

What Happens When Someone Dies?

Part A—the Hebrew Scripture (OT)

March 12, 2023

Does the Bible teach humans are made up of two parts (dualism) in such a way that we can come apart and survive bodily death?

body-soul (Heb.) *nephesh* / (Gk.) *psyche*

Adam is God-formed as a special creation made up of body and breath = a complete, holistic living body-soul (Gen 2:7).

Praise the LORD, O my soul [nephesh] (Psa. 103:1-2)

spirit (Heb.) *ruach* / (Gk.) *pneuma*

The word *ruach* is used of the Spirit of God (2 Sam 23:2) and breath (Psalm 146:4) and **wind** (1 Kings 19:11).

Sheol (Heb.) —the realm of the dead; the grave

A place of darkness and gloom and no escape, as far away as possible from the heaven of heavens where God dwells.

NOTE: The OT doesn't refer to the dead as "*nephesh*" (souls) or "*ruach*" (spirits) but "*rephaim*" (shades) without substance.

What, if anything, is existence like in Sheol?

- The grave, or **burial** site (Genesis 37:35)
- A place of peace, sleep, **rest** (Job 3:13)
- No remnant of former earthly **activity** (Ecc. 9:10)
- No **praise** of God (Isaiah 38:18; Psalm 115:17-18)

Is there any existence in Sheol beyond sleeping?

The Israelites were forbidden to consult mediums or spiritists and this makes no sense if it were not a possibility (Isaiah 8:19; see also Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:11).

Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28)--Samuel was buried at Ramah (28:3), yet he is in *Sheol* and came up at Endor! He was recognizable as an old man wearing a robe and talked. He was understandable and expected Saul to join him in *Sheol* soon.

Which verses hint at something like "life after death?"

Psalm 49:15

heaven is where God is

"But God will redeem my life/soul (nephesh) from Sheol (the grave); he will surely take me to himself."

See also Psalm 16:10-11 and 73:24.

This life is real, vital, energizing, creative, worshipful and beautiful. By comparison, the shadowy place of the dead in *Sheol* is nothingness. But, the Hebrew Bible offers a third possibility – a permanent, living fellowship with Yahweh enduring beyond the grave.

What verses give clues about one's destiny beyond the grave?

Job 19:25-27

the last one standing is **God**

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*

*²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,*

Daniel 12:2

two **destinies**

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth
shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame
and everlasting contempt.*

Isaiah 26:19

dust to dust to **life**

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.

*You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.*

Conclusion—there are several places in the Hebrew Bible that speak of the spirits of the dead coming to life again, being raised. The nature of the dead and promised resurrection will become clearer next week as we consider Jesus' teaching and example.

NEXT WEEK: "What Happens When Someone Dies?" (B)