

Soul Man?

So what are we? A basic description of the makeup of man is found in the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call the Old Testament). God formed man from a combination of the dust of the earth and the breath of life from God. Then man became a living breathing creature (being, person, or living soul). [see [Genesis 2:7](#)] This simple description persists throughout the Old Testament and is illustrated in reverse by King Solomon's description of what happens at death, in the book of Ecclesiastes. He says in death we are like the beasts. We all die the same. We have the same "breath" (also translated "spirit") and our bodies all return to be dust again. Further he says in death humans have no advantage over animals. [see [Ecclesiastes 3:18-20](#)] At death the "breath" (also translated "spirit") which is given us by God, returns to him. [see [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#)] King Solomon makes no distinction between good or evil people. God was the one who gave the physical body, "life" (or "breath" or "spirit") and at death everybody's "spirit" returned to God. Ecclesiastes 12:7 is often used as proof that a person's soul ascends to heaven, because it returns to God. That idea runs into a couple serious problems. First and foremost the Hebrew word for the "spirit" in Ecclesiastes 12:7 is never translated as "soul." Secondly if **every soul** ascends to heaven and returns to God that includes wicked souls too! This is certainly not what Christianity teaches. Thirdly the spirit may return to God, but Solomon says no one really knows where it (the "spirit" or "breath") actually goes. [see [Ecclesiastes 3:21](#)] Nowhere does the Bible (Old or New Testament) mention the soul goes to heaven. The closest thing is Revelation 6:9-11 which will be discussed later.

Preaching on the day of the first Pentecost feast after the death of Jesus, Peter quoted Psalms 16:10. He indicated that King David (the author of Psalm 16) predicted not only the death but also the resurrection of the messiah. This account from Acts chapter 2 is said by much of Christianity to indicate that Jesus' soul went to Hell after death. Some translations say exactly that. [see [Acts 2:27 from the King James Version](#)] For other English translations see [Acts 2:27](#). I like the Expanded Bible in this instance. Inside the brackets: the superscript ^L is a more literal translation, the *or* is an alternate translation and the superscript ^C is a comment by the translators.

...Even my body ·has [^L will live in; *or* will rest in] hope, 27 because you will not ·leave [abandon] ·me [^L my soul/life] in ·the grave [^L Hades; ^C the underworld]. You will not let your Holy One [experience; ^L see] decay. Acts 2:26b,27 (Expanded Bible)

I believe the Expanded Bible translators have tried to be honest in showing the possible variations, but most people want answers instead of more choices. To help you decide let's look at the original Old Testament verse that Peter was referring to. [see [Psalms 16:10](#) from a variety of English Translations – again notice how the translations can vary.] The correct translation should be consistent with principles already revealed in the Old testament. With that in mind the verse could read “...because you will not leave me in the grave (Sheol) nor will you let your faithful one decay.” This is exactly how the Apostle Paul interprets this verse in Acts 13:29-36. Although Psalms 16:10 was written by King David, according to Paul it was not about him because David died, was buried and his body decayed; whereas Jesus died, was buried (i.e. laid in a tomb) and God raised him from the dead before his body could decay. [see [Acts 13:29-36](#)]

In Acts 2:27 from The Expanded Bible quoted above, notice the comment, “the underworld,” next to “Hades.” This is important because it exemplifies the role of the Greek language (used in the writing of the New Testament) in altering the original meaning of the Hebrew text it was quoting. In Psalms 16:10 the Hebrew word for grave is, “Sheol.” It means where the dead reside (figuratively or generally, the grave). In Acts 2:27 the Greek word translated “grave” (or “Hell” in some translations) is “Hades,” who was the Greek god of the underworld where departed souls went at death. Are you beginning to see where the concept of souls going to Hell when a person died might have come from? It certainly wasn't the Old Testament and it wasn't the intent of the New Testament either.

Believing the soul to be immortal gives credence to the idea of eternal punishment for the wicked (a wicked immortal-soul would have to exist somewhere for eternity, right?); yet nowhere does the Bible teach that the soul is immortal. Only God has immortality [see [1 Timothy 6:15,16](#)]. It is a gift from God for a person to receive immortality/eternal life [see [Romans 6:23](#)] and Paul encouraged believers to seek it [see [Romans 2:7](#)]. They did not already possess it.

The idea that the soul can exist apart from our bodies permeates world religious beliefs and much of Christianity. In the Old Testament there was no such concept. The basic concept is that we are souls because we live and breath and have desires and emotions. The soul is who we are, it is our self, our being. The soul exists because the “breath of life” or the “spirit” gives the body life. It is the result of a union of body and spirit. Take away the spirit which gives us life and the soul ceases to exist, in other words it dies. Yes, the soul can die! The prophet Ezekiel stated that very thing [see [Ezekiel 18:4](#)]. Some translators of Ezekiel use “life” or “person” instead of “soul.” Regardless of how it is translated it is still the same Hebrew word that is translated “soul” elsewhere throughout

the Old Testament. Actually all those translations are valid and they are all similar in meaning, because the soul is not some ethereal part of us that can exist apart from the body.

Even animals are souls, but translators often translate the word “soul” as “creature” [see [Genesis 2:19](#)] when it refers to animals. King Solomon's comment in Ecclesiastes about humans being like animals in death [see [Ecclesiastes 3:18-20](#)] has been met with skepticism as to whether or not it is biblically correct; but knowing the same Hebrew word for souls is used for humans and animals alike emphasizes the conformity of his statements with the rest of the Old Testament. Even in the New Testament original Greek text, Adam was called a living soul [see [1 Corinthians 15:45](#)] as were creatures in the sea [see [Revelation 16:3](#)]. James the brother of Jesus also confirmed an Old Testament style belief in New Testament times when he said, “...the body without the spirit is dead...” [see [James 2:26](#)]

The Bible is pretty straight forward on the meaning of the soul yet, there are some usages that seem a little strange to us today. The Greek word for “soul” is used over 100 times in the New Testament but is only translated as “soul” 55 times in the *King James Version* and 23 times in the *New International Version*. More modern translations often substitute “soul” with more contemporary words. For example compare Luke 12:19 from the *King James Version* with the *New International Version* and *The Expanded Bible*.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. (KJV)

19 And I'll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” (NIV)

19 Then I can say to myself [L my soul], “I [L Soul, you] have enough good things stored to last for many years. Rest [Take it easy], eat, drink, and enjoy life [celebrate; T be merry]!” (EXB)

Who says to themselves these days, “And I will say to my soul?” Odd yes, but still no indication the soul is a separate entity that can exist without the body. The one exception is Matthew 10:28 which is discussed in the chapter; *Everlasting, Eternal and For Ever and Ever*.