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The Soul and The Unseen

by – James R. Coram (1946-2022)

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Key Points:

The soul in death returns to a state of non-existence, akin to its state before life.....8829
Orthodoxy erroneously claims the soul survives death prior to resurrection.....8829

[Death is described as stillness and absence of life.....8835](#)
[The ultimate hope lies in resurrection and the eventual triumph over death through Christ.....8836](#)

In approaching the question of the scriptural meaning of the Hebrew *sh'ôl* and the Greek *hadēs*, it is necessary first of all to establish the scriptural significance of “soul.” This is because, in Scripture, man, who is said both to *be* a soul and to *have* a soul, returns in death to the “unseen,” which is *sh'ôl* or *hadēs*.



in conceiving the human soul to be not the human experience itself, but to be instead an intangible, immortal entity, a spirit (or “ghost”) which, while possessing personal traits and partaking of personal experience, is nonetheless not a person or corporeal being at all.

Since man is a corporeal being which, both by association with and as the representation thereof, is a living “soul,” it is evident that when he returns to the unseen, his soul returns there as well. Since in death, man, who “is” a “soul,” does indeed return to the unseen (e.g. Psalm 9:17), it is correct to say of any certain man who dies, not only that *that* “soul” has returned to the unseen, with reference to the man himself, but that *his* soul has returned there as well, with respect to his sensations or experiences.

Wherever the Scriptures declare that a certain man “died,” or wherever they speak of his “death,” the orthodox insist that we are not to understand that that *man* died, but only that his present lifetime ended and that his *body* died. It is not that these traditionalists do not know what death is, but that they insist that it does not appertain to man. Indeed, like the spiritualists, they assure us that they are correct in their claim that, in death, man *does not* die because he *cannot* die.

UNTENABLE TRADITIONS

From a realization of this fact alone it becomes evident that orthodoxy is mistaken, at least in part. For while the soul's pre-existence is repudiated, its post-existence is insisted upon, its survival after death, prior to resurrection. Yet whatever the lot of the human soul *after* this life (prior to resurrection), it is that which obtained unto it as well *prior* to this life. Therefore the orthodox view cannot be correct in both of its claims. Orthodoxy is mistaken as well

SENSATION OR EXPERIENCE

Nevertheless, scripturally speaking, the human “soul” is simply the human *experience*. Soul is the *sensation* which *results* from the combination of an organic body with breath or spirit (Genesis 2:7; cf.

[\(continued on page 8831\)](#)

The Soul and The Unseen.....8829
[Making Mistakes and Dealing with the Evidence \(quote: Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.\)..... 8836](#)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
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- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
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- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice,

misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);

- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6);
 - adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

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This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

*We are always open for discussion, but
never for disputation. – André Sneider*

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1:21). Soul is connected with the blood (Leviticus 17:14, “life,” AV), and is possessed not only by man but by all living creatures that move or “roam” (Leviticus 11:46).

The expression “living souls” speaks of the entire animate creation generally, “... *every animal of the field and every flyer of the heavens* ...” (Genesis 2:19; cf. 1:24, 30), even “... *the great sea monsters and all the moving living souls with which the waters swarm* ...” (Genesis 1:20-21).

Soul is a *phenomenon*; it is the perception of the senses. It encompasses all sensation, all that is experienced by means of the sentient faculties. By association, soul is the capacity for seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling. In itself, soul consists in the sensation of these things themselves. Man, like the animals, is a “*living soul*” (Genesis 1:21; 2:7). While both are living creatures, they are termed (by association) living “souls.” This is because they are not only *living* creatures but are living creatures which possess *soul*, that is, sentient capacity. Both man and beast are termed living souls because they are living creatures which, through sentient faculties, are capable of experience.

“Soul” (Hebrew, *nephesh*, Greek, *psuchē*) does not mean “life,” though it is often incorrectly translated “life” in the *Authorized Version*. Soul is not life itself, though it is intimately connected with it. A man’s “soul” speaks of a man’s sensations or experiences. A man who is termed a “soul,” speaks of a man from the standpoint of his sensations or experiences.

In Scripture it is common to speak of men as “souls.”

Through this means man comes before us not simply as an organic entity such as a tree, but as a sentient creature partaking of experience. Literally, soul is not something that man is, but something that he partakes of.

When a man is spoken of as a “soul,” the word is a figure of speech (*metaphor* [representation] and *metonymy* [association]). And, even when man is spoken of as possessing a soul, technically, this too is a figure of speech (*ellipsis* [omission]).

When man is spoken of as *being* a soul, he thus becomes *representative* of that with which he is closely *associated*. Yet when man is spoken of as *possessing* a soul, the evident thought in view, while understood, is not expressed. This is because it would be both tedious and needless to do so.

The inherent idea which is present, though not expressed, when man is spoken of as possessing “a” soul, is capacity of or means of experiencing. The full thought is that man has “a [capacity of] soul,” or sensation. Strictly speaking, man does not have “a” soul but a capacity of soul, a means by which he engages in sentient activity, a facility by which he *experiences* life.

DEFINITIVE TEXTS

The connection of *soul* with the senses is evidenced by a selection of interesting passages. “*My soul is disgusted with my life; I shall give free rein to myself and my concern; Let me speak in the bitterness of my soul*” (Job 10:1). The taste is especially intended in such scriptures as, “*with all the yearning of your*



268 pages

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Death, the Intermediate State and the Resurrection (A Comprehensive Compilation)

Are you afraid of death or “hell”? Well, you needn’t be. After all, Christ has the keys to both of them. Authors include:

Arthur P. Adams (1847-1925), Cecil J. Blay (1906-1976), E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913), Joseph E. Kirk (1903-1974), A.E. Knoch (1874-1965), Aaron Locker, Adlai Loudy (1893-1984), Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Charles H. Pridgeon (1863-1932), William B. Screws (1884-1961) and André Sneidar.

soul you may sacrifice and eat flesh” (Deuteronomy 12:15; cf. :20-21); “you may eat grapes to your **soul’s** desire, to your satisfaction” (Deuteronomy 23:24); “their **soul** abhorred all food” (Psalm 107:18); “a thief when he steals, In order to fill his **soul’s** needs when he is famishing” (Proverbs 6:30); “The just man knows the **soul’s** needs of even his domestic beast, yet the compassions of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10); “eating to his **soul’s** satisfaction” (Proverbs 13: 25); “... honey of the comb, [is] sweet to the **soul** and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24); “... if you are a person of **soulish** appetite” (Proverbs 23:2); “The **soul** that is surfeited tramples on honeycomb, yet to the famished **soul**, any bitter thing is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7); “cause his **soul** to see good from his toil” (Ecclesiastes 2:24); “All of a man’s toil is for his mouth, yet even then the **soul** is never filled” (Ecclesiastes 6:7); “... to make the **soul** of the famished empty” (Isaiah 32:6).

In all of these cases, the point lies in the sensation accompanying the use of food, the physical satisfaction which the *soul* furnishes when we partake of its products.

This is amply confirmed by our Lord’s words: “... Do not worry about your **soul**, what you may be eating, or what you may be drinking ... Is not the **soul** more than nourishment?” (Matthew 6:25). These creature needs are what the soul craves, yet true satisfaction is not to be found in them. Even as He said on another occasion: “For what will a man be benefited, if he should ever be gaining the whole world, yet be forfeiting his **soul**? Or what will a man be giving in exchange for his **soul**?” (Matthew 16:26). This is the evil which the wise man saw: “... a man to whom the One, Elohim, gives riches and substance and glory, and he has no lack to his **soul** of all that he yearns for, yet the One, Elohim, does not give him power to eat of it ...” (Ecclesiastes 6:2) ...

How luminous does our Lord’s invitation become in the light of a true understanding of the soul! “Hither to Me, all who are toiling and laden ... and you shall be finding rest in your **souls**” (Matthew 11:28-29). It is the soul that feels the pressure and distress of life’s burdens and responsibilities, and

it is the soul that finds its rest in His yoke.¹

DEATH IS A RETURN

Having established the meaning of soul, that it is a phenomenon or that which pertains to the senses, we must emphasize that, in death, the human soul undergoes a *return*. It returns to that concerning which, apart from revelation, we can only inquire. Yet we do so because we are interested in the whence and whither of things, especially in the whence and whither of man. *From* where did he come, and *to* where does he go?

Now if we should ask, “What are we, *where* did we come from and *where* are we going?” the answer is, “From the ground you were taken; for soil you are, and to the soil you shall *return*” (cf. Genesis 3:19). But if we should ask, “Yet what of the human *soul*; what becomes of it?” the answer is, “The soul *returns* to the unseen.”

That is, the human soul, man’s *experience*, has the same status *subsequent* to this life that it had *prior* to this life. If it had life before this present, corporeal lifetime, then, when that which we term “death” ensues, it *returns* to its previous life. Alternatively, if it did *not* have life prior to this present, corporeal lifetime, then, when that which we term “death” ensues, human experience *returns* to its previous status, that of non-existence.

Job knew that God would *return* him to death.

I know that You are turning me back to death, to that house appointed for all the living (Job 30:23).

If He places it in His heart concerning him, He can gather back His spirit and His breath to Himself; all flesh would breathe its last together, and humanity would return to the soil (Job 34:14-15).

You conceal Your face; they are flustered. You gather away their spirit; they expire and return to their soil (Psalm 104:29).

1. A.E. Knoch, *What is the Soul?* pp. 8-9, 11.

All are going to one place; all have come from the soil, and all return to the soil (Ecclesiastes 3:20).

It is thus, through such passages of Scripture as these, that we become aware that, essentially, death itself is a return. Man is soil and *returns* to the soil (Genesis 3:19). The spirit – the imperceptible *power* of life, action and intelligence – in death, *returns* to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). “Death,” then, is simply the specialized term signifying the absence of life which follows mortality as contrasted with the absence of life which precedes it.

We may speak of *our* soul even as we speak of *our* body. Even as the elements, however, which compose our body are entirely decomposed in death, the experiences which comprise our soul are entirely terminated in death. This is because “soul” is that which is produced when an organic body is endowed with spirit or breath, that is, with life-giving, soul-enabling power (Genesis 2:7).

SH^e’ôl AND HADĒS

The Hebrew for that to which, in death, man returns (“*the unseen*,” CV; “grave,” “hell” or “pit,” AV), is *sh^e’ôl*, which signifies “ask,”² and corresponds to the Greek *hadēs*, meaning “unseen” (cf. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27, 31). Thus, in death, the soul returns to the “ask”; that is, it returns to that which must be asked about in order to be known, being unseen.

Since it is imperceptible, that to which the soul returns

2. *Sh^e’ôl* belongs to the Hebrew word family of the stem *shal*, ask, which is regularly used in that sense; cf. *The New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance*, p. 1220, cf. entries 2 and 6 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).

is naturally the subject of inquiry. How appropriate, then, that the Hebrew should speak of it as the “ask” and that the Greek should speak of it as the “unseen.”

It is true that *sh^e’ôl* is ordinarily concerned with the state of those who are in “*the tombs*” (John 5:28), or as we would say, according to our own burial customs, that it is ordinarily concerned with those who are in their graves. Nevertheless, *sh^e’ôl* does not mean “grave.” It means “ask,” and is used in reference to something that is unseen, which is an object of inquiry.

In Matthew 16:18, the Greek equivalent of *sh^e’ôl*, which is *hadēs*, is used in reference to the unseen domain of the Adversary. Yet in Matthew 11:23, it is used in reference to the unseen *state* (as a consequence of its destruction and desolation) to which the city of Capernaum would one day subside.

In Genesis 37:35, Jacob declared, “*I shall go down mourning to my son, to the unseen*.” This expression of lamentation, however, does not refer to being lowered into a grave, but to that which he claimed as his portion for the remainder of his lifetime (*i.e.*, continuation in mourning for his son).

We use a similar idiom when we say, “having traveled *down* the road of life and come to the *end* of our journey.” The sense of “go down mourning” is parallel to the modern idiom, “go down fighting,” namely, to continue on, unintermittingly, until the end.

It should also be noted that Jacob’s words, “*to my son*,” are elliptical; they are not complete in themselves. Since it would be a neutral expression, the objective ellipsis must be, “*to [the status of] my*



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son” – regardless of what that status may be. To say the least, it is begging the question to insist upon some sort of extraordinary, double ellipsis such as, “to [the dwelling place of] *my son* [where he is still alive, even though not in a body].”

THE SOUL IN *sh'ôl*

We have learned that the soul is not substance; nor is it immaterial spirit. It is only the result of a combination of the spirit with the body ...

A point which seems to have been entirely overlooked, and which will help us much at this juncture, is the fact that the soul *only* is coupled with the unseen. The spirit must never be associated with *sh'ôl* or *hadēs*. The body is never connected with the unseen, except in such extraordinary cases as the sons of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who “descended ... **alive** toward the unseen” [i.e., into the unseen substratum, below the earth’s surface], when “the ground which was under them was rent, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up” (Numbers 16:31-33), or Jonah, who found his *sh'ôl* in the fish’s belly (Jonah 2:2).³

In contrast to this, the soul is definitely spoken of as in *sh'ôl* in at least six passages (Psalm 16:10; 30:3; 49:15; 86:13; 89:48; Proverbs 23:14), as well as in *hadēs* in two (Acts 2:27, 31). Besides this, the thought latent in the context of these two words is always concerned with *sensation* when the reference is to humanity.⁴

SCRIPTURAL USAGE DETERMINES MEANING

It does not follow from the fact that the Greek word *hadēs* signifies “unseen,” that, when speaking of the human soul in death, *hadēs* therefore speaks of an unseen *place*, much less that it speaks of an unseen place where “disembodied spirits” abide. An “abode” is the place where one remains or dwells; it is the place

where one lives or resides. Our inquiry is that of the nature of the unseen. It will not do simply to make the bold claim that *hadēs* is “the abode of disembodied spirits.” We are aware that such were the notions of certain intertestamental Jews and of many ancient Greeks. We also realize that many modern scholars are of the same opinion. Tales, however, about disembodied spirits in the unseen world of Greek mythology even as historical records concerning ancient Jews who, under the influence of such myths, claimed that similar doctrines are to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, are no basis for truth. What we are interested in is what the Scriptures actually reveal concerning the unseen. If it is a sufficient revelation, God granting us eyes to see, we will then know from the Scriptures themselves whether such sources as those to which so many appeal are right or wrong.

CONSOLATION ACCORDING TO TRUTH

The Scriptures always speak of the death and resurrection of *man himself*; they never speak of either the death or resurrection merely of the body. It is *the dead* who are in their tombs (John 5:28); and, the dead *are* in their *tombs*, not in “the abode of disembodied spirits.” Indeed, why should we deem it unbelievable that God is rousing *the dead*? (Acts 26:8).

Concerning *believers* who are *reposing* (not, believers’ *bodies* which are merely *lying* in the grave; I Thessalonians 4:13), we are told to console one another with the words that “... **the dead in Christ shall be rising first, and thereupon the living shall at the same time be snatched away together with them, to meet the Lord in the air ...**” and always to be together with Him (I Thessalonians 4:16-17). It is remarkable indeed, then, if the dead in Christ are not really dead but are instead in the joy of heaven, that, in a context in which the theme is the consolation of the bereaved, we are told *only* to console one another with *these* words (I Thessalonians 4:18), the words of the apostle Paul concerning resurrection, and are *not* at all told to console one another as well with some testimony to the effect that our loved ones are not really dead at all but are gloriously alive, even in the presence of Christ Himself.

Howbeit, resolute claims seeking to justify the

3. It is as foolish to claim that “hell” (where “lost souls” are [purportedly] tormented prior to judgment) is within the bowels of the earth as it would be to claim that it is within the belly of the great fish which swallowed up Jonah.
4. A.E. Knoch, *Unsearchable Riches*, “Sheol and Hades,” vol. 54, pp. 167-168.

immortality of the soul are the order of the day. Such claims are regularly set forth, even in the face of the most explicit, scriptural declarations to the contrary. For example, the testimony of Ecclesiastes concerning the dead is viewed as utterly mistaken, and is appraised as but “humanistic thought,” the “perspective of autonomous man.”⁵ Such claims are freely set forth by many, notwithstanding the fact that Ecclesiastes’ own author, concerning this same testimony, under divine inspiration, insists that “*what was written is uprightness and words of truth*” (Ecclesiastes 12:10).

Similarly, it is claimed that what the psalmist meant when declaring, “*The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all those descending into stillness*” (Psalm 115:17), was that, in death, one can no longer praise God *before men, in this life*: “in the church militant, as is done by saints in the land of the living.”⁶ This, however, we hardly need to be told. Besides, since the dead descend into “stillness,” it is evident that they do not praise God at all.

DEATH PRECLUDES LIFE

The Scriptures make it clear that the dead are not alive and that soul (i.e., sensation) is impossible in death. The fact is that “... *the dead do not live* ...” (cf. Revelation 20:5).

The unseen is not only commonly set in parallel to death as its practical equivalent (e.g. I Samuel 2:6; Psalm 6:5; 89:48; Hosea 13:14), but, the apostle Paul, in a close adaptation of Hosea 13:14, even *substitutes* the Greek word for “death” (*thanate*) where the prophet had used the Hebrew *sh’e’ôl* (I Corinthians 15:55).

Similarly, earlier in the same chapter, in reply to the claim of some of the Corinthians “*that there is no resurrection of the dead*” (:12), the apostle argues that if *the dead* are not being roused, (1) neither has Christ been roused; (2) vain is your faith; (3) you are still in your sins! and (4) “*Consequently those also, who are put to repose in Christ, **perished***” (:18). The apostle does not say that, if there is no resurrection,

those no longer having bodies will just have to continue to make do without them, but, that if there is no resurrection, the dead in Christ *perished*.

In many places, the Scriptures speak of the dead as destitute of knowledge or speech, and as knowing nothing until resurrection. These Scriptures are to be believed, not twisted. They make it clear that death is truly death, not life in some other form. The following are a selection of notable passages concerning *sh’e’ôl* and the state of the dead. May God give us grace to believe them.

Do return Yahweh! Do extricate my soul! Save me on account of Your benignity. For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the unseen, who shall acclaim You? (Psalm 6:4-5).

What gain is there in my blood poured out, in my descending to the grave? Does soil acclaim You? Does it tell Your faithfulness? (Psalm 30:9).

O Yahweh, let me not be ashamed, for I have called out to You. Let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the unseen (Psalm 31:17).

The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all those descending into stillness (Psalm 115:17).

Let me praise Yahweh throughout my life; let me make melody to my Elohim through all my future. Do not trust in patrons, in a son of humanity with whom there is no salvation. His spirit shall go forth, and he shall return to his ground; in that day his reflections perish (Psalm 146:2-4).

This is the evil in all that is done under the sun: That one destiny is for all; moreover, the heart of the sons of humanity is full of evil, and ravings are in their heart throughout their life, yet after it, they are joined to the dead. Indeed for anyone who is joined with all the living there is trust; for it is better for a living cur than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing whatsoever (Ecclesiastes 9:3-5).

All that your hand finds to do, do with your vigor, for there is no doing or devising or knowledge

5. Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, pp. 65, 216 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984).

6. John Gill, *Body of Divinity*, vol.2, p. 208 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

or wisdom in the unseen where you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Indeed the unseen cannot acclaim You, nor can death praise You; and those who descend into a crypt cannot look forward to Your faithfulness. The living! the living one! he is acclaiming You as I do today; the father makes known to his sons Your faithfulness (Isaiah 38:18-19).

THE LAST ENEMY

From the scriptural facts set forth in this present exposition, we may be certain that, with reference to the human soul after death, the “unseen” is not a *place* (i.e., a realm or locale) at all, but a *status*. In death, the status of the human soul is that of post-existence. Except for the fact that it follows rather than precedes the time of the soul’s existence, the post-death status of a man’s soul is the same as that of its pre-generative status, namely, that of non-existence. Therefore, we may be certain that any and all who claim otherwise – be they ancient Jews or Greeks or modern scholars – are mistaken in their beliefs.

Let us rejoice that the day will come when Christ will have gloriously placed *all* of His enemies “*under His feet*” (I Corinthians 15:25). “*Under His feet*,” is a figure of speech signifying subjection. The secret of God’s will is to head up all in the Christ (Ephesians 1:10). Thus *all* will become “*in Christ*,” their Head, to Whom all will be subject. This will come to pass in a way that accords with God’s *delight*, and as the achievement of that which He purposed in Christ (Ephesians 1:9).

Let us rejoice that, after all other enemies have been

subjected, even the very last of all of Christ’s enemies will also be subjected. But while we await that day, let us recognize what that last enemy is.

The last enemy is being abolished: **death** (I Corinthians 15:26).

BSN

— Unsearchable Riches, Vol. 83; p. 204

(edited)

TOPICS:

Major: *Hadēs*; Hell; *Shē’ōl*; Soul; Unseen

Minor: Death; Grave; Last Enemy; Life; Spirit

HOLDING TO
THE DOCTRINE OF
ETERNAL TORMENT
IS TO BELIEVE THAT
GOD MAKES MISTAKES
AND THEN *HIDES* THE
EVIDENCE, WHILE HOLD-
ING TO ANNIHILATION IS
TO BELIEVE THAT GOD
MAKES MISTAKES, AND
THEN *DESTROYS*
THE EVIDENCE.

CLYDE L. PILKINGTON, JR.



Will We Escape Death?

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The plight of humanity is mortality and death. In every age the believer’s hope has always been resurrection from the dead and the glory which lays beyond. It was Satan who first introduced the idea, “*Thou shalt not surely die.*” So, what makes anyone think that Satan was right – that we are actually not going to die? What makes someone expect that, of all of the people who have ever lived before them, they will somehow be the ones who will *escape* death? The answer, in one word: tradition.

62 pages

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