
The Concept of Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament and its Implication for the People of Hona in Gombi, LGA., Adamawa State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the afterlife is not a strange subject to an average African person. According to the African belief system, life continues after death in a different location. When a person dies, they continue to exist in a spirit realm in a new body replicating the one they had before but can move like an ancestor. Being an ancestor after death is something that everyone wants to experience, but it is believed that this cannot happen if a person did not live a fulfilling life or if their life was cut short due to an accident or an untimely death. This author is not ignorant of myriads of publications done by other authors about the same subject, but rather to fill a gap that he discovered as it relates to the people of Hona. The paper presents the concept of the afterlife in the Old Testament and how Hebrews believed in an afterlife devoid of any pleasures that make this life delightful and rewarding, which historians widely propagate. Nevertheless, this interpretation did not accurately reflect the ideas found in the Old Testament. The idea that death was just a normal part of life suggested that the end of life predominated in the pre-Exilic period. Therefore, in this paper, such a concept is reviewed through historical-critical discourse and its application as it relates to the people of the Hona ethnic group of Gombi L.G.A., Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Introduction

The subject of the afterlife is not a strange subject to an average African person. According to the African belief system, life continues after death in a different location. When a person dies, they continue to exist in a spirit realm in a new body replicating the one they had before but can move like an ancestor. Being an ancestor after death is something that everyone wants to experience, but it is believed that this cannot happen if a person did not live a fulfilling life or if their life was cut short due to an accident or an untimely death. Since of this, Africans would prefer a delayed, lingering death that happens naturally because they would have more time to settle many issues, such as making peace and saying farewell to family, and they would be permitted access to the afterlife. Except for the very elderly, death is considered an unnatural and premature event in all groups. Since it is thought that the goal of existence is to become an ancestor after death, a person is given a respectable burial when they die away. If this is not done, the person can become a restless spirit that cannot endure after death and endangers people who are still alive. Funeral rites and ceremonies emphasize this irreconcilable separation, and extra care ensures that no unjustified insult is shown to the deceased. This author is not ignorant of myriads of publications done by other authors about the same subject, but rather to fill a gap that he discovered as it relates to the people of Hona. The paper presents the concept of the afterlife in the Old Testament and how Hebrews believed in an afterlife devoid of any pleasures that make this life delightful and rewarding, which historians widely propagate. Jewish thinking about life after death did not incorporate immortality and resurrection until the late post-Exilic era.

Nevertheless, this interpretation did not accurately reflect the ideas found in the Old Testament. The idea that death was just a normal part of life suggested that the end of life predominated in the pre-Exilic period. Therefore, in this paper, such a concept is reviewed through historical-critical discourse and its

application as it relates to the people of the Hona ethnic group of Gombi L.G.A., Adamawa State, Nigeria.

The Old Testament's view of death

The idea that the Old Testament concept of the afterlife evolved along these lines is generally acknowledged, but additional evidence suggests that this view may need to be modified. It is important to note that the Hebrew word *mawet*, which means “death,” has multiple connotations in the Old Testament.¹¹² It is challenging to determine when the word “death” is being used symbolically or metaphorically because “death” can be interpreted in all situations as being used in its purely biological sense, “the end of historical life.”¹¹³ Understanding some passages can be challenging because the word “death” in *mawet* can have a variety of meanings. Unsurprisingly, this can be critical in determining how the Old Testament views the afterlife.¹¹⁴

According to L. R. Bailey, there are two main ways that biological death is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible: either a person dies a “good” death or a “bad” death. These two types of death appear to have been distinguished by the ancient Hebrews. Bailey offers three standards that, in his opinion, define a “bad” death: early demise (2 Samuel 18:32–33; Isaiah 38:1–12); violent demise (1 Sam. 28:15–20; 1 Kings 2:28–33); and lack of a living heir (Gen. 15:2–3; 2 Sam. 18:18).¹¹⁵

¹¹² L. R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Overtures to Biblical Theology) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 39–47.

¹¹³ Brueggemann comments, ‘Israel’s environment sustained a mythology which presented Death (Mot) as an active personal agent in combat with Yahweh’ (*IDB Supp.*, 219–220). Cook, Stephen L. “Eschatology of the OT.” In *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 2. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 299–308. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.

¹¹⁴ A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2nd edn 1949), 177; R. L. Harris, ‘*māwet*,’ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), p. 497.

¹¹⁵ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives*, 48–51. Johnston, Philip S. “Afterlife.” In *Dictionary of The Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*. Edited

However, those who live to a ripe old age and have descendants to succeed them need not be afraid of dying (Gen. 25:8; 35:28–29).

However, there are passages (Isaiah 57:1–2; 2 Kings. 23:29–30; 2 Chron. 35:24) that raise the possibility that other elements besides Bailey’s descriptions might distinguish between a “good” and a “poor” death, even though they may be uncommon. Because of man’s mortality, death is seen in the New Testament as natural or as a punishment for man’s disobedience. Although many authors contend that these passages portray death as “natural,” there seems to be a strong argument for arguing that death is instead depicted as divine retribution, especially in light of Genesis 2:17 and 3:3–4.¹¹⁶ In contrast, some scholars considered death unnatural, supported by the prohibitions found in Leviticus and Numbers. Anyone who touches a person who has been killed with a sword or who has naturally passed away, or anyone who touches a human bone, or anyone who touches a grave, will be unclean for seven days, according to Numbers 19:16.¹¹⁷ Stricter prohibitions against contact with corpses apply to priests (Lev. 21:2–3, 10–11) and Nazirites (Num. 6:6–12; Judg. 14:8–9) than other religious groups.¹¹⁸ Finally, Leviticus chapter 11 states that all animal carcasses are unclean unless an animal has been sacrificed in a ritual.¹¹⁹ It is clear that death is the critical element of this situation from the fact that a Hebrew could handle unclean animals while they were still alive (camels, pigs) but would become briefly unclean if they touched the corpses

by Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, 5–8. Downers Grove, IL, and Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity, 2008.

¹¹⁶ H. Blocher, *In The Beginning* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 184–187

¹¹⁷ G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 290–291.

¹¹⁸ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 20; E. Feldman, *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 13–30.

¹¹⁹ Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 176–177; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (Leicester: IVP), 129–130.

of those same animals (Vv. 8, 11, 24-28). When kitchenware or household items came into contact with some small animal remains, they also became contaminated (Vv. 29-38).

These representations paint a negative picture of death, showing how it is contaminated and defiled like sin. Such a link hardly lends credence to the notion that death is “part of an organized, controlled, harmonious creation.” It is untrue for Bailey to assert that only premature death is unnatural, and that old age death was the divine intention for creation. However, the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence points to the Hebrews’ belief that death was the just punishment for man’s rebellion against God.

Bailey’s argument is founded on two other fundamental principles. The first is that all men die and go to Sheol, regardless of their moral character.¹²⁰ Any attempt to categorize a person as “good” or “bad” must be based on events before death rather than those that did not. As a result, Bailey concentrates on the details of death, such as whether it was violent, unexpected, or childless. It is assumed that everyone, without exception, enters the nether world after death and that there is no distinction between the righteous and the wicked in Sheol, following one interpretation of the Hebrew concept of Sheol. This presumption is founded on the idea that both good and evil suffer the same consequences in the afterlife. Only once in non-biblical literature does the word “Sheol” refer to the location of the dead. This particular allusion, found in the fifth-century Aramaic papyri of the Jewish community of Elephantine in Egypt, does not suggest much else. The origin of the word “Sheol” is the subject of numerous theories. F. Delitzsch suggested that it originated from the *Akkadian* word *u’alû*, translated as “nether globe,” nearly a century ago. A recent theory put forth by several academics contends that the word “Sheol” originally meant “examining tribulation” but later

¹²⁰ T. H. Gaster, ‘Dead, Abode of the’, *IDB*, vol. 1, 787-788; A. Dagan, ‘Olam Ha-ba’, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 12, 1356.

changed to “nether world.” This hypothesis claims that the word is a translation of an *Akkadian* term (to “ask” or “enquire”). However, these suggested etymologies have limitations and cannot be relied upon without hesitation.¹²¹ It is impossible to ascertain what *Sheol* was intended to represent from each Old Testament context because its precise meaning cannot be ascertained from extra-biblical references or etymology.

The Nature of Life in *Sheol*.

The idea that the good and the bad are divided into different sections of *Sheol* after death has a long history and was once widely believed.¹²² The biblical texts do not support the idea that *Sheol* was divided into different zones during the time of the Old Testament, despite how appealing it may be to believe so, given later Jewish theology. R. L. Harris¹²³ claims that *Sheol* frequently alludes to the burial, where the actual corpse is interred. In contrast to the New Testament, does the Old Testament assert that all people who die go to a place where the dead have no knowledge and are separated from God? This query motivates the proposal because it attempts to avoid a problem if all men’s souls coexist in *Sheol*.¹²⁴ This theological conundrum is resolved if the term “*Sheol*” refers to the grave, which is the location where the body dies, but the soul does not.

¹²¹ R. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 37; J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (*Biblica et Orientalia* 21) (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 21–23.

¹²² J. Jeremias, ‘hadēs’, *TDNT*, vol. I, 147; Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 40.

¹²³ Schmidt, Brian B. “Afterlife, Afterdeath.” In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, 24–27. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

¹²⁴ Schmidt, Brian B., J. Edward Wright, José Costa, et al. “Afterlife.” In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Vol. 1. Edited by Hans-Josef Klauck, Dale C. Allison, et al., cols. 519–561. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2009.

Look elsewhere in the Bible to learn about the ultimate fate of men's souls (Exod. 3:6; Mat. 22:32).

However, there are a few factors that argue against this suggestion. First, despite appearing 65 times in the Old Testament, the word "Sheol" never contains a definite article, suggesting that it was likely used as a proper name for the afterlife. Second, Harris is correct that some images of *Sheol* (Ezek. 32:26–27) resemble Palestinian tombs, but this could be because the Hebrews believed that *Sheol* was a continuation of the grave. O. Keel believes that the virtual realm of the dead is an imaginary place because no one has yet visited it (Psalm 88:10; Job 7:9–10; 10:21; Akkadian *eret*, literally "land of no return"). Direct observation led to the development of the grave's specific characteristics. There is not much more to say about the afterlife besides that. It appears to be a traditional burial blown up to enormous proportions. Harris demonstrates that some descriptions of *Sheol* resemble a common grave as a result, but the same descriptions could also be used to describe the nether world.

Thirdly, the term "Sheol" has a variety of meanings; it can be "used as a figure of speech to denote great misfortune, seemingly inescapable death, the edge of death," as in Psalm 30:4, 86:13, 88:4, and Jonah 2 (Deut. 32:22; Numbers 16:30–33); the afterlife (Isa. 14:11; Ezek. 32:26–27); or even the underworld (Isa. 2:2). Heidel asserts that "it has been revealed that the term, in the sense of the underground realm of the spirits, refers only to the residence of the wicked souls" and that "Sheol can mean many different things."¹²⁵ Heidel draws a clear distinction between the fates of the good and the bad in the afterlife when he says that while the souls of the wicked go to *Sheol*, the souls of the righteous go to heaven.

¹²⁵Heidel, A. *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949. 184.

Theological problems brought on by the coexistence of good and evil in the nether realm are avoided by Heidel's argument, but it could be argued that he arbitrarily interprets the biblical evidence. *Sheol* is almost always interpreted to mean "grave" when a passage refers to the death of a righteous person (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; Isa. 38:10), but it is almost always interpreted to mean "nether world" when the wicked are mentioned (Num. 16:30; Isa. 14:13–15). In light of this, it is unclear whether Heidel's understanding of *Sheol* as the "grave" depends on how he views *Sheol*.

Therefore, we must confine ourselves to a few broad observations. *Sheol* is always portrayed negatively, except for a few hazy references (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Song 8:6). For example, it is the exact opposite of heaven and a terrifying place that should be avoided (2 Samuel 22:6; Psalms 16:10; 30:3; 86:13). (Job 11:8; Psa. 139:8; Amos 9:2). Second, it is unmistakable that *Sheol* is associated with evildoers in several texts (Num. 16:30, 33; 1 Kings 2:6, 9; Job 24:19; Psalm 9:17; 31:17; 49:14; Proverbs 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; Isa. 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; Ezek. 31:15–17; 32:21, 27). These facts suggest that *Sheol* refers to where the dead are buried.

However, it is generally accepted that a few *Sheol* incidents demonstrate that the righteous were discovered there. Jacob laments his son Joseph's untimely death, saying, "In mourning will I walk down to the grave (*Sheol*) to my son" (Gen. 37:35). Similar statements can be found in Genesis 42:38 and Genesis 44:29, 31, which were probably influenced by Jacob's anxiety over losing Benjamin, his youngest son. Even though Heidel translates *Sheol* as grave in 37:35, Jacob's refusal to comfort Joseph after his apparent death at the hands of a wild animal may indicate that he thinks Joseph has been punished by God and is, therefore, among the wicked in the nether world. Jacob's comprehension of *Sheol* would help him express his sorrow over his son Joseph. The same explanation can be used to explain *Sheol*'s appearance in both 42:38 and 44:29.

Isaiah chapter 38 is another passage that seems to imply that the righteous go to Sheol. The prophet Isaiah predicts that King Hezekiah will pass away young, and the king pleads with God to remember him. As a result, he is granted a fifteen-year life expectancy (Vv. 1–8). Hezekiah later records, “I asked, “Do I have to go through the gates of death (Sheol) and be denied the remainder of my years in the prime of my life.”... Because neither the grave (Sheol) nor those who descend into the pit can extol your faithfulness, death cannot praise you (vs. 10, 17–18). The standard interpretation of these statements is that Hezekiah believed the righteous would enter *Sheol*. Hezekiah may have had every reason to think that he would be joining the wicked in the underworld, given Isaiah’s prediction against him (v. 1) and his knowledge of his faults (v. 17). Jacob and Hezekiah likely thought that *Sheol* was the place where the wicked were laid to rest.

The widespread notion that *Sheol* was divided into different compartments and R. L. Harris’ claim that Sheol only refers to the grave of the conceptualizations above of Sheol can now be discounted. We must choose between the two options to determine whether the Hebrews believed that only the wicked perished in the nether world or whether all of humanity did. Although it is impossible to come to a firm conclusion from our study of the term “Sheol,” the evidence seems to support Heide’s theory that only the godless went there. A few passages seem to be heading in the same general direction. The idea that Sheol was the final resting place for the wicked is consistent with the Hebrews’ view of death as a punishment rather than a process of nature. Humanity was subject to divine judgment because death was usually associated with imprisonment in a gloomy, dark place from which no one could ever escape. Going to Sheol meant having a “bad” death.

Even though the wicked died in a “bad” way, the righteous deaths were perceived as “good” deaths. What happens to them immediately following their death is still an open question. The psalmist expresses several expectations for the future. The Old

Testament does not mention the righteous fate after death. Therefore, the best one can hope for is to combine various pieces of information to create a coherent picture. On the other hand, the concept of resurrection is essential.

Many modern academics believe that the concept of resurrection was only recently developed in Jewish afterlife theology.¹²⁶ There are two significant arguments in favor of this position. To begin with, all writings that expressly refer to the resurrection of the dead can be dated to the post-Exilic period (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2).¹²⁷ Second, during the early post-Exilic period, when Jews and Persians were in close contact, the Jewish concept of the resurrection appears to have been influenced by the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism.

Greenspoon refuted the idea that post-Exilic Christians later came to believe in the resurrection.¹²⁸ He claims that the Old Testament belief in bodily resurrection arose “out of themes associated with YHWH as Divine Warrior,” rejecting the influence of both earlier Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths and rituals concerning “dying-and-rising gods” and later Zoroastrian beliefs regarding the “reconstitution of the body.” It is believed that Yahweh can defeat death and release the prisoners. He also discovers that biblical material, whose period of product spans from the ninth to the second century B.C.E., expresses the idea of the corporeal resurrection of the dead¹²⁹ based on a review of pertinent passages. Even though his arguments are unlikely to change the current consensus favoring a late date for introducing the concept into Jewish

¹²⁶ T. H. Gaster, ‘Resurrection’, *IDB*, vol. 4 (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 39.

¹²⁷ This assumes, however, a 2nd cent. bc date for Daniel and a late Exilic or post-Exilic date for the Isaiah Apocalypse.

¹²⁸ B. Halpern and J. D. Levenson (eds), *Traditions in Transformation. Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 247–321.; Stendahl, Krister. “Immortality Is Too Much and Too Little.” In *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide*. Edited by Krister Stendahl, 193–202. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

afterlife thought, Greenspoon offers plausible reasons for believing that the idea of bodily resurrection can be traced back to the pre-Exilic period.

According to the resurrection theory, the righteous will stay in the afterlife until they are miraculously brought back to life.¹³⁰ It follows that there must be a period between death and resurrection. Many writers assert that if all men, regardless of their moral character, descend to *Sheol*, the righteous must be exalted from it. If *Sheol* is considered the only dwelling place of the wicked, the righteous must have lived elsewhere before being raised to live. Sadly, the characteristics of the temporary home of the righteous are not well described in the Old Testament.

One of the few hints as to what happened to the righteous after death is the phrase “to be collected to one’s people” or “to be gathered to one’s fathers” (Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50). (Judg. 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chron. 34:28). These figures of speech do not, as has been assumed, allude to the burial in the fathers’ graves or the ancestral tomb because Abraham, Aaron, and Moses were not interred with their fathers. Jacob was “gathered to his people” (Genesis 49:33) several months before his body was laid to rest, and it is explicitly stated that Abraham and Isaac were buried in the accounts of their “gathering” (Gen. 25:8-9; 35:29). Furthermore, they make no mention of general burial (50:1–13).¹³¹ Notably, the biblical authors’ use of the phrase “to be gathered to one father” (or “people”) seems to imply a sense of hope regarding death (Gen. 15:15). The righteous are reunited with family members who have already passed away, even though death may separate a person from his or her relatives in this life.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 319.

¹³¹ Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, 187–188.

The fact that resurrection is frequently described as reawakening and death is sometimes described as falling asleep¹³²The interim state of the righteous is one of primarily peace and tranquility, according to 2 Kings 4:31, Job 14:12, Isa. 26:19, and Dan. 12:2. Despite this, it is still thought that they exist in the world of the mortals. Perhaps this explains why the final resurrection of the saints is given more weight in the Old Testament than in their current state.

We might be better able to comprehend the Old Testament authors' sometimes disparate views of *Sheol* if we keep these things in mind. The fact that the righteous would be raised after death and the wicked would be left behind, even though it was thought that all men went to Sheol upon death, may be why *Sheol* is frequently portrayed negatively. While the righteous would eventually enter God's presence, the wicked would continue to rot in the depths of *Sheol*. *Sheol* represented for the Hebrews the final and eternal dwelling of those cast out of God's presence, despite the virtuous' transitory sojourn there.

Summarily, despite some conflicting evidence and unanswered questions, some fundamental questions about the Old Testament's understanding of the afterlife may be answered. We can first disprove the commonly held belief that the Hebrews had little interest in the afterlife because they saw death as a natural result of man's mortality in the pre-Exilic period. Second, the word "Sheol" was not always used to refer to the underworld, where the ungodly lived permanently. Third, the righteous believed that God would save them from the effects of death and take them to himself, while the ungodly believed that they would remain in Sheol's quiet, dark place (Psa. 49:15).

A Brief Overview Of The Hona People's History

¹³² J. F. A. Sawyer, 'Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead', *VT* 23 (1973), 218-234.

The Hona people do not refer to themselves as a tribe by the term “Hona.” They refer to themselves as the Fiteriya, which is short for “The Fittri People,” with the usual plural ending of *ya*. When speaking to outsiders, the Hona call themselves Hwana. It is said that the name Hona was derived from the Fulani *honabe*, “the people who were attacked,” or the phrase *min honoyanbe*, “we are going to attack them.” These derivations are probably mere inventions, for the name Hona or Hwana is found in distant parts of Africa as a tribal title; for example, there are the Huana in the Kwango-Kasai region and Bachuana in Bechuanaland. The word, perhaps, means “The Men” for, among the so-called “Fali” of Maesso, who are not far from the Hona, we find the word *hono* meaning “man.”¹³³

The Hona has no definite tradition of a migratory movement, but the general opinion is that they came into their present habitat from Bornu, with Nahwi being mentioned. This would bear out the linguistic inference that the Hona formed part of a group of Tera-speaking peoples, for there are still groups of Tera at Nahwi. Having crossed the Hawal River, they settled at the old site of Guyaku, which is to the south of the present site. The name Guyaku is a Fulani corruption of the Hona pronunciation, Kweekha. The first occupants of old Guyaku, possibly aboriginal inhabitants, are represented today by the family of the *Chapirma*, a variant of the title Birma. This family has the right to appoint the chief. They were joined by the family owning the rain cult of Kakara and later by other groups.¹³⁴ It is said that they were rich in cattle, sheep, and goats and employed Fulani as herdsmen. However, it does not appear that there was any central authority in the form of a tribal chief. Each group was an independent political unit. Even at old Guyaku, each ward had its chief. When the holy war broke out at the beginning of the last century, the Fulani who were herding the

¹³³ C.K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* vol.2 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., LTD., 1931), 395-416.

¹³⁴ But the villagers of Dingai claim to be of Kabin origin, and those of Dahai to have been Bura from Gosafa.

Hona cattle joined the insurgents under Modibo Dau at Bilawa near Gola, and the Hona was forced to fly northwards. Some settled at Jau; others settled at the present site of Guyaku, which is said to have been occupied over a century ago by Bura, who abandoned it because of the plague.

When the British first visited the Hona district, there was no central authority, and there were two chiefs of Guyaku, one, Malim, chief of the western section, and another, Sunda, chief of the eastern section. Sunda was given the headship of Guyaku, For some time, the Hona was administered by the Fulani chiefs of Gola, but in 1914 the Hona and Bura were formed into an independent area under Ngiyaye, the chief of Guyaaku then. The village of Tawa, however, remained under Gola. Finally, the area was again included in the Adamawa Emirate as a separate district, the chief of Guyaku becoming a district headman.

The Hona still retain their old official titles. Thus, the Chapirma confers the chief's office and is the chief's principal adviser, corresponding to the Hausa and Fulani Waziri. The Hletuma corresponds to the Galadima, the Kadala to the Kaigama, and the Zarma to the Salama. The Katafir ascertains the people's wishes before the appointment of a chief, and the Taliba acts as an intermediary between the Chapirma and the chief. As among the Gabin, the chief is known as the Kutira, and this title occurs among the Hinna in the form of Kudiri and the Tera as Kudi. It contains a common African root, *Ku* = chief or king, and one which occurs in Northern Nigeria among the Jukun-speaking peoples in the forms *Aku* and *Kuru*.

The Concept of Death and the Afterlife Among the Hona

When a chief died, his death was, in former times, kept secret for one month. The Chapirma and the chief's younger brother sat in the late chief's hut, and if anyone came to see the chief, he was told that the chief was engaged or was not well. The body was buried the same night, clothed in several gowns, trousers,

riding boots, cap, fez, and turban. However, before consigning the body to the grave, the dead chief's brother placed some grains of corn in his hands, saying: "We give you food—say not that we have sent you away hungry." The body was laid in a flagon-shaped grave, resting on the skin of a cow that had been secretly killed. It faced towards the west, an unusual position, as among most Nigerian tribes, the body is laid facing towards the east. The mouth of the grave was blocked by a stone, which was cemented over with mud.¹³⁵ A grass hut was built over the grave. Those who had taken part in these secret burial rites then assembled and ate a solemn meal together, the cow's flesh which had provided the skin-mat being consumed. After a month, the Chapirma reported that the chief was dead, and the people assembled from near and far. A representation was made of the chief, consisting of a log of wood covered over with a white gown. This was held by an official seated on a basket, and all the people came and bowed down before it and cast over it seeds of guinea corn, beniseed, and pumpkins, saying as they did so: "See, we give you corn that you may not say that we have sent you away hungry." Dance was then held, and the Chapirma kept fanning the effigy during the dance. At the dance's conclusion, the people came in kindred groups and saluted the late chief's brother. They then dispersed. The corn thrown over the effigy was collected and converted into beer and flour for use at the funeral feast.¹³⁶

Meanwhile, the effigy had been dismantled, but a pot took its place with a strip of cloth tied around the neck. Set upon a forked branch beside the dead chief's hut, this pot was carefully tended by the late chief's widows and washed regularly every day. At the final rites, the funeral feast held during the dry season, the pot was carried around, and all the people saluted and called: "Go carefully, go carefully." After the feast, the pot

¹³⁵ This is the normal type of Hona grave. A small mound of earth is raised over the mouth of the grave, and the calabash that had been used in scooping out the earth is laid on the top after having been broken in two (to prevent it being stolen).

¹³⁶ Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* vol.2, 397.

was smashed and thrown away to sign that the chief and his people had parted forever. The chief's widows were then permitted to remarry.

After two or three years, the chief's grave was opened by members of the grave-digging family, and the skull was removed, washed, wrapped in a white cloth, and deposited in a cave. However, it did not become the object of any traditional religious rites. These rites are still observed, but the ancient custom of concealing the chief's death was abandoned when the Hona was driven out of old Guyaku. It may be added that the ritual for the chief's death does not differ from that of an older man, except that in the case of a commoner, no cow is killed. Unless the dead man has reached comparatively old age, it is not customary to make an effigy. Nevertheless, the body is paraded before burial.

After the first ceremony of parading the effigy, the various candidates for the vacant chieftainship approached the Chapirma secretly at night with gifts of potash and other articles. Having made his choice, the Chapirma intimated that he would announce his decision in seven days. Before the assembled people, he picked out the man he had chosen and bound a loincloth of tanned goat skin on him. He then clothed him in a gown and cap and tied a fillet around his temples. The new chief was required to present a cow to the Chapirma with which the latter gave a feast. He also had to bear a significant part in the late chief's funeral feast expenses.

The Hona and the Spirit World.

The Hona make a regular practice of fashioning pots to transfer particular classes of diseases to pots of a particular design; each pot is regarded as a home provided for the spirit which causes the disease and is regarded as a place of safe deposit for the man's soul. Nevertheless, similar practices and ideas are found among the Hona. Thus if a man, who has been accustomed to seeking favors at the shrine of Kakara, falls ill,

he may conclude that his illness is due to the excessive dynamism of his body by the continued presence of the favoring spirit. He will then have a pot made to transfer the spirit to the pot, for in his shrine, Kakara is accustomed to taking up his abode in a pot. The pot must be made by a young girl who has not yet reached puberty and is therefore regarded as free from the “sin” of sexuality. Having obtained the pot, the owner sacrifices a chicken, pours the blood on the pot, and requests the spirit to be pleased to take up its abode there. These rites are performed at sunrise, and food offerings are laid before the pot. At sunset, the offerings are removed and eaten by the patient and all the members of his household.¹³⁷

On the same principle, a mother will have a pot made so that bush spirits, believed to rob children of their lives, may take up their residence in the pot and leave her children alone. These pots are made with human features; therefore, it might be presumed that the spirits are regarded as having a human origin, that is, ancestral spirits. The mother constantly deposits pieces of food on the lips of the pot, removing them subsequently and eating them herself, the spirits being considered to have partaken of the substance of the food in the meantime. When the child is first taught to eat, the food is deposited on the pot and given to the child.¹³⁸

The Hona has the parallel custom of fashioning pots or using stones (fragments of cornrubbers) as an abode for the spirits of forefathers. There is little doubt that these pots and stones are a substitute for the skulls of the forefathers. Each head of a kindred has a special hut with symbols, usually pots but sometimes stones, representing a particular ancestor. However, the symbols do not extend beyond the previous generation; that is to say, a man does not concern himself with grandfathers; he merely gives his attention to dead fathers or paternal uncles. If the head of a household dies and leaves no brothers, his son

¹³⁷Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* vol.2, 398.

¹³⁸Meek, 400.

removes the pots or stones representing his father's father and paternal uncles and substitutes a pot representing his father.¹³⁹

Having deposited the new symbol in the hut, the head of the kindred lays a pot of beer before it. This is done at sunset, and on the following morning, the head of the kindred, in the presence of all members of the kindred, addresses all the dead ancestors, saying: "You, our relatives, have died and gone before us. We whom you have left beseech you to hinder us not, nor charge us with offenses. We care for you; do you also care for us and grant that our crops may be bountiful, our hunting successful, and our wives fruitful." The offerings are then removed and eaten ceremonially by all. The food eaten is regarded as consecrated. Wives, not being members of the kindred, may not partake of it. The latter are given unconsecrated food instead. Offerings are always made to these symbols of ancestors at sowing, harvest, and on any occasion of illness. If the kindred has had a bad year, the rites may be withheld, the head of the kindred entering the shrine and saying: "This year I will give you nothing, as you have hindered us. We did well by you, but you have done ill by us."

The Ancestral Cult

This ancestral cult is known as *Sambariya*, and there is a cognate cult known as *Bilfara*, which is confined to the worship of dead mothers. At *Jau*, a cult known as *Tee* is used for procuring, childbirth, and success in hunting. Again, the symbol is a pot with a long narrow neck set as a mound of sand and is covered with a lid in which several holes have been pierced. If rain or childbirth is sought, the priest cleans the shrine and then approaches the symbol, kneels, claps his hands, and says: "Hail to thee, hail to thee." He scatters some beniseed over the pot and then says: "Our cult, our cult, our cult. If God (the Sun) is here, if God is here, grant us rain, grant us rain, grant us rain." Rites may only be carried out at sunrise

¹³⁹ Ibid.

or sunset, for it is said that the shrine's spirit (Tee) goes abroad during the day. When the guinea corn has ripened, the priest deposits a porridge dish at sunrise in front of the symbol, and in the evening, he returns with three or five members of his family and pours the porridge over the symbol. The presence of an uneven number of people, including the priest, is taboo. Some days later, the priest again comes at sunrise with many people who, including the priest, must compose an even number; and an offering is made of the flesh of a fowl, porridge, and beer. All present eats the remainder of the food. However, the priest does not partake. He must wait until sunset, when he consumes the offerings made to the spirit, the intention being that the spirit shall have time to eat the 'substance' of the offerings.¹⁴⁰

Another common Hona cult is *Kakara*, a fertility cult, being much resorted to by women who have not borne children for some considerable time. The gifts offered to the spirit are usually beniseed and groundnuts. Young suitors seek the services of the godling. They take the iron bracelet to the priest, which they propose bestowing on their fiancée so that the bracelet may be blessed. The priest deposits it beside the symbol (a pot) and asks that the boy may be prospered in all his relations with the girl of his choice. Rain rites are also performed at the shrine of *Kakara*.

The Implications For The People of Hona In Gombi, Local Government Area, Adamawa State

Lineage Progression: A Hebrew needed to believe in family growth. Therefore, hoping and believing in having children was a significant decision in Hebrew households. They believed that a living God created the heavens and the earth. The propensity to cherish continuity likely led to this hate of aridity. The Hona people shared a value of continuity. They also believe that progeny is a gift from the gods and that it is more powerful than

¹⁴⁰ Meek, 403.

the might of mere mortals. They visit some middlemen who ask the Supreme God for his blessing on reproduction. Hona people need to reevaluate how they approach God in their prayers, notwithstanding how helpful this practice was. Through His Son Jesus Christ, who does not require elaborate ceremonies to approach Him, God is accessible to everyone.

The Afterlife: Even among the more recent Hebrews, the idea of the afterlife is understood differently. For instance, whereas other sects, such as the Pharisees, Essence, etc., believed in the afterlife, the Sadducees rejected the idea that there is life after this world. The Hona people likewise practice the Hebrews' belief in an afterlife. They think that when someone passes away, they will go live with their ancestors somewhere. There is a distinct belief in who owns life and who should be held accountable. They occasionally perform ceremonies in honor of the deceased because of this. For instance, the brother of the deceased chief delivered the body to the grave while saying, "We offer you food—say not that we have sent you away hungry." He also held a handful of corn in his hands. Alternatively, it may be done by a representative perched atop a basket, in front of which everyone knelt and tossed pumpkin, beniseed, and guinea corn seeds while he or she said, "See, we provide you corn so that you may not say that we have sent you away hungry." During the funeral feast held during the dry season's closing ceremonies, the pot was carried around while everyone saluted and shouted, "Go carefully, go carefully."

This activity will teach you that although the Hona people believe in a hereafter, there is no evidence to support their belief in the Creator. The general public must believe that God created everything, including human souls. This idea will cause people to live responsible and accountable life among themselves. They recognized that somewhere, someone's life would be accounted for.

Believe in the afterlife: The Bible often mentions ghosts and spiritism, especially in the Old Testament. Even though the

Bible refers to them, attempts to communicate with the dead or engage in necromancy are discouraged. All contact with the afterlife is categorically prohibited, regardless of the nature of the spirits involved (Lev. 19:26-31; Deut. 18:10-11; Job 7:7-10; Isa. 8:18-20; Luke 16:19-31). The Hona people and people worldwide continue to practice various forms of ancestor worship, even in modern civilizations that are a part of the modern global economy. An essential aspect of ancestral beliefs is the notion that living people can impact the fate of their deceased ancestors, that living people can communicate with the dead, and that the spirits of the dead may return to the living and affect their lives.

The Bible rarely makes explicit reference to ancestral spirits or ancestor worship, although there may be clues or inferences that can be made from word origins, as in the case of the example above, or even by reading inferences between the lines. According to 2 Samuel 12:23 and Job 19:27, the Bible makes it quite clear that the connection between the living and the dead is irreversibly severed when a person dies. As a result, the righteous dead cannot interact with or return to the living. The righteous dead cannot be brought back to life because they are already in God's presence. However, the fact that a prohibition on necromancy or mediumship was judged essential suggests that the phenomenon may be more troublesome and pervasive than what is described in the Scriptures.

The ceremonial rituals related to ancestor worship are fundamentally based on the notions that the dead can visit the living and affect their lives, that it is acceptable for the living to communicate with the dead, and, ultimately, that the living can affect the fate of the ancestor. The findings of this inquiry made it very clear that necromancy and its related acts are against biblical teaching because the Bible forbids them. Second, it is clear from the debate that the Biblical evidence does not justify accepting such experiences "at face value," even though some claim to have had encounters with the ghosts of deceased

relatives.¹⁴¹ Therefore, consulting or worshiping spirits must be jettisoned and cling to the Holy Spirit, full of blessings.

Conclusion

The subject of eschatology is profound, and the nature of study such as this cannot promise to exhaust all the aspects of the subject. Therefore, the concern of this paper has been to present a concise historical approach to the development of the concept of eschatology as revealed in the Old Testament practices. The implications are drawn from the study to the people of Hona for a balanced and responsible living among them.

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¹⁴¹S.M. Pigott, "1 Samuel 28 - Saul and the not so wicked Witch of Endor." *Review and Expositor* 95, (1998): 435-444.

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