

Question #3: “Are You Going to End Up In the Right Destination?”

Both Christians and Jehovah’s Witnesses want to go to heaven and be with God forever.

The question we must explore is whether Watchtower theology revolving around the afterlife and heaven are consistent with what Scripture teaches.

Explore...

Is There One Heaven and One People of God or Two Different Classes of People with Different Destinies?

According to Watchtower theology, only 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses go to heaven, and these make up what is known as the "Anointed Class" (**Revelation 7:4; cf. 14:1-3**). All the remaining Jehovah's Witnesses are a part of God's "other sheep," and will live forever on a paradise earth. Speaking of this "great divide," **Reasoning from the Scriptures** tells us that "God has purposed to associate a limited number of faithful humans with Jesus Christ in the heavenly Kingdom." This book teaches that only those who become "born again"—thereby becoming "sons" of God—can share in this heavenly Kingdom (**John 1:12,13; Romans 8:16,17; 1 Peter 1:3,4**).

These individuals look forward not to **physical** but to **spiritual** existence in heaven. The book "**Your Will Be Done On Earth**" says that "in the resurrection from the dead they expect to be born like Jesus Christ into the fullness of spirit life in heaven, changed, transformed indeed."

We are told that "since 'flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom,' these must become the spiritual sons of God." "Let God Be True" likewise says that "Christ Jesus was put to death in the flesh and was resurrected an invisible spirit creature. Therefore, the world will see him no more. He went to prepare a heavenly place for his associate heirs, 'Christ's body,' for they too will be invisible spirit creatures. Their citizenship exists in the heavenlies."

Now, the Watchtower Society teaches that only a "few" find entrance into this spiritual kingdom—and they are truly a "little flock" when compared with earth's population.⁶ This little flock of true believers (**Luke 12:32**) allegedly began with the 12 apostles and was completely

filled by the year 1935 (Judge Rutherford received a "revelation" to this effect). According to current statistics, less than 5,000 of these "anointed" believers are still alive today. Since most of these individuals are currently very old, this number is expected to drop dramatically in the coming decade.

Watchtower literature teaches that to be saved, these individuals must believe in God, repent of their sins, dedicate themselves to God, be baptized by immersion, and undergo the "sacrifice" of all human rights and hopes, even as Jesus did. This is very clearly a works-oriented salvation. These individuals must "set their affections and keep their minds fixed on the things above." (*Your Will Be Done On Earth*, p. 50)

What will be the primary activity of the Anointed Class in heaven? According to Watchtower literature, these individuals will rule with Christ. Indeed, "they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will rule as kings with him for the thousand years" (Revelation 20:6 NWT). And, obviously, if the Anointed Class is made up of "kings," then there must be others over whom the Anointed Class will rule (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 79). These are the "other sheep" who have an earthly destiny.

Jehovah's Witnesses who are not members of the Anointed Class look forward not to a heavenly destiny but to living eternally on an earthly paradise. **The Watchtower** magazine says that "the heavenly hope was held out, highlighted, and stressed until about the year 1935. Then as 'light flashed up' to reveal clearly the identity of the 'great crowd' of **Revelation 7:9**, the emphasis began to be placed on the earthly hope" (*The Watchtower*, 1 February, 1982, p. 28).

Since the required number of 144,000 members for the Anointed Class became a reality in 1935, all Jehovah's Witnesses since that year have looked forward to an earthly destiny.

The book "**Your Will Be Done On Earth**" assures us that "the heavenly hope of the 144,000 faithful ones of the true Christian congregation does not leave the rest of mankind with nothing to hope for. That gleaming hope of an earthly Paradise, where God's will is to be done on earth

as well as in heaven, is the blessed hope reserved for them according to God's unchanged loving purpose" (*Your Will Be Done On Earth*, p. 50).

In support of this, the Watchtower Society says the Bible consistently sets forth the idea that "the earth will remain 'to time indefinite, or forever' (Psalm 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Luke 12:32 – Is the “Little Flock” the “Anointed Class”?

The Watchtower Teaching

The little flock, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, is made up of 144,000 people who have a heavenly destiny (**see** Revelation 7:4). Indeed, the Watchtower Society teaches that "the Revelation limits to 144,000 the number that become a part of the Kingdom and stand on heavenly Mount Zion. Thus, it is seen that God never purposed to convert this old world and take **all** the good to heaven. There are only a few that find entrance into this kingdom—only a 'little flock' when compared with earth's population" (*Let God Be True*, pp. 136-137)

The Watchtower Society also teaches that pre-Christian saints such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Old Testament prophets are not a part of this little flock. Rather, they are part of the "other sheep" Jesus spoke of in **John 10:16**. Therefore they have an earthly hope and not a heavenly one.

The Biblical Teaching

The Watchtower interpretation of **Luke 12:32** violates the context of the passage. A look at the context shows that **Luke 12:22-34** (all thirteen verses!) is a **single** unit. It begins this way: "Then Jesus said **to his disciples . . .**" (verse 22, emphasis added). The entire unit—from verses 22 to 34—contains words spoken by Jesus **directly to His earthly disciples** in the first century. By no stretch of the imagination, then, can **Luke 12:32** be made to relate to a select group of 144,000 members of an anointed class that would develop from the first century to 1935. The Jehovah's Witnesses are reading something into the text that simply is not there.

Jesus elsewhere referred to His disciples as sheep in His flock. For example, when He was giving the twelve disciples instructions for their future service, He said, "I am sending you out **like**

sheep among wolves. Therefore, be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (**Matthew 10:16**). Later, Jesus told the disciples that His crucifixion would cause them to scatter: "This very night you will all fall away on account of Me, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and **the sheep of the flock** will be scattered'" (**Matthew 26:31**). Just as the disciples are called "sheep" in Jesus' flock in Matthew 10:16 and 26:31, so also are they called Jesus' "little flock" in Luke 12:32.21 Jesus called them a "little flock" because they were a small, defenseless group that could be easily preyed upon. But there was no cause to worry, for the divine Shepherd would take care of them.

More specifically, in **Luke 12:22-34** Jesus is instructing the disciples not to worry about food, clothing, and other things. Worry is senseless because it doesn't really accomplish anything (verses 25,26). It will not extend anyone's life a single day, and the root of worry is a lack of faith (verse 29). The disciples were to keep in mind that God the Father knew what they needed (verse 30). Jesus therefore said that if they would simply commit to making the kingdom their consuming passion, then God would take care of all their other needs (verse 31). Disciples are not to fear but to trust in God, for God "has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (verse 32). Clearly, then, in context, there is no warrant whatsoever for relating these verses to 144,000 members of a so-called anointed class.

Ask...

- According to **Luke 12:22**, who is Jesus speaking to in the thirteen verses that span **Luke 12:22-34**?
- Where specifically is there any indication in the text of **Luke 12:32** that the 144,000 of Revelation chapters 7 and 14 are being spoken of?
- Where does Scripture indicate that entrance into this so-called "little flock" of anointed believers would be closed in the year 1935?

Point out that the Gospels portray Jesus as incessantly speaking of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God during His three-year ministry. And **never once** did He restrict the kingdom

to a mere 144,000 people. He taught that **all** people should seek the kingdom, and said that whoever sought it would find it (e.g., **Matthew 9:35-38; Mark 1:14,15; Luke 12:22-34**).

Ask...

- *Can you think of a single verse in the Bible where Jesus limits the citizenship of heaven to 144,000 people?*

John 3:5 says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (NASB). The Watchtower Society teaches that only members of the Anointed Class are "born again" and thus can enter heaven. But that is not what Scripture teaches. 1 John 5:1 says, Witness, "Whoever **believes** that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him".

Ask...

- **1 John 5:1** says that " **whoever** believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Doesn't the "whoever" include **everyone** and not just a select 144,000 people?
- If becoming "born of God" is open to "**whoever** believes"—and if the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven is being "born of God" or "born again" (**John 3:5**)—then isn't the kingdom of heaven open to "whoever believes" and not just 144,000 people?

What about the Watchtower teaching that the Old Testament saints are not part of the little flock or Anointed Class and therefore do not have a heavenly hope? The best way to answer that is to simply turn to Scripture.

Ask...

- Please read **Matthew 8:11, Luke 13:28, and Hebrews 11:13-16**. How do you reconcile the Watchtower teaching that Old Testament saints look forward to an earthly destiny with the scriptural evidence that says Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, and other Old Testament saints will be with God in heaven?

Revelation 7:4 and 14:1-3—144,000 in the "Anointed Class"?

The Watchtower Teaching

Though the Book of Revelation says the 144,000 represent the twelve tribes of Israel with 12,000 people from each tribe, the Watchtower Society says this is actually a metaphorical reference to the Anointed Class of Jehovah's Witnesses. Indeed, "the heavenly congregation is likened to twelve tribes of 12,000 members each, under the Greater Moses, Christ Jesus" (*Let God Be True*, p.130)

How do we know that literal tribes of Israel are not meant in **Revelation 7:4-8**? The Watchtower Society says these cannot be the tribes of natural Israel because there never was a tribe of Joseph in the Old Testament, even though it is mentioned in **Revelation 7:4-8**. Also, the tribes of Ephraim and Dan—which are listed in the Old Testament—are not included in **Revelation 7**. And the Levites—who are mentioned as being a tribe in **Revelation 7**—were set aside for service in connection with the temple in the Old Testament but were not reckoned as one of the 12 tribes. Clearly, then, the 144,000 in Revelation 7 are not **literally** the twelve tribes of Israel. This passage refers not to natural Israelites but to the Anointed Class of 144,000 consecrated Jehovah's Witnesses according to Watchtower theology.

The Biblical Teaching

First, point out that the Watchtower Society switches interpretive methodology right in the middle of Revelation 7:4. Notice that they interpret the first half of the verse using a **literal** method of interpretation: "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: **144,000...**" (emphasis added). They conclude from this that the so-called Anointed Class will have **precisely** 144,000 people.

But then, the second half of the verse **is not** interpreted literally: ". . .from all the tribes of Israel." In other words, the Watchtower Society says there are literally 144,000 people, but this refers not to the literal tribes of Israel but to the Anointed Class of Jehovah's Witnesses. Within the confines of a single verse, then, they use both a literal **and** a figurative means of interpreting Scripture.

Ask...

- What justification is there for switching methods of interpretation—from **literal** to **figurative—right** in the middle of **Revelation 7:4**?

Second, you will want to show that women are clearly excluded from the 144,000 in the Book of Revelation.²⁹ In referring to this group, Revelation 14:4 says, "These are those *who did **not defile themselves with women, for they kept them selves pure***" (emphasis added). This means either that the 144,000 men are unmarried, or celibate (cf. **2 Corinthians 11:2**). Either way, the fact that they "did not defile themselves with women" and that masculine pronouns are used of this group shows that they are men. For the Watchtower Society to say that women are a part of this group is to ignore the clear teaching of Scripture.

Third, and most important, it is the clear testimony of Scripture that a heavenly destiny awaits **all** who believe in Jesus Christ, not just a select group of 144,000 anointed believers (**Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 3:1; 12:22; 2 Peter 1:10,11**). Drawing a dichotomy between those with a heavenly destiny and those with an earthly one has absolutely no warrant in Scripture. **All** who believe in Christ are heirs of the eternal kingdom (**Galatians 3:29; 4:28-31; Titus 3:7; James 2:5**). The righteousness of God that leads to life in heaven is available "through faith in Jesus Christ **for all those who believe; for there is no distinction**" (Romans 3:21 NASB, emphasis added). Jesus promised, "**If anyone** serves Me, let him follow Me; and **where I am, there shall My servant also be** [i.e., heaven]" (**John 12:26**). Jesus clearly affirmed that all believers will be together in "one flock" under "one shepherd" (**John 10:16**). There will not be two "folds"—one on earth and one in heaven. Scripture is clear: **onfold, one Shepherd!**

Ask...

- How do you reconcile the Watchtower teaching that there will be an "Anointed Class" in heaven and the "other sheep" on earth when **John 10:16** clearly says that **all** believers will be together in "one flock" under "one shepherd"?

We must now address the Watch-tower contention that the tribes mentioned in **Revelation 7** cannot be literal tribes of Israel. One key observation is that the very fact that specific tribes are mentioned along with specific numbers for those tribes removes all possibility that this is a figure of speech. Nowhere else in the Bible does a reference to twelve tribes of Israel mean anything but twelve tribes of Israel. Apologist Norman Geisler rightly says that "the word 'tribes' is never used of anything but a literal ethnic group in Scripture." Besides, as the **Expositor's Bible Commentary** points out, the word "Israel" is normally used in the New Testament as referring to the physical descendants of Jacob. The Watchtower view is thus against the normal New Testament usage of "Israel."

Next, we must address the question, Why are the Old Testament tribes of Dan and Ephraim omitted in Revelation 7? It's important to know that the Old Testament "has no fewer than twenty variant lists of the tribes, and these lists include anywhere from ten to thirteen tribes, though the number twelve is predominant (cf. **Gen. 49; Deut. 33; Ezek. 48**)." Thus, no list of the twelve tribes must be identical. However, since twelve seems to be the ideal number when listing Israel's tribes, it seems clear that John wanted to maintain this ideal figure in **Revelation 7 and 14**.

Most scholars today agree that Dan's tribe was omitted because they were guilty of idolatry on many occasions and, as a result, were largely obliterated (**Leviticus 24:11; Judges 18:1,30; 1 Kings 12:28,29**). To engage in unrepentant idolatry is to be cut off from God's blessing.

An examination of Scripture indicates that the tribe of Ephraim—like the tribe of Dan—was involved in idolatry and paganized worship (**Judges 17; Hosea 4:17**). Apparently, Ephraim was omitted from the list in **Revelation 7** for the same reason Dan was. And, as the **Expositor's Bible Commentary** points out, if idolatry is the reason for omitting both Dan and Ephraim, "the readjustment of the list to include Joseph and Manasseh to complete the twelve can be understood."

One final question remains: Why was the tribe of Levi included in the listing of tribes in Revelation 7? Remember that in the Old Testament they were not a part of the twelve tribes

because of their special status as a priestly tribe under the Mosaic Law. It is probable that they are included here because the priestly functions of their tribe **ceased** with the coming of Christ—the ultimate High Priest. Indeed, the Levitical priesthood was fulfilled in the Person of Christ (**Hebrews 7-10**). Because there was no further need for their services as priests, there was no reason for keeping them distinct and separate from the others; hence, they were properly included in the tribal listing in the Book of Revelation.

The Watchtower Society's objections to interpreting the tribes of **Revelation 7 and 14** as literal tribes of Israel are thus seen to be completely unwarranted. Their view that the 144,000 refers to an Anointed Class represents a gross and heinous distortion of Scripture.

John 10:16—The "Other Sheep"

The Watchtower Teaching

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that though there are only 144,000 spirit-anointed believers who go to heaven, God has "other sheep"—that is, other true believers— who will receive eternal life and live on an earthly paradise. As noted earlier, the opportunity to become part of the 144,000 ended in 1935.

The Biblical Teaching

It is very clear from the context that the phrase "other sheep" in **John 10:16** is referring to **Gentile** believers as opposed to **Jewish**. As a backdrop, it is critical to recognize that in the Gospels the Jews were called "the lost sheep of Israel" (**Matthew 10:6; 15:24**), and those Jews who followed Christ were called His "sheep" (**John 10**).

Now, when Jesus said, "I have **other sheep**, which are not of this fold" (**John 10:16**), He was clearly referring to non-Jewish, Gentile believers. These Gentiles, along with the Jewish believers, "shall become **one flock with one shepherd**" (**John 10:16**). This is in perfect accord with **Ephesians 2:11-22**, where we are told that in Christ, Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in **one body**. **Galatians 3:28** tells us that "there is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], slave nor free, male nor female; for **you are all one** in Christ Jesus". Likewise, **Colossians 3:11** speaks of "a

renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek [Gentiles] and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

It must be emphasized that the latter part of **John 10:16** says: "They shall become **one flock** with **one shepherd**." There will not be one flock of God's people in heaven and another flock on earth. There will be no distinction between an Anointed Class and the "other sheep." Rather, all will dwell together as "one flock" under "one shepherd."

Revelation 7:9 – Are the “Great Multitude” the “Other Sheep”?

The Watchtower Teaching

In the Watchtower publication **Mankind's Search for God**, we read the following summary of the Book of Revelation's "great crowd":

In 1935 the Witnesses came to a clearer understanding regarding the heavenly Kingdom class, who will reign with Christ, and their subjects on the earth. They already knew that the number of anointed Christians called to rule with Christ from the heavens would be only 144,000. So, what would be the hope for the rest of mankind? A government needs subjects to justify its existence. This heavenly government, the Kingdom, would also have millions of obedient subjects here on earth. These would be the "great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues."...

This understanding about the great crowd helped Jehovah's Witnesses to see that they had before them a tremendous challenge—to find and teach all those millions who were searching for the true God and who would form the "great crowd."

The Biblical Teaching:

In regards to **Revelation 7:9**, Watchtower expert Marian Bodine poses the following questions...

Ask...

- Where in the text does it say the great multitude is exempt from heaven?
- Where does it say the great multitude is relegated to live on earth?

Now, **Revelation 7:9** clearly refers to this great multitude as "standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." Though Jehovah's Witnesses try to argue that "before the throne" simply means "in sight of the throne," this is not at all what is being communicated in this verse. The picture is of a great multitude that is **physically present** before God's throne in heaven, just as the angels are before His throne (verse 11).

The Greek word for "before" (**enopion**) in Revelation 7:9 is used a number of times in that book to speak of those who are in the physical presence of God's throne. For example, the word is used in **Revelation 5:8**, where we are told that "the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down **before** the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." The Greek word is used again in **Revelation 7:11**, where we read, "All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces **before** the throne and worshiped God." The word is also used in Revelation 14:3, where we read this of the 144,000: "And they sang a new song **before** the throne and **before** the four living creatures and the elders." Now, **enopion** is used in the **exact same sense** in **Revelation 7:9**, which says that the great multitude is "**before** the throne" of God. According to the authoritative **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, this Greek word is used in **Revelation 7:9** not in the sense of "in sight of" but in the sense "**of place**, before someone or something."⁴³ In other words, it refers to being in the physical presence of God's throne.

Notice what is said about this great multitude in **Revelation 7:15**: "They are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night **in his temple**" (emphasis added). And where is God's "temple" located? Point out to the Jehovah's Witness that **Revelation 11:19** refers to "the temple of God **which is in heaven**" (NASB). **Revelation 14:17** likewise says, "And another angel came out of the temple **which is in heaven**" (NASB).

If the great multitude serves God day and night in His temple (**Revelation 7:15**), and if the temple is in heaven (**Revelation 11:19; 14:17**), then clearly the great multitude is in heaven and not on earth, as the Watchtower Society tries to argue. The great multitude is "before the

throne," "in front of the Lamb," and they serve God day and night "in his temple "which is" in heaven. "What could be clearer? To say that the great multitude is on earth is to completely ignore the context of Revelation chapters 7 and 14.

A good cross- reference for Revelation 7:9 is Revelation 19:1,2: "After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of **a great multitude in heaven**, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" (NASB). Note that the great multitude is said to be "in heaven" in this passage.

Explore...

Is Man Conscious In the Afterlife and Is Hell a Real Place of Eternal Suffering?

The Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that man's soul or spirit is distinct from the physical body. Rather, they believe that man is a combination of body and "breath" that together forms a "living soul."

To be more specific, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the **soul** refers not to an immaterial part of man that can survive death, but to the very life that a person has. Every person **is** a "soul" — not because he or she possesses an immaterial nature but because he or she is **a living being**. "A soul, heavenly or earthly, consists of a body together with the life principle or life force actuating it."

The Watchtower book **Mankind's Search for God** thus comments, "If, as the Bible says, man does not **have** a soul but **is** a soul, then there is no conscious existence after death. There is no bliss, and there is no suffering. All the illogical complications of the 'hereafter' disappear." Hence, "when a person is dead he is completely out of existence. He is not conscious of anything." (*You Can Live Forever in Paradise On Earth*, p. 88) Indeed, the dead experience neither pain nor pleasure, since they have no thought processes whatever. (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 103)

Is this what the Scriptures teach? The following is not an exhaustive list, but gives abundant evidence that the soul is distinct from the body and goes on to live in one of two places, heaven or hell, for all of eternity. It is not simply a force that goes out upon death as Watchtower theology teaches. We will finish by looking at some of the Scriptures passages used by the Watchtower Society that supposedly prove the cessation of the soul at death, but are actually misinterpreted and used to prove something untrue and without warrant.

The most important principles of Bible interpretation is that **Scripture interprets Scripture**. We must ever bear in mind that the interpretation of a specific passage must not contradict the total teaching of God's Word on a given point.

I say this because the Jehovah's Witnesses will argue that **Genesis 2:7** teaches that man does not have an immaterial nature. This is a faulty and unwarranted conclusion since, again, the text is telling us what man **is** (a living being), not what he **is not**. The Watchtower view clearly goes against the rest of the Bible on this subject. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, it becomes quite evident that while **Genesis 2:7** says only that man became a "living being," other passages clearly point to man's immaterial nature. Let us now turn our attention to some of these and the excellent summary teachings by Jehovah's Witness expert Ron Rhodes.

Matthew 10:28—The Soul Exists After Death

In **Matthew 10:28** Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." In this verse, the Greek word used for "soul" is **psuche**. In their authoritative **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich point out that the word **psuche** can mean "breath of life, life-principle," "earthly life itself," "the soul as seat and center of the inner life of man in its many and varied aspects," and "the soul as seat and center of life **that transcends the earthly**"²³ (emphasis added). The word **psuche** is often used to translate the Hebrew term **nephesh** into Greek. (For example, the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint—has **psuche** in place of **nephesh** in **Genesis 2:7**.)

Now, in **Matthew 10:28** **psuche** is clearly being used to designate the part of man that continues on after physical death. It is not being used simply to refer to the "whole person." If that were the case, then the **psuche** (soul) would die when the physical body is killed. This verse clearly indicates that it is possible to kill the body **without** killing the soul (**psuche**). What Jesus is saying, then, is this: "There is something about you which those who kill you [in your physical being] cannot touch! That something is that aspect of man which continues to exist after the body has been lowered into the grave."

Ask...

- How do you reconcile the Watchtower position with **Matthew 10:28**, which clearly indicates that it is possible to kill the body without killing the soul?

Revelation 6:9,10—Souls Under God's Altar

In **Revelation 6:9,10** we read, "And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"

In this passage it is impossible for "souls" to refer to living beings, for then the text would read, "I saw underneath the altar the living beings of those who had been slain." Notice that the souls exist and are conscious despite the fact that they had been physically slain. How do we know they are conscious? Scripture says that they "cried out" to God and are spoken to in turn. That which is unconscious cannot cry out or be spoken to.

Luke 23:46—"Into Thy Hands I Commit My Spirit"

In Luke 23:46 we read these words Jesus uttered as He died on the cross: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."

The word translated "spirit" in this verse is **pneuma**. According to Arndt and Gingrich, this word can have a wide range of meanings—including "wind," "breath," "life- spirit," "soul," "the spirit as a part of the human personality," "the spirit of God," "the spirit of Christ," and "the Holy Spirit."

Now, many of the above meanings are disqualified as possible contenders for Luke 23:46 by virtue of the context. It doesn't make any sense for Jesus to commend His "wind" or His "breath" to the Father. Nor does it fit the context for Jesus to commit "the spirit of God" or "the Holy Spirit" to the Father. In fact, the only meanings of **pneuma** that make any sense in this context are "soul" and "spirit as a part of the human personality." It seems clear from a plain reading of the passage that Jesus is committing His **human immaterial soul or spirit** to the Father. And since Christ was not raised from the dead until three days after His crucifixion, we must conclude that Jesus' human soul or spirit went directly to the Father's presence in heaven while His body lay in the tomb.

Acts 7:59—"Lord Jesus, Receive My Spirit"

In **Acts 7:59** we read, "And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'" This verse would make virtually no sense if we interpret "spirit" (**pneuma**) as simply the life-force within Stephen that ceased to exist at the moment of his death. Why would Stephen ask Jesus to "receive" that which was about to cease existing? He is clearly asking Jesus to receive and take to Himself that part of his self that would survive the death of his physical body.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17—"The Dead in Christ Shall Rise First"

Note that though the term "sleep" is often used to denote death in Scripture, it is never used in reference to the immaterial part of man. Indeed, cult expert Walter Martin explains that "the term **sleep** is always applied in Scripture to the body alone, since in death the body takes on the **appearance** of one who is asleep. But the term **soul sleep** is never found in Scripture. And nowhere does Scripture state that the soul ever passes into a state of unconsciousness."

Walter Martin had this to say about the significance of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 in relation to the idea of conscious existence of the soul after death: Verse 14 in this passage indicates that Paul, while using the metaphor **sleep** to describe physical death, clearly understood that when Jesus comes again, He will bring **with** (Greek: **sun**) Him those whose bodies are "sleeping." To be more explicit, the souls and spirits of those who are now with Christ in glory (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:22-23) will be reunited with their resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15); that is, they will be clothed with immortality, incorruptibility, and exemption from physical decay. The Greek word **sun** indicates that they (i.e., their souls and spirits) will be in a "side by side" position with Christ, and their physical bodies that are "sleeping" will in that *instant be raised to immortality and reunited with their spirits.*

Luke 20:38—The God of the Living

In **Luke 20:38**, we read of Jesus' words to the Sadducees regarding the Old Testament saints Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "He [God] is not the God of the dead, but **of the living**; for all live to Him".

According to first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, "the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: that souls die with the bodies." And in **Luke 20:38**, Jesus contradicts the view of the Sadducees. In effect, He is saying, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though they died many years ago, are actually living today. For God, who calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is not the God of the dead but of the living." Jesus' words clearly indicate that these Old Testament patriarchs are living **at the present moment**, even though they "died " physically many years ago.

Philippians 1:21-23—To Depart and Be with Christ

Now, here's the question that immediately comes to mind:

How could Paul refer to death as "gain" if death meant nonexistence? What the apostle meant by gain is very clear from the context, for he defines it as departing the physical body to **be with Christ. Being with Christ is far better, Paul says, than remaining in the physical body.**

(Being in a state of nonexistence, however, cannot be said to be far better by any stretch of the imagination.)

It is important to note that **Philippians 1:21-23** is not speaking of a future resurrection at which time Paul will be with Christ. Rather Paul is saying that the very moment after physical death occurs he will be with Christ. How do we know this? It's clear from the Greek text! Without going into too much detail, suffice it to say that an aorist infinitive ("to depart") is linked by a **single article** with a present infinitive ("**to be** with Christ"). The infinitives thus belong together: "The single article ties the two infinitives together, so that the actions depicted by the two infinitives are to be considered two aspects of the same thing, or two sides of the same coin." So Paul is saying that the very moment after he departs the body or dies, he will be with Christ in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8—Absent from the Body; Home with the Lord

In the Greek text of this passage, the phrases "at home in the body" and "absent from the Lord" are **both present tense** (which indicates continuing action). We could paraphrase Paul in this way: "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are **continuing to be at home in the body** we are **continuing to be absent from the Lord.**"

By contrast, the latter part of the passage contains two **aorist infinitives**: "absent from the body" and "at home with the Lord." Such aorists indicate a sense of "once-for-all." We might paraphrase it, "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be . . . **absent from the [mortal, perishable] body** and to be **once-for-all at home with the Lord.**"

Regarding all this, Anthony Hoekema comments, "Whereas the present tenses in **verse 6** picture a continuing at-homeness in the body and a continuing away-from-homeness as to the Lord, the aorist infinitives of verse 8 point to a once-for-all momentary happening. What can this be? There is only one answer: **death**, which is an immediate transition from being at home in the body to being away from home as to the body." **The moment a Christian dies, he or she is immediately in the presence of Christ.**

It is also noteworthy that the Greek word **pros** is used for "with" in the phrase "be at home **with** the Lord." This word suggests very close (face-to-face) fellowship or intimate relationships. Paul thereby indicates that the fellowship he expects to have with Christ immediately following his physical death will be one of great intimacy.

From the above Scripture passages, it is clear that human beings do indeed possess an immaterial nature that survives physical death. And this immaterial nature enjoys **conscious** existence following death. Let's now explore some of the passages used by the Watchtower Society in its attempt to show that the soul does not exist after death.

Psalm 146:3,4—Is Man Conscious After Death?

The Watchtower Teaching

Jehovah's Witnesses say this verse proves there is no conscious existence after death. When the spirit is said to go out of the human body, this simply means that the life-force in that person ceases to be active. That is when a person's thoughts supposedly perish. His thought processes do not continue on in another realm.

The Biblical Teaching

The Jehovah's Witnesses have grossly misunderstood what is being said in Psalm 146:3,4. It does not say that people will think no thoughts at all following the moment of death. Rather—in context and in consideration of the original Hebrew, according to the authoritative **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament**—it means that peoples' **plans, ambitions, and ideas for the future** will cease and come to nought at the moment of death. That is what the Hebrew word for "thoughts" communicates in **Psalm 146:3,4**. A person's plans and ideas for the future die with him.

Ecclesiastes 9:5—The Dead Know Nothing?

The Watchtower Teaching

Since the dead are "conscious of nothing at all," the Watchtower Society argues, it is also obvious that people feel no pain or pleasure whatsoever following death. (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 169)

The Biblical Teaching

It is well known that the Book of Ecclesiastes presents two contrasting ways of looking at man's plight in the world. One is the secular, humanistic, materialistic viewpoint that interprets all things from a limited earthly perspective—not recognizing God or His involvement in man's affairs. This earthly perspective is one completely unaided by divine revelation. (Jerry and Marian Bodine, *Witnessing to the Witnesses*, p. 59)

The other perspective is a godly, spiritual one that interprets life and its problems from a God-honoring viewpoint. This viewpoint takes divine revelation into account when interpreting life and its problems. This perspective triumphs at the end of the book.

There are many scholars who interpret **Ecclesiastes 9:1-10** as reflecting the **earthly** perspective that is unaided by divine revelation. To prove that *these* verses express a strictly human perspective, former Jehovah's Witness David Reed suggests the following:

Not only does the writer say in **verse 5** that the dead know nothing, but he also adds that "they have no more **for ever** any share in all that is done under the sun" (**v. 6**).

Ask...

- Do you believe the dead are gone forever?

Verse 2 expresses the thought that "one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil," an idea contradictory to all the rest of Scripture.

Ask...

- Do you believe the righteous and the wicked receive the same judgment and fate?

Watchtower expert Marian Bodine raises one further point (which is similar to David Reed's) regarding this verse. She says, "If the phrase, 'know not anything,' means the dead are unconscious in the grave or spirit world, then [the phrase] 'neither have they anymore reward' means there will be no resurrection or rewards after 'this' life."

Ask...

- If the phrase "know not anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5) means the dead are unconscious in the grave, then doesn't the phrase "nor have they any longer a reward" mean there will be no resurrection or rewards after this life—even for Jehovah's Witnesses?

Luke 16:22-28—Abraham's Bosom

The Watchtower Teaching

Jehovah's Witnesses say this teaching of Jesus is entirely symbolic and does not indicate conscious existence after death. They argue that this passage is a parable. Indeed, **The Jerusalem Bible** is cited, which says, This is a "parable in story form without reference to any historical personage." (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 174) If taken literally, this passage would mean that all of God's people could fit at the bosom of one man—Abraham. Also, the water on a man's fingertip is portrayed as not being evaporated by the fire of Hades—and this single drop of water is supposed to bring relief to a suffering man. The Watchtower Society asks, **Does this sound reasonable to you?** Obviously this is not to be taken literally.

If this parable is not to be taken literally, what, then, does it mean? The Watchtower Society says that the rich man symbolizes the Jewish religious leaders—the Pharisees. Lazarus is a picture of the Jewish followers of Jesus—people who had been despised by the Pharisees and who repented to follow Jesus. (Some of these became the apostles of Jesus.) Abraham pictures Jehovah-God.

The death of each of these "people" pictures a change of conditions for each group while here on earth. (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 175) Those who had once been despised came into a position of divine favor. By contrast, those who had been seemingly favored were rejected by

Jehovah-God, and became "tormented" by the proclamations delivered by the ones they had despised (the apostles). In other words, the torments of the rich man pictures the **public exposure** of the hypocritical Jewish religious leaders by the preaching of the apostles.

The Biblical Teaching

If at death people simply lapse into a state of nonexistence or *unconsciousness*, then what is the *point of Luke 16:22-28*? Are we to conclude that Jesus was teaching something based entirely on a falsehood—something that is wholly untrue in every way? If the rich man and Lazarus were not conscious after death, then the answer would have to be yes.

Scholars have noted that when Jesus taught people using *parables or stories*, He always used *real-life situations*. For example, as David Reed notes, " a prodigal son returned home after squandering his money; a man found a buried treasure in a field, hid it again, and sold everything he had in order to buy that field; a king put on a wedding feast for his son; a slave owner traveled abroad and then returned home to his slaves; a man constructed a vineyard, leased it out to others, but had difficulty collecting what they owed him; and so on."⁵⁸ All of these were common occurrences in biblical days!

Clearly, Jesus never illustrated His teaching with a false hood. We must conclude that Luke 16 portrays a real-life situation and should be taken as solid evidence for conscious existence after death. Any other interpretation makes an absurdity of the text.

Ask...

- Do you believe Jesus illustrated His teachings with falsehoods?
- Since Jesus was **absolutely consistent** in using real- life situations to illustrate His teachings, what does this tell you about His words in Luke 16?
- If the Watchtower's interpretation of Luke 16 is correct, then how can we **not** conclude that Jesus was being utterly deceptive with His words—since at face value they indicate conscious existence after death?

2 Thessalonians 1:9—Everlasting Destruction?

The Watchtower Teaching

The **New World Translation** renders **2 Thessalonians 1:9**, "These very ones will undergo the judicial punishment of **everlasting destruction** from before the Lord and from the glory of his strength" (emphasis added). The destruction of the wicked, Jehovah's Witnesses say, is everlasting in the sense that they are forever annihilated and cease to exist. (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 171-172) They do not suffer eternal torment.

The Biblical Teaching

The New American Standard Bible translates this verse, "And these will pay the penalty of **eternal destruction**, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (emphasis added). Contrary to the Watchtower's understanding of this verse, annihilation is not in view here. The Greek word translated "destruction" in this verse is **olethros**, and carries the meaning "sudden ruin," or "loss of all that gives worth to existence." New Testament scholar Robert L. Thomas says that **olethros** "does not refer to annihilation... but rather turns on the thought of separation from God and loss of everything worthwhile in life... Just as endless life belongs to Christians, endless destruction belongs to those opposed to Christ."

Along these same lines, commentator David A. Hubbard notes that "annihilation is not the thought but rather total ruin, the loss of everything worthwhile. Specifically, it is separation from the presence (**face**) of the Lord, the true source of all good things." Hence, the "destruction" suffered by the wicked does not involve a cessation of existence, but rather a continual and perpetual state of ruination.

Notice too that the word "eternal" (**aioniori**) is used in conjunction with "destruction." Now, it is obvious that annihilation, by definition, must take place **instantly—in** a mere moment. It makes virtually no sense to say that the wicked will suffer "endless annihilation." Rather, **2 Thessalonians 1:9** is saying that the wicked will suffer a ruin which is everlasting— a punishment that will never end.

Revelation 14:9-11—Tormented with Fire?

The Watchtower Teaching

The book *Reasoning from the Scriptures* asks, What is the "torment" to which this passage refers? The book answers by pointing to Revelation 11:10, where reference is made to "prophets that torment those dwelling on the earth." Ungodly people on earth experience torment as a result of the humiliating exposure they go through because of the message the prophets proclaim.

It is true, Jehovah's Witnesses say, that worshipers of the "beast" are said to be "tormented with fire and brimstone." However, this cannot refer to eternal conscious torment after death because, as Ecclesiastes 9:5 tells us, "The dead know not anything." Revelation 14, then, is explained as referring to the torment individuals suffer while **still living**. And what causes the torment? It is simply **the message of God's servants** that worshipers of the beast will experience the second death—represented by the "lake which burnest with fire and brimstone." (*Reasoning From the Scriptures*, p. 172)

Does the smoke that rises forever mean that the suffering of these individuals must be eternal? Not at all, the Watchtower Society says. This symbolic reference simply indicates that their destruction will be eternal and will never be forgotten. (*Ibid.*, p. 173)

The Biblical Teaching

A look at the Greek text of **Revelation 14** shows that the torment is not related to a mere message of God's prophets, but to real, genuine physical pain. The Greek word for "torment" in this verse is **basanizo**. Joseph Thayer's lexicon says the word means "to vex with grievous pains... to torment."⁸⁸ Likewise, Arndt and Gingrich's lexicon says the word means "to torture, torment."⁸⁹ When one examines the way this word is used throughout Scripture, it becomes plain that it is always used in contexts of great pain and conscious misery.

You might mention to the Jehovah's Witness that the same word for "torment" is used to speak of the pains of childbirth in **Revelation 12:2**. It is also used of the centurion's sick servant being grievously tormented by palsy in **Matthew 8:6**. It is used in **Luke 16:23 and 28** to describe the

physical suffering of the rich man in Hades. Clearly, the word communicates the idea of horrendous physical pain.

Now, the "torment" in Revelation 14 is described as a **never-ending** torment: "And the smoke of their torment **rises for ever and ever**. There is no rest day or night" (verse 11). The words "for ever and ever" translate an emphatic Greek phrase, **eis aionasaionon** ("unto the ages of the ages"). The two fold use of the term **aionas** is used in Scripture to emphasize the concept of eternity. And the plural forms ("unto the **ages** of the **ages**") reinforces the idea of never-ending duration.

This same emphatic construction is used to speak of the never-ending worship of God in Revelation 1:6,4:9, and 5:3. It is also used to describe the eternality of God in **Revelation 4:10 and 10:6**. We cannot emphasize too strongly that this phrase shows beyond doubt that the physical torment of the wicked is forever and ever and ever.

In closing, it is vital to note that many of the most graphic descriptions we have of the eternal perdition of the lost come from the very lips of Jesus. Just a few examples include **Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 16:22-28)**

Conclusion:

We have discovered that the Watchtower Society and its prophets do not speak for God but have instead made numerous false prophecies, have misinterpreted much of Scripture, and teach a works-based salvation that cannot save. They also teach a false God, have unjustifiably stripped Jesus and the Holy Spirit of their deity, and falsely taught against the One true God as a triune being. They have also given a false dichotomy in terms of believers having supposed different destinies when Scripture teaches there will be one flock of God brought into one heaven by one shepherd.

If you are a Jehovah's Witness who is ready to trust the true God of Scripture, here's your invitation...

The Gospel: God's Good News for Mankind

God Desires a Personal Relationship with Human Beings

God created human beings (Genesis 1:27) and He did not create them to exist alone apart from Him. He created us to be in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:5-7) just as He originally created Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8-19).

The problem is...

We Have a Sin Problem

When Adam and Eve chose to sin against God in the Garden of Eden, they catapulted the entire human race into sin.

The Apostle Paul affirmed that "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin" (Romans 5:12). Contrary to the Mormon minimalization of sin as a "mistake," Jesus often spoke of sin in metaphors that illustrate the tremendous havoc sin can reap in one's life. He described sin as blindness (Matthew 23:16-26), sickness (Matthew 9:12), being enslaved (John 8:34), and living in darkness (John 8:12; 12:35-46). Jesus also taught that this is a universal condition and that all people are guilty before God (Luke 7:37-48).

Of course, some people are more morally upright than others. But even if we seek to do good works every day, we all fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). In a contest to throw a rock to the moon, a more muscular athlete would be able to throw the rock further, but all would fall woefully short of throwing the rock to the moon. Similarly, all of us fall short of measuring up to God's perfect standard.

The good news is that...

Jesus Made Salvation Possible

God's absolute holiness demands that sin be punished. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that Jesus has taken that punishment upon Himself. That is how much God loves us!

Jesus Himself affirmed that His very purpose for coming into the world was to die for our sins (John 12:27). Moreover, He perceived His death as being a sacrificial offering *for the sins of all humanity* (Matthew 26:26-28). (This is contrary to the Mormon teaching that Jesus covered

only Adam's transgression.) Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross for us, we have a complete and wonderful redemption (not just resurrection).

God requires us to...

Believe In Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; John 11:25)

God then provides for us...

Freedom From Sin and the Forgiveness of Sins (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:17; Psalm 32:1-2)

Complete assurance of the freedom from sin, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life with God forever in heaven is provided by simply believing in Jesus' finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

While it is not a prayer that saves you, but one's faith in Christ, you can pray something like this if you have chosen to place your trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is God in flesh and the only One worthy of paying our penalty...

Dear Jesus,

I want to have a relationship with you.

I know that I can't save myself because I am a sinner.

Thank you for dying on the cross on my behalf.

I believe you died for me. I accept your free gift of salvation.

Thank you, Jesus!

Amen!