

Death, the Dead and the Underworld in Biblical Theology – Part 1

Tony Wright

Death is the most fundamentally profound and confronting matter that all people must face. To examine death and the closely associated topics of the dead and the underworld, this paper adopts biblical theology as its methodology. The nature and purpose of humanity is established from the creation account of Genesis. In these opening chapters death (as do the dead and the underworld) stands over and against humanity as its most fundamental problem. This depiction is maintained consistently throughout the Pentateuch and into the remainder of the Old Testament. Israelite reflection upon these themes reveals the development of a hope that is beyond the confines of death, the dead and the underworld. This hope is tentatively raised in the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature and is strengthened into a resurrection hope along eschatological lines in the prophecy of Isaiah. The New Testament builds upon the foundation laid by the Old Testament. Jesus is the radical solution to the problem of death. In his life he drives back the invader death, and in his death and resurrection he defeats death and sin. In doing so the Christian hope is grounded in the past event of Jesus' resurrection. The eschatological trajectory of Old Testament material is developed in Romans and Revelation, such that the Christian's hope for the future is to be like their Lord in death, descending to the underworld, but rising again to new life in the resurrection age.

1. Introduction

Death is the one sure constant in human life. It marks out life and all of life is conducted in its shadow. As such, it is a matter of great concern and relevance to humanity. Despite this, death is the one aspect of existence that humanity is singularly ill-equipped to comment upon, for once experienced no further comment can be made.

Part 1 of this paper examines the Old Testament while Part 2 examines the New Testament material. In doing so this paper adopts a biblical theology methodology. Given the constraints of space it is not possible to address in

entirety the biblical material that concerns the concepts of death, the dead and the underworld. As such selectivity is required. It must be recognised that in selecting the texts to be examined there is a certain level of arbitrariness, for undoubtedly other texts could have been examined. However, it is not solely arbitrariness that has led to the particular passages being chosen. The sections of Scripture that have in fact been chosen, and the way in which they are handled, reflects the author's intention to fairly represent the biblical presentation of these concepts and to engage with alternate viewpoints of them, to deal with each section of Scripture on its own terms and to reflect the development of these concepts across the biblical narrative. The attempt has been made (albeit in a limited way) to address those texts which have garnered most attention amongst the secondary literature concerning the matters at hand. Overarching the entire work is a recognition of the Christocentric nature of the Scriptures in general and in relation to these themes in particular.

1. The Old Testament

1.1. The Pentateuch: In the beginning

Genesis is the beginning, not merely of the Bible as God's self-revelation to humanity but also of all theological reflection. Luther apparently described the opening of Genesis as 'certainly the foundation of the whole of Scripture'.¹ More recently, Francis Schaeffer wrote: 'In some ways these chapters are the most important ones in the Bible'.² Genesis lays the foundation for, and suggests the framework of, the remainder of the Bible's understanding of God and humanity. For no area of biblical inquiry is this more true than the task of biblical theology in general, and for the themes of 'death, the dead and the underworld' in particular.

The creation account of Genesis enables us to understand the nature and purpose of humanity. To appreciate the nature of humanity we must take into account the distinct anthropology of Genesis. God is the sole, undeniable, purposeful creator of humanity and humanity's longevity, or otherwise, is contingent on continued access to God (through the 'tree of life'). This is represented by God's provision of the 'breath of life' to humanity, which should not be understood as the provision of an immortal soul, for God gives this breath to all creatures; rather, it is the sustaining force of life. We must agree with Green's assessment that 'one looks in vain in the creation story for an attempt to portray human beings in a dualistic way—either as body or

soul'.³ Humanity is vivified dust (Gen. 2:7, 22).⁴ This is why it is accurate to say that 'we are material, bodily beings, and are so essentially'⁵ and why Israelite thought conceived of an individual as a single entity, a person.⁶ This stands in stark contrast to the religious contemporaries of the Israelites. The evidence is simply overwhelming that the Ancient Babylonians and Assyrians conceived of the body and immortal soul-spirit as two distinct entities that separated at death.⁷ Similarly, later Greek-thought conceived of humanity as possessing variegated constituent parts.⁸ The impact of this upon the history of Christian thought through to the present day should not be underestimated.⁹

To determine the purpose of humanity much attention has been focused upon the meaning of humanity as being created in God's image. The debate on this matter is lengthy, and while there is no need for us to enter into the details, we shall draw out the two strands that can be understood as encapsulating the purpose for which humanity was created.¹⁰ The first strand is that humanity is created as a relational being, seen firstly in the relationship between the speaking creator God and human as obedient creature (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:8-9), and secondly between persons (Gen. 2:23-25). That this is the case is reinforced by God's negative assessment of man's isolation (Gen. 2:18; 21-22), identified by O'Donovan as 'the determining moment in the creation of the human race'.¹¹ Knox highlights the significance of relationship: 'God has created us for relationship, for he is relational.'¹² The second strand relates to the function of humanity. Genesis 1:28 is clear that humanity is to 'subdue' and 'have dominion' over the creation, with the specific tasks being 'to work' (to serve) and to 'take care of' (to guard, watch over, preserve, care for) (Gen. 2:15). Implied is humanity's enjoyment of the creation (Gen. 2:9 and 3:8). Luther sums up this second strand by saying that humanity is created to rule.¹³ In drawing these two strands together we see that humanity has been created for relationship and activity.

Death is absent from the creation account, indicating that death is not a 'natural' part of the creation.¹⁴ Rather, understanding 'human existence in Eden when death was foreign to the human experience is basic to the biblical interpretation of 'life' and 'death'.¹⁵ As Martin-Achard states, 'at the outset, the Old Testament informs us that man is not immortal: there is nothing eternal in him'.¹⁶ Thus the biblical account must be considered striking in its presentation of a humanity that is simple (rather than complex and variegated)

and as such there are not different types of death which address different elements of humanity (e.g. spiritual death and physical death); rather, death must be viewed as an entirety—‘Total Death’.¹⁷ Thus death must be recognised as a singular proposition that strikes at the entire person.

The first reference to death is found in God’s speech to Adam when he says to him, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die’ (Gen. 2:17). At the beginning of the next chapter the crafty serpent speaks to Eve saying: ‘You will not surely die’ (Gen. 3:4). While there may be some inherent ambiguity in the serpent’s words, what is clear is that at heart they challenge the inevitability of death that God has spoken about.¹⁸ The woman and Adam must decide who is trustworthy and who is a liar. They make their assessment, disobediently consume the fruit and, in doing so, sin. In response to their sin, God pronounces the curse upon the human pair, the snake and all of creation. Some contend that it is only in these opening chapters of the Bible that death is connected to sin as punishment, and that for the remainder of the Old Testament death takes on a variegated hue.¹⁹ However, such a view fails to adequately account for how the curse extends beyond Adam and Eve to their descendants and the entire creation. None—no matter how righteous—escapes death.²⁰ Dubarle is correct in saying ‘it is death itself, and not simply premature death, that punishes sin’.²¹ Death is the punishment for sin.

We would do well to contend with Wright’s observation that ‘if the promised punishment for eating the fruit was death, the *actual*, or at least immediate punishment was banishment from the garden’.²² This apparent dichotomy between stated and actual punishment raises the question ‘Did the serpent get it right?’. If the answer is in the affirmative, then God is found to be a liar. In seeking to defend him from such a claim some state that the enigmatic working of the sovereign God must not be challenged.²³ This, however, seems to be side-stepping the issue, implying that the author of Genesis is either unaware of, or unconcerned by, this problematic question. A more direct defence is Moberly’s argument that death must be understood in a non-literal metaphorical way, where it does not signify the termination of physical existence but the quality of that existence.²⁴ The value of this insight is that it acknowledges that death is not merely the cessation of the vital functions of the human organism.

Problematically, this metaphorical conception of death is now so abstracted from the concrete, that it fails to speak of the actual end of a person's life, and one cannot help wondering whether Moberly has overstated his case. The insight of von Rad speaks powerfully at this point, for he observes that in Hebrew thought death is seen to reach into life.²⁵ Armed with this insight, we are able to reject Moberly's description of death as a non-literal metaphor. Instead what we see in the Genesis account is that death is very real but that it is more than just the cessation of the body's functions. As Blocher says, 'death disintegrates the power to live [but] this condition is not [to be] confused with the extinction of being'.²⁶ The curse is not, as intimated by Wright, the alternative (or delaying tactic) of God to the punishment of death. It is death. The curse is actually an exegesis of death. It articulates what it means for death to enter the world of humanity now that God prevents any further access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). This is what Cullman recognises when he says that 'Death is a curse, and the whole creation has become involved in the curse'.²⁷ This understanding is captured in Blocher's translation of Genesis 2:17: 'in the day that you shall eat of it, DYING you shall die'.²⁸ The curse could well be termed 'The Curse of Death' that strikes at both the purpose and nature of humanity. In regards to purpose; relationships are frustrated, both interpersonally and between God and humanity (Gen. 3:16, 23), and the activity of humans is now subject to frustration and toil (Gen. 3:19). In regards to humanity's nature; the pronouncement that 'to dust you shall return' shows how the curse of death unravels the physical being of humanity. In the curse all the harmonies of life in all their essential relationships are rent asunder.²⁹ As the Psalmist says: 'the cords of death entangle me' (Ps. 18:4, 116:3). In the curse death has invaded life, the tendrils of death have begun to reach into life and choke it, and when this assault on life is ultimately successful the life of the person is permanently and fatally brought to an end.

Although defining a negative is always difficult, we are now well positioned to answer the question: 'What is Death?' In regards to the purpose of humanity Jungel's lead should be followed: 'the essential nature of death is relationlessness'.³⁰ To this must be added the matter of inactivity. In regards to the nature of humanity, the body does not continue. This is seen fully, finally and fatally when the body ceases to function, but also prior to that 'in all the experiences of pain, discomfort, discord and separation, we can recognise a kind of funeral procession'.³¹ In terms of the biblical story, death stands as the

fundamental problem that faces humanity, the problem to which the entire bible responds and that will take the entire bible and the entire trajectory of human existence, to fully and finally solve. Death is a parasite that feeds fatally upon life, all but thoroughly and completely undoing a person. Thus death is ‘non-bodily relationlessness and inactivity’.

Despite the assault of death, the Scriptures do not depict complete annihilation of the person in death, but rather maintain that a vestige of the person continues after death. This is seen in the use of the term ‘shades’ to describe the dead. Used only infrequently (explicit: Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:19; Is. 14:9; 26:14,19 implicit Prov. 21:16) its exact meaning is imprecise, but it would seem that ‘this translation evokes well the shadowy, insubstantial existence which the texts describe’.³² Schmidt notes that this biblical term has Ugaritic counterparts, and in both sets of material the depiction is of the powerless nature of the shades.³³

Aubert’s description is appropriate, stating that the dead ‘differs from absolute nothingness only in that a shade remains, some undefinable and insubstantial vestige of the individual formerly full of force and activity in the land of the living’.³⁴ Indeed, as Wright summarises: ‘The minimal sort of “life” that the shades had in Sheol, or in the grave, approximated more to sleep than to anything else known by the living. ... They were not completely non-existent, but to all intents and purposes they were, so to speak, next to nothing’.³⁵ This deathly existence is because they have been cut off from God, the source of all life.³⁶ Here, as so often, the Israelite writers appear to have taken a general Semitic concept and adapted it significantly to fit their particular Yahwistic perspective.³⁷ Thus even to say that ‘the dead live on’, is an overstatement of the quality and nature of their existence. What is on view is not *the life after death* but rather *the death after life*.

The negative nature of the dead is confirmed by the biblical presentation of the underworld. The most important term for the underworld in the Old Testament, ‘Sheol’, occurs 66 times: the Pentateuch (7 times), Psalms (16 times), wisdom literature (19 times), the prophets (22 times), and the writings (2 times). The extra-biblical material fails to assist our understanding of this word, for the only witness is a fifth-century Aramaic papyrus of the Jewish inhabitants of Elephantine in Egypt that states: ‘your bands will not descend to

Sheol'.³⁸ This reveals little else apart from the fact that it refers to the place of the dead.³⁹ The etymology of the word yields precious little fruit, for slender evidence supports the varying suggestions that Sheol derives from: a Hebrew noun meaning 'hollow place'; a Hebrew verb meaning 'to be desolate'; an Assyrian verb meaning 'to sink'; the Hebrew verb 'to ask'.⁴⁰ A safe conclusion is that the 'efforts to determine the precise meaning of Sheol by appealing either to extra-biblical occurrences or to etymology have so far proved unsuccessful'.⁴¹ However, the very distinctiveness of the term 'Sheol' to biblical Hebrew is, in itself, important. As Johnston suggests: 'Since the underworld was a widespread concept in the ancient Near East, it is remarkable that Hebrew has a name for it which is virtually unique. ... The linguistic distinctiveness permitted a clearer expression of theological distinctiveness.'⁴² Accordingly, we will look to the Old Testament material to understand the meaning of 'Sheol'.

While historically Sheol has been associated with post-mortem punishment and equated to hell,⁴³ the solid linguistic work of Marlowe has thoroughly discredited this rendering of Sheol, and the popularity of this position has largely waned.⁴⁴ Despite this, the equating of Sheol with hell has regained some momentum in more recent times, with the work of Alexander being highly influential. His survey of the references to Sheol leads him to conclude that 'the weight of evidence possibly favours [the] opinion that only the ungodly descended there'.⁴⁵ This is coupled with his understanding that Sheol is 'punitive [and a] place from which no one could ever escape'.⁴⁶ By describing Sheol as 'the final abode of the wicked alone',⁴⁷ it is hard to see how Alexander intends Sheol to be understood as anything other than hell. There are two key problems with this view. The first is that because a number of passages speak of all descending to Sheol (e.g. Ps. 89:48-49; Ecc. 9:7-10) there is sufficient evidence to cast doubt upon the validity of equating Sheol with the destiny of the wicked alone.⁴⁸ The second is that in arguing that Sheol is always negative Alexander puts forward a handful of verses suggesting they show that 'Sheol is the antithesis of heaven'.⁴⁹ This statement implies a moral or qualitative contrast, which again reinforces the equation of Sheol with hell. However, when these passages are examined, the contrast is in fact spatial, for each of these passages speaks of 'the heavens', that is the sky, as being as far away from Sheol as possible.⁵⁰ Thus, while it is possible in some sense to conceive of Sheol as being in the depths of the earth,⁵¹ it is an error to equate it to hell.

Indeed, rather than presenting a uniquely Judeo-Christian view of the destination of the dead, elements of Sheol parallel other underworld descriptions from the Ancient Near East. Dahood considers Sheol as a place of sludge, slime, mire and filth (Ps. 7:6; 22:15; 30:10; 46:3,24; 69:3; 90:3), which, if correct, finds parallels in Ugaritic material.⁵² The seminal work of Martin-Achard recognises that the biblical presentation of Sheol, at times, is depicted as a vast subterranean underworld deep within the earth (Is. 5:14; 7:11; 57:9) where there is overwhelming darkness (Job 10:21; Ps. 88:6,12; 143:3; Lam. 3:6). This leads him to consider that the Old Testament conception of Sheol is considered to be akin to other ancient views of the underworld.

The Israelites, like most of the primitive peoples, believe that the dead are gathered together in a vast and usually subterranean region that is set apart for them. The world of the dead, the Sheol of the Hebrews, corresponds in every particular to the Hades of the Greeks and the Arallu of the Assyro-Babylonians.⁵³

The singular strength of this view is that it recognises that Sheol is not a place of punishment. Rather it is the place to which all the dead—righteous and wicked, believer and non-believer—descend upon their death. The great weakness of Martin-Achard's position is the failure to preserve any distinction between Hebrew thought and other religious conceptions of the afterlife. In doing so the Old Testament's presentation of Sheol is misconstrued.

An important step in correcting this weakness is seen in more recent works. Harris acknowledges that the Old Testament clearly teaches that both wicked (Num. 16:3) and the righteous (Gen. 38:35) go to Sheol.⁵⁴ Harris objected on theological grounds to considering Sheol as a dark and dismal underworld to which all the dead go and where they know nothing and are cut off from God, for he held such a view to be in direct contradiction to the teaching of the New Testament.⁵⁵ To resolve this apparent contradiction he focused on parallel usages of Sheol with grave and death, as well as descriptions of Sheol evoking images of maggots, worms and dirt, and in doing so he reached the conclusion that Sheol simply means 'the grave'.⁵⁶ Yet there are two critical weaknesses to this position. The first of these lies in the way in which he considers a particular teaching of Sheol to be a contradiction of New Testament teaching. Such a consideration both fails to let the Old Testament speak on its own terms and presumes upon the New Testament teaching concerning the status of the

dead. This paper argues in subsequent sections for both the continuity and discontinuity concerning the dead across the testaments in such a way that shall overturn Harris's understanding of the New Testament teaching on the dead. The second of these weaknesses lies at the grammatical level. As T. D. Alexander notes, none of the sixty six references to Sheol take the article, indicating that Sheol appears to be functioning as a proper noun which denotes the underworld and not simply the grave.⁵⁷ Thus Harris can be considered to have made only a faltering step in the right direction.

Today, it is generally agreed that whilst Sheol is often associated with the grave, this does not prove identity of meaning.⁵⁸ Knibb points out that 'at death the individual was placed in the grave, but he was at the same time thought to go down to the realm of the dead, ... the two concepts frequently overlap'.⁵⁹ It is probably best then to understand the association of maggots, worms and dirt as representing a poetic description of the underworld, as Motyer insightfully notes: 'Though neither an architect's drawing of the world-to-come nor a sociologist's report, a poem can be expected to draw out principles and focus issues. In this way it expresses some central Old Testament truths about the dead'.⁶⁰ Johnston suggests: 'obviously, the Hebrew term "Sheol" has different nuances in different contexts, but these are nuances of the single basic concept of the underworld. Views to the contrary cannot be sustained.'⁶¹ Thus, Sheol must be understood in some sense as a place, for it is the destiny of those who die.⁶²

It is unsurprising then that the shades in Sheol are inactive (Ps. 94:17)⁶³ and silent (Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:5-6, 10-12; 115:17; Is. 38:18). While such a description parallels earlier Greek writings,⁶⁴ it contrasts with the major Greek cult 'The Eleusinian Mysteries',⁶⁵ and later Greek material.⁶⁶ It also contrasts Babylonian accounts, which depict the dead descending to the city of the dead where they are greeted and reunited with their families.⁶⁷ Both the Assyrians and Babylonians held that 'life after death was ... more or less a continuation of life on earth'.⁶⁸ This silence suggests a denial of ongoing relationships, especially with God, a suggestion confirmed by the description of Sheol as a place where the dead cannot remember, praise or thank God (Ps. 6:6; Is. 38:18; Jonah 2:5), a land of forgetfulness where the dead are cut off from him and forgotten (Ps. 88:5,12). Unsurprisingly then, sleep is an appropriate description of death and the dead (2 Kings 4:31, 13:21; Job 3:13, 14:12; Ps. 13:3; Jer.

51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2). It would seem that Johnson is on the right track with his description of death as ‘the weakest form of life’,⁶⁹ which Kaiser and Lohse take a step further in the right direction by identifying that this minimalist existence as that of the dead in Sheol.⁷⁰ Ironically, while he considers it to be only a ‘metaphorical expression’, Martin-Achard provides the best description for Sheol when he says: ‘it is an enfeebled form of life ... It is conceived of as a state in which the powers of life are at their lowest ebb, as a sleep from which one may wake’.⁷¹ However, as a concept sleep might belie the hopelessness and horror of death, the dead and Sheol. As such a better analogy for our purposes is to liken the state of the dead in Sheol to being in a **coma**.⁷²

Despite this, there are a number of authors who continue to argue for a positive depiction for death from Genesis. A significant feature of their argument is the significance of the phrase that attends Abraham’s death: ‘Abraham ... died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people’ (Gen. 25:8).⁷³ It is suggested that this description shows: a departure from this life ‘in peace’;⁷⁴ that death is the ‘natural end to life’;⁷⁵ and that in this refrain ‘lies considerable comfort’;⁷⁶ and the expectation of a post-mortem reunification in the afterlife.⁷⁷ The phrase falls into two parts. The second part, ‘gathered to his fathers’, is particularly problematic for those who assert that this indicates a positive postmortem reunion because of the exceptions to the rule, such as the the earthly minded man of who will ‘join the generation of his fathers’ and yet ‘never see the light of life’ (Psalm 49:19-20) and that the violent death of the wicked King Ahab is spoken of in this way (1 Kings 22:37-40).⁷⁸ Bailey rightly points out that it is difficult to decide whether what is reflected in the idiom ‘gathered to his fathers’ is a communal existence in the tomb/underworld, or the physical reality of communal burial, or whether it is merely the equivalent of ‘N died’.⁷⁹ The phrase is ambiguous and those who place great weight on this phrase have assumed too much. In regards to the first part of the phrase, ‘he died at a good old age, an old man and full of years’ it is highly significant that it is missing from the account of Jacob’s death at the age of one hundred and forty seven (Gen. 49:33). It must be noted that when addressing the Pharaoh (at the considerable age of one hundred and thirty) Jacob states that his ‘years have been few and difficult’ (Genesis 47:9), which suggests that the reference to length of life is qualitative rather than quantitative. Thus the positive phrase ‘old and full of years’ is not a comment on death, rather it is a description of the satiety, the blessedness, of

one's life.⁸⁰ Despite this, Johnston considers that the lack of a mention of Sheol (and the use of other terms as phrases) in the account of Jacob's death as indicating that he did not descend there.⁸¹ While subtle and nuanced, this is essentially an argument from silence. Equally plausible is that Jacob had so established Sheol as his destiny during his lifetime that at death it required no further mention (Gen. 37:35; 42:38), a point supported by Johnston's own observation that Sheol as a person's destiny is never reported, but only arises in personal engagement.⁸² From the demise of the patriarchs and later individuals there is nothing to indicate that, in both actuality and expectation, the dead did anything other than descend to a somnolent Sheol.

In the remainder of the Pentateuch death continues its association with sin. This is suggested by the story of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:8); attested to by God's punishment of sin with death (e.g. Gen. 6:13; Exod. 32:25-35; Lev. 10; Num. 25); indicated by the Law's use of death as the harshest form of punishment for the most heinous crimes (Exod. 21:12, Lev. 24:17-21); affirmed by the sacrificial system where 'through the animal's death and the subsequent rituals men are ransomed from the death that their sin and uncleanness merit';⁸³ and confirmed by the concept of uncleanness to the degree that death can be understood to represent the utmost degree of uncleanness (Num. 9:6; 16,18; 19:11-22; 29:11; 31:19).⁸⁴ Throughout the Pentateuch death is associated with sin in such a way that both are consistently portrayed negatively.

The Pentateuch lays the foundation for the biblical presentation of death, the dead and the underworld. From the very beginning of Genesis death is linked to sin, a link maintained throughout the Pentateuch, and as such death is only ever presented negatively. In the Curse of Death handed down to Adam and Eve, death enters the world of humanity for the first time. Furthermore, the curse explicates the meaning and significance of death, showing that death strikes at relationship, activity and the body, unravelling the nature and purpose of humanity until a person is all but undone in the cessation of their bodily functions. Given that all die, death must be seen as the fundamental problem facing humanity. The dead are 'shades', who lack a body, are inactive and silent, and as such their minimalistic existence is best likened to a coma. All of the dead lead this comatose existence in the dark silence of the underworld.

1.2. 1 Samuel

Alternative views to the state of the dead being comatose are often substantiated from 1 Samuel 28, which is the solitary instance in the Scriptures of the forbidden practice of necromancy. Three salient features require addressing. The first feature is that Saul initiates the encounter with the witch of Endor for the express purpose of contacting the recently departed Samuel. Saul's recent expulsion of the mediums and spiritists from the land indicates his awareness of the prohibitions in the law concerning such practices (e.g. Lev. 19:31, 20:6; Deut. 18:9-16). Saul's breach of both his royal decree and the Law certainly raises questions about the Israelites' understanding and expectations of necromantic practice. Kaiser and Lohse hold that the Israelites were convinced of the successfulness of necromancy because of a 'general popular belief' that ghosts were the persistence of a shadowy-ghostly death-soul'.⁸⁵ That Saul must ask the witch what she sees, would seem to indicate that Samuel was not present in a physical body, but rather in a manner consistent with that of a 'shade'. However, when we probe the assertion concerning the widespread beliefs of the Israelites further, we find that 'the evidence for a widespread cult of the dead amongst Israel is meagre at best'.⁸⁶

Schmidt's extensive study of this very matter leads him to conclude that 'our findings favour the view that the corresponding belief in the dead's supernatural beneficence was nonexistent throughout most, if not all, of the pre-exilic histories of Israel and Judah'.⁸⁷ Indeed, Saul's actions in this particular instance, are undertaken in the face of both the dire military circumstances and the silence of God. This could well mean that Saul's actions indicate not sure conviction, but desperation, concerning necromancy.⁸⁸ The cause of the witch's surprise is debatable, but a very real possibility is that it indicates surprise at her success.⁸⁹ The second feature is Samuel's statement: 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?'. While Harris protests that 'the text does not imply that Samuel was sleeping',⁹⁰ there is no evidence to support his assertion. Indeed, the opposite is true, for Samuel speaks of being disturbed, which is entirely consistent with a somnolent conception of the dead (cf. Ps. 88:3-12; Ezek. 26:20).⁹¹ The third feature to consider is Saul's encounter with Samuel. It is anti-climatic, for Samuel provides no new information to Saul except the defeat will come 'tomorrow'. Furthermore, it is not Samuel who causes fear in Saul, but rather his distressing words that confirm Saul's imminent demise. The anaemic nature of this encounter is

made even more striking by observing that this episode is in stark contrast to the Mesopotamian religious literature, which highlights the power of the spirits of the dead to harm the living and that the spirits of the untended or unburied seek to wreak revenge of the living.⁹² What we are left with is the impression of the dead's pathetic weakness rather than their demonic strength.

The practices of the Israelite nation were to be in stark contrast to their neighbours, for their religion expressly prohibited them from consulting or contacting the dead.⁹³ While the summoning of the deceased Samuel is indeed exceptional, it serves to confirm that the dead are not non-existent but also that from them the living have nothing to fear and nothing to gain. There is every reason to expect that Samuel was brought up from and returned to Sheol, where he was in a bodiless comatose state.

1.3. The Psalms and Wisdom Literature

In the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature death, the dead and the underworld are significant themes. This is unsurprising for they share a commonality arising from their reflection upon humanity, the world and God. The poetic and figurative nature of much of this material presents a particular challenge to appropriately understanding the meaning conveyed in these writings. How, for instance, is the use of Sheol in the following passage (and others like it) to be understood?: 'O Lord, you brought me up from Sheol, you spared me from going down into the Pit' (Ps. 30:3). A number of different approaches have been taken. Firstly, the most common view, holds that Sheol is being used as a metaphor. The Psalmist's experience of extreme distress is related in hyperbolic language, 'Sheol is used as a figure of speech to denote extreme misfortune, seemingly inescapable death, the brink of death or the like (Ps. 30:4; 86:13; 88:4)'.⁹⁴ However, dissatisfaction with terms such as 'figure of speech', 'metaphor' and 'hyperbole' as adequate explanations of the experience of the Psalmist leads to a second view, Sheol as a total experience. This view considers that whenever anyone is struck by evil, unhappiness, disease or other trouble they are actually in Sheol.⁹⁵ This view is thoroughly dependent on a particular view of anthropology that considers Israelite thought to have been completely governed by totality, that is 'black and white thinking'. Problematically for this view is the fact that much of the anthropological and ethnological material that was relied upon is 'of doubtful value',⁹⁶ and as such this view is widely

regarded as highly questionable.⁹⁷ This leads to the third view, Sheol as a real experience. Barth presents death as a real experience, but differs from those who consider it to be a total experience. He conceives of death ‘as a two-sided reality: on the one hand as the boundary of life that God has fixed for each of us, on the other as the power of destruction that menaces us on our path through the world’.⁹⁸ Johnston objects to Barth on the grounds that death cannot be both real and partial.⁹⁹ However, such an objection is grounded in the conception of death as being the final cessation of the body’s functions. This paper has argued against such a narrow conception of death, and while we would speak of the degree to which death has invaded life, there is essentially agreement with Barth’s suggestion that the ‘second aspect of death manifests itself in illness, persecution, and the other forms of suffering’.¹⁰⁰ As Calvin forcefully puts it when considering the manifold diseases our bodies carry ‘a man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were, with death’.¹⁰¹ Indeed the Psalmist, and others such as Jonah (Jonah 2:2), have an experience of death and Sheol that is real, though not total.

Having recognised that for the Psalmist Sheol was a real experience, we must also acknowledge the personification of death and Sheol in the Psalms and wisdom material. Death and/or Sheol can be conceived of as having gates (Ps. 9:13; 107:18), bars (Job 17:16), as a shepherd (Ps. 49:14), having an appetite (Prov. 27:20; 30:15-16), and a mouth (Ps. 141:7). We should understand these not as literalistic descriptions of death and Sheol but rather as poetic expressions of truth, analogous to the way that we understand ‘the shadow of death’ not as a literal shadow, but nonetheless a true account of the effect of death upon the living (Ps. 23:4; 44:19; 107:10,14). This personification of death will find further development in the apocalyptic material of the book of Isaiah and in the New Testament, most notably Romans and Revelation.¹⁰²

There is much in the Psalms and Wisdom literature that supports our contention that the Israelites viewed death as the fate of all and conceived of Sheol as the destiny of all (e.g. Ps. 89:48; Ecc. 9:9-10; Job 7:7-11) even the righteous (Job 14:13; Ps. 88:3). Death is the great leveller of all (Job 3:13-19). However, the hope outlined in Psalm 49 is taken by some as revealing an exception to this presentation of death and Sheol, and the psalm becomes almost paradigmatic for understanding the relationship of the righteous in

regards to death and Sheol. Certainly Johnston takes the psalm this way, and as such it is worth spending some time investigating this psalm and Johnston's use of it.¹⁰³ Johnston considers verses 6-7 to lay out the age-old riddle of the apparently pious person in trouble and suffering oppression. He then holds that two responses are given. The first is enunciated in verses 8-10: no human can pay a ransom to avoid the underworld and live forever, all die and will remain permanently in their graves, whether foolish, like the unwelcome oppressors, or wise, presumably like the righteous psalmist.¹⁰⁴ The second response is found in verse 15, that 'God will provide for him an alternative destiny to the underworld'.¹⁰⁵ These two responses create a conundrum—for how can it be said that all go the underworld if in fact some avoid it? Johnston's solution to this 'riddle' is to consider the identification of the underworld with the wicked as paramount.¹⁰⁶ This emphasis allows him to conclude that the 'peaceful death for the godly is never presented as descent into Sheol'.¹⁰⁷ It is worth observing that for Johnston's view to hold, he must subtly shift from considering Sheol to be predominantly the destiny of the wicked, to being exclusively the destiny of the wicked. This is in spite of the explicit claim (vv. 10, 14) that all die and go to Sheol. Furthermore, Johnston's solution does not actually resolve the contradiction. It merely asserts that the first response does not apply to the righteous. Indeed, if Johnston is in fact correct, there is actually no riddle in verses 6-7, for the answer is 'the wicked go to Sheol and the righteous go to God'. A better way forward is to recognise that the riddle posed by verses 6-7 is answered but also further compounded by the material in verses 8-10. That is, the riddle is answered in respect to the wicked, for Johnston appears to be correct to observe that 'those destined for Sheol are predominantly the ungodly'.¹⁰⁸ This would fit well with the suggestion that Psalmist considered death to be non-bodily relationlessness and inactivity in the coma-like state of Sheol, for this would be an appropriate fate for the wicked. However, the riddle of verses 6-7 remains unanswered for the righteous, for death and Sheol are inappropriate for the righteous.

That this is indeed the case is seen clearly in the nature of the hope held out by the Psalmist, for the Psalmist does not seek to avoid Sheol as Johnston claims. The stated desire of the individual is not to be left in Sheol, but rather to be redeemed from Sheol (v.15). The hope of the Psalmist is grounded in his knowledge of God, whom he considers capable of just such an action, and this hope of redemption from Sheol is seen throughout the Psalms and Wisdom

Literature (e.g. Job 14:13; 19:25-27; Ps. 16:10; 17:15; 49:7-15). What Heidel says of Psalm 17:15 is true of the hope contained in other Psalms: ‘in this verse the psalmist (not the community) expresses his conviction that he will awake from the sleep of death (Ps. 13:4; 76:6; Jer. 51:39,57) and rise from the grave (cf. Dan. 12:2); that he will then be permitted, as one who is righteous in God’s sight, to stand in the presence of God’.¹⁰⁹ Although focussed upon the psalmist’s phrase that ‘afterwards you will take me into glory’ (Ps. 73:24), there seems little to prevent us from more widely applying Anderson’s comment that what we find here is ‘a tentative venture to go beyond the then current beliefs, although the result would be a glimpse rather than a firm faith’.¹¹⁰ What we see here is the beginnings of an eschatological resurrection hope. Resurrection as the reversal of death—for it is a restoration of bodily existence for relationship with God and one another, and for activity. Resurrection is life.

This eschatological hope, while not as firm as the Psalms, is seen in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes investigates ‘life under the sun’, that is life on earth where man dwells.¹¹¹ Death as the fundamental human problem raises this possibility.

Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return’ (Ecc. 3:19-20).

From these verses there is no need to modify our anthropology, despite Heidel’s claim that what is described here is: ‘the soul leaving the body at the moment of death to be with God’.¹¹² If instead we recognise the ‘breath’ as a reference back to the breath of life (Gen. 2:7) then this is not describing souls, but God’s life-force returning to Him. The dead are still the dead. This position is subtly tempered by the author’s acknowledgement in verse 20 that there are some matters beyond the discovery of humans.¹¹³ That there is a tentative possibility that death is not the ultimate end marries with the desire of the author who states that; ‘I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgement both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed”’ (Ecc. 3:17). Here, as in the Psalms, there is a hope in an eschatological day when God will leave neither the righteous nor the wicked in Sheol, but raise both to judgement.

Thus the Psalms and Wisdom Literature confirm the way in which death, the dead and the underworld are presented in the Old Testament. Death is the fate of all. Sheol the destiny of all. The insight of this material is that it begins to consider that death and Sheol are (in a sense) appropriate for the wicked, but both are inappropriate for the righteous. The righteous long for a future just judgement of both of themselves and the wicked, where they shall be vindicated (and receive resurrection life) while the wicked punished (and receive death).

1.4. Isaiah

In turning to Isaiah to examine its presentation of death, the dead and the underworld, the first thing to note is that in Sheol there is some sense of personal continuity and recognition. The leaders of the world who have died greet the freshly deceased king of Babylon (Is. 14:9-19). Some see in this a continuity of hierarchy into the underworld in the references to rulers in Sheol.¹¹⁴ However, this fails to grasp two things. The first is that the greetings' very purpose is 'to inform the newly arrived monarch that his power counts for nothing in this miserable world'.¹¹⁵ The second is that the dead require rousing prior to greeting the king of Babylon, which indicates that they have been slumbering, a point reinforced by the use of the term 'shades' to refer to the dead. Thus the kings are identified to show the continuity with who they were when they were alive, not the status they have in the underworld.¹¹⁶ Moreover, inactivity is the norm for the residents of Sheol.¹¹⁷ Death and Sheol are the great levelers of humanity.

Hezekiah's prayer reinforces the negativity of Sheol (Is. 38:10-20). His reference to 'the gates of Sheol' (Is. 38:10) emphasises that Sheol is a place of captivity and subjugation,¹¹⁸ as well as connecting it to the poetic personification of Sheol in Isaiah 5:14 as 'no mere remote region passively waiting for mankind to die one by one; it is a power endlessly threatening the living, an insatiable monster opening its jaws to devour Israel'.¹¹⁹ It is a place where one 'cannot hope for your faithfulness' (Is. 38:18). Importantly, this is Hezekiah's prayer thanking God for deliverance from Sheol. Motyer claims that Hezekiah feared Sheol because he 'saw his illness as a divine judicial visitation on sin and his death in such circumstances as dying unforgiven'.¹²⁰ But when the context is examined, this assertion seems contrary to the facts. Hezekiah asks the Lord to remember 'how I have walked before you faithfully

and with wholehearted devotion' (Is. 38:3), the veracity of which is confirmed by God's action of extending Hezekiah's life a further fifteen years. The conclusion must be that Hezekiah anticipated his descent to Sheol because Sheol is the destination of all people, righteous or wicked.

In Isaiah the negative nature of death and Sheol does not diminish or limit the sovereignty of God. It is Yahweh who brings people down to Sheol (Is. 14:5,11,15). Sheol is not out of the control of Yahweh (Is. 7:11). As Johnston suggests, 'the contrast between Yahweh's power over Sheol and separation from it is often overstated: that Yahweh has access to Sheol does not imply that its inhabitants have access to him. The themes are complementary rather than contradictory.'¹²¹ This creates a tension between the negativity of death, the dead, and Sheol on one side and the character of God on the other. It would seem that from this tension arises the eschatological hope of Isaiah.

The focus of this eschatological hope is Isaiah 24-27, the so-called 'Apocalypse of Isaiah', a section best described as eschatological prophecy.¹²² As a unit, these chapters have a simple theme, namely, the triumph of God over his enemies for the sake of his people. Here, in this vision of the arrival of God's Kingdom, the great enemy death is defeated and hope is given to those who die waiting for the arrival of that Kingdom. Two key passages in this section treat 'the subject of death in novel ways'.¹²³ The first is Isaiah 25:6-8, which represents the prophet's response to the announcement of the destruction of the corrupt earth-city in the preceding five verses, followed by a feast which is marked by the bestowal of favours from the king.¹²⁴ As Colgan cleverly comments: 'this is no mere earthly king's inauguration banquet or victory feast; here one witnesses the inauguration of Yahweh's eschatological kingdom.'¹²⁵ For this feast to be enjoyed, death (the ultimate cause of all mourning), must be removed: 'before human beings can experience the joy of God's great feast, something must be done about the universal curse. At the end of every pathway the Grim Reaper awaits us all, and that cold hand blights every human happiness.'¹²⁶ Where before death and Sheol were said to devour, now 'God will swallow death like a great sea monster attacking a smaller fish. God will attack this marauding beast and take it in the jaws, crush it, chew it, reduce it, eliminate it, and perhaps spit it out.'¹²⁷ Whether or not resurrection is specifically on view here is hotly debated, but Butterworth's insight seems valid: 'the prophet does not specify this [resurrection], but he may be said to

prepare for it. In other words this makes it more likely that 26:19 will yield evidence for belief in the resurrection of individuals.¹²⁸ Thus it is appropriate to turn to the second of these passages, Isaiah 26:14-19, the context of which reflects the plight of the righteous: ‘while they wait for the final day to dawn, the righteous are perplexed by the perversity and blindness of the wicked who surround them on every hand ... Hence the longing for him to act decisively to establish righteousness.’¹²⁹ The righteous hope that the wicked will remain in death (Is. 26:14), but such a destiny is unsatisfactory for the righteous. Oswalt correctly sums up verses 16-18 by identifying ‘the underlying question of the lament: it is fine to believe that God will one day be crowned on Mount Zion and invite all his saints to feast with him in the presence of their enemies, but what about all those saints who have lived and struggled and died in the meantime with no apparent result?’¹³⁰ The solution to the problem is provided in verse 19: they will be raised from death to share in the final victory; their hope is for new life, resurrection (Is. 26:19).

A number of scholars however, suggest that this image of resurrection is not to be taken literally, but is rather a reference to the nation. Support for such a position is based upon a poetic, symbolic or hyperbolic reading of the language at this point.¹³¹ In response, it must be noted that no single event in the history of Israel or Judah appears to be on view. Indeed the contrast here (as in the rest of the Apocalypse of Isaiah) is not primarily between Judah and the nations, but rather between the godly-righteous and the godless-wicked. For instance, 26:14 has individuals in view, and these individuals who will not live are contrasted in 26:19 with those (individuals) who will live and who will rise. With regards to the nature of the language, even if considered to be poetic or hyperbolic, it does not match with a political or national restoration, e.g. ‘the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no more’ (Is. 26:21). Whilst ‘return from exile’ is clearly on view in Isaiah, especially in the ministry of Cyrus in Isaiah 45, it is not spoken of in the language of resurrection.¹³² Thus ‘it is still possible, of course, that here resurrection is [...] a metaphor for national restoration; but the wider passage, in which God’s renewal of the whole cosmos is in hand, opens the way for us to propose that the reference to resurrection is intended to denote actual concrete events’.¹³³ As such there is no need to conceive of the national and the individual concerns as either-or, but rather both-and, for the themes of death and life that dominate this portion of Isaiah are universal.

Isaiah confirms what we have already seen about death, the dead and the underworld. Death is the unwelcome end of all humanity, and Sheol the somnolent, dark, unpleasant destiny of all. The description of the dead as 'shades' reflects that there is a sense of continuity with who they once were. However, this description also reveals discontinuity, for now they are insubstantial, non-bodily beings, 'bereft of all personality and strength'.¹³⁴ Reflection upon the appropriateness of death and Sheol in regards to the wicked, produces a realisation that for the righteous who trust in God this is an inappropriate destiny. From this there arises an eschatological hope of a divine victory over death. This hope is not merely, or even primarily national, but individual. As such this lays the foundation for the hope of resurrection – which at the very least must be conceived of as a return to bodily life.

2. Conclusion

In the beginning death was alien to human life. The Israelite conception of death invading life arises from the account of the curse (Gen. 3). God's punishment upon disobedient humanity can rightly be considered The Curse of Death, for it depicts the effect of death upon the living, to such a degree that eventually life is finally eroded to the point of the cessation of the functions of the body. As such death strikes at the nature and purpose of humanity, and is the fundamental problem facing humanity. The depiction of death here and throughout the Old Testament is: non-bodily relationlessness and inactivity. Tied inextricably to death are the concepts of the dead and the underworld. The dead are 'shades' whose existence is minimal, for they lack a body and are deprived of relationship and activity. Sheol is the unique Hebrew term for the underworld, and it is to this dark and silent place that all those who have died descend. The dead in Sheol have a somnolent existence that is best likened to a coma. This negative portrayal of death, the dead and Sheol is consistently maintained throughout the Old Testament. The Psalms and Wisdom Literature confirm this portrayal, seen in its consideration that, in some sense, the negative nature of death, the dead and Sheol, is a fitting destination for the wicked. In regards to the righteous, this is held to be an inappropriate end. Given the nature of the God in whom the righteous trust, there arises a hope that God will not leave the righteous in Sheol, but will raise them up to new life with their God. The prophetic book of Isaiah maintains the biblical depiction of death, the dead and Sheol as the comatose fate of all, while developing the

trajectory of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature. This development occurs mainly in the apocalyptic material where death and Sheol are personified as the enemies of humanity and God. This section sharpens the eschatological focus onto a final day where the Lord God shall defeat the great enemy Death. In this material the resurrection hope tentatively suggested in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature is significantly strengthened. This final day relates not only to the righteous, for Isaiah picks up and develops the hints contained in Ecclesiastes, but this final day shall be a day of judgement for the wicked.

TONY WRIGHT is assistant minister at St Alban's Anglican Church Lindfield, Sydney, Australia.

ENDNOTES

1. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The opening chapters of Genesis* (trans. David G. Preston); Leicester: IVP, 1984 [1979], p. 16.
2. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space & Time* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1972), p. 9.
3. Joel B. Green, 'A Re-examination of Human Nature in the Bible', in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (ed. Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Malony; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp. 149-174, 156.
4. A form of monism known as nonreductive physicalism; Stephen G. Post 'A Moral Case for Nonreductive Physicalism', in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* pp. 195-212.
5. Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A historical and systematic study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 205.
6. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 5-10.
7. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 138-9.
8. Lloyd R. Bailey Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 42.
9. "The view of immortality that predominates in Western and Christian thought is Platonic, according to which the term signifies an inherent characteristic of every rational soul that guarantees its persistence after death," Murray J. Harris, 'The New Testament View of life after death,' *Themelios* 11:2 (1986): 47-52, 47.
10. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, p. 95.
11. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures 2003* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 241.
12. D. B. Knox, *D. Broughton Knox Selected Works, Volume 1: The Doctrine of God*

(Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2000), p. 89.

13. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Volume 1: Chapters 1-5* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan). Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958 [1536], pp. 63-64.
14. *Contra* Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, pp. 52-53; Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life* (trans. John Penney Smith; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960 [1956]), p. 17.
15. William Dumbrell, 'Life and Death in God's Creative Purposes: Genesis 1-3,' in *The Ethics of Life and Death* (ed. B. G. Webb. Homebush West: Lancer, 1990), pp. 5-28, 5-6.
16. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 17; cf. Otto Kaiser & Eduard Lohse, *Death & Life in the Old Testament* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981 [1977]), p. 23.
17. This phrase is coined by Thomas Barrosse, 'Death and Sin in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15.04 (1953): 438-459, 449; cf. C. Clifton Black II, 'Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8', *JBL* 103/3 (1984): 414-419 (who conceives of death both positively and negatively, however the positive category must be dismissed on the grounds that none of the biblical passages he uses actually support this category: 1 Kings 19:4; 2Kings 2:3; Job 1:21).
18. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 74-75.
19. Eberhard Jüngel, *Death: The riddle and the mystery*, Iain & Ute Nicol (trans.) (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), p. 74; Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, pp. 20-21.
20. The one clear exception to this rule is Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). Two others frequently cited are Enoch (the phrase in Genesis 5:22 'walked with God' is ambiguous) and Moses (who, despite Jewish traditions to the contrary, died cf. Deuteronomy 34:5-6).
21. A. M. Dubarle, *Le peche originel dans l'Ecriture* (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 68; cited from Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 184.
22. N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 92.
23. Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1-11: a commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), 225; Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis: translated and interpreted by Hermann Gunkel* (trans. Mark E. Biddle), (Macon: Mercer University, 1997), p. 10.
24. R. W. L. Moberly, 'Did the serpent get it right?', *JTS* 39 (1988): 1-27, 16.
25. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: Volume I* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; Peabody: Prince Press, 1962 [1957]), 387; also Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (Word Biblical Commentary: Dallas: Word Books, 1990), p. 405.
26. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 171.

27. Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), p. 28.
28. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 171 (capitalisation his).
29. Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall and Flood* (MN: Augsburg, 1969), p. 87.
30. Jüngel, *Death*, p. 135.
31. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 172.
32. Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), p. 128; *contra* W.O.E. Osterley, *Life, Death and Immortality: Studies in the Psalms* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1911), p. 153.
33. Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead* (Indiana: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), p. 269.
34. L. Aubert, *La view apres la mort chez les Israelites* (Lausanne, 1902), 5; cited from Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, p. 17.
35. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 90.
36. Richard Bauckham, 'Life, Death and the Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism', in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 80-95.
37. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 142.
38. Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament* (*Biblica et Orientalia* N.21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 21.fn.2.
39. T. Desmond Alexander, 'The Old Testament View of Life After Death', *Themelios* 11:2 (1986): 41-46, 43.
40. For a more detailed discussion; Richard N. Longenecker, 'Introduction,' in *Life in the Face of Death*, pp. 1-18.
41. Alexander, *Old Testament View*, p. 43.
42. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 79.
43. The KJV translates Sheol as: Hell (31 times), grave (31 times), pit (3 times).
44. W. Creighton Marlowe, "'Hell" as a Translation of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible: De-Hellenizing the KJV and NKJV Old Testaments,' *Ashbury Theological Journal* 57:2, 58:1 (Fall 2002, Spring 2003): 5-23.
45. T. D. Alexander, *Old Testament View*, p. 44.
46. T. D. Alexander, *Old Testament View*, p. 44.
47. T. D. Alexander, 'The Psalms and the Afterlife,' *Irish Biblical Studies* 9 (1987): 2-17, 14.
48. For a critique of this position, see 'The Psalms and Wisdom Literature'; 'Isaiah'.
49. Alexander, *Old Testament View*, p. 44; citing: Job 11:8; Psalm 139:8, Amos 9:2.
50. The NIV translates it as 'heavens' not 'heaven' in each instance.
51. Supported by the observation that the Hebrew terms for 'pit' can function

- synonymously for Sheol; Johnston, *Shades*, pp. 83-84.
52. Mitchell Dahood, *The Psalms II (51-100): A new translation and commentary* (The Anchor Bible: NY: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 39, 156, 323. When commenting on Psalm 104:29 Dahood refers to the 'nether slime' from which humanity was created (cf. Gen.3:19), but translates the word as 'clay'. This indicates the possibility that Dahood has overstated his point and that the 'dust' on view is the formative substance of humanity to which they return in death, meaning that Sheol is 'dusty' because the dead are there; Mitchell Dahood, *The Psalms III (101-150): A new translation and commentary* (The Anchor Bible: NY: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 37-39.
 53. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, pp. 36-37.
 54. R. Laird Harris, 'Why Hebrew Sheol was Translated Grave', in *The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (ed. Kenneth Barker); (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), pp. 75-92, 76.
 55. R. Laird Harris, 'Sheol: The Grave, Hell, Pit', in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris *et al.*; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 892-3.
 56. R. Laird Harris, 'The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts', *JETS* 4(4) (Dec. 1961): 129-35; Harris, 'Sheol: The Grave, Hell, Pit', pp. 892-3; Harris, 'Why Hebrew Sheol was Translated Grave', pp. 75-92.
 57. T. D. Alexander, *Old Testament View*, p. 43.
 58. E.g. see Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 42; M. A. Knibb, 'Life and Death in the Old Testament', in *The World of Ancient Israel* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 395-415; Edwin Yamauchi, 'Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East' in *Life in the Face of Death*, pp. 21-50.
 59. Knibb, 'Life and Death in the Old Testament', p. 403.
 60. J. A. Motyer, *After Death: A sure and certain hope?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), p. 143.
 61. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 75.
 62. That Sheol is described as being 'down' and 'deep within the earth' does not mean that it necessarily possesses a temporal-spatial locale, in the same way that heaven could be said to be 'up'—although not necessarily reachable in a space-ship.
 63. Only two passages depict any kind of activity in Sheol, and they shall be dealt with (to varying degrees) in the subsequent section: 'Isaiah'.
 64. Homer, *The Odyssey*, 11; cf. Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods* (trans. Moses Hadas. London: Thames & Hudson, 1954), pp. 143-4.
 65. Jon D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 82-90.
 66. Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus: A history of religions* (trans. Florence Simmonds; New York: Liveright, 1930), pp. 85-86; cf. Francis T. Glasson, *Greek Influence in Jewish*

- Eschatology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961), p. 8 (who identifies the first instance of these changes to the 7th century BC).
67. A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts Volume 1* A. R. George (trans. & ed.), (Oxford: OUP, 2003), Tablet XII 87-153.
 68. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic Parallels*, 192.
 69. A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1949), p. 94.
 70. Kaiser & Lohse, *Death and Life*, 34.
 71. G. Pidoux, *L'homme dans l'A.T* (Paris: Neuchatel, 1953), p. 55; cited from Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, p. 17.
 72. The weakness of this analogy is that those in a coma retain their body, but this weakness should not be seen to override its strengths.
 73. See also Isaac (Genesis 35:29) with similar phrasing in Judges 2:10, 2 Kings 22:20; Psalm 49:19; 2 Samuel 7:12.
 74. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, p. 21.
 75. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, pp. 41-42.
 76. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, p. 51.
 77. Motyer, *After Death*, p. 19.
 78. Donald Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings* (Tyndale OT Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 190; pace: G. R. Driver, 'Plurima Mortis Imago' in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (eds. Meir Ben-Horin, Bernard D. Weinryb and Solomon Zeitlin); (Leiden: Brill, 1962), pp. 128-43, 140. When using Driver's work Johnston concedes that the 'supporting textual argument is tenuous', *Shades of Sheol*, p. 35, fn. 45.
 79. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, p. 46.
 80. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 390; Jünger, *Death*, p. 67.
 81. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, pp. 81-3.
 82. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 72.
 83. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 28.
 84. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 275-6; (the exception is incurable leprosy).
 85. Kaiser & Lohse, *Death and Life*, p. 35.
 86. Philip S. Johnston, 'The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament', *Tyndale Bulletin* 45:2 (1994): 415-19, 18.
 87. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, p. 275.
 88. Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (Word Biblical Commentary: Waco: Word, 1983), p. 271.
 89. Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000),

- p. 234; Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986), p. 195.
90. Harris, 'Why Hebrew Sheol was Translated Grave', p. 79.
 91. Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, p. 195-6.
 92. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic Parallels*, 154-157; J. B. Burns "Necromancy and the Spirit of the Dead in the Old Testament," *Transactions of Glasgow University Oriental Society* 26 (1979): 1-14, 11; cited from Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 166.
 93. Quite possibly (false) Israelite conceptions of the dead gave rise to particular views and practices concerning necromancy and magic, in the same way that (false) Israelite conceptions of other gods gave rise to idolatry.
 94. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic Parallels*, p. 177.
 95. J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: OUP, 1926), p. 466.
 96. R. R. Wilson, 'Anthropology of the Old Testament', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979): 175-181, 167.
 97. J. W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 16.
 98. Christoph Barth, *God With Us: A theological introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 277.
 99. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 93.
 100. Barth, *God With Us*, p. 277.
 101. J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* I xvii 10 Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), John T. McNeill (ed.), (Phila: Westminster Press, 1960 [1559]), p. 223. 1 Corinthians 15:43, 53 would seem to justify this association of weakness and mortality.
 102. See sections: Romans; Revelation.
 103. Johnston's argument here parallels his more broadly based arguments concerning Sheol. See: Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 79-85; Philip S. Johnston, 'Death and resurrection', *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. D. Alexander & Brian Rosner (eds.), Leicester: IVP, 2000), p. 443-7.
 104. Philip S. Johnston, 'Psalm 49: A Personal Eschatology', in *Eschatology in the Bible and Theology: Evangelical essays at the dawn of the millennium* Kent E. Brower & Mark W. Elliott (eds.), (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), pp. 73-84, 74-5.
 105. Johnston, 'Psalm 49', p. 76.
 106. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 81.
 107. Johnson, 'Psalm 49', p. 76.
 108. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 81. Citing: the wicked (Is. 5:14; Ps. 9:17; 31:17; 141:7; Job 21:13), sinners (Job 24:19), the foolish rich (Ps. 49:14), scoffers (Isaiah 28:15-18); and immoral (Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18).
 109. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic Parallels*, p. 210.

110. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms* (73-150) Volume II, New Century Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 535.
111. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1983), 44; R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 37.
112. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic Parallels*, p. 146.
113. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 80.
114. Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, 39; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (Trans. R. A. Wilson; The Old Testament Library: London: SCM, 1974), p. 36.
115. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 89; pace: Charles A. Briggs, *Psalms* (ICC: Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907), 246; H. W. Saggs, 'Some Ancient Semitic Conceptions of the Afterlife', *Faith and Thought* 90:3 (Winter, 1958): 157-182, 170.
116. Motyer, *After Death*, p. 143.
117. A similar argument could be made for the other passage which depicts activity in Sheol (Ezekiel 32:21).
118. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 76.
119. Martin-Achard, *Death to Life*, p. 42.
120. Motyer, *After Death*, p. 294.
121. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, p. 76.
122. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (NICOT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 440; G. W. Anderson, 'Isaiah xxiv-xxvii Reconsidered', in Congress Volume Bonn 1962 (Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. IX; G. W. Anderson *et al.* (eds.), (Leiden: Brill, 1963), p. 118-126, 123.
123. D. E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), p. 92.
124. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 462; cf. Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: on eagles' wings* The Bible Speaks Today—Old Testament Series (Leicester: IVP, 1996), p. 109.
125. P. Colgan, *The individual hope for the afterlife in Isaiah* (Sydney: Unpublished 4th yr project, 2003), p. 42.
126. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 464.
127. Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster Bible Companion: Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 199 (his italics).
128. M. Butterworth, 'Old Testament Antecedents to Jesus' Resurrection', in *Proclaiming the Resurrection: Papers from the first Oak Hill College Annual School of Theology*, Peter M. Head (ed.); Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), pp. 1-28, 13.
129. Webb, *Message*, pp. 110-111.
130. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 485.
131. Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 216;

cf. T. H. Gaster, 'Resurrection' in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Vol. 4 (R-Z)* George A. Buttrick *et al.* (eds.), (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 40; Saggs, 'Ancient Semitic Conceptions', p. 175; Edmund F. Sutcliffe, *The Old Testament and Future Life* Bellarmine Series VIII (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1946), p. 129.

132. Anthony Petterson, 'Antecedents of the Christian Hope of Resurrection, Part 1: The Old Testament', *Reformed Theological Review* 59:1 (April, 2000): 1-15, 11 fn. 23.

133. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 117.

134. Longenecker, 'Introduction', p. 8.