

Interview with Garner Ted Armstrong – Program 4

By: The John Ankerberg Show
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By: **Garner Ted Armstrong**; ©1983

Is death the “complete absence of conscious thought or mind,” as Armstrong claims, or are we consciously aware of where we are and what is happening around us?

What Happens to the Soul After Death?

Introduction

Tonight on the John Ankerberg Show we will be interviewing Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God. Garner Ted is best known as the popular radio and television speaker of the Worldwide Church of God’s “The World Tomorrow” broadcast. Before his break with his father, Garner Ted was President of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California; Executive Vice President of The Worldwide Church of God, and Editor-in-Chief of *The Plain Truth* magazine which reached a circulation in 1982 of 5 million. In 1978 Garner Ted broke with his father and founded a new organization, the Church of God International in Tyler, Texas. He is now rebuilding his outreach. Tonight we will examine the teachings of Garner Ted Armstrong in light of the Bible. We will ask him if he still believes God is a family; does he still hold that every believer is a potential God; does he still believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person but a divine force and that the new birth occurs after believers have died and are recreated for eternal life. Join us for this discussion.

Program 4

Ankerberg: We are glad that you joined us tonight. Our guest is Garner Ted Armstrong. And, Garner Ted, we have been talking about some of the things that you are teaching on the radio and the way Christians usually read their Bible and we are trying to compare the two. We would like to talk about some of your strong statements about the soul. If I could give you one here, you say that “the Bible makes it clear that death is a state of total unconsciousness, the complete absence of conscious thought or mind.” Do you want to improve on that?

Armstrong: I don’t know how I could.

Ankerberg: Okay, what’s the evidence for your belief on that?

Armstrong: Well I think there is ample evidence both in the Bible and through science. I think that my evidence primarily is clinical and scientific and secondarily is biblical. I want to hasten to say that I think there has been perhaps overemphasis in the past on taking issue with the doctrine of the soul without going ahead to relate the truth of the fact of the spirit in man. Because you see, I do believe there is a spirit in man. It says so very clearly not only in Romans 8, “our spirit,” but in the book Job, “there is a spirit in man,” [Job 32:8 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job%2032.8>)] in those very words.

Ankerberg: I would take it from a biblical context, okay, and let's say, let's talk with Jesus. In Luke 20:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2020.27>), the Sadducees came to Him. Jesus tells these fellows in the account of the bush He says, "Even Moses showed that the dead rise." [Luke 20:37 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2020.37>)] Well, you agree with that, but He calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." [Luke 20:37 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2020.37>)] What we are talking about is not just the fact of soul sleep where the person just lays in the ground and then at the resurrection he is resurrected by God and given a spiritual body at that point.

And at that point we also need to come back to the fact of what kind of spiritual body did Jesus have? I believe it was the spirit-body, not just pure spirit, okay? And I think we are going to have a body like Him. But coming back to what Jesus said here, for he calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for to him all are alive." [Luke 20:37-38 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2020.37-38>)] Now we know that Abraham and these men were dead and they hadn't resurrected, and yet God said He was the God of the living. Now the thing is, it would seem that they are living then at that moment according to Jesus, because He said it strictly to the Sadducees.

Armstrong: No, I take issue with that, because I don't think that is meant. I think that is an analogy. I think it is a statement that God is the God of patriarchs, that He is the God of living creatures. He was their God while they were alive, He is their God and will resurrect them. And I would look at Hebrews 11, and it mentions them by name, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "these all died in faith not having received the promise." [Heb. 11:13 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%2011.13>)] What am I going to do with that?

If I am a believer in the inviolable Word of God and if I believe, which I do, that according to its most original documents, the codices, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus, portions of the Ephraimi, perhaps other codices which make up the earliest Greek text, and so far as I can tell through painstaking research and all the available English and other language translation, I want to get at what is the original Holy Scriptures. If I believe one portion of that is in error and contradicts any other, then I have, in my opinion, no basis for my faith at all. I am dealing with a book that is capable of gross errors and almost limitless errors.

So, there is so much evidence to the contrary that the dead in Christ will rise first and you shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom, and you yourselves cast out. He said that to the Pharisees. And the fact that they are dead, I wanted to finish real quickly and I will try to support it in 15 seconds, what I said earlier.

Ankerberg: Before you go any further, in your verse in 1 Thessalonians that you used there, it says that, "we do want you to be ignorant about those who sleep or to grieve like the rest of the men. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus," the preposition *sun autoo*, bring with him. [1 Thess. 4:13-14 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess.%204.13-14>)] Now if Jesus is coming from heaven He is bringing with Him somebody.

Armstrong: From the clouds. It goes on to say, "The dead shall rise first... and shall meet the Lord in the air." [1 Thess. 4:16-17 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess.%204.16-17>)] Zechariah 14:4 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech%2014.4>), "In that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives."

Ankerberg: And that says that after it says, though, that Jesus is going to bring "with Him." Now, what I like about you is you say you love to read the Bible, and the words themselves, *sun autoo*, are a preposition that is talking about these spirit beings that have died that have believed in the Lord Jesus. Their body goes into the ground, their soul – because I think that the Bible is saying that the Bible is teaching that there is a soul, that God gives to us – that is not immortal by itself. The fact is, it is a created thing that God gives to us. It is inherent in man, and once God gives....

Armstrong: Use the word spirit; then you are saying the same thing I am, instead of soul. The word spirit is a better word, because the English word soul comes from the Greek *psuche*, and you say the Greek word *psuche* doesn't mean something spiritual.

Ankerberg: Okay, but what you are saying is that when the body dies, that's it; there's nothing that goes to heaven, there is nothing that exists, the man is dead.

Armstrong: No, not quite. Solomon didn't know. It was a puzzle to him. He said, "Who knoweth the spirit of a beast or the spirit of a man that goeth downward or back up to God..." [Eccl. 3:21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles.%203.21>)] The point that I am making, that I needed to conclude very quickly, was that when the Holy Spirit comes into us it does not come into the knee or the elbow, it comes into the frontal lobes of the brain. It comes into that part of the human brain which is the mind and is not just mere brain. It doesn't improve your memory, it doesn't make you necessarily a better athlete except it might clean up your habits and you know you might work harder. But the Holy Spirit will not help you in material or physical ways. It will help you in spiritual, moral and in ways of character, and the decision making and the inner psyche, the thought processes of the mind. So I wanted to make that clear, there is a spirit in man. You want to use the word "soul," I'll use the word "spirit," I think we are saying the same thing.

Ankerberg: How about when Stephen prayed and said, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." [Acts 7:59 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%207.59>)] If that's just his breath...

Armstrong: Oh, perfect. Yes, why not. Yes, that's what I believe.

Ankerberg: What? That it's just his breath that he's committing to the Lord?

Armstrong: Well, it says, "in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump," [1 Cor. 15:52 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor.%2015.52>)] it says, the living, we, "shall be changed," [1 Cor 15:52 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor%2015.52>)] and it says, "Christ the firstfruits," and "every man in his own order," "afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." [1 Cor 15:23 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Cor%2015.23>)]

You know, John, if, pardon me and I am being kind, if I read the Bible like you do, if I took a preposition and hinged a doctrine on a couple of prepositions or a conjunction or two and then I looked at a couple of dozen plain Scriptures an 8th grader could understand, I am going to run headlong into all kinds of absolute incontrovertible conflicts.

Ankerberg: What about this statement. Garner Ted is fond of saying that the Scriptures should speak for themselves. But did the Lord mess up the grammar when He gave the Scripture? Do prepositions and conjunctions matter? In Galatians 3:16-17 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal%203.16-17>) the apostle Paul argued that Christ was the person who fulfilled God's promise to Abraham. Here the apostle rested his entire case on a masculine singular pronoun and a masculine singular verb in Genesis 22:17 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2022.17>). In the Hebrew this was only the difference in one letter in two words. Apparently Paul thought the grammar in the Scriptures was crucial for the proper meaning of the passage.

How about our Lord? Jesus also read, interpreted and argued from Scripture pointing out grammatical differences. In Matthew 22:32 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2022.32>), the passage we have been talking about, He accused the learned religious leaders of being in error and not knowing what the Scriptures said about the resurrection of the dead simply because they had missed the significance of the emphatic present tense of Exodus 3:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod%203.6>). There God said, "I myself [right now] am the God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Jesus said that these words proved that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Now, in the context, the Sadducees who did not believe in any resurrection came to Jesus. So if Jesus only meant to point out that God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when they were living but not now, Jesus would have lost the argument with the Sadducees. But Jesus used the present participle *zoontoon* in the Greek to show that God was the God of “the living ones,” that is, those who were presently, continuously in a state of living right now.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Tim%203.16>) Paul specifically told us that all Scripture, *pasa graphe*, is God breathed. Now the word *pasa* is the word “all” and specifically it means “each and every little piece of the whole of Scripture is God inspired or God breathed.” That’s why we can trust it.

Armstrong: You know, John, if, pardon me and I am being kind, if I read the Bible like you do, if I took a preposition and hinged a doctrine on a couple of prepositions or a conjunction or two and then I looked at a couple of dozen plain Scriptures an 8th grader could understand, I am going to run headlong into all kinds of absolute incontrovertible conflicts. It’s going to blow my mind. Well, I’d rather take what the Holy Spirit says, here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept [Isa. 28:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa.%2028.10>)] and realize that God delivers these things and reveals them unto babes. That there is a childlike quality of belief and acceptance of God’s Word we have to have. The greatest intellects in the world, I think, you know, are in religions that are different from mine. The Catholic religion is not a religion of a lot of stupid people; evolutionists are not stupid people, they are intelligent.

Ankerberg: How about this one: Matthew 10:28 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2010.28>)? Let’s go back to Jesus’ simple teachings where He says, “Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the *psuche*.”

Armstrong: Unable to kill the soul or the *psuche*, right.

Ankerberg: Okay, “But rather fear him whose able to destroy...”

Armstrong: Both.

Ankerberg: Yes, okay. But the thing is that you do have both, and it doesn’t mean destroy in the sense of annihilation. The Greek word is “punish.”

Armstrong: Oh, I don’t know about that.

Ankerberg: Kittel, you want me to quote Kittel?

Armstrong: You just read, it says, “Fear him who has the power to destroy both *soma* and *psuche* in [Gehenna fire].” He will destroy it.

Ankerberg: That’s what we are talking about is the evidence. Let’s take Kittel here who is one of the prime authorities when you are using the tools to get at the words which you said we need to get at. He says, “This is not a simple extinction of existence, but an everlasting state of torment and death.” And the word Gehenna,...

Armstrong: He’s not an authority.

Ankerberg: ...now you’ve come through, and you said “Gehenna.” You don’t believe there is any eternal punishment either, is that correct?

Armstrong: There is absolutely eternal punishment. Yes, there is no eternal **punishing**.

Ankerberg: Does it last forever?

Armstrong: Yes, it lasts forever. The punishment is death by fire.

Ankerberg: You are saying extinction?

Armstrong: The most horrible death that I could imagine occurring to anybody. And your heart goes out to people who die in flames, but that is the second death of which the Bible speaks. It says very clearly that the wicked will be ashes under the feet of the righteous, in the last chapter of Malachi. [Mal. 4:3 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal.%204.3>)] It very clearly talks about the extinction of the wicked and that they would be burnt completely up. The works therein and the wicked will be burnt up.

Ankerberg: The problem there is the word “destroy” means, according to Vine, an authority on the Greek New Testament, he says, “It signifies to ruin utterly and it is not extinction, it is not annihilation but ruin, loss, not of being but of well-being.”

Ankerberg: In Matthew 10:28 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2010.28>) Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul.” In both of these instances the word “kill” is from *apakteino* which means “to kill or to slay.” Notice, he says, “Neither human beings nor the devil can kill the human soul, only God.” He says, “But rather fear Him [God] who is able. ..” and then he changes the word where he says, “to destroy.” Now the word destroy here is the word “to punish.” It’s ruin, loss, not of being but of well-being. Garner Ted says this means extinction, and yet in his book concerning the demons he says, “Evil, supernatural beings do exist. The Bible reveals Satan as eternal and will not be destroyed in the sense of human or physical destruction.” But in Luke 4:34 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%204.34>), where I suppose he got this, the demon says, “Art thou come to destroy us,…” and it is the same word. It does not mean extinction. They are going to live forever.

This *apoloumai*, destroy, is the same word used of humans in Matthew 10:28 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2010.28>). “Rather,” Jesus says, “fear Him [that is, God] who is able to destroy [that is, punish] both soul and body.” Notice soul and body, *psuche* and *soma*. Jesus if He had meant soul to be both body and soul would have only had to use one word, but He differentiated: there are two separate entities. In Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, on page 397 in volume one, we find concerning this word destroy, *apolesai*, from *apoloumai*. He says it means, “Not a simple extinction of existence, but an everlasting state of torment and death.” In W. E. Vine’s *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* page 294, he says, “‘Destroy’ means not the idea of extinction but ruin, loss; not of being, but of well-being.” The soul will live forever.

Ankerberg: And the thing is, if that is true then we have eternal punishment of living souls that are reunited with their...

Armstrong: Punishment, but not punishing.

Ankerberg: Well, the only way I can tell you this, because the people that are supposed to know from reading the words of that time and all the papyri just like you were mentioning, simply say that it does not mean extinction, but it means “the ruin, the loss, not of being but of well-being” and it is forever. That’s what Kittel says, that’s what Vine says, that’s what Thayer’s lexicon says. That’s what the words mean. Now if we want to put another meaning into it I guess we can. I am saying that it **is** there, it is something serious that man does have a soul that is going to last forever. We believe that at the resurrection that soul is united with the body. We agree with you on the fact that we are going to get a new body, but we don’t believe it’s spirit-body completely. We believe that it is **spirit-body**, not just spirit and I think there is a difference there. But. ..

Armstrong: Spirit-body, well yes, what is the difference, please tell me. Please inform me. If you’ve got a spirit-body can you walk through that brick column?

Ankerberg: Okay, let's answer that question when we come right back. I am glad you asked it. Okay, stick with us.

Audience: I would like to have you go back to the concept of soul sleep. I understand what you are saying about. ...

Armstrong: I never heard of that concept.

Audience: Well, alright, let's say that the soul or the spirit is unconscious after death until the resurrection and that it is burned up in a moment of time and that's the end of it. It's eternal punishment, but not eternal punishing. And yet throughout the Scripture you have Christ, for instance, talking about the rich man and Lazarus and they are both conscious.

Armstrong: I wrote an article on that, that's a good one.

Audience: You have the souls of the dead beneath the throne saying, "How long, O Lord..." [Rev. 6:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%206.10>)]

Armstrong: In a vision in the book of Revelation, very familiar with it.

Audience: Right, and then you have the concept of...

Armstrong: You have your brother's blood crying from the ground, [Gen. 4:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen.%204.10>)] did it have a mouth, you know in the first murder?

Ankerberg: The problem with that is that you are going back to Abel and you are saying that it is metaphorical. The problem is in the next verse, though.

Armstrong: It's metaphorical in the book of Revelation. It's a metaphor.

Ankerberg: Yes, but God didn't interact with that voice in the ground, where in Revelation 6:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%206.10>) He gives robes to those people...

Armstrong: Again, you are asking me to say the Bible is filled with contradictions and I won't do that. The Bible is not filled with contradictions.

Ankerberg: You're saying there is a contradiction. What's the contradiction?

Ankerberg: Okay, let's stop and very carefully look at these verses. Garner Ted has been talking about Ecclesiastes 3:20 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles%203.20>) which read: "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." But Solomon asks the question in verse 21: "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" Solomon at least knew enough to ask the question of whether or not a man had a soul that went back to God. But is that all? No. In Ecclesiastes 12:7 Solomon, the same writer, says: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

In Revelation 6:9-10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%206.9-10>), look at it carefully. There the Bible says: "And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls [*psuche*] of the ones who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

Some like Garner Ted say this is figurative just as Genesis 4:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%204.10>) where Abel's blood cried out to God. They say the dead are unconscious in the grave. But that this is more than a figurative languages is evident by the

fact that God interrelates with these souls and He gives them white robes and speaks to them. He did not do this with the voice in Genesis 4:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%204.10>).

Then also you have Luke 16:19-41 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2016.19-41>) where Jesus Himself gives an account of two men that died. Verse 19-20 identify, "There was a certain rich man... and there was a certain beggar." It doesn't say that it was a parable, they were specific men. Verse 22: "The rich man also >died, and was buried." And then it says, "And in Hades [in Hell] he lifted up his eyes being in torment, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me." [Luke 16:23-24 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2016.23-24>)] As you read this account you will find out that the rich man, now dead and in Hades, was alive, conscious in the full exercise of his faculties, could remember and could make requests and he was in torment. He apparently was alive.

In 2 Corinthians 5:8 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Cor%205.8>) we find Paul saying: "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%204.16>) Paul talks about believing Christians who have died that they will return with the Lord at His second coming. He says in verses 13-14: "Brothers we do not want you to be ignorant about those who sleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with him [with Jesus] those who sleep in him."

How about those that die not believing in Jesus? In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Thess%201.9>) we don't see a first or second chance after death. Rather it says: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." The word "destruction" here is not annihilation, but conscious torment forever and ever. Jesus talks about eternal punishing in Matthew 25:41 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2025.41>), where he says: "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." In Revelation 20:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.10>) we find that place is where they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. In Matthew 25:46 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2025.46>) Jesus said: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Everlasting punishment and everlasting life are the same Greek word. It compares the conscious existence of those that are in Hell with the conscious existence of those in heaven. According to Scripture both the wicked and righteous shall exist forever.

Armstrong: The Bible so very clearly says that the dead know not anything.

Ankerberg: You ought to read the next verse.

Armstrong: It says, "As one dieth so dieth the other." [Eccl. 3:19 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles.%203.19>)] It says in that very day "their thoughts perish." [Psa. 145:4 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps.%20145.4>)]

Ankerberg: I've got great news for you because I am glad you brought that up because the next verse simply says, if you read it, that "the souls [the *nephesh* there] which rise to God, the soul of the man goes to God and the soul of the beast goes to the ground." [Eccl. 3:21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles.%203.21>)]

Armstrong: No it says: "Who knoweth whether..." I brought that up myself earlier, if you recall, about the spirit in man. "Who knoweth whether the spirit of the beast goeth to the ground or the spirit of a man goeth back to God that taketh..."

Ankerberg: Not Ecclesiastes 12...

Armstrong: I don't know whether it does. I think it stays right there near the body, but it's totally unconscious. But I don't know.

Ankerberg: Okay, then go with Ecclesiastes 12, the question is asked in 3 but it is answered in Ecclesiastes 12:7 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles%2012.7>) where it says it does. And that seems to seal that whole argument that the fact is there is a soul.

Armstrong: No, there are so many dozens of Scriptures that prove the absolute oblivion of the dead and the unconscious state of the dead and the fact they are not in heaven as I have mentioned. I've got book after book of them, over 28 years.

Ankerberg: Yes, I am glad you brought it up because I know there are 25 ways in your King James Bible to translate the word *nephesh*. And if you will take out your Brown, Driver and Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon of the Old Testament* you will find under the word *ruah*, which is another word for breath,...

Armstrong: Hebrew for spirit.

Ankerberg: Yes, and you know what? There are at least 12 reference and one of those happens to be the departure of the spirit. And it also applies to what kind of spirit. God is called a spirit with the same word.

Armstrong: Of course.

Ankerberg: The flexibility of that word can include that.

Armstrong: It's the only word in the language for spirit, sure.

Ankerberg: Yes, and you have Elijah coming and laying on the form the body of the boy that had died, okay. [1 Ki. 17:21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Kings.%2017.21>)]

Armstrong: His spirit came into him again, sure.

Ankerberg: That's right, and it is *nephesh*.

Armstrong: His breath or his life, sure.

Ankerberg: Okay, but the thing is, if he is talking about the body, he is laying on the body, he is not asking God to give him another body.

Armstrong: No, but why did, in the case of the Witch of Endor, which of course were outlawed.

Ankerberg: She was as surprised as anybody. [1 Sam. 28:12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Sam.%2028.12>)]

Armstrong: Well, but in this case why, because those people of course did not believe in the so-called immortality of the soul, did the witch have to conjure up not a spirit or a voice but the entire body of the departed boy?

Ankerberg: I look at that just the opposite. Why did Saul go to there and ask for it if they didn't believe in it?

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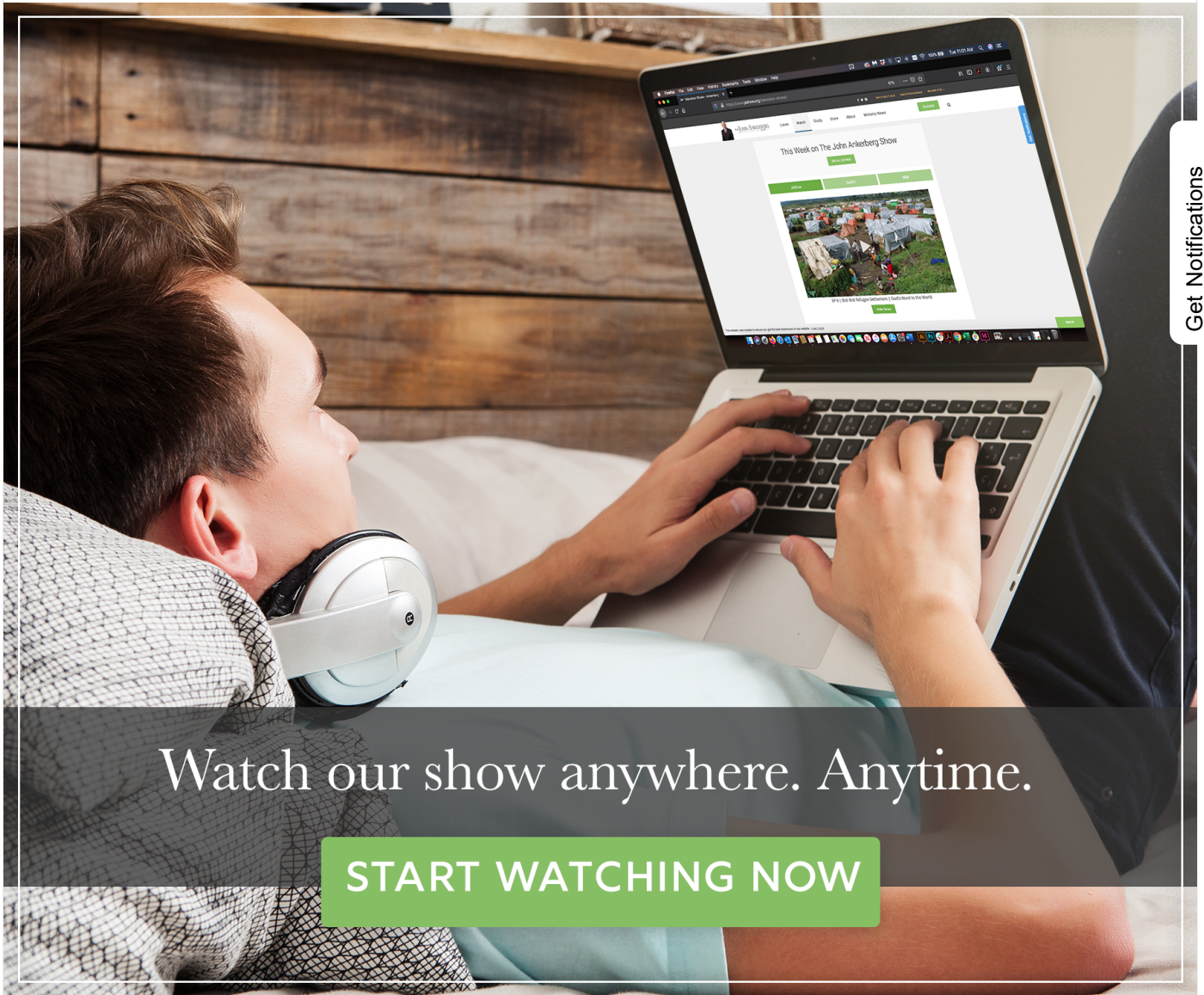
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