

A REFLECTIVE STUDY OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW נַפֶּשׁ AND רִוּחַ AS 靈魂 “SOUL” IN THE CHINESE UNION VERSION (CUV)

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Abstract

There is no concept of a soul that loses its body after death, and continues to live independently, in the Hebrew Bible. Even though the word 靈魂 (“soul”) is used in the Chinese Union Version (CUV) translation, there is not even one original Hebrew text of נַפֶּשׁ (*nepesh*) and רִוּחַ (*ruah*) that supports the idea of the immortality of the soul. Therefore, the better translation of נַפֶּשׁ in the Chinese Bible would be 人的生命 (“human life”) or 整全的人 (“wholistic person”), רִוּחַ and would be better translated as 靈 (“spirit”) or 生命 (“life”).’

Keywords: Bible Translation, Chinese Versions; Hebrew *nepesh* and *ruah*, death, afterlife.

1. Introduction

The world of the dead is covered with the veil of mystery. Practically, in every culture we find beliefs in the existence of the soul or spirit after death, and Chinese civilization is no exception. There is a term 魂 (“soul”) related to this belief in a “dead soul.” In ancient times, the word 魂 (“soul”) contained rich meanings, such as “human’s natural Yang energy (陽氣),” “an element which constitutes man,” “the soul is in charge of the human spirit,”

and “the soul is the spirit,” etc.¹ However, it is much simpler to understand the 魂 (“soul”) in the modern context, and two authoritative Chinese and English dictionaries provide us with clear definitions of what the term means today. In *The Oxford Chinese Dictionary*, one of the meanings of the Chinese word 魂 (“soul”) came from the ancients’ imagination that the human soul can leave the body and continue to live and wander in the world after death. Thus, 魂 (“soul”) refers to the independent existence without the body, such as 鬼魂 (“ghost”) and 靈魂 (“soul”).² Besides, according to *Longman Chinese Advanced New Dictionary* (“朗文中文高級新辭典”), the term 靈魂 (“soul”) refers in a religious sense to something immaterial attached to the human body and can exist independently of it.³ The term 靈魂 (“soul”) is from the Chinese death culture—a soul that loses its body after death. Further, the Chinese Union Version Bible (CUV) often translates the Hebrew words נַפְשׁ (*nepes̄*) and רֹחַ (*rûah*) with 靈魂 (“soul”). The CUV translates נַפְשׁ with 靈魂 (“soul”) 23 times,⁴ and רֹחַ 2 times.⁵

The goal of this essay is to analyze and discuss whether or not the Hebrew words נַפְשׁ and רֹחַ should be translated with 靈魂 (“the soul after death”). This interpretation leads to the fundamental question of this article: Do the Hebrew Scriptures agree with the above Chinese notion of the after-life?

¹ Jin Ye Xu, *The Kangxi Dictionary* (Taiwan: Culture Book, 1976), 1461. There were different interpretations of the term 魂 (“soul”) in ancient times based on the different perceptions of the composition of human beings in ancient China. For further studies, see *易傳繫辭* (“Book of Changes : Xi Ci I”).

² Julie Kleeman and Harry Yu, eds., *The Oxford Chinese Dictionary: English-Chinese-Chinese English* (New York: Oxford University, 2010), 324, 893, 744.

³ Li Qun Ye, *Longman Chinese Advanced New Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Pearson, 2003), 1342–43.

⁴ The lexeme נַפְשׁ is rendered as 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV in the following cases: Gen 35:18; 1 Kgs 17:21–22; Job 33:22, 28, 30; Ps 16:10; 22:20(21); 23:3; 26:9; 30:3(4); 34:22(23); 35:3, 12(13), 17; 71:23; 86:13; 89:48(49); 109:31; 116:4; Prov 23:14; Isa 38:17.

⁵ The lexeme רֹחַ is rendered as 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV in Ps 31:5(6) and Eccl 3:21. Although only Ps 31:5(6) is translated with 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV, Eccl 3:21 uses the similar word 魂 (“soul”) in translating the רֹחַ. Thus, both passages should be included in a study of the idea of “soul” as it relates to the Hebrew Bible. See *Mandarin Bible - Chinese Union Version* (Shanghai: American Bible Society, 1920), 105–9.

2. How Do the Chinese Understand the Term 靈魂 (“Soul”)?

The concept of a soul separated from the body after death has long existed in traditional Chinese beliefs. It describes the belief in the existence of another world after death. This belief has deeply influenced the Chinese Christians’ perception of death, most notably through four major impulses: Confucian, Taoism, Buddhist philosophy, and Chinese folk beliefs.

Confucian concepts of the afterlife have varied over time. In this paper we will take the understanding of the afterlife in *The Analects of Confucius* (論語) as representative. First of all, Confucianism does not discuss much what happens after death. The Confucian philosophy focuses on personal cultivation, family ethics, and social responsibility while the human is alive. Confucius (ca. 551–ca. 479 BC), the founding sage of Confucianism, once said: 未知生，焉知死 (“How can one know death without knowing life?”).⁶ In other words, if there is time to discuss or think about the invisible world after death, it is still better to focus on what is alive here and now. Besides, when 季路 (Ji Lu), a student of Confucius, asked him about ghosts and spirits, Confucius replied: 未能事人，焉能事鬼? (“Before we are able to serve the living, how can we think about serving the spirit of death?”).⁷ On another occasion, Confucius announced that 子不語怪、力、亂、神 (“I do not talk any of monstrosities, violence, or gods in any spirituality”).⁸ To this end, Confucianism initially did not have much in-depth discussion on the soul, and it even adopted a non-discursive attitude towards death or the question of life after death. On the contrary, Confucian scholars attached more focus to the human issues of the living still alive.

Taoism, on its side, contains two systems that should be distinguished: Philosophical Taoism (道家) and Religious Taoism (道教). First, 道家 (Philosophical Taoism) was closer to the time of Confucius. It viewed death simply as a natural process. There was the contrast between life and death. 莊子 (Zhuangzi) used to say: 死生，命也；其有夜旦之常，天也 (“Death and life are destinies, just like the alternation of the night and the day; they are a natural phenomenon”).⁹ In the face of the impermanence of life and death,

⁶ De Li Song, *The Analects of Confucius*, ed. Chen Yan Wang and Fei Dai (Beijing: University of International Business and Economics, 2010), 217–18. The translations from Chinese are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁷ Song, *Analects of Confucius*, 217.

⁸ Song, *Analects of Confucius*, 183–84.

⁹ Gu Ying Chen, *Zhuangzi’s Notes and Translations in Today*, Part 1 (Beijing: Chung Hwa,

道家 (Philosophical Taoism) advocates accepting death as normal, and thus to conform to nature. For example, 莊子 (Zhuangzi) also stated: 不知說生，不知惡死...受而喜之，忘而復之 (“Not knowing how to love life, not knowing how to hate death ... accepting all encounters with joy, and restoring the original state of being without any obsession”).¹⁰ In other words, 道家 (Philosophical Taoism) teaches people to obey nature and that if people can get rid of their attachment to life and death, they can live with ease and comfort. Because of this view, 道家 (Philosophical Taoism) does not enter into any further discussion on the spiritual realms.

Second, although 道教 (Religious Taoism) developed from the 道家 (Philosophical Taoism), the doctrine of 道教 (Religious Taoism) is more complex and comprehensive. It combined Taoist philosophy, shamans, qigong, Chinese medicine, and belief in polytheistic worship.¹¹ Unlike 道家 (Philosophical Taoism), 道教 (Religious Taoism) does not readily accept natural death and advocates eternal life and how to become immortal.¹² The essential book for Religious Taoism, the 洞玄靈寶諸天世界造化經 (*Dong Xuan Ling Bao Zhu Tian Shi Jie Zao Hua Jing*), formulates the doctrine of death and the afterlife in Religious Taoism as follows: 又眾生死時，形滅而神移 (“when living beings die, their forms are extinguished and their gods/spirits are moved to somewhere”).¹³ In short, 道教 (Religious Taoism) believes that the human body is destroyed, but the soul is not. This idea also provided the foundation for believing in the soul's suffering after death in later Chinese folk beliefs.

Buddhism influenced beliefs already in ancient China.¹⁴ Buddhism asserts that human life is 非常非断, which means that human death is not the end, but life after death follows.¹⁵ According to Buddhist philosophy, the human form (身體) will eventually perish, in contrast to the human soul (靈魂) which is indestructible. All souls are constantly reincarnated in the “Six classes of beings (六道),” and this cycle of reincarnation is regarded as “Sam-

1983), 195–96.

¹⁰ Chen, *Zhuangzi's Notes and Translations*, 186–87.

¹¹ Bing Chen, “The Taoist Concept of Life and Death and Its Relationship with Buddhism,” *Religious Studies* 4 (1997): 11.

¹² Chen, “Taoist Concept of Life and Death,” 9.

¹³ Chen, “Taoist Concept of Life and Death,” 10–12.

¹⁴ Hui Ming, *Fully Understand the Buddhist Scriptures Once—Read a Piece of Buddhist Scriptures, Less Trouble*, 2nd ed. (Taiwan: Sea Dove, 2021), 34.

¹⁵ Zhan Guo Chen and Yu Qiang, *Beyond Life and Death—The Wisdom of Life and Death in Traditional Chinese Culture*, ed. Si Peng Wang (China: Henan University, 2004), 176–77.

sara (輪迴).¹⁶ After the wicked die, they will descend to hell to be judged, and two kings of hell will judge them: Yamarāja (閻羅王) and Ksitigarbha (地藏王). Yamarāja (閻王 or 閻羅王) is a word transliterated from Sanskrit यमराज. The original meaning is “to bind,” specifically to bind the guilty. Originally, in ancient Hindu mythology, Yamarāja was a god who governed the underworld.¹⁷ Buddhism accepted the doctrine of hell, and the concept of Yamaraja continued to be used as the god of hell.¹⁸ Finally, Yamarāja becomes the king of hell who controls evil souls.¹⁹ Another is Ksitigarbha (地藏王), which is one of the four great Bodhisattvas. He is also known as Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, is again transliterated from the Sanskrit क्षितिगर्भ.²⁰ In Buddhist lore, Ksitigarbha once said: “Until the hells are empty (of suffering souls), I will not become a Buddha” (地獄不空，誓不成佛). Since his vow to release all souls from purgatory in hell, Ksitigarbha is also known as the lord of the underworld.²¹

The formation of modern “Chinese folk beliefs” would not have been possible without the influence of other religions, including the Religious Taoism’s (道教) concept of separating the body and soul, and the Buddhists’ concept of judgment after death. The two Buddhist gods of the underworld, Yamarāja and Ksitigarbha, have slowly evolved into (or infiltrated) Chinese traditional folk beliefs. At the beginning of ancient Chinese culture, there was no concept of a king of hell. It was only after Buddhism came to China that the belief in hell began to gain popularity in China.²² In the first century

¹⁶ The six classes of beings include the way of gods (天道), Asuras (阿修羅), human beings (人道), animals (畜牲道), hungry ghosts (餓鬼道), and hell-beings (地獄道) (Ming, *Fully Understand Buddhist*, 34–37). Other thinks that, the Six Paths of Buddhism are the Three Paths of Brahma, adding another three more, finally formed into the six reincarnations (Tian-Min Gong, *Nine Lectures on Brahmanism and Buddhism* [Taiwan: Taosheng, 2006], 29–30).

¹⁷ The oldest surviving collection of Indian poetry, *The Rig Veda* (梨俱吠陀), already contains a legend about Yamarāja. See Shu Jia Zhou, *Gods of Hong Kong: Origins, Temples and Worship*, ed. Jing Wei Bai, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa, 2022), 120.

¹⁸ Che Xu, *Ghosts of the Underworld* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page, 2020), 109.

¹⁹ There are eight cold hells, eight hot hells and eighteen level hells in the Buddhist Scriptures (Zhou, *Gods of Hong Kong*, 120–21).

²⁰ Xu, *Ghosts of the Underworld*, 2–3. Ksitigarbha is the Buddhist Bodhisattva name. His records are written in the *Daśacakra Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* (地藏十輪經).

²¹ Zhou, *Gods of Hong Kong*, 104–5. See also Xu, *Ghosts Underworld*, 2–3. The Sakyamuni Buddha ordered Ksitigarbha to be the leader of the underworld and manage the underworld.

²² Xu, *Ghosts Underworld*, 109.

AD, around the Han Dynasty (漢朝), Buddhism was introduced to China through the Silk Road. Over the next ten centuries, Buddhist culture eventually developed into a concept of faith with Chinese characteristics, including the concept of the world after death.²³ In other words, the Chinese concept of death is a blend of Buddhist philosophy and traditional culture. Although some Buddhist rituals and philosophies are not widespread, the concept of death remains staple in Chinese folk beliefs. The Chinese believe there is a king of hell who governs all dead souls. Eventually, the king called Yama (閻王) became the folkloric lord of the underworld, commonly known as Yan Wang or Yan Wang Ye, who was in charge of human life, death, and reincarnation.²⁴ The Yama (閻王) is the most widely recognized Chinese folk god and the Chinese people's most familiar god of the underworld.²⁵

In summary, Chinese folk beliefs have undergone a long process of evolution under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, culminating in the formation of the concept of the immortality of the soul and the concept of suffering after death. This is now recognized as traditional folk beliefs by the Chinese people. The 靈魂 ("soul") is understood as leaving the body after death, and goes to the underworld (陰間) to be judged by Yama.²⁶ This makes it easy for Chinese reading 靈魂 ("soul") in the CUV to confuse this with the Chinese folk beliefs about life after death. The following section will explore more about the origin of the Chinese Union Version and the relationship between Chinese theology and translation.

²³ Ming, *Fully Understand Buddhist*, 24–27. In about 60 AD, Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty (漢明帝) sent Jumotan (攝摩騰) and Arista Faran (竺法蘭) to translate the Buddhist Scriptures into Chinese. And the first Chinese Buddhist Sutra, "Forty-two Chapters" (四十二章經), was written in China. See Jing Yin, *Introduction: 2600 Years of Buddhism*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa, 2022), 105–9.

²⁴ Che Xu and Yan Li, *Hundred Buddhas in the Buddha World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page, 2020), 136–37.

²⁵ This concept of the Yama figure then evolved into the "Ten Kings of Hades" (十殿閻王), which created a "Yin Cao Palace" (陰曹地府) in imitation of the ancient judicial system of the human world. This is a complete underworld capture, interrogation, adjudication, judgment, and edification system. See Che Xu and Tai Yun Chen, *Hundred Gods in the Chinese Folk*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page, 2020), 46–49.

²⁶ Xu and Li, *Hundred Buddhas*, 136–37.

3. The Influence of the Chinese Union Version on the Development of the Doctrine of Death in Chinese Theology

3.1 Origin of the Chinese Union Version

There are records in the literature that the Bible was translated into Chinese in the seventh and eighth centuries AD.²⁷ However, since the missionaries in China have independently translated the Bible, there are as many as thirty translations. In 1890, the “European and American Missionary Bible Translation Conference” led by the Bible Society in Shanghai decided to launch a unified translation. Eventually, the Mandarin Union Version (or the Chinese Union Version—CUV) was published in 1919.²⁸ In 1934, the Mandarin Union Version accounted for most Chinese publications of the Bible—more than 90 percent. Although the Union Version has been published for a hundred years, it is still widely used by Chinese Christians. It is the essential translation of the Bible in the history of Chinese Christianity.²⁹

The Chinese Union Version is based on the English Revised Version. If there are any differences, the King James Version will be used as a reference. In addition, the CUV uses the original languages from the Massoretic Text (MT) for the Old Testament and the *Textus Receptus* for the New Testament for the translation.³⁰ The CUV is deeply influenced by the King James Version regarding language translation. The CUV is intended, like the English King James Version, to be a Bible for audiences from different social classes.

²⁷ David Lee, “Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of the Future,” ed. Wen-Chi Guo (Hong Kong: Evangel Press, 2013), 360–61.

²⁸ Cho Yuen Lam, *Faithfulness and Manipulation: A Study of Chinese Translations of the Contemporary Christian Bible* (Hong Kong: Lingnan, 2003), 21–23. The Simplified? Literal New Testament Translation (淺文理) was first published in 1902. The Literal New Testament Translation (深文理) was also published in 1907. Finally, in 1919, the complete translation of the Mandarin Chinese Union Version (官話和合本) was officially published.

²⁹ George K W. Mak, “‘United Version Bible’—The ‘Definitive Version’ of the Chinese World?,” *CSCCRC* 42 (2021): 1–2.

³⁰ Lam, “Faithfulness and Manipulation,” 44–45.

3.2. The Influence of the Chinese Union Version on the Development of the Doctrine of Death in Chinese Theology

The development of biblical theology is inseparable from the translation of the Bible. Dualism (body-soul separation) has been mixed into many Christian theological discussions for centuries. But how does this dualism relate to the biblical text? Part of the answer involves translation issues. Around 250 BC, the Septuagint Bible translated Hebrew anthropological terms into Greek. This translation may include terms for the parts of the human being familiar to the minds of Christians influenced by Greek philosophy. This could have had an impact on the perception of anthropology of LXX readers. An example of this is the Hebrew word נַפְשׁ (*nepeš*), translated as ψυχή (*psuchē*) in the Septuagint, and later translated into English as "soul."³¹ Nancey Murphy explains that the passages supporting dualism which can be found in the Bible, are almost always the outcome of poor translations. The Greek translations are mixed with what Greek philosophers would mean in that era. However, none of the meanings of original Aramaic and Hebrew terms are exactly the same as the Greek. Presently, those faulty doctrines are passed down to Christians with older English Bible translations.³² Seligson also saw the deficiencies of translations and said that even if the modern Bible uses the word "soul," נַפְשׁ is different from the contemporary concept of "soul."³³

Chinese Christian theology is neither immune to such dualistic concepts. An extremely influential theologian in Chinese Christianity of the twentieth century, Watchman Nee (1903–1972), developed his "tripartite anthropology." With this he meant that humans are divided into three components: the flesh, the psychos, and the spiritual. Nee found a basis in the 1 Thess 5:23 saying, "may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless" (ESV).³⁴ Whereas the original word for "soul" in 1 Thess 5:23 is ψυχή (*psuchē*), the CUV translated it as 魂 ("soul"). Besides, the same word 魂 ("soul") was

³¹ Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16–18.

³² Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 37.

³³ Miriam Seligson, *The Meaning of נַפְשׁ in the Old Testament* (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1951), 21–23. Unfortunately, the author does not give any definition of the "modern meaning" of the word "soul."

³⁴ Jason Hing-Kau Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology* (Hong Kong: Tien Dao, 2000), 75.

used by Nee when he literally translated Gen 2:7. He maintained the understanding that נִפְשׁ should be translated as 活的魂 (“the living soul”). We will discuss Gen 2:7 more in the following section. In short, Nee advocated that Chinese Christians should conquer the “body” and “mind” to release the “spirit,” for example in his two important books, *The Spiritual Man* and *The Release of the Spirit*.³⁵ Eventually, the result of his theology made Christians pursue only spiritual things, and his theology aroused the negative attitude of Christians toward the world at that time.³⁶ This theological view of the separation of the body and the soul has also caused much controversy and discussion around the doctrine of the soul among contemporary Chinese theologians.³⁷

As we can see, the translation of CUV has significantly influenced the direction of the development of the Chinese theology of death. Besides, since the concept of the soul after death is found in Chinese folk beliefs, this easily leads to a misunderstanding of the concept of death in the Hebrew Bible when the Chinese Christian reads the term 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV. We should now discuss if the theological understanding of the “soul” in contemporary Chinese theology is representative of the Hebrew Bible? This is an important question I intend to answer in this article. The following section will delve into the original Hebrew words translated as 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV: נִפְשׁ and רִיחַ.

4. The Chinese Translations of נִפְשׁ and רִיחַ

There are two major words, נִפְשׁ and רִיחַ, translated as 靈魂 (“soul”) in the CUV. The term נִפְשׁ is used 756 times in the OT.³⁸ Although the term נִפְשׁ has been translated as 靈魂 (“soul”) several times, it is clearly not the only way it is translated in the CUV. More often, CUV translates נִפְשׁ as “life” (生命/性命/命 e.g., Job 2:4), “living creature” (活物 e.g., Gen 9:10), “heart”

³⁵ Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man Collection* (Taiwan: Taiwan Gospel Bookroom, 1992), 1–5. Furthermore, see more in Hui Er Yu and Johannes Malherbe, “The Semantic Field of the Hebrew Word נִפְשׁ in the OT,” *Conspectus* 27 (2019): 115. The lexeme נִפְשׁ is rendered as 靈魂 (“soul”) 23 times and 靈 (“spirit”) 4 times in the CUV. However, this translation was criticized by Watchman Nee, who believed that the only meaning of נִפְשׁ was “soul.”

³⁶ Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 75.

³⁷ Ken-Pa Chin, “The Theological Anthropology of Watchman Nee: In the Context of Taoist Tradition,” *Sino-Christian Studies* 12 (2011): 160–62.

³⁸ Charles A. Briggs, “The Use of נִפְשׁ in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 16.1/2 (1897): 17.

(心 e.g., Jer 22:27), "person" (人 e.g., Gen 45:25-27). The verbal form נַפֶּשׁ can be translated as: 活著 ("to live," e.g., Ps 49:18), 活潑 ("to be active," e.g., Ps 38:19), 存活 ("to survive," e.g., Ps 34:12), and so on.

The *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* gives a more detailed classification: 1. Concrete meanings (breath and throat/gullet). 2. Desire, including (a) hunger, (b) vengeance, (c) wish, (d) negative aspects, and (e) expressions. 3. Soul, such as (a) desirous, (b) hungry/sated, (c) melancholy/happy, (d) hoping, (e) loving/hating, (f) alive. 4. Life: (a) maintenance, (b) threat. 5. Living being: (a) the person in the laws, (b) in enumerations, (c) general expressions, (d) pronouns. Last, 6. נַפֶּשׁ with death, which is the corpse.³⁹ Thus, נַפֶּשׁ is a complex and multifaceted term. The question is, does נַפֶּשׁ include the meaning of the soul after death? In CUV translation, נַפֶּשׁ only is translated 23 times as '靈魂-soul.'

Table 1: The OT Scriptures were translated from נַפֶּשׁ to 靈魂 (soul) in CUV, along with different versions of the Chinese Bible and the King James Version Bible

Texts (in HB)	HB Term	KJV	CUV	RCUV	Douay	Lyu Jhen Jhong
- Gen 2:7	נַפֶּשׁ לְ	Soul	有靈的 ⁴⁰	有靈/生命	有靈	有生命
1 Gen 35:18	נַפְשָׁהּ	Soul	靈魂	一口氣	斷氣	繼氣
2 1 Kings 17:21	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	生命	靈魂	魂
3 1 Kings 17:22	נַפְשׁוֹ הַיָּלֵד	Soul	靈魂	生命	靈魂	魂
4 Job 33:22	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	性命
5 Job 33:28	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	性命	性命	性命

³⁹ Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann and M. E. Biddle, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:946–47. The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* also agrees that נַפֶּשׁ has various meanings, including: 1. Throat and gullet. 2. Desire. 3. Vital self and reflexive pronoun. 4. Individuated life. 5. Living creature or person. And the last 6. the נַפֶּשׁ of God (G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry and David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9:497–519. Moreover, *TDOT* mentions that נַפֶּשׁ is commonly understood in OT usage, which is why it is necessary to coordinate and understand the meaning of the separate (scriptural) texts individually (*TDOT*, 9:504).

⁴⁰ In the translation of CUV, the נַפֶּשׁ in Gen 2:7 is not translated as 靈魂 ("soul"), but 靈 ("spirit"). However, both translations have the same direction—to separate human beings into two independent elements of body and spirit, thus destroying the "holistic" concept of the human being. This is a crucial text for understanding whether human beings have a soul or not. Thus, in the following I will explore further the meaning of נַפֶּשׁ in Gen 2:7.

6	Job 33:30	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	性命	性命	生命
7	Ps 16:10	נַפְשִׁי	soul	靈魂	靈魂/我	我	我
8	Ps 22:20 (21)	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	我
9	Ps 23:3	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	靈魂/心靈	心靈	精神
10	Ps 26:9	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	性命
11	Ps 30:3 (4)	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	我	我
12	Ps 34:22(23)	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	性命	生命	性命
13	Ps 35:3	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	我	我	我
14	Ps 35:12 (13)	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	我	心靈	我
15	Ps 35:17	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	我	我
16	Ps 49:15	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	命	我靈	性命
17	Pss 71:23	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	性命
18	Pss 86:13	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	性命
19	Pss 89:48 (v49)	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	自己	自己	自己
20	Pss 109:31	נַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	死罪	罪	死罪
21	Pss 116:4	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂	我	性命	性命
22	Prov 23:14	וְנַפְשׁוֹ	Soul	靈魂	性命	靈魂	他
23	Isa 38:17	נַפְשִׁי	Soul	靈魂/生命	性命	生命	性命

Another term that is translated as 靈魂/魂 (“soul”) in CUV is רִיחַ. The word רִיחַ occurs 378 times in OT,⁴¹ plus 11 times in the Aramaic of Daniel.⁴² Different theological dictionaries agree that רִיחַ has multifaceted meanings.⁴³ The majority of translations in CUV are 靈 (“spirit” e.g., Gen 1:2), 風

⁴¹ Charles A. Briggs, “The Use of Ruah in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 19.2 (1900): 132.

⁴² Heinz-Josef Fabry, Helmer Ringgren, G. Johannes Botterweck and David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 13:372.

⁴³ The *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* mentions that the most basic meaning of רִיחַ is “wind” and “breath.” The wind has two dimensions: on the one hand, it is the manifestation of a physical phenomenon, while on the other hand, it is associated with Yahweh, because the origin of the wind is a mysterious and unknown source, which is very similar to the activity of God. In addition, the breath can also be used as a representation of the power that comes with breathing (*TLOT*, 1498–530). Next, the *TDOT* divides רִיחַ into three meanings, including “wind” (natural wind and divine wind), “breath” (one of the elements that make up human beings), and “spirit” referring to the vitality of human existence, spirit mobility, and emotion (*TDOT*, 13:372–401). Felix H. Cortez states that רִיחַ has a wide range of meanings. It may mean breeze,

(“wind” e.g., Gen 3:8), 心 (“heart” e.g., Gen 26:35), 氣息/氣 (“breath/air” e.g., Gen 6:17), 靈性/精神 (“spirituality” e.g., Jud 15:19), and 心靈 (“mind” e.g., Job 10:12). Nevertheless, only twice is the word translated as 靈魂/魂 (“soul”) in the CUV, only in Eccl 3:21 and Ps 31:5(6).

Table 2: The OT Scriptures were translated from רוּחַ to 靈魂 (soul) in CUV, along with different versions of the Chinese Bible and the King James Version Bible

Texts (in HBS)	HBS Term	KJV	CUV	RCUV	Douay	LYU, JHEN JHONG
1 Eccl 3:21	רוּחַ	spirit	獸的魂	獸的魂	氣息	獸的魂
2 Ps 31:5(6)	רוּחִי	spirit	靈魂	靈	靈魂	靈

4.1 The lexeme נִפְשׁ in the Context of the Origin of Life in Gen 2:7

Apparently, rather than looking up the meaning of “soul” in the theological dictionary, a better way to discern whether Scripture teaches that man has a soul separate from the body, is going to Scripture itself. Regarding the origin of human life, a most critical passage is Gen 2:7.⁴⁴ Although Gen 2:7 is not the first time the lexeme נִפְשׁ is used in the OT, it should be acknowledged as a key passage, since it describes the process of how man was created by God.

וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה
וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנִפְשׁ חַיָּה:

wind, breath, feeling, mind, and heart. Regarding humans and animals, רוּחַ is something God gives or removes, causing them to live or die. Last, רוּחַ does not dwell in the body, but only gives it life. Th lexeme רוּחַ does not have an independent life (Felix H. Cortez, “Death and Future Hope in the Hebrew Bible,” in *What Are Human Beings that You Remember Them?*, ed. Clinton Wahlen [Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015], 97). Furthermore, Richard M. Davidson emphasises that when רוּחַ is applied to human nature, it is often used to refer to a complicated and unified “physical-psyhic composition,” with either emphasis on “physical vitality” (best interpreted as “breathing”) or mental vitality (best explained as “spiritual”) (Richard M. Davidson, “The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1–11,” in *What Are Human Beings that You Remember Them?*, ed. Clinton Wahlen (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 24).

⁴⁴ Richard Pleijel, “To Be or to Have a Nephesh?,” *BZAW* 131.2 (2019): 195–96.

And the Lord God formed the Adam from the dust of earth,
 And he blew in his nose the breath of life (חַיִּים).
 And the man became a living being (נִפְּשׁוּת חַיִּים).⁴⁵

One pattern we notice is that the three verbs in v. 7 all begin the three clauses, and indicate a sequence of actions. In the first clause and action, God made the human physical body, וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם (‘‘and the Lord God formed the Adam’’). The human body was formed materials from the dust of the earth. Next, the second clause and action describe how God breathed the breath of life (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים) into human noses. Thus, the human beings has two components, the physical body with material form and the breath of life with non-material form. The third clause and action is a declaration, a statement about the אָדָם (hā-`ādām) human being. The statement begins with וַיְהִי (wayyāhî), a standard narrative construct to declare an occurrence of something.⁴⁶ The third clause is a summary of the human being, which is נִפְּשׁוּת חַיִּים (nepeš hayāh), having the form (the first clause) plus the breath (the second clause). From this point of view, the process of the creation of the human in the Bible does not mention or support any non-material existence of a ‘‘soul.’’ On the contrary, נִפְּשׁוּת is composed of the physical body and the breath of life together as a whole of human being. Similarly, Hans Walter Wolff emphasizes in his classic book *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, that ‘‘man does not have נִפְּשׁוּת, he is נִפְּשׁוּת, he lives as נִפְּשׁוּת.’’⁴⁷ This life equation of A plus B equals C can also be seen by other scholars.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The translation is my own.

⁴⁶ Matthew H Patton and Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Basics of Hebrew Discourse: A Guide to Working with Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 71–73.

⁴⁷ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropologie Des Alten Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 10.

⁴⁸ Hui Er Yu cites Ellis R. Brotzman, mentioning that the ‘‘dust from the ground’’ as the material, plus ‘‘the breath from God’’ as the immaterial, equals Adam (man) as a ‘‘living נִפְּשׁוּת.’’ In other words, Adam is essentially נִפְּשׁוּת, a person, an individual (Hui Er Yu, ‘‘Putting ‘Whole Man’ into the Old Testament: Psalms as an Example of Rethinking נִפְּשׁוּת Translation,’’ *Jian Dao* 56 [2021]: 74). See also Yu and Malherbe, ‘‘Semantic Field,’’ 119–20. Davidson agrees that the dust of the ground—the physical material—plus the breath of life—the divine life principle, equals חַיִּים נִפְּשׁוּת (the living being) according to Gen 2:7 in Davidson, ‘‘Nature of the Human Being,’’ 24. According to Cortez, the נִפְּשׁוּת is equivalent to the end result of the integration of the breath of God with the dust of the ground (Cortez, ‘‘Death and Future Hope,’’ 98). Moreover, Wolff puts more emphasis on the breath of life that God has given to human beings. Although man is indeed defined as נִפְּשׁוּת in Gen 2:7, the man was not simply created from the dust of

The lexeme נפש is the whole human being, and can also represent everything pertaining to a human being. The lexeme נפש often refers to a person in legal texts or in lists of people groups (both male or female), such as Lev 17:10. In Lev 23:30 it refers to the person, and in Exod 12:4 and Jer 52:29 to a people group.⁴⁹ Leviticus 17:10 states:

וְנִתַּתִּי פָנַי בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאֹכֵלֶת אֶת־הַדָּם
וְהִכַרְתִּי אֹתָהּ מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּהּ:

I will set my face against that person who eats blood
and will cut him off from among his people (ESV).

Thus, the נפש is the one who is eating blood, and it can be either איש נפש (ʾiš wəʾiš) in Lev 17:10,13, this phrase refers to “any man” (NET) in Israel or any other person. Another example is found in Jeremiah 52:29, when the eight hundred thirty-two נפשות (“individuals”) are captured from Jerusalem. Wolff calls this a “collective use of נפש,” and more examples are shown in the offspring numbers in Gen 46:15–25; there are 33 נפש of Leah, 16 נפש of Zilpah, 14 נפש of Rachel and 7 נפש of Bilhah.⁵⁰ It can be seen that נפש is not only a part of a person, it also represents the entire life of a person. The Bible may use this word to refer to a singular individual (Lev 17:10; 23:30), a plural person (Exod 12:4), or the representative of the entire collective (Jer 52:29).⁵¹ On the other hand, נפש can also represent some inner part of humans. The lexeme נפש can refer to human organs, such as the throat and neck, the breathing, life, living being, and the desire of humans.⁵²

Unlike other dualistic cultures, the Hebrew Bible consistently believes that the human is a complete individual, a נפש. As Davidson mentions, the entire Hebrew Bible paints a holistic picture of human beings. After the rise of the biblical theology movement around the 1950s, there is no room for seeing the platonic dichotomy of body and soul, or dualism, in the Hebrew

the ground. Only the breath produced by the Creator made him a living נפש, a living being, a living person, and a living individual (Wolff, *Anthropologie Des Alten Testaments*, 21–22).

⁴⁹ Yu and Malherbe, “Semantic Field,” 119–20.

⁵⁰ Wolff, *Anthropologie Des Alten Testaments*, 21–22.

⁵¹ Yu and Malherbe, “Semantic Field,” 119–20.

⁵² Cortez, “Death and Future Hope,” 98. Moreover, Yeung extended the understanding of desire even more, stating that נפש can also convey various movements of emotion, will and thought, such as sorrow (Gen 42:21), panic (Ps 6:3), and even hunger (Num 11:6), and religious thirst, cf. Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 77–78.

Bible.⁵³ The understanding among the Hebrews was a kind of anthropological wholism, “the human is a psychosomatic whole” — and modern biblical scholars almost universally admit this.⁵⁴

Last, I will borrow Gerhard von Rad’s embellishments as a conclusion. If someone wants to distinguish different components in the human, the only thing that can be differentiated is the natural body from life, not the body from the soul. The marriage of the divine breath with the physical body makes humans a “living soul,” whether from the physical or psychological association.⁵⁵ Clearly, the human is body and breath of life together, and there is no other immortal entity, like the “soul,” separate from these.

4.2 The Lexeme נַפְשׁ in the Context of Death

Generally, Christians believe that the existence of the disembodiment of the “soul” does not happen when one is alive, but when a person dies and is separated from the shackles of the body. Then the “soul” can allegedly leave free. Although in the previous section, we clearly saw that נַפְשׁ represents a complete human being, not an element of a human being, this does not solve all questions of “whether a human being has a soul.”⁵⁶ In short, even if the human was created as one, some believe it is still possible that the body and soul are separated at death.⁵⁷

⁵³ Davidson, “Nature of the Human Being,” 24–25.

⁵⁴ Davidson, “Nature of the Human Being,” 30. See more discussions on dualism in Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 77–78. Yu and Malherbe agree and quote Owen’s note on the dualism of separating body-soul, that the word “soul” scarcely means anything.

⁵⁵ Davidson, “Nature of the Human Being,” 25.

⁵⁶ Some scholars believe that the human being is not composed of a whole, but rather of two or three elements, one of which is the soul. This gave rise to the later doctrine of the separation of the soul from the body. For example, the Chinese theologian, Nee mentioned in his book *The Spiritual Man* that the soul is released after death (Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 75). See Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man Collection*, 1–5.

⁵⁷ Pleijel challenges the possible meanings of נַפְשׁ. He cites a 2008 archaeological study of inscriptions found on the Katumuwa stele in Zincirli of Turkey. This stele was dedicated to a royal official named Katumuwa during an Aramaic funeral (probably from the 8th century BC). In this inscription is written about the “נַבְשׁ of Katumuwa” (a different spelling of the ancient Hebrew נַפְשׁ). In the inscription, the stele said that the “נַבְשׁ of Katumuwa” had the ability to eat and drink. Pleijel catches this as a clear example, expressed in an Aramaic funeral setting, that while נַבְשׁ (or נַפְשׁ) abandons the

Similar arguments exist based on the CUV translation of “soul” in Gen 35:18, the first translation in CUV of נִפְשׁ as 靈魂 (“soul”). Here it is said that Rachel’s 靈魂 (“soul”) left and she died immediately. The CUV is 他將近於死, 靈魂要走的時候 (literal translation: “She is about to die and her soul is leaving translation”). This text describes the moment of death. Two things are said to happen simultaneously: the departure of the 靈魂 (“soul”), and the passing away at death. Further, the second and third occurrences of נִפְשׁ translated as 靈魂 (“soul”) is found twice in 1 Kgs 17:21–22. This passage states that when the 靈魂 (“soul”) entered again into the child’s body, then “he will live” (1 Kgs 17:22). It seems like the CUV supports the above theory about the separation of the “soul” and the “body” by its translation, and it relates this separation to the time death.

Table 3: The action terms of the Hebrew texts of Gen 25:18 and 1 Kgs 17:21-22

Texts	Clause of נִפְשׁ	Action with נִפְשׁ	Stem	Outcome
Gen 35:18	And it came to pass, as her soul (נִפְשׁ) was in departing (KJV)	וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נִפְשָׁהּ יָצָא	Qal, Inf C	כָּמַתָּה (“as death”)
1 Kgs 17:21	I pray thee, let this child’s soul (נִפְשׁ) come into him again (KJV)	וְתָשֻׁב נַאֲ נִפְשׁ־הַיָּלֵד הַזֶּה עֲלֵי־קִרְבּוֹ שׁוּב	Qal, Imp	
1 Kgs 17:22	and the soul (נִפְשׁ) of the child came into him again, and he revived (KJV)	וְתָשֻׁב נַאֲ נִפְשׁ־הַיָּלֵד עֲלֵי־קִרְבּוֹ וַיְחִי	Qal, Way-yiqtol	וַיְחִי (“live”)

Beyond the Chinese translation, these three verses are also often cited in discussing the theological issues related to the existence of the soul.⁵⁸ Some

physical body or person, this would be a “defunct-soul” (Pleijel, “Have a Nephesh?,” 202–5). The author also quotes Matthew J. Suriano, claiming that נִפְשׁ is a term for the late king, thus, this stele seems to be a piece of evidence challenging the holistic interpretation of נִפְשׁ in the Hebrew Bible.

⁵⁸ As Cortez mentions, in can be argued that it is not the “breath” that leaves but the “soul” (Cortez, “Death and Future Hope,” 97). Discussing 1 Kgs 17:21–22 and Gen

read נִפְשׁ in these passages as supporting dualism. However, this interpretation of נִפְשׁ as “soul” lacks the support of how other Scripture passages used נִפְשׁ.

There are better ways of understanding the lexeme נִפְשׁ, than as an bodiless and independent “soul.” The lexeme נִפְשׁ in Gen 35 and 1 Kgs 17 can be read in at least to alternative ways. One possibility is that נִפְשׁ can be understood as “life.” In a general sense, the existence or non-existence of life determines death, and the loss of life means the imminence of death. As Briggs points out, the most direct fact is that without the נִפְשׁ there is no more a living person, until life may be restored.⁵⁹ If נִפְשׁ is to be translated as “soul,” Schuele categorically retorted, “the idea of an immortal *soul*, however, is entirely absent from the Hebrew transmission of OT.”⁶⁰ He refers to some passages in the Pentateuch using נִפְשׁ, pointing out that נִפְשׁ often refers to the physical body. One example is the purity of a Nazirite who is not allowed to approach the “dead נִפְשׁ,” the dead body in Num 6:6 (cf. Lev 21:11). Touch is forbidden, and even getting close is not allowed, since it may cause Nazirites to become unclean. Additional background information is provided on how dead bodies create uncleanness in Num 19:14–15. Simply put, the translation of נִפְשׁ as “dead soul” is not found in any translation; instead, the word is usually merely translated as dead person or corpse. Back to the definition of death, death is the opposite of life. If the “dead נִפְשׁ” is translated as dead soul, which continues to survive in the afterlife disguised, there is no death. Schuele also clarifies the difference between life and death; נִפְשׁ is considered the life of every creature because all life is connected with God and can “participate in life itself.” Conversely, when the living being is disconnected from the “fountain of life” (Ps 36:10), when one is cut off from God, that is tantamount to “dying and being dead.”⁶¹ Finally, Gane points out that the phrases נִפְשׁ חַיָּה (*nefeš hayāh*) or

35:18, Ernest D. Burton concluded that נִפְשׁ as a living being (Ernest D. Burton, “Spirit, Soul, and Flesh: Ii. נִפְשׁ, תוֹד, and נִפְשׁ in the Old Testament,” *AmJT* 18.1 [1914]: 68–69). Moreover, Pleijel follows Richard Steiner’s definition of נִפְשׁ, which is “an entity that can be located in space.” He finds the preposition על used in 1 Kgs 17:22 as critical, regardless of whether על should be translated as “upon” or “(in)to,” the preposition indicates that נִפְשׁ is “one object entering another object.” According to Pleijel this supports seeing נִפְשׁ as separate from the child itself (Pleijel, “Have a Nephesh?,” 201–2).

⁵⁹ Briggs, “The Use of Nefesh,” 18.

⁶⁰ Andreas Schuele, “The Notion of Life: נִפְשׁ and רוח in the Anthropological Discourse of the Primeval History,” *HBAI* 1.4 (2012): 486.

⁶¹ Schuele, “The Notion of Life,” 486.

נֶפֶשׁ מֵת (*nefesh mēt*) indicate the aliveness or dead state of a creature, human or animal. When a creature is alive, it has the ability to move around and survive (cf. Gen 7:21; Lev 11:46). However, when a living being dies, it loses the locomotion ability (cf. Lev 21:11; Num 6:6). Thus, the most appropriate understanding of מֵת נֶפֶשׁ is a "corpse," not a "dead soul."⁶² In other words, although נֶפֶשׁ is often translated as "soul," it is clear that the "dead נֶפֶשׁ" in the Bible is just an unconscious corpse. This does not offer any support to doctrine of dead souls. In short, when death occurs, the person loses his life, and only the unconscious body (corpse) remains. The same principle can be applied to the other passages mention. In Gen 35:18, "Rachel's נֶפֶשׁ leaving" simply means her "life" ceased. Also, the וַתָּשָׁב נֶפֶשׁ הַיֶּלֶד in 1 Kgs 17:22 can literally be read as the "child's life returned."

As discussed above, the equation of life with נֶפֶשׁ is clearly seen in Gen 2:7. The breath of God added to the formed dust of the ground constitutes a "living נֶפֶשׁ" (living human). Naturally, when the breath of God is subtracted from the living being, life will not exist and the creature will be lifeless—dead. From this point of view, the breath of God, נְשֵׁמַת (*nišamat*), and the living being, נֶפֶשׁ, are inextricably linked.⁶³ Yeung says that when the נְשֵׁמַת ("breath") stops, נֶפֶשׁ ("life") naturally ends. Thus, the action of the נֶפֶשׁ is the activity of the whole life.⁶⁴ Again, נֶפֶשׁ is a "composite entity," and when life disappears, only a corpse is left. Likewise, when the breath leaves Rachel in Gen 35:18, she is no longer נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, a living being. And when God returns the breath to the child in 1 Kgs 17:21–22, the child becomes a נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, living being, again.⁶⁵ Yu and Malherbe follow Brotzman's summary and linking of these three verses, stating that "death is described as the *going out of the breath* while the restoration of life is described as the *returning of the breath*." It is an unequivocal declaration in the Bible, that the breath animates the body, and the absence of the breath brings death.⁶⁶

In conclusion, נֶפֶשׁ is not a "soul" that continues to life independently after death. Only the unconscious body remains when the life or breath is gone, and the lack of life or breath means death. Moreover, נֶפֶשׁ מֵת has nothing to do with the "soul" after death, but simply refers to a lifeless

⁶² Roy Gane, "The Nature of the Human Being in Leviticus," in *What Are Human Beings that You Remember Them?*, ed. Clinton Wahlen (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 45–46.

⁶³ Yu and Malherbe, "Semantic Field," 118–20.

⁶⁴ Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 77–78.

⁶⁵ Cf. Cortez, "Death and Future Hope," 98.

⁶⁶ Yu and Malherbe, "Semantic Field," 118.

corpse (cf. Lev 21:11; Num 6:6). Lastly, I agree with Cortez’s summary of death as a deterioration of creation and the life process, and at a point in time the deterioration results in death. He epitomizes that the best explanation for death is the reversal of the description of God’s creation of human beings. God combined dust and breath to create living beings in creation. Thus, the Scriptures describe death as the disintegration process of human beings: the life of breath leaves, humans die, and their bodies return to the dust of the earth.⁶⁷

4.3 The Lexeme נַפֶּשׁ and the Place of Death

From our discussion above, it has become clear that נַפֶּשׁ is a proxy for “life” and “breath” in the narratives of the Pentateuch and 1 Kings, and not related to the idea of an existing “soul” without the body. In the poetry of the Hebrew Bible the נַפֶּשׁ is associated with the pit and Sheol, which makes it easy for readers to understand this as relating נַפֶּשׁ to the afterlife in the biblical records.⁶⁸ For this reason, the following will focus on the use and meaning of נַפֶּשׁ in the poetry of the Hebrew Bible. Since the texts using נַפֶּשׁ in the Psalms and Job are numerous, this article will mainly focus on the passages where CUV translates נַפֶּשׁ as 靈魂 (“soul”).

4.3.1 The Lexeme נַפֶּשׁ in the Context of the Pit

The use of the lexeme תַּהַם, the “deep pit,” in the Hebrew Bible can be divided into two broad categories. One is a physical pit, which may be naturally formed or manufactured. The latter are pits dug into the ground, sometimes modified with slate or clay (e.g., Exod 21:33). Physical holes were used to collect and store water and other substances, even used as graves. The other is the spiritual pit, considered a source of danger in ancient periods because it was deep and filled with the unknown. This pit is used symbolically to describe the doom that awaits those who turn to evil. Furthermore,

⁶⁷ Cortez, “Death and Future Hope,” 96–97.

⁶⁸ Pleijel explains that נַפֶּשׁ is something that exists in a certain space or place, so after a person passes away, נַפֶּשׁ cannot still exist in the human body, but instead leaves and goes to another site. Psalm 49:16 states: “God will ransom my נַפֶּשׁ from the hand (power) of Sheol.” Ps 116 and Job 12 speaks of נַפֶּשׁ in a similar vein. See Pleijel, “Have a Nephesh?,” 202–3. Pleijel cites the research of Steiner, who refers to several rabbinic sources, and points out that the passages in Job and Psalms can be understood similar to a sleeping man’s soul, which is deposited in the hands of God in heaven until it reawakens.

the pit is also synonymous with "Sheol," שְׂאוֹל, a place representing the domain of the dead (Prov 1:12; Ps 16:1). In Rev 9:1–11 and 11:7 it is described as the source of the destruction of the earth and the seat of demons.⁶⁹

In the book of Job, CUV translates נֶפֶשׁ as 靈魂 ("soul") in three main passages: Job 33:22, 28, 30. These three texts have a common feature, that is, they all connect נֶפֶשׁ and שַׁחַת. The "pit" in Job is an spiritual pit, but also a metaphor, associating the pit with Sheol, which is death. In fact, the second clauses in Job 33:22 also have a corresponding extension, and the last word לְמַמְתִּים (*lamamitīm*) as *hiphil* participle, functions as the noun "Death." We see a balanced structure in this text:

וּתְקַרְבּוּ
 a לְשַׁחַת
 b נֶפֶשׁוֹ
 b² וְחַיָּתוֹ
 a² לְמַמְתִּים

As we mentioned, the word שַׁחַת ("pit") is used in a similar way as מוֹת ("to dies"). In this verse the two words are parallel in a and a², both in construct with the preposition לְ. Further, in b and b² the words נֶפֶשׁוֹ ("his soul") and וְחַיָּתוֹ ("and his life") are used in a similar construction (prepositin + noun).⁷⁰ In other words, when נֶפֶשׁ is associated to the deep pit, this means that "life" is no more. Thus, the most immediate meaning of his נֶפֶשׁ is his 'life' in Job 33:22.

If "near the pit" points to death, in the same sense, far from the pit means far from death. The only verb in Job 33:22 is וּתְקַרְבּוּ ("and they draw near"). In Job 33:30 we find the opposite direction of movement, i.e., away from the pit: מְנִי־שַׁחַת נֶפֶשׁוֹ לְהָשִׁיב ("to bring his soul back from the pit"). The meaning of the root word שׁוּב is "turn back, and return" to a place.⁷¹ And here

⁶⁹ The pit is used symbolically to describe the destruction awaiting those who are wicked: those who plot evil will fall into their own "pit" (Ps 7:15[16]; Prov 26:27). Those who sin will fall into the pit created by God's judgment (Isa 24:17–18). See David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1061.

⁷⁰ Although it is not clear that Job 33:22 refers to Gen 2:7, it is worth noting the parallel between נֶפֶשׁוֹ and חַיָּתוֹ in Job 33:22 and לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה in Gen 2:7.

⁷¹ The word שׁוּב as infinitive construct always point to a place, such as Exod 4:21 referring to a return to Egypt (Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 996.

his נִפְשׁ returns מְנִי־שְׁחַת (“from the pit”). It results in regaining the light of life, בְּאֹרֶת הַחַיִּים (“the light of life”). The word “light” can have different meanings in the Hebrew Bible. And Jamieson, Fausset and Brown suggest that it has to do with life, as in Job 3:16, 20; Ps 56:13, and Eccl 11:7.⁷² The חַיִּים that follows indicates the same element of life as the breath of life used in Gen 2:7. In other words, when נִפְשׁ stays out of the pit, that person continues to have a life. The last verse, Job 33:28, reads, “He has redeemed my נִפְשׁ from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light” (ESV). Verses 28 and 30 both express the significance of the rescue from שְׁחַת. Verse 28 uses פָּדָה (“to ransom, rescue”), and verse 30 uses לְהָשִׁיב (“returning or bringing one back”) to describe this rescue. Other texts use הִגְוִיֵּל (“to redeem,” Ps 103:4) and וַתַּעַל (“to go up, bring up,” Jonah 2:7) to express similar ideas. Although the above passages use different verbs, those verbs can all express the same meaning of being rescued from the pit. We can see this pattern of “characteristics and associations form an analogous imagery of the grave.”⁷³

Table 4: The lexeme נִפְשׁ in Job 33:22, 28, 30 translated as 靈魂 (“soul”) in CUV

Texts	CUV translation	The נִפְשׁ	Action with pit	Result (ESV)
Job 33:22	他的靈魂	נִפְשׁוֹ	וַתִּקְרַב לְשְׁחַת	who brings death.
Job 33:28	我的靈魂	נַפְשִׁי	מֵעֵבֶר בְּשְׁחַת	my life shall look upon the light.
Job 33:30	人的靈魂	נִפְשׁוֹ	לְהָשִׁיב מְנִי־שְׁחַת	be lighted with the light of life.

In short, the “pit” is just a metaphorical way of speaking about a place of death. When נִפְשׁ is dead or alive that determine whether one is in the Pit or not. However, there is no indication in these passages that נִפְשׁ as a bodiless “soul” survive in the death zone (pit). Therefore, נִפְשׁ is still connected with life in the book of Job.⁷⁴

⁷² Robert Jamieson, Andrew Robert Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Washington, DC: Faithlife, 1997), 337.

⁷³ Eriks Galenieks, *The Nature, Function, and Purpose of the Term Sheol in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), 586.

⁷⁴ Briggs, “The Use of Nefesh,” 18. It is worth noting that none of the other occurrences of נִפְשׁ in Job are translated in CUV as 靈魂 (“soul”), but instead are translated as 生命 (“life”) or 心 (“heart”).

4.3.2 The Lexeme נַפֶּשׁ in the Context of Sheol

The pit is not the only metaphor used for death in the Hebrew Bible. The term שְׁאוֹל, Sheol, is used for the same purposes. Similar to the case of שְׁחַת, the “deep pit,” the psalmist often connects “his נַפֶּשׁ” with Sheol. One example is found in Ps 30:3(4):

יְהוָה
 a הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאוֹל
 b נַפְשִׁי
 a² חִייתָנִי מִיֹּרְדֵי־בֹר

In the first clause, “you have brought my נַפֶּשׁ up from Sheol,” the phrase מִן־שְׁאוֹל (*min-šə’ôl*) is highlighted by the word order; the author moves this phrase before the נַפְשִׁי (*napəšî*). Not only that, these two clauses build a neatly parallel structure. The two main verbs הֶעֱלִיתָ (*he’elita*) and חִייתָנִי (*hyîtanî*), are both in qatal 2ms. The complement phrase מִן־שְׁאוֹל explains that the action is from the place of Sheol, which corresponds to מִיֹּרְדֵי־בֹר (*mîyôrafi-bôr*) in the second clause.⁷⁵ The בֹּר (*bôr*) can also be translated as the pit, occasionally used for graves or the “realm of the dead.”⁷⁶ Besides, Galeniëks collected relevant Scripture passages regarding the function of ירד (*yarad*). Similar formulas are seen in other OT texts, such as יֹרְדֵי־בֹר in Isa 38:18 (“those who go down to the pit”), מְרַדֵּת שְׁחַת in Job 33:24 (“going down to the pit”), כָּל־יֹרְדֵי עָפָר in Ps 22:30 (“all go down to the dust”), יִרְדְּתִי in Jonah 2:7 (“I descended to the land”), כָּל־יֹרְדֵי דוּמָה in Ps 115:17 (“they that go down in silence”), and יִרְדוּ/יֹרְדֵי שְׁאוֹל in Job 7:9 and Ps 55:16 (“he who goes/they go down to Sheol”).⁷⁷ In other words, ירד (*yarad*) is not just an expression of action or direction. The lexeme ירד in these phrases creates a new meaning representing death. Terms like בֹּר, שְׁחַת, and שְׁאוֹל are used to refer to death (e.g., Prov 1:12, Job 14:13).⁷⁸

Another verse related to נַפֶּשׁ and שְׁאוֹל is Ps 86:13, וְהִצַּלְתָּ נַפְשִׁי מִשְׁאוֹל וְתַחְתֵּיהָ (“you have delivered my נַפֶּשׁ from the depths of Sheol”). Similar to

⁷⁵ The מִיֹּרְדֵי־ is infinitive construct and function as a noun within the construct chain. Thus, the phrase מִיֹּרְדֵי־בֹר can be translated as “from among those descending to the Pit.”

⁷⁶ *The NET Bible, First Edition: A New Approach to Translation, Thoroughly Documented with 60,932 Notes by the Translators and Editors* (Ricardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 939 (see Ps 30:3–17).

⁷⁷ Galeniëks, *Nature, Function, and Purpose of Sheol*, 584.

⁷⁸ Galeniëks, *Nature, Function, and Purpose of Sheol*, 584–85.

Psalm 30 and Job 33, it begins with the divine action *וְהִצִּילָתָּ* (*wəhīsalatā*), carrying the poet’s *נַפְשׁ* out of *שְׂאוֹל*. The only difference is that, compared with Ps 30, Ps 86 elaborates with the adjective *תַּחְתִּי* (“depths”). The term *תַּחְתִּי* is only used 19 times in the OT, and most of them are linked with Sheol, pit, and the earth. Table 5 gives an overview of these.

Table 5: The nouns associate with the Hebrew verb *תַּחְתִּי* (*tahṭî*) in the OT phrases

Texts	Phrase of <i>תַּחְתִּי</i>	The term with <i>תַּחְתִּי</i>	Verb
Deut 32:22	עַד־שְׂאוֹל תַּחְתִּית	שְׂאוֹל	וַתִּיקַד
Isa 44:23	תַּחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרֶץ	אֲרֶץ	הִרְיֵעוּ
Ezek 26:20	בְּאֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	אֲרֶץ	וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּיד
Ezek 31:14	אֶל־אֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּית	אֲרֶץ	נָתַנוּ לַמָּוֹת
Ezek 31:16	בְּאֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּית	אֲרֶץ	וַיִּנְחֲמוּ
Ezek 31:18	אֶל־אֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּית	אֲרֶץ	וְהוֹרְדָתָּ
Ezek 32:18	אֶל־אֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	אֲרֶץ	None
Ezek 32:24	אֶל־אֲרֶץ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	אֲרֶץ	יָרְדוּ
Ps 63:10	בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת הָאָרֶץ	אֲרֶץ	יָבֵאוּ
Ps 86:13	מִשְׂאוֹל תַּחְתִּיָּהּ	שְׂאוֹל	וְהִצִּילָתָּ
Ps 88:7	בְּבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	בוֹר	שִׁתְּנִי
Ps 139:15	בְּתַחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרֶץ	אֲרֶץ	רָקַמְתִּי
Lam 3:55	מְבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת	בוֹר	קָרַאתִי

Except for the terms *בוֹר* (Ps 88:7; Lam 3:55) and *שְׂאוֹל* (Deut 32:22; Ps 86:13), which are used twice each in association with *תַּחְתִּי*, the most common term related to *תַּחְתִּי* is *אֲרֶץ* (“earth”). As Galeniëks points out, in these passages *בוֹר*, *שְׂאוֹל*, and *אֲרֶץ* refers to the same location, the grave, through the same modifier *תַּחְתִּי* (“lower” or “below”).⁷⁹ In the rest of biblical poetry “the term Sheol functions as a poetic synonym of the grave.”⁸⁰

Table 6: The OT passages where CUV translated *נַפְשׁ* when associated with Sheol as 靈魂 (“soul”)

Texts	Hebrew translation	ESV translation
Ps 16:10	כִּי לֹא־תַעֲזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשְׂאוֹל	For you will not abandon my <i>נַפְשׁ</i> to <i>שְׂאוֹל</i> (“the grave”).
Ps 49:16	נַפְשִׁי יִפְדֶּה אֱדֹנָיִם מִיַּד־שְׂאוֹל	But God will ransom my <i>נַפְשׁ</i> from the power of <i>שְׂאוֹל</i> (“the grave”).
Ps 89:49	מִיַּד־שְׂאוֹל נַפְשׁוֹ יַמְלֹט	Who can deliver his <i>נַפְשׁ</i> from the power of <i>שְׂאוֹל</i>

⁷⁹ Galeniëks, *Nature, Function, and Purpose of Sheol*, 584.

⁸⁰ Galeniëks, *Nature, Function, and Purpose of Sheol*, 582.

	סֵלָה: ("the grave")? ⁸¹	
Ps 88:4	נַפְשִׁי בְּרַעוּת כִּי־שָׁבַעָה	For my נַפֶּשׁ is full of troubles,
	הִגִּיעוּ: לְשֵׂאוֹל וְחַיִּי	and my life draws near to שֵׂאוֹל ("the grave").
Prov 23:14	תִּצִּיל מִשֵּׂאוֹל וְנַפְשׁוֹ	You will save his נַפֶּשׁ from שֵׂאוֹל ("the grave").

What the psalmist often attempts is not to describe a scene of a "soul" in hell after death, but rather to explain "the hope to leave death" or "encountering the dilemma of death." Typically when the psalmist uses the lexeme נַפֶּשׁ it can best be understood as "life" or the psalmist himself, not the "soul." Sometimes the psalmist poetically describe themselves as already in שֵׂאוֹל, and sometimes as saved by God from שֵׂאוֹל. And sometimes the location of the speaker is not clear, nor what event brought him in the situation.⁸² Cortez concludes that although we cannot be sure about the precise location of the psalmist, it is clear that he can still call on God for help, and is still alive, having thoughts and ability to compose poems.⁸³ Therefore, these so-called experiences in the afterlife are just expressions of literary creativity, and not actual events.

4.4 The Lexeme נַפֶּשׁ in the Context of Salvation

In the previous section, I argued that the psalmist used the metaphor of the underworld or death to express his plight and hope to be rescued by God. Sometimes, however, the poet focused even more on the need and desire for salvation. One example is Ps 22:20(21): "Deliver my נַפֶּשׁ from the sword, my life from the hand of the dog." The structure of the verse can be illustrated as follows:

הִצִּילָה
 a מְחַרֵּב נַפְשִׁי
 a² מִיַּד־כְּלָב יְחִידָתִי

Again, we see a clear, balanced, and parallel structure. The verse begins with a vital verb, נָצַל ("to deliver" or "to escape"). The following two phrases parallel each other as shown. The first set of parallels is between

⁸¹ Cf. Cortez, "Death and Future Hope," 104. Psalm 49 is concerned with the suitability of the underworld as the ultimate destiny of those who believe in God.

⁸² Cortez, "Death and Future Hope," 103. An example of an analogous modern idiom is "it was sheer hell." The speaker does not claim to have been in hell, but draws from this image to create a forceful expression.

⁸³ Cortez, "Death and Future Hope," 102–3.

מְחַרֵּב (*mēhereb*) and מִיַּד-כֶּלֶב (*miyad-keleb*). Both tell of the poet’s plight, perhaps war and enemies, but we do not know the exact circumstances. In the second set of parallels, נַפְשִׁי (*nepāšî*) corresponds to the poet’s life, יְהִידָתִי (*yəhîdatî*).⁸⁴ Thus, through this parallel structure, the interpretation of נַפְשִׁי is not a “soul” but his “precious life” (ESV, NET).

Another similar pattern is found in Ps 35:17. The structure can be seen as follows:

הַשִּׁיבָה
 a נַפְשִׁי
 b מְשֹׁאֵיהֶם
 b² מִכְּפִירִים
 a² יְהִידָתִי

This verse begins with the imperative word הַשִּׁיבָה (*hašîbah*), meaning “to rescue.” The parallel structure again forms two sets of phrases. Both מְשֹׁאֵיהֶם (*mišo’êhem*) and מִכְּפִירִים (*mikəfirîm*) use the preposition מִן (*min*) to indicate a place where the poet needs to escape from. The two subjects, נַפְשִׁי and יְהִידָתִי (*yəhîdatî*), are balanced against each other. Again, נַפְשִׁי in this verse does not indicate any bodiless “soul,” but is given as synonymous with the life of the poet. While CUV translates נַפְשִׁי in Pss 22:20 and 35:17 as 靈魂 (“soul”), the parallel structure in the Hebrew texts shows that נַפְשִׁי should rather be understood as the “life” of the poet himself. Analogous records are also found in other scriptures, as illustrated in table 7.

Table 7: Passages in the Psalms related to salvation where CUV translated נַפְשִׁי with 靈魂 (“soul”)

Texts	Clauses of נַפְשִׁי	CUV translation	NET
Ps 34:23	נַפְשִׁי יְהוָה פּוֹדֶה עַבְדָּיו	靈魂 (“soul”)	his servants
Ps 35:3	יִשְׁעֲתֶךָ לְנַפְשִׁי אֱמֹ אֲנִי:	靈魂 (“soul”)	me
Ps 109:31	מִשְׁפָּטִי לְהוֹשִׁיעַ נַפְשִׁי	靈魂 (“soul”)	lives
Ps 116:4	אָנָּה יְהוָה מִלְּטָה נַפְשִׁי	靈魂 (“soul”)	me

⁸⁴ The lexeme יְחִיד only appears 12 times in the Old Testament, and the basic meaning is “only” and “only one.” In poetry יְחִידָה can be understood as “my only one,” which BDB believes represents the poet’s only life. See Pss 22:21; 35:17 (BDB, 402).

Most Bible translations render *נַפְשׁ* here as "life", not "soul" (e.g., NET, RSV, NASB and JPS). Likewise, other Chinese translations support rendering *נַפְשׁ* as 人的生命 ("human life") or 整全的人 ("wholistic person"), but not 靈魂 ("soul").⁸⁵ Therefore, how *נַפְשׁ* should best be translated does not pose a major difficulty. The usage here of *נַפְשׁ* is similar to the narratives of the Pentateuch and 1 Kgs.⁸⁶ In conclusion, there is no single passage that supports the idea of the immortality of the soul, thus, the Chinese translations of the *נַפְשׁ* as 靈魂 ("soul") in CUV is not fit on the meaning of soul under the Hebrew understanding.

4.5 Humans and Animals Shares a Common Life: Ecclesiastes 3:21

In addition to the analysis of *נַפְשׁ*, we also need to consider the passages where CUV translates *רִוּחַ* (*rûah*) with 靈魂 ("soul"). Ecclesiastes 3:21 is an example of this. Interestingly, there are two occurrences of *רִוּחַ* in this verse, but CUV translates these two *רִוּחַ* into two different ways, namely "soul" and "spirit." The 人的靈 ("spirit of man") is going up, while the 獸的魂 ("soul of animal") going down to the ground. The Chinese Catholic commentary explains that humans have "souls" and "breaths," while animals only have "breaths." They use Eccl 9:10 to argue that human souls go to hell after death, or alternatively go to God, who created them (cf. Eccl 12:7).⁸⁷ Jamieson agrees that the text strongly expresses a difference between the *רִוּחַ* of man and beast. He finds that "their destinations and proper element differ utterly," and due to this difference, the spirit of man ascends because it belongs to the high; but the beast that descends to the earth below.⁸⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:21 raises the question, will the spirit/soul ascend or descend after death? Horne asks if we here see the "sage's recognition of Hellenistic

⁸⁵ Such as 思高聖經譯釋本 (Douay version), 和合本修訂版 (RCUV), and 呂振中譯本 (LUV).

⁸⁶ Examples of passages where *נַפְשׁ* should be understood as "life" are Ps 86, Ps 116, Ps 35, and Ps 31. See Burton, "Spirit, Soul, and Flesh," 71–72. He highlights some idiomatic phrases in the Bible, such as "my life shall live," "as thy life liveth," "to smite a life," "to stay a life," or "the life dies." Briggs takes Ps 22:21; 34:28; 49:9,16; 89:49; 116:4–5, 8 as examples of passages where *נַפְשׁ* is best understood as "life" (Briggs, "The Use of Nefesh," 20–21).

⁸⁷ Studium Biblicum O.F.M., *Wisdom Books*, 4th ed. (Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum H.K, 2015), 186.

⁸⁸ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 406–7.

anthropology?”⁸⁹ Or is this an influence of the new teachings that came into vogue in the late biblical period?⁹⁰

Ecclesiastes 3:21 is not a doctrinal discussion about the “soul,” but belongs to the discussion of the judgment in Eccl 3:16–22. This paragraph starts with an author’s observation and puzzlement about the order of the world in v. 16, “the place of justice ... the place of righteousness, there was wickedness” (ESV). Qoheleth observed that reality is not what it is supposed to be. Nevertheless, in the next verse, he affirms that “God will judge the righteous and the wicked” (ESV). This statement establishes the extent of God’s judgment, including the righteous and the wicked, meaning all humans.⁹¹ It is worth noting that in the face of the injustice in the world, according to v. 16, Qoheleth considers two explanations in vv. 17 and 18, both beginning with אָנִי בְלִבִּי (“I said in my heart”). Moreover, Qoheleth looks at the social injustice among humans, linked to “their own corruption and death” as a fallen humanity (Eccl 3:18–21).⁹² In the face of death, there is nothing special about man. He fares similar to animals, and the same happens to the “wise” and the “fool” (Eccl 2:16).⁹³ The righteous and the wicked die alike, as the animals die, and all life returns to the dust (Eccl 3:20).⁹⁴ Mangum and Runge conclude, “we (righteous and the wicked) come from the same dust, are equally activated by the breath/spirit (רוּחַ), and then return to that dust.”⁹⁵ Barry emphasizes that verse 20 describes death as the

⁸⁹ Milton P. Horne, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 436.

⁹⁰ Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2010), 352–58. The author believes that the “beast alike descends into the earth” can also mean “the underground world,” and thus indirectly strengthening the rationale for the existence of the soul.

⁹¹ The Hebrew word כָּל, “all” or “each,” appears seven times in Eccl 3:17–20 (Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light, Depth, Truth (ABC)* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), 1:798–99.

⁹² *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament (LCC)*, vol. 3, eds. Douglas Mangum and Steven Runge (Bellingham: Lexham, 2020), Eccl 3:18–22. There are other explanations for Eccl 3:18. Jerry Shepherd et al. argue that the lack of justice in v. 16 causes Qoheleth to see “God as the divine test-giver.” An in this test God shows humans that they are not different from animals. See Jerry E. Shepherd, Allen P. Ross, George Schwab, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), s.v. Eccl 3:18–22.

⁹³ Rodríguez, *ABC*, 1:798–99.

⁹⁴ Amy Plantinga Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 159–60.

⁹⁵ Mangum and Runge, *Lexham Context Commentary*, s.v. Eccl 3:18–22.

final outcome of humans and animals, but it does not imply a statement about any afterlife.⁹⁶ It can be seen that the description of רִוּחַ in verse 21 is based on the comparison between humans and animals. Qoheleth emphasizes that there is no difference between the two, especially in matters of death.

The passage continues to explore the concept of death. As for the description in v. 21 that רִוּחַ will rise up or fall down to the ground, Qoheleth uses the interrogative clause מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows?") in v. 21. One alternative is to see this clause as a rejection. Schuele believes that Eccl 3:21 actually means to reject any discussion of whether the spirit/soul in humans is superior to the spirit of other creatures because "spirit" is something beyond human limits. According to Qoheleth, human beings find themselves in a world where God has assigned the appropriate time, עֵת (*'et*), and no part of man—neither the material nor spiritual—is exempt from the rhythm and order of the created world.⁹⁷

Besides seeing Qoheleth as rejecting any discussion, another interpretation is that the Qoheleth simply does not know, or does not see that it matters. Understood in this way, the reality after death is not the main focus of Ecclesiastes. Instead, his focus is upon the mortal life, seen in his discussion in vv. 16–18. Another hint is from vv. 19–20. These verses affirm that humans and animals have the same רִוּחַ. Additionally, v. 20 confirms that both humans and animals were created from dust. These familiar elements, רִוּחַ and עָפָר (*'āpār*), remind the reader of the equation of "dust" and "breath" when God created man in Gen 2:7. This associates רִוּחַ closer to the "breath of life," as seen above, than the "immortal soul."⁹⁸ Barry also sees Qoheleth as emphasizing the limitations of human knowledge, not an immortal soul after death.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ John D. Barry, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2020), s.v. Eccl 3:19–21.

⁹⁷ Schuele, "The Notion of Life," 498–99. Alter also rejects that the Bible is talking about the human soul here. He emphasized that this may be a newly emerging culture of the Hebrews at that time, which Ecclesiastes opposes. See Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, 350–65.

⁹⁸ DCH points out that the word הָבֵל in the phrase כִּי הֵבֵל הָבֵל in Eccl 3:19 may also be understood as "breathing," just as in Isa 57:13. In Isa 57:13, הָבֵל and רִוּחַ create a balanced structure, and the two terms have a similar meaning (*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, eds. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies and John W. Rogerson [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011], 2:485).

⁹⁹ If Qoheleth wanted to discuss the ascension of the human soul, he possibly would find Eccl 12:7 to be the more appropriate statement. Thus, he would likely not see Eccl 3:21 as a statement about what happens after death. See Barry, *Faithlife*, s.v. Eccl 3:19–21.

4.6 The 靈魂 (“Soul”) Returning Back to God’s Hand: Psalm 31:5

Another text where CUV translates 魂 as the 靈魂 (“soul”) is Ps 31:5(6). As mentioned before, some scholars support dualism, believing that the שׁוֹפֵן and הַנֶּפֶשׁ both refer to the soul of a human, so when שׁוֹפֵן leaves the body it leaves the body behind, while the הַנֶּפֶשׁ returns to God’s hand, according to Ps 31:5.¹⁰⁰ However, I cannot agree that the biblical texts teach that הַנֶּפֶשׁ is identical to the שׁוֹפֵן (or that the הַנֶּפֶשׁ returning to God’s hand means to die).

Psalm 31 is a hymn of prayer to God from a believer in pain. The psalm can be roughly divided into three parts. The first part, vv. 1–8, is the intersection of the poet’s voice and confidence. In the second part, David carefully describes the details of grief, including the crisis of the body: eye disease, physical and mental disease in v. 9, and a heart full of sorrowful sighs in v. 10. Being forgotten and discarded creates an environment of crisis in v. 12, and slander and murder are described in v. 13. Lastly, David declares his joy and trust in the Lord and encourages others to emulate him.¹⁰¹ While facing great difficulties, the psalmist is willing to put himself (or “my הַנֶּפֶשׁ”) into God’s hands in v. 5.

But what does it mean to be “in the hands?” This phrase בְּיַדְיָ (bəyādākā) is common in biblical texts, with a total of 65 occurrences in OT.¹⁰² For most of them, “in your hands” does not necessarily represent the idea of death or an afterlife, but “in control.” The same sense can be applied to Ps 31:5, and it can be understood that the poet is willing to hand himself over to the hands of God for God to save him, based on God’s faithfulness and love in vv. 1–4.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Yeung, *Encountering Systematic Theology*, 75–76. *The Geneva Bible* supports this interpretation, that the psalmist desires God to take care of him in this life and even hopes that “his soul” will be saved after death (“Geneva Bible: Notes” [Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2016], 240).

¹⁰¹ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 356.

¹⁰² The term בְּיַדְיָ is widely used in the OT Scriptures, not only in Psalms. It is used when God speaks with Gideon (Judg 7:9), in military jargon (Gen 14:20, Num 21:34, Deut 2:24, 30; 21:10, Josh 6:2; 8:1, 18; 10:8; Dan 2:38; 1 Chr 14:10, etc.), in the more general sense “being under someone’s control” (Job 1:12, Josh 9:25; Ps 10:14).

¹⁰³ Same as Barry’s insight that “the psalmist entrusts himself to Yahweh’s faithful care” (Barry, *Faithlife*, s.v. Ps 31:5).

The term “hand,” יָד (*yād*), appears 4 times in Ps 31; these four יָד make an ABA'B' structure.

Table 8: The four phrases with יָד (*yād*) in Psalm 31

The texts	Who's hand?	Who is in the hand?
Ps 31:6	בְּיַדְךָ In God's hand	רוּחִי My רוּחַ (delivered) me
Ps 31:9	בְּיַד־אֹיִב Hand of enemy	וְלֹא הִסְגַּרְתָּנִי (delivered) me
Ps 31:16a	בְּיַדְךָ In God's hand	עֵתֹתַי My times
Ps 31:16b	מִיַּד־אֹיִבֵי Hand of enemy	הַצִּילָנִי (Rescue) me

It is worth noting that the object in someone's hand points to the same person—the poet himself. Except for the first case of “my רוּחַ” (31:6), which is somewhat ambiguous but that I take to also likely refer to the poet himself, the three others clearly point to the author himself. The second and fourth times are “me” (first person, common singular suffix), and the third time is עֵתֹתַי (“my time”) in God's hands.¹⁰⁴ None of the four descriptions mention death or the afterlife. Therefore, according to the context, the term רוּחַ in Ps 31 does not refer to the “soul” after death, but more likely represents the poet himself or the poet's life. The contrast between the two completely different hands, בְּיַדְךָ (*bəyādākā*) of v.6 and בְּיַד־אֹיִב (*bəyad-’ōyēb*) in v. 9, convey the psalmist's desire for God to save him from the hands of his enemies, but also to return to the hands of God.¹⁰⁵

5. Conclusion: The of Meaning of נֶפֶשׁ and רוּחַ as it relates to the CUV Translation

The term נֶפֶשׁ (*nepes*) is crucial for an understanding of humanity and life in the Old Testament. The Scriptures confirm that humans (the living being) are created as a “whole,” without a separation of “body” and “soul.” The biblical writers may have used an invisible “life” or “breath” to denote life's leaving and death. However, no biblical verse supports the idea that a person can continue to live in an afterlife as a bodiless “soul.” Whether it is narrative or poetry, the best translation of נֶפֶשׁ is “life.” Occasionally, it also can be rendered as “breathing” or representing “an individual.” Therefore,

¹⁰⁴ The phrase עֵתֹתַי, “my time,” is equivalent to “my life” in Ps 31:16 because time is the course of life. See Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 356.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 356. Also in Barry, *Faithlife*, s.v. Ps 31:5.

among the 23 times CUV translates נַפְשׁ as 靈魂 (“soul”), none of these biblical texts explicitly support the notion of an immortal “soul.” A better Chinese translation is 人的生命 (“human life”) or 整全的人 (“wholistic person”).

The same applies to רוּחַ (*rûah*). As has been seen, neither of the two verses, Eccl 3:21 or Ps 31:5(6), supports the idea of an immortal soul. According to Eccl 3, humans and animals have the same value. There is no high or low status of the “soul.” Psalm 31 regards רוּחַ as the author himself, not his soul without the body. Therefore, רוּחַ is best translated as 靈 (“spirit”) or 生命 (“life”).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Cortez, “Death and Future Hope,” 97. CUV typically translates רוּחַ as “wind” or “spirit,” and only in Eccl 3:21 and Ps 31:5 is it rendered as 靈魂 (“soul”). However, even these two “soul” translations are not supported by other Chinese translations (和合本修訂版 in RCUV, and 呂振中譯本 in LUV).