



## BIBLICAL HERITAGE REPORT & DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

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### Do Animals Have Souls?

*By Jim Myers*

This may not be one of the most pressing theological questions, but it is one that I have been asked on more than one occasion. The biblical answer to the question is found in the *Book of Genesis*. However, before we address the question, we must first define the word “soul.”<sup>1</sup>

- (1) The animating and vital principle in humans, credited with the faculties of thought, action, and emotion and often conceived as an immaterial entity.
- (2) The spiritual nature of humans, regarded as immortal, separable from the body at death, and susceptible to happiness or misery in a future state.
- (3) The disembodied spirit of a dead human.

You may notice that the words “soul” and “spirit” are almost used synonymously and that “soul” is also linked exclusively with humans. Now let’s turn to Genesis 1:24 and see if we can find a biblical answer to our original question:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

This verse contains a great deal of information. First, did you notice to whom God was speaking? God was speaking to “the earth” and instructing her to take an action. In previous verses God

“made” most things Himself. God was the one taking the action, but in this case “the earth” is told to bring forth “living creatures.” When we examine the Hebrew text we find the words below (remember Hebrew is read from right to left):

<sup>2</sup>                      <sup>1</sup>  
 חַיָּה                  נֶפֶשׁ  
 ChAYAH        NEFESH

The first word – **NEFESH** – is usually translated as “soul;” the second word – **ChAYAH** – is translated as “living.” Together they would be translated as “living soul.”

The Hebrew word **NEFESH** is defined<sup>2</sup> as:

- (1) soul
- (2) life being
- (3) life
- (4) self
- (5) personal
- (6) desire
- (7) appetite
- (8) emotion
- (9) passion

As you can see, **NEFESH** has been translated by a wide-variety of English words by translators. An interesting point is that it is a feminine singular word. However, this fits well within the context of Genesis 1:24 because everything mentioned in the verse is also in the singular – a large animal (cattle), a small animal (creeping thing) and a wild animal. For some reason the

Bible translators translated the words as plurals – *cattle, creeping things and wild animals* – instead of literally translating them in the singular. So, let’s translate the verse as it reads in the Hebrew text and see if it makes a difference:

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth a living soul after her kind: a large animal, a small animal and a wild animal after her kind.” And it was so.

The Hebrew word for “large animal” is **BEHEMAH** which has been translated as -- *beast, animal, cattle and hippopotamus*. The word for “small animal” is **REMES** which has been translated as – *creeping thing, moving thing, gliding thing and animal*. The word for “wild animal” is **ChAYAH** which has been translated as – *living being, animal and wild animal*.

So, the answer to our initial question -- *according to the biblical text of Genesis – YES, the animals listed in verse 24 have a “living soul.”* It is important that we keep in mind that this soul was brought forth by the earth, not by God. It is also important to recognize that there was another kind of soul mention in verse 20:

20 And God said, Let the waters swarm with a swarm of a living soul, and let a bird fly upon the surface of the firmament of the skies.

*Don’t you wish translators would consistently translate a Hebrew word by the same English word? English readers will never know that the Hebrew word **NEFESH** was translated as “creature” instead of “soul” without some help.*

I don’t know about you, but as a student of the biblical text, I would like to have the most literal and consistent translation available. *Instead of making the biblical text conform to the translator’s religious belief system, I would rather measure my belief system against the most accurate translation of the biblical text. How about you?*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew Lexicon

## JANUARY MEMORIALS

*May the memories of our loved ones  
inspire us to seek in our lives  
those qualities of mind and heart  
which we recall with special gratitude.  
May we help to bring closer to fulfillment  
Their highest ideals and noblest strivings.  
May the memories of our loved ones  
deepen our loyalty to that which cannot die --  
Our faith, our love, and devotion to our heritage.*

*(Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)*

*In Loving Memory of*  
**HOMER MELTON (DOC) PITNER**

Born: October 7, 1914

Died: January 10, 1971

*In Loving Memory of*  
**JULIE FALLIN KELSOE**

Born: January 12, 1960

Died: January 19, 1990

*In Loving Memory of*  
**MURLIN BENTLEY**

Born: May 24, 1929

Died: January 20, 1996

*In Loving Memory of*  
**GRAYSON COLUMBUS  
TENNISON**

Born: December 27, 1924

Died: December 31, 2004

*In Loving Memory of*  
**CLIFTON RAYMOND TENNISON,  
SR.**

Born: December 19, 1919

Died: January 13, 2005