

Nephesh/Soul P3

What Happens After We Die?

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What Happens After We Die?

Jon: What happens after we die? Do we go to heaven or do we come back to life? I'm Jon Collins. This is about project podcast, and we're talking about the Hebrew word "nephesh." It's often translated in English as "soul." In this episode, we're discussing what happens to our souls, our nephesh after we die.

Tim: People often assume the idea of eternal nonphysical existence that humans living on after death apart from their bodies as disembodied souls forever and ever. That's a really important idea in the Bible or a main teaching of the Bible. I certainly thought that till actually started to read the Bible.

Jon: In the past two episodes, we've discovered that in Hebrew thought people don't have a soul, they are soul. A living breathing nephesh. According to the Bible, God has committed to recreating and renewing His world, a physical world. And if that's the case...

Tim: Then within this biblical mindset, death cannot be the end of me. What is the "me"? What is the state and experience of the "me" after I die?

Jon: So what's after death? You might be surprised what the biblical authors think. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Tim: Why are we having this conversation?

Jon: Well, because you're trying to ruin my existence, Tim.

Tim: Your nephesh?

Jon: No, no, I'm joking. We're having this because we are going to do a video on soul and it's going to spin some people out.

Tim: We're going to try and condense all this into like a three-and-a-half-minute video.

Jon: Honestly, the video will be like, "that's really interesting, but really?"

Tim: "I have a ton of questions." That's what it's going to do.

Jon: Then hopefully you can listen to this and have less question.

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Tim: Let's bring it around because the video is part of explaining the Shema. "Hear, O Israel. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your nephesh." Now, seeing those two alongside each other I think helps clarify.

Jon: We've already done heart and it's very holistic sense of a view.

Tim: Holistic sense of your thoughts, emotions, desires. But what it doesn't account for is your body, your physical existence and your very life itself represented by that, constituted by that body. So it's with your thoughts ideas, purposes, desires. And now here it's with your whole self.

Jon: This might help. Why wouldn't Moses just have the line be "Love the Lord your God with all your nephesh"? Because that seems to also incorporate the essence of who you are which means also your emotion and feelings.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: When my nephesh is thirsting, I'm not talking about I'm just literally thirsty. I'm talking about my whole essence is longing for something. That way we're kind of in the realm of emotions. It could have been a simpler prayer just to say, Love the Lord your God with all of your nephesh." What is heart doing differently?

Tim: Notice from all the examples that we looked at that your nephesh is what we might call your base physical existence: thirst, hunger, sex, and it represents your physical life.

Your heart is about emotions, thoughts, ideas, longings. Obviously, your hearts and your body are connected, but in some ways, it's like, "I don't have a lot of control over the fact of what my nephesh needs. It needs to breathe. It needs food. It need sleep." But I have a lot of control over the thoughts and purposes and desires. And I can shape those.

Jon: So your heart, there's a certain amount of control that seems to keep those all connected?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: With your body, it's less so. These are more of your just instinctual need.

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Tim: Your existence as a physical being. So I devote the things I can control in a way, my thoughts, ideas, purposes, I devote those all in allegiance and love to God. Then my whole body and physical life with all of its limitations and possibilities, I dedicate those to God as well.

Jon: I might be jumping the gun, but when we talk about it that way, wouldn't the word we use is flesh. My flesh like the way Paul uses it. Like, I have these urges and these instincts and it's my body but you know...

Tim: Yes. I mean, the fact that this word can come to stand for just the person as a whole, the whole person or the whole self "love the Lord your God with all of your thoughts, and ideas and feelings and with your entire self. Maybe the English word "self" doesn't get there.

Jon: Why? Because your thoughts, emotions, and feelings. doesn't cover your entire self?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I guess.

Tim: No, it doesn't know. No, no.

Jon: "Love the Lord your God with all your thoughts, desires, and feelings, your heart, but more so your whole." It's kind of like, "Here's the small part of you." He saying like, a little bit, but then—

Tim: There's like a scale.

[crosstalk 00:06:31]

Tim: This part of you with the whole of you. Then we're going to see that word strength is about the possibilities and the opportunities that are not yet realized. That's interesting. I've never thought about the sliding scale. Anyway. Nephesh, there you have it.

Jon: Nephesh.

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Jon: Is it there is some nonmaterial part of me that survives death? Does the Bible talk about that?

Tim: Yes, it does. You're like, "Why do you take me through all this." But the point is that's not the focus. That's not the emphasis.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: The reason why the biblical authors have a category for a "you" that survives after death, after your body gives out is not because of Greek speculation or not because they believe...It has to do with their deep conviction that God made this world good, that He loves it, and that He's committed to it. And He's committed to rescuing it so that it can be what He always meant to be.

If that's the case, then within this biblical Hebrew mindset, death cannot be the end of me. What the biblical authors refuse to speculate about is what is the "me," what is the state and experience of the "me" after I die. We've had these conversations before. It's just there's virtually no information. The grave or being with the Lord. Here we go.

Here's one great example in the Old Testament, where the poet of Psalm 16 is talking about how God is committed to him, connected David, the hope of the David the King, how God's committed to him. And he says, Psalm 16:8, "I've set the Lord continually before me. Because He's at my right hand, I won't be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, my glory rejoices; my flesh dwell securely, you won't abandon my nephesh to the grave, or allow your Holy One to see the pit. You will make known to me the path of life."

Here's a sense of you won't abandon my nephesh to the grave. So when I die

Jon: Is it my body going to go to the grave?

Tim: Yeah. So, in essence, my nephesh, my physical existence is, but there's another sense in which that can't be the end of the story if this God is who this God says He is. He's committed to redeeming His world and His people. So here's the use of that does seem to be the you that isn't tied to your current mortal body, but is connected to the you that will be the immortal physical you.

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"You've made known to me the path of life." There'll be a way through death to a physical existence on the other side. This is not talking about afterlife. This is talking about when this prototype of my nephesh gets out, the next version will be what you usher me into.

This is very important. This is not talking about the afterlife. Even in this use, we're not talking about an immortal, eternal soul. It's talking about my nephesh will take a new form. So I mean, he's going to die, but in another sense, he's able to say you're not going to let my nephesh die.

Jon: He knows he's going to die?

Tim: Well, I think there's the sense of...I mean, it's just being human. You're going to die unless you're Enoch.

Jon: But a lot of these Psalms are—

Tim: Oh, that's right. Metaphors for dying.

Jon: No, were like, "Enemies are going to come and get him and he's asking God to protect him." That's not what's happening here?

Tim: That's right. There's one layer of which the poets often describe brushes with danger with this depiction of death right here. Or you're saying often these poets are saying...

[crosstalk 00:11:24]

Jon: He's just saying basically, like, "God, don't let these guys kill me." And then for me to say, "I believe you won't let them kill me. You won't let me get buried to the ground."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. There's one sense in which you can read that. Simply that's what's going on here. But this is one among a number of these suffering and deliverance poems and the deliverance comes out the other side. I also didn't copy and paste the whole poem.

The last line of the poem is "In your presence is fullness of joy, in your right hand, are pleasures forever." It seems like what the poets straining at here is that if God is truly committed to me into this world, in this case to the line of David, he says, he is, then death can't be the end. There has to be a form of

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eternal life, physical existence that God still has in store. There's a similar sentiment in a conclusion of Psalm 73. It's just not that many, but that's the basic idea.

Jon: There's this verse where it says, "You will redeem my life from the grave." I think it's like, "You will redeem my life from the grave. You will surely take me to yourself." Here it is. Psalm 49.

Tim: Yeah, that's the other main one.

Jon: "God will redeem me from the realm of the dead. He will surely take me to himself."

Tim: That's right. As for the wicked, death will be their shepherd, but God will redeem my nephesh from the grave for He will take me," is what it say.

Jon: "He will take me."

Tim: Once again, we're in the take me - where?

Jon: Is nephesh twice? Take my nephesh or just take me?

Tim: No, just take me.

Jon: What does it mean for God to redeem, rescue a soul from the grave? Again, we think, "Yeah, through the pearly gates."

Jon: "To eternal bliss, I'm going home."

Tim: So redeem is vocabulary from the Exodus story. Rescue. So what does it mean to be rescued from the power of death? If you use the exodus as the image, if you're enslaved in Egypt, you're saved out of slavery and your status changes and you go into the promised land. Here it's you're redeemed from having to die then your status changes so that you can be alive.

Jon: So there's a resurrection hope here?

Tim: Correct. These are the bedrock or these are different metaphors - the seed bed. And I'm not making this up. The Apostle Peter thought so too at the top of page 8. Psalm 16 was really important for the early Christians and how help

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them find language about Jesus. This is right after Peter is giving a message and he quotes the section of Psalm 16 that we just read.

Here's his commentary. He says, "Fellow Israelites, I tell you confidently that the patriarch David died, he was buried, his tomb is with us to this day. But he was a prophet, and he knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his seed descendants on the throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah - and they quote from the psalm - that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead nor did his body see decay. God raised this Jesus to life and we're all witnesses."

Jon: So Peter looked at this hope that he saw in the Psalms of resurrection and he said, "Look, that's what happened with Jesus?"

Tim: Yes. This psalm wasn't talking about the afterlife. This poem was talking about the hope of God rescuing someone into new physical existence.

Jon: It's not afterlife. It's more life.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Scholar NT Wright has a clever phrase in his fat book on the resurrection. He called it "Life After Life After Death."

Jon: Wait. Life After Life After Death.

Tim: Resurrection life after life after death.

Jon: I'm so confused.

Tim: Because by definition, if I die, if my body gives out, the hope and the trust is that what happened to Jesus will happen to me. But most likely there's going to be a time gap like there has been for many followers of Jesus. So where are those people?

Jon: Oh, okay. Life after life after.

Tim: What is the afterlife existence of those?

Jon: We have no idea. It's very obscure.

Tim: Here we go. In the Old Testament, it's just there's no nothing.

Jon: He will take me.

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Tim: What we know is that death won't be the end. "You've redeemed me from the power of the grave."

Jon: And so is that's afterlife, that's life after death, then the resurrection is, is really the life after that.

Tim: Life after death.

Jon: The life after the life after.

Tim: Then Paul writes in those handfuls of passages to, and then once with Jesus write to the guy next to him on the cross, "Today you'll be with me in paradise."

Jon: That's the afterlife.

Tim: Or to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Life after death according to the New Testament is to be with Jesus.

Jon: So we're all obsessed with what is life after death?

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And he writes a clever turn of phrase to say we should be more obsessed that the life that comes after the life after.

Tim: What the biblical authors are actually talking about and describe—

Jon: Is the life that comes after life after life.

Tim: Life after death. Come on. That's clever.

Jon: We just talked about the afterlife, we should start talking about the life after.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

[00:17:52]

Tim: There's a couple of passages that then talk about in the New Testament the equivalent for nephesh is different language. Greek. So this Greek word "psuche." There was a couple of passages where actually in teachings of Jesus he'll talk about the nephesh/psuche of—

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Jon: Because in Greek nephesh become psuche?

Tim: Yeah. When the Hebrew Bible is translated into Greek before Jesus, the standard translation for nephesh was psuche.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: Again, it's the Jewish authors of the New Testament thinking in Hebrew Bible but they're using Greek language.

Jon: They weren't thinking in platonic language.

Tim: A famous saying of Jesus "Whoever tries to save their psuche will lose it. And whoever loses the psuche will preserve it or save," it usually gets translated as "life." I think that's a good translation. But it's not the word "life." It's the equivalent of nephesh.

Jon: What's the Hebrew word for life?

Tim: Chaiyim. Another famous saying of Jesus. "Therefore, I tell you don't worry about your psuche." Listen to the commentary. "What you will eat or what you will drink or don't worry about your body, what you're going to wear."

Jon: Distinction there.

Tim: "Isn't your psuche more than food and isn't your body more than clothes?" There's this distinction; body and psuche. What is it that sustains the body? Well, food and drink. What is it that sustains...It's almost there's like surface. Clothes just go on your body, and that's not your identity, your essential self.

Jon: That can scrape off and regrow pretty easy.

Tim: Yes. And then he says even, "Your psuche is more than just food." This seems to be the logic underneath fasting for Jesus. You symbolically withhold food from yourself on regular intervals to remind yourself that your truest self, your true physical life is based on God's generosity and not by your own ability to feed yourself.

It's like Psalm 42. "My nephesh hungers and thirsts for God." "Man doesn't live by bread alone." That kind of thing. So that same mindset. That's interesting.

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Jon: It's not life more than food? It's not your nephesh, your psuche more than food? I don't know. That's confusing to me. I don't think of my life as just food. But what he's saying is what sustains you.

Tim: What truly sustains the true you.

Jon: Here's another thing. I live in a time where there's just tons of food. I just go to the supermarket, there's lots of food. So if I put myself in the mental categories as someone who every day, it's like, "Let's make the bread. Let's make sure we got enough food. Is there enough food today?"

That becomes a daily obsession of sustenance. And so it could almost begin to feel like my life is about food. My life is about wanting to make food in me. That's what this corporal embodied existence feels like. It's just a chase after nourishment.

Tim: It's what it needs.

Jon: And if I was a caterpillar, that would be my life.

Tim: Your life—

Jon: Would just be about food. That's my job. Fill up my belly. But by fasting—

Tim: Image of God bearing humans, your psuche is more.

Tim: It's more than that.

Tim: Transcends.

Jon: In fact, spend a while, spend a day or two or a week without that and you'll realize there's something more going on.

Tim: You're still you and there's a you that can live and exist in the world interact with God and others that transcends your physical appetites. Men, Jesus, so good. He packs so much into these little sayings.

Jon: "Don't worry about it." Well, I'm not going to run around naked Jesus so can forget about that one."

Tim: Here's a whopper. "Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the psuche." This is an encouragement. Matthew chapter 10, if you're

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going out sharing the kingdom of God, it says when he sending out the other disciples to go ahead of him—

Jon: just sending two?

Tim: Or 72 in Luke. It's just the 12 in Matthew 10.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He's trying to encourage them, like, "Hey, listen, God is where the sparrows. He won't let hair of your head fall off the ground. And don't be afraid all they can do is kill you. They can't kill your psuche." Now that's interesting to play because one of the terms for a murderer in the Bible is the psuche slayer or the nephesh slayer.

So in one sense, that's true, but now we're back to the same idea. For Jesus...

Jon: That's not all there is.

Tim: ...who I am is not just the fate of this prototype version of me. My current physical existence isn't all that there is to me.

Jon: This begins to really gel with this idea of where we were starting which is more of a spiritual part of you?

Tim: Yes. Though he very clearly doesn't use the word "spirit."

Jon: He doesn't use the word "spirit."

Tim: He uses a very physical earthy word. "Your psuche."

Jon: Don't worry about people can kill your body because they really can't kill you.

Tim: Because they can't kill you. Then the next phrase he connects it to future vindication. "Rather than be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." So what you should have your eye on is the hope of resurrection, right? If your hope is on resurrection, you can kill me now, it's fine, God will redeem me from the power of the grave.

Don't base your decision making on people who can only kill the prototype version of you in the moment because God will take care of—

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Jon: Keep the after party in mind.

Tim: Keep the after party of mind. What you really should base your decisions off of is one who controls the after party.

Jon: And who gets the party.

Tim: Whether or not you will be resurrected into the new creation, that's the person's verdict you should care about. Even this example doesn't show Jesus saying, "See, after all." There's the eternal nonphysical part of you. His eye is still on your physical existence. It's whether you exist in this form or in the new creation.

Jon: And so by saying, "who can destroy your psuche in hell," what's he talking about?

Tim: It's a whole other conversation. Let's get this into what did Jesus mean when you use the word "Gehenna," which gets translated as "hell" in English, and the depictions of the fate of those who don't want to be a part of the new creation? What's their status or existence? There are different portraits given in the New Testament and different metaphors. We kind of talked about this before in some of The Day of the Lord conversation.

Here uses the verb "destroy." In other words, the point is they can kill this version of your body, but the real you that will live on into resurrection and new creation, they can't touch that. But there is somebody who controls whether or not you will be raised into the new creation. And the opposite of that he uses as destruction of your entire self.

Jon: You've used a prototype a couple times. Is that your word?

Tim: I just started using it. Well, for Jesus, what he's talking is stage one or stage two.

Jon: Did you read that somewhere?

Tim: No. I'm just thinking that it's a good image because it's like Jesus walking around Galilee—

Jon: Is the MVP is what they call that in the tech world.

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Tim: What's that?

Jon: Minimal viable product

Tim: That's interesting.

Jon: That's what you need to get out the door. Don't make the perfect thing just get the MVP out there, the minimal viable product and then-tweak it from there.

Tim: Maybe it's a bad analogy. It probably doesn't work on [unintelligible 00:26:51].

Jon: Prototype means less like that so forget the minimal viable product. In prototypes, we're like, "Here's a fully working thing but we're not mass producing it yet. It's kind of what prototype means.

Tim: That's a good point. So that analogy breaks down too.

Jon: But it is an interesting concept.

Tim: But that's the vision of humanity and Jesus relation to humanity in the New Testament. That we are the prototype of which he is the full real thing. He is the human that I am made to be but have not attained it. Jon: Human 2.0.

Tim: He's human 2.0 and we're human beta reference. What he's talking about here is our existence—

Tim: I will make him human 1.0.

Tim: Yeah, 1.0 or prototype version is really important. It's not the end goal. There you go. Or in the apostles' language, the first Adam, whose image we all reflect, 1 Corinthians 13, and then what he calls the last Adam - the fulfillment of humanity, which is the resurrected Jesus. There you go. There you go.

Even that uses that you might think, "Oh, there's that good old immortal soul don't even really means quite that. They need to get reworked in light of the biblical story of new creation and these concepts of the physical world is good, but compromised and will be redeemed and my nephesh is me. My physical embodied existence.

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Jon: I don't feel like the video we're going to make is going to help everyone turn that corner.

Tim: No, we're going to limit it to the basic Hebrew meanings. It's just going to raise a bunch of questions. Because basically, it's just going to work through "Hey, nephesh means your physical body as yourself." And everyone's going to be asking, "What are you saying? I don't have a soul?"

Jon: "Are you saying we don't have a soul?"

Tim: I'm saying we are a soul.

Jon: Are you saying there's no afterlife? No, I'm saying there's life after life.

Tim: That's right. Life after the life after. A friend and theological mentor once said to me, "If you are comfortable with what you already think and believe about Christianity, and life and God in the world, for goodness sakes, don't read the Bible."

Jon: Who said that to you?

Tim: Gerry Breshears. It'll just mess up everything you believe.

Jon: Well, no, just read it with a really good study Bible that can explain everything to you.

Tim: Or read without thinking and then it won't mess with your belief.

Jon: I don't know. I've read the Bible a lot and you just force everything into the categories that you understand and then certain translations help you do that in a way. But then there are parts where you're just like, "I don't get that, but it's not safe to ask questions and it's confusing and so I'm just going to keep on."

Tim: We're for the opposite of that. Cheers.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. If you're like us, and you ask lots of questions about the Bible, like, what is the Bible? Why is it confusing and hard to read and why is there so much in there, you might enjoy our YouTube video series called How to read the Bible.

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Also, we released a video that Tim and I have been referencing in these episodes about nephesh and a link to it is in the show notes. You can also find it on our YouTube channel, "[youtube.com/thebibleproject](https://www.youtube.com/thebibleproject), or you can go to our website, thebibleproject.com.

We're crowdfunded nonprofit, and we can make all of these resources because of your generous support. So thank you for being a part of this with us.

We'll be back to do a Q&R episode next time on nephesh, so if you have a question about the Hebrew word "nephesh" or about the concept of a soul in the Bible, send it to us. You can send it to info@jointhebibleproject.com.

Try to record your question, keep it to around 15 seconds, and don't forget to tell us your name and where you're from. Looking forward to hearing your questions. Thanks for being a part of this with us.