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AFTERLIVES OF THE AFTERLIFE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF HELL IN ITS JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN CONTEXTS

Mark Finney

ABSTRACT

The singular construct of afterlife within the Hebrew Bible is Sheol, a desolate place where, to the lament of many, the souls of both the righteous and the wicked reside. Yet there are striking developments within the periods of Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament and the post-apostolic Christian era. Within Second Temple Judaism, Sheol is transformed into a place of differentiation: the souls of the righteous depart to a place of blessing, the wicked to a place of torment. For the New Testament writers, this concept remains, but the soul is now conjoined to the physical body, and in the later post-apostolic period there is accentuated terror for the wicked in vivid descriptions of the eternal fires of hell. The modern understanding of a tortuous afterlife is drawn from the imagery of the church fathers, which was further accentuated within mediaeval Christendom.

Yet the polemical and apologetic context of this development needs to be recognized. Within Judaism, changes were made to defend the Jewish faithful and castigate apostates in the context of encroaching Hellenism. For the early Christ-movement, further development was related to the need to define and defend itself both against first-century Judaism and Graeco-Roman paganism from without and apostasy from within. For the church fathers, the fear of hell was employed for ideological purposes in asserting ethical priorities in the early church. As such, the development of the afterlife can be seen as a social construct, the repercussions of which in the modern period have, for many people, had a lasting, destructive influence.

*Afterlife in the Hebrew Bible*²⁹

Hell, as a place of eternal suffering and punishment, does not exist in the Hebrew Bible. Early Israelite thought on death simply assumed that it

1. On the following section see E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (4 vols.; London: T. & T. Clark, rev. edn, 1979–87), II, pp. 539–46 (and bibliography, II, p. 539 n. 90); H.C.C. Cavallin, *Life after Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor 15* (ConBNT, 7; Lund: Gleerup, 1974); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against its Graeco-*

marked, for all people, the end of worthwhile existence. From a *physical* perspective, death led both to the destruction of the flesh (for example, by decomposition, fire, or being ravaged²) and to the dissipation of the blood (by draining away, drying up, or by less delicate means³). The bones, being more resilient, may remain for some time.⁴ Typically, Hebrew texts reiterate that the body is formed from dust (עפר; LXX, χόψς),⁵ and on death will return to dust,⁶ in the sense that those who are said to ‘dwell’ in the dust are the dead.⁷ And as the body returns to dust, in the words of Job, hope and youthful vigour are dragged down also.⁸ Similar expressions are found in the Apocrypha.⁹

From a *nonphysical* perspective however, things look very different. The soul (ψυχή), sometimes called the spirit (πνεῦμα), is considered the essence of the human being.¹⁰ This is articulated in Genesis 2, where the divine breath breathed into the body brings life; its removal brings death.¹¹ For the

Roman Background (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987); M.C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (JSNTSup, 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); R. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); R.N. Longenecker, *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

2. Gen. 40.19; Lev. 26.29; 2 Macc. 9.9; 4 Macc. 9.17; Ps. 26.2; Prov. 5.11; Job 33.21; 34.15; Lam. 3.4; Jer. 7.33; Isa. 34.3.

3. Gen. 4.10; Zeph. 1.17; Ezek. 32.5-6; 1 Macc. 7.17; 4 Macc. 10.8; Isa. 49.26 (where the blood is, hopefully metaphorically, drunk).

4. Ezekiel 37, of course, details the procedure in reverse.

5. E.g., Gen. 2.7; Ps. 103.14; Eccl. 3.20.

6. Pss. 22.29; 30.9; 104.29; Eccl. 3.20; 12.7; 4 Kgdms 13.7; 1 Macc. 2.63. Cf. Ps. 22.15, the ‘dust of death’. The NRSV rendition of Ps. 7.6 (‘then let the enemy pursue me and overtake me, trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust’), is misleading. Δόξα may have a wide semantic range, but is never translated ‘soul’ (LSJ, BAGD s.v.). Better is ‘glory’ (so, NASU), or ‘honour’ (so, NKJV). See Walter Brueggemann, ‘From Dust to Kingship’, *ZAW* 84 (1972), pp. 1-18. G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946–1948), sees such ideas as ‘common notions . . . which are found among various peoples on comparable planes of civilization’ (II, p. 287). On ‘dust’, see also Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), pp. 85-91.

7. Gen. 3.19; Pss. 90.3; 104.29; Dan. 12.2; Job 20.11.

8. Job 17.16; 20.11; cf. 21.26.

9. E.g., Sir. 17.1 (‘the Lord created human beings out of earth, and makes them return to it again’); Wis. 2.3 (‘When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes’).

10. See Sir. 51.6, ‘My soul drew near to death, and my life was on the brink of Hades below’ (where, in Hebrew parallelism, ‘soul’ is contiguous with ‘life’).

11. Moore (*Judaism*, II, p. 287) notes, ‘Death is the departure from the body of the life, or, as we say, souls, concretely imagined as the vital breath (Gen. 2.7) or as the blood, or in the blood (Lev. 17.14)’. Cf. Lev. 17.11; Gen. 9.4.

Psalmist, ‘when you take away their breath [πνεῦμα], they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit [πνεῦμα], they are created’ (104.29-30). So, too, Tobit laments, ‘my spirit is taken from me so that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust’ (3.6).¹² Interestingly, as the flesh can be said to return to the dust, the same is also said of the soul, although the context of ‘dust’ is quite distinct and is contiguous with the underworld realm of Sheol (Ἰσθ; LXX ἕδης),¹³ also known as the Pit (λάκκος),¹⁴ and synonymous with ‘death’ (θάνατος),¹⁵ and with the ‘grave’,¹⁶ or the ‘places of the dead’ (such as the ‘earth’, or Abaddon).¹⁷ So, the soul survives the demise of the body and departs to Sheol, ‘an undesirable abode of wretched shades’,¹⁸ where it knows nothing and sees nothing.¹⁹

In Hebrew thought, Sheol was an extensive underground area: dark, dusty and gloomy.²⁰ It was also a place of no return, a vast prison with its

12. Cf. Ps. 7.5, ‘The enemy pursue and overtake me, trample my life to the ground, and lay my soul in the dust’.

13. Job 17.16 (‘Will [my hope] go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?’); Ps. 7.5; Isa. 29.4; 4 Ezra 7.32 (‘The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the chambers shall give up the souls that have been committed to them’). S.G.F. Brandon notes that in Mesopotamian thought the underworld was called the ‘House of Dust’; see *The Judgement of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of a Post-Mortem Judgement in the Major Religions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), p. 51. See also Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, pp. 85-91.

14. Job 33.18-30; Pss. 16.10; 30.3, 9; 29.4; 49.9-14; 87.4-5; Ezek. 31.16. See E. Yamauchi, ‘Life, Death and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East’, in R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 21-50 (43-45).

15. Nearly thirty-times throughout the LXX (e.g., Job 17.13-14; Pss. 6.6; 17.5-6; 88.5-10; 89.48; Prov. 7.27; Isa. 28.15, 18; Hos. 13.14; Dan. 3.88; Sir. 51.6; Wis. 1.12-16; 16.13; *Pss. Sol.* 16.2; Rev. 6.8; 20.13).

16. Job 10.19-22; 17.1-7; Ps. 88.5-6, 11; Ezek. 32.23.

17. 1 En. 51.3; 4 Ezra 7.32; *Ps-Philo* 3.10; 2 Bar. 42.8; 50.2. On Abaddon, see Job 26.6; 28.22; 31.12; Ps. 88.11; Prov. 15.11; 27.20.

18. C.K. Barrett, ‘Immortality and Resurrection’, in C.S. Duthie (ed.), *Resurrection and Immortality* (London: Bagster, 1979), pp. 68-88 (70).

19. Eccl. 9.5; Ps. 88.3-7, 10-12; Isa. 26.14; see also Gen. 3.5; Ps. 6.5; 16.10; 30.9; 115.17; Isa. 38.10f., 18f.; 2 Sam. 14.14; Job 3.13f., 17-19; Pss. 29.4; 48.15-16; 85.13; 88.49; 93.17; 116.3-7; Job 33.22; Wis. 16.13-14; *Pss. Sol.* 16.2; Isa. 14.9; Bar. 2.17. Cf. Sir. 51.6 (n. 10 above). See Yamauchi, ‘Life, Death and the Afterlife’, pp. 43-44.

20. Gen. 37.35; 42.38; 44.29, 31; 1 Sam. 2.6; 1 Kgs 2.6, 9; Tob. 3.10; 4.19; 13.2; Ps. 54.16; 87.5 [LXX]/88.4; *Odes* 3.6; Prov. 2.18; 5.5; 7.27; 15.24; Job 7.9; 17.16; 21.13; Wis. 16.13; Isa. 14.11, 15; 38.18; 57.9; Bar. 3.19; Ezek. 31.15-17; 32.27; *Pss. Sol.* 15.10. Num. 16.30, 33 notes a descent alive into Sheol, which, in the context, is considered extraordinary. See Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, pp. 91, 145-47.

own gates, bars and guards.²¹ However, in both Hebrew and Greek thought, Sheol/Hades was not a place of punishment for the wicked; it was the place where the souls of *all* the dead go.²² Here, all hope is gone (Ps. 143.3; cf. Wis. 13.10), and God has no more dealings with the departed, who are forgotten forever (Ps. 88.10ff.; Eccl. 2.16). On the rare occasions that a soul is said to leave Sheol, it is said to *rise up*. So, Saul's enquiry of the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28 was that the spirit or soul of Samuel be brought *up* out of Sheol (ἀνάγω, v. 11; ἀναβαίνω, vv. 13, 15).²³

In Sheol, souls exist as shades, *rephaim*, in a dark world;²⁴ and although they have some kind of 'existence', and could even be 'conscious' enough to speak (so, Samuel to Saul), they are certainly considered the *dead*.²⁵ This is found in a wide range of texts from the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha (for example, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, Sirach, Baruch).²⁶ Hence, the common term for the ψυχή in Sheol is νεκρός (Ps. 88.10).²⁷ Most writers of the Hebrew Bible appear to deliberately avoid any discussion

21. Isa. 38.10; Job 38.17; Pss. 9.14; 107.18; Eccl. 9.10. See Robert Martin-Achard, 'Resurrection: Old Testament', *ABD* V, pp. 680-84; Richard Bauckham, 'Hades, Hell', *ABD* III, pp. 14-15; Moore, *Judaism*, II, p. 289. Sheol is imagined as a monster with gaping jaws that greedily swallows men down and is never sated (Isa. 5.14; Hab. 2.5; Prov. 27.20; 30.15f.).

22. 2 Macc. 6.23; 1 En. 102.5; 103.7; *Sib. Or.* 1.81-84; *Ps.-Phoc.* 112-13; 2 Bar. 23.4; *T. Ab.* resc. A 8.9; 19.7.

23. Cf. Ps. 30.3 [29.4 LXX]; 88.10 [87.11 LXX]; Isa. 26.19). Moore, *Judaism*, II, p. 289, notes, 'From Sheol there is no exit; compare the Babylonian Aralu, the Land without Return'.

24. See 1 Sam. 28; Ps. 88.10; Prov. 2.18; 5.5; 7.27; 9.18; Isa. 14.9; 26.14, 19; R.N. Longenecker, 'Introduction', in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 1-17 (8).

25. For Homer, too, souls in Hades are always defined as *dead*. See Dag Øistein Endsjø, 'Immortal Bodies, before Christ: Bodily Continuity in Ancient Greece and 1 Corinthians', *JSNT* 30 (2008), pp. 417-36 (428).

26. Ps. 17.6 (the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me); Pss. 48.14; 54.15; 88.48; 116.3; Prov. 2.18; 5.5; 7.27; 9.18; Job 33.22; 38.17; Sir. 14.12; Hos. 13.14 ('Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death?'); Isa. 14.19; 28.15-18; 38.18; Bar. 2.17 ('Open your eyes, O Lord, and see, for the dead who are in Hades, whose spirit has been taken from their bodies, will not ascribe glory or justice to the Lord'); Dan. 3.88. In the Apocrypha, Sirach has much to say on Sheol and the state of the dead. The author asks, 'Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades, in place of the living who gives thanks? From the dead (νεκρός), as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased'. So, those in ἄδης are the νεκροί as opposed to the ζῶντες, and the answer to the question is, of course, no one (17.27-28; cf. 51.6; 38.23; 48.5).

27. Deut. 18.11 speaks of 'a medium, or a spiritist, or one who enquires of the dead'; and for Isaiah too, the *dead* are the νεκροί (Isa. 26.14; cf. 8.19). *Νεκρός* is also used of the dead physical body, as in Gen. 23.6, 9.

of the subject, but some do reflect on the afterlife and with it the apparent injustice of death for the righteous, for it was assumed that both the righteous and the wicked were destined for this same place of misery and desolation (texts in Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah).²⁸ Such was the anticipated horror of Sheol that, in the words of Qohelet, ‘a living dog is better than a dead lion’,²⁹ that is, the poorest living wretch was considered better even than the king who abides in Sheol.³⁰

Interestingly, the evidence of the Hebrew Bible suggests that Sheol was not necessarily considered unclean in early Israel: there are no regulations against kissing a corpse (Gen. 50.1); bodies could be interred in the home after death (1 Sam. 25.1; 1 Kgs 2.34);³¹ and, according to Ezekiel, departed kings were buried close to the temple until the exile (Ezek. 43.7).³² Hence, the sphere of death, as demarcated ‘unclean’, either socially or legally, is not an ancient concept for the early Israelite community. (Interestingly, too, is that the early church, in recognizing the assertion of the Hebrew Bible that everyone, righteous and wicked, goes to Sheol,³³ taught that the Old Testament saints went to an upper level of Sheol from which Christ would later deliver them.³⁴)

*Second-Temple Judaism:
Resurrection and the Myths of Israel*

The reception history of the ‘afterlife’ texts of the Hebrew Bible within the Maccabean period shows an interesting development. There is continuity in that, on death, the soul/spirit is released from the body to Hades, a place in

28. Eccl. 3.16-21; 9.2-3, 9-10; 12.7; Job 7.9-10; 14.7-22; 30.23; Ps. 6.5; 90.3, 10-12; Prov. 5.11; Isa. 26.14.

29. Eccl. 9.4.

30. Cf. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, pp. 80-81, who writes that the dead, in Hebrew thought, ‘were cut off from God, the source of all life. It is this view, which is not peculiar to Israel but was common to many ancient peoples that most of the Hebrew Scriptures take for granted’. He concludes, ‘evidence for a belief in life after death in the Old Testament is, at best, minimal’ (p. 81). Cf. Longenecker, *Life in the Face of Death*, pp. 10-11.

31. Theoretically, ‘house’ could stand for ‘grave’, but archaeological evidence has established the practice of interring in the house.

32. See Rachel S. Hallote, *Death, Burial and Afterlife in the Biblical World: How the Israelites and their Neighbors Treated the Dead* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001); Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, p. 207.

33. Gen. 37.35; Isa. 38.10; Ps. 30, 3, 9; Num. 16.30, 33.

34. J. Lunde, ‘Heaven and Hell’, in Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight and I.H. Marshall (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 307-12 (309).

the lowest regions of the earth, the place of the dead,³⁵ where it remained for a while or forever.³⁶ Yet there is also sharp discontinuity. One of the earliest, and clearest, expressions of this change is found in Dan. 12.1-3. (Discussion of the antecedents to the Danielic text, particularly the metaphorical imagery of Isa. 26.19 and Ezek. 37.1-14, will be passed over and left to a future work.³⁷) I concur with the consensus of scholarly opinion that Daniel 12 is one of the earliest explicit references to some form of afterlife in the Hebrew Bible:

At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise [ἀναστήσεται] . . . at that time your people shall be delivered [ὑψώω],³⁸ everyone who is found written in the book.³⁹ Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake [γῆ; ἐξεγείρω], some to everlasting life,⁴⁰ and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.⁴¹

The various crises of the period generated ideological reflection on an afterlife that, to the lament of the Hebrew Bible, saw no distinction between the righteous and the wicked. How could the righteous, heroic Jew, put to death for refusal to compromise Torah, comport with those who were all too willing to Hellenize and forsake the traditions of Israel?⁴² The texts of

35. Tob. 3.6, 10; 5.12; 13.2; Wis. 1.14.

36. Wis. 12.1; Sir. 38.16-23; Bar. 2.17; 4 *Ezra* 2.45; 4 *Macc.* 17.2; 18.23.

37. On the imagery of Ezekiel 37, see de Boer, *Defeat of Death*, p. 44, 'symbolizing the miracle of national revival by God after the annihilation of His people by foreign powers'.

38. BDB, 'Slip away; escape; be delivered'. See the striking parallels (thematic and linguistic) with Isa. 49.24-25 and also see Ps. 89.48.

39. The 'Book of Life'; see Exod. 32.32-33; Ps. 69.28.

40. Most likely *physical* life; Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, p. 169; although see Cavallin, *Life after Death*, p. 28 n. 1.

41. On this text, see esp. G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Cavallin, *Life after Death*, pp. 26-27; J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 191-218; P.R. Davies, *Daniel* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 109-20; Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 109-15. Davies (*Daniel*, p. 113) notes, 'The description in these verses is extremely sketchy . . . a series of brief statements which hardly amount to a coherent description'. Alexander DiLella claims that Dan. 12.2 is an 'inspired midrash' on the Isaiah text (Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 307.

42. C.K. Barrett, *New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, rev. edn, 1987), writes of the literature of the Maccabees, 'In these circumstances, martyrdoms took place, perhaps for the first time in religious history' (p. 306).

this period (of which Daniel is a part) demonstrate a conceptual shift to take cognizance of the deaths of these righteous martyrs and, henceforth, for the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, the soul of the righteous would head in a very different direction to that of the wicked.

In the Apocrypha, we find the author of Sirach noting, 'It is easy for the Lord on the day of death to reward individuals according to their conduct' (Sir. 11.26), and for Tobit, the (righteous) spirit is released to an eternal home (in a positive sense, 3.6). *First Enoch* 1–36 (second century BCE) is perhaps the earliest text within Judaism that provides an expression of the concept of explicit divisions *within* Sheol for the righteous and the wicked.⁴³ The author asserts, 'You, souls of the righteous . . . Be not sad that your souls have gone down into Sheol in sorrow', for there is the promise of restoration (*I En.* 102.4f.). This is further accentuated in the Wisdom of Solomon (first century BCE), 'The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God . . . they are at peace . . . their hope is full of immortality . . . they will govern nations and rule over peoples . . . the Lord will reign over them forever . . . they will stand with confidence [and] will receive a glorious crown' (Wis. 3.1, 7; 5.1, 15). For the wicked, however, their spirits will wander about in torments (*4 Ezra* 7.80-99). For them, 'there will be no resurrection to life!' (2 Macc. 7.14). Elsewhere, Pseudo-Philo (first century CE) even quotes God himself to confirm the same, 'At the end of the lot of each one of you will be life eternal, for you and your seed, and I will take your souls and store them in peace until the time allotted the world be complete' (*LAB* 22.13). So, all souls are held in Hades until the day of judgment, and the souls of the righteous are kept in what are called 'chambers', where they are guarded by angels, and where they rejoice that they have now escaped what is mortal.

If *I Enoch*, cited above, notes that the soul of the righteous goes *down* into Sheol, other texts speak of the righteous soul rising *upward* to heaven. The doctrine of the Essenes affirms that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh they then rejoice and mount upward (1QM 2.155). In the *Apocalypse of Adam and Eve*, the soul of Adam is taken *up* to heaven (13.3-6, 37ff.). The same is said of Abraham in the *Testament of Abraham*, and Job in the *Testament of Job*. Interestingly, these (and other) texts omit entirely the descent into Sheol, and note that the righteous soul ascends immediately into heavenly paradise (although whether such a purview is simply temporal compression, that is, omitting *mention* of the intermediate stage of a descent into Sheol, or actually rejecting it altogether, is difficult to ascertain).

From the perspective of Josephus, once the righteous soul is released from the treasury it then undergoes a transformation into the glorified splendour of angels. For the wicked, however, things are very different. Josephus

43. T. Francis Glasson, *Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology* (London: SPCK, 1961), p. 12, suggests that such an idea came from the Greeks.

notes that they are to be detained in an everlasting prison where their souls are subject to eternal punishment (*War* 2.163; *Ant.* 18.14). *Second Baruch* confirms the same, ‘After the appointed day, the wicked will be changed into startling visions and horrible shapes; and they will waste away even more. Then they will go away to be tormented’ (cf. 51.1-6). That this section of *2 Baruch* speaks of the afterlife of the soul and not the body comports with 49.1-3, where the author looks forward to the soul’s release from its evil chained members (that is, the body).

For some authors, at this point in the resurrection scenario the righteous souls are glorified and are made manifest to the *living*. Typically there is no overlap between the present order and that of the end-time, but (as has been seen elsewhere), certain texts appear to demonstrate temporal compression: the death of the wicked is omitted and the narrative moves directly to a scenario of the judgment of the souls of the wicked and their sending to a place of torment. Here, it is as if the author cannot resist articulating a grand display of divine one-upmanship when the wicked, *while still alive*, will recognize the error of their ways!⁴⁴

The concept of eschatological judgment and voyeurism is found in other texts of the period. *Fourth Ezra* 7.75-101, for example, notes that after death, souls have seven days of freedom, during which they see the rewards awaiting the righteous and the torments awaiting the wicked. As the righteous rejoice, the wicked despair. After the seven days, the righteous enter their chambers where they rest in quietness, guarded by angels (7.85, 95), and the wicked wander around in tormented awareness of their doom (7.80, 93).⁴⁵ The two locations are in sight of each other (see *4 Ezra* 7.85, 93), but this need not necessarily imply that both are in the underworld, since even after the last judgment paradise and Gehenna are said to be visible to each other (*4 Ezra* 7.36-38; *1 En.* 108.14-15; *Apoc. Elij.* 5.27-28).⁴⁶

For some authors, the souls of the righteous will be given garments of glory, as noted in *1 Enoch*, where the righteous will shine like the lights of heaven.⁴⁷ Other texts concur with Josephus above, that resurrected souls

44. On the idea of voyeurism, eschatological judgment and the dynamics of power, see Kimberly B. Stratton, ‘The Eschatological Arena: Reinscribing Roman Violence in Fantasies of the End Times’, in *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Ra’anana S. Boustán, Alex P. Jassen and Calvin J. Roetzel; Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 45-75 (66-71). This display of one-upmanship is also noted in later Rabbinic literature; see C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 601.

45. Bauckham, ‘Hades’, pp. 14-15.

46. See Stratton, ‘Eschatological Arena’, pp. 45-75, noting *1 Enoch* 27, the *Similitudes of Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of John*.

47. *1 En.* 51.1-2 (italics, mine); cf. 22; 62.13-16; 103.3-4; 104.2.

will become like angels.⁴⁸ For Philo, Abraham left the mortal realm to be ‘added to the people of God . . . having received immortality, and having become equal to the angels . . . for the angels are incorporeal and happy souls’ (*Sacr.* 1.5). In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the writer describes the seventh heaven where he saw ‘Enoch and all who were with him in their robes of the above, and they were like the angels who stand there in great glory’ (9.7-8). For *1 Enoch* too, ‘the righteous and the holy ones from among (the risen dead) will all become angels in heaven. . . . The righteous will shine like the lights of heaven’ (*1 En.* 51.1-2; cf. 104.2).

Elsewhere, there is the claim that the resurrected soul will become as stars or a heavenly body. Philo writes that the stars are embodied, intelligent souls, describing the (resurrected) patriarchs as stars or constellations and noting that the rewards of the righteous soul are immortality and being inscribed ‘in the records of God, sharing the eternal life of the sun and moon and the whole universe’.⁴⁹ Pseudo-Philo claims the same.⁵⁰ So, too, *4 Ezra* notes that ‘the righteous souls rejoice that they have now escaped what is mortal, they are to be made like the stars’.⁵¹ *Second Baruch* notes the same (51.1-6). Finally, as noted above, Pseudo-Phocylides (103–15) asserts that the resurrected souls become gods (*ὀπίσω δὲ θεοὶ τελέθονται*, 102).

In summary, the reception of the Hebrew Bible’s concept of afterlife within Second Temple Jewish texts demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity. There is continuity in the sense that the afterlife experience is for the soul alone, not the body. The body, as many comparative texts of the ancient Near East recognize, simply decomposes.⁵² The dramatic change within Second Temple Judaism rests in the demarcation of righteous and wicked souls after death and their final place of abode. The righteous soul goes to a place of blessing, the wicked to a place of torment. This sharp disjuncture emerges within a context of ideological reflection within the Maccabean crisis and is made for a number of polemical or apologetic reasons.

Afterlife in Paul

So how does all this comport with the concept of afterlife in the New Testament? Within the earliest writings of the New Testament, which are the genuine letters of the apostle Paul, there is no Hades, no Gehenna, no ‘pit’,

48. Cavallin, *Life after Death*, pp. 203-205; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 142-45.

49. *Opif.* 144; cf. *Somn.* 1.135-45; *Gig.* 7; *Quaest. in Exod.* 2.114; *Mos.* 2.108.

50. *LAB* 23.13; 28.10; 15.5; 16.3; 23.6; 51.5; 63.4; and see also *4 Ezra* 4.35, 41; 7.95-96 (and see wider, 7.75-101).

51. *4 Ezra* 7.97. Cf. *LAB* 33.5, ‘Then your likeness shall be seen as the stars of the heaven’.

52. See, Brandon, *Judgement of the Dead*; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*.

and no 'hell'. There will certainly be a day of wrath (Rom. 2.5, 8; 3.5; 5.9; 9.22), when vengeance will be inflicted on the *unbelieving*, but there is no concept of eternal suffering in the fires of hell.⁵³ As argued elsewhere,⁵⁴ in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4-5), we find Paul in continuity with the Second Temple Jewish texts noted above, envisioning an afterlife comprised of the soul even though he can confusingly employ *body* language. Here, he does not mean flesh and blood (1 Cor. 15.50) but a type of anthropomorphic entity capable of housing the spirit. What he experienced on the Damascus road was the new postmortem existence of Christ in a form of christophanic glory similar to theophanies noted of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible of which no author uses the term 'body'.⁵⁵ What Paul appears to mean in terms of the glorified Christ is actually a new entity stripped of its natural flesh and blood.

Along with the weight of Second Temple Jewish texts discussed, and particularly the writings of Josephus, Paul most likely construes Jesus' death being followed by his soul raised from Sheol (that is, from the dead); and, as Josephus, being taken up to heaven. From there the now-glorified Christ comes out of heaven to reveal himself in successive christophanies. Whereas, for Josephus, the soul will 'at the end of the ages' enter a new habitation, for Paul, his Damascus road experience is a proleptic experience, a depiction of the firstfruits and an image of the splendour awaiting believers. At the end of the age, when there is a new or re-creation, the righteous will be transformed to have some kind of new existence, which Paul describes (in 1 Corinthians 15) as a *resurrection 'body'*, or, later (2 Corinthians 5), as a dwelling from heaven, a house/building from God eternal in the heavens. So, the 'chaste body/new habitation' of Josephus can be seen to stand in correlation to the new 'form' that Paul experienced on the Damascus road.

In sum, the reception of the afterlife scenarios of the Hebrew Bible within the Pauline corpus, like those of other Second Temple Jewish texts, demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity. Paul is in continuity with the emphasis on the afterlife of the soul/spirit and not a resurrected physical earthly body (and so is consistent with other Second Temple texts), and yet he stands in discontinuity with the Hebrew Bible in his affirmation of a day of wrath and distinctions of afterlife scenarios for the souls of the righteous as opposed to the wicked. He stands in continuity with other Second Tem-

53. See 2 Thess. 1.7-8, 'when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus'.

54. Mark T. Finney, 'The Priority of the Soul: Constructions of Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism' (forthcoming, 2013).

55. Although theophanies in the Hebrew Bible can be described in anthropomorphic terms (Gen. 32.28-30), they are normally described in terms of the supra-natural (Exod. 13.21-22; 24.9-11; Judg. 13.21-22; Isa. 6.1).

ple Jewish texts when they speak of a positive afterlife for the soul of the righteous, but not where they speak of *eternal* punishment for the wicked.⁵⁶

Afterlife in the Gospels

It is only in the Synoptic Gospels (and Jas 3.6) that, for the first time in biblical literature, we see the construct of what is normally understood as hell (the translation of the Greek *Gehenna*).⁵⁷ In Mk 9.43 it is placed on the lips of Jesus: ‘If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better to enter life maimed than to have two hands and go to hell’. It is repeated in 9.45 (If your foot causes you to stumble . . .), and 9.47 (If your eye causes you to stumble . . .). In this section of the Markan text, there are numerous textual variants. Verses 44 and 46 (‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’) are omitted by a large number of significant manuscripts and should not be read.⁵⁸ At Mk 9.45 the textual apparatus of the United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament* (4th edn) details the textual variants found alongside the Greek phrase εἰς γέενναν (into hell), which is also found at 9.43. These include:

- εἰς γέενναν (without the definite article)
- εἰς τὴν γέενναν, τοῦ πυρός (into the hell of fire)
- εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον (into the unquenchable fire)
- εἰς τὴν γέενναν, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον (into hell, into the unquenchable fire)

A likely textual scenario would be that the original text was simply ‘it is better for you to enter life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into hell’, which would then parallel vv. 43 and 47. Yet such a reading gives no sense of either the type of punishment to be administered in hell or the temporal aspect of that punishment (how long it would last). The various textual variants, through scribal additions, then determine and accentuate the nature of Gehenna: it is now the ‘fire of hell’ or the ‘unquenchable fire’, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’ (v. 44). These various additions assert unambiguously that Gehenna will be a place of *eternal* punishment!

56. 2 Thess. 1.9, a later pseudepigraphical text, does assert that the wicked ‘will pay the penalty of *eternal destruction*, away from the presence of the Lord’ (italics mine). As such, the text stands in continuity with other texts of the later New Testament (see below).

57. ‘Gehenna’ occurs in the Gospels in Matthew (7); Mark (3); Luke (1); but not in John.

58. So, Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), pp. 86-87; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 346.

Further, Mk 9.49 is found in three major textual forms: ‘For everyone will be salted with fire’; ‘For every sacrifice will be salted with fire’; and ‘For everyone will be salted with fire and every sacrifice will be salted with salt’. The various additional minor textual variants on these phrases are even more diverse and are not found in the Synoptic parallels of Matthew or Luke.⁵⁹ Especially interesting is that Matthew, who employs *γέενναν* more extensively than Mark or Luke, omits Mark’s *εἰς τὴν γέενναν* in his parallel of Mk 9.43. It would thus appear that the various scribal additions to Mark appeared in the later textual history of the Gospel with the sole purpose of accentuating the horror of Gehenna.

In a similar way, the extensive use of Gehenna in Matthew may be for apologetic or polemical reasons where he follows the (original) Markan tradition, yet extends and intensifies it as part of a sustained anti-Jewish polemic.⁶⁰ This is certainly clear in Mt. 23.15, 33 (and possibly 5.22 and 10.28) where he employs *gehenna* in the context of a sharp attack on the Pharisees. Indeed, throughout his Gospel, Matthew repeatedly undermines the authority of the Pharisees and criticizes their behaviour:

- 5.11-12. God’s favour rests with a faithful minority ‘persecuted for righteousness’ sake’ who are contrasted (5.20) with the unrighteous Pharisees.
- Chapter 6 highlights the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes.
- 8.5-13, the faith of the centurion and the messianic banquet at which the Jews are rejected.
- The parable of the vineyard (21.33-46). The kingdom of God will be taken away and handed over to other tenants/nation (*ethnos*). The Pharisees realize that he is referring to them. Both of these points are Matthean additions or alterations to Mark.
- Chapter 23 contains the most sustained polemic: the sustained denunciation of the Pharisees; attribution to them of the death of prophets, wise men and scribes.
- Matthew’s use of ‘Jews’ indicates an ideological break (28.15). This is also evident in Matthew’s use of ‘their’ synagogues (4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 12.9; 13.54). In the last two texts, Matthew has added these to his Markan source (and cf. ‘your’ synagogues in 23.35).

Elsewhere in the Gospels, Gehenna is used consistently to refer to a place of punishment prepared for the wicked—who consist of the devil and his

59. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 87; Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, pp. 346-47.

60. See Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992).

angels,⁶¹ the hypocrites and disobedient⁶² and those who reject Jesus, or God, or the prophets.⁶³ Gehenna may be pre-existent (Mt. 25.41, where it has been ‘prepared’ beforehand), and its punishment is eternal (Mt. 25.41, 46); it stands as both the place of judgment for the soul of the wicked immediately after death (Lk. 12.5) and for the judgment of the wicked in a reunited body and soul after resurrection and judgment (Mt. 10.28).⁶⁴ Predictably, its location is understood by Jesus to be in the depths of the earth,⁶⁵ and, as noted, there is an emphasis that individuals sent to Hades will be in the body.⁶⁶ Finally, it seems that Jesus taught that hell would involve an eternal, conscious punishment, with such images as the ‘undying worm’, the ‘fire that is not put out’, and the emotive picture of ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’.⁶⁷

So, the language of the afterlife placed on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels vis-à-vis the demarcation of the righteous and the wicked stands in continuity with Second Temple Judaism but not with the Hebrew Bible. Yet such language also stands in discontinuity with Second Temple Judaism in its assertion that postmortem judgment will be made in a bodily afterlife. This appears to have been part of a trend toward the end of the first century CE and into the second century, where discussion took place over the punishment of the wicked and the necessity of a bodily presence, for it was thought that the immortal soul could not feel pain and so a physical aspect to postmortem existence was necessary in order for suitable punishment to take place.⁶⁸

The textual history of the Gospel of Mark also shows the editorial activity of various later scribes in order to accentuate the horrors of the afterlife for the wicked. As before, this may be part of a polemical or apologetic move over the late first and early second centuries as the Christ movement

61. Mt. 25.41; Lk. 8.31.

62. Mt. 5.22; 7.19; 13.40, 42, 50; 25.30; 18.8-9 // Mk 9.43-47; Mt. 24.45-51//Lk. 12.41-46; 23.15, 33; Jn 15.6; 5.28-30.

63. Mt. 11.20-24 // Lk. 10.12-15; cf. also Mt. 8.8-12 // Lk. 7.6-9 with 13.28-29; Mt. 22.1-14; 25.41-46; Mt. 23.31-33; Lk. 16.29-31.

64. Interestingly, while Lk. 16.23, 26 and Rev. 20.13f. note that all of the dead will be in Hades, 1 Pet. 3.19 has only the spirits of the wicked there.

65. Mt. 11.23 // Lk. 10.15.

66. Cf. Mt. 5.29-30; 10.28; 18.8-9; Mk 9.43-47 (unquenchable fire); see also Lk. 12.4-5.

67. Mt. 25.46; Mk 9.48; cf. Isa. 66.24; Mt. 8.12 // Lk. 13.28; Mt. 13.42, 50; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30; cf. *Sib. Or.* 2.305; Mk 9.48; Mt. 25.41. However, the use of the verb ‘destroy’ (*ἀπολλύμι*, Mt. 10.28) and the frequent image of ‘burning’ has been understood by some to imply annihilation (e.g., Mt. 7.19; 13.40, 42, 50; Jn 15.6; cf. *4 Ezra* 7.61; *1 En.* 10.13-14; 38.3-6; 90.26-27; 91.9; 108.3).

68. Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 161; Athenagoras, *De resurrectione* 21.4.

came into increasing conflict with Judaism and Roman imperialism (particularly with regard to the Roman imperial cult⁶⁹), and even intra Christian conflict(s) regarding various schismatic groups.⁷⁰

*Afterlife in the Later New Testament
and Post-apostolic Literature*⁷¹

Descriptions of the afterlife in the later New Testament and post-apostolic literature continue the trend established in the Gospels. Hell is now a place of eternal punishment for the wicked, and it is described in language that becomes increasingly horrific.

For Jude and 2 Peter the end of the wicked is ‘destruction’ (2 Pet. 1.12; 2.1, 3; 3.16), where the destruction of Sodom is an example of fiery judgment (Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2.6-10; cf. Mt. 10.15; *1 Clem.* 11.1-2). God will rescue the righteous from the fire as he did Lot, whereupon he will then destroy both heaven and earth in a fiery conflagration (2 Pet. 3.7-12). The later New Testament also offers a picture of Christ descending into hell during the time between his death and resurrection to preach to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3.19; 4.6; Eph. 4.9-10). This doctrine was firmly established by the second century in the works of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.⁷²

The most sustained and graphic picture of the horrors of the afterlife in the later New Testament is found in the book of Revelation. Here, the final abode of both the wicked angels and the unrighteous is the ‘lake of fire’. This or burning sulphur is common in apocalyptic literature, where it is equivalent to ‘gehenna’. The beast and false prophet, followed by the devil, death and Hades, join the wicked in being cast into the lake (20.10, 14-15, 20; 21.8). The book of Revelation also employs the language of the Abyss, a bottomless pit, from which emerges the beast to make war on the saints (9.1-2; 11.7; 14.18; 17.8; 20.1-3, 7).⁷³ Like Matthew, the emphasis on the

69. A topic of increasing recent interest, see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010).

70. E.g., the ‘Jews’ of the Fourth Gospel and secessionist group of 1 and 2 John.

71. See especially, G.S. Shogren, ‘Hell, Abyss, Eternal Punishment’, in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 459-62.

72. L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 260-63.

73. The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* (6.15, first century CE) connects the abyss to Hades.

punishment of the unbeliever in Revelation may also be for an anti-Jewish or anti-Roman imperial polemic.⁷⁴

The picture of hell in the later New Testament is continued into the post-apostolic age with the language of ‘unquenchable fire’ in Ignatius (35/50–98/115),⁷⁵ ‘burning hell’ and ‘eternal destruction’ in the Shepherd of Hermas (95/100) (*Vis.* 3.7.2; *Sim.* 6.2.4), and, in Polycarp (69–155 CE), the fire of coming judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly—an eternal fire that is never extinguished (*Mart. Pol.* 11.2 ; 2.3). Justin Martyr (100–165 CE) uses the language of ‘fires of hell’ for apologetic purposes in that if Christians believe wickedness leads to the eternal fires of hell, they are highly motivated to live as good citizens (*Apol.* 1.12, 17). Interestingly, he also makes a polemic against the imperial cult and asserts that eternal punishment awaits those not offering worship to God (1.17). In the writings of Justin Martyr, ‘eternal fire’ was certainly intended to intimate everlasting suffering (*Apol.* 1.8.52).

Between the late second and mid-third century CE, the descriptive language of hell becomes more acute. For Hippolytus (212 CE),

the lovers of evil shall be given eternal punishment. The unquenchable and unending fire awaits these latter, and a certain fiery worm which does not die and which does not waste the body but continually bursts forth from the body with unceasing pain. No sleep will give them rest; no night will soothe them; no death will deliver them from punishment; no appeal of interceding friends will profit them (*Against the Greek* 3).

And for Minucius Felix (226 CE), ‘clever fire burns the limbs and restores them, wears them away and yet sustains them, just as fiery thunderbolts strike bodies but do not consume them’. They would prefer to be annihilated rather than be restored for punishment (*Octavius* 34.12–5.3). Finally, for Cyprian of Carthage (252),

An ever-burning Gehenna and the punishment of being devoured by living flames will consume the condemned; nor will there be any way in which the tormented can ever have respite or be at an end. Souls along with their bodies will be preserved for suffering in unlimited agonies. . . . The grief at punishment will then be without the fruit of repentance; weeping will be useless, and prayer ineffectual. Too late will they believe in eternal punishment, who would not believe in eternal life (*To Demetrian* 24).

74. Rev. 2.9-10, 14, 20; 3.9; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*; Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Viking Books, 2012).

75. Ignatius, *Eph.* 16.1-2; see also *2 Clem.* 5.4, ‘fear him who, after you are dead, has power to cast soul and body into the flames of hell’.

The Development of Hell in the Middle Ages

The conceptions of hell described by the writers of the second- and third-century church continued to be embellished into the Middle Ages. Roman Catholic thinkers in the period developed a series of levels in hell, all with no biblical basis:

- *Infernus*, the place of torment for the unrighteous damned and the demons. This is, in popular imagination, the place most often associated with the concept of hell.
- Purgatory, where the saved souls go to be purged of the temporal effects of their sins.
- *Limbus infantium* (Limbo of the Infants), a place of perfect, natural, subjective happiness to which those who died before Baptism but who have not committed personal sins (so do not warrant punishment) go.
- *Limbus patrum* (Limbo of the Patriarchs), where the righteous who lived before Jesus came to earth went. It is this part of hell that Christ descended into. In Catholic theology it no longer exists.

The artistic representations of hell in the late mediaeval and early Renaissance periods enhanced and gave suitable expression to a theology of the afterlife within Catholicism. Three of the key artistic works of the period are the *Hortus deliciarum*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the later Renaissance fresco, the *Last Judgment*, by Michelangelo. As a preface to a discussion of the influence of any form of art in the late mediaeval to high Renaissance periods, it must be remembered that a singular truth bound together almost everyone alive in late mediaeval Europe: unconditional and total belief in Christianity and with it concepts of heaven and an eternal torment in hell. The *Hortus deliciarum* (Garden of Delights) provided visual expression to the latter. Compiled by the Abbess Herrad of Landsberg between 1167 and 1185 it is an illuminated manuscript designed as a pedagogical tool for young nuns at Hohenburg Abbey in Alsace. It was one of the most celebrated illuminated manuscripts of the period for it stood as a compendium of twelfth-century knowledge, containing poems, music, and 336 illustrations, the best known of which is a depiction of hell (folio 155; see Fig. 1).⁷⁶

The image is strikingly graphic with a jagged border, black background (unique in the period), and accented by red tongues of fire and rivers of flame that divide the four registers of the scene into distinct levels of hell. The demons are a bluish-grey colour, which serves to highlight them from the black and red of their surroundings.⁷⁷ The people represented suffer a

76. The image is in the public domain, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hortus_Deliciarum_-_Hell.jpg.

77. See Fiona Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007);



Fig. 1

variety of torments: some are strung up and tortured in various ways; others are force-fed coins; while still others are boiled in large cauldrons (these are clearly identified as Jews and knights). In the deepest register, the lowest level of hell, Satan (chained at the neck, Rev. 20.1-3) is seated upon a

Theodore Spencer, 'Chaucer's Hell: A Study in Mediaeval Convention', *Speculum* 2 (1927), pp. 177-200.

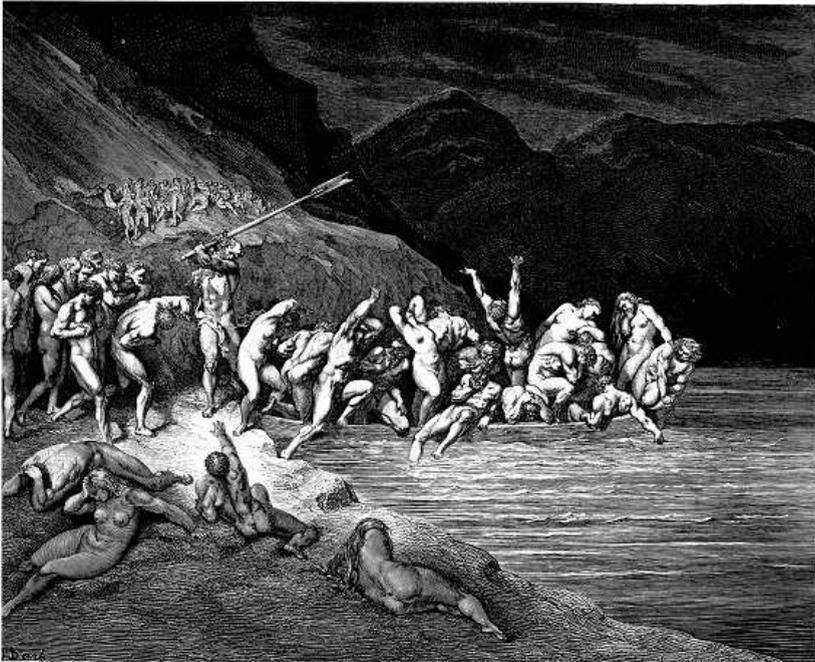


Fig. 2

throne of beasts with a human Antichrist in his lap. In this level stands a fully clothed clergyman (in colour), being led toward Satan by a devil.

Herrad's concept of hell developed into the refined literary visions that we read of in Chaucer as well as in the works of the poet Dante (1265-1321). Indeed, from the period, the primary images of hell we have today come from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the reader is taken through three realms of the afterlife: Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. The poet has developed places for every type of person, allowing him to editorialize about people's actions in the world of his day. In the process, he creates vivid scenes of all three realms. These, then, became the basis for virtually all of the artistic depictions of hell in the Middle Ages and our modern conceptions of afterlife with demons, eternal torment and fire. All of it is literary imagination; none derives from the biblical texts (see Fig. 2).⁷⁸

78. The most extensive illustrations made of Dante's text are those by Gustave Doré (1832-83); see *The Doré Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy: 136 Plates by Gustave Doré* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976); *Dante's Inferno, Illustrated by Gustave Doré* (New York: Paddington Press, 1976). The above illustration by Doré is of the ferryman Charon herding sinners onto his boat, taking them to be judged. Image is in



Fig. 3

In Michelangelo's, *The Last Judgment*⁷⁹ (1536-41), the well-known fresco spanning the entire altar wall of the Sistine Chapel (Fig. 3), the artist provides a fitting summary of reflection upon death, resurrection and the afterlife in the high period of the Renaissance. Christ, centred, with Mary on his right, is surrounded by the saints, while a group of angels (centred below him) announce, with trumpets and open books, the judgment of all

the public domain, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gustave_Dor%C3%A9_-_Dante_Alighieri_-_Inferno_-_Plate_10_-_Canto_III_-_Charon_herds_the_sinners_onto_his_boat%29.jpg.

⁷⁹. The image is in the public domain, <http://maitaly.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/michelangelo-sistine-chapel-the-last-judgement/>

people. From the viewer's perspective scenes on the bottom left show the righteous leaving their graves and, some with the help of angels, rising to join the elect with Christ. Other righteous souls return to physical bodies and some, shrouded in burial cloths or as ghostly skeletons, sit between the forces of heaven and hell.

In contrast, scenes of hell on the bottom right show the influence of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with Charon, the ferryman of the underworld, beating and casting the wicked from his boat, who are then dragged down by demons into the depths of hell.⁸⁰ Another figure from Dante is Minos, the mythological king of hell, seen as the most prominent figure in the bottom right, and painted in the likeness of one of Michelangelo's fiercest critics, the Pope's master of ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena. It is said that when Cesena complained to the Pope of the image, the pontiff joked that his jurisdiction did not extend to hell, so the portrait would have to remain.

The commissioning of the work was done by Pope Clement VII (1523–34), the second of the Medici popes, the ruling family of Florence, who abused their power and in some senses were thought to have 'bought' the papacy. The first Medici pope, Leo X (1513–21), is best remembered for granting indulgences to those who donated to the reconstruction of St Peter's Basilica, a papal offer that was critically challenged as part of Martin Luther's 95 Theses in 1517. The turmoil of the Reformation during Clement's papacy saw Protestant armies fuelled by religious hatred of the Catholic Church sacking Rome in 1527, and engaging in a spree of killing, burning and looting. It was in this context that Clement commissioned the *Last Judgment* in order to reassure Catholics of papal authority and of the Roman Catholic Church as the only faith that could assure eternal salvation.⁸¹ Those considered to be outside the church, indicated vividly in the fresco, were doomed to an eternity in hell.

Conclusion

The reception history of the Hebrew Bible's concept of the afterlife can be seen to have been multivalent. Within Second Temple Judaism an emphasis on the afterlife of the soul remains, yet this is transformed for various apologetic and polemical reasons into scenarios in which the righteous soul departs to a place of blessing and the wicked soul to a place of torment. The rising influence of Hellenism within the period and particularly the conflict

80. For fuller details, see Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Sistine Chapel* (Vatican City: Ufficio Vendita Pubblicazioni e Riproduzioni, 2000).

81. A clear and unambiguous depiction of the white-haired and bearded St Peter stands on Christ's left, looking over to the saviour and holding out the keys (to heaven and earth) in his left hand.

under Antiochus Epiphanes and the ensuing struggles of the Maccabees fomented a conceptual change wherein the faithful Jew would be rewarded and the apostate Jew condemned. In the period of the New Testament, the earliest writings, those of the apostle Paul, demonstrate continuity with Second Temple Jewish texts but which, along with postbiblical Judaism in general, place him in tension with the Hebrew Bible.

Significant changes begin within the Gospels and later New Testament for not only is there development away from an emphasis on an afterlife for the soul alone, toward an afterlife that included body and soul together, but the concept of Gehenna, the underworld place of torment and fire, takes precedence. This was begun in the Maccabean period but is now accentuated in the later New Testament, a trend that continues into the post-apostolic age with further emphasis on the horrors of hell. These changes, too, can be seen as deriving from apologetic or polemical impetus as the early Christ movement attempted to define and defend itself against both first-century Judaism and Greco-Roman paganism. The church fathers, in particular, employed the fear of hell for ideological purposes in asserting ethical priorities in the early church.

Finally, further literary emphasis in the late mediaeval period was compounded by visual modes of expression. In the case of the *Hortus deliciarum*, this was done for pedagogical purposes, and for the *Last Judgment*, for apologetic reasons within the religious and socio-political turmoil of the early Reformation.

Overall, the development of Sheol/Hades/hell can be construed as an ideological construct stemming from notions of religious authority: it was the Jewish religious hierarchy in Second Temple Judaism who demarcated the righteous from the wicked and asserted the victory and blessing of the faithful righteous Jew in the face of encroaching Hellenism; the religious leaders of the early Christ movement or the post-apostolic ecclesiastical church who held the keys to heaven and hell and who, similarly, were able to differentiate the wicked from the righteous; and within a mediaeval framework that believed fundamentally in the truth of Christianity, it was the papal office alone that held the keys to heaven and the certainty of a blessed afterlife.

The theological afterlife of an eternal fiery pit of hell persists into the modern period, with modern concerns and worries now labeled hadophobia and with the Internet full of discussion boards and threads prompted by those with deep anxiety and fear over thoughts of a tortuous afterlife.⁸² A traditional Christian reading of such a framework is defended and indeed

82. See, for example, <http://www.christianforums.com/t7605491/>; <http://recoveringfundamentalists.com/fear-of-hell.html>; <http://www.ex-christian.net/topic/7197-fear-of-hell>.

insisted upon by those who undertake fundamentalist literal readings of the biblical texts, and yet the study here has hopefully demonstrated the ideological impetus behind such discourse. Perhaps the time is right for a (socio-theological) review of the social construction of hell together with a salient reminder that the texts *are* polemically and apologetically driven, and that understanding the social context(s) is vital. Holding such texts a little more lightly could help to alleviate the anxiety of hadephobes and may be a cause of suitable pastoral reflection by those who can all too easily employ 'hell' as a tool with which to assert authority and to instill fear into nonbelievers, and even believers, of many religious traditions. At the very least, profound reflection and debate on how and why the picture of the afterlife placed upon the lips of Jesus in the Gospels places him in tension with the Hebrew Bible is worthy of serious discussion.

