# Life

**Life, both physical and spiritual, originates from God. Physical life is the time between one's birth and death. Spiritual life is communion with God. Physical and spiritual life flourish when one is in communion with God.**

## Concept Summary

In Hebrew, the concept of life is expressed through physiological terms such as נֶפֶשׁ (*nepeš*, "throat") and דָּם (*dām*, "blood"), as well as through abstract terms such as חָיָה (*ḥāyâ*, "to live"), and חַי (*ḥay*, "life"). For example, in God's covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1–17), God instructs Noah that humans are not to consume meat with "its life (*nepeš*)—that is its blood (*dām*)—in it." In Greek, the concept is expressed most commonly through terms denoting physical life. At times, these terms are used metaphorically to denote the inner life or an aspect of it. Life, in an abstract sense, is commonly expressed with the Greek term ψυχή (*psyche*, "soul"). In both testaments, the concept of life is related to right conduct. In the OT, life flourishes when the people of Israel obey God's law, and in the NT, the evidence of true life is displayed by one's conduct.

## Theological Overview

The concept of life as expressed in the Bible is fundamentally concerned with communion with God. In Genesis 1, God intends to transform an earth incapable of producing and sustaining life (Gen 1:2) into an earth full of life and vitality by bringing into existence plants and "living (חַי, *ḥay*) beings (נֶפֶשׁ, *nepeš*)": animals and humans (Gen 1:20–21, 24; 2:7). God blesses humanity as his image-bearers with the duty of filling the earth with human life and bringing the earth under God's rule of life (Gen 1:26–29). However, humanity rebels against God's rule of life, bringing death into the garden, and as a result God exiles them from his presence. In Deuteronomy, God offers Israel a choice between communion with him (i.e., faithful observance of his law) resulting in life, or communion with idols resulting in death (Deut 30:11–20). As the OT progresses, Israel chooses communion with idols, which results in exile from God's presence and in death.

In the NT, Jesus brings life in the promise of communion with God the Father. Jesus is creational life and light (John 1:1–5), bringing humanity (and Israel) back from exile to communion with God (John 1:14–18). In John's Gospel, Jesus states, "Now this is eternal (αἰώνιος, *aiōnios*) life (ζωὴ, *zōē*): that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). True

life—communion with God and Jesus—is a gift from the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor 3:6). This new life is made evident by one's conduct or way of life (1 Pet 2:12; 3:1–2, 16). It is seen also in someone giving his or her "life" (ψυχή, *psychē*; 2 Cor 12:15) for others or sharing "possessions" (βίος, *bios*; 1 John 3:16) with someone in need. However, a struggle exists between one's new life in Christ and the old way of life in the "flesh" (σάρξ, *sarx*; Rom 8:1–13).

## Lexical Information

### Old Testament

חָיָה (*ḥāyâ*); Aram. חֲיָא (*ḥăyāʾ*). vb. **to be alive, to live, to preserve alive, to keep alive.** *This verb primarily refers to living a natural life.*

The Hebrew verb *ḥāyâ* most commonly denotes living physical life; for example, the genealogies in Genesis (e.g., Gen 5:3–32) use it in a formula to express how long a man lived (*ḥāyâ*) before he fathered his first son and how long he lived after that. Deuteronomy connects living with observing the law. Those who keep God's law will live (*ḥāyâ*) and prosper, and those who do not will die (Deut 4:1; 30:16–19).

Some grammatical forms of *ḥāyâ* can mean "to keep alive" and "let live": Noah was to bring animals into the ark to keep them alive (*ḥāyâ*; Gen 6:19–20), and Abram asked Sarai to tell the Egyptians that he was his sister, so that they would let him live (*ḥāyâ*; Gen 12:12). The Psalms praise Yahweh for keeping alive (*ḥāyâ*) those who fear him (Pss 30:4 33:19; 41:2; 119:25). The related Aramaic synonym *ḥăyāʾ* appears in the OT only in Daniel, mostly in the respectful formal address to the king, "O king, live (*ḥăyāʾ*) forever," (e.g., Dan 2:4), but once a speech from Daniel in which he says that God let live (*ḥăyāʾ*) whomever he wanted (Dan 5:19).

חַי (*ḥay*). Aram. חַי (*ḥay*). n. masc. **life, lifetime.** *Refers the state of life or a span of life.*

The Hebrew noun *ḥay* is related to the verb חָיָה (*ḥāyâ*, "to live"), and denotes life in contrast to death (Deut 30:15). The word can be used in an abstract sense to express life in all its fullness and vitality (Deut 30:15, 19; 30:20; Prov 3:22; 4:13). It can also be used to express someone's span of life (e.g., Gen 23:1). The Aramaic equivalent *ḥay* is similar (Ezra 6:10; Dan 7:12).

חַי (*ḥay*). Aram חַי (*ḥay*). adj. **living, alive.** *Describes something as alive.*

The Hebrew adjective *ḥay* is related to the verb חָיָה (*ḥāyâ*, "to live"). It is used to describe a being as living, whether an animal (Gen 1:20) or a human (Gen 2:7). It

can be used as a noun to refer to a living being, including a living person (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:23). The Aramaic equivalent *ḥay* is similar (e.g., Dan 2:30; 4:34).

נֶפֶשׁ (*nepeš*). n. fem. **breath, throat, life, soul.** *This word can refer to a life or soul.*

The word has a wide range of meaning in the Hebrew Bible. It can denote the throat or neck (e.g., Job 24:12; Isa 32:6; Pss 69:1; 105:18) or the breath that comes through the throat (e.g., Job 41:21; Jer 15:9). Breath is necessary for life (Job 31:39); thus, the first man "became a living (חַי, *ḥay*) being (*nepeš*)" when God "blew into his nostrils the breath (נְשָׁמָה, *něšāmâ*) of life (חַי, *ḥay*)" (Gen 2:7). The word can thus also denote life, the quality of living that is lost when a person or animal dies (e.g., Gen 1:30; 19:19; 35:18; 1 Sam 19:11). In several places, the OT says that this life (*nepeš*) is contained in the blood (דָּם, *dām*); this is the foundation for the prohibition against eating blood (e.g., Gen 9:4–5; Lev 17:14). The *nepeš* is revived and refreshed by Yahweh and his law (Pss 19:7; 23:3; 34:22; 35:17; 54:6).

דָּם (*dām*). n. masc. **blood.** *This word primarily refers to physical blood, which is essential to life and associated with it.*

The word refers to blood; according to several passages in the OT, the life (נֶפֶשׁ, *nepeš*) of an animal or person is contained in the blood (*dām*). This is the foundation for the prohibition against eating blood (e.g., Gen 9:4–5; Lev 17:14). It is also important in the practice of animal sacrifice; the spilling or shedding of animal blood resulted in the death of the animal but brought life to the one offering the sacrifice (Exod 12:13, 22–23; Lev 16). Killing—ending a life—is sometimes described as pouring out blood (e.g., Gen 37:22; 2 Kgs 21:16).

יוֹם (*yôm*). n. **day, daylight**; pl. **lifetime.** *The plural of the word for "day" can refer to someone's lifetime.*

This word primarily refers to day, either as opposed to night (e.g., Gen 1:16) or as a full cycle of light and dark (e.g., Gen 1:5). Sometimes a person's span of life is referred to as that person's days, using the plural of *yôm*. For example, Joshua 24:31 says that "Israel served Yahweh all the days of Joshua."

## New Testament

ζάω (*zaō*). vb. **to live, to be alive.** *Primarily refers to living a natural life.*

The verb *zaō* is used literally to denote living physically (Acts 28:4; 2 Tim 4:1). The NT also uses the term figuratively to denote eternal existence (John 6:51; 11:25) or a person's manner of living (Luke 15:13; Gal 2:14; 2 Tim 3:12); however, at times, a clear distinction between physical life and eternal life does not exist. The participle

form of *zaō* is often used as an adjective meaning living, and is used to describe the living (*zaō*) God (Matt 16:16; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:6; 2 Cor 3:3; Heb 10:31), the living (*zaō*) Father (John 6:57), living (*zaō*) water (John 4:10–11; 7:38), living (*zaō*) bread (John 6:51), a living (*zaō*) sacrifice (Rom 12:1); and Adam as a living (*zaō*) being (*psychē*; 1 Cor 15:45).

ζωή (*zōē*). n. fem. **life.** *Primarily refers to a natural life.*

This word is related to the verb ζάω (*zaō*, "to live") and broadly denotes either physical or eternal life. In the physical sense, *zōē* can refer to one's life or lifespan (Luke 16:25; Acts 8:33). Paul contrasts physical life ("the present life [*zōē*]") with eternal life, the life "to come" (1 Tim 4:8). The word *zōē* is also used to communicate the concept of eternal life (Matt 19:16; John 3:15–16; Acts 13:46, 48; Rom 6:22). God is the originator of life (*zōē*; Acts 3:15), and life is found in him, for he is eternal life (John 5:26; 1 John 5:20). Jesus is similarly referred to as life (*zōē*; John 1:4; 5:26; 14:6).

ζωοποιέω (*zōopoieō*). vb. **to give life, to make alive.** *Refers to giving a being new or renewed life.*

The word denotes the action of giving life or making alive. Only the triune God can perform this action. God the Father and his Son give life (*zōopoieō*; John 5:21; Rom 4:17). The Spirit also gives life (*zōopoieō*; 2 Cor 3:6); indeed, after his death on the cross, Christ was "made alive (*zōopoieō*) in the Spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). Based on this fact—that the Spirit raised Christ from the dead—Paul affirms the hope that God will give the life (*zōopoieō*) of future resurrection to the Roman believers (Rom 8:11).

ψυχή (*psychē*). n. fem. **life, soul, person.** *Can refer to a person's inner life or to the life-principle.*

This word may denote that which gives life (the life-principle) or life itself. For example, Paul uses the expression "for his *psychē* is in him" to express that the young man Eutychus in Acts 20:10 is still alive. When used in this way, it is not always clear whether *psychē* is material or immaterial. Note the connection between *psychē* and food in Matt 6:25 and Luke 12:22–23. The word *psychē* is also used to denote the inner life of a human—the soul or the heart that produces a variety of internal human processes (Mark 12:30; Luke 1:46; Col 3:23). It is used in conjunction with "spirit" in Luke 1:46–47 to express the whole inner person, both "soul" and "spirit." Lastly, the word may be used as a metonymy to describe the totality of a person (Rom 2:9; 13:1).

βίος (*bios*). n. masc. **life, possessions.** *Can refer to a person's livelihood or manner of life.*

This word is used to refer to a person's manner of life, including the everyday activities needed to get the resources

needed to sustain life. In the explanation of the parable of the sower, the thorns represent "the worries and riches and pleasures of life (*bios*)" (Luke 8:14). Paul says that Christians should pray for civil leaders, "that we may live a tranquil and quiet life (*bios*)" (1 Tim 2:2). The word can also refer to the resources necessary for life. The widow gave to the temple treasury all of her *bios*—that is, all she had to live on (Mark 12:44; Luke 21:4). John exhorts Christians who have *bios* to be generous and give to those who are without (1 John 3:17).

ἀναστροφή (*anastrophē*). n. fem. **conduct, way of life.** *Refers to a person's way of life.*

This term denotes a particular manner of conduct based upon a certain pattern or way of life. Paul uses the term to refer to his "former way of life (*anastrophē*) in Judaism" (Gal 1:13; compare Eph 4:22). Peter uses the term in a similar manner in 1 Pet 1:18. Peter encourages Christians to have a holy way of life (*anastrophē*; 1 Pet 1:15; 3:1–2, 16; 2 Pet 3:11; compare Jas 3:13).

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## See Also

- **Related Concepts:** Creation; Death
- **Bible Sense Lexicon:** life (state), to be kept alive, life (course of) ⇔ flesh, life (experience of), life (course of), life, life (birth-death), life (birth-present), life (present-death), life (person), life (collective), life (circumstances), to live, living, living thing