before or after man dies. Only sincere theologians with *a priori* assumptions influenced by pagan ideas of the soul and Greek dualism see such a connection. But not without marginalizing and rendering superfluous the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead in Christ, and an end time Judgment (see additional question and content).

**Does Genesis teach the freedom to choose nothingness?** Yes! The absence of life is death. When you don't have body + breath, you don't have a being or soul. You have nothing. Similarly, if you don't have wood or nails, you don't have a house. The body returns to nothing but dust. Genesis 3:19 NLT says, “By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.” And the breath of life returns to the maker of life. Job 34:14 NLT is another verse that equates spirit and breath using the same word for breath from Genesis 2:7. “If God were to take back his spirit (רוּחַ ruwach) and withdraw his breath (נְשָׁמָה nēshamah), all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust.”

We know this is really the truth about the non-immortality of the soul and man's spirit because the Bible says people and animals share the same spirit / breath and same fate. Ecclesiastes 3:18-20 NLT says, “I also thought about the human condition—how God proves to people that they are like animals. For people and animals share the same fate—both breathe (רוּחַ ruwach) and both must die. So people have no real advantage over the animals. How meaningless! Both go to the same place—they came from dust and they return to dust.” Only Hollywood teaches that All Dogs Go to Heaven. The Bible does not.

So what does the very next verse in Ecclesiastes 3:21 NLT mean? “For who can prove that the human spirit goes up and the spirit of animals goes down into the earth?” The answer is nobody but God! Solomon is saying the destiny of the body is known—it returns to dust—but human wisdom cannot ascertain what happens to the spirit or breath except that it returns to God. Ecclesiastes 12:7

NLT says, “For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit (רוּחַ ruwach) will return to God who gave it.”

But if the spirit or breath of a man becomes a disembodied immortal spirit or soul at death, the same must be said of the animals. Because they not only are called the same word for soul (נֶפֶשׁ nephesh) in Genesis 2:7, they also share the same spirit (רוּחַ ruwach). So if animals don't die and go to heaven, why should we claim likewise for people?

**Are there serious implications for accepting the doctrine of the immortal soul?** Yes. If you embrace the immortality of the soul which is required to accept eternal torment in hell, how can you not also embrace the non-Biblical spiritualism of the Egyptians, or reincarnation and the eastern religions of ancestor worship or the more readily accepted but unBiblical teachings of purgatory, indulgences, prayer, alms, and masses for the dead, veneration of Mary and saints in heaven all of which share in common the immortality of the soul?

If you embrace the immortality of the soul, how can three of the pillars of Christianity including the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead in Christ, and an end time Judgment not be marginalized or rendered superfluous? Why did Jesus say, “That where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3 NKJV) if you, your soul, or spirit are already there? The immortality of the soul makes the foundational doctrines of the Christian church and Jesus' own words not just marginalized and superfluous but also nonsensical.

If you embrace the immortality of the soul, how does God not appear to be a liar who didn't really say you would die (cf. Genesis 2:17) and didn't really mean it when He said there would be no more pain or suffering (Revelation 21:1-4)?

No, from Genesis to Revelation, the choice has always been between eternal life and eternal death. James 1:15 KJV concludes, “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

**Are there any Christian authors who see the non-immortality of the soul in the Bible?**

Marc Alan Schelske (2017) says, “The influence of Platonic dualism on the church is hard to overstate. It's a topic for larger than can be discussed here. But know this: most people today, both Christians and non-Christians, believe the

Christian view of humanity is dualistic. That's true even for people who have never heard of Platonic dualism. According to this view, we have bodies and we have souls. They are two separate things. Our bodies are our flesh. They're biological. They're the vehicles our souls use to get around for the duration of our earthly lives. When this life is over, we will shed our bodies. Only then will our true nature, our souls, be freed. This view sounds like Christian teaching. It's mirrored in popular culture, but this wasn't the early Hebrews view. It may surprise you that this isn't what the scriptural creation story teaches." - The Wisdom of Your Heart: Discovering the God-Given Purpose and Power of Your Emotions, pp.72-73

Thomas G. Long (2009)

Since we are not immortal, when the body dies, the whole person dies, period. We don't have deathless souls, spirits, or anything else. Only God is immortal (1 Timothy 6:16), and Christians speak of anything human as "immortal" only a derivative way. Paul tells the Corinthians that "this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53), but he is not spouting Platonism; he is preaching resurrection. He is saying that God's love for human creatures is so powerful and steadfast that God will not allow anything—not even death—to drive a wedge between us. - Accompany Them With Singing: The Christian Funeral p.25

N.T. Wright (2008)

Not to a disembodied entity hidden within the outer shell of the disposable body but rather to what we would call the whole person or personality, as being confronted by God. - Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church p.28

Karl Barth (1960)

They themselves are their souls, for their souls are the souls of their bodies. - Church Dogmatics Vol 3 p.491

Thomas G. Long (2009)

Christians, to sum up, do not believe that human beings are only bodies, not do they believe that they are souls who, for the time being, have bodies; Christians affirm, rather, that humans beings are embodied. What others call "the soul" and "the body," Christians call the "breath of God" and dust; and when it comes to living human beings, they form an inseparable unity. There is no such reality in the Christian lexicon as "the real me" apart from the "the embodied me." Moreover, the "embodied me" is a creature, created by God. Human life flows

entirely from God as a gift. Take away the breath of God, and there is no immortal soul left over to make a break for it to freedom; there is just dust. -  
Accompany Them With Singing: The Christian Funeral p.24