Thanatology: Issues of Afterlife

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Abstract: Anthropology shows that most cultures throughout time had some conception of an afterlife.[1] The afterlife in the ANE differed from culture to culture; among the ancient Egyptians, the afterlife was filled with experiences, while in Syria-Palestine, "the prospect of the afterlife was not quite so attractive" as in Egypt.[2] This paper will focus on afterlife thinking from the Old Testament and how the idea of post-mortem experience developed in the New Testament. With the Biblical position of physical death being a one-time event (cf. Hebrews 9:27), the Eastern side of reincarnation will be examined and compared to Biblical data.

Death and the afterlife. The idea of an "afterlife", an existence once one passes from earthly life, as "survival beyond death was ubiquitous in the ANE."[3] But that existence was not necessarily one of joy and contentment. Mesopotamian records of antiquity speak of the soul becoming food for "vermin and worms" and the underworld itself an impregnable fortress, with huge bars, large bolts and "demonic gatekeepers."[4] Toby Jennings notes the ANE view of death and the afterlife and that of Israel was markedly different. He uses material from Alexander Heidel's 1946 book on The Epic of Gilgamesh and Old Testament

[1] For a scholarly discussion on ancient cultures and their views on the afterlife, see Gregory Shusan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism and Near-Death Experience* (London and New York, Continuum, 2009).

[2] Paul Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions* (NSBT 44). (London: Apollos and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2017), 10.

[3] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 7.

[4] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 13.

Parallels in his observations. From Heidel, Jennings draws five basic differences between the two cultures:[5]

1. Mesopotamian belief was man was mortal with death the "natural result" of who man is. Israelite belief held to man being created with a "never ending life" but "succumbed to unnatural death" because of the entrance of sin into the world.

2. Mesopotamian afterlife had its "own pantheon of deities", whereas in Israel that was one God, whether in life or in death.

3. Mesopotamian "afterlife" and "underworld" was the "final destination of all men without distinction". Jennings cites Heidel at length, noting it is arguable the exact position on post-mortem existence; in the earliest days of Israel's existence, every soul, whether rich or poor, good or bad, wound up in the "nether world", but some Old Testament passages "unmistakably hold out tot he righteous the hope of a future life of bliss and happiness in heaven."

4. Mesopotamian belief held to an interdependence between the living and the dead. Israelite "theology" maintained a distance between the living and the dead: the living and the dead do not have insight into what happens to the other, no dead and disembodied spirit can return to "affect the living" and no living soul has any power to change the "lot of the departed soul."

5. Babylonian and Assyrian material on death never mentions anything about a resurrection; the dead never left the underworld for all eternity. Some material in Isaiah and Daniel speaks of the eventual resurrection of the flesh.

Babylonian writings on death and the afterlife included "malign forces of disease and death", divided into demons, ghosts and "female spirits" (succubi).[6] The Babylonian conception of

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[5] Toby Jennings, *A Biblical Portrait of Death as the Qualifier of Both the Ethic and Value of Human Life* (unpublished Ph.D dissertation; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 118.

[6] Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979), 10-11.

human life was such that when a person died, that individual was no longer useful to the gods; "…thus there would be no reason for their having provided for, or for the creatures to expect, a meaningful life after death."[7]

For the Israelites, the afterlife involved a place called *Sheol.*

> Sheol was below the surface of the earth. The dead are said to "go down to Sheol" (Ezekiel. 31:15, 17; Job 7:9; Psalm 55:16), or to "go down to the pit"…(Psalm 28:1). Sheol is "beneath"--Psalm 86:13. Similarly, Sheol is "deep" (Job 11:8, "deeper than Sheol"). Those who are dead are said to be "beneath the waters" (Job 26:5)…. Amos declares: "Though they dig into Sheol from there my hand shall take them" (9:2). In the last passage, and in Psalm 139:8, Sheol is opposed to heaven….[8]

Other scholars believe "She'ol" simply means "the grave.

> Many times Sheol clearly means just "grave". Its parallels are "death," "pit" (which predominantly means a hole dug in the earth), or "sepulcher". Its accoutrements are worms, dust, armor, etc. Its characteristics are darkness, being forgotten (the phrase "land of forgetfulness" does not mean the deceased forgets, but that he is forgotten), lack of wisdom, lack of work, and absence of praise. The only passages that speak of activity in Sheol are those in Isaiah 14:11 and Ezekiel 31 and 32 which are pretty clearly the "grave" with some figurative treatment. The New Testament usage of Psalm 16:10 and Hosea 13:14 depends on Sheol being interpreted as "the grave." Sheol is not a cavern way below the earth's crust; it is it grave dug into

[7] Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 17.

[8] D. K. Innes, "The Meaning of She'ol in the Old Testament", *EvQ* 32.4 (1960), 198.

> the ground. All go to Sheol without moral distinctions because the grave is our common end. There is no clear case of punishment in Sheol because this is not applicable to the grave.[9]

Contra Harris, and others who limit She'ol to "the grave, Williamson argues that "Sheol's topography ('depths' and 'uttermost parts') certainly seems to imply more than a few feet underground."[10] Shaul Bar points to the story of King Saul and the witch (medium) of Endor, where the deceased Samuel was summoned at the king's behest (1 Samuel 28).[11]

She'ol and death, in Old Testament witness, are said to:

- Enlarge its appetite (Habakkuk 2:5).[12] The context is a comparison to the Babylonian invaders, who are said to never be satisfied with whatever they have conquered. She'ol, which the NIV renders as "the grave", is never "satisfied" as it always is able to receive more into its grip.[13]

- Opens its throat wide (Isaiah 5:14). The prophet's employment of the She'ol imagery does not reflect the idea of the grave (again, as in the NIV). It is a place of "the dead spirits", devouring those with an apparently insatiable desire for self-indulgence (Isaih 5:11-12). "The world of the afterlife will open its doors wide for

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9 R. Laird Harris, "The Meaning of the Word 'Sheol' as Shown By Parallel Poetic Texts", *BETS* 4.4 (December 1961), 135.

10 Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 41.

11 Shaul Bar, "The Dead in the Underworld", *IBS* 28.2 (2010), 84.

12 The aspects of Sheol/death given here are taken from F. J. Mabie, "Chaos and Death", *DOTWPW*, 51.

13 Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (NAC 20) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 328-329.

thousands of people (especially the upper class nobles) and swallow them all.[14]

- Swallows people (Psalm 69:15, Proverbs 1:12). She'ol and the whole of the netherworld are here referred to as "the pit".[15] The Hebrew word, *bôr*, also refers to a "cistern", which besides their water containment ability, also served as a prison (Genesis 37:20-29, Isaiah 24:22), a ready made dumping place for a dead body (Jeremiah 41:7, 9) and as a hiding place when danger approached (1 Samuel 13:6). The cistern or the pit is made into a synonym for She'ol (cf. Psalm 40:2).[16]

- Is never satisfied (Habakkuk 2:5, Proverbs 27:20).

- Compared to the tools of a hunter: traps, snares, netting (Job 18:9-13, Psalm 13:14), an image down from the Mesopotamian deity Mot, the god of death.[17]

- Death is also pictured as a place with "gates and bars" (Job 17:16, Psalm 9:13), giving the idea that it is an actual place for the dead as a opposed to a synonym for the grave.

She'ol is only associated with the dead, whether as "grave" or as a spatial location.

> Sheol is a place of no return (Job 16:22),"a place of captivity with gates (Is. 38:10) and bars (Jonah 2:6). The 'cords of Sheol' may also suggest captivity (Psalms 18:3; 116:3), but more probably

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14 Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39* (NAC 15A) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 175. Smith comments that white Isaiah does picture She'ol as some kind of starving monster, it is possible he is using a "well-known ancient myth" to communicate his point.

15 Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20) (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 197.

16 Jack P. Lewis, "*bā'ar",* TWOT*, I:88.*

17 Robert L. Alden, *Job* (NAC 11) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 197.

> evoke hunting. Job's wish to be hidden temporarily in Sheol (14:1.3; cf. 18-22) initially seems to question this finality, but the wish is hypothetical, an attempt to move beyond his perceived impasse with God, and does not qualify the general picture.
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> Existence in Sheol is very sketchily drawn. It is a place of darkness (Job 10:21; Psalm 88:6, 12; 143:3; Lamentations 3:6; Sirach 22:11), of inactivity and silence (Psalms 94:17; 113:17). Only two prophetic oracles portray any form of activity. In one the denizens of Sheol must be roused to greet a newcomer, and they then describe themselves as weak (Isaiah 14:9f). In the other, the long dead declaim that others 'have come down, they lie still' (Ezekiel 32:21). These texts simply confirm that inactivity is the norm.[18]

The Old Testament expectation of Sheol was not especially inviting. It is thought the dead in Sheol would lose any ability to have "on-going relationships, especially with God",[19] (e.g., Isaiah 38:18).[20] Hezekiah's prayer reveals any conception of blissfulness with God after death was an idea that had not come to fruition yet in Old Testament thinking on death. As such, death remained a very scary, "fearful" thing.[21] It seems almost all hope in God was lost or suppressed after death.

Ancient Jewish thinking on death was apparently reduced to a loss of all hope in God once a person died (cf. Psalm 88:5). The

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[18] Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Leicester, UK: Apollos and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 76.

[19] Tony Wright, "Death, the Dead and the Underworld in Biblical Theology", *Churchman* 122.1 (Spring 2008), 17.

[20] Hezekiah, king of Judah, uttered this understanding of death and the dead as he gave thanks to God for additional years of life instead of facing an immediate death. Hezekiah's gratitude is less about the years themselves and more about his continuing ability to give praise to the Lord. See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1993), II:596.

[21] John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 429.

psalmist is more than likely reflecting from accepted cosmological belief of that day. That said, it does not change the truth that for those Israelites, this was the reality of death and the afterlife. Psalm 88 as a lament is an expression of "all that sense of the unfairness of life and of the hopeless, useless, God-forsake existence of Sheol."[22]

A common euphemism in the Od Testament for death is "sleep" (i.e., 2 Kings 4:3, Psalm 13:3, Jeremiah 51:39); perhaps a better analogy or word descriptor might be "coma", that people in the afterlife are simply in a hopeless, horrific state and are unable to respond or make any change in their condition.[23]

Whether "sleep" or "coma" is the appropriate idea for the afterlife, what was true in Israel before the exile was hope expired at death.

> Sheol, like the Babylonian nether world, is a land of no return where the individual continues in a shadowy existence in darkness behind closed gates and bards, away from the presence of God and without any possibility of praising God (cf. Job 10:18-22). It is only when life is unbearable, as in the case of Job, that one prefers the grim existence in Sheol. This existence is never described as *life*.[24]

Death in the Pentateuch is at times associated with God's visiting His punishment on offending parties.

> The enormous antediluvian life-span is reduced to a norm of 120 years as punishment for illicit marriage (whatever the interpretation of these life-spans and marriages, Genesis 6:3). Then the flood

[22] R. E. O. White, *A Christian Handbook to the Psalms* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 136-137.

[23] Wright, "Death", 18.

[24] E. C. John, "The Old Testament Understanding of Death", *IJT* 23:1-2 (January-June 1974), 127. (Italics in original.)

> itself destroyed nearly all humanity in punishment for its sinfulness (Genesis 6:5-7). Later the death of numerous individuals and communities is presented as judgment for sin: Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19); rebellious Israelites in the wilder ness (Exodus 32:28, 35; Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1, 33f; 16:31-35; 25:8f); the entire exodus generation (Numbers 14:23); and Canaanites at the conquest (Genesis 15:16). In the same way, disobedience after settlement in the land w ill bring death and destruction (Leviticus 26:22, 25, 30; Deut. 28:21,26). The rest of the Old Testament paints a similar picture of premature death as punishment for sin in texts too numerous to cite, for Israelites and foreigners, for kings, prophets, priests and ordinary people alike.[25]

The Sadducees of Jesus' day continued the belief that Sheol was the final destination of the dead who were at best in a semi-conscious state. Their opposing religious party, the Pharisees, believed there would be a resurrection of the dead,[26] a position which is central to Christian belief.

The Old Testament picture of death has been described as that of a hunter (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:26, 9:12), the "first born of death", the "king of terrors" (Job 18:14), and "death the robber" (Jeremiah 9:20). Death, then, is the "grim shepherd dragooning his helpless flock to the underworld."[27]

Reactions to death. When Jesus arrived in Bethany four days after Lazarus had died, He was accosted by Martha, one of the dead man's sisters. Jesus had earlier told His disciples, perhaps using enigmatic language, that He was not going to rush to Bethany when the sisters sent a message for Him to come. He

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[25] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 42.

[26] Bailey, Sr. *Biblical Perspectives on Death,* 24-25.

[27] John Barclay Burns, "Some Personifications of Death in the Old Testament, *IBS* 11 (January 1989), 23-34, quotation from page 24.

delayed so that the disciples "may believe" (John 11:15). Martha, perhaps understandably upset over the death of her brother and the apparent tardiness of Jesus, expressed her grief over Lazarus' demise (John 11:20-24).[28]

As discussed above, the traditional view of death in Israelite culture was a "one-way street", so to speak, a way from which there is no return. Jesus' use of the word "sleep" in John 11:11 is thought to be a full orbed description of death, and His insistence on waking Lazarus up shows death did not "have the same finality for Jesus as it does for every other person."[29] Martha expressed the typical belief of the day that the righteous would arise at the end of the present age to continue living in the Kingdom of God.[30] Her objection to Jesus' request to open the tomb, that there would be an odor, since Lazarus had been dead four days, was the acknowledgement his body was in a state of decay[31] is highlighted in many of the commentaries as the chief reason for her objection. However, among the Jews of that time, the spirit of the departed was said to hover over the corpse for three days in the hope of a revivification; by the fourth day, all hope for that was apparently lost. To raise Lazarus from death after four days would then be a "manifestation of the glory of God", a means of bringing a strengthening to both Martha and Mary.[32]

Martha, however, had come into agreement with how the Pharisees viewed the future state.

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[28] J. Ramsey Michaels, *John* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1981), 201. Michaels does not view Martha as necessary upset or even angry at Jesus; the woman was speaking out of her broken heart. Even if Jesus had come to Bethany immediately, Lazarus would have been dead for two days. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36) (Waco, TX: Word. 1987), 90, sees nothing by way of reproach but a tension between her faith in Jesus and her grief at the death of her brother.

[29] Gary M. Burge, *John* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 311.

[30] Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190.

[31] William Hendriksen, *John* (NTC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), II:157.

[32] Coljn F. Kruse, *John* (TC) (Nottingham, UK and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 246.

> Jesus' response, "your brother will rise again," would have been startling had it been understood.... For Martha the statement was perceived as a confirmation of her Pharisaic-like theology concerning the future. ... The Pharisaic doctrine of the afterlife...had virtually become the popular theology of the people in Jesus' day. The old idea of Jewish corporate personality, where one lived on only in the lives if one's children, hardly provided a satisfactory hope for the hasidic (pious) ones who had risked their lives for their "God and country". ... (T)he populace wanted the assurance of a personal involvement in Israel's future. Accordingly, when Martha heard Jesus say that her brother would rise again, her thoughts immediately fastened on the end of time ("the last day", 11:24).[33]

Death was seen a final act, not to be remedied in this present life. The typical despair of the Old Testament over the journey to the afterlife found some glimmers of hope through the Pharisees believing in a general resurrection at the last day. Jesus expanded on that hope from some future locus to His own presence; "immortality is centered in Jesus now."[34] Paul Rainbow sees a chiasmus in John 11:25-26 which further underscores the truth of Jesus having the power to raise people from the dead.[35]

There apparently is little information in the Old Testament which provides clear description of the fate of the righteous dead, which may be the reason behind emphasizing the resurrection "on that day"< where those righteous at death would be taken out of Sheol's shadows and brought into the

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[33] Gerald Borchert, *John 1-11* (NAC 25A) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 355-356.

[34] Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity and Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2014), 283.

[35] Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 283.

presence of the Lord God, while the wicked continue to languish in their negative, unremitting existence.[36]

Natural life/death	**Eternal life/death**
"He who believes in me, though he die" (A)	Yet shall he live (B)
And whoever lives (B') and believes in me	Shall never die (A')

Reincarnation is a reaction to death, a view that death is not the final arbiter but a person will live on in another form in this life. It is the idea that a human soul will travel through a number of successive lives,[37] and which is embraced by several religious groups, leaders and sects.

> What exactly is reincarnation? It simply means that we leave one life and go into another; it is all for the sole purpose of soul development and spiritual growth. The soul may take the form of human, animal, or plant depending on the moral quality of the previous life's actions. This doctrine is a central tenet of the Indian and Greek religions. However, reincarnation implies that the person remains essentially the same, while occupying a new body. Reincarnation is also known by other terms like "rebirth," "metempsychosis" (Greek word), "transmigration" (English equivalent of metempsychosis), "disambiguation," "palingenesis" and so on.[38]

[36] T. Desmond Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life After Death", *Themelios* 11.2 (1986), 45.

[37] Ronald Enroth, "Reincarnation", in Elwell, ed., *EDT*, 926.

[38] Anil Kumar Mysore Nagaraj, Raveesh Bevinahalli Nanjegowda, and S. M. Purushothama, "The Mystery of Reincarnation", *IJP* 55: Supplement 2 (January 2013), S171. The definition of reincarnation from this article was utilized despite the authors subsequently retracting their work, owing to plagiarism from Wikipedia. The paragraph cited is foundational and informative, not provocative or promotional.

Research on reincarnation's influence on American thinking about death demonstrates approximately one-quarter of all American believe in reincarnation, and that the idea of being brought back as another life form found its way into Judaism some centuries earlier.

> The doctrine of reincarnation was a part of ancient Western religious and philosophical systems, including Pythagoreanism and Neoplatonism. Today it is a significant part of Hinduism and Buddhism, but can also be found in Judaism, Druzism and other religious traditions. In contrast to Eastern traditions in which the doctrine of reincarnation is central, Jewish theologians have diverged on the topic, and do not have it as a central tenet; however, it has become so widespread a view among orthodox Jews that its rejection would be a little heterodox. Indeed, Levi ibn Habib (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries) and Menashe ben Israel (seventeenth century, a teacher of Spinoza) treat it as a dogma established by the majority of religious authorities, despite there being some disagreement.[39]

According to Goldschmidt and Seacord, the rabbinical thought was God oversaw the necessity of punishment for having been evil in some past life, even if one was righteous in the immediately concluded life. By the late Middle Ages, a child born without a limb or blind or with some other physical impairment was thought to be a reincarnation of an evil person now receiving his or her just recompense for previous actions.[40]

> There is additionally the prospect of subjects coming to know the wrongs they committed at a future point. Rabbi David Gottlieb proffers such a proposal in answer to an objection along the lines

[39] Tyron Goldschmidt and Beth Seacord, "Judaism, Reincarnation and Theodicy", *Faith and Philosophy* 30:4 (October 2013), 393-394.

[40] Goldschmidt and Seacord, "Judaism, Reincarnation and Theodicy", 398.

> of the memory problem: "the suffering could be a relevant and useful punishment for the past, because memory of his past can be restored at a later time, and at that time he will appreciate the relevance of his suffering to his past misdeeds." The Jewish tradition does not propose an endless cycle of reincarnations. The cycles eventually come to an end, and then the subjects are appraised of their behaviour throughout past lives, and rewarded and punished for whatever deeds could not be dealt with through reincarnation.[41]

An immediate response to the idea of reincarnation is the total absence of any such idea throughout the Old Testament text. Judaism had the idea of reincarnation from a piecemeal document known as "Bahir", [42] which was embraced by Kabbalism, a twelfth-century mystic ideology within Judaism.[43] The Old Testament speaks of an eternity of misery in Sheol for the wicked dead and an eventual resurrection for the righteous. Jesus' parable/story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) offers no indication the rich man could somehow escape his tortured situation by some reincarnation mechanism.

Further, reincarnation runs completely counter to the eschatological view of the Scriptures.

> The ultimate objective of all reincarnation is to fuse with "ultimate reality", to merge with God, to become God. All reincarnation teachings are based on a monistic, mystical-occult world view that promotes the essential divinity of humanity, denies the notion of a sovereign personal God, and offer the promise of esoteric wisdom.

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[41] Goldschmidt and Seacord, "Judaism, Reincarnation and Theodicy", 400.

[42] Goldschmidt and Seacord, "Judaism, Reincarnation and Theodicy", 393.

[43] Ronit Meroz, "The Middle Eastern Origins of Kabbalah", *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* (February 2007), 39-56.

> Biblical Christianity, in contrast to reincarnational teaching, emphasizes grace, atonement and forgiveness for fallen humanity through the once-for-all death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian's disavowal of reincarnation is anchored in the Biblical assertion that "man is destined to die once, and that that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).[44]

Psalms, death and the afterlife. The Psalms have been characterized as s*ui generis*[45] in the Old Testament literature, in that they are "the supreme example of religious devotion and served as effective vehicles for the propagation of truths unfolded in the processes of divine revelation."[46]

T. D. Alexander's examination of the Psalms concluded twenty-six psalms had a strong theme of death in them; twenty-three could be divided into either death by violence or death by illness, while three were concerned with death in a less specific way.[47] Alexander's analysis showed a clear emphasis on death itself but a more figurative or symbolic representation of Sheol as a metaphor for the afterlife. One psalm with which Alexander interacts is Psalm 88, with special attention to verse 13. He believes the reference to being delivered from "the depths of Sheol" is meant to be figurative, not literal. It is highly likely the allusions to Sheol and being "set apart" to death are symbols showing the depths of the psalmist's suffering.

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44 Enroth, "Reincarnation", 926.

45 "In a class of its own".

46 R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969).

47 T. Desmond Alexander, "The Psalms and the Afterlife", *IBS* 9.1 (January 1981), 4.

Sheol" is meant to be figurative, not literal.[48] It is highly likely the allusions to Sheol and being "set apart" to death are symbols showing the depths of the psalmist's suffering.[49]

One psalm thought to engage the idea of the afterlife is Psalm 49, particularly verses 13-14. There the writer speaks of the forms of the wicked dead decaying in the grave, completely separated from their mansions — no longer able to trust in their riches to gain them an advantage. By contrast is Psalm 73, where the "privileged position of the righteous" is contrasted to the fate of the wicked.[50] Instead of the grave and decay, the righteous enjoy the on-going presence of God and divine favor indicated by God holding the author "by my right hand" (verse 23). In this life, the author receives God's counsel; in the afterlife, God will take the author to glory (verse 24). The psalmist may have had doubts and questions in this life, but he is assured God will in time receive him in "glory" - heaven - where all doubts and questions either about God's existence, His justice or His governance will completely disappear.[51]

Alexander concludes his examination of the Psalms and the afterlife with the affirmation the Psalms contain a definite knowledge of the afterlife.

> …the traditional consensus that the Psalter contains no significant discussion of the Hebrew conception of the afterlife must be questioned. By concentrating on the numerically greater Psalms of Lament and Thanksgiving scholars came, not surprisingly, to view the psalms as being uninterested in life after death. Unfortunately, insufficient attention was given to the very small group of psalms which do not all within these

48 Alexander, "The Psalms and the Afterlife", 6.

49 W. Dennis Tucker and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms* (Volume 2) (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 305. .

50 Alexander, "The Psalms and the Afterlife", 11.

51 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament Explanatory and Practical: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), II:201.

> larger categories, and consequently important evidence to the contrary has been neglected. Rather than being assessed independently, Psalms 49 and 73 have been wrongly interpreted in the light of results obtained elsewhere in the Psalter.[52]

The prophets and warnings to Israel. A reading of the Old Testament prophets shows they were very familiar with and very able to engage others persuasively to achieve their desired end, and, at times, "death was the ultimate threat, and this was one of the most powerful image they could evoke."[53] At times, the prophets would use anthropomorphistic images to give color and force to their message. An example of this is in Isaiah 5:14. Sheol "enlarges its appetite" and "opened its mouth" in order to bring judgment on the disobedient royalty in Israel. Isaiah was communicating the certainty of captivity to the people, accompanied with hunger, thirst and finally, death. Sheol's enlarged appetite is a picture of "a great monster with wide and open jaws, ready to receive those who die."[54] Isaiah 5:12 speaks of the feast and the music at the feasts; the judgment coming will change the feast from the people and their food to Sheol consuming those who are given to sin.[55] The picture of Sheol having an appetite and eating the damned could well have arisen, in part, from the Ugaritic deity Mot, "the swallowing god of death".[56]

> This image of Death as a hunter, fisherman or bird-catcher has been linked with Mot, the Canaanite god of the underworld. Mot appears chiefly as a sluggish but rapacious monster waiting for his prey to come to him. I believe that

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[52] Alexander, "The Psalms and the Afterlife", 15.

[53] Christopher B. Hays, "Death", in Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *DOTP*, 152.

[54] Young, *The Book of Isaiah,* I:212.

[55] Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 114.

[56] Hays, "Death", *DOTP*, 153.

> the imagery is Egyptian in origin.[57]

The messages of the prophets was more focused on the events and attitudes of this present life, including repentance and reform, than they were necessary about an afterlife. There were times, however, where the prophecy did involve death, characterized as an enemy (cf. Jeremiah 9:21-22). As such, the prophets looked forward to the time when Yahweh, in complete triumph, will end death's intrusion into life.[58] Isaiah 25:7-9 is a poem of hope and victory, eschatologically declaring a time God shall "swallow up" completely the cause of misery in the human condition — death.[59]

The prophets tended to focus on "theocentric" living, a desire for the people to open their hearts to the Spirit of God, whose actions serve to guide the people into righteousness and holiness. [60] More often than not, the people rejected the prophetic warning, particularly when the demand was made for repentance and reformation (cf. Jeremiah 6:10, 17).

> Freedom is not a natural disposition, but God's precious gift to man. Those in whom viciousness becomes second nature, those in whom brutality is linked with haughtiness, forfeit their ability and therefore their right to receive that gift. Hardening of the heart is the suspension of freedom. Sin becomes compulsory and self-destructive. Guilt and punishment become one.[61]

God entreaties and warnings through the prophets, generally falling on willfully deaf ears, brought stern warnings of

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[57] Burns, "Some Personifications of Death in the Old Testament", 24.

[58] Philip S. Johnston, "Afterlife", *DOTP*, 1.

[59] Young, *Isaiah*, II:196.

[60] Willem A VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 361.

[61] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2000), I:361.

consequences, including that of death. One such example is Jeremiah 42:13-17.

> "However, if you say, 'We will not stay in this land,' and so disobey the LORD your God, and if you say, 'No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread,' then hear the word of the LORD, you remnant of Judah. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there, then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die. Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them'.

"Determined", or "set your face" in Hebrew is idiomatic for having made a decision, "tenaciously clinging to a certain course of action" by those who would not be swayed from their stubborn decision, "even (by) the word of divine warning", to do other than what they wanted to do. The very things the Israelites desired to avoid — death, whether by sword, famine or plague — would become their lot if they chose to flee to Egypt.[62] Death, the counter to life, which was viewed as divine favor, indicated the removal of that favor and a separation from any and all blessings from God.[63]

Jesus and the power of death. Life in Scripture is sourced back to the Son of God (John 1:4). Operating by and through the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14), Jesus manifested life as a sign of the present presence of the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:20). In the Gospel records are three when Jesus, as the author of life, took authority over death.

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[62] John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), II:403.

[63] Jennings, "A Biblical Portrait", 103.

• *Nain.* This small town is believed to be about six miles southeast of Nazareth near a place called "Little Hermon."[64] A widow's only son has passed; nothing is said of the man's age or the reason for his decease. Nevertheless, this situation was a complete social an economic disaster for the widow, as she was left with no tangible means of support.[65] The story is fairly straightforward: Jesus saw the funeral procession, He intervened, He restored the dead man to life and then restored him to his overjoyed mother.[66] Jesus' command for the young (?) man to rise would have been a "cruel remark unless He had the power to bring it to pass."[67] When Jesus touched the funeral bier, commanding for the bearers to stop in their journey to the tomb, He demonstrated both compassion and authority, first for the widow and then to overturn the effect of death and remove the grief with which it was associated.

• *Daughter of Jairus.* The next resuscitation or raising from the dead involved the pre-teen daughter of Jairus, a "ruler of the synagogue" (Luke 8:41). Jairus came to Jesus, desperate, pleading for help for his only daughter[68] was dying. In the

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[64] Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Baker Bible Atlas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 308.

[65] See 1 Timothy 5:3-10, where the apostle Paul addresses the need for the Church to give help to those widows who were "really in need", having no family to help them. Acts 6:1-2 documents the complaints of the Greek widows in the Church, who were being "overlooked" when the believers provided food help on a daily basis. See H. Jamieson, "Widow", in *ZPEB* IV:928-929, who points out several places in both the Old and the New Testament highlighting the general helplessness of the widow and the divine requirement to care for the widow along with the orphan as those "sincerely pitied."

[66] There is some discussion as to whether this miracle at Nain was a resurrection or a resuscitation. Warren Vanhetloo, "Two Resurrections", *CBTJ* (Spring 1990), 117-118, argues for a "resuscitation resurrection", where the dead person came out of the grave but would face death again. Grant Osborne, "Resurrection", *DJG,* 677, similarly argues that because the ones Jesus restored to life would face death again, the were miracles of resuscitation, not resurrection.

[67] Darrell C. Bock, *Luke* (NIVAC) (Grand Rpaids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 204-205.

[68] Luke's detail that this girl was Jairus' "only daughter" may also indicate she was his only child, thus giving a greater weight to his passioned entreaty to Jesus. See Owen Crouch, *When God Became Human: Studies in the Gospel of Luke* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1991), 129.

course of His going to Jairus' home, Jesus was "interrupted" by a woman with a twelve year bleeding situation, which left her "unclean" (Leviticus15:25f) and subject to much disgrace in the public sector.[69] The woman's touch of the fringe of Jesus' garment effected her immediate healing; Jesus' brief interaction with her caused a delay in his going to Jairus' home. Two messengers came from the man's house to inform the daughter had passed away. Jesus was undeterred; He continued to Jairus' home, went in to where the child's body was on a bed, and raised her back to life (Luke 8:54-55).

• *Lazarus of Bethany* (John 11:1-44). The pericope gives no doubt Lazarus was truly dead. He had been in the tomb for four days and was believed to have gone beyond the opportunity for a resurrection. Jesus ordered the stone covering the tomb be moved, then commanded Lazarus to come out. The man stepped out of the grave, covered in the grave cloths.

Were these miracles of restored life a genuine resurrection or simply a resuscitation? The New Testament language of "resurrection" is connected with "a new body, glorious, incorruptible and immortal (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)".[70] It is perhaps preferable to see the miracles of raising from the dead as resuscitations or revivifications, but not resurrections in the strictest sense as it is found in the New Testament. Jesus, in His reply to John the Baptist's question, did not say people were being resurrected; He did say the dead are raised (Matthew 11:5); it could be objected that "raised from the dead" is a metaphor for resurrection (see Matthew 17:9). However, Paul's teaching on resurrection typically and consistently connected it with the eschatological state (cf. Romans 6:5, 1 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 4:14), consistent with Jesus' teaching that resurrection was a future event, attached to the idea of final judgment.[71] The use of "raised from the dead" would then be necessarily interpreted in light of context; a resurrection was

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[69] Crouch, *When God Became Human*, 130.

[70] R. E. O. White, "Resurrection", *EDT*, 943.

[71] Willliamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 84-85.

indeed a raising from the dead, but it was not a raising to continue with the old way of life in the same old body (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:35-58).

Jesus' power over physical death during His earthly ministry is more than likely an indicator of His power over spiritual death as well, in that by His sinless life and sacrificial death He made a way for human sinners who, bound up in spiritual death, might find a way to God (cf. 1 Peter 3:18). To come to Christ in salvation, is to come into life, to pass out of death (John 5:24). Such people may still experience physical death but they will not experience the horrors of spiritual death (John 8:51-52) and never undergo "eternal separation from God, a second death" (Revelation 20:14).[72]

Death and the atonement. The very nature of the atonement in Scripture is one of something dying in order to provide life for something else. Atonement in the Old Testament is often viewed as an "expiation" or an "expiatory sacrifice";[73] the term "expiation" in Scriptural use, refers to "the removal of guilt by means of an atonement or satisfaction offered to God."[74]

It has also been argued that death in the creation, as a general truth, and the death of Christ, specifically, cannot be "considered in isolation."

> Clearly, if the Bible message means nothing at all, it means that the death of man is somehow related to his standing before God. It means too that the death of Christ is organically related to that alteration in the standing of man before God which we call the atonement. The significance of the death of Christ cannot be understood apart for the significance of death in general. The death of

[72] P. H. Davids, "Death", *EDT*, 300.

[73] A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 401.

[74] Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International and Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ambassador Productions, 2002), 173.

> Christ has meaning because it was a deliberate and voluntary entry into a human experience which also has meaning.[75]

It has also been argued that atonement is substitutionary, in that God in and through Christ bore the death (because of sin) that was meant for humans.[76] It has also been argued that the idea of a "substitutionary" atonement is not a true representation of the meaning and the effect of Christ's death. Among the ideas *contra* substitutionary atonement include that of a *representative* death, with the thought that a substitutionary death is "crude, external, legalistic and mechanical". [77] Thus Christ died as humankind's representative. This position can be summarized as follows:

> He believes that Jesus, drawing on Old Testament conceptions, especially those of the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant, and at the same time transforming them, gave a profound interpretation of His own sacrifice as representative and vicarious. The same aspects are presented repeatedly in the witness to Christ found throughout the New Testament. Christ has identified Himself with men, taken upon Himself the consequences of human sin and has presented to God on behalf of men a perfect offering of penitence and submission. The sacrifice is not substitutionary except in the sense that Christ does for men what they cannot do for themselves. Substitution in the sense of a transfer of guilt, an external or mechanical exchange expressive of a legal rather than an ethical and

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[75] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Significance of Death in Relationship to the Atonement", *EvQ* 21:2 (April 1949), 122.

[76] For example, John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 7.

[77] Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 40.

> religious relationship, is to be definitely excluded.[78]

However, Leon Morris argued at length from word studies and contextual use in both the Old and the New Testaments that the death of Christ was necessarily substitutionary. The Greek *lutron*, "ransom"" (Matthew 20:28 par. Mark 10:45), "consistently notes the payment of a ransom price substitutionary in character, and the same we saw to be true almost universally outside the Bible."[79] It has been suggested that the use of *lutron* in Mark 10:45 "seems to combine the substitutionary redemption of Isaiah 53 by the one on behalf of the many with the idea the many are the elect community."[80] It is perhaps preferable to regard the atonement as a substitutionary act rather than a representative one, given the language of Isaiah 53/Mark 10:45 and the evidence in the earliest writers of the Church that Christ's death was indeed substitutionary in its nature and meaning.[81] However, it should be noted the proposal to consider the atonement as both substitutionary and representative.[82]

The work of Christ on the cross, as an atonement, was not incomplete or partial; all which was necessary to accomplish victory over sin and death was accomplished in and through the cross.

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[78] G. B. Mather, "The Atonement: Representative or Substitutionary?", *CJT* IV:4 (1958), 268.

[79] Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 33.

[80] NTDNTW, 771.

[81] For a discussion of the substitutionary atonement in the writings of the church fathers, see Garry J. Williams, "Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Church Fathers", *EvQ* 83:11 (July 2011), 195-216, which is a critique and refutation of another article which disputed Williams' findings and rejected the substitutionary nature of the atonement. See also Peter Ensor, "Tertullian and Penal Substitutionary Atonement", *EvQ* 86.2 (2014), 130-142;, idem., "Justin Martyr and Penal Substitutionary Atonement", *EvQ* 83.3 (2011), 217-232, and idem., "Clement of Alexandria and Penal Substitutionary Atonement", *EvQ* 85.1 (2013), 19-35.

[82] Mather. "The Atonement", 272.

> When Jesus cried on the cross from Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34), it was not a cry of defeat as one who had pinned his hopes on the advent of God's kingdom only to be disappointed at the end. Rather, it was a cry of abandonment. Jesus was abandoned by God because he bore the sins of others and God could no longer look upon his Son with love. Jesus made that cry of God-forsakenness so that no child of God would ever be God-forsaken. Jesus became a cosmic sponge that absorbed the evil of humanity and the wrath of God against it. He absorbed the wrath with such perfection and such finality that no wrath remains on those for whom his sacrifice is effected.[83]

Sin brings an alienation from God (Colossians 1:21). That sin that brings separation from God is at the same time an alienation from life. Man's rejection of the relationship of God because of sin beings a spiritual blindness (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4) and a spiritual deafness that chooses to ignore the call of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2) to receive salvation through Christ. Man outside of relationship with God abides in death; physical death cannot be artificially divided from spiritual death, as sin brought both into the world. God through Christ's atoning work made it possible for God to "receive the sinner again *qua* person where once he must be rejected and destroyed *qua* sinner."[84] It thus becomes ironic, in a sense, that within the divine economy to understand death as destructive and so at odds with the gift of life in Christ while simultaneously knowing death is the instrument or the means by which sin and death itself is defeated.[85] Christ's vicarious death became the perfect and necessary substitute for man and his sin.

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[83] Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 405.

[84] Bromiley, "Significance of Death", 125-126.

[85] Bromiley, "Significance of Death", 126.

> Jesus' death is a necessity to deal with the fundamental human problem of death, for it is through his death that Jesus deals with sin and defeats death.[86]

Effect of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus spoke of a coming resurrection (John 5:28-29) in which He would be the effectual agent (John 6:39). His use of "last day" language is definitively future-oriented; it is connected to the idea of a "final judgment" as well as a spiritual resurrection at the time of salvation, but never to any pre-eschatological resurrection event.[87]

Caution has been expressed over exalting the resurrection at the expense of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus the crucified is Jesus the risen; one cannot be separated from the other (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11). [88] It also has been argued Paul's declarations in 1 Corinthians 15 derive from a creedal statement circulating in church prior to 54 A.D., the date "generally agreed upon" [89] when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Ananias, the Damascene believer who came to Saul/Paul after the latter's confrontation by the risen Christ (see Acts 9), may well have taught the creedal statement to the recent convert.[90] The significance of this apparent long-held teaching in the Church has to do with a proper understanding of the nature of Christ's redemptive work as well as the importance to understand the resurrection as a crucial event against death.

> …the believer has a new relationship with God through God's work in Jesus Christ, and based on that new relatedness the believer anticipates God's gift of a new life after death through the resurrection (of the dead). This whole chapter is

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[86] Wright, "Death, the Dead and the Underworld", 108.

[87] Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 84.

[88] Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Message of the Resurrection* (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2000), 121.

[89] Henry C. Theissen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 205, thinks the letter was written in the spring of 54 A.D or possibly 55 A.D.

[90] Beasley-Murray, *The Meaning of the Resurrection*, 122.

> Paul's argument against the Corinthians' misunderstanding of resurrection, or life after death, as a simple freeing of the spirit through death. Paul insists that humans are creatures whose lives are created by God. If there is a life beyond this physical world, it is life as new creation because God who gave a first physical life now redeems that corrupt existence in a new, incorruptible gift of (spiritual) life through the resurrection from the dead. … Paul insists that the resurrection of the dead, the granting of a new, transformed life's a new creation, is not only true; indeed, it is the key to comprehending the reality of God's saving work.[91]

Two statements in particular in 1 Corinthians 15 demonstrate the necessary importance of Christ resurrected from the dead. The first is in 1 Corinthians 15:14 - "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." Paul's reference to "our preaching" is probably not limited to his ministry but to the whole of the Christian message, everything about Christ and the cross and salvation, everything the church beginning in Jerusalem had been proclaiming since the Day of Pentecost.[92] If Christ remains in the grave, dead, then all the preaching about hope and release from sin is useless (or, "vain", as in ESV); the Greek Paul used, *kenos*, can mean "empty, having nothing, empty handed": by metonymy, "fruitless, void", and is also translated in the New Testament as "hollow, fallacious, false".[93] The weight of this cannot be missed. If Christ was not resurrected, then the whole of the Christian message is a lie, giving false hope and deliberately deceiving people.

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[91] Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 316.

[92] See Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity and Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 226f for a discussion on the tradition in the preaching and its relationship to Jerusalem.

[93] William D. Mounce, ed. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1188.

This is borne out in the second text, 1 Corinthians 15:17 - "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Remaining in sin necessarily means remaining in death, with an existence devoid of any hope of any other than the grave and the darkness of the afterlife. If it is said that Christ is not raised, then those who were "in Christ" when they died "simply perished."[94] The early Christian writer Clement, in his epistle to the Corinthians, affirmed the reality of Christ resurrected from the dead was the bedrock of hope beyond the dismal prospects of the grave and a Christless afterlife.

> Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead (1 Clement 24).[95]

Paul consistently connects having hope to the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the faith of individuals in that truth (Romans 6:8-10). Jesus arising from the grave gives rise to the assurance of a coming spiritual resurrection; death's power will be ended just as it was ended when Christ died on the cross, and by that power will those who believe in Christ in a state of both spiritual life and eventual heavenly life.[96]

New Testament and the afterlife. A strong influence on Jewish conception of "afterlife" derives from Ecclesiastes, also known as *Qoholeth* or *Qohelet* (from Heb. *qōhelet*).[97] It is in Ecclesiastes where questions are raised about the actual fate of both the righteous and the unrighteous dead, even though some scholars believe the writer had no true belief in any afterlife.[98] For example, the writer was convinced no one can

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[94] Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 327.

[95] Clement, "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians", *ANF*, I:11.

[96] Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1881), 245-246.

[97] For a brief introduction to *"Qohelet",* see M. A. Shields, "Qohelet", *DOTWPW,* 635-640.

[98] Stephen Sims, "Problems with Ecclesiastes", *KTR* 12:2 (Autumn 1989), 49.

discern their future (Ecclesiastes 7:14), that sometimes the righteous suffer the consequences of the wicked and the wicked receive what the righteous should have received (Ecclesiastes 8:14). It was in the later *Targum Qoheleth* (late 1st century A.D.) that Judaism began to understand the afterlife as having a deed-consequence connection.[99] In the Gospels, Jesus revealed much about the afterlife which would may or may not have been understood or accepted within the Judaism of His day.[100] The two major religious groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were split in disagreement as to whether there was a post-mortem resurrection (Luke 20:27, Acts 23:6-8). Jesus' allusions to the afterlife indicate that both the wicked and the righteous dead will certainly have a conscious existence once they leave this earthly sphere. A comatose, slumbering being (the idea of "soul sleep") will not be "weeping" or "gnashing" the teeth (cf. Matthew 22:13, 24:5, 25:30; Luke 13:26). While the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is parabolic, and the content of the story may be more metaphorical than literal, it is still legitimate to conclude that the righteous dead receive blessing after death while the unrighteous enter into a place of conscious, eternal punishment.[101]

There is debate among scholars as to what the New Testament actually teaches about what happens after death. Some think the metaphors of "darkness" and "fire", for example, need to be

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99 Sims, "Problems", 50

100 Kim Papaioannou "Motifs of Death and Hell in the Teaching Of Jesus. Part 2: An Examination of Gehenna", *MJT* 33.1-2 (2017), reviews Jewish writings outside the canonical Old Testament, demonstrating a strong conception of a resurrection at the end of time: "Resurrection plays an important role in non-Biblical Jewish writings. In 4 Ezra 4:42 the 'the earth' is compared to the womb of a pregnant woman, anxious to deliver. The dust will give back what does not belong to it (2 Baruch 42:8). Sheol will return the deposits she received (1 Enoch 51:1). In 2 Baruch 50:2 the dead return to life in exactly the same form in which they died. As such, Hades/Sheol is only a temporary home for the dead. It is not a place of punishment; rather punishment will come in the day of judgement. After the resurrection, Hades itself will cease, the realm of death will be sealed, and its mouth will be shut." The question is how many of the common people of Jesus' day, and before, were aware of these writings.

101 Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 206.

understood in a strictly literal sense, others have argued that such metaphors, since they are not explicitly explained in the Scriptures, become "hints" about the exact meaning of suffering for unbelievers, in that "rebel sinners will suffer the eternal mental and physical consequences of their ultimate and irreversible alienation and separation from the person and gifts of God."[102] Morey ties conscious eternal punishment for rebel sinners to the atoning work of Christ, offering three points of rationale for his premise.

First, the atonement, as a factual reality", "reveals the necessity of divine punishment for sin." Second, Christ's suffering on the cross experienced the punishment "which His people would have suffered". Third, what Christ suffered vicariously "will be a good indication of the nature of divine punishment for rebel sinners."[103]

There are several views on the fate of the unrighteous dead among Biblical scholars; here we briefly discuss the better-known positions.[104]

• *No life after death.* Social reformer and agnostic Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) felt modern science had successfully accomplished the "dispelling of religious myths, such as heaven and hell."

• *Universalism.*[105] British philosopher John Hick (1922-2012) rejected both traditional evangelical theology and with it, the long-held teaching on hell. Hick felt that such a doctrine was "morally revolting" as it makes God out into One who is content with "unappeasable vindictiveness and insatiable cruelty." Hick

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102 Robert Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984), 101.

103 Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 101-102.

104 Here we follow the outline from Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 3-16.

105 For a discussion and critique of universalism, see Graham J. Watts, "Is universalism theologically coherent? The contrasting views of P. T. Forsyth and T. F. Torrance", *EQ* 84.1 (2012), 40-46.

embraced the idea of universalism, where everyone, without qualification, will eventually be saved and enter into heaven. The means by which all persons will enter heaven among universalism proponents, but all seem to reach the same basic conclusion.

> Nineteenth-century advocates of universalism frequently emphasized the role of retributive punishment in their scheme, but more modern universalists often reject hell as a result of rejecting the idea of retributive punishment Thus the problem of universalism cannot be reduced to a simple choice of alternatives. Only the belief that ultimately all men will be saved is common to all universalists. The rationale for that belief and the total theological context in which it belongs vary considerably.[106]

• *Post-mortem evangelism.* This view is a necessary aspect of the idea of annihilationism (see below). A strong advocate of this idea was theologian Clark Pinnock (1937-2010) whose views on the afterlife shifted considerably over the years. He believed God would raise the impenitent in order to give them one more chance to be saved, because God desires to save every person.

• *Annihilationism.* This is also known as "conditional mortality."[107] Pinnock strongly advocated for the idea that the impenitent will not suffer in an everlasting hell but will be made completely non-existent — annihilated — as a consequence of their having died without Christ.

> Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and

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[106] Richard Bauckham, "Universalism: An Historical Survey", *Themelios* 4.2 (September 1978), 47.

[107] For a discussion and critique of annihilationism, see Andy Saville, "Arguing with Annihilationism: An Assessment of the Doctrinal Arguments for Annihilationism", *SBET* 24.1 (Spring 2006), 65-90.

> moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon His creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God…[108]

Other theologians who held to annihilationism or conditional immortality were John R. W. Stott (1921-2011) and John Wenham (1913-1996).[109]

• *Orthodox belief.* Those who adopt what is known as the "orthodox" position on the fate of the unsaved is based on the plainness of Jesus' teaching, which then precludes any other conclusion.

> …against the wrong body of NT teaching that there is a continuing punishment of sin we cannot put one saying which speaks plainly of an end to the punishment of the finally impenitent. Those who look for a different teaching in the NT must point to possible inferences and alternative interpretations. But if Jesus wished to teach something other than eternal retribution, it is curious that he has not left one saying which plainly says so. In the NT there is no indication that the punishment of sin ever ceases.[110]

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[108] Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent", (http://claypeck.com/articles/the-destruction-of-the-finally-impenitent-clark-h-pinnock/#sthash.zDTPmC6Z.dpuf), accessed September 2, 2021, n.p.

[109] See Robert A. Peterson, "Basil Atkinson: A Key Figure for Twentieth-Century Evangelical Annihilationism", *The Churchman* 111.3 (Autumn 1997), 198-217 for a discussion on the influence on John Wenham to adopt the annihilationist position.

[110] Leon Morris, "Eternal Punishment", *EDT,* 369-370.

Jesus' claim that He had come to give abundant life (John 5:21, 6:27) is probably intended to go beyond the limitations of the corporeal, mortal state. It is necessarily meant as the divine alternative for the consequences of sin in the world, consequences which bring the wrath of God (i.e., 1 Thessalonians 2:16) that is to all except those "who find refuge in the Son".[111] For the righteous dead, there will be no surprise s to their rewards for their faithfulness to God. Having died in Christ, with the knowledge of their union with Christ, and the finished payment of the penalty for sin, and at the time of their judgment they will not be giving account as to whether they were saved but rather the quality of their lives lived for Christ after salvation (2 Corinthians 5:10). Having this knowledge, "it is inconceivable that believers should be surprised by the verdict delivered."[112]

But what of those who die without salvation in Christ? Cunnington points to the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, particularly to the foolish ones. He argues they failed to prepare themselves for the imminent but unannounced return of Christ. When they returned from their search for oil for their lamps, the bridegroom had already appeared and the door to the wedding was locked, denying them entrance. Instead of demanding what they thought should have been theirs, they ought to have been crying for mercy.[113]

A popular position within evangelicalism is the idea that both the righteous and the unrighteous dead will be "immortal" post-mortem. However, it has been argued that immortality is not a "given" in the New Testament, and the unbeliever, in a reading of the apostle Paul, never achieves "immortal" status.

> The view of immortality that predominates in Western and Christian thought is Platonic, according to which the term signifies an inherent

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111 Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 109.

112 Ralph Cunnington, "A Re-Examination of the Intermediate State of Unbelievers" *EQ* 82:3 (2010), 220.

113 Cunnington, "A Re-examination", 223.

> characteristic of every rational soul that guarantees its persistence after death. For Paul, however, immortality is a natural attribute of God alone (1 Timothy 6:16) and a future acquisition of the righteous gained by means of a resurrection transformation (Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:52-54). Immortality is conditional, but only in the sense that there is no eternal life except in Christ. This does not imply that existence beyond death is conditional and that unbelievers will be annihilated. Because, in New Testament usage, immortality has positive content, being more than mere survival beyond death, its opposite is not non-existence but the 'second death' (Revelation 20:6, 14) which involves exclusion from God's presence (2 Thessalonians 1:9). All human beings survive beyond death but not all will become immortal in the Pauline sense. As for the question of man's original state, we may suggest the he was crested neither immortal (see Genesis 3:22-24) nor mortal (see Genesis 2:17) but with the potentiality to become either, depending on his obedience or disobedience to God. While not created with immortality, he was certainly created for immortality. Potentially immortal by nature, man actually becomes immortal through grace.[114]

Other world religions have an aspiration for immortality, but none have the mechanisms to deliver on the aspiration. Islam believes Allah gave immortality to all, but the righteous will enjoy bliss while the unrighteous will experience the fire of hell.[115] Buddhists have no idea of "the soul"; they cannot accept there is anything in the world which is either eternal or

[114] Murray J. Harris, "The New Testament View of Life After Death", *Themelios* 11.2 (January 1986), 47.

[115] Muhammad Mitwaly Ash-Sha'rawy, "Man and Immortality", https://www.islambasics.com/chapter/man-and-immortality, accessed September 15, 2021.

unchangeable.[116] Hinduism asserts immortality is to be achieved by "surpassing death", a "complete identification with the real person", known as "the Self."[117]

Evangelical Biblical theology would necessarily dispute those systems, coming closest to Islam with their belief in Allah granting immortality, but noting an absence within Islam of any opportunity to weigh against the consequences of sin, including the death it necessary causes. What Allah gives is based not on grace but on an individual's works.[118] It is readily apparent nothing within Islam allows for either grace or compassion.[119]

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[116]Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, "Is There An Eternal Soul?", https://www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbeliev/115.htm, accessed September 15, 2021.

[117] R. Dinesh, "Joy of Being: Life, Death and Immortality", The Hindu (July 11, 2016), https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/society/joy-of-being-life-death-and-immortality/article3380633.ece, accessed September 15, 2021.

[118] Peter G. Riddell, "Islam (Shi'a)", in Christopher Partridge, ed., *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World* (Leicester, UK and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 244-247 notes the entirety of a Muslim's life is spent on doing to achieve; nothing is mentioned about grace or atonement.

[119] Wanis Seeman, "The Relationship of Islam to Judaism and Christianity," *MJT* 11:1 & 2 (1995), 77. Seeman, who is a "sociologist of religion", points out Islam's great divide with Christianity comes in the identification of Jesus Christ: "Islam posits strongly the belief that Jesus was a mere man, although He is believed to have been a very good man, but still He was only a man. He is not divine; He is one among the many prophets whom God had sent at different times to different peoples. Islam denies the crucifixion. Someone who looked like Jesus did, in fact, get crucified. God would not permit such a person to be so brutally killed. God raised Him to Himself. In other words, Jesus, even today, still lives in the body somewhere, and that, some day, He shall die, and, on the day of the general resurrection, He will be raised with all the others. And since He was not crucified, He cannot have been raised from the dead, as Christians claim and believe." In that denial of the Incarnation and the ontological being of Jesus, there is a denial that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Any religion based on works, such as Islam, cannot provide any assurance, for no one will ever know whether his or her works in this life were sufficient to appease the deity. In many respects, Islam is a religion of salvation by works - fasting, pilgrimage, reading the Qu'ran, reciting prayers, defending the faith - which means at the time of death, no one can be assured the works done in life were sufficient.

Christian doctrine holds to salvation vicariously provided, offered freely, effectual for those who respond in faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The ground of salvation is God's grace and mercy; the response to His offer of salvation is grace and mercy in service to Him.[120] The eschatological parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) speaks of a division based on works; the "sheep", having faithfully served, are taken to the side of divine favor, while the "goats", having not served faithfully, are taken to the left, rejected, and labeled as "cursed". The "sheep" are the saved who responded to the call to service (e.g., Ephesians 2:10), while the "goats" either never truly responded or turned back from their initial faith,[121] and were judged as unworthy to be in the presence of the King.

Post-mortem judgment. Scripture very clearly teaches that both the righteous and the unrighteous will face a post-mortem time of judgment. The venues are different and the outcomes, of course, are different. But both occasions remain times of judgment.

For those who die as believers in Christ, the time of reckoning will be at the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This judgment is not as to one's salvation; it is a judgment on response to having been saved, of serving in the Kingdom.[122] It is a matter of faith, ultimately, not works, that brings to that

[120] Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 350-351.

[121] "Never truly responded" reflects Calvinism/Reformed view, while "turned back" reflects the Arminian view. In sum, the "goats", whether they never responded or turned back still has them arrive at the same awful destination.

[122] David Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29) (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishers, 1999), 265-267, draws on Paul's words in verse 9, about living to please the Lord, as indication that this judgment is reserved for believers in Christ and the standard will be how such people lived their post-salvation lives.

judgment, and it is works that will be judged as the standard of that faith.[123]

Unbelievers, conversely, will be judged on their works in their lifetime, having no refuge in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Human works are never esteemed as worthy of divine favor (Isaiah 64:6), not when those works are offered as a standard or proof of one's supposed righteousness before God.[124] Their end is eternal consignment to the "lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14).[125]

The end of death. "Death" will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire in the eschaton (Revelation 20:14). In John's next vision after the last judgment, he hears "a loud voice from the throne" declare "there will be no more death" (Revelation 21:4). Jesus said that "in the age to come", that is, in the eschaton, those who believe will receive "eternal life" (Luke 18:30). With the permanent removal of death from human existence, those believers who receive eternal life will "enjoy the fullness of divine life forever as a state of well-being or process"; they will also reign with Christ "forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).[126]

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123 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), II:184, notes, "That all will stand before God's judgment-seat offers the severest kind of rebuke to the impiety of sitting in judgment upon others whether it is in the form of censorious condemnation or haughty contempt."

124 Commenting on Isaiah 64:6, Young (*Isaiah*, III:436) observes: "The term unclean…is the technical word to indicate a legal impurity (cf. Leviticus 5:2, 7:19), and he people are acknowledging that were like those whom the law required to call out 'Unclean!' so that other men might not be contaminated by them. The second comparison, lit., garment of times, refers to the menstrual periods of a woman. Both these comparisons are intended to stress the character of sin as pollution and to point out its disgusting nature. The righteous works that the people could present before God were even in their own eyes as disgusting and filthy as the menstrual cloths of women."

125 The nature of the lake of fire is debated; those who hold to the annihilationist position believe the "lake of fire", as the "second death" is metaphorical for complete destruction, while others, who hold to conscious, eternal torment, see a literal lake and literal eternal suffering.

126 Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 134.

The vision of "death and hell" being cast into the lake of fire is not one to be taken in a rigid literalism; neither death nor hell are sentient creatures, which means the idea of conscious eternal torment of either one is nonsensical. The "otherness" of the lake of fire, separate from the new heavens and the new earth, symbolizes a place of non-existence; nothing will stand in the way of the triumphant life-visions which follow.[127]

For the believer, the "death of death" occurs at the time of the Parousia, at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

> (In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58), Paul uses three expressions—'moment', 'twinkling of an eye' and 'sounding of the last trumpet' to show that he is not thinking of a gradual change. The 'moment' is a particular point in history, i.e. the moment of the parousia. Paul does not appear to draw any distinction between the raising of the dead, the transformation of the living and the last trumpet. He does not discuss the question of the intermediate state.
>
> For this reason he sounds the note of victory. The 'perishable' and the 'mortal' are transformed into the imperishable and the immortal. It is no wonder that Paul rejoices over such a hope as this—everything which hampers will be instantaneously removed.[128]

Christ's victory over sin is made complete in the eschaton; the "goats" are sent away, out of the presence of the Lord, suffering the "second death" in the lake of fire, while the "sheep" are brought into the presence of the King. Sin will not be part of the eternal Kingdom of God, and without sin, there is no basis for death (Romans 8:1).

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[127] J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (IVPNTC 20) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 233.

[128] Donald Guthrie, "Transformation and the Parousia", *VoxE* 14 (1984), 44.

ABBREVIATIONS

A. D.	*anno domini* ("year of our Lord")
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
BETS	*Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*
CBTJ	*Calvary Baptist Theological Journal*
CJT	*Canadian Journal of Theology*
DJG	Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels
DOTP	Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets
DOTWPW	Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings
EDT	Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Walter A. Elwell, ed.)
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
Heb.	Hebrew
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
idem.	"the same"; used to replace the name of a repeated author.
IJP	*Indian Journal of Psychiatry*
IJT	*Indian Journal of Theology*
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
KTR	*King's Theological Review*
MJT	*Melanesian Journal of Theology*
NAC	New American Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary New Testament
NTDNTW	NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTC	New Testament Commentary
repr.	*reprint*

TC	Tyndale Commentary
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
VoxE	*Vox Evangelica*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZPEB	Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible

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