

Nephesh/Soul P4

Q&R

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Jon: Hey, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Today on the podcast we're having Q&R, question response on nephesh. A few months ago we released a video and some corresponding podcasts talking about the Hebrew word "nephesh."

In Hebrew, the word "nephesh" originally and most basically met your throats. But in our English Bible, the word "nephesh" often gets translated as "life" or often as "soul." How do we get the word soul from a word that originally meant throat? That's a long conversation. It involves Greek Platonic philosophy. The King James Bible impacted our culture and the difficulty of understanding biblical context and nuance. And we have a lot of podcasts talking about that.

A couple of key takeaways though. According to Biblical authors, we don't have a soul, we are a soul - a living, breathing nephesh. Secondly, the biblical hope is that God will one day sustain our nephesh beyond death so that we can enter a renewed creation in a physical embodied state.

As you can imagine, this topic is a bit of a mind bender for everyone, including me. So today, Tim and I respond to your questions about nephesh, soul, and the afterlife. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

Okay, here we are. We are going to answer some questions about nephesh.

Tim: Or about the soul. We did a video about the meaning of the Hebrew word "nephesh" which gets translated as soul in the Shema. Then we had many podcasts discussions about the meanings or misunderstandings of the word "nephesh."

Jon: I knew going into that, this is a category bender that's hard to wrap your mind around.

Tim: You were a little bit worried that we were going to disturb people?

Jon: Yeah. I'm surprised people just rolled with it as much as they did though. "Yeah, awesome. We are a soul." That's great, but it's still it's still hard for me actually. A lot of these questions are great springboards for me to probably continue asking question too.

Tim: Maybe just to, again, summarize, the main point is the biblical words Hebrew "nephesh" and the Greek word "psyche" used in the New Testament, these words have been historically since the early English translations translated with English word "soul." But what that word means in English doesn't correspond neatly to what either of those words means in their original languages.

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What's happened is that we have adapted the Bible to mean what the word "soul" means in our cultural tradition as supposed to the opposite.

Jon: Which a lot of that comes from Platonic thought, like a Greek.

Tim: Yeah. It's a European stream of thought that links back to the great Greek philosophers.

Jon: That's a good place for me to start before we jump into these questions because all these questions are about vocabulary. For me to just make sure I'm on the same page with the vocabulary that we usually begin in our modern Western context when we talk about soul, which is for Plato there was this more real immaterial part of you that exists apart from your physical self.

Actually, he has that metaphor of the charioteer riding two horses. Like you're the rider. Your charioteer is like your rational spiritual self that survives outside of this corporeal existence. Then the horses, there's two. I don't know the difference. I know one was this brute of a horse, like the bad passions, and one was like your good passions.

But the whole point is that your rational spiritual self can drive and control this kind of more beastly physical self - your emotions and passions, and those kinds of things. Dualism is what comes out of that, which is also what continues on into enlightenment is this thinking that we have these two parts of us.

There's immaterial part and there's physical part, and they're separate, and they can live distinct from each other. That dualistic thought comes into how we read the Bible.

Tim: Again, I'm not an expert on ancient Greek philosophy.

Jon: I'm not either.

Tim: It'd be fun to interview someone who is. But from what I understand and from the moderate amount of reading I've done, that it wasn't just an idea that there's the material and immaterial. But there was an evaluation being made, namely, that the material because it's temporary and fading and breaks down, it's not the ideal. So whatever is true or ultimate, or eternal, these are the non-material things. And so it created a value distinction too.

The Israelite Jewish way of recognizing that material and immaterial because again, we saw that in view, that idea is in the Old Testament, namely when a human dies, they don't go out of existence. That self can be sustained by God's own power.

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But the story in which that material and immaterial distinction makes sense it does is totally different in Jewish tradition. I think that's where especially modern Western leaders need to adapt our idea of soul to what the biblical story is trying to say.

Jon: What's the quick summary of what that story is then?

Tim: Is that the material world is good - Page 1 of the Bible. The material world's good. It's become compromised and death is a reality in our existence that keeps us from attaining to the full ideal that God has for our world.

But that full idea that God has for our world is material, is physical, but it's a form of existence that transcends the current limitations of the physical world as we know it. That's the biblical story. And that's why the resurrection of Jesus is the linchpin for a Christian, that is Jewish Christian worldview because the whole hope is because Jesus was a physical person.

So whatever the Christian hope is for the world, it's that our nephesh, our being becomes fully redeemed and transformed, not abandoned for a non-material existence. That's the big adaptation, I think.

Jon: Let's jump into some questions then.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: Sam Darby has a question.

Sam: Hello, hello, Tim and Jon. This is Sam speaking from Marietta, Georgia. Can you explain why Paul wrote that each of us has a body, a soul, and a spirit? If, in fact, the soul is the same thing as the body, what do we make about the Spirit then with all this? Thanks.

Tim: Great question. Sam, you're referring to the passage in one of Paul's letters. The first letter of the Thessalonians Chapter 5, literally, like the last few sentences that the letter. "And he praised the blessing over them." And he says, "Now may the God of peace himself make you entirely holy, or sanctify you entirely. And may your spirit and soul and body be kept completely without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus."

People have noted for centuries, millennia, now actually, that Paul uses this three-part description to describe the whole person. "May you be wholly kept." He uses two words to talk we think about the immaterial, non-material and then one word to talk about material. The question is, what if he uses three words, he must have three

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categories in his mind. That's one way of thinking about it is that these are three separate distinct categories of the human person.

What's fascinating is this one sentence, this is the only time in all Paul's letters where he uses this three-part description. He uses each of these words individually all over his letters. Spirit, "Pneuma," soul is that Greek word "psuche," and then body which is "soma." He uses them all a lot individually.

He also uses most basically a two-part description. When he wants to talk about the whole human person, he'll often use a two-word phrase. Sometimes its body and spirit. In 2 Corinthians 7, he says, "My friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit." But other times he'll talk about just the body or other times he'll talk about just the spirit.

Usually, the human spirit for Paul is connected with thoughts. Actually, we looked at some of these passages in our podcasts on spirit. Paul talks about a person's thoughts - that one passage from 1 Corinthians 2 where he says, "Who knows a person's thought except the spirit within them."

I remember that you had a cool moment where you connected a whole bunch of things in a way that was helpful for me too about the immateriality of our thoughts. We experience our thoughts as nonmaterial things. So Paul connects our mind with spirit.

Jon: Which is weird, because isn't psuche actually more related to mind? Because psyche comes from it?

Tim: In English.

Jon: But in Greek, it's not.

Tim: No. Well, for the New Testament authors they pretty much continue on the usage of nephesh. When they use the word psuche—

Jon: They mean nephesh? It's a little hard.

Tim: It's super complicated.

Jon: Because you've got Greek writers thinking in Hebrew and then we're reading it in Greek thinking in English.

Tim: It's ridiculous. But for most people, they don't experience it because they read the Bible in a translation, namely English.

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- Jon: But all those layers are hidden there.
- Tim: All those interpretive layers are underneath. They are behind our translations. They represent—
- Jon: So when Paul write psuche, he is really just using a Greek word to mean nephesh?
- Tim: I'd say the primary concept that he's using is the biblical concept of nephesh.
- Jon: Physical living, breathing?
- Tim: The being.
- Jon: Your beingness.
- Tim: Which is represented by my body, but which doesn't get extinguished by death, but can be preserved by God to be brought into human 2.0 in the new creation. That's the story Paul has in his head.
- Jon: And so spirit, pneuma is then following the Hebrew tradition of ruach?
- Tim: Ruach, correct. Which in the Hebrew Bible primarily means animating life energy.
- Jon: While psuche is more related to mind in English and Hebrew thought, and Paul's Greek thinking Hebrew thought it was more related to "your being"? So spirit is actually more related to your thoughts.
- Tim: Your thoughts, correct.
- Jon: We did have this conversation.
- Tim: We did.
- Jon: I remember that now. Because there are a handful of passages in the Hebrew Bible where spirit can refer to not your whole life animating energy, but to the invisible ideas you have that create a physical effect in the world. There's a handful of those passages.
- That's actually one of the passages that Paul quotes right here in 1 Corinthians 2 where he talks about a person's thoughts being known by their spirit. It's from Isaiah 40, "Who has known the mind of the Lord." But in Hebrew, it's "who has known the Spirit of the Lord."
- Jon: But it's translated to mind.

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Tim: But it's translated by the Greek translators as mind. Spirit (ruach) gets translated as mind correctly I think by—

Jon: What's the Greek word for mind?

Tim: Nous. That's what Paul is riffing off of this whole second chapter 1 Corinthians. Here's the point is that Paul is aware that these words have different meanings - soul and spirit. The question is, when he uses all three of them together—

Jon: Is he creating some complete ontology?

Tim: That's correct. I think here's many people...sort of this one verse in 1 Thessalonians 5 has been used to generate traditions whole theologies, whole ministries. Because the assumption is, well, if Paul said it, then for people who have a view of the Bible as divine revelation, this the divine revelation of the true nature of humanity that we are physical, spiritual and soulish. Those three distinguish from each other.

The question is, well, first of all, does that honor the context? Does that honor the rhetorical or communicative purpose of these greetings at the end of the word? In other words, is Paul delivering a lecture here on the nature of humanity? No. I mean, literally, it's a—

Jon: It's a greeting at the end of the letter.

Tim: Yeah. It's a prayer. And you could take it many ways. You could take it that there are many different ways of talking about the complex human person. Paul will sometimes say, body and spirit. Here he says, body, soul, and spirit.

What about Jesus? I mean, if you really want to range the whole Bible here, I made a list of all these words. Think of the Shema. That's a way of thinking about—

Jon: Your heart, your nephesh, and your strength.

Tim: That's right. Heart, soul, and strength. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus quotes the Shema, he adds a fourth one.

Jon: Your mind.

Tim: Heart, soul, mind, and strength?

Jon: Can we throw all these up on a wall and create some sort of complete taxonomy of the human person?

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- Tim: Yes. Or there's another possibility, namely that there was no point at which Jesus and the apostles and Paul got into a room and said, "Okay, when we say pneuma, we all mean this exact thing, and when we say..."
- Jon: They weren't psychologists.
- Tim: Correct. It doesn't seem like the vocabulary that they use is always precise across different authors or are referring to the same thing. So you could say these are overlapping terms. The most basic distinction you have is of material and immaterial namely, something that is physical that's at home at this stage of the universe's existence. Then there's the reality that transcends beyond death and lives on into the new creation. To those things are applied other words like soul or spirit. The essential you.
- Jon: But "soul" can also refer to just your physical you?
- Tim: Yeah. Your existence, which is your bodily existence both now and in the new creation.
- Jon: And somehow in between?
- Tim: Yes. If I have a nephesh now, if it's going to be a transformed nephesh in the new creation, then somehow my nephesh endures through death. That's the classic Jewish and Christian hope.
- Jon: It's just helpful for me in that if you start with a Greek thought, it's that importantly we're immaterial and we'll escape our bodies and we'll be kind of immaterial for all eternity. But this is the other way around, which is no, we are material. If you start it that way...
- Tim: It's good. It's not to be escaped.
- Jon: We will end that way. That's the hope of Scripture. But there is this time in between, which is kind of—
- Tim: It's an anomaly.
- Jon: It's not the ideal. It's the anomaly. That's a good way to put it.
- Tim: It's a human nephesh existing in a disembodied state because your body is rotting in the ground.

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Jon: And that shouldn't be like, "Yeah, of course." Because I am a disembodied person living in a body, you would go, "That's weird. How's that going to happen because I'm a body?"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Another difference is I think Greek thought tries to be really precise. I think the point was they were trying to be very clear, where it seems like in this Jewish thought the point wasn't to make these really clear categories to argue about philosophically as much as—

Tim: Correct. But also it's just that we're trying to adapt to a Hebrew cultures way of seeing the world and thinking about humanity. Sam Darby, your question was, "Why does Paul seem to distinguish between soul and body if they're the same?"

Just to be super clear, in Paul's usage and in Old Testament usage, they're not the same. Your nephesh is constituted by your body. But if your nephesh can be redeemed beyond the grave, then it's more than this version of my body.

Jon: It's your operating system.

Tim: Yes, the operating system, but that requires hardware. It has this current hardware and the biblical hope is that it will receive new hardware. So it's your nephesh. That's the you now that goes on. Whereas for Paul, the body, when he uses that word body or flesh, he's usually referring to human 1.0, namely, the version that will end up in the grave and that needs to be redeemed and rescued. So they are different.

Jon: Then why another word then for soul and spirit?

Tim: Well, essentially, there's one other New Testament passage in the mix here in Hebrews chapter 4—

Jon: Why don't we throw another question and then mix them too because we have someone asking about that. This is from Johnny Ricardo.

Johnny: Hi, Tim. Hi, Jon. This is Johnny B, from Chicago. My question is about Hebrews 4:12. It seems to me this tells us that man is dual nature and bones and marrow in physical and so on spirit, meaning nonphysical. How can we understand this with the view of man as a single nature being, meaning man is a soul?"

Tim: In Hebrews 4:12, I'll just read that the passage. It's a conclusion to really epic movement of thought in the letter to the Hebrews. But he says, "For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates, literally

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divide or separate between soul and spirit - those are our words again, psuche and pneuma - joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Obviously, it's a metaphor. He's saying that the power of God's Word through history, and specifically in Hebrews 4 is talking about the story of Israel rebelling in the wilderness, and how it names the rebellion, and there are consequences for it. So it's sharper, namely, that it cuts to the heart of the issue.

Then what he wants to imagine are things that are so closely bound together, they're virtually impossible to separate. The point of the metaphor is, there are things in this world that ought not to be separated, or that are very difficult to separate.

He names two things. The immaterial nature of the human. What is that essential you that lives that God can redeem into the new creation? What is that? One of the Hebrew words for it is "nephesh." Another one can be the word "ruach." The point here is actually how close they are and how difficult to separate. Not that they are separate and very clear. It's funny.

Usually, this passage gets appealed to, to say, "Look, they're clearly two parts to the nonmaterial part of the human." This point is the opposite - is they're so close together—

Jon: The only thing that can divide them is God's Word?

Tim: That's correct. In the same with joints and marrow, of course, you can break them apart. But if you're breaking them apart, it means you're killing it. They are not supposed to be separated. The same with your thoughts and attitudes. So how do I tell the difference between an idea that I have or the motive for having that idea?

Once someone pointed that out to me. The point of all those things is their unity, not their clear distinction. At least in context.

Jon: So Paul senses some sort of unity between these two ideas of soul and spirit?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: Even though he also by having different words is identifying they also are distinct?

Tim: Yeah. They're distinct in that they're the biblical vocabulary that he got from his Bible. They are distinct words in the Hebrew Bible. But he never offers any clarification on what precisely he means.

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The fact that he can use them interchangeably, one time he'll say, "Body soul spirit," another time, he'll say, "body and spirit," he doesn't need three parts. He just needs two to make his point. It seems as if Paul really just has a core idea of current physical body 1.0, and then what an what endures beyond into 2.0.

Jon: And in what indoors beyond, you could say, soul and spirit. But if you were to try to separate those, I think I heard you say this little bit, soul is focused on your essential being this, your like being a person, where spirit is from ruach which is more about the energy, the life force and specifically a lot of times your mental energy?

Tim: Yeah, yeah. What is invisible to me and others that produces visible effects in the world, that's ruach and pneuma. They are two ways of talking about the same thing.

Jon: That's the thing. It might be two different ways of talking about the same thing.

Tim: Just like the Shema can say "Your heart and your nephesh." So your attitudes and will and choices and emotions and your whole being. But it's a way of talking about the whole United person.

Jon: And strength in the Shema is just another way of saying everything about you too, right?

Tim: That's right. Every possibility that your heart and nephesh.

Jon: It's a lot more lot more symmetry to these words than distinctions.

Tim: Or unity.

Jon: Unity.

Tim: I think that's right. Unity. In fact, let me just recommend two books that have been really helpful for me. This is a very old question people have been writing and thinking about all these terms and what they mean about the nature of humanity. At least in the understanding of the biblical authors. But two recent works that both summarize the whole history of discussion and a really clear study, one is by guy named John Cooper called "Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate." Thrilling title.

Then Joel Green, a book called "Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible." Joel Green's awesome. He's one of the only biblical scholars I've ever known of who went the full PhD. route in biblical studies and then said, "My education is not over." Then he went on into the sciences and got a Master's.

Jon: You told me about this guy. A neuroscientist.

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- Tim: A neuroscientist. Then he's gone on to write and edit a number of books on this whole set of issues. He's written a number of books, but this is my favorite one - "Body, Soul, and Human Life." This have been very helpful for me if you're interested in taking a deeper dive.
- Jon: Nice. All right. This question is from Daniel Ferguson. "In Psalm 63, David says that his soul "nephesh" thirst for God. This is poetic language. But what does this look like in daily life? What does it practically mean to thirst after God with my soul?"
- Tim: From our earlier conversations on the word soul, you talked about how you could use the word soul in your previous understanding of it a just the part that floats away to heaven. But you still had a way to talk about it. What did that mean to you when you read a psalm that said, "My soul thirsts for God"? What did that mean to you?
- Jon: It meant the most significant part of me. The part of me that really matters.
- Tim: Like your core being.
- Jon: And I think it's because—
- Tim: But that's kind of like nephesh.
- Jon: It is like nephesh. It's so similar, but there's a little difference in that it's core because it's separate from the physical. That's what makes it more essential.
- Tim: I see.
- Jon: So when I'm talking about my soul, it's not that like, I long for you because I like to snuggle with you, if I'm talking to my wife, but I long for you because something deep and important in me is connected to you. It's more than you have.
- Tim: And that view of the most important part of you was, it's the nonphysical part of you. That's the most important part. So I'll say my soul.
- Jon: Similar to nephesh in that it was the essential part of me, but it's still had this Greek thought, which is separation from the physical. And the more I can separate from the physical, the more real and essential I become.
- Tim: We talked about that usage of the English word "soul" in transportation language, but I was also thinking about soul music or soul means a music that's in touch with the core of humanity. It comes from a nonrational core that exudes the—
- Jon: I think that's what people mean a lot of times is the core.

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Tim: Yeah, the core.

Jon: That's close to nephesh.

Tim: Yeah, it's very similar to nephesh.

Jon: But it's a core including your the body, not...

Tim: Constituted by a body.

Jon: ...not trying to separate it from the body.

Tim: Correct. Yeah, I guess that would be the difference. But that difference is important because what these biblical poets are saying is that their very being, which is constituted by their body. Like, what are we? At least in this form of creation, we are intimately connected with our bodies. It's ridiculous to talk about ourselves apart from our body.

Jon: You say that, but it's been easy for me my whole life to think of myself as apart for my body. It's been easy for me to think of myself as some rational driver somewhere inside my head that can exist apart from my body.

Tim: I hear that. I hear that. I mean, I'm with you. It might be we're both also fives on the Enneagram. Meaning that we are very emotionally detached and tend to think about our emotions instead of feeling them.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So you and I are the best candidates for it.

Jon: But for me, I think my nephesh is so important because it grounds me more and my body. It's saying, "I do have this rational part of me that feels separate, but it's an illusion that it is completely separate. It's still connected intimately to my emotions and passions and feelings in my body.

Tim: Correct. That's right. Daniel, your question is, what does it mean for me to feel? I think what the poets trying to get at actually isn't something that you need to try to feel. Usually, these poets are describing some difficult situation they're in - a moment of loneliness, of hardship, of deprivation, or persecution and what they're longing for is the love and generosity and presence of their Creator.

One author, for me personally, that's pastorally guided me into this in may be way, he either is Catholic or is a Catholic priest. His name is Ronald Rolheiser. It's called "The Holy Longing." Then you got a second book called "An Infinite Horizon." But it's

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in the spiritual formation tradition. But the whole book is about this - the holy longing.

The whole point is he actually uses a lot of these biblical metaphors and songs about longing for God. His point is to be human in this stage of the story that we're in is to be a being beset with limitations and shortcomings. Whether it's hunger, or thirst, or loneliness, the need for relationships is...He talks about how we're creatures that are constantly longing to transcend the boundaries of our existence. Whether it's to never be hungry, or to never be tired, or to never be bored, or never be lonely.

Jon: We're talking about emotions here - sadness, fear?

Tim: Well, where he goes with it, and what to me was helpful about the book was, he said, "What it means to take each of those limitations and stop seeing them as negatives. Whereas deprivation is to see them as pointers, to see them as signs that I am looking for something that transcends the kind of life experience that's available to me. That hunger right points me to a limitation that my life can only be constituted by the gift of something outside myself or sexual tension or loneliness. Those are longings to be connected to and other than myself.

It's a very pastoral guide of taking places of pain and loneliness or need in your life and transforming them into signposts pointing you towards something that neither you or any human can ever provide for you.

Jon: So would he say then when you are feeling the pain of loneliness, your nephesh is longing?

Tim: That's right. That's your nephesh longing.

Jon: Then if you direct that to where is it pointing to, then your nephesh is longing after God?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So if you just kind of wallow in it, and your nephesh is just longing and being miserable, but if you make that a spiritual moment of what is it that I'm wanting, and God can you give that to me, now you're doing what David was doing thirsting after God?

Tim: That's right. They're using their moments of need, and limitation, and lack, to remind themselves of the inability of my current form of existence to satisfy any of my longings. It's a holy longing. That's the title of the book.

Jon: That's cool.

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Tim: Those can become redemptive moments to point you to your Creator and other, but who transcends my limitations, and who can meet me in my moment of need. That's true for the biblical poets when they think of Yahweh, the God of Israel, who came to meet them in their slavery in Egypt, who redeemed them out of exile in Babylon.

Then that continues on into the Christian story where the one who entered into our limitations by becoming human and Jesus of Nazareth by the one who suffered and participated in human suffering, who endured it and came out the other side into new creation, and that that one loves us and is with us and is committed to redeeming our nephesh, this is what Rolheiser says it provides a moment to turn your limitations and lack into moments of really profound spiritual experiences.

Anyway, it's a great book. It's one of the best things that I've come across that helps me know how to translate those moments of my nephesh logging into spiritual growth.

Jon: It's great. Let's talk about the afterlife then.

Tim: We've got a number of questions about the state of the nephesh after physical death.

Jon: Kevin Duker from Indiana.

Kevin: Hey, Tim, and Jon. This is Kevin from Indiana. My question is about the biblical writers perspective on say our state of being in this anticipated resurrection. Is it some sort of physical state or more of a spiritual state?

Then how does that connect to different burial practices maybe of their time or of our own time when you consider something like being cremated? I'd love to get your thoughts on all this. Really enjoy the podcast and all your videos. Thanks so much.

Tim: For the biblical authors that mention, we're talking about the idea of resurrection, it's most definitely a physical reality. That's the whole point. If it was a nonmaterial reality, the whole storyline of the Bible is short-circuited.

The whole point is that it's God's good world, but redeemed with death and evil transcended and left behind. In the best sense possible, left behind. How does that connect with burial practices? Man, there's like experts on this. Whole experts. I haven't done immense amounts of reading in this literature. Because we actually can know quite a lot about ancient burial practices because of tombs are often things that survived from the ancient world.

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Jon: You know what's interesting is, the Egyptians when they lay mummified Pharaoh's, they didn't think the brain was important. They took it out and threw it away.

Tim: They scoop it out.

Jon: They pulled it out their nose and they threw it away.

Tim: Grey matter.

Jon: They're like, "What's this?" "I don't know. Some unimportant part?"

Tim: That's Probably what the Hebrews thought too. They didn't have a word for it. It's interesting. It's fascinating. So burial practices. Well, one thing is I've been studying Genesis recently and there's that phrase to be gathered to your ancestors is a way to talk about your burial because you're being laid in the family tomb. So the idea is you go to be with them in the grave.

Again, it does seem like the Hebrews Israelites, for people who were aware of and use the writings of Moses and the prophets to form their thinking, they had some sense of a future beyond death. But whether that connects to different burial practices, it's really hard to know from the tombs that they dig up.

It does seem like many burial practices people brought...like in Egypt, people brought gifts of food and different things to symbolically sustain the dead in their current existence.

Also, there is tradition in Judaism, actually in Christianity too that the burial of the body is important to not let the body be destroyed and not let it be cremated. Because if you believe in open resurrection, it's some form of that body that's going to get transformed and raised.

It's only been in recent years, I believe...I'd have to go read up on that too - if there's been a broadening of use on cremation. I'm pretty sure that there has. Some of our listeners probably know way more about this than I do.

My take on it, that's all it is. My take on it is if God's capable of recreating, not just recreating but transforming human 1.0 into 2.0, it's kind of involve a full new creation. So whether or not human 1.0—

Jon: We just think of this from what we know about...

Tim: Cremated, I don't think it matters.

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Jon: ...Biology and Chemistry and stuff is that if someone died 2,000 years ago, and they weren't mummified or something—

Tim: Fully reintegrated.

Jon: Fully. I probably drank some of them this morning with my cup of coffee.

Jon: All their carbon atoms have been turned into other things. It's game over. It's going have to be a full recreation.

Tim: Which is how I think of Ezekiel famous vision of his valley of dry bones. That's what he envisions for symbolic recreation. It does seem that there were connections with different burial practices to people's hopes of the afterlife or resurrection.

Jon: There's a really interesting parallel to this conversation and futurist thinking. Which is people who are expecting that we're on the verge of being able to upload our minds into computers and then live in kind of a new body that we can create.

Tim: I wrote the word avatar. Can avatar cover that?

Jon: I think an avatar is something...it's a simulation.

Tim: I see.

Jon: But in the movie, I think they were actual physical bodies. Were they?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: It could be that I suppose. I guess that would be the word, avatar, potentially. So there's this hope in a certain type of resurrection and people are freezing their brains and stuff hoping that in a few decades we'll get there. So their burial practices are definitely really being taken seriously.

Tim: In light of their eschatology.

Jon: Yeah. But it's interesting it's a parallel thought in that whatever it is that makes me, can transform this body. Another way to think about that is, we know medically or scientifically, whatever, that our cells are constantly reproducing, dying, and being replaced by new cells throughout our whole body. Some tissue is faster than other tissues. But on average, everyone's body is completely new every seven years.

The body you had as like a 15-year-old, you don't have any of those cells anymore. They're all brand new cells. But it's still you. You still have the same kind of conscious experience that's connected to that 15-year-old kid.

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Tim: And if you were to juxtapose a 15-year-old, you end up 87-year-old you. It's a really different version of you.

Jon: It looks different. The cells are sagging.

Tim: We still say that's you.

Jon: But it's still you. And so what is that? This is this idea of your mind, your consciousness, or maybe as Paul would talk about it, your soul and your spirit. It's a mind bender.

Tim: Resurrection in particular? Is that what you mean?

Jon: Yeah. This is something I've thought a lot is this is getting really geeky.

Tim: Is [unintelligible 00:40:07] usually not in geek mode.

Jon: There's a sort of experiment of teleportation devices, right? How the teleportation device would have to work is somehow your body would have to dematerialize and then rematerialized somewhere else. In theory, this could potentially work.

But if I came up to you, and I said, "Walk through this door right here, and your body will dematerialize, and then you're going to appear on some other planet or on the other side of the world completely reconstructed cell by cell exactly who you are," you'd be like, "Okay, wait a second. So you're telling me I'm going to walk through the door, I'm going die? "I mean, it's going kill you, every cell in your body is going to disappear." So is that person that's going to be recreated on the other side? Is that me? Is that my consciousness? I mean, it's going come with all my thoughts and all my experiences, but is it still me? That's a big gamble to make.

Tim: Yeah, I suppose it is.

Jon: And how could you ever know?

Tim: We could ask James Kirk.

Jon: There's actually a show on Netflix right now called "Travelers," which is about people from the future, coming back and embodying 21st century people. But they have to reboot this one girl who has a brain disorder. And to reboot her means she's going to lose last like six months of her memories. She doesn't want to do it, because she doesn't feel like she'll be her anymore because she won't have those memories.

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Then it becomes this whole weird philosophical discussion of like, what is it that makes you, you? So if you upload your consciousness into a computer and then it gets downloaded somewhere else...Anyways, it's super geeky.

Tim: That's a great question.

Jon: But I think the hope of the resurrection is basically that. You will still be you in a new body.

Tim: Yes. New hardware. But that's using another metaphor.

Jon: These are ancient questions from the scriptures 2000 years ago and now they're being asked again by futurists and neuroscientists in a different way.

Tim: It's fascinating.

Jon: Super fascinating.

Tim: Really fascinating. This is the whole thing. The mind body connection isn't just an issue for religious people. It's a front and center talk and philosophy and science.

Jon: It's our basic question of reality.

Tim: That's right. Essentially, what the biblical authors want to affirm is the goodness of our physical existence, but it's also that it's compromised and severely limited and needs to be rescued...to use the Exodus metaphors redeemed and rescued and brought into a new mode of existence.

There's a personal connection between the me that is me now and the me that lives in that upgrade form of existence. But the biblical authors don't seem to have developed a scientific or precise vocabulary for it. They have a narrative vocabulary for it.

Jon: So when it comes to burial and stuff, which was I guess the question is it doesn't seem like there's anything we could do minus freezing your brain.

Tim: I see. That could prevent you from—

Jon: That could try to keep the stability of your conscious awareness intact so that you don't wake up and it's not you anymore. It's just a version of you that you're "I'm not gone and now it's just another version of me."

Tim: Correct. There probably is more to say about burial practices in early Christianity and Judaism.

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Jon: How do you want to get buried?

Tim: How do I want to get buried? Oh, I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. Sprinkle my ashes in the mountain stream. I don't know.

Jon: You're really making it difficult on God.

Tim: Resurrection is such a difficult thing to believe.

Jon: It is. It is really weird.

Tim: If that's really what's going to go down, and I hope and trust that that's what's going to happen, then I just have a feeling nothing I do is going to get in God's way of making that happen. That's such a remarkable category breaking type of event that how can my choice to be cremated or not get in the center of that?

Jon: It is easier to believe that one day will just exist outside of our bodies. As remarkable that is, it's almost easier to stomach than believing in new creation and the resurrected body.

Tim: Sure.

Jon: That sounds more sci-fi or just kind of wonky religious talk.

Tim: I think that's probably true. You're saying there's more cultural overlap with—

Jon: You go walking around and you're just like, "Hey, you'll live one day in some embodied state."

Tim: And many people are like, "Yeah."

Jon: You'll be like, "Yeah." You walk around and you're like, "Hey, you will be reformed into a new body." All sudden, it's just kind of like, "Whoa, what kind of science fiction you've been reading?"

Tim: "The Bible."

Jon: Natalia has question.

Natalia: Hello. This is Natalia from Greeley, Colorado. I have gotten so much out of your podcast, and I really enjoy listening to it. There is one question I still have after listening to the lessons on nephesh. I think over the years I've heard many people say what they think about how our bodies will be in the new creation.

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I haven't found a lot from the scriptures myself, but I wonder what do we know about how our bodies will be in the new earth when Jesus comes back? And what did the first century Christians think? I'd love to hear your thoughts and just learn more about that. Thank you.

Tim: It's kind of continuing from our previous discussion, though. But this is about the nature of—

Jon: The new body.

Tim: I'm a bit of a broken record here, too, but it's worth repeating because I need to remind myself of this. The apostles who wrote the documents we have on our New Testament, when they talked about their hope for the future it's not because they had a crystal ball and they could see it and then explain it to us.

What they're going off of, is their encounter and experience they had, namely, with Jesus. After his execution by the Romans, they met him again alive and in a physical mode that was both familiar, they could recognize him, but also was odd and remarkable. Sometimes the other ways they couldn't recognize him, but it still was still him, because he had the nail marks. It was physical. They ate with them, had meals with them. That's what they experienced.

Then by the guidance of Jesus presence with them going on from there, they realized what this meant for the fulfillment of the whole biblical story up to that point and therefore, what that meant for the future hope of the universe. That's where they're writing from.

We have questions. "What's the nature of the new creation and of our bodies?" And Paul will just say, it'll be a transformation in the blink of an eye, and it'll be made like Jesus. That's the only model that they have to go off of is what happened to Jesus will happen to his people and the whole universe. That's how the apostles framed it.

Jon: All we can know is what we can reconstruct from a few stories about Jesus and his resurrected body.

Tim: Yeah. And the and the point of those stories isn't even to teach us about the nature of Jesus' existence.

Jon: So you can probably go too far maybe a little bit.

Tim: Yeah. The nature of the stories is to invite you to consider this remarkable thing.

Jon: But he ate food?

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Tim: But ate food. There are the remarks that the apostles and his disciples were in a locked room because they were afraid about people knowing about what was going on and Jesus could somehow just be in that room, and then not be in that room. That's remarkable. And there you go.

Jon: That breaks the laws of the —

Tim: Yeah. But it's very clear from the experience that it was a physical him because they hung out with him and touched him and it was the him that they walk around with in Galilee over the last few years. You can say that there are different ways, there are different themes you can emphasize.

Sometimes when the apostles want to emphasize how fundamentally transformed and awesome the new creation is where it's the fulfillment of our longings for hope, and beauty, and justice, and life, and goodness, then they'll emphasize that it will be totally different than anything we experience right now. That's what Peter's going after in 2 Peter of like, it'll be like this world passing away completely.

But then other times the apostles want to emphasize the connection and continuity. The Apostle Paul will use Exodus metaphors. It'll be this world, but rescued or this world, but liberated from slavery. There the emphasis is on the same Israelites enslaved in Egypt where the Israelites freed out of Egypt.

Both of those can be valuable points to make depending on the audience and the season of life that they're in. But those are both true at the same time.

So Jon, give me your fundamental takeaway from our conversation about nephesh and from the video. What do you hope people are thinking about now that the video and podcasts are out there?

Jon: I think the fundamental takeaway is what I want to do is I want to create some complete ontology from the Bible about what it means to be human. But I think the takeaway is to just allow for some mystery there, not trying to be so precise.

The real practical takeaway is that my physical state, my emotions, and my discomforts and all these things that I have physically are really important. And learning how to like live in New with them isn't just a practice, isn't something I can put up with now, it's a discipline that I will need for all eternity if we are physical creatures for eternity - if that is true and I hope it is and get excited about thinking about. It makes me more just in my body, more embodied and more sensitive to care about things I'm feeling.

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That conversation we just had on longings was really, really powerful. That it isn't something I need to try to figure out how to transcend now because ultimately that's the point is to transcend it, it's to live in it and to be embodied in that.

It's also helpful for me as an explainer to try to think of it separate from one category of thinking is the immaterial part of us is more important, but we're stuck with these bodies, let's deal with it so we can abort ship at some point to flip that to being physical as good. And we will be physical and we will continue to be physical but there is this paradox of in order for this to pass away and to be made something new, there's some weird in-between state that we just can't explain with our categories of existing and transcending without a physical body. That actually is the anomaly.

It's not an anomaly to be these rational, psycho social-emotional beings. It's like that's normal. The anomaly is when that gets disjointed for a while, while we wait for new creation. Which is completely different than I think what I had before, which is, I can't wait till I can get out of these emotions and get out of these feelings and passions.

Tim: Something about this question about the nature of humans from a biblical angle, for me it's similar in that it's required me...it would be much more convenient to have a another view. Like the biblical view fills me with tension and questions. Not because it's incoherent, it's just different than my default way of thinking.

To me, this is one of these issues where actually humbling myself and hearing the biblical authors as a conversation partner is going to say things that surprise me and maybe have misunderstood them. And allowing them to say things that might still surprise me it's just a posture.

For me, this issue among many, that's just the posture we have to have maybe we've just misunderstood at all along and need to rethink it all over again. Once you go through that experience many times with the Bible, that's refreshing, ultimately, but it is kind of destabilizing. That's what makes I think biblical studies so exciting and rewarding.

Jon: It's cool. This is the longest we've spent on a word study session.

Tim: That's a good point.

Jon: This all came from nephesh from Word Study. It's a big one.

Tim: Yeah.

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Jon: Thanks for hanging in there guys.

Tim: Cool. See you guys next time.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. If you haven't seen our video on the soul, it's on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/thebibleproject and on our website, thebibleproject.com.

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