

Ecclesiastes 12:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Analysis

The Preacher describes death poetically: 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.' The language echoes Genesis 2:7 and 3:19—God formed man from dust and breathed life into him; at death, these separate. The body ('dust,' *aphar*, אֶפֶר) returns to earth, while the spirit (*ruach*, רוּחַ) returns to God. This verse affirms both human mortality (bodily decomposition) and spiritual survival (the spirit returns to God for judgment). It anticipates resurrection hope: though the body returns to dust, God will raise it (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). The phrase 'return unto God who gave it' reminds readers that life is divine gift, and humans remain accountable to their Creator. This verse grounds the subsequent call to fear God and keep His commandments (12:13-14).

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite understanding of death involved the body returning to earth while the person descended to Sheol. This verse adds the crucial detail: the spirit returns to God—not merely to shadowy existence but to divine judgment. Later revelation clarified this: believers go to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:23), while unbelievers face judgment. The early church emphasized bodily resurrection, countering Greek dualism that denigrated the physical. Augustine taught that both body and soul are God's creation; death separates them temporarily, but resurrection reunites them eternally. The Reformers affirmed immediate conscious existence after death followed by bodily resurrection at Christ's return. Modern

readers find comfort that death isn't annihilation but transition—the spirit returns to God.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does believing that your spirit will 'return unto God who gave it' affect your view of death—fear, hope, accountability?
2. What does this verse teach about the relationship between body and spirit, and why does bodily resurrection matter theologically?

Interlinear Text

תָּשׁוּב	הָעָפָר	עַל	הָאֶרֶץ	כַּשֶּׁהָיָה	וְהָרוּחַ
return	Then shall the dust		to the earth		as it was and the spirit
H7725	H6083	H5921	H776	H1961	H7307
תָּשׁוּב	אֶל	הָאֱלֹהִים	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן:	
return		unto God	who gave		
H7725	H413	H430	H834	H5414	

Additional Cross-References

Daniel 12:2 (Parallel theme): And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Psalms 146:4 (Parallel theme): His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Genesis 3:19 (Parallel theme): In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Zechariah 12:1 (Spirit): The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Genesis 2:7 (References God): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Isaiah 57:16 (Spirit): For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

Numbers 16:22 (Spirit): And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

Psalms 90:3 (Parallel theme): Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

Job 20:11 (Parallel theme): His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust.

Numbers 27:16 (Spirit): Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,