

Old Testament and the Afterlife: Part 2

I. Introduction: rolling...rolling ...rolling.



II. Why Study OT eschatology?

- a. Cohesiveness/ Relevance of all parts of the Bible Ex. Sheol, Blessing
- b. Hope

III. Review: Phase 1 Sheol- dust, darkness, silence, forgetfulness, joylessness

*"It would be wrong to give the impression that the early Israelites were particularly gloomy about all this. Only a world which had already begun to hope for something more interesting and enjoyable after death would find this vision unusual or depressing."*¹

*"It is true that, as we shall see, at some points within this tradition a new word was spoken, promising life beyond the grave. But for the vast majority in ancient Israel the great and solid hope, built upon the character of the creator and covenant god, was for YHWH's blessing of justice, prosperity and peace upon the nation and land, and eventually upon the whole earth. Patriarchs, prophets, kings and ordinary Israelites would indeed lie down to sleep with their ancestors. YHWH's purposes, however, would go forwards, and would be fulfilled in their time. Such was the foundational hope of ancient Israel."*²

¹ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 90). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

² Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (pp. 102–103). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

IV. Phase 2: Life after Sheol?

“At some point (nobody knows when; dating of developments in such matters is notoriously difficult) some pious Israelites came to regard the love and power of YHWH as so strong that the relationship they enjoyed with him in the present could not be broken even by death.”³

“The constant love of YHWH was never merely a theological dogma to the ancient Israelites. In many parts of their literature, and supremely the Psalms, we find evidence that they knew this love in vivid personal experience. It was this personal experience, rather than any theory about innate immortality, that gave rise to the suggestion that, despite the widespread denials of such a thing, YHWH’s faithfulness would after all be known not only in this life but in a life beyond the grave.”⁴

- Dogma and experience are not necessarily incompatible.
Example: “the love of God.”
- The difficulty of imagining life after Sheol is no different than the difficulty of us imagining what Heaven will really be like....certainly it is not a barrier to eternal life.

A. Glory After Suffering?

Psalm 73

A PSALM OF ASAPH. ¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. ³ For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹ And they say, “How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?” ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. ¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children. ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, ¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I

³ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God*. (p 86) London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁴ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 103). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

discerned their end. ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. ²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²² I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Psalm 49:

¹⁴ Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. ¹⁵ But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. *Selah*

B. The Basis for Future Hope

“... if YHWH was the inheritance of his people, and if his love and faithfulness were as strong as Israel’s traditions made out, then there was no ultimate bar to seeing death itself as a beaten foe.”⁵

V. Phase 3: Bodily Resurrection?

*“...again, at an uncertain point, a quite new idea came forth: **the dead would be raised.***⁶

-clear as mud: life after Sheol after death after life (translation: **life after Sheol**)

“...to read Daniel 12 is thus to stand on the bridge between the Bible and the Judaism of Jesus’ day, looking both backwards and forwards, and watching the passage of ideas that went to and fro between them.”⁷

Daniel 12:

¹ “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall

⁵ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 108). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁶ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 86). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁷ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 109). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”

Isaiah 53:10

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, **he shall see his offspring**; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Isaiah 26:19

¹⁹ Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. **You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!** For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Ezekiel 37:12

¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: **Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves,** O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.

“The constant factor, throughout the types of belief we have surveyed, is Israel’s god himself. The vision of YHWH’s creation and covenant; his promises and his faithfulness to them; his purposes for Israel, not least his gift of the land; his power over all opposing forces, including finally death itself; his love for the world, for his human creatures, for Israel in particular, and especially for those who served him and followed in his way; his justice, because of which evil would eventually be condemned and righteousness upheld—... the emerging belief that the relationship with YHWH would be unbreakable even by death, and the eventual belief that YHWH would raise the dead. The biblical language of resurrection (‘standing up’, ‘awakening’ etc.), when it emerges, is simple and direct; the belief, though infrequent, is clear. It involves, not a reconstrual of life after death, but the reversal of death itself. It is not about discovering that Sheol is not such a bad place after all. It is not a way of saying that the dust will learn to be happy as dust. The language of awakening is not a new, exciting way of talking about sleep. It is a way of saying that a time will come when sleepers will sleep no more. Creation itself, celebrated throughout the Hebrew scriptures, will be reaffirmed, remade.”⁸

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⁸ Wright, N. T. (2003). *The resurrection of the Son of God* (pp. 127–128). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.