The Nature, Function, and Purpose of the Term Sheol in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings

Eriks Galenieks
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THE NATURE, FUNCTION, AND PURPOSE OF THE TERM

IN THE TORAH, PROPHETS, AND WRITINGS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Eriks Galenieks

April 2005
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Eriks Galenieks

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ABSTRACT

THE NATURE, FUNCTION, AND PURPOSE OF THE TERM

IN THE TORAH, PROPHETS, AND WRITINGS

by

Eriks Galenieks

Adviser: Richard M. Davidson
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE NATURE, FUNCTION, AND PURPOSE OF THE TERM שָאוֹל IN THE TORAH, PROPHETS, AND WRITINGS

Name of researcher: Eriks Galenieks

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Richard M. Davidson, Ph.D.

Date completed: April 2005

The fact that scholars depict Sheol either as the underworld where the dead continue their existence or simply the grave has resulted in contradictory conclusions, fierce polemic, and unremitting disputes. This lack of consensus makes it imperative to justify another approach, which is more comprehensive in its entirety in comparison with the earlier attempts that sought to determine the meaning of the term Sheol mainly by exploring its etymology and various nonbiblical sources.

Unlike the previous studies, this exegetical research systematically examines all the sixty-six references to the term Sheol in the Hebrew Bible by almost exclusively focusing on its nature, function, and purpose. Chapter 1 provides a concise outline of the whole dissertation. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 comprise the major exegetical block.
Chapter 5 establishes the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol in the Hebrew Bible as a whole, and draws together anthropological and theological insights.

Repeatedly drawn conclusions that the term Sheol functions as a poetic synonym of the place of the dead were reached by exploring the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol and by taking into consideration its various degrees of interrelation with other death-related terminology, the strength of their links, their interconnections and interdependence in the concrete context. This organic system of terminological interdependence, where one concept inevitably influences and clarifies another, plays an extremely important role in determining the factual meaning of the term Sheol.

Sheol represents the place of the dead, where both the dead righteous and the wicked go. No physical, mental, or spiritual activity is possible there because it is never linked with life or any kind of existence, but exclusively with death. Besides, the examination of the term Sheol reveals two opposing anthropological and theological systems or paradigms: the so-called popular view of a disembodied personal existence in Sheol and the scriptural paradigm, where at death the body becomes again the dust of the earth, but the spirit of life returns to God.

Finally, there is a slight but extremely important distinction between the grave (common noun) and the term Sheol (proper noun), which is rooted in their classification. Because Sheol may refer to a number of entities by means of common characteristics pertaining to the sphere of death, it may function as a pointer to any place of the dead, regardless of its location, form, content, or description, and that is why it is best to consider the term Sheol as a poetic designation of the grave.
To my mother

Lidija Galeniece

Job 19:25-27

and to

the Church of Tomorrow
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<td>AB</td>
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<td>ABD</td>
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<td>AJSL</td>
<td>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</td>
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<td>ANET</td>
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<td>BKAT</td>
<td><em>Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament</em></td>
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<td>FOTL</td>
<td><em>The Forms of the Old Testament Literature</em></td>
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<td>FRLANT</td>
<td><em>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Göttingen</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GKC</td>
<td><em>Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Edited by E. Kautzsch</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GNB</td>
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<td><em>Grace Theological Journal</em></td>
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<td>HALOT</td>
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<td>HAR</td>
<td><em>Hebrew Annual Review</em></td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTT</td>
<td>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBL</td>
<td>L. Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, <em>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBC</td>
<td>Layman’s Bible Commentary</td>
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<td>LXE</td>
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<td>Masoretic Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAC</td>
<td>The New American Commentary</td>
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<td><em>New Catholic Encyclopedia</em></td>
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NIDNTT  New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis

NIV  New International Version

NIVAC  NIV Application Commentary

NJB  New Jerusalem Bible

NKJV  New King James Version

NRSV  New Revised Standard Version

NT  New Testament

OBO  Orbis biblicus et orientalis

ODCC  Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church

OT  Old Testament

OTG  Old Testament Guides

OTL  Old Testament Library

OTM  Old Testament Message

OTS  Oudtestamentische Studiën

PEQ  Palestine Exploration Quarterly

PTR  Princeton Theological Review

RevExp  Review and Expositor

RSV  Revised Standard Version

SBL  Society of Biblical Literature

SDABC  The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary. Edited by F. D. Nichol

Sem  Semitica

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SJOT Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SJT Scottish Journal of Theology
SP Samaritan Pentateuch
StudBT Studia biblica et theologica
Syr Syriac
Targ Targum
TDOT Theological Dictionary to the Old Testament. Edited by G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren
THAT Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Edited by E. Jenni and C. Westermann
ThLZ Theologische Literaturzeitung
TLOT Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament. Edited by E. Jenni and Claus Westermann
TOTC Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TS Theological Studies
TWAT Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament
TWOT Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. Edited by R. L. Harris et al.
TZ Theologisches Zeitschrift
UBS United Bible Societies
VigCh Vigiliae Christianae
VT Vetus Testamentum
VTSup Vetus Testamentum, Supplements

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The best way to sum up the years spent at Andrews University and the process of this dissertation is by referring to them as “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” (Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities). The most difficult and painful experience during this research project was to get over the unexpected death of my mother, whom I miss dearly today. Despite this agonizing blow and other problems, it has also been a wonderful period of study and various creative experiences.

First of all, there is no way I will ever be able to thank sufficiently my God, Who is the source of all true wisdom and knowledge, for the opportunity to accomplish this research, for the gift of life and health, and for being right at my side every moment.

Second, it is well known that no work is done in a vacuum or isolation and almost nothing is accomplished entirely on one’s own. Since this dissertation is no exception, for its completion I must acknowledge the unselfish and generous guidance of my supervisor, instructor, and friend, Professor Richard Davidson. His persistent assessment of my research project, and his wise recommendations and encouragement have proven to be invaluable. The same is more than true of my cosupervisor, Professor Jiří Moskala (Th.D., Ph.D.), who suggested the dissertation topic, and who willingly and enthusiastically rendered assistance whenever it was requested. Special thanks I also owe to Professor Jacques Doukhan (D.H.L., Th.D.) for reading the earlier...
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In addition to those who have been involved directly with this research project, many others have assisted in various ways. Especially I would like to single out Professor Emerita of Biblical Languages, Leona Running, for editing this work and revising some Hebrew summaries. No less credit goes to the Dissertation Secretary, Bonnie Proctor, for the last touch and polish of this dissertation. It is also impossible to pass by Dorothy Show, whose selfless care for doctoral students should be commended as outstanding.

Among many other friends who faithfully ministered to bring this project to completion and deserve special attention are Dr. Gordon and Marjorie Franklin, who provided a tremendous financial support and kept my family in their daily prayers. I also extend a warm handshake to my dear friends in Latvia, Viktors and Vesma Geide. Above all, I owe a great debt to my mother-in-law, Elena Gerasimova, and to my deceased mother, Lidija, for unceasingly bringing me and my family to God in their daily prayers.

Finally, the most profound gratitude, love, and appreciation go to my dear wife, Anna, who has been the bright light in the darkest moments along the way, and our two children, Andrejs and Estere, who had to live with this project for the last four years. Though often it was extremely painful, they never complained about their vacation time that was stolen by my research, nor expressed any displeasure because of our family separations during my various trips to the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. They believed in me by providing constant support and encouragement through all the ups and downs of the research process.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

General Background

Despite numerous and various prominent religious institutions that are represented by the brightest scholarship of this age, which is involved in extensive anthropological-theological studies of the Hebrew Scriptures, the most confused ideas, beliefs, and reactions prevail today on such subjects as the state of the dead and Sheol. At the same time, the multiple references to these and other related subjects,\(^1\) which are scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible, continue to challenge modern man.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the Hebrew Scripture has much to say about life and even more about death, as is seen from the frequency of the employment of the roots נָחַל ("live")\(^2\) and מָתַת ("die").\(^3\) Regardless of one’s social and religious


\(^2\)Occurs about 800 times.

status, whether a person was rich or poor, righteous or wicked, king, slave, or prophet—all of them had to face one day the reality of death and the grave, or, in other words, they had to go down to the place called Sheol.

In spite of the fact that the Hebrew term הַשֵּׁאָל seems to exist from times immemorial, its scrupulous study by various scholars has led to no additional light from outside sources. The only major extrabiblical reference is found in an Aramaic text of the Jewish community from Elephantine in Egypt of about 400 BC.1

It should also be noted that both L. Harris2 and D. Clines3 refer in their works to an undated Jerusalem ossuary lid that has the word הַשֵּׁאָל scratched on it, thus attempting to identify it with the scriptural הַשֵּׁאָל, but L. Rahmani4 is not so sure because of the adjacent Greek letters ΣΑΥ/ΑΟΣ, which could simply mean “Saul.”

However, the basic data of the term הַשֵּׁאָל are well-known, as in the


2"The only other extrabiblical usage is on the lid of an ossuary found in Jerusalem. These ossuaries were little stone boxes into which the bones of the departed were gathered some time after burial and decay. The lid of the box has the word ‘Sheol’ scratched on it. The meaning ‘grave’ would seem to fit, for the box was the resting place of the remains of the person.” Laird Harris, “Why Hebrew Sh’ol Was Translated ‘Grave,’” in The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986), 58-71.

3"One such ossuary from Jerusalem . . . actually bears the inscription $\text{ש'אול}, ‘Sheol.’” David J. A. Clines, Job 1-20, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), vol. 17 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 399.

Hebrew Scriptures it occurs sixty-six times and always refers to the place of the dead.\(^1\)

All but nine of its occurrences are found in highly poetical contexts.\(^2\) The word is found eleven times with directional הָרוֹצָה \(^3\) and eight times with defective spelling.\(^4\) As a proper noun it functions without the definite article and is designated as feminine.\(^5\)

The basic data and distribution of the term הָרוֹצָה in MT, and its translation in LXX, VUL, KJV, NIV, NRSV, and NASB are summarized in table 1.

It is significant to emphasize that not only various Bible translations\(^6\) reflect different understandings of the term Sheol, but moreover the variety in these

\(^{1}\) Many biblical scholars mention the term as occurring only 65 times. They leave out the reference found in Isa 7:11 where the MT reads הָרוֹצָה. However, according to Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion the term should be emended to הָרוֹצָה, thus totaling 66 occurrences. See Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., A New Concordance of the Bible: Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible, Hebrew and Aramaic Roots, Words, Proper Names, Phrases and Synonyms (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1993), s.v. הָרוֹצָה.

\(^{2}\) Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9, and Isa 7:11.

\(^{3}\) Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; Isa 7:11; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; Ps 9:18.

\(^{4}\) Gen 37:35; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6; Job 17:16; Isa 7:11.


\(^{6}\) The King James Version renders הָרוֹצָה as “grave” 31 times, “hell” 31 times, “depth” once, and “pit” 3 times. The word is rendered הָרוֹצָה 61 times in the LXX and 65 times (infernum 47 times and inferus 18 times) in the Vulgate. The New Revised Standard Version (except Cant 8:6) and The New American Standard Bible simply transliterate the Hebrew term הָרוֹצָה into English as “Sheol.” The New International Version usually translates it as “grave” (sometimes as “death”) with a footnote, “Sheol.”
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<td>Ps 89:49</td>
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<td>Job 14:13</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>Job 24:19</td>
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<td>Job 26:6</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Prov 1:12</td>
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<td>Prov 5:5</td>
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translations points toward an even greater diversity of interpretations.¹


On the one hand, Peter H. Davids asserts, "Sheol is therefore not only a place of rest but also of punishment.” “Sheol,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Peter C.Craigie, J. D. Douglas, et al., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 2:1948-1949. This encyclopedia emphasizes, “The idea that the dead abide in the underworld persists in the OT. The incident in the case of Saul with the medium of Endor is a good illustration. Samuel is brought ‘up out of the earth’ to be consulted by the king at a time of crisis. . . . Apparently, those in the underworld, though separated from the living, were held to be familiar with the affairs of men” (2:1948). VanGemeren defines *הֵיכָל* as “an intermediate state in which souls are dealt with according to their lives on earth” (William A. VanGemeren, “Sheol,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995], 1011-1012). See also Robert B. Laurin, “Sheol,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*,

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<td>58</td>
<td>לְהָיוֹתַן</td>
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<td>61</td>
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Analysis of the nature and function of the term בִּזְתָנָה in various contexts has led scholars to four major views: (1) the literal or traditional view interprets it as a place of eternal punishment and flames; (2) the metaphorical view suggests that it is a place of everlasting punishment but not as literal as in the traditional view, namely, not necessarily with smoke and fire; (3) the conditional view emphasizes conditional immortality, a temporary situation with no everlasting punishment; and (4) the


purgatorial view\(^1\) sees it as a place of cleansing from which some will emerge 
redeemed. Moreover, these views not only overlap each other, but also create various 
mixed subcategories.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Represented by Zachary Hayes, “The Purgatorial View,” in Four Views on 
Hell, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 91-118. According to 
Catholic teaching, “For the individual souls the purifying fire endures until they are 
free from all guilt and punishment. Immediately on the conclusion of the purification 
they will be assumed into the bliss of heaven” (Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic 
Mind and Heart (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1993), 130-131. Flannery comments, “The 
doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been 
taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or 
cleansed. . . . In fact, in purgatory the souls of those who died . . . are cleansed after 
death with punishments designed to purge away their debt” (Austin P. Flannery, ed., 
Documents of Vatican II [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 64).

\(^2\)The issue is much more complex than it seems. Under the “four major views” 
there are various subviews which should be listed in order to demonstrate what 
biblical scholars are dealing with: (1) Sheol means simply “the grave” to which good 
and bad people go after their death (Gen 37:35; Num 16:30). There is no conscious 
existence. (2) Sheol refers to the place of departed spirits. It is a realm of shadowy 
and semi-conscious existence and all people go there (Ezek 31-32). (3) Sheol is “the 
next world” which consists of two compartments. The upper compartment is for the 
righteous where they await their resurrection. The lower compartment is for the 
wicked and it is the place of miserable existence. (4) Only bodies go to Sheol, but 
souls of the righteous go to heaven. (5) Sheol is the Nether World inhabited by 
demons and some or all of the dead. They live contrary to the will of God and those 
living on the earth. (6) Sheol is used in two totally opposite ways: “death/grave” and 
“the next life.” (7) Sheol is the place of punishment and eternal torment. (8) Sheol is 
the place of “sleep” or prejudgment preservation (1 Sam 28:15). Douglas K. Stuart, 
Bromiley, Everett E. Harrison, Roland K. Harrison, William Sanford Lasor, and 
Edgar W. Smith, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:472. Other related works are: 
Daniel P. Walker, Decline of Hell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Jon 
Zens, “Do the Flames Ever Stop in Hell?” Free Grace Broadcaster, March-April 
1978, 1-8; Harry Buys, The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment (Philadelphia: 
Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957); David L. Edwards and John Stott, Essentials: A 
Liberal–Evangelical Dialogue (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988); Jonathan L. 
These varied and opposing interpretations in current scholarship are derived not only from a variety of methodologies and approaches but also from eschatological assumptions. This diversity is linked, moreover, to the question of whether the Hebrew Scriptures teach eternal punishment or other ideas.¹

In order to put an emphasis on the uniqueness of the so-called underworld, or to display the distinction between natural and unnatural death, or to show the difference between the extraordinary realm of the wicked and the righteous, scholars have explored the term יַהֲנֶן mainly on a comparative basis, focusing on such cultures as Greek, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and especially Ugaritic.² In their studies the term יַהֲנֶן has usually been investigated within the context of some broad spectrum themes connected with death and afterlife. The nature, function, and purpose of יַהֲנֶן and the specific contexts in which the term was attested, were not satisfactorily researched or emphasized. The main features of the term יַהֲנֶן were inferred by logical reasoning from the nonbiblical literary sources focusing on

¹“The doctrine of eternal torment is either true or it is not. Traditionalists say it is. Conditionalists say it is not. But only the Word of God can give an authoritative answer” (Edward William Fudge, The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994], 3). “As theories of the afterlife multiply, so does confusion among pastors on this most important topic. . . . Confusion about the afterlife—is there anything more tragic? What are the competing views about the destiny of the wicked, and how do they measure up to Scripture? As scholars challenge historic teachings on hell, how solid is the biblical evidence for eternal punishment,” asks Petersen (Robert A. Petersen, Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995], 2-3).

such topics as eternal punishment of the wicked, immortality of the soul, or ancestor worship,¹ and then imposed on the biblical text.²

**Statement of the Problem**

Few terms in the Hebrew Scriptures have caused as many differing opinions and misunderstandings, which have been so disturbing and controversial and have led scholars to fierce polemic, as the term לְעִידָן.³ In spite of valuable contributions by


³For example, R. Morey describes conditionalists as those who are trying to “silence their conscience,” “justify their wicked lives” and “defend their evil ways” as “they capitulate to liberalism” and a “weak view of Scripture.” Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), 157, 203. John Ankerberg accuses conditionalists of teaching “doctrines of demons” (*The Facts on Life After Death* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992], 37). J. Blanchard calls E. W. Fudge an Adventist, which for him is a concept denoting something sectarian and cultic. John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham: Evangelical, 1995), 166, 212-219. In the same book he writes, “The human body is a part of the material universe, and it has long been established that no material object in the universe can be destroyed in the sense of being wiped out of existence. Even if it disappears it is immediately reconstituted either as matter or energy. As this is a law which operates everywhere in nature, the human body is literally indestructible, and that being the case the extinction of the soul would be out of character with everything else that God has created” (68). Dixon asserts that those who deny the tradition of everlasting punishment share “modernism’s mindset,” from positions based on “tolerance of all viewpoints,” or shape their beliefs in such a way as to achieve “a kinder and gentler evangelism.” Larry Dixon, *Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 9, 16, 182.
many scholars, there is little consensus among them in regard to its nature (the “what”), function (the “how”), and purpose (the “why”) in the Hebrew Scriptures.

**Purpose of the Study**

In order to discover the nature, function, and purpose of the term בִּמְדָע in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, this research will systematically examine all of its sixty-six occurrences. The possible meanings and implications of the word בִּמְדָע, including its interrelated terminology, will be explored in order to provide a more cogent rationale for its employment. Popular assumptions concerning the term בִּמְדָע will be challenged, as the major emphasis will fall on various factual elements and evidence from the Scripture rather than philosophical or extrabiblical considerations.

**Justification of the Study**

The point of motivation and justification of this study starts with the awareness

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that currently no comprehensive research is available that would examine the nature, function, and purpose of the term בַּלּוֹד in the entire Hebrew Bible. Despite the fact that there are three dissertations on the topic in English, and the fourth is tangentially relevant, none of them covers the scope of this study.¹ For example, R. Rosenberg surveys etymologies of the term בַּלּוֹד and critically evaluates “their linguistic and semantic adequacy.”² She also examines the contexts in which the semantic equivalents of the word Sheol appear, and then investigates the denizens of Sheol and the concept of violent death.³ Rosenberg reviews former views and suggests “modifications on the basis of different interpretations and in the light of new comparative material (Ugaritic and Babylonian).”⁴ R. Doermann’s study deals primarily with various conceptions of the underworld (Greek, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite).⁵ D. Martin attempts to discover and interpret the teachings of the book of Proverbs on Sheol and immortality. He affirms that “descriptions in Proverbs are basic and necessary for a more complete picture of existence after death as imagined by the Hebrews.”⁶ Finally, H. Scharen in his


³Ibid., 1-3.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Doermann, “Sheol in the Old Testament.”

⁶Martin, “An Examination of the Concept of Sheol,” xi.
dissertation seeks to address the concept of Gehenna and its development in intertestamental Judaism and its use in the Synoptics. As introductory material, Scharen briefly considers the concept of Sheol, its description, inhabitants, and their condition. Though the mentioned authors have made significant contributions to an important debate, they fail to address the issues of the current research.

Moreover, the dilemma of contradictory and even diametrically opposing views concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the term גהנָה, that is so characteristic to various camps of modern scholarship, calls for exegetical analysis and synthesis, which form an intrinsic part of the projected systematic investigation of all the sixty-six references to the term גהנָה in their contexts. Therefore, the contribution of this research will be on philological, exegetical, and theological levels.

Because of confusion over the understanding and interpretation of the meaning of the term גהנָה, there is an ambiguity in the resulting theology, which motivates this study to make an attempt to answer a broad range of questions raised by modern scholarship concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the term. These questions are important for various branches of research, because the answers provided shape many aspects of anthropological and theological understanding of the Scripture.

Procedure of Investigation

The research on the word גהנָה in its context, including its interrelated terminology, will be done with exegetical, anthropological, and theological arguments.

1Scharen, "The Development of the Concept."

2Lawrence O. Richards, Expository Dictionary of Bible Words (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 356.
in view, whereas the exegetical process will be based on the present canonical form of
the MT.¹ Such a stance has been affirmed by recent studies in rhetorical criticism and
by B. Childs's biblical interpretation in canonical context.²

The significance of context has been discussed by many scholars. For
example, J. Barr emphasizes the importance of the biblical context over against
etymology and root meanings, and repeatedly invites researchers to determine the
meaning of a particular word within its context.³ J. Sawyer concludes that there is

¹The MT is taken as the foundation for the current exegesis, except those cases
when the text is clearly corrupt. Textual variants will be noted in the process of
exegesis. A hypothetical reconstruction of the Sitz im Leben will be avoided.

²Brevard Springs Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia:
Westminster, 1970); idem, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture
(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); idem, Old Testament Theology in a Canonical
Context (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986). See also Rolf Rendtorff, “What We Miss by

³In several of his works James Barr has criticized the popular trend to build
theological implications on Hebrew and Greek morphology, syntax, and etymology.
One of the most influential books on this subject written by him is called The
Silva summarizes Barr's criticism in the following way: (1) too much focus on a word
and its derivatives often leads to an exaggerated estimate of etymological studies; (2)
there is danger in ignoring what may look like small differences between the ways the
word is used; (3) concentrated study on one term seldom leads to the examination of
semantically related terms; and (4) there exists a real danger of confusing the term for
reality (Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics
[Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 25-26). See also Anthony C. Thiselton,
Essays on Principles and Methods, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster,
1977), 83. Other related works are: Elmer Dyck, “Canon as Context for
Interpretation,” in The Act of Bible Reading: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Biblical
Interpretation, ed. Elmer Dyck (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 33-64;
James Barr, Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament (Oxford:
Clarendon, 1968); idem, “Etymology and the Old Testament," in Language and
Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis, ed. A. S. van der
definite evidence "for the significance of the word as a sense-bearing element in some contexts," but these words must be tempered by "the context of situation," which he feels is more important in determining the meaning of a word than the lexical context. In other words, there must always be a balanced interchange between the meaning of a word and the thrust of the context in which it is found. F. De Meyer points out, "One has always to investigate how a word is used in a particular context." Finally, "more important than discovering the etymology of a word is to study the semantic field of a word" and "this is particularly true of 'ól," assert H. McCord and J. Elliott.

In order to determine the nature, function, and purpose of the term לִשָּׁהְעַ in its context the proposed exegesis will adhere to the following pattern. First, this study will examine all the sixty-six references to the term לִשָּׁהְעַ occurring in the Hebrew Bible. This will include each of the seven passages from the Torah in which the word לִשָּׁהְעַ is employed, the twenty-four occurrences of לִשָּׁהְעַ in the

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Prophets,¹ and the thirty-five occurrences in the Writings.² When the term לָשׁוֹן occurs two or more times in a text or coherent unit, the reoccurrences will be considered together while staying attentive to possible nuances of each reference.

Second, chapters 2, 3, and 4 will each consist of three main sections and an excursus. In the first segment each reference in which the term לָשׁוֹן occurs will be quoted and then followed by an English translation usually taken from the New Revised Standard Version, because in this version the word לָשׁוֹן is consistently transliterated rather than translated. Then the לָשׁוֹן passage to be explored will be delimited by means of various literary devices and textual considerations, paying attention to specific textual problems whenever they are relevant. This section will also briefly refer to various literary issues, pertaining to the chosen reference or even its textual unit in its intermediate and broader contexts, which include structural arrangement, genre, and its elements, setting, and others.³

The second section will deal with the exegetical process, where each reference under scrutiny, including its unit, will be subjected to an exegetical discussion with the

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focus on the language and particular emphasis on the term לֵילָאָם. In order to better understand the exegetical interpretation of the term Sheol by modern scholarship, this section will also quote two or three anthropological-theological statements of various scholars, which in the process may be challenged. When appropriate, grammatical and syntactical analysis of specific terms, various verbal constructions and their links, formulaic expressions, allusions, interconnections, and interrelated terminology\(^1\) will be investigated in the context of the term under scrutiny.

The third section will synthesize the data, which have been obtained on the nature, function, and purpose of the term לֵילָאָם with a view toward recognizing its emerging patterns, dynamics, and common meanings. In other words, in this section the focus will be on the nature, function, and purpose of the word לֵילָאָם as they are recapped and established.

The excursus part will refer to the term Sheol and its conceptual links, directly or indirectly interrelated terminology, and briefly exegete some of the relevant texts which have both intrinsic and extrinsic impact on the understanding of the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol. In other words, this section intends to clarify, expand, and deepen the information obtained during the exegetical process, as it unavoidably interacts with the term Sheol and other death-related imagery.

The goal of the steps described above is to provide an accurate exegetical foundation for the determination of the nature, function, and purpose of the term לֵילָאָם in its immediate and broader contexts.

\(^1\)As some of the terms used in parallelism with לֵילָאָם can be mentioned רָאָשׁ (“pit,” “destruction”), קֶבֶר (“grave”), בֵּית (“pit,” “cistern”), etc.
Third, chapter 5 will briefly demonstrate the significance of the interrelated terminology and its interconnections in the context of the term Sheol. It will also summarize the exegetical data, which have been obtained concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the term שֵׁאול in the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole. Anthropological and theological insights will be drawn together in order to synthesize and strengthen the scriptural understanding of the current research, and to emphasize the importance of harmonizing the interpretation and conclusions concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol with the scriptural paradigm, as they entail the most crucial and far-reaching consequences.

**Delimitations**

This study is limited to an examination of the term שֵׁאול, interrelated terminology, and consideration of their usage in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is no intent to engage in an extensive investigation of the etymology of the term or of conjectured derivations of the word from other languages.¹ This has already been


And (2) those who assert its derivation from the Akkadian or a loanword point to (a) šu’ara (William F. Albright, “Mesopotamian Elements in Canaanite Eschatology,” in *Oriental Studies in Commemoration of the Fortieth Anniversary of...*
done by others, and all attempts to recover its etymology have failed.\(^1\) Neither will it
focus on Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Canaanite terminology of the
underworld, inasmuch as the term לֵבָן does not occur in the ancient cognate
languages.\(^2\) Since this study is limited only to the Hebrew Bible, no underworld
terminology from the Intertestamental period related to לֵבָן will be discussed.\(^3\)

This investigation has no intention to discuss the ancient Near Eastern
conceptions of the underworld either, because this is a terminological and not a

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\(^1\)See Doermann, 9-32. According to Harris, the word לֵבָן is of uncertain
etymology. Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol,” 129-135; Theodore J. Lewis,
“Dead, Abode of the,” The Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD), ed. David Noel Freedman
and others (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 2:101-105; Eugene H. Merrill, “,” New
International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE), ed.
Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:6-7; Paul Haupt, “The


\(^3\)For pertinent information see Scharen, “The Development of the Concept of
Gehenna,” 139-246.
conceptual or motif study. Indeed, this research does not attempt to demonstrate an exhaustive anthropological and theological analysis of each separate passage; on the contrary, it is limited just to the discovering of the nature, function, and purpose of the term הָדַי in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

Finally, an understanding of the nature, function, and purpose of the term הָדַי in the Hebrew Scriptures, including its relationship to the New Testament equivalents and their theological implications, is of extremely great significance. However, because of the comprehensive nature of this current study, it is impossible to do even a superficial investigation of the related New Testament passages or their terminology.1

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CHAPTER 2

IN THE TORAH

Introduction

Exploration and interpretation of the Hebrew term לֵאָשֶׁת brings up a number of anthropological, theological, and eschatological issues. In spite of the fact that all biblical scholars who have investigated this term in one way or another point to some aspect of death, there is no agreement among them as to what is exactly meant by the word, what it refers to, what happens to a person at death, and what is the nature, function, and purpose of לֵאָשֶׁת.

Since the term לֵאָשֶׁת does not appear in extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern literature, the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves must provide the clues that would help to solve the problems of the controversial word under scrutiny. Moreover, the nature, function, and purpose of the word לֵאָשֶׁת should not be determined by a single reference, but must be discovered from all the various contexts as contained not only in the Torah but in the whole Hebrew Bible. The findings thus accumulated must be combined in order to gain a full and balanced picture and to determine whether or not there is consistency.

1See page 2 above.
The objective of this chapter is to investigate the five biblical passages from the Torah in which the proper noun נִשָּׂא occurs seven times. In order to determine the nature, function, and purpose of the term נִשָּׂא, emphasis will be placed on its immediate and wider contexts in which the term and its semantic equivalents, key phraseology, interconnected terminology, or their combinations appear.

Texts

Gen 37:35

traduction

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol.” Thus his father wept for him.

Translation and Textual Remarks

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol.” Thus his father wept for him.

Text Unit and Its Genre

In order to delimit vs. 35 one must take notice of verbal and thematic links it has with the preceding vs. 34, thus forming a closely integrated subunit within a

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1Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; Deut 32:22. The specifics of Sheol as a proper noun and its relation to a common noun “grave” will be discussed in the next three chapters, especially in chapter 5 under “Theological Implications.”

2LXX adds καὶ ἡλθον in vs. 35a.

3This and the following translations are made with the purpose to reflect the MT text as closely as possible; otherwise the NRSV is quoted.
division of 37:2-36. Verses 34-35 not only expose Jacob’s anguish but also, according to R. Longacre, outline a chiastic structure which emphasizes the intensity and climax of its expression.¹

Longacre points out that chiasmus presents closure to several episodes in Joseph’s story, emphasizing that the key explanation of this chiasmus is found in a narrative antithetical paragraph, which often occurs at the end of a unit.³

Undoubtedly, a sharp contrast is demonstrated here between what Jacob’s sons and daughters endeavored to do and hoped for, and what they experienced in reality,

¹Scholars approach and delimit the unit in various ways and see its content from different perspectives. For example, Wenham sees a clear-cut unit in 37:2-36 which is composed of: Title, 37:2; First Conflict, 37:3-4; Second Conflict, 37:5-11, and eight scenes: (1) vss. 12-14, (2) vss. 15-17, (3) vss. 18-20, (4) vss. 21-22, (5) vss. 23-28, (6) vss. 29-30, (7) vss. 31-33, and (8) vss. 34-35. Gordon Wenham, Genesis 16-50, WBC, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 348-350. However, Brueggemann takes 37:1-36 as a unit, but according to him, it has only three clear scenes: (1) vss. 5-11, then vss. 12-17 constitute an interlude, (2) vss. 18-31, and (3) vss. 32-35. Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (BCTP) (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 298-300. According to Coats, the narration in 37:5-36 is basically a unit. He divides it into three major parts: (A) Dream Report, vss. 5-11, (B) Development of the Crisis, vss. 12-33, (C) Conclusion, vss. 34-35, plus (D) Transition, vs. 36. Then he takes the major parts and splits them into smaller units, subunits and scenes. George W. Coats, Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 268-269.

²A and he tore Jacob his clothes
and he put sackcloth on his loins
B and he mourned for his sons many days
C and they rose up all his sons and daughters to comfort him
C¹ and he refused to be comforted
B¹ and he said ‘I will go down to my son mourning to Sheol’
A¹ and he bewailed him his father


³Ibid., 30, 31, 103.
namely, the setback of their anticipation.\textsuperscript{1} Jacob is brokenhearted. He refuses to stop lamenting for Joseph regardless of all the pleas and supplications of his sons and daughters.

The basic unit is written in prose, containing such literary patterns as dream speeches and rhetorical questions (vss. 5-10), the elements of commission and legal speeches (vss. 13-14; 32-33), but the climax reached in vss. 34-35 is portrayed in the form of a dirge.\textsuperscript{2}

In brief, the climax and, at the same time, conclusion in vss. 34-35 as a dirge expand and intensify the basis of tension established by the exposition into the main focus of the design which points to the problem of the plot.

Exegetical Notes

The term בָּשָׁלָה in the form of appears in the Hebrew Bible for the first time in Gen 37:35. Biblical scholars have interpreted Jacob’s statement

“For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol”

in various ways. For example, J. Wenham uses 2 Sam 12:23 and Isa 14:14-20 to demonstrate that “Sheol is the place of the dead . . . where the spirits of the departed continue in a shadowy and rather unhappy existence . . . and where relatives could be

\textsuperscript{1}Thesis:

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him

\textsuperscript{2}For detailed analysis of a setting and genre of Gen 37 see Coats, Genesis with an Introduction, 266-268, 271.
reunited with each other.”¹ V. Hamilton, in turn, goes beyond the evidence by asserting that “Jacob has no concept of a heaven for the faithful”² and “what he does believe is an underworld where life is far from pleasant for all its occupants.”³ He


²Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT) (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 428. V. Hamilton’s assertion, that “Jacob has no concept of a heaven for the faithful,” challenges both the immediate and broader contexts and defies the essence and implications of such expressions as “Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me,’” “God appeared to Jacob,” “he blessed him,” “God Almighty appeared to me,” or “I have seen God face to face,” etc. (Gen 28:12-20; 31:3, 11-13, 53; 32:1-2, 9-12, 26-30; 33:5, 10, 11, 13; 35:1, 6-7, 9-10, 14, 15; 46:2; 48:3-4; 49:25; 50:24; Exod 4:5; Matt 8:11; 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:32, 3:13; Heb 11:21, etc.). The key words “appeared,” “said,” “blessed,” “face to face,” “promised,” “give,” point out that, like Abraham, Jacob had unique relationships with God and was not only an heir of His promises but also well acquainted with “the concept of a heaven for the faithful” as Paul emphasizes it, “By faith Abraham obeyed... as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,” “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb 11:8-16).


tries to compare and then connect Gen 37:35 with Ugaritic text\(^1\) only to conclude that in vs. 35 “Jacob will make a ritual descent into the underworld.”\(^2\) H. Gunkel assumes that “in the underworld, everyone remains in the state one was in at death.”\(^3\)

According to this view, Jacob intends to wear his mourning garments until his death so that when he enters into Sheol, he will make known to Joseph his grief and lamentation over him while living on the earth.

However, in order to understand the meaning of Jacob’s exclamation “For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol,” it is necessary to explore the main features of the statement.

The examination of vss. 34-35 exposes the heartrending character of the crisis by elaborating on Jacob’s mourning for his dead son. The monologue in vs. 35 dramatizes this point to its utmost, כָּלָּהַ אָבִי בָּנָּהָ שָׁאָלַי ("For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol"). The conjunction כִּי introduces direct narration with the secondary idea of a particle of statement.\(^4\) The verb כָּלָה ("I will go down")

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is in Qal impf. 1 c. s. from רָכַל ("go down") and represents action or event which is imminent, conceived or desired in the mind of Jacob.¹

Three main points highlight the intensity of Jacob's lament: (1) tearing of clothes (vs. 29), (2) putting on sackcloth (vs. 34), and (3) mourning for many days (vs. 34).² V. Hamilton suggests that the Hithpael form of לָבֵל ("mourn," "lament") used in vs. 34 may include all three of the above-mentioned aspects.³ It is significant to note that the verb לָבֵל is used not only to describe the mourning for the dead, but the word לָבֵל "is clearly a technical term for all these customs together that might be observed in case of a death."⁴

In vs. 35 the word לָבֵל ("mourning," "lament") is an adjective, m. s., which follows after the verb and thus specifies the mental state of Jacob, namely, his

¹Ibid., 313.

²See also Exod 33:4; Num 14:29; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 3:31, 19:2; Ezra 10:6; Neh 1:4, 9:1; Esth 4:1; Dan 10:2; Amos 8:10.


⁴Arnulf H. Baumann, "לָבֵל," TDOT, 1:45.
mourning. The term describes primarily outward behavior and has time limitations such as mourning for seven days (Gen 50:10), thirty days (Deut 34:8), many days (Gen 37:34), three years (2 Sam 13:38). The concise expression in Gen 37:34, רֵעַ֥וּת אֹתָ֥לַוּת יַעֲ֥שֹׁש יָאָבָ֖ד (“and he mourned for his son many days”) describes Jacob’s grief as a temporary event, thus excluding the idea of continuous mourning after his death in vs. 35.

The second term בַּלַּה (“weep,” “cry,” “shed tears”) expresses emotional grief and is used to describe the action that accompanied Jacob’s mourning, namely, weeping for the death of his son.

Furthermore, the term הָלָּאָשׁ has the ending יַ, which, in the current case, simply indicates “direction toward” or “motion toward” a place and functions as a prefixed י. Note in particular that the He-Directive is never used to describe a movement “toward a person.” Thus, syntactically there are no verbal forms or structures expressing ceaseless action or suggesting that Jacob’s mourning would continue after he “goes down” to יָאָוָשׁ. Also no hint can be found of a conscious

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1Ibid., GKC, 374.


5To describe an action which is continuous or progressing see GKC, 340-344.
reunion of the two in Sheol.1

The crucial verb here, which by its nature and function contains the idea of downward movement, is יָרַד ("I will go down"). The term dominates not only Jacob's announcement but also portrays the act of his moving to מִשְׁמַר הַמְּדְתִּים, 2 thus making it clear that the word יָרַד refers to the place of the dead, not life.

It is important to note that according to C. Westermann, in vs. 35 "death is described as 'going down to Sheol'" and this "going down" serves as "a standard expression" of dying. 3 Z. Mayer comes to the same conclusion, "Death is described as descent."4 J. Hartley states, "whoever dies goes down to Sheol."5 S. Shibayama comments that "Yărād is always used when the actor is going to a place lower than the place he has been standing."6 The distribution and application of the verb יָרַד ("go down," "bring down"), which is used directly or indirectly twenty-five times in


3See table 2. Westermann, Genesis 37-50, 44. Nevertheless, Westermann asserts that "a standard expression" does not belong to the patriarchal period but "to the period of narrator" (ibid., 44).


5John E. Hartley, "Yărād," TWOT, 1:401-402.

connection with Sheol, play an important role, as can be seen in table 2.

When we talk about death, Jacob’s words “to go down to Sheol” find their reflection in our language, too. The phrasing may be diverse but when a person refers to “going down into death,” “crossing the river,” “the Great Divide,” “the deep end,” “last rest,” “the beyond,” “the hereafter,” “other world,” the point is clear.

Does Sheol in Gen 37:35 represent the underworld, a place of miserable existence, or something else? First of all, on the basis of this research one may argue that Sheol is the place of death, not life. Indeed, there is no formula, expression, or any key word in the Torah that would contain the slightest hint of life or idea of some form of existence after death.

Second, there is no specific grammatical-syntactical or intertextual data which might allude to a state, condition, or status in which the dead find themselves such as could be created by the imagination or presented to the mind. The directive נא in the word נָלַאַת serves to indicate only direction toward and does not contain any descriptive element concerning its nature.

1 Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Isa 5:14; 14:11, 15; 38:18; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27; Pss 30:4; 55:16; Job 7:9; 17:16; Prov 1:12; 5:5; 7:27.

2 See נָלַאַת with its parallel phraseology and its variations such as נָלַאַת, etc., and a discussion on intertextual and parallel expressions under Excursus 1, “נָלַאַת and Its Conceptual Links.”

3 See נָלַאַת and its parallel terminology נָלַאַת

4 See grammatical and exegetical notes on נָלַאַת.
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</table>
Third, Jacob’s “going down” to his son to “Sheol” excludes any idea of reunion in the grave. When the brothers bring Joseph’s tunic smeared with bloodstains, Jacob bursts into a lament, הימים מרגיעים מרים המאנית (lit. “is torn, he was torn, Joseph!”), for he believes that Joseph had been “torn by a wild beast” (Gen 37:32-33).

Fourth, in the immediate context of בו י坐 in Gen 37 the term עין (“pit”) occurs six times בָּא הָאָדָם (vs. 22); יָשָׂר אֶלֶף בָּא (vs. 24); יָשָׂר אֶלֶף בָּא (vs. 24); יָשָׂר אֶלֶף (vs. 28); יָשָׂר אֶלֶף (vs. 29); יָשָׂר אֶלֶף (vs. 29), thus forming the image which binds Joseph’s death together with Jacob’s death. The ultimate goal why the brothers ניסלתי והתרה (“and they threw him into the pit”) dumped Joseph into the pit was not to bring him continuation of life in the underworld, but death in the fullest sense of the word (Gen 37:23-24).^{1} The pit with the directive יָשָׂר, as in the case of יָשָׂר, had to become Joseph’s grave. That is why S. Kunin concludes that the term יָשָׂר “go down” is “strengthening the analogy of the pit with the grave,” and he translates Gen 37:35 as “I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.”^{2}

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This brief exegesis of the basic terminology not only clearly demonstrates how simple and clear-cut the biblical text is, but also counteracts such “assumed theories” and distortions as presented by R. Morey, who asserts that,

Jacob assumed that his son was still alive and conscious and that he would eventually reunite with his son after his own death. . . . He even speaks of “going down” to reunite with his son, because it was assumed that Sheol was the place of departed spirits, probably a hollow place in the center of the earth.¹

Moreover, there is another aspect and serious problem with a similar view, according to which, if Joseph died “prematurely,” the so-called “wicked” or “evil” death, ² his place is in Sheol. However, in this situation one must deal with the question which naturally comes up concerning Jacob, who is regarded righteous: Why should he go down to Sheol which is the place reserved only for the wicked?

Finally, the basic question is rather what the dead patriarchs now mean for the living, as they are buried next to their fathers who have died before and whose memory is kept alive. It is significant to note that R. Davidson in his commentary on Genesis comes to the following conclusion, “There is no theorizing about Sheol in the Joseph story. Wherever the word occurs . . . it is no more than a synonym for death or the grave.”³ L. Froom asserts that the substitution of Sheol with “gravedom” would clarify the whole problem.⁴ One of the most often quoted scholars, J. Pedersen,

¹Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 75.
²Rosenberg, “The Concept of Biblical Sheol,” 173-245. See also discussion on Num 16:30, 33.
concludes, “The dead are at the same time in the grave and in Sheol, not in two
different places”; “Sheol is the entity into which all graves are merged. . . . Sheol
should be the sum of the graves”; and “Where there is grave, there is Sheol, and where
there is Sheol, there is grave.”¹ According to R. Harris, “Sheol does not describe the
place where the souls of men go, but the place where their bodies go, the grave.”²

Gen 42:38

Translation and Textual Remarks

But he said,
“My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left.³
If⁴ harm should happen to him on the way that you are going, you would bring
down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.”

¹Johannes Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture, 2 vols. (Atlanta, GA: Scholars

²R. Laird Harris, “Sheol,” TWOT, 2:892. See also Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis
The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society,
1989), 262-263.

³The Peshitta (i.e., “the simple”) Syriac version composed in the second or
third century A. D. appends the words “for his mother.” It means that only Benjamin
is still alive of Rachel’s two sons. Usually the verb ל_list is parsed as Nif. ptc. m. s.,
however, Wenham describes the form as Nif. pf. 3 m. s. paus. Wenham, Genesis 16-
50, WBC, 2:403.

⁴The perfect plus † in both protasis and apodosis of ל_list and מ_list forms the equivalent of a conditional sentence. James L. Kugel, The Idea of Biblical
Poetry: Parallelism and Its History (New Heaven and London: Yale University,
1981), 32.
Text Unit and Its Genre

Gen 42 is closely linked with chap. 37 by picking up the major events introduced there, thus establishing in 42:38 "an antithetical parallel."¹ Gen 39-41 point to a carefully integrated subdesign which functions as an interlude with the main connecting motif of famine.²

Vss. 36-38 form a clear subunit and are a part of a bigger division of vss. 29-38.³ In its present form, the genre questions of the unit should be restricted to the functional uniqueness it demonstrates in relationship to the entire narrative. By means of a dialogue, vss. 36-38 structure the continuous whole where vs. 36 describes Jacob’s lament, thus emphasizing the elements of a dirge (accusation and explication). In vs. 37, the oath formula offered by Reuben is totally different from the traditional ones. It emphasizes the condition (you may kill my two sons) that will be fulfilled if the assertion is broken (if I do not bring him back to you). Finally in vs. 38 a dirge reveals Jacob’s sorrow concerning his sons, thus bringing his reply to a close. That is why vs. 38 is so similar to that of Gen 37:35.

¹Thesis: נָתַן אֲבָדָה לֵבָבָה וְלֹא נְבָא לֶבַבְתָּהּ for his brother is dead, 
Antithesis: לָבַבְתָּהּ לֹא נְבָא לֵבָבָהּ and he alone is left. See Coats, Genesis, 285.

²Westermann, Genesis 37-50, 103.

³Westermann divides chap. 42 into three main divisions: (1) Journey to Egypt (vss. 1-5); (2) Experience in Egypt (vss. 6-25); and (3) Arrival at the father’s house (vss. 26-38). See Westermann, Genesis 37-50, 103-104. Wenham finds in chap. 42 five palistrophically arranged scenes: vss. 1-4, vss. 5-17, vss. 18-24, vss. 25-28, and vss. 29-38 (Wenham, Genesis 16-50, 2:403-405). Hamilton has three main units which are similar to Westerman’s divisions (Hamilton, Genesis 18-50, 514-537).
Exegetical Notes

Gen 42:36-38 points to the culmination of the events similar to that of Gen 37:34-35. In vs. 36 Jacob laments over the “death” of his son Joseph and the fate of Simeon. In spite of the fact that Reuben’s request was based on the severest oath involving the death of his own two sons, Jacob refuses to allow Benjamin to travel with his brothers to Egypt. Jacob laments Benjamin as if he is facing his death. It is noteworthy that each of these episodes in the lament of Jacob contributes to the development of crises.

Vss 36-38 show how deeply Jacob had loved Joseph and how dear the sons of his favorite wife had been to him. Jacob’s words concerning Benjamin’s death, “you would bring down (Euphemism) my gray hairs (Metonymy) in sorrow to Sheol,” emphasize the thought that he would not be able to endure another tragedy.

As it was in the case of Gen 37:35, so it is here: The term ἄλλης ends with the directive ἔτοιμος and provides no hint in regard to the state or some kind of existence of the dead who have “gone down” there. However, a totally opposite conclusion is reached by V. Hamilton, who comments, “In these Genesis passages, all involving Jacob, one should consider Sheol, as denoting the state or condition of death into

1Euphemism (the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful, less offensive, etc., than another), that is, “you will kill me.” See Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 685.

2Metonymy (a figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used in place of that of another associated with or suggested by it), that is “me, in my old age.” Ibid., 587.
which the dejected Jacob will enter.”

O. Procksch focuses on Job 14:22 to prove that “Wer voll Kummer in der Totenwelt geht, ruht dort in ewigem schattenhaftem Kummer (He that departs to the realm of the dead full of grief rests there in eternal shadowy grief).”

What the suffering Job whispered in his physical pain and mental anguish cannot be attributed to the conviction of patriarchs. To hang any teaching about Sheol or to fabricate a dogmatic proof based on this or another verse leads only to speculation and building of an unsubstantiated case. As H. Leupold puts it, “much has been imputed to the term [Sheol] without good grounds,” and he points out that “Jacob expresses only this thought: My last days, should Benjamin die, will be steeped in great grief under the load of which I shall die.”

Here as in Gen 37:35 ᾳαὶασῖα means “to the grave.”

Gen 44:29, 31

לִלְֹכְחְתִּים בִּמְאָרָרִים מִנְּפָם עוֹלָה אֶפֶם אֶזְדוֹמִים אֶחְרְשִׁיבֵנוּ

Barnea Shalalha:

וְרַּחֲמֵי קַרְנָאֲתֵךְ לְאֶמֶּר נַעֲרֵה נַעֲרֵה נַעֲרֵה נַעֲרֵה נַעֲרֵה נַעֲרֵה

Eben Beno Shalalha:

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1 Hamilton, *Genesis*, 537.


4 For the discussion on the key terms and its equivalents see exegetical notes on Gen 37:35.
Translation and Textual Remarks

29 If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, then you will bring down my gray hairs in misery to Sheol.
31 When he sees that the boy is not with us, then he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father in sorrow to Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Exegetes generally agree that chaps. 43:1-45:28 form a clear unit within the narrative of Joseph, describing the second of three journeys of Joseph’s brothers to Egypt. Wenham, Coats, Westermann, and others indicate that the content, structure, and corresponding exposition parts of these three chapters mirror chap. 42, developing the tension to its culmination point before the completion is reached.

Vss. 29 and 31 are located within the passionate speech of Judah, which is one of the two most important literary masterpieces in the entire unit (Gen 44:18-34). It can be split into smaller subunits consisting of vss. 24-29 and 30-32. It should also be noted

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1A perfect consecutive containing the condition as in Gen 44:29 (םייחא בָּנִי אָבֵי רֹאֲשׁוֹת יִרְאוּ יָאמִר עַל לְוָדָם יִתְנַשֵׁהוּ) implies in the mind of the speaker the following notion, “If it ever shall have come to this, that you have taken this one also, then you have thereby brought me down to Sheol.” See GKC, § 112kk.

2An addition “with us” (which is required by the context) is also found in the LXX, Peshitta, and Samaritan versions.

3The perfect consecutive occurring as the apodosis (וְיִתְנַשֵׁהוּ) is often used to announce future events (he will/would die). The same is true concerning דְּרַיו נֹא. See GKC, § 112oo.

4Wenham, Genesis 16-50, WBC, 2:418-420; Coats, From Canaan to Egypt, 38-54; Westermann, Genesis 37:50, 130-131.

5By its rhetorical power it is similar to his speech to Jacob in Gen 43:3-10.

6Coats sees in vss. 30-31 one subunit, a conclusion, and vss. 32-34 form a new subunit--a request. Coats, Genesis with an Introduction, 290.

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that Gen 44:24-31, the episode of the second journey, refers back to Gen 42:29-38, and such verses as Gen 44:29, 31, 42:38, and 37:35 contain the same elements.

It is impossible to give a concrete genre definition for the whole unit, as it consists of numerous and various stereotyped formulas. However, the lament of Joseph’s death and with it the theme of Jacob’s “going down” to death, that is, “Sheol-wards” continually reverberate throughout the story (Gen 37:35; [42:36]; 42:38; [43:14]; 44:29, 31).²

Exegetical Notes

At this point it is necessary to have a brief overview. The cruel plan of Joseph’s brothers succeeded. In his grief Jacob was ready to go where his beloved son had gone, “For I will go down mourning to my son to Sheol” (Gen 37:35). Jacob’s comment concerning Benjamin, Rachel’s second son, speaks by itself, “If harm should happen to him on the way that you are going, you would bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol” (Gen 42:38). Here the reason for “going down to Sheol” is different from that of the previous passage. By using the causative form, הָרַעְשָׁה (Hi. 2 m. pl.) Jacob’s straightforward language leaves no doubt that “you would be the cause of my death.”

Finally, with slight variation the same phraseology is repeated twice by Judah, “If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, then you will bring

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¹Ibid., 293.

²See also Gen 44:22; 45:28; 47:9; 48:1; 49:1, 28-33.
down my gray hairs in misery to Sheol” (Gen 44:29) and “When he sees that the boy is not with us, then he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father in sorrow to Sheol” (Gen 44:31). “The gray hairs” is a metonymy used in a metaphorical sense and stands for their father Jacob. It illustrates Jacob’s great sadness and sorrow and what the loss of Benjamin would mean to him. The reason and essence of Jacob’s unbearable grief are synthesized in vs. 30 where Judah provides an explanation; דגה הנפשך ("and his soul being bound with his soul").¹

In vs. 31 the term נפשו ("die") is parallel to ירד ("go down"), thus emphasizing the analogy of “dying” with “going down” to Sheol. Here, as in all the previous passages, the term נפשו has the ending י, thus indicating direction toward ("to the grave") and excluding any speculation or reference to some kind of existence in the spirit underworld. Otherwise both texts contain the same elements as in the two previous references.

Num 16:30, 33

Translation and Textual Remark

30 But if Yahweh creates a creation, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised Yahweh.

33 So they with all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Num 16:30, 33 belongs to the section consisting of vss. 25-35, which starts with Moses going to Dathan and Abiram and concludes with the destruction of 250 men. The section is held together by two subunits (vss. 25-30 and vss. 31-35). It deals with the punishment of the rebels and is integrated into chaps. 16 and 17, which together form a major literary unit. Both chapters form the peak in the chiastic structure and introversion of Numbers, thus presenting Korah's rebellion as the

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1The LXX reads ἐν ἐμφάνεισιν ἔσεθή. There is a big difference between an apparition or a portent and an entirely new created thing. NRSV has “creates something new.” J. Milgrom suggests the following translation: “makes a great chiasm.” Jacob Milgrom, Numbers 7:2727: The JPS Torah Commentary (JPST) (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 137. According to H. Hanson, in the context of Num 16, vs. 30 could be also translated as “splits open a crevice” or “forms by cutting.” See Howard E. Hanson, “Num XVI 30 and the Meaning of בָּרָא,” Vetus Testamentum (VT) 22 (1972): 353-359.

2After the phrase יִצְרֹאָתָם the LXX inserts a few words from vs. 32.


climax of the book.

Numbers contains a variety of genres. Chaps. 16 and 17 belong to one of the seven narrative sections, alternating with six law sections.¹ Vss. 25-35 are in prose and the unit is but a report of an event. However, the event is particular and unique; the elements of entreaty/exhortation and prohibition (vs. 26) call to the test (vss. 28-31) and the punishment (vss. 31-33) of the defiant, and find their culmination and solution in the act of “going down alive into Sheol” (ןַחְלָה נַחֲלָה).² Moreover, as vs. 30 and vss. 31-33 describe the same event, it is easy to notice their parallel

**TABLE 3**

PARALLEL STRUCTURE OF NUM 16:30 AND 16:31-33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers 16:30</th>
<th>Numbers 16:31-33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נָחֲלָה נַחֲלָה אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
<td>נָחֲלָה נַחֲלָה אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but if Yahweh creates a creation</td>
<td>the ground under them was split apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>השָׁמָיִם אֶלֶּה אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
<td>השָׁמָיִם אֶלֶּה אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the ground opens its mouth</td>
<td>and the earth opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְהִבְדַּלַּת אָדָם אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
<td>וְהִבְדַּלַּת אָדָם אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and swallows them up with all that belongs to them</td>
<td>and swallowed them up with their households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְהָלֹךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֵׁלָלָה</td>
<td>וְהָלֹךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֵׁלָלָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they go down alive to Sheol</td>
<td>and they went down alive with all that belonged to them Sheol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


structure, which, like a prophecy with its fulfillment, demonstrates the resolution of
the challenge (see table 3 above).

Exegetical Notes

The case of Korah and his company (Num 16:30, 33) is one among many
controversial passages on which opposing views have been presented.¹ A. Heidel
makes a very strong statement: “And as regards Sheol in particular, we have evidence
that it, in the signification of the subterranean realm of the spirits, applies to the
habitation of the souls of the wicked only,” and “Contrariwise, there is no passage
which proves that Sheol was ever employed as a designation for the gathering place of

¹Commenting on Num 16:33, R. Doermann explains that “Korah, Dathan and
Abiram were received directly into Sheol without first entering the grave.” Doermann,
“Sheol,” 191. J. Milgrom in his discussion on Korah touches the view of premature
or evil death, which is popular among many scholars. He writes, “Only the wicked
descend to Sheol (see Pss. 9:18; 31:18) and that the egregious wicked ‘go down alive
to Sheol’ (see Ps. 55:16), whereas the righteous ascend heavenward (Prov 15:24; Eccl
3:20-23).” Milgrom, Numbers תנה תנה, JPST, 137-138. Rosenberg has the commonly
held view that the term Sheol is a neutral concept. It is neutral when Sheol is the
destiny of all men. Taking the biblical text and applicable Near Eastern material, she
emphasizes its close connection with the concept of evil and premature death. Thus,
Sheol becomes a negative concept through its association with the evil death of the
wicked and its descriptive features. To come to her conclusion she uses a quantitative
approach: (1) Ten times the wicked are sent to Sheol in Num 16:21-22, 30; Hos
13:12-14; Isa 5:8-14; 14:5-9; Ezek 32:27; Pss 9:18; 31:18; 49:15; 55:16; Job 21 7:13,
Job 24:19. (2) Eight times it may be inferred so in Pss 18:18; 49:15-16; Isa 38:18;
Jonah 2:4; Job 14:13; Prov 3:5; 7:27; 9:18. (3) Eighteen times those who die a violent
death by the sword go to Sheol in Isa 14:19; Ezek 31:17-18; 32:20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
26, 28, 29 (2×), 31; Prov 7:21; Ps 88:4-6. (4) Three times they die in blood in 1 Kgs
2:9; Ps 30:4-10; Prov 1:12. (5) Four times they are sent to Sheol alive in Num 16:29;
Isa 5:14; Ps 55:16; Prov 1:12. (6) Five times the cause is severe affliction in Isa
38:10, 11; Pss 6:3-4; 30:3; 31:8; 88:16-17. (7) Twice because of intense anguish in
Gen 42:38; 44:31. (8) Once it is by mourning, Gen 37:35. (9) Twice “evil” appears,
Bailey, Biblical Perspectives of Death, 48-53, with the arguments of Desmond
the departed spirits of the godly.”¹ J. Pedersen presents the opposite trend: “Viewed from the world of light all the deceased form a common realm because they are essentially subject to the same conditions. This common realm the Israelites call Sheol or the netherworld: . . . Everyone who dies goes to Sheol.”²

These contradictory quotations create dichotomy and a certain tension in the mind of the modern reader. On the one hand, scholars perceive Sheol as the place of the dead or simply the grave of all men regardless of their moral character. On the other hand, they identify it as the place reserved only for the wicked by pointing to their premature death, which comes as the consequence of Yahweh’s judgments, and thus results in their continuous miserable existence in the underworld.³

In order to find out what Num 16:30, 33 says, it is necessary to identify key words, phrases, structural essentials that reveal Yahweh’s will, and other elements in terms of their function within the given text, and synthesize them to reveal their contribution to the theological and anthropological emphases of the current passage concerning the term Sheol. Vs. 30 consists of four conditional clauses and the apodosis in the last part.⁴


²Pedersen, Israel, 460, 461, 465; Heidel, Gilgamesh Epic, 173.


⁴Vs. 29 has a similar structure, which consists of two conditional phrases and an apodosis.
but if Yahweh creates
and the ground opens its mouth
and swallows them up...
and they go down alive to Sheol
then you shall know...

The first clause starts with the adversative particle \( \text{נָשָׁתָה} \) ("but") and is followed by the adverbial particle \( \text{יקף הים} \) ("if"); thus, the term \( \text{בָּרָא} \) ("create") implies something totally new, unprecedented, unseen, and unheard.\(^1\) Hence, the term \( \text{בָּרָא} \), which is exclusively used to refer to the nonparallel character of the creative work of Yahweh and which also represents the concept of life, in contrast to its nature, here functions as the concept of death. The phrase \( \text{בָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית} \) ("creates a creation")\(^2\) is a hapax legomenon.\(^3\)

Moreover, a verb and a cognate noun are used together in order to put a strong emphasis on the expression “but if Yahweh creates” and is similar to a supreme degree in verbs to proclaim the magnitude of the action and the greatness and

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\(^2\)For the discussion on the technical and theological term for creation \( \text{בָּרָא} \) see Hanson, “Num. XVI 30 and the Meaning of \( \text{בָּרָא} \),” 353-359; Martin I. Lockshin, ed., *Rashbam's Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers: An Annotated Translation* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001), 231-233; Milgrom, *Numbers 1-31*, JPST, 137, 314. The term \( \text{בָּרָא} \) occurs 49 times in the Hebrew Scripture.

\(^3\)It serves as a cognate accusative. A similar phrase with similar syntax is found in Jonah 3:2, \( \text{בראשית וייהוותי נברא} \) ("and proclaim to it this proclamation"). See also Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (AB), vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 417. Compare with Exod 34:10, Isa 48:6, and Jer 31:22.
significance of its results as “they go down alive to Sheol, then you shall know.” 

Instead of dealing with the situation and conditions immediately, all five key verbs (וָדַר הָאָרֶץ, חַלְלֵם, אִנַּה, בָּא-לוֹא, אָמְצוּת, כָּבָר) are inflected in the future. In other words, Moses anticipates God’s active intervention and the destruction of the rebels.

Two verbs of interest here are רָחַב לְפָנֵי ("part," "open") and הִבְלָב ("swallow," "consume"). To understand the full implications of these words in their context, it is necessary to take into consideration the concepts to which they are related and the vocabulary that is generally used in the Hebrew Scripture to express them. “And the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up” are figurative expressions where אָמְצוּת ("its mouth") is a metaphor for an opening or hole. Table 4 shows how almost identical phrases occur in seven texts.

For the purpose of further exposition of the text it should be noted that the term הָאָרֶץ (Gen 4:11; Num 16:30) is used interchangeably with לְפָנֵי (Num 16:32; 19:37) 

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1 Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 275-279.

2 The first verb לְפָנֵי is in the imperfect and serves as the governing verb for the rest of the four following verbs which are the perfects prefixed with waw consecutive. For further information see Kelley, Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar, 209-216.


26:10; Deut 11:6; Ps 106:17) and they are synonymous. The personification of the ground (“opens its mouth,” “swallows them up”) and the earth (“opened its mouth,”

### TABLE 4

**TEXTS WITH IDENTICAL PHRASES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen 4:11</td>
<td>האָּשָׁר קְצָר חַדָּדְרֶם אָזְדָּרָה</td>
<td>קְשֹׁר קְצָר חַדָּדְרֶם אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to receive your brother's blood</td>
<td>which has opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:30</td>
<td>בְּבָנְיָם אַחֶם</td>
<td>פָּוְתָּה אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and swallows them up</td>
<td>and the ground opens its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:32</td>
<td>בְּבָנְיָם אַחֶם</td>
<td>פָּוְתָּה אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and swallowed them up</td>
<td>and the earth opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 26:10</td>
<td>בְּבָנְיָם אַחֶם</td>
<td>פָּוְתָּה אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and swallowed them up</td>
<td>and the earth opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 11:6</td>
<td>בְּבָנְיָם אַחֶם</td>
<td>פָּוְתָּה אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and swallowed them up</td>
<td>and the earth opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps 106:17</td>
<td>בְּבָנְיָם אַחֶם</td>
<td>פָּוְתָּה אָזְדָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and swallowed up Dathan</td>
<td>the earth opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 5:14</td>
<td>תָּבֹלָת אֲבֹת</td>
<td>שִׁאוֹל ... נַחֲרָהָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shalom ... has opened its mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“swallowed them up”) alludes to Sheol and functions as its parallel terms. For instance, Ps 141:17 speaks about the bones scattered “at the mouth of Sheol” (שָׂבֵת אָמַר) with the word שָׂבֵת acting as its equivalent term. Moreover, the word שָׂבֵת or פָּוְתָּה is the subject of the dynamic verb בְּבָנְיָם (“swallow”), implying the idea of Sheol seven times, thus intensifying their connotations with the grave.¹ It

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should be strongly reemphasized that it is the earth (יָרָד) and ground (יוֹדֵעֶל) that swallow the rebels and not some shadowy, ethereal place.

The verbs יָרָד (“open up”) and יוֹדֵעֶל (“open”) are used interchangeably in the context of punishment when the earth opens its mouth wide in order to swallow those who challenged Moses’ authority.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Hebrew Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:30</td>
<td>יָרָד הָאָרֶץ נַגֵּב תַּחַת</td>
<td>(“if the earth opens its mouth”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 11:6</td>
<td>יוֹדֵעֶל הָאָרֶץ נַגֵּב תַחַת</td>
<td>(“the earth opened its mouth”)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Num 16:32</td>
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<td>(“and the earth opened its mouth”)</td>
</tr>
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<td>(“and the earth opened its mouth”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps 106:17</td>
<td>יוֹדֵעֶל</td>
<td>(“the earth opened”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is highly significant that not only these passages found in the Torah, but also those outside it refer exclusively to the Korah story. It means that in ancient Israel, the phrase “the earth opened its mouth” was one of those descriptive similes² or half hyperbolic formulas that were used to demonstrate the way to total destruction.³

In order to indicate the enormity of death in Num 16:30-33, the image of “earth


²Simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, or a comparison of two persons, places, or things that are unlike, with “like” or “as.” For example, “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3).

³Abraham S. Yahuda, The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 277-278.
opening its mouth" is reinforced by two verbs, הבקע (“swallow,” “consume,”
"devour”) and "descending" (“go down”),¹ thus making the figure enormously powerful and
vivid. It is remarkable that in the Torah the term הבקע emerges especially in contexts
of destruction, and "the punitive intervention and judgment of Yahweh." "Swallow"
means death and excludes any continual existence in whatever form.²

The consigning of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to Sheol by means of the earth’s
mouth is striking. The major intertextual bridge between the unique incident in Num
16 and the event described in the epic poetry of Exod 15:12 is demonstrated in the
destruction of Pharaoh’s army.³ As "the earth swallowed" (מהבהב את עולם) the
Egyptians, so it swallows Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.⁴ It means that the Egyptians
not only drowned as the result of Yahweh’s judgments, "but they were also buried
beneath the sea."⁵ U. Cassuto explains that the phrase "the earth swallowed them"

¹See discussion on Gen 37:37.

²Isa 49:19; Pss 52:6; 124:3; Prov 1:12; Job 2:3; 10:8; 37:20; Hab 1:13. See
also Exod 15:12; Deut 11:6; Isa 19:3; Pss 21:10; 55:16; 106:17, etc. Bonn J.
Levine, Numbers 1-20, AB, 428-430.

³It is not necessary for the verb "open" to be always present. Cornelis
Houtman, Exodus: 7:14-19:25, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament

⁴James Nohrenberg, Like unto Moses: The Constituting of an Interruption
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 151-152.

⁵Benno Jacob, The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV
should be understood as “Sheol swallowed them.”

In Num 16 events move rapidly toward a horrifying but retributive climax as can be seen from the following comparison in table 5.

### TABLE 5

**COMPARISON OF NUM 16:30 WITH 16:32-33**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Num 16:30</th>
<th>Num 16:32-33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>בְּרִיאָה בַּרְאָא</td>
<td>הַשְּׁפִיטָה הָאָרֶץ אַרְּפָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creates a creation</td>
<td>and the ground opens its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אַחֲרֵיהֶם אַרְּפָּרָה</td>
<td>אַרְּפָּרָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the ground opens its mouth</td>
<td>and the earth opened its mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בְּרִיאָת אָרֶץ</td>
<td>בְּרִיאָת אָרֶץ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and swallows them up</td>
<td>and swallows them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רֵעָרָה נָתֵמָה שָאֲלָה</td>
<td>רָדַּךְ ... נָתֵמָה שָאֲלָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they go down alive to Sheol</td>
<td>and they went down alive to Sheol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they perished from the midst of the assembly</td>
<td>and the earth closed over them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the earth closed over them</td>
<td>and the earth closed over them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vs. 33 contains two more descriptive elements: “the earth covered them over” and “they perished from the midst of the assembly.” Unlike the previous passages where the dead “went down” to Sheol, here the house of Abiram with those who took part in Korah’s revolt went down to Sheol “alive.” The contrast is obvious and

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2. For discussion on the phrases see Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT, 318-321.
significant. Did they go down to continue their existence in some underworld region? The basic meaning of the verb יָרָה ("destroy," "perish," "exterminate") is clear.1 They went down alive to die, to be destroyed or exterminated. The word יָרָה is diametrically opposite to the term "to live" and excludes any possibility of life. It is significant to note that after the incident there was no sign to mark the spot. This is solemn, multifaceted truth that reminds the reader of Yahweh’s holiness and omnipotence, and the deadly danger of daring to rebel against Him.

Furthermore, it is also noteworthy to consider the fact that just after the death of Korah and his followers הָעִידָה הָעִידָה הָעִידָה הָעִידָה תְמוּנָה ("fire came out from the Lord") and בָּשָׂמְרוּת תְמוּנָה ("consumed the two hundred fifty men").2 The text presents some additional insights concerning death in the context of Sheol by means of a spectacular fire coming out (гора) from Yahweh3 where the subject of "consume" (הָשָׂמְרָה) is "fire." In a similar incident Nadab and Abihu died instantly; however, their bodies were not burned to ashes, for their clothed corpses were taken

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2 There are similarities with the tragedy of Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10. John C. Laughlin, “The ‘Strange Fire’ of Nadab and Abihu,” JBL 95 (1976): 559-565. Fire is used in the Scriptures not only as a means of punishment and total destruction: Gen 19:24; Exod 9:23-24; Lev 10:2; Num 11:3; 21:28; 31:10; Deut 29:22; Josh 6:19; Judg 1:8; 2 Kgs 1:10, 12, 14; 25:9; Job 18:15; Ps 11:6; Isa 34:9; 30:33; Ezek 38:22, etc., but also plays an important role as the concept of the eschatological destruction of the enemies of Yahweh: Mal 3:19; Mark 9:48, Rev 14:9-11, etc. Vinzenz Hamp, "טבְּרָה," TDOT, 1:418-428.

for burial (Lev 10:5). It seems that something like that happened also with the 250 men. Moreover, Num 17:13-14 (in English vss. 48, 49) mentions the death of 14,700 rebels and how Aaron stood בֵּית הַמַּעֲרָבִים דְּבָרִים ("between the dead and the living"), only two parties. Nowhere does the Scripture mention the third group as continuing to live in some subterranean region after death. The key words here, בָּשָׂר ("consumed") and מַעֲרָבִים ("the dead"), contain not the slightest hint concerning any kind of existence in Sheol and are self-explanatory.

The death of Korah and his people presents a prototype of the suddenness, totality, and finality of destruction. The fact that "the earth closed over them" was a remarkable testimony to direct divine intervention. Thus, Num 16 serves as an example of defiance and an archetype of eschatological judgment which goes beyond historical reality and provides a model to demonstrate the danger of rebellion in which the people may engage, and the harshness of the retribution they would receive.

In summary, vss. 30-33 make it clear that what happened was something unique, new, unseen, and unheard of with an emphasis on its causation, namely, an act of Yahweh’s judgment which resulted in the death of the rebels. The vocabulary of the judgment language, בְּרֹאשׁ וְלַעֲבָדִים וְלָבָב (רָדִיָּה רְדִיָּה), including the term בָּשָׂר ("create"), which in this specific case functions to reverse or undo His creation, emphatically demonstrates not only the mode of execution and its process, but also the consequences of it. In an instant the earth “opened its mouth and swallowed” not only

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2 In Num 25:9 those who died were 24,000, etc.
Korah and his followers, but also their tents with all their possessions. It would be absurd to assert that all their goods went to a place of departed spirits. No underground cavity or a pit representing Sheol is mentioned in the text. It simply means that Korah and his company with all their possessions were buried alive.

The terminology of the passage clearly points to the usage of judgment vocabulary. The key verbs אֱלֹהִים (“creates”), יָבֹא ("and opens"), נָבָא ("and opened"), אָכַז ("and swallowed"), עָבַד ("and they went down"), מַגָּל ("and

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1 Some critics have come to the conclusion that Korah with his company died as the result of some natural catastrophe, such as an earthquake, lightning, etc. See, for instance, Greta Hort, “The Death of Qorah,” Australian Biblical Review (AusBR) 7 (December 1959): 2-26; Wenham, Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, TOTC, 137-138. However, the death of the rebels was not a “natural” accident. First, they were taught and warned to serve in harmony with the instructions received from the Lord, “or they will die” (Num 4:15, 18-19). Second, when Korah assembles the whole congregation “the glory of the Lord appeared” (vs. 19). Third, Yahweh caused the earth to “open its mouth” and “swallow them” (vss. 31-33) and then “a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men” (vs. 35). A similar confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18). Fourth, the issues involved were almost the same. Fifth, time elements and the sequence of events were similar. If the predicted judgment had not been carried out, this would prove that the Lord had not sent either Moses or Elijah.


3 G. Maier comments on Num 16:30 in the following way: “Der Ausdruck 'in die Scheol hinabfahren' deutet an, daß mit dem Tode nicht alles aus ist... In der Scheol sind Toten, leben dort aber schattenhaft weiter (vgl. Ps 49:16; Jes 38:18; Hos 13:14).” (The expression “to go down to Sheol” means that with death not everything is finished. The dead are in Sheol and continue to live there as shadows [comp. Ps 49:15; Is 38:18]). Then in the footnote he explains that “Überzogen ist es aus 4 Mo 16:30 herauslesen zu wollen, hier werde die Scheol, als ein unter der Erdoberfläche befindlicher hohlraumvergstell” (It is convincing from Num 16:30 that here Sheol “is pictured as an open space situated under the surface of the earth”). Gerhard Maier, Das Vierte Buch Mose (The Fourth Book of Moses) (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1989), 237.
covered”), and וַיֶּבֶסֶנְפוּ ("and they perished") serve as graphic elements in the figure of speech, which has three functions: (1) reveals the way of God’s active intervention, (2) leads progression of events to its culmination, and (3) pictures the manner of death the rebels would die.

The interchangeable usage and personification of the לַעֲבֹדְתֵּן, לַעֲבֹדְתֵּן ("earth," "ground") which "opens its mouth," "swallows them up," and then "covers them up" clearly allude to their burial alive in the grave, and nothing more. Those who rebelled against Yahweh and Moses were רֵבָעַת ("destroyed") from the midst of the assembly.

Furthermore, in a broader context, the execution of 250 men and 14,700 rebels indisputably refers only to their death. Concerning the condition of their souls or some special status after their death in Sheol, or further punishment after their death, the texts are totally silent.

Finally, in Lev 10:2 Nadab and Abihu were struck dead before the sanctuary by fire from the Lord and then carried outside the camp for burial. In Exod 15:12 "the earth swallowed" the Egyptian army. It means they died and were buried at the bottom of the sea. Most likely some of the dead bodies were thrown on the seashore (Exod 14:13), where they decomposed and returned to dust.

It is true that in all the discussed passages, the rebels and Yahweh’s enemies died prematurely; however, “by contrast to the later Christian idea of hell, Sheol is not a special place of punishment reserved for the wicked.”


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as the place of the wicked only (Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Num 16:30-33) should be refuted by the fact that the righteous like Jacob go there, too (Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29-31). Sheol is the place where all the dead are gathered indiscriminately, both saints and sinners.

As none of the texts under consideration teaches immortality or postmortem existence of human beings, the term Sheol in the present passages should be understood as equivalent to the grave, without imposing upon the concept ideas that were not current at the time of the Torah.\(^1\) Therefore, the term Sheol here alludes to the place of the dead.

**Deut 32:22**

\[
כִּירָאָשׁ קְרָאָה בַּעֲדֵי שְׁמִיכְּךָ וּדְרִישׁ שָׂאתָוֹת
cir'asher qara ba'av'i shem'kha u'drise sh'so'ot

ותַאֲכֵל illicit ro'el'il w'thal'mem moserim h'irim
\]

**Translation and Textual Remarks**

For a fire is kindled by my nostrils,
and\(^2\) it burns to the depths of Sheol;
and\(^3\) it devours the earth and its increase,
and\(^4\) it sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. omit

**Text Unit and Its Genre**

Vs. 22 is part of an eloquent and dynamic poem, given under divine

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\(^2\) The LXX omits \(\dagger\) (waw conjunction).

\(^3\) The LXX, SP, Syr, and Targ omit \(\dagger\) (waw conjunction).

\(^4\) The LXX, SP, and Targ omit \(\dagger\) (waw conjunction).
inspiration by Moses, and is a fraction of Deut 32:15-29 which forms a logical unit.

It, in turn, consists of three smaller, well-organized subunits (15-17; 18-25; 26-29).

Vss. 15-17 speak about Israel’s rejection of the “Rock” and sacrificing to demons, thus provoking Yahweh’s wrath. Vss. 18-25 contain the major part of Yahweh’s speech describing the coming punishment and devastation, and according to D. Christensen, within a narrative framework, they build the following structure:1

A  Israel forgot their Rock—“the God who birthed you” 32:18a
B  In anger YHWH decided to hide his face from them 32:18b-20
C  As they provoked me, so I will provoke them in fiery wrath 32:21-22
B1 YHWH decided to “gather evils against them” 32:23-24
A1 Bereavement and terror will come upon everyone 32:25

The motif of the coming judgment and the threat of total destruction develop and find their expression in the climax of tension in vss. 21-22. The third subunit (vss. 26-29) not only concludes the speech of Yahweh emphasizing His mercy, but also points to it as the climax of the whole structure of Deut 32.2

Scholars differ concerning the nature of the structure, meaning, and form of

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2See Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 792.
Deut 32, which has been designated as “a prophetic theodicy,”1 “didactic poem,”2 and “a religio-political song.”3 However, there is a general consensus among scholars that the song is written in the form of a rib (“a lawsuit”)4 and its style is characterized by longer lines and more polished forms of poetic parallelism than other early Hebrew poetry.5


3Umberto Cassuto, Biblical and Oriental Studies (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 41-46.


The Song is written in 3 + 3 meter, is rich in parallelism, and contains such genre elements as doxology, indictment, judgment, covenant blessings and curses, lamentation, etc. The didactic purpose of the Song is teaching and doxology.

Exegetical Notes

Deut 32:22 is the only reference in the Torah where the term Sheol occurs in a poetical context of Yahweh's judgment. Here the phrase הֶעֱרֵבָה לְגָבָה יִמְצָא (lit., "unto the deepest Sheol") is characterized by a new qualifying element הֶעֱרֵבָה ("low," "lowest," adj. f. s.), which is used by scholars to develop and emphasize its spatial aspects or other features depending on its attributed function. In fact, discussions revolving around the word הֶעֱרֵבָה (including its variants) have divided researchers into two main groups: those who believe in the "realm of the dead" and those who take it as a reference to "the grave." For instance, R. Rosenberg contends that the plural form in the phrase הֶעֱרֵבָה נְחַדְּקָא ("earth below") is an intensive plural and that "the term implies the existence of distinct realms in the netherworld."

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Commenting on vs. 22, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch bring into play such phraseology as "the lower hell," "the lowest region of Sheol," or "the lower regions," and then referring to Calvin they assert, "As the indignation and anger of God follow His enemies to hell, to eternal flames and infernal tortures, so they devour their land. . . .

There is no necessity therefore to imagine that there is any hyperbole in the words 'to the lower hell.'"¹ R. Clements speaks of a "subterranean world"² and M. Rose points to the "tiefste Unterwelt."³ According to the opposite view, "in Deuteronomy 32:22 'Sheol beneath' simply means a deep grave."⁴

What does Yahweh really say here, and what is the message of the concrete elements of the text? First, the adjectives הַנֶּרֶק, הָרָאָקָן, הַנֹּאָקָן, הַנֹּאָן ("low," "lower," "nether," "beneath," "below") and a variant expression הָרָאָקָן ("low," "lower," "nether," "beneath")

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⁵Also functions as substantive.
“beneath”) are derivatives of הֵרָפֵף (used adverbially and propositionally).\(^1\)

Second, the term הֵרָפֵף and its modifications are used not only to describe literal situations but also metaphorically to qualify such terms as “Sheol,”\(^2\) “the earth,” הָרְפֵּף (“lower parts of the earth,” “the lowest earth”),\(^3\) and “the pit,” הָרְפֵּף רַבִּים (“in the lowest pit”).\(^4\) The last two phrases are parallel to the “depth of Sheol” and will be discussed in the next chapter with added details.

Second, in order to understand the implications of הֵרָפֵף and the fem. adjective הֵרָפֵפ used as noun concerning Sheol in Deut 32:22, it is necessary to look at a broader context. Gen 35:8 contains a description of the death of Deborah and her burial below Bethel under an oak. She was buried “below” and “under” and not “underneath” or “lower than” the tree. Similarly, Exod 20:4 forbids to make and to worship any image of anything הָרְפֵּף מִמָּה (“that is on the earth beneath,” NIV, NRSV, NAU) or הָרְפֵּף לָא לְמָה (“that is in the water under the earth”).\(^5\) The phrase


\(^2\)Deut 32:22; Ps 88:13.

\(^3\)Isa 44:23; Ezek 26:20; 31:14; 16, 18; 32:18, etc.

\(^4\)Lam 3:55; Ps 88:7.

\(^5\)Compare with Deut 4:18, 39; 5:8; Josh 2:11, and 1 Kgs 8:23.
"under the earth" is used graphically to express the idea of its being lower than the solid earth.¹ C. Houtman comments on the phrase יָגְדוֹלָה מַגָּזַת Earth in the following way: "die Meere, Flüsse, Quellen usw., zu denken ist, die tiefer als die Erde bzw. das Festland liegen"² ("the seas, rivers, springs, etc., are to be thought of as those that lie deeper than the earth, or mainland"). In other words, it should be understood that the waters of the seas, rivers, and springs lie at a lower level than the earth or as being "below" the earth's surface.³ Thus, the phrase "under the earth" contains no idea of any subterranean dwelling or region, where the spirits of the dead continue their miserable existence. Moreover, 1 Sam 7:11 provides a description of the Israelites pursuing the Philistines רֶבֶן יִרְאוּ הַמִּרְכָּז ("until they came under Bethcar"), not "underneath" the city.⁴ It can be concluded that the terms under scrutiny are used to illustrate (often wrongly to impose on the text postmortem existence) that something is located below or beneath or near, to differentiate a lower object from an upper.⁵

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⁴RSV has "as far as beyond Bethcar." See also Judg 7:8; 1 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 4:12.

⁵Alexander, "תְּרוֹמָה," NIDOTTE, 4:288.
R. L. Harris argues that the adjective ־יָשָׁם in Deut 32:22 does not mean "lowest" or "deepest" but simply "beneath" and therefore the phrase should be understood as "Sheol beneath."¹ The same view is expressed by D. Alexander. He points out that when Sheol is used with ־יָשָׁם, the term indicates that it is located beneath or below.² Furthermore, Sheol beneath points to the fact that it is the opposite of heaven and clearly alludes to the tomb, "remembering that in antiquity burial shafts were often deep in the earth."³ The merism of heaven and Sheol is used several times in the Hebrew Bible to indicate the total sphere of God's control⁴ and to remind one that there is no place to which Yahweh's sovereignty would not extend. Moreover, the mention of geographical extremities, like Sheol, visualized as the deepest grave beneath the earth and "the foundations of mountains," brings to mind Yahweh's authority and His ability not only to control but also to restrain these symbols of power, majesty, and death.

One may argue about the nuances of the translation, but the main point seems clear, which E. Merrill has summarized in the following way:

Yahweh's anger with his disloyal subjects would know no boundaries. In poetic and highly graphic language he described its universality as extending into the very bowels of the earth, into Sheol itself. In Old Testament understanding this would have no reference to the fires of hell, a concept of much later origin. . . .

¹Harris, "The Meaning of the Word Sheol," 130.

²Alexander, "_Enter the Word," _NIDOTTE_, 4:288.


⁴For example, Deut 32:22; Job 11:8; Pss 86:13; 139:8; Amos 9:2.
Moses here was not addressing the matter of the afterlife and the condition of the righteous and the wicked dead but had in mind the cosmological distinction, so common in the Old Testament, of things on the earth, below the earth, and above the earth, that is, all things everywhere (Ps 139:7-10). Yahweh’s anger would be so intense and pervasive that it would penetrate the most inaccessible regions of the created universe.¹

To describe Yahweh’s anger in Deut 32:22 Moses uses the vocabulary of destruction: two nouns שבע (“fire”) and רע (“nostril,” “anger”), and four verbs: נק (“kindle”), רע (“burn,” “kindle”), כותב (“consume,” “devour,” “burn up”), and נק (“kindle,” “burn”). Here the imagery of שבע (“fire”) plays a particularly notable role as it introduces the nature of Yahweh’s wrath² and in the Scripture Yahweh Himself, the judge of sinners, is described as a “consuming fire.”³ Furthermore, the totality and severity of Yahweh’s all-encompassing punishment is also emphasized by two phrases: נק על (“the earth with its increase”) and רע (“the foundations of the mountains,”⁴ both of which are parallel to נק על (“the depths of Sheol”). It means there is no escape from the fire of divine wrath, which will burn even to the depth of Sheol/grave, the place of the dead. In order to


²2 Sam 22:9, 13.


accentuate the universality of destruction even more, vss. 23-25 contain the list of
seven specified יִהְיוּדֵי ("evils") 1 which graphically describe the far-reaching and
destructive consequences of Yahweh's anger. Each "evil" is qualified by an
appropriate descriptive word, that is, not only "hunger," but יִהְיוּדֵי הָעַל ("wasting
hunger"), יִהְיוּדֵי הָעַל ("burning consumption"), יִהְיוּדֵי הָעַל ("bitter pestilence"),
etc. 2

In summary, the major focus of the unit under discussion (vss. 18-25) is on
Yahweh's burning wrath, which is compared to a fire that destroys everything in its
way, reaching even to Sheol beneath. It means, therefore, that the judgments of
Yahweh that will visit Israel and are described in graphic detail point to the
implementation of covenant curses from Deut 28. 3

The only descriptive element of Sheol is the adjective יִהְיוּדֵי, which points to
a deep grave or the domain of the dead. The phrase יִהְיוּדֵי הָעַל ("unto the
deepest Sheol") of vs. 22, including its context, does not contain any allusion


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concerning the abode of dead souls or any subterranean region(s). Furthermore, it should be noted that unlike the previous cases, in vs. 22 the term Sheol is without the directive הַלּוֹ. However, it is preceded by the preposition יָלָל which, in the given context, plays an important explanatory role. The proposition יָלָל ("as far as," "even to," "until," etc.) functions as the gamut, beginning with the distance from, the advance toward, and the movement up to. It is used spatially, temporally, and comparatively.\(^1\) In vs. 22, especially strong is a spatial dimension which indicates that Yahweh’s judgment will reach even the lowest geographical location, namely, the deepest grave. This is a picture of the universality and totality of Yahweh’s judgment where nothing will be able to hide or escape.

Another important point to mention is that the text does not allude to any particular individual’s life, death, grief, or burial. Instead it focuses on the disobedient Israel, and the word Sheol is used in general terms in the setting of Yahweh’s judgment. Finally, Moses is discussing neither the issue of life after death nor the state of the righteous or the wicked dead, but specifies the cosmological dimensions of Yahweh’s sweeping destruction. The term Sheol in Deut 32:22 means simply a deep grave and nothing more.\(^2\) Whether one argues for "the depth of Sheol"


or “Sheol beneath” does not change anything, for a grave is a grave.

By briefly summarizing the studied passages, the following conclusion can be drawn, thus demonstrating the sufficiency of the Scripture to explain the term Sheol by itself:

1. The direction to Sheol is downward.
2. Its location is in the earth.
3. Its nature points to the state of the dead and the grave is a concrete evidence of it.
4. Its relation—it is never once connected with the living, except by contrast (Deut 30:15, 19). The living on this earth mourn for the dead in Sheol (Gen 37:34, 35), sorrow (Gen 42:38), and fear (Num 16:27-34).
5. It is associated with death and punishment (Num 16:30).
6. Its analogy points to a pit, the grave, or simply the place of the dead (Gen 37:22-29).

Discussion and Synthesis

Nature of בֵּית הָעָלָם

In order to grasp the nature of Sheol and ultimately its significance in the Torah, it is necessary to synthesize the material discussed by asking the question, “What is the nature of בֵּית הָעָלָם?” The researched terminology and parallel vocabulary, specific formulas and allusions, intertextual bridges, and the Scriptural description concerning human nature in life and in death provide clear insights and meaning as to
the nature of the term Sheol.\(^1\)

The verb \(דְּרֵשׁ\) is used six times to point out the direction to Sheol as being down or beneath.\(^2\) Sheol is located in the earth and is equivalent to the grave. In contrast to the dead, the living on this earth mourn for the dead in Sheol (Gen 37:35); they sorrow (Gen 42:38), fear, and experience shock (Num 16:34).

Concerning the nature of Sheol, it stands for the present state of death or the state of the dead, of which the grave is tangible physical evidence.\(^3\) Jacob believed that his son was dead. Thus, being overwhelmed by intense, heartbreaking grief, Jacob expresses the desire to “go down” to his son, which implies that the sorrow would cause his death and that he would rather die and be buried next to him than to live. Sheol is never linked with life or the living. Though occasionally in the Hebrew Bible it may be personified and depicted as acting and its dead speaking, as sometimes lifeless things are impersonated, especially ground/earth, trees, etc.,\(^4\)


\(^2\)Gen 37:37; 42:38; 44:29:31; Num 16:30, 33. It should be recalled that the first six references to Sheol in the Torah are found in prose contexts. The last reference in Deut 32:22 is written in poetry and a highly figurative language and is coupled with a qualifying component (יָדָעַ). However, none of the references mentioning Sheol in the Torah contains such highly figurative descriptive elements as are found in the Prophets or in the Writings.


however, in the Torah Sheol is exclusively connected with the dead.\(^1\)

Some of the most essential characteristics of Sheol are its association with "pit" (תֵּיאֶ), "ground" (יוֹגָר), "earth" (גּוֹן), and "dust" (שֵׁל), which allude to the grave, total dissolution of body, and total termination of any kind of existence.

The nature of Sheol in the Torah is far from being as explicit as many scholars assert, namely, that it is exclusively the abode of the wicked.\(^2\) On the contrary, both the righteous like Jacob (Gen 37:35) and the wicked like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16:30-33) go there; therefore, it is better to understand Sheol as referring primarily to the grave. In brief, Sheol as established in the Torah is the place where all the dead are gathered without distinction: both the righteous and the wicked, the young and the old (Qoh 9:2-7, 10). Furthermore, when a patriarch died he was "gathered unto his fathers" (Gen 15:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, etc.), or to put it differently, was buried as his fathers were buried, without any allusion to the continued existence of their souls.

Sheol in the Torah has nothing to do with the theologically questionable designations and theories of a mysterious "underworld," "place of departed spirits," or "the abode of the dead." Scholars too often presuppose the terms or expressions from the very outset and then build a corresponding case. For instance, the English word "abode" is a technical term and applicable only to the living and has nothing to do

\(^{1}\)Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33.

with the dead. Similarly, the words “underworld” and “netherworld” have been presented as the place of some kind of existence, which contradicts their basic meanings. None of them exist in the Hebrew Scripture as such, as was explained above with the term נְבָרָה. Consequently, the nature of Sheol in the Torah, in its narrow or broader contexts, does not support the teaching that the body goes to the grave and the soul goes to Sheol or heaven.

Finally, the Torah alludes to the nature of Sheol as unprotected and vulnerable. For instance, in Deut 32:22 Moses describes Yahweh’s anger which “burns to the depth of Sheol,” thus demonstrating Yahweh’s superiority over the deepest grave and at the same time exposing the weakness of its nature. As a mortal man has only one option to live between birth and death, so Sheol have its starting point and its end. However, in the Torah there are no explicit references concerning destruction of Sheol/grave or how long it will preserve its nature and dominion over the dead. These eschatological aspects will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Function of הָעֵבָר

The purpose of this section is to synthesize and summarize the main aspects of the function of הָעֵבָר in light of the conclusions made concerning the nature of the term in the Torah as discussed in the previous segment. In fact, the function of the

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term הַשָּׁוֶל springs directly out of its nature and character.

One of its functions is termination of man’s agonizing grief and suffering. For Jacob, the loss of his beloved son Joseph is real and therefore his grief is genuine (Gen 37:35). “Going down” to Sheol would put an end to Jacob’s suffering. The same actual anguish for Joseph and projected heartache for Benjamin are emphasized in Gen 42:38, and the same motif is reiterated in Gen 44:29-34 by Judah.

Sheol also functions as the tool of punishment.1 In Num 16:25-35 the following pattern can be found: (1) accusation, (2) proclamation of judgment, and (3) execution of judgment, which is followed by public reaction. The unit not only describes the rebellion of Korah and his followers but also presents a prototype of the suddenness, totality, and finality of their destruction. In vss. 30-33 various interchangeable elements of personification are used, such as ground/earth, which “opens its mouth,” “swallows them up,” and then “covers them up.” These concise phrases point to the specific aspects of the function of Sheol in times of Yahweh’s active intervention and judgments, that is, their burial alive in the grave.

The function of Sheol is limited. In highly graphic language Moses describes the universality of Yahweh’s burning anger against His disloyal people, so that even the deepest Sheol is powerless to stand against Yahweh’s might and protect her dead ones (Deut 32:22).

The term Sheol is employed to emphasize the contrast existing between the state of “the dead and the living.”2 Not even once is Sheol associated with the living,

1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 24:19; Ps 9:17, etc.

2 Num 16:46; Deut 30:15, 19; 1 Sam 2:6; Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5.

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other than by contrast. Moreover, when Moses calls “heaven and earth as witnesses”
to testify on behalf of the Lord, he never mentions Sheol or “the realm of the dead.”

Another function of Sheol calls attention to its antithetical aspect which
characterizes it as cosmologically opposite to heaven. The formulaic expression
רנדה \כז \א \פ (Deut 32:22) forms the strongest contrast to heaven. However, it
is impossible to make any definite observation from the expression as to some existing
subterranean region or underworld where the departed souls continue their miserable
existence.

Finally, its theological and historical dimensions illustrate that Sheol functions
only temporarily. It will suffice to say that Sheol started to operate when, through the
disobedience of two individuals, sin claimed dominion over the whole human family.
From that moment on, death and Sheol exercise their power over all the living (Gen
3). However, the key to Sheol’s total destruction is found in the restoration promises
of the Scripture.

Purpose of לְאֵמוֹן

The purpose of Sheol is deeply integrated with its nature and function. In
order to discover it in the Torah, the last section of this chapter focuses on the
question, “Why is the term לְאֵמוֹן employed by the author?”

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1 See Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1.
2 Compare Deut 32:22; Job 11:8; Ps 139:8; Isa 57:9; Amos 9:2.
3 Deut 32:29; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 17:22; Job 14:12; 19:25-27; Pss 1:6; 16:10;
17:15; 49:15; 71:20; 73:24; 88:10; Isa 25:8; 26:14, 19; 53:11; Ezek 37:10; Dan 12:2;
Hos 6:2.

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One of the main intentions of the employment of the term Sheol is to remind us that by nature man is mortal, and that is true in regard to all human beings. It is obvious that the author's intent was not to provide a detailed description of the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol/grave in the Torah. However, the usage of highly figurative language and imagery in the case of the death of Korah and the others in Num 16 clearly indicates that after death, while being in Sheol, a person has no second opportunity to change one's destiny.

Death, both of the righteous and the wicked, is followed by the grave, Sheol. However, the author goes a little further and alludes to the logical conclusion of this observation. If death is the end, then the grave puts down and brings to rest some of the most violent actions against Yahweh by human beings (Num 16). The striking and refreshing effect of this aspect in the emotion-filled report of the death of Korah and all those who dare to stand against Yahweh finds its renewed authority in the number of parallel references.

Sheol is the great leveler; namely, it does not matter who was there—Jacob, Joseph, Korah with all his followers; all those who lived once righteously or led a life of rebellion by murmuring against Moses and Yahweh, or strove for dominance in life—all went down to Sheol.

Its purpose is to point out that the place of the dead, Sheol (grave, pit), is the opposite to the land of the living in which alone the divine presence can be experienced and its redemptive and life-giving opportunities are available. It means that if one cannot live beyond the grave, the significance of human life as such must be explored for its true and lasting meaning.
Another important aspect of its purpose is to point out that Yahweh is the One who indicts and judges. He is able to remove the people who are too wise in their own eyes. It is clear that this is Yahweh’s great reckoning with all who “in the land of the living,” declare themselves to be “god” and scorn “the Rock of salvation.”

Against this background Yahweh addresses the display of the disobedience of the people of Israel, which in their days dared to defy Yahweh’s sovereignty (Deut 32). The indictment and judgment by Yahweh echo with the dreadful inevitability of the unavoidable destruction that makes up the covenant curses (Deut 32:22-24).

The judgment pronounced over the living always leaves open the option of discerning evil and turning away from it. Therefore, the author’s description of the death of Korah and his group contains a somber note of warning. “These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; הַיָּמְתֵּן וְאָסַף בְּרָאשׁוֹן ("and they became a warning sign"). The meaning of the word בָּשָׂר ("signal pole," "sign") is that of conspicuousness, in order to attract attention and constitute a warning. At the same time Yahweh in His judgment bestows saving terror on those who see it, in the hope that they will awake and start to fear Him and return to Him.

1Deut 32:15-29; Ps 52:5.

2Num 26:9, 10. Compare with Ps 60:6, “You have set up a banner for those who fear you.” Those who “fear” Yahweh will find protection from the attacks of the evil one, who is symbolized by the “bow.” The confidence of the righteous lies in Yahweh, who is the Divine Warrior. See also Isa 11:10.
The reference to Sheol often serves as the affirmation of Yahweh's sovereignty as is seen from Korah's and his followers' descent to Sheol. The description of how "Yahweh creates a creation . . ." (Num 16:30-33) emphasizes the degree and extent of His sovereignty, as does the "going down alive into Sheol." In fact, it is a part of the background upon which trust and hope are established in Yahweh's future actions.

Since Yahweh is the Creator of everything He is also the Lord over human life and history (Deut 10:17; 32:6). No person or nation is self-created. The people of Yahweh, religious leaders, and nations draw their strength and energy from the resources provided by Him and they receive their high status by divine appointment. Yahweh not only holds the keys of human history, but also He is in control of the dead in Sheol beneath. Like Moses' contemporaries, the church must recognize the futility of reliance on one's own power, for its confidence should be rooted in God alone.

Sheol is not to be confused with such concepts as "abode" or "underworld," which scholars try to associate with continuous existence of the departed spirits. It is quite obvious that in the Torah Sheol is equivalent to the place of the dead and contains no allusion to one's after death survival in the grave in any form.

While evaluating the seven references to Sheol, the reader must remember that the primary aim of the term is not doctrinal, but experiential (Gen 32, 42, 44), instructional (Num 16), and doxological (Deut 32). The author wants the reader to understand the anguish and love of Jacob towards his son Joseph, which is so deep that he is ready to die, and at the same time by Korah's tragic experience be warned of the dangers of rebellion against Yahweh. As another dimension of the given references, the author's intention to inspire faithfulness in the hearts of his people and
later generations could be mentioned. It is crucially important to have an understanding of human responsibility before Yahweh and the far-reaching consequences in the case of the eventual termination of life, whether of the righteous or the wicked.

Finally, although the seven references to Sheol in the Torah do not provide a straightforward description of a final eschatological judgment, or discuss the final fiery retribution of the wicked or the reward of resurrection of the righteous from their graves, some of them contain allusions to it and function as a prototype of the last events, as, for example, Num 16. All of these prophetic developments will be discussed in other parts of the Hebrew Scripture and find their fulfillment in later days.¹

Excursus 1

ительно ליהוה and Its Conceptual Links in the Torah

Introduction

It should be noted that the phrase in Gen 37:35 ("I will go down to my son") finds its counterpart in the biblical formulas that have different wording but convey the same anthropological and theological reality.² They contain not only conceptual links but also form terminological bridges by employing various

¹See especially Excursus 2 and 3 at the end of corresponding chapters.

²In table 2 are found the following four parallel terms expressing the same idea as נתן, namely, (1) ניטני ("go," Isa 38:10; Qoh 9:10), (2) לומד ("be low," "sink," Isa 57:9), (3) מרסי ("step," "march," Prov 5:5), and (4) דאכנ ("go down," "descend," Job 21:13). Other formulas containing the verb נתן referring to the dead or grave will be explored in the next two chapters.
key terms, as will be seen below. Note in particular that such exact statements
as יְאָלָה ("gathered to his people"), יְאָלָה ("gathered
to my people"), יִאֶלָה ("gathered to your people"), and יְאָלָה ("gathered to their fathers") are idioms of death and describe the
same reality as in Gen 37:35 where the term Sheol appears. Therefore, it is necessary
to investigate briefly some of the main and parallel terminological and phraseological
references that are based on these and other specific governing words or phrases
which, after having been discovered and applied to the whole context of the Torah,
will help to recognize their interrelatedness and clarify the major issues.

**םֹיק within Formula**

Table 6 shows the usage of יְאָלָה ("gather," "collect") within the formula, its
variations, and its parallel vocabulary in the Torah where the term יְאָלָה occurs twelve
times. It should also be noted that all of its occurrences appear in prose.

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2 Gen 49:29.
3 Num 27:13; 31:2; Deut 32:50.
5 See Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic, 186-188.
6 The discussion on the term יְאָלָה will be continued in Excursus 2 and 3, which are at the end of chapters 2 and 3.
# TABLE 6

**UASGE OF קָבָל WITHIN THE FORMULA, ITS VARIATIONS, AND ITS PARALLEL TERMINOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Formula</th>
<th>Formula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gen 25:8</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם אַל-עָפָרִים</td>
<td>and was gathered to his people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Abraham breathed his last and died</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gen 25:17</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>and was gathered to his people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>he breathed his last and died</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gen 35:29</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>and was gathered to his people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Isaac breathed his last and died</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gen 49:29</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>bury me with (to) my fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I am to be gathered to my people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gen 49:33</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>and was gathered to his people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and he drew up [gathered] his feet and breathed his last</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Num 20:24</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>let Aaron be gathered to his people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Num 20:26</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>and he shall die there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Aaron shall be gathered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Num 27:13</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>as your brother Aaron was gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>you shall be gathered to your people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Num 31:2</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>you shall be gathered to your people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Deut 32:50</td>
<td>יָּבֹא קֶרֶם</td>
<td>and shall be gathered to your people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>you shall die on the mountain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and was gathered to his people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as Aaron died</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional Terminology

In order to better understand the main concepts and elements of importance and their inner relationship and explanatory functions, table 7 presents additional parallel key terminology relevant to the current subject.

TABLE 7

ADDITIONAL PARALLEL TERMINOLOGY RELATING TO DEATH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Terminology of Death</th>
<th>Terminology of Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen 3:19</td>
<td>קִיֵּמְךָ אל-יָדֵיָךְ</td>
<td>יָרֵאָל עֵמוּיָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for you are dust</td>
<td>until you return to the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and to dust you shall return</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen 15:15</td>
<td>בֵּית בֵּית שֵׁבַע</td>
<td>בֵּית נַפַל קִינָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you shall be buried in a good old age</td>
<td>you shall go to your fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen 47:30</td>
<td>בָּרַבְרֹתֵי בֵּיתֶךָ</td>
<td>תִּשְׁבָּחֲךָ עֵמֶל אֶבָּתִי</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bury me in their burial place</td>
<td>when I lie down with my fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 31:16</td>
<td>שַׁבֵּךְ עֵמֶל אֶבָּתִי</td>
<td>שַׁבֵּךְ עֵמֶל אֶבָּתִי</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you will lie down with your fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of the Key Vocabulary

The key vocabulary as presented in tables 6 and 7 consists of seven verbs and five nouns.¹ The Niphal of the verb יָרֵאָל ("to be gathered")² usually has a passive

¹Verbs: יָרֵאָל, קִיֵּמְךָ, בֵּית בֵּית, בָּרַבְרֹתֵי, שַׁבֵּךְ, בֵּית נַפַל, בֵּית נַפַל קִינָה. Nouns: עֵמוּי, יָרֵאָל, שָׁבָע, שָׁבָע, מַחְתּ, בָּרַבְרֹתֵי, בָּרַבְרֹתֵי בֵּיתֶךָ, שַׁבֵּךְ עֵמֶל אֶבָּתִי, בֵּית נַפַל קִינָה.

meaning. As can be seen from table 6, דוד stands side by side with such parallel key words as דוד (“die,” “kill,” 6 times),1 דוד (“be dead,” “die,” “perish,” “give up the ghost,” 4 times),2 and דוד (”bury,” once),3 which strongly suggests that the phrase “to be gathered” is another way to express “to be buried.” Table 7 contains three more verbs, דוד (“return”), דוד (“go,” “come,” “enter”), and דוד (“lie down”), all of which in specific settings pertain to the concept of death and burial. In the context of the family grave, such expressions as “to go down to,” “to go to,” “to be gathered to,” and “to lie down with” clearly allude to death including all its aspects, whereas the phrases “to my/your fathers,” “to my/his/your people,” or “to my son” refer to the grave, dust, and are equal to the qualitative formula given by Yahweh, “for dust you are,” and “to dust you will return” (Gen 3:19). Thus, to “be gathered to” or “go down to” one’s “people,” “fathers,” or “son” who are “dust” means to become dust, respectively, to be dead and buried next to one’s ancestors. According to Westermann, the phrase דוד (”Abraham breathed his last and died”) describes a process, the gradual passing away, and דוד (”and 


3 Altogether the verb is used 132 times, always of human burial. Laird R. Harris, “ד�,” TWOT, 2:784.
was gathered to his people”) means that he is dead, buried, and numbered among the dead.¹

Specifics of Jacob’s Death

A very strong statement of Jacob’s specified wish, which serves as a foundation for Joseph’s future action and its positive outcome, is found in Gen 47:30. It provides the reader with insightful information in relation to the current issue. The verse starts with a protasis of a condition, דוקא דותנ (“when I lie down with my fathers”), that is when I am dead, which is followed by the apodosis, a positive command עוניס אתיי (“carry me out of Egypt”)² that leads to the desired culmination, namely, תдиין ודרכי (“and bury me in their burial place”).³ These three clauses are not only parallel but also sequential. The verb קפכ (“lie down”)⁴ is parallel to מבר (“bury”), and קפכ (“with my fathers”) is parallel

¹Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 397. The phrase is also used to describe the death of Ishmael (Gen 25:17), and Isaac (Gen 35:29), and relates to Jacob’s death (Gen 49:33). Countless examples could be quoted from today’s conversational European languages (Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, German, etc.), where “to be gathered to his fathers” or especially “to go to one’s fathers” means simply “to die” or “to be buried” and nothing more.

²It is the opposite of Jacob’s request of vs. 29, תני הם לבר (“Do not bury me in Egypt”).

³For a discussion of “in their grave,” see Westermann, Genesis 37-50, 183.

⁴See Gen 47:30; Deut 31:16. The verb “lie down” occurs 40 times (mostly in 1, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles).
to מ��ך ("in their burial place," or "in their grave")\(^1\) which leads to the three main questions: "How?" "Where?" and "When?"

**How?**

A partial answer to the question "How" is provided in Gen 49:33, which contains two parallel idiomatic expressions describing Jacob’s death: נמאח נאמחל (Qal, "and he drew up [gathered] his feet") and נמאח ("and breathed his last"), which are followed by נמאח (Nif., "and was gathered to his people"). Jacob is ready to die and that is why he draws (gathers) his feet into his bed (compare with Gen 48:2). In spite of the fact that the phrase נמאח as a hapax legomenon occurs only once in the Hebrew Scripture, it contains a "formula for dying."\(^2\) The second expression "and was gathered to his people" means that Jacob was dead, like his people who had died before.

**Where?**

According to R. De Vaux, the expression “to be gathered (united) to one’s fathers"\(^3\) or "to sleep with one’s fathers" in the days of the patriarchs referred to the

\(^1\)Gen 47:30; Deut 34:6; 2 Kgs 9:28; 21:26; 23:30; Ezek 32:23-24.


\(^3\)For the negative expression “shall not be gathered” or “buried” see Jer 8:1 and 25:33; Ezek 29:5.
family tomb, but later related to death and the blood ties which reached beyond the
grave.  

Consequently, both Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt. Both were embalmed in
Egypt, but they were not buried there. They were buried in the land which God had
promised to their descendents. Jacob was buried in Hebron, in the field which
Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite, and Joseph—the bones of whom
Moses took with him to Palestine—was buried at Shechem in the spot of ground
bought by Jacob.

The presence of their graves in the land of promise, where the tombs of

1See also 2 Sam 21:13; 1 Chr 10:12; Roland De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life
and Institutions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 56-64; Eric M. Meyers, Jewish
30-45; Erik J. Smit, “Death and Burial Formulas in Kings and Chronicles Relating to
the Kings of Judah,” in Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of Die Ou-Testamentiese
Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika Held at the University of Stellenbosch 26th-29th July
1966, and Proceedings of the Second Meeting of Die Nuwe-Testamentiese
Werkgemeenskap van Suid-Afrika Held at the University of Stellenbosch 22nd-25th
July 1966 (Potchefstroom, 1966), 177-183; William I. Reed, “Burial,” IDB, 1:474-
476.

burial of Sarah (Gen 23:9, 17, 19). Later Abraham himself (Gen 25:9, 10), Isaac,
Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah were buried there (Gen 49:29-32; 50:13). It was natural for
a man to be buried in the tomb of his father (Judg 8:32; 16:31; 2 Sam 2:32; 17:23).
Moses, Aaron, and Rachel are buried elsewhere. See also Josh 24:32. To be buried
in a family tomb is not only a clearly stated desire but also a special privilege (Judg
8:32; 2 Sam 19:38, etc.), while failure “to be buried with one’s fathers” is considered
Scripture: Meaning and Method; Essays Presented to Anthony Tyrrell Hanson for His

3For further discussion see George R. Wright, “Grave under the Tree by the
Omphalos at Shechem,” VT 22 (1972): 477-486; Jason S. Bray, “Genesis 23—A
Abraham and Isaac were already, emphasized the major truth that in spite of the fact that they had to die in Egypt, they died in faith.\footnote{Heb 11:13 shows that faith was the fixed principle by which the patriarchs lived and died. The future eschatological aspect of the blessing of Jacob is emphasized in Gen 27:29, 37. When Isaac pronounced the blessing upon Jacob, the promises made to Abraham were rekindled concerning the future. Thus, the patriarchs’ decisions and actions served as an indicator of their faith (Gen 28:4). Though Joseph had achieved distinction and eminence in Egypt, his home was not there. With the anticipation that only faith awards, he saw “things not seen” (Heb 11:1) as clearly as the things happening in his time and acted in response to them with firm faith. In faith he saw that the anticipation of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt was certain because it was fundamental to the consciousness and awareness of the promise of possession of the land (Gen 50:24-25). His focus on the future links him to the other patriarchs by means of faith. That is why he “made mention of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial” (Heb 11:22).} The faith of patriarchs was rooted in the trust that God’s plans were indestructible, and that the promises were being worked out under His providence. It should be pointed out that the patriarchs’ faith is associated not only with receiving of blessings but also with burial in the Promised Land. When Jacob as a sojourner understood that he would soon die, he focused on the eschatological dimension through the exercise of faith in the awareness of the promises of God (Gen 47:29-31; 48:49). Burial in Canaan was an expression of trust in the promise of possession of the land in the nearby future (Gen 28:4; 50:24, 25).

When?

It is impossible to emphasize too strongly the fact that Joseph was “gathered to his fathers” only after centuries had passed and the second burial could take place. The Scripture contains nothing that would suggest or imply some kind of shadowy existence of the patriarchs immediately after their death or reburial. Moreover, this Hebrew custom of collecting the bones from the former burial places is in harmony
with the concept of Sheol, as it strongly emphasizes a connection which existed between the safekeeping or gathering of the bones with the concept of the individual bodily resurrection.¹

Scholarly Views

At one end of the spectrum are such scholars as I. Cornelius and A. Hill who suggest that the phrase “to be gathered” refers to “burial” and nothing more.² B. Levine sees in it several meanings, such as “being buried,” “being brought to the family grave,” or “resting with ancestors in Sheol.”³ W. Kaiser presents his argument in the following way:

Actually, the expression “he was gathered to his people” or “he went to his fathers” cannot mean that he was buried with his relatives and ancestors. In Genesis 25:8-9 such an analysis is impossible, because we know that none of Abraham’s kin, except his wife, was buried at the cave of Machpelah. . . . The event of being “gathered to one’s people” is always distinguished from the act of burial, which is described separately (Gen 25:8-9; 35:29; 49:29, 31, 33). In many cases only one ancestor was in the tomb (1 Kings 11:43; 22:40) or none at all.

¹When Jesus quotes Exod 3:6, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” and then adds an explanation that “He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:32), He suggests that one day the patriarchs will be resurrected in order to inherit the transcendent promises that God had spoken to them. Furthermore, Ezekiel’s eschatological vision about the resuscitation of the dry bones reveals a powerful truth, namely, there is hope beyond the grave and there is life after death. Only Yahweh has the power of resurrection and only He can bring back to life the dry bones lying in Sheol (Ezek 37). Donald A. Hagner, Hebrews, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 194, 195; Frederick F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 136, 137; Levy Y. Rahmani, “A Jewish Tomb on Shahin Hill, Jerusalem,” Israel Exploration Journal (IEJ) 8 (1958): 101-105.

²Izak Cornelius, Andrew E. Hill, and Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “.pag,” NIDOTTE, 1:470. In Judg 2:10, “the whole generation was gathered to their fathers.” Compare the formula so often found in 2 Kgs, “I will gather you to your fathers” with “you shall be gathered to your grave in peace” (2 Chr 34:28).

³Levine, Numbers 1-20, AB, 494.
(Deut 31:16; 1 Kings 2:10; 16:28; 2 Kings 21:18), so that “gathered to one’s people” could not mean being laid in the family sepulcher. Readers of the text should not infer something special from the use of Sheol in some of these texts. In every one of the sixty-five instances of Sheol in the Old Testament, it refers simply to ‘the grave,’ not to the shadowy region of the underworld.¹

In spite of the fact that none of these idioms contains the slightest allusion to any kind of existence after death, there are many commentators who imagine it and describe it. Thus, at the other end of the spectrum, though it is difficult to understand, are such scholars as B. Jacob, who has a diametrically opposite view. He finds in these formulas “a reunion of the soul, of the transfigured personality, with the souls of the ancestors.”² C. Keil and F. Delitzsch write about “the reunion in Sheol with friends who have gone before, and therefore presuppose faith in the personal continuance of man after death.”³

In order to clarify the issues under scrutiny even more it is indispensable to exegete the key text, Gen 3:19, which, as it will be demonstrated below, contains theological and anthropological rationale for human death and helps to clarify the


²Benno Jacob, The First Book of the Bible: Genesis (New York: KTAV, 1974), 165. J. Milgrom accepts the view of B. Alfrink concerning the formula “to be gathered to.” As a result he comes to the conclusion that the Torah speaks about three stages of the patriarchs’ death: (1) they die, (2) they are “gathered,” meaning “the act that takes place after dying but before burial. Thus it can neither mean to die nor to be buried in the family tomb. Rather, it means ‘be reunited with one’s ancestors’ and refers to the afterlife in Sheol,” and (3) they are buried. See Milgrom, Numbers 169, 170, 407; Alfrink, “L’Expression אֵלָלָה מַהְוֹל,” OTS, 118-131.

³Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 1:263.
nature and function of Sheol. The verse is verbally linked to Gen 2:7 and alludes to the fulfillment of the words of Gen 2:17. The idea that a human is only dust is echoed in various passages of the Scripture. For instance, the term הָעָשֶׂה ("dust," "earth," "ashes") occurs twice in Gen 3:19, and twelve times it is used to describe the quality or material from which the human body is formed and the original state to which it will return (יהָשָׁב). The verb יָשָׂב plays an important role in the context of death and life. For instance, 2 Sam 12:23 speaks about returning from death to life, namely, "Can I bring him back again?", and Qoh 12:7 underlines the reverse, יָשָׂב הָעָשֶׂה תּוֹלָדוֹתָו מִשְׁכָּהוֹ ("and the dust will return to the earth as it was"). These and many other passages make it clear why the dead can be equated with dust.

It should be noted that at least in ten cases the הָעָשֶׂה of the earth corresponds to the grave. Moreover, הָעָשֶׂה functions as a typical element of הָעָשֶׂה and is equivalent

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1Gen 2:7; 3:19 (twice); Job 4:19; 8:19; 10:9; 34:15; Pss 103:14; 104:29; Qoh 3:20 (twice); 12:7.

with it in Job 17:16 and as its synonym "ID PTID IK" is found in Job 20:11; 21:26; Ps 30:10.\(^1\) This may also be mentioned as an illustration of metonymy in Hebrew thought.

The term "ID PTID IK" ("ground")\(^2\) occurs in Dan 12:2 and is parallel with "ID PTID IK". N. Ridderbos, N. Tromp, J. Collins, and others come to the conclusion that the expression "ID PTID IK" ("the dust of the earth") signifies "netherworld" or "ID PTID IK".\(^3\) It is significant to note that Dan 12:2 echoes Gen 2:7 and 3:19 where the two terms are employed side by side and present the origin of this metaphorical image. However, the terms "ID PTID IK" and "ID PTID IK" are also used in other combinations as symbols to represent the grave or its dead.\(^4\) The fact that in the Hebrew Scripture Sheol is often

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\(^2\) Gen 3:19; Num 16:30, 31, 32. In Gen 3:17 the ground is cursed. It has become the substance in which the dead are bedded down, that is, the dead sleep in "the dust of the earth" (Dan 12:2). To be blotted out from the "ID PTID IK" means death (Gen 6:7; 7:4, 23). To be on the "ID PTID IK" means life (Exod 20:12; Deut 4:40; 30:20). Josef G. Plöger, "ID PTID IK," TDOT, 1:88-98.

\(^3\) Ridderbos writes: "Wir ziehen es vor, den Ausdruck aufzufassen als 'das Land des Staubes, d.h. Die Sjeol'" ("We prefer to interpret the expression as 'the land of dust,' i.e., Sheol"). Ridderbos, ""ID PTID IK" als Staub des Totenortes," 177; see also Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 91; John J. Collins, Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 392.

called a "land," but instead of הָעָרָה its synonym הָאָרָה ("earth," "land") is used for its designation, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Key Vocabulary and Its Links

It is apparent that the key vocabulary and phraseology with their parallel and interrelated terminology and intertextual relationships result in exposition of the crucial term "Sheol," thus helping to clarify other vitally important issues which have been investigated in this chapter in relation to the main theme. Now it is necessary to emphasize the main features of the given statements and to engage in a concluding comparative summing-up of the key terminology and phraseology referring directly or indirectly to Sheol and their parallels in the context of death in the whole Torah. Consequently, the major key words and formulas form the following explicit links:

1. **Structural.** All formulas under scrutiny contain fixed order, namely,
   
   verb → preposition → noun.

2. **Verbal.** Various verbs in different death-related formulas refer to dying and the grave.

3. **Prepositional.** In all cases the preposition בָּעַס (only in construct and almost always with makkeph) signifies motion to a physical location, especially with the verbs of movement such as רָמַע, בָּיָט, מָכַב, etc.

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“together with,” “in the company of,” etc.), that is often used in such idioms as “he slept with his fathers,” has the power of describing the common lot of mankind.¹

4. **Thematic.** All expressions including their key terminology in one way or another refer to death, burial, or the grave.

5. **Intertextual.** The intertextual study of the terminological and phraseological elements reveals their interdependence and clarifies their nature and function.

Synthesis of the explored elements yields the following formula: Death (verbs of movement—“go down,” “return,” “lie down,” etc.) → Burial (preposition expressing motion to a place) → Location (“grave,” “to (with) fathers,” “to (with) people,” “to son,” “to Sheol,” etc.). Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the phrase “to go down to Sheol” (Gen 37:35) is used to describe death, burial (implied), and location, as all the other related formulas do.

**Intertextual Dependency**

Exegetical arguments show that there is not only an intertextual dependency among the key words and phrases dealing with the question of Sheol in its direct contexts, but that they also allude to and are interrelated and interconnected with the first three chapters of Genesis (Gen 2:7, 17, and 3:19), in which the main anthropological and theological elements find their beginnings and explanation. The interrelatedness and interdependence of these links demonstrate not only their strength, but also show that the formulas under discussion are not left hanging in the

air to be understood in isolation. In other words, they have a common starting reference point.

Gen 37:35 for I will go down to my son (to Sheol)

Deut 32:50 and was gathered to his people

Gen 15:15 you shall go to your fathers

Deut 31:16 you will lie down with your fathers

Gen 3:19 until you return to the ground

All these formulas by their nature are parallel/synonymous expressions. Such common Hebrew figures of speech as to “go to” one’s fathers (Gen 15:15), “go down” or “bring down” (Gen 37:35; 42:38, etc.), “to be gathered to” one’s people (Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29), “to be gathered to” one’s fathers (Judg 2:10), or “to lie down/sleep with” one’s fathers (Gen 47:30; Deut 31:16; 2 Kgs 10:35, etc.) are used figuratively in the given contexts. Therefore, to enforce upon them a literal meaning is a methodological mistake that leads to wrong theological conclusions because they are ordinary Hebrew euphemisms meaning simply “to die.” To imply from these expressions the immortality of the soul apart from the body is to misread the Scriptures. Such central characters of the Torah as Abraham,1 Ishmael,2 Isaac,3 Jacob,4 Joseph,5

1Gen 25:8; 26:18; John 8:52.

2Gen 25:17.

3Gen 35:29.

4Gen 49:29, 33.

5Gen 50:24, 26.

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Moses,¹ and Aaron² eventually died without receiving the promise and were buried.³ The term “bury” or “be buried” emphasizes even more the view just expressed. All the patriarchs were buried as their fathers had been buried and are resting in their graves.

**Anthropological Issues and Elements**

Whatever the reasons are, it is no coincidence that by misreading and misapplying the biblical text and its context, G. Driver comes to a strange and paradoxical conclusion:

One of the Psalmists seems to make clear what the ancient Hebrews thought when a man was ‘gathered to his fathers’; for he says that, when a man dies, ‘his soul shall go to the generation of his father’ (Ps 49:19). In other words, firstly he expires; then his soul or spirit, *i. e.*, that part of him which is immortal, leaves this world and ‘is gathered to his fathers’ in the world below, where his ancestors already are; and lastly his body is consigned to a grave, commonly the ancestor grave, in the world above.⁴

If according to G. Driver the soul is immortal, and the term יְבַלְקָנָה in Gen 37:35 describes the place where departed spirits or souls go, it shows how critically important is the approach one uses for framing anthropological questions. In this

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¹Num 27:13; 31:2; Deut 32:50; Heb 10:28. The idiom “to be gathered to one’s people” is made especially clear by the text itself in Deut 32:50.

²Num 20:24, 28; Deut 10:6; 32:50.

³Compare the following texts: Heb 11:10, 13, 39, 40; Matt 16:27; 1 Thess 4:16, 17; Col 3:3, 4.

connection it is necessary to address the problem from another angle, that is, to briefly explore some essential and crucial anthropological issues that would bring clarity which comes from the biblical text itself. Amid an enormous conflict over one of the basic words of biblical anthropology, מַעַן, and the nature of man, only the Hebrew Scripture can serve as a standing ground from which to discern, accept, or reject the major assumptions of the day.

“Living Soul”

Gen 2:7 has documented the fact that after the man was formed, God breathed into his nostrils the חֵיֶן ("breath of life"), and "the lifeless body became יָדָר מַעַן ("a living soul") or a living being." The adjective מַעַן means “alive” and no more. The term מַעַן is related to the verbal root מַעַן “to breathe,” “take breath,” and metaphorically means “life” (Deut 24:6).

Unfortunately, various scholarly statements referring to Sheol repeatedly demonstrate the fact, that the account of man’s creation has often been construed as the infusion of a “soul” or some incorporeal, abstract, metaphysical, or spiritual component into a human body. However, such an assumption contradicts the foundational biblical text. There is no reference in the Hebrew Bible saying “that a

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2 This issue will be addressed in the next three chapters.
man was supplied with a *nephesh,* but rather he *is* a nephesh ("soul"), a person, or individual. The usage of nephesh for both man and animals (Gen 1:20, 24, 30; 2:19; 7:21) confirms that there is nothing immortal in relation to it, or even pertaining to some mysterious higher functions.

Furthermore, neither the basic elements comprising man, nor the modus operandi applied at Creation, as described in Gen 2:7, alludes to anything like a "soul"

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2When Abraham left for Canaan he took "the souls (nephesh) whom they had acquired in Haran" (Gen 12:5). In Gen 14:21 the king of Sodom asks, "Give me the souls (nephesh), but take the goods for yourself." We read about "two souls" (נפוש); "seventy souls" (Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5); "832 souls" (Jer 52:28). During a census the main question is: How many souls are there? For other references see Gen 46:15, 18, 22, 25; Exod 12:16; Lev 27:2; Num 19:18; 35:10; Deut 24:7; 2 Kgs 12:5; Judg 18:25; Isa 49:7; Ezek 18:4; Prov 28:17, etc. The blood is called nephesh in Lev 17:11.

3Eichrodt points out, "The unhappy rendering of the term by 'soul' opened the door from the start to the Greek beliefs concerning the soul." Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:135. The traditional rendering of nephesh as "soul" often misleads the reader since the semantic range of nephesh is much broader and various translations indicate extreme variations in meaning. For instance, in the KJV nephesh is translated as "soul" 428 times, "life" 119 times, "self" 19 times, "person" 30 times, "heart" 15 times, "mind" 15 times, "creature" 9 times, "dead" (body) 8 times, "body" 7 times, "desire" 5 times, "will" and "pleasure" 4 times, "man" 3 times, "appetite," "beast," "ghost," and "lust" 2 times.
in the dualistic sense. E. Jacob emphasizes that “the text clearly affirms that the 
nephesh is not given to man as a soul which might be considered as deposited in a 
body, but as the final result of divine activity which is a reality at once physical and 
spiritual.” L. Coenen explains that “nephesh means the whole man, his total 
existence, and it is the whole man that dies.” Hebrew Scripture strongly emphasizes 
a person as a unified whole and it does not picture life or some kind of existence apart 
from the body (Job: 26-27). It should also be noted that when Adam and Eve 
committed their first sin, the whole person was involved (mind, body, spirit, soul, see 
Gen 3), not just one part of their nature, but the whole self was affected. And when a 
man dies, the whole person dies.

“Dead Soul”

The idea becomes clearer when a “living soul” is contrasted with ἐνσαύλον (“a

1According to the dualistic view, inner and relational life takes place within an 
entity called “spirit” or “soul” and is immaterial in nature. It lives within the human 
organism and is able to function independently from it; however, animals are 
disadvantaged here. Dualism is generally coupled with the idea that a soul or spirit, 
separated from man in death, continues to function perpetually, hence, “immortal 
soul.” Concerning Greek dualistic philosophy and its influence on the biblical 
interpretation of the nature of man, see Claude Tresmontant, Essai sur la pensée 
ébraïque (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1953); Oscar Cullmann, Immortalité de l’âme ou 
résurrection des morts? Le témoignage du Nouveau Testament (Paris: Delachaux & 
Niestlé, 1956); compare Josef Scharbert, Fleisch, Geist und Seele im Pentateuch: Ein 
Beitrag zur Anthropologie der Pentateuchquellen (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches 

2Edmond Jacob, Theology of The Old Testament, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote 

3Lothar Coenen, “νεκρός,” The New International Dictionary of New 
Testament Theology (NIDNTT), ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 
1971), 1:444.
dead soul”) meaning a person, and not the soul of the dead. It should be particularly emphasized that often the Hebrew Bible designates the lifeless corpse simply by the term שֵׁ Unidos, thus emphasizing the personal identity of a dead individual, of one who has died. This is also clearly seen from the explanatory and instructional statements in Num 19:11, 13, where the reference to the שֵׁ Unidos of the dead is employed to denote the corpse in its totality, לֶחֶם הָעֵצָה אֵשָׂרָם מַחְצָת (v. 13). Concerning the שֵׁ Unidos of the dead E. Jacob writes: “In the Bible שֵׁ Unidos ref. only to the corpse prior to its final dissolution and while it still has distinguishing features.”

A “soul” is pronounced dead when its original union of נֶפֶשׁ (“breath of life”) and נַשְׂף מָרָא אֵרָם (“dust of the ground”) is terminated. Unlike the word נַפְשָׁה (“spirit,” “breath”) which is applied to God, man, and animals, Gen 2:7 uses נֶפֶשׁ as a special term for “breath” because it is man and man alone who is the

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1Lev 21:11; Num 6:6; 19:13. See Edmond Jacob, Theology of The Old Testament, 161. It should be noted that “In the LXX, however, nekros is not combined with psyche, soul. By thus accommodating the Gk. concept of a permanent soul contrasted with a transient body (the soul does not die), the way was prepared for the later infiltration of the doctrine of the soul’s immortality.” See Coenen, “νεκρός,” NIDNTT, 1:444.

2Lev 19:28; 21:1; 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:11; 9:6, 7, 10; Hag 2:13, etc.


receiver of the divine “breath of life.” “Breath” is a metonymy, meaning “life.” The breath of God refers to the cause of life, and נֶפֶשׂ (“nostril”) is associated with the “breath of life” (Isa 2:22). To have the “breath of life” or “breath” means to be alive (Deut 20:16; Josh 10:40; Job 27:3); the absence of it describes the dead (1 Kgs 17:17). Thus, there are no grounds for reading into the text that something divine, immortal, was imparted to man at his creation, which continues its existence after death in Sheol.

“And man became a living being” is the final result of the two-stage act of creation.

The Hebrew Scripture associates the נְפֶשׁ נֶפֶשׁ (“breath of life”) with the נֶפֶשׁ נֶפֶשׁ (“spirit [breath] of life”). Qoh 12:7 reminds us that when the life force, the נַפְשׁ (“spirit”) goes out, that is, “returns to God,“ man becomes a lifeless corpse. The term נַפְשׁ occurs 379 times in the Hebrew Bible, and not even once does it denote “an intelligent entity capable of existence apart from the physical body, so far as man is concerned.” L. Bailey asserts that “there is no hint, in this idea of a ‘return to God,’ of the later concept of a ‘soul’ which includes memory and personality.” Indeed, there is no text in the Hebrew Scripture where the נַפְשׁ of the

1 Gen 35:18; 1 Kgs 17:17; 19:4; Job 34:14; Qoh 12:7; Pss 104:29; 146:4; Lam 2:12; etc.


4 Bailey, Biblical Perspectives on Death, 41-47.
dead body separates itself from the corpse in order to continue its existence in Sheol. Moreover, such a phrase as “immortal soul” is nonexistent in the Hebrew Bible, since “immortal” is only that which never dies. Though “dead souls” were never a part of God’s original plan, biblical information concerning the process of dying and its consequences clearly contradicts dualistic thinking.

Gen 3:19—the Reversal of Gen 2:7

Biblical terminology found in Gen 3:19 describes death as a reversal process of Gen 2:7. In dying, a man who was formed from “the dust of the ground” reverts to his origins, respectively, “ground” and “dust” (Gen 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:35; Ps 104:29), and ‏לֶבֶן‏ (“wind,” “spirit”), which represents the life force entrusted to him for a period of time in the beginning, returns to God (Qoh 12:7). In fact, as K. Mathews reminds us, “death is precise fulfillment of what God had forewarned in Gen 2:17” and “what the serpent had denied (Gen 3:4).”¹ M. Henry emphasizes the same idea only by different wording, “This was a lie, a downright lie.... It was contrary to the word of God.”² When death arrives or after the reversal process of death has taken place, no individual or conscious entity survives or continues its existence in any conceivable form.³

¹Mathews, Genesis 1-11:26, NAC, 253-254.


³Pss 6:5; 30:9; 88:10; 115:17; 146:4; Isa 38:18, 19; Qoh 9:5, 6.
The inseparable relationship between the man’s creation from “dust” (Gen 2:7) and the “return” (Gen 3:19e-f) to the man’s beginnings is clearly outlined in the following chiastic structure, adopted with some modifications from S. Kempf.

\[ \begin{align*}
& \text{T} & & \text{A} \quad \text{you} & & \text{shall} & & \text{return}^1 \\
& \text{דוע} & & \text{ע} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(process)} \\
& \text{לשתך} & & \text{המגנה} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(place)} \\
& \text{לשתך} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(material)} \\
& \text{לשתך} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(material)} \\
& \text{לשתך} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(place)} \\
& \text{לשתך} & & \text{לשתך} & & \text{(process)} \\
\end{align*} \]

W. Holladay explains that the central meaning of the verb בָּשָׂר in Qal is to return to the point of departure. In the current case, the emphasized double repetition of בָּשָׂר clearly means only the dust of the ground and nothing more. R. Murphy points out that “this is a picture of dissolution, not of immortality, as if there were a redivus animae ad Deum, ‘the return of the soul to God.’” He also reminds us that the questions of the “soul” and of the life-breath are two totally different categories of thought, and that “the Israelites never speculated how the ‘I’ was in Sheol.” In other


\[ \text{[3]} \text{Roland E. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, WBC, vol. 23A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1992), 120.} \]

\[ \text{[4]} \text{Ibid.} \]
words, according to the scriptural paradigm death is simply the reversal of the creation and there is no ambiguity. M. Knibb expresses the same view: "In contrast Gen 3:19c, 'you are dust, and to dust you shall return,' reflects the view that death is the inevitable fate of all men, a view that under a variety of images occurs throughout the Old Testament: cf. e.g. 1 Kings 2:2; 2 Sam 14:14; Job 14:1-2." Indeed, both the elements constituting man, the procedure of forming him, as described in Gen 2:7, and the description of the process of dying in Gen 3:19, clearly contradict the dualistic thought that teaches the implantation of an immortal soul into a physical body.

The time of man's life on this earth is limited, and every grave testifies in support of this truth. Molded from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), man's only opportunity is to live between birth and death (Gen 3:19, 22). However, death is also an eschatological event. It means that the reversal can be and will be made only at the resurrection. That is why all hope of a life beyond the grave centers on the resurrection and resurrection alone, at the same time excluding any idea about a

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2It is interesting to note J. Sawyer's reference to Rashi's comment on Gen 2:7, who argues "that "12Ta1 in this verse is spelt with two Yodhs to symbolize two creations: one refers to this world and the other to the resurrection of the dead. The same word is spelt with only one Yodh in vs. 19 where the creation of the beasts of the field is described." John F. A. Sawyer, "Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead," VT 23 (1973): 218-234; see also Menahem M. Kasher, Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation: A Millennium Anthology (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1953), 94.
disembodied state.¹ M. Harris in his profound statement goes one step further than the other scholars when he explains, "Man is not immortal because he possesses or is a soul. He becomes immortal because God transforms him by raising him from the dead," and "resurrection is the sole means of acquiring immortality."²


CHAPTER 3

Sheol in the Prophets

The purpose of this chapter is to present a sustained exegesis of passages containing the term Sheol in the books of the Former and Latter Prophets. The Latter Prophets are frequently subdivided into the Major Prophets and the Book of the Twelve.

Former Prophets: Samuel and Kings

Introduction

The first part of this chapter deals with the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) or the so-called historical books. The books of Samuel focus on the establishment of kingship in Israel and its theological significance, whereas the books of Kings register the ups and downs of a united Israel, then the divided kingdom, and finally Judah alone.

In the Former Prophets there are only four references to the term Sheol: two of them occur in the books of Samuel (1 Sam 2:6; 2 Sam 22:6) and two in Kings (1 Kgs 2:6, 9). The first two are found in a poetical context, while the last two belong to the list of those nine references in the Hebrew Scriptures which occur in a narrative context. Beyond this point, in the Hebrew canon all the occurrences of the term Sheol, except Isa 7:11, are found in a poetical setting.
In order to discover the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol in the current study, the implementation and integration of exegetical procedures will be pursued according to the same pattern which was carried out in the examination of the relevant passages in the Torah.

Texts

1 Sam 2:6

יָהֵה יָמְטֵה וְנָתֵן שָאֹל לַחֲיָהּ

Translation and Textual Remarks

Yahweh puts to death and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

Text Unit and Its Genre

The Song of Hannah in 1 Sam 2:1-10 contains a clear-cut basic unit. It is easy to delineate the poem, as it is encircled by the narrative material, and starts with an initial transitional clause, הֵדֵת הַזָּהָבִים אֱלֹהִים יְהֹוָה (“Then Hannah prayed and said”), and is enveloped in vss. 1 and 10 by reference to לַחֲיָהּ (“horn”).

Identification of new themes or ideas set forth by the author helps to discern and outline smaller sections. Thematically the Song can be divided into three subunits: (1) “Salvation of the Faithful” (vss. 1-3); (2) “Yahweh’s Actions” (vss. 4-8);

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1See Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, BCTP (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 16, 17.

and (3) "Yahweh’s Judgment (vss. 9-10)."

It should be noted that vss. 6-8 contain a cluster of eight participles describing Yahweh’s dealings in pairs of antithetical parallels. Thus, the unit reaches its culmination by means of positive and negative actions, emphasizing various aspects of Yahweh’s deeds, and attributing to Him diametrical opposites, such as “Yahweh kills and brings to life“ (vs. 6); “brings down to Sheol and raises up” (vs. 6); “Yahweh makes poor and makes rich” (vs. 7); “he brings low, he also exalts” (vs. 7).²

The Song reflects the fundamental pattern of a hymnic literature; however, scholars cannot arrive at a single genre definition.³ For example, A. Bentzen

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¹ An interesting study was done by J. E. Cook where she divided the main block (vss. 2-10) according to the following pattern: vss. 2-3, Yahweh’s Attributes; vss. 4-5, Yahweh’s Guidance; vss. 6-8b, Yahweh’s Deeds; vss. 8c-9c, Yahweh’s Goal and Rationale, and vs. 10, Yahweh’s Deeds. Joan E. Cook, “The Song of Hannah: Text and Contexts” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1989), 87-95. See also discussion on strophic divisions by A. David Ritterspach, “Historical Criticism and the Song of Hannah,” in Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg, ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 68-74.


identifies it as a "Royal Psalm,"¹ and S. Mowinckel calls it a "Psalm of Thank
Offering."² R. Bergen suggests that the Song represents a "Poetic Hymn" or "Psalm
of Thanksgiving."³ G. Robinson comes to a similar conclusion and writes, "this is a
thanksgiving psalm."⁴ Whatever the case, it is obvious that Hannah’s monologue
with its prayer emphasis focuses on Yahweh, Who is the source of power, strength,
and triumph for those who fear Him.

Exegetical Notes

Before engaging in exegesis it should be noted that, as in the previously
discussed cases, so in 1 Sam 2:6, many scholars see in a reference to Sheol some kind
of existence after death. For instance, The Interpreters Bible explains that to Sheol
goes "not the self but a pale wraith or replica of the self" and "Sheol is the abode not
of an afterlife but of the dead."⁵ According to J. Willis, Sheol is "the abode of all
departed spirits both good and bad."⁶ P. Ackroyd states that Sheol is "a shadowy place

¹Bentzen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:95; Also John T. Willis, “The

²Sigmund Mowinckel, Samuelsboken: Det Gamle Testamente, 2 vols. (Oslo:
A. Aschehoug, 1936), 2:152.

³Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 75; Joyce G. Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction
and Commentary, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 55-56.

⁴Gnana Robinson, Let Us Be Like the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of
1 and 2 Samuel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 18.

⁵George B. Caird and John C. Schroeder, “1 Samuel,” The Interpreters Bible

⁶John T. Willis, First and Second Samuel (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1982), 42.
of no true life,”¹ but J. Baldwin sees it “as a huge underground cave, where judgment takes place (Deut 32:22; Ps 88:3-6).”²

Whatever methodology is used to come to such conclusions, these scholars fail to notice some crucial aspects and elements of the passage. The term הָנַח in vs. 6 is in the center of the Song of Hannah, which represents an intensively personal style of thanksgiving and an unambiguous offering of praise to Yahweh. Yahweh’s power is behind all of the future developing events which are totally impossible and unthinkable to accomplish through human or historical agencies or means.³ Syntactically Yahweh occupies the key place. In vss. 6-10 alone, His name is mentioned five times. In this short section, which consists of only 58 words, Yahweh is the subject of 18 different verbs.⁴ Moreover, if in vss. 4-5 the sentences are formulated in the passive without directly referring to the name of Yahweh (though it is clearly implied there), then, in vss. 6-8 not only is Yahweh mentioned by name but every verb is in the active voice.

In this catalogue of radical reversals vs. 6 contains a pair of antithetical parallels where the messages of the first line are reinforced by the opposites of the second line.


²Baldwin, 1 & 2 Samuel, TOTC, 57.


⁴Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 76.
Thus, the phrase יָ֙הִ֔נָּה יָ֙מָ֔לָה (“Yahweh puts to death”) is parallel to מְרַדֶּ֣ד שֵּׁאֲלָֽה (“He brings down to Sheol”), and וְיִֽהְוָ֣ה יָ֔מֵּ֖ת (“and He brings to life”) is parallel to וְיָ֣הַה יָ֖שָׁעֲל (“and He raises up”). These polar contrasts of vs. 6 demonstrate not only the tension between death and life, Sheol and resurrection, but also produce literary symmetry where the given image is solidified into a single whole with verbal opposites, thus reinforcing the theology of Yahweh’s sovereignty as the Creator over His creation.

Furthermore, the causative stem Hiphil is “pervasively used to describe killing in all kinds of contexts,” and “the fundamental idea is the cessation of life.”\(^1\) The clause יָ֙הִ֔נָּה יָ֙מָ֔לָה is parallel to Deut 32:39 יָ֙הִ֔נָּה יָ֙מָ֔לָה (“I put to death and I make alive”), where Yahweh functions as subject and the verbs are in the first person singular, Hiphil. The same phrasing consisting of Hiphil stem verbs is also reflected in the cry of the king of Israel in 2 Kgs 5:7, who realized that leprosy was a disease that only God could cure, רָֽאַֽי לָ֖מָֽתְהַתֶּֽה (“Am I God, to kill and make alive?”). These expressions are general affirmations, implying that Yahweh alone is in charge of person’s destiny.

Moreover, the phrase "\textit{נָקְתָה} מַמָּשָּׁרָה" is located in the context describing Yahweh as the Creator of the world (vs. 8) and alludes to Num 16:30, where the concept of life ("create"), which is inseparable from the name of Yahweh, is used to bring death and descent to Sheol. Thus, it is obvious that "the ability to deal death or life is a trait of divinity."\footnote{See the discussion on Num 16:30-33, \textit{ןָּמָשָּׁרָה} ("But if Yahweh creates a creation").}

It should also be noted that the motifs of life and death, true and false safety, and two diametrically opposite fates, which are repeatedly emphasized in the song, are also presented in the form of an insightful antithesis in vs. 9:\footnote{Jeffrey H. Tigay, \textit{Deuteronomy: Narrative and Poetry}, JPST Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 405. According to A. Johnson, these verses refer to a revitalizing not from physical death but from threat of death which even disease brings, "to be in sickness of body or weakness of circumstances is to experience the disintegrating power of death, and to be brought by Yahweh to the gates of Sheol; but to enjoy good health and material prosperity is to be allowed to walk with Him in fullness of life." Johnson, \textit{The Vitality of the Individual}, 108.}

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
יָכְלָה יְבִירָה אַמְּרָה
He will guard the feet of His saints

בַּרְשֵׁי בָּתְשֵׁי יְבוּמָה
but the wicked shall be silenced in darkness

כִּי בֵּלָה יֲבֵירָה אַמְּרָה
for not by might shall a man prevail
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

The text contains two important words, \textit{כִּיָּכְלָה} and \textit{כָּכְלָה}. The verb \textit{כִּיָּכְלָה} ("be or grow still," "lifeless," "silent") is in Niphal and basically means "to perish."\footnote{Fokkelman, \textit{Narrative Art and Poetry}, 4:104.}
“be destroyed,” or “die.”¹ In the context of sin, death, and punishment, one of the most commonly used words in the Hebrew Scriptures is the word TjOFt (“darkness”). Because of its identity with grave and death, the term TjOFt is used as a synonym or a poetic name for Sheol.² In vs. 9, the destiny of the wicked is presented in sharp contrast with those who walk with Yahweh. The ṣwF (“godly,” “saint”) is protected and victorious while the ungodly are silenced, they perish, and are in the TjOFt of Sheol. The phrase “but the wicked shall be silenced in darkness” provides additional information concerning the understanding of vs. 6.

Thus, the statement ṣwF “Yahweh puts to death and brings to life”)³ or the affirmation that ṣwF (“he brings down to Sheol and raises up”)⁴ has nothing to do with flaccid shades, the abode of departed spirits, an underground cave as a judgment place, or an underworld where persons exist in a form


³See Deut 32:39 where Yahweh affirms that ṣF (“and there is no god with me”), which recalls almost the same phraseology found in Deut 4:35, 39; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:32; Isa 44:6; 45:5, 6, 21, 22; 46:9.

⁴For the discussion of the term DwF (“go down”) as a standard expression of dying, see chapter 2.
of semi-life. The categorical announcements of vs. 6 contain no descriptive or figurative elements nor provide any other information which could offer some specific insights concerning the nature or function of the term Sheol. Furthermore, unlike the seven references of the word in the Torah, in vs. 6 Sheol occurs for the first time in the Hebrew Scriptures both without directive הַנָּחַפַת and without any prefixed particle preposition (see Deut 32:22). The structure of the Song, its genre, thematic arrangement, and its intention make it apparent that הַנָּחַפַת is a poetical synonym for הַנָּחַפַת ("grave") and nothing more. Here the term expresses its particular idea in the same manner as it does in the Torah.

Moreover, in vs. 6, הַנָּחַפַת is enclosed by the verbs הַנָּחַפַת ("to live") and הַנָּחַפַת ("go up," "ascend") which, according to Sawyer, especially in their causative stems, are Hebrew words for the resurrection of the dead and do not allude to an afterlife.

Analyzing the words for resurrection, Sawyer writes:

Possibly הַנָּחַפַת “to come up again,” as opposed to הַנָּחַפַת “to go down (to Sheol),” should be included here too, together with their causative stems; according to Rabbi Joshua, for instance, מָרָדְךָ הַנָּחַפַת מָרָדְךָ (the Lord) sends down to Sheol and brings up again (1 Sam 2:6) was the song sung by the warriors raised from the dead in Ezekiel’s vision (Sanh. 92b). The verse was also understood by the translators of the Targum as referring to “God’s raising up of the dead to everlasting life.”

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1 Harris, “Why Hebrew Sheol Was Translated ‘Grave,’” 61.

2 Sawyer, “Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead,” 218-234. For example, Sawyer quotes from Sanh. 91b הַנָּחַפַת הַנָּחַפַת הַנָּחַפַת “I put to death and I make alive” (Deut 32:39) to refer to the resurrection of the dead. Ibid., 220, 221. See also 1 Sam 2:6; Hos 6:2.

3 Ibid., 224, 225.
It is true that the resurrection of the dead does not occupy a central place in the Hebrew Scriptures; however, its “theological starting point is without doubt the consciousness of the unconditioned might of Yahweh.”¹ In this connection particularly close attention should be paid to the fact that Yahweh has the power to bring persons down to Sheol and to raise them up again, which is one of the main eschatological realities. Though it could be argued whether Hannah means death and resurrection or simply preservation from fatal sickness and imminent death,² one aspect is beyond doubt, namely, she did not sing about “going down to” the spirit world and emancipation from there. Moreover, the expressions “raises up” and “brings to life” function as the synonyms for the term “resurrection” and are intended to point to some kind of life after death which may allude only to a bodily resurrection.


In vs. 6, as in the whole Song, Hannah triumphs in Yahweh’s sovereignty and the principle that the final settlement of all things is in the hands of Yahweh the Creator who has the power over the living and the dead in a grave. In fact, the words of Hanna’s Song describing Yahweh’s supremacy and dealings, מָרָן רָאָל רְצִיל (“he brings down to Sheol and raises up”), serve as an implicit prophecy which was soon almost literally fulfilled in the lives of Saul and David, whereas its full materialization will be demonstrated during the last eschatological events.

2 Sam 22:6

The cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 22:1-51 contains one of the well-known psalms of David which naturally forms a basic unit. Scholars have tried to analyze it in various ways. For example, NIB discerns in the chap. three fundamental and distinct segments (vss. 1-20; 21-28; 29-51). On the other hand, the study done by R. Youngblood also points to three major divisions, but they result in a slightly different structure, and Bergen


constructs chap. 22 as a symmetrical chiasmus. Whatever approach is used, vs. 6 is a part of a larger segment which Youngblood designates as David's deliverance from his enemies (22:5-20) and splits into three subunits: (1) though death threatened, Yahweh heard me, vss. 5-7; (2) great is the Lord of heaven and earth, vss. 8-16; (3) though great in heaven, He saved me on earth, vss. 17-20.

The Psalm of David in chap. 22 towards the end of 2 Samuel and the Song of Hannah at the beginning of 1 Sam 2:1-10 not only have common vocabulary and themes but also form an inclusion, thus bracketing and framing the narrative's contents of both books. This inclusion establishes a theological background on which the books of Samuel are to be explored and understood. 2 Sam 22 also harmonizes the Song of Hannah by contemplating and celebrating the same past ultimate reality of Yahweh's sovereignty that was projected in the Song of Hannah.

Concerning its genre, it seems that this is one of those rare cases when biblical scholars are in almost undivided agreement. The text of 2 Sam 22 is a Royal Psalm

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a Praise for the Lord (vss. 1-4)
   b The Lord's deliverance of David (vss. 5-20)
   c Reasons for David's deliverance (vss. 21-29)
   b1 The Lord's deliverance of David (vss. 30-46)
   a1 Praise for the Lord (vss. 47-50)

d Postscript: the Lord's enduring support for the house of David (vs. 51)

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1Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 451.


of Thanksgiving, attributed to David, and it also exists separately as Psalm 18.¹ In vss. 5-7 its hymnic pattern is more similar to that of narrative.

Exegetical Notes

Only two persons in the Former Prophets use the term Sheol, namely, Hannah in 1 Sam 2:6 and David in 2 Sam 22:6 (also 1 Kgs 2:6, 9). Both of them employ metaphoric language and call attention to Sheol. In a way, both references structure the tragic story of Saul’s rejection and the acceptance of the outwardly less commendable David.²

The term יָדָו in vs. 6 has been understood by scholars variously. For instance, P. McCarter interprets the term as “the shadowy abode of the dead” and “place of interrogation.”³ H. Hertzberg points out that Sheol equals with “hell=the kingdom of the dead.”⁴ Noll understands that Sheol stands for

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²Noll, The Faces of David, 144.


⁴Hertzberg, 1 & 2 Samuel, 394. See also Cross and Freedman, “A Royal Song of Thanksgiving: 2 Sam 22,” where they speak about “the abode of the dead.”
“Underworld/Grave.” And according to Harris, the word Sheol means only “grave.”

In the light of various interpretations of the term Sheol in the current text, it is necessary to briefly highlight some of the major aspects of the whole segment (vss. 5-7) which leads to the theophany (vss. 8-17). In vss. 5-6, David graphically describes the deadly threats to his life. Being confronted by destructive powers of death, he uses the images of waters (vs. 5), "for the waves of death encompassed me"), and hunt (vs. 6), "the cords of Sheol entangled me"), and "the snares of death confronted me"). It should be noted in particular that by employing highly rich metaphorical phraseology, variation of perfect and imperfect tenses, plus chiastic structure consisting of four plural construct chains and four plural verbs with first-person-singular suffixes, the author reaches utmost intensity in his description of the deadly forces seeking his death.

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32 Sam 22:1, 4, 18, 19, 44; God delivered David from the power of all his enemies and from the power of Saul. Noll points out that this is an allusion to Saul (סער) because the term Sheol (שָׁאָול) occurs only twice in the book of Samuel, here and in Hannah’s prayer. See Noll, *The Faces of David*, 143; Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 206-207. Hertzberg refers to “David’s perils of war.” Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 394.


In vss. 5a and 6b the cola are started by the verb, while in vss. 5b and 6a they are concluded by the verb. This emotional and heartrending description of David’s impasse is followed by the tetra-colon of vs. 7 with his cry for urgent help, “in my distress I called upon the LORD; and I called to my God”) and “and from his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to His ears”). That is, the situation was so dangerous and the distress so overwhelming that humanly speaking no deliverance was possible. Yahweh’s answer and David’s rescue from death are the theophanic act by itself. Furthermore, the phrase “the cords of Sheol” is parallel to “the snares of death.” “The waves of death” and “the torrents of perdition” are virtually synonymous expressions for “the cords of Sheol,” and vs. 6 is synthetic to vs. 5. These are highly figurative and personified images that threaten David’s life. Thus far, the language of vss. 5, 6 does not contain any allusion pertaining to some kind of existence in Sheol or

1Ibid.

2Yahweh heard from His heavenly sanctuary: Pss 11:4; 29:9; 138:2; Isa 6:1; Mic 1:2; Hab 2:20.


4Compare with Job 18:9, 10; Pss 18:5, 6; 11:4; 116:3; 119:61; 129:4; 140:5.
David being in Sheol, as can also be seen from the following key terminology.

For example, the verb יָבֹא ("surround," "encompass") is used "exclusively in poignant descriptions of crisis," "conveys the idea of immense suffering," and occurs "in thanksgiving songs looking back to crisis with the intent of enhancing God's gift of deliverance."¹ The term בֵּית הָאָדָם ("worthlessness," "nothingness," "perdition," "swallower," etc.)² occurs twenty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible and seventeen times in the books of Genesis to Kings.³ In spite of the fact that the term בֵּית הָאָדָם relates to Sheol only a few times,⁴ it encompasses all that is in opposition to Yahweh.⁵ That is why its basic meaning serves as an ideal description of the very essence of Sheol, namely, the denial of life. The parallelism of בֵּית הָאָדָם to מַפֶּהַלְבָּב ("death") and מַפֶּהַלְבָּב is in particular noteworthy since it functions as a descriptive title of Sheol. In

¹Leslie C. Allen, "ינדוטה," NIDOTTE, 1:482.


³Noll, The Faces of David, 144; by using biblical texts Noll shows how the basic contextual meaning of the term בֵּית הָאָדָם is commonplace. Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 127.

⁴Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 127.

this chain of parallel vocabulary “death” is personified, namely, David is encompassed by “the waves of death” (vs. 5) and confronted by “the snares of death” (vs. 6). Death as opposed to life makes the contrast between life and death the only decisive options for David. Moreover, the whole context refers to Sheol with a meaning of the grave. This is due to the so-called synonymous parallelism, where the lines of vss. 5 and 6 have similar meanings, though analogous terminology does not involve exactly the same nuances or connotations.2

The term הַלָּמִים (“cord,” “rope”) in the phrase הַלָּמִים יַעֲאוֹל (“the cords of Sheol”) is used metaphorically to emphasize “the imminent mortal danger”3 to which David is exposed. The imagery of a hunt intensifies the description of a seemingly no-escape situation and his helplessness in the face of being overwhelmed by enemies. By synthesizing the phrase הַלָּמִים יַעֲאוֹל with מַקְשֵׁר רֹמָה (“the snares of death”) and the imagery of the deadly waters (vs. 5), the term הַלָּמִים serves to demonstrate the unyielding constriction worked out by the powers of death.

Finally, the verb כָּבָב (“turn around,” “encircle,” “surround”) in the phrase כָּבָב יַעֲאוֹל “is often used in a hostile or military sense.”4 Here it refers to


David's enemies who surround (בֵּיתוֹ) him and seek his death. It is also important to note that in the given context the first person singular suffix "יָוָה, which is attached to all four verbs in vss. 5 and 6 (יָוָה, יָוָה, יָוָה, יָוָה), points to David as the subject of all attacks, emphasizes his personal agony, and at the same time explains why he calls upon Yahweh for protection against his adversary.

In summary, in vss. 5 and 6 David describes the deadly dangers which encompassed him as having been so critical that he imagined himself as having already been dead in Sheol. He sees himself as being entangled in the cords of death, and being already in the grave. In these crucial circumstances only Yahweh is able to deliver and save him. These are the main emphases and message of the text.

David has in his mind death and the grave, and has nothing to do with "an underground region, shadowy and gloomy, where disembodied souls had a conscious but dull and inactive existence,"2 "a place of sorrows,"3 or how those in Sheol "are held captive with ropes."4 In fact, to hang any teaching about some kind of continued existence in Sheol on vs. 6 or to build something up and then try to adjust it to fit in the assumed pattern is an unsubstantiated exegetical attempt indeed.

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Translation and Textual Remarks

6 So act according to your wisdom
and do not let his gray hairs go down in peace to Sheol.
9 And now, do not leave him guiltless, for you are a wise man;
and you will know what you should do to him,
and you must bring his gray hairs with blood down to Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Generally the first two chapters of 1 Kgs are regarded as the conclusion of the
“Succession Narrative” (2 Sam 9-20) that marks a transition from one generation to
the next in David’s dynasty.¹ Chap. 2 falls naturally into two major parts:
David’s farewell speech and his death (vss. 1-12), and the establishment of Solomon’s
kingdom (vss. 13-46).² However, it is possible to divide the first part into smaller
subunits. David’s final charge to Solomon (vss. 1-9) consists of two smaller sections,
namely, adherence to the law of Moses (vss. 2-4), and David’s directions to Solomon


²B. Long splits chap. 2 into the following parts: (1) Report of farewell Speech
(vss. 1-9); (2) Report of death: concluding regnal resume (vss. 10-12); (3) The killing
of Adonijah (vss. 13-25); (4) The expulsion of Abiathar (vss. 26-27); (5) The killing of
Joab (vss. 28-35); (6) The killing of Shimei (vss. 36-46). Burke O. Long, 1 Kings with
an Introduction to Historical Literature, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
(FOTL), vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 41-57. See also Elmer B. Smick,
“Job,” EBC, 4:21; Simon John DeVries, 1 Kings, WBC, vol. 12 (Waco, TX: Word,
1985), 28-34.
(vss. 5-9). The last subunit is introduced by the composite particle מְנַבֵּה (“and also“), and is marked off from its surroundings by a shift in style. It consists of three parts:

1. Negative directive concerning Joab (vss. 5-6)
2. Positive directive concerning the sons of Barzillai (vs. 7)
3. Negative directive concerning Shimei (vss. 8-9).

The first and third segments are joined together by parallel terminology of wisdom and death. David’s allusion to Solomon’s “wisdom” and the observation that “you are a wise man” (vss. 6, 9) prepare Solomon for a decisive action in the nearest future.

The genre of the whole chapter, which is recounting various final acts and death of David, can be specified as a report of death. The directives of vss. 5-9 remind the reader of careful planning which at the same time contains allusions to self-justification. Though the narrative elements are minimal, one can specify the genre of vss. 1-9 as the report of a farewell speech. According to W. Koopman, 1 Kgs 2:1-10 is composed as narrative poetry.

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1 See 2 Sam 17:27-29; 19:31-40.
2 See 2 Sam 16:5-14.
4 Long, 1 Kings, 42.
5 Ibid., 43-45.
Exegetical Notes

In the books of Kings the term Sheol occurs only twice (1 Kgs 2:6, 9). It contains similar elements to those in Genesis, but there are also some differences which will become apparent below.

Again, it is striking that so many writers who explore and comment on the biblical text concerning the subject under discussion at the same time demonstrate religious assumptions and a marked reluctance to accept and affirm the text as it is. For instance, J. Gray, commenting on the current texts, creates the picture that “Sheol is the shadowy, insubstantial underworld.” D. Wiseman, in turn, points out that according to Hebrew thought one is supposed to enter Sheol “through the dark and dusty underworld of the grave.” And L. Honor explains that “it [Sheol] is the universal gathering place of the souls of the departed. . . . The verse expresses the common belief that the shade preserves the appearance . . . with which he made his exit from this world.”

These summary statements clearly bring out the necessity to briefly explore both Hebrew texts for the determination of the nature, function, and purpose of the

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1See Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31.


3Donald J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 76-77.

word Sheol. The context of vss. 6, 9 is unusual. David, who was an expert in the consolidating of power, in the crisis of succession of his death gives his son premeditated advice to guarantee the protection and safety of the throne after he is gone.¹ In vss. 6 and 9, David’s reference to Solomon’s wisdom means craftiness and slyness² and is understood as a direct hint to murder, that is, “you do know what to do with him,” “you will certainly find an opportunity” to get rid of Joab and Shimei legally, for they are a potential threat to the kingdom,³ and not only that.⁴

The phrase שֶׁאָלָּמָן שְׂדָהֶם (“do not let his gray hairs go down in peace to Sheol,” vs. 6) and its variation שָׁלֹם שֶׁאָל (“you must bring his gray hairs with blood down to Sheol,” vs. 9), with the abstract noun שֵׁנָּה, (“grayness,” “gray hairs”), partially echo Gen 42:38, 44:29, 31. Usually, the idiom “gray hairs” refers to an old age which naturally ends with cessation of life.⁵ However, concerning David, that is not the kind of death he wants for the two men.


⁴ “Afterward when David heard it, he said, ‘I and my kingdom are innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall on the head of Joab and on all his father’s house; and may there not fail from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, or who is a leper, or who takes hold of a distaff, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread’” (2 Sam 3:28-29).

As can be seen from vss. 6 and 9, the real intention of both expressions is focused on
the pronouncement of death sentences for Joab and Shimei.¹

Moreover, the wording “do not let . . . go down in peace to Sheol” and “you
must bring . . . with blood down to Sheol” reveals a totally new dimension that is
different from all that has been discussed before. In this connection it is vitally
important to emphasize that these statements do not present a qualifying description of
Sheol or the dead in the grave and should not be generalized or dogmatized. For
instance, the texts describing someone “going down” to Sheol in “mourning” (Gen
37:35), “in sorrow” (Gen 42:38; 44:31), “in misery” (Gen 44:29), “alive” (Num 16:30,
33), “not in peace” (1 Kgs 2:6), “with blood” (1 Kgs 2:9), or simply dying “in a good
old age, full of days” (1 Chr 29:28), provide explanatory information concerning the
way a person dies and have nothing to do with the conditions or distinctions in Sheol.²

In fact, the expression “do not let . . . go down in peace to Sheol” also implies the
opposite thought, suggesting that one may “go down in peace to Sheol.”

Furthermore, as was seen from the discussion on Gen 37:35 (Qal impf.), death
is described by the verb יָרָק as “going down,” but that is not all. According to Z.
Mayer, the Hiphil stem in vs. 6 יָרַק (Hi. impf. 2 m. s) and in vs. 9 יָרַק (Hi. pf.

¹“Do not let . . . in peace,” “bring down . . . with blood.” See Martin J. Mulder,
1 Kings 1-11, HCOT (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998-), 97-98. Also Robert L.
Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Books of Kings: The Case of the Dying
Monarch,” CBQ 47 (1985): 603-616; James S. Ackerman, “Knowing Good and Evil:
A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2,” JBL 109,
no. 1 (1990): 41-64; Jan W. Wesselius, “Joab’s Death and the Central Theme of the
Succession Narrative (2 Samuel IX-1 Kings II),” VT 40 (July 1990): 336-351;

²Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 193-194.
2 m. s.) highlights and expresses the responsibility of a second party for someone’s premature death. Solomon finds such a “second party” in the person of Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, who is ready to carry out the execution of Joab and Shimei without a trial or any other legal procedure. David’s last wish is fulfilled in detail when Solomon gives an order to Benaiah, מָשַׁלָּה הַיֶּהוֹוָה וָרָבָּא (“strike him down and bury him,” see vss. 29, 31). Consequently, 1 Kgs 2:34, 46 present an explicit and sequential description of Joab’s and Shimei’s murder by Benaiah.

TABLE 8

SEQUENTIAL PATTERN OF JOAB’S AND SHIMEI’S DEATH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Kgs 2:34</th>
<th>1 Kgs 2:46</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>יָעַל and he went up</td>
<td>יָעַל and he went out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיִּשָּׁלַג and struck him down</td>
<td>וַיִּשָּׁלַג and struck him down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיָּשָׁלְק and killed him</td>
<td>וַיָּשָׁלְק and killed him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיִּזְבֶּר and he was buried</td>
<td>וַיִּזְבֶּר and he died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בָּית at his own house</td>
<td>בָּית at his own house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בָּית in the wilderness</td>
<td>בָּית in the wilderness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the key words in this picture of death is נָכַר (“to encounter, “to meet”). When the verb נָכַר is followed by בּ, it serves not only as a synonym for the verb “to kill” but has a particular focused meaning, namely, “to strike down,” that is,

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“to kill with the sword,” “to execute.”¹ In vs. 34 הָעַל парallels the verb מָלַת ("to die," “to kill”) which is in Hi. impf. 3 m.s. and has the meaning of “to kill,” “to put to death.”²

Though the Former Prophets contain no information that Joab had rebelled against Yahweh in the way Korah and his company did (Num 16), Joab was guilty of the murder of Abner (2 Sam 3:22-27) and David did condemn the act: “May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil” (2 Sam 3:39). Joab died in the tent of the Lord beside the altar, where he had run to find refuge (vss. 28, 29). The expressions “do not let his gray hairs go down in peace to Sheol” and “you must bring his gray hairs with blood down to Sheol” were materialized and without doubt refer to the manner in which both Joab and Shimei died and to the committed murder as a fact.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in the current text there is absolutely nothing that would contain any descriptive element or hint concerning the nature or function of the term Sheol. Moreover, neither the text nor its context contains any key word or phrase that would allude to Joab’s or Shimei’s shadowy existence in Sheol after they were murdered and buried. Any reference to the punishment they must endure in Sheol or portrayal of the condition of their souls therein is absent.³


The fact that Joab "went down to Sheol" is mirrored and clarified in its parallel and self-explanatory phrase, "and was buried at his own house" (םבג פגוי ליבר), which simply means that he was dead/killed and was buried in the grave at his home in the wilderness (vs. 34).  

Latter Prophets: Isaiah and Ezekiel

Introduction

The second part of this chapter deals with the term Sheol in the books of the Latter Prophets which consist of four volumes. The first three books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) are directly related to particular persons, and because of their greater length are often designated as Major Prophets. The fourth volume, the Book of the Twelve, presents an anthology and will be studied in reference to the word Sheol in the next segment of this chapter.

In the Major Prophets the term Sheol occurs in only two books: ten times in the book of Isaiah, which is written for the most part in poetry, and five times in Ezekiel, where the major themes are the proclamation of judgment, hope, and restoration. No reference to Sheol is found in Jeremiah. It should be especially emphasized that in the Major Prophets the term Sheol primarily occurs in the contexts of a highly figurative and allegorical language.


2Isa 5:14; 7:11; 14:9, 11, 15; 28:15, 18; 38:10, 18; 57:9.

3Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27.
Texts

Isa 5:14

Therefore Sheol has opened wide its throat, and enlarged its mouth without limit. And down will go her 1 splendor and her multitude and her uproar and each one in her who exults. 2

Translation and Textual Remarks

Rhetorically, Isa 5:1-30 comprises one composite speech unit, which falls into two major sections: the Song of the Vineyard (vss. 1-7) 3 and Prophetic Announcement of Punishment (vss. 8-30). 4 The last section is marked by six אָלֶל (“alas,” “woe”)

1 The verse refers to Jerusalem (see Isa 22:2). That is why the NRSV renders the pronoun (תִּם) “in her splendor” as “the nobility in Jerusalem.”


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oracles (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22) which condemn the guilty people, and a fourfold 𐤀𐤌𐤊𐤃 (“therefore”) pattern (vss. 13, 14, 24, 25), which introduces the statements of judgment and its consequences. As a result, the structure splits into the following subunits: the first two 𐤀𐤌𐤊𐤃 (vss. 8-12) are followed by two 𐤀𐤌𐤊𐤃 (vss. 13-17), and the last four 𐤀𐤌𐤊𐤃 (vss. 18-23) are similarly followed by two 𐤀𐤌𐤊𐤃 (vss. 24-30).¹

The consequences of Yahweh’s judgment message in vs. 13 are expanded and intensified in vss. 14-17.² It should also be noted that vss. 13-17 are located in the center of a chiastic arrangement.³


²Adopted with minor changes from Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 122.

³(1) A Accusation: social injustice (vs. 8)
    B Announcement of judgment (vss. 9-10)
(II)    C Accusation: carousing (vss. 11-12a)
    D Accusation: failure to recognize Lord’s work (vs. 12b)
    E Announcement of judgment (vss. 13-17)
(III)    D¹ Accusation: failure to recognize Lord’s work (vss. 18-21)
    C¹ Accusation: carousing (vs. 22)
    A¹ Accusation: social injustice (vs. 23)
    B¹ Announcement of judgment (vss. 24-30)

Consequences

1) Exile of people
2) Humiliation of people
   a) Sheol opens mouth
   b) Nobility goes down to Sheol
   c) People are humiliated
   d) Yahweh is exalted
   e) Lambs will graze

The chapter as a whole (Isa 5:1-30) may be characterized as an allegorical judgment speech which displays two standard genre patterns. While vss. 1-7 function as an allegory\(^1\) to proclaim judgment against Israel and Judah, vss. 8-30 emphasize those standard elements that are found in the prophetic judgment speech.\(^2\) The reasons for Yahweh’s judgment are cast in the form of woe oracles,\(^3\) whereas their consequences are introduced by the adverb גֶּ֣פֶן which appears in vss. 13-17, 24, 25. The genre of the unit under discussion can be defined as the announcement of judgment of the prophetic judgment speech.

Exegetical Notes

Scholars perceive and interpret the term Sheol in the current passage variously.


\(^2\)Vss. 8-30. For detailed discussion see Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 126-127.

For example, G. Gray explains that Sheol is “a country under the earth,”¹ whereas D. Stacey clarifies that “Sheol is not to be confused with hell or purgatory. It simply represents the life of the grave, dark, cold, witless, horrific, and inevitable.”² J. Goldingay refers to the term Sheol in Isa 5:14 as “the home of dead people,” or more precisely, “an underground home for people’s personalities that is equivalent to the one the grave provides for their bodies.”³ The list of similar and sometimes even contradictory views could go on and on. However, as in the previous cases one must question whether these scholars who employ the term Sheol of Isa 5:14 as the reference to some gloomy type of existence have not read into the text the kind of information they want to find in order to support their views.

In this connection a few points of relevance should be addressed. The term Sheol is located in the midst of the sixfold employment of "חַיָּה" (vss. 8-22). Usually, the interjection חַיָּה introduces the accusation formula, which is followed by the announcement of judgment, and serves as a variant of the prophetic judgment speech.⁴

Thus, after presenting the list of specific accusations relating to the crimes

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committed by the oppressive and irresponsible wealthy (vss. 8, 11-12, 18-23), vs. 13 culminates in proclamation of the coming judgment in an unusually explicit reference to exile (vss. 13-17). In order to emphasize the great reversal in the lives of those who “have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (vs. 24), the picture of captivity is specified and reinforced by two technical terms, בנה (“hunger,” “famine”) and נאום (“thirst”). The judgment description of vs. 13 is continued, elaborated, and arranged progressively further in vss. 14-17. Both clauses in vs. 14, “Sheol has opened wide its throat” and “enlarged its mouth without limit,” are parallel and synonymous, as can be seen below:

At the same time, both expressions contribute to the intensification of the theme and to the climax of the consequences of Yahweh’s judgments. Moreover, here inanimate things are personified and “this is to show the great mortality of that day.”2

It is important to note that the verb נב (“opened wide”), like the verb נב (“to go into exile”) in vs. 13,3 is in the perfect tense and may be regarded as a prophetic perfect,4 expressing “facts which are undoubtedly imminent, and,

1See also vss. 9-10; 25-30.

2Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 864-866.


4GK, p. 312-313 (sec. 106n); p. 333 (sec. 112s).
therefore, in the imagination of the speaker, already accomplished."¹ Moreover, the message of the prophet refers not to life continuation in the underworld or survival in Sheol, but focuses on judgment, death, and the grave.

In this highly allegorical description, Sheol is characterized by anatomical terms as having סтоп (“throat,”) and מפ (“mouth”), which are parallel concepts and are used metonymically. One of the inherent functions of סтоп is swallowing, which in the current relationship to Sheol results in death.² The verb פז (“open wide”), with Sheol as subject, is in the causative stem and functions to emphasize the spatial aspect of her “throat.”³ Sheol is in full readiness to “swallow” the dead ones.

The other term מפ as a metaphor for an opening or hole is used in the same figurative sense as סтоп. The image of Sheol with wide-open mouth refers to its ability to receive instantly those who will perish in captivity. Moreover, the verb מפ

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¹Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:214, has diagrammed vss. 14-15 as follows:

vs. 14 הָעֲלַתָה simple prophetic perf., “will enlarge.”
   נָפַע coordinate perf., with waw conj., “and will open wide.”
   רָפַע coordinate perf., with waw conj., “and they will go down.”

vs. 15 מָלַי impf. suggesting consequences, “and will be bowed down.”
   מָשַׂה impf. suggesting consequences, “and they will be humbled.”
   מָשַׂה vivid simple impf., “are being humbled.”


("open wide") in the phrase יִבְנָה יָרַדְתָּה ("and enlarged its mouth") creates a forceful figure of the grave and death that may occur at any time. Even today, the implications of the figure are in force, namely, every newly dug-out grave has its "wide-open mouth," impatiently waiting to swallow up its corpses.

The imagery of the enormity of death and the grave, depicted as "enlarged throat" and "wide-open mouth," is not only reinforced and intensified but also dominated and finalized by the key verb יָרַדְתָּה ("and down will go"). What is more, the term יָרַדְתָּה points to the cause and consequences of the exile and provides an explanation why Sheol's mouth is wide-opened. In the given context Sheol is personified, pictured as alive, and ready to have its own "banquet," which is interlocked with such expressive imagery as יָרַדְתָּה ("and down will go") יָרַדְתָּה ("splendor"), יָרַדְתָּה ("multitude"), יָרַדְתָּה ("din," "uproar"), and יָרַדְתָּה ("exultant"). Furthermore, the expression יָרַדְתָּה יָרַדְתָּה reminds one of the parallel texts in the Torah where "the earth/ground opened its mouth" to swallow its victims and served as a synonymous designation for the grave.

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1 In the Hebrew Scriptures the term occurs only four times: Job 16:10; 29:23; Ps 119:13; Isa 5:14. Victor P. Hamilton, "1172," NIDOTTE, 3:652-653. It should also be noted that "the perfect with waw consecutive express a definite assurance or expectation. The coordination of the two perfects is somewhat loose and usually occurs when the reference is not to some definite or specific act but to that which may take place at any time." Young, The Book of Isaiah, 1:212-213.

2 Gen 4:11; Num 16:30, 32; 26:10; Deut 11:6.

3 See the discussion on Num 16:30, 33 above.
It should also be noted that in the broader context the phrases נִסָּתָו ("the deeds of Yahweh," vs. 12) and והנָאוֹס ("the work of His hands," vs. 12) are parallel to פִּי הָיוֹת ("His work," vs. 19) and בָּשָׁם הָיוֹת ("the plan of the Holy One of Israel," vs. 19), and allude to הָיוֹת הֶכְרָב ("but if Yahweh creates a creation," Num 16:30), which is also in the context of Yahweh's deeds, judgment, and Sheol. Thus, "the deeds of Yahweh" in vs. 12, except creation, redemption, preservation, etc., refer to the coming judgment, when the rebellious nation will be exiled and suffer death, that is, רֹדֶה ("and will go down") to Sheol, the place of the dead, or the grave.

The fact that Sheol means only the grave can also be clarified and demonstrated by means of the following structural outline:

A Sheol feeds on the sinners (vs. 14)
   B The sinners are humbled (vs. 15)
      B¹ Yahweh is exalted (vs. 16)
   A¹ Flocks feed on the ruins of the sinners' dwellings (vs. 17)

If in vs. 13 the rebellious people are described as dying from hunger and thirst, then in vs. 14 they are portrayed as "going down" to Sheol. Vss. 15-16 of this structure are important as they contain the contrast-dominant theme for vss. 8-30,

1Wildberger, Isaiah 1-12, 202-204.


namely, during His judgments the carousers are humiliated (vs. 15), but Yahweh is
exalted (vs. 16). The “feeding on” pattern used in vs. 14 recurs in vs. 17. It
summarizes the outcome of Yahweh’s judgments in the striking but self-explanatory
imagery of the flocks, which are feeding among the ruins of their former estates (vs.
17). According to vss. 25-30, this total devastation which brought death to the rebels
and נֶלְעָתָם בְּקָרָב הָאָזְנוֹת (“left their corpses like refuse in the streets”) was
carried out by the Assyrian army.

Finally, it should be remembered that the focal feature of the term Sheol in the
current text, incorporating figurative statements of hyperbole and metaphor, results in
a real climactic intensification and in the ultimate resolution. As the consequences of
Yahweh’s judgments the carousers die unchanged. They “go down” to Sheol in the
close they had developed on this earth, still spiritually insensitive and all unready
to meet Yahweh. There is nothing in the text nor in the passage that would suggest
any kind of consciousness of the carousers after they “go down” to Sheol. Moreover,
this animated description of Sheol, as having “opened wide its throat” and “enlarged
its mouth without limit,” does not contain any allusion to “a country under the earth”
either. It should be noted that T. Willis, A. Motyer, and other commentators on Isa

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1The contrast echoes the “Day of the Lord” oracle of chap. 2. See Joseph
Jensen, Isaiah 1-39, OTM (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 78. See also the
covenant curses in Deut 28.

2Willis, Isaiah, 133-134; Alec Motyer, Isaiah: An Introduction and
Commentary, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 64; Harris, “The
Meaning of the Word Sheol,” 133.

3Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, 92-93.
5:14 are right, as they see in the Hebrew term Sheol in this passage only the grave or simply the place of the dead and nothing more.¹

Isa 7:11

Ask for yourself a sign from Yahweh your God; as deep as Sheol or as high as heights.²

Translation and Textual Remarks

Text Unit and Its Genre

There is no general agreement concerning the structural outline of chap. 7:1-25 because it comprises a quite complicated system of specific thematic and literary elements and arrangement.³ On the other hand, there is a consensus that chap. 7 consists of two major episodes, thus forming two basic units. It is obvious that 7:10-25 depend on vss. 7:1-9. This dependence between the episodes is recognized by the introductory speech formula, "and again


²This verse like the previous one contains some translation problems. The verbs הַפָּתָה and הַנְּבֵן may take either imperative or infinitive forms in the Hiphil stem. MT reads רָצָה "please ask it." However, the reading with another vowel הַפָּתָה meaning "Sheol" with a directive ח is widely recognized since it fits the contrast with "heights." See Watts, Isaiah, 1-33, 96; Wildberger, Isaiah 1-12; 285; GKC 114n.

³Wildberger, Isaiah 1-12, 287-288.
Yahweh spoke to Ahaz, saying”). The encounter between Isaiah and Ahaz is the central point of the first episode (vss. 1-9).

One of the possible ways to determine the structure of the second episode is to look at the outline of the speech formulas. Consequently, vss. 10-25 can be split into three subunits: (1) the report of Yahweh’s/Isaiah’s first address to Ahaz (vss. 10-11), (2) the report of Ahaz’s response (vs. 12), and (3) the report of Yahweh’s/Isaiah’s second address to Ahaz (vss. 13-25). According to A. Motyer, the arrangement of vss. 1-17 around the theme of trust outlines and enforces the main point, which reaches its climax in vss. 10-12:

A The house of David threatened (vss. 1-2)
   B Isaiah’s son: the plans of the northern powers (vss. 3-6)
      C The Lord’s word of assurance (vss. 7-9)
      D The response of unbelief (vss. 10-12)
      C1 The Lord’s sign of judgment (vss. 13-15)
   B1 The virgin’s son: the destruction of the northern powers (vs. 16)
A1 The house of David destroyed (vs. 17)

The overarching genre of chap. 7 is report, or more precisely, account. The prophetic announcement of a sign, which appears in the context of the report of a dialogue (7:1-25), introduces it as the secondary genre. Vss. 10-17 are written in the third-person narrative form and identify Yahweh as the speaker. However, the first-person perspective indicates that in fact Isaiah is Yahweh’s mouthpiece. This segment

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1Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 143.


3For detailed analysis of structure see ibid., 143-148.

4Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 80-81.

can be considered either as autobiographical material or as the third-person narrative.¹

Exegetical Notes

In an attempt to inspire faith in Ahaz, Yahweh speaks to him through Isaiah for the second time (vss. 10-12). Yahweh challenges Ahaz to ask for a sign in order that he might have confidence in His words concerning מְצֹווֹת אֶרֶצָה וַעֲדַעַת אֶרֶצָה (“Rezin”) and מְצֹווֹת אֶרֶץ פֶּקָה (“Pekah”), מְצֹווֹת אֶרֶץ פֶּקָה (“these two smoldering stumps of firebrands,” 7:4).² Yahweh confronts Ahaz verbally, defying him to make his request מָמַת יְهوּדָה אֶלֶּה (“from Yahweh your God”) מָמַת יְהוָה אֶלֶּה (“as deep as Sheol or as high as heights,” vs. 11).

Scholars interpret the term Sheol inconsistently. P. Johnston sees in the combination of the stem בָּקָע with Sheol (depths of Sheol) a reference to the underworld.³ H. Leupold explains that Sheol means “the netherworld, or the hereafter,” and relates it to “the sign granted to King Saul when Samuel reappeared from the realm of the dead (1 Sam 28:11).”⁴ The Interpreters Bible defines Sheol as

¹Ibid., 148-164.

²The purpose of the sign is to revive Ahaz’s faith and persuade him not to fear (vs. 4), but to put his trust entirely in Yahweh’s power (vs. 9). In vs. 14 Isaiah gives Ahaz another sign, which reveals his unbelief and means disaster for Ahaz. Franz J. Hefmeyer, “Rezin,” TDOT, 1:167-188. Compare Exod 4:8; 7:8; Num 16:38; Deut 6:22; 13:2; Judg 6:14, 17-18, 38-40; 1 Sam 2:34; 10:7, 9; Isa 8:3, 4, 18; 38:7; Jer 44:29; Ezek 12:6.

³Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 121.

⁴Herbert C. Leupold, Exposition of Isaiah 1-39, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 154. Saul’s meeting with the witch of Endor and the appearance of Samuel after death as a shadowy figure will be discussed in Excursus 2.
"the world of the dead."

First of all, it should be noted that in vs. 11 the form of the term Sheol is totally different from anything seen up till here in the Hebrew Scripture. The spelling of the term הַשָּׁוֶל has confused many scholars and affected their understanding and interpretation of the term. Usually, the regular pausal form for the term הַשָּׁוֶל is הַשָּׁוֶל. However, in Isa 7:11, the word is in an intermediate pause which is unique, namely, הַשָּׁוֶל. It seems that the purpose of such orthography is to create a phonetic assonance with הַשָּׁוֶל.

Furthermore, Yahweh's challenge to Ahaz in vs. 11 contains two verbal phrases which function as antithetic parallels, הָעַלֶּה הִנֵּה שְׁכוֹל ("lit., make it to the depths of Sheol") and הָעַלֶּה הָעֵבֶר (lit., "make it high upwards"). Both verbs הָעַלֶּה and הָעֵבֶר are Hiph. inf. absolutes and express a determination of

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3 See discussion on Gen 37:35 and 42:38.

4 Jouon, A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew, 1:107, par. 32c; GKC, par. 29u.

5 It is also possible to see the verb הָעַלֶּה as imperative, "let it be deep as Sheol." John Joseph Owens, Analytical Key to the Old Testament, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989-1991), 4:21. However, none of the following translations "as deep as Sheol," "make it to the depths of Sheol," "let it be deep as Sheol," or "make it high upwards," "high as heaven," "as high as heaven," etc., seem to capture the full meaning of the Hebrew text.
adverbial/qualifying denotation.¹ In this antithetical construction מְנַעֶלֶל is contrasted to מְנַעֶלֶל and מְנַעָלֶל is opposite to מְנַעָלֶל.² The basic meaning of the adverb מְנַעֶלֶל, with the directional ב and preposition ב in the phrase מְנַעֶלֶל מְנַעֶלֶל ב, is to emphasize the direction upwards.³ In brief, this is a figure of speech, a merism that employs two extremes with the purpose of including all the areas between them.

Generally the root מְנַעֶל is rendered as “height” or “high.” Correspondingly, the finite verb מְנַעֶל reflects its original meaning, “to be high,” “make high” with an inherent antithetic attribute in relation to the word מְנַעֶל (“to be deep”).⁴ The verb מְנַעָל serves to simply define more precisely the subsequent noun מְנַעָל with a directional ב, thus emphasizing downward direction. Exactly the same functional principles are true and should be applied in regard to the opposite expression, namely, מְנַעָל מְנַעָל ב “make it high upwards.”⁵ The contrast drawn between the heights of heaven and the depths of Sheol puts emphasis not only on the spatial dimension,


³“מְנַעָל,” *BDB*, 751.


which is vertical and endless, but also specifies Yahweh’s omnipotence and sovereignty. On the other hand, both concise expressions, “as deep as Sheol” and “as high as heights,” are forceful in terms of their allusion to extremities or limits. How deep is Sheol/grave? It is known today that some of “the Royal Tombs at Ur excavated by Wooley were 30 feet deep.” Is that the depth Yahweh means? Then the reference from Sheol shifts to the vertical dimension, “as high as heights,” which includes knowledge that cannot be comprehended.

In other words, the message is clear; Ahaz is invited to choose any extraordinary thing or occurrence in the entire space of creation, from the lowest part of Sheol to the highest part of the heavens. Yahweh made this offer to strengthen Ahaz’s faith.

Unfortunately, instead of trusting in Yahweh’s protection, Ahaz regarded Tiglath-pileser of Assyria as the answer to his dilemma. The king set “the power of man above the power of God.” Ahaz declined Yahweh’s offer to ask for a sign (7:12)

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1 The same idea is found in Deut 32:22; Job 11:8; Pss 86:13; 139:8.


4 See 2 Kgs 16.

because he refused to see the crisis in any terms other than military and political.¹

Finally, both antithetical phrases, הָלַךְ לַמַּעֲבָד לֶחֶם, in the context of a sign, reveal Yahweh’s supremacy over the whole universe. The elements of contrast strengthen the spatial aspect and point to Yahweh as the only source of trust. It is very clear that the reference to Sheol in this passage has nothing to do with necromancy, the dead, or the souls continuing their miserable existence in some shadowy underworld. Moreover, any idea of death as such is entirely absent in the text. Even if one takes שָאָלִים as the qualifier of הָלַךְ, the term means only the grave and can be rendered “as deep as the grave,” or “to the depth of the grave.”² The employment of the diametrical opposites “deep” and “high,” Sheol and “heights” indicates the totality of Yahweh’s all-encompassing control over entire cosmos, including the sphere of death.³

Isa 14:9, 11, 15


²See a similar case discussed in Deut 32:22.

³See also Job 11:8; Pss 86:13; 139:8.
Translation and Textual Remarks

9 Sheol from beneath is stirred up¹ because of you, to meet you at your coming. It rouses for you Rephaim, all the chief ones² of the earth; it raises³ from their thrones all the kings of the nations. 11 Down to Sheol is brought your pomp, and the music of your harps.⁴ Under you is spread⁵ the maggot, and your covers are worms. 15 Only to Sheol you shall be brought down, to the deepest pit.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Before turning to the structure of the current passage, it should be recalled that chap. 14 belongs to the composite unit which may be entitled as God’s Judgments on the Nations (13:1-23:18). ⁶

¹The LXX has ἐπικράνειν (“to cause to become bitter,” “make bitter”). The Vulgate has conturbatus est (“is confused”). In English the feminine verb ניב is rendered as “moved” (KJV); “excited” (NASB, NKJV); “astir” (NIV, NJB).

²Literally, the noun רפת means “he-goats” or “rams.” In Zech 10:3 the word is coupled with “shepherds.” The term is often applied to human leaders as a designation of power and authority (Jer 30:8).

³According to Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 206, the form of the verb יבר (“roused up”) is not Polel pf. but rather Polel inf. abs. (“rouse oneself,” “awake”). For this reason, ניב should also be indicated as Hi. inf. abs., namely, ניב (“raised up”).

⁴“מנבל (“your harps”) appear in DSS as נבל, which could mean “your disgrace” or “your corpse.” See נבל, נבל, and נבל, BDB, 614, 615.

⁵The verb ינמר is in Ho. impf. and its sense is parallel to ינמר (“and your covers”).

⁶The block is clearly marked off by tenfold נב (“burden,” “utterance,” “oracle”). See 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 21:11; 21:13; 22:1, and 23:1, which are followed by a place name, for example, המבר נב (“The oracle concerning Babylon”). The basic structure is clear.
The structure of chap. 14 is thematically demarcated by a string of images that focus on the end of the tyrant and culminate in the murder of his sons and the devastation of Babylon. Because of this specific setting, the chapter can easily be divided into smaller units and subunits. Very interesting and insightful is Motyer’s chiastic structure, which consists of four parts. Two of them, A and A₁, describe the events taking place on the earth, while the other two, B and B₁, focus on Sheol:

Reactions (vss. 4b-10)
A Earth’s reaction to the end of oppression (vss. 4b-8)  ⇐
B Sheol’s reaction to the arrival of the king (vss. 9-11)  ⇐

Contrasts (vss. 11-15)
B₁ Not the apex of heaven, but the depth of Sheol (vss. 12-15)  ⇐
A₁ Expectation and reality. No continuance of tomb or line (vss. 16-23)  ⬅️

According to this outline, vss. 9, 11, and 15, where the term Sheol occurs, belong to two different subunits (vss. 9-11 and vss. 12-15). However, for the

1. Oracle against Babylon  13:1-14:27
2. Oracle against Philistia  14:28-32
3. Oracle against Moab  15:1-16:14
4. Oracle against Damascus  17:1-18:7
5. Oracle against Egypt  19:1-20:6
6. Oracle against the Wilderness of the Sea  21:1-10
7. Oracle against Dumah  21:11-12
8. Oracle against Arabia  21:13-17
10. Oracle against Tyre  23:1-18


1See Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 184-195; Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 218-221.

2Adopted with some minor changes. See Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 143.

3See also Hans Wildberger, Isaiah 13-27, CC (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 50-53.
purpose of this study they will be treated as one unit, because both entities complement each other in an enriching and illustrative way and are tied together thematically and verbally.

The term נְחַלְךְ defines the genre of the whole block (13-14). The instruction of Yahweh to take up the taunt song (נְחַלְךְ) against the king of Babylon in 14:3-23 puts an emphasis on two diametrically opposite aspects, namely, the restoration of Israel and destruction of Babylon. The taunt song is cast in the form of a dirge and its purpose is to mourn the death of the Babylonian king. As a dirge it contains specific elements which are characteristic to this genre, as for example, particle interjection (לֵאָּת, “alas,” “how,” vss. 4, 12), the 3/2 qinâ meter, and contrasting comparisons of the past glory with the present tragedy.

On the one hand, the song uses various elements found in a lament for the dead. On the other, the mourning is cast in such a way as to convey mockery. O. Eissfeldt calls Isa 14:4-21 “the most powerful prophetic dirge which we possess in the Old Testament,” “the most precious of all Old Testament poems,” and designates it as a “mocking prophetic funeral dirge,” but for H. Jahnow it is a parody on a lament for the dead.

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2Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 227-229.


4Hedwig Jahnow, Das Hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1923), 239-256.
Exegetical Notes

In order to be able to recognize the central point of the current text, which would help to identify the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol, it is necessary to consider the whole structure of this passage in its framework. Moreover, one ought to remember that the threefold repetition of Sheol is entwined in the composition that is written in the style of a sarcastic lament, which is arranged in such a manner that when articulated it takes the form of a song mocking the dead oppressor. Paradoxically, the dead in Sheol are talking and greeting the arriving dead, just as in Hollywood's horror movies.

It is instructive to briefly survey how scholars understand and interpret the term Sheol in these verses. For instance, A. Davidson argues that "nowhere is Sheol confounded with the grave, or the word used for the place of the dead body. Sheol is the place of departed personalities... The personalities crowding there are powerless, and drowsy, and still, and silent."\(^1\) A similar and rather comprehensive description of Sheol is provided by H. Leupold, "men still exist there... They may be stirred from their slumber and apathy. But they can be roused only to make a few remarks."\(^2\) W. Vine points out that Sheol "is not Gehenna, but what the corresponding Greek word in the New Testament calls Hades."\(^3\) And A. Motyer believes that "the grave should be Sheol, for it is not the cemetery that is in view but the home of the

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\(^3\) He also explains that the term Sheol is "wrongly translated 'Hell' and 'the grave.'" William E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Commentary on Isaiah* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 45; Freehof, *Book of Isaiah*, 88-89.
departed in the next world.”¹ It is also important to note that most of these scholars use the word “grave” not in its traditional sense, but as an “opening” in the earth which serves as an entrance into the so-called underworld or Sheol. Consequently, in spite of the fact that biblical authorities see in the current verses various messages, they draw attention, in one way or another, to one common theme, namely, a non-biblical teaching of the immortality of soul.

Thus, before exegeting the relevant texts, it is necessary to reemphasize that it is the song of death (vss. 9-15) and not of the continuation of life. It is not sung at a funeral as such because the oppressor is left without appropriate burial (vss. 18-20). Moreover, although the spatial, social, and time elements are pictured in realistic and extremely vivid detail, they do not present objective reality in its original, literal, or exact sense. In other words, the taunt song in the guise of a lament represents one thing under the image of another. It is used to emphasize the danger of arrogance, which is followed by a sudden reversal, and also to unfold certain theological themes.² Consequently, in vss. 4-8 the author introduces the vivid personification of the earth and the trees of the forest,³ which burst forth in

¹Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 144.


this triumphant song at the news of the oppressive ruler’s death.\(^1\) Next, in vs. 9, the scene suddenly shifts from the earth to the strikingly realistic imagery of \(\text{סִבְּלָה} \), which is personified and represented as a living organism. It is portrayed as \(\text{שָׁבָע} \) ("stirred up"), \(\text{לְפָרֹת} \) ("to meet"), \(\text{נַחֲלָה} \) ("it rouses"), and \(\text{לַעֲמָה} \) ("it raises").

The progressing tension, excitement, and commotion of the song are partially due to the change of physical location and introduction of principally new social elements and bizarre characters. This is obvious from vs. 9, which describes the totality of the dead in Sheol in a specific order where they belong to one of the three major groups. Thus, the dead are arranged and distinguished as (1) \(\text{מְדִינֵי} \) ("the dead ones"), (2) \(\text{כָּל־נַחֲלָתִים} \) ("all the chief ones [he-goats] of the earth"), and (3) \(\text{כָּל־מַלְיֵי} \) ("all the kings of the nations").

As noted, the first group in the list of the dead is introduced with the technical term \(\text{מְדִינֵי} \),\(^2\) which in the context of death occurs eight times in the Hebrew

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\(^1\) The phrase in vs. 7, \(\text{סְפָרָה} \) ("break into singing"), is found in Isaiah in two more verses, 44:23 and 49:13. See also Isa 24:9, 14, 16; 25:5; 26:1, 19; 48:20; 54:1; 55:1, 12.

\(^2\) The etymology and the original meaning of the term "Rephaim" are subject to controversy. The derivation of the substantive is uncertain, and none of the existing theories is convincing. The etymology of the term is usually explained as derived either from the verb \(\text{נָפָר} \) "heal," "make healthful," "restore," or from the verb \(\text{נָפָר} \), which would mean "be weak," "to sink down," "relax," "let drop," "be disheartened." Concerning its etymological problems, usage, and meaning, see Michael L. Brown, "Rephaim," \textit{NIDOTTE}, 3:1173-1180. His article also provides a long list of interesting bibliographical references. See also Conrad E. L’Heureux, \textit{Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba’al, and the Rephaim} (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 111-223; Edward Lipinski, "Dita’n,“ in \textit{Studies in Bible and Ancient Near East} (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein’s Publishing House, 1978), 91-110; John Gray, "The Rephaim," \textit{Palestine Exploration Quarterly (PEQ)} 81 (1949): 127-139; Friedrich Schwally, \textit{Das Leben nach dem Tode: nach den Vorstellungen des alten Israel und des Judentums}.
Scriptures and always exclusively in poetic passages. Because of space limitations, the discussion on this crucially important and controversial term will be restricted to only a few of its most significant and applicable points pertaining to the subject.

Furthermore, there is a serious problem of the interpretive expansions and applications of the term מִשְׂפָּט, which can be more clearly demonstrated by means of a comparison of its various translations. For instance, in different Bible versions the term is rendered as “the shades” (NRSV, NAB), “the ghosts” (NRB), “the spirits” (NIV), “the spirits of the dead” (NASB, NAUB), and “the dead” (NKJV, ASV). These diverse translations, while determining the meaning of the word מְשַפְּט, point to a methodologically questionable approach and too extensive dependence upon the Ugaritic data.

1. Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19; Job 26:5; Ps 88:11; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16.
2. Generally, the standard dictionaries make distinction between Rephaim I to denote the shades of the dead, and Rephaim II to make reference to an ancient race of giants. The term occurs in Gen 14:5; 15:20; Deut 2:10-11, 20-21; 3:13; Josh 15:8; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:18, 22; 23:13; Isa 14:9; 17:5; 26:14, 19, etc. The expression “Valley of the Rephaim” is found in Josh 15:8; 2 Sam 5:18, 22; 23:13; 1 Chr 11:15; 14:9; Isa 17:5. See an insightful study on the term Rephaim by Rosenberg, “The Concept of Biblical Sheol,” 193-218.
3. The uses of the term מְשַפְּט, in Ugarit, for giants and for the dead, should remain open, and it is too dangerous to impose them on the biblical text. Wildberger suggests that the term מְשַפְּט might be related to the root מָשַּׁפְּט (“sleep”), thus fitting the content of the text. See Wildberger, Isaiah 13-27, 60-62; Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 209; William White, "מָשַּׁפְּט,” *TWOT*, 2:858-859. It could also be related to מָשַּׁפְּט (“whither,” “collapse”); compare Isa 5:24 with the Niphal form which has the idea of “inactive” in Exod 5:8, 17.
There are several significant factors which help one to better understand why the NKJV and ASV have rendered the term רפאים as “the dead.” First of all, the term רפאים is parallel to כהנים (“all the chief ones of the earth”) and מלכים (“all the kings of the nations”) all of whom once ruled the nations but now are dead. Second, in a broader context, in Isa 26, 14, the word רפאים is parallel to פלחים (“the dead”), and vs. 19 contains an entire string of synonyms standing side by side with Rephaim: נפש (“your dead”) → לבה (“my corpse”) → שבע ימים (“dwellers in the dust”) → רפאים (“Rephaim,” “the dead”). These examples show that the word רפאים functions as a general term, not as a specific one, to describe all the dead in Sheol. In other words, the term רפאים can function as a synonym for “the dead” and also as the reversed parallelism to form רפאים = רפאים structure.

Against this background of the current discussion it is noteworthy to quote the words of White, who affirms: “It is clear that this ancient quasi-mythological term was used merely to satisfy the requirements of Hebrew poetic structure and in no way indicates any specific connotation to the root רפאים other than as a synonym for ‘the dead’ and ‘the place of the dead.’”

1 Other parallelisms are found in Job, Psalms, and Proverbs and will be discussed in the next chapter. See also an article by Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Is There a ‘World of the Dead’?” Adventist Review, April 8, 2004, 29.

2 Rodríguez, 29.

dynamism and even intellectual capacity are ascribed to the Rephaim, they serve only as a means for intensification of a literary effect of the main theme and no more.

Another term deserving brief attention is the word expressing action, הוב ("come," "enter"). The form יבוא ("your coming") in vs. 9 is used in a metaphorical sense and excludes a literal interpretation which implies a notion that Sheol is a place "where happy reunions occur." Consequently, it functions as the parallel verb for וב and ובו ("brought down") in vss. 11, 15 and signifies death. This can also be illustrated by the following positive and negative references:

1 Kgs 13:22
לארתנחתא נבלתא אלי יבוכר אלא תַּבְרָה
your carcass shall not come to the grave of your fathers

1 Kgs 14:13
ליאו יבוכר יראבש אלא תַּבְרָה
for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave

The verb מב ("come," "arrive") contains not only a death-burial idea but also nuances of the applied judgment.²

In brief, the symbolic and prophetic language of the parable (3פ) pictures the grave as a place where "the chief ones of this earth" and "the kings of the nations" are found after their death. The tyrant is visualized as being already dead and as being met by the kings who are already in the grave. All three groups of the dead act amazed that even the cruel oppressor was unable to escape death, and in vs. 10 all of

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¹Stadelmann, The Hebrew Conception, 174.

²See also Gen 15:15. In Isa 57:2, the expressions יבוא ושלום ("enter into peace") and גג יושב ("they rest on their beds") are parallel phrases describing death of the righteous. Horst Dietrich Preuss, "ָבָא," TDOT, 2:20-49.
them declare, "you have become like us"), which means, you are dead, too.

Furthermore, vs. 11 continues the taunt song by contrasting and mirroring two fundamentally opposite realities and elements from two different topographical sites.\(^1\) The first reality is characterized by recalling the essentials characteristic to the oppressor’s luxurious lifestyle, "your pomp," "exaltation," "pride") and "the music [sound] of your harps"). The second reality is sharply focused on the description of the once mighty king of Babylon, who is dead and in the grave.

Two feminine nouns designating corruption and decay, "maggot") and "worm"), play an important explanatory role concerning the term Sheol by introducing an appalling but realistic picture of a decomposing corpse covered with worms. The word "worm" occurs only seven times in the Hebrew Scriptures,\(^2\) and apart from Exodus references, it always serves as "a metaphor for death and the grave" and also as "a graphic image for the judgment of death."\(^3\) Especially it refers to "the grave with corpses."\(^4\) Another word, "worm," "maggot"), functions as a synonym


\(^3\) August H. Konkel, "DDR," *NIDOTTE*, 4:1125-1126. Houtman points out that the presence of worms "is the cause and a sign of decay." Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:142.

\(^4\) "HALOT*, 3:1241.
and is a parallel term for חַד. According to BDB, the phrase נָבָא חַד נָבָא ("and your covers are worms") should be understood as "worms covering the dead in the grave,"\(^1\) whereas חַד as the subject of the verb לֵבּ (in Ho. lit. "to be spread out as a bed") describes the process of decomposition by employing "worm, as couch for king of Babylon."\(^2\)

In view of this discussion there is nothing here that would contribute to the teaching concerning some miserable and shadowy existence in the underworld. It is clear that by Sheol the prophet means the grave. This position is best presented by Bullinger, who summarizes vss. 9-11 in the following words: "Dead people in the grave are represented as speaking. And Sheol or the grave is represented as being moved and stirred. That it is the grave is clear from the reference to the 'worms.'"\(^3\)

In vss. 12-15 the taunt song continues its progression with the introduction of a totally new and spectacular imagery. The shift of location and action from Sheol to heaven (vss. 12-14) and back to Sheol (vs. 15) illuminates the deadly consequences of a king's arrogance and pride, which are clearly outlined in the following structure:\(^4\)

\(^{1}\) "חַד," BDB, 492; "ונָבָא נָבָא," HALOT, 4:1702.

\(^{2}\) "לֵבּ," BDB, 426; "לָע י ב," HALOT, 2:428.

\(^{3}\) Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 866.

A

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of dawn!

How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

B

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne above the stars of God;

And I will sit upon the mount of congregation
on the heights of Zaphon;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High."

A

Only to Sheol you shall be brought down, to the deepest Pit.

These verses also allude to Satan, "much like the way the kings of the line of David point to Christ."1 Whatever is the case, the basic idea is very clear. The main emphasis is on death and not on life. By means of antithesis and focused picture of the double obliteration, vss. 12-15 represent a thought-provoking and awe-inspiring

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description of condemnation of the pride of the tyrant. Three words describe the problem of the king's fall, קָרַא בָּלִי רֹעַ ("and you said in your heart") and the consequences are demonstrated by the contrast: instead of יָשַׁר לֹא יָשְׁרֵי ("I will ascend to heavens") and נִפְלַת מְשָׁמֵי ("you are fallen from heavens"). It is particularly important to note that both vss. 12 and 15 contain the twofold death description, thus excluding any idea of survival. Instead of sitting בָּרְכוּ הַיָּדָּה ("on the heights of Zaphon"), נַפְלָה ("you are fallen"), and נַגְדְּבָה לֹא יָשְׁרֵי ("you are cut down to the earth"), whereas vs. 15 continues the theme by elaborating on vs. 12, אֶל שְׁאָר לְךַר ("to Sheol you shall be brought down") and אֶל שְׁאָר לְךַר ("to the deepest pit").

The vocabulary of the phrase שְׁאָר לְךַר (vs. 11) is actually repeated in vs. 15, thus calling attention to the focal point of the song. The verb נַפְלָה ("brought down") is intensified and clarified by its parallels found in vs. 12: נַפְלָה ("you are fallen") and נַגְדְּבָה ("you are cut down"). The verb נַפְלָה ("fall," "be cast down") refers to "falling" in death which leads to the grave and results in restoration of the cosmic order. The second term, בֹּקֵן ("hew down," "cut off"), in

Nif. pf. literally means "to be cut down into pieces" or destroyed.\(^1\)

Moreover, the term הַשֵּׁלֵל in the phrase יִשָּׁמַר הַשֵּׁלֵל of vs. 12 serves as a synonym for אִשְׁפָּר in vs. 15. Though no qualifying or descriptive term is attached to הַשֵּׁלֵל and it stands alone, the analysis of the term in its context shows that it alludes to Sheol.\(^2\) The meaning of הַשֵּׁלֵל is explained by the parallel phrases of vs. 11, אִשָּׁמַר וְיִשָּׁמַר אֵלָי in vs. 15. Similarly, the words גַּלֹּל and הַשֵּׁלֵל in the expressions הַיּוֹם הַיּוֹם ("awake and sing, O dwellers in the dust") and הָרְעֵהִים ("and the earth shall cast forth the dead") in Isa 26:19, which are in the context of epiphany and the resurrection, mean only the grave (Sheol).\(^3\) These conclusions are made in harmony with J. Barr's words that the semantic value "has to be determined from current usage and not from derivation."\(^4\)

Finally, vs. 15 is the shortest of all these verses, containing only seven words, but they are the finalizing ones. The prophet uses parallel expression or the so-called periphrasis to describe the picture of death and the grave more completely. Next to the expression הַשֵּׁלֵל stands its descriptive phrase הָרְעֵהִים ("to the

\(^{1}\)"HALOT, 1:180.


\(^{3}\)See also Ps 7:6 and Isa 29:4 where both terms גַּלֹּל and הַשֵּׁלֵל are used twice. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, 23-31.

deepest pit"), which is similar to that in Ezek 32:23, יָעַרְיָא ("in the depths of the pit").

Before moving on, it is necessary to take a brief look at the masculine noun בָּרָא, which has various meanings, namely, "cistern," "pit," "trap," "dungeon," etc., and occurs sixty-five times in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, in twenty-three occasions, the term בָּרָא serves as a common metaphor for death and the grave. All of these occurrences are found exclusively in poetical contexts, as is demonstrated by table 9 below.

Like the term Sheol יָאָרָא, which functions as the proper noun, the word בָּרָא referring to the grave, as seen from table 9, has no definite article and is parallel to the term יָאָרָה six times. In fact, it functions not only as a parallel term but often serves as a synonym of Sheol. It should be noted that Sheol as the proper noun refers to a number of individuals by means of their common characteristics, thus presenting each of them. In other words, according to its intrinsic nature, the term Sheol functions as a pointer to any place of the dead, regardless of its location, form, or content.

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1The term יָאְרָיֶת ("side," "extreme parts," "recesses") is rendered variously: "to the depths of the Pit" (NRSV); "to the uttermost parts of the pit" (ASV), and "to the lowest depths of the Pit" (NKJV).


3See also the similar term יָאָרָה ("well," "pit"), which out of 37 occurrences in the Scripture twice refers to the grave: Pss 55:24 and 69:16. Jean-Georges Heintz, "תַּלְמוּד", TDOT, 1:463-466.

4Isa 14:15; 38:18; Ezek 31:16; Pss 30:4; 68:4; Prov 1:12.
TABLE 9

OCCURRENCES OF THE TERM בור REFERRING TO THE GRAVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ps 28:1</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ps 30:4</td>
<td>from going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ps 40:3</td>
<td>he brought me up from the pit of destruction</td>
<td>נסעתי מצマー שער</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ps 88:5</td>
<td>with those who go down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ps 88:7</td>
<td>in the lowest pit</td>
<td>בור交谈חת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ps 143:7</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Prov 1:12</td>
<td>like those going down to the pit</td>
<td>קאייר בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prov 28:17</td>
<td>with the blood of a soul unto the pit</td>
<td>ברסמיס ערבר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Isa 14:15</td>
<td>to the depth [sides] of the pit</td>
<td>אלנימבר בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Isa 14:19</td>
<td>going down to the stones of the pit</td>
<td>נירמי אל-אספבר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Isa 38:18</td>
<td>those who go down to the pit</td>
<td>ידידי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lam 3:53</td>
<td>they have cut off my life in the pit</td>
<td>עמותה בור ת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lam 3:55</td>
<td>from the depth of the pit</td>
<td>פואר תחתית</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ezek 26:20</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ezek 26:20</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ezek 31:14</td>
<td>with/to those going down to the pit</td>
<td>אלנימבר בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ezek 31:16</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ezek 32:18</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Ezek 32:23</td>
<td>to the depth [sides] of the pit</td>
<td>בורתחבת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ezek 32:24</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ezek 32:25</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ezek 32:29</td>
<td>and with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ezek 32:30</td>
<td>with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>עזרי בור</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As an abstract term, occurring mainly in poetical contexts, it does not function against, in parallel to, in isolation, or in an attempt to neutralize the term בָּרֹא.

Moreover, as various proper nouns like Adam, Eve, Abel, and Cain individually represent totally different and unique persons, all of whom are united by one and the same indicator, “humanity,” so the same is true concerning the proper nouns יֵאָדָם, הָעֵדָם, and בָּרֹא (only in RSV, NRSV, NKJ), and other entities, which are unified by common indicators of death and the place of the dead. This juxtaposition of both words denotes the place of the dead and even more strengthens the analogy with the grave. To “go down” to Sheol/pit is to experience the decay of the grave, and, according to Bullinger, it means “to be dead and buried.”

However, the taunt song goes on unfolding additional important details concerning the hated tyrant who made the earth tremble, conquered cities, and refused to release his prisoners. According to vs. 19 he is denied a proper burial, as his corpse is deserted and dishonored, לָא תַחֵטֵּב אֲחַטְטֵב תִּשְׁלַמ, ("but you are cast out, away from your grave"). And vs. 20 reassures him that לָא תַחֵטֵּב אֲחַטְטֵב תִּשְׁלַמ (“you will not be joined with them in burial”). Here the basic key vocabulary הבּוּר (“grave”), בּוּר (“grave,” “burial”), and בָּרֹא in the formula נְעָרִי אֶל-אֲמוֹנִים בָּרֹא ("she'll not be joined with them in burial").

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1For a detailed discussion on the distinction between proper and common nouns see “Theological Implications” in chapter 5.

2Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 420.

(“who go down to the stones of the pit”)¹ are synonyms of Sheol and refer back to vs. 9-15. It is obvious, as J. Heintz points out, that the dead are designated as יָרָאת הָאֱלֹהִים ("those who go down to the pit").² The depiction of the treatment of the oppressor’s corpse, the terminological association of “pit,” “going down to the pit,” and “grave” with Sheol, excludes any “literal description of the condition of the wicked dead.”³

In spite of the fact that the main character of this taunt song is the king of Babylon, the oppressor (vs. 4), the question should be asked, Who has the real power to bring down the cruel despot to Sheol?⁴ Apart from referring to Бог ("God") and אַלַי (“Most High”) in vs. 13-14, the reference to הַרְוִדָה in vs. 5 who “has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers,” is extremely important,⁵ because it is הַרְוִדָה whose actions stand behind all the passive verbs of the subsequent verses.

¹See table 9, where the formula יָרָאת הָאֱלֹהִים (“those who go down to the pit”) occurs 16 times.

²Heintz, "אַלַי," TDOT, 1:463-466.


⁴For “the king of Babylon” as a figurative designation for Lucifer see vs. 12, where the term בֵּית הלל is a hapax legomenon and means “shining one” or “brilliant one.” It comes from the verb בִּיבָה, which basically means “to shine,” “to flash forth light,” and “to be brilliant.”

⁵Altogether the proper noun הַרְוִדָה occurs ten times in the current chapter: Isa 14:1, 2, 3, 5, 22 (2×), 23, 24, 27, and 32. Though, the name הַרְוִדָה is absent in vs. 9-15, the unit is governed by vs. 5.
Moreover, the main theme of the song is Yahweh’s victory over the oppressor and restoration of peace.

Finally, any interpretation of Isa 14:9-15 which does not take into account the highly figurative character of the taunt song, like its vivid personification of Sheol, the dead ones in it, and the main prophetic message, does not do justice to what the prophet wanted to convey. The key vocabulary, “Sheol,” “Rephaim,” “coming,” “going down,” “worms,” “maggots,” “falling,” “cutting down,” “pit,” “grave,” including parallel terminology, specific verbal expressions, and clarifying descriptive elements—all this and more are governed by one key word, דָּמָל (vs. 4), which puts everything in its proper place.

The prophet speaks as if the oppressor were a corpse ready for burial. In other words, he viewed his awful future as if this had already happened. What a powerful way to portray the certainty and horror of the despot’s demise and the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise!¹ This passage refers only to the place of the dead or the grave.

Isa 28:15, 18

Translation and Textual Remarks

15 Because you have said:
"We have made a covenant with death,
and with Sheol we have an agreement;
When the overwhelming scourge passes through,
it will not come to us;
For we have made lies our refuge,
and in falsehood we have hidden ourselves."
18 And your covenant with death will be annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
When the overwhelming scourge passes through,
then you will be trodden down by it.

Text Unit and Its Genre

There is general consensus that Isa 28:1-29 can stand by itself as a separate
unit, as it is defined by the introductory interjection particle נַחֲלָת (“woe,” “ah,” “alas”) in vs. 1 and by a matching נַחֲלָת in chap. 29:1. Scholars also agree that the passage consists of four distinct parts (vss. 1-6; 7-13; 14-22, and 23-29).\(^1\)

\(^1\) There are two terms, both of which are problematic, namely, מַקְרִי and מַקְרִי in vs. 18. Usually they are translated as “vision” and “seer.” However, none of them fits the current context. LXX renders them as συνθήκας (“agreement”) and ἐλπίς (“hope”). The Targum uses the word לֶגֶד (peace). For other variations see Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 367-368.

\(^2\) Generally the word מַקְרִי means “to cover up,” “to make reconciliation.” Here it is translated “annulled.” That is why there have been numerous recommendations for emendation. See Godfrey R. Driver, “‘Another Little Drink’—Isaiah 28:1-22,” in Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas on His Retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 47-67.


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The first consists of a woe oracle directed against the Ephraimite leaders concerning the Assyrian aggressor. The second is introduced with הנני ונה (“and these also”) and contains the prophetic judgment speech against the leaders “who presume to teach knowledge in Israel.”\(^1\) The third structural unit (vss. 14-22) starts with the introductory preposition ואת (“therefore”) and is the prophetic judgment speech against the Judean leadership. The final unit is presented as an allegory of a farmer and contains an instruction referring to the duration of punishment.\(^2\) Vss. 15-18 form not only protasis (vs. 15) and apodosis (vss. 16-18) but also a significant mixed chiastic arrangement,\(^3\) which by itself helps to unfold and illustrate the major dilemma of the passage by means of inverted parallelism.\(^4\)


\(^4\)Compare with Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 228-229. Beuken also presents a similar description of a tightly concentric pattern (A-B-C-D-C\(^1\)-B\(^1\)-A\(^1\)) exhibited in vss. 15-18, which is built by a large number of repeated words in the matching segments: vs. 15a-b\(^1\) and vs. 18, vs. 15b\(^2\) and vs. 17b, vs. 16a-b\(^2\) and vs. 17a. The center contains the words: “One who trusts will not shake (vs. 16b\(^3\)).” Beuken, *Isaiah 28-39*, 42.
A  a. Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, vs. 15
b. and with Sheol we have an agreement;
c. when the overwhelming scourge passes through,
d. it will not come to us;  
   B  a. for we have made lies our refuge,
b. and in falsehood we have hidden ourselves."
   C  "Behold, I lay in Zion, a stone for a foundation vs. 16
      a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;
Therefore, thus says the Lord Yahweh: D He that believes will not be shaken
   C¹ And I will make justice the line, vs. 17
      and righteousness the plummet;
   B¹ a. hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
b. and waters will overwhelm the shelter."
A¹ a. And your covenant with death will be annulled, vs. 18
b. and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
c. when the overwhelming scourge passes through,
d. then you will be trodden down by it.

The overall genre of this passage is based on the prophetic instruction.¹ Vss. 14-22 contain the prophetic judgment speech against the rulers in Jerusalem which incorporates various generic literary elements. For example, the verb ἀκοφίζω ("hear!") in vs. 14 functions as a call to attention. Vs. 15 serves as the foundation for an unusual indictment against the leaders of Jerusalem who have made the "covenant with death." Another element to be mentioned is a messenger speech in vss. 15-20 that focuses on the announcement of punishment and concludes with the prophet's word of warning not to ridicule the message.²

Exegetical Notes

The harsh words of condemnation in this chapter are directed against the
Northern Kingdom, Ephraim (vss. 1-13), and the Southern Kingdom, Judah (vss. 14-

¹Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 364.
29). As Ephraim and Judah are in an identical quandary, Yahweh's chosen instrument of punishment for both of them is also the same.

Isaiah portrays the conditions which provoke Yahweh's judgments in a rich figurative language. The prophets, priests, and rulers who should lead the people in the ways of righteousness are proud and self-indulgent, drunken and perverted, and their tables are covered with vomit (vss. 1-8). Moreover, they not only reject instruction (vss. 9-13), but trying to escape the punishment they make "a covenant with death" and "with Sheol they have an agreement" (vs. 15).

As in previous cases, biblical scholars have various opinions concerning the reference to Sheol. Though the passage is seemingly straightforward, different ideas are being read in the text. For instance, A. Motyer asserts that here by the term Sheol should be understood "not the place of burial but the abode of the soul after death."\(^1\) According to J. Oswalt, the "covenant with death" may imply that the leaders "have engaged in sorcery and have entered into an agreement with the gods of the netherworld."\(^2\) But K. Toom and others see in vs. 15 a description of necromancy,

\(^1\) Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 233.

namely, an actual covenant with the underworld deities of Mot and Sheol.  

Taking into consideration the above-quoted statements, it is necessary to put a special emphasis on the key vocabulary and context in order to discover whether the term Sheol, in the specified context, has any particular application. In the current case, the meaning of the word Sheol may be influenced by interaction of other surrounding terms and thus lead to a totally new function in the given context, conveying a new message. However, that remains to be seen during this brief exegesis.

Similar to Isa 14, the references to Sheol (vss. 15, 18) are located amid highly figurative language combining a variety of literary devices. Vss. 15 and 18 contain two key terms, הָרָע ("death") and בַּלְכַּנְיָה, which function not only as directly interrelated concepts but also are personified. The fact that there is a connection between the words הָרָע and בַּלְכַּנְיָה is not surprising, because both of them refer to the same domain. Moreover, this parallelism is extended to other words, and can be demonstrated by a chiastic arrangement.  

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2Christoph Barth, Die Errettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), 79.

with death we have made a covenant

we have an agreement and with Sheol

Here the word נָכוּת not only “represents” נָכוּת, but also functions as its equivalent and at the same time as the contrast to life. Furthermore, the chiasm shows that the controversial term נָכוּת (“seer,” “vision”) in vs. 15, including נָכוּת (“vision”) in vs. 18, which in both verses is translated as “agreement,” serves as a parallel term to the noun נָכוּת (“covenant”).

Because it is too often affirmed that the phrase “a covenant with death” provides an explanation of leaders’ own description of the pact and serves as the reference to the pagan god Mot, whose name means “death,” the question should be asked: What kind of covenant and agreement with death and Sheol are meant here?

1 Gerleman, “נָכוּת,” TLOT, 2:663.

2 Illman and Fabry, “נָכוּת,” TDOT, 8:205.


4 The statement concerning “a covenant with death” has been interpreted variously: (1) As a figurative expression for Assyria. Robertson W. Smith, Prophets of Israel and Their Place in History to the Close of the Eighth Century B.C. (New York: Appleton, 1897), 244. (2) It serves as a metaphor for destruction generally (Isa 5:14; Job 5:23; Hos 2:18). (3) The expression should be understood literally and refers to the sacrifices brought to the deities of the dead. James A. Montgomery, “Notes on the Old Testament,” JBL 31 (1912): 140-146.
There are several factors which are hard to reconcile with the idea that the phrase “we made a covenant with death” refers to necromancy or some kind of association with the underworld. First of all, Isaiah’s poetry mainly deals with death, employing highly figurative language, including a variety of literary devices.\(^1\) That allows one to freely play with the countless intermingling of images and alternative worlds. It means that the literal approach of interpretation should be abandoned, namely, there is no such thing as a literal covenant with literal death, which in this case is presented as alive. The same can be said about the agreement with Sheol and all the other images and mental pictures.

Moreover, the approaching danger is described by a mixed metaphor \(\text{di\text{\textregistered}}\) ("overflowing scourge") where the noun \(\text{pa\text{\textregistered}}\) is a prophetic term denoting Yahweh’s judgments.\(^2\) In addition, the participle \(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) ("flooding") is especially significant because this term is often used to refer to the destructive force of military conquest and to depict the overwhelming nature of Assyria’s invasion in Judah.\(^3\)

In order to avoid the coming disaster, the leaders “make a covenant with death” and “an agreement with Sheol” by using \(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) ("lie") and \(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) ("falsehood," “deception”) as their \(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) ("refuge," “shelter”). What is meant by the word pair

\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) 7:11; 14:9, 11, 15; 28:15, 18; 38:10, 18; 57:9.\(^1\)

\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) 9:23; Isa 10:26; 28:15, 18; Nah 3:2. David M. Fouts, “\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\),” \textit{NIDOTTE}, 4:64; Jacob Barth, “\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) \(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\),” \textit{ZAW} 33 (1913): 306-307; Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah} 1-39, 317.

\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\) 8:8; 10:22; 28:2, 15, 17, 18; 30:28; Jer 47:2; Dan 11:10, 22, 40. Michael A. Grisanti and Elmer A. Martens, “\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\),” \textit{NIDOTTE}, 4:96-97; Victor P. Hamilton, “\(\text{he\text{\textregistered}}\),” \textit{TWOT}, 2:918.
“lie” and “falsehood” which serves as an antithesis to Yahweh’s “justice” and “righteousness” (vs. 17)? Before answering the question and looking at some details, it should be noted that even the sequence of the word order in the chiasm with its parallels shows a specific way of their rationalizing: verb—places of refuge (ד"ת)—verb, which is identical to vs. 15a: verb—treaties (ב"ח) —verb.

The verb ד"ת basically means to invent and speak lies. In vs. 17, Isaiah describes the scoffers (vs. 14) who made ד"ת ("the refuge of lies") only to be destroyed and swept away at the end. The term ד"ת differs from the noun ד"ת not only by putting emphasis on deceitful deeds but also by referring to the violation of justice, faith, and covenant stipulations (Isa 9:14; 32:7). Consequently, those

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scoffers/leaders make a “refuge” of “lies” and “falsehood” which stand in parallel with “Sheol” and “death” and are in sharp contrast with the immovable “foundation” of Yahweh (vs. 16), the God of death as well as of life. It is obvious that the language used here is figurative. Commenting on this treaty with death/Sheol and the refuge in lies/falsehood, E. Good writes:

The prophet parodies the communiqué from Judah’s state department about a mutual assistance pact from Egypt, which might have said: “We have made a covenant [treaty] with Egypt, with Pharaoh we made an agreement. Assyria’s invasion will not trouble us, for we have protection with Egypt and security with pharaoh.” By substituting words, the prophet ironically criticizes the treaty making, as he frequently does with Judah’s political ties with Egypt.¹

Really, the text contains an obvious irony, because nobody in the modern or ancient world would ever use the expression, “for we have made lies our refuge,” in a literal sense to refer to an agreement they had negotiated or worked out. Isaiah applied his ironic metaphorical phraseology as an illustration of the leaders’ trust in foreign coalitions. In fact, the prophet warned Judah concerning the devastating consequences such alliances would have.² The assurances of support and protection, expressed in a mutual agreement, which were promised by other nations, in reality involved nothing more than lies and falsehood.³

The inverted parallelism of the chiastic structure clearly demonstrates that the main point of the passage is focused on trust (vs. 16), which again is represented by a


highly figurative description. The leaders of Jerusalem had to choose between two sources of security: foreign powers or Yahweh. Judah could continue to pursue the political and military alliances with neighboring countries, but "the very thing that Jerusalem's rulers had hoped to avoid will sweep over them (vs. 15b),"¹ as it can be seen from vss. 17 and 18.

c b a

"the refuge of lies" "hail" and will sweep away

water overflow waters and hiding place.

b a

"your covenant with death" and will be annulled

will not stand and your agreement with Sheol.

Finally, Isaiah's use of various prophetic devices by means of a highly allegorical language has led F. Landy to the following conclusion: "The covenant with death is paradoxical as well as absurd, in that it is a bond with death that frees one from death."² Moreover, the "covenant with death" as a parallel to "an agreement with Sheol" excludes any idea of the immortality of soul, an existence of the dead, or

¹Watts, Isaiah 1-33, 370.

gods, including the underworld itself.\textsuperscript{1} Johnston is very clear and exact in his wording, “Nothing here implies that death and Sheol are deities, and van der Toom presents no substantial arguments for it. Some Israelites may indeed have worshipped underworld deities, but this passage does not indicate it.”\textsuperscript{2}

The prophetic judgment speech is straightforward. Instead of relying on Yahweh, the leaders find their security in the foreign alliance and that “is in reality a covenant that brings death and that leads to the grave.”\textsuperscript{3} Consequently, the term Sheol in vss. 15 and 18 has no direct relevance as such to the dead, but is used as an allusion to the consequences of the trust in foreign powers. The Hebrew word Sheol in the current context is identical with grave. Whatever the scholarly arguments and claims, to interpret these metaphorically vivid expressions in a literal sense leads to the distortion of the biblical text and a different message.

\textit{Isa 38:10, 18}

\begin{verbatim}
בשעיה שאול ישחרר הגנה 있고 
כין לא שאול תורה מקה הגלק
לא ישחרר ייחר יבך אל אמת
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{1}The thought is similar to that expressed in Job 5:23, “For you shall have a covenant with the stones of the field and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.”

\textsuperscript{2}Johnston, \textit{Shades of Sheol}, 160.

\textsuperscript{3}Harris, “Why Hebrew Sh\textsuperscript{c}ol Was Translated ‘Grave,’” 67; Young, \textit{The Book of Isaiah 19-39}, 2:282.
Translation and Textual Remarks

10 I said,  
“In the cessation of my days1  
I will go to the gates of Sheol,  
I am deprived of the rest of my years.”  
18 For Sheol cannot thank you,  
Death cannot praise you.  
Those who go down to the pit cannot hope  
for your faithfulness.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Isa 38:1-22 informs the reader about Hezekiah’s illness and recovery. The delineation of the chapter as a basic unit is determined by means of the temporal formula of 38:1, בְּיוֹםָיו (“in those days”), and another formula of 39:1, בְּר יִת (“at that time”), that starts a new block.2 The inner structure is established principally by a combination of formal and thematic elements. Thus, one of the options is to divide the unit into three major sections: (1) vss. 1-8 provide a description of Hezekiah’s illness and prayer, (2) vss. 9-20 tell of the writing of Hezekiah’s letter to Yahweh, and (3) an account of Hezekiah’s healing process is presented in vss. 21-22.3

1 The meaning of the phrase בְּיוֹםָיו is not clear. The NIV renders it as “in the prime of my life” and RSV translates it “in the noontide of my days.” According to Ps 63:6 and 83:2, the basic meaning is “in the quiet of my days.” Many commentators think that the expression refers to the end of a regular human life, though the context speaks about premature death. Wildberger, referring to Jer 17:11 and Ps 55:24, 102:25, translates the term בְּיוֹםָיו with the traditional meaning, namely, “the half of, the middle of.” Jesaja 28-39, 1442. See also Godfrey R. Driver, “Linguistic and Textual Problems: Isaiah I-XXXIX,” Journal of Theological Studies (JTS) 38 (1937): 36-50; Beuken, Isaiah 28-39, 380.

2 Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 490.

Vs. 9 serves not only as the title of the song, but also contains a technical term "writing," thus introducing the poem (vss. 9-20) and also identifying its content. The song can be outlined in the following chiastic structure:¹

A  The gates of Sheol: sorrow at the shortening of days (vs. 10)
B  The land of the living and the land of the dead (vs. 11)
C  Description of distress (vss. 12-14)
C¹ Description of restoration (vss. 15-17)
B¹ The land of the dead and the land of the living (vss. 18-19)
A¹ The house of the Lord: joy over days prolonged (vs. 20)

Basically, the encompassing genre of Isa 38 can be characterized as a narrative.² However, concerning the genre of vss. 9-20, scholars have different opinions. Some classify it as a "petition," others as a "song of illness," a "thanksgiving song," or a "hymn of praise."³ Because the song combines complaint, thanksgiving, and praise elements, it is basically designated as a thanksgiving song.⁴

The unit (vss. 9-20) essentially outlines a first-person address to Yahweh, though on


several occasions it refers to Yahweh in the third person (vss. 11, 14, 15, 16, 20). The song describes Hezekiah's lamentation, his prayer for healing, and thanksgiving for divine intervention in his behalf.

Exegetical Notes

The basic thought of the psalm is clear. Hezekiah becomes critically ill, and Isaiah tells him to get ready for death. Hezekiah weeps bitterly and implores Yahweh for mercy, and He grants him fifteen more years. On one hand, the major thrust of the song is to reveal that Hezekiah, though king, is only a mortal being, and on the other, it clearly demonstrates the fact that the life of a person is exclusively in the hand of Yahweh.

Furthermore, in the setting of life and death which the song unfolds, the term Sheol occurs twice (vss. 10, 18). Referring to Sheol in these verses, scholars state various conclusions. For example, D. Stacey explains that “Sheol is a figurative way of describing the existence of the tomb.” According to The New Westminster Dictionary, Sheol is “the place to which the souls of all men without distinction

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1 For a detailed analysis of subordinate generic elements, see Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 493-496.

2 There are some other references which describe the healing of a person from a deadly illness: 1 Kgs 17:17-24; 2 Kgs 4:31-37; 5:1-14. See also 1 Kgs 14:1-18; 2 Kgs 1:1-18; 8:7-15. However, Hezekiah's crisis is unique, because it presents a case where the recovery comes as an answer to prayer.


4 The song of Hezekiah is absent in the parallel account of 2 Kgs 20.

5 Stacey, Isaiah 1-39, 229.
D. McKenna describes Sheol “as a land of shadowy creatures and ambiguous relationships.” And H. Leopold asserts that “Sheol itself is that dismal, dreary place where the departed lead a dull and listless existence, that insatiable monster that swallows all the children of men in due course of time.”

These scholarly statements, containing special connotations, implications, and challenges concerning their various conclusions, lead to the necessity of exploring the passage anew. Here, as in the previous references, the text is abundant with specific vocabulary, creating vibrant turns of phrases and images of their objects, which are characteristic of a highly figurative language.

The phrase ("I will go to the gates of Sheol") of vs. 10 contains one of the most important key words in the unit, ("to go," "come," "walk"). Moreover, the main nucleus of Hezekiah’s prayer is organized and revolves around the term ("I will go") in such a way that it is setting the tone for the entire song. Here the verb is in parallel with the verb ("to go down") in an equivalent phrase ("those who go down to the pit") of vs. 18, and

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4Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Isa 5:14; 14:11, 15; 38:10; 38:18; 57:9; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27. The other nine occurrences of the verb “to go down” will be discussed in the next chapter.
5See Excursus 1.
functions as a figurative substitute for "to go to death, die," "dying," or "to pass away." Bullinger is very clear that the euphemism of "going" in the phrase "I shall go to the gates of the grave (Sheol)" should be interpreted as "I shall die."2

The description of the imminence of Hezekiah’s death is reinforced by means of four graphic similes, which by their powerful imagery dominate the entire section of vss. 12-14:

my dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent

like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom

like a lion—so he breaks all my bones

like a swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove

These unusual images of destruction provide insightful information concerning the king’s understanding of death in the face of its inevitability. In vs. 12, Hezekiah compares his short life to a shepherd’s tent that has been pulled up. The verb בָּנָה

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2Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 687.
(“tear down,” “pull up,”) is linked with מָנֹקֵי ("my dwelling") and is parallel to מָנַון ("and is removed from me").

The second metaphor, which forms a powerful complementary image to the first one, describes the abruptness of human life by two verbs: מִקָּבַּל ("gather together," “roll up") and מִכְמָנִים ("cut off"). In the Hebrew Scriptures the verb מִכְמָנִים refers to death as “being cut off.” According to the simile, the weaver himself rolls up the pattern of the life he has woven while suddenly another comes and cuts off the thread and removes it from the loom, which means the end of life. Here Hezekiah is depicted as both a weaver and fabric. Both similes describe the “objects which suddenly disappear from their expected place.” This practical language, describing a

1 For additional information see Hand-Jürgen Zobel, "דִּבְרֵיהֶם," TDOT, 2:476-488; David M. Howard, "וּכָלָה," NIDOTTE, 1:861-864.


4 Job 21:21; Ps 88:6; Isa 53:8; Ezek 37:11; Lam 3:54; Eugene E. Carpenter, "דִּבְרֵיהֶם," NIDOTTE, 1:693-694; Begrich, Der Psalm des Hiskia, 31.


7 Clements, Isaiah 1-39, 292.
fabric-making process, is employed to illustrate the sudden end of one’s life. Moreover, the imagery does not contain any element or allusion that the death of Hezekiah would bring him into the presence of Yahweh or into the company of the living souls of the dead. On the contrary, these figures of speech show that when death comes, it totally “cuts off” any possibility of vertical or horizontal communication (vs. 11).

In vs. 13, Hezekiah uses another imagery of death as he faces it. Instead of being a weaver, Yahweh is portrayed הַשָׁכָה (“like a lion”) who יָדַע (“breaks all my bones”). Since the bones form the core of the whole body they are synonymous with the whole person of the speaker. The simile refers to Hezekiah’s suffering and the loss of physical health in the face of fast approaching death.

After comparing Yahweh with a lion, Hezekiah associates himself with wailing birds, יָתַע (“swallow”) and יִנְבָּא (“dove”), which יִקְרָא (“chirp,” “clamor”) and יִרְע (“moan”). It is very strange that Watts uses this imagery (vs. 14) as a description of death and indirectly Sheol. He refers to Isa 8:19; 10:14; 29:4, and 59:11, where each text has some “connection with the ghosts of the dead,” as parallel references to vs. 14, and asserts that “only moans or groans are possible there.” However, that is not the case. The various sounds of birds inform about the mixed nature of Hezekiah’s


2Seybold, Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament, 147-149.

3Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 60.
suffering, sobs and shed tears, and his many cries to Yahweh: at one time quiet, next
time shrill, and then mournful, and have nothing to do with the spirits of the dead or
the teaching about the underground.¹

There are several more important questions to be addressed. In the restoration
section (vss.15-17), Hezekiah particularizes his healing by such wording as רזגוי (“and restore me to health”) and דרור (“and make me live”). In vs. 17, Hezekiah
summarizes the gift of life and healing granted to him by Yahweh by the phrase
דְּלָתי (“surely, it was for my peace”). And then, the very next clause informs
the reader about something extremely important, מִשָּׁהַ בְּלָל (“but you have delivered me [my soul/life] from the pit of destruction”). What is
meant by the phrase מִשָּׁהַ בְּלָל (“pit of destruction”), which is a hapax legomenon
and sounds almost like a formula? As can be seen from table 10, the word מִשָּׁהַ
occurs twenty-three times in the Hebrew Scripture, almost always in poetical contexts,
and in idiomatic constructions twenty-one times.²

The term מִשָּׁהַ is a feminine noun,³ which, unlike בֹּל and תָּל, occurs with
the definite article seven times.⁴ In the Hebrew Scriptures the basic meaning of the


²Various constructions such as מִשָּׁהַ בְּלָל (“bring down to the pit”) will
be discussed in the next chapter. See table 10.

³“מִשָּׁהַ,” BDB, 1001.

⁴See table 10. The seven occurrences are: Job 9:31; 17:14; 33:22, 28; Ps 49:9;
Isa 51:14; Ezek 28:8.
**TABLE 10**

**OCCURRENCES OF THE TERM **ָהִית** IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Isa 38:17</td>
<td>from the pit of destruction</td>
<td>מָשָׁהּ בְּלִי</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Isa 51:14</td>
<td>and he will not die in the pit</td>
<td>לֹא אֶלֶּהָ לָשׁוּת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ezek 19:4</td>
<td>he was caught in their pit</td>
<td>בֶּשָׂחַם נַחֲשָׁת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ezek 19:8</td>
<td>he was caught in their pit</td>
<td>בֶּשָׂחַם נַחֲשָׁת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ezek 28:8</td>
<td>they will bring you down to the pit</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת יָוֶרֶדֶת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jonah 2:7</td>
<td>but you brought my life up from the pit</td>
<td>נַעֲלוּפָה לָשׁוּת וָיִלָע</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ps 7:16</td>
<td>and he falls into the pit he made</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת נִיֵּמְבָּה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ps 9:16</td>
<td>the nations have sunk in the pit</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת נִיֵּמְבָּה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ps 16:10</td>
<td>to see the pit</td>
<td>לְרַאְאָה לֶבֶרֶךְ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ps 30:10</td>
<td>if I go down to the pit</td>
<td>בַּאְדִירָה אלְשָׁהָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ps 49:10</td>
<td>that he sees not the pit</td>
<td>לֹא רֶאְאָה לֶבֶרֶךְ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ps 55:24</td>
<td>bring them down to the pit of destruction</td>
<td>חוֹרָה לָבֶרֶךְ שֶׁמָּה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ps 94:13</td>
<td>until a pit is dug for the wicked</td>
<td>טָנָאָה לָשׁוּת וָיִלָע</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ps 103:4</td>
<td>who redeems your life from the pit</td>
<td>תָּגיָרָה מָשָׁהּ חָיָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Prov 26:27</td>
<td>whoever digs a pit will fall into it</td>
<td>בַּעַרְתָּה בַּעַלְּשָׁת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Prov 28:10</td>
<td>will himself fall into his own pit</td>
<td>בְּשָׂחַם יָרַע יָרַעְיָלְא</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Job 9:31</td>
<td>then in the pit you would plunge me</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת נִיֵּמְבָּה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Job 17:14</td>
<td>if I call to the pit</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת נִיֵּמְבָּה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Job 33:18</td>
<td>he keeps back his soul from the pit</td>
<td>נָרָהָבָה נַפָּשָׁה מִיָּתָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Job 33:22</td>
<td>then his soul draws near to the pit</td>
<td>נָרָהָבָה לָשׁוּת נַפָּשָׁה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Job 33:24</td>
<td>deliver him from going down to the pit</td>
<td>שָׁפַרְתָּה מָרֲדָה שָׁתָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Job 33:28</td>
<td>from going down to the pit</td>
<td>עֵנָבָה בֶּשָׂחַמ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Job 33:30</td>
<td>to bring back his soul from the pit</td>
<td>לָשׁוּת נִיֵּמְבָּה מִיָּתָה</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
term הֲנַחֶשׁ is “pit,” “grave,”\(^1\) and it may refer to a hole in the ground, a trap, or function as a synonym of Sheol with the meaning of “grave.”\(^2\) It is significant to note that the people of Qumran associated the term with the idea of physical corruption.\(^3\)

The root הֲנַחֶשׁ forms an inseparable part in the descriptions of Yahweh’s judgments and total devastation and annihilation.\(^4\)

The second term, הֲנַפֶּס ("without"), occurs fifty-seven times in the Hebrew Scriptures and usually functions as an adverb of negation with adjectives or participles.\(^5\) Generally the negative particle הֲנַפֶּס is used in the same way as one of the

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\(^4\) Used for the destruction of all flesh and all the earth (Gen 6:13, 17; 9:11, 15); Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:10; 19:13, 14, 29); Babylon (Jer 51:11); Tyre (Ezek 26:4); destruction of the king (1 Sam 26:15), or nations (Jer 4:7). Cornelis Van Dam, "הֲנַחֶשׁ," *NIDOTTE*, 4:92-93.

five principal negative adverbs ("is not," "nor," "nothing," etc.),\(^1\) which negates various verbless clauses.\(^2\) The only case when the particle adverb \(\text{בַּלִּים} \) functions as a substantive is found in Isa 38:17, where the phrase \(\text{בַּלִּים הָעָשָׁה} \) ("from the pit of destruction") refers to Sheol. It is significant to note the twofold function of the term \(\text{בַּלִּים} \), which is quite specific in the current text, namely, it qualifies \(\text{הָעָשָׁה} \) ("pit") as the place of obliteration and at the same time as the particular form of negation ("without," "no," "not") excludes any possibility of the afterlife existence in the pit/Sheol. Furthermore, the phrase \(\text{בַּלִּים הָעָשָׁה} \) not only is identical with grave as the "pit of destruction or corruption," but also serves as a platform preparing for vs. 18, which in turn clarifies vs. 17.

It is interesting that Watts translates the phrase "the pit of extinction" to point out that it is "a cogent example of the OT's lack of a general positive view of life beyond death," and then he continues by making a totally wrong summary: "Death at best is lifeless existence among the shades in dust and darkness."\(^3\) However, his ideas contradict the description of Sheol in vs. 18. Furthermore, using different wording.

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\(^1\) The five negative adverbs are: \(\text{בַּלִּים, לֹא, זֶה, קְלַל, שָׁלֹם} \), and \(\text{לֹא} \). See also Charles F. Whitley, "The Positive Force of the Hebrew Particle \(\text{בַּלִּים} \)," ZAW 84 (1972): 213-219; Takamitsu Muraoka, Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 125-127.

\(^2\) The adverb basically is a negative substantive and in all cases the negative aspect is present. See Waltke, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 660-662; Jack B. Scott, "זֶה," TWOT, 1:81-82.

\(^3\) Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 60.
Rosenberg expresses the same idea. She translates the term יָדוֹן only as “pit” or “underworld” and never as “grave.” Moreover, after introducing her argument that there is no association of the term יָדוֹן with the hope of escape, which is expressed by a specific vocabulary, and briefly referring to a family grave, she asserts, “It is therefore inaccurate to translate biblical יָדוֹן as ‘grave,’ as is so often done.”

However, the literal meaning of the word יָדוֹן is clear. It denotes a large hole in the earth for various uses. Most often the term in the Hebrew Scriptures occurs in a metaphorical sense to signify the grave. Unfortunately, scholars make spatial and qualitative distinctions between יָדוֹן (in this case “underworld”) and the synonymous terms יָסָב (“grave”), יָדוֹן (“pit”), and יָדָב (“pit”), employing them as the entrance or door to the underworld or afterlife. Basically this idea is not new, as it is borrowed from ancient non-biblical sources and then imposed on the interpretation of the biblical text.

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1Rosenberg’s conclusions are based on her studies of Pss 30:3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12; 49:6-10; 55:24; 94:1-7, 13; 103:3-4; Isa 38:17; Job 9:29-32; 33:13-30. Rosenberg, “The Concept of Biblical Sheol,” 60-71. She asserts that the term יָדוֹן “is used predominantly to describe the ultimate destination of the wicked who died prematurely.” Ibid., 71. The same point is emphasized by Martin, “An Examination of the Concept of Sheol,” 160-168.


4Here is where the question of biblical authority arises.

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Gilgamesh was required by the gods to dig a hole in the earth so that the spirit of his deceased friend, Enkidu, might issue forth from the underworld/netherworld. Similarly, Homer writes about Odysseus, who dug a trench to gain access to the spirits and consult a dead seer. Obviously the acceptance of non-biblical ideas concerning the underworld leads to the classification/separation of specific biblical terminology, which may have been misunderstood or intentionally misrepresented, thus entailing significant hermeneutical consequences when it comes to the task of formulating a teaching on Sheol.

Furthermore, by means of common figurative expressions in the first half of his prayer for healing, Hezekiah strengthens a notion of the inevitability of death. In addition, the double emphasis at the beginning of vs. 10 on the personal pronoun, יִתְנַבֵּל (“I – I said”), and the subsequent vocabulary clearly demonstrate that death is the end of this life and exclude any idea concerning the continuation or

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3Other aspects of this issue will be discussed in the following chapters.
beginning of the next.\textsuperscript{1} The expression “in the cessation of my days” in vs. 10 is used as an auxiliary for emphasis, and is followed by two descriptive parallel phrases.\textsuperscript{2}

\begin{align*}
\text{I said} & \quad \text{vs. 10} \\
\text{In the cessation of my days} & \\
\text{אֲלֹהֵּי בֵּיתֵּי שֵׁאֲרִי} & \\
\text{I will go to the gates of Sheol} \\
\text{שָׁמַרְתִּי} & \\
\text{I am deprived of the rest of my years}
\end{align*}

The verb \textit{יַלֵּלִי} (“I will go”) is parallel to \textit{יִכְפָּרְנִי} (“I am deprived”) which in Pual means “be caused to miss” or “be deprived.”\textsuperscript{3} The word \textit{שָׁמַרְתִּי} (“gate”), in the phrase \textit{אֲלֹהֵּי בֵּיתֵּי שֵׁאֲרִי} (“I will go to the gates of Sheol”), literally means a physical entrance or exit in towns, cities, temples, and homes.\textsuperscript{4} In the current case, the word \textit{שָׁמַרְתִּי} is used as a metaphor together with \textit{יַלֵּלִי} to describe the passage from life to death, or rephrasing it, I will die and be buried in the grave.\textsuperscript{5}

Furthermore, the king continues his lament in vs. 11, emphasizing by means of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}See also Johnston, \textit{Shades of Sheol}, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Young, \textit{The Book of Isaiah 19:39}, 517-518.
\item \textsuperscript{3}“יִכְפָּרְנִי,” \textit{BDB}, 824.
\item \textsuperscript{4}For entrance \textit{מַחָּב} and exit \textit{מַחָּב}, see Jer 17:19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27; Lam 4:12 Ezek 26:10, etc., “פָּלַס,” \textit{BDB}, 1045; “פָּלַס,” \textit{HALOT}, 4:1614-1616.
\item \textsuperscript{5}The parallel phrase \textit{מַמְחָבָרִי-רַעֲשֵׁי} (“the gates of death”) occurs in Job 38:17; Pss 9:14, and 107:18 and will be discussed in chapter 4. It should be noted that the expression “the gates of Sheol” is parallel to the NT phrase \textit{πύλαι ξέδου} (“the gates of Hades”) in Matt 16:18. Richard S. Hess, “פָּלַס,” \textit{NIDOTTE}, 4:208-211.
\end{itemize}
contrast two major aspects which are presented by two parallel phrases. He underlines a fundamental difference between life and death, the living and the dead. Hezekiah is absolutely sure that after his death all contacts with life are cut off. That is why he says, "I shall not see YAH, YAH in the land of the living". The double use of the divine name is inseparably coupled with life itself and this is articulated by the phrase. The negative wording refers to Hezekiah’s death and the grave. The second parallel phrase reveals another important truth, namely, "I shall look upon man no more among the inhabitants of the world". The second negative phrase ("I shall not look/observe") like the first one refers to his death. It means that after Hezekiah is dead, all relationships, whether they are vertical with YAH or horizontal connections with the inhabitants of the world, are terminated. Finally, this verse presents a clear message concerning the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol, as does vs. 18 by introducing additional clarifying elements.

for Sheol cannot thank you,

death cannot praise you

those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.

Vs. 18 contains three parallel phrases which are represented by the dominant

key vocabulary, שור, רוח, and בּוּרְרָה, referring to the sphere of death. This parallelism functions as the antithesis for double emphases of המי, המי, המי, referring to the living, living, living, he will thank you) of vs. 19. Moreover, special attention should be paid to the twofold negative particles לא... לא (“cannot... cannot”), which structurally are tied together with לא... לא (“not... not”) of vs. 11, thus providing the strongest possible negation for any activity after one is dead.2 The following categorical statements, “I shall not see YAH, YAH,” “I shall not look upon man,” because “Sheol cannot thank you,” “death cannot praise you,” “those who go down to the pit cannot hope,” including the graphic similes of vs. 12-14, are in sharp contrast with any assertion concerning some kind of existence in Sheol.3 Hezekiah understood that the dead simply cease to exist.

Furthermore, the contrast between life and death, the land of the living and the grave, is demonstrated and reinforced by the word pairs יָהּ, יָהּ (“YAH, YAH”) and הָיָהוּ, הָיָהוּ (“the living, the living”).4 In addition, in vs. 19, the emphasis is put on the third-person independent personal pronoun הוא (“he”), which leads to the

1 According to Kaiser, “the underworld, Sheol and death are actually personified.” See Kaiser, Isaiah 13-39, 406.

2 Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 295.


4 One of the recurring themes in the Psalms is that only the living can praise Yahweh and not the dead: Pss 6:6; 30:10; 88:11-13.
intensification of the contrast with the dead, namely, the living, the living, he it is who will praise you.¹

The term מָּרָה ("death") serves as a synonym for the grave, as is demonstrated in Isa 53:9, מְחַלָּא הַעַלַּיֶּהָ מַעֵּת יָמָּה ("with the wicked his grave, and with the rich in his death [translated tomb, NRS]"), where מְחַלָּא is parallel to מַעֵּת ("grave"). Commenting on Isa 38:18, Bullinger explains, "The grave (i.e., those who are buried in it) cannot praise thee,"² and it harmonizes well with the phrase "Sheol cannot thank you."

Finally, the term בַּדֵּר ("pit," "grave")³ in the phrase מְחַלָּא בַּדֵּר not only is parallel to Sheol but also is clearly identified with the grave.⁴ This analogy is also demonstrated by the broader canonical context.⁵ For example, Jer 41:7 informs the reader about seventy men who were slaughtered and thrown מְחַלָּא הַנָּהָר ("to the midst of the pit"). When Joseph’s brothers wanted to kill Joseph, their language was straightforward, מְקַלְקֵל בַּדֵּר בַּדֵּר הַנָּהָר ("let us kill him and throw him

¹Young, The Book of Isaiah 19-39, 527.
²Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 578.
³See table 9.
⁴"בַּדֵּר," BDB, 92. BDB consistently defines the figurative meaning of בַּדֵּר as "grave." Contrary to this, KBL identifies בַּדֵּר with "the cistern as the entrance to the קֹסֶם את הַמִּשְׁמַר." See Koehler and Baumgartner, "בַּדֵּר," KBL, 114. For additional information on the term בַּדֵּר see the discussion on Isa 14:9-15.
⁵See also discussion on Gen 37:35.
into one of the pits,” Gen 37:20.\(^1\) Lam 3:53 reads that, רָדַּשׁ הָאָדָם אֶל הָאָדָם (“they have cut off my life in the pit”), and 2 Kgs 13:21 has the term “grave” which is a synonym of “pit,” אֶלֶף הָאָדָם אֵל הָאָדָם (“and they threw the man into the grave of Elisha”). It is obvious that there is nothing in the Scriptures suggesting that the dead have to go through the “door” of the pit to Sheol.

The picture of death presented in this passage signifies ultimate separation from the land of the living and even from Yahweh as well. According to Hezekiah, the key word Sheol refers to the total unconsciousness and complete cessation of all activity and thought, which clearly implies the decomposing state of the body in the grave, simultaneously excluding any idea of continued existence in the underworld. Consequently, in spite of the fact that the nouns רָדַּשׁ, רָדַּשׁ and נְבֵד are representatives of spatial imagery, they have nothing to do with the function of an “entrance,” “door,” or “opening” leading to the underworld called Sheol. On the contrary, as death is described by means of various antonyms of life, such as נָבַל (“tear down”), נָבַל (“remove”), נָבַל (“roll up”), נָבַל (“cut off”), and נָבַל (“break,” “destroy”) to underscore the termination of human life including all possible relationships, so also, each of the discussed words, רָדַּשׁ, רָדַּשׁ, and נְבֵד, provides

\(^1\)Hamilton points out an important detail that the rendering “throw” for the verb רָדַּשׁ in Gen 37:20, 22, 24 is inaccurate. He comments, “The brothers will not ‘toss’ Joseph into a cistern. When used with a person as its object, śālak almost always refers to the placing of a dead body in a grave (e.g., 2 Sam 18:17; 2 Kgs 13:21; Jer 41:9) or to the placing of a living body into what is assumed will be its grave (e.g., Gen 21:15; 37:24; Jer 38:6).” Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18-50*, 417. For additional insights see Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 353.
some descriptive element, analogy, or aspect of Sheol.

Isa 57:9

Translation and Textual Remarks

You journeyed to the king\(^1\) with oil, and multiplied your perfumes;\(^2\) and you sent your envoys far away, and sent down even to Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Usually scholars look at Isa 56:9-57:13, which describes injustice and idolatry, as one compositional unit. However, there is no consensus among them concerning its structural outline. The problem lies in a highly figurative language, which contains mixed metaphors of death and sexual imagery, and in addition to that, scholars have been greatly puzzled by difficulties encountered in establishing the meaning of the passage.\(^3\)


\(^2\)LXX reads “those far from you.”

There are several ways to demarcate the structural unit of which vs. 9 is a part. One of the possibilities is to divide Isa 57:1-13 into three main sections thematically: vss. 1-2 lament the righteous and devout who perish innocently. The next subunit (vss. 3-5) is introduced with the phrase רְשֵׁי קֹשֵׁם (“but you,” masculine plural), condemning religious apostasy and its leaders. Vss. 6-13 deal with a female prostitute (Jerusalem), therefore the form of address shifts from masculine plural to the second feminine singular.\(^1\) As in previous cases the problem is both religious and political.

The genre of this passage is frequently defined as a prophetic disputation and a judgment speech,\(^2\) a lament or a threat,\(^3\) or a prophetic liturgy.\(^4\) However, the best option is to denote the passage as an extended indictment speech, which in fact contains all the elements of various genres mentioned above.\(^5\)

**Exegetical Notes**

Researchers have often been perplexed over the passage, including vs. 9, where the clauseNAS נָשָׁתָה מְרַחֲקֶה הַיָּשָׁר יָסְרָאֵל יַעֲנֶה (“you sent your


\(^5\)Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 197.
envoys far away, and went down even to Sheol”) seems to be problematic for many scholars. Like the other verses of the unit, it has been subjected to various possible interpretations.1

A. Pinker points to Isa 57:9 as a proof that Sheol is located “down deep in the depth of the earth,” and because of excess of distance “it cannot be considered to be equivalent of a grave.”2 The IB explains that “envoys were sent to consult the gods of the underworld.”3 Similarly, G. Long and R. Whybray believe that Israel worshiped the gods of the underworld by engaging in necromancy.4

Before focusing on the text, it should be emphasized that vs. 9 is located in the midst of the description that is saturated with a highly figurative language. Generally, metaphorical expressions transcend actual life situations and do not accept an interpretation which is based on the actual words in their ordinary meaning.

The vivid imagery of the passage (vss. 6-13) presents a grim picture of idolatry when the people of Yahweh engaged in degrading activities. Vs. 9 informs the reader that נֵבֶט הַדּוֹמָה וְהַשְּׁאָרִיִּים, נַעֲרֵי־שְׁאָרִיִּים ("you sent your envoys far away, and went down even to Sheol"). The verb נָשָׁל, in the expression נָשָׁל נֶפֶל הַשְּׁאָרִיִּים, נַעֲרֵי, 

1For an overview and concise analysis of some problematic aspects in Isa 57 see Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 175-178.


is in Hiphil form, and basically means “to bring low,” "to humiliate," or "to make low." Furthermore, the verb functions as an absolute superlative or hyperbole in a negative sense, which can be formed with such terms as מָרָן ("to die"), נִמְשׂ ("death"), הַשָּׁוְא ("Sheol," "grave"), and many other words. The figure is used as an overstatement of the expression in order to heighten the main point for effect and should not be taken literally. In fact, the hyperboles of "death," "the dead," or "grave" are also used in modern English to put heavy emphasis on some specific element or aspect of speech, the meaning of verb, expression, or sentence, which at the end can be characterized as "extremely," "completely," or "to the very last degree."

Moreover, the term בִּֽאֲם is followed by יָרֵאָם, which in turn is parallel to נַעֲרָם ("even to afar"). Thus, by means of specific literary devices which lead to intensification and culmination of the main thought, the author demonstrates the profundity of degradation. BDB interprets the phrase as “you did show abasement” to


3Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 423.

4People often use expressions such as "nearly died laughing," "bored to death," "to grow deathly pale" (extremely), "deathly afraid," "deadly dull," "to make one turn in his grave," "one foot in the grave" (almost dead, near death), "devilish trouble," "devilish pranks," "devilishly clever," or "was hopping mad," "tried a thousand times," etc. Nobody believes such statements should be understood literally, but people make them to sound impressive or to emphasize something, such as a feeling, effort, or reaction.

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The same idea is clearly expressed by Bullinger, "You did debase yourself even unto Sheol." In other words, vs. 9 points out that people went so far in their apostasy that they debased themselves even to the lowest depth, even to the grave, though no hints concerning precise location or spatial aspects are given. It is noteworthy to point out that here the only functional elements are those of contrast found in vss. 7 and 9, "...עַל־רְאֵי־יָם...עַל־יְהוָה" ("on a mountain high and lofty... you went up") and "...תַּנְבִּיאֵה...תַּנְבִּיאֵה" ("and sent down even to Sheol"), which emphasize the readiness and willingness of the wicked to pursue their own goals regardless of the outcome, even if it means death and the grave.

In the Hebrew Scriptures frequent occurrences of superlative absolutes play an important role. As an example can be mentioned Jonah 4:9, which contains the phrase הָעָנָה הַפְּרוּצִית הַשְּׁלֹשִׁית ("I am angry even unto death") with the verb הָעָנָה meaning "to burn" or "be kindled." Similar to הָעָנָה הַפְּרוּצִית (Isa 57:9), the phrase הָעָנָה serves to intensify the idea already expressed, so that the expression can be rendered as, "I am exceedingly angry," "very angry," or "mortally angry," as NEB translates it.

Furthermore, as the imagery of prostitution describes Israel's total apostasy from Yahweh and her pledge of loyalty to others, the straightforward expression

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1. לֹא-דָגָן, "BDB, 1050.
2. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 425. He sees here the indignity of Ahaz, when he asked the king of Assyria to help him against Israel, saying: "I am your servant" (2 Kgs 16:7).
4. For the background see 2 Kgs 16:10; Isa 7, 8-30; Ezek 16:23.
("and you sent your envoys far away," Isa 57:9) can be understood as referring to the king (ךלמך) of Assyria (vs. 9a) and envoys (ךנש) sent to Egypt (Isa 30:1-10). Instead of seeking help from Yahweh, the leaders of Judah flirted with pagan nations by signing agreements of their own destruction (Isa 28:14-15). Young’s statement on vs. 9 is quite insightful: “The latter clause is not to be understood literally, as though Israel had descended to Sheol for the purpose of consulting their God, but simply indicates the extreme to which Israel was ready to go to accomplish its purpose.” Consequently, people literally abased themselves.

Finally, it is particularly important to emphasize that the term Sheol, in the expression (ךנש) ("and went down even to Sheol"), is used in a hyperbolic sense to demonstrate the readiness of the leaders to act beyond reason and to emphasize their degradation. In fact, the phrase characterizes their apostasy as their descent into death. The unit contains no descriptive elements, either spatial or topographical, which would in some way characterize Sheol. It also does not provide


3 Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3:406.

4 Ibid., 406.

any information concerning the attributes, inhabitants, or any form of possible existence in the underworld. As in all the previous cases, the term Sheol in vs. 9 should be understood as the grave or the place of the dead.1

Ezek 31:15, 16, 17

Translation and Textual Remarks

15 Thus said the Lord Yahweh: In the day it [Egypt] went down to Sheol I caused mourning, I covered for it the deep, I restrained its rivers, and the many waters were held back. And I caused Lebanon to mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted because of it.

16 At the sound of its downfall I made the nations quake, when I brought it down to Sheol, with those who go down to the pit. Then all the trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, all that were well watered, were comforted in the earth below.

17 They also went down to Sheol with it to those who were slain by the sword, and those who were its strong arm lived in its shadows among the nations.2

1Because of the space limitations, the words which occur in a broader context (Isa 57:1-2) and refer to death and the grave, such as "דב ("perish"), משל ("gather," "remove"), נב ("he enters into peace"), ה ("rest"), and משל ("bed") as a place of burial (Ezek 32:25, 2 Chr 16:14), will not be discussed here.

2Compare translations of the NASB, NKJV, and NIV.
Text Unit and Its Genre

Ezek 31:1-18 contains the fifth oracle against Egypt, and structurally can stand as a separate unit. The passage is clearly demarcated by two dated prophetic word formulas, HOT rntOSJ HnK3 'iT l (“and it came to pass in the eleventh year,” vs. 1), and rO© TOT3 nrP1 (“and it came to pass in the twelfth year,” 32:1). The phrase W  (“to whom are you like?”) in vss. 2 and 18, forms an inclusion. The divine signatory formula in vs. 18, ITirP “ T lX  DK3 (“says the Lord Yahweh”), summarizes the whole unit in a nutshell.

Structurally the main body (vss. 3-17) of the chapter easily divides into three smaller subunits (vss. 3-9; 10-14; 15-18). The first subunit (poem, vss. 3-9) is introduced by the interjection HSn (“behold, Assyria”) and functions as an extended metaphor. It depicts Assyria as a cedar of Lebanon, which is admired (vss. 3-7) and envied by all the trees of Eden (vss. 8-9).

The second segment (vss. 10-14) starts with (“therefore”) and is followed

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1 Altogether Ezekiel has pronounced seven prophecies against Egypt: Ezek (1) 29:1-16; (2) 17-21; (3) 30:1-19; (4) 20-26; (5) 31:1-18; (6) 32:1-16; (7) 17-32. See also Cassuto, Biblical and Oriental Studies, 227-240; Daniel I. Block, The Book of Ezekiel 25-48, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 128-131; also idem, The Book of Ezekiel 1-24, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-60.


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by the citation formula נַעֲמָה יְהֹוָה ("thus says the Lord Yahweh").\(^1\) The unit is written in prose and functions as a prophetic judgment oracle. The arrogant cedar is cut down by foreigners, and all its former supporters have abandoned it. The message is directed against Pharaoh and his army.

The final subunit (vss. 15-18), which stands out clearly with its prose description of the descent of the arrogant tree into Sheol, is introduced by the phrase נַעֲמָה יְהֹוָה ("thus says the Lord Yahweh"). Here the prophet describes Lebanon, trees of the field, and the trees of Eden as all of them join together to take comfort in the cedar’s downfall.\(^2\)

The chapter is complex because of the mixture of various form and genre elements. On the one hand, it draws heavily on allegory and has the power of judgment oracle; on the other, it is similar to the style of a funeral dirge, נַעֲמָה ("lamentation").\(^3\) Among scholars there is no consensus concerning the main genre of the chapter. G. Fohrer and H. Parunak put emphasis on the terms of mourning in vs. 15, נַעֲמָה נַעֲמָה ("I made to mourn"), מַעֲמָה ("and I closed with gloom"), and thus come to the conclusion that the unit is a metaphorical lament.\(^4\) Fishbane and J. Taylor

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designate it as a taunt-song.\(^1\) A. Solomon calls it "a political fable."\(^2\) Furthermore, if one accepts vss. 10-14 as the rhetorical center, then this oracle is best defined as a prophetic statement of judgment.\(^3\) Whatever the scholarly conclusions, the passage serves as a paradigm of accusation, proclamation of judgment, execution of judgment, and public reaction to it.

**Exegetical Notes**

The passages of Ezek 31 and 32 are similar to that of Isa 14, as they describe the humiliation of the kings of Babylon and Egypt and play the most critical role concerning interpretation of the term Sheol. At first sight, the three occurrences of the term Sheol in Ezek 31:15-17 might seem to refer to hell or the underworld, and many scholars have come to such conclusions.\(^4\) On the other hand, Heidel, Harris, and Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 46-47; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 208.


\(^3\)See the oracle against the prince of Tyre in 28:1-10. According to Block, the thematic and structural links with Ezek 28 lead to the conclusion that this oracle may also be interpreted as a prophetic satire. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, 25-48*, 180; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 428.

others point out that the term \( יָמִ֣ים \) refers only to the grave.\(^1\) The lack of consensus among scholars shows that one problem that confronts and divides them in their research is rooted in the question of whether Ezekiel’s allegory describes a real picture of some kind of existence after death, and if yes, to what extent, or if it simply serves to bring home some concrete theological and anthropological points. The answer to this question entails far-reaching consequences, especially concerning the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol, which in turn has to do with the state of the dead, resurrection, etc.

At the very outset of this brief analysis, it is important to note that according to Block’s detailed studies,\(^2\) more than half of the book of Ezekiel employs judgment and death vocabulary, which can be summarized by three technical terms, standing next to each other at the beginning of the book (Ezek 2:10), namely, \( יִנְּבָ֣נָא \) ("lamentations"), \( יִנְּבָ֣נָא \) ("and mourning"), \( יִנְּבָ֣נָא \) (and "woe," "wailing").\(^3\)

In addition, it is also necessary to mention that almost the whole chapter of Ezek 31 (vss. 3-17) is written in the perfect (imperfect consecutive), which in the description of the judgment scene usually functions as a prophetic perfect, referring to

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\(^3\)In fact, the death terminology in the book of Ezekiel and its relationship with Sheol could provide enough material for a separate dissertation. Because of space and time restrictions, the current study will briefly discuss only a few terms.
the future fulfillment of Yahweh’s word.\textsuperscript{1} Furthermore, various genre elements, including those of the dirge, focus on the coming event as having already taken place, and therefore, in the context of the imagery of the destruction of the arrogant tree, it is also accompanied by mourning (vs. 15).\textsuperscript{2} As the allegory presents a highly figurative description of Assyria’s death, where it is symbolized by the deadly fall of the beautiful cedar, where the figure of trees is maintained for its allies, and where all the trees go down to the same place where people go, any attempt at a literal interpretation of Sheol should be reconsidered.

Taking the above-mentioned general features as the guiding principle for analysis of vss. 15-18, which are introduced with the citation formula \textsuperscript{2} וֹנֵחַ הַמִּזְבַּחַת, one may focus on the subsequent description of Yahweh’s unique acts. These acts are illustrated by specific death imagery, which is almost identical with the imagery of the judgment scene in the oracle against Tyre (26:19-20). The current passage depicts, under the symbol of trees, Assyria and her allies as “going down” (דָּרֵךְ) to יָרָה. The term יָרָה occurs three times (vss. 15, 16, 17) and always with the directional דָּרֵךְ. Furthermore, it is located in the midst of a highly significant analogous vocabulary, which in one way or another refers to death or the grave. This key terminology executes some important descriptive functions concerning Sheol and at the same time gives a good idea of its nature.

\textsuperscript{1}George A. Cooke, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel} (Edinburgh: Clark, 1936), 343.

\textsuperscript{2}On the use of a great tree as a symbol of a strong nation, see Ezek 17; 19:1-14; Dan 4.
The development and increased intensity of the judgment theme are produced by means of parallelisms, which are clearly mirrored in the last segment of the oracle. Table 11 presents a brief overview of some of the major key vocabulary, which Ezekiel uses to specify death and the grave.

**TABLE 11**

**PARALLELISM IN EZEK 31:14-18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 31:14</td>
<td>פֶּרְבָּלִים יִתְנֵּנּוּ לְפָהָה</td>
<td>for all of them are handed over to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אֲלִיאָרִים חֲתוֹתָה</td>
<td>to the earth below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בַּהֲדוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם</td>
<td>among the sons of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אַרְיָהלֵה בָּהָ</td>
<td>to those who go down to the pit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 31:15</td>
<td>בִּירוֹמ רְדוֹעָה שָאַלָּלָה</td>
<td>in the day it went down to Sheol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 31:16</td>
<td>בְּהוֹדְיֵרֵי פֶּרְבָּלָה</td>
<td>when I brought it down to Sheol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בְּאֱניֵי הפרד</td>
<td>with those who go down to the pit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 31:17</td>
<td>בָּהֲדוֹת בְּנֵי שֶׁאַלָּלָה</td>
<td>they also went down to Sheol with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּהֲדוֹת בְּנֵי שֶׁאַלָּלָה</td>
<td>to those who are slain by the sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>לֹא בָּהֲדוֹת בְּנֵי שֶׁאַלָּלָה</td>
<td>and his arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 31:18</td>
<td>וְאַרְיָהֵתָהּ אַרְיָהלֵה</td>
<td>and you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אַרְיָהלֵה חֲתוֹתָה</td>
<td>to the earth below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שֹׁפֵבָה בְּנֵי עָלִילָה</td>
<td>you will lie among the uncircumcised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אָרְיָהלֵה</td>
<td>with those who are slain by the sword</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cluster of various terms for death in vs. 14, forming parallel phraseology and functioning rhetorically, emphasizes the main point of the whole allegory, namely, the vertical descent from the height of arrogance straight down to the grave. To call...
attention to the life-death contrast\(^1\) and the totality of destruction, Ezekiel uses such words as וְלַעֲשֹׁת ("death"), מִסְדֶּה ("the earth below"), יָרָה ("go down"), and בֹּר ("pit") interchangeably.

The often discussed word יָרָה ("to go down") is a technical term for dying,\(^2\) and is used with Yahweh as the subject in vss. 16 and 18. To go down to the בֹּר ("pit," vss. 14, 16) basically means to go down to the grave, as בֹּר describes the place or hole in the earth for physical burial.\(^3\)

Much discussion goes on concerning the expression מִסְדֶּה יָרָה ("the earth below," vss. 14, 18), what it involves, and whether it should be understood as "the realm of the dead" or "the netherworld."\(^4\) The adjective מִסְדֶּה ("beneath," "below") in combination with earth occurs thrice, מֵסְדוֹה יָרָה ("to the earth beneath," vs. 14), מֵסְדוֹה יָרָה ("in the earth beneath," vs. 16), and מֵסְדוֹה יָרָה ("to the earth beneath," vs. 18), and always in feminine singular. The term מֵסְדוֹה is used metaphorically to directly qualify the noun יָרָה ("earth") and indirectly בֹּר and

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\(^2\) Concerning the term יָרָה ("go down"), see the discussion on Gen 37:35. The term occurs six times in Ezek 31 and seven times in Ezek 32: Ezek 32:18 (2 times), 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, and 2 times in 26:20.

\(^3\) Wehmeier, ""The Concept of Biblical Sheol,"" *TLOT*, 2:892. The formula יָרָה בֹּר is found in Ezek 26:20 (2 times), 32:18, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30. See the discussion on Isa 14:9, 11, 15.

\(^4\) For various scholarly views see the discussion on Deut 32:22, especially Rosenberg, "The Concept of Biblical Sheol," 42-51.
Sheol. It means that the “earth below,” “pit,” and Sheol are located below the earth’s surface, and refers to the place of those who have died, that is, the grave. In a way, the phrase (the earth beneath) answers to the dilemma by itself as it represents the place where life is nonexistent and functions as a diametrical opposite to the expression, (“in the land of the living”).

Finally, the adjective in the expression contains no allusion to any kind of activity in the underworld and excludes any attempt to use it as a qualifier for the conscious existence of spirit after death. The same is true concerning its parallel terminology.

Furthermore, both the direct and broader contexts of the current passage contain an overabundance of specific vocabulary referring to death. For example, the unit preceding vss. 15-18 is rich in terminology relating to death, the dead, and the grave: (to give over” to death, vss. 11, 14); (”to cast out,” 31:11); (”to do,” “deal,” vs. 11); (”to cut off,” vs. 12); (”to leave,” “cast away,” vs. 12); (”to fall,” vs. 12); (”to break in pieces,” ”ruin,” vs. 12); (”carcass,” “ruin,” vs. 13); etc. In spite of the fact that there is an abundance of direct lexical

1 For more information on the term see the discussion on Deut 32:22.

2 Ronald F. Youngblood, “,” TWOT, 2:968. Compare the usage of the adjective in Deut 32:22; Judg 1:15; Job 41:16; Ps 86:13. However, Ezek 26:20, 32:18, 24 uses a variant expression of , namely, the plural noun (translated as, “the lower parts,” “the lowest,” “depth”). See also Josh 15:19; Pss 63:10; 88:7; 139:15; Isa 44:23; Lam 3:55.

3 Ezek 26:20; 32:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 32.

4 For the vocabulary of death in a broader context, see an insightful and highly recommendable article written by Block, “Beyond the Grave: Ezekiel’s Vision of Death and Afterlife,” 113-141.
links with Ezek 32, they will be discussed separately below.¹

It should also be noted that vss. 12 and 13 mirror the content of vss. 15-18 by providing additional thematic links, nuances, and insights. Accordingly, vs. 12, employing figurative language, describes the death of the arrogant tree, which is being cut down (חֵילִים בָּאִים) by alien ruthless nations and then left alone (וַיַּעָקְבוּ). Here the Qal of the term חֵילִים (“cut off,” “kill”) is used figuratively in the sense of “to annihilate,” “destroy,” or “exterminate.” ² The words לַרְכַּבְתָּם ("its branches," vss. 7, 9) and לַרְכַּבְתָּם ("its boughs," vss. 5, 6, 8, 13) in the following parallel expressions, אֲלֵיַחַרְמָיָם בּוֹקֲנָה אֶת הַחָרִים בּוֹקֲנָה אֶת הַחָרִים (“on the mountains and in all the valleys its branches have fallen”) and אֲלֵי בּוֹקֲנָה אֶת הַרְכַּבְתָּם אֲלֵי בּוֹקֲנָה אֶת הַרְכַּבְתָּם (“and its boughs have been broken in all the ravines of the land”) are clear allusions to the dead bodies, which are scattered across mountains and valleys.³ Moreover, vs. 13 continues to describe the consequences of the death of the cedar. It portrays the total destruction of the tree by using imagery of כל הַנַּחַל (“all the birds of heaven”) and כל הַנַּחַל (“all the beasts of the field”) as dwelling על הַנַּחַל (“on its ruins”) על הַנַּחַל (“and on its boughs”).⁴ Here is absolutely nothing that would suggest a

¹For the diagram of the lexical links of the oracle see Block, Ezekiel 25-48, 178-180.

²Gerhard F. Hasel, קֹדֶם, תד. תד. תד. תד., 7:339-351.

³Compare with Ezek 36:8 where the language is literal: "I will fill its mountains with its slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain by the sword will fall." See also Greenberg, Ezekiel 21-37, 640.

⁴A similar picture of a total destruction is found in Lev 26:33-35; Deut 29:23; Isa 13:19-22; Jer 50:39-40, etc.
continuation of existence in Sheol.

As can be seen from table 11, vs. 14 contains not only the message of judgment, which results in the death penalty and serves as a warning to all those nations who want to follow in Assyria's footsteps, but also absorbs the essence of the entire oracle. Yahweh, who always has the last word in human affairs, reaffirms the death sentence for the arrogant trees anew, נָתַתּוּ לְפָטָא ("for all of them are handed over to death").

The term לָלַע ("to mourn," "lament") in vs. 15 functions as another indicator of the death of the beautiful tree. The term לָלַע, in the causative stem (Hi. pf. 1 c.s., "I will cause to mourn"), occurs in the passage containing announcements of Yahweh's judgments which are about to be executed, and an inseparable part of them is mourning over those who are going to perish. ¹

Moreover, the purpose of these judgments is to cut down the arrogant tree from the land of the living, which is clearly demonstrated by means of a triple emphasis on the "going down" to Sheol in vss. 15-17, which excludes any notion of survival after death. In fact, Yahweh Himself brings the beautiful tree down to Sheol with those who go down to the בְּרֹא. All allies had also gone down to the Sheol, thus joining those killed with the sword (vss.16-17). Moreover, the description of the final scene in Sheol (vss. 15-17) presents all the previously mentioned characters: הָלוֹא ("the deep," vss. 4, 15), לַעֲבֵר מְעַטָּו ("of many waters," vss. 5, 7, 15), מֶלֶת נְחֵשׁ ("waters," vss. 4, 15), נְחֵשׁ מַעֲכֵֽשׁ ("its rivers," vss. 4, 15), לָלַע ("shadow," vss. 3, 6, 12, 17),

The phrases "all trees of the field," "all well-watered trees," "all well-watered trees," "nations," "all the trees of Eden," and "all the trees of Eden," and "the choice and best of Lebanon" present extended metaphors which refuse to be interpreted literally. The apposition of trees is listed by the inclusive label ָ֣יִם (lit., "all drinking waters"). Moreover, they generate elements for which no correspondent exists in the referent, and therefore cannot be used as the proof of life in Sheol. The term ָ֣אָמ ("be comforted," "comfort") is in Ni. impf. 3 m. p., and one of its uses is in the context of death. The basic idea of Ezekiel is simple: the arrogant cedar was envied by all the trees in its earthly life (vs. 9), but after it is cut down, the trees are comforted by the final result that in Sheol all the trees are on the same level.

The prophet takes the term ָ֣אָמ and balances it by its synonyms, ָ֣בֹר and ָ֣ו. Accordingly, by means of the specific choice of analogous words, Ezekiel provides various descriptive aspects of the grave, which include the information about its location, direction, and, in a way, also a spatial imagery. The phrases ָ֣בֹר ("the sons of men," vs. 14) and ָ֣ו ("those who go down to the pit," vss. 14, 16) function not only as equivalent expressions, but also as all-
inclusive idioms for all the human race that has died. In other words, all die and go down to the pit. Though both expressions הָעָנָן ("those who are slain by the sword," vss. 17, 18) and נָגָלַם ("the uncircumcised," vs. 18) are correlative designations referring to the dead, they cover a relatively small group of people. To this group also belongs נָגָלַם ("and his arm"), which is translated by the NAU as "its strength," or by NIV and NRSV, "its allies." The phrase נָגָלַם serves as a dynamic metaphor to designate "its allies among the nations" that helped him in his conquests.

Finally, all three terms, נָגָלַם, בֹּדֶר, and נָגָלַם function as synonyms for the grave. There is nothing in the text suggesting that Sheol, "pit," and "the earth below" would represent three different specified locations. All the trees went down to one and the same place. "The sons of men," "those who go down to the pit," "those who are slain by the sword," and "the uncircumcised" are also lying in the same location. Besides, neither Sheol, nor "pit," nor "the earth below," is connected in any way with morality or ethical concepts, for they are not moral, as can be seen from previous studies.

The analogical conclusion of the allegory (vss. 2-18) serves as an object lesson to all nations. The question asked in vs. 2, "וַתֵּרְא אֶלֶף נְפֹלִים וַתֵּרְא אֶלֶף נְפֹלִים ("and to whom are you like in your greatness")—to a once-beautiful cedar, Assyria—is addressed to Pharaoh and his hordes. The detailed reply to the question is found in the subsequent description of the fall and death of the arrogant tree and all its

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1See a similar passage in Ezek 26:20, צְנָהֵרִים בֹּדֶר, פַּלְמָם שֻׁלַם ("with those who go down to the pit, to the people of old").

followers. Moreover, at the very end of this extended figure the same inquiry is repeated. (אֲלֵהִים אֲהַלָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“to whom are you like thus in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden?”)—to the beautiful cedar. The response and the message of the whole allegory are more than clear: You, Pharaoh, with all your hordes are like to nothing but cut down trees and dead bodies in the grave. In addition, “to go down to Sheol” is the same as the termination of your existence, which means that רַעַבּ (“you will be no more”).

Ezek 32:21, 27

The mighty chiefs shall speak of him, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: "They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised, killed by the sword."2 And they do not lie with the fallen warriors of long ago,3 who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and whose swords were laid under their heads,

1Ezek 26:21; 27:36; 28:19; also Isa 17:14.


3MT implies מָשָׁה (“from the uncircumcised”), which has been adopted by NIV, NASB, NKJV, etc., where LXX has מִשְׁעָלָם (“from of old”) and is used by NRSV.

Translation and Textual Remarks

21 The mighty chiefs shall speak of him, with their helpers, out of the midst of Sheol: 

27 And they do not lie with the fallen warriors of long ago, who went down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and whose swords were laid under their heads,
and whose shields are upon their bones; for the terror of the warriors was in the land of the living.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ezek 32:1-32 incorporates the last two oracles against Egypt (vss. 1-16, 17-32) and serves as an expansion of the previous chapter. The seventh oracle, which can be clearly demarcated, contains two references to Sheol (vss. 21 and 27). It starts with the date notice, ("and it came to pass in the twelfth year,” 32:17), is followed by an address in vs. 18, ("Son of man, wail"), and in vss. 31 and 32, it closes with the twofold signatory formula, ("says the Lord Yahweh"). The oracle comprises at least three smaller subunits:

The first unit (vss. 19-21) is marked off by the verb in Hophal ("be laid to rest") at the beginning of vs. 19, and ("they lie") at the end of vs. 21, thus forming an envelope structure. Egypt is sent down to Sheol where it is greeted by the mighty leaders.

The next segment (vss. 22-28) pictures multitudes of the dead in Sheol. Each nation is introduced by the adverbial particle ("there is," vss. 22, 24, 26), which is followed by a repeated, slightly modified, standard phrase. Each group of the dead is accused with having spread dread of themselves ("in the land of the

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1MT and all the other ancient versions support the reading of ("their iniquities") which is employed in NIV, NASB, NKJV. However, NRSV uses the emendation ("their shields").

2Structurally the passage is problematic. It is possible to take vss. 19-21 as one unit, which constitutes a proclamation of judgment upon the nation, and vss. 22-30 as the second unit, describing the nations already in Sheol. In vs. 19, a direct address is in the second person, but starting with vss. 20-32, it is in the third person.
The last unit (vss. 29-32) is introduced by the adverbial particle בָּשְׁלָלָה ("there is") which points out that the leaders of Edom and the Sidonians, despite their מְיָשָׁרִים ("might"), are also lying in Sheol. The basic structural form of the unit can be diagrammed in the following way:

```
| Date and command to prophesy | 32:17 |
| Proclamation of judgment     | 32:18-19 |
| Reason                       | 19a   |
| Proclamation                 | 18, 19b |
| Results of the judgment      | 32:20-31 |
| Mighty warriors              | 21    |
| Assyria                      | 22f   |
| Elam                         | 24f   |
| Meshech-Tubal                | 26    |
| Mighty heroes                | 27    |
| Judgment against Egypt       | 28    |
| Edom                         | 29    |
| Princes of the North/Sidon   | 30    |
| Judgment against Egypt       | 31a   |
| Concluding formula (אָוֹם אָוֹם אָוֹם) | 32:31b |
| Summary of judgment oracle (refers to vs. 19) | 32:32a |
| Concluding formula (אָוֹם אָוֹם אָוֹם) | 32:32b |
```

To determine the overall genre of the last oracle is difficult. The text is filled with various fixed phrases and repetitions. The opening command to the prophet in vs. 18, קְרָעָה ("wail, lament"), identifies the unit as a dirge. However, the absence of the 3:2 lament meter forces one to look for other clues. The oracle is not identified as

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1 Boadt, *Ezekiel’s Oracles against Egypt*, 150.

2 This impression is even more strengthened by the participation of the בָּשְׁלָלָה ("daughters of the powerful nations," vs. 18).

3 The prophet is again told to lament, but what follows is not called a קְרָעָה, and the meter, where detectable, is of the regular 2+2 type, perhaps an alternative lament form as, for example, in Jer 9:19.

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a אנך ("lamentation," "dirge") either. In fact, it is a hybrid, or to put it in different terms, it represents a parody of the lament form.\(^1\) Finally, the oracle contains various elements of the prophetic judgment speech, formal accusation, and punitive action.

**Exegetical Notes**

The final vision (vss. 17-32) in the string of the seven pronouncements against Egypt ends the entire series of oracles against foreign nations by bringing all the previous messages to their culmination and resolution. The oracle contains, however, no distinct elements of accusation but only the message of the proclamation of judgment. The prophet takes the thought of Ezek 31:15-18, where the tree symbolism plays a central role, and replaces it by direct allusions to historical nations, which he sees as having come to an end and lying in their graves. Basically, the oracle describes Yahweh’s great reckoning with all those who spread terror on earth by causing them to go down to Sheol.\(^2\) In spite of the fact that the motif of the descent to Sheol has been picked up already in Ezek 28:17, the present prophecy may be interpreted as an expansion of the fifth oracle. As far as the distribution and meaning of the basic key terminology are concerned, the oracle is in complete agreement with the interpretation of Ezek 31:15-18.

It should also be strongly reemphasized that Ezekiel’s description of Egypt’s descent to Sheol is one of the most figurative and graphic passages in the entire Hebrew Scripture. It means that the rules of interpretation of the passage differ from


the regular cases when a researcher should use a literal approach. As strange as it may be, some scholars take the description of Ezek 32:17-32 with all its figurative details and interpret it literally in order to build and prove the doctrine of life in the underworld. For example, D. Block provides a detailed explanation about the state of the dead in Sheol by the following words:

On the other hand, our primary text, 32:17-32, clearly recognizes a continued existence for the deceased. Several observations on their condition in the afterlife may be made. First, that which survives of the deceased is not simply the spiritual component of the human being, but a shadowy image of the whole person, complete with head and skeleton. Second, as we have already noted, the deceased lie (šākāb) on beds (miškāb) in their respective wards, arranged according to their nationality. Third, the inhabitants of Sheol are not asleep but fully conscious. They are not only aware of one another and their relative positions; they also know that their conduct during their tenure “in the land of the living” has determined their respective positions in Sheol.1

The problem with this interpretation is that it takes the highly figurative language, deliberately employed by the prophet, and reads it literally. It also tends to work against the messages of those texts where the term Sheol clearly refers to death and the grave as it was demonstrated in the Torah and partially in the Prophets. Instead of taking notice of distinctive vocabulary, which intersects with specific genre

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Identification and theological concerns, the predetermined categories generate and lead to the desired but contradicting conclusions.

In order to avoid misinterpretation and find out what Ezekiel means by the pronouncement of the last oracle against Egypt, it is necessary to identify the basic key words, phrases, images, and structural elements that allude to Yahweh’s plan in this world, and then to briefly examine their function in the text, synthesize, and summarize their theological contribution.

The links of terminology with the previous chapter are obvious. The only difference is that chap. 32 has more repetitions and a much higher density of the key expressions. Stylistically, the oracle draws mostly from the vocabulary of death.1 Table 12 reflects the basic content of the oracle by presenting in a successive order Egypt, Assyria, Elam, Meschech-Tubal, Edom, and the Sidonians, describing each of them in a similar way.

By creating highly graphic imagery and emphasizing various figurative elements, Ezekiel pursues a definite goal. The prophet deliberately presents an exaggerated picture of the consignment of the hordes of Egypt to Sheol in order to make a point, which has nothing to do with the map of the underground regions or the doctrine of the afterlife. By means of sarcasm and irony, Ezekiel often uses lament-style imagery to portray the inflated greatness of an arrogant nation, which is followed by the description of its sudden humiliation and death (Ezek 26:31). The last oracle is no exception.

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1For additional information see also the structural pattern and synoptic chart of Ezek 32:22-30 by Block, The Book of Ezekiel, 25-48, 222-223. For versional correspondents and structural analysis see Parunak, “Structural Studies in Ezekiel,” 406-421.
### TABLE 12

THE BASIC PATTERN OF THE KEY VOCABULARY REFERRING TO DEATH AND GRAVE IN EZEK 32:17-32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Words/Phrases</th>
<th>Egypt 17-21</th>
<th>Assyria 22-23</th>
<th>Elam 24-25</th>
<th>Meshech-Tubal 26-28</th>
<th>Edom 29</th>
<th>Sidon 30</th>
<th>Egypt 31-32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>יָרֹר</td>
<td>4x</td>
<td></td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>יָרֹרֹר</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בְּרֹר</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>שֶׂאֶל</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>פְּאַרְמִי הָיוֹם</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>נֵהל</td>
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<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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In vs. 18, Yahweh’s address to Ezekiel, יד הריב (“son of man”), is followed by the command וַהֲלֹא (“wail, lament”) over the Egyptian hordes and to decree their descent to Sheol. The term וַהֲלֹא belongs to the sphere of mourning for the dead.¹ Thus at once it creates a sinister atmosphere of the burial and enhances the portentous nature of the message of death and the grave. Furthermore, the prophet is not made to wail for the sudden loss of Egypt’s fame or defeat in the land of the living, but for the final punishment which brings it down to Sheol,² where it is impossible to undo or change one’s destiny.

The rhetorical function of the question to Egypt in vs. 19, מֶלֶךְ מַלְאָכֵי (“whom do you surpass in beauty?”), not only reminds one of the parallel investigations, “to whom are you like in your greatness!” and “to whom are you like thus in your glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden?” (Ezek 31:2, 18), but also carries a strong connotation of taunt, mockery, and derision. The very next two imperatives, standing side by side, in vs. 19, רָדַר וַהֲלֹא (“go down and be laid with the uncircumcised”), show that the judgment has already taken place and its verdict is the death penalty. The execution of the punishment is at hand, and sending Egypt down to Sheol would leave nothing of its former greatness, glory, and beauty. Consequently,

¹Leonard J. Coppes, “לְהַלֹּא,” TWOT, 2:559; August H. Konkel, “לְהַלֹּא,” NIDOTTE, 3:43. Usually mourning is connected with past events. This lament is unusual in the sense that it refers to future events which are to take place as the result of Yahweh’s judgments. Whatever is the case, the oracle contains the four basic lament characteristics: (1) direct address to the dead (in this case, the future dead), (2) eulogy of the dead, (3) call to mourning, and (4) an evaluation of the loss to the living.

²Eichrodt, Ezekiel, 438.
the hordes of Egypt are to be brought down "to the earth below" \( \text{בּוֹר} \) ("with those who go down to the pit"), but that is not all, for "out of the midst of Sheol" \( \text{מַתָּחָה} \) ("the mighty chiefs") welcome Egypt who now lies "with the uncircumcised, amid those killed by the sword," vss. 18-21. The expression "killed by the sword" is repeated twelve times to denote the judgment as being executed by Divine government.\(^3\)

It is interesting to note the progression of the death penalty and its execution in the oracle by means of the particular usage of the key term \( \text{נָשַׁל} \) ("to go down"). In vs. 18 Yahweh commands the prophet \( \text{לֶאָד} \) ("and bring it down," Hi. impv. 2 m.s.-3 m.s. sf.). In vs. 19 the idea of the death sentence is reinforced by the second \( \text{נָשַׁל} \) ("go down," Qal impv. 2 m.s.), and in vs. 21 the Egyptians are already dead, \( \text{נָשַׁל} \) ("they have come down," Qal pf. 3 c.p.). As in the previous cases, the expressions contain the same synonymous vocabulary and function as equivalent phrases to designate the grave. It is clear that Egypt went down only to one place and not to several different locations simultaneously or in turn. Here the prophet introduces a clear picture of burial when the dead are buried in \( \text{נָשַׁל} \) or \( \text{נָשַׁל} \) (Ezek 28:8) deep in the ground.\(^4\) Each of these

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\(^1\) Literally, "to the lower parts of the earth."

\(^2\) Ezek 32:20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32.

\(^3\) Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 342.

\(^4\) Zimmerli, Ezekiel 25-48, 172.
key terms, including the extended image of נרמגטשת נרמגץ (NRM), serves to provide some descriptive aspect of Sheol.

The second lengthened imperative in vs. 19, נרמגץ נרמגץ נרמגץ ("and be laid with the uncircumcised"), is in Hofal and functions as the equivalent to the first imperative נרמגץ ("go down"), thus intensifying and enhancing the portrayal of Egypt's death. In the Hebrew Scripture death is often alluded to as a sleep, and it is reasonable that the verb נרמגץ ("to lie down") has become a common metaphor for death. For example, in 1 Kgs 11:21 the verb נרמגץ is parallel to נרמגץ ("to die"). The same euphemistic application of the term to dying is found in many other texts. To emphasize the destructive power of death and its consequences, in this oracle alone, Ezekiel employs the term נרמגץ eight times (see table 12).

Some scholars attempt to use the phrase נרמגץ נרמגץ נרמגץ for drawing a map-like representation of Sheol as "the heart of the netherworld," or speak about the underworld, "consisting of a central part, lower depth and fringes," thus leading to the

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1 See 2 Chr 16:14.


3 1 Kgs 14:31; 2 Kgs 8:24; Isa 14:4, 8, 18; 43:17; Job 3:13; 7:21; 14:12.


5 Boadt, Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt, 161.
misinterpretation of the Hebrew text. Basically, when the noun "מְצָלִית ("middle") is combined with the preposition "מִן ("from," "out of"), it has the meaning "out" or "from within," carrying a sense of separation or source and nothing more.¹

Sarcastically, but to the point, Ezekiel derides Egypt, which once was a superpower and now is greeted by the dead from Sheol as it has come down to lie next to the uncircumcised.

In the given passage Ezekiel refers to seven nations (וֹלַדְתָּם וֹלַדְתָּם ("and all their hordes"),² מְלָכִים מְלָכִים ("helpers"),³ מְלָכִים מְלָכִים ("and all their princes"),⁴ among whom there are two specific groups, מְלָכִים מְלָכִים ("the uncircumcised") and מְלָכִים מְלָכִים ("those killed by the sword"), which are mentioned more often than any other representatives. In order to dramatize Egypt’s descent to the grave, Ezekiel employs the hyperbolic effect, namely, he portrays מְלָכִים מְלָכִים ("the mighty chiefs") as speaking out of Sheol. Bullinger calls it personification of inanimate things, namely, "dead people are represented as speaking out of Sheol: i.e., the grave, as is clear from the whole context."⁵ He continues to explain that "verses 22-32 are about those who

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¹ Steven S. Tuell, "מדַלָת, " NIDOTTE, 4:279-280.


³ "מְלָכִים מְלָכִים," BDB, 740.

⁴ "מְלָכִים מְלָכִים," BDB, 672.

⁵ Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 866.
have been slain with the sword, and are fallen and lying in their graves.”¹ This effect
does not contradict the major theme of the oracle and cannot be used to prove life’s
continuation in the underworld. Just the opposite is true: Various groups of the dead,
which are mentioned in the oracle, function as additional indicators that by Sheol is
meant the grave. First of all, the expression הָרִידוּתָב (“those slain by the sword”)
several times is associated with מַנְכָּה (“the uncircumcised,” see table 12) and
always designates “those who are slain,” “slaughtered in the heat of battle,”
“murdered,” or “executed.”² Second, the repeatedly occurring equivalent expressions
כָּלִים וּכָלִים (“all of them slain”) and נֶפֶלָה (often נָפֵל (“fallen by the sword”), plus
other related vocabulary, exclude any idea of any form of existence after death. All
of them are slain, fallen, and dead, because they are cut off from the land of the living.

In order to intensify and demonstrate the description of Egypt’s total
humiliation and shame, the prophet, being Israelite and a priest (Ezek 1:3), entwines in
his piled-up death vocabulary the term מַנְכָּה (“the uncircumcised”),³ which occurs
in the oracle ten times. Ezekiel uses this designation to call attention to (1) “going
down” by the sword, to emphasize (2) the outcome of death, and (3) to associate it
with the grave. The word מַנְכָּה has extremely negative connotations, and for
Egypt it represents the utmost contempt and disgrace. Instead of being buried in honor
and lying among the mighty men (vs. 27), Egypt with her hordes is degraded to the

¹Ibid.

²Otto Kaiser, “בָּלִים,” TDOT, 5:155-165; Peter Enns, “בָּלִים,” NIDOTTE,
2:259-262. See also (slain) Num 19:16; Deut 21:1-9; Jer 41:9; (“killed in battle”) Isa
34:1; Lam 2:21; (“fallen”) Isa 22:2, etc.

³בָּלִים,” BDB, 790.
level of the unclean, uncircumcised, and murdered pagans.¹

Furthermore, in vss. 22-30 the prophet pictures various nations that Egypt
would join in Sheol.² He starts with Assyria, which is there surrounded by
(“her graves”), of her slain (“in the depth/sides of the pit,” vss. 22-23).
Elam is in (“(her grave”) with her hordes who went down uncircumcised
(“to the earth below”) (“(with those who go down
to the pit”), with the hordes around (“(her grave,” vss. 24-25). Meschech and
Tubal have their hordes around (“(their graves”). They lie with the others
who went down uncircumcised to (“(with their weapons of war, whose swords
were placed under their heads” (vss. 26-27). Edom and the Sidonians also lie with the
uncircumcised (“(and with those who go down to the pit.” vss. 29-30).
It is impossible to determine a precise geographical location of these graves and it is
not necessary. The point is that any place of burial functions as the grave or the place
of the dead and contrariwise, which by extension also includes any place of death that
involves an impossibility of a proper burial.

¹The Phoenicians, like the Israelites, and the Egyptians practiced circumcision.
See Werner Dommerhausen, “”, TDOT, 4:409-417; Leslie C. Allen, “”,
NIDOTTE, 3:537-538; Günter Mayer, “”, TDOT, 11:359-361. For various views
and aspects of circumcision see Zimmerli, Ezekiel 25-48, 173-174; Jack M. Sasson,
“Circumcision in the Ancient Near East,” JBL 85 (1966): 473-476; Moshe Weinfeld,
“Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel,” ZAW 88 (1976): 17-56;

²Because of the overabundance of the material to process and space
limitations, only a few observations will be made.
It is possible to take vss. 22-26 as one segment because the burial description of the three nations contains some specific and common characteristics. Moreover, each nation with its hordes is depicted according to the sequence of an ABCD structural outline (see table 13), which in turn puts one nation in parallel to another, thus emphasizing their common destiny in the grave:

As can be seen from this brief summarized overview in table 13, each nation is characterized by almost the same wording. Because they spread מִזְמַרְת מִים (“terror in the land of the living”), יָסְדָם תְּקִיפָה יָבִים (“all of them are slain, fallen by the sword”), וְעַל מְצֹאָת מְדֻבָּרָה (“and all their hordes are around their grave”). Ezekiel pictures here a huge cemetery with numberless graves where the representatives of various nations lie dead. They all are יָמַש (“there”) in their graves. The adverbial particle יָמַש is used for strong emphasis that the mentioned nations with all their hordes are really dead and in Sheol. In these few verses the prophet uses the term יָמַש (“grave”) six times, once in parallel with הָאָרֶץ (“to the earth below,” vs. 24), once with בָּשָׂר (“bed,” vs. 25).

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1The pattern is partially based on the research done by Boadt, Ezekiel’s Oracles against Egypt, 156-164.

2דָּשׁ, BDB, 1027.

3The earth below” is a compound expression with “below” serving as its qualifier. However, neither Sheol nor “pit” needs such qualification. See an interesting discussion on this point in Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 109.

4For the term בָּשָׂר see Excursus 1, 2, and 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>there is Assyria and all her company</td>
<td>סביותה יכרים בחרות</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ezek 32:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>round about him are his graves</td>
<td>בצל תphetamine והפלים בחרוב</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all of them killed, fallen by the sword</td>
<td>אספר עלמו יכרים בחרות</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whose graves are set in the depth/sides of the pit</td>
<td>נגזר קהלב סביותה בחרות</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ezek 32:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and her company is round about her grave</td>
<td>בצל תphetamine והפלים בחרוב</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all of them killed, fallen by the sword</td>
<td>אספר עלמו יכרים בחרות</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who spread terror in the land of the living</td>
<td>שנциально יכרים מחיית נחרה</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ezek 32:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there is Elam and all her multitude</td>
<td>סביותה יכרים</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>round about her grave</td>
<td>בצל תphetamine והפלים בחרוב</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all of them killed, fallen by the sword</td>
<td>אספר עלמו יכרים בחרוב</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who went down uncircumcised to the earth below</td>
<td>נגזר ת捍ה יכרים מחרה</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who spread terror in the land of the living</td>
<td>שניאל יכרים מחיית נחרה</td>
<td>E</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>and they bear their shame with those going down to the pit</td>
<td>בוחר תulanceי יכרים משלכפב</td>
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<td>Ezek 32:25</td>
</tr>
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<td>among the slain they have made a bed</td>
<td>לעון יכרים משלכפב</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for her with all her multitude</td>
<td>סביותה יכרים</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>round about him are her graves</td>
<td>בצל תтельный יכרים מחרה</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13—Continued.

| all of them uncircumcised, killed by the sword | D |
| because terror of them was spread in the land of the living | E |
| and they bear their shame with those going down to the pit | C |
| among the slain they are laid | A |
| there is Meshech, Tubal and all her multitude | B |
| round about him are her graves | |
| all of them uncircumcised, killed by the sword | D |
| because terror of them was spread in the land of the living | |


which in this context functions as a “place of burial,”¹ and according to Boadt, especially as “a bier or sepulcher,”² and thrice with בֵּית הָרָעָב (“pit,” 23, 24, 25).³ Except for a few hyperbolic/personification effects of vs. 21, where (“the mighty chiefs will speak of him”), and of vs. 31, (“when Pharaoh sees them, he will be comforted”), which cannot be taken as proof of the conscious state of the dead in Sheol, the oracle contains no allusion to any kind of existence in Sheol. The main point of the entire prophecy focuses on the fact that those great nations which brought terror in the land of the living will one day be

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²Boadt, *Ezekiel’s Oracles against Egypt*, 164.

³Vs. 23 contains the phrase בֵּית הָרָעָב (“in the depth/sides of the pit”).
destroyed. Moreover, none of the details of this judgment oracle can be used to build the doctrine of life after death in the underworld.

After the question posed to Egypt, בָּאָר מִקַּמָּה ("whom do you surpass in beauty?" vs. 19) and the subsequent description of specific nations, which are slain by the sword and lying in their graves, Yahweh delivers a straightforward message to Pharaoh: יִשָּׂרֵאֵל ("So you shall be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and lie with those who are killed by the sword," vs. 28). This is not the language of continued existence in the underworld, but that of death and the termination of life. In spite of their past advantages, the nations are able neither to escape from Yahweh’s judgments nor to save themselves from the grave. Now these nations and their leaders are waiting for Egypt’s coming.

In summary, the oracle pictures Egypt and other nations with their leaders and armies as “going down,” “fallen,” “slain,” and “lying” with “the uncircumcised.” In the passage some of the major characters are: Egypt, Assyria, Elam, Meshech-Tubal, Edom, Sidon, “hordes,” “companies,” “helpers,” “mighty chiefs,” “mighty men,” “kings,” “the princes,” “the uncircumcised,” “those slain by the sword,” and “those who go down.” The place where the dead lie is called: “grave,” “earth below,” “pit,” “Sheol,” “bed,” “in the midst of the slain,” “among the uncircumcised,” and “there.” These words are figures of speech, as was demonstrated above. Moreover, these figures are the figures of death.

It is obvious that in the last oracle against Egypt, the terms are synonymous and mean no more than a place below earth where the dead are buried, namely, the grave. There is no need to refer to any mythical location or subterranean place which
is inhabited by ghosts or shades. Neither any special cosmology nor mythology is implied here.¹ In order to clearly demonstrate the main point of the prophecy, Ezekiel, by means of a highly symbolic language, presents an imagined scenario, that any earthly kingdom, no matter how powerful it may be, eventually comes to an end as Yahweh judges the affairs of the earth.

**The Book of the Twelve**

**Introduction**

In the Hebrew Scriptures the Major Prophets are followed by the Book of the Twelve. It is a collection of various much shorter prophetic books, which, on the basis of their brevity, have been frequently called the Minor Prophets. For instance, the book of Obadiah consists of only twenty-one verses, while Zechariah has fourteen chapters. The same contrast is seen concerning their dates, which cover the time period from the eighth century to the fifth century B.C. Altogether the term Sheol in the Book of the Twelve is found only five times: Hos 13:14 (twice); Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:3, and Hab 2:5.

**Texts**

Hos 13:14

Yehoshua, "The Book of the Twelve," TWOT, 2:967-969.

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¹Youngblood, “The Book of the Twelve,” TWOT, 2:967-969.
Translation and Textual Remarks

From the hand\(^1\) of Sheol I will ransom them, from death I will redeem them.\(^2\) Where are your plagues, O Death? Where is your destruction, O Sheol? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Hos 13 is demarcated by proper nouns סֶנָא ("Ephraim") at the beginning of 13:1 and שְׂמַרָה ("Samaria") at 14:1. The chapter contains a number of combined units which are arranged so that it constitutes a coherent structural and rhetorical whole. Various literary features including the thematic links between the chapter’s subunits and its rhetorical genre strategy permeate the whole chapter. The resulting structure provides a logical progression of ideas and images employed in chaps. 4-12, thus forming a sequence leading to the culmination of the book.

\(^{1}\)Usually translated as “power.”

In vss. 2-3 and 15-14:1, the prophet condemns idolatry and pronounces the impending disasters, but the middle part, vss. 4-14, contains Yahweh’s judgment speech. Scholars divide the chapter into smaller units and subunits variously. As the chapter consists of several short judgment speeches, one possibility is to divide it into the following units: Ephraim’s fall (vss. 1-3); Yahweh’s judgments (vss. 4-8); Ephraim’s vulnerability (vss. 9-11); Ephraim’s stubbornness (vss. 12-14); and Samaria’s fatal rebellion (vss. 15-14:1). It is important to note that Garrett’s chiastic arrangement of vss. 10-14 is very helpful for the current study:

A “Where is (I will be) your king?” (vs. 10)
   B Yahweh will give a king (vs. 11)
   C Ephraim’s iniquity locked up (vs. 12)
   C1 Ephraim has travails of labor pains (vs. 13)
   B1 Yahweh will ransom from death (vs. 14a)
   A1 “Where is (I will be) your destructive power?” (vs. 14b)

The overarching genre of Hos 13 may be designated as prophetic discourse. As such, it has no clearly fixed structure or form other than the character which is determined by the content of the unit. It contains accusation material (vs. 6), threats of


4 With minor changes adopted from Garrett, Hosea, Joel, 256.

5 Andersen and Freedman, Hosea, 626.
punishment (vss. 7-8; 14:1), references to redemption (vs. 14), taunt (vs. 14), clusters of similes (vv. 3, 7-8), and synonymous parallelism (vss. 11-12). Finally, the smaller units and subunits range from well-formed poetic bicolon or tricolon of standard types to sentences which are simply prosaic in nature.

Exegetical Notes

Scholars are completely divided concerning the translation and application of ambiguous Hebrew clauses of vs. 14. One of the major difficulties is the word הָאָנָן, which as a short form of הָאָנָן (“I will be”) occurs four times in Hos 13.

(“I will be like a lion to them”) (vs. 7)
(“I will be your king”) (vs. 10)
(“Death, I will be your plagues”) (vs. 14)
(“Sheol, I will be your destruction”) (vs. 14)

Harold Fisch, who studies examples of ambiguous wordplay, the power of punning connections, and how the double meanings contribute to new nuances, adds

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1Ibid.

2Those who point out that the text should be translated as a series of questions instead of a series of positive assertions, in order to achieve harmony with the context, view the passage as one of warning and destruction. The other option is to look at vs. 14 as the positive assertions to the death threats of vs. 13 and interpret them as a promise of the resurrection and of the ultimate annihilation of death and Sheol (see also the resurrection passage in Hos 6:1-3).

3This translation of vs. 14 cannot be rejected on grammatical grounds although jussive usually functions with second and third persons. Examples of a first-person jussive are found in Deut 18:16; 1 Sam 14:36; 2 Sam 17:12; Isa 41:23, 28; 42:6; Hos 9:15 Ezek 5:16. See Laetsch, _Minor Prophets_, 101.

4Bullinger, _Figures of Speech_, 905.
three meanings to vs. 14:1

Alas/where are/I will be your plagues, O Death!
Alas/where is/I will be your destruction, O Sheol!

He argues that “the same signifiers bring all these meanings together in the tempest of contradictory meanings, the only rock we can hold onto is the words themselves,” and “Ehî alone has continuity in the turbulence of its dizzily changing significations and the discontinuities of its context.”

Whatever the case, the difficulties of the textual problems do not seem to complicate the primary task of the dissertation, namely, the investigation of the term Sheol. Commenting on vs. 14, E. Achtemeier writes, “Throughout the OT, Sheol is the place below the waters under the earth to which all the dead go.” BDB makes a reference to Sheol in Hos 13:14 “as place of exile for Israel.” H. Wolff sees in the concept of Sheol and death a new meaning, specifically, “they represent the foreign

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The term יְהוָה can be taken as (1) an interrogative particle, a synonym of יְהוָה ("where are your plagues"?), (2) a verb form of Qal impf. 1 c.s. apoc. יְהוָה ("I will be your plagues"), (3) a Hifil verb form ("I will bring about your plagues"), (4) a variant of Yahweh ("YHwY is your plagues," Hos 1:9; 14:6), and (5) an exclamatory particle like יִהְיֶה, יְהוֹ, יְהוָה ("Alas for your plagues"). See Andersen and Freedman, Hosea, 638-640.


powers which menace Israel’s life.”¹ These and other similar views, however, do not provide the necessary information regarding the nature and function of Sheol. That is why it is necessary to briefly examine the text.

First of all, the term יָאָסַל occurs twice in vs. 14 and both times in parallel with the word רָאָס (“death”). Furthermore, the first two clauses contain verbs יִשְׂרֶה (“I will ransom them”) and יִשְׂרֶה (“I will redeem them”), which function as equivalents, and the same is true concerning the two following nouns: דְּרָבְרַת (“your plagues”) and דְּרָבְרַת (“your destruction”). When outlined, vs. 14 forms not only four clear parallel structures but also two chiastic patterns, as can be seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>יָאָסַל</th>
<th>Hos 13:14a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>מָמָה</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B¹</th>
<th>מָמָה</th>
<th>Hos 13:14b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A¹</td>
<td>דְּרָבְרַת</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The synopsis of the key vocabulary referring to the grave and death constitutes one chiasm, and the outline of the rest of the clauses makes up the second chiastic arrangement.²

It should also be noted that vs. 14 is in the context of restated indictments and continuous death threats, expressed by means of a highly figurative language. Thus, vs. 12 informs the reader that דַּעְלַת (“bound up is the iniquity of Ephraim”) and that מַעֲבֹרָת (“hidden is his sin”), which implies judgment and a death sentence. Vs. 13 contains the second metaphor, where

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¹ Wolff, Hosea, 228.

² Andersen and Freedman, Hosea, 627-628.
“pangs of a travailing woman come to him”). It pictures an abnormal childbirth with Ephraim as a baby in the midst of the birthing process, implying that the child will die rather than live. The metaphor of drought is found in vs. 15, describing Ephraim’s prosperity and tragic consequences of the deadly "east wind from Yahweh". The fourth imagery is that of war and bloodshed, "they will fall by the sword," Hos 14:1), in which Hosea describes the slaughtering of children and pregnant women.1

Accordingly, vs. 14 introduces another metaphor where both parallel terms of death, האָלָה and מְסָפַּה, are personified. In spite of the fact that they are lifeless or unanimated entities, which never were nor are alive, the prophet employs specific terminology idiomatically. Using anatomical vocabulary, Hosea speaks about a particular kind of redemption הָעְצָבָא (“from the hand of Sheol”)2 and מְסָפַּה (“from death”). Also in vs. 14b the second pair of both מַעְלַּה and האָלָה are treated as living beings, which have the power to destroy or they will be destroyed. In a way, both the plagues (הָעְצָבָא) of death and the destruction (מְסָפַּה) of Sheol are inseparable concepts. On the other hand, it should be noted that vs. 14 does not contain any topographical information or any specific descriptive elements concerning Sheol as a place or its inhabitants. This is obvious because the focus of the passage is on Yahweh and His dealings with Ephraim.


2The same expression הָעְצָבָא מְסָפַּה (“from the hand of Sheol”) occurs also in Pss 49:16 and 89:49.
The very first phrases, "from the hand of Sheol I will ransom them, from death I will redeem them"), contain two significant parallel verbs, רansom, "rescue" and בְּשָׁאָל ("redeem," "avenge"). As both verbs have to do with redemption by the payment of ransom, the meanings of the two words often overlap and they are used as synonyms. The basic idea of the verb רansom is the transfer of ownership of a person or object to another, which can be done by purchase (Lev 27:27) or by force (Deut 9:26). The same meaning is shared by the second term בְּשָׁאָל, which sometimes emphasizes the role of a kinsman in completing redemption (Lev 25:25, 48; Ruth 3:13). The fact that Yahweh is the subject of both verbs underscores the inability of His people to save themselves from Sheol and death and emphasizes the salvific nature of His redemptive acts.

It should also be pointed out that even if scholars interpret Hos 13:14 as an affirmation ("I will be"), or as an ironic question ("where are/is?") expecting a negative answer in the form of Yahweh's refusal to ransom Ephraim from death, this does not affect the meaning of the verbs or the nouns of death. Moreover, in the given context of parallelism and chiastic arrangement, the term HID functions not only as the force of destruction but also as metonymy, that is, when the place of the dead is denoted as death itself.

It is also particularly instructive to note that when the verbs רansom and בְּשָׁאָל are

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2McComiskey, The Minor Prophets, 1:224.

3Hubbard, "רansom," NIDOTTE, 3:579.
used with the preposition יָבֹא ("from"), they "specify that from which or out of which a particular thing or person is redeemed." Thus, in the current case, Yahweh speaks about the deliverance of Ephraim from Sheol and death, which can only denote a place of the dead or the grave. To "ransom from the hand of Sheol" and "to redeem from death" is the same as dispossessing the grave of its victims, either by protecting the living from death or by resurrecting those who are dead and in the grave.

The victory over the grave and death is expressed even more powerfully in the two rhetorical questions of vs. 14: אֵלֶיוּ אֵלֶיהָ תַּחְתָּו מַעְלָו ("Where are your plagues, O Death! Where is your destruction, O Sheol!"). Both masculine nouns בְּרֵי יִת ("your plagues") and בְּמִמְסָפֶת ("your destruction") are with suffix, stand in parallel, and are synonymous. The plural of בְּרֵי יִת functions as an amplifier to intensify the inherent qualities of destruction and death which are so characteristic to the term. Furthermore, the Hebrew Scripture always interprets בְּרֵי יִת as Yahweh’s punishment sent for disobedience. The second term בְּמִמְסָפֶת ("destruction") basically denotes a destructive “sting or plague” or literally “a cutting off.” Both terms, בְּרֵי יִת, which is one of the most popular destroyers in the Scripture,

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2 The text can also refer just to the state of being dead, irrespective of where the body is located—it may never even have entered a grave, per se.


4 "בְּמִמְסָפֶת," BDB, 881; K. Lawson Younger, "בְּמִמְסָפֶת," NIDOTTE, 3:909. It is possible to take the suffixes יָבֹא as emphatic within construct chains and to translate them as: "the plagues of death" and "the destruction of Sheol." See Andersen and Freedman, Hosea, 640.
and מֲפֶלֶת, operate as the instruments of death.\(^1\) In a sense even מַעֲמֹת, is parallel to רֶםֶשׁ, and is parallel to יְשָׁנָה. On the other hand, “the plagues of death” and “the destruction of Sheol” are not only in sharp contrast to Yahweh’s redemptive acts but also subjected to them.

Finally, contra Smith who denies the idea of a personal or national resurrection in vs. 14,\(^2\) this summary presents the opposite conclusions. In the book of Hosea the motif of destruction, death, grave, salvation, and resurrection are set side by side (Hos 5:14-6:2; 13:7-8) without introducing specific elements of transition or explanation (Hos 1:6-10).\(^3\) Thus, in order to understand the questions of vs. 14b, “Where are your plagues, O Death? Where is your destruction, O Sheol?” one must refer to vs. 14a, “from the hand of Sheol I will ransom them; from death I will redeem them,” which plays a decisive role in understanding the whole verse.\(^4\) The basic idea of vs. 14 is clearly presented by Garrett in his commentary by the following words:

The metaphor of death follows from the previous passage, in which Ephraim is like a woman giving birth to a breech baby, but it also describes in general terms the condition of national demise and exile. Ezekiel develops the idea of national resurrection further in his dry bones text (Ezek 37:1-14). As in Ezekiel, the message of resurrection applies first of all to the restoration of Israel, but it also looks ahead to a personal bodily resurrection. Here, as elsewhere, the prophet develops a type. Both national and personal resurrection legitimately arises from

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\(^1\) Both words are in parallel in Ps 91:6. Compare with Deut 32:24; Isa 28:2; Ezek 21:11; Hab 3:5.

\(^2\) Smith, Hosea, Amos, Micah, 187.

\(^3\) Garrett, Hosea, Joel, 265.

\(^4\) The opening couplet functions as an affirmation or a straight promise. Unfortunately, modern scholarship tries to turn it into a question expecting the answer “no.” For comment on this issue see Derek Kidner, Love to the Loveless: The Message of Hosea (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 117-119.
the idea that God can restore that which has died. Paul's appropriation of this text in 1 Cor 15:55 as a celebration of the resurrection is fully warranted.¹

Whatever is the translation of the text (“Alas/where are/ I will be your plagues, O death!” “Alas/where is/ I will be your destruction, O Sheol!”) and its interpretation,² the term Sheol, occurring twice in vs. 14, denotes only the grave in a general sense and nothing more. Because the term Sheol functions as the proper noun,³ representing and being associated by common characteristics with particular objects, it does not point here to a concrete individual grave in a literal sense, but to the place of the dead or the graves in their totality. The same is true concerning the abstract term “Death” which functions as a deadly agent that destroys life and brings mankind down to Sheol, down to their graves. Due to specific characteristics of the proper nouns and their particular function, it is no coincidence that exactly in this taunt passage, which implies the death of death and the certainty of Yahweh's salvation, Hosea is able to make a powerful prophetic statement that directly alludes to the final eschatological victory over death and Sheol.⁴

¹Ibid.

²Limburg sees in the final questions of vs. 14 commands to “death” and Sheol to get on with their work of destruction. See Limburg, Hosea-Micah, 49; Mays, Hosea, 182.

³It seems that proper nouns originated from common nouns as is seen from investigating such names as Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, and so on (see Gen 1-4). For a short discussion on common and proper nouns, see chapter 5, “Theological Implications.”

Amos 9:2

םיריחוֹת בּשָאָלָה מִשְׁמַח יְהֹוָה תֵּחַנֵּם
הָאָרֶץ נַעֲלֵי מִשְׁמַח עַל יְהוָה

Translation and Textual Remarks

If they dig down to Sheol, from there my hand shall take them;
and if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Most scholars agree that the last chapter of Amos 9:1-15 is a compositional
entity of some kind, and that five main parts of this entity are vss. 1-4, 5-6, 7-10, 11-
12, and 13-15. In fact, this last chapter functions as the climax not only of earlier
vision reports in chaps. 7-9, but of the book as a whole. The fifth and final vision is
distinctive in its form and differs from the first four visions in a number of ways. It is
introduced by the main verb of the introductory vision report formula רָאָתָה (‘I
saw’), which is followed (vss. 1-4) by the announcement of the certainty or
inescapability of the coming destruction. The next unit (vss. 5-6) is a hymn and

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2 For the description of the five visions in the book of Amos and their climax in
the current chapter, see Samuel L. Terrien, The Elusive Presence: Toward a New
4 Marvin A. Sweeney, The Twelve Prophets: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and
contains judgment language which by its nature is apocalyptic-eschatological.\textsuperscript{1} It is introduced by יָהֵה יְהֹוָה ("and the Lord, Yahweh of hosts").\textsuperscript{2} The unit (vss. 7-10) which describes the end of the nation starts with a rhetorical question לֹא אַבְגֵּי בְּנֵי כּוֹשִׁים לַלֵּא ("Are not you like the sons of Cushim to me?"). Finally, vss. 11-15 speak about the restoration of the kingdom (vss. 11-12) and the land (vss. 13-15) after Yahweh’s judgments.

The structure analysis of the chapter’s major sections shows that the overall arrangement and genre of it bears all the hallmarks of a prophetic vision report. Thus, vss. 1-6 represent poetry; the middle part (vss. 7-10) constitutes prose material that in turn is followed by poetry (vss. 11-14) and prose (vs. 15). The chapter contains various genre forms and literary elements, namely, vss. 1-4 function as a vision-judgment oracle, vss. 5-6 display hymnic form,\textsuperscript{3} and the chapter concludes the whole book with a restoration blessing oracle, which largely is cast in synonymous parallelism.\textsuperscript{4} The basic thrust of the prophet’s last vision is to emphasize the finality of the approaching judgment, implying that even dialogue would now be pointless.

Exegetical Notes

At the very outset of this brief exegesis it should be noted that the message of


\textsuperscript{2}Compare with Amos 4:13; 5:8-9.


\textsuperscript{4}Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 397-399.
Amos 9:2 is very clear by itself and from its context, and does not create any difficulties concerning the understanding of the usage of the term Sheol. Here, the metaphorical language of the text contains no information or any suggestion either on death as a state, or as an event, either in terms of sin or its punishment. Moreover, because the same figurative language is used in the subsequent verses, the reference to Sheol means only grave, and cannot be inferred to defend any view of any kind of shadowy existence in the underworld after death.

In order to better comprehend the reason why the prophet refers to Sheol in his last vision and what he intended to state, it is necessary to briefly discuss vs. 1-4 as a whole. Thus vs. 1 contains in a nutshell the main point of the whole vision, that is, the message of a total destruction. The expression, רָאָתָה אֲשֶׁר אָלָרָהָ נִבְּגָד עֵלֶֽהְמֹאָבִית ("I saw the Lord standing beside the altar") is followed by the double command מָשָׁתָה ("smite," "strike") and מָשָׁתָה ("and break off them," "shatter," "cut off"), which is escalated by the phrase "םוֹלָה מַרְוָה בְּשָׁנָה ("and those who are left I will kill with the sword"). The two synonymous lines at the close of vs. 1 contain a categorical statement and bring the message to its culmination:

לֹא רַעְבָה לַיהָ נָֽם
not one of them shall flee away

וֹלַֽא רַעְבָה לַיהָ אֲפַלֶֽהְיָה
and not one of them shall escape

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1 Compare with Judg 16:29-30; Amos 2:3; 4:10.

2 For the literal translation of the two last clauses of vs. 1 see Billy K. Smith and Frank S. Page, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 155; Thomas J. Finley, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (WEC) (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 315.
The theme of no escape from Yahweh’s retribution (even if someone manages to escape he will not be able to hide himself) is also enhanced by the poetic effect of consonances, O ו and O ו and O ו.\(^1\)

Furthermore, by means of regular internal repetitions and specific illustrations (vss. 2-4), Amos not only expands the theme of Yahweh’s judgments but also creates extremely high tension and at the same time clarity of the message, namely, that no one will be able to escape from the omnipresence of Yahweh,\(^2\) as can be seen below:

from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them

from there I will command the sword and if they go into captivity before their enemies

from there I will search out and take them and if they hide from my eyes in the bottom of the sea

from there I will bring them down.

from there my hand shall take them if they dig down to Sheol, and if they climb up to heaven,

The syntactical repetition of five protasis-apodosis conditional statements are introduced by the fivefold particle adverb O נ (“if”)\(^3\) plus an imperfect verb, which in

\(^1\)McCominskey, Minor Prophets, 479. See also Homer Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 122-123.


This repeated pattern is highly significant because of its dual function and application. It demonstrates not only the fact that Yahweh is the only true judge and His judgments cannot be restricted by geographical boundaries, but also makes it totally clear that for the rebels there is no such thing as any hiding place or escape route from the Lord. In these verses, seven times Yahweh states, “I will” supervise my vengeance, מְזַכֶּר ("I will kill," vs. 1), מְזַכֶּר ("my hand will take them," vs. 2), מְזַכֶּר ("I will bring them down," vs. 2), מְזַכֶּר ("I will search," vs. 3), מְזַכֶּר ("and I will take them," vs. 3), מְזַכֶּר ("I will command," vs. 4), and מְזַכֶּר ("and I will fix my eyes," vs. 4).

The specifics of the overall outline of vss. 1-4 and the function of the term Sheol in the given context can be demonstrated in the following way:

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Heavens       Sword       Captivity
              ↑            ↑
             |            |           Bottom of the sea
             v            v
Sheol        Carmel
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All scholars in one way or another have noted the similarities between Amos 9:1-4 and Ps 139:7-12 where the “Spirit” of Yahweh is parallel with “your presence” (vs. 7). Unlike David, who found his protection in Yahweh’s presence, it brings death to the idolaters in the fifth vision of Amos.

Furthermore, the phrase of vs. 2, מֵכְסַבְּר ("if they dig down to

1McCominskey, Minor Prophets, 480.

2Morris, Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea, 54.
Sheol”), contains the verb פָּלַח (‘dig,’ “break through”),¹ which is used metaphorically in order to emphasize an attempt of finding a refuge in the grave, and at the same time the whole expression functions as a contrast to the diametrically opposite attempt, namely,-hook (“and if they climb up to heaven”). It is clear that both expressions “to dig down to Sheol” or “climb up to heaven”² are figures of speech and should not be interpreted in a literal sense. Since Sheol equals the grave, can no one dig a grave? The answer is obvious. Furthermore, in order to reach the intensification of the theme, Amos takes not only something really deep as the “bottom of the sea” and sets it off against the Mount Carmel, but makes a contrast between Sheol and Heavens. Here the merismus combines two contrasts or extremes, as for example, רַעְשָׁן שָׁמָיִם or דְּבֶל שָׁמָיִם,⁴ and functions to express “the totality of all that exists,” that is, “the entirety of the universe.”⁵ As McCominskey points out, “the pair is a merismus for ‘everything’ that humans know of—and the Lord’s presence/dominion extended beyond it.”⁶


²Finley, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, 315.

³Deut 32:22; Isa 7:11; Ps 139:8; Job 11:8.

⁴Gen 1:1; Deut 32:1; Isa 1:2.


⁶McCominskey, The Minor Prophets, 480.
It should also be noted that the anthropomorphic term יָדָיְ ("hand," "power") in the phrase יָדָיוֹ יָדוֹ ("my hand will take them") alludes to Hos 13:14, יָדָיְ אַלָּא ("from the hand of Sheol").¹ The contrast between two references lies in the fact that in Hosea Yahweh’s יָדָיְ saves from the יָדָיְ of Sheol, but in Amos the יָדָיְ of Yahweh takes the people from the יָדָיְ of Sheol in order to punish, which is the reversal of the exodus experience. The verb וַיְלֶה ("to take") like the term יָדוֹ ("come or go down") in יָדוֹ ("I will bring them down") is used figuratively and bears the meaning of catching and destruction.²

In summary, in his last vision Amos powerfully demonstrates the total impossibility for the living to escape from the judgments of Yahweh even if they would choose to flee to Sheol itself,³ even in the depth of the grave, a place of the dead, they would not be able to find a refuge. It is a major issue of the text and a message of warning for everyone (Ps 11:4). The popular suggestion, that because Sheol is “in the opposite direction to heaven” it functions as “the subterranean


dwelling-place of the spirits of the dead,” is completely unacceptable here.¹ The passage provides no information on postmortem bliss or any descriptive elements concerning Sheol as a place of existence or condemnation. Here the term Sheol is associated not only with the place of the dead, namely, the grave in general, but also alludes to the condition or state of being dead. It does not carry any specific qualitative aspects or theological meaning, except pointing to Yahweh’s omnipotence and omnipresence.

Jonah 2:3

Translation and Textual Remarks

And he said,
“[I called out of my distress to Yahweh, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, you heard my voice.]”

Text Unit and Its Genre

Vs. 3 belongs to the segment that is designated as Jonah’s psalm (vss. 3-10) and is encompassed by the prose framework (vss. 1-3a and 11).² However, there is no scholarly consensus concerning the origin of the psalm, its nature and place,³ and the

¹Richard S. Cripps, A Commentary on the Book of Amos (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1981), 257.

²According to the English versions, the poem is found in Jonah 2:2-9. The Hebrew versification of Jonah 2:1 corresponds to the English designation 1:17.

³H. Wolff in his work on Jonah as “A Drama in Five Acts” omits the psalm altogether. See Hans W. Wolff, Jonah: Church in Revolt (St. Louis: Clayton, 1978).
arrangement of the psalm is not as clearly marked off as in other cases. The various contradictory attempts to delineate the structure of the psalm and sharp disagreements from expert scholars lead to the thought “that there is no recoverable structure to be found.”

Whatever is the case of this disparity, for the purpose of this study it is possible to arrange the whole chapter (vss. 1-11) into the following chiastic structure, which provides highly important and insightful contextual connections and details in terms of understanding the nature and function of the word Sheol in vs. 3:


1See Pss 18; 30; 32; 34; 40:1-10; 66:13-20; 92; 116; 118, and 138.


A Yahweh appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah 2:1-2
B Jonah’s prayer from Sheol: a lament 2:3
C Though driven from Yahweh’s presence Jonah continues to look to his holy temple 2:4-5
D Jonah’s descent to the roots of mountains 2:6-7b
D¹ Jonah’s ascent from the pit 2:7c
C¹ Though his soul-life has expired, Jonah continues to turn to Yahweh in his holy temple 2:8
B¹ Jonah’s prayer in Yahweh’s temple: a thanksgiving 2:9-10
A¹ At Yahweh’s word the fish vomits Jonah 2:11

As can be seen from this chiastic outline, the structural and thematic center of the psalm lies in vss. 6-7, where Jonah describes his distressful experience by the words יָרָה (“I went down”) and then יָשָׁנָה לְעָלָם (“but you brought my life up from the pit”).¹ Principally the psalm revolves around a cluster of life and death ideas.² Because of the specific purpose of this paper, this study will mainly deal with vss. 3-10 as a unit without any attempt to split it into smaller subunits.

The presence in the psalm of both lament and thanksgiving elements generates problematic issues for some commentators;³ however, the majority of scholars agree that the overarching genre of the psalm of Jonah corresponds to the basic pattern⁴ of a


³For various views concerning genre and its elements see Bolin, Freedom Beyond Forgiveness, 97-120.

psalm of thanksgiving (תָּנֵס, “praise,” “thanksgiving,” vs. 10).

Exegetical Notes

Jonah 2 is one of the most popular and well-known passages in the Hebrew Scripture. It seems that the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol are quite obvious and do not need any clarification. Nonetheless, scholars see in vs. 3 a reference to the underworld. According to T. Alexander, the term Sheol probably points to “the place where the wicked remain until their final judgment.”

U. Simon speaks about the “lowermost Sheol” where people dwell as “shades.” T. Fretheim comments that “Sheol was believed to be under the floor of the ocean.” G. Landes goes so far as to write: “Just as Inanna required three days and three nights to complete her descent into the underworld, so also the fish is assigned the same time


span to return Jonah from Sheol to the dry land.”¹ J. Sasson critiques Landes’s statement by pointing out that “such an approach risks turning the psalm into a travel guide to hell and back.”² And Sasson is right, as will be demonstrated below.

Before looking at the basic vocabulary of vs. 3, which briefly summarizes Jonah’s experience and serves as the foundation for his thankfulness, it should be noted that the language of the psalm is not only rich in poetic imagery,³ but also contains the mixture of both literal and figurative elements. Thus, vs. 3 consists of two couplets which demonstrate synonymous parallelism, namely, both successive lines speak about the same thing: death threat and rescue:⁴

I called out of my distress to Yahweh, and he answered me
out of the belly of Sheol I cried, you heard my voice

It should be noted that despite the fact that נֶפֶךְ and נֶפֶךְ are in parallel relationships, the feminine noun נֶפֶךְ does not qualify Sheol as a place of distress or continued suffering, but functions only as a figure of speech to qualify Jonah’s agony, as will be seen below. This especially striking death-and-rescue motif


²Sasson, Jonah, 153-154.


is worked out and developed further in the subsequent verses (vss. 4-10) by means of the specific vocabulary of synonymous parallelism that progressively advances towards the culmination of Jonah’s prayer.¹

In vs. 3 the term Sheol is personified and represented as having the central digestive organ (נַפְס [“belly,” “womb”]),² which is reminiscent of the previous references, where Sheol had such body parts as מַר (“hand”),³ מַשְׁפֵּר (“throat”),⁴ and קֶשׁ (“mouth”).⁵ However, the figurative expression מַכַּלַּם נָפְס (“out of the belly of Sheol”) is unique and occurs only here.

Furthermore, Jonah’s circumstances are perfectly defined and characterized by the word מַדְחָא ("distress," "need," "anxiety"), whereas its parallel terminology מַכִּבָּא functions as metonymy. It should be noted that metonymy (where one word stands for another) is established on relation and not on resemblance,⁶ and that is one reason why the expression מַכַּלַּם נָפְס can be understood as “out of the inside/depths of the grave.” Moreover, as the phrase מַכַּלַּם נָפְס conforms to the pattern of the place of the dead functioning as an analogy to the grave, one should not miss the point that its double function also includes the formation of the primary and

¹For details see Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 399-400.
³Hos 13:14.
⁴Isa 5:14.
⁵Isa 5:14.
⁶Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 538-608.
most important connection with the literal location, that is, אָרָּמָּא ("in the bowels of fish," see Jonah 2:1-2). In the current context the basic meaning of the term אָרָּמָּא is to be "inside"¹ and is related to and functions as a synonym of הָעָלִים ("inward parts," "bowels," "belly").² It is particularly important to note that Jonah’s location is described by means of both synonyms as being in the הָעָלִים (vss. 1-2) and אָרָּמָּא (vs. 3) of the fish, which is the fact speaking by itself and has nothing to do with Sheol in its traditional sense.³ This thought is strengthened by the inherent function of the preposition יַּצְרָא ("from"), which is attached to the parallel terms אָרָּמָּא and הָעָלִים (vs. 3).⁴ Consequently, it not only binds the imagery of vss. 2 and 3 together, but also serves as an indication of Jonah’s physical location, and focuses the reader’s attention on the phrase רַבַּה אָרָּמָּא ("from the bowels of the fish," vs. 2).⁵

The assertion that Jonah was “beyond the earth and the sea”⁶ or that he was

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³It is interesting to note that L. Freedman sees in Jonah 2:3 “the lower cosmos, Sheol.” Freedman, “ארמה,” TDOT, 2:95.


⁵For the contrary view see Simon, Jonah 197, 19.

⁶Trible, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 166.
impossible for Jonah to be in two different places simultaneously, namely, in the belly of the fish and in Sheol. Likewise there is no terminological clue or allusion in the text that after יָהֳウェָה יָשָׁבָה לְיָהֳוָה יָשָׁבָה לְיָהֳוָה יָשָׁבָה לְיָהֳוָה יָשָׁבָה לְיָהֳוָה יָשָׁבָה Lm ("Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah," vs. 1), he left its belly in order "to go down" to Sheol, or that at first the prophet "went down" to Sheol and only then he was swallowed by the fish, as is asserted by Achtemeier, who writes: "It is from there that God's appointment of the great fish rescued him." However, her statement concerning the fish, which lives and swims in water, is hard to reconcile with her definition of Sheol as "the land."2

In this connection it is important to note that by means of seven terms, which create unusually rich, vivid, and powerful water imagery, the prophet describes the deadly dangers (vss. 4-6), thus making Jonah's death by drowning inevitable:

(1) מַעֲמַכִּת ("depths," "deep"); (2) יָשָׁבָה ("seas"); (3) נֶפֶשׁ ("stream," "river");

(4) גָּלֵי ("all your waves"); (5) נֶפֶשׁ ("and your billows"); (6) נֶפֶשׁ ("waters"); and (7) מַעֲמַכִּת ("deep"). The picture of drowning, including its various nuances, reaches its extreme intensity and vividness as the result of the combination of the water imagery with the verbs related to death and burial. For example, the "burial" of Jonah in the sea is described by the verb מַעֲמַכִּת ("go around," "surround,"


1Achtemeier, Minor Prophets I, 272.

2Ibid.
vss. 4, 6), which in the current context carries the sense of destructive grip and death. The other verbs are:  וָנֶשָּׁה ("throw," "cast"), מָכַבְשׁ ("pass over"), מָכַבְשׁ ("drive out," "cast out"), and מָכַבְשׁ ("surround," "encompass"). The expression of vs. 6 לְכַתִּי מַעָּרֶשׁ מַעָּרֶשׁ ("seaweed was wrapped around my head") provides additional details concerning a rapidly worsening situation in which the prophet's downward plunge seems to be fatal. However, this language describing Jonah's terrifying experience and hopelessness has nothing to do with the underworld or Sheol as the place of postmortem existence. One cannot take the highly descriptive language of the sea and build upon it a teaching about the netherworld, as it contradicts the basic content of vss. 4-6, where Jonah provides the deep-sea drowning description, which is vivid, powerful, and expanded to show his ordeal while being trapped at the bottom of the sea, unable to breathe, and choking with water.

Furthermore, vs. 7 is of special importance, for it not only contains a parallel vocabulary to the term Sheol in vs. 3, but also brings to a conclusion the description of Jonah's drowning by employing the key verb מָכַבְשׁ ("I went down"). Here the term

1 David was threatened by the "bonds of Sheol" in 2 Sam 22:6; Ps 18:6. The passage contains a huge amount of valuable information referring to this research; however, because of the space limitations other terms will not be discussed here.


3 Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, 477.

4 For the function of the key verb מָכַבְשׁ in vs. 7 see Magonet, Form and Meaning, 43. For the discussion on the term מָכַבְשׁ, see exegesis on Gen 37:35.
exhibits two functional aspects: (1) it emphasizes Jonah’s downward vertical movement (sinking down) לָעָבָדָא וְלָעָבָדָא ("to the roots of the mountains")\(^1\) and נַעֲרֵי (“the earth with her bars”), and (2) it highlights the process of his dying. In other words, the prophet “is going down” into the depths of the sea and facing death.

The noun נאָר (“her bars”) is used in a metaphorical sense to point out the boundaries beyond which nobody is able to go and to emphasize the inescapability and finality of death.\(^2\) Hence, the expression יַרְדֵּה נַעֲרֵי בַּהַרְרְיָה לְעֹלָם ("I went down, the earth, her bars about me forever")\(^3\) means to die in a watery grave on the floor of the sea, with no prospect of returning לְעֹלָם ("unto the dry land," vs. 11).

In addition, vs. 7 contains the vocabulary of “synthetic” parallelism: גּוֹמָא (“pit”),\(^4\) נאָר (“earth,” “land”), and לָעָבָד ("to the roots of mountains”), thus forming a natural terminological link with vss. 3 and 4. In vs. 4, Jonah is cast into the נאָר ("deep,” “depths”) and also לָעָבָד ("into the heart of the seas”), which in the verbal fabric of specific parallelisms form direct links with the vocabulary of

\(^1\) The exact meaning of the term מָנָה (“shape,” “form”) is in doubt. For various translations of Jonah 2:7 see “מָנָה,” HALOT, 3:1120.

\(^2\) HALOT, 1:157; Elmer A. Martens, “בְּרֵי,” NIDOTTE, 1:746.

\(^3\) In the current text the term נאָר functions as a temporal adverb; however, in some specific contexts it can be used as a metonymy for the grave. See Alan Cooper, “Ps 24:7-10: Mythology and Exegesis,” JBL 102 (1983): 37-60.

\(^4\) For a discussion of the term מָנָה see exegesis of Isa 38:10,18; Pope, “The Word מָנָה in Job 9:31,” 269-278.
vss. 6 and 7, especially with the key term הַמִּטְנָה (vs. 7).

These key words not only relate to the imagery of death, but also in various contexts function as synonyms of Sheol, meaning the grave, but in the current text they refer to the grave in a figurative sense. Nonetheless, Achtemeier is categorically against translating “Sheol in vs. 3 with grave.” She calls it “a disservice” and defends her point by arguing that “a grave was dug in the earth or carved out in rock.”\(^1\) On the one hand, she is partially right. On the other, to restrict the term “grave” only to “the earth” or “rock” does not do justice to the passage nor to the very concept of the grave. Generally, the notion of “grave” is understood in a much broader sense, namely, a final end or death of a person and any place of his or her “burial” thus especially vss. 6 and 7 allude to “the grave of the sea.”\(^2\)

Finally, the sudden twist from Jonah’s “going down” (ךָפִית) to his rescue is demonstrated by the verb הָלַךְ (”but you brought up,” vs. 7b). Both verbs function as antonyms to strengthen the contrast between Jonah’s fleeing, which leads to going down to the pit, and Yahweh’s deliverance.\(^3\) The vocabulary of the expression

\(^1\) Achtemeier, Minor Prophets I, 272.

\(^2\) Even today, the designation “watery grave” is used in many Western languages. There are thousands of drowned people to whom the seas, oceans, and lakes have become their graves symbolically. After one of our friends drowned in the Baltic Sea and the coast guard could not find his body, we always refer to the sea as his grave. Nobody means by that a literal grave dug in the floor of the sea.

\(^3\) For discussion of the antonyms קָנֵט and לָהֵן see Baruch Halpern and Richard E. Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” HAR 4 (1980): 79-92. They write: “Lexically, then, it is as though descent represents distance from YHWH, ascent movement toward him. YHWH’s ‘casting down,’ however, precipitates an involuntary ‘descent,’ the most meaningful descent—away from YHWH, and into the fish’s gut.” Also Raymond F. Person, In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah, JSOTSup 220 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), 69-71.
my God")\(^{1}\) metaphorically describes Jonah’s salvation from inevitable death, or as Stuart puts it, “he was actually snatched from the grave, as it were.”\(^{2}\) Typically the term סֵפָר denotes the place where one goes at death (Isa 51:14; Ps 30:9)\(^{3}\) and also serves as a synonym for Sheol (vs. 3).

In order to better understand the nature and function of the term Sheol in vs. 3, it is particularly significant to note the description, depicting suddenness, spatial aspects, and the way of Jonah’s final and complete rescue as described in vs. 11, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהֹウェָה לֵבָנָה נֶפֶק אַשְׁרָיוֹתָה אֲלֵהֶם ("and Yahweh said to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land").\(^{4}\) The words נִרָאת אַשְׁרָיוֹתָה ("and it vomited Jonah") serve as a clear indication that Jonah was in the belly of the fish and not in the underworld of dead spirits. The vocabulary of Jonah’s salvation is linked with another text, which describes the cause and starting point of Jonah’s “going down,” וַיִּאקֵם יְהֹウェָה בּוֹנֶא לֵבָנָה אַשְׁרָיוֹתָה ("and Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah," vs. 1). The term לֵבָנָה ("to swallow") basically means “to bring down into the inside,” and is also used to describe somebody who is being swallowed alive ("and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up . . . and they went

\(^{1}\) Jonah’s “going down” started in 1:3 (twice) and continued in vs. 5.

\(^{2}\) Stuart, Hosea - Jonah, 477.

\(^{3}\) See table 10.

\(^{4}\) This phrase recalls the pattern of creation, where Yahweh’s efficacy is demonstrated by His spoken word and its execution.
down alive . . . to Sheol,” Num 16:30-33).  

The fish swallowed Jonah not to kill him but to preserve him. The prophet was in the bowels of the fish three days and three nights (vs. 1) and prayed for his deliverance to Yahweh from the same place (vs. 2). In vs. 10 Jonah testifies about the answered prayer that "salvation comes from Yahweh”.

Consequently, one of the major themes of the passage is Yahweh’s omnipotent control of nature and His love toward Jonah.

In conclusion, Jonah’s psalm, being rich in metaphorical imagery, contains two important themes: one of life and the other of death, which are not only parallel in their development but also interact with one another. Exactly the same is true concerning the two locations, which are analogous and interrelated, where one of them—if not for Yahweh’s active intervention—could have become the place of the prophet’s death and grave. Besides, nobody knows the time span between the time

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1Ps 124:3, 6; Prov 1:12. For discussion on the verb יִלָּכֵנ see exegesis on Num 16:30, 33; Simon, Jonah 177, 18-19.

2Some scholars see in the reference to the great fish the Exile, which for a time swallowed up Israel. Moreover, liberal critics interpret the passage as following, “Jonah himself represents disobedient Israel; the sea represents the Gentiles; the whale stands for Babylon . . . ; and the three days of Jonah’s confinement in the whale’s belly points to the Babylon captivity.” See especially Archer, who demonstrates the absurdity of such an interpretation. Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 341-350; James D. Smart and William Scarlet, “Jonah.” IB, 6:886.


4Person, In Conversation with Jonah, 72.
Jonah was thrown from the ship into the sea (1:15), how deep he sank, how long he was under the water, and the time when he was swallowed by the fish.

Taking into consideration all the above facts and specific nuances of Jonah’s ordeal, it is obvious that the term Sheol may be applied to the belly of the fish and also to the prophet’s drowning experience when Jonah was cast “into the heart of the seas” (vs. 4), when “the deep surrounded” him (vs. 6), and he went down “to the roots of the mountains (vs. 7).” Whatever is the case, the proper noun Sheol in Jonah 2:3 may allude to the grave and the grave only—either to the grave of the sea or the grave in the belly of the fish. A third choice simply does not exist. That is why the phrase should be understood as “out of the inside/midst/depths of the grave” and no more.

Consequently, in order to avoid mutually conflicting and nonbiblical teachings, one needs to eliminate from the term Sheol those mythological labels and elements which have been attributed to it, including numerous variations, definitions, and descriptions of the conditions during an after-death existence there. In this connection Y. Kaufmann makes an all-inclusive and comprehensive statement: “The realm of the dead, the rites connected with death and burial, as well as the destiny of the soul in the other world, play no part in the religion of YHWH.”

1For three lines of interpretation (1) literal, (2) figurative, and (3) allegorical, see C. Hassell Bullock, An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 50.

2See all previous references to the term Sheol, especially their exegesis.

Hab 2:5

And indeed, the wine is treacherous, the man is haughty and he will not endure. Who enlarged his throat like Sheol, and he is like death and will not be satisfied. And he gathered to himself all the nations, and collected to himself all the peoples.

Translation and Textual Remarks

And indeed, the wine is treacherous, the man is haughty and he will not endure. Who enlarged his throat like Sheol, and he is like death and will not be satisfied. And he gathered to himself all the nations, and collected to himself all the peoples.

Text Unit and Its Genre

The basic structure of Hab 2:1-20 is determined by the distinction between the two main parts, namely, the report of Yahweh’s response to the prophet in vss. 1-5 and the specific language of the five woe speeches in vss. 6-20. The demarcation of the

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1. Besides the current reference, this adjective (חָפָרוֹן) occurs only once, in Prov 21:24. The basic meaning of it is to be “proud,” “haughty,” “a presumptuous man.” See “חָפָרוֹן,” BDB, 397.

2. The verb is a hapax legomenon. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB render it “He does not stay at home.” The NJB translates the phrase as “He is for ever on the move.”

3. The NASB and NJB render the term בָּזִי as “appetite,” the RSV and NIV as “greed,” and the KJV and NKJV as “desire.”

4. The fact that there are widely differing views among the scholars concerning the term בַּעֲלָם is clearly reflected in the following various translations. For example, the KJV renders the word בַּעֲלָם as “death,” the NKJV as “hell,” the NIV as “grave,” the LXX as “underworld,” and the NJB and NASB transliterate the term as “Sheol.”

5. (1) Woe to the extortioner (6-8), (2) Woe to the greedy and arrogant (9-11), (3) Woe to those who build on bloodshed (12-14), (4) Woe to the drunk and violent (15-17), and (5) Woe to the maker of an idol (18-20). Compare with Isa 5:8-23. Michael H. Floyd, Minor Prophets: Part 2, FOTL 22 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 115-118.
first unit is problematic, as scholars disagree concerning the end of the first part, which depends on how one interprets vss. 4, 5, and 6. On the other hand, most scholars agree that Yahweh’s message not only reaches its culmination in vs. 4, but also is linked by both form and content to vs. 5, thus marking off vss. 1-5 as a unit. Basically the unit (vss. 1-5), which provides a striking contrast between the righteous and the wicked, consists of the following parts:

1. Announcement of oracular inquiry (vs. 1)
2. Instructions concerning the vision (vs. 2)
3. Significance of the character of the vision (vs. 3)
4. Contrasting the fate of the wicked with the fate of the just (vss. 4-5)

The overarching genre of this complicated passage bears a rather unusual designation, namely, a report of an oracular inquiry. The whole passage is presented from the first-person perspective, which emphasizes Habakkuk’s close relationships with Yahweh. In addition, the passage is rich in various literary devices: chiasmus

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3 For a detailed discussion on this type of genre see Floyd, Minor Prophets, 118-120.

(vss. 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, 16), metonymy and merismus (vs. 5), personification (vss. 5, 11), simile and metaphor (vss. 5, 7, 8, 15, 16), assonance (vss. 2, 6, 7), allegory (vss. 15-16), proverb (vs. 6), etc.¹

Exegetical Notes

Before examining the term Sheol in its context, it is necessary to focus briefly on its direct setting (vss. 4-5) and discuss some of its specifics, which will help to better understand the nature and function of the term.

Hab 2:4 contains a short but comprehensive announcement.² In fact, it comprises the basic message of the vision, which in a succinct form contrasts the righteous (vss. 4) with the one whose soul is not upright in him). The negative part of this antithetical statement is further elaborated in vs. 5, which consists of the death-related terminology and the last reference to Sheol in the prophets.

Furthermore, both verses are tied together by the compound particle (moreover)³ that is followed by the metaphor of the wine (the wine,” see Hab 2:15-16),⁴ which as an agent of deceit and destruction deals treacherously,” Qal act.


²Rudolph, Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania, 216.

³Scholars translate the particle variously, as “indeed” (NIV, NKJV), “furthermore” (NASB), “yea also, because” (KJV), “now, surely” (NJB).

⁴Some scholars argue that instead of rendering the wine one should read it as “wealth”; see William H. Brownlee, “The Placarded Revelation of Habakkuk,” JBL 82 (1963): 319-325.
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ptc.)\(^1\) with its victim, leading the arrogant one\(^2\) not only to “intoxicating delusions of grandeur” but also to his downfall.\(^3\)

It should be noted that the term רָעָב (“strong man,” “hero”) in the phrase בַּלֶּא הָא רָעָב ("a man is haughty and he will not endure/abide") carries the connotations of power, might, and military associations.\(^4\) Nevertheless, in sharp contrast to the בִּלְא הָא רֹהֵחַ (“will live by his faith”), is the explanatory statement that reinforces the image of arrogance and deadly effects of wine, and strongly emphasizes the fact that this mighty and רָעָב (“haughty”)\(^5\) man will not הָיָה (“abide,” “endure”).\(^6\) The literal meaning of the hapax legomenon הָיָה is something like “to reach the goal of travel” or “to rest (from travels),” and captures the idea of the short-lived nature of a temporary dwelling.\(^7\)

In the sequence of four clauses of vs. 5 the author describes the expansion and dynamics of the arrogant man’s greed, and how “the one state of affairs leads to the

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\(^1\)Compare with Hab 1:13.

\(^2\)Usually identified with Babylon, Hab 1:10.

\(^3\)Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, 125.


\(^5\)This adjective occurs otherwise only once, in Prov 21:24, in parallel to רָעָב (“proud,” “insolent”).

\(^6\)The verb הָיָה is found only here. See “הָיָה,” *BDB*, 627.

\(^7\)Gerald H. Wilson, “וֹלָה,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:54-56.
other."¹ By employing highly metaphorical language, which includes parallel similes and the vocabulary of death, the prophet vividly demonstrates the merciless and boundless nature of this greedy man

who enlarged his throat like Sheol

and he is like death

and will not be satisfied

The two concluding clauses, which continue to describe the far-reaching consequences of the insatiable ravenousness of the haughty, form an absolute synonymous parallelism.² Both couplets refer to the arrogant man’s (Babylon’s) political ambitions for international conquests and submission of “all the nations” and “all the peoples.”³

and he gathered to himself all the nations

and collected to himself all the peoples

It is important to note that the first clause in the sequence of four is introduced by the relative pronoun יָאַבָּב ("who") with והָא ("and he," conj.-pers. pr. 3 m. s.) as

¹Floyd, “Habakkuk 2,1-5,” 474.


³See Hab 1:15-17 and 2:6-17; compare with Exod 23:10; Deut 11:14; Jer 51:7; Dan 5:1-30.
its parallel. Moreover, both of these pronouns plus two occurrences of הָמוֹן ("for himself," prep.-3 m. s. sf.) refer to one and the same antecedent, הַנָּעַר ("man"). This haughty and arrogant man (including also the reference to the wicked one in vs. 4a) is the subject of all the five verbs occurring in vs. 5, namely:

- וְלֹא נְתִמוּן and he will not endure
- וַעֲשָׂר הָרֹמִים who enlarged
- וְלֹא מְשֵׁב and he will not be satisfied
- וַעֲמָלָה עָלָיו and he gathered to himself
- וַעֲמָלָה עָלָיו and he collected to himself

Furthermore, the prophet takes two distinctly parallel, death-related, terms כִּשָּׁאָל (“like Sheol”) and כִּמָּה (“like [the] death”), both of which are personified, represented as living organisms with ability to open one’s throat (the idea of swallowing implied), and applies them to the arrogant one to emphasize his insatiability. The preposition כִּ (“like”) is used in a qualitative sense to express the resemblance of the attributes of death and the grave. Though in this metaphor, or more precisely, hyperbole of comparison, the arrogant man has nothing in common with death and Sheol in a literal sense, nonetheless his greed functions in the same way as death and Sheol. The definite article before כִּמָּה emphasizes the fact that here the imagery of death is quite tangible, because “death never takes a holiday.”

On account of the fact that the haughty one has no limits for his insatiability, greed,

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1 Qal act. ptc. החָרָב (“treacherous”) refers to wine. See also Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 208-220.

2 "כִּ," *BDB*, 455.

Sheol, and death are almost identical and affect בָּהֵא ("all the nations") and בְּחֵי ("all the peoples") in much the same negative way, as can be seen from the last two lines and the whole passage.¹

It is also important to point out that the first two clauses in the succession of four, in fact, contain three culminating statements. The first two describe the wicked, who is temporarily in control and that is why he has "enlarged his throat (שָׂפָה) like Sheol" and "he is like death." In this context it is appropriate to remember, in the words of Waltke, that בָּהֵא "means the whole self, a unity of flesh, will and vitality."² Accordingly, the whole being of the בָּהֵא is directed towards carrying out his wicked schemes. However, the third statement, which functions as a conclusion, shows that in spite of all his efforts "he will not be satisfied," and because of his greed "he will not endure."

Finally, here the term Sheol is employed without any implication concerning its relation to a spirit world. Both Sheol and its parallel term "death" are used in the sense of a hyperbolic comparison to designate the greed and insatiability of the בָּהֵא.³ Moreover, the gluttony of the arrogant one is directly linked to the inherent nature of death and the grave, "which continues over the ages to swallow up

¹Floyd, Minor Prophets, 125.


everyone.”¹ The meaning of the figuratively used word Sheol is partially determined by the function of its parallel term “death,” which is always associated in one way or other with the place of the dead or “the grave.”²

In this connection Patterson, who favors translating the term Sheol in Hab 2:5 as “the grave,” writes: “Israel did not share the pagan concept of an underworld for all souls, nor did it espouse the so-called ‘two-compartment theory’ that developed in intertestamental Judaism and the early church.”³ In other words, here the poetic term Sheol conveys a symbolic representation of the grave as the place of the dead without providing any specifics concerning its location or descriptive elements of it, which could be used as the proof text for underworld activities.

Discussion and Synthesis

Nature of לֵוֹלָה

It is significant to note that the term לֵוֹלָה, occurring twenty-four times in the Prophets, is scattered throughout the whole spectrum of the prophetic books. Except 1 Kgs 2:6, 9, the term Sheol with its key verb לָלָה (“to go down,” occurring twelve times)⁴ is employed in poetic contexts, some of which comprise a highly

¹Robertson, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, 184.


³Patterson, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, 182.

⁴See table 2.
figurative and extremely vivid imagery.¹

To avoid duplication it will suffice to say that the basic conclusions reached in the Torah concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the word Sheol are also applicable here. However, unlike the Torah, the Prophets contain some new descriptive particulars which will help the reader to make more concrete decisions and form a more solid opinion about the term, not only because of its quantitative usage but also its qualitative features.

The Former Prophets provide the reader with no new insights concerning the term Sheol, its spatial characteristics, physical features, or any kind of qualifying elements which would hint at life’s continuation in the underworld. The noun הָעָבְרָה ("darkness") in 1 Sam 2:9 can be mentioned as the only secondary descriptive term of Sheol, referring to its nature, which also serves as a synonym of Sheol and the grave (1 Sam 2:6).² The term by itself, including its current context, does not imply the idea of miserable postmortem existence in darkness, but simply states the fact that the grave is a physically dark place.

In the Former Prophets the term Sheol is used exclusively as a reference to the grave, and that is clearly demonstrated by the very context in which Sheol is employed. For instance, in 1 Kgs 2:6, 9, the expressions “do not let . . . go down in peace to Sheol” and “you must bring . . . with blood down to Sheol” refer to Joab’s and Shimei’s murder by Benaiah. This “going down to Sheol” is further clarified by the words in vs. 34, רָבִּים שֵּׁם יִבְנֵי ("and was buried at his house, [at his dwelling]"),

¹Isa 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27.

²See exegesis of 1 Sam 2:6.
which means that Joab was slain and afterward buried in the grave.¹ Thus, the term Sheol designates the place of the dead or death, which factually is the place of their burial without any further implications.

It should also be recalled that there is no such thing in the Hebrew Scripture as a distinction between “life” and “existence,”² but only between “life” and “death.” In this context the words of Wolff, who makes a pointed statement, become especially significant: “The dying person has much of importance to say, but his grave has little significance.”³

Finally, in the Former Prophets as in the Torah, the nature of Sheol exhibits two mutually exclusive features. On the one hand, Sheol’s weakness and limitations are exposed and subjected to the total control of Yahweh over it and its dead (1 Sam 2:6). On the other, Sheol, which by itself is nothing without death, exercises its full dominion over every human being (2 Sam 22:6).

In the Major Prophets the term Sheol, occurring fifteen times, is described in a vivid and highly figurative language. Nevertheless, as in all the previous instances, this abstract term continues to refer to the place of all the dead, clearly having an analogy with the grave. For example, in Isa 14:11 “maggots” and “worms” describe

¹Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 52.

²Though the Hebrew Scripture has nothing to do with such artificial distinction, Lou H. Silberman tries to introduce it in his article, “Death in the Hebrew Bible and Apocalyptic Literature,” in Perspectives on Death, ed. Liston O. Mills (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 13-33, esp. 20; see also Johnson, The Vitality of the Individual, 88-91.

³Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, 100.
the rotting of corpses, which is an inseparable characteristic of any grave. Other
descriptive elements, characteristic only of the grave, are especially emphasized by the
twofold negative particles “not . . . not,”¹ which demonstrate the fact that Hezekiah
undiably understood the nature of Sheol. He asserts that the dead are dead by using
such definite statements as “I shall not see YAH, YAH,” “I shall not look upon man,”
“Sheol cannot thank you,” “death cannot praise you,” and “those who go down to the
pit cannot hope” (Isa 38:10-18). To these could be added another of Hezekiah’s
expressions, “in the cessation of my years,” an expression that speaks for itself. In
brief, Sheol derives its nature from the burial and as such it is a place of darkness and
silence, excluding any notion of one’s existence there.

Unique are the references to Sheol in Ezek 31, 32, and Isa 14, which are almost
identical. It seems that these texts focus on the state of the dead rather than on an
event, thus contradicting everything that was said up until now. However, these texts
do not imply that Sheol is a place of vivid activities. To the contrary, the prophets use
specific figurative devices in order to reaffirm and authenticate the nature of Sheol as
a location with no life or distinctions. The descent of the king of Babylon is
seemingly associated with some stir on the part of the dead, and “although his glory
had made him seem almost immortal, he too must bow to corruption and decay.”²

Furthermore, it is almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of
recognizing the character and aim of these taunt songs. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel use
highly figurative language to picture some activity in Sheol, which with some

¹See exegesis of Isa 38:10, 18.

figurative treatment clearly points to the "grave." For instance, Ezekiel uses such synonymous terms as "pit," "the earth beneath," Sheol, "grave," and others, only in an imagined scenario. In this Sheol, various nations and their leaders are imagined as buried together in large groups, where some nations are in more disgraceful locations within Sheol than others.

The expressions of these taunt songs are highly instructive for understanding the nature of Sheol. Pharaoh and his horde will lie in Sheol in one of the imagined places reserved for armies killed in battle. Assyria is also destined for death. Elam, Meschech, Tubal, and the nations are pictured as slain, lying with the uncircumcised, with those killed by the sword. These are all said to be in Sheol (31:15, 16, 17) and they are also said to be in the "grave" (32:22, 23, 25, 26). And the fact that so many other great nations of the past are also lying in similar circumstances will be a sort of consolation to the Egyptians. All these descriptive details conclusively point to the grave, where underneath the earth lie buried the great warriors, leaders, various nations, and all the dead of all the times.

Furthermore, figuratively Sheol means a place of degradation and disgrace. In vivid personalization, the dead put their swords under their heads, and are pictured as talking (32:21, 27). An animated Sheol provokes kings and princes to meet the

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1The term הַמּוֹאַ is just a poetic synonym for מְאֹד, which is used 71 times for "grave," and the verb מָמַע is used all 132 times for "bury."

2It should be pointed out that none of these allegorical details fit with what the Hebrew Scripture otherwise teaches about Sheol, and therefore they must be taken as a symbolic background against which the point of the prophecy can be clearly seen, namely, great earthly powers, no matter how cruel and powerful, all eventually come to an end as God judges the affairs of the earth.
newcomer. Ezekiel personifies Sheol so vividly and consciously that many scholars have been misled into interpreting this figurative language literally. As a result they see Sheol as a state in which people outside their bodies are half awake, partially conscious, existing in a gloomy and shadowy waiting place, or as G. Ladd writes, for example, that the dead in Sheol "exist not as souls or spirits capable of existence apart from the body, but as 'shades.'”¹

Finally, it is important to recognize the significance of the echoes of fixed phrases, parallel terms, and special figures of speech. Though images can be highly figurative, they are not meaningless. It is no coincidence that Ezekiel employs the term Sheol interchangeably with its various synonyms, which as the figures of death and burial focus the reader’s attention on the grave. The same approach is also used by the prophet Isaiah. For instance, in order to assert that “Sheol has opened wide its throat and enlarged its mouth without limit,” he takes the elements of personification and hyperbole, thus emphasizing the insatiable nature of the grave (Isa 5:14), which always is open and ready to “devour” the newcomers. Consequently these conclusions provide substantial support to the assessment of the above references that the nature of Sheol corresponds to that of the grave.

The same basic elements, intrinsic to the nature of Sheol, recur in the Minor Prophets. By using the device of personification, Hosea pictures the destructive power of Sheol, which at the same time is totally exposed before Yahweh’s supremacy (Hos 13:14). The prophet emphasizes the fact that Sheol’s nature is vulnerable and lasting.

¹George E. Ladd, “Eschatology,” ISBE, 2:133.
only for a time. The same idea of Sheol’s defenselessness is expressed in Amos 9:2.  

Hab 2:5 compares the greed of the arrogant man by referring to the insatiable voracity of Sheol as its innate character, which harmonizes well with the nature and function of both literal and figurative grave. And finally, although Jonah 2:2, 3 contains no information concerning Sheol’s nature, the context associates it with the grave in a non-literal sense. To put it differently, the passage reminds the reader that the location and form of the “grave” may vary, namely, the place of death can be found not only in the traditional literal grave or desert, but also in the sea or even in the belly of the great fish.

None of these five occurrences of the term Sheol contains any information or even the impression of a surviving soul, spirit, or some kind of ongoing existence in the underworld. It means that one should be careful not to impose on the term Sheol the teaching of the immortality of soul when the term clearly refers to the grave.

Function of הַשֵּׁאֹל

In the Former Prophets the term הַשֵּׁאֹל fulfills several important functions, resulting from the specific characteristics of its nature. Accordingly, in 1 Sam 2:6 its main function is to point to the grave as the place of death, which at the same time serves as the contrast to those whom Yahweh “brings to life” and “raises up.” This rather elaborate description not only shows that Sheol’s specific function of holding the dead in its grip is restricted and temporary, but also focuses one’s attention on the omnipotence of Yahweh and an eschatological dimension.

1See Deut 32:22; 1 Sam 2:6; Amos 9:2.
Furthermore, in 2 Sam 22:6 David describes the mercilessness and utmost intensity of the deadly forces seeking his destruction, by animating both Sheol and death. Because of the deadly functions of “the cords of Sheol” and “the snares of death” David becomes “like the dead.” This means that he had virtually experienced the disintegrating and destroying power of death and the severe reality of the grave.

Finally, the primary function of the term Sheol in 1 Kgs 2:6, 9 is explained by the context, especially in vss. 34 and 46. The passage shows how a carefully planned murder by Benaiah leads to the premature death of Joab and Shimei and their “going down to Sheol,” which equals to the grave and functions exactly as the grave.

In the Major Prophets, Ezek 31 and 32 are the most critical passages concerning the interpretation of the term Sheol. In Ezek 31 one of the main functions of the term Sheol is to describe the judgment of Yahweh against Pharaoh and its effect on the surrounding nations (Ezek 31:15-18). The pattern is clear: (1) accusation, (2) proclamation of judgment, and (3) execution of judgment, which is followed by (4) public reaction. The prophet uses here the procedure of intensified reversal to tell the story of his gigantic downfall to the grave.

Once the constructive and affirmative control of Yahweh over the arrogant tree, which the tree ignored and neglected, becomes a negative and destructive force at the end, resulting in the fall of the haughty tree (vss. 13-16), which, in turn, equates with its descent to Sheol. Moreover, as was demonstrated earlier on the exegetical basis, this conclusion is strongly supported by the key vocabulary. Ezek 31 and 32 are crowded with a formula-like parallel terminology referring to death and the grave, as for instance, “handed over to death,” “go down to the pit,” “went down to Sheol,” “lie
among the uncircumcised,” “slain by the sword,” “to the earth below,” and others, which describe not the continuation of life but death and the dead.¹ According to the prophet, “to go down to Sheol” means complete termination of any imagined existence in the underworld, namely, “you will be no more” (תַּחַת הָאָדָם).² Thus Sheol functions exactly as the grave.

Another aspect of its function is to introduce a group of newcomers, which is described in a highly metaphorical language (Ezek 32:21-27). The degree of their participation and their conversation with Egypt and all her allies is extraordinary, and it all takes place “from the midst of Sheol” (יתְבֹעֵם לְרַבָּם). The mighty are the honorable dead of vs. 27, and their leaders make comments on the new arrivals. This description recalls the scene from Isa 14:9-10, where the dead companies sarcastically greet the slain Mesopotamian king as he comes to Sheol, the place of maggots and worms.

However, Egypt is not alone in Sheol. According to Ezek 32, Assyria with her allies occupies the first place in it because she was “spreading terror in the land of the living” (vss. 22-23). Elam’s presence with all her multitudes among the uncircumcised clearly points out her destiny in the grave (vss. 24-25). Now she bears shame “with those who go down to the pit” (יתְבֹעֵם לְרַבָּם לְרַבָּם). There are Meshech and Tubal and all their armies, too (vss. 26-28).

Finally, this list concludes with Edom’s multitudes, her kings and leaders,

¹For parallelisms and key vocabulary in Ezek 31:14-18 and 32:17-32, see tables 11 and 12.

²Ezek 26:21; 27:36; 28:19.
northern princes, and every Sidonian (vss. 29-30). It is significant to note, although Edom is not accused with “spreading terror in the land of the living” like other nations, its place is “beside those slain by the sword,” “with the uncircumcised,” and “with those who go down to the pit.” The deadly function of Sheol demonstrates how all of them have gone down in shame and disgrace to their graves, only to lie next to the dreadful victims of the sword and the uncircumcised.

The judgment message of Isa 5:14 is almost identical to that of Ezek 31 and 32, therefore the term Sheol functions almost in the same way as the grave. The only difference is that in Ezekiel the focus is on the dead (foreign nations) in their graves, but in Isa 5:14 the main emphasis is on Sheol itself, which is vividly described as being alive and ready to swallow all its victims (Israel and Judah).

In Isa 28:15, 18, using sarcastic metaphorical wording, the prophet condemns Ephraim and Judah for their treaties with Egypt, for seeking refuge in lies and falsehood. Instead of choosing Yahweh, the Israelites rely on treaties, which operate exactly in the same way as death and Sheol.

Especially important are the references to the term Sheol in Isa 38:10, 18, where Hezekiah speaks about the dead in the grave. As death is real, so the grave is a real place. Asserting that “Sheol cannot thank you,” “death cannot praise you,” and “those who go down cannot hope,” Hezekiah reveals something about Sheol’s inner functions, namely, total termination of any possible life form and nonexistence of the so-called shadows/souls/spirits/ghosts. Or more precisely, the king shows that in Sheol the dead are dead. If in Sheol there were some kind of existence, then Hezekiah

\[\text{Pss 6:5; 115:17. This aspect will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.}\]
would have provided a corresponding description.

In the Minor Prophets, as in previous references, Hosea strongly emphasizes that any destructive function of the power of Sheol and death is limited (Hos 13:14), whereas Amos focuses on its antithetical aspect, thus specifying Sheol’s function as being the opposite in relation to heaven (Amos 9:2; see also Isa 7:11). Jonah describes his distress and anguish by referring to a location/spatial dimension of Sheol, namely, “the belly of Sheol” (Jonah 2:2, 3), which functions as the grave in a figurative sense. And in Hab 2:5, by using personified imagery of Sheol and death as a hyperbole of comparison, the prophet shows that the greed of the arrogant one functions in the same way as the voraciousness of the grave.

Purpose of הָאָדָם

In order to have a full picture of this three-faceted synthesis, it is necessary to focus briefly on the third dimension, that is, the purpose of Sheol in the Prophets. The similarity of various aspects in this triangle helps to establish the interconnection between various employments of the term Sheol in its direct and broader contexts, which is important in combination, not in isolation or fragmentation. Furthermore, the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol, though differentiated from each other by the particularity of its specific aspects, serve as building blocks for the identification of its factual characteristics and the recognition of its theological/anthropological implications.

Consequently, in her thanksgiving song in the Former Prophets (1 Sam 2:1-10), Hannah celebrates the unconditional might of Yahweh, Who is the source of wisdom, strength, and triumph for those who fear Him. By declaring that “Yahweh
puts to death and brings to life” and that “He brings down to Sheol and raises up” (2:6), she creates a powerful picture of Yahweh’s omnipotence. As is seen from the context of a life-and-death contrast, from its nature and function Sheol is not a place of life after death, but a place of death,¹ the grave; therefore the assertion that He “raises up” has nothing to do with the living in the netherworld but refers to the dead and their physical resurrection.

Moreover, 1 Sam 2:6 contains all-embracing nuances of the time-space elements in which these specific actions of Yahweh are exerted and in which the identifications of space allusions occur. No human being is able to control the destructive force of the grave or life-giving power except Yahweh. Both death and the grave are absolutely subjected to His authority, and that is the main purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in Hannah’s song.

The vocabulary of 2 Sam 22:5, 6 and vs. 7 forms an extremely powerful contrast. Thus in vss. 5 and 6, to describe his agony in the face of imminent death David relies heavily on watery and terrestrial imagery such as “the waves of death” and “the torrents of destruction” (vs. 5), “the cords of Sheol” and “the snares of death” (vs. 6).² In this cluster of the most violent and compelling images drawn from nature and the sphere of death, the purpose of the term Sheol is to intensify the picture of David’s near-death experience, when he felt death and the grave as close “as a rope coiled around him.”³ It means that he imagined himself as having already been dead in


²Similar imagery is found in Pss 22:13, 16, 17; 40:13; 42:8; 49:6; 88:7, 8, 17, 18; 116:3; 118:10-12; Hos 7:2; Jonah 2:3, 5.

³Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 235.
the grave. On the other hand, the words of his deliverance in vs. 7, “I called . . . He heard,” serve as a sharp contrast to the grave-death imagery and also as the resolution of the death-life tension.

As in all the previous cases of the current research, it should be stressed also here that an attempt to identify the term Sheol in 2 Sam 22:6 with “the realm of the afterlife, the place of departed spirits”¹ not only leads to the imposition on the text of humanly imagined and preferred ideas and socially accepted Scripture-contradicting ways of thinking, but also results in theologically strange doctrines.

The final two occurrences of the term Sheol in the Former Prophets, which function in the context of specific directives given by David to Solomon, contain a blended imagery of wisdom and violent death (1 Kgs 2:6, 9). The rationale behind David’s counsel, “do not let his gray hairs go down in peace to Sheol” and “you must bring his gray hairs with blood down to Sheol,” is more than clear. There is only one way to get rid of Joab and Shimei and bring them down to the grave; they must be murdered. Except for the thrust on assassination and the grave, which are necessary for Solomon to legitimize a later actual situation, no after-death-existence ideas or associations are implied here.²

The major bulk of Sheol occurrences, which includes the most crucial and at the same time misinterpreted passages, is found in the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel (see Isa 14 and Ezek 31 and 32). The discussion on the nature and function of the term Sheol in the Major Prophets has already made it obvious that neither Isaiah nor

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¹Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” EBC, 3:1067.

²See concise summary on the nature and function of 1 Kgs 22:6, 9, especially the exegesis section.
Ezekiel had any intention to provide their readers with a detailed description of the afterlife. Their main purpose is to make known that the day of divine retribution is coming and that Yahweh is able to remove the one who is too powerful in his own eyes. It is beyond doubt that the graphic imagery of Isa 14 and Ezek 31, 32 focuses on Yahweh’s great reckoning with all that “in the land of the living” declares itself to be “pomp,” powerful “array,” and “might.” Against this background Yahweh addresses the display of the powers which in their days thought to defy Yahweh’s sovereignty. Consequently, all of them are destined to go down to Sheol. At the same time Yahweh’s judgments function not only as the tool of destruction but also as the means of salvation of those who see them being carried out; there is a hope that they would awake and return to Him.

On the other hand, the employment of the term Sheol in the Major Prophets serves as a multipurpose term having a wide range of theological and anthropological implications, as for example the affirmation of Yahweh’s sovereignty that underlines both Egypt’s fall and its descent to Sheol. The use of “many hordes” in Ezek 32 emphasizes the degree and extent of His sovereignty, as does the darkening of the heavens in vss. 7-8 as well as the terrifying of other nations in vss. 9-10. In fact, it is a part of the background upon which trust and hope in Yahweh’s future actions of redemption are based.

Another vitally important aspect should be mentioned: The majority forgets that the essence of being human means to be mortal, and that is as true in regard to all human beings as it is of nations and their leaders. By using a highly figurative language, vivid imagery, elements of ridicule and taunt, and personification of Sheol...
and its dead, both Isaiah and Ezekiel clearly indicate that after death a person has no opportunity to change his destiny.

Seen in this light, and from this larger perspective, Ezekiel’s oracles of judgment take on a more positive purpose. They not only reflect acts of divine punishment of Egypt and other nations for their foolish pride and evil deeds, but are episodes in a cosmic history in which powers of rebellion are conquered. All judgment is in some sense a part of the battle between good and evil and therefore all judgment has ultimately a positive purpose, namely, the forces of evil are held back and Yahweh’s plan is carried out. Beyond judgment there lies a better world, in which Yahweh’s will and intentions will be carried out in a perfect harmony.

Thus far the discussion on the nature and function of the term Sheol has identified it with the place of the dead, which suggests that its purpose should work in the same direction. This conclusion is clarified by those descriptive elements which are characteristic of the grave, thus providing some useful insights. For instance, Hezekiah, contemplating his death, refers to Sheol as the place of total silence and nonexistence. There is no hope, praise, or thanksgiving in the grave (Isa 38:10, 18), but only maggots and worms covering the dead (Isa 14:11). The fact that by employing the term Sheol the authors of the Major Prophets intended the grave is supported by the abundant usage of its parallel and synonymous terminology, such as “pit” “grave,” “death,” “the earth beneath,” etc., as well by the vocabulary belonging to the sphere of death.\(^1\) Moreover, according to Isaiah, both the righteous and the

\(^1\)See exegesis sections of the verses under discussion, especially Ezek 31 and 32.
wicked, the chosen ones and the enemies of Yahweh, all die and go down to the same place, the grave.¹

Finally, in Isa 28:15 and 18, the prophet uses the term Sheol as a personified entity with a specific end in view, namely, to warn Judah and its leaders concerning their blind trust in political alliances and the deadly consequences such treaties would entail. An agreement with Egypt equals an agreement with the grave; it means that their distrust in Yahweh would eventually bring them death.²

The primary purpose and intention of all the references of the term Sheol in the Minor Prophets, except one, is to demonstrate the total control of Yahweh over the deadly power of death, the grave, and those who are in it, which in Hos 13:14 evinces itself as the power of bodily resurrection. Accordingly Amos 9:2 reveals Yahweh’s omnipotence by describing the coming judgment and a no-escape-alternative even if one digs into Sheol. The purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in Jonah 2:3 is to focus the reader’s attention on Yahweh’s incomparability and superiority, love and compassion, which are exhibited in the punishment/salvation motif. The only exception is found in Hab 2:5, where the insatiability of personified Sheol is used to illustrate the greed of the arrogant one in order to contrast the fate of the wicked and the fate of the just.

In summary, it should be noted that by emphasizing the same aspects over again, both the Torah and the Prophets follow a clear and fundamentally consistent

¹Compare Isa 38:10, 18; 5:14; 28:15; and 14:9, 11, 15.

²For similar nuances see exegesis section of Isa 5:14 and 57:9.
pattern in describing the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol. The regularity of the specific treatment of the term Sheol in both the Torah and the Prophets by various authors is clearly demonstrated by its particular vocabulary, which in one way or other refers to the grave, either to the literal one or figurative one, and describes the destructive effects of death in language that is totally opposite to the creation/life terminology. On the other hand, this does not mean that both the Torah and the Prophets carry out the whole blueprint of Sheol in the least detail, including the disposition of its emphases, nuances, and elements, and there is no need for that.

Finally, the current exegesis clearly substantiates that the three-faceted synthesis of the term Sheol in the Prophets, which functions as the synonym for the place of the dead or the grave, has nothing to do with after-death consciousness in the underworld and is in perfect harmony with the fundamental pattern of employment of the term Sheol as the grave in the Torah.

Excursus 2

דֶּעָה and Its Conceptual Links in the Prophets

Introduction

In order to continue the groundwork of the current exegesis concerning the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol in the Prophets, it is necessary to present a sketchy analysis of some of the key parallel terms (already discussed in the Torah) in a broader context here. For instance, an examination of the verbs יָבֵשׁ ("gather") and יָבְשׁוּ ("lie down") in various formulas and the conclusions made regarding their basic
function in the death contexts provide additional support for the current discussion.\footnote{There are many other terms of importance, such as  הָקָדָם ("to awake," 2 Kgs 4:31; Isa 26:19; Jer 51:39, 57), לָשׁוּב ("to sleep," Jer 51:39, 57), בִּלְחָד ("bier," 2 Sam 3:31; 1 Kgs 17:19; 2 Kgs 4:21, 32), בַּשָּׁב ("bed," Isa 53:2; Ezek 32:25), נוּפָל ("slumber," Nah 3:18), קָלָם ("sleep," Jer 51:39, 57), etc., which because of space limitations will not be discussed here.} The importance of these verbs was already demonstrated in the Torah, and their recurrence in the Prophets functions as a structuring device, which makes it easier to discern and solidify the discovered insights about the term Sheol as it occurs in various settings.

There are two more points which should be briefly addressed in this last section. Both of them are directly related to the current study and have to do with the rationale of the three-faceted aspects of Sheol. First, it is necessary to look at 1 Sam 28, which is often used as a proof text of afterlife in Sheol, and second, one must consider what is the relationship between the Sheol passages of Ezek 31, 32 (the last three oracles against nations) and one of Ezekiel's subsequent major visions, namely, the resurrection passage in Ezek 37.

\textbf{יהֵלָה in the Prophets}

As was seen in chapter 2, the term הֵלָה ("gather") is found in various death formulas and refers to the grave without any implications of afterlife or some kind of existence in Sheol. In the Prophets the formula differs slightly from the one in the Torah. If in the Torah the author used the expression "and was gathered to his people" over again,\footnote{See table 6 and the discussion there.} then in the Prophets it is slightly modified and more clear-cut. It is
interesting to note that after the description of Joshua’s death in Judg 2:8 and 9,  "then Joshua died" (“then Joshua died”) and “and they buried him”), in vs. 10 the reader is informed that “and also all that generation was gathered to his fathers”). Some scholars see here an “entry upon the afterlife.” However, practically speaking, there is no distinction between the formula “was gathered to his fathers” and “was gathered to his people,” except nuances. In both cases the expressions refer to the dead ancestors and the grave.

Furthermore, in 2 Kgs 22:20, the same expression ( “I will gather you to your fathers”) functions in parallel to ( “and you shall be gathered to your grave”), thus strengthening and defining the analogy of familial associations with the grave. Speaking about the death of the righteous in Isa 57:1, the prophet uses identical wording, ( “and men of kindness are gathered”) and ( “gathered is the righteous one”).

Moreover, these figurative expressions recall other similar phrases, which in the Hebrew Scriptures imply the same idea of death and the grave, as for instance, (“I am going today the way of all the earth”), (“before I go and I am no more”), or one of Job’s sayings, (“before I go, and I shall not return”).


2 Josh 23:14; 1 Kgs 2:2.

3 Ps 39:14.

4 Job 10:21.
All these instances of various formulas demonstrate not only an impossibility of splitting the expressions and separating “one’s people” from “one’s fathers” or “one’s grave,” but also the absurdity of creating for every nuance a new interpretation. “The fact that the word could be used without any prepositional phrase suggests that the meaning was the same and there was no distinction between the phrases.” The use of the term פִּסְנָה in the formula in the Prophets simply points to the fact that people die and are buried in the grave, and has nothing to do with the manner of their death or an afterlife in the underworld.

Pisnah in the Prophets

Both in the Torah and in the Prophets the term הבכש (“lay down”) functions in the same way as the verb פִּסְנָה in its formulas. Generally the verb is used in the expression נַעֲשָׂה עַל פִּסְנָה פְּנֵיהֶם (“and he lay down [slept] with his fathers”) and its variants, “when I will lie down,” “you will lie down,” or “they lay down,” where the verb is further clarified by its parallel vocabulary, קָבָר (“to bury”), קָבָר (“grave,” “burial place”), 3 or the phrase כָּבָד קָבָר נְפָשׁוֹ (“and was buried with his fathers”), as is seen in table 14. In the Torah the formula is used in the context of the death and burial of Jacob and Moses, whereas in the Prophets it is mainly used concerning the death and burial of kings and Yahweh’s enemies.

1Cornelius, Hill, and Rogers, “PISNA,” NIDOTTE, 1:468-472. The same article also provides a concise description of the five views concerning the formula.

2For the description of the corpses which לא נַעֲשָׂה עַל פִּסְנָה (“are not gathered and are not buried”), see Jer 8:2 and 25:33.

3See Gen 47:30; Deut 31:16.
The verb הָלְךָ, depending on the structure and the context of the text, is translated as “slept” (NASB, NRSV), “rested” (NIV, NKJV), “fell asleep” (NJB), or “lay down.” Since death is often compared to a sleep, the verb הָלְךָ, which basically means “lying down,” functions “as a metaphor for death,” as is clearly seen from the forty-six references shown in table 14, containing the major statements referring to death and the grave.

It is also instructive to recall the dangers when scholars try to focus on every minutest detail in the phrase. For example, by making a distinction between the expressions “and he lay down with his fathers” and “and was buried with his fathers,” Driver comes to the conclusion that the immortal part “is gathered to his fathers in the world below” and the “body is consigned to a grave . . . in the world above.” However, there is no hint or further qualifications that would support his conclusions as none of the texts even mention “soul,” “spirit,” or any other descriptive element referring in some way to the underworld. The phrase “and he lay down with his fathers” simply serves as a general description of somebody’s death. Actually the phrase “and he lay down with his fathers” is parallel to the expression “and he was buried with his fathers” (1 Kgs 14:31). These mental images simply function as common metaphors for going to the grave.

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3 For the discussion of the phrase see Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 33-35.
### Table 14

**The Distribution of the Term נפנפ in the Context of Death Terminology in the Prophets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Judg 5:27</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>he fell, he lay down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 Sam 7:12</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>you will lie down with your fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 Kgs 1:21</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>when ... lies down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 Kgs 2:10</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>then ... lay down with his fathers and was buried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 Kgs 3:20</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and her dead son she laid (twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 Kgs 11:21</td>
<td>נפפ וּרְאָל וּרְאָל</td>
<td>David lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 Kgs 11:43</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>lay down with his fathers and was buried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 Kgs 14:20</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 Kgs 14:31</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1 Kgs 15:8</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and they buried him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 Kgs 15:24</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and Asa lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 Kgs 16:6</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and was buried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1 Kgs 16:28</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and was buried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 Kgs 17:19</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and laid him down on his bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 Kgs 22:40</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1 Kgs 22:51</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 Kgs 4:21</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and she laid him on the bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2 Kgs 4:32</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>lying dead on his bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 Kgs 8:24</td>
<td>נפפ</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers and was buried with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2 Kgs 10:35</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2 Kgs 13:9</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 Kgs 13:13</td>
<td>and they buried him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2 Kgs 14:16</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>2 Kgs 14:22</td>
<td>the king lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2 Kgs 14:29</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>2 Kgs 15:7</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>2 Kgs 15:22</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2 Kgs 15:38</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>2 Kgs 16:20</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2 Kgs 20:21</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2 Kgs 21:18</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2 Kgs 24:6</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Isa 14:8</td>
<td>since you lay down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Isa 14:18</td>
<td>all of them lay down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Isa 26:19</td>
<td>you who lie in the dust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Isa 43:17</td>
<td>they will lie down and will not rise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Isa 50:11</td>
<td>in pain you will lie down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Isa 51:20</td>
<td>they lay at the head of every street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Ezek 31:18</td>
<td>you shall lie among the uncircumcised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ezek 32:19</td>
<td>and be laid with the uncircumcised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Ezek 32:21</td>
<td>the uncircumcised lay down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Ezek 32:27</td>
<td>and they do not lie with the mighty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Ezek 32:28</td>
<td>and you shall lie with those slain by the sword</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moreover, table 14 clearly demonstrates the fact that the employment of the term נפוג in fixed phrases or its variations is closely tied together with such descriptive elements as location, place, material, and other specifications, as for instance, “to lie down with one’s fathers,” “to lie dead on one’s bed,” “to lie in one’s own tomb,” “to lie in the dust,” “to lie at the head of the street,” “to lie among the uncircumcised,” or “to lie with those slain by the sword.” In all these cases by means of the verb נפוג the Prophets fill out a twofold function, namely, (1) characterize the dead ones and (2) point to their place or location, which usually alludes to the grave. This might include the surface of the earth, as in the case of the king who remains unburied (Isa 14:18, 19).

Finally, it should be noted that this metaphor of death, employed in both the Torah and Prophets, follows a clearly balanced pattern by simultaneously pointing to a person’s condition in death and defining the nature of Sheol. Consequently, the Hebrew Scriptures use the verbal image of the term נפוג to describe the dead ones and to express the total loss of life and nonexistence. These insights are particularly important to remember when dealing with Ezek 32, where the verb נפוג is used eight times and surrounded by numerous parallel and synonymous terms of death vocabulary (see table 12). Both verbs נפוג and נפוג impart additional information not only that death and Sheol are merciless levelers of all people, but they also
invalidate the stereotypes concerning one’s afterlife in the netherworld and confirm the term Sheol as the synonym of the grave.

1 Sam 28

Without going into exegetical details, the purpose of this section is to focus on two major questions in this tragic story of Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Sam 28:3-19), namely, Did the medium actually establish a communication with a genuine spirit-being? and Was it really the dead prophet Samuel? The conclusions made are crucially important, as they will strengthen or distort the manifold theological and anthropological truths of the Hebrew Scriptures.1 For instance, this well-known passage is too often used as an illustration and proof text of an after-death existence in Sheol, as can be demonstrated by the following statements:

The story of the “witch” of Endor is an excellent example of the concept of Sheol in Israel’s Monarchic Period. Samuel appears after death as a shadowy figure, appearing much as he had in old age (1 Sam 28:14). Thus Sheol is a place where the conditions of life are unchanged. From 1 Sam 28:15 it seems that those in Sheol are in some state of rest and can be disturbed from that calm.2

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1 The fact that there are at least seven views concerning the event shows how divided is the scholarly world. They see in the passage (1) a real event of raising Samuel by means of necromancy; (2) the witch presenting a deception; (3) God causing either Samuel or a demon to appear; (4) a demon acting apart from God to deceive; (5) a vision coming as the result of hallucinatory drugs; (6) a vision induced psychologically, and (7) Satan himself impersonating the prophet Samuel. For a detailed discussion see Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, 104-117; Klaus A. D. Smelik, “The Witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis till 800 AD,” *Vigiliae Christianae* (VigChr) 33, no. 2 (1979): 160-179; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 266-268; Thomas O. Figart, “Saul, the Spiritist, and Samuel,” *Grace Theological Journal* (GTJ) 11 (1970): 13-29.


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Commenting on this classical example of necromancy, B. Lang joins West in asserting the immortality of soul by providing a further elaborate interpretation: "The story gives us a glimpse of an afterlife in which the dead, though apparently deprived of material substance, retain such personality characteristics as form, memory, consciousness, and even knowledge of what happens on the other side."¹ B. Philbeck writes likewise: "Samuel is portrayed as a spirit, roused out of his slumber in Sheol where existence was seen as a state of weakness and forgetfulness (Psalm 88:4, 12)."² However, W. Humphreys puts somewhat different emphases on the event: "Assumptions are made here about the state of the dead that are clearly not found elsewhere in ancient Israelite or early Jewish material."³

Those who defend the doctrine of the soul/spirit existence in Sheol point to such technical key words and phrases as קְרָא וְיִתֵּן מֵאָדֹם לִגְדֹּל אָדָם ("divine, I pray you, to me by a spirit," vs. 8),⁴ קָרַב ("cause to come up to me"), and עוֹלִי הַלְּבָנָה מֵאָדֹם מֵאָדֹם (5) "go up," "ascend") occurs six times in the passage: Hi. impv. in vss. 8 and 11; Hi. impf. in vs. 11; Qal act. ptc. in vss. 13 and 14, and Hi. inf. estr. in vs. 15. The term עֶשָּׂרֵב functions as a direct antonym to the verb עָלָי ("go down") to express movement in opposite directions: Gen 24:16; 28:12; Exod 19:24; Num 20:27, 28; Deut 28:43; Judg 14:1-2, 19; 16:31; 2 Kgs 1:4, 6, 16; Jer 48:18, etc. See also "עָלָי," BDB, 750; Eugene H. Merrill, "עָלָי," NIDOTTE, 3:402-404; Hans F. Fuhs, "עָלָי," TDOT, 11:76-95.

⁴See Harry A. Hoffner, “עָלָי,” TDOT, 1:130-134.
(“coming up out of the earth,” vs. 13). They say that the verb “to bring up” is in harmony with the concept of Sheol as a place for the dead beneath the earth’s surface, to which people “go down” at death.¹

Concerning this unusual event one can make some general and undeniable observations:² First, the medium really sees somebody like Samuel coming out of the earth (vss. 12, 13). Second, Samuel appears resembling a genuine person (vs. 14, compare with 15:27). Third, even the medium is terrified at Samuel’s apparition, so that she נִשָּׁהוּת אֶחְפָּךְ (“cried out with a loud voice,” vs. 12). Fourth, the message addressed to Saul was previously pronounced by the living Samuel (1 Sam 15). Fifth, neither Samuel’s message nor his task seemed to be altered in this encounter with Saul (vss. 16-19).

The very first impression is that the witch had some special skills or abilities to establish a communication between the living and the dead. However, in the light of the whole Hebrew Scripture this suggestion is highly questionable.³ It would not be an exaggeration to assert that there is only one way to understand what is taking place at Endor and who stands behind Samuel’s apparition, namely, by discerning in the passage key exegetical elements and looking at the event in the context of the entire


²See an excellent summary on this in Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 267.

³Related to this topic, arguments will be discussed in chapter 4.
Great Controversy, or as G. Boyd labels it, a Cosmic Conflict between God and Satan. Unfortunately, many modern interpreters overlook this dimension of the Scripture, thus failing to recognize that behind the sin problem, death, and various forms of magic are the agents of death, hosts of supernatural adversaries, which are led by ἡ διάβολος ("the Satan," Job 1:6). The whole Hebrew Scripture is a book about that great controversy.

Furthermore, just as the Fall of humanity started with the serpent (one of the created beings God had pronounced "good," even "very good," Gen. 1:25, 31), when Satan used it as a medium in his attempt to deceive Eve, or as Mathews puts it, "the serpent's trickery was ultimately the voice of Satan," so Satan impersonated Samuel

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1 See two of his latest books (each of them more than 400 pages), which extensively deal with various aspects of the great controversy between God and Satan: Gregory A. Boyd, God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); and also, idem, Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

2 The Scripture calls him διάβολος ("the devil," "accuser," "slanderer," "tempter," Matt 4:1), providing a detailed history of his fall, characteristics, intentions, and his final destruction. Besides, the Scripture also informs concerning demons (Matt 17:18), which are called unclean or evil spirits (Mark 1:23) and evil angels (Rev 12:7, 8), etc. In the Hebrew Scriptures Satan is pictured as having access to heavenly beings (Zech 3:1), whereas in the NT he has lost that privilege (Luke 10:18, 19; Rev 12:9). See also the following works, which discuss the topic from various angles: Frederick A. Tatford, Satan: The Prince of Darkness (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974); Edward M. Bounds, Satan: His Personality, Power and Overthrow (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963); Alan M. Olson, Disguises of the Demonic: Contemporary Perspectives on the Power of Evil (New York: Associated Press, 1975), 9-30, 57-68; Dwight Pentecost, Your Adversary the Devil (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Peggy L. Day, "Satan in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1986).

3 This is one of the most important themes in the Bible and contains the material for several dissertations at least.

4 See an expanded discussion on the great adversary of Yahweh and man in Mathews, Genesis 1-11:26, 232-249.
to deceive Saul. Just as Pharaoh's magicians were enabled to counterfeit the miracles of Yahweh by satanic aid (Exod 7:14-12:36), so the medium of Endor was able to call up an apparition of Samuel by drawing on exactly the same demonic powers of necromancy (see also Deut 18:10-11).

In this connection it is important to make several essential observations.

First, 1 Sam 28:3 (see 25:1) contains a description concerning Samuel's death, Israel's lament, and his burial, which by itself is a very straightforward comment that excludes any allusion to Sheol or to Samuel's postmortem existence in it. It should be noted that the term Sheol does not occur even once in the passage.

Second, of extreme importance is both the descriptive and clarifying assertion in vs. 6 that "Yahweh did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets"). By mentioning this three-way avenue of communication with Yahweh, the author highlights and puts the strongest emphasis on the fact that Yahweh had left Saul on his own. The king was cut off and there was only silence.

Third, at this point it is also particularly significant to note that in the current passage there are three occurrences of the term "night". The temporal emphases on "night" in vs. 8, "and they came to the woman by night"), its echo in vs. 20, "for he had not eaten bread all the day and all the night"), and its repetition in vs. 25, "and went away that night"), create a powerful image of a...
night-danger setting, thus permeating the entire narrative of Saul’s visit to the medium with an atmosphere of foreboding and sinister premonition, where fear, darkness, deceit, trepidation, demonic activities, anguish, despair, and finally death are inseparably joined together. Thus, the menacing atmosphere is extremely heightened by the threefold reminder that it is night, which is associated with the tragic events that cannot be separated from it. The darkness of night is not only an appropriate time for necromantic rituals, but also serves as a suitable environment for communicating with those who live in darkness.¹

Fourth, having no contact with Yahweh, under the cover of darkness when all the omens are unpropitious, Saul finds the necromancer and calls on the supposed spirits of departed souls for help. He turns to the origin of information which is condemned by Yahweh and leads to destruction.² There are only two potential sources with diametrically opposite results, namely, just as the prophet of Yahweh functions under the control of the Holy Spirit, so the medium is energized by demonic powers to counterfeit His work.

Fifth, the information was supernaturally imparted, but not from Yahweh. Not only was the medium shocked by Samuel’s appearance, but she was also given specific competence immediately to realize that the visitor was Saul himself. It seems that this dramatic night adventure implies the idea that the medium really did not expect to raise up Samuel but only a devilish imitation.


Sixth, she started to describe the apparition by words which speak for themselves, "I see gods coming up out of the earth") and then continued by providing sketchy details concerning his appearance, "an old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe"). The same word ("robe," "outer garment") is used in 1 Sam 15:27. Thus Saul perceived that it was Samuel.

It should also be noted that Samuel is not depicted here as a weak or diminished shade, which was cut off from the living and now is coming up out of Sheol. To the contrary, he is presented as a fear- and terror-inspiring force with the capacity to assume the form of Samuel or imitate an angel of light with whom one can establish communication.

Seventh, though Saul was prevented from viewing the spirit, he was able to speak with it directly. The king was deceived by the real counterfeit of appearance which demons have power to do, not which they pretend to do. It was not Samuel who came forth at the medium’s incantation. Yahweh’s prophet was not present in that phantom of evil spirits.

Eighth, by despising Samuel’s earlier counsel and reproofs while the prophet

1Rendered as “a divine being” (NASB, RSV); “a spirit” (NIV, NKJV); “a ghost” (NJB), and “gods” (KJV).

2Only here in the Hebrew Scriptures is the dead called by the term ("ghost"). Compare with Gen 35:2; Exod 12:12; 20:3; 32:4, etc., where the term is used to designate false gods. The KJV translates the word as “judges” in Exod 21:6; 22:8, 9.

3Humphreys, “Rise and Fall of King Saul,” 81.

4In 2 Thess 2:9 and 10 Paul speaks about “the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception.” According to the NT, that supernatural manifestation was produced exclusively by the power of Satan.
was alive, and now consulting the dead, Saul had signed a death penalty for himself and his sons, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (vs. 19; Lev 20:6, 27).

The satanic element in this story lies in the false idea that one can gain otherwise unavailable information from the dead through a spirit medium.¹

Ninth, 1 Chr 10:13, 14 not only describes the reason of Saul’s death, but also links together his sin of disobedience to Yahweh (1 Sam 13:13) with seeking the counsel of a spirit medium, which finally leads to his death:

Saul died for his trespass which he committed [trespassed] against Yahweh, because he did not keep the word of Yahweh; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, and did not inquire of Yahweh. And He put him to death and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.

These verses clearly specify the depths of Saul’s spiritual degradation. By turning to a medium, who represented the evil one, the divine presence was totally shut out and Yahweh was absent during Samuel’s apparition. Had Saul truly repented, seeking Yahweh in meekness and contrition, He would have heard him. Moreover, almost in all cases when Yahweh is about to execute His judgments on an individual or nation, He sends a message of hope, but not in this case.

In summary, from this brief overview it is evident that it was not the spirit of Samuel that communicated with Saul.² Even in a visionary form, it was not an actual


²Matt 4:1-11; 2 Cor 11:13, 14; 2 Thess 2:9, 10; Rev 13:13, 14. The Scriptures reveal that Satan and his angels have the ability to impart information and also change their appearance.
appearance of Samuel, but a demonic impersonation of the dead prophet.

On the one hand, the passage demonstrates that mediums have no real power over the dead, especially the righteous, but can only produce counterfeits; on the other, it warns about the deadly dangers of turning for help to Yahweh’s enemy. P. Miscall in his concise statement is right, “To speak with the dead is to join the dead.”¹ His words echo the “prophecy” of the impersonated Samuel in vs. 19, which was fulfilled literally, when the bodies of Saul and his sons were recovered by the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead.² Thus, despite the nature of the two contrasting death descriptions, of the righteous and the wicked—both the prophet Samuel, who had died earlier and was buried at his house (1 Sam 25:1; 28:3), and King Saul with his sons, who were killed and buried in the grave—there is nothing that would allude to the existence of bodiless souls or immaterial spirits or any other imaginable form of consciousness in Sheol.

Ezek 37:1-14

While systematically exploring each occurrence of the term Sheol in order to determine its nature, function, and purpose in the Torah and Prophets, one of the observations made points out that there is a total absence of any form of life or existence in Sheol, and no connection exists between those in the land of the living and the dead in the grave. But does this absolute separation of the dead from the


²See the entire description of Saul’s death in 1 Sam 31:1-13. See also 11:1-11.
living mean that with death all is over and there is no hope beyond the grave? To answer this question it is necessary to turn to Ezek 37:1-14, which presents one of the most powerful visions about the resuscitation of the dry bones in the Prophets. At the same time it should be noted that such texts as 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 17:17-24; 2 Kgs 4:18-37; 13:21; Isa 26:14, 19; 53:10-12; 66:24; and Hos 6:2 also relate to Yahweh’s power to bring the dead ones out of the dust of the grave back to life.\footnote{There is one more text in the Torah, namely, Deut 32:39. For the relevance and meaning of these texts see Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 218-227.} Unfortunately, because of time and space limitations this investigation is forced to focus only on Ezek 37 and only on those few details which relate to the current subject.\footnote{There will be no discussion in this segment concerning various aspects of interpretation of the passage, such as Israel’s political or national restoration, etc. See David E. Demson, “Divine Power Politics Reflections on Ezekiel 37,” in Intergerini Parietis Septvm (Eph 2:14): Essays Presented to Markus Barth on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Press, 1981), 97-110; Michael V. Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones,” “The Place Is Too Small for Us:” The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship, ed. Robert P. Gordon (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 176-190; Frank C. Fensham, “The Curse of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 Changed to a Blessing of Resurrection,” Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages (JNSL) 13 (1987): 59-60; Hasel, “Resurrection in the Theology of Old Testament Apocalyptic,” 267-284.}

It is remarkable that amidst the various and numerous expressions related to death, dying, and the grave used in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet introduces his well-known vision of life after death. It becomes even more important if one remembers that the vision follows Ezek 31 and 32, the passages which are extremely saturated with death vocabulary.\footnote{In spite of the fact that between Ezek 32 and 37:1-14 there are many differences (genre, style, nations, aim, etc.), both passages are unified by a death context and their specific terminology. See Block, “Beyond the Grave,” 132.} Against this background Ezek 37:1-14 clearly demonstrates the fact that the final word on life after death is “resurrection,” and not a
miserable existence in Sheol. It is true that the technical formulas for resurrection of the dead ("the resurrection of the dead") do not occur in the Hebrew Scripture. However, as will be seen below, the idea is expressed by means of various word-images and the verbs of resurrection, which in the current passage are strongly eschatological.

First of all, the importance of the vision concerning death, the grave, and the dead should never be underestimated, especially in light of the fact that Ezekiel receives the message as a direct revelation straight from Yahweh (vs. 1). Second, the vocabulary employed belongs to the spheres of death and resurrection. The prophet is taken in vision to a valley which is full of bones ("full of bones," vs. 1). By focusing his attention on these bones, in vss. 3-5 the phrase occurs three times), which signify the people who had died a long time ago, the prophet describes them as being scattered on the surface of the valley and also makes an observation that they are very many and very dry ("very many") and ("very dry," vs. 2). The key term ("bone") occurs ten times in the passage and its antecedent "they," "them," "you" is employed almost twenty times.

The first clue to the identity of the dry bones is found in vs. 9 where they are associated with ("the slain"), probably killed in some battle. Furthermore,

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1 Matt 22:31; 1 Cor 15:21, 42; Heb 6:2; see also (Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; 1 Cor 15:12, 13, 29.

2 Luke 20:27; Acts 4:2; 17:18; 23:8; 24:21; 1 Tim 2:18. See also Sawyer, "Hebrew Words for the Resurrection," 220, who points out that is attested 4 times in Mishna and 41 times in the Talmud.

3 For various scholarly views (Zimmerli, Wevers, Hals, Cooke, etc.) concerning the chapter, see Cooper, Ezekiel, 17:319-320.
as the vision progresses, the imagery of the unburied bones lying on the surface of the valley is changed to the imagery of the dead in their graves, who are identified as "my people," vss. 12-14. The expressions "your graves," twice and "from your graves," occurring also twice in vss. 12 and 13, particularly emphasize the condition of the dead after their death, namely, that the dead have nothing to do with any imaginable kind of existence in Sheol and at the same time are absolutely cut off from any connection with the land of the living. The prophet presents the picture of Sheol as a place where the dead are dead and only death reigns.

By addressing Ezekiel with the words "son of man," 1 Yahweh not only introduces one of the most important questions concerning the resurrection of the dead, "will [can] these bones live?"), but also by means of a rational manifestation of His omnipotence, Yahweh Himself provides an indisputable answer to it. He takes two ultimate polarities, death and life, 2 and by reversing the consequences of death He virtually demonstrates the potentiality of His creative power by resurrecting the dead, which means that death has no final say.

Though the vision is set in the context of national restoration of Israel, it is particularly important to note the presence and specific function of a number of technical terms for the resurrection of the dead or dry bones. For instance, in the current context of death, the verb "to live" is used six times and basically means

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1See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, 260; Block, The Book of Ezekiel 25-48, 374.

to return to life or revive.1 In vs. 10 the wording נָדַּנְתָּם (“and they came to life”) refers to the restoration of life when the slain were resurrected. According to Sawyer, the term נָדַּנְתָּם and its causative stems are often used “in the sense of rising from the dead or raising someone of the dead.”2

The idea of the resurrection of the dead is strengthened and even more established by the usage of the verbs נָדַּנְתָּם (“to go up,” vss. 6, 12, 13)3 and נָדַּנְתָּם (“to stand,” vs. 10),4 both of which belong to the same category of the resurrection terminology.5 At first in vs. 12 Yahweh says, נָדַּנְתָּם נָדַּנְתָּם (“I am opening your graves”); then He asserts, נָדַּנְתָּם נָדַּנְתָּם (“and I will cause you to come up out of your graves”). In this setting of death and grave imagery, these verbs of resurrection play an extremely significant part not only because of their eschatological connotations and associations, but also because of their power to neutralize that attractive notion of spirit/soul existence in Sheol.

Furthermore, without the main agency of Yahweh, which in the passage is employed ten times and is called נָדַּנְתָּם (“breath,” “spirit”), no resurrection would ever take place. In vs. 4 Ezekiel is instructed, נָדַּנְתָּם נָדַּנְתָּם (“prophesy to these bones”) and proclaim to them the following message: “I will cause נָדַּנְתָּם to enter

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2Sawyer, “Hebrew Words for the Resurrection,” 218-221.

3“Nid,” BDB, 750; Fuhs, “Nid,” TDOT, 11:76-95.


you that you may live. I will overlay you with sinews, cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. I will infuse you with נְשׁוֹגָה and you shall live. Then you will know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 37: 5-6).

One can describe the vision as a “two-stage” resurrection. First, after Ezekiel had acted according to the Word of Yahweh, there was a noise, a rattling sound. All the bones, sinews, flesh, and skin קָבָלָה (“came together”) and the restoration of the dead was finished (vss. 7-8). In spite of the fact that every element was in its place, the dead remained dead, because דַבָּר נַפְשֶׁיהָ (“there was no breath in them,” vs. 8). Then the second stage follows, but unlike the previous usage of the term קָבָלָה, it has the definite article קָבָלָה (“the breath,” vs. 9). Block explains that the קָבָלָה “that the prophet has summoned is the breath of life, the life-force that animates all living creatures.” The dead were resurrected only because of the קָבָלָה of Yahweh as is seen from vs. 10, נִשְׁלְטַתִי נִנְשָׁלְתִי וַתְּחִקְוָנָה (“and they lived and stood up on their feet”). In vs. 14 this קָבָלָה is identified as the קָבָלָה of Yahweh Himself. According to A. Johnson, קָבָלָה does not operate independently but functions as an “extension of Yahweh’s personality.”


2The resurrection of the dry bones is described as a one-time event, namely, the graves open and return the dead to the land of the living. Resurrection and regathering go together. The resurrection of the body is clearly in view also in Isa 26:19.

3Aubrey R. Johnson, The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1961), 36.
Finally, the death and resurrection terminology of Ezek 37:1-14 demonstrates that any attempt to link Ezek 31 and 32, or any other text referring to the term Sheol, with the continued existence of soul or spirit after death in the shadowy underworld, goes beyond that information which is presented in the pertaining text. The dead were resurrected not because their soul or spirit returned to them, but because Yahweh breathed upon them His נlesi. The process of man’s disintegration in death is made clear in the Hebrew Scripture and it cannot be substituted by another model.¹ In order to raise the dead from Sheol and experience the resurrection, one must have a reunion of the physical body (dust) and the נlesi of Yahweh. And that is exactly what Ezekiel saw in his vision.²

Moreover, the “two-stage” description of the resurrection process in Ezek 37:1-14 alludes to the paradigm of the creation of man in Gen 2:7. Both passages refer to the same theological and anthropological function, namely, at first Yahweh formed אָדָם אֵין נְפָשׁוֹ ("man of dust from the ground"), but he was not a living being yet. Only when Yahweh Himself נִשָּׁתָהוּ נָפְשָׁתוֹ ("breathed into his nostrils the breath of life") did man become a living soul.

It is obvious that the paradigm of resurrection as a new creation mirrors the paradigm of the original creation. Both of them help us to better understand not only the origins of life and death, but also provides us with significant insights concerning the nature, purpose, and function of Sheol not only in Ezek 31 and 32, but also in any other passage where the term Sheol might occur.

¹Gen 3:19; Qoh 12:7; Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29.
²See Cooper, Ezekiel, 320.
In conclusion, Isa 26:19 emphasizes the same message of resurrection as Ezekiel and the other prophets do, but only in a much more expressive way: Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise; dwellers in the dust shall awake; . . . and the earth will cast out the dead.” The resurrection of the dead is that great, final, and sudden eschatological event which will follow after one’s death in Sheol and towards which the whole universe is moving.


CHAPTER 4

IN THE WRITINGS

The Writings\(^1\) or הָעֲצָהָא forms the third major division of the Hebrew Scriptures. In terms of the form and content they represent the most diverse and miscellaneous collection of books. The Writings consists of thirteen various volumes: Psalms, Wisdom books (Job, Proverbs, Qohelet), the so-called Five Scrolls or נין (Esther, Ruth, Lamentations, Qohelet, Canticles), and Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles. Altogether the term Sheol occurs thirty-five times in the Writings; however, its occurrences are limited to only five books: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Canticles, and Qohelet.

Psalms

Introduction

The first segment of this chapter will focus on the Psalms\(^2\), where the term Sheol occurs sixteen times,\(^3\) more than in any other book of the Hebrew Scriptures.

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\(^1\)In some books this division is called by the Greek name Ḥagiographa, meaning "sacred books."

\(^2\)The Psalms are divided into five books, each one of which ends with an appropriate concluding doxology: Pss 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 106-150.

Before starting a systematic examination of each occurrence of Sheol in its context, it is important to note that the Psalms are poetry where the basic element is parallelism or thought rhyme, which differs from prose by terseness, vivid word pictures, sound, and figurative language, as was partially seen from the Sheol texts in the Prophets.¹

Texts

Ps 6:6

כִּי אֲרָשָׁם וִיהָדוּתִּי בֵּשָׁוָה מֵעָלָיו

Translation and Textual Remarks

For in death there is no remembrance² of You; in Sheol who will give You thanks?³

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 6:1-11 is a prayer for help and healing, presenting a mental picture of immense physical and emotional sufferings of the Psalmist, and is the first one of the


²Instead of the noun зап; (n. m. s. -2 m. s. sf.), meaning “memory,” “remembrance,” the LXX has μνημοσύνα (partc. pres. act. nom. m. s.).

³NIV and NRSV render the Hi. impf. verb קָרָא as “give praise.” NJB translates “to sing praises.”
seven traditional penitential psalms.\textsuperscript{1} The structure of Ps 6 is determined by factors of both vocabulary and content,\textsuperscript{2} which lead to the following major sections: vss. 1-4 describe the Psalmist’s cry of distress; vss. 5-8 are a plea for deliverance from his anguish; and vss. 9-11 express the Psalmist’s confidence in Yahweh that his prayer will be answered. Furthermore, it is possible to divide vss. 5-8 into two smaller subunits, where vss. 5-6 contain a lament of his sufferings and vss. 7-8 caution his enemies to depart.\textsuperscript{3} Because of the specifics of the current study the focus of the present exegesis will be only on the first two units (vss. 2-6).

Though the discussion of the genre character is rather complicated, the Psalm is classified as an individual lament, or more precisely it is a Psalm of sickness.\textsuperscript{4} The major elements are complaint and confession of the answered prayer.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{Exegetical Notes}

What is the nature of Sheol in Ps 6:6 and what happens to man when he is

\textsuperscript{1}Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; and 143. See Hans-Joackim Kraus, \textit{Psalms 1-59}, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 161. For various views concerning the usage of the term Sheol in Psalms see Johnston, \textit{Shades of Sheol}, 86-95.

\textsuperscript{2}In English the Psalm is divided into 10 verses. For the comparison of the MT with RSV see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, \textit{Psalms: Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry}, FOTL 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 61.

\textsuperscript{3}Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, WBC, 91-92. See also the chiastic structure of Ps 6 below, which is taken from Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” \textit{EBC}, 5:97, and slightly modified here:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[A] Prayer for God’s favor (vss. 1-4)
  \item[B] Prayer for God’s love (vss. 5-6)
  \item[B\textsuperscript{1}] Prayer for God’s love (vss. 7-8)
  \item[A\textsuperscript{1}] Prayer for God’s favor (vss. 9-11)
\end{itemize}


dead? Many scholars insist that the text provides exactly the same information as in all the previous cases referring to some kind of existence after death. For example, commenting on vs. 6, A. Anderson points out that the current verse "does not mean that the dead are unable to remember anything" and that the psalmist "already experiences something of the Sheol-existence."¹ P. Craigie draws similar conclusions concerning Sheol and persons existing "in a form of semi-life, at rest, yet not in joy."² A. Kirkpatrick sees in vs. 6 a description of "a dreamy, shadowy existence which did not deserve the name of life"³ and according to L. Jacquet, "Le Shéol est ... une demeure mystérieuse et souterraine, où se retrouvent, après la mort, tous les humains pour y poursuivre."⁴ These represent a common conclusion of scholars, but what does the text actually say?

The first half of the Psalm contains a vivid description of the Psalmist’s deeply personal anguish, which functions as a cry of utter desperation and a plea for deliverance to Yahweh. The depth and force of his agony and suffering are expressed and strengthened by the sevenfold urgent request for help, which in vs. 6 culminates in the imagery of death and Sheol. The usage of specific verbs, which are not only parallel but repeatedly function as synonyms, is meant to heighten the


emotional intensity of the Psalmist’s call for rescue from death. His pleas are pointed ones, and thus strike at the heart of his motivation. It is no coincidence that only in vss. 2-5 is the name of יהוה employed five times, whereas its referents occur almost twice as many times.

O Yahweh, in your anger rebuke me not
and in your wrath discipline me not

The first two pleas “rebuke me not” and “discipline me not” form a verbal parallelism, which by means of negative jussives “expresses the will of the speaker without resorting to the absolute demand associated with the imperative.”

By their nature the next two pleas in vs. 3 are positive. They are expressed in the form of Qal imperatives: יִתֵּן (“be gracious to me, O Yahweh”) and יְחַלּ (“heal me, O Yahweh”) and are followed by the ו (“for,” “because”) clauses, thus progressively unfolding the intensity of the Psalmist’s agony:

for I am weak,
for my bones are dismayed

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1Gerald H. Wilson, Psalms: From Biblical Text . . . to Contemporary Life, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 177. “In Hebrew negative commands or prohibitions are expressed neither with imperatives nor with jussives but with imperfect verb forms negated by the particle שֶׁ.” Ibid.

By introducing new explanatory details in vs. 4, the Psalmist expands the description of his sufferings even more, namely, יְהַעַלְתָּה ("and my soul is greatly dismayed"), which is followed by a heart-rending question-exclamation, יִזְדָּמֵן ("and You, O Yahweh, how long?").

The last three cries for help and mercy, which factually are imperatives, יֶרְפָּא ("turn, O Yahweh"), יָשָׁר עַל ("rescue my soul"), and יִשָּׁחֵב ("save me"), point to the Psalmist’s indescribable distress and pain, which together with the previous four pleas serve as the basis for calling on Yahweh to rescue him from imminent destruction and the grave. That is why these verses are saturated by increasingly heightened tension between יַעֲנֵא ("I") and יהוה ("Yahweh"), between life and death, between being alive and Sheol.\(^1\)

Furthermore, the graphic language of physical, mental, and emotional sufferings not only reflects the essence of the sevenfold plea, showing that the life and death issue depends only on Yahweh’s יְרָמָה ("loving-kindness"), but also clearly demonstrates that the Psalmist understood the state of the dead, as is seen from vs. 6, which in turn explains the rationale of his cries for rescue from death.

It should be noted that vs. 6 is highly significant not only because it helps the reader to understand the key reason behind the Psalmist’s desperate sevenfold cries for help, but also provides the answer to the questions asked at the beginning of this exegesis section.

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The text starts with the introductory particle "כ", which governs the two subsequent prepositional phrases which are in parallel relationship and focus on the sphere of death. As is seen below, this principle of death, to which reference is made by two limited but insightful descriptive elements, finds its definition and determination in the nature of Sheol.

כִּי אַיִן בְּמַעֲשַׂה יִבְרָה
ci ayn bem'ash'ah yivra
for in death there is no remembrance of You;

בְּשָׁמַא לְמִי יִדְרְדוֹלָה
b'esma lem'yiirdo'lah
in Sheol who will give You thanks?

The first clause contains a strong negative assertive statement that in death “there is no remembrance.” It implies that neither mental, spiritual, nor physical activity is possible in death. It should also be noted that the usage of the masculine noun יִדְרְדוֹלָה ("remembrance") corresponds to the Hiphil form of the verb יִדְרְדוֹל ("remember," "think").¹ In fact, this dynamic term of remembering is so closely “associated with action that at times it functions as a synonym for action of various kinds.”² According to B. Childs, the parallelism of יִדְרְדוֹל ("remembrance of You," n. m. s.-2 m. s. sf.) with יִדְרְדוֹ לָה ("give You thanks," Hi. impf. 3 m. s.) indicates that the Psalmist has in mind not only “remembering” but basically an active praise.³ The

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² Ibid., 1103.

nature, function, and application of the expression יָדוֹת ("in death") indicate that the term serves as a universal image of death, referring to and dealing with the sphere of death.

Unlike the first clause, the second line contains a rhetorical question, “In Sheol who will give You thanks?” which corresponds to the first line and implies a forceful and clear-cut reply: “No one!” If in the first clause the term יָדוֹת is employed as a general term for death, then in the second line the term Sheol functions as “the concrete and specific image of death,”1 thus bringing into focal point the nature and function of Sheol even more.

In the current text Sheol clearly refers to the place of the dead or simply the grave, where all the righteous, like the Psalmist himself, the wicked, and the Gentiles (Ezek 31, 32) go as well. In Sheol there is no hope, no punishment, no survival, no blessing, no existence, for there is nothing. With death every existence is terminated, every biography is closed, and every possibility to straighten out its mistakes and blunders is cut off. Because of the finality of death, no second chance is given to the dead in Sheol. That is the main reason why the Hebrew Scripture is totally silent, providing no information of what “lies beyond” the grave, except disintegration of the corpse (Gen 3:19) and those passages which point to the bodily resurrection.2

In a way, “no remembrance” functions as a synonym for “the dead,” whereas

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“remembrance and thanksgiving” is synonymous with “the living.”¹ The fact that there is no existence in Sheol explains why there is no remembrance of Yahweh.² This is one of the main key motives why the Psalmist laments and calls on Yahweh that He would rescue him and let him live, because only the living can thank the Lord.³

Finally, it should be noted that in the Psalms the term Sheol is parallel to “death” in six passages.⁴ As for additional details concerning the current text, see the exegesis section on Isa 38:18 and Qoh 9:10, where both texts employ almost the same vocabulary. Hezekiah and Qohelet, like the Psalmist, knew that the righteous, like the wicked ones, go to Sheol and that for both of them there is no existence.

Ps 9:18

מְרַמְּנוּ וּלְשַׁמָּאָלָה כָּלָּנְמוּ שְׁבֵּחֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים

Translation and Textual Remarks

The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.


²See Hermann Eisig, "מְרַמְּנוּ," TDOT, 4:64-82.


Text Unit and Its Genre

Most scholars consider Pss 9 and 10 as a unit, which is shaped after the so-called acrostic pattern. On the other hand, they can be treated as separate and independent compositions, having different backgrounds and literary textures.

Ps 9 is predominantly thanksgiving for Yahweh's deliverance from the wicked and arrogant nations, whereas Ps 10 is dominated by a complaint and prayer not to delay His intervention on behalf of the helpless and to avenge the wicked for afflicting the weak.

The basic structure of Ps 9:1-21 can be outlined in the following way.

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1For various views concerning Pss 9 and 10 see Samuel E. Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, Psalms (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 133-136; Wilson, Psalms, 223-225. The term acrostic is derived from the Greek words ακρο, “at the end,” and στίχος, “line.” The structure of acrostic psalms is guided by an alphabetic arrangement, where each following unit begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, Pss 9, 10, and 37 have two verses for each of the 22 Hebrew consonants. Pss 25, 34, and 145 have one verse for each of the 22 Hebrew consonants. Ps 119 has eight verses for each of the 22 Hebrew consonants. Pss 111 and 112 have a half verse for each of the 22 Hebrew consonants. See David N. Freedman, “Acrostic Poems in the Hebrew Bible,” CBQ 48 (1986): 408-431.

2Schaefer, Psalms, 27.

3In English the Psalm is divided into 20 verses. For a comparison of the MT with RSV see Gerstenberger, Psalms, 73.

4For various structures see Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part I, 73; Kraus, Psalms 1-59, 192-193; Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 116-117. An insightful block parallelism is presented in VanGemeren, “Psalms,” EBC, 5:115:

A Individual praise (vss. 1-3)
B Judgment on the wicked (vss. 4-7)
C Hope in Yahweh's just rule (vss. 8-11)

A' Communal praise and individual prayer (vss. 12-15)
B' Judgment on the wicked (vss. 16-19)
C' Hope in Yahweh's just rule (vss. 20-21)
The majority of scholars agree that the overall genre of Ps 9 is that of thanksgiving\(^1\) though it employs a number of subordinate generic elements to achieve its ends. Because of the periodic change of its themes, the Psalm exhibits a combination of various literary forms: a hymn (9:1-5; 10-13, praise for delivering from death), a song (vss. 6-9; 16-21, celebrating Yahweh’s judgments), and a lament (vss. 14-15, suffering persecution from the wicked).\(^2\)

**Exegetical Notes**

In order to describe the extreme measures of Yahweh’s judgments against the wicked nations, which would culminate in their death, the Psalmist uses strong language. One of the specifics of the current verse is that it contains the subject of much discussion and disagreement, namely, the term Sheol.

According to A. Barnes, the word Sheol here means “the world of the departed spirits” and “a place of punishment.”\(^3\) A. Kirkpatrick believes that “Sheol is not hell as the place of torment,” but at the same time he speaks about “the shadowy existence

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\(^1\)Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1*, 75.

\(^2\)Bratcher and Reyburn, *Book of Psalms*, 84.

in Sheol to which man passes at death.”¹ A. Maclaren comments on “reduction to nothingness and yet a shadowy, dim life or death-in-life will certainly be the end of the wicked.”² To agree or disagree with the above conclusions depends on the subsequent brief exegesis.

First of all, it is important to note the specific character of this Psalm.³ It is the Psalmist who calls for Yahweh’s vengeance and judgments on behalf of בְּנֵי צְרֵדֶת ("the oppressed," vs. 10), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("those who know Your name," vs. 11), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("those who seek You," vs. 11), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the afflicted," vss. 13, 19), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the needy," vs. 19), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה (the innocent," 10:8), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the helpless," 10:14), and יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the orphan," 10:14, 18). This sevenfold pattern contains some insightful parallel and synonymous structures, creating a perfect contrast to the opposite alignment, which is hostile to the deprived, namely, יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the wicked," vss. 6, 17, 18), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("the enemies," vss. 4, 7), יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("those who hate me," vs. 14), and יְשֵׁנֵי יְהוָה ("nations," 9:6, 16, 18, 20, 21).

This observation is important precisely because of the emphasis falling on both groups. It highlights the true nature of the innocent and the wicked and leads to the heightened tension between them, which can be solved only by means of Yahweh’s judgments, which cannot be mitigated or presented as unjustified. The quality of

¹Kirkpatrick, The Book of Psalms, 49, 50.


³Ps 9:18 goes together with Ps 31:18.
these judgments is fully revealed in vs. 18, thus providing an explanation for the usage of the term Sheol.

The masculine adjective used as the noun בּוֹלֵם ("the wicked," 9:18) functions as a synonymous parallel to בָּלָם ("all the nations," vs. 18). The first line, "The wicked shall return to Sheol," is explained by the second, "all the nations that forget God." Here בּוֹלֵם are characterized as those who are "רַבִּים (adj. lit. "forgetful of" or "forgetting") God, or as R. Bratcher clarifies it, "everyone who forgets God is headed for death."¹

The basic idea here is more than clear. The phrase בּוֹלֵם בְּשָׁמַש ("the wicked shall return to Sheol") is equivalent to their destruction. The form בָּלָם ("to Sheol-ward") has a unique structure, which among the sixty-six occurrences of the word Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures is found only here. The double emphasis on direction towards the grave is achieved by the preposition ל ("to")³ and directional מ,⁴ both of which, coupled with the Qal impf. verb יָבֹא ("they will return"), function to create a synchronized tension and the strongest assurance motif that the wicked will not simply descend to Sheol, the place of death and destruction, but unquestionably they will be there soon.

¹See also Deut 8; Ps 50:22; Job 8:13. In Ps 9:13 and 19 the Psalmist affirms his trust that Yahweh does not forget His people. Leslie C. Allen, "תָּמִית," NIDOTTE, 4:103-105.

²Bratcher and Reyburn, Book of Psalms, 95.

³See Excursus 1 above.

⁴See exegetical notes on Gen 37:35.
Furthermore, the use of the verb רוחבל ("return") in this passage is highly significant intertextually as it alludes to the classical text of Gen 3:19 where the same verb is employed to emphasize the reversal of Gen 2:17. In death, a man who was formed from "the dust of the ground" returns to his origins through the process of disintegration, thus again becoming "the dust of ground." The notion of total destruction of the wicked is further clarified by the recurring key vocabulary of death: אָסַפְּרֵה ("and they perish," vs. 4), רָשָׁע ("you have destroyed the wicked," vss. 6, 7), and מֵאַלְלָה (NASB, "the enemy has come to an end," vs. 7). Thus, the destiny of the wicked is death and the grave, which is in a sharp contrast with the fulfilled hopes of the afflicted (vss. 10, 13).

The analogy of the grave is further strengthened by the fact that the term Sheol is parallel to the term מִלְּפָּה ("pit," vs. 16) in the phrase מְלֹפְּהָּתָה ("the nations have sunk into the pit," vs. 16). Another allusion to the same place of death, namely, the grave, is found in the words of the Psalmist, when he refers to his personal salvation by Yahweh מְלֹפְּהָּתָה ("from the gates of death," vs. 14), which functions as an antonym of "the gates of the daughter of Zion" (vs. 15).

Finally, according to this brief exegesis, both the parallel key terminology

1The motif to Sheol is also found in Pss 6:11; 90:3; 104:29; Job 1:21; 30:23; 34:15; Qoh 3:20, 21; 5:14; 12:7. M. Graupner and Heinz-Josepf Fabry, "םשד," TDOT, 14:461-521. See also Excursus 1.

2For discussion on the term מְלֹפְּהָּתָה see exegetical notes on Isa 38:10, 18. For its occurrences see table 10.

3Job 38:17; Ps 107:18; Isa 38:10.
and phraseology argue against any idea of Sheol as the place of departed spirits, shadowy existence, or eternal punishment. The Psalmist does not provide any descriptive element concerning Sheol’s nature, spatial aspects, or any kind of existence there. The basic focus of Ps 9:18 is on the wicked whose lives, in order to protect the oppressed, will be cut short by the judgments of Yahweh. The term Sheol, “pit,” and “the gates of death” in the current context may refer only to the grave as the place of death and burial and not to three different locations. It should also be noted that the Scriptures repeatedly highlight the fact that both the righteous and the wicked go down to Sheol, as is seen from the Torah, Prophets, Ps 6:6, and 9:18.

Ps 16:10

ךי לאַרְתֶּנּוֹב יִבְּשָׁי לַשְׁפַּיָּל לָאָרְתֶּנּוֹ בַּקִּידָא לָרָאָות שְׁאָתָה

Translation and Textual Remarks

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see the pit.¹

Text Unit and Its Genre

From the very first verse to the very last, Ps 16 testifies about unwavering trust in Yahweh in both life and death. Gerstenberger labels it a “Confession of Faith,” a “Song of Confidence,” and then he states, “The psalm can be compared in its function with the Apostles’ Creed in Christian worship.”² J. Boice designates it as a “Prophecy

¹The LXX has διαφθοράν (“decay,” “rotting”).

of Resurrection.\(^1\)

According to the progressive display of a coherent pattern of conceptual development, Ps 16 may be represented as a four-part sequential structure. The first basic unit takes up the Psalmist’s confidence in Yahweh (vss. 1-4). Its internal structure is constituted of a prayer (vs. 1), which is followed by the expression of trust in Yahweh (vss. 3-4). The second section focuses on Yahweh as the Psalmist’s portion (vss. 5-6). The third subunit refers to Yahweh as the Psalmist’s Counselor (vss. 7-8). And the final subunit presents Yahweh as the Psalmist’s life (vss. 9-11).\(^2\)

Scholarly discussions on the overall genre of Ps 16:1-11 lead to the conclusion that it can be designated as a Song of Confidence or a Confession of Faith.\(^3\) The unit under investigation (vss. 9-11) contains both praise and thanksgiving elements.

**Exegetical Notes**

This unique Psalm communicates both explicit and implicit profound


meaning.1 But why does the Psalmist use the term Sheol in the current context and what do scholars think about it? Predominantly they provide the same conclusions as on all the previous references. Thus, commenting on vs. 10, C. Briggs states that “the flesh does not go to Sheol at death, but only the soul.”2 J. Rogerson speaks about “the gloom of Sheol”3 and A. Cohen refers to the popular view of “the soul’s deathlessness.”4 Whatever is the case, these interpretive conclusions can be clarified by means of the exegetical tools especially on the lexical level.

The last unit (vss. 9-11) is introduced by the particle adverb מִשְׁפָּט (“therefore”), which is followed by the description of the Psalmist’s trust and joy in Yahweh’s protection. The text shows that the whole person is involved in the expression of his joyful confidence, יְנֵינַל בָּרוֹדֵי (“my heart is glad”), יְנֵאָה לִבִּי (“and my glory rejoices”), וַיְהֹלֵךְ לָבֵשׁ (“also my flesh will dwell securely”).

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1This is clearly demonstrated by vvs. 8-11, which are quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25-28, 31 on the day of Pentecost, whereas vs. 10 is cited by Paul in Acts 13:35-37 at Antioch, when he referred to Christ’s resurrection. It means that the words of the Psalmist are also typological; namely, they went beyond his own experience and became historically authentic in Christ; see John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 804. Concerning the second meaning in the Psalms, see Clive S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms (Harcourt, NY: Brace & World, 1958), 99-108; 120-138. That is why for Harris vs. 10 is “the famous Messianic verse.” See Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol,” 132.


The rationale and motivation for this “therefore” is found in the progressive development of the Psalmist’s manifold arguments concerning his firm trust in Yahweh as his Lord apart from Whom there is no good (vss. 1-2). The Psalmist is certain in his assigned portion, pleasant places, inheritance, counsels and instructions, for Yahweh is always at his right hand (vss. 5-8).

The chain of dynamic developments of the Psalmist’s unconditional and ultimate trust in Yahweh as the only source of his security is brought to its climax in vs. 10, which is introduced by the conjunction כ (“for,” “because”). By means of specific literary tools and choice of death vocabulary he emphasizes and unfolds the profundness of his confidence that Yahweh would not leave him even in Sheol. That is the basic reason why the term Sheol is used in the current text.

כִּי לֹא תָּנֹתֵב נִפְשִׁי לַשְּאוֹל
For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol,

לֹא תַחֵקְתֵךְ הָאָדָם לַרְאוֹת הַגֶּה
nor will You allow Your Holy One to see the pit

It is highly significant that each line, both of which are in parallel relations, starts with the primary Hebrew particle כֵּּל (“not,” “no”).¹ This twofold employment of the negation particle כֵּל, which is coupled by the parallel verbs הָיָה לֹא תָּנֹתֵב (“You will not abandon”) and הָיָה לֹא תַחֵקְתֵךְ ("You will not allow"), not only negates the factual verbal statements, but also functions syntactically to make them more pointed and forcible.² Moreover, it confirms both the theological reality concerning Yahweh’s

¹See "כֵּל," BDB, 520.

protection and at the same time expresses the strongest possible negation against any idea of staying in the grave.¹

Both verbs בָּזַז (“abandon,” “leave”) and מָנַח (“give,” “hand over”) are used in the spatial-geographical context, which deals with leaving and handing over to death and the grave.² It should be noted that when the verb מַח occurs in a unit of a sequential linguistic structure, namely, מַחְתַּנְתַּנ (negation + verb) + Qal inf. cstr. מַחְתַּנְתַּנ (preposition + verb), it stands for “let” or “allow” with the basic meaning “set, put.”³ The verb מַחְתַּנְתַּנ (“to see”) is a complement to מַח and is used in the sense that Yahweh will not allow His מָחְתַּנ ("Holy One")⁴ to experience or be subjected to corruption.⁵ Accordingly, any idea of “abandoning” the Psalmist to Sheol or “allowing” him to experience the pit is denied by the specific function of the double negation מַח מַח.

Furthermore, both terms Sheol and מָחְתַּנ (“pit”) comprise a synonymous

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¹See discussion on Isa 38:10, 18.


³Edward Lipiński, “ BaseType,” TDOT, 10:584-90-107; Michael A. Grisanti, “ BaseType,” NIDOTTE, 3:205-211.

⁴For the nuances of the adjective מָחְתַּנ see Helmer Ringgren, “ BaseType,” TDOT, 5:75-79; “ BaseType,” BDB, 339. For various views see R. Laird Harris, “ BaseType,” TWOT, 1:305-307.

parallelism and both refer to the grave.  

Following the LXX’s translation of the noun יָרָדָה into διαφθορά ("decay"), the NKJV renders it “corruption,” whereas NASB and NIV have “decay.” It is significant to emphasize here that the fundamental meaning of the verb יָרָדָה is to “destroy,” “corrupt.” In fact, the term “corruption” functions not only as a synonym and a descriptive element for Sheol and “pit,” but also nicely fits in the current context and is in harmony with the other similar references.  

To put it differently, the word יָרָדָה is used here to denote the effect of the possible action if such is carried out, the final result of which would be “corruption.”

Finally, a few words should be said concerning the views of Briggs and others who state that “the flesh does not go to Sheol at death, but only the soul.” In Psalms the feminine noun שְׁמוֹנָה occurs 144 times, out of which 105 times it appears in the form of שְׁמוֹנָה ("my soul"). Because of the reasons mentioned below, one cannot take and use this terminology either to prove the immortality of the soul or to defend some kind of existence in Sheol.

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1 Concerning the term יָרָדָה see table 10 and exegetical notes on Isa 38:10, 18.

2 See יָרָדָה, BDB, 1008.

3 Compare Ps 30:9; Job 17:14 with Acts 2:31 and 13:36.

4 Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 823.

5 Briggs, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, 1:121-122.

6 For statistics see Westermann, שְׁמוֹנָה, TLOT, 2:743-759; Bratcher and Reyburn, Psalms, 40.

7 See Excursus 1.
In the Hebrew Scriptures, no particular independently existing component is ever designated by the expression יָדַע. The term יָדַע is a metonymy and it is used to designate the whole person. 1 “From the basic idea of nephesh being an individual, or a person, springs the idiomatic use of nephesh for the whole person. Expressions such as ‘my soul’ are idiomatic for ‘I,’ ‘me;’ ‘thy soul,’ for ‘you;’ ‘their soul,’ for ‘they’ or ‘them.’” 2 Consequently, Wolff is very clear when he states that “the human is יָדַע, and this is not the case that יָדַע belongs to him.” 3 Because יָדַע often refers to the whole person, 4 the first line “for You will not abandon my soul to Sheol!” is the same as “for You will not abandon me to Sheol,” which basically means to the grave. 5

In summary, vs. 10, as well as the entire Psalm, contains no explanatory element or any hint to the afterlife and cannot be used to refer to the popular belief that after death the soul continues its existence in Sheol. To the contrary, the major thrust of it is on the Psalmist’s confidence in Yahweh that He will deliver him from the grave, as is clearly put in plain words by Harris:

The plainest interpretation of Psalm 16:10-11, therefore, is that the psalmist looks forward to deliverance from the grave. He will not be left there to decay, but God will take him to his heavenly abode. . . . If David had hope of his own resurrection (Ps 17:15), much more could he understand that the Messiah (who would die, Ps 22:15) would not be left in the grave. Of course this is the whole point of Peter’s

1 Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 545.

2 George R. Knight, ed., Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 397-400.


4 Hans-Joachim Kraus, Theology of the Psalms (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 145. See also corresponding dictionaries.

5 Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 641.
reference in Acts 2:25-38 and Paul's in Acts 13:356-37. This verse is used as a proof from the Old Testament that Christ would rise bodily from the grave.¹

Ps 18:6

הַבֵּלַי שֵּׁאול שְׁבֹבַתְךָ קִרְבּוֹתָךְ מִקְפַּשׁ מְשַׁח

Translation and Textual Remarks

The cords of Sheol entangled me,
the snares of death confronted me.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 18:1-51 has already been discussed in 2 Sam 22 where the same composition appears with some slight variations. In both places the Psalm is attributed to David (2 Sam 22:1; Ps 18:1).

Though the arrangement of Ps 18 in its present form displays a coherent composition and intent within a broader context, discussion on its structure is complicated by its composite nature.² Because of the special focus on vs. 6 and the unit including it, the Psalm can be outlined thematically in the following way:³


²See discussion on 2 Sam 22:6.

The overarching genre of Ps 18 is Royal Psalm of Thanksgiving. The subunit of the current focus (vss. 4-7), which portrays the Psalmist’s cry for help amid deadly dangers, uses such literary tools as metaphors, personification, and synonymous parallelism.

Exegetical Notes

See exegesis on 2 Sam 22:6.3

Ps 30:4

Translation and Textual Remarks

O Yahweh, You brought up my soul from Sheol,
You restored me to life from among those going down to the pit.

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2 For additional information on the issue see Berry, “Traditional Approaches and a Reader-Oriented Analysis of Psalm 18,” 91-86.

3 Pages 111-118.
Text Unit and Its Genre

The structure of Ps 30:1-13 is determined by a variety of lexical resonances and thematic features. However, there is little unity among scholars on its arrangement. One of the reasons for their disagreements is found in the sections which are blended together without clearly defined literary markers. For the purpose of this study it is possible to present an outline of an interpretive structure consisting of four major parts.

- vss. 1-4 Thanksgiving and praise to Yahweh
- vss. 5-6 Call to worship
- vss. 7-11 Account of suffering
- vss. 12-13 Thanksgiving and praise to Yahweh

It should be noted that the first section, on which the main emphases will fall, can be divided into three smaller subunits: a superscription (vs. 1), a thanksgiving formula (vs. 2), and a description of salvation (vss. 3-4).

It is not easy to determine the overarching literary genre of the Psalm as various elements of thanksgiving and praise overlap each other. Basically, scholars classify it either as an Individual Psalm of Thanksgiving or an Individual Declarative

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3For the titles see Pss 18; 45-46; 48; 65-68; 75-76; 83; 87-88; 92; 108, where all of them, except Pss 83 and 88, are the Psalms of praise.


Psalm of Praise.¹ The experience of healing and salvation from death (vss. 3-4) usually leads to thanksgiving, which in turn is expressed by various elements of praise (vss. 2, 5, 13).²

Exegetical Notes

This Song of thanksgiving and praise, describing the Psalmist’s specific experience of healing and salvation from sure death and Sheol (vs. 3, 4), has close verbal and thematic parallels with the Psalm of praise of Hezekiah, where the king is recalling his agony during his severe illness (Isa 38:10-20). It is also similar to Ps 6.³

The purpose and nature of the term Sheol in vs. 4 are clarified by the employment of numerous life-and-death contrasts, metaphors, and rhetorical questions (vs. 10), which functioning as analogous expressions lead to various antithetical parallels and heightened tension.

ורוֹה יְהֹウェָה לעלֶיהָ נָשִׁית מֵאֲשָׁ税务总局
O Yahweh, You brought up my soul from Sheol,

וַחֲסִיטַנְי מִנָּוֶרֶר בֶּהְר
You restored me to life from among those going down to the pit.

¹Joachim Becker, Wege der Psalmenexegese (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1975), 52-57; Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 251-253.


³See the discussion on both texts. To avoid unnecessary repetition it will suffice to say that generally scholars refer to the term Sheol in vs. 4 as in all the previous cases (see exegesis on Pss 6:6; 9:18; 16:10; 18:6, including the already discussed occurrences of Sheol in the Torah and Prophets). Generally scholars take the term Sheol and impose on it various assumed ideas, which almost always lead to and result in making strong theological and anthropological statements referring to some kind of soul/spirit existence in the underworld.
The basic emphasis not only in vs. 4 but within the whole Psalm is on the Psalmist’s deliverance, which must be understood only against the background of the death vocabulary. Accordingly, each of the two parallel lines of the current verse under scrutiny contains a key verb which draws attention to the motif of deliverance from Sheol.

The first verb נברנ (“go up”) has the Hiphil form, נבנה (lit., “you caused to come up”) and is used metaphorically to describe the Psalmist’s “deliverance from the danger of death.”¹ The basic idea is that the psalmist “was caused to go on living” or in other words “was kept from the grave.”² Second, the Piel form of ריהנה, which expresses intensity, can be rendered, “You kept me alive,” or “You restored me to life” with the meaning that Yahweh did not allow him to die, clearly implying the idea of overcoming his death.³ This usage is based on the idea that sickness represents a potential deadly danger, but deliverance equals life.

In addition, the rationale for the Psalmist’s thanksgiving and praise is further strengthened by some other key verbs, which function as parallel terms to the verbs נבנה and ריהנה. The verb in the expression י_ARROW (“You lifted me up”) in vs. 1 comes from the term י_ARROW (“to draw water”).⁴ It is used in a figurative sense, that is,

²Bratcher and Reyburn, Book of Psalms, 284.
³Elmer B. Smick, “יArrow,” TWOT, 1:279-283. Concerning the discussion on the verb יArrow as one of the resurrection terms see Sawyer, “Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead,” 218-234.
⁴Exod 2:16, 19; Prov 20:5. See also יArrow, BDB, 194.
"You have rescued me" or "You have saved me" from the grave, Sheol, the pit (vs. 4).

The phrase יָשָׁרֵב ("and You healed me")\(^1\) in vs. 3 implies not only such a traditionally understood aspect as physical healing,\(^2\) but also functions to emphasize the "deliverance from death and the grave."\(^3\)

The verb נָפָג ("to stand")\(^4\) in the phrase הָעִשָּׁרֵב לְעַד ("You made my mountain stand firm") of vs. 8 is a figurative expression and refers to the Psalmist's regained strength, healing, and his vertical relationships.

The antithesis of life and healing is death and the grave. As in previous cases, death/dying is specified by the technical term נָרַג ("to go down"),\(^5\) which functions as the reverse for "going up," expressing salvation. In Ps 30 נָרַג is used twice, once in vs. 4, where the Psalmist refers to the preservation of his life מִנְגָּר נִבְרַג ("from among those going down to the pit") and the second time in the rhetorical question of vs. 10, מִנְגָּר בָּדָר ("when I go down to the pit?").

The place of death or the grave from which the Psalmist is delivered is designated by four different nouns: מִנְגָּר ("from Sheol," vs. 4), נָרַג נִבְרַג מִנְגָּר ("from Sheol," vs. 4), נָרַג נִבְרַג נִבְרַג ("from Sheol," vs. 4), נָרַג נִבְרַג ("from Sheol," vs. 4).

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\(^1\)Pss 6:3; 41:5; 103:3; 107:20.

\(^2\)It also includes such related and inseparable aspects as mental, emotional, spiritual, and social.

\(^3\)Alan Kam-Yau Chan, Thomas B. Song, and Michael L. Brown, " nomine, " NIDOTTE, 3:1162-1173.

\(^4\)See "נָפָグ," BDB, 765.

\(^5\)See discussion on Gen 37:35.
("from among those going down to the pit," vs. 4),\(^1\) נא"ל ("to the pit," vs. 10),\(^2\) and their synonymous term דוע ("dust," vs. 10).\(^3\) In the Hebrew Scriptures the dead and the place of death often are referred to as the dust. Harris suggests that the term מות in vs. 10 "naturally refers to the corruption of the grave."\(^4\) All these key terms contain spatial and qualitative elements which have nothing to do with an afterlife.

This view is made even more emphatic by the chain of rhetorical questions of vs. 10, which at the same time indirectly refer to the nature of Sheol:

What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it declare your faithfulness?

The answer to these questions is obvious and can be expressed by a categorical denial, No. Moreover, they set forth a strong contrast between Sheol and the Psalmist, who is delivered from death and as the living one can express his thanksgiving and praise to Yahweh. He is concerned with these questions because he knows that in Sheol he would turn into dust. It should also be noted that the synonym of life בדם ("blood") in the phrase "in my blood") functions as a hyperbole for

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\(^1\)See exegesis on Isa 14:9, 11, 15 and table 9 there.

\(^2\)See exegesis on Isa 38:10, 18.

\(^3\)Pss 22:16, 30; 88:11-13; 115:17. See Excursus 1.

imperiled life and should be understood as “in my death.”

It is also significant to point out that because of the regular antithetic parallelism the term פִּי הַרְעָע ("moment") in the line פִּי הַרְעָע הַיּוֹם בּוֹרֵא הוּא ("for his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime," vs. 6) alludes to death, and that is why one of the suggestions is to translate it as “death,” namely, “for in His anger is death, but in His favor is life [eternal].” In other words, the noun פִּי הַרְעָע would refer to Sheol.

The second line of vs. 6 presents another allusion to death, which like the first one also operates in the context of time, בּוֹרֵא הַיּוֹם בּוֹרֵא הַרְעָע הַיּוֹם ("the evening come weeping, but with the morning cries of joy"). Between the two fixed points בּוֹרֵא ("evening") and בּוֹרֵא ("morning") is darkness, which symbolizes danger, sufferings, death, and the grave.

Finally, the short construction נֶשֶׁת ("my soul") in the expression of vs. 4, וָנֶשֶׁת מִרְשַׁאֹל נֶשֶׁת ("You brought up my soul from Sheol") simply means “You brought me up from Sheol.” The sphere of death is set in the greatest contrast with the sphere of life. In fact, every term that is used in this Psalm seems to have been deliberately chosen in order to put the strongest possible emphasis on one of the two

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1 See "רַגָּר," BDB, 197; August H. Konkel, "רַגָּר," NIDOTTE, 1:963-970.

2 For a discussion on the translation see Dahood, Psalms 1-50, AB, 182-183; Tesh and Zorn, Psalms 1, 246-247. See also "רַגָּר," BDB, 921.

3 According to Dahood, "night is the symbol of death" and "dawn is the symbol of resurrection and immortality." Dahood, Psalms 1-50, AB, 183.

4 See discussion on Ps 16:10 and Excursus 1.
opposites: either on Sheol with its satellite synonyms of destruction, or life with the verbs of deliverance and salvation. Both of them provide the Psalmist with a theological as well as an anthropological foundation on which to establish his praise and thanksgiving for his deliverance by Yahweh from death and the grave.

Ps 31:18

Translation and Textual Remarks

O Yahweh, let me not be put to shame,
for I have called on You;
Let the wicked be put to shame;
let them be silent in Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

The keynote of Ps 31:1-25 is a plea for deliverance from the net of an evil and open conspiracy that the enemies of the Psalmist had set for him and his trust in Yahweh in the time of his greatest distress.

Designation of form elements and distinction of units can be only tentative, because this Psalm is rather diffusive in character. Despite the fact that scholars generally agree on the division of Ps 31 into three main sections, the demarcation of smaller subunits remains much debated, as its structure appears to be framed lucidly along the boundaries of trust, lament, and thanksgiving (see structure below).

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2For various views see Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 258-260; Laberge, “A Literary Analysis of Psalm 31,” 151.
The individual sections of Ps 31 may be outlined in the following way:  

- **Prayer to Yahweh** (vss. 1-6)
- **Confidence in Yahweh** (vss. 7-9)
- **Lament over danger** (vss. 10-14)
- **Prayer for deliverance** (vss. 15-19)
- **Thanksgiving and exhortation** (vss. 20–25)

Prayer for deliverance (vss. 15-19) consists of an affirmation of trust in Yahweh (vss. 15-16a), petition (16b-18a), and imprecation (18b-19).

Discussion on the generic character of Ps 31:1-25 is as complicated as the delineation of its structure. The predominantly lament/petition form of this Psalm identifies its genre as a genuine Complaint Song of the Individual, whereas W. Bellinger classifies it as an Individual Lament.

Exegetical Notes

Ps 31:18 goes together with Ps 9:18, in both of which the Psalmist cries out for Yahweh’s vengeance and speedy judgment on the φυγεμ ("wicked"). As in the previous cases, the reference to the term Sheol in Ps 31:18 is widely understood as the

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3 Ibid., 139.


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underworld with some kind of life. Commenting on the meaning of the word Sheol, A. Barnes explains, “But it means the region or abode of the dead, to which the grave was regarded as the door or entrance—the under-world. The idea is that the soul would not be suffered to remain in that under-world—that dull, gloomy abode.”\(^1\) J. Rogerson puts an emphasis on Sheol as “the final home of the wicked,”\(^2\) whereas C. Broyles points out that the wicked “lie silent in the grave.”\(^3\)

The message of the Psalmist’s imprecation in vs. 18 is straightforward. Vs. 18 is built into the structure of those seven statements that are introduced by the particle מ (“for”),\(^4\) thus summarizing the essence of the whole petition:

1 for You are my rock and my fortress
2 for you are my strength
3 for I am in distress
4 for my life is spent in sorrow
5 for I have heard the slander on many
6 for I have called on You
7 for He has made marvelous His loving kindness to me

The expression הָלֵּא אִבְּבַת אֶלֶּה (“let me not be put to shame”)\(^5\) precedes “for I have called on You” and receives its specific emphasis not only because it is introduced twice by the negation ל (“not”), but also because of its position in the

\(^1\)Barnes, *Psalms*, 1:130-131.


\(^3\)Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1999), 158.

\(^4\)See Shaefer, *Psalms*, 76.

\(^5\)The verb הֲלֹא אֱלֹהִי is cohortative in both form and meaning.
Psalm (vss. 2, 18). However, at the third occurrence of this verb, in vs. 18, the Psalmist changes its focus and reverses the same plea into a positive request, הָשָּׁם ("let the wicked be ashamed"), which is further expanded and elaborated by its parallel phrase, נָשָׁם לְשָׁם הַשָּׁם ("let them be silent in Sheol").

Here the Psalmist’s specific wish to see his enemies “ashamed” and in Sheol has nothing to do with an allusion to some kind of miserable existence of the wicked in the underworld or their punishment and shame in Sheol. His wish is not motivated by revenge, either, “but by the fact that the falsehood with which the worshipper’s enemies deal with, and thus negate the truth of God, shall be manifested in his enemies.” In other words, in the current case the verb הָשָּׁם ("to be ashamed") is used to express the Psalmist’s righteous yearning concerning his enemies and to reveal his unreserved trust in Yahweh that he will be established (vss. 1, 3-5).

The next term of importance, יָשָׁם ("to be silent") in the phrase נָשָׁם לְשָׁם הַשָּׁם, relates to silence that results from death or destruction. The Psalmist prays that those who make his life intolerable would be silenced in the grave. Sheol and the dead in it are characterized by silence, which at the same time excludes such a notion as

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1The verb is jussive only in meaning. See also Pss 25:2, 35:4; 70:3; 71:1, 13; 86:17; and 119:78.


4See Pss 94:17 and 115:17.
“passive” silence. It is non-biblical to regard the place of death as the place of life, the dead as the living, and death as continued existence, because such a stance leads to anthropological and theological confusion concerning the nature, function, and purpose of death and life as such.

Finally, there is no tension between Sheol and the grave as the place of silence because at death any activity, whether mental, spiritual, or physical, comes to its end and the corpse disintegrates, becoming dust.

Ps 49:15, 16

Translation and Textual Remarks

15 Like a sheep they are appointed for Sheol,
Death shall be their shepherd.
And the upright will rule over them in the morning,
and their form shall waste away. Sheol is a dwelling for him.
16 But God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol,
for He will take me! Selah

Text Unit and Its Genre

The contents of Ps 49:1-21 are characterized as דִּבְּרָי "wisdom," vs. 4),

1 See Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 262.
2 Pss 6:6; 88:12, 13; Qoh 9:10.
3 These and previous verses are extremely difficult to translate, as can be seen from a number of suggested emendations in the BHS textual apparatus. Compare the translations in the NIV, NASB, NRSV, and NKJV. See Kraus, Psalms 1-50, 480; Wilson, Psalms 1, 750.
and as a wisdom Psalm it examines intellectual and theological concerns.\(^1\) The central theme of the Psalm is death and the foolishness of dependence on riches and their power.\(^2\) Unlike the previous texts, by its scope and force of expression the Psalm is addressed to a universal audience: “Hear this, all nations, listen, all who dwell on earth,” “both low and high, rich and poor together” (vss, 2, 3).

The structure of the Psalm consists of three major segments: introduction (vss. 1-5), the futility of wealth (vss. 6-13), and the fate of those who rely on themselves (vss. 14-21).\(^3\)

The overall genre of Ps 49 can be classified as a Meditation and Instruction.\(^4\) However, it should be noted that the author employs various literary and genre elements in order to present his message in the most effective way. Consequently,

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vss. 6-12 contain a plaintive meditation, whereas the section under scrutiny (vss. 14-
20) functions as a lament and comfort setting, proverbial conclusions are found in vss.
13 and 21, and metaphor and personification devices in vs. 15.¹

Exegetical Notes

The entire Ps 49 draws a sharp contrast between the life and destiny of the
wicked rich, who are prosperous, arrogant, and secure in their own eyes, and the
righteous one who wholly relies on Yahweh.² This distinction is further intensified by
the affirmation of vs. 14, IQ*? *703 D3TX JIT ("this is the way of those who are
foolish"), which leads both contrasted lifestyles to the progressive culmination and
final solution in vss. 15 and 16, where the term Sheol occurs thrice.

Commenting on the destiny of the rich in Ps 49, C. McDannell and B. Lang
refer to Sheol as the place of survival: "Their fate is to perish and be sent to the abyss
of Sheol. In Sheol they will survive without their riches, denied any glimpse of
light."³ E. Kissane points out that Sheol is "a place of darkness and oblivion where
the disembodied spirit endures in a shadowy existence little better than non-
existence."⁴ Discussing the biblical view of the term Sheol, T. Long writes, "At death
people do not cease to exist entirely. Rather, they continue to exist in an ill-defined


²Compare with Ps 73.

³Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, Heaven: A History (New Haven and

⁴Edward J. Kissane, The Book of Psalms: Translated from a Critically Revised
place of the dead called Sheol.”¹ These are the common scholarly views, and the question should be asked whether they are in harmony with the passage.

First of all, it should be noted that both verses under scrutiny are located in the midst of the description of the universality of death. Accordingly, the classification of humanity into "rich," vs. 3 and "man," vss.. 13, 21) and "like the beasts," vss. 13, 21)² refers to the same group of people, who like "the wise," vs. 11), "the fool," vs. 11), "the foolish," vs. 11), "and the stupid," vs. 11) are subjected to the power of death. In other words, as wealth has no impact on the preventability of death, so wisdom and foolishness are likewise powerless.

To show that the rich have no advantages over the poor and to lay emphasis on death as a great leveler, the Psalmist uses a variety of verbs: "to die," vs. 11), "to perish," vs. 11), "be cut off," "perish," vss. 13, 21), "will not remain," vs. 13), "to go," vs. 20), and "to see," compare vss. 10 and 20).³

Furthermore, the place of death or the grave is designated by the vocabulary already discussed in the previous chapters, "the pit," vs. 10), "their


²Concerning the metaphor equating the foolish man with the beasts, see Judah J. Slotki, “Psalm 49 13, 21 (AV 12, 20),” VT 28, no. 3 (1978): 361-362.

³To see the pit” means to experience death, the decay of the grave.

graves,” vs. 12),1 מֵתִים ("their houses," vs. 12),2 and מֵתוֹת ("to the
generation of his fathers,” vs. 20),3 which in one way or another refers to the term
Sheol and often functions as a direct or indirect synonym of the grave. This brief
survey of various people groups subjected to death, including the specific terminology
pertaining to death/dying and the place of death, contains no hint or any allusion to
one’s afterlife in Sheol. The observation of H. Gunkel that the “human being cannot
save themselves from death, and the idea that the one who dies must leave his treasure
to others”4 encapsulates one of the main points of the Psalm.

Having made an observation that death is universal and using it as the
background for the development of his further argument, the Psalmist focuses the
reader’s attention on the rich. Due to some specific reason he is particularly
concerned with the wealthy, as one may see from vss. 15 and 16, which are arranged
antithetically. Though vs. 15 has some vocabulary and translation problems,5 the main
idea is clear: The wicked rich and their admirers will perish and finally end in Sheol,

1LXX, Syriac, Vulgate.

2Some scholars love to argue that the last line of vs. 12 refers to the invocation
of the dead ancestors. For their reasoning see Mark S. Smith, “The Invocation of
Ambiguity in the Psalter,” 213-227. For a contrary view see Philip S. Johnston,
"Psalm 49: A Personal Eschatology,” in Eschatology in Bible & Theology:
Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium, ed. Kent E. Brower and Mark
W. Elliot (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 73-84.

3See Excursus 1.

4Hermann Gunkel, Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric

5Because of time and space limitations, no textual problems will be addressed
here.
whereas the righteous will ultimately be redeemed from it (vs. 16). By using a powerful imagery of death, the Psalmist depicts the defenselessness of the self-righteous wealthy in face of the rapidly approaching destruction.

ことわざ その富や権力は もう寛ぐに至る よって 神や世に救されず (vs. 16)

Like a sheep they are appointed for Sheol

death shall be their shepherd

and their form shall waste away

Sheol is a dwelling for him

It is apparent that these phrases have nothing to do with the assumption concerning the survival of one’s spirit or soul after death in Sheol, but with the fact that with death any imaginable activity of the rich, including their dependence on self, wealth, or power, is terminated. This is clearly seen from the vocabulary employed.

The simile ("like a sheep") is followed by a clause, ("they are appointed for Sheol"),¹ which simply means that "they are doomed like a sheep."² The idea of the inevitability of their death is further strengthened by the powerful metaphor ("death shall be their shepherd"), where the noun ("death") is personified as a shepherd³ who leads his sheep to the slaughter.⁴ Moreover, because

¹See Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 410.
²Bratcher and Reyburn, Book of Psalms, 453.
³Compare with Pss 23:1; 80:2; and 95:7, where Yahweh Himself is the Shepherd of His people.
⁴VanGemeren, Psalms, 5:371.
of the specific nuances of the verb בָּלֶבֶן, the phrase can be articulated in even more threatening and ominous tones, “death will feed on them” (NIV) or rule them, which refers to an absolute impossibility for the rich to escape from death and subsequently the grave.

On the other hand, if to concur with the popular view that Sheol is more than the place of the dead or grave and includes some kind or form of life’s continuation in the netherworld, then this text implies the idea that animals also have a continued existence after death, which by itself is an absolutely nonbiblical notion.

The last two phrases of vs. 15, לָבֶל הַיָּדָא (“and their form shall waste away”) and לָבֶל הַיָּדָא (“Sheol is a dwelling for him”), continue to describe the destructive results of death after the rich are dead and in the grave. The verb לָבֶל (”to become old,” “worn out,” Pi. inf. cstr.) is very difficult and in the current text expresses the idea of their form rotting or wasting away in Sheol. Here the idea of “wasting away” refers to the corruption of the whole being, not only of the physical body as such, but also to every function of it, whether mental or spiritual. In order to reflect the most plausible meaning of this extremely complicated sentence, D. Kidner suggests the following translation, “and their form is for Sheol to consume, without a

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1Wilson, Psalms 1, 750-751; Clifford John Collins, “‘Death Will Be Their Shepherd’ or ‘Death Will Feed on Them’? mavet yir’em in Psalm 49.15 (EVV v 14),” The Bible Translator 46, no. 3 (July 1995): 320-326.

2See discussion on Qoh 3:19-21.

place for it,”1 which basically preserves the same elements and function of the grave as in the current text used for this research. And he is right, because the term Sheol functions as the subject of the verb יִשְׂרִית. This view is further strengthened by the parallelism, where the first two lines “they are appointed for Sheol” and “death shall be their shepherd” are analogous to “Sheol will consume their form.”

Furthermore, the term Sheol is contrasted with the noun הֶשְׁלוֹמָה (“height,” “lofty abode”) 2 to emphasize the exalted status the rich delighted in once but lost it through death. In spite of the fact that the term Sheol contains no direct descriptive elements, which could help the reader to comprehend better its nature, its double employment provides the reader with some insights concerning its function and purpose. By means of the double emphasis on Sheol the Psalmist demonstrates the reversal in expectations of the rich; moreover, he guarantees that the rich not only will be led to Sheol, namely, they will die, but they will also decompose into their original component elements in their grave (Gen 3:19).

The third occurrence of the term Sheol in vs. 16 is found in a totally different setting, which functions antithetically to everything that has been discussed up till now. The verse is introduced by an emphatic adversative יִתְנַסָּה (“but”),3 which

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simultaneously leads not only to the intensified dramatization of the contrast between
the fate of the rich and the fate of the righteous, but also to the resolution of the
problem of death.

But God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol,
for He will take me.

It is significant to note that vs. 16 is characterized by a figurative language,
parallel vocabulary, and serves as “an example of untypical parallelism.” The term
Sheol in the phrase is personified. It is presented as a living organism due
to its association with the noun “hand”, which functions as a symbol of deadly
power. Here the emphasis falls on Sheol more as a power than a location.

Unlike the rich who will decay in Sheol, the Psalmist affirms his conviction by
a statement, “but God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol”), thus focusing his attention on the final outcome that is
diametrically opposite to that of the wicked. The two lines of vs. 16 contain two
crucially important key words, namely, the verbs (“to ransom,” “redeem”) and
 (“to take”). The word is used when a lost object or person is reclaimed in
return for payment. In view of the fact that only is able to redeem a person

1Bratcher and Reyburn, Book of Psalms, 454.
2See Ps 89:49 and Hos 13:14.
3“,” BDB, 804.
4“,” BDB, 544.
5The divine name is found only in vss. 8 and 16 in this Psalm.
from Sheol, the salvific nature of this redemptive act plays the dominant role in the life of the Psalmist, leading to eternal consequences.¹

The contrast in the Psalm aims not only at the contradistinction between the fate of the rich and the fate of the Psalmist, but also intensifies and establishes it by putting the strongest possible emphasis on human limitations and divine supremacy, as is seen from vss. 8-10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vs. 8</td>
<td>no man can by any means redeem his brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 9</td>
<td>nor give to God a ransom for him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 10</td>
<td>for the redemption of their soul is costly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and he should cease trying forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that one should live on forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and never see the pit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By using a special grammatical construction (neg. + Qal inf. abs. + Qal impf.), where the infinite absolute stands immediately before its cognate verb, thus intensifying and reinforcing the verbal idea, which in turn is dominated by the negation, the Psalmist emphasizes the futility and pointlessness of any human scheme to redeem the lost from Sheol. Any human efforts are doomed, because no person is able to “ransom” another, not even by paying God דְּלֹן (“the price of a life,”

“ransom”);¹ nor can human beings ransom themselves whatever price they might offer (vs. 9).² That is why the Psalmist exclaims, “but God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol” and יִתְנַהֲגוּ (“He will take me”).³

It should be recalled that the combination of the pronominal suffix with the noun עַדָּגָה (“my soul”) refers to the whole person, literally, “me,” whereas in vs. 8 it speaks about a human life as such.⁴ Consequently, the deliverance of עַדָּגָה from Sheol emphasizes the Psalmist’s temporal protection from physical death,⁵ while the presence of the עַדָּגָה in Sheol refers to the fact that the dead body (Pss 16:10; 89:49), which in this case is equal to “the dead soul” or corpse, has been placed in the grave.⁶ E. Brotzman makes a pointed observation that “the presence of the ‘soul’ in Sheol needs to be sharply contrasted with the Greek idea that a ‘disembodied soul’ lives on

¹עַדָּגָה, ” BDB, 497.


³Compare with Ps 73:24, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.”

⁴See the discussion on Pss 16:10, 30:4, and Excursus 1.


after physical death. נפש does not refer to the part of man which transcends death.”¹

It is apparent that the Psalmist has in mind “two quite different situations,” because in vss. 8-10 “the ransom is paid to God,” whereas in vs. 16 it is “God who redeems from Sheol.”² It should also be noted that the corruption in vs. 15 is described impersonally as “wasting away,” whereas the redemption of the Psalmist is personal from the very beginning to the very end.³

The understanding of the second verb 내מ (“to take”) in the phrase ימי נפש (“for He will take me”) against the background of death is more than decisive. The particle י is used emphatically in order to characterize the subsequent verb 내מ with its subject ימי נפש. In the current context ימי נפש functions as one of the technical resurrection terms of the dead⁴ and also indirectly alludes to the “God’s taking” or “translation to a different place.”⁵ The Psalmist has chosen to employ exactly the same term which is used to describe the unique fate of Enoch⁶ and Elijah,⁷ who did not experience resurrection, because they had not died, but did experience glorification as


³Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 184.


⁶Gen 5:24.

⁷2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 9, 10.
they were transported directly to God. Concerning this immediate access into the
presence of Yahweh, Kaiser writes that it

would also close down all speculations on any kind of intermediate state,
receptacle or location as unscriptural. To say that Old Testament believers stayed
in a separate compartment in Sheol or in a kind of purgatory runs directly counter
to the fact that God snatched Enoch and Elijah away "to himself."  

It is significant to note the observation made by T. Alexander, who points out
that "in Psalm 18 it [נָפֵל, vss. 17-20] refers to deliverance from earthly enemies," but
"in Psalm 49, however, vss. 14-20 focus on the consequences on death. In this context
the statement 'he will take me' surely takes on the same significance as found in
Genesis 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 9."  

Though the Psalmist does not detail how and when he would be redeemed,
there are strong allusions to Ps 73:24. They demonstrate that both Psalms not only
have common syntactical, conceptual, and linguistic elements, but Ps 73:24 contains a
special identification of the time progression or chronological marker מִשְׂרָת ("and
afterwards") in נָפֵל מִשְׂרָת וְהוֹדָא ("and afterwards You will take me to glory"),
which sheds light on the interpretation of the current verse. The basic difference
between the discussed verses is obvious from the fact that Enoch and Elijah were
taken up before their death, but the Psalmist's deliverance from Sheol would take

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2Kaiser et al, Hard Sayings, 106.

place after his death.¹

It becomes instantly obvious that there is an alternative destination for the righteous, which radically differs from that of the wicked, and that Sheol is not their final fate. Moreover, exactly this very life-and-death tension constitutes the Psalm’s forward-looking, prophetic perspective, which awaits its final resolution.²

Whatever the scholarly opinions might be,³ it is apparent that the text implies much more than simply a short-time preservation of life in the land of the living.⁴ It reveals the Psalmist’s hope and assurance in a final, eschatological deliverance from death and Sheol.⁵ The resurrection of the dead from their graves is the ultimate culmination of Yahweh’s final redemption of man.⁶

In summary, though the term Sheol is used in the context of universal death, it does not provide any clue or hint concerning some probable survival of the dead in the underworld. From the current discussion it is apparent that Sheol in vss. 15 and 16


²Johnston, “‘Left in Hell?’” 213-222.


⁴Johnston, Shades of Sheol, 202-204.

⁵Hubbard, יָמִי, NIDOTTE, 3:578-582.

⁶Coker, יִתְנְכָה, TWOT, 2:716. W. Kaiser is very clear when he writes concerning the resurrection of the body, “The common assertion that the Old Testament saint knew nothing at all about such a possibility is an error caused by preconceptions;” see Kaiser et al, Hard Sayings, 128.
functions only as a place of death, the grave, and no more. The primary purpose of
the term is to demonstrate and intensify the progressing contrast between the rich and
the Psalmist. The first group has chosen to be shepherded by “death” and as a result
they finish in Sheol. They are powerless to stand against the destructive force of
death and are without any means or possibilities to ransom themselves from it, while
the Psalmist, because of his trust in God, is rescued from the “hand of Sheol” forever.¹

Ps 55:16

 пс 151 151 ל ו :ג ה י פ נ ל ש ה ו נ פ מ נ מ פ נ M

Translation and Textual Remarks

Let death² come upon them;
let them go down alive to Sheol;
for evil is in their dwellings,³ in their midst.⁴

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 55:1-24 echoes a prayer and complaint of a man who, in spite of the
treachery and apostasy of one of his closest friends, expresses his confidence in the
justice and swift vindication by Yahweh.


²Or תְּמוֹנָה (“desolation”). Generally scholars divide the term תְּמוֹנָה into
two separate words תְּמוֹנָה and תְּמוֹנָה (“let death overcome”). See also “השָׁוָא,” BDB, 674.

³The word קֵנָה literally means “sojourning-place, dwelling-place.” See
“קֵנָה,” BDB, 158.

⁴RSV translates the last part as “let them go away in terror into their graves.”
The difficulties and problems of the current Psalm are mirrored in the differences of translations and in all the possible variations of the structural arrangements, which in fact are rather tentative.1 Because of the special interest in vs. 16, one way to divide the Psalm is to follow the development of its thought, the shift in its mood, and its resolution of the problem. Accordingly, the Psalmist prays for himself (vss. 1-9); then for his enemies (vss. 10-16); and in the last segment he expresses full assurance in Yahweh (vss. 17-24). However, the middle section (vss. 10-16) can be divided into three smaller subunits: Prayer and complaint (vss. 10-12), betrayal by a friend (vss. 13-15), and vs. 16, containing an imprecation, can stand by itself.2

The text is rich with various plaintive expressions, which lead to the designation of the overall genre of the Psalm as an individual lament.3 Vs. 16 functions as an exclamation of denunciation and imprecation against the background of the Psalmist’s persecutors and betrayal, thus closing the second round of the three-section complaints.4

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2Gerstenberger, Psalms: Part 1, 222-225; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 56.


Exegetical Notes

Ps 55 is comprised of polar contrasts and tensions, revealing the motivation, agony, and purpose of the Psalmist’s desperate cry (vss. 4-8). His straightforward and passion-loaded call for swift divine retribution on his enemies is further intensified by the specific function of the term Sheol. As in the previous occurrences, most scholars would characterize Sheol as a location of some kind of survival or as a place of punishment,¹ and Ps 55 does not constitute an exception.²

In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, this exegetical segment will touch only some of the major points, because the basic terminology, referring to the sphere of death, has already been discussed numerous times in detail.

The first two phrases of vs. 16, פָּתַח לְלַיְיָה (“let death come upon them”) and דַּעַת (“let them go down alive to Sheol”), are parallel. By suddenly switching from singular (vss. 13-15) to plural, the Psalmist intensifies his emotional outburst to such a degree that it culminates in the call for a rapid destruction of all of his enemies. The Psalmist prays that death, as if it were a personified being, would destroy all those who seek his ruin.

The phrase רָדַּד נָאֵל לִלְטָה represents a direct allusion to Num 16:30, 33, where the death of Korah and his followers function as a prototype of the suddenness, totality, and finality of the destruction of the wicked.³ Just as in Korah’s case, the friend of the Psalmist has gone so far that he can no longer be disassociated either

¹For example Briggs, The Book of Psalms, 2:25.
²See the discussion on the previous references to the term Sheol.
³See exegesis on Num 16:30 and 33.
from his enemies or his wickedness. That is why the Psalmist considers his former friend and his enemies as one entity and calls for their removal from the land of the living.¹

In the contexts of death the verb הָנָךְ functions as one of the key concepts for “dying,” and in the current formula הָנָךְ it basically means “to die” or “to go down to the grave,”² whereas the masculine plural adjective בְּךָ (“alive”) is explained in vs. 24 by the phrase לַאֲחָדָה (“will not live out half their days”). It means that the Psalmist expects sudden, disastrous, and premature death of his adversaries,³ just as it literally happened in Num 16:30-33.⁴

Ps 55:16
let them go down alive to Sheol

Num 16:30
and they go down alive to Sheol

Num 16:33
and they went down alive to Sheol

It should be noted that Ps 55 contains three imprecations (vss. 10, 16, and 24), which are parallel to each other. In all these verses the vocabulary is that of death,


²For the term הָנָךְ (“go down”) as designating “dying” and its function in various formulas see the discussion on Gen 37:35.


containing no allusion to life in Sheol. On the contrary, the terminology used by the Psalmist represents a total termination of life, which excludes any hint concerning human existence after death. For instance, in vs. 10 the imperative בָּלָת (“swallow up,” “destroy”) functions as the verb of annihilation, which is followed by another imperative פָּלִיל (“divide their language [speech]”), alluding to Gen 11:1-9, where the nations of Babel are suddenly scattered. The verb בָּלָת refers back to the death experience of Korah, where it is used for the ground, which opens its mouth וְכִלְלַהוּ אֱלֹהים (“and swallows them up,” Num 16:30), דַּקְטִיר (“and swallowed them up,” vs. 32).1

The first line of vs. 24, נַעֲמֹת אֶלֹהִים חֹרְדוּת בָּאָרָה שֶׁהָאָרָה (“but You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction”), is parallel to the expression נְכוֹר (“to the pit”).2 The terms נַעֲמֹת (“to the pit”) and נשך (“pit,” “cistern”) are synonyms, but here נשך should be understood as the place of corruption.3 The verb נָבַר paired with the triple synonyms נֶבֶר, בָּאָרָה, and נַעֲמֹת strengthens the imagery of the grave as the place of death.

The function and the purpose of the term Sheol are revealed by the Psalmist himself, namely, the progression of his prayer moves from the general to the specific. All three imprecatory points to the characteristics and magnitude of the wickedness of his adversaries, making it obvious why he wants to see them in the grave.

1See also Gen 4:11; Num 26:10; Deut 11:6; Pss 106:17; 124:3; Prov 1:12; Isa 5:14. Read the exegetical segment on Num 16:30, 33.

2See exegesis on Isa 14:9, 11, 15, and table 9.

3See exegesis on Isa 38:10, 18, and table 10.
for I have seen violence and strife in the city

for evil is in their dwellings, in their midst

men of blood and treachery

Finally, the basic emphasis in vs. 16 is on a sudden death of the Psalmist’s enemies because their wickedness must ultimately experience the divine punishment. Death will shorten the lives of “men of blood and treachery” (vs. 24) and they will “go down” to Sheol, “the pit of corruption,” that is, the grave.

Ps 86:13

Translation and Textual Remarks

For great is your steadfast love1 toward me; And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 86:1-17 is הַשָּׁפֵל (“a prayer of David”) in which its author reflects on a specific crisis situation. He addresses it by turning to God in complaint and supplication for mercy, power, and deliverance from dangers (vss. 1, 7, 14, 17).

The Psalm contains a number of indications that structurally and thematically form varied individual units and subunits, and provide some specific insights into its

1The NASB translates the word יְרַמְשָׁד as “your lovingkindness,” whereas the NJB has “your faithful love.”
The following chiastic arrangement helps to locate the unit of vs. 13 within the structure of the Psalm and at the same time to determine its relation to it.²

A Your servant vss. 1-4
B abounding steadfast love vss. 5-6
C in the day of my distress vs. 7
D they will glorify Your name vss. 8-10
E make me single-hearted in fearing Your name vs. 11

D¹ I will glorify Your name vss. 12-13
C¹ O God, the godless have risen against me vs. 14
B¹ abounding steadfast love vs. 15
A¹ Your servant vss. 16-17

The majority of exegetes classify this Psalm as the lament of an individual.³

However, the design of the Psalm demonstrates a mixture of such genre elements as thanksgiving (vss. 12-13), complaints and supplications (vss. 1-7), affirmation, petition, imprecation, praise (vss. 14-17), etc.⁴

Exegetical Notes

There is no need to perform a comprehensive exegesis of the current text as its

¹ Altogether the structure of this short Psalm is unique. The emphatic particle (“for,” “because”) occurs 9 times (vss. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 12-13, 17). The emphatic pronoun of the 2 pers. m. s. תִּלְנָה (“you”), referring to God, is found 7 times (vss. 2, 5, 10, 12, 15, 17). The Psalmist uses a divine name מַלְאך (“my Adonay”) 7 times (vss. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15). For other insightful details see Schaefer, Psalms, 210-212; Caroll Stuhlmueller, Psalms 2 (Psalms 73-150), OTM 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 51-52.

² The structure is based on the work of Pierre Auffret, “Essau sur la Structure Littéraire du Psaume LXXXVI,” VT 29 (1979): 385-402; Tate, Psalms 51-100, 377.


⁴ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations, FOTL 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 132-137. According to Gerstenberger, the Psalm is written in a liturgical prayer genre. Ibid., 137.
key terminology was already discussed in the previous chapters. Thus, a few general observations pertaining to this brief overview will suffice.

Some scholars believe that שהל, somehow “separated from the body of the deceased,” exists somewhere in Sheol and that Ps 86:13 serves as a proof of “the liberation of the שהל from the underworld” or “the revivification of a dead person.” Others see in the word Sheol “the dwelling place of the dead in the lowest parts of the earth,” or “‘hollow place’ down below the ground” or “the realm of God-forsakenness.” Do the nature and function of the term Sheol in vs. 13 correspond to the above statements? In order to figure this out it is necessary to start with the general and then focus on specifics.

As can be seen from the structural outline, vss. 12 and 13 form a thanksgiving unit, which starts and moves from a thanksgiving vow to glorification and then resolution. In vs. 12 the Psalmist characterizes the response of his heart with the following words, “I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forever.” Then, in order to provide the rationale for his vow of praise, the Psalmist introduces vs. 13 with the forceful particle ג (“for,” “because”), which also functions causally to introduce an explanatory clause, “for great is your

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1See especially the exegetical sections on Deut 32:22; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27.


4Knight, Psalms, 2:70.

5Tate, Psalms 51-100, 382; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 183.
steadfast love toward me.” Furthermore, a particular basis for the vow of thanksgiving is his deliverance from physical death already received, or perhaps from imminent dangers of death: ¹ הָיוָה נַעַלָּתִי נָפָשִׁי (“and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol”).² In other words, the Psalmist was involved in a situation facing death from which escape, humanly speaking, would be inconceivable.³

The root of the verb הָיוָה (“deliver,” “rescue”) in the phrase הָיוָה נָפָשִׁי (“and You have delivered my soul”) indicates an act of separation.⁴ When the verb הָיוָה with a divine subject is construed with the preposition יָמָן (“from,” “out of”), it expresses Yahweh’s saving activity, literally meaning “to take out,” “rescue.”⁵ In this case it has a connotation of “taking out” or “rescuing” from Sheol.⁶ It is significant to note that the phrase under scrutiny “and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol” can also be understood in the future tense. The verb הָיוָה is in a causative stem (Hi. pf. 2 m. s.), and one can look at it in two ways. It is possible to inflect the verb as a “perfect consecutive,” which occurs in a prose construction

¹Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, 2:37.
²Tate, Psalms 51-100, 382.
³Compare with Pss 33:19; 56:14; Prov 10:2; 11:4; 23:14.
⁴Ulrich Bergmann, הָיוָה, TLOT, 2:760-762.

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describing a completed action, or as a “prophetic perfect,” which conveys the assurance of the future events as though they were already completed. In such a case, the deliverance from death and the grave would refer to “Yahweh’s salvific power in a universal and eschatological” event of a bodily resurrection, which is in harmony with the context and the Hebrew Scripture.

Furthermore, the Psalmist does not use the expression יִשָּׁ넥 הַנִּפְלֵי (“and You have delivered my soul”) to focus the reader’s attention on the immortality of the soul which should be delivered from the prison of Sheol. It is impossible to overemphasize the significance of a correct understanding of the nature and function of יִשָּׁ넥 in the Psalms. Here, just as in the previously discussed cases, יִשָּׁ넥 (“my soul”) stands for the whole person and should be understood as “You have delivered me” or “my life” from death, which also implies the grave, and no more.

Finally, the stereotyped formula, יִפְלָט הַנִּפְלֵי (“from the depth of Sheol”), including its variations, is scattered throughout the Hebrew Scripture. For example, a counterpart of the expression יִפְלָט הַנִּפְלֵי (a noun with an adjective) is found in the Torah, יִפְלָט הַנִּפְלֵי (“to the depth of Sheol,” a noun with an adjective) and was discussed in detail above. Several variant expressions of the same stereotyped formula, יִפְלָט הַנִּפְלֵי ("the lowest earth" or "the earth beneath"), which are

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1Kidner, Psalms 73-150, 313.

2Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 182-183.

3The form יִשָּׁ넥 ("my soul") occurs 173 times in the Scripture. For discussion on the term יִשָּׁ넥 see Excursus 1; Pss 16:10; 30:4; 49:16; Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, 21.

4For the major treatment of יִפְלָט see the exegesis on Deut 32:22.
equivalents in their form and function, occur repeatedly in the Prophets.¹

All these recurring expressions, including in the Psalms, where the phrases דלתות תחתון נמיה ("to the lower parts of the earth")² and בכרות תחתון נמיה ("in the depths of the pit")³ are used in the contexts of death, should not be considered as explaining one another, but as standard formulas referring to the place of death. It is clearly demonstrated by the threefold employment of the key terminology, פְּרִי, בֹּר, and קַיִל, which is linked either to the adjective בְּרִיית ("low," "lower") or noun תחתון נמיה ("lower," "lowest parts"). In the contexts of death, these three terms, though each of them has specific characteristics and nuances, function as the semantic equivalents or synonyms referring not to three different geographical locations in the underworld, but to only one place, the grave.⁴

In this connection A. Anderson calls attention to the fact that the term בכרות תחתון נמיה, translated as "depths," "does not point to any divisions in Sheol, such as are described in later apocalyptic literature," but then he explains that "Sheol was a place far below and in the very depths of the earth."⁵ However, one must be careful not to overemphasize the formula תחתון נמיה בכרות by putting special stress on the term

¹See Isa 44:23; Ezek 31:14, 16, 18, 24; See also Ezek 26:20.
²Pss 63:10; 139:15.
³Ps 88:7; Lam 3:55.
⁴Gunkel argues for the meaning of the term בכרות in its literal sense as the place "where the dead live" (da die Toten wohnen) and excludes the meaning "grave." Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 121.
and some imagined subterranean location, which is inhabited by spirits of the dead or shades.¹

In the figurative expression under scrutiny, “and You have delivered my soul,” the main emphasis falls on the Psalmist’s deliverance from sure death, which implies a place below the surface of ground where the dead are buried. This idea is supported by the only available descriptive detail, which is associated with the term Sheol, namely, the adjective הַמַּרְאִים (“lower,” “lowest parts”). Finally, the discussion of the above section indicates that the term Sheol, which occurs in a specific context with the emphasis on the Psalmist’s deliverance from it, should be interpreted as a poetic synonym of the grave.

Ps 88:4

עִקְרַשְׁבַּנָּה בְּרֹעַת נְמוֹשָׁי לַשָּׁאָאֶלָל הָנִיָּה

Translation and Textual Remarks

For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

It is necessary to provide this section with a short preface. Ps 88:1-19 contains one of the most desperate cries for help and a few glimpses of trust. Vs. 2 is introduced by a focused emphasis on the name of Yahweh as the only source of

¹Youngblood, “Death,” TWOT, 2:967-969.
hope,\(^1\) הָיָה, הַיָּהָה ("O Yahweh, God of my salvation"). Otherwise, there is not even one word of confession of guilt, thanksgiving, or praise in the Psalmist’s I-You dialogue. Even the last word of the Psalm is “darkness.”\(^2\) The prayer is thoroughly saturated with vocabulary exclusively pertaining to death and the grave.

Generally scholars are unanimous that the Psalm can be divided into three major sections: First complaint (vss. 1-10), Second complaint (vss. 11-13), and Third complaint (vss. 14-19), where the third section mirrors the first one,\(^3\) as can be seen below:\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Complaint</th>
<th>Third Complaint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vss. 1-3</td>
<td>vss. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cry for help</td>
<td>cry for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vss. 2, 10</td>
<td>vss. 14, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day and night</td>
<td>morning and day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vss. 4-7</td>
<td>vs. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the dead and Sheol</td>
<td>death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 7</td>
<td>vs. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dark place</td>
<td>dark place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 8</td>
<td>vs. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your wrath, afflicted me</td>
<td>Your wrath, destroyed me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 8</td>
<td>vs. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your waves</td>
<td>waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 9</td>
<td>vs. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquaintances removed</td>
<td>lover and friend removed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second Complaint

| vs. 11 | the dead and Rephaim |
| vs. 12 | the grave and Abbadon |
| vs. 13 | darkness and the land of oblivion |

\(^1\)VanGemeren, Psalms, 5:565.

\(^2\)See Bratcher and Reyburn, The Book of Psalms, 762.


\(^4\)Adopted with some modifications from Schaefer, Psalms, 214.
Ps 88 contains various form elements such as complaints and judgment motifs (vss. 4-10; 14-19), a series of rhetorical questions and metaphors (vss. 11-13), petition (vss. 2-3), etc. The overall genre of the current Psalm is easily recognizable and can be classified as an individual lament.¹

Exegetical Notes

Ps 88 describes excruciating distress and suffering of an individual, who is almost on the brink of death, though it does not mention the cause of the Psalmist’s desperate cry, whether it is because of some terminal illness, danger, or threat. The vivid imagery and vocabulary of death, its interrelation and connections are not only unique but also provide important insights concerning the nature and function of the term Sheol.

It is significant to note that generally scholars use Ps 88 to defend the view of after-death existence in Sheol. K. Illman states that “we have the description of the nether world as a place deep down which many people enter (5a), where they exist in a state of feebleness (5b. 11b).”² A similar view is expressed by Andersen, who, commenting on vs. 4, provides a rather elaborate explanation: “The quality of the

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Psalmist’s life is becoming more and more like that of the shadowy existence of the dead in Sheol.”¹ The same view is defended by Mays: “In Sheol one continued to exist as one of the shades.”²

The almost unanimous interpretation of Sheol as a place of continuous existence calls for more detailed consideration of the basic terminology of death and its relation to the term Sheol. The place of the dead, as one of the three dominating subjects in Ps 88, is mutually related to the other two major themes, namely, the Psalmist and Yahweh, thus setting the tone for the whole lament.³

It should be noted that the author of the Psalm is the righteous,⁴ not the wicked, who graphically describes himself as being already like a dead man in Sheol. In order to portray the grave and his state there, the author employs almost all the known basic terminology pertaining to the place of death (see table 15).

Except for four terms, רַבְרֹא, מַעַרְכָּל, מַעַזְזָׁל, and the unusual phrase רַבְרֹא רַבְרֹא (“in the land of forgetfulness”), all the other key vocabulary has been discussed previously numerous times.

¹Andersen, The Book of Psalms, 2:624.
²Mays, Psalms, 282.
³As it goes beyond space and time possibilities to discuss all three basic subjects of the Psalm here, attention will be focused only on the reality of the dead as dead and their association with Sheol. For a detailed discussion on the subjects of the Psalmist and Yahweh, their mutual relation to each other, their word forms, and synonymous vocabulary, see Nowell, “Psalm 88: A Lesson in Lament,” 111-114.
⁴Unfortunately, the fact that the righteous also “go down” to Sheol is ignored by many scholars, as was seen from chapters 1 and 2 of this study. See also Rosenberg, “The Concept of Biblical Sheol,” 88-90, who supports the view that Sheol is a place only for the wicked.
### TABLE 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and my life has drawn near to Sheol</td>
<td>חָלָ֣ה כְּלָ֖וָאָל הָגֵ֣יָה</td>
<td>Sheol</td>
<td>vs. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with those who go down to the pit</td>
<td>נְפָלֵ֑י בֹּרַ֣ר</td>
<td>בור</td>
<td>vs. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who lie in the grave</td>
<td>שְׁבֵ֣בֵי בָּ֣ר</td>
<td>בָּר</td>
<td>vs. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the lowest pit (the bottom of the pit)</td>
<td>בָּרְכִּ֣י חַ֣דָּשׁ</td>
<td>בָּר בָּרְכִּ֣י</td>
<td>vs. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in dark places</td>
<td>בֵּ֛מַהְשְׁפִּ֥ים</td>
<td>מְשִׁפְּת</td>
<td>vs. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in depths</td>
<td>בְּמָעְלָ֣ה</td>
<td>מְעַלָּה</td>
<td>vs. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the grave</td>
<td>בָּר</td>
<td>בָּר</td>
<td>vs. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Abaddon</td>
<td>אֶבֶ֗ד</td>
<td>אֶבֶד</td>
<td>vs. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the darkness</td>
<td>בָּהֳלָה</td>
<td>בָּהֳלָה</td>
<td>vs. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the land of forgetfulness</td>
<td>בָּאֵ֣ר נֵשְׁתָּא</td>
<td>נֵשְׁתָּא</td>
<td>vs. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dark place</td>
<td>מֹהַ֥ה</td>
<td>מֹהַ</td>
<td>vs. 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In vs. 7 the noun נֵשְׁתָּא ("dark place," plural)\(^1\) is equivalent to בָּר נָבֹא ("the lowest pit," "in the pit beneath"),\(^2\) whereas in vs. 19 נֵשְׁתָּא ("dark place," singular) ends the Psalm on the note of unavoidability of the impeding death and the grave.\(^3\) Here the word נֵשְׁתָּא is used figuratively and also functions as a synonym of the term Sheol, but in Isa 42:16, Ps 143:3, and Lam 3:6 it is parallel to the grave.\(^4\) The "dark place" refers to the grave and not to survival there.

\(^{1}\) "נֵשְׁתָּא," BDB, 365.

\(^{2}\) Concerning the qualifying term נֵשְׁתָּא in various formulas see exegesis on Deut 32:22; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27; Ps 86:13. Williams believes that "The 'pit' is the grave, the entrance to the abode of the dead." Williams, Psalms 73-150, 135.

\(^{3}\) Tate, Psalms 51-100, 404.

\(^{4}\) Robert L. Alden, "נֵשְׁתָּא," TWOT, 1:331.
Both the formula בֵּית רִיָּה בָּשָׁם (in vs. 7) and the word רֵעָה (in vs. 7) are followed in vs. 7 by the parallel noun בָּשָׁם ("in depths"). Here the metaphorical employment of the term מֵאָמָּה ("depth," "deep")\(^1\) connotes not only extremely deep distress,\(^2\) but also, being analogous to הָלֵל בְּגִלְגַּל, relates to the place of the dead, Sheol.

The masculine noun נַפְעִי in vs. 12 is derived from the verb נַפְעַה (“perish,” “be destroyed”) and refers to the place of destruction and ruin.\(^3\) "It pictures Sheol as the place where all earthly activities and hopes come to ruin."\(^4\) This argument is clearly seen from the following three texts where נַפְעִי is analogous to Sheol:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Job 26:6} & \quad \text{Naked is Sheol before Him, and there is no covering for Abaddon} \\
\text{Prov 15:11} & \quad \text{Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh} \\
\text{Prov 27:20} & \quad \text{Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied}
\end{align*}
\]

In Ps 88:12, the construction נַפְעִי נַפְעִי ("in the place of destruction") is synonymous with the expression נַפְעִי נַפְעִי ("in the grave"), but in the phrase

\(^1\) "אָמָה," \textit{BDB}, 847.
\(^3\) The term is used six times in the Hebrew Scripture. "נַפְעָה," \textit{BDB}, 2; R. Laird Harris, "נַפְעָה," \textit{TWOT}, 1:3-4; Eugene H. Merrill, "נַפְעָה," \textit{NIDOTTE}, 1:226.
Abaddon and death say,” Job 28:22) both terms פָּרָה and
Death (“death”) are personified and related to one another by means of a direct
parallelism. The only text where פָּרָה stands without its counterpart is in Job 31:12,
פָּרָה (for that would be a fire consuming down to Abaddon”), where it refers to the destruction of the grave.¹

In these six references there is nothing that would suggest or give an
impression that פָּרָה refers to the place of torment² or functions as a special
subdivision in Sheol or distinct department, as is seen in later rabbinical teachings.³
The basic meaning of the term פָּרָה is “the place of destruction,” which functions as
another designation of the grave, or simply the place of the dead. There is no better
word than פָּרָה to picture both the place and the undergoing process of the physical
decomposition of the dead body in the grave.⁴

Furthermore, the noun יָאָשׁ (“forgetfulness”) in the unique phrase יָאָשׁ (‘land
of forgetfulness”)⁵ qualifies Sheol as the place where all mental or spiritual

¹See an excellent summary on the word פָּרָה in Tromp, Primitive
Conceptions, 80-81. For a brief exegesis of Ps 88 see James L. Haddix, “Lamentation
as Personal Experience in Selected Psalms” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University,
1980), 113-130.

²Harris, "שֈוָא הון," 1:3.

³Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

⁴For the distinction between a proper and common noun, see chapter 5 under
“Theological Implications.”

⁵For a discussion on יָאָשׁ, see Excursus 1.
processes come to their end.¹ This *hapax legomenon* is in perfect harmony with Ps 6:6, which says that there is neither remembrance nor praise in the grave, and Qohelet 9:5 employs the key word ‏אֲדֹנָיו ("to know") to declare,  אֲדֹנָיו ("but the dead know nothing").²

This cluster of eight various terms and formulas in table 15 does not refer to eight different locations in the underworld, but are used by the Psalmist to denote the place of death. While all these words contain specific nuances and implications and may create in the mind of the reader differing concrete or abstract mental pictures of the grave, all of them function as synonyms of the term Sheol.

In addition, whereas "pit," "grave," or "depth" can be characterized more from the spatial aspect, terms such as "dark places," "Abaddon" ("place of destruction"),³ "darkness," and "the land of forgetfulness" express the nature of the proper noun Sheol, thus emphasizing its qualitative features. Finally, one must be careful to avoid giving the wrong notion that these eight words refer to several different places or that they contain some allusion to survival in Sheol.

Of special importance are vss. 5, 6, and 11, where the Psalmist in his agonizing situation compares himself with those who are already dead. Thus in vs. 5 he

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¹ "אֲדֹנָיו," *BDB*, 674.


³ For more information see discussion on Prov 15:11 and 27:20, where Abaddon is in parallel with Sheol. In Ps 88:12 it is parallel with *geber* ("grave"), and in Job 31:12 the term stands alone.
associates himself "with those who go down to the pit"), that is, with those who are dying or are already dead in the grave. In vs. 6 the Psalmist goes further by focusing his attention on two structurally and thematically parallel terms. First, he refers to himself as a lifeless corpse that is left among the dead", and second, it seems to him that he is like the slain who lie in the grave). The noun most likely is the shortened form of ("those who are slain by the sword"). The Psalmist compares himself with those who are killed on the field of battle and thus meet their death prematurely.

On the one hand, the direct parallelism between (" . . . the dead") and (" . . . Rephaim") in vs. 11 is similar to that of vs. 6, thus representing equivalent concepts. On the other hand, because of the direct synchronism the noun "Rephaim" functions as a clear synonym for the dead and has nothing to do with "shades," "shadowy replicas," or "spirits" of the underworld. Though each of the three parallel terms, "the dead," "the slain," and "Rephaim," as synonymous equivalents contain their own nuances, it is obvious that their purpose is to designate

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1 The Psalm is rich in the vocabulary that pertains to dying or death: "free," vs. 6); ("lie down," vs. 6); ("to be cut off," vs. 6); ("put," vs. 7); ("shut in," "finished," vs. 9); with negation ("to come out," vs. 9); ("to exterminate," "cut off," vs. 17); ("surround," vs. 18); ("strike off," "engulf," vs. 18). Considering time and space limitations, this terminology will not be discussed here.

2 See discussion on Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27.

3 For the main discussion on Rephaim see Isa 14:9, 11, 15. See also Isa 26:14, 19; Job 26:5; Prov 2:18; 9:18, and 21:16. See also Illman, Old Testament Formulas About Death, 142.
dead bodies, lifeless corpses in the grave, and nothing more.¹

Moreover, it is possible to look at the term לֹאֵת from another angle as a proper noun, which, due to its unique individuality and inherent common characteristics with other entities, can be applied to all the dead, regardless of the manner of their death, social status, age, or sex. Consequently, the proper nouns לַאְדוֹן (general designation for the place of the dead), לֶאֶדֹת (emphasizes its destructive nature), and לַאֵת (general term for the dead in Sheol) are not only in agreement among themselves but also interlocked by at least two common indicators “death” and “the place of the dead.”

Finally, the Psalm’s emotional and literary progression reaches its culmination in the three-paired rhetorical questions, which not only form clear parallelisms, but also imply an unambiguous negative reply (no! never!)
or a negative statement:

¹However, not every scholar agrees that the dead are really dead. For example, Tate comments that “the word for ‘shades’ is the Hebrew rephaim, which refers to the dead who live in an attenuated sense of life, ‘shades’ or ‘shadowy replicas’ of full life in the world.” Tate, “Psalm 88,” 92. A similar view is expressed by Kraus, “The are the phantom spirits of the dead (cf. Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Job 26:5).” Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 194. And Rogerson points out that “the rephaim are the inhabitants of the underworld, mere shadows of their former selves.” Rogerson and McKay, Psalms 51-100, 2:187; Anderson affirms that, “What survives in Sheol is not some immortal soul or spirit, but rather the whole man in the form of a ‘shadowy’ replica which defies any further definition.” Anderson, The Book of Psalms, 2:628. For similar views see also William O. E. Oesterley, Immortality and the Unseen World: A Study in Old Testament Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 63-79.
Do You work wonders for the dead?
Do Rephaim rise up to praise you? Selah.

Is Your loving-kindness recounted in the grave?
Or Your faithfulness in Abaddon?

Are Your wonders known in the darkness?
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

It is no coincidence that the Psalmist asks not one but factually six pointed questions, all of which are concise, penetrating, focused, and clearly aimed at one and the same issue, namely, Does consciousness survive in Sheol? He addresses the issue from the physical, mental, and spiritual angle, which leads to only one conclusion, namely, that “in the grave,” “in Abaddon,” “in the darkness,” and “in the land of forgetfulness” “the dead” or Rephaim do not “rise up,” they “do not praise Yahweh,” do not recount His “loving-kindness” nor “faithfulness.” His “wonders” and “righteousness” are not “known” or experienced there, because the dead are dead. They simply have ceased to exist.

In summary, by purposefully employing death vocabulary and graphic imagery, the Psalmist portrays Sheol as the place of the dead, that is, the grave, as accurately and expressly as possible. At the same time he clearly demonstrates his

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1 The NIV renders the word אָדָם as “the dead,” NRSV, RSV, NJB as “the shades,” and NASB as “the departed spirits.”

2 For a contrary view see Tate, “The rhetorical questions in these verses present the realm of existence in the netherworld as without the wonderful deeds of Yahweh and without praise for him. Even the mighty among the dead (the Rephaim) are incapable, or unwilling, to rise and praise Yahweh.” Tate, Psalms 51-100, 403.
conviction and understanding concerning the state of the dead and the nature of Sheol, or more precisely, his conviction is characterized by the comprehension which excludes any conscious or nonconscious existence in death.1

Ps 89:49

What man can live and never see death?
or deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol? Selah.

Translation and Textual Remarks

Ps 89:1-53 is a very long and complicated poem, which strategically is located at the end of the Third Book. Despite the fact that scholars remain divided concerning its literary unity, genre, and setting,2 it will not influence the study of vs. 49 of this royal Psalm as a prayer.

The Psalm naturally falls into three sections which are different in a sense of its genre and content: (1) Praise to Yahweh for His kingship and faithfulness (vss. 1-19) is written as a hymn; (2) Yahweh reminds His people of His covenant promises to David (vss. 20-38) in the style of an oracle; (3) A prayer to Yahweh urging Him to

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1Bratcher and Reyburn notes that, “The Hebrews did not speak of the ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’ of the dead surviving in Sheol, as did the Greeks; the ‘shades’ or ‘shadows’ were pale, lifeless, ineffectual, shadowy images or replicas of the former living, active, robust self. Care should be taken not to picture them as ghosts, however, since this introduces elements not present in the Hebrew concept.” Bratcher and Reyburn, The Book of Psalms, 767.

2Tate, Psalms 51-100, 413-418; Kraus, Psalms 60-150, 201-202; Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part 2, 147-157.
remember His covenant with His anointed one (vss. 39-53) is in a lament genre. In spite of these distinctive parts, the Psalm is unified by its major themes, which are represented by such pivotal words as רָאָהָאָה ("loving-kindness," 7 times), מַעַן ("faithfulness," 7 times), כְּovenant," 4 times), and its synonymous expression בָּרַב ("You swore," 3 times). The emphasis in the Psalm is on Yahweh’s covenant with David.

To bring into focus vs. 49 it is necessary to divide the last section into three major subunits: (1) complaint against Yahweh (vss. 39-46); (2) questions and petitions (vss. 47-52), and (3) praise (vs. 53).

Exegetical Notes

Ps 89:49 is very similar to Pss 6:6, 18:6, 49:15, 16, 55:16, and 116:3, where the term Sheol and death are in parallel. However, these recurring terms by

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2 Ps 89:2, 3, 6, 9, 14, 25, 29, 34, 50. See Sama, “Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” 32.

3 Ps 89:4, 29, 35, 40.

4 Pss 4, 36, 59.

5 As for the overall genre of the Psalm, unlike Clifford, who denotes it as a lament, Gerstenberger designates it a Communal Complaint. See Clifford, “Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler’s Continued Failure,” 35-47; Gerstenberger, Psalms, Part 2, 154.
themselves do not say much unless they are connected with other terms by means of which they reveal their specific nature or function. In other words, the vocabulary of Sheol and death should be situated in the context.

The unit of vss. 47-52 exposes the Psalmist’s lament, which is reinforced by a string of penetrating questions and pleas:

\[ \text{How long, O Yahweh? Will You hide Yourself forever?} \]

\[ \text{Will Your wrath burn like fire?} \]

The Psalmist refers to his abandonment by the figure of Yahweh’s hiding Himself, which is further connected and intensified with the description of His anger, expressed by the threefold fire imagery: "burn," "consume", "fire", and "rage," "heat".

The Psalmist concludes his prayer with the two-part rhetorical question, which contrasts the promise given under oath by Yahweh (vss. 5-6; 21-39) with the extremely sad reality of his day (vss. 40-50).

\[ \text{Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Adonai?} \]

\[ \text{Which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?} \]

And just between these two verses (vss. 47, 50) are inserted vss. 48 and 49,

\[ \text{The idea of Yahweh hiding Himself occurs only three times in the Hebrew Scripture: Ps 89:47; Isa 45:15, and 57:17. Compare with its synonymous expression \text{hide your face} in Pss 13:1, 88:15, and 104:29.} \]

\[ \text{See Bratcher and Reyburn, The Book of Psalms, 790.} \]
which not only contain a passionate plea to remember the fragile nature of human beings, thus increasing the intensity of the lament, but also introduce totally new material.1

\[\text{Remember me, of what duration [my] lifespan is,}\]

\[\text{for what vanity You have created all the sons of men!}\]

The imperative ("remember me")2 is addressed not only to Yahweh but also implies the fact that the Psalmist has a clear understanding of life and death issues, which is demonstrated by the subsequent phraseology. The phrase ("of what duration") is phonetically and semantically parallel to ("for what vanity"),3 where the noun ("vanity," "nothingness")4 including its equivalent terminology puts a special emphasis on "human frailty, weakness, and particularly mortality."5 Furthermore, by shifting the focus from his own hopeless perspective the Psalmist explicitly asserts actuality of mortality of ("all the sons of men"), thus emphasizing the universal condition and fate of the whole

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1Tate, Psalms 51-100, 427.

2The imperative of vs. 48 relates to ("remember, O Adonai, the reproach of Your servant") in vs. 51.


4\[\text{BDB}, 996; Jerry Shepherd, "NIDOTTE, 4:53-55.}\]

5Bratcher and Reyburn, The Book of Psalms, 789.
humankind. The idea of the inescapability of death is further emphasized by the rhetorical question:

תנ ו תד ה לולע תוא ה - vs. 49

What man can live and never see death?

ירל ינש מיניהושיאול

or deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?

The answer to this question is exclusively negative: No one can escape death; no one can deliver one’s life from the power of the grave. This notion is supported by the specific choice of the word for man נב (“man”), which in Psalms usually refers to a strong man, and a strong man is the one who “stands in an intimate relationship with God, trusts and fears God, and does what God requires of him.” Even Yahweh’s נב has no hope of avoiding death, which automatically excludes any idea concerning the after-death existence of the righteous in Sheol.

It is instructive to note that the parallelism of the term Sheol and death is not confined to these two words alone. It encompasses both lines of the verse and is extended to other words in it. For example, the noun נב is parallel to ינש (“his soul”), literally “his life” or “himself.” Generally such verbs as ליע (“to live”), ידלי (with the negation “never see”), which basically means “never to experience,” and נופל (“escape,” “deliver”) are positive by their nature. However,


2Concerning ינש see detailed discussion in Excursus 1, Pss 16:10; 30:4; 49:15, 16; 86:13; 88:4.

3See discussion on Ps 16:10.
because they are located in a specific context of a rhetorical question, they function in parallel to one another in order to reemphasize one and the same negative concept of man’s helplessness to avoid death and the grave.

Practically all the terms of vs. 49 are used to emphasize the brevity and transient character of human life. The rhetorical question contains an antithetical parallelism, expressed by the verbs הָיָה ("to live") and תָּתָן ("to see death"), which leads to an increased intensity of the Psalmist’s lament. In fact, the progression of the rather straightforward language of the prayer creates a tension and pointed contrast with the threefold promise of Yahweh, “I will establish your seed forever and build to generation and generation your throne” (vss. 5, 30, 37).1 The description of mortality, death, and Sheol is in a sharp contrast against the eternal sovereignty of Yahweh.2

Furthermore, the imagery of absolute death leading to the grave is further strengthened by the death terminology of the second line. The term מְצָל in the line מְצָל נַפְשִׁי מִיַּדָּיָו ("[who can] deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?") is in the Piel stem, thus putting special emphasis on the verb in its “factitive sense to make safe, bring into safety, or save."3 Generally the term is used in the fixed phrases to save one’s life/soul, or literally, “to make life to escape.”4 By employing the phrase

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2 Ward, “The Literary Form and Liturgical Background,” 326.
3 Robert L. Hubbard, "טָלָה,” NIDOTTE, 2:950-954; "טָלָה,” BDB, 572.
4 Hubbard, "טָלָה,” NIDOTTE, 2:950-954.
"from the hand of Sheol") the Psalmist refers to the destructive power of the grave.¹

Finally, in the current verse the term Sheol contains no descriptive or spatial elements, nuances, or hints, except for the obvious message that no person, not even יbindung, is able to escape death and Sheol. The proper noun Sheol is used intentionally to focus attention on physical death from which nobody is ever able to save one's שפוג, which means oneself or one's life.

As was repeatedly pointed out, the term שפוג does not represent some mysterious entity that continues to live on after death in the netherworld. The Psalmist does not provide any hint concerning a soul's conscious or unconscious existence in the underworld or some kind of survival in Sheol either. The text is also absolutely silent concerning punishment after death in the netherworld. Here the term Sheol functions as a poetic imagery for the place of the dead or the grave.

Ps 116:3

The cords of death entangled me.
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I found distress and sorrow.

Translation and Textual Remarks

The cords of death entangled me.
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I found distress and sorrow.

Text Unit and Its Genre

At first glance, Ps 116:1-19 may seem to offer a rather simple outline, as it

¹See Pss 49:15, 16; 89:49, Hos 13:14.
describes the joy and gratitude of the Psalmist, his love and commitment to Yahweh for delivering his life from sure death.\(^1\) Nevertheless, scholars have discovered that its structure has proved to be rather elusive and difficult to analyze.\(^2\) Taking into consideration the form and content, rhetorical devices, and its key terminology, the overall arrangement of Ps 116 can be presented in the following way:3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Praise and introductory summary</td>
<td>vss. 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress and deliverance</td>
<td>vss. 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report of deliverance</td>
<td>vss. 5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks and vow of the Psalmist</td>
<td>vss. 8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account of deliverance</td>
<td>vss. 10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vow and thanksgiving</td>
<td>vss. 12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account of salvation</td>
<td>vs. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vow and thanksgiving</td>
<td>vss. 17-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two basic themes of the Psalm are death and thanksgiving for the experienced deliverance. In spite of the fact that Ps 116 contains a mixture of various form elements such as prayer (vss. 2, 13, 17), thanksgiving (vss. 1-2, 12-14, 17-19), lament (vs. 4), and vows (vss. 14, 18), its overall genre can be classified as an

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\(^3\) The structural divisions are based on the outline of Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2*, 291. The LXX has divided Ps 116 into two Psalms: vss. 1-9 form Ps 114 and vss. 10-19 comprise Ps 115.
individual thanksgiving hymn.¹

Exegetical Notes

In vs. 3 the Psalmist describes his agonizing situation as that of certain and imminent destruction. The word “death” occurs three times in the Psalm (vss. 3, 8, 15) and functions as one of the thematic key terms. Not only does it identify the deadly crisis which evoked the Psalmist’s prayer but it also leads to the assertion that he called out to Yahweh in the midst of his distress and Yahweh saved his life.

The vivid imagery of death, various metaphors, synonymous parallelism, personification of death, and the basic vocabulary of Ps 116:3 are very similar to those already discussed. In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions see the exegesis sections on 2 Sam 22:6 and Jonah 2:3, where the term Sheol functions as a poetic designation of the domain of the dead.²

Ps 139:8

Translation and Textual Remarks

If I ascend to heavens, You are there;
if I make Sheol my bed, behold, You are there.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 139:1-24 is one of the most intimate, personal prayers of trust and


²See also Pss 17:11, 13; 18:6, 40:12.
confidence in Yahweh as an ever-present and all-knowing God. However, despite the most intensive and comprehensive studies of this well-known poem, modern scholarship remains sharply divided concerning its structural arrangement and the classification of its genre.

For the purpose of this study it will suffice to use the traditional division of the Psalm into four major sections, each of which is concluded by two successive lines that bring into focus the unit's central theme:

- Yahweh is omniscient (vss. 1-6)
- Yahweh is omnipresent (vss. 7-12)
- Yahweh/Creator is omnipotent (vss. 13-18)
- Yahweh/Judge is holy (vss. 19-24)

To produce an exact genre classification of the Psalm is almost impossible, because various elements of thanksgiving, praise, prayer, lament, and complaint overlap each other. Therefore, as Gerstenberger puts it, "tentatively we may call the psalm a Meditation."

1Bratcher and Reyburn, *The Book of Psalms*, 1125.


5For a discussion on the problems of denoting genre of Ps 139, see Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2*, 406.
Exegetical Notes

The unit (vss. 7-12) to be briefly examined starts by two rhetorical questions, which not only address the main point of the whole Psalm but also lead to an absolutely negative answer to both of them.

_where shall I go from Your spirit?_  

_or where shall I flee from Your presence [Your face]?_

As is seen from vs. 7, both questions contain perfectly balanced synonymous parallelism. The verb "shall I go" is parallel to "shall I flee", and the expression "from Your Spirit" equals to "from Your face"; thus both phrases function as synonymous references to Yahweh Himself. This interrogative language is further intensified in a forceful and emphatic way by a double employment of the interrogative pronoun "where", which alludes to the one and only possible answer, "Nowhere." Both rhetorical questions of vs. 7 are further amplified and answered in the subsequent mental images.

_if I ascend to heavens, You are there_

_and if I make Sheol my bed, behold, You are there._

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2Leupold, *The Psalms*, 945.

In order to describe Yahweh’s omniscience (vss. 1-6)\(^1\) and His omnipresence (vss. 7-12) the author uses not only parallelisms, but also merisms and polar expressions.\(^2\) How the spatial aspects of various extremes refer to the Psalmist and to Yahweh’s universality is clearly demonstrated by vs. 8. The opposites of יְבַעַל (“heavens”) andְּבַעַל do not function as two isolated spots but include every known area and everything that is in between, thus implying Yahweh’s total control over the whole created universe.

Despite the fact that the phrase רָאָל (“if I ascend to”) is parallel to רָאָל (“if I make bed”), they emphasize two diametrically opposed movements. The verb רָאָל is in Hiphil רָאָל and basically means “to spread out a bed” or in the passive Hophal “be spread out for a bed,” which brings into focus the fact that the Psalmist “alludes to spreading out Sheol as his resting place.”\(^3\) In Isa 14:11 the verb is in Hophal רָאָל (“are spread out”) which creates the imagery of the grave where worms function as the bed for the dead king of Babylon.\(^4\) Likewise, Job speaks about Sheol as his home and making his bed in darkness.\(^5\)

In order to develop and intensify the progressive development of the thought even more, namely, that there is no place in the whole universe which is beyond

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\(^1\)Because of space limitations no key vocabulary of vss. 1-6 will be discussed.


\(^4\)Compare with Ps 132:3.

\(^5\)Job 17:13.
Yahweh’s operation, the Psalmist refers to other imaginable extreme locations and circumstances: יָדְיוֹ נֵבֶל (“the wings of the dawn”) and לַטְחֵיוֹ נֵבֶל (“the remotest part of the sea,” vs. 9), כּוֹכֶב (“darkness,” here parallel to Sheol), לַיְלָה (“night”), and אָרֶץ (“light,” vss. 11-12). All these spatial, geographical, and time specifications, including the term Sheol, serve one purpose, to reinforce the image of Yahweh’s “absolute sovereignty over His creation.” Indeed, this is a solemn thought that no spatial or physical aspects or elements can ever limit Yahweh’s presence or knowledge, which by itself contains not only a message of comfort and hope but also a stark warning of impossibility to hide or escape Yahweh’s scrutiny. This is further confirmed by two laconic assertions יָדְיוֹ נֵבֶל (“there You are”) and לַטְחֵיוֹ נֵבֶל (literally, “behold, You”), which intensify the Psalmist’s conclusions to the utmost, leaving no doubt concerning Yahweh’s omniscience and omnipresence.

As the term Sheol in vs. 8 does not contain any qualitative element or descriptive characteristics, its sole function as merism is to point out the lowest location on this earth, which is the grave. On the other hand, linked together with

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1VanGerner, Psalms, 5:637. According to Rogerson and McKay, “The statement that God is present in Sheol contradicts other statements in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 88:5) that those in Sheol are cut off from God’s help.” Psalms 101-150, 157. However, it should be noted that these texts do not contradict each other. The examination of the term Sheol in various contexts shows that Sheol as the place of the dead entails all its negative associations: decay, decomposition, and rottenness (Gen 2:7; 3:19). Furthermore, the Hebrew Scripture reveals that the “breath of life” of the dead returns to Yahweh Who gave it, “You take away their breath, they expire and return to their dust” (Ps 104:29-30; Qoh 12:7). Nothing and nobody is out of His control. He is able to resurrect any dead person at any time He wishes to (Job 19:25-27; Dan 12:2). This is clearly seen from all the discussed references, which are in perfect harmony among themselves and context. The problem starts when a person begins to believe in some kind of miserable existence in the underworld. See also Claus Westermann, Elements of Old Testament Theology, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 100-101.
other parallel specifications Sheol is shown as an absolutely unprotected place, which is under the total control of Yahweh. The text does not contain anything that would suggest or hint of the idea of eternal punishment or the soul’s existence in the underworld. For further examination of Ps 139:8 see exegesis on Amos 9:2 and Deut 32:22.¹

Ps 141:7

כְּמָה פָלַח וְיַרְדָּן בְּאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי שֵׁאֹוֵל

Translation and Textual Remarks

As one plowing and breaking open in the earth,² So our bones³ have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Ps 141:1-10 is a short but distinct prayer for deliverance from the wicked and their enticements.⁴ Only Yahweh is able to intervene and protect the Psalmist’s


²The meaning of vss. 5-7 is obscure and therefore problematic. This has been reflected in the most diverse translations. For instance, vs. 7a in NRSV reads: “Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land,” whereas NIV translates, “They will say, ‘As one plows and breaks up the earth.’” RSV renders, “As a rock which one cleaves and shatters on the land.” And LXE has, “As a lump of earth is crushed upon the ground.”

³In the MT is (‘our bones”), but in the Syriac and some manuscripts of the Septuagint one reads “their bones.” See Bratcher and Reyburn, The Book of Psalms, 1144; Allen, Psalms 101-150, 271.

⁴Ps 141 is very similar to Ps 1.
life. Structurally the prayer contains the following thematic components:

- Prayer for deliverance (vss. 1-2)
- Prayer for protection (vss. 3-4)
- Prayer for the condemnation of the wicked (vss. 5-7)
- Prayer for protection from the wicked (vss. 8-10)

Generally scholars identify Ps 141 as a classic complaint of an individual or the individual lament genre, which includes such form elements as imprecation (vss. 5-7), petition (vss. 3-4, 9), condemnation (vss. 6-7), and confession of confidence (vs. 8).

**Exegetical Notes**

Despite the fact that vss. 5-7 contain particular textual and interpretation problems and scholars have failed to arrive at a unified understanding of these obscure verses, it is clear that in vs. 7 the Psalmist speaks about death and destruction. Whether the simile "as one plowing and breaking open in the earth" is meant to designate splitting of "rock" (RSV), cutting and cleaving "wood" (KJV), or "millstone" (NJB), or plowing and breaking up "the earth" (NIB) in the current study does not matter much. The point is that the author associates the participle מִשָּׂרֶשׁ, which is translated by scholars as "shattered millstone," "rock,"

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5 Ash and Miller, *Psalms*, 434.
“wood,” or “clods,” with עננים ("our bones") that נוֹרִים...לאָדוֹלִים ("have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol").

It should be noted that some scholars use the phrase נוֹרִים...לאָדוֹלִים for the designation of “the entrance of the underworld" or they point out that the phrase means “denying to the dead even shadowy existence in Sheol," or that the wicked “have been devoured by Sheol and that their bones are scattered around its mouth." However, the text does not provide the basis for such arguments, as will be seen below.

First of all, normally the word הָרָה ("mouth") means an organ of the body that serves for eating, drinking, or speaking. Here the construction לָלְפָּה ("at the mouth of") is used in a figurative sense to refer to the place of the dead or the mouth of Sheol. Similarly the Hebrew Scriptures speaks about וְהָלְפָּה ("at the mouth of the well," Gen 29:2), הָלְפָּה ("to the mouth of the cave," Josh 10:18), and the author of Gen 4:11 refers to the ground figuratively as to a living organism, רְפָּה ("which has opened its mouth") to receive Abel’s blood.

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1Dahood sees נוֹרִים...לאָדוֹלִים to be in parallel with נוֹרִים...לאָדוֹלִים. Dahood, Psalms III: 101-150, 313.
3Rogerson and McKay, Psalms 101-150, 164.
6See the exegesis section on Num 16:30, 33.
None of these occurrences suggests some kind of opening leading to the underworld. Furthermore, in a way the word יָמֵּש functions as its parallel term יָמָּע (“throat”), which metaphorically describes the readiness of Sheol to devour its victims.¹ The preposition ל ("to," "at," "by") in the construct form of יָמֵּש emphasizes the spatial aspect where its purpose is to mark the location at a given point, that is, beside or around the mouth of Sheol.²

The verb יָמֵּש (“scatter”), which in vs. 7 is in the Niphal form יָמֵּש (“have been scattered”), occurs only ten times and is used to refer to Yahweh’s judgments over the enemies of His people and also to His own representatives who were sent into exile.³ Accordingly, Ps 53:5 describes God scattering יָמֵּש (“the bones [of the ungodly]”) and Ps 89:11 reminds the reader that יָמֵּש (“You scattered Your enemies”). Whether the Psalmist has in mind the bones of the righteous dead, or the wicked ones who may have been destroyed “by an earthquake,”⁴ it does not influence the nature, function, or purpose of Sheol in the current text.

Consequently, the basic imagery is that of (our/their) scattered bones lying

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²See Waltke and O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 205.


⁴See Beyse, "סָפָך," TDOT, 11:304-309.
beside or near the grave like the “clods of earth,” “pieces of wood,” or “rock.”

Because the text does not contain any additional qualifying or descriptive elements concerning the term Sheol, except the already mentioned יָם, nothing more than the grave can be meant here.¹

Job

Introduction

The second section of this chapter deals with the book of Job, which along with Proverbs and Qohelet forms the so-called subcategory of Wisdom Literature in the Writings. Unlike the Torah and the Prophets, these books focus on the presentation and description of wisdom (חכֹמָה), which requires a totally distinct vocabulary and literary style.

The book of Job as an unmatched work of the Hebrew Scriptures is unique and complex from its literary and artistic perspective. The book is especially important for the current study as it deals with the most fundamental questions of human existence: the issues of life and death, suffering and the grave, resurrection and the nature of Yahweh. In this context the term Sheol occurs eight times, which should help either to discover new insights concerning its nature, function, and purpose or to better establish more the ones already discussed.²

¹For the view that the bones are of “God’s saints, scattered right at the mouth of the grave where they are buried, but not buried in utter hopelessness,” and “the belief in the resurrection” see Herbert C. Leupold, The Psalms (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1959), 957.

Translation and Textual Remarks

As the cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who is going down to Sheol does not come up.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Job’s first response, covering two chapters, consists of a monologue which because of its double focus has two distinct sections. In chap. 6:1-30 Job addresses his three friends/comforters, whereas in chap. 7:1-21 he directs his speech to God.

Accordingly, chap. 7 can stand on its own as a block, which can be divided thematically into the following major units:1

- Description of man’s lot and Job’s sufferings (vss. 1-6)
- Brevity of life (vss. 7-10)
- Complaint and description of suffering (vss. 11-16)
- Questions to God (vss. 17-21)

Chap. 7 is dominated by various complaint motifs and elements, which blend the description of afflictions and fate of human beings in general together with the agonizing sufferings of Job and certainty of his near death. Depending on one’s approach, the overall genre of chap. 7 can be denoted either as that of a lament or as a disputation speech, whereas vss. 7-10 function as a complaint against God.

Exegetical Notes

In the book of Job the term Sheol occurs mainly in the contexts of death, which can be characterized as highly dramatic, passionate, and extremely intense expressions, thus presenting unique cases for the disclosure of the nature and function of the word under investigation.

Before starting the exegesis of Job 7:9 and other appropriate references in their contexts, it should be noted that as in the previous scriptural passages many scholars refer to Sheol as a place of some kind of existence. For instance, F. Andersen points out that “in spite of the vagueness with which the living conditions of Sheol are described, the continuation of conscious personal existence and identity after death is...”

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1 See Clines, Job 1-20, 17:168.
3 Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 25.
clearly believed."¹ Others emphasize that "Sheol . . . was not life . . . It was a kind of existence to be abhorred,"² or point out that "in Sheol . . . the Shades, in their dreary, shadowy existence . . . could neither praise Him, nor experience His benefits (Ps 6:8; 88:6, 11-13; Is 38:18),"³ or that man "by reason of his soul, remains in existence after death."⁴ And N. Habel declares that "to descend to Sheol is to enter the meeting house of the living in the realm of the dead below (30:23)."⁵ All these statements can be accepted or denied after the examination of the term Sheol is complete, and its nature, function, and purpose become manifest.

First of all, in vss. 7-10, including their broader context, Job fixes his mind on the subject of the brevity of his life, which is repeatedly emphasized by means of various similes and metaphors. It is particularly important to note that whenever and whatever imagery is used by Job to emphasize the transitory nature of his life, it does


not contain any allusion to an afterlife in the underworld. Only some of the
metaphorical imagery, which Job employs to picture the fundamental truth concerning
the fragility and shortness of human life, will be mentioned here.

my days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and they come to an end without hope/thread2
for a breath is my life for a breath are my days
As the cloud vanishes and is gone for a shadow are our days on earth
My days are swifter than a runner they have passed with ships of reed
like a vulture [eagle] that swoops on its pray

The basic function of this vocabulary is to refer to the time element of fleetness
and speed as emphatically as possible. Its employment clearly demonstrates that Job
understood the transience and fragility of human life, and that is why he addresses
himself to God by introducing vs. 7 with the imperative form "remember," which by contrast means "do not forget me," "do not leave me." In vss. 7-10 Job
intertwines two unquestionable facts: (1) death is unavoidable, it ends all, and (2) after
death there is nothing in Sheol, as it is seen from the subsequent texts.

Such expressions as "my eye will never again see good," vs. 7) and "and I will not be," vss. 8, 21) are clear and mean

1William B. Stevenson, “Rhythm, Assonance, Structure, and Style,” in The
Poem of Job: A Literary Study with a New Translation (London: Oxford University
Press, 1947), 56-72; Clines, Job 1-20, 17:186. Compare with 1 Chr 29:15; Isa 38:12;
40:6-7; 44:22; Hos 13:3; Pss 37:20; 39:7; 78:39; 90:5-6; 102:4, 12; 103:15-16; 129:23;
144:4.

2The NEB renders “and come to an end as the thread runs out.”
“I will be dead” and “I will no longer exist,” thus excluding any idea of life’s continuation after death in the netherworld. If there were some kind of existence after death, Job certainly would have alluded to it.

Moreover, in the first line of vs. 9 Job illustrates his transient life by the image of the נָעַר (“cloud”), which rapidly vanishes נָעַר (“and is gone”). Here the verb נָעַר (“to go,” “walk”) has the sense of “disappearing” and is parallel to נָעַר (“to go down”), thus clearly referring to death and dying.

In the second line of vs. 9 Job continues to elaborate on his idea of death further by referring to the nature of Sheol: נָעַר (“so he who is going to Sheol does not come up”). Job does not allude here to the spirit or soul’s consciousness in Sheol. On the contrary, his choice of terminology demonstrates his keen perception and clear insights of life-and-death issues. Such straightforward expressions as נָעַר (“and I will not be,” vss. 8, 21), נָעַר (“be finished,” “cease,” “vanish,” vs. 9), נָעַר (“and it goes,” “disappears,” vs. 9), and נָעַר (“he who is going down,” vs. 9) affirm not only his conviction of imminent end, but also refer to

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2 Dhorme, Job, 205.


4 נָעַר,” BDB, 35.

5 נָעַר,” BDB, 478.

6 See discussion on Gen 37:35.

7 Clines, Job 1-20, 187.
the finality of death, the decomposition of his body in Sheol from which nobody

believing ("will come up," vs. 9). Besides, the construction of the second line of vs. 9
functions as "an emphatic denial of the possibility of return to earth after death."

It should also be mentioned that a number of scholars use vs. 9 to assert that
"disbelief in the resurrection could hardly be affirmed more bluntly than it is here." However, the phrase הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים ("does not come up") is limited in its meaning and controlled by the following verse. The statement; הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים לְבָנָי ("he will not return again to his house," vs. 10) does not speak about the denial of resurrection at all, but refers back to vs. 9. The phrase הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים ("he will not come up") coupled with הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים ("he will not return again") forms the strongest possible double negation, the purpose of which is to provide an additional clarifying explanation that the dead in Sheol do not rise to return to their families. Even if one takes the phrase הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים in isolation, it does not refer to definiteness and finality in an eschatological sense, but to an unfinished process. It means that the statement of vs. 9 הִנְּני הָאֱלֹהִים does not support the view which emphasizes a denial of the resurrection.

The observation that by the term Sheol Job means simply the grave where his

1 Victor E. Reichert, Job: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary (Jerusalem: Soncino Press, 1985), 30. E. Dhorme comments that "for the Hebrews, as for the Babylonians, Sheol is situated beneath the earth: one goes down to it, one comes up from it (cf. 1 S 28:11ff.)." Furthermore, Dhorme refers to the meeting of Saul with the witch of Endor, who brought up Samuel as "the case of an extraordinary intervention." Edouard Dhorme, A Commentary on the Book of Job, trans. Harold Knight (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 103. For the discussion on 1 Sam 28, see Excursus 2.

physical body goes, without any further implications, is further demonstrated by the parallel terminology, which occurs in a broader context in the book of Job. The phrase יִרְדָּה אַשָּׁרִי is equivalent to the expression of vs. 21 יִרְדָּה נַפְסִי (“I will lie down in the dust”), where the verb שָׁכַב (“to lie down”) functions as a metaphor for death. In other words, to go down to Sheol means to lie in the dust, because נַפְס (“dust”) is one of the major characteristics of Sheol. In Job 17:16 נַפְס and Sheol form a direct parallel (see also Dan 12:2), whereas in Job 20:11 and 21:26 the expression יִרְדָּה נַפְס (“they lie down in the dust”) primarily refers to death and then to the grave.

Of particular importance for the current discussion is chap. 3:13-22, which contains one of the longest and most elaborate descriptions of the place of the dead in the entire Hebrew Bible, though the term Sheol is not directly mentioned. Despite the fact that Job employs here a variety of terms to refer to the place of the dead in general terms, the imagery of death and the descriptive elements of the grave are so precise that he leaves no place for misinterpretation or manipulation. For instance, he employs the noun קָבֶּר (“grave”) as an equivalent for the term Sheol in Job 3:22, 5:26, and 10:19, while the grave of 3:22 functions as a parallel term to מַטָּה (“death”) in vs. 21. Job also refers to the place of the dead or the grave by employing its antecedent, the adverb מַטָּה (“there,” see 3:17 [twice] and 19), whereas in 7:21 he denotes the

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1Because of time and space restrictions, the discussion of chap. 3 will focus only on the major key elements.

place of the dead as רamburg ("dust"), and in 10:21 and 22 as ינמ ("earth," "land").

Consequently all five words, ניבר, נבר, נבר, נבר, and רamburg, serve as an analogous vocabulary of the term Sheol.

Furthermore, the book of Job vividly pictures the nature of Sheol by employing a variety of synonymous terms, which function not only as descriptive elements but undoubtedly qualify Sheol as the place of the dead. For example, in order to call attention to the fundamental nature of Sheol he uses at least five different words for darkness: (1) ליב ("darkness," 3:4, 5) and (2) איב ("shadow of death," 3:5).

In 10:21 Job qualifies Sheol as "land" by employing both terms ליב and איב simultaneously, that is, ליב איב ("the land of darkness and the shadow of death"). The other qualifiers are: (3) נב ("darkness," "gloom," 3:6) and (4) זב ("darkness," 10:22). The last three words for darkness are piled up in 10:22 in the following way, ליב איב זב ("the land of utter gloom like darkness of shadow of death"), which is also designated as (5) וリア ("and no order" or "disorder," "chaos"). Though it is impossible to discern

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1See Excursus 1.


4"Aib," BDB, 734.


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all the semantic nuances intended by these words and what exactly they imply, it is
apparent that they refer not only to the grave as the place of darkness but also allude to
the creation account of Gen 1:2.¹ In fact, by using the language of synthetic
parallelism, Job reverses the order of creation and returns to the place of nonexistence
and darkness, which is also described in the prophetic vision of Jer 4:23-26.²

In addition to the five nouns which lead to the powerful intensification of the
imagery of “darkness,” chap. 3 contains nine other no less important terms, thus
providing additional insights concerning the nature and function of the term Sheol in
Job. Four of the nine terms stand next to each other in vs. 13.

For now I would be lying down and quiet
I would be asleep and then at rest

By employing the verb נתנ = ("to lie down")³ metaphorically, Job creates a
vivid mental picture of himself as being dead and lying in the grave.⁴ He continues to
describe his state at death by two other verbs: ב": ("be quiet,” “undisturbed,”

¹See Michael Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV:23-26 and Job III:3-13: A Recovered
Use of the Creation Pattern,” VT 21 (1971): 151-167. See also Rick D. Moore, “The

²Habel, The Book of Job, 104.

³See Excursus 1, 2, and 3.

“motionless”)¹ and נַעֲשֶׁהָ (“sleep,” “be asleep”)² Because of “the similarities of one deceased to one asleep”³ the last word נַעֲשֶׁהָ functions as a metaphor for designating death and thus refers to “the sleep of death.”⁴ The fourth verb נָשָׂא (“to rest,” “be quiet,” “cease,” see in vs. 17)⁵ also “relates to rest in death,”⁶ that is, Job would be free from all his earthly troubles if he were dead and in the grave/Sheol.

Job 3:17-19 contains the second cluster of five similar terms, which describe the place of the dead almost in the same way as vs. 13. However, this cluster differs from vs. 13 by the emphasis Job puts on the earthly social structure and its total reversal in Sheol. It is significant to note that such terms and expressions as נָשָׂא (“they cease from raging,” vs. 17),⁷ נָעְשֶׁה (“they are at peace,” vs. 18)⁸ וַעֲשֵׂה מְתַל (“they hear not,” vs. 18), and נָשָׂא מְתַל (“are free,” vs. 19)⁹ are used in a definite and precise sense in order to describe the state of the dead in the grave,

²נַעֲשֶׁה,” BDB, 445.
⁵נָשָׂא,” BDB, 629.
⁷נָשָׂא,” BDB, 293; “נָשָׂא,” BDB, 919.
⁸נָשָׂא,” BDB, 983.
⁹נָשָׂא,” BDB, 344.
thus providing a comprehensive picture of its nature and function.

Finally, in chap. 3:11 Job laments that if he had died (מָלָא) and perished (נָתוֹנָה) at his birth, he would lie down with the dead whom he describes according to the standards of this earth, namely, "with kings and counselors of earth," vs. 14) and "with princes," vs. 15). He points out that in the grave (there are the wicked," vs. 17) and "the exhausted of strength," vs. 17), and together with them are ("prisoners," vs. 18), "slave driver," vs. 18), ("the small and the great alike are there," vs. 19), ("and the slave," vs. 19) with his ("master," vs. 19). The expression functions as a summary of the previous verses, thus including everyone on the list of the dead. The power of this dynamic imagery can be attributed neither to the adjectives and their function nor to the nouns themselves, but only to what these various identified representatives of a social structure have become in Sheol. In the land of the living these various social groups were locked together and there was a distinction between them, but in death all their social differences have been annihilated.2

Consequently, as can be seen in table 16, chap. 3 contains directly interrelated and interconnected terminology representing the sphere of death, which unveils and amplifies the intrinsic nature of the term Sheol in Job 7:9 in a more expanded way.

1See Reyburn, The Book of Job, 83.
2Clines, Job 1-20, 93.
### TABLE 16

**A BRIEF SUMMARY OF DEATH TERMINOLOGY IN JOB 3 AND 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Qualifier</th>
<th>Death</th>
<th>The Dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>קבר</td>
<td>ḫāshāh</td>
<td>קבר</td>
<td>מָלַכִים</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grave</td>
<td>darkness</td>
<td>lie down</td>
<td>kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מות</td>
<td>מִלּוֹת</td>
<td>מות</td>
<td>מִשְׁפְּתִים</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death=grave</td>
<td>shadow of death</td>
<td>be quiet</td>
<td>and counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>סין</td>
<td>כֶּסֶף</td>
<td>כֶּסֶף</td>
<td>כֶּסֶף</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of death</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קערת</td>
<td>יִרְעָה</td>
<td>יִרְעָה</td>
<td>יִרְעָה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>darkness, gloom</td>
<td>be asleep</td>
<td>princes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>דם</td>
<td>דם</td>
<td>דם</td>
<td>דם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dust</td>
<td>darkness</td>
<td>rest</td>
<td>the wicked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָדָם</td>
<td>לְאָדָם</td>
<td>לְאָדָם</td>
<td>לְאָדָם</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earth</td>
<td>no order, chaos</td>
<td>at peace</td>
<td>the exhausted of strength,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>מֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>מֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>מֹשֶׁה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they hear not</td>
<td>prisoners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נוֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>נוֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>נוֹשֶׁה</td>
<td>נוֹשֶׁה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be free</td>
<td>slave driver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מַעַל</td>
<td>מַעַל</td>
<td>מַעַל</td>
<td>מַעַל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cease</td>
<td>the small and the great</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, it is hard to comprehend on what grounds scholars take more than a dozen specific synonymous terms, which refer to death and the place of the dead, and assert that Job is dealing here “with death as a quiet, restful, inactive existence,”¹ or “degrees of punishment in the afterlife,”² or “that the dominant image of existence in the underworld he presents is of peace and rest.”³

The above statements concerning the quiet “existence” of the dead in Sheol are

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³Clines, *Job 1-20*, 91.
almost impossible to reconcile with those particular images of death which form a comprehensive description of Sheol. It is a great mistake to identify Sheol as the place of the departed spirits, because Job was not looking for the spirit or soul existence in the underworld, he was longing for the grave.\(^1\) Job, as was seen above, employs five synonyms for the term Sheol to designate the grave, and not six different locations. To qualify Sheol as the place of darkness he uses five different terms, all of which are inseparably joined with the grave. In other words, as light is associated with life, so darkness is associated with death and the domain of the dead. In addition, Job employs a cluster of nine different words to repeatedly emphasize the fact that in Sheol no physical, mental, or spiritual activity is possible, because in the grave there is a total absence of consciousness and existence. In the grave there is no social distinction; whether one belongs to kings, princes, prisoners, slaves, the wicked, or to the “blameless and upright” like Job himself (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3), it does not matter, because in death “all corpses look alike.”\(^2\) This comprehensive picture of death and the place of the dead has nothing to do with existence in the underworld, but solely refers to the grave. That is the essence of the term Sheol also in Job 7:9.

\[\text{Job 11:8}\]

\[\text{נְבוֹדָה} \text{ שָׁמְיוֹת} \text{ כֹּחַרָה} \text{ בְּעִם} \text{ מְשָׁאֵל} \text{ לִמְדוֹדָם}\]

\(^1\)Harris, “Why Hebrew Shōl Was Translated ‘Grave,’” 68.

Translation and Textual Remarks

It is higher than the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?

Text Unit and Its Genre

In chap. 11:1-20 Zophar the Naamathite, the third friend of Job, delivers the first of his two speeches. At first, Zophar challenges Job's understanding of God's motives and wisdom, and then instructs Job to repent in order to restore his previous relationship with God. The speech naturally falls into three main parts.

1. Zophar rebukes Job (vss. 1-6)
2. Zophar examines the wisdom of God (vss. 7-12)
3. Zophar calls Job to repentance (vss. 13-20)

However, because the term Sheol of vs. 8 is in the focus of this current study and is located in the second section of the outline, it is necessary to divide vss. 7-12 at least into two smaller subunits. Consequently, the structuring and movement of thought of the second unit can be presented in the following way: God's incomprehensibility is the main focus in vss. 7-9, whereas vss. 10-12 picture God's indisputable justice.

As for its genre, chap. 11 belongs to the category of the disputation speeches.

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1. The phrase הַרְגָּן הַשָּׁמַיִם literally means, "the heights of heavens."


4. Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 29; Clines, Job 1-20, 17:257.
which is structured by legal (vss. 2-6) and wisdom motifs (vs. 12), hymnic (vss. 7-8) and prophetic elements (vss. 15-19), and other specific rhetorical devices.  

**Exegetical Notes**

The term Sheol of vs. 8 is located in a passage of great beauty and also of a fundamental truth that God is absolute in His power as well as His wisdom. It is exactly this theme of God’s unfathomable knowledge that is introduced in the form of questions by Zophar in vs. 7.

Can you fathom the depths of God?

Or can you discover the limit of the Almighty?

The two lines of vs. 7 contain parallel rhetorical questions. Both lines have the same key verb נָצַר (“[can] you find out”), which in the current context has the meaning “to discover a deep truth of a matter,” “explore,” “attain,” “learn,” or “penetrate.” Zophar employs the same verb נָצַר twice, but each time with a different connotation. Moreover, each question demands a negative reply, “you cannot find out the depth of God” and “you cannot discover the limit of the 

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1Ibid., 257-258.

2Compare Job 11:2 and 38:16.


Almighty.”1 This idea is further emphasized by two synonyms מַעֲנֶה ("searching," “thing to be searched out”) and הַכְּלֵי ("end," “perfection”), which express God’s unlimited greatness, wisdom, and power. Here the object of the search is not established because it is “unsearchable” and “immeasurable,” and therefore the searching is to have no success or any satisfactory result.2

Zophar’s questioning reaches its further progression and intensification in vs. 8 and 9, where he employs a form succinct but powerful by nature-spatial imagery.

_vs. 8_

what can you do? 
It is higher than heavens

what can you know? 
deeper than Sheol

_vs. 9_

longer than earth is its measure
and broader than the sea

It may seem that in these verses the identification of the objects of the investigation would lead to the expected results, but the goal of the quest is inaccessible, unrealizable, and unattainable. The spatial dimensions expressed by the masculine plural noun פֵּבָתי ("heights") and three feminine adjectives מַעֲנֶה ("deep"), רָאָה ("long"), נֶחָלָה ("broad," “wide”) function to denote the totality of


God’s created world and refer to הָלַיְלֵת (“end,” “perfection”) in vs. 7. The main purpose of the four dimensional terms is to describe the two noun pairs, הָאָרֶץ (“heavens”) and לְאֶלֶף (“the grave”), הָאָרֶץ (“earth”) and יָם (“sea”), one of which refers to vertical extremities and the other to horizontal vastness.

In light of this exegetical information the function and purpose of the term Sheol becomes manifest. Despite the fact that both nouns שָׂאֶל and לְאֶלֶף of vs. 8 are in parallel lines, they represent two extremities, the function of which is diametrically opposite by their nature as well as direction. The term Sheol is used only in an illustrative way to stress the place of the dead as the opposite location to heaven and no more.

The same is true concerning the words לֹאֵז and לְאֶלֶף. It should be noted that the adjective הַדָּקָא, with the heavens as its counterpart, denotes not only “the totality of creation” but also describes the inaccessibility to the place of the dead or Sheol. In the current context the adjective הַדָּקָא does not qualify Sheol as a bottomless pit. E. Smick argues, “The NIV should not have used the word ‘grave’ for לְאֶלֶף (שְׂאֶל) in this context. The stress is on a place that is opposite to heaven and

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1 Hartley, The Book of Job, 197-198.
2 See exegesis sections on Amos 9:2, Ps 139:8, Deut 32:22, and Ps 86:13. The last two references are very similar to the current text; however, there is no mention of the heavens above. For additional information concerning the search of wisdom at the extremities of the universe see Habel, The Book of Job, 208. Compare with Jer 23:24; Hag 2:6; Ps 135:6, which do not deal so much with the wisdom of God as with His presence and ability to intervene in human affairs. Clines, Job 1-20, 263-264.
very deep—the netherworld.” However, it is hard to agree with this conclusion, because the preposition הָא ("from," "out of") functions here as a comparative marker and should be translated as “[more] than.” It is prefixed to the term Sheol or the standard “by which the quality is measured,” that is, the wisdom of God is “deeper than Sheol” or “deeper than [the deepest] grave.” In this case the location plays a secondary role, because the emphasis is on “deeper” than.

Finally, both rhetorical questions "מָא אִם ("what can you do?") and מִי יִדְיפוּ ("what can you know?") have only one answer, “Nothing.” The term יָדַד ("to know," “learn”) which is parallel to עַד ("to do") means more than mere intellectual knowledge, as it incorporates the ability to experience and act according to that knowledge. The question “what can you know?” about Sheol, the place of the dead, leads to a negative reply. Only God has knowledge of the grave and the dead in it. It means that none of these extremities, neither heavens nor Sheol, can be used as a standard to measure the immeasurable and unfathomable wisdom of God.

Job 14:13

מִי יַדִּיפַךְ בַּשָּׁאָל יָדָיוֹ בְּשָׁאָל יָדָיוֹ וּרְאֵשָׁב יָדָיוֹ

תָּשִׁית לְיִדְיוֹ וְשָׁב

1Smick, “Job,” EBC, 4:918.


3Ibid.


6Reichert, Job, 52.
Translation and Textual Remarks

Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would set a limit for me, and remember me!

Text Unit and Its Genre

The speech of Job in chaps. 12:1-14:22 marks the end of the first cycle of discourses and leads to the second. Structurally each chapter represents one separate section or a major speech of Job. Habel divides Job 14 into two major parts that consist of vss. 1-4 and 7-22. The basic arrangement of chap. 14:1-22 can be outlined in the following way:

- Human suffering and brevity of life (vss. 1-6)
- A contrast between tree and man concerning their future (vss. 7-12)
- Job's desire for a respite in Sheol (vss. 13-17)
- Hopelessness of man's lot (vss. 18-22)

The overall genre is a lament focused on the brevity of human life and the inescapability of death. The speech consists of various genre elements: elaborated wish (vss. 13-17), wisdom instruction (vss. 7-9), plea (vss. 4-6), contrast (vss. 10-12), complaint (vss. 18-22), similes (vss. 11, 18, 19), etc.

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1Habel, _The Book of Job_, 215-216; Murphy, _Wisdom Literature_, 29.

2In his analysis Habel focuses mainly on axioms, nature analogies, and pivot questions. Habel, _The Book of Job_, 235-239.

3Reyburn divides the Psalm into three discourses on despair which alternate with two on hope: vss. 1-6 (despair), vss. 7-9 (hope), vss. 10-12 (despair), vss. 13-17 (hope), and vss. 18-22 (despair). Reyburn, _The Book of Job_, 265. For other variants see Clines, _Job 1-20_, 285-286; Habel, _The Book of Job_, 235-239; Andersen, _Job_, 169-170.

4Rowley, _Job_, 127.

5Especially see Clines, _Job 1-20_, 287-288; Murphy, _Wisdom Literature_, 30.
Exegetical Notes

In chap. 14 Job pictures his desperate circumstances by means of an extensive description of a human condition which in many ways is similar to the material discussed in Job 7:9. However, a new element emerges here as Job focuses on human subsistence with all its diverse life-and-death aspects and contrasts them with the cut-down tree, placing emphasis on the future life.

It is interesting to note how scholars understand death and the nature of the term Sheol in chap. 14. For example, Hartley writes, “In Sheol that person is aware of only his own disembodied, shadowy existence” and “for in OT thought at death the body remains behind in the grave and the person or self descends to Sheol.”1 Habel, in turn, comments that “they are not totally distinguished at death, but reduced to shades with a capacity for pain and self-pity.”2 Reyburn makes a similar remark, “that the dead body, for at least a time, continues to feel pain.”3 Unfortunately, these statements contradict the earlier conclusions drawn concerning the sphere of the dead; that is why the necessity of discovering the nature and function of the term Sheol in Job 14:13 becomes apparent.

The verse under investigation not only is located in the midst of the intertwined motifs of death, resurrection, judgment,4 and hope, but the specific vocabulary of this

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2Habel, The Book of Job, 244.


4See Job 9:5, 13, 32-34; 13:20-21; 14:13. Because of space limitations the “judgment” theme will not be considered here, except as it occurs in direct context of the term Sheol.
fourfold pattern is found in vs. 13 itself. When in his distress Job cries out "who will give me," or "oh that" (lit., “you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me”), he uses two synonymous Hiphil verbs ("hide," “treasure up”) and ("hide," “conceal”), thus emphasizing his agonizing wish for death. The sufferings of Job are so excruciating that an immediate death seems to be the most attractive option.

The fact that Job had a clear understanding concerning the main anthropological issues is undoubtedly demonstrated by the frequent recurrence of the life-and-death imagery and his particular emphasis on it. As was seen from the discussion of Job 7:9, in order to underline the brevity, transience, and fragility of a human life Job repeatedly draws analogies and comparisons from nature. For example, in 14:2 Job uses two similes, ("and he flees like a shadow and does not last") and ("like a flower he comes forth and withers"), and in vs. 6 he refers to a hireling. Nothing is more unsubstantial or floating than a shadow or the short-lived life of a flower. The imagery is “that of silence and sudden disappearance,” which by itself excludes any idea of further movement, progression, or existence.

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1 See also Job 6:8; 11:5; 13:5; 14:4, 13; 19:23 (twice); 23:3; 29:2; 31:31, 35.

2 "רָכָּב," BDB, 860; Siegfried Wagner, "דַּעַם," TDOT, 12:450-454.


4 1 Chr 29:15; Pss 102:11; 144:4; Qoh 6:12.

5 Isa 40:6-7; Pss 37:2, 20; 90:5-6; 103:15-16.

To describe the inescapability of death Job uses the basic four terms for man both interchangeably and comprehensively, namely, (1) רָעַשׁ ("man," vss. 1, 10) which as a generic term for mankind alludes to man's substance, that humans are "dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7); (2) עָבָדְ("strong man," vss. 10, 14); (3) נָחַל ("man," "male," vs. 12), and (4) נָחַל ("weak," "mortal man," vs. 19). By highlighting these lexical nuances Job achieves a double effect: (1) he clearly demonstrates human frailty and (2) he confirms death as a great leveler.

Furthermore, the variety of verbs and various images used by Job to designate death or dying provides not only a rather clear picture of the nature and function of Sheol but also leads to the intensification of the major point, which is the finality of death. According to Job, נָחַל comes forth "and withers," "is cut off," vs. 2),1 אֱלֹהֵי סְדָרִים ("and he flees," vs. 2),2 נָחַל ("and a strong man dies," vs. 10), נָחַל ("and is prostrate," vs. 10), נָחַל ("and he breathes his last," "dies," vs. 10), נָחַל ("and where is he?" vs. 10), נָחַל ("and man lies down," vs. 12), נָחַל ("and he rises not," vs. 12), נָחַל ("they awake not," vs. 12), and נָחַל ("they are not roused from their sleep," vs. 12), נָחַל ("and he goes," vs. 20), נָחַל ("changing his face," vs. 19) 2

1 "עָבָדְ," BDB, 576.


3 "עָבָדְ," BDB, 325.

4 As was seen previously, the term נָחַל is often used as a metaphor for "dying." See Gen 15:2; 1 Kgs 2:2; 1 Chr 17:11; Job 10:21; 19:10; Ps 39:14; Qoh 3:20; "עָבָדְ," BDB, 237.
and which is parallel to “and he goes.” It is particularly important to note that about half of the above vocabulary refers to the process of dying and the other half to the state of the dead in Sheol. However, none of these terms contain the slightest hint that the dead in Sheol continue to exist in one form or another.

Moreover, in vs. 21 Job focuses on the state of the dead by providing a detailed explanation which contains clear insights concerning the nature and function of the term Sheol, (“his sons may come to honor, but he does not know it; they may be brought low, but he does not perceive it”). This view that the dead know nothing and that there is no knowledge in Sheol is in perfect harmony with the views expressed by the prophets and psalmists, as they strongly emphasize the finality of death and that in Sheol any mental, spiritual, or physical activity is terminated.

In order to deepen the theme of the finality of death and with it the destruction of human hope to survive the most horrible tragedies, Job employs in vss. 18 and 19 four particular observations from nature: (1) the falling mountain crumbles away,” vs. 18), (2) “and a rock is moved from its place,” vs. 18), (3) “waters wear away stones,” vs. 19), and

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1The phrase refers to the distorted face of the dead person. See “יחר,” BDB, 1040; Robert B. Chisholm, “הנה,” NIDOTTE, 4:190-191.

2See “כוס,” BDB, 1019.

3See discussions on Isa 38:18; Prov 9:18; Pss 88:11-13; 115:17; Qoh 9:5, 10.

4See vss. 7 and 19.

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(4) "the torrents wash away the soil of the earth," vs. 19). All four analogies convey one and the same message as they refer to the process of disintegration, dislodgment, and the irreversibility of the consequences. Just as "mountain," "rock," "stones," and "the soil of the earth," all of which function as symbols of immovability and durability, disappear, so also man is transient and subject to the finality of death.

Before continuing the discussion on vs. 13 it should be noted that the two parallel lines of vs. 22, אֲרוֹן בָּעֵר  יָכנָה יָבַש  יָכֲבֶל (“but his body pains him, and his soul for him mourns”) do not mean that Job suddenly contradicts himself or that he denies his previously articulated view on the state of the dead. Some scholars assert that in vs. 22 Job describes his suffering in Sheol as “both Physical . . . and mental” pain. However, this difficult verse should not be interpreted and used as a proof that the dead in Sheol suffer physically and mentally, no matter how great the scholarly tendency to implant in the text the notion of survival in the underworld.

The function of vs. 22 is predicated by the language, which is quite specific, not only here but in the whole chapter as well. On the one hand, it is employed to create a graphic imagery of the destructive power of death, and on the other, to refer to the resurrection hope. For example, in vs. 14, by picturing himself as being dead in Sheol and by using highly figurative, vivid mental pictures, Job punctuates his wish by


the figures of personification, \(\text{עַל הַיָּמִים הַקְּבָאָה, אֲנָחָה, יְהִוָֹאָהּ, הַלִּירוֹת},\) ("All the days of my service I will wait until my change comes"), and \(\text{חֲגִירָה וְאָנָנָה, אֲנָנָהּ, הַלִּירוֹת},\) ("You will call and I will answer," vs. 15). Job refers in these verses to his current situation and to the rapidly approaching event of death. Consequently, it is more than clear that in Sheol the dead do not "serve," "wait," or "answer."

Exactly the same development takes place in vs. 22 where the term \(כֹּפֶל\) ("be in pain," "anguish")\(^2\) "refers to an injury that objectively damages the vital force of a sentient being, causing subjective suffering."\(^3\) R. Moses presents a quite profound exposition on vs. 22:

Job 14:22, however, states the cause of the pain that is felt (‘al with a reflexive pronominal suffix the only occurrence in the qal of k‘b with ‘al). The man whose face God has disfigured, whom he has “dismissed,” can no longer share in the fortune, good or ill, of his own children, because he is already consigned to death. His “flesh” and “soul,” i.e., his total bodily existence, during his own lifetime are already and totally (‘ak) dominated by sorrow for his own fate (‘ālāyw yīḵ ‘āh par. ‘bl ‘ālāyw). Here the qal of k‘b denotes the pain occasioned by a sense of one’s own imminent and certain end, which leaves no room for any other human emotion.\(^4\)

This observation is in perfect harmony with Job 2:13, where the expression

\(^{1}\) There are specific life situations when, talking about death or the dead in the grave, we use in our conversational language a phraseology similar to that of Job. I have heard such expressions as "I must go; my mother (father, brother, or sister) is waiting for me" or "he, she, they are waiting for..." By referring to "waiting" only few believe that the particular dead one is "alive" in a literal sense. Generally, the term is used to allude to the rapidly approaching death of the living one who is contemplating the grave or the future individual resurrection from the grave.


\(^{3}\) Rudolf Mosis, "כֹּפֶל," \textit{TDOT}, 7:7-12.

("that his pain/grief/suffering was very great") contains the same term in the form of a noun כאהב ("pain") in order to depict his tremendous agony. The same idea and meaning are found in 16:6 where Job describes his pain that is not assuaged by the words נאבה ("my pain").

It should be noted that there is another way to interpret the verses under scrutiny, namely, by means of a poetic personification. Job ascribes to his imagined dead body sensation, intelligence, and consciousness. Moreover, this sort of figurative language in which inanimate things speak and act contains a well-known feature, which is often used concerning the objects totally devoid of these attributes (see Judg 9:8-15). Besides, vs. 22 is coupled with vs. 21, which emphasizes the fact that the dead in Sheol do not know anything. However, this approach has problems with the general context and the mode of Job's speech.

Finally, after expressing his wish in vs. 13, "Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past," Job continues by picking up an extremely significant theme, which negates the teaching of the soul's existence in the underworld and at the same time is in perfect harmony with the entire Hebrew Scripture. By carefully chosen words סגור ותודעיהו ("that You would set a limit for me, and remember me"), Job addresses vitally important theological, anthropological, and eschatological issues, which in the context of Sheol provide an answer concerning the question of how final is the finality of death.

In vs. 13, Job uses one of the major terms פָּעַם ("something prescribed," "a

1See BDB, 456.
statute or due") with at least three dimensions:

1. The dimension of time refers to the period between two fixed points, beginning and end (birth and death) or end and beginning (death and resurrection), whether in the past, present, or future. In other words, Job matches spatial and temporal aspects by referring to his life of suffering under the current cosmic order as one phase (vs. 5) and to his resurrection as another (Job 14:13; 24:1). Already in chap. 8:7 he stresses two extremely important terms, "first," "former") and (latter," "future" [of time]) which are picked up again in the following chapters.

2. Another dimension refers to the eschatologically fixed time point of individual resurrection, "and You will remember me"), which means that the point of temporal division is actualized according to a divinely appointed decree.

3. On the third dimension G. Liedke comments with the following words: “It is clear that the always involves a superior and an inferior; it is the result of an

\[1 BDB, 349; Peter Enns, ""."" NIDOTTE, 2:250-251.\]

\[2 Helmer Ringgren, ""."" TDOT, 5:139-147.\]

\[3 It should be stressed that “the biblical hope of resurrection does not come from the fertility cults or the cycle of nature.” Andersen, Job, 171; see also Donald H. Gard, “The Concept of the Future Life According to the Greek Translator of the Book of Job,” JBL 73 (1954): 137-143.\]

\[4 See Excursus 3; Janzen, Job, 111.\]

\[5 Allen, ""."" NIDOTTE, 1:1100-1106.\]

\[6 Janzen, Job, 111.\]
action carried out by the superior and affecting the inferior.\(^1\) Here the noun פְּרִי functions as the object of the verb נָשַׁל (Qal impf. 2 m. s. “You would set/appoint”) and the superior is Yahweh himself.\(^2\)

All the three dimensions come together and reach their culmination in the concluding phrase יְהֹוָה. Moreover, the idea of resurrection is further intensified by the Hiphil verb הָעַל (“that it will sprout again/change,” vs. 7),\(^3\) the noun form יָנָה (“my change,” vs. 14), referring to a “revival after death,”\(^4\) a highly significant term in Job’s vocabulary יָד (“hope,” vs. 7),\(^5\) a resurrection term יָד (“to live,” vs. 14), the question יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה יָד יָד (“if a [strong] man dies, will he live again?” vs. 14), requiring a positive answer, “Yes,”\(^6\) and finally, the language of original creation in chap. 14:15, which emphasizes the unity of Yahweh, His

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\(^2\) Compare with Jer 5:22; Ezek 16:27; Ps 148:6; Job 14:5; 23:14; 28:26; 30:10; Prov 8:28; 30:8. See also Richard Ernst Hentschke, Satzung und Setzender: Ein Beitrag zur israelitischen Rechtsterminologie, BWANT 5, no. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963), 91.

\(^3\) הָעַל, “BDB, 322.

\(^4\) יָנָה, “BDB, 322.

\(^5\) Job uses the term 12 times. יָד, “BDB, 876.

\(^6\) Here the answer is positive because of specific vocabulary and context, whereas in Ps 88:10-12, a similar rhetorical question calls for a negative response.
creation, and the resurrection of the dead.¹

This brief exegesis of Job 14:13 demonstrates that Job employs the term Sheol as a poetic synonym for the place of the dead, or more specifically, the grave. He is well aware of the nature and function of Sheol, its limitations, and the destructive power of death including its helplessness before Yahweh. This explains the absence of any description of the so-called spirit world. Instead, Job contemplates and focuses his attention on the individual resurrection, “which may be described as proto-apocalyptic in scope and character.”² It functions as the true alternative to the soul survival or shade existence in the underworld, and that is why Job is ready to go down to Sheol, his temporary “hiding place,” in faith.

Job 17:13, 16

If I wait for Sheol as my house, and spread my couch in the darkness,

Translation and Textual Remarks

13 If I wait for Sheol as my house, and spread my couch in the darkness,

¹Because of space limitations none of these terms will be discussed here. For additional comments on the individual resurrection see Excursus 3.

²Janzen, Job, 110.


To the bars of Sheol it goes down; When we descend together to the dust.

**Text Unit and Its Genre**

As part of a three-cycle series of speeches, chaps. 16 and 17 contain the fourth discourse of Job as he dialogues with each of his friends successively, or the second reply to Eliphaz. Here Job matches his wording, by means of contrast, with the ideas of the preceding speaker, but in a more aggressive and straightforward manner.

Since there is no break between the chapters they form a single coherent major block within the larger framework. Nonetheless, there is no consensus among scholars as to its basic structure, its individual units or subunits.

For the purpose of this study, which focuses mainly on vss. 13 and 16, it is not

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1The LXX has ἐτέρωσεν ἐποδερην, meaning “truly with me to Sheol” which is followed by the NASB, NJB, NEB, NSAB, AB.

2It is assumed that the verb ἁπάντησεν is Qal impf. 1 c.p. However, Owens takes ἁπάντησεν as n. f. s. paus., and translates it as “a rest (of death).” Owens, *Analytical Key of the Old Testament*, 3:189.

3For details see Andersen, *Job*, 179.

4Hartley divides the speech into four major sections: A dispute with the comforters (16:1-6); a personal lament with a complaint against God (16:7-17); the heavenly witness (16:18-22); and a personal lament (17:1-16). Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 256. Habel’s outline is much more complicated:

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necessary to solve every demarcation problem, as it is possible to divide chap. 17

thematically into the following sections:¹

1. Complaint against mockers and imminence of death (17:1-5)
2. Description of distress (17:6-9)
3. The fruitlessness of friends (17:10-12)
4. Hope in death and Sheol (17:13-16)

The overarching genre of Job 16 and 17 belongs to the category of the
disputation speech.² It contains such form elements as lament (17:1-2, 4-6, 11-16),
wisdom controversy (17:5), plea (17:3-5), complaint (17:7-10), etc.³

Exegetical Notes

Being under tremendous emotional tension, Job verbalizes the reality of his life
by three short phrases: רוחי הבולת ("my spirit is broken"), ימיה נפשי ("my days are
extinguished"), and קברני ("the grave is ready for me," 17:1). The "grave" in
the last phrase is in the plural, which literally means "graves for me." This
expression functions as a poetically compressed form to refer to the imagery of
graveyard or cemetery that awaits Job,⁴ and as there is no verb in the phrase it is
supplied by an adjective "ready" (RSV, NKJV, NRSV) or a verb "awaits" (NIV).

Job knows that his vindicator is in heavens (16:19)
and his separation from God by death is not everlasting (19:25-27), but for the time

¹G. Fohrer omits vss. 8-10 and as a result he has the following outline: 17:1-4;
5-7; 11-13; 14-16. Fohrer, Das Buch Hiob, 292-296.
²Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 32; Clines, Job 1-20, 17:376.
³For other genre elements see Clines, Job 1-20, 17:376-377.
⁴Reyburn, The Book of Job, 321.
being, death for Job is an inevitable reality that is further demonstrated in an elaborated description in 17:13-16, where Sheol and the terms related to it are analogous to the eponym noun יָדָהוֹן.

Before exegeting the unit under scrutiny, a few brief references to academic works will help us to better understand how scholars perceive and identify the place of the dead here. Generally scholars refer to the term Sheol in vss. 13-16 either as “the destination of soul,”¹ “the region of departed spirits,”² “great subterranean dungeon with gates,”³ or “a veritable dwelling place,”⁴ “composed of houses, each with a door or windows.”⁵ However, as was seen earlier, these and similar conclusions are incompatible with the speeches of Job which reveal his clear insights concerning death and the state of the dead in Sheol.

First of all, in vss. 13 and 14, which form the apodosis of conditional sentences, Job describes his seemingly fast-approaching death with all its inescapable consequences. He introduces his reflections on the grand theme of Sheol and hope with the conjunctive particle לֵךְ (“if”).⁶ At the same time vss. 15 and 16, which start

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¹Kissane, The Book of Job, 106.
²Barnes, Job, 1:302.
³Reichert, Job, 89.
⁴Dhorme, Job, 253.
⁶לֵךְ, BDB, 50.
with the interrogative adverb "where," function as the protasis. The entire unit serves as a soliloquy of Job as his thoughts are focused on death and its after-effect in Sheol.

In the first line of vs. 13, "if I wait for Sheol as my house"), Job compares the place of the dead with "house." The structure "my house" is parallel to Sheol and refers to the grave. It is instructive to note that the expressions in Job 30:23, "and the house appointed for all the living"), and in Qoh 12:4, "for man is going to his eternal home"), unmistakably designate the grave and emphasize its spatial and temporal dimensions. Similarly, the author of Ps 49:12 speaks about Sheol and the grave by succinctly picturing an impressive imagery of the consequences of death, "their tombs are their homes forever," Ps 49:12).

The second line continues to expand on the house imagery by using a familiar metaphorical expression, "[and] spread my couch in the darkness"), which also alludes to the place of the dead, the grave. The masculine noun in the phrase "in the darkness" is equivalent to both the term Sheol and

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1 "BDB, 110; Harry A. Hoffner, "TDOT, 2:107-116; Gerald H. Wilson, "NIDOTTE, 1:655-657.

2 It is recommended to read מַעֲרָה for מַעֲרָה. See Craigie, Psalms 1-50, 19:356-357.

3 For the term מַעֲרָה ("darkness") as the designation of Sheol or death see the discussion on 1 Sam 2:6; Ps 88:4; Job 7:9. See also "BDB, 365; Ps 35:6; 88:13, 19; 143:3; Lam 3:6; Job 15:30; 18:18; 22:11; Qoh 6:4; 11:8; Nah 1:8, etc.
ם"מ, each of which not only functions to create a specific mental picture of the
sphere of death, but also in a way provides some descriptive elements, referring to the
spatial and qualifying aspects of the grave.

The phrase י"נה ו"מה ("spread my couch") contains two rare words. The
first term י"נה has the meaning "to spread" or "support," whereas ו"מה is a poetic
word for a "bed" or "couch." The phrase alludes to preparing one's bed or going to
sleep, which in turn emphasizes the linguistic association between sleep and death.
The rationale for the mutual relationship between death and sleep in the grave is
rooted in their imagery and commonly shared elements. The main focus here is on the
mental picture of "spreading his couch in the darkness," which not only incorporates
the imagery of death in terms of sleep but also emphasizes the close association
between "couch/bed" and Sheol as the place of the dead. Furthermore, by means of
a comparison, A. Murtonen draws an important conclusion concerning the state of the
dead in Sheol: he refers to it as that of unconsciousness or sleeping.

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2 "ו"מה," BDB, 467.
3 McAlpine, Sleep. Divine & Human, 144.
4 See discussion on Isa 14:11; 57:9 (vs. 2); Ezek 32:21 (vs. 25). Compare 2 Chr
   16:14 and Job 21:26; Holman, "Analysis of the Text of Ps 139," 37-51, and 198-227,
esp. 50-52.
5 Aimo Edward Murtonen, The Living Soul: A Study of the Meaning of the
   Word naefæst in the Old Testament, Studia Orientalia 23, no. 1 (Helsinki:
   Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Kirjapaino, 1958), 33. See discussion on Ps 6:6; also Pss
   88:11-13 and 115:17.
In vs. 14 Job continues to elaborate on the nature and function of Sheol by using a highly figurative, family-related language:

If I call to the pit,

“You are my father!”

“My mother and my sister!”— to the worm.

By employing two powerful images of destruction, הֵמָּה (“to the pit”) and הֵמוֹם (“to the worm”), Job develops and progressively intensifies the idea of decomposition and the finality of his death. Both expressions הֵמָּה and הֵמוֹם are personified and function in parallel to each other and to Sheol. It should be recalled that in Ps 16:10 the term נַפָּה is equivalent to נֵמוֹם, and as was seen earlier, it designates the grave, the place of corruption and decay, where worms feed on the dead body till the corpse is destroyed.

By applying the imagery of “father,” “mother,” and “sister,” which usually designates the most intimate relationships, to “the pit” and “the worm,” Job emphasizes their full authority over him in death. The fact that Job uses family terminology in a metaphorical sense is more than clear. Normally by the terms

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1For discussion on the term נַפָּה see discussion on Isa 38:10, 18. See also Isa 51:14; Ezek 28:8; Jonah 2:7; Pss 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24; 103:4; Job 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30; Pope, “The Word נַפָּה in Job 9:31,” 269-278.

2Alden, Job, 193.

3Christopher J. H. Wright, “בְּאֶת,” NIDOTTE, 1:219-223; Andersen, Job, 187.
“father” and “mother” one indicates particular relationships, designates originators, and refers to them as those who exercise protective and caring activities.

Furthermore, by employing highly figurative language Job points out that in death “the pit” and “the worm” would take the place of his earthly parents in a negative sense; instead of caring they would destroy him. The feminine noun רֶפֶשׁ (“worm”) functions here as the substitute for לְאֵלְבָּה (“my mother”) and לְאֵלְבָּה (“my sister”) and has a collective meaning. Commenting on this subject, Reyburn explains that “the thought is of a mass of worms that will eat Job’s remaining flesh in the grave” and “not the worms that are already eating him.” The same imagery is also found in Job 21:26, נֶעְרָתְ הַבֵּשָׁה נְעֵרָתְ (“and worms cover them”). In brief, as if being already dead and buried, Job is entirely subjected to their destructive power “because they are equally encased in the earth.”

Despite the fact that vs. 16 contains various textual problems, the main idea is clear. In this final verse Job focuses once more on Sheol as the place of no existence. The term יָדוֹנֶנֶת is equivalent to רְבַע (“dust”), and מָגַר (“it goes down”) corresponds to a poetical word מָגַר (“descend”). Exactly the same relationship


2Reyburn, The Book of Job, 331.

3Gordis, The Book of Job, 185.

4On יָדוֹנֶנֶת see Excursus 1.

5For the term מָגַר see discussion on Gen 37:35 and other related texts.
between death, dust, and the grave is distinctly emphasized in the following texts:

Job 7:21  
כִּנַּחַת לְעַטָּרָה שַׁחַבָּה
for now I will lie down in the dust

Job 20:11  
זַעַּמָּה עֵלָּמָּה שַׁחַבָּה
and with him on the dust it shall lie down

Job 21:26  
זַאֲרוּ עֵלָּמָּה יִשְׁמַרְנָה
together on the dust they lie down

Similar language is also employed in Dan 12:2, יָרֹב מִמְּשֹׁנֵי אֲרוֹמְתַּנּוּר
(“and many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground”), whereas Isa 26:19 speaks about "וָּפֶּר שָׁבָּה" ("dwellers in the dust"). All these references in one way or another refer to the grave, thus highlighting the nature of its poetical equivalent Sheol.

Against this background it is particularly significant to note that factually Job is dealing here with fundamental issues of anthropology as a unified whole, namely, man was made of "הָדָעַר מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם" ("the dust from the ground,” Gen 2:7), then "וַיַּעֲמֶר יַעֲמֶר יִשְׁרָאֵל עַנֵּגְנָה" ("we are dust,” Ps 103:14), and at death "וַיִּשְׁמַר עֶלְיוֹן יִשְׁרָאֵל אֲנִי הָאָדָם" ("man to dust returns,” Job 34:15). The fact that man’s quality is unmistakably designated by the Hebrew Scripture as "טָבַר" ("dust") is also demonstrated by other writers: "וַיִּבָּלָהוּ נְמוּנֵי אַלֶּקֶת לַשָּׁבוֹת" ("they expire and to their dust they return,” Ps 104:29) and "וַיִּשָּׁמַר הָאֹלֶל מִן הָדָעַר הָדָעַר אַלֶּקֶת שֶׁבֶם אֲלַי הָאָדָם" ("all are from the dust, and all return to dust,” Qoh 3:20). The association of man with “the dust of the ground” turns into a literal synthesis when the corpse is brought לַעַטָּרָה מִמְּשֹׁנֵי ("to the

1Compare with Pss 22:16, 30; 30:10. See also "טָבַר,” BDB, 780.
dust of death,” Ps 22:16). Indeed, not only the “analogy of dust,” but also the rest of the anthropological and theological aspects of the Scriptures are absolutely irreconcilable with the philosophy of the so-called immortal element, which would leave man at death and continue its existence in Sheol.

Finally, although the phrase הָרֵגֶגָה הִיא (“bars of Sheol”) is not so lucid as scholars would prefer to see it, there is absolutely no reason to take it literally because it functions as a figurative expression. None of the following imagery that has been already discussed, as for instance לֹא הָרֵגָה (“from the hand of Sheol”),2 לֹא הָרֵגָה (“at the mouth of Sheol,” Ps 141:7), הָרֵגָה (“Sheol opens wide its throat,” Isa 5:14), and לֹא הָרֵגָה (“from the belly of Sheol,” Jonah 2:3),3 can be interpreted or applied to Sheol literally. Consequently, the expression “bars of Sheol” functions as an epithet for the grave itself, and no more.

In conclusion, as in the previous texts, vss. 13-16 contain no evidence that the souls of the righteous or the wicked would go down to some subterranean spirit world or Sheol, which is frequently presented as the land of dust and darkness where the spirits of the dead or their shadows continue their miserable existence. On the contrary, the context shows that Job speaks only about the grave, and such a definite term as מֵאָדָם in Job 17:1, which is associated with vss. 13-16, in no way can function as a synonym of the so-called netherworld.

1See discussion on Isa 38:10 and “דִּי,” BDB, 94.


3For other similar expressions see Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic, 180.
Job knew that all worldly hopes and concerns come to their end in the grave and that everything would rest in the dust. Because hope is synonymous with life\(^1\) it cannot continue its existence where there is no life. In spite of his critical circumstances and the question in vs. 15, "and where then is my hope?"), Job had a hope and he had described it already in 16:17-21. This idea of hope is beautifully summarized by Harris: “The poignancy of Job’s question shows that he hoped for more than the grave (Sheol) and its dust (17:16). His hope as he had said in 14:15 was for a future where God would call him to a new life,” and then he continues, “This hope is made explicit in Job’s famous declaration of 19:25-27.”\(^2\)

Job 21:13

רבד השם והרוחות וה UIL הعلامات על ים

Translation and Textual Remarks

They spend their days in prosperity, and in a moment\(^3\) they go down to Sheol.

Text Unit and Its Genre

The sixth response of Job in chap. 21:1-34 is unique not only because it closes the second cycle of speeches\(^4\) but also because of its nature, which reveals the

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\(^2\)Harris, “Why Hebrew Shē’ol Was Translated ‘Grave,’” 69. See Excursus 3.

\(^3\)The NIV, NRSV, and NJB translate מָרָיו “and in peace.”

vehement challenges and counterattacks of Job against the views of his friends, especially their understanding of the doctrine of retribution.

Taking note of the fact that various scholarly attempts to determine the basic structural arrangement of Job 21 have resulted in quite differing outlines that are of little help for the current study, one way to demarcate the unit including vs. 13 as limited in size as possible is to sketch the design along the lines of Job’s argumentation:

- Happiness for the wicked (vss. 1-6)
- Prosperity of the wicked (vss. 7-13)
- No need of God (vss. 14-16)
- No calamity for the wicked (vss. 17-18)
- God reserves punishment for the wicked (vss. 19-22)
- Description of two deaths (vss. 23-26)
- The glory of the wicked (vss. 27-34)

The overall genre of chap. 21 is based on Job’s debate with his friends and can be categorized as another disputation speech.

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4. Reyburn divides chap. 21 into four units: vss. 1-6; 7-16; 17-26; 27-34. Reyburn, *The Book of Job*, 386-387. According to Hartley, the speech has three major sections: vss. 1-6; 7-33 (it is divided into vss. 7-16; 17-21; 22-26; 27-33); and 34. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 310, 312. See also Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 33-34.

5. The structural arrangement is shortened and based on Habel’s detailed outline. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 324.

Exegetical Notes

As the main theme and focus of the current chapter are on the prosperity of the wicked and not on Sheol, a succinct summary of the main point and a few exegetical notes will suffice.

Contrary to Zophar’s claims (20:12-19) that the wicked die prematurely, Job refers to the daily observable facts with the question (“why,” vs. 7), which dominates all the subsequent verses.1 Why do רשבים יחיון (“the wicked live”), ינאה (“continue on”), וסרובים י_Msgר (“also grow mighty in power,” vs. 7);褊ורים בלול (“their seed/children are established,” vs. 8); בקורים בלול (“their houses are safe [peace] from fear”); ורגים ימקום (“and their children skip about,” vs. 11); וספשת לשלח (“and rejoice at the sound of the flute,” vs. 12)? Then Job concludes, וספשת איננה עליה (“and the rod of God is not on them,” vs. 9); as the wicked laugh, וספשת קירינברג (“who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?” vs. 15).2

In vs. 13, which functions as the highest point of the passage, Job summarizes his observations concerning the prosperity and contentment of the wicked by saying, יבר (“they spend their days in prosperity”). And then he makes an important comment, יבר (“and in a moment they go down to Sheol”), which means that unlike Job’s excruciating pain, the life of the wicked is free from agonizing illnesses and suffering; they die suddenly “in a moment” and in peace.

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1. Andersen, Job, 199-200; Alden, Job, 223.
It is important to note that here as in Job 17:16, the Qal verb יָנַה ("go down," "descend") is linked with the term Sheol. It functions in the same way as יָנַה ("go down") in the expression "to go down to Sheol," which embodies the formula of death and dying. However, the verb יָנַה includes something more than specifying only direction or relating to the process of death, namely, there are two identical nouns: יִנְנָה ("descent") and יִנְנָה ("rest"). The first is derived from the root יָנַה ("to descend") while the other is from יָנַה ("to rest"). As a result, because of these specific inherent nuances and connotations, the term יָנַה has not only the meaning of "going down" to Sheol, but also emphasizes "the cessation of activity in death," which by itself is a very significant detail. In terms of its specific implications and associations, the function of יָנַה is similar to that of the other two, often-discussed, nouns: יִנְנָה ("pit," "grave") and יִנְנָה ("corruption," "destruction"), which originate from the corresponding verbs and provide some useful insights concerning the nature of Sheol.

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1See exegesis on Gen 37:35 and other related texts.


It should be emphasized that in the current context Job does not use the expression רָקְעָה וְבָאֵל (“and in a moment they go down to Sheol”) to refer to a swift punishment of the wicked or their miserable existence in Sheol. He simply portrays their departure from life as a natural process. Another important point concerns Sheol as the place of the dead. Except related terminology in a broader context, Job does not provide any descriptive details concerning the term, and there is no need for them. It is self-evident that the place called Sheol can refer only to the domain with no life. This conclusion is supported by the synonymous term בֶּקֶר (“grave”) of vs. 32, יָרָה לִבְּכֵם (“when he is borne to the grave”). It should be noted that as in Job 17:1 the word בֶּקֶר is in plural יִבְּכֶר (lit. “to graves”), and refers to the place of many graves, that is, cemetery or graveyard.

In the second line of vs. 32 Job provides additional descriptive details, which continue to strengthen the imagery of the grave further: יַעֲשַׂר יְהֹוָה (“and watch is kept over the tomb”). The basic meaning of the term יָשָׁר, which is translated as “the tomb,” is “heap” or “stack.” Moreover, the depiction of the grave is developed to the utmost by the expression of vs. 33, namely, מִתְחַסֵּל לַגְּנֵב יָגֶלוֹ (“sweet to him are the clods of the valley”), which in turn is parallel to “the tomb” of vs. 32. The plural construct noun יָגֶלוֹ literally means “the clods of earth” as in Job 38:38. By referring to “the clods of earth” that cover the dead body of the wicked, Job

1Reyburn, The Book of Job, 395.

2“שַׁוֶּר,” BDB, 155.

3“יַעֲשֶׁר,” BDB, 918.
vividly pictures the imagery of a fresh grave. Indeed, it is not a description of Sheol as an underworld region, where the dead continue their existence.

Furthermore, the phrase יָבֹא לִפְלֹד (“sweet to him”), which depicts the dead man “as consciously experiencing the mound of clods piled upon him as being comfortable,” functions only as a figure of speech and should not be interpreted as a teaching about conscious existence of the dead in Sheol. By describing the “clods of the valley” as “sweet,” Job emphasizes the contrast that the dirt covering the dead is neither heavy nor burdensome, as in the grave the dead are exempt from the troubles and cares of the world of the living. This idea is clearly reflected in various translations, which point out that the “clods of the valley” “gently cover him” (NAU), “lie easy on him” (NJB).

Another characteristic of the grave originates from the dead bodies that are subjected to the process of decay and worms, as Job points out (“and the worms cover them,” vs. 26). This fact is further substantiated by the shift in imagery when Job employs all-inclusive language, (this) “one dies in his full strength,” vs. 23) (“and [this] another dies in bitterness of soul,” vs. 25), and (“together they lie down on the dust,” vs. 26).

1See Reyburn, The Book of Job, 407.

2Ibid.


4See discussion on Job 17:13, 16. In the book of Job the word יָבֹא לִפְלֹד occurs in 7:5; 17:14; 21:26; 24:20; but יָבֹא לִפְלֹד is used in 25:6.
These statements not only provide useful insights concerning the character and functional aspects of the term Sheol in vs. 13, but they also contain the most profound truths, namely, death is the great leveler: The wicked and the righteous, the rich and the poor, all go down to the grave. In Sheol there is no distinction that would be "based on the nature of their earthly existence,"\(^1\) as worms cover all of them.

Job is also absolutely silent concerning the spirit existence or punishment of the wicked in Sheol. Then what is the alternative? The answer is found in the key vs. 30, which contains two concise parallel phrases. Job employs them to point out the fact that the wicked are reserved לָדוֹת הָאָדָם ("to a day of calamity") and לִפְנֵי הַבָּשָׁם ("to a day of coming judgment").\(^2\) Regardless of the appearances, God will judge the wicked, and this thought is a solemn one.\(^3\)

Job 24:19

נַעֲשֶׂה נֵבֶרָה יְנוּלֶת מִמְסָרָה לְעַנִּים אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Translation and Textual Remarks

Drought also heat snatch away the snow waters; [so does] Sheol [those who] have sinned.

\(^1\)Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 319.


Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 24 goes together with chap. 23 as they contain the seventh response of Job or the first speech of the third cycle series. In chap. 23 Job is longing for an audience with God (23:1-9), refers to his innocence and confidence (vss. 10-12), and meditates on God's sovereignty (vss. 13-17).¹

Though scholars refer to chap. 24 as the most complicated part of the whole book, emphasizing various problems of form, content, interpretation, obscurity of text, relevance of the material,² especially the identification of the speaker and place of vss. 18-24,³ etc., this will not affect the study of vs. 19. The current study accepts the entire chap. 24 as the speech of Job, which can be divided into three main sections: (1) complaint of the wicked who oppress the poor (vss. 1-12); (2) the description of the wicked who commit their crimes in the dark (vss. 13-17); and (3) the fate of the wicked and their punishment (vss. 18-25). However, the last section consists of several subunits, which can be arranged thematically in the following way:⁴

| Retribution of the wicked     | (vss. 18-20) |
| The wicked oppress women     | (vs. 21)     |
| God spares [destroys] the wicked | (vss. 22-23) |
| Retribution of the wicked     | (vs. 24)     |
| The challenge concerning the truth | (vs. 25) |

The seventh speech of Job contains various genre elements: long complaints,

³Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 35.
⁴The subunits are based on Reyburn's chiastic outline. Reyburn, *The Book of Job*, 441-442.
litigation, avowal of innocence, etc. In spite of the fact that chap. 24 has provoked considerable problems and disagreements among scholars, the overarching genre of the response is the disputation speech.¹

Exegetical Notes

Despite heated scholarly debates and numerous emendations of the text to be studied,² the central theme of the chapter and the employment in its context of the term Sheol do not create any problems. In fact, vss. 18-20 mirror the same basic characteristics of the place of the dead as in chap. 21, which emphasized the prosperity of the wicked.

By employing the term Sheol in a specific context of the depraved and their evil deeds, Job has a special objective in mind. In vss. 1-12 he describes the misery, exploitation, and oppression of the poor by the cruel and wicked people. In vss. 13-17 the focus is on the three categories of evildoers: חרב (“the murderer,” vs. 14), הָאָבָב (“the adulterer,” vs. 15), and the thief who בֵּית בְּרֵאשִׁים (“in the dark digs into houses,” vs. 16). All of them hate light but love darkness in order to be able to commit their crimes under cover of night.³

After presenting this depressing and gloomy picture of the wicked who act

¹Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 35; Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*, 370-373.


unpunished, Job emphatically shows that כְלְיָהָ הָאָדָם ("he is [light] foam on the face of the waters") and בֹּשֶׁךְ ("cursed is their portion in the earth," vs. 18). And then in vss. 19 and 20 Job reveals the fate of the wicked:

Drought also heat snatch away the snow waters

[so does] Sheol [those who] have sinned

To demonstrate the real condition of the wicked and their actual destruction, Job turns to the imagery of nature: יָאִיר ("drought"), חָיָה ("heat"), and יָמִים ("waters of snow"). As "drought" and "heat," which are synonymous terms, cause the snow waters to disappear, so does Sheol consume the wicked. As the Yomim ("waters") that quickly evaporate in the hot sun evoke "the notion of the transience of life," so the imagery of the dried-up waters (see Job 14:11-12) depicts death, which is irrevocable. In the current context a metaphorical employment of the water imagery is an appropriate figure to denote the termination of life, which functions to designate the reversal of creation.

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1 Job refers to "snow" in various contexts in 6:15-15; 9:30; 24:19; 38:22.

2 Roland E. Clements, "יָאִיר, חָיָה, " TDOT, 8:265-280.


In the simile there is only one verb, נָשַׁב ("snatch away"). Not only does it dominate both lines of vs. 19, it also describes two parallel events, the consequences of which are disappearance, destruction, and death. The basic meaning of the term נָשַׁב is "to tear away" or "seize." Though the Qal imperfect verb נָשַׁב functions in the first line in a figurative sense referring to the taking away of snow waters, the Hebrew Scripture confirms its original meaning as "to snatch away violently," or as W. Domeris points out the term נָשַׁב "carries the sense of taking something by force." It is exactly this characteristic that helps to clarify the meaning of the second line that consists of only two words.

Despite the fact that Job moves from general in the first line to specific in the second line, he provides in vs. 19 no qualifications for the term Sheol but only the final result, נָשַׁב (lit., "Sheol [those who] they sinned"). The mental picture is that of the sinners "snatched away" by Sheol, which is personified and functions as a living organism. In order to make the second line more understandable, the NKJ inserts the verb "consumes" and renders "So the grave consumes those who have sinned." Here the term Sheol functions more like death that cannot be isolated from its deadly effects.

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1 See "בֵּית", BDB, 160.


4 Reyburn, The Book of Job, 459.
Furthermore, the immediate consequences of death and the “snatching away” of the sinners by Sheol are unfolded in vs. 20. Job describes the state of the dead wicked in Sheol by employing four independent clauses, which are characterized by parallelisms, contrasts, and extremely vivid imagery.

A womb will forget him

The worm sucks him sweetly

he is no longer remembered

And wickedness will be broken like a tree.

It is evident that Job portrays here the decay and decomposition of the dead in the grave, and no more is intended. Eventually the wicked die and are forgotten; that is the basic idea of the first clause. The feminine noun דמ (“womb”) is used metaphorically and refers to the mother of the dead. Because of death the wicked are in the grave and even his mother forgets him as she is unable to care any more. The Qal verb וְכִפַּק (“forget”) functions as a synonym to Niphal imperfect דְּכִפַּק (“he

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2Alden, Job, 251.


4Compare with Ps 31:13; Qoh 2:16; 9:5.

is not remembered"). This double emphasis on the forgetting of the dead intensifies the imagery of the grave, which is further clarified by the symbol of corruption הַעֲמָדָה ("worm"),\(^1\) which, excepting Exod 16:24 and Job 25:6, is always used to depict the decay of the dead body in the grave.\(^2\)

Both נפח and לֹא חָי function as merismus.\(^3\) The "womb" is the starting point of life and the "worm" is the end of it.\(^4\) The word picture נפח לֹא חָי creates a stunning imagery of the state of the dead and the nature of the grave. The term מַעֲמָד ("become or be sweet")\(^5\) is used in a figurative sense to confirm and intensify the imagery of the decomposition, namely, the worm sucks the corpse and finds it sweet, it "feasts on the dead body of an evil person in the grave."\(^6\)

The last clause מַעֲמָד לֹא חָי ("and wickedness will be broken like a tree") functions not only as a concise summary statement of the preceding thoughts,\(^7\) but also guarantees the inevitable end of wickedness. Job says that the wicked will be

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\(^1\) On הַעֲמָדָה see Job 7:5; 17:14; 21:26; 24:20.


\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) See "מַעֲמָד," *BDB*, 608.


\(^7\) Reyburn, *The Book of Job*, 460.
“destroyed like a tree that is cut down.” The same theme is continued in vss. 21-24, where Job points out that God’s eyes are on the wicked and their ways. Though they are exalted for a little while, they will receive what they deserve. תֹלְעַיִן ("and they are gone") ("and like the head of grain they are cut off," vs. 24).

This is the language of death and the grave. Unlike the previous passage of chap. 21, Job refers here only to the wicked who feel safe and exalted. According to Job, death is acknowledged as the absolute end of life and complete annihilation of consciousness in the grave. The text does not contain the slightest hint of the soul's separation from the body, its descent to the underworld, or its continuous existence in Sheol in any imaginable form.

Job 26:6

עֵדֹת שֶׁאֲדוֹל נַהֲעָה יָאָו בְּשֵׁהוּת לְאַבָדֹתָה

Translation and Textual Remarks

Naked is Sheol before Him, and there is no covering for Abaddon.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 26:1-14 functions not only as a part of one of the longest speeches of Job, covering five chapters (26:1-31:40), but also as one of the most beautiful descriptions of God’s majesty and transcendence over His creation in the whole book.  

1Ibid.

2See also Tur-Sinai, The Book of Job: A New Commentary, 379.
The basic structure of chap. 26 consists of two clearly distinguishable sections: in vss. 1-4 Job rebukes Bildad, and in vss. 5-14 the focus is on the established cosmic order and its evidences, where everything depends on the universal power and absolute wisdom of God. The second part consists of three units:

- God’s power over death and Sheol (vss. 5-6)
- God’s power in creation (vss. 7-13)
- Concluding observation (vs. 14)

The overall genre can be identified as the disputation speech, which contains the elements from the wisdom dispute genre (vss. 2-4) and a clear hymnic praise to God (vss. 5-14).

Exegetical Notes

The text under consideration is very similar to Ps 139:8 and Amos 9:2, which emphasize God’s omnipresence. Because the terminology of death in vss. 5 and 6

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1 Some scholars ascribe vss. 5-14 to Bildad or Zophar; see Reyburn, *The Book of Job*, 472, also 464, 468-469; Rowley, *Job*, 213-214; Westermann, “Chapters 24-27: Fragments,” in *The Structure of the Book of Job*, 131-134. Andersen writes, “We shall say nothing further about the dozens of mutually-contradictory ‘solutions’ by which scholars have unscrambled the allegedly disordered speeches at the end of the third round. . . . But when there is so little sign of a consensus, it might be better to leave the text as it is, since the onus of proof rests with those who wish to alter it, and so far nothing like proof has been forthcoming.” Andersen, *Job*, 216. For some examples concerning reordering parts of chaps. 25, 26, and 27 see Habel, *The Book of Job*, 366-368, 376-378; Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, xlvii-l; Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB, vol. 15 (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1973), xv-xxiii, 180-189. For a diagram of the above hypothesis, which is based on a varied metrical structure, see Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job: Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), 164-165.


3 Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 36.

4 See the discussion on Ps 139:8 and Amos 9:2.
has been discussed repeatedly, a few concise exegetical notes will suffice.

Vs. 6 is the last reference to the term Sheol in the book of Job. As is seen from the above structural arrangement, the subunit consisting of vss. 5 and 6 introduces the dominating theme of God's omnipotence. The greatness of God is manifested in His absolute control over the whole universe, which includes: הָרָקָב (“the dead,” vs. 5) and הָרָקָב (“empty space”) and כְּנֵן (“earth,” vs. 7); הָרָקָב (“waters”) and בְּקַדְשֵׁי (“clouds,” vss. 8-9); הָרָקָב (“light and darkness,” vs. 10); כְּנֵן (“heavens”) and הָרָקָב (“the sea,” vss. 11-12).

Scholars refer to vss. 5 and 6 as the description of Sheol that is located under the ocean, representing “a murky, watery abode.”¹ Hartley explains that “its inhabitants eked out a wretched, meager existence,” and “for while they have existence and identity, they are weak and helpless.”² Reyburn speaks about “the vast pit beneath the waters of the underworld,” “the lower regions and Sheol,” and “the spirits of the dead” that “tremble in Sheol.”³ The same view is expressed by Barnes, who writes: “The reference is to the abode of departed spirits—the netherworld where the dead were congregated.”⁴ It is apparent that these verses contain enough material to start heated debates and defend various opinions.

² Ibid.
First of all, it is significant to note that Job initiates his description of God’s omnipotence by employing a highly figurative language, which as a result creates extremely vivid mental pictures. Though vs. 5 does not represent its message in fixed ways and has been subjected to numerous emendations and various interpretations, it will not affect the identification of the main elements concerning the nature and function of Sheol as the place of the dead.

The Rephaim tremble, from beneath the waters, and their inhabitants

The D’KEnn, that is the dead, are synonymous with (“and their inhabitants”). It is significant to note that the identification problems in the current text are clarified by the parallel references, which contain the same terminology. Both Rephaim and the phrase (“dwellers in the dust”) are found in Isa 26:19, where the author describes the dead and their resurrection. Both categories, 


2The problems of the text are reflected in various translations: “The shades beneath writhe in terror, the waters, and their inhabitants” (NAB); “The departed spirits tremble under the waters and their inhabitants” (NAU); “The dead are in deep anguish, those beneath the waters and all that live in them” (NIB); “The dead tremble, those under the waters and those inhabiting them” (NKJ); and “The shades below tremble, the waters and their inhabitants” (NRSV).

3For the major discussion on the term see exegesis on Isa 14:9, 11, 15. See also Isa 26:14, 19; Ps 88:10; Prov 2:18; 9:18; and 21:16.

4“Commentators invariably have taken the allusion to the inhabitants of the waters to mean fishes, marine monsters, and other denizens of the deep.” Pope, *Job*, 183. Reyburn suggests the following interpretation: “In Sheol, in the water under the earth, the spirits of the dead tremble with fear.” Reyburn, *The Book of Job*, 474.
and דיכן, are characterized as יררה ("Your dead") and בְּכָלָה (lit. "My corpse"), thus excluding any notion of the existence of their souls in the underworld. As was repeatedly pointed out, the term יָדִיע ("dust") often designates the grave.

A similar expression is also found in Ps 94:17 where the Psalmist thanks Yahweh for saving him from Sheol, for יָדִיע רָדֵב הַגָּמָו ("my soul would soon have dwelt in the land of silence"), which simply means "I would have died." The wordしば ("silence") basically "connotes the silence of death" and clearly alludes to "the land of silence" or simply the grave.

From these few instances it is evident that the Qal participle יָדִיע functions as another designation of the dead in the grave. Not only does it harmonize well with the basic meaning of the verb יָדִיע, "to settle down" or "dwell," but it also highlights particular nuances concerning the dead as "dwellers" and their location as Sheol.

The phrase בְּכָלָה מִתֵּבַע (lit. "from beneath waters") contains a double prepositional construction, which refers not only to the specified location below the earth’s surface, but also creates a sharp contrast with the entire list of the diametrically opposite elements described in vss. 7-14. In this connection it should be recalled that

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1See discussion in Excursus 1. Ps 22:16 speaks about נַחַל מַהְו ("dust of death"), and Ps 22:30 פֶּלֶט גְּרָשׁ ("all who go down to the dust").

2Robert D. Culver, "Yahvah," TWOT, 1:186-187. In Ps 115:17 the Psalmist explains: הָרָדֵב מַהְו גְּרָשׁ ("The dead do not praise Yah, nor all those who go down to silence").


4See exegesis on Deut 32:22.
the term הַיָּם ("waters") in the particular context of death represents Sheol,¹ but here, being juxtaposed with Sheol and Abaddon of vs. 6, it also functions as a synonymous entity to both of them, thus forming a direct inter trio parallelism, which beyond doubt refers to the place of the dead.

As in Job 24:19, vs. 5 has only one verb for both lines, namely, Polal impf. 3 m. pl., יַרְדָּנָה, which literally means "are made to tremble." Job employs the verb דַעַל ("travail," "be in anguish," "dance," "whirl," "writhe," "fear," "tremble")² in a highly figurative sense by personifying שָׂדָם and נֵפָר וְאֵל as conscious beings. The conclusion that vs. 5 deals with the elements of personification is based on and rooted in vs. 6 where Sheol is depicted as "naked" and Abaddon with "no covering," which excludes literal interpretation. Exactly the same imagery, in which the dead are represented as being alive, is used in Isa 14:9, 11, 15 where the Rephaim are graphically depicted as rising from their thrones in Sheol to greet the king of Babylon.³ By employing a single term יַרְדָּנָה, Job suddenly creates dramatically vivid mental pictures that are saturated with tension and intensity.⁴

¹See the discussions on Jonah 2:3, Job 24:19, and Cant 8:6; Pss 18:17; 32:6; 69:2, 15; Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 59-66; Pope, Job, 183.


³See the exegesis of Isa 14:9, 11, 15 and Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27.

⁴A similar parallelism in imagery is found in Job 25. At first it speaks about the heavenly luminaries, הַלָּעַי ("the moon") and כָּלָל הָאָרֶץ ("stars," vs. 5), but in vs. 6 the imagery suddenly changes to that of worms, which are usually associated with the grave, הָוֶל [וֶל], רֹם לְאָדָם ("How much less man—maggot, and the son of man—worm!").
this metaphorical language is to demonstrate the manifestation of God’s power over death, the dead, and the grave, and it is achieved by the imagery of the dead who are depicted as trembling “in awe and wonder before the majesty” and omnipotence of Yahweh. This idea is further explicated in the next verse.

In vs. 6, Job portrays Sheol as נִצָּר (“naked”) and לָאָבָדְר א (“to Abaddon”), meaning “(the place of) destruction,” as without protection, נָחָל (“and there is no covering”). Though both Sheol and Abaddon function as perfectly synonymous terms, containing encoded information for the concrete situations they depict, it is evident that the noun לָאָבָדְר א is not employed in isolation, but as a relevant concept it characterizes Sheol as the place that is associated with death, destruction, and decay. It is also apparent that by employing לָאָבָדְר א, Job does not refer to “the lowest hell,” or to some another region in the underworld where the spirits of the deceased continue their shadowy and gloomy existence. He does not contradict himself.

Both expressions, נִצָּר (“naked is Sheol”) and לָאָבָדְר א (“there is no covering for Abaddon”), serve as particular figures of speech, which embody the entire sphere of death, including such concepts as death itself, the grave, and the dead. Exactly the same words and in the same order, נִצָּר and לָאָבָדְר א, but in a different context, are found in Job 24:7.


2For the major discussion on the term לָאָבָדְר א see Ps 88:4, also Prov 15:11; 27:20.


One of the functions of the masculine adjective נזרם ("naked")¹ is to describe Sheol as the concrete entity as well as to state its limitations. Because of the specific connotations of the term נזרם and its relation to Sheol, the place of the dead is represented as a poetically personified being that has definite, individual existence, which is "naked" or exposed before God.²

The second phrase נזרם is parallel to נזרם and functions to emphasize the central motif of God's omnipresence as well as His omnipotence.³ The noun כיסה ("covering," "clothing")⁴ in the expression כיסא נזרם is used in a figurative sense, which by means of synonymous parallelism strengthens the idea that both Sheol and Abaddon are absolutely exposed, defenseless before God.

In conclusion, vss. 5 and 6 contain the imagery of the place of the dead, which is expressed by three parallel terms: נזרם, כיסא, and נזרם, whereas the dead are denoted as נזרם and כיסא. The fact that Job employs a highly figurative language is a particularly significant element by itself, because by means of it he demonstrates that his intention is not to provide a description of the state of the dead in Sheol but something else.⁵


⁵There are many more important texts and related terminology to exegete in the book of Job, which is unsurpassed in its beauty and uniqueness. Unfortunately, because of space and time limitations they must be left for another dissertation.
As "this is one of the most fascinating cosmological passages in the entire Bible,"\(^1\) the basic thrust of both verses is to highlight the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. The purpose of Job’s selective language functions as an emphatic rhetorical device to demonstrate the fact that in the entire universe there is no place hidden from God. This observation is dramatically intensified "by drawing attention to the searching eye of God from which even Sheol and Abaddon provide no hiding place,"\(^2\) as the grave is "naked" and all its dead "tremble"\(^\text{a} \text{דָּבָר}" ("before Him").

Writings Attributed to Solomon\(^3\)

Introduction

The last section of this chapter deals with three books: Proverbs, Canticles (Solomon’s Song of Songs), and Qohelet (Ecclesiastes). Because each of the books employs a distinct terminology, they are quite different and specific in character. Accordingly, the book of Proverbs contains various wisdom sayings from ancient Israel with the term Sheol occurring nine times.\(^4\)

Canticles, containing only eight chapters which are written entirely in poetry,

\(^1\)Andersen, *Job*, 217.


\(^3\)Critics usually deny the Solomonic authorship by attributing to Proverbs, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes a much later author or authors. However, there are numerous internal arguments that lend support to the Solomonic authorship. For arguments on both sides, see Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 515-543.

is rich in an intense garden and erotic imagery, exclusive in its radical portrayal and
description of human love. In this love song the term Sheol is mentioned only in
chap. 8:6.

The book of Qohelet is unique in terms of its content, style, and vocabulary
and different from all the other books of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the author
of Qohelet has some common nuances with Job, but employs the term Sheol only
once, in Qoh 9:10.

Texts

Prov 1:12

ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ θαίματι ἑωραμένοις ἐν βωρῷ.

Translation and Textual Remarks

Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,
and whole, like those who go down to the pit.¹

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 1:1-33 exhibits an organic structure, which is arranged in an orderly way
consisting of three major sections:² (1) vss. 1-7 function as an introduction,³ as it
establishes the purpose and theme of the whole book; (2) vss. 8-19 contain the first

¹The LXX has a variation that reads like Pss 34:17 [33:17] and 109:15
[108:15], namely, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῷ τὴν μνήμην ἐκ γῆς (“and let us take away the
remembrance of him from the earth”).

²See Paul E. Koptak, Proverbs, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 57-

³Roger N. Whybray, The Composition of the Book of Proverbs, JSOTSup 168
exhortation to flee sin and violence; and (3) vss. 20-33 describe the consequences that follow the rejection of wisdom.¹

Since special interest of this study is in vs. 12 and its unit, which belongs to the middle section, it is necessary to divide it into smaller subunits. The structure of vss. 8-19 is relatively simple, as it is constituted by the pattern of various thematic formulations.²

| Introductory exhortation | (vss. 8-9) |
| Summary statement | (vs. 10) |
| Murderous intentions of sinners | (vss. 11-14) |
| Warning not to join sinners | (vss. 15-17) |
| Sinners caught in their trap | (vss. 18-19) |

Though the overall genre of this chapter can be identified as an instruction, each of its parts comprises a variety of common elements and specifics. Thus, vss. 1-7 serve as the superscription for the subsequent instructions, vss. 8-19 have their own generic character as an instruction and contain such subordinate components as positive and negative admonitions (vss. 8, 15), but vss. 20-33, because of the uniqueness of their genre, are specified as “a speech of personified wisdom.”³

¹For the insightful chiastic structure of this last segment, which contains some elements pertaining to the current topic, see Phyllis Trible, “Wisdom Builds a Poem: The Architecture of Proverbs 1:20-33,” JBL 94 (1975): 509-518.


Exegetical Notes

In order to lay some foundation for the following exegesis on the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol in the book of Proverbs, it is necessary to present a brief description of some of the key vocabulary that will help the reader to better perceive the general background, including certain situations and the impact they have on Sheol.

For instance, the following synonyms: מְסַרָה ("proverbs," "parables," 1:1), מַדְרַשּׁת ("wisdom," vss. 2, 7), מְסַרָה ("discipline," "instruction," vss. 2, 3, 7, 8), מֶשֶׁכֶל ("understanding," vs. 2), מֶשֶׁכֶל חָסִידִים ("righteousness, and judgment, and equity," vs. 3), מֶשֶׁכֶל ("prudence," vs. 4), מֶשֶׁכֶל ("knowledge," vs. 4), מֶשֶׁכֶל ("and discretion," vs. 4), מֶשֶׁכֶל ("learning," vs. 5), מִשְׁחַל ("wise counsels," vs. 5), מִשְׁחַל ("the fear of Yahweh," vs. 7), מִשְׁחַל ("the law," vs. 8), including the verbs מִשְׁמַע ("hear," "listen," vs. 8), מִשְׁמַע ("and discretion," vs. 4), מִשְׁמַע ("do not consent," vs. 10), and others, determine the purpose and the essential character of the entire chapter and the whole book. It is already obvious that the context is educational by nature; it refers to discipline and training, and a sound decision-making in specific cases.

On the other hand, such terms as מִשְׁמַע ("fools," vs. 7), מִשְׁמַע ("despise," vs. 7), מִשְׁמַע ("sinners," vs. 10), מִשְׁמַע ("entice," vs. 10), מִשְׁמַע ("let us ambush," vs. 11), מִשְׁמַע ("blood," vss. 11, 16), and מִשְׁמַע ("spoil," vs. 13) function as the diametrically opposite encapsulations to the wisdom that comes only from Yahweh, and as destructive elements and principles with which the author is very concerned. It is evident that the background for the term Sheol is unique, as it differs from
everything discussed so far. Consequently, the composite wisdom character of the
text by itself provides some major insights concerning the treatment of the word
Sheol,\(^1\) which mostly is employed in the contexts of warnings and specific sinful acts.

Thus, vs. 12 is situated in the milieu of instructions and warnings given to "my son," vss. 8, 11, 15\(^2\) against the enticements of "sinners," vs. 10, who say, "let us lie in wait for blood," "let us ambush the innocent without cause," vs. 11, and then "we will fill our houses with spoil," vss. 13, 14.\(^3\)

The culmination of their cruel plot is further revealed in vs. 12:

\[
\text{נָבְלִים כַּשָּׁאֵל אֱלֹהִים}
\]
Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,

\[
\text{וַתִּמְסַוֶּם כַּשָּׁאֵל בּוֹרָּא}
\]
and whole, like those who go down to the pit.

It sounds extreme, but the bloodthirsty nature of "כַּשָּׁאֵל" in the expression

\[
\text{נָבְלִים כַּשָּׁאֵל אֱלֹהִים}
\]
that functions as a hyperbole, is pictured as analogous to that

\[^1\] Except a few specific references, no scholarly views will be quoted concerning the term Sheol in this book, as they are practically the same as in the previous cases. See, for example, Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904), 15.


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emphasis here is on Sheol as a deadly power rather than location; however, both of them go together and one cannot exist without the other. The imagery of death is especially strong because of the specific connotations and function of the term בד (“blood”), which is further intensified and clarified by means of such expressions as אני תומך (“let us lie in wait for blood”) and הם מתממים (“they hasten to shed blood”) in vs. 16. Here as in many other passages “blood” is used metaphorically and refers to death; however, in vs. 11 it is specified and represents the death of the innocent victims, who are destined to go down to Sheol.

Though the phrase נבלתם (“let us swallow them”) with the adjective חי (“alive”) evokes the verbal imagery of the rebellious company of Korah and his followers, vs. 12 describes a qualitatively totally different situation. In vs. 12 the innocent victims are designated by the personal pronoun “them,” which is further characterized by two adjective-antecedents, namely, ב (“innocent person,” m. s., vs. 11) and התחממים (“complete,” “sound,” “the blameless,” m. pl., vs. 12). In other words, the Hebrew expression בבלתם simply means “let us kill the innocent.”

1Clifford, Proverbs, 38.


3Steveson, A Commentary on Proverbs, 12.

4For the major discussion on נבלתם see Num 16:30, 33. See also Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5; Prov 27:20; 30:16.

5See “ם,” BDB, 667.

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the phrase of the second line, "I'D '''T lt 'lp ("like those who go down to the pit"), is in parallel to יִשְׁרִי הַר ("like Sheol"), it does not have a common referent with the first line. Consequently, it seems that sinners have unconsciously "put themselves in the position of 'those who go down to the pit'" (see vss. 16-19).²

It should also be noted that vs. 12 contains the only reference in the book of Proverbs where both terms Sheol and “the pit” are in parallel.³ The basic idea, as it is represented by the imagery of death and the grave, is clear. As the sinners conspire to bring the innocent down to the grave, there is only one way to realize their plot, namely, they must take the function of Sheol upon themselves. The language alludes to Gen 37:20 when Joseph was thrown נָתַהוּ לְהַמַּחְרַח ("into one of the pits"), and Jer 38:6 mentions Jeremiah, who was cast נָלָל-דַּבָּרְךָ ("into the pit,").⁴ The Psalmists also refer to the pit in similar contexts; for instance, Ps 7:16 speaks about him who נָתַהוּ לְהַמַּחְרַח ("has dug a pit") and falls in it, whereas Ps 28:1 refers to נִבָּר הַמַּחְרַח ("those who go down to the pit"), or as in Ps 40:3, where the author thanks Yahweh

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¹For the major discussion on the verb נָתִהו see table 2 and exegesis on Gen 37:35.


³It is interesting to note that “the Vilna Gaon defines she 'ol as a closed grave and pit as an open one.” Eliezer Ginsburg, Mishlei יִשְׁרִי הַר Proverbs 1-15: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1998), 1:44.

for salvation ("from the pit of destruction"), etc.¹

Finally, vs. 12, including its context, deals neither with eschatological issues nor with spirit existence in the underworld or the immortality of soul, but with the deadly schemes of the wicked and with the consequences of their plot that lead to their self-destruction in “the pit” (vss. 16-19). In the current context of the wisdom instruction, both נֵסָע and בַּרְרָה function not only as analogous terms, designating the grave, but they also encapsulate the notion of retribution: נֵסָע הָאָרֶץ כִּי נָפָל (“he who digs a pit will fall into it,” Prov 26:27).²

Prov 5:5

Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of Sheol.

Translation and Textual Remarks

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 5:1-23 functions as the eighth instruction, warning against the dangers of the strange woman (vss. 1-14) and urging fidelity to one’s own wife (vss. 15-23). Structurally it consists of four major sections, three of which are marked off by the

¹For the discussion on the term בַּרְרָה see table 9 and exegesis on Isa 14:8, 11, 15, above.

exhortation to "יִשֵׁה" ("my son," vss. 1, 7, 20). The first segment (vss. 1-6) appeals to accept wisdom and avoid the strange woman’s lips and feet. The second part (vss. 7-14) appeals to accept wisdom and avoid her who will bring disgrace. The third part (vss. 15-19) counsels to enjoy one’s own wife, and the last section (vss. 20-23) warns against the strange woman, for Yahweh sees the ways of a man.

However, the first section, which is the focus of the current study, naturally falls into two subunits: vss. 1-2 function as the introduction of the chapter, urging to accept wisdom, and vss. 3-6 describe the strange woman as a deadly threat.

The overarching genre of the current passage can be characterized as an instruction to avoid the strange woman.

Exegetical Notes

In terms of a general pattern Prov 5:5 is almost identical with Prov 1:12, containing the same recurring structural elements and motifs, which means that the point of departure of the current exegesis is the same as in the previous case.

Chap. 5 is introduced by an urgent practical appeal to יִשְׁחֵה ("my son") to pay attention to לִבְּרוֹתָה ("my wisdom") and יִנְתַּן יִתָּח ("my understanding") in order

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1 For the key vocabulary see Clifford, Proverbs, 69.


3 Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 205-210.

4 Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 59.
that he might be able to maintain הָדַּרְצָה ("discretion") and preserve התֹּנֶת ("knowledge," vss. 1-2). The reason and concern of the admonition are explained in the immediately following portrayal of the הָרֵל (“strange woman,” “harlot,” vss. 3-6),¹ which functions as the main topic of the chapter.

At first, the description refers to the strange woman’s² lips and speech, which are characterized by the terms מַפְתֵּחַ ("flowing honey")³ and שֹׁם (“oil.” “fat”)⁴ that usually represent precious commodities and healthful food ingredients, but in the current context they are employed as similes, bearing strongly negative connotations. Both expressions הָרוֹל מַפְתֵּחַ נָפָס הַרְלִי ("for the lips of a strange woman drip honey") and שֹׁמְעָה שֹׁם נָפָס ("and smoother than oil is her speech," vs. 3) as the qualifying figures of speech refer to a seductive woman and the deceptiveness of her words.⁵

In order to emphasize the tragic outcome of an adulterous relationship with the


²K. Farmer argues that הָרֵל is a metaphor “for the lure of foreign ways.” However, this view is unacceptable, as the context and the Hebrew Scripture on the whole contain multiple references against this sin and therefore the current passage should be understood as a literal warning, given to a young man. See Kathleen A. Farmer, Who Knows What Is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, International Theological Commentary, ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 41. For another view see Norman C. Habel, “The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” Interpretation 26 (1972): 131-157.

³See “מַפְתֵּחַ,” BDB, 661.

⁴“שֹׁם,” BDB, 1032.

leading one to total disillusionment with the “aftereffects,” the author introduces vs. 4 by the abstract noun נָהַרְדָּה ("end," “after part”), which functions here as a capstone, נָהַרְדָּה (lit., “but her end”). The imagery of “honey” and “oil” is contrasted with the imagery of suffering and destruction, בַּעֲרֶיה, נָהַרְדָּה ("bitter as wormwood") and הַרְדָּה, נָהַרְדָּה (lit., “sharp as a sword of mouths/edges”), which designates here the natural outcome of man’s sin. Both images combined refer to the inflicted wounds, agony, and the bitter fate which נָהַרְדָּה brings upon him who gives in to her flattery. However, that is not yet all.

The progressive description of נָהַרְדָּה reaches its culmination in vs. 5 where both lines are practically analogous and illustrate the disastrous end results of her seductive actions even more explicitly:

Her feet go down to death
her steps take hold of Sheol

Vs. 5 is one of the three verses in the book of Proverbs where both words,


4 Toy, The Book of Proverbs, 103-104.

5 Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 192.
Sheol and death, are in parallel.\(^1\) The figure of speech הַרְגָּדָה ("her feet") conveys at least two basic meanings here: (1) Feet are the means of locomotion\(^2\) and (2) "by synecdoche the feet stand for the entire person."\(^3\) It means that הַרְגָּדָה leads a lifestyle that takes her down to death. The second figure הַרְגָּדָה ("her steps")\(^4\) functions as a perfect equivalent to הַרְגָּדָה, and practically overlaps the already mentioned aspects of her life by referring to her routine behavior.\(^5\) Consequently both metaphors הַרְגָּדָה and הַרְגָּדָה designate her integrated way of life as typified by her actions, which in the context of wisdom have moral implications. Moreover, the fact that "such immoral conduct brings its own punishment, leading to death"\(^6\) and "to certain and irremediable ruin,"\(^7\) and that it is so closely associated with death and Sheol, puts the strongest emphasis on the significance of moral aspects.

The destructive consequences of her conduct are further emphasized by the

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\(^1\) The other two references are in Prov 7:27 and 9:18.


\(^4\) See "רֵגָדָה," *BDB*, 857.


\(^7\) Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1852), 190.
parallel verbs of action, הָרְשַׁב (), ("going down") and תְּחִז (), ("take hold"). The verb אָסַפ (), ("grasp," "hold fast") functions as an idiom, which in turn is intensified by its parallel verb תְּחִז, meaning that the הָרְשַׁב sticks to and follows the path that drags her down to premature death and leads straight to the grave. Moreover, according to vs. 6, the real reason for her death is the fact that she gives no thought to the דַּעְת (), ("way of life") and מֵאָס (), ("she does not know") it. By employing two exactly opposite nouns, בָּשָׁב ("death," vs. 5) and דַּעְת (), ("life," vs. 6), the author refers to two different ways of life, thus urging the reader to choose and accept the right alternative.

In conclusion, the main point of vs. 5 is represented by the entire instruction, which at first contains a forceful description of why the strange woman’s depraved lifestyle hastens her end, and second, a warning that the one who chooses to associate with her will meet the same fate. She goes down to death and Sheol, "but not alone; she drags her guilty associates with her, and together they think into the grave." The same idea in a succinct form is repeated in vs. 23, ("he will die without instruction"), which practically implies both spiritual and physical death.

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1For a discussion on the term בָּשָׁב , see exegesis on Gen 37:35, table 2, and other related texts above.

2See "זָבַב," BDB, 1069; Richard D. Patterson, "זָבַב," TWOT, 2:973.

3Reyburn and Fry, Proverbs, 119.

Furthermore, neither Sheol nor death, in vs. 5 or their context, contains any qualifying or descriptive elements that would allude to the netherworld as the place of some kind of existence. The current text has nothing to do either with the divine punishment of the wicked in the underworld or the assertion that Sheol is the abode of the dead spirits. Both parallel terms are used in the setting of a specific situation, which not only shows the dangerous course of the strange woman and her tragic end in the grave, but also relates to the ability of making the moral distinction between right and wrong in one’s conduct.

Prov 7:27

Her house – the ways of Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

Translation and Textual Remarks

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 7:1-23 contains the tenth instruction and the fourth warning against the strange woman and her seductive power, which she exercises through smooth speech, persuasive words, and the strategy of enticement.

The literary structure of the warning naturally falls into three major parts, thus forming a clear A-B-A pattern: an introductory instruction (vss. 1-5); description of

\[\text{1For the other three see Prov 2:16-22; 5:1-23; 6:20-35.}\]

\[\text{2See Murphy, Proverbs, 22:42; Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 251-252; Perdue, Proverbs, 133-137; Garrett, Proverbs, 102; Clifford, Proverbs, 84-87.}\]
seduction (vss. 6-23); and a closing instruction (vss. 24-27),\(^1\) which in turn can be divided into three smaller subunits:

- Call for attention (vs. 24)
- Prohibition (vs. 25)
- The strange woman’s danger (vss. 26-27)

The overarching genre of chap. 7 is the instruction, which has integrated in the main composition (vss. 6-23) a typical example story.\(^2\) The last section (vss. 24-27) picks up the style of the introduction and conveys the final warning.

**Exegetical Notes**

After presenting his dramatic description of seduction by the הָרִים הַנִּשְׁנָה ("strange woman," vss. 5, 6-23), the author sums up his closing warning in an emphatic recapitulation (vss. 24-27), which is introduced by the adverb הָרִים הַנִּשְׁנָה ("and now"), and then followed by the traditional address, בֵּיתֵי הָעָזְרוֹן ("O sons, listen to me," vs. 24).\(^3\)

Each of the two parallel lines of vs. 25 starts with the adverb of negation לֹא ("not," "no"),\(^4\) which functions as the key factor and guarantee of safety. The

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\(^1\)An insightful structural arrangement is offered by Koptak, *Proverbs*, 206, who demonstrates the unfolding theme of chap. 7 in the following mirror-like fashion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A 7:1-5</th>
<th>B 7:6-9</th>
<th>C 7:10-20</th>
<th>B(^1) 7:21-23</th>
<th>A(^1) 7:24-27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>The first call of attention—protected from the strange woman</td>
<td>A simple young man wonders</td>
<td>The woman described and quoted</td>
<td>A simple young man is slain</td>
<td>The second call to attention—an image of the woman’s slain victims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^3\)The plural form בֵּיתֵי הָעָזְרוֹן occurs also in Prov 4:1 and 5:7.

\(^4\)לֹא, "*BDB*, 39.
instruction by itself is simple and straightforward: "do not let your heart turn to her ways") and ("do not stray in her paths"). In other words, avoid such a woman and you will live.

Vss. 26 and 27 function not only as a capstone of the whole chapter,¹ but also reveal the grounds for the vitally important instruction given in vss. 24 and 25. By means of powerful metaphors the speaker describes the deadly consequences of association with the as a murdereress. The language, since it echoes the imagery of war, is extremely concentrated in its intensity.

for many are the victims she has cast down,
and numerous are all her slain

She is pictured as vividly as if she had literally killed countless of her victims by stabbing them straight in the heart.² The tension is achieved by two parallel verbs ("fall," “perish")³ and ("kill,” “slay”).⁴ It should be noted that when the term is used in the Hiphil form “it is used of death being caused to someone.”⁵ Similarly the verb is employed to refer to “literal killing in war,” especially in the

¹See Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 251.
³See “", BDB, 658.
⁴See “", BDB, 247.
Wisdom literature. Furthermore, the same connotations are characteristic to m. pl. noun מְדַּמֵּרָה (lit., "pierced ones"), which "can refer to someone murdered" but most often to "those slain in battle and warfare." The text also informs the reader that her victims are מַרְכַּבִּים ("many") and זָעֲבִים ("mighty," "numerous"). It is more than obvious that the function of the death vocabulary has a specific purpose, namely, to depict the strange woman as a "slayer" of a mighty throng, and that effect can be achieved only by means of highly figurative language. The author draws the picture of the devastating consequences of her course, which are as destructive as death itself and may result, in fact, in actual death of the victim. Thus vs. 26 already contains the main exegetical clues for the next verse.

The description of the מְדַּמֵּרָה, who causes the downfall and destruction of numerous men, is further developed in vs. 27 by employing a number of mixed metaphors.

לְהַרְכֵּן שֵׁאוֹאֶל בָּהֵיתָה
Her house — the ways of Sheol,

ליִרְהָות אֲלָדָה וּרְהָות-
going down to the chambers of death

Except the plural construct noun מְדַּמֵּרָה ("ways"), all the rest represent a pile-up of death terminology. Here the word מְדַּמֵּרָה functions as the metaphor to designate

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2Isa 22:2; Jer 14:18; Ezek 31:17, 18; 32:20, 21, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32; Lam 4:9.


the strange woman's destructive lifestyle to which she has totally committed herself,¹ and also to refer to many possibilities of damage from association with her. In fact, the plural form of יִרְבּוּיִם provides additional explanatory detail that "all the ways that lead to her house eventually lead to Sheol."² The noun רְמוּג ("room," "chamber"),³ in the qualified figurative expression יִרְבּוּיִם ("chambers of death"), refers not only to the place of the dead or the grave⁴ but also functions as a poetical parallelism to Sheol.

It should be noted that some scholars use the phrase יִרְבּוּיִם to construe the topography of Sheol and to describe its residents. For example, Fox comments that Sheol is divided into separate provinces or "chambers," sometimes numbered as seven. It is unclear who resides where, but the "depths" of Sheol (Prov 9:18) is considered the worst, and the uncircumcised seem to have their own chamber, in which they are joined by the unburied casualties of battle (Ezek 31:18; 32:19, 21, 24; 32:25-26).⁵

L. Perdue strikes the same note: "Her house of seduction is on the way to the underworld and serves as the gateway to the chamber or rooms of its house (Ezek

¹Only in the Book of Proverbs does the term יִרְבּוּיִם occur 75 times. See "ירְמוּג," BDB, 204; Eugene H. Merrill, "ירְמוּג," NIDOTTE, 1:989-993.

²See Cohen, Proverbs, 43.

³See "ירְמוּג," BDB, 293.


⁵See Fox, Proverbs 1–9, 251. See also the exegesis of Ezek 31:15, 16, 17 and 32:21, 27; Prov 9:18.
And according to C. Toy,

The distinctions in Sheol are not moral, but ritual or social: the uncircumcised and those who descend without proper burial-rites are assigned to remote, socially inferior, corners (Ezek 32:18-22; Isa 14:15), kings and great warriors sit on thrones or occupy other prominent positions (Isa 14:9).²

However, it is surprising that scholars take extremely figurative texts from Ezekiel and Isaiah, which ridicule and taunt Yahweh’s enemies, and apply them to Prov 7:27. If a person insists that the phrase מִזְמַר הַנֶּבֶר is literal, then one must also accept the following interpretations, namely, that the מִזְמַר הַנֶּבֶר is a real mass or serial killer, her home is a real grave, and so on. Indeed, such exegesis would lead only to preposterous and absurd ideas.

As is evident from vs. 27, since both lines are in parallel complementing each other, the death imagery can be used interchangeably. It should be kept in mind that the word מִזְמַר הַנֶּבֶר (“her house”) in such contexts as this designates the grave.³ The string of mixed metaphors, “ways,” “house,” and “chambers of death,” focuses on the seduction and its consequences.⁴

As Ross puts it, “A man’s life is not destroyed in one moment. It is taken from him gradually as he enters into a course of life that will leave him as another victim of

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³ For the term מִזְמַר הַנֶּבֶר see exegesis on Isa 14:9, 11, 15; Job 17:13; Qoh 12:5. Other texts are Gen 15:2; Isa 22:13, 15, 16; Ps 49:12; Job 30:23.

⁴ Koptak, Proverbs, 212.
the wages of sin."¹ To go to her house means to accept her "ways" and to identify oneself not only with her but also with Sheol, which foreshadows the future of both of them.

In the context of the instructive warning, which by its nature strongly emphasizes the ability of distinction between right and wrong in one’s conduct, the term Sheol is more than merely a synonym for the grave, because in this moral-spiritual setting it first of all alludes to spiritual death with all its far-reaching consequences. On the other hand, there are many ways by which this פִּסִּים ("going down")² to the grave could imply physical death.

Almost identical mirror imagery is found in Prov 2:16-19, where רָעָה נֶשֶׁת ("strange woman") is synonymous with רָעָה נָבָה ("foreign woman," "adulteress," vs. 16).³ The emphasis, as in the previous cases, is on the role of wisdom to unmask the deceptiveness of the strange woman and protect one from her enticements.

For her house sinks down to death,

and to the Rephaim her paths

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¹ Ross, Proverbs, 5:942.

² For the meaning and occurrences of the verb פָּרַת in the death contexts, see exegesis on Gen 37:35 and table 2 above.

Though the syntax of vs. 18 is difficult,¹ the main idea that is pictured by a highly metaphorical imagery is clear. Both הִרְבּרִי ("her house") and הָרַגְלִים ("her paths") are in parallel and figuratively designate her course of action in a negative sense,² while הָרוֹם may include those who are with her. The expressions associated with the sphere of death, מַעַל ("to death") and מְסָל ("to the Rephaim"), though each of them contains specific nuances, function in parallel with Sheol.

It should be noted that the term מַרְאָא, which serves as a synonymous designation of the dead, always occurs in the contexts of highly figurative language. However, some scholars refer to מַרְאָא as the inhabitants of Sheol. For instance, Murphy writes, “The ‘shades’ of vs. 18 (cf. 9:18) are to be identified with the inhabitants of Sheol who have no real ‘life,’ but only a shadowy existence.”³ Fox explains that “‘Ghosts’ or ‘shades’ are the spirits of the dead.”⁴ And McKane, referring to Driver, asserts that “the dead are envisaged as a massed community leading a common life in the netherworld.”⁵

It should be emphasized once more that as in Prov 7:26, 27, so in Prov 2:18 and 19, the language creates powerful mental pictures which cannot be subjected to

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³ Murphy, Proverbs, 22:17.

⁴ Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 122.

⁵ McKane, Proverbs, 287-278.
literal interpretation or else they will lead to irrational conclusions. Nobody can say that “her house sinks down to death” in a literal sense; even if one accepts the recommended emendations and reads the verse as “For her house is a pit (leading) to death,” there is no sense. The same is true concerning the term בָּשָׂם, which here functions only as the poetical designation of the dead (see NKJ, NIV, NAU), and no more. Further, the parallelism with vs. 19 identifies “her house” and “her paths” with those “who go to her” and “do not regain the path of life.”

None who go to her return,

nor do they regain the paths of life.

The essence of the stern warning is that if one goes to the strange woman’s house, he joins her on the paths of adultery, which leads both of them to spiritual death, degradation, and even to the grave. In fact, more than personal death is implied here: ("but the wicked will be cut off from the land," vs. 22). Both 7:26-27 and 2:18-19 emphasize the same point, that the lack of moral and spiritual discernment culminates in the unavoidability and irreversibility of consequences.

Finally, none of these metaphorical descriptions contain any hint or allusion concerning the soul or spirit existence in the underworld, as both of them focus on


2For the discussion on the term בָּשָׂם see the exegesis on Isa 14: 9, 11, 15; Ps 88:4; Job 26:6; Prov 9:18. Also Isa 26:14, 19; Prov 21:16.

3Steveson, Proverbs, 32-33.
the main principle of wisdom: to choose “the paths of life” instead of following “her path,” which leads to death, the grave, and the dead.

Prov 9:18

Translation and Textual Remarks

But he does not know that Rephaim are there, in the depths of Sheol are her guests.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Prov 9:1-18, which is the twelfth and last instruction in the section of instructions and speeches of wisdom (chaps. 1-9), summarizes the main points of the first eight chapters by contrasting woman wisdom with woman folly. The author shows how wisdom’s banquet brings life, but folly’s banquet leads to death.

The structural arrangement of this chapter is clear, as it naturally divides into three major parts: vss. 1-6 depict wisdom’s invitation; vss. 7-12 contrast the responses of the mocker and the wise man, whereas vs. 10 functions as a climax of the whole chapter, “the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (vs. 10); and vss. 13-18 describe the deadly consequences of folly’s invitation. The last segment consists of three subunits:

1Reybura and Fry, Proverbs, 200.

2For an insightful three-part structure see Koptak, Proverbs, 264. Compare with Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 62; idem, Proverbs, 22:57-58; Reyburn and Fry, Proverbs, 200. Fox divides chap. 9 into two major sections. Fox, Proverbs 1-9, 303; see also Ross, Proverbs, 5:947-951.
Description and location of the invitation (vss. 13-15)
Invitation to the simple (vss 16-17)
Consequences of the invitation—Death (vs. 18)

Though chap. 9 includes various genre elements like admonition (vs. 7), a saying (vs. 10), an affirmation (vs. 11), specific contrasts and repetitions (vs. 12),¹ it is locked together by the main theme. The overall genre of the chapter can be defined as the wisdom speech.²

Exegetical Notes

Prov. 9:18 contains the third reference to the term Sheol in the book of Proverbs, which functions not only in the milieu of particular contrasts and warnings, but also is directly linked with the strange woman. As in each of the two previous cases (5:5; 7:27), so also here, the author deals with the moral implications and consequences of her adultery as well as the one who accepts her invitation.

In fact, some of the descriptive aspects of the strange woman in chap. 9 are even more specific than the ones referred to in the previous situations. In a thumbnail sketch she is depicted as נָחַלֹת הָעָלָה (“a foolish woman”), יְרְצָה (“boisterous”), נָחַלֹת (“simple,” “foolish”), וַעֲבַרָה-יוֹנָה (“and she knows nothing,” vs. 13). These profile characteristics confirm that the woman is not able to discern between right and wrong. In fact, this is the most appropriate imagery to designate the strange woman

¹Murphy, Proverbs, 22:57-58.
and her adultery, which shows itself as the highest degree of foolishness.¹

Next the author illustrates how the concise characterization of the woman harmonizes with her actions: הַשְּׁלוּשָׁה לִפְתֹּחַ בֶּיתָהּ (“and she sits at the entrance of her house,” vs. 14) לְקַרְבָּה אֲלֹנַת רוּחַ (“to call to those who pass by,” vs. 15). She invites to her house not simply any passerby, but מִי רָעַת רוּחַ יֵשׁ נְבָה (“whoever is simple let him turn here”) and לְהַשַּׁלְמוּ בּ (“who lacks heart/judgment,” vs. 16). It should be pointed out that exactly the same invitation was already extended by the first woman Wisdom in vss. 4 and 5, moreover, the acceptance of her offer would lead the simple to abandon his ways by choosing life (vs. 6).

Furthermore, the metaphors of vs. 17, מִים נֹגֵבִים יִשְׂפַּק (“stolen waters are sweet”)² and מִים תָּהָוִים יִנְנָה (“bread of secrecy is pleasant,” vs. 17),³ show that the strange woman has diametrically opposed goals, as her language contains not only clear overtones of seduction and adultery, but also has something to say about the routine of her lifestyle as such.

In order to lock vs. 18 into the entire fabric of the strange woman’s portrayal, it is extremely important to have this concise overview of the context, as it contains the keys for better understanding of the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol in

¹Steveson, Proverbs, 127.


the current description. It can be already asserted that so far the context is absolutely void of any allusions to Sheol as the place of continued existence.

Vs. 18 contains one of the most dramatic statements, which fittingly culminates in the summarized description of the strange woman’s trap, the problem of her visitor, and the tragic finale. Though the invitation seemed attractive, promising secret enjoyment and sweet pleasures, her house turned out to be the place of the dead:

But he does not know that Rephaim are there,

in the depths of Sheol are her guests

It is important to note that the major function of the disjunctive ‡ (“but”) is to introduce and emphasize the contrast between the invitation of the strange woman and the real consequences, that is, death. The phrase הָלַךְ לֵיהּ (“he does not know”) refers to the person who accepted the invitation to come to her house, which in Prov 7:27 was described as רָפָא הָאֱלֹהִים (“her house—the ways of Sheol,” see also 5:5).

It is a real paradox that the house, which under normal circumstances functions as the place of utmost shelter, protection, and safety, in the current portrayal is depicted as the place where, due to the employment of death imagery, the threatening atmosphere is heightened to the utmost, thus showing that the location is one of the greatest dangers. In fact, the message is unambiguous: The simple man could be safe outside her house, but by staying inside he will be destroyed together with the strange woman like the ones who are dead in the grave.

But what does he not know? He does not know that her house is like Sheol
itself. The specific term נְֶבַעַל is employed not only as another poetic parallel for the dead,¹ which should not be confused with the shades or ghosts of the dead,² but also as a summary of the final outcome of their immoral deeds. In addition, the masculine plural noun נְֶבַעַל is parallel to נְֶבַעַל (Qal pass. ptc. m. p. cstr. 3 f. s. sf.), literally meaning, “her invited ones,” “those invited by her,” or “those called by her,” which functions as the analogy of the one “who does not know.” It is obvious that everything here is construed around the framework of the death vocabulary, which denotes a downward progression from life to death.

The particle adverb נְֶבַעַל (“there”) focuses attention on the spot in which a scene is vividly localized in the author’s imagination³ and also serves as the antecedent of נְֶבַעַל (“in the depth of Sheol”). It is instructive to note that the descriptive term נְֶבַעַל (“depth”) does not imply here any supernatural connotations, but simply refers to the physical depth of the grave.⁴ This is one of the reasons why the phrase נְֶבַעַל has nothing to do with “the deepest parts of the netherworld,” “the worst (cf. Ps 86:13; Ezek 26:20; 31:14-18; 32:24 . . .)”⁵ or “the dead who lead a shadowy existence in Sheol.”⁶

¹See the NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, and RSV. The NJB has “the Shades.”

²See Harris, “Proverbs,” 566. For the discussion of the term נְֶבַעַל see exegesis on Isa 14: 9, 11, 15; Ps 88:4; Job 26:6; Prov 7:27. Also Isa 26:14, 19; Prov 21:16.

³See “ניי,” BDB, 1027.


⁵Fox, Proverbs 1- 9, 302.

⁶Ross, Proverbs, 5:951.
In the current setting it is impossible to separate their sinful pleasures from the
trap of death, since every detail here functions as a part of the whole.\(^1\) Thus vs. 18
graphically associates the house of the strange woman with Sheol, and the ones called
by her “are accounted as dead even while alive.”\(^2\) The author employs a highly
figurative language mixed with death imagery to demonstrate the inseparable
relationship that exists between this adulterous woman and the sphere of death. In
other words, the simple one identifies himself with the woman not only physically, but
also emotionally and ideologically. Consequently, יָם־מִּרְכָּב ("he does not know")
that to be בֵּית ("there") in her house is the same as to be in the depths of the grave, and
that is a forceful statement.

Here the purpose and function of the term Sheol, which is used in the same
case of sexual immorality as in Prov 5:5 and 7:27, is to demonstrate the fact that a
lifestyle of adultery and promiscuity inevitably leads to death and the grave,\(^3\) and that he who accepts the invitation of the strange woman to go to her house is as if already
dead. By accepting her invitation he declares his solidarity with her cause.

Finally, the basic idea of the whole passage—in fact, of all the first nine

\(^1\) Koptak, *Proverbs*, 270.

\(^2\) Cohen, *Proverbs*, 55.

\(^3\) See Claudia V. Camp, “Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological
Consideration,” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of
Roland E. Murphy*, ed. Kenneth G. Hoglund et al., JSOTSup 58 (Sheffield: JSOT
Press, 1987), 45-76; idem, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*
(Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1985), 115-120; idem, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The
Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000),
64-66.
chapters of the book—is demonstrated by its repeatedly strong interpretive emphasis on instruction and warnings that wisdom offers life with no mention of immoral pleasure, whereas folly offers sweet pleasure, “stolen water,” and “secret bread” with no mention of death and the grave.¹ In other words, the strange woman functions as a symbol and metaphorical agent for the destructive forces that lead the simple with her to death and the grave, and at the same time form a direct antithesis to everything that is called life.²

The employment of the term Sheol in Prov 9:18, 5:5, and 7:27 functions as a stark warning and refers to the necessity of Yahweh’s people to distance themselves physically, morally, and even socially from the corrupt and seductive influences of the strange woman and her adultery. In a nutshell, it serves as a prototype of judgment which transcends historical reality and provides a tool to designate the depths of sin into which the unwise had sunk, and the finality of the punishment they could receive, namely, eternal death. Neither Sheol nor Rephaim in vs. 18 has any relation to the idea that “physical demise initiates the real death which continues into the afterlife.”³

There is only one way to obtain wisdom and avoid death and Sheol, נָחַלָת הַנְּחָלָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה וַתַּעֲשֵׂה קַרְשִׁים בַּנָּה ("the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight," vs. 10). This

¹Ross, Proverbs, 5:947.

²Camp, Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs, 120.

means that another function of the term Sheol in the current passage is to point beyond the time-and-space dimensions of this earth to the reality of Yahweh, Who is sovereign and immortal and whose wisdom is absolute.

Prov 15:11, 24

The path of life [leads] upward for the prudent, in order to turn from Sheol below.

Translation and Textual Remarks

11 Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh, how much more the hearts of the sons of men!
24 The path of life [leads] upward for the prudent, in order to turn from Sheol below.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Chap. 15:1-33 consists of individual two-line short sayings, where the second line often is in contrast to the first one. The instructions of chaps. 1-9 were mostly addressed to “my son,” whereas here no such person is singled out. Chap. 15 differs from everything that was explored before, not only because of the powerful emphasis on acquiring wisdom and instruction concerning practical daily life, but especially because of the frequent appearance of Yahweh’s name (vss. 3, 8, 9, 11, 16, 25, 26, 29, and 33).

Scholarly approaches to the structural divisions of the chapter are mostly tentative, as each proverb contains its own message and can function independently.

from other sayings, and that is why it is hard to make an exact outline.\(^1\) The structural arrangement here represents a modified version of Koptak’s outline:\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Verses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words and Speech</td>
<td>(15:1-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh Sayings</td>
<td>(15:9-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Heart” Sayings</td>
<td>(15:12-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Better than” Sayings</td>
<td>(15:16-18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sluggards and Fools</td>
<td>(15:19-24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh Sayings</td>
<td>(15:25-33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall genre is not so much the instruction, as simply “a collection of sayings with the catch words in vss. 2-3, 8-9, 13-16, 29-32.”\(^3\)

Exegetical Notes

There is a wide variety of ways in which to present the same idea from various angles and which at the same time are locked together through their direct intertextual relationship. For example, the function of the recurring death vocabulary like Sheol and Abaddon in vs. 11 emphasizes Yahweh’s omniscience and omnipresence, which has already been discussed in almost identical fashion in Amos 9:2, Ps 139:8, and Job 26:6. Consequently, a few succinct exegetical notes will suffice.

אָדָם אֶל שֵׁבַת מֵבָנָא, אֵלָיו נִנָּפַל.
Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh,

אִם כָּל הַלָּמִידָה מֵעֲנֵי אָדָם;
how much more the hearts of the sons of men.


\(^{2}\)Koptak, *Proverbs*, 394.

\(^{3}\)Murphy, *Proverbs*, 22:111.
The first line contains only four words, three nouns and one preposition, but it is sufficient with this succinct form to demonstrate Yahweh's omniscience. The words יָמָן (meaning destruction, are synonymous conceptions designating the place of the dead, and exactly the same parallelism occurs in Prov 27:20. As was repeatedly seen from various books and contexts, these terms have nothing to do with the spirit world or some kind of underworld stratum.

Contrary to the assertions that "יתית is the lowest hell, the place of deepest descent, of uttermost destruction," or "Sheol and Abaddon represent the remote underworld and all the mighty powers that reside there . . .," they simply function as parallel poetic designations for the grave, which, of course, is below the earth's surface.

The preposition וְ ("in front of," "in sight of") is associated here with the "collateral idea of being open or known to," which basically means that "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before Yahweh," "are known to Him," or "lie exposed." The statement emphasizes Yahweh's absolute control and dominion over the sphere of death and is identical with that of Job 26:6, "Naked is Sheol before Him, and there is

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1For the major discussion, see exegeses on Amos 9:2, Pss 88:4; 139:8, and Job 26:6.


3Ross, Proverbs, 5:995. Similarly, Clifford refers to Sheol and Abaddon as "the place where the spirits of the dead live in a shadowy existence." Clifford, Proverbs, 152.

4Harris, "Proverbs," 570.

5"יָמָן" BDB, 617. See also Isa 59:12; Hos 7:2; Pss 38:10; 69:20; 119:168; Job 26:6.
In order to convey the main point of the proverb, the author uses parallelism by employing the first line as the foundational platform, which leads to the identification and intensification in the second line, אָּכֶל יָּרֵאָה בָּני-אָרֹם (“how much more the hearts of the sons of men”). The author takes the specified truth as the fact and applies it to the new situation. C. Feinberg explains that, after a positive sentence when “a previous statement is built into a fortiori argument,” the conjunctionarna (“also,” “yea”) functions to express an emphatic “how much more.”

The phraseלבָּהֶת בָּני-אָרֹם (“the hearts of the sons of men”) is parallel to Sheol and Abaddon. It is interesting to note that in vs. 3 the author expresses the same thought as in vs. 11,יִצְאֲרוּ יְהוָה (“in every place are the eyes of Yahweh”) and furthermore, He isלָצָה רַעַם יִשָּׂרָאֵל (“watching the evil and the good”). It means that not only physical places are exposed before Him, but also the most intimate and hidden regions of a human being (see vss. 8, 9, and 10). Both lines pinpoint the location aspect, Sheol, Abaddon, and hearts, but with absolutely different qualitative implications.

However, vs. 11 implies more than mere comparison, emphasizing Yahweh’s infinite knowledge. Far from being mere coincidence, the imagery of Sheol and Abaddon points not only to the place of decay that designates the end of human existence, but also entails the full process of returning to the dust of the ground.

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1 For more details see exegesis on Job 26:6.


3 See “heart” in Prov 15:7, 13 (twice), 14, 15, 21, 28, 30, 32.
Moreover, the fact that Sheol and Abaddon are exposed before Yahweh basically refers to the dead in the grave, thus implying the notion that He knows their character and all their deeds, and the examination of “the hearts of the sons of men” alludes to an act of judgment. The main function of both terms Sheol and Abaddon in vs. 11 is that of comparison in order to highlight Yahweh’s omniscience and His total control over the sphere of death. The meaning of the term Sheol is restricted here by its context, which is void of any idea pertaining to existence in the underworld.

Furthermore, the importance of the employment of the term Sheol in vs. 24, in particular its direct association with the already familiar “path” motif from Prov 1-9, is demonstrated in terms of antithetic parallelism and is self-evident.

וָיהֲעָלָם לְבֵית הָשָׁאֵל הָלָּא לְמַשְׁפְּכָל
The path of life [leads] upward for the prudent,

לְמַשְׁפְּכָל מַשָּׁאָלָן מַמְלָא
in order to turn from Sheol below.

The first clause characterizes the path of the prudent as הָלָּא ("the path of life"). Though the term הָלָּא ("way," "path") \(^1\) functions in a synonymous parallelism with הָרָח ("way," "road"), \(^2\) it emphasizes more “the state or condition of the man under consideration” than his actions. \(^3\) Here the word הָלָּא refers to the entire life of the prudent, and also implies the notion of “the ultimate destination

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\(^1\) See "הָלָּא," *BDB*, 73.

\(^2\) See "הָרָח," *BDB*, 204.

\(^3\) Klaus Koch, "הָלָּא," *TDOT*, 3:280-281.
of the way of Yahweh,” which is life. More than that, the term דָּוִי functions here not only as a metaphor for life, but also exhibits theological connotations, which imply relationship with Yahweh within a covenant context.

The masculine plural noun דָּוִי (lit., “lives”) implies more than purely physical existence, and that is why the author states that דָּוִי הַיָּדָה ("the path of life") leads the prudent נַפְסָה ("upward"). The path of life is qualified in Ps 16:11 as the path that leads to life, which is synonymous with the presence of Yahweh, His right hand, fullness of joys, and pleasures.

By employing the adverb יָרָא ("above," "upward") with the directional מֹאָב, and the preposition of possession ב, that characterizes the intention and activity of the prudent, the author highlights the qualifying-spatial-directional aspect, which by its nature and function is diametrically opposed to the adverb of the second line מֹאָב.

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3The phrase “path of life” occurs four times in the book of Proverbs: 2:19; 5:6; 15:24, and once in the form of דָּוִי הַיָּדָה ("the way of life").

4See Bratcher and Reyburn, Psalms, 147.

5G. Lloyd Carr, “דָּוִי,” TWOT, 2:666-670; “דָּוִי,” BDB, 750. For antimereia (the exchange of one part of speech for another) of the adverbs, when an adverb is used instead of an adjective, see Bullinger, Figures of the Speech, 491, 494-495.

6See Delitzsch, Proverbs of Solomon, 1:329.
Despite the fact that vs. 24 does not contain a reference to heaven, the direct association of the adverb מְטָלַּת with the place of the dead, Sheol, serves as an argument that the adverb מִטָלַּת alludes to the opposite location, heaven, which, of course, should be understood as the end of the path in an eschatological sense. In addition, the statement מִטָלַּת מִטָלַּת מִטָלַּת implies not only the progression in quality or the spiritual aspect but also embraces the future dimension. It means that the concepts of life and death cannot be restricted merely by the physical sphere of this world, as both of them, in one way or another, relate to the realities that are eternal.

The second line is introduced by the appositional preposition מְטָלַּת (“in order that”), and therefore it functions as a purpose clause, מְטָלַּת מְטָלַּת מְטָלַּת (“in order to turn from Sheol below”). The second line clarifies the first one by referring to the prudent as the one who מְטָלַּת מְטָלַּת מְטָלַּת (“turns from Sheol below”). The verb מְטָלַּת ("turn away," "depart") functions to emphasize the necessity of turning away.

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1See “מְטָלַּת,” BDB, 641.

2Toy argues that “above” refers only to life on upper earth while “below” refers to the grave in lower earth. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 314. Contrary to Toy’s argument, McKane writes, “This is evident from the consideration that if the path of life is envisaged as a this-worldly way of life conditional on submission to discipline, ‘upwards’ does not make any sense in relation to it. Hence the opposition of ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’ is not apposite if the contrast is between a this-worldly pattern of conduct which ensures vitality, and Sheol.” McKane, *Proverbs*, 480.


from evil as well as accepting the path of life in order to avoid the grave.\textsuperscript{1}

By employing the most fundamental contrasts, which have nothing in common among themselves since they comprise such opposite polarities as "life" and "death," or the clearly implied antithesis of heaven and Sheol,\textsuperscript{2} the author describes two ways of life and their consequences.\textsuperscript{3} Furthermore, vs. 24 associates the choice of one's path with the relation of cause and effect, which means that by making wise decisions it is possible to avoid one's premature death and the grave, a notion which has far-reaching consequences. On the other hand, those who choose to reject the path of life accept the other path with the opposite direction, which eventually leads them to Sheol below.\textsuperscript{4} In either case the result is produced as the exact correlative of the cause, which implies one's choice of action and process. Primarily the implications in both cases are moral.

Finally, in the current context the term Sheol as a poetic word, designating the place of the dead, refers only to the grave. Neither of the two adverbs (טֵרָם, 토ְרָם) can be used to support the teaching of the immortality of the soul or the punishment of the wicked in the underworld, as the function of both adverbs is to contrast two diametrically opposed ways of life which lead to two corresponding outcomes, namely life and death. The employment of the term Sheol in vs. 24 also provides


\textsuperscript{2}McKane, \textit{Proverbs}, 480.

\textsuperscript{3}Whybray, \textit{Proverbs}, 234.

\textsuperscript{4}For the contrast drawn between the righteous and the wicked see Prov 11:7; 13:9; 23:18: 24:14, 20.
no evidence for the view that Sheol is reserved exclusively for the wicked.\textsuperscript{1}

\textbf{Prov 23:14}

\begin{center}
\textit{אֶלֶךָ בּשֶׁבֶטֶת וְנָשָׁאָה מַשָּׁאָלֵי}
\end{center}

\textbf{Translation and Textual Remarks}

You shall strike him with the rod, and you will save his soul from Sheol.

\textbf{Text Unit and Its Genre}

As a part of the so-called thirty sayings (22-17-24:1-22),\textsuperscript{2} Prov 23:1-35 contains a variety of practical themes and images, whereas in terms of the teaching style it is similar to chaps. 1-9.\textsuperscript{3} It seems that the topics are clearly defined as one theme changes to another; however, because of the specific nature of its sayings, scholars have no unified approach to its structural arrangement.\textsuperscript{4}

For the current exegesis the following tentative outline will suffice:\textsuperscript{5}

vss. 1-9 contain various instructions and warnings concerning one’s behavior at the ruler’s table, craving, riches, and one’s speech; vss. 10-11 prohibit moving the

\begin{itemize}
  \item Contra Milgrom, \textit{Numbers} 73-74, 137-138; Rosenberg, “The Concept of Biblical Sheol,” 173-245. See also exegesis on Gen 37:35; 1 Sam 2:6; Isa 7:11; 28:18; Jonah 2:3; Pss 18:6; 88:4; 89:49; 116:3; 139:8; Job 14:13; 17:13, 16.
  \item For the demarcation of the thirty sayings see Garrett, \textit{Proverbs}, 193-200.
  \item See Reyburn and Fry, \textit{Proverbs}, 472.
  \item Murphy, \textit{Proverbs}, 22:174.
  \item For an insightful structure see Koptak, \textit{Proverbs}, 544. For different structural arrangements see Murphy, \textit{Wisdom Literature}, 74-77; Whybray, \textit{The Composition of the Book of Proverbs}, 141-142; Perdue, \textit{Proverbs}, 200-213.
\end{itemize}
boundary stone; vss. 12-18 describe the importance of discipline; vss. 19-21 counsel one to avoid drunkards and gluttons; and vss. 22-35 exhort one to avoid the harlot and wine.

Structurally vss. 12-18 can be divided in the following way:

- Invitation to accept wisdom (23:12)
- Do not withhold discipline (23:13-14)
- Invitation to be wise (23:15-16)
- Fear Yahweh and you will have a future (23:17-18)

The overarching genre of chap. 23 is that of instruction. The main purpose of its function is to instruct, warn, admonish, prohibit, and motivate its audience to exhibit a specific mind-set by adopting true wisdom, which leads a person to think and behave ethically.

**Exegetical Notes**

It is significant to note that the term Sheol in vs. 14 is located in a milieu of instructions, warnings, and prohibitions, which are marked by two recurring key words, כֶּ֔ל ("heart") and פָּנֵי ("eye"), repeatedly urging the youth to be on the alert. In the instance under review, these general details help to better identify the setting of the term Sheol and also its specifics that the author meant to convey.

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1. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 74.
2. Prov 23:7, 12, 15, 17, 19, 26, 33, and 34.
Do not hold back discipline from a child,

although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.

You shall strike him with the rod,

and you will save his soul from Sheol.

Both vss. 13 and 14 are addressed to the person in authority, parent or teacher, and express the same advice, whereas vs. 14 points to the positive results of the physical correction of youth. The only major difference between them is that vs. 13 starts with a negative command ("do not hold back discipline"), whereas in vs. 14 the instruction is introduced by an emphatic pronoun ("you"), which is followed by two positive statements.

Though the context of the term Sheol emerges as straightforward and self-evident, which clearly communicates the basic meaning of Sheol as that of the grave, some scholars see in the second line of vs. 14, נפשו משאואל tranquilit ("and you will save his soul from Sheol"), a reference to the underworld.

For example, G. Berry asserts that "pertinent to Sheol and punishment is Proverbs 23:14: the corporeal discipline of a son shall deliver his soul from Sheol." 1 J. M'Clintock and J. Strong refer to Prov 23:14 by labeling Sheol as "the penal abode of

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the wicked as distinguished from and opposed to the righteous.”¹ But H. Ironside explains that “Sheol is not exactly hell. It is the world of spirits; here used as that to which a vicious life will soon lead.”² Apparently, these quotes imply much more than merely saving a youth from early death and the grave, and that is why it is necessary to focus briefly on vs. 24b.

Though the expression \( \text{b} \text{m b lK fQ} \text{TOD}31 \) is quite terse, it contains important key vocabulary, namely, \( \text{b} \text{m} \text{h} \text{nesh} \text{t} \) (“and his soul”) and \( \text{y} \text{n} \text{n} \text{z} \text{l} \) (“you will save”; see also Ps 86:13). The idiom “his soul” refers to the whole person, and as was repeatedly emphasized earlier, it should be understood as “you will save him,”³ that is, the whole being as such, and not some abstract, invisible element of his soul. One should never try to artificially separate the noun \( \text{h} \text{n} \text{esh} \text{t} \) from its pronominal suffix \( \text{h} \text{n} \) in vs. 14, or else it may lead to non-biblical theories. In other words, because of the wrongly applied emphasis and misinterpretation of the construction \( \text{h} \text{n} \text{esh} \text{t} \text{n} \text{n} \text{z} \text{l} \text{n} \text{y} \text{n} \text{m} \) in its context, the text loses its inner balance, and the meaning of another key verb \( \text{y} \text{n} \text{m} \text{l} \) (“deliver, “rescue, “save”)⁴ is also misunderstood.

The verb \( \text{y} \text{n} \text{m} \text{l} \) is in Hiphil form, which in Proverbs generally refers to “rescue


³See Excursus 1, especially the exegesis on Pss 16:10; 30:4; 49:16; 86:13; 88:14.

⁴See “\( \text{y} \text{n} \text{m} \text{l} \)” BDB, 665.
from potential, not actual, disaster by steering one away from calamitous paths."\(^1\)

The exhortation to correct a youth רָצוֹן ("with the rod") and the statement רָצוֹן ("he will not die," vs. 13) basically mean that "he will come to no very great harm."\(^2\) It is also important to note that in those cases where the verb רָצוֹן ("he will die") is in Qal imperfect, which in turn is negated by ל ("no," "not"), both terms serve as a formula, which in most instances designates the avoidance of death.\(^3\) This negative statement with positive consequences functions as a reassurance that a youth will not die under the mentioned conditions. The purpose and motivation of discipline are further described in vs. 24, "and you will save his soul from Sheol," that is, you will save him from premature death and the grave, or in other words, you will save him from the fatal consequences of a wicked lifestyle.\(^4\) On the other hand, the lack of discipline would lead a youth to sure death.

The fact that the verb בָּשָׂם in the current context has nothing to do with Sheol as the spirit world is also seen from its other functions. Basically the root בָּשָׂם denotes an act of separation,\(^5\) which together with the preposition ב ("from," "out of") takes

\(^1\) Hubbard, "בָּשָׂם," NIDOTTE, 3:141-147.


\(^4\) Hubbard, "בָּשָׂם," 3:146.

\(^5\) Bergmann, "בָּשָׂם," TLOT, 2:760-762.
on the sense of “rescue.” However, in vs. 14 the verb יָסָרֵץ exhibits another quite distinct and significant aspect of its function, namely, it has a strong connotation of protection from various evil and immoral ways. This message of protection of the verb יָסָרֵץ is encoded in the situations it depicts. Implying not only physical deliverance, but also communicating relevant spiritual overtones, it graphically pictures a youth who should be protected or removed from deadly dangers.

Consequently, the purpose of various instructions and warnings of chap. 23, and the book of Proverbs as a whole, is to emphasize the role of wisdom, which delivers a youth from a wicked lifestyle (Prov 2:12), the strange woman (vs. 16; 23:26-28), envy (23:17-18), gluttony and intoxication (23:19-23), etc., thus protecting a youth from the resulting disaster and death (vss. 19, 22; 10:2; 11:4).

It should be noted that Prov 23:27 contains two parallel lines, which are quite similar in their meaning. The major reason for the employment of a highly figurative language is to intensify the warning to avoid a “deadly trap” of a harlot and a strange woman:

4 Ibid.
5 See Reyburn and Fry, Proverbs, 504.
Despite the sexual overtones of this verse, there is something more. The terms הָרָהשׁ ("pit")\(^1\) and הָנָּב ("pit," "well")\(^2\) are in parallel and here serve as synonyms of Sheol, which in turn has direct verbal linkage with the strange woman of Prov 5:5, 7:27, and 9:18, where death, the dead, Sheol, and the strange woman function as an almost identical entity.\(^3\) Consequently, this implied relationship between the term Sheol of vs. 14 and הָרָהשׁ / הָנָּב in vs. 27 alludes to a specific motif, which serves as a model of dangers and death from which a youth should be protected or rescued. Of course, this danger motif is interrelated to Sheol and implies much more than merely the strange woman, as was seen above.

In summary, vss. 13-14 emphasize the necessity of disciplining a youth by the rod, which is a symbol of authority and necessary means of correction. The avoidance of death is further stressed through the formula וְתֹּאַב ("he will not die"), which functioning under the mentioned conditions would lead a youth to a certain pattern of behavior.

When the explicitly stated exhortation to use the rod is met, then one of the major functions of the verb לָשָׁב is to confirm the consequences of discipline, that a youth is protected from early death which naturally entails the grave (see also Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15, 17).\(^4\) Thus, the one who administers corporeal punishment saves

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\(^1\)See "הָרָהשׁ," *BDB*, 1001.

\(^2\)See "הָנָּב," *BDB*, 91. See also table 9 and exegesis on Isa 14:9, 11, 15.

\(^3\)See the exegesis of the mentioned verses.


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the young person spiritually and physically from various wicked ways which lead to Sheol. This is the main point of vss. 13 and 14. While in the current context the term Sheol alludes to premature death and serves as a poetic synonym for the place of the dead or the grave, it also functions as the antithesis to life (his soul), but that is all.

Prov 27:20

Translation and Textual Remarks

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of the man are never satisfied.

Text Unit and Its Genre

Prov 27:1-27 is part of a larger block which consists of chaps. 25:1-29:27 and is often referred to as the Proverbs of Solomon copied by Hezekiah’s men (25:1). This chapter characterized by particularly short individual sayings and brief admonitions,1 which refer to various aspects of friendship and mutual human relationships.2

Though some verses are paired (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 15-16), and vss. 23-27 can be identified as an extended admonition,3 there is very little of cohesiveness or interaction among the sayings, which therefore result in no structural unity.4 In order

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1Whybray, Proverbs, 379; Koptak, Proverbs, 605.

2Reyburn and Fry, Proverbs, 572.

3Ibid.

to avoid tentative structural details, the following general outline adopted from Koptak will suffice:¹

- Praise and rebuke (27:1-7)
- Family and safety (27:8-12)
- Bad neighbors and quarrelsome wives (27:13-16)
- Iron to iron, face to face (27:17-22)
- Care for one’s animals (27:23-27)

Vss. 17-22 consist of six synthetic and by their nature comparative sayings: the focus of vs. 17 is on influence; vs. 18 refers to fidelity; vs. 19 speaks about sympathy; vs. 20 pictures human greed; vs. 21 mentions test of character; and vs. 22 states that folly is ineradicable.²

It is hard to define an overarching genre of Prov 27 since it represents various forms; however, vss. 1-22 could be referred to as antithetic proverbs and vss. 23-27 as instruction.³ The setting is the same as in the previous cases, namely, instruction.

**Exegetical Notes**

Vs. 20 is located almost in the middle of miscellaneous reflections on the human character (vss. 17-22), whereas one of its basic functions, the fourth comparative saying, is to exhibit the negative side of human nature.

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Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,

and the eyes of the man are never satisfied.

This is the third occasion (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11, and 27:20) when both terms ("Abaddon" or "Destruction"\(^1\)), which particularly in the wisdom literature refers to the place of destruction,\(^2\) stand next to each other and function as two synonyms. Though it is impossible to describe in detail the exact nuances they have, it is clear that the terms complement each other by clarifying the nature and function of the place of the dead, or simply the grave, as was seen earlier from the parallel references. The combination of both poetical synonyms creates the so-called "rhetorical fullness."\(^3\)

To make the comparison as striking as possible the author employs a figurative language that depicts as living beings who are ("never satisfied"). Normally the verb ("be sated," "satisfied")\(^4\) designates "a state of satiation," which "is the result of having eaten or drunk to the point of fullness."\(^5\)

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\(^1\)For various views concerning the spelling of the term as see Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, 215-216; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 22:205, note 20a.


\(^3\)Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 490.

\(^4\)See "satisfied," *BDB*, 959.

In this connection it is important to point out that, because the last part of a syntactical structure is introduced by the negative particle קָל, which is followed by the Qal imperfect verb, יִנָּתֵן, it expresses an emphatically forceful and pointed negation¹ that Sheol and Abaddon never reach such “a state of satiation.”

Furthermore, the first-line statement is concise and provides no information concerning the “object” of Sheol’s “insatiability.” However, the parallel references, which also describe Sheol and death in personified terms, depict the place of the dead as if it had a mouth opened beyond measure and endlessly swallowing multitudes, going down to their graves.² In vs. 20 both Sheol and Abaddon are represented as deadly powers that unremittingly devour their victims, and at the same time they are qualified as insatiable. The basic meaning of Sheol is that of the grave that never is “satisfied (Prov 30:16).” And as Sheol is related to Abaddon, so the grave is related to death and destruction.

The characteristics of both terms שֵׁאֹלָהָרֵביה (Sheol) are mirrored in a parallel phrase וְלָמַּיְמִין (“and the eyes of man”), where the conjunction ¶ (“and”) serves as a link binding together the nouns, which are to express related ideas. The same is also true concerning Sheol and Abaddon. The observation described in the first line not only is relevant to the point it represents, but also has direct bearing on the second line, which functions as a fitting comparison concerning human greed:

¹See “אֵל,” BDB, 520.

²See exegesis on Num 16:30, 33; Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5; Hos 13:14; Prov 1:12.
The word הִיּוֹן ("eye") in the phrase יַעֲשֶׂה יָאָרֵי יָתָר ("and the eyes of the man") functions as a concentrated expression of one’s personality, which is inseparable from one’s inward disposition toward the surrounding world. In a more narrow sense, one may take “eyes” as the metonymy for various desires, that is, “the desires of man” לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה ("are never satisfied"). The description of human covetousness is as negative and destructive as that of the grave. As there are no limits to human ambitions, so there are no limits to the destruction and death humans may bring upon themselves and others.

In summary, vs. 20 represents a comparative saying that associates the insatiability of Sheol and Abaddon with the eyes of man that are never satisfied. No teaching concerning the underworld as the place of continued existence can be construed here, except that it is already a registered fact that the grave and death are insatiable and lethal powers.

Prov 30:16

נַעַלְתָה נַעַלְתָה וְתַנְא שֶׁמָּבָהָה סַפְתִּי וְתַנְא אָמְרָה הָוִיתָה

Translation and Textual Remarks

Sheol, and the barren womb,
the earth that is never satisfied with water,
and fire that never says, "Enough."

1See “יִיָּון,” BDB, 745.


3Clifford, Proverbs, 240.
Text Unit and Its Genre

Prov. 30:1-33 goes together with chap. 31 by introducing “the sayings of Agur” (30:1)\(^1\) and “the sayings of King Lemuel” (31:1). Though scholars are sharply divided concerning various aspects and details of the chapter,\(^2\) the basic structural arrangement can be presented in the following way: Prov 30:1-14 contains the oracle of Agur, whereas the second part, vss. 15-33, has the form of numerical sayings.\(^3\) The structural outline of vss. 15-33 falls into six parts:\(^4\)

Four that never say “Enough” (30:15-17)
Four amazing ways (30:18-20)
Four earth-shattered outcomes (30:21-23)
Four small but wise creatures (30:24-28)
Four stately in stride (30:29-31)
Pride and Strife (30:32-33)

Though the setting is that of instruction, chap. 30 contains various genres as can be seen from the above notes on the structure.\(^5\)

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\(^1\)See Perdue, Proverbs, 251-268.


\(^4\)It is partially adopted from the outline prepared by Koptak, Proverbs, 654.

\(^5\)Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 80-81.
Exegetical Notes

Since the nature and function of the term Sheol in vs. 16 is identical with that of Prov 27:20, a few short notes will suffice. Vs. 15 contains a laconic description of the הַעֲרִיב ("leech"),¹ as having בֵּית נַפַל ("two daughters"), who are crying וְנָשָׁנָהוֹ ("Give," "Give"). The הַעֲרִיב in the current context functions as the symbol of greed and covetousness.²

The same motif of extremely negative associations is further continued in vs. 16, where the author refers successively to four things which are never insatiable:

ינא Europ
Sheol

וְזֶרֶם רָדֵה
dand the barren womb

כִּי לְעַל שִׁפְתָּה פִימוּ
the earth that is never satisfied with water

וְאֶת לְאָפָה אִמְמוֹת הָוֹן
and fire that never says, "Enough."

Normally the first two images, Sheol and בֵּית נַפַל ("the womb"), represent two antithetic concepts, the grave and birth, death and life,³ but not in this case, since they


²Ross, Proverbs, 5:1122.

are associated with each other by the common theme of their insatiability. Unlike the
last two lines, where both לְאָמָרָה בֵּית ("the earth") and פָּרָה ("fire") contain a succinct
explanation and the womb is qualified as בַּעַל־יָרָה ("barren"), the term Sheol stands on its
own without any descriptive elements attached to it.

However, the synonymous theme of insatiability, which is dramatized by the
double expressions לְאָמָרָה בֵּית ("not satisfied," vss. 15, 16) and פָּרָה ("never say enough," vss. 15, 16),¹ not only locks the metaphors of the
("leech") and her תַּקְרִיב בָּנוֹת ("two daughters"), לְאָמָרָה בֵּית ("the barren
womb"), לְאָמָרָה ("the earth") and פָּרָה ("fire") together, but also helps to identify the
nature and function of Sheol.² In fact, this juxtaposition here is remarkable not only
concerning its primary implication as greed, but also in regard to its secondary aspect,
referring to the condition of no-life and total destruction. The barren womb that is
unable to bring forth life, the dry earth where nothing grows, and the all-consuming
fire, that burns all combustibles with which it comes into contact, function to create
specific mental pictures of conditions and settings where no presence of life is
possible, thus intensifying the imagery of Sheol as the place of total nonexistence.

Since in the context all the parallel imagery is personified, it is reasonable that
Sheol functions exactly in the same way as all the other metaphors, which clearly

¹The expressions contain small differences in number and gender. Whereas in
vs. 15 the verbs are plural, in vs. 16 they are singular.

²For suggested parallelism of לְאָמָרָה and בֵּית, לְאָמָרָה בֵּית, and פָּרָה, see Delitzsch,
Proverbs of Solomon, 291.
imply the notion of destructive consequences. Accordingly, Sheol as the place of the dead performs its part by “swallowing” its victims, and it is never so overfilled that there would be no room for another corpse.¹

Finally, the line of argument leads to the conclusion that as in all the previous passages, which contain the references to Sheol, vs. 16 is no exception as it does not have any mythological significance and can tell the reader absolutely nothing about life after death.² As in Prov 27:20, here the term Sheol is associated with the common place of burial,³ or simply the grave. It should also be noted that the emphasis falls more on the deadly power of the grave than on the place,⁴ though both concepts are intrinsically interrelated. The term Sheol of the current text in no way can be used as a reference for a subterranean spirit world; on the contrary, the nature and the function of Sheol assert not only its insatiability but also its deadly power by unceasingly destroying its victims.

Cant 8:6

Sheol יוהה ילו-לך קרהו ילו-רוהה
כשתה קמא קמה קמה קמה קמה קמה
לשתה קמה אול שמלתיה

¹See Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5; Pss 49:15, 16; 89:49; Prov 27:20.
³Steveson, Proverbs, 426.
⁴Koptak, Proverbs, 660; Murphy, Proverbs, 22:235; Clifford, Proverbs, 265.
Translation and Textual Remarks

Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm;
For love is strong as death, ardent love\(^1\) is unyielding as Sheol.
Its flashes\(^2\) are flashes of fire, the flame of Yah.\(^3\)

Text Unit and Its Genre

Scholars are surprisingly unanimous in designating the book as a "love song"\(^4\) in which a man and a woman articulate their tenderness and attachment,

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\(^{1}\) R. Gordis argues that הָעַל should be translated not as "jealousy" but as "zeal, hence, passion." Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1954), 96.

\(^{2}\) The term נֵמַע has been translated variously as "its flashes" (RSV, NRSV, NASB), "its flames" (NKJV), "the coals thereof" (KJV), and "it burns like blazing fire" (NIV). O. Keel translates the term as "its arrows." Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs, CC* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 270, 275. See also "בָּרָא," *BDB*, 958.

\(^{3}\) Scholars are divided concerning the difficult expression הָעַלְתָּרָה נֵמַע. The noun נֵמַע ("flame") occurs in Job 15:30 and Ezek 21:3. It is rendered as "a flame of Yahweh himself" (NJB), "a most vehement flame" (NKJ), "like a mighty flame" (NIV), "the very flame of the Lord" (NASB), and "a raging flame" (NRSV). "According to the Eastern Recension, however, which is also the reading of Ben-Naphtali and several early editions" it consists of two words, נֵמַע וָהָעַל, and should be translated as "the flame of Yah." This is a hapax legomenon and the only reference in the Song to Yahweh. Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoreto-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897), 386; Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 121; Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," 209-227, esp. 221; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 7C (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 670-672; Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, *Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 191-192; Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 210.

\(^{4}\) This designation points to a general category without specifying genre.
adoration and affection, passion and sexual longing for one another.¹

Generally scholars agree that the last chapter of the Song of Songs 8:1-14 consists of three major segments that can be divided into smaller subunits.² The first segment (vss. 1-4) starts with the collocation נְאֻן הַשָּׁם (lit., “who will give you”)³ which serves to introduce and express a wish. The basic emphasis here is on the beloved’s yearning for a greater intimacy. The second section (vss. 5-7) is introduced with a rhetorical question נְאֻן הְלָעָה (“who is this?”) and describes the nature and power of genuine love.⁴ It is especially important to note that by affirming the unparalleled

¹Like no other book, the Song of Songs has been subjected to numerous and radically differing interpretations as for example (1) an allegory, (2) poems sung at peasant weddings, (3) a liturgy for celebrating the cultic wedding of the goddess Ishtar and the god Tammuz, (4) an anthology of disconnected love songs, (5) a funeral love feast, (6) a drama, (7) genuine love song, etc. See Garrett, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, 352-367; Robert Gordis, The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 2-13; Pope, Song of Songs, 89-229; Harold H. Rowley, The Servant of the Lord, and Other Essays on the Old Testament (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 189-234; Tremper Longman III, Song of Songs, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-49.


⁴Some scholars divide 8:5-14 into five separate units, namely, 8:5; 6-7; 8-10; 11-12; and 13-14. See Murphy, The Song of Songs, 195; Keel, The Song of Songs, 265-285; Stadelmann, Love and Politics, 201-228; Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 121-124.
power, depth, and value of love, vss. 6-7 lead to the conclusion and form the peak of
the literary climax and heightened intensity of the entire Song. The last segment (vss.
8-14) functions as the epilogue and, in a way, as a return to the beginning (1:2-6).¹

The overall genre of the Song, which incorporates various genre elements,
such as self-description, admiration, tease, etc., can be denoted as that of yearning.
Consequently, as a unit vss. 5-7 encompass two different genre components: vs. 5
(compare it with 3:6 and 6:10) can be characterized as the genre of admiration song,
whereas vss. 6-7 are classified as a song of yearning.²

Exegetical Notes

In almost all versions the term Sheol of vs. 6 is rendered as “the grave” (KJV, NIV, NKJV, NRSV) except the NJB and NASB, which simply transliterate it. However, it is a little surprising that T. Gledhill at first translates Sheol in vs. 6 as “the grave.” Then, referring to other commentators, he points it out as the place of one’s afterlife: “It would appear that all men, both good and evil, lived on in Sheol after


²Murphy, Wisdom Literature, 121-122. See also Jack M. Sasson, “Unlocking the Poetry of Love in Song of Songs,” Bible Review 1 (February 1985): 11-30.
death, in a dark phantom-like existence, in the lower parts of the cosmic ocean.”¹ A similar pattern is observed in the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*: “Sheol, the Hebrew word for ‘the grave’ in both *Song of Songs* and Hosea, is the underworld where the departed go according to Hebrew cosmology.”² F. Landy identifies the term Sheol of 8:6 with the place which “is tenuous, shadowy, dominated by imagery of unrelieved darkness and grief” and “Sheol is non-death, as well non-life, phantom-existence, not non-existence.”³ Due to the views expressed in this paragraph and in order to discover the meaning of the term Sheol in the current context, there is a need for a concise exegesis of the language and its imagery in vss. 6-7.

Since the Song describes the love relationships between a man and woman, pictures their physical beauty and portrays their yearnings for intimacy, passion, and ecstasy, asserts their loyalty and sexuality in all their aspects and variety, the occurrence of the Hebrew word Sheol in the current context is unique and unparalleled. In order to describe this specific love relationship between the two lovers, in vss. 6-7 the author employs the feminine noun הָרַעַק ("love") three times, thus linking both verses together, as can be observed from the structural-thematic outline in table 17.


## TABLE 17

THE TERM אַלָּלֶֽיךָ IN THE CONTEXT OF CANT 8:6-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>on your heart</th>
<th>like a seal</th>
<th>set me</th>
<th>Request</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on your arm</td>
<td>like a seal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[is] love</th>
<th>like death</th>
<th>strong</th>
<th>for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[is] ardent love</td>
<td>like Sheol</td>
<td>unyielding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the flame of Yah</th>
<th>flashes of fire</th>
<th>its flashes [are]</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the love</th>
<th>quench</th>
<th>cannot</th>
<th>many waters</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>overflow it</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>and rivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>for love</th>
<th>[of] his house</th>
<th>all the wealth</th>
<th>if gave a man</th>
<th>Condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>at him</th>
<th>they would scorn</th>
<th>to scorn</th>
<th>[i.e. indeed]</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As can be seen from the first two lines of vs. 6, the usage of סִבָּה נֵבָה (“set me like a seal”) demonstrates a strict grammatical parallelism in the request segment. It is followed by the two-clause explanation part, where both לְגַדְּר (“death”) and יְסֹדוּ (“mighty”)1 and כְּשֹׁר (“hard,” “unyielding”)2 they are presented as assertive and dynamic forces. Both clauses function in the same parallel construction relationship3 and serve with the same intent to refer to the same reality.4 The same can be said about the syntactic and semantic positions of נָפַל (‘ardent love’),5 the parallelism in meaning of אָשֶׁר (“flashes of fire”) and נָשְׁמַת (“the flame of Yah”) in the conclusion section, פֶּתֶם (“many waters”) and נְפָר (“rivers”) in the explanation segment of vs. 7.

It is obvious that besides qualifying feminine adjectives נָפַל in the expression נָפַל נְפָר in the phrase נָפַל נְפָר, the term Sheol is not associated with any direct descriptive element which would provide insights concerning its spatial aspects or allusions relating to its inhabitants. Exactly the same


3Compare Hos 13:14; Pss 18:6; 49:15, 16; 89:49 where death and Sheol are in parallel.

4Bergant, The Song of Songs, 98.

can be said about its context. The only qualifier of Sheol דֵּרֶךְ ("hard," "unyielding") is used to describe ardent love as one of love's specific characteristics, which is as unyielding or inflexible "as the grave.") Nevertheless, the word Sheol in 8:6 is employed with a specific purpose in mind which differs from everything discussed previously in the Torah or Prophets.

It is especially important to note that the term Sheol stands next to some of the most powerful and dominant images known to humans on this earth, namely, שֵׁלוֹם ("flame"), מְנֹרָה ("all wealth"), all of which function as figures of amplification and comparison not only to elucidate and clarify the nature and characteristics of הֵרָבָה, but also to intensify its essence to the utmost.

Consequently, vs. 6 employs the three forceful metaphors of "death," Sheol, and "fire" to portray the depth and power of love, and four similes which are introduced by the same proposition שֶׁ ("as," "like"). It should be noted that in the current context the imagery of וְאַחַת נַעַר יָדִיעָה and נְעַרַּים of vs. 7 operate not only as an antipode to "fire," but also as a destructive force which contains a clear allusion to the grave. It means that the first two statements of vs. 7, "many waters cannot quench love" and "rivers cannot overflow it," function in the same way as metaphors of death

1Walker, "עזרות," 3:999.

2See also Stadelman, Love and Politics, 208.

3The phrase וְאַחַת נַעַר יָדִיעָה occurs twenty-eight times in the Scriptures.

4Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 64. See also 2 Sam 22:5, 6, 17; Ps 18:4, 5, 16; Jonah 2:3, 5, 6. See also Francis Landy who points out that "in the Song of Songs (3:6-11; 8:5) the lovers are seen coming up from the wilderness, which is likewise associated with death." Beauty and the Enigma and Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible, JSOTSup 312 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 288.
and Sheol in vs. 6. In other words, the power of death and the grave is “absolute and inexorable, yet love’s power is no less.”¹

A considerable role is played by the presence of the particle "די ("for") in vs. 6, which not only provides the foundation for the beloved’s request, but also introduces the explanation of the nature of love, namely, “for love is strong as death,” “ardent love is unyielding as Sheol,” etc. Landy points out that “the comparative particle כ suggests not simply an equivalence but an opposition, their strength as tested against each other.”² Love and death, namely, ardent love (jealousy) as a unique aspect of love, and Sheol are antonyms; one is positive and creative, the other negative and destructive. Both function as universal, unavoidable, and irresistible powers. As love unites two lovers together, so death and the grave separate them. By comparing תִּתֵּן with Sheol, the author of the Song describes the unique and possessive nature of love, which by F. Delitzsch is summarized in the following way:

So the jealousy of love wholly takes possession of the beloved object not only in arrest, but also in safe keeping; she holds her possession firmly; that it cannot be taken from her (Wisd. ii. 1), and burns relentlessly and inexorably against any one who does injury to her possession.³

By using two powerful figures of speech, “for love is strong as death” and “ardent love is unyielding as Sheol,” the Song portrays the nature of genuine love, its


²Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 123.

³Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 146.
commitment and resistance to any opposite destructive power.

Moreover, after comparing love with death and Sheol, which can be interpreted only as the grave, it is further identified with "flashes of fire". The metaphor of fire presents a mental image of the quality of love as being intense, including its warming and refining effect on both lovers.

In the Hebrew Bible fire is often associated with the presence of Yahweh. On the one hand, if death and Sheol function as negative and destructive forces and as opponents of Yahweh, then on the other, the only positive and creative force left is that of Yahweh, Who is the true source of "flashes of fire," namely, love. In fact, the whole Song is encapsulated in the phrase "the flame of Yah" and everything, including "death" and Sheol, must be read and interpreted in the light of it. Consequently, the term Sheol, as a poetic designation of the place of death, simply refers to the grave, as it has been translated by most versions.

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3 Gen 3:24; 15:17; Exod 3:2-5; Num 9:15; Lev 9:24; Deut 4:11, 12, 24; 1 Kgs 18:12; Isa 29:6, etc.


In summary, vs. 6 describes the supreme subject of the Song, namely, true love, its nature, and identity, which are intensified by the most powerful imagery of death, the grave, and fire. Vs. 6 shows that love is irresistible as death, the grave, and fire that burns but does not consume, whereas vs. 7 asserts that it is "an irrepressible, irresistible, and unquenchable force" and this kind of love cannot be bought or sold.

Qoh 9:10

Translation and Textual Remarks

All that your hand finds to do, with your strength do; For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, To which you are going [there].

Text Unit and Its Genre

Qoh 9:1-18 picks up the theme of death from the previous chapters (2:14-16, 3:19-21, 4:1, 2, etc.), which already explained that death makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and subsequently elaborates on the positive and negative aspects of wisdom.

As it stands now, the entire structure of chap. 9 can be divided into three distinct units, which in turn can be split into smaller subunits. Thus, the terms נַעֲשֶׂה

1Wendland, "Seeking the Path," 44. See also p. 43 where the author convincingly demonstrates vs. 6 as the main peak of the whole Song.

2Carr, The Song of Solomon, 171.
("love") and הָרֱעָה ("hate"), appearing in vss. 1 and 6, form an inclusion and set the limits of the first segment. The catchword בֵּית הַמָּוֶת ("the dead") is used in vss. 3 and 4. The next unit consists of vss. 7-10 and is characterized by the string of imperatives. The phrase יִדְעָה ("knows not") is typical for the last section (vss. 11-18), which consists of three smaller subunits (vss. 11-12, 13-16, and 17-18), each of which is introduced by a specific vocabulary.

Because of the stylistic complexity, there is no agreement among scholars whether the book is prose or poetry or both, although J. Loader argues that the overall genre of the book is poetry. Concerning chap. 9, due to the specific structural elements and thematic nuances, it deals with varied genres; however, in general it can be specified as the genre of reflections. It should be added that the author employs the literary devices which are characteristic to the wisdom writings, such as the recommendation to enjoy life (vss. 7-10), example story (vss. 13-15), or the woe-

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1Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 144-145.


saying and the benediction (vss. 16-17), which all together can be designated as instructional material.1

Exegetical Notes

The book of Qohelet is one of the most important sources concerning the current topic, not only because 9:10 contains the last canonical reference to the term Sheol, including some significant descriptive elements of its nature, but also because it recapitulates nearly all the previously more-or-less-discussed points, such as man’s nature,2 life-and-death issues,3 creation,4 judgment,5 etc.6

It seems that in the instance under review, the identification of the nature and function of the term Sheol does not contain any difficulties as it is found in the context


2Man is subject to death: 3:19-20; 6:6; 7:2; 9:5, understands: 1:17, observes: 1:14; 2:12; 24; 3:10, draws conclusions: 2:14; 5:18, enjoys: 2:10; 9:7; 11:9; loves: 9:1, 6, 9, despairs: 2:20, etc. For other aspects of the human nature such as “sin,” “heart,” “spirit,” “soul,” “work,” and other, see the corresponding references.


4Qoh 3:11-14; 7:13-14, 29; 9:1-3; 11:5; 12:1. All together the term סֵפַּר (twice) is employed in various capacities in the book of Qohelet at least 40 times: 1:13; 2:24, 26; 3:10, 11, 13, 14 (twice), 15, 17, 18; 4:17; 5:1 (twice), 3, 5, 6, 17, 18 (twice), 19; 6:2 (twice); 7:13, 14, 18, 26, 29; 8:2, 12, 13, 15, 17; 9:1, 7; 11:5, 9; 12:7; 13, 14.

5Qoh 2:26; 3:15-17; 5:3-5; 6:2; 8:12-13; 11:9; 12:14.

6The book is so rich with various anthropological and theological insights pertaining to the current investigation that one could write an entire dissertation based on Ecclesiastes alone.
of the ordinary human way of life, characterized by recurring events,\(^1\) where
everything is terminated by death. Nevertheless, some scholars understand that
Qohelet employs the word Sheol to remind the reader that after death there is some
kind of continued existence in the underworld. Accordingly, A. Schoors asserts:
"That Koheleth defends the traditional biblical conception of life after death is very
obvious in 9:10. . . . The dead go to Sheol where all activity ends, and there they lead
a shadowy existence."\(^2\) Ogden and Zogbo, commenting on vs. 10, see in the term
Sheol "the place of departed spirits."\(^3\) In one of his works Ogden clarifies the nature
of Sheol by making the following anthropological statement: "Thus we have a sage’s
perspective on the nature of one’s shadowy existence in Sheol."\(^4\) T. Perry and other
scholars see in 9:10 "the grave" and no more.\(^5\) As in the previous cases, this text
deserves a closer examination.

The uniqueness of vss. 7-10 can be attributed to several factors: (1) this subunit
represents one of the seven texts providing practical advice on how to maximize the

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\(^1\) The quest for the meaning of human existence, toil, wealth, love and hatred,
marriage, the righteous and the wicked, the confrontation with hardships, etc.

\(^2\) Anton Schoors, "Koheleth: A Perspective of Life after Death?" *Ephemerides

\(^3\) Ogden and Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes*, 335. Compare with a similar

\(^4\) Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth: Readings—A New Biblical Commentary*
(Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 154; Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His

\(^5\) Theodore A. Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes*
(University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 147; Harris, "The
Meaning of the Word Sheol," 131; Étan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Qohelet*
quality of human life, 1 (2) the description of a full-fledged life reaches its culmination by the employment of the five imperatives: יָלַךְ ("go"), אֶכְתָּב ("eat"), אָכְבָּד ("drink"), הָעְצָב ("see," "enjoy"), and אֶכְּבָּד ("do"), 2 which already by themselves function as forceful imagery, but when employed next to each other they create a powerful picture of a dynamic life, and (3) the reason for enjoying life at its best is introduced and explained by the abrupt change of vocabulary, namely, the description of Sheol.

In the unit under scrutiny, three verses (vss. 7, 9, and 10) contain three attached "for" clauses. In the first two instances they provide the rationale for Qohelet’s advice to enjoy life; however, in the third case the "for" clause deserves special attention. 3 The conjunction "for" in vs. 10 introduces the clause which functions as a motivation for vibrant living, as well as an explanation of the nature of Sheol, and a contrast to Qohelet’s instructions given for those who are alive. Furthermore, the conjunction "for" is built into the construction where the negation הָא ("there is no") 4 “is used in its original function, as a particle expressing non-existence,” thus


2The imperatives do not provide a license for carousing, reveling, or debauchery. Qohelet “commands” to enjoy one’s life in a healthy manner with gratitude and thankfulness as one’s life is given from God, and that is why 11:9 contains another imperative "but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment”).

3Ogden, “Qoheleth IX 1-16,” 163.

4_HOST", BDB, 35.

absolutely denying any likelihood of one’s continued existence in Sheol.

The nature of Sheol is qualified by means of the four all-encompassing terms, referring to both the physical and mental areas. In the book of Qohelet the noun מָצוֹן (“work,” “deed”), referring to various kinds of good and evil deeds,\(^1\) sums up the entire range of actions belonging to the physical sphere. By asserting that “there is no מָצוֹן,” Qohelet points out that any corporeal activity in Sheol is excluded.

Moreover, in order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the state of the dead and to emphasize the fact that in Sheol any imaginable psychological or intellectual process has come to its complete end, Qohelet employs three specific terms תשב”ת (“device,” “account,” “thought”),\(^2\) וּנְחֵית (“knowledge,” “opinion”),\(^3\) and חכמה (“wisdom”),\(^4\) which are characteristic only for the living and refer to their mental sphere.\(^5\) The basic idea of the current verse is succinctly summarized in vs. 5: יִדְרַעְתִּים וְאֵין מְנוֹנָה (“but the dead know nothing”),\(^6\) where יִדְרַעְתִּים (Qal act. ptc. m. p.) points to continuity in time, and instead of directly modifying מְנוֹנָה

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\(^1\) In the book of Qohelet the noun refers to various kinds of good and evil works. See Thomas E. McCominskey, *“נְצַר,”* \textit{TWOT,} 2:701-702.

\(^2\) "חָשֵׁב,” \textit{BDB,} 363.

\(^3\) "וּנְחֵית,” \textit{BDB,} 396.

\(^4\) "חֲכָמָה,” \textit{BDB,} 315.

\(^5\) Longman, \textit{The Book of Ecclesiastes,} 231.

\(^6\) See also Pss 88:11-13; 115:17; Job 14:10-12.
(substative use) it asserts that the dead actually know nothing because they are dead.\textsuperscript{1} Furthermore, by using in the same verse the same negation אֲנָכָּה, Qohelet emphasizes another aspect, namely, the dead cannot enjoy the fruits of their work as do the living ones, לֹא מִתּוֹם לֹא חָכָּר (“and there is no more to them a reward,” see 4:9). It means that with death all their earthly wages, benefits, and profits have come to an end and there is nothing more for them to expect, only obliviousness.\textsuperscript{2}

Moreover, considerable attention should be given to 9:6, where Qohelet refers to the third aspect of human nature, the emotional one. Qohelet takes the three feminine nouns designating the strongest and the most intensive emotions, לְבָנָה (“their love”), לְבָשָׁם (“their hatred”), and לְבָשָׁמ (“their jealousy”), which here represent the whole emotional spectrum of human life, and are applied to the vertical and horizontal relationships, and shows that with death all the emotions לְבָשָׁם (“have perished”). In the current text, the feminine verb לְבָשָׁם (“perished,” “are destroyed”)\textsuperscript{3} functions as the key term, emphasizing the fact that the dead are totally unconscious, nonexistent, with no emotions in any capacity. Thus, by referring to the physical, mental, and emotional spheres of human life, Qohelet convincingly demonstrates that in Sheol, which refers to the place of death or simply the grave, not one or two spheres, all of them simultaneously cease to function and thus to exist.

\textsuperscript{1}For the use of the Qal active participle see Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, Basics of Biblical Hebrew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 261-263; Kelley, Biblical Hebrew, 200.

\textsuperscript{2}Longman, The Book of Ecclesiastes, 229.

\textsuperscript{3}See “לְבָשָׁם,” BDB, 2.
Against this background it is easy to grasp the tremendous significance of the theological and anthropological implications, which function not only to explain the current theme but also to remove any unnecessary tension and conflict concerning the state of the dead in Sheol. In this connection it should be noted that Qohelet’s straightforward assertion that מְתָנָה לְאֵל וּמְלָטָה (“all return to the dust”) and מְתָנָה לְאֵל וּמְלָטָה (“the spirit returns to God who gave it”)¹ is not only in perfect harmony with 9:10 and other similar texts,² but also is linked with Gen 2:7 and 3:19. The author refers to the spirit of life that returns to God and not one’s soul. This text provides additional, critically important details, clarifying and reinforcing the insights concerning the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol, which were discovered in this dissertation in the previous chapters, and at the same time completely nullify the view of immortality of soul in the underworld.

Finally, the expression רְמַנָּה לְאֵל (“to which you are going [there]”) contains a solemn message for all the living: that everyone is going to die and be in Sheol, as is evident from the function of the participle רְמַנָּה (“going”) and the adverb רְמַנָּה (“there-wards”), which has the directional ר, and is parallel to the term Sheol.

Furthermore, the relative pronoun רְמַנָּה (“which”) not only introduces a relative clause but also directly refers to Sheol as the place of death. In order to

¹Qoh 3:20; 12:5, 7.

²For additional discussion on the traditional view of man’s state in death see Excursus 1. Unfortunately, space does not allow even a brief treatment of a number of other references pertaining to this study, but some of them will briefly be discussed in Excursus 3. See also David M. Clemens, “The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-3,” Themelios 19 (May 1984): 5-8.
personalize this notion to the utmost, Qohelet uses the personal pronoun הָנָךְ ("you"), which should be understood as applied to every individual person.

It should also be noted that the participle קְלֹלַת is repeatedly used in the book of Qohelet to emphasize the temporal limitations and finitude of human life on this earth:

Qoh 1:4

a generation goes, a generation comes

Qoh 3:20

all go to the same place

Qoh 6:6

do not all go to one place?

Qoh 12:5

for the man goes to his eternal home

According to Qohelet, one of the major intentions of employing the participle קְלֹלַת is to establish the truth that life is short and death is inevitable, that all the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fools, absolutely everyone go to the same place, namely, the grave.

The reference to Sheol, including the elaborate treatment of the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of the dead, convincingly demonstrates the fact that according to Qohelet the dead in the grave are in a state of complete unconsciousness. The dead know nothing. Their love, hate, and jealousy have perished. There is no reword, no work, no thought, no knowledge, and no wisdom in the grave. There is nothing, as the dead are returning to dust. Longman comes to exactly the same conclusion when he makes comments on vs. 10: "The second half of this verse is one
of the clearest indications that Qohelet had absolutely no concept of life after death” and “for Qohelet death is the absolute end.”\(^1\) Murphy points out that “this description of Sheol is a classic; it portrays a state of non-life.”\(^2\)

The wise person is the one who realizes that after death there is no chance to compensate or recover opportunities neglected in this life, and lives in the light of this awareness. Qohelet is neither a pessimist nor a skeptic, as some scholars assert him to be,\(^3\) but a person who knows by experience that material wealth and possessions have limited value, who has tasted the elusiveness of wisdom and temporal character of human life, who presents realistic considerations concerning the true values for man, which Qohelet summarizes by a simple imperative אֵּדָע לִבּוֹת אֱלֹהִים (“fear God!” 5:6, 12:13), “and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Qoh 12:13, 14).\(^4\) Against this background should be discussed and scrutinized all the issues pertaining to one’s life and death, the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol, including related eschatological developments.

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\(^2\) Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 93.

\(^3\) W. Anderson labels Qohelet not only as a pessimist but also “annihilistic at worst.” He writes, “Death was the ultimate, brutal reality for Qoheleth—and a lack of future hope, i.e., afterlife, may have made this reality all the more painful and fearful for him.” William H. U. Andersen, *Qoheleth and Its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), 88, 195; George R. Castellino, “Qohelet and His Wisdom,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 15-28; Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet*, 145.

Before proceeding to synthesize the information obtained from the exegeted references,\(^1\) it should be noted that practically all the conclusions, which were reached concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the word Sheol in the Torah and Prophets, not only form a unified imagery of the grave, including its various unyielding qualities as the place of the dead, but also are relevant and applicable here.

In spite of the fact that the settings of the term Sheol in the Writings radically differ from the contexts in the Torah and Prophets, the fundamental nature of the term remains unchanged. More precisely, whatever the literary milieu of the term, whatever its connotations or its descriptive elements, none of them has the capacity to instigate a change of the basic nature of Sheol. This assertion becomes self-evident when the fundamental function and purpose of Sheol are shown clearly demonstrating that Sheol is the place of the dead and never the region of ongoing existence of life.

The first part of the current section deals with Psalms, especially the Psalms of thanksgiving and lamentation, which express either deep distress, a deadly threat of the wicked to the righteous, or the projected fate of the wicked. In order to depict any of these concrete situations by the most vivid imagery and lead the main point to the utmost tension, the Psalmists employ one of the most powerful words from the sphere

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\(^1\)For comparative reasons it is worth mentioning that in the Writings the term Sheol occurs thirty-five times; in particular the term is scattered throughout the whole spectrum of the books of poetry and wisdom, whereas altogether in the Torah and Prophets it appears thirty-one times. See table 1.
of death, the term Sheol as well as its related vocabulary.

Consequently, the exegesis of Ps 6:6 reveals that the Psalmist clearly understood the destructive nature of Sheol, which is inherent not only to the place of the dead, but also to the state of the dead, and that is why he laments that in the grave any mental, spiritual, or physical activity is inconceivable for the corpse. Although the wording of the Psalmist provides no spatial characteristics or any specific physical aspects of Sheol, it is more than enough with the given description to qualify Sheol as the place of no existence or simply as the grave.

In Ps 89:49 the Psalmist highlights the reality that not only every human life on this earth has its limits but also confirms the universal fact that no one is able to escape “from the hand of Sheol.” Here the emphasis falls on the all-inclusive deadly nature of the grave, which, by the way, is always open and ready to swallow both the righteous and the wicked. The direct parallelism of “death,” which spares no one, with Sheol, leaves no basis for one’s survival in the so-called underworld.

In a number of Psalms² the authors use the term Sheol in specific contexts and according to a definite purpose, that is, finding themselves amid unparalleled dangers or under unbearable sufferings,³ whatever they might represent, the Psalmists experienced the destructive nature of death and the reality of the grave so vividly and to such an extent that they were almost “like the dead.” It must be particularly emphasized that the imagery of death, which is employed in these contexts, should not

¹Compare Isa 38:18 and Qoh 9:10.


be interpreted as simply animated illustrative representations, or as mere figurative
descriptions, or as a fruitful product of the imagination of the Psalmists, but as an
inescapable and grim, ever-present reality, the nature of which was constantly
manifested in the form of death and the grave.¹

There is another set of verses in which the Psalmists call for Yahweh’s
righteous judgments by bringing the wicked ones down to Sheol.² Although in Ps
49:15, death, the grave, and Sheol form a direct parallelism, and in Ps 55:15 death and
Sheol stand next to each other, none of these, or other texts dealing with the wicked,
imply the idea of miserable postmortem existence in darkness, or the punishment of
the wicked in Sheol. Basically these lament Psalms perform two things: either they
express the Psalmists’ pleas to Yahweh, asking for protection, which are subsequently
combined with curses over the evildoers (Pss 31:8; 55:16), or they simply state the fact
that the wicked will die one day and consequently lie in the grave, as death and the
grave are the only means to stop them in their evil ways (Pss 9:18; 141:7).

In the book of Job, which maintains a nondualistic view³ concerning life-and-
death issues, the term Sheol is used exclusively as a reference to the grave, and that is
clearly demonstrated by the contexts in which the term is employed. The fact that Job
has much to say about death and the nature of Sheol is remarkable by itself. Even if
there were no other references to the term Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures, those given
by Job would be enough to indicate its notion. For instance, despite the fact that the


³A nondualistic view denies that human nature is dualistic, namely, consisting of a mortal body and an immortal soul.
term Sheol is not employed in chap. 3:13-19 as such, the interrelated terminology of the passage not only directly alludes to and interconnects it with other Sheol references but also depicts the dead in their graves by classifying them as "kings and counselors of earth," "princes," "the wicked," "the exhausted of strength," "the slave," "his master," and "the small and the great." At death, all of them are made equal, as "they rest at peace," "they cease from raging," and "they hear not."

The nature of Sheol is further clarified by a number of verbs and expressions which denote the finality of human existence: "to lie down," "be quiet" or "motionless," and "be asleep," "rest, cease" (3:13-17; 14:12), "is prostrate" (14:10), "he rises not" (14:12), "they awake not" (v. 12), "they are not aroused from their sleep" (vs. 12), "he does not know" (14:21), "he does not come up," "he will not return again to his house" (7:9, 10), "and I will not be" (7:8, 21). Indeed, this terminology has nothing in common with the idea of a soul’s miserable existence in the underworld, as it clearly designates the state of the dead as the end of any form of life, except the worms feeding on the corpse.

The nature of Sheol is further clarified by its physical and spatial qualifications, which can refer only to the grave and nothing more. The term Sheol is used interchangeably or in parallel with "dust" (7:21; 17:16; 20:11; 21:26), "grave" (3:22; 5:26; 10:19; 17:1), "there" (3:17, 19; 7:21), "earth," "land" (10:21, 22), "darkness" (3:4, 5; 17:13), "death-shadow" (3:5), "my house," "the pit" (17:13, 14), "worm" (17:14), "the tomb," "the clods of valley" (21:32, 33), and other words, which in turn, in one way or another, are associated with more than a dozen verbs, referring to death/dying or directly relating to the process of disintegration of the corpse in the
According to Job, the dead person is one who has ceased to exist; he is no more. And that is one of the major reasons why Job negates the false assumptions credited to the nature of Sheol as a location which is qualified by some kind of existence. In this connection it should be noted that the dualistic approach with its anthropological-theological presuppositions tends to present Sheol either as a place of retribution where the righteous are rewarded and the wicked undergo their punishment, or its variants, as was seen from the previous discussions.

Finally, in order to demonstrate the defenselessness of Sheol as the place of the dead, the author makes a straightforward statement that “naked is Sheol before Him, and there is no covering for Abaddon” (26:6), thus emphasizing God’s omnipotence and absolute control over the dead and the grave. Again, this declaration is in harmony with the previously discussed references in the Torah (Deut 32:22), Prophets (Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:3), and Writings (Ps 139:8; Job 11:8; Prov 15:11). Moreover, Job’s belief in the final destruction of death and Sheol is indirectly implied in the passages which express the resurrection idea and involve an eschatological perspective as well as interpretation.

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1For other qualitative terms, verbs of destruction, and parallel texts, see the exegesis segments on the term Sheol in the book of Job.

2This approach teaches [classical dualism] that human nature consists of two parts: material and immaterial, a mortal body and an immortal soul. Dualism maintains that after the death of the body, the spiritual entity or the soul goes either to heaven or Sheol. See also the discussion on “Living Soul” in chap. 2, pp. 92-93.


4See exegesis on “difficult” texts in Job 14:13, 21:13, and Excursus 3.
The context of Proverbs is quite different from that of Job\(^1\) as it presents a
dualistic way of thinking\(^2\) by polarizing the subjects into opposites.\(^3\) This means that
death and Sheol are associated with what is negative—the wicked, the fool, or
negative behavior.\(^4\) Life is associated with what is positive—the fear of Yahweh, the
acceptance of wisdom, the wise and positive behavior.\(^5\) In other words, in the current
setting the emphasis falls on a qualitative understanding of life-and-death issues.\(^6\)

For example, Prov 1:12 contains a description of sinners, who have murderous
intentions and liken themselves to Sheol. In order to call attention to the violent and
cruel character of these sinners, who are ready to mercilessly destroy the innocent one
in the same fashion as death and the grave do, the author uses an emphatic reference to
Sheol, which is paralleled with "the pit." The highly expressive verb "swallows,"
referring to death of its victims, is employed to expose and characterize not only the
deadly nature of Sheol, but first of all the evil plans of the wicked.

Similar illustrative imagery is used in Prov 5:5 (2:18), 7:27, and 9:18, which


2Not to be confused with classical dualism. For various kinds of dualism see
Paul Helm, "Dualism," \textit{New Dictionary of Theology}, ed. Sindair B. Ferguson, David
F. Wright et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 210-211.


Life and Death: A Comparison of Proverbs 1-9 and Job," in \textit{Prophets and Paradigms:}
\textit{Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker}, JSOTSup 229 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic


6John J. Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish

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associate the strange woman with Sheol. In the first two cases the term Sheol is parallel to death and in the third reference is parallel to the dead. By drawing a comparison of the deadly nature of Sheol and death and then applying it to the strange woman, the author demonstrates the deadly consequences which await everyone who dares to associate with her through forbidden relationships.

The contexts of Prov 15:24 and 23:14 emphasize “the fear of Yahweh” and “the path of life” as the only guarantee of protection from the deadly grip of Sheol. “The teaching of the wise” helps to avoid the מֵשְׁאָלָה מֵתוֹ ("snares of death," Prov 13:14; 14:27), which in turn lead to premature death and the grave.

Finally, both texts in Prov 27:20 and 30:16 refer to the insatiable nature of the grave, whereas in 27:20 the voracity of Sheol is paralleled to the greed of humans. So far no reference to the term Sheol in the book of Proverbs can be used to construe the conclusion of a miserable existence of the dead in the so-called underworld, as practically all of them are employed in a homiletic and didactic sense.

Similarly, in Cant 8:6, love is likened to death and ardent love to Sheol. It is no coincidence that both death and Sheol are used in a superlative sense, since by their nature they are the most destructive powers on this earth known to humans. The implication is that by its nature love is as strong as the deadly forces of the grave and death, which means that true love is “invincible, steadfast, victorious.”

In conclusion, Qoh 9:10 contains a succinct and straightforward statement

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1 Compare with Qoh 7:26.


concerning the nature of Sheol. The place “to which you are going” beyond any doubt refers to the grave, where “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom.”

Function of יָםִש

In Psalms the term Sheol fulfills several important functions, all of which result from the major features of its nature and specifics of its context. As indicated earlier, the Psalmists employ the imagery of death and Sheol when facing the prospect of seemingly certain death or finding themselves in extremely dangerous situations, when the deliverance of the righteous is necessitated by a physical destruction of their persecutors, as is expressed in the calls of imprecation against the wicked.

Accordingly, one of the main functions of the term Sheol in Ps 6:6 is to point to the grave as the place of death and the dead, where no remembrance of Yahweh or thanksgiving is possible. At the same time the death vocabulary of vs. 6 provides an explanation why the Psalmist calls on Yahweh for mercy and deliverance from his enemies (vss. 1-5, 7-9).

Furthermore, in Pss 18:6 and 116:3 both Sheol and death are personified and function to describe the anguish of mercilessness and utmost intensity of the deadly forces which were seeking the destruction of the psalmist. Because of the deadly threats of “the cords of Sheol” and “the snares of death,” the righteous person experiences such an agony as if he were already dead. Both are metaphorical expressions and function as comparisons, and not as an identity. It means that the

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1See Pss 18:5-6, 16-17; 30:4, 10; 32:4-6; 40:3; 116:3.

2See Pss 30:10; 88:11-13; 115:17; also Qoh 9:4-6, 10; Isa 38:10-11, 18.
disintegrating and destroying power of death and the severe reality of the grave had almost overcome him.

In Pss 49:15 and 55:16, where death and Sheol form a direct parallelism, the term Sheol functions as a specific type of judgment called down on the wicked, which would lead them to their premature death. The strong sense of justice finds its expression in the form and content of the desired punishment, which is appropriate and corresponds to the evil deeds of the wicked. The major aspect of the function of the term Sheol is to receive the dead bodies and to turn them into the dust of the earth, which is exactly what the grave does.

It should be stressed that the phrase “but God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol” (Ps 49:16) does not mean that the Psalmist is actually being in Sheol itself, but refers to the salvation by Yahweh from the deadly power of the grave. It also has nothing to do with the soul’s existence in the netherworld, as it was repeatedly emphasized that it is impossible for a soul to exist independently of a body. Moreover, “no biblical text authorizes the statement that the ‘soul’ is separated from the body at the moment of death.” In other words, exegetical and theological concerns dictate that the term “soul” should not be used as a foundation to construe any dogmatic conclusions concerning its continued existence in the underworld.

In Ps 89:49 the Psalmist stresses death and Sheol as the fundamental and essential elements of the universal reality which nobody is able to escape. Both

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1 Compare Pss 31:18 and 141:7.
“death” and “the hand of Sheol” are in parallel and serve to emphasize their deadly force, which functions as a great leveler, sparing neither the righteous nor the wicked.

It is significant to note that in Ps 139:8, Sheol and heaven do not obtain their particular status from their cosmological localities nor from the imagery which is associated with each of them, but only from their respective relationship with Yahweh, who is in absolute control of both of them. In the current case the term Sheol in the expression “if I make Sheol my bed, behold, You are there” executes a double function: it emphasizes Yahweh’s omnipresence and refers to the grave. The last is also true concerning the statement “my life draws near to Sheol” (Ps 88:4).

As was already stated in the previous segment on the nature of Sheol, the imagery of the unbearable sufferings of Job, which were so severe that he would prefer death and the grave rather than to continue in his agony of pain, functions in the setting of a nondualistic worldview. Moreover, the passages describing Job’s yearning for death reveal one of the most fundamental facts: that Job had the basic understanding of the anthropological and theological issues concerning death, the grave, and the state of the dead. This becomes self-evident from the considerable number of texts that are focused on death and the place of the dead, Sheol, which sometimes are quite elaborate and interspersed with allusions to hope of the physical resurrection and new life after death (14:13-17; 19:23-27).

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2For the discussion on Job’s death speeches, see Bruce Zuckerman, “The Art of Parody: The Death Theme,” in *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 118-135, 260-269.

Practically all eight occurrences of the term Sheol in the book of Job function as equivalents of the grave, as was clearly demonstrated by the exegeted passages and the related parallel terminology. However, since Sheol is used in various, sometimes quite nuanced, contexts, it becomes necessary to summarize some of its main points.

Job does not provide any description of the soul's survival in the context of Sheol and he does not try to; instead he focuses on the fragility and shortness of human life (7:6-16; 8:9; 9:25-26) and the nature and function of the grave.\(^1\) As in the case of Jacob, who experienced agonizing grief and suffering because of the loss of his beloved son Joseph, so in the instance of Job's anguish, Sheol functions as the terminator of all human sufferings (7:9; 17:13). Death and Sheol bring the end to any human activities, whether they are of a physical, mental, or spiritual nature (3:13-17; 7:8-10; 14:10-21). At the same time the term Sheol draws a contrast between life and death, the land of the living with all its activities and the place of the dead with no existence.

It is significant to note that according to Job, life is life and death is death, and that is why no allusion to the miserable or shadowy existence in the underworld is ever mentioned. In this connection it is instructive to recall that the book starts with the words יִשְׂרָאֵל (“[there] lived a man,” 1:1) and closes with the succinct phrase יָהֳנָן (“and Job died,” 42:17). Vs. 17 does not say that the soul or spirit of Job, as a distinct and separate immortal entity that once was encased in Job's body, now has left his corpse to abide in Sheol. Moreover, there is no text in the entire

\(^1\)For the textual references see the above discussion on the nature of Sheol in the book of Job.
Hebrew Bible that would refer, in one way or another, to the existence of Job’s soul after his death in the underworld.

Another function of Sheol finds its expression in Job 3:13-19, which demonstrates its universal power to destroy and bring all men to the same place and subject them to the same conditions of corruption and decay. The deadly results of this function not only speak by themselves, but also are in perfect harmony with the rest of the Scripture, namely, in spite of the previous social status or rank, “kings and counselors of earth,” “princes,” “the wicked,” “the exhausted of strength,” “the slave,” “his master,” “the small and the great,” which include every person, are dead and disintegrating in their graves.

Furthermore, the imagery of the place of the dead is used in the context of comparisons in Job 11:8, which is a part of Zophar’s elaboration on God’s unfathomable wisdom. Technically in vs. 8 Sheol functions as the diametrically opposed location to the heavens by forming two of the four extremities (the other two are length and width, vss. 7-9), thus emphasizing spatial dimensions of the totality. Though the term Sheol refers to the grave, it plays here a secondary role, as the focus is on God’s infinite wisdom, which is beyond man’s reach in any of the mentioned four dimensions and is particularly emphasized by the question, “What can you know?”

Two laconic statements in Job 21:13 specify the lifestyle of the wicked as prosperous and their death as peaceful, whereas 24:19 designates the dead in Sheol as sinners. In both references the term Sheol functions as a poetic imagery of the grave,

1See discussions on the function of Sheol at the end of chapters 2 and 3.
though in the latter case it is personified and the sinners are depicted as being “snatched away” by it. The other functional aspects of Sheol are represented by an extremely vivid imagery of “the worm” that sucks the corpse “sweetly” (24:20). This imagery of a total destruction and decomposition of the dead body in the grave is based on a sound anthropological foundation, which provides the clearest mental picture of the state of the dead. Not only does it confirm the common lot of the wicked and the righteous, but at the same time it excludes contradictory ideas concerning existing differentiations among the dead in Sheol.

The last reference to Sheol in the book of Job is found in the phrase “naked is Sheol before Him,” which is in parallel to “and there is no covering for Abaddon” (26:6). Both lines not only supplement and clarify each other but also emphasize at least two important functional aspects: the terms Sheol and Abaddon represent a comprehensive imagery pertaining to the sphere of death, which basically functions as the grave and destruction, whereas the assertive conclusions that Sheol is “naked” and “there is no covering for Abaddon” point to their total defenselessness before Yahweh and to His absolute omnipotence over them.

Furthermore, by its very nature and purpose, the function of the term Sheol in Proverbs zeroes in on some specific cases, which on the one hand emphasize the general truth as represented by the biblical wisdom, and on the other hand, the portrayed situations serve to instruct, educate, and lead to faithfulness that is rooted in the knowledge and fear of Yahweh (2:5; 9:10).

Thus, in Prov 1:12 one of the functions of the term Sheol, which is in parallel to the pit, is to reveal the true nature of the sinners who, in order to enrich themselves,
not only plot to attack the innocent but are ready even to spill his blood (vss. 16-18).\(^1\)

The reference to the imagery of death, Sheol, and the pit functions to emphasize the deadly character of the grave as well as to warn “my son” to be wise.

There are three occurrences of the term Sheol in Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18 (see also 2:16-19), which by their nature and implications are almost identical. The dominant imagery of the strange woman or foolish woman is associated with her seductive speech that leads the simple one to illicit sexual activities. However, here much more is involved than merely forbidden intercourse, since her destructive lifestyle is demonstrated by means of various metaphors, as for instance, her feet/steps/house, the dead/guests, chambers of death, etc., all of which are tightly interlocked, directly or indirectly, with one another and the imagery of death and the grave. Despite the fact that technically the term Sheol serves as a poetical synonym for the place of the dead, in the current contexts its function is emphatic; it is employed to express a comparison of the deadly nature of the strange woman’s activities on the one hand, and as the warning to “my son” or the simple one, of what he may expect if he follows her path, on the other hand. The basic function of the term Sheol in the above texts is to depict in graphic and illustrative ways the high cost of foolishness of one’s association with the strange woman.

It is logical to infer from the implications of the term Sheol in Prov 15:11, 24 that it is understood in a literal sense as the grave. It should also be noted that in the first line of vs. 11 Sheol is linked with Abaddon\(^2\) which together with the expression

\(^1\)Perdue, *Proverbs*, 78-79.

\(^2\)The verse is almost identical with Job 26:6.
of the second line, “the hearts of the sons of men,” forms a comparative parallelism, thus forcefully demonstrating Yahweh’s omniscience, whereas in vs. 24 it functions as the place which should and can be avoided if one chooses the path of life.

Prov 23:14 speaks about the necessity of instruction, discipline, and correction of one’s child as the basic rule of parenting. The motivation and goal are to save a youth from Sheol, which in the current context functions as a synonymous designation of the grave and refers not only to premature death but also alludes to death eternal.

The last two references to the term Sheol in Prov 27:20 and 30:16, as was demonstrated earlier on the exegetical basis, depict it as a negative and destructive force which refers to death and the grave. In both cases Sheol is personified and functions to demonstrate the main point of the proverbs, namely, human insatiability or greed, which knows no limits.

The two powerful figures of speech in Cant 8:6, “for love is strong as death” and “ardent love is unyielding as Sheol,” not only complement each other, but above all, reveal the nature of genuine love. By employing the vocabulary of “death” and Sheol, the author emphasizes the quality and intensity of love, which means that on this earth no power is able to destroy it. Practically speaking, the term Sheol serves here as a poetic designation of the place of the dead; however, by applying the nature and function of the grave to specific aspects of true love, the author emphatically demonstrates its uncompromising and unyielding character in a positive sense.

The last mention of Sheol in Qoh 9:10 is straightforward, literal, and by its nature self-evident. It should be emphasized that this reference to Sheol, including its elaborate explanatory remarks, that “there is no work or thought or knowledge or
wisdom," functions not only as the clear designation of the grave, but also to convincingly demonstrate the fact that according to the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures the dead in the grave are in a state of complete unconsciousness.

Finally, this brief summary on the function of the term Sheol more than clearly confirms the findings that in the Writings there is no reference where Sheol would allude to one's existence after death, immortality of the soul, or the incorruptibility of it in some gloomy region of Sheol. The popular assertion that wherever the term Sheol is employed, there is some kind of existence, results from the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Hebrew Scripture. On the other hand, if there is no existence after death, then there is no such thing as Sheol in its traditional sense.1

**Purpose of הַשֵּׁאוֹל**

In order to complete this three-faceted synthesis in the Writings, it is necessary to briefly focus on the third dimension, the purpose of Sheol. The mutual interdependence of various aspects in this triangle helps to establish the identification of the factual characteristics of the term Sheol, which are inseparable from its anthropological and theological implications.

Thus, Ps 6 contains an extremely intense description of the Psalmist's physical, mental, and emotional anguish, which finds its expression in the sevenfold plea to Yahweh for rescue. In this setting of life-and-death tension, the major purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in vs. 6 is to emphasize as forcefully as possible the fundamental qualifications of the death imagery. Since the purpose of the destructive

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1The designations “traditional,” “popular,” “unbiblical” are used interchangeably to refer to the view that teaches one’s existence after death.
power of death is to spare neither the righteous nor the wicked, so its logical consequences manifest themselves in the fact that in death there is no remembrance of Yahweh and in the grave nobody is able to give thanks or praise His name.

The basic intention of the emphasis on the term Sheol in Ps 9:18 is to contrast “the wicked” and “the nations” that forget God and “pass into oblivion in the grave”\(^1\) with “the needy” and “the poor” of vs. 19, who will never be forgotten, and whose hope will not perish. A similar point is found in Ps 31:18 where the Psalmist, facing imminent death threats, cries out for his vindication and Yahweh’s active intervention in terms of vengeance on the wicked. He calls for speedy judgments, which would be manifested in silencing them in the grave.”\(^2\)

As was already indicated in the two previous sections, which deal with the nature and function of Sheol, there is a cluster of Psalms in which the Psalmists describe or seek deliverance and grace from Yahweh, as they are subjected to enormous distress and suffering.\(^3\) To these individuals the power of death seemed so real and the grave so close and unavoidable that they felt as if they were almost dead.

In this connection it should be particularly strongly emphasized that the purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in these Psalms is not to provide evidence that the Psalmists were actually in Sheol, or to describe the state of the dead as that of consciousness, or that they were undergoing some kind of agony in the

\(^1\)Wilson, *Psalms*, 231.

\(^2\)See also Ps 55:16, which has an almost identical purpose.

\(^3\)See Pss 16:10; 18:6; 30:4; 31:18; 49:15, 16; 86:13; 88:4; 116:3.
underworld. As was demonstrated in a number of exegetical sections, the Hebrew Scriptures are clear and unambiguous concerning the dead as well as their supposed existence in the netherworld by repeatedly emphasizing the fact that no one is able to return from Sheol and no activity ever takes place there.

Furthermore, the following imagery, “the cords of Sheol entangled me,” “the snares of death confronted me” (Ps 18:6), “You brought up my soul from Sheol” (Ps 30:4), “You have delivered my soul from the depth of Sheol” (Ps 86:13), and the like, is associated with the deadly dangers of premature death and consequently the closeness of the grave, but nothing more. These and similar references to the term Sheol point to the reality of the deadly power of death as being able to manifest itself under various circumstances in multiple forms and at any time.

Of special interest is Ps 49, where a sharp distinction is drawn between the destiny of the rich and the righteous one, who relies on Yahweh. Practically speaking, the term Sheol is used there in the twofold sense: In vs. 15 death, the grave, and Sheol are in parallel and refer to the destruction and the final end of the rich, whereas in vs. 16 the term Sheol has an absolutely different rationale. The two lines, “but God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He will take me,” contain not only figurative imagery, but also draw on the resurrection terminology, which necessitates strong eschatological connotations. The purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in vs. 16 is to emphasize it more as a power than a location, and the


2For similar imagery see Pss 22:13, 16, 17; 40:13; 42:8; 49:6; 88:7, 8, 17, 18; 116:3; 118:10-12; Hos 7:2; Jonah 2:3, 5.

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fact that the Psalmist one day will be delivered from “the hand of Sheol” means that the grave will lose its grip over the dead. The text does not allude to a continued existence of one’s soul in Sheol, but to the bodily resurrection of the dead from the grave. In fact, the use of the term Sheol in vs. 16 leads to a sharp contrast between the grave-death imagery on the one hand, and the resolution of the death-life tension, expressed by the key verbs “ransom” and “take,” on the other.

Finally, the purpose of the term Sheol in Ps 116:3 is to confirm the universality of death and to emphasize an absolute impossibility of its avoidance, whereas in Ps 139:8 the term is used in the context of a powerful portrayal of the omnipresence of Yahweh. In vs. 8 Sheol is portrayed as an unprotected and diametrically opposed location to the heavens, which is subjected to the total control of the Creator.

As was repeatedly pointed out in the previous discussions, the enormous sufferings and despair of Job led him to contemplate and embrace death rather than to continue in his indescribable anguish. In this anticipation of a new end, Job focuses his thoughts on the grave, and on its nature, function, and purpose, thus providing the reader with the powerful and elaborate imagery of death and Sheol, which is in perfect harmony with the other related and informative references. However, one should never miss the other side of this death-and-life coin, namely, that Job not only saw the grave before him, but he also believed that beyond it there will be a new creation and a “new existence that transcends ontology.”

In Job 7:9 the imagery of the vanishing cloud in the sky and Sheol in the earth

forms a spatial antithesis, which by its nature and function portrays not only two
distinct and opposite developments, but also shares some common qualitative
indicators. Vs. 9 as a part of a broader picture is dominated by various similes and
metaphors that forcefully emphasize the brevity and miserable conditions of human
life.¹ In this context, the major purpose of Job’s reference to Sheol is to reemphasize
the universal observation that death and the grave indicate the finality of human life.
This fundamental anthropological aspect is clearly stated in the second line, “He who
is going down to Sheol does not come up” (vs. 9), which, in the light of chap. 3:11-26,
means a respite for Job from his pain.

In order to stress the inscrutability of God’s incomprehensible and profound
wisdom, Zophar refers in Job 11:7-12 to the four cosmic dimensions: height, depth,
length, and breadth. The basic purpose of the employment of the term Sheol in the
phrase “deeper than Sheol,” which is followed by the rhetorical question, “What can
you know?” is to emphasize God’s omniscience and, against its background, to expose
human limitations. Besides, the effect of the immeasurability of the wisdom is
achieved by contrasting the spatial and directional aspects of Sheol with those of the
heavens, which in the text are depicted as limitless, thus showing that God’s wisdom
extends beyond any imaginable dimension.

Quite similar to Job 11:8 is 26:6, where the term Sheol is characterized as
being naked before God. However, here the intent and the major emphasis of the

¹Job 7:6-9, 16; 8:9; 9:25-26. See William J. Urbrock, Mortal and Miserable
Man: A Form-Critical Investigation of Psalm 90, SBL Seminar Papers, 1 (Cambridge,
MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 1-34; David Howard, How Come, God?
employment of the term Sheol, which is in parallel to “there is no covering for Abaddon,” is slightly different from that in the preceding paragraph. By drawing an extremely vivid imagery of the grave and destruction, which is qualified as being “naked” and with “no covering,” Job exposes the limitations of the nature and function of the grave and death on the one hand, and the omnipotence and omnipresence of God, on the other. None of these texts has any relation to the underworld as the abode of the spirits of the dead.

It is significant to note that the implications of various images in Job 14:13 are more than simply profound and far-reaching. Job’s reference to Sheol is encircled by the vocabulary, allusions, and motifs of death, resurrection, judgment, and hope,¹ thus putting a strong emphasis on the grave as exclusively a temporary hiding place. The last two lines, “that You would conceal me until your wrath is past” and “that You would set a limit for me, and remember me,” contain profoundly important elements, which by their function are of a theological, anthropological, and eschatological nature. In the imagined triangle, which can be diagrammed as consisting of Sheol, Job, and God, Job focuses on God as the initiator of his physical resurrection, which in turn implies an eschatological perspective with all its developments, including the destruction of the grave.

Unremitting pain and tremendous physical and emotional tension have moved Job to the very brink of the grave, and that is why he refers to Sheol in 17:13, 16 as his future “house.” Job knew that all his hopes and concerns would be terminated by

¹For details see exegesis on Job 14:13.
death and he himself would return to dust when he “will lie down in the dust” (7:21; 20:11; 21:26).

In the last two references of Job 21:13 and 24:19, the term Sheol is employed as the synonym of the grave but with different purposes. For instance, in 21:13 Job asserts that the wicked “spend their days in prosperity” and then “in a moment they go down to Sheol,” which refers to their painless or easy death. However, in spite of their seemingly sudden and peaceful end, the wicked are reserved “to a day of coming judgment” (vs. 30). In a broader context Job shows that regardless of the way an individual may die—“one dies in his full strength” (vs. 23) or “another dies in bitterness of soul” (vs. 25)—the end is the same as “together they lie down on the dust” (vs. 26). The nature and function of Sheol correspond and serve its purpose.

The basic design of employing the term Sheol in 24:19 is to demonstrate the power of death and the grave over the insolent sinners, who feel safe, protected, and exalted. By drawing on the nature imagery, “drought also heat snatch away the snow waters,” and then depicting Sheol as a living being that snatches away “those who have sinned,” Job makes a factual observation that the lives of the wicked are terminated by death and they disappear, like the melting snow waters, in the grave for ever.

The purpose of the reference to the term Sheol in Prov 1:12 is determined by its literary genre, which as the first of ten wisdom instructions dominates the entire passage by specifically focusing on the formation of a godly character. The design of

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the imagery of a personified Sheol is not only to reveal the true identity of the sinners, but also to warn against their enticements, as is seen from the imperative verb forms: “do not consent” (vs. 10), “do not go” (vs. 15), and “keep your foot from their paths” (vs. 15). Consequently, vs. 12 cannot be used to support the teaching about the underworld as the place of one’s existence after death.

The next three references to the term Sheol (Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18) are almost identical and subjected to the dominating theme of “the strange woman” (also 2:1-22), who has various identities: a prostitute, an adulteress, and a fool.\(^1\) It is significant that after providing a description of her external looks, words, and deeds,\(^2\) which serve as the vehicles of deception and seduction, the author communicates the deadly consequences of her lifestyle by referring to the imagery which by its nature represents destruction, death, and the grave: “Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of Sheol” (5:5), “her house—the ways of Sheol,” “chambers of death” (7:27), “Rephaim are there, in the depth of Sheol are her guests” (9:18). The major purpose in these Sheol references is exactly the same as in Prov 1:12. In order that a youth would be able to avoid the strange woman’s trap by obeying the fatherly instruction and thus be protected from illicit intercourse with her, the author delivers to him a severe warning as persuasively as possible by exposing the true nature and intentions of the strange woman, and the deadly consequences of associating with her.

The statement in Prov 15:11, that “Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh;

\(^1\)Ibid., 119.

how much more the hearts of the sons of men," intends to emphasize Yahweh's omniscience. If He knows the grave, the dead, and everything relating to the destruction and its processes, then even more so He knows the hearts of people. In vs. 24 the term Sheol is used to refer to death and the grave; however, the basic intention of the reference to Sheol is not so much to contrast life and death as to highlight the vital importance of the fear of Yahweh,¹ which results in “the path of life” leading the prudent upward.

The importance of physical training and correction of youth is highlighted by the further explanatory reference to Sheol in 23:14. The author asserts that by following the recommended way of correction, “you will save his soul from Sheol,” which is the same as to “save him from death” (vs. 13), or in other words, you will protect him from premature death and the grave, whether death comes as a result of wrong actions or choices.

Finally, in Prov 27:20 the reference to the destructive nature and function of Sheol is used as an emphatic comparison of the avaricious appetite of humans, which by its nature, function, and purpose is not less deadly, whereas the final reference to Sheol in 30:16 emphasizes the gloomy reality of the ever-present power of death and the grave.

In Canticles 8:6, the term Sheol is encircled by the powerful and principal imagery of death and fire, which is designed to contribute its specific nuances to the portrayal of true love. In order to accomplish this goal and to emphasize her true nature, depth, and power as expressively and forcefully as possible,

¹Compare Prov 13:14 with 14:27, which are almost identical.
the author employs its antonym Sheol, the term for the place of the dead or the grave.

In the Writings the last reference to Sheol, found in Qoh 9:10, which contains a number of descriptive elements relating to its nature, function, and the state of the dead, beyond any doubt refers to the grave. One of the major intentions is to reemphasize the universal truth that life is short, in the grave there is nothing, and therefore, "all that your hand finds to do, with your strength do."

In summary, the exegetical investigation of the term Sheol in the Writings demonstrates a fundamentally consistent pattern in describing its nature, function, and purpose. Though the term occurs in diverse contexts, the consistency and directness with which it is treated in various books of the Writings lead to the conclusion that the term Sheol functions as a poetical synonym of the place of the dead or the grave. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the Psalmists, Job, the author of the book of Proverbs, Canticles, and Qohelet would meticulously replicate the entire imagery of Sheol in every detail. On the other hand, it is logical and natural that each of these authors employs the term Sheol in the combination of various literary means of expression, unusual emphases, nuances, descriptive elements, and portrayal of actual or imagined situations, the purpose of which is to convey a concrete message that with death any form or manifestation of life is cut off in Sheol.

Finally, from the Writings it is impossible to establish any connection or to find any verbal clues concerning the term Sheol, including indicators of its nature, function, and purpose, that would designate Sheol as the place, where the souls or spirits of the dead would continue their existence. Such connections simply do not exist. They are not there.
Excursus 3

לֵוַעַל and Its Conceptual Links in the Writings

Introduction

As was seen from Excursus 1 and 2, there is a consistent pattern in the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the distribution and major functions of the death vocabulary, which being related to the grave leaves a direct and clarifying impact on the understanding and interpretation of the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol. In fact, there is an entire spectrum of various concepts, formulaic expressions, contrapositions, juxtapositions, complexities, and reasons, which altogether, in spite of their diversity and quantity, functions as a unifying principle, thus presenting a holistic anthropological view of the fundamental life-and-death issues.

The purpose of this segment is to make short references to the formulaic expressions of death, which in varied forms were previously discussed in the Torah and Prophets. It is also important to have a summarized overview concerning the distribution of the verb לָעַל in the Writings, as it has direct relation to the grave.

However, the major intent is to focus on and discover that exegetical information which in the framework of the current research would provide additional alternative insights pertaining to one’s death and the state of the dead in Sheol, as well as the bodily resurrection from the grave.

Formulas of Death in the Writings

As the term Sheol does not occur in isolation, it should be treated in relationship to other relevant terminology, as was done before in the Torah and Prophets. For example, the idiomatic expression לָעַל נֶמְנָאָבֵת [“to go [to be]
with your fathers,” 1 Chr 17:11) refers to David’s death and burial, and by no means can be inferred as one’s continued existence after death in Sheol. Similar wording is employed in Ps 39:14, "before I go and I am no more”) and Job 10:21 (“before I go, and I shall not return”). The nature of both statements “I am no more” and “I shall not return” is self-evident and assertive, excluding any notion relating to after-death existence in Sheol.

The same idea is also expressed by another, almost identical formula concerning Josiah, (“I will gather you to your fathers”), which is further clarified by two parallel lines, ("you shall be gathered to your grave") and ("and your eyes will not see all the evil,” 2 Chr 34:28). This threefold reference to Josiah’s death and burial in the grave is in harmony with all the other previously discussed references. Since these idioms represent the imagery of death and the grave and function as a mirror model of Sheol, none of them or other identical formulaic expressions can be interpreted as Israel’s belief in life after death.

in the Writings

The verb ("lie down") in table 18 functions in the same way as its synonyms ("go") and ("gather"), which were referred to in the above section. The term is an ideal metaphor and designation for such expressions

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1 See Excursus 2.

2 For the major discussions on the formulas see Excursus 1 and 2.

3 For the major discussion on the term see Excursus 2.
TABLE 18
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TERM עֵצֶבֶּן IN THE CONTEXT OF DEATH TERMINOLOGY IN THE WRITINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ps 88:6</td>
<td>כִּמָּה חֲלִילֵיהּ שָׁקַבְנֵי עֵצֶבֶּן</td>
<td>like the slain who lie in the grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Job 3:13</td>
<td>כִּפְרָּתָה עֵצֶבֶּן</td>
<td>for now I would be lying down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Job 7:21</td>
<td>כִּפְרָּתָה לַעֲמֵה הָאָשֶׁבֶּן</td>
<td>for now I will lie down in the dust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Job 14:12</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן לֵאָרָיוֹתָם</td>
<td>so man lies down and does not rise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Job 20:11</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן לֵאָרָיוֹתָם</td>
<td>and with him on the dust it lies down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Job 21:26</td>
<td>לָהֶם עֶלֶּה תָשֶׁבֶּן</td>
<td>together on the dust they lie down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lam 2:21</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן לִאָרָיוֹתָם</td>
<td>they lie on the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 Chr 9:31</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 Chr 12:16</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he buried him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 Chr 13:23</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2 Chr 14:1</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and they buried him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2 Chr 16:13</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 Chr 16:14</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן בָּקְבָּרָיו</td>
<td>and they buried him in his grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2 Chr 21:1</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and they laid him on a bier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2 Chr 26:2</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן תֹּם בַּעַזְיָהִי</td>
<td>the king lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2 Chr 26:23</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 Chr 27:9</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and they buried him with his fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2 Chr 28:27</td>
<td>עֵצֶבֶּן ... נַמְאָבָּה</td>
<td>and he lay down with his fathers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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as "to be dead," "to lay down in the grave," and "to be buried," as there are direct similarities between lying down, sleep, and death: inexorability, body position, stillness, the loss of power to receive and hold knowledge, impressions, or mental perception in relation to others, lack of consciousness, awakening, etc.¹

According to table 18, it is evident that by employing the verb בָּשָׂם the biblical authors assert the fact that the condition of any human being can be characterized as mortal, which means the end of all existence.

Suffice to say that to "lie down" "in the grave," "in the dust," "on the earth," and "with his fathers," is the same as to go down to Sheol. Generally these figurative expressions refer to one's death and the place of burial that is located either close to or the nearest proximity from the dead person's parents or relatives.

The point is, however, that without merging into the discussion whether the term בָּשָׂם refers to "peaceful" or "wicked" death, practically it is employed as one among numerous concepts referring to dying and the grave. Its synonymous and interrelated terminology will briefly be discussed in the sections below.

Ps 104:29, 30

Ps 104 is a hymn of praise to Yahweh as the Creator and Sustainer of the

entire universe and mirrors Gen 1. In his discussion on Ps 104, L. Toombs refers to the sevenfold structure of creation as follows: 1 (1) organization of the heavens (vss. 1-4); (2) formation of the earth (vss. 5-9); (3) provision of water (vss. 10-13); (4) food for people and animals (vss. 14-18); (5) organization of time (vss. 19-23); (6) the sea (vss. 24-25); and (7) control of life (vss. 27-30). Special attention should be devoted to vss. 29-30, which, by laconically describing the absolute dependence of the animated world on Yahweh, provide valuable information concerning life-and-death issues.

You take away their spirit, they expire

and to their dust they return

You send forth Your Spirit, they are created

Without going into detailed exegesis it is evident that these statements are in the context of divine sustenance and expose at least three basic points of importance:

1. Existence is possible only by the רוח (“spirit”) of Yahweh, which, being the essence of life, functions as the animating, life-sustaining principle and serves as the synonym of נשא (“breath,” Gen 2:7). 2


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2. As soon as Yahweh גור ("gathers," "removes") דухו ("their spirit"), every living beings dies, but the spirit of life returns to the Creator (Eccl 12:7). In other words, life ends with death without any further implications, as is clearly emphasized by Anderson: "When the body is no longer animated by the breath of life, it reverts to the dust from which it was taken in the first place (Gen 3:19; cf. Job 34:14f.; Ps 146:4)."

3. It is impossible to overemphasize the fact that there is no substitute for the הרוח of Yahweh, which means that life apart from bodily existence is an absolutely impossible notion.

On the other hand, the expression in vs. 30, יתת הרוח ("You send forth Your Spirit, they are created") refers to the opposite process, which by its nature is unique and implies Yahweh's creative work. Here the term יתת ("create") first of all emphasizes not only the idea that everything basically has its origin with Yahweh, but also refers to the so-called creatia continua (continual creation), which is possible only through Him who possesses the breath of life. To assert that there is some kind of non-bodily existence after one's death in Sheol is to negate the essence

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1 See "חגר," BDB, 63.

2 The same word בס is found in Gen 6:17 and 7:21.


of these clear statements.¹

Ps 146:4

Ps 146 is the first of five לְלוֹן (“praise”) psalms that conclude the book of Psalms (146-150).² Its descriptive genre of praise in combination with its structural elements³ and simplicity creates a hymn of “a strong impression.”⁴

Vs. 4, like Ps 104:29, demonstrates the limitations of human beings by stressing their mortality and their total dependence on the animating force of life, which comes from Yahweh.⁵

חנָנָא רוחוֹ הַשָּׁב לֵאָדְמוֹתוּ הַשָּׁב לֵאָדְמוֹתוּ
His spirit departs, he returns to his ground;

בִּכְלָלָה הַחֵרֹה אַבוּרָה תַּשְׁתְּנֵתִיו
In that very day his thoughts perish.

The very first words, “his spirit departs” or “goes forth,” serve as the direct reference to the spirit of life, which in the case of withdrawal leads to death and consequently to returning to the ground, which characterizes the qualitative aspect of every human being. It is significant to note that the expression יָשָׁב לֵאָדְמוֹתו ("he

¹Ps 90:3 contains the same idea of returning to the dust, “You turn man to destruction, And say, 'Return, O children of men.'”

²Mays, Psalms, 439.

³For a chiastic structure see VanGemeren, Psalms, 5:864.

⁴Weiser, The Psalms, 829.

⁵In ten verses of this short Psalm, the proper noun “Yahweh” occurs 11 times.
returns to his ground") alludes to and links together both Gen 2:7, which describes man’s origins, with 3:19, which depicts his death, disintegration, and decomposition. In addition, in the current verse the phrase לֶכֶת עַד ("to his ground") has clear connotations of the grave and brings up "the motif of Sheol as the land to which all mortals must return"; however, not the slightest hint can be traced in the text that Sheol is the place of continued existence.

The phrase אַלְכֵּהַ ("in that very day") refers to the point in time when the spirit of life is taken away or simply one’s death, the nature of which is further emphasized by the cessation of every mental function, including that "his thoughts perish" at once and forever. Neither consciousness in death nor soul existence is implied here. It is self-evident that the discussed text emphatically refutes the popular view of a conscious state of soul or spirit existence in Sheol between death and the resurrection.

Moreover, it is absolutely wrong to think that mental or spiritual faculties of human beings can operate without physical existence, which, in turn, is absolutely impossible without the spirit of life. Indeed, it should be stressed again that the origin of every human being, the existence of every person as the living soul, and

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2. The term הֵקְלִנִי is a *hapax legomenon*, often translated as "plans" (NRSV, NKJV, NJB).

3. On the living and the dead soul, see Excursus 1.

death as the end of every form of life are conditioned only by Yahweh.\(^1\) The presence of נְרָּאָה means life, whereas its absence means death and decay.\(^2\)

**Job 34:14, 15**

As in the previously discussed instances, so in Job 34:14, 15, Elihu employs almost identical terminology to emphasize the absolute sovereignty and ability of God to withdraw the spirit of life from earth in an instant should He decide to do so.\(^3\)

If He should set His heart to Himself,

If He should set His heart to Himself,

then shall He gather His spirit and His breath to Himself,

all flesh would perish together,

and man would return to dust.

By illuminating their semantic interrelationships, both terms נְשָׁמָה (“breath”) and נָרָּאָה (“spirit”) form a direct synonymous parallelism. But not only that, “breath” and “spirit” also function as the highly intensified indicator of one’s continuous and total dependence on that life force or principle, where נְשָׁמָה, as the characteristic

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\(^1\)See Num 16:22 and 27:16, where the author refers to Yahweh not only as the Creator of all life, but also as the Sovereign over it. He is the One who controls life and death of His creation. See Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 313-314; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 415.


\(^3\)Habel, *The Book of Job*, 483.
feature of life, reveals the existential reality that every human being is bound together and inseparably with Yahweh (Gen 2:7).¹

If Yahweh should come to a decision to take away His breath or His spirit, then in an instant יָהָּוָּז יָדוֹ ("all flesh would perish together"), which includes every form of life. The formulaic expression יָוָּז יָדוֹ ("and man would return to dust")² was pronounced by Yahweh Himself in Gen 3:19 and functions as the idiom referring to dying and decay in the grave with no after-death existence implied.

Qoh 3:19-21

Without going into structural details it will suffice to note that these three verses (vss. 19-21) function as part of a unit (vss. 18-22) that centers on the inevitability of death. In fact, the unit itself emerges in the theological context amid allusions to God’s eschatological judgment of the righteous and the wicked, which includes such inseparable and dynamic aspects as the sentence and its execution.³ Though vss. 19-21 contain some new elements, their basic death-related terminology


²See Excursus 1.


In spite of the fact that the judgment theme is extremely important and, in one way or another, related to the term Sheol, because of space and time limitations it will not be discussed here.
is in perfect harmony with the discussed vocabulary in such references as Pss 104:29-30, 146:4, and Job 34:14-15, which altogether creates a powerful picture of anthropological reality of death and reaffirms the conclusions made previously.

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts

and they have one fate.

As death of this so death of that;

and the same [one] spirit belongs to all and there is no advantage for man over beast,

for all is vanity.

All are going to the same [one] place.

all came from the dust and all are returning to the dust.

Who knows the spirit of the sons of men ascends upward

and the spirit of the beast descends downward to the earth?

In order to clarify some terminological issues, it is necessary to make a few comments. First of all, though the term מֵתָרָה in most versions is translated as “fate,” it has nothing to do with mysterious accident, fortune, ill luck, or chance. The basic meaning of the noun מֵתָרָה, which comes from the verb מָתרָה ("happen,"
"encounter"), is "happening," "occurrence," or "event." In other words, the author highlights and then puts a strong emphasis on the specific event, which is beyond the control of those who represent the animated world and at the same time are partakers in mortality; namely, what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts, and as the result of that "happening" or "event" all of them die. The יֶפֶן (“happening”) is further clarified and intensified by an emphatic statement, יֶפֶן יֵשׁ הָעַצְמוּת (“as death of this so death of that”), which means that all without exception are subject to death. The masculine nouns יֶפֶן and יֶפֶן function here as synonyms.

It should also be pointed out that Qohelet has nothing to do here with the differentiation between humans and beasts; neither does he dwell on any moral, physical, or mental distinctions, nor does he try to put all humans and animals on exactly the same level. He simply specifies and then emphasizes two common points, namely, both humans and beasts have יִתְנָה יִתְנָה (“the same [one] spirit”) of life, and when Yahweh "gathers" His spirit (Job 34:14, 15; Pss 49:13, 14; 104:29), both of them die.3

Furthermore, the numeral יִתְנָה (“one”),4 which is employed three times in vss. 19-20, functions as an adjective to emphasize:


2Michael A. Grisanti, "תַּנָּה," NIDOTTE, 3:984-986. Compare the occurrences of the word יִתְנָה in Qoh 2:14, 15; 3:19 (3 times); and 9:2, 3.


4See "תַּנָּה," BDB, 26.
1. The fact that humans with beasts have a common lot, מִקְרָא הַעֲצָרִים ("and they have one fate," vs. 19).

2. The fact is that לְצָאִים לְכָל הָעוֹלָם ("all have one spirit") and that is why there is no advantage for humans over beasts (compare Gen 1:30; 2:7). By placing the adverb of negation עַל ("nothing," "is not," "are not") at the very end of the phrase, Qohelet turns it into a categorical statement: "advantage for man over beasts there is none,"¹ or as humans are subject to death they are in no way superior to beasts.

3. The fact that לְצָאִים לְכָל הָעוֹלָם ("all are going to the same [one] place," vs. 20).

The formulaic conclusion כִּכָּלָה כִּכָּל ("for all is vanity") in the current context may refer to the fact that death functions to limit humans and beasts in time and space by destroying them biologically and then turning them back into the basic elements of the earth; however, in the context of the entire book the phrase "for all is vanity" clearly specifies that kind of life which is lived without God, the Creator of heavens and earth, and thus without an eschatological hope.

The Qal participle forms מִרְדַּה ("are going") and מִרְדַּה ("are returning") in vs. 20 function as euphemisms for dying. It is also important to note that in order to highlight and emphasize the point of universal mortality, which automatically negates any notion of immortality, for there is no such thing as the coexistence of mortality and immortality, Qohelet starts each of the three lines of vs. 20 by the all-inclusive term כִּכָּלָה כִּכָּל ("all"). Consequently, the phrase מֵתָא לְכָל ("all are going to the same [one] place") refers to Sheol or simply the grave, which further

¹See Whybray, Ecclesiastes, 79.
is associated with the dust by referring to human origins as פָּדָיָה ("all came from the dust"), and describing inevitability of human death and destruction as פָּדָיָה ("all are returning to the dust"). In the current case the term “dust” is linked with two basic meanings: going down to Sheol or the burial in the grave, and the decomposition of the corpse as it turns again into dust.

It is interesting to observe that in spite of the clearest language and dominant death imagery, the interdependence of the repeated terminology between vs. 20 and Gen 2:7; 3:19, Crenshaw comes to quite surprising conclusions: “The dissolution of the body into dust might rule out belief in continued existence in Sheol, but that is not the case. Qohelet affirms the traditional belief that people go to the shadowy abode after death.”2 If one follows his interpretation, then beasts that have the same spirit as humans must also have immortal souls.

The rhetorical question in vs. 21 ( "who knows") whether “the spirit of the sons of men ascends upward and the spirit of the beast descends downward to the earth” implies the answer “nobody knows.” Though no person has ever observed its movement, God has revealed that “the spirit of life” returns to Him. Besides, vs. 20 does not refer to a distinction between the spirit of humans and the spirit of beasts, as the existence of such a distinction was already absolutely negated in vss. 19-20.3

However, it is a well-established fact that the body at death goes to the grave, and then during a process of disintegration it becomes dust (Gen 3:19), and it is also

1 Ogden and Zogbo, Ecclesiastes, 116.
2 Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 104.
3 Whybray, Ecclesiastes, 80.
known that at death the energy of life or “the spirit returns to God who gave it” (12:7; Gen 2:7). It should be particularly emphasized here that both human beings and beasts have הַשִּׁפְרָה הַבְּרָאָה (“the same [one] spirit,” vs. 19). If the spirit of life, which is given to humans, returns back to God, then the same should happen with the spirit of beasts.¹

Finally, like the discussed references in Psalms and Job, this brief overview clearly demonstrates the same fact: None of the three verses (19-21) contains any allusion to the popular assumption that at death the spirit or soul becomes a disembodied and conscious, independently existing entity, which goes down to Sheol in order to continue its existence in the miserable environment of darkness and shades.

Qoh 12:7

Chap. 12 starts with one of the most important key words, בָאָז (“remember,” Qal impv.), referring not only to inner mental functions, but also urging one to perform concrete external actions.² The object of the imperative הָלַךְ, which is the opposite of הָפֵל (“forget”), is רָאָה בְּרוּאָה (“your Creator”). It is particularly important to note that the verb הָלַךְ governs the whole chapter, as it is linked together with another הָלַךְ in 11:8, רָאָה הָתַּחַם (“and let him remember the days of darkness”), thus bringing vs. 7 to a climax.

The other two significant key words are the imperatives of בָא (“fear”) and בָיָשׁ (“keep,” “guard”), which are found at the conclusion of the whole book in vs.

¹For various usages of בָא, see Friedrich Baumgärtel, “Spirit in the OT,” TDNT, 6:359-368.

This key vocabulary has various anthropological, theological, and eschatological implications, which should motivate every person not only to “remember” the Creator but also to take seriously the fixed facts of vss. 7 and 14.

The author sets the stage for vs. 7 by introducing in vss. 5 and 6 various metaphors, and mental pictures, all of which symbolize death and the grave. For example, in vs. 5, the expression נבות ליאו כוכב קשת ("for a man is going to his everlasting home") refers to death and the grave. The four metaphors in vs. 6 are dominated by the imperative נבר, that is, “remember your Creator” before הנבשה ("the silver cord is broken"), הנבשה ("and the golden bowl is crushed"), הנבשה ("and the pitcher is shattered at the fountain"), and הנבשה ("the wheel is broken at the well"). After employing highly figurative language to signify death, Qohelet focuses on the consequences of death and the grave in vs. 7.

1See Qoh 3:14; 5:6; 7:18; 8:12.
4See Excursus 1.

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And the dust will return to the earth as it was,

and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

This is the imagery of absolute dissolution, and not a reference to the immortality of one’s spirit in Sheol. The text does not speak about human soul or some abstract thought entity returning to God either. However, Fox reads in vs. 7 the following message: “The verse says that at death a person’s body returns to the dirt and the life-spirit is withdrawn; in other words, he is deprived of breath, without which he is a helpless, somnolent semi-being in Sheol.”

It should be noted that in order to describe death, Qohelet employs the vocabulary of Gen 2:7 and 3:19. The word נָשָׁב (“the dust”) in the expression נָשָׁב הַגוֹמֵר עַל-הָאָדָם נָשָׁב (“and the dust will return to the earth as it was”) can be understood as the qualitative reference to the corpse, which in the grave turns to dust. Though the expression נָשָׁב הַגוֹמֵר can be interpreted either as the disintegration of the dead body as it becomes the dust of the earth or burial in the grave, the point is clear that Qohelet emphasizes the reversal of Gen 2:7. The phrase נָשָׁב הַגוֹמֵר (“as it was”) directly refers to the נָשָׁב and provides additional explanatory emphasis concerning the origins, material, and quality of man (Job 10:9). Dust is the

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essence of the earth, and human beings as dust must again become dust.

It is significant to note that the parallel lines of vs. 7 form a chiastic structure, which helps to better identify and emphasize the basic elements and their functions. The repeatedly emphasized fact that “the dust” is one of the qualifications of man and “the spirit” designates his life force emphasizes two diametrically opposed and at the same time interdependent realities, without which no man is able to function. Thus, the term נפש (“will return”)\footnote{Holladay, \textit{The Root Šūbh in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts}, 1-191.} is used for the second time to demonstrate as clearly as possible that at death נפש נושה אל-האפתחים נחלה (“the spirit will return to God who gave it”).\footnote{Brevard Springs Childs, “Death and Dying in Old Testament Theology,” in \textit{Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope}, ed. John Marks and Robert Good (Guilford: Four Quarters, 1987), 89-91. See also the related study of Paul Armes, “The Concept of Dying in the Old Testament” (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981).}

The text does not say that נפש goes down to Sheol and stays there. Moreover, this expression has nothing to do with an immortal soul that detaches herself from the corpse and continues its existence in a disembodied state in Sheol, instead it focuses on the spirit or breath of life, which returns to God who only is in control of all life-and-death processes. In fact, the second line contains the fundamental truth, which not only alludes to Gen 2:7, but is in total harmony with the rest of the Hebrew Scripture. It should be recalled that soul (the whole person) and spirit of life represent two totally different categories of thought, which should not ever be confused.\footnote{Murphy, \textit{Ecclesiastes}, 23A:120. See Excursus 1.}
In summary, whatever scholars may say, the facts of death and the grave, as presented in the Hebrew Bible, remain unalterable. The dead body dissolves and becomes one with dust, but the spirit or breath of life returns to God. Qohelet asserts that the life principle in humans and animals is the same and there are no qualitative differences between them (3:19-21; Ps 104:29, 30). Moreover, he urges everyone to remember the Giver of life, and that one day “God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (12:14; also 3:17; 11:9). Actually, the direct allusions to the future judgment point to the future beyond Sheol, which in turn demonstrates that Qohelet is not a pessimist or nihilist but an optimist.\(^1\)

**Job 19:25-27**

In spite of the fact that many modern scholars see in vss. 25-27 only contradictions and find in them no hope of resurrection at all,\(^2\) they are undeniably vibrant and forceful in their expression, meaning, and application. Indeed, these verses function as the most dynamic and powerful affirmation of Job’s faith in the personal resurrection from Sheol. The fact that Job focuses in his speeches so much


\(^{2}\)There are three major views: (1) Job refers to the bodily resurrection, (2) modern scholarship points out that in these verses Job expects to see God after his death in a disembodied state, and (3) they describe Job’s desire to see his restoration before his death. For discussion of these three views see Clines, *Job 1-20*; 17:463-466.
on death and Sheol does not mean that he has no hope. On the contrary, Job repeatedly looks beyond the present to the future with confidence. He never even alludes to popular assumptions concerning the spirit or soul existence in the underworld, as his focus is on another alternative:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,

and that at the end He will stand upon the earth;

And after my skin is destroyed, this [I know],

That from my flesh I shall see God,

Whom I will see for myself,

And my eyes will behold, and not another.

My heart faints within me.¹

Vss. 25-27 belong to the unit (vss. 21-29) which in spite of its diverse structural and thematic elements represents both a well-balanced chiasm and a structurally systematic arrangement.² Moreover, vss. 25-27 not only function as the

¹Literally “My kidneys grow faint in my breast.”

peak of the entire chiastic outline, but also demonstrate that they are bound together phonologically by their own double chiastic structure based on sound.¹

These three lines are interlocked by numerous emphatic elements that directly expose and dramatize Job’s conviction in the bodily resurrection: the additional emphatic presence of the pronoun "I" before the verbs "I know," vs. 25 and "I will see," vs. 26; intensification by repeating the verbs "I know," (vss. 26, 27) and "they will see," vs. 27; the clarifications after the verb, "I myself," vs. 27² and "and not another," vs. 27).

Vs. 25 starts with the phrase "for I know," where "but" introduces contrast with vss. 23-24,³ and the personal pronoun "I" takes on an emphatic form "I myself."⁴ The verb "I know,"⁵ occurs in the book of Job.


²For the reflexive and emphatic function of personal pronouns suffixed to propositions occurring after a verb, see Waltke and O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 305.

³Clines, Job 1-20, 17:458.

⁴See Habel, The Book of Job, 303.

⁵See also “וּניָ,” BDB, 395.
especially in legal contexts, where it basically means “I have a strong conviction,” or “I firmly believe.” It is highly significant to note that J. Doukhan points out Job’s unique relationships with God by focusing on the verb רדידת in the interdependent textual parallels:

\begin{align*}
\text{I have known that this is with You} & \quad 10:13 \\
\text{For I know that my Redeemer lives} & \quad 19:25 \\
\text{You have granted me life and lovingkindness} & \quad 10:12 \\
\text{my Redeemer lives} & \quad 19:25
\end{align*}

By affirming that ידידת (“my Redeemer lives”) Job focuses on Yahweh, who functions as his personal Defender, Redeemer Advocate, and Judge. The pronominal suffix “my” refers to Job and at the same time the phrase ידידת is structurally contrasted with ידידת (literally, “on the dust”). The noun ידידת (“earth,” “dust”) points back to the ידידת in Gen 2:7 and 3:19 as the place of life and death. In the book of Job it occurs twenty-six times, alluding either to death and the

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grave or to mortal human beings. Moreover, the occurrence of the term יְהֵם" so close to the adjective יְהֵם ("alive," "living"), which characterizes the Redeemer as a living being, alludes to the resurrection. This view can be further substantiated by the nature and function of the verb יְהֵם ("He will stand"), especially as it functions parallel to יְהֵם and clearly alludes to 14:12, where Job employs יְהֵם in parallel to יְהֵם ("they will awake") in order to emphasize the eschatological event of resurrection. The presence of both terms יְהֵם and יְהֵם, the subject of which is the Redeemer, intensifies and reinforces the concept of the resurrection even more.

Furthermore, the adjective יְהֵם ("and at the end") is derived from יְהֵם, which means "behind," or "afterwards." Both in terms of space and time, יְהֵם can mean either "what immediately follows," or to describe the general "beyond" or

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3See "YH", BDB, 312; Clines, Job 1-20; 17:460.
4The foundation for this connection is found in Gen 2:7, when a man was formed from the יְהֵם of the ground and Yahweh caused him יְהֵם ("to live"). See also Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2.
7See Bill T. Arnold, "YH", NTDB, 1:360-361; L. Harris, "YH", TWOT, 1:33-34.
“future,” and finally, even the limits of space or the very end of time.¹

According to Dahood, the word יִתְנַסְתּ functions as a technical term for the eschaton if it is qualified by an eschatological context.² This is exactly the case in vss. 25-27, which contain various elements of death and resurrection, thus demonstrating all the criteria for understanding it in an eschatological sense.

Job’s faith is in the eschaton. Even if he has to die and go down to Sheol and become again the dust of the earth, Job is confident in the eschatological resurrection, as is seen from the discussed vocabulary.

By employing the expression יָנָה יִתְנַסְתּ (“and after my skin is destroyed,” vs. 26), Job refers to his death and decay in the grave, which is contrasted by the resurrection imagery, יָנָה יִתְנַסְתּ (“that in [from] my flesh I will see God”).³ Scholars are divided on how to understand vs. 26, especially concerning the phrase יָנָה יִתְנַסְתּ (“and in my flesh”), which is interpreted by many as “from the grave, Job, a bodiless spirit, will witness the occasion when God appears before the local assembly to verify Job’s innocence.”⁴ Such conclusions contradict the immediate context and the nature and function of the employed terminology. For example, the preposition יָנָה can mean both “from” or “from the standpoint of,” and

¹See “יתנשת,” BDB, 31. A number of references signify a meaning like “end” or “last” part of a period. See 2 Sam 23:1; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 16:11; 25:26, and 28:26. Yahweh is “the first and the last” (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).

²Dahood, Psalms III, xlvii.

³For a detailed discussion on vs. 26 and its parallels in Job 10, see Doukhan, “Radioscopy of a Resurrection,” 190-192.

⁴For four major views concerning vs. 26, see Hartley, The Book of Job, 295-297.
many examples of the latter can be found in the Hebrew Scripture.\(^1\) Literally the expression ַָּ֣קְבָּן means “from my flesh” and not “without my flesh.”\(^2\) It should be noted that by their nature and function ֶּּוֶּוְתָּה (“my eyes,” vs. 27) not only forms an inseparable part of a physical body, but also serves as a parallel to ַָּ֣קְבָּן (“and in my flesh,” vs. 26). Moreover, both phrases “and my eyes” and “in my flesh” have the first-person suffix “my,” plus from both sides they are enclosed by the emphatic pronoun ַָּ֣קְבָּן (“I”), which taken altogether imparts a tremendous structural and thematic force to Job’s dynamic hope of a new life in the resurrected body: I myself, my flesh, I myself, my eyes.\(^3\)

It should be noted that the descriptive elements of a human body like ֶּּוֶּוְתָּה ("skin"), ַָּ֣קְבָּן ("flesh"), ַָּ֣קְבָּן ("bones"), and ַָּ֣קְבָּן ("sinews," 10:11; 19:20) find their counterpart in the resurrection context in Ezek 37:3-10, where Ezekiel is an eyewitness of a new creation.\(^4\) Consequently, the enhanced emphasis on various body parts authenticates the restoration of the physical nature during the event of the resurrection which, on the one hand, means that Job envisioned death and the grave, but on the other hand, this concrete description illustrates the fact that after the resurrection the identity of Job remains the same as before his death.\(^5\)

\(^{1}\)See "קָּחְבָּן," *BDB*, 577-583.

\(^{2}\)Pope, *Job*, 139.

\(^{3}\)See Janzen, *Job*, 144.

\(^{4}\)See Excursus 2.

Finally, the force of Job's conviction in the future resurrection is manifested by the choice of the eschatological terminology, especially the verb הָנְעַר ("see," "behold"),\(^1\) which functions to express the vision of God that every righteous person will have in the resurrection.\(^2\) Generally the words for "to see" are associated with the words for waking.\(^3\) Some scholars would include in this category even those texts that do not have the word "to see," but which nevertheless imply it.\(^4\)

Generally the verb הָנְעַר ("to see") denotes the act of "seeing," "perceiving," "watching," or "looking" with one's own eyes.\(^5\) Job expresses his conviction that he will live again by הָנְעַר הָעָר ("my eyes will behold," vs. 27), or will see again. There is no such thing as seeing without awakening, for in sleep the eyes are closed, it is dark, and one cannot see; however, in awakening the eyes open, it is light, and one can see again.\(^6\) That is why in Scripture seeing is often paralleled with awakening. Note, for example, the references in Pss 17:15 and 11:7:

\(^1\)See "יִתַּרְתּ," \textit{BDB}, 302.


\(^3\)Sawyer, "Hebrew Words for Resurrection," 224. See, for example, Pss 17:15, 16:10, and 36:10.


\(^5\)Eve perceived that the fruit of the tree was good (Gen 3:6). In Isa 53:11, הָנְעַר occurs without an object, and one can understand this to indicate simply that after the suffering of death (the grave, vs. 9), the Suffering Servant will see again, that is, his eyes will be opened; see Dahood, \textit{Psalms III}, xlii-lii.

The context in both Psalms is the threat of death at the hands of the wicked. In both contexts, the beholding is a reward in contrast to the fate of the wicked. On the wicked, “God will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur” (11:6), and the men of this world have their reward in this life (17:14). In this context the reward of the righteous person is seeing God when he awakes at the resurrection (17:15).

In summary, by employing two synonymous verbs, דַּעְלוּ (occurs twice) and רָאֵן, and in particular emphasizing his personal, by its nature physical, involvement, namely, seeing with רָאֵן ("my eyes") and then clarifying his assertion by adding לאָרְאֵה ("and not another," literally, "stranger"), Job demonstrates a powerful conviction that he himself, in person, not a stranger, will see God in his new resurrected body. Thus Job’s hope for the bodily resurrection is not focused on the immortality of the soul or its continued existence in Sheol; instead it is rooted in God’s wholistic creative power and is characterized by assurance and confidence that looks forward to its fulfillment.

The theology which is delineated in this passage does not support the idea of the immortality of the soul, since our text implies the presence of the body, nor does it support the idea of an existential experience, since our text implies death through the reference to dust. We find here, then, a clear expression of the doctrine of resurrection as it will be later developed in “Paul’s famous discourse on the topic in 1 Cor 15.”

Dan 12:2

It is significant to point out that the current passage, like all the others which were discussed previously, has nothing to say about life for the corpse after death in Sheol. It has nothing to say either about a shadowy and miserable existence of the dead one’s spirit or soul or shades in the underworld. It has nothing to say about Sheol as a place of retribution or punishment.

As was emphasized over and over again, the Hebrew Bible has much to say about the alternative, which, instead of the existence of ghosts of the dead in Sheol, focuses on a quite different concept and category of thought, namely, the authentic bodily resurrection of the dead individuals from Sheol.¹

Therefore, it is no wonder that almost the same cluster of resurrection terms that were discussed in Job 19:25-27 is also found in Dan 12:1-3. The very first verse is introduced by the formulaic expression, לִבְּשֵׁנָה נָבְרָיִא (“now at that time”), which because of the specifics of its context demonstrates its “strongly eschatological character.”² Here the time formula emphasizes a direct relationship between time and eschatological events that will radically change the entire flow of the history of this world.³ “That time” refers to פִּרְעַה (“a time of distress”), which is specified as מַעֲרַר לִאֵד נְאָרִים מְאוֹדָה וּפִlek תּוּבָּתָה (“such as never occurred since there


was a nation until that time”). It means that by its indescribable fury this eschatological time of distress will surpass everything known and experienced in human history. The text refers to multiple and simultaneous events, as at that time ינֵחַ מִישָׁאֵל נֵתָר הָרֹּדַה (“will stand up Michael, the great Prince,” see 10:13), who הַנֶּמֶר עַל-בֵּית יָשָׁף (“is standing up for the sons of your people”).

Furthermore, the author provides not only a description of the crucial and final events, מֵאֲשֶׁר הָדוֹת אֶל-מַלְאָךְ עַמּוֹ (“and at that time your people will be delivered,” see also 7:18, 22, 27; 10:14), but also highlights the rationale for their deliverance, כל-נְמוֹתא יɩוּר תֶּפֶר (“everyone who is found written in the book,” 7:10).

Though the subject of the deliverance is clear, the construction of the last statement puts a significant limitation on the number of those who will be delivered. Consequently, this succinct overview of vs. 1 not only is permeated with eschatological overtones, but also is integrally related to the resurrection description in vs. 2:

וַרְבֵּיתָן מַצֶּהָנָא
And many of those who sleep

אֶת-נְמוֹתא יַקְוַר / in the dusty earth will awake,


2Compare the following texts: Exod 32:32-33; Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 20:15; 21:27; 22:19.

Some to everlasting life,

Others to shame [and] everlasting contempt.

Vs. 2 depicts two resurrections, one for the righteous, and the second for the wicked. The phrase "and many of those who sleep" ("and many of those sleeping") literally means "of those sleeping" and refers to the dead.\(^1\) The imagery of "sleep" ("sleep"), which as a figure of speech is frequently used to designate physical death, is employed in a temporal sense; and as every sleep has its beginning and end, so it is also true with death.\(^2\) The term "functions as a euphemism for the state of death or sleep in the grave, which in the context of eschatological events emphasizes the bodily resurrection. The term has nothing to do here with the so-called intermediate state, which later "came to be known as Purgatory, or place of cleansing."\(^3\)

It is said that the dead sleep in "the dusty earth"), which, as

\(^1\)Death is often compared with sleep: 1 Sam 28:15; Jer 51:39, 57: Job 3:13; 14:12; Isa 26:19; Pss 13:4; 90:5-6.

\(^2\)For the discussion on the term see Stele, 109-111.

was repeatedly emphasized, points back to Gen 3:19 and functions as a synonym for Sheol. The construct chain נֶפֶלָה הָאָרֶץ literally means “the earth of dust” and is associated with the imagery of burial in the grave. Since the plural noun נֶפֶלָה is in a construct state, it specifies the dead as “sleepers of the dusty earth,” which in fact qualifies the dead as dust. Note in particular that the author does not allude to souls or spirits of the dead, which continue their miserable semi-conscious existence somewhere in darkness, but to the dead in their graves.

The statement that יִשְׂרָאֵל (“they will awake”) definitely refers to the bodily resurrection of those who are to be delivered, and “not simply a renewal of the soul.” Thus, the death and resurrection of an individual is designated by the imagery of “sleep” and “awakening.” It should be recalled from the discussion on Job 19:25-27 that the verb יָשָׁר (“awake”) is associated with “seeing” and “light.” Moreover, here it is located next to the term לְחיָי (lit., “lives”) in the phrase ‘יִנָּהָלָה לְחיָי (“these to everlasting life”), thus forming a strong eschatological resurrection imagery, which at the same time highlights a clear life-and-death antithesis. The negative consequences of the resurrection event are described in the parallel phrase, which refers to those who lived without God.

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2For a detailed analysis of the phrase יִשְׂרָאֵל see Stele, “Resurrection in Daniel 12,” 111-115.


4See יָשָׁר, BDB, 886. Also Stele, “Resurrection in Daniel 12,” 115-123.

5Especially see Isa 26:19, which contains the same cluster of the resurrection terms as Job 19:25-27.
to shame [and] everlasting contempt”). People die individually, but the resurrection of the dead is represented as an eschatological event of a corporate nature.

Furthermore, Dan 12:13 employs an almost identical death-and-resurrection imagery that is characteristic for the resurrection passages.¹ The introductory phrase ("but you, go on to the end") means "to the end of your life," thus referring to the cessation of his earthly existence. The nature of Daniel’s death is clearly specified as that of rest, ("and you will rest"), where the Qal verb ("rest") functions as a synonym of (compare with Job 3:13, 17, 26). Again, there is no hint that Daniel’s soul or spirit would leave his body after death in order to continue its survival in the underworld.

Not only is the imagery of death very concrete, but it is also followed by the figure of speech for the final resurrection, ("and you will stand"), which is further clarified by the phrase, ("at the end of the days"). The technical term for resurrection ("stand") functions as a synonym of ("stand," "arise") and that is why its employment here emphasizes a particular purpose, which will be carried out .² The term ("end") signifies the eschaton³ or the end time of human history,⁴ which will culminate in the bodily resurrection of the


²Of eight occurrences of the noun ("end") with the definite article, only two have prefixed the preposition , namely, Dan 12:13 and Hab 2:3. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "" TDOT, 13:78-86. See also Gerhard Pfandl, “The Latter Days and the Time of the End in the Book of Daniel” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1990).

³Dan 8:17, 19; 11:40; 12:4, 6.

⁴See Andrew E. Hill and Gordon H. Matties, "" NIDOTTE, 3:955.
dead from Sheol.¹

In conclusion, as is seen from various texts, the consistent scriptural perspective of the bodily resurrection of the dead is both absolutely different from and incompatible with the popular belief in the immortality of soul or its existence in the underworld, which in turn is interlocked with the misinterpretation of the nature, function, and purpose of the proper noun Sheol. Indeed, human death with all its implications, the concept of soul and the nature of Sheol, and any other related theological teaching can be understood and accordingly appreciated only against the scriptural focus on the new creation, which among other things implies the bodily resurrection from the dead.²


CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

יִשְׁדָּא and Interrelated Terminology

It is not the purpose of this chapter to replicate in detail all the results that were obtained during the systematic and quite extensive exegetical investigation of the term Sheol in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and can be found in their proper contexts in the corresponding exegetical sections. Consequently, except for a few specific items, this chapter will focus only on the most important conclusions and insights.

As was seen from the process of the current exegesis, the term Sheol does not function in a vacuum, and that is why there is no need to characterize it as an independent or isolated concept. One way to detect the nature, function, and purpose of the word Sheol is by its interrelatedness and interconnections with other terms, which because of their intrinsic and extrinsic features, in one way or other, activate, modify, or describe the intention of the term under scrutiny.

Repeatedly drawn conclusions that the term Sheol functions as a poetic synonym of the grave were reached by taking into consideration its various degrees of interrelation with other death-related terminology and the strength of their links. In order to determine the interconnections or interdependence of the term Sheol with its counterparts, where one concept inevitably influences and illuminates another, thus
creating an organic system of terminological interdependence, it is extremely important to focus also on the context and nature of the current investigation. This terminological interrelationship of and to the term Sheol can be expressed by a relation of “is” and “has.”

One of the terms which directly interacts with and characterizes the word Sheol is the masculine noun בָּרֹד (“the pit”). It is interesting to note that in the Hebrew Scriptures the word בָּרֹד sometimes occurs without the definite article, especially in such formulas as בָּרֹד וְאֵל (“those going down to the pit”). Thus, functioning as a proper noun, it creates a specific mental image, which focuses on its innate spatial aspects and at the same time, by transferring its basic meaning, the noun בָּרֹד explicates Sheol. For example, Isa 38:18 contains three words which are interrelated by their semantic associations, namely, the term בָּרֹד operates in a direct parallelism with Sheol and with מְתָא (“death”), which means that in this case the nature and function of Sheol are characterized by the specific qualitative features of מְתָא and בָּרֹד. Although בָּרֹד may have various meanings and can function in literal and metaphorical ways, depending on the context and interconnections, the word not only does not imply in itself the concept of “bottomless pit,” but in the whole Hebrew

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2See table 6. In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions of the vocabulary already discussed, only a few major terms will be mentioned here.

3See table 9.

4See also Isa 14:15; 38:18; Ezek 31:16; Pss 30:4; 88:4, 5; Prov 1:12.
Bible no allusion can be found that the noun functions as an “opening” or “door” leading to Sheol. To argue that the word הַבָּעָר refers to such an idea means to alter its basic meaning or to transfer it from another concept or category and impose it on the noun “pit.”

Furthermore, the constructions הַבָּעָר הָרָב (“the lowest pit,” Ps 88:7; Lam 3:55), הַבָּעָר הַגְּדוֹל (“the lowest earth” or “the earth below,” Ezek 26:20; 32:18, 24), and הַבָּעָר הַגָּדוֹל (“Sheol below,” Deut 32:22) form direct parallel links and interrelated associations of the place of the dead. In the paradigm of הַבָּעָר, הַגְּדוֹל, and הַגָּדוֹל all three locations are interconnected by the same modifier הַגְּדוֹל (“lower,” “below”) and qualitatively common associations, which as an organic whole refers to one and the same place, the grave.

It is also necessary to refer briefly to an important function of the verb הָנָה (“go down”) in such stereotyped formulas as, הָנָה הַבָּעָר (“those who go down to the pit,” Isa 38:18), הָנָה הַבָּעָר (“those who go down to the dust,” Ps 22:30) and הָנָה (“the earth,” Jonah 2:7), הָנָה (“those who go down to silence,” Ps 115:17), הָנָה (“from going down to the pit,” Job 33:24), and הָנָה (“he who goes down to Sheol,” Job 7:9; Ps 55:16). It is clear that the verb הָנָה exposes double or joint significations, because הָנָה not only features movement and direction, implying the time element (past, present, or future), but also is interconnected with the nouns, which interact among themselves through their common semantic features. This direct interrelatedness between הָנָה, הָנָה, הָנָה, הָנָה, and הָנָה, which is expressed by the particular functions of their nature and character, demonstrates not
only the fact that all these nouns belong to the same category or class, but also exposes a distinctive analogy to the grave, and not various regions in Sheol or six different locations where the dead could be buried.

Another related term, which is a synonym of תָּרְפֶּה ("pit"); however, by its characterization it exposes the connotations of corruption and destruction and also functionally it is equivalent to Sheol. For example, in Ps 16:10 תָּרְפֶּה is equal to לָאוֹשֶׁה, but in Ps 7:16 it is in parallel with רָבִּים, whereas in Ps 30:10 תָּרְפֶּה is directly interrelated with בֵּית ("dust," see also Isa 38:17; Ps 55:24; Job 33:24). In Job 17:13-14 the cause and effect, similarity, and space factors form strong interconnections between לָאוֹשֶׁה, תָּרְפֶּה, and מָאָב ("worm," also Isa 14:11). Again, each term of this cluster indicates some nuances which complement the purpose and the meaning of the term Sheol, including its various implications as the place of the dead.

Moreover, the explicitly strong relationship between לָאוֹשֶׁה and תָּרְפֶּה as synonymous terms is also established by means of their common verbal significations. For instance, "to go down" or "to cause to go down" to תָּרְפֶּה is expressed by the verb יָפָר in Ps 30:10 and Ezek 28:8, whereas the term יָפָר, meaning "to see or experience" יָפָר, is found in Pss 16:10 and 49:10. In Isa 51:14 the verb יָפָר ("to die") refers to dying in תָּרְפֶּה, but in Job 33:22 יָפָר ("to draw near") relates to the pit.

1It is significant to note that the absence of the article implies "the class to which the referent belongs, its quality and character," while "the definite article refers to identity, specificity, or particularity." See Waltke, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 13:2, p. 236-237.

2See tables 9 and 10, including the corresponding discussions on the terms.
as “drawing near” to it.

There is another cluster of synonymous verbs which describes the rescue from שֵׁלֹם, as in Job 33:30, where the verb בָּאַהְיו points to “returning” or “bringing one back” from the pit. In order to describe his salvation שֵׁלֹם (“from the pit”), Jonah employs the term יִכְבָּר (“to go up,” “bring up,” see 2:7), and whereas Ps 103:4 uses the verb יִשָּׁר (“to redeem”), Job 33:28 interlinks שֵׁלֹם with the verb יִרְכַּב (“to ransom,” “rescue”). These verbs not only reflect a naturally integrated interrelation of יִכְבָּר with יִשָּׁר, but also combined with other firmly established characteristics and associations form an analogous imagery of the grave.

Finally, there are three more important terms, יִרְכָּב (“ground”), רֲפָא (“dust”), and יִרְכַּב (“earth”), which are used interchangeably not only as interrelated representations of the place of the dead, but also as a paradigm or prototype, describing and exposing the fundamentally intrinsic nature of the term Sheol. The fact that these words have powerfully strong links with the term Sheol is revealed both by the concrete context in which the terms operate and also by their functional interrelations and interdependence.

For example, in Dan 12:2 the compound structure יִרְכָּב תַּכְוּ (“soil/ground of dust” or “dusty soil”) contains the affirmation about the subject term of a preposition where both signify the same thing, namely, Sheol, the grave.

1For other verbs associated with שֵׁלֹם, see Job 33:18; Pss 35:7 and 94:13.

2Notice the structure of the construct chain: it is not יִרְכָּב תַּכְוּ, which would denote “the dust of the ground,” but rather יִרְכָּב תַּכְוּ, that basically means “soil of dust” or just “dusty soil.” See Waltke, 9.5.3d (p. 151) where the author refers to the “genitive of material” which indicates material of which something is made or with which it is filled, namely, the word in the construct is made of the material specified by the word in the absolute.

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The conclusion that יָדוֹןתָןָם designates Sheol can be strengthened and clearly established by means of the two verbs, which are opposite in their nature, character, and function, namely, one verb characterizes the state of the dead as sleep, יָדוֹוןתָןָם (“of those sleeping”), and the other is the word of resurrection, יָדוֹוןתָןָם (“they will awake”), both of which interlock the whole phrase. The direct intertextual connection of Dan 12:2 with מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("from the dust of the ground" or "dust from the ground") in Gen 2:7, and with the identical representations of Gen 3:19, מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("to the ground"), מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("for dust") and מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("to dust"), is unmistakable, as it signifies both the material from which man was formed and the place of his return.

The imagery of the returning place as Sheol is further determined by the directional preposition מַחֲשַׁבָּה and the function of the verb בּוֹעֵשּׁנָה ("you will return"), where every lexical element influences each other towards the same representation, thus unmistakably characterizing and strengthening the idea of the grave as the place of מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת.

There is also a direct interrelatedness of the term מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת with מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת in Job 17:16 and Ps 30:10; and in Ezek 31:14, 16, 18 מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת is linked with מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (Ezek 26:20). In Job 21:26 מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת is represented as the grave through concise but precise references to those who מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (“lie down”) and מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (“worm”) that מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (“covers”) them. The imagery of the grave is further represented by joint significations of מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת and מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (“Your dead") and מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת (“my corpse”), מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("earth") and מְאֹדַת מְאֹדַת ("Rephaim," "the dead"), which is further intensified by a punctuated vocabulary of the resurrection (Isa 26:19).

1See Exod 15:12; Num 16:30, 32; 26:10, 11; Deut 11:6; Ps 106:17.

As is seen from the brief analysis of the term Sheol and its interrelated terminology, it is clear that by employing the word Sheol the writers viewed the grave in its established sense as the place of the dead. It should also be reemphasized that there are neither isolated nor interrelated connections in the Hebrew Scriptures, which would allude to or signify Sheol as the location of punishment or the place of the continued existence of a bodiless soul. The fact that the much-debated Sheol is devoid of such a meaning, and all ensuing implications, is established by means of the indicated associations of the term Sheol with the interrelated terminology, including various cross-interconnections and links, which can represent and signify only the grave as the place of the dead and nothing more.

Nature of \( \text{Hebrew terminology} \)

The exegetical investigation of all sixty-six references to the term Sheol demonstrates that it is scattered throughout the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The word Sheol occurs both in narrative and mostly in poetical contexts, which often demonstrate highly emotional and personal reactions to concrete life-threatening or otherwise agonizing situations (Gen 37:35; Ps 18:5).

\[ \text{In Jonah 2:3 the term Sheol is used in a general sense as the place of death.} \]

\[ \text{There are numerous terms which directly relate, in one way or another, to the term Sheol as the poetic designation of the grave. The other related terminology includes various words for the dead and diverse descriptive elements of Sheol, which, if space and time afforded, could be summarized according to the above pattern of the terminological interrelatedness and interdependence. Concerning the vocabulary omitted in this section, see the corresponding exegetical sections. For general information on some of the related terms, see Sidney Jellicoe, “Hebrew-Greek Equivalents for the Nether World, Its Milieu and Inhabitants, in the Old Testament,” in Textus: Annual of the Hebrew University Bible Project, 8 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 1-19.} \]
However, a special note should be made concerning such extremely figurative and concentrated passages as Isa 14, Ezek 31, 32, etc., that the key to understanding the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol is not so much identifiable by the employed vocabulary itself, but by the entire context. In other words, within the highly metaphorical setting where the unanimated things are personified, the specific terminology and imagery propose a concrete idea, which is not literal or characteristic to the language itself, but illustrates a different thought. Thus, the purpose of the metaphorical language in Isa 14 and Ezek 31, 32 is to communicate the main point, which is represented in a most convincing way by the portrayal of a total destruction of Yahweh's enemies, because "the metaphor's function is to be communicative."¹

Consequently, after systematic and comprehensive study of the term Sheol in various contexts, the culminating question should be asked: What is יְלַםְנָת in the Hebrew Scripture or what is its nature?² The answer to this question can be formulated by the condensed summary, which expresses not only the essence of the term Sheol, but also is in harmony with the anthropological and theological insights of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. In brief, by its nature the term Sheol demonstrates the qualities that are diametrically opposite to any life form and therefore functions as the grave or an antithesis of everything that can be termed as being, life, or existence.

The numerous interrelated and interacting terms for death, dying, the dead bodies, and the place of the dead, lead to totality, which not only associates Sheol with


²For detailed summaries on the nature of the term Sheol see Excursus 1, 2, and 3 at the end of the corresponding chapters.
the grave in its general sense,¹ but also helps to define its nature. For example, the recurrence of the key verb תָּרַע ("to go down"), which refers to dying and at the same time specifies direction, including other synonymous and interrelated terms,² convincingly demonstrates that the location of Sheol or its position in space is below the earth (Gen 37:35; 1 Sam 2:6). It should be recalled that the formula מַעַלְמַת הָאָרֶץ ("in the earth below," Ezek 26:20), including its variations, "means no more than a place below ground where the dead are buried."³ Consequently, the location of Sheol, as the place of the dead, is in perfect agreement with its nature.

There would be no Sheol without such inseparably interrelated physical constituents, which represent the core and essence of the place of the dead, as the corpse (Job 17:16) and dust (Isa 26:19, Dan 12:2, etc.). In the Hebrew Scriptures the nature of Sheol is also characterized by such fundamentally intrinsic and destructive elements as worms and maggots (Isa 14:11; Job 17:16), which in combination with the corpse function as an essential feature that can correspond only to the qualifications of the grave. This correspondence or interconnectedness focuses not only on one point, representing the dead body covered by worms that are feeding on it, but also interacts with "darkness" (1 Sam 2:9; Job 17:13; Ps 88:7, 13), with "a land of darkness" and "shadow of death" (Job 10:21, 22), "silence" (Pss 94:17; 115:17), and "destruction" (Job 28:22, 26:6; Ps 88:12).

¹Though one may argue concerning the exact terminology whether Sheol should be designated as "the grave" or "the domain of the dead," the essence remains the same.

²See table 2.


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In anthropological sense the term Sheol is exclusively interlocked with death and the dead, but never once is it associated with the existence of the dead person’s soul or spirit in the so-called underworld. This is apparent from the fact that at death the spirit of life returns back to Yahweh (Qoh 12:7), but the dead body goes down to Sheol to return to the dust of the earth (Gen 3:19). Consequently, the process of “returning” not only excludes any possibility of an independent self-existence of the soul in Sheol, but also makes it absolutely impossible in terms of contacting with the living ones. Since at death the “soul” ceases to exist, any life-related activity, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, comes to an end, for “there is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol” (Qoh 9:10), the dead “cannot hope” (Isa 38:18), “there is no remembrance” (Ps 6:6), and the dead “do not come up” from Sheol (Job 7:9). In other words, Sheol is the place of the dead, the place of decay, and destruction, where the process of the reversal of the creation is completed till it reaches the precreation stage (Gen 2:7; Job 10:9).

According to the theological pattern of the Hebrew Bible, the nature of Sheol can be formulated as vulnerable and as being under the absolute control of Yahweh. The conceptual characteristics and the interrelatedness between Yahweh and Sheol are demonstrated by the fact that the grave provides no place of escape from Him (Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8), “Sheol is naked” and “Abaddon has no covering” before God (Job 26:6) as both “lie open” before Him (Prov 15:11). Yahweh’s omnipotence is also revealed by His unrestricted freedom to set Sheol on fire (Deut 32:22), to bring down to Sheol or to resurrect the dead (Num 16:33; 1 Sam 2:6; Job 14:13; Dan 12:2, etc.), or to do whatever He wishes (Isa 7:11).
Function of גֵּדֶר

The direct interrelatedness of the nature, function, and purpose dimensions is defined by the common terminology that interacts, overlaps, and interconnects all the three dimensions in one whole, which at the same time not only allows each separate facet to exert a strong influence on the other two, but also makes it possible to investigate each part individually. The purpose of the second dimension of this three-faceted structure is to summarize the factual functions of the term Sheol, which were already identified in the previous chapters. Consequently, the focus of the basic question to be asked centers on How does the term Sheol function in the Hebrew Scriptures?¹

By using a highly metaphorical language, especially the elements of personification, the biblical writers emphasize one of the most significant functions of the term Sheol, which is inseparable from its deadly nature and purpose: Sheol is the great leveler of all people. For instance, as “Sheol has enlarged its throat” (Isa 5:14) no one “can escape the hand of Sheol” (Ps 89:49), neither kings, counselors, princes, nor small or great (Job 3:13-19).² Isaiah entwines the threefold repetition of Sheol in his sarcastic lament, which mocks the dead oppressor (Isa 14:9, 11, 15), whereas Ezekiel emphasizes the same point, which in the context of the taunt, accusation, judgment, and punitive elements, depicts the leaders of various nations

¹For detailed summaries on the function of the term Sheol, see the corresponding chapters.

²For more information on the mentioned texts, see the related exegesis sections.
together with their armies as lying in their graves (Ezek 32:21, 27; also 31:15, 16, 17, etc).¹

It should be particularly emphasized that the interrelated terminology of death, the place of the dead, and the dead, which is employed in the above references, including their specific contexts, refers exclusively to physical death of the whole human being, and does not imply the popular idea of the after-death existence in Sheol in any of its forms. Besides, the popular idea that Isaiah and Ezekiel describe some shadowy existence and social hierarchical distinctions in Sheol cannot be supported, since the main point of these texts is to emphasize the common lot in death and equality in the place of the dead, and does not imply a continued after-death order of their rank. These passages point out the differences in life and the equivalence in death, but nothing more.

Another popular view that associates Sheol as exclusively reserved only for the wicked (Num 16:30, 33; Isa 5:14; Pss 31:18, 49:15) or that there are no passages in which the righteous would visualize their death in Sheol, contradicts the statements of Jacob (whose experience is described in Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; 44:31), Hezekiah (Isa 38:10), Jonah (Jonah 2:3), Job (Job 14:13; 17:13, 16), the Psalmists (Pss 88:4; 116:3), and others.

A cosmological pattern in the use of the term Sheol is revealed in Isa 7:11, Amos 9:2, and Ps 139:8, where the term functions as merism or the opposite extreme to heavens. Technically the distinction between the two concepts represents a spatial contrast or a death-and-life antithesis that finds its expression in theological contexts.

There is another set of verses in which the function of the term Sheol is to represent a specific anthropological dimension, which, instead of affirming one's after-death existence in the grave, makes a strong and convincing case against it. The support for this argument is seen in the intrinsic and extrinsic meaning of the employed terminology, their direct interconnections with Sheol, and the directly applied characterizations of the dead body, which refer to the process of complete disintegration as depicted in Isa 14:11, 38:18, Job 17:13-16, and Qoh 9:10.

It should also be noted that as the result of the distinctive and comparative function of the destructive nature and purpose of the term Sheol, which draws parallels with that of human thoughts and deeds, including Sheol's directly interrelated terminology (death, the pit, Abaddon, etc.), the author of Proverbs is able to employ the death-and-grave imagery in a strongly emphatic way. Consequently, the interconnectedness and application of the basic aspects of Sheol to the central characters, which are portrayed in specific life situations that serve to educate and instruct, lead to a highly charged moral tension between the ways of the wicked and the righteous. Thus this comparative function not only posits similarities between Sheol and human beings, but also results in unmasking the evil nature of sinners (Prov 1:12, 16-18) and the adulterous and destructive course of “the strange woman” (Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18), emphasizes the necessity to discipline a youth in order to protect him from death and Sheol (Prov 23:14), and depicts human greed as an extremely destructive force (Prov 27:20; 30:16; also Hab 2:5).

Finally, as death and Sheol have full control over every human being, so the Creator has full dominion over Sheol and the dead in it (Isa 7:11, Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8),
which means that Sheol does not function as an independent or isolated entity, but is subjected to Yahweh. Another important aspect of the theological function finds its expression in death (Isa 14:11; 14:15) and the resurrection experiences (1 Sam 2:6; Hos 13:14), where the latter are different from and irreconcilable with the popular belief in a bodiless existence of the immortal soul.

**Purpose of יָם שֹׁלֶל**

It would be correct to assert that, depending on the degree and strength with other interrelated terminology, the employment of the term Sheol in various contexts and situations leads to a quite comprehensive exposition of its intrinsic nature and basic functions. However, the question why the term יָם שֹׁלֶל is employed in the Hebrew Scriptures includes more than that, for it is meant to convey knowledge which in its intent goes far beyond being merely informative, as it contains direct anthropological and theological implications.¹ To put it another way, it is highly important to recognize these specific features, because they help to identify the intentions of various writers concerning the employment and purpose of the term Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The current exegetical investigation of the term Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures comes to the conclusion that the primary aim of its usages is not theoretical or philosophical, but experiential (Gen 37:35; Pss 18:6; 88:4), instructional (Num 16:30, 33; Prov 1:12; 5:5), and doxological (Deut 32:22; Job 11:6; 26:6; Ps 139:8), although often these dimensions may overlap each other.

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¹For detailed summaries on the purpose of Sheol, see the corresponding chapters.
In the experiential dimension, the unalterable fact that life ends with death is inseparable from its practical implications and purpose, which serve to remind that every human being is mortal (Ps 88:49). In spite of both their moral grounds (Gen 37:35; Num 16:30, 33) and social ranks (Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27), death operates on all levels as the great equalizer of all people, thus representing one of the most clearly defined aspects of the term Sheol in the experiential field. Though scholars often complain that the term Sheol contains only a few descriptive details, it is enough with the above references to come to the conclusion that such concepts as “death,” “soul,” and Sheol did not create any theological or anthropological problem for biblical writers, and should not for us.

Another aspect of the experiential dimension refers to the “cords of Sheol,” “snares of death,” “the waves of death,” and “the torrents of perdition,” which by the function of their nature and purpose are intertextually interrelated and as synonymous vehicles create the uttermost intense imagery of one’s agony (2 Sam 22:6; Isa 38:10; Jonah 2:2; Pss 18:6; 116:3). In other words, the situation is so dangerous and the distress of the imminent mortal dangers is so overwhelming that the sufferer feels as if he is already in the grave. In these experiential contexts the authors have in mind only death and the grave and have nothing to do with a shadowy underground region, or the continued existence of the disembodied souls.

The purpose of the instructional dimension is to warn, instruct, and educate. For instance, the employment of the term Sheol in Num 16:30, 33 not only serves as a paradigm of the execution of Yahweh’s judgment over those who rebel against Him and His people, but also constitutes a direct warning to the living (also Ezek 31 and
32), whereas in the book of Proverbs the word Sheol is purposefully emphasized in specific instructional contexts. When the focus is on such particularly selected subjects as “the bloodthirsty sinners” (Prov 1:12) or “the strange woman” (Prov 2:16-19; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18), the intentional reference to Sheol, including its interrelated death terminology, results in clarification of the facts, teaching of the path of life (Prov 15:24), and providing a distinct warning concerning various hidden dangers. Other references in this category point out that a wise corporal discipline will save a youth from Sheol (Prov 23:24), whereas Prov 27:20 uses the term Sheol to characterize the nature of human greediness, or conversely, the power of true love (Song of Songs 8:6).

It the doxological dimension Yahweh is represented as the Judge or the One who is omnipresent (Ps 139:8) or omniscient (Job 11:8), and the purpose of Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures inevitably has to deal with the temporary character of the grave and the dead in it. Yahweh not only exposes the disobedience of His people, but also demonstrates His sovereignty in judicial acts of indictment and judgment, as in the case of Korah and his followers (Num 16:30, 33), His people (Deut 32:22; Isa 5:14; 28:18), or His enemies (Isa 14:9, 11, 15; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21:27). The absolute control of Yahweh over Sheol and death is especially emphasized in Isa 7:11, Job 26:6, Prov 15:11, Amos 9:2, etc., and at the same time is interconnected with the notion of redemption (Ps 49:16) or the bodily resurrection (1 Sam 2:6; Hos 13:14). In other words, it means that the power of death and Sheol is restricted.

The synthesis of the basic information concerning the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings in one wholly crystallized entity shows that Sheol is the place of the dead with no existence. Indeed,
the major purpose of the employment of the term Sheol is to demonstrate as clearly and persuasively as possible the fact that humans are only mortal beings, and this is reflected by such a vitally important anthropological aspect as the state of the dead.

It is almost impossible to imagine how such explicit statements concerning Sheol—which is characterized as the place of “maggots,” “worms” (Isa 14:11), and darkness (Job 3:4, 5; 17:13), which “cannot thank You,” “cannot praise You” and “cannot hope” (Isa 38:18; Pss 30:10; 88:11), where the dead “lie still, the uncircumcised, killed by the sword” (Ezek 32:21), and “kings and counselors,” “princes,” “prisoners,” “slave driver,” “the small and the great are there” (Job 3:11-19), where is “no remembrance of You” (Ps 6:6), as the dead are “lying down,” “quiet,” “asleep,” “at rest” (Job 3:13), and “there is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol” (Qoh 9:10), where “the dead do not praise Yahweh” (Ps 115:17), because “his breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Ps 146:4)—can be so blatantly misunderstood as to regard Sheol as the place of conscious existence of the disembodied human spirits and souls, which by itself is a misinterpreted and dangerously deceptive view. Sheol means no more than the place of the dead or simply the grave in general, where the dead bodies or corpses return to become the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7; 3:19). On the other hand, the fact that not even one of the sixty-six references to the term Sheol contains any indication that Yahweh would somehow try to communicate with the dead is strikingly clear and does not need to be commented on.

Finally, it should also be noted that the theological emphasis overlaps the experiential and doxological dimensions in those Sheol passages where the focus falls
on Yahweh as the source of life and restoration. For example, in 1 Sam 2:6 Yahweh is represented as the One who can take away the breath of life, bring a person down to Sheol, and then raise up from it, whereas in Num 16:30, 33 Yahweh's sovereignty is characterized by the function of the Judge,¹ but in Hos 13:14 He is the Author of the bodily resurrection, transformation, and immortality.

**Classification of the Term הָאָדָם**

As was seen from this study, the term Sheol is used in a wide variety of contexts, with related but sometimes distinct meanings or connotations. On the one hand, understanding the classification of the term Sheol in different types of contexts and their relationship to one another on different levels of thematic recurrence is crucially important, as it helps to determine the focal emphasis of the term in each related case. On the other hand, such classification is achieved with some difficulty. Since the context may involve numerous connoted and denoted ideas,² there is some ambiguity as to which of its diverse features functions as the focal point and primary emphasis of the term under discussion. Despite the problem of ambiguity with regard to the specific nuances of the context, a tentative classification of the usages of Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptures is attempted in this section.

Table 19 represents a tentative attempt to systematize different Sheol

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¹According to Johnston, "Old Testament eschatology has no concept of judgment after death. Nor does it comment on the punishment or destruction of the wicked." Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 237. On the contrary, see such Old Testament references as Gen 6:7; 7:4; 19:24-29; Deut 29:23; Ps 1:4; 2:9; 37:20; 58:8; 73:19; Isa 1:31; 66:16-24; Ezek 39:9-22; Dan 12:2; Zeph 1:14-18; Jer 49:18; 50:40; Mal 4:3, etc.

²The word “context” may refer not only to the text or a nonlinguistic situation, setting, or background, but also to the information contained in the text or situation, to some specific term or phrase, to some subject, entity, or topic of interest, etc.

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references according to their particular contexts, including their miscellaneous but
interrelated dynamic connotations and emotional associations, which, as employed by
various Hebrew authors, highlight some specific qualitative aspects of the term.

TABLE 19
CLASSIFICATION OF THE TERM ACCORDING TO ITS PRIMARY EMPHASIS IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Emphasis On</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grave as the Place of the Dead:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) In general sense</td>
<td>1 Sam 2:6; Isa 57:9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Its power</td>
<td>2 Sam 22:6; Pss 18:6; 116:3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Place of no existence</td>
<td>Isa 38:18; Ps 6:6; Job 7:9; (Qoh 9:10)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grave as Destiny:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Of all people</td>
<td>Ps 89:49; Qoh 9:10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Of the righteous</td>
<td>Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Isa 38:10; Ps 88:4; Job 17:13, 16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Of the wicked</td>
<td>Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Isa 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; 28:15, 18; Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27; Pss 9:18; 31:18; 49:15 (2x); 55:16; 141:7; Job 21:13; 24:19; (Prov 1:12); 5:5; 7:27; 9:18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deliverance from Grave:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Rescue</td>
<td>(1 Sam 2:6); Hos 13:14 (2x); Jonah 2:3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Protection</td>
<td>Pss 30:4; 49:16; 86:13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Avoidance</td>
<td>Ps 16:10; Prov 23:14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grave Personified:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Deadly</td>
<td>Hab 2:5; Prov 1:12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Destructive</td>
<td>Prov 30:16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Uncompromising</td>
<td>Prov 27:20; Cant 8:6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Grave as Cosmological Extremity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deut 32:22; Isa 7:11; Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8; Job 11:8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Grave as Temporary Refuge:</td>
<td>Job 14:13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Grave as Defenseless Place:</td>
<td>Job 26:6; Prov 15:11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The basic structural idea for this table is borrowed in part from Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 80.
According to table 19, such a systematic approach\(^1\) has resulted not only in an interesting sevenfold pattern of the term Sheol, but also offers important information about its primary qualitative emphasis, as is seen from its statistical data. Thus, whether taking the quantitative distribution of the Sheol references in each category separately or in combination, it is apparent that Sheol refers to the place of the dead with an emphasis on: *Grave as Destiny* (36) → *Deliverance from Grave* (9), *Grave as the Place of the Dead* (8) → *Grave Personified* (5), *Grave as Cosmological Extremity* (5) → *Grave as Defenseless Place* (2), and *Grave as Temporary Refuge* (1).

Typically the term Sheol is associated with a cluster of different connotations which are not shown in table 19, but are found in exegetical sections of the research. This is because in many cases the term Sheol functions not only in its direct context, but also in a subcontext, which deals with various motifs and submotifs, nuances and associations, while in some cases the word is its own context. For example, in Qoh 9:10 the term Sheol has at least two basic meanings: (1) it refers to the grave as the destiny of all human beings and (2) it designates the grave as the place of no existence. Both emphases are equally important and this is true for numerous Sheol references.

The current attempt to arrange the term Sheol in various groupings shows that in the thirty-six cases Sheol points to the grave as man’s common destiny, which clearly refutes the view that Sheol is designated only for the wicked. On the other

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\(^1\)This classification procedure helps in facilitating understanding of different connotations of the term Sheol in its various contexts, including their interrelatedness, and exploring ways to further regroup the obtained information to bring out a more meaningful and comprehensible pattern. For example, the subcategory dealing with “destiny of the wicked” in table 19 contains other connotations, namely, in Num 16:30, 33 the term Sheol functions in the context of judgment and punishment (see Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27), but in Pss 31:18; 49:15; 55:16 in the setting of imprecation, and in Isa 28:15, 18 in a prophetic-judgment situation, etc.
hand, the fact that Sheol is predominantly (26 times) depicted as the doom of the wicked (which has its own implications) cannot be used either to construe or defend the teaching of the immortality of the soul. The same is true concerning such categories as "Grave as The Place of the dead" and "Grave personified." Although the classification of the term Sheol by its primary emphasis is rather relative, at the same time it is quite illuminating and instructive for perceiving a more complete picture of this unique term.

Theological Implications

The current exegesis, which by itself implies an informed understanding of the specified texts including their various procedures and aspects, dealt with the sixty-six Sheol references in the Hebrew Bible. It is exactly through this exegetical process, which focused on the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol, its immediate context and cumulative and mutually harmonizing details, that two diametrically opposite theological and anthropological systems are laid bare and illuminated. The essence of these two systems revolves around the question of one’s postmortem existence and nonexistence in Sheol.


2At one end of the spectrum, representing the popular view, which supports some kind of existence after death, are such scholars as Edward B. Pusey, William G. T. Shedd, Norman Anderson, Harry Buis, William Hendriksen, Robert Morey, Roger Nicole, Paul Helm and James I. Packer, John H. Gerstner and Donald A. Carson, Millard J. Erickson, and others.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who exclude any after-death existence till the day of the bodily resurrection, as for example, Edward White, Henry Constable, LeRoy Froom, John W. Wenham, Russel Aldwinckle, Stephen H. Travis, Edward W. Fudge, Thomas N. Finger, John R. W. Stott, Philip E. Hughes, Clark H. Pinnock, Michael Green, David J. Powys, E. Earl Ellis, and others.
Accordingly, the four major views concerning the term Sheol, which were briefly mentioned in the first chapter, belong to one of the two systems or theological schools, and this can be demonstrated by arranging them into two opposite groups. In spite of the fact that the literal or traditional, purgatorial, and metaphorical views, including their subcategories, deal with various tenets of thought, they can be joined together in one block by a common idea of the immortality of the soul or some kind of existence in Sheol, whereas the opposite camp is represented by the conditional view, according to which, the soul cannot exist apart from the body in Sheol, for it represents the whole man.

This is an extremely important dilemma for at least two reasons. On the one hand, both theological and anthropological conclusions are designed to represent the total reality concerning Sheol and all the other issues associated with the place of the dead in the Hebrew Scriptures. In addition to that, the derived information from the sources, which represent at least an Evangelical perspective, should be factual, responsible, dependable, and in harmony with the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, as its end result will be manifested in a dynamic formulation of a concrete belief. On the other hand, it is apparent that the two theologies are built upon differing grounds.

It should also be pointed out that the problem is not with the Hebrew Scriptures or its authors, but with imposing on the term Sheol non-scriptural ideas by indiscriminately importing various meanings from outside sources or ignoring what the author was trying to convey by the term Sheol in a particular context, or reading into it all the possible meanings, which can be defined as "illegitimate totality.
transfer."¹

As was repeatedly seen during the exegetical process, these two theological systems are in fundamental disagreement concerning the location of Sheol, its nature, function, and purpose, the state of the dead in it, and the identity of the dead (the wicked, the righteous). There are numberless statements made by the representatives of the so-called popular or traditional theology, which serve as clear and summarizing illustrations of the above-mentioned observations. For example M. and L. Becqué assert, “But when the breath of life leaves the body, it does not die but dwells in ‘Sheol.’”² Martin-Achard emphasizes the same view: “Although the departed no longer lives, he none the less continues in existence.”³ Morey vigorously contends that “While the Old Testament consistently refers to the body as going to the grave, it always refers to the soul or spirit of man as going to Sheol.”⁴ In order to reemphasize that “Sheol is the place where the souls of all men go at death”⁵ and reinforce his dualistic anthropological paradigm, Morey registers twenty reasons why Sheol is not the grave:


³Martin-Achard, *From Life to Death*, 17.

⁴Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 72.

⁵Ibid., 78. The same view is expressed by Fortman, *Everlasting Life after Death*, 27-37.
1. While the *kabar* (to bury) is used in connection with *kever* it is never used in connection with Sheol. We can bury someone in a grave but we cannot bury anyone in Sheol (Gen. 23:4, 6, 9, 19, 20; 49:30, 31, etc.).

2. While *kever* is found in its plural form "graves" (Ex. 14:11), the word Sheol is never pluralized.

3. While a grave is located at a specific site (Ex. 14:11), Sheol is never localized, because it is everywhere accessible at death no matter where the death takes place. No grave is necessary in order to go to Sheol.

4. While we can purchase or sell a grave (Gen. 23:4-20), Scripture never speaks of Sheol being purchased or sold.

5. While we can own a grave as personal property (Gen. 23:4-20), nowhere in scripture is Sheol owned by man.

6. While we can discriminate between graves and pick the "choicest site" (Gen. 23:6), nowhere in Scripture is a "choice" Sheol pitted against a "poor" Sheol.

7. While we can drop a dead body into a grave (Gen. 50:13), no one can drop anyone into Sheol.

8. While we can erect a monument over a grave (Gen. 35:20), Sheol is never spoken of as having monuments.

9. While we can, with ease, open or close a grave (2 Kings 23:16), Sheol is never opened or closed by man.

10. While we can touch a grave (Num. 19:18), no one is ever said in Scripture to touch Sheol.

11. While touching a grave brings ceremonial defilement (Num. 19:16), the Scriptures never speak of anyone being defiled by Sheol.

12. While we can enter and leave a tomb or grave (2 Kings 23:16), no one is ever said to enter and then leave Sheol.

13. While we can choose the site of our own grave (Gen. 23:4-9), Sheol is never spoken of as something we can pick and choose.

14. While we can remove or uncover the bodies or bones in a grave (2 Kings 23:16), the Scriptures never speak of man removing or uncovering anything in Sheol.

15. While we can beautify a grave with ornate carvings or pictures (Gen. 35:20), Sheol is never beautified by man.

16. While graves can be robbed or defiled (Jer. 8:1, 2), Sheol is never spoken of as being robbed or defiled by man.

17. While a grave can be destroyed by man (Jer. 8: 1, 2), nowhere in Scripture is man said to be able to destroy Sheol.

18. While a grave can be full, Sheol is never full (Prov. 27:20).

19. While we can see a grave, Sheol is always invisible.

20. While we can visit the graves of loved ones, nowhere in Scripture is man said to visit Sheol.¹

¹Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, 74-81.

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As is seen from Morey's twenty points, in order to build his case for the continued bodiless existence of the soul in the underworld, he deliberately selects the references that focus on the literal "grave" in a narrow sense and then contrasts them with Sheol references. He does that by cutting them out from the general context and absolutely refusing to consider the multiple internal evidences concerning the nature, function, and purpose of Sheol. Moreover, his categorical statement, "It [Old Testament] always refers to the soul or spirit of man as going to Sheol," contradicts the basic fundamentals of biblical exegesis, interpretation, and theological anthropology (Gen 2:7; 3:19).¹

This negative assessment can be supported by the current exegesis, which systematically investigated all sixty-six references to the term Sheol and its contexts, finding not even one case where the soul or spirit of the dead person would go down to Sheol in order to continue its existence. Indeed, none of the Sheol references contains even the slightest allusion to some kind of immaterial self-conscious, abstract, or immortal entity, which continues its existence in a disembodied state in the underworld. As G. Carey puts it, "It is a false trail to look within the human body for an immortal 'soul,' mind, or residual self which somehow survives the destruction of

the flesh."¹

However, Morey's twenty statements are only partially correct in a technical sense, as the noun הָעִבר is mostly used for the literal grave, "excavated hole, or corresponding stone structure into which the human corpse was placed."² Out of the forty-seven references, the noun הָעִבר occurs only three times in the Psalms, eight times in Genesis, eighteen times in the Prophets, and eighteen times in the Historical books.³ In view of this statistical information the question arises as to why the term Sheol (66 times) is used so often and not the grave. At this point it is necessary to make a minor but extremely important grammatical distinction between the grave and the term Sheol that explains the phenomenon of the current study.⁴

This distinction is rooted in the classification of the words הָעִבר ("grave") and הָעִבָּר, both of which have common and differing characteristics requiring some explanation. The term הָעִבר is derived from the concrete idea (a hole dug in the ground where a corpse is buried) and usually is referred to as a common noun.⁵ However, this concrete idea represents a complex of ideas or characteristics⁶ which

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¹George Carey, I Believe in Man (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 171-172.


³Ibid. According to L. Harris, the word הָעִבר is used 67 times; see "עִבָּר," TWOT, 2:784.

⁴For many insights of this section credit goes to Professors Richard Davidson and Paul Matychuk.


⁶It is almost impossible to find the words which express only one idea.
make up the basic nature of the grave. The word רד לֶבֶן functions as a common noun because it can be applied to any grave regardless of its location, type, or form.

Moreover, because the noun רד לֶבֶן, as the single concept, contains a complex of specific characteristics, it is possible to analyze the meaning of רד לֶבֶן in terms of the commonality by referring to several entities with similar nature and functions, as for example, רד בּ (or נבּ לֶבֶן, “graves” as a group) may function as an equivalent to “the pit” and/or be associated with “the graveyard” and/or “cemetery” and/or “burial place.”

Though it is true that the common noun רד לֶבֶן basically refers to any single grave, nonetheless, because of its complex characteristics and qualifying elements, which are intrinsic to and shared with a number of other common nouns belonging to the same category, the noun רד לֶבֶן can be applied to various and multiple entities, as for example, רד ב ("pit"), נב ("pit," “destruction”), and לֶבֶן ("earth"). In other words, these common nouns have inherent semantic characteristics which function as unifying elements that cannot be used in an unsystematic way.

By contrast with the nuances of the common noun “grave,” one of the intrinsic characteristics of the proper noun is to name the place, person, or thing itself by referring to its individuality, which makes it single and unique, thus describing what is proper and what constitutes it. Consequently, the term Sheol is always without the definite article and capitalized, as it identifies a specific entity, its nature, and

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function. However, this does not mean that while being a proper noun the term Sheol is built and functions exclusively on a one-to-one basis, designating only a single and isolated spot, as many assert, the place where “the souls of the dead exist.” On the contrary, the term Sheol serves as a pointer which can be used to refer to multiple and even unrelated entities because they belong to the same class, as was seen in the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:12; 5:5; 7:27; etc.).

To illustrate the relationship between a common and proper noun, it is instructive to look at Gen 2:7 which speaks about the first ד"ח (“man”) and refers to him by a common name that points to his origin as that from דומא (“ground,” “earth”). It is also important to note that the first ד"ח is not called this because of his individuality but because of a qualifying characteristic common to all his descendants. However, in Gen 4:25 ד"ח (“Adam”) is designated by his individuality and thus it functions as a proper noun, which may be applied to five, ten, or a hundred different individuals of the same name without ceasing to be proper, and the only thing they have in common is their name ד"ח and qualifying elements. The same principle applies to a variety of proper nouns such as Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, and Joshua, which individually represent totally different and unique persons. Nonetheless, all of them are united by one and the same common indicator, namely, the fact and qualities of being human. In this case the noun “humanity” functions as a unifying factor of numberless individuals despite their sex, age, or social position.

Exactly the same is true concerning the proper nouns ד"ח, and ד"ח.

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1 It seems that at the very beginning the term Sheol also functioned as a proper noun.
(in some cases, see table 9), which are unified by such common indicators as death and the place of the dead, or the grave. Because of the quality of individuality and the fact of assigning a concrete name, the proper noun Sheol is in itself determinate: it is single, unique, and set apart from all other entities that share the same attributes, on the one hand; but on the other hand, as the proper name, it refers to a number of categories or entities by means of common characteristics, thus standing for each of them. In other words, the proper noun Sheol includes in its meaning specific qualities pertaining to the sphere of the dead and therefore it may function as a referent to any place of death, regardless of its location, form, content, or description. It deals with the concept of “totality,” as is seen from Hos 13:14, where the prophet alludes to the eschatological victory over מ”ג (“Death”) and ה”כ, both of which are personified and function as proper nouns.

As was repeatedly noted, the word Sheol mainly occurs in poetical contexts, and as a poetic term is employed to designate the domain of the dead. At the same time it is also an abstract term which does not function versus, in parallel to, or in an attempt to neutralize such concrete entities as “the grave,” “the pit,” “the dust of the earth,” but as an all-inclusive concept, depending on the nuances of its employment and the speaker’s purpose, the term Sheol may refer to any of its entities that are


2The word Israel, designating the country, functions as a proper noun, which can be applied to any related entity of the given group, as for example, its cities, mountains, rivers, people, etc.

3In most translations the term “Death” is capitalized. Compare with 1 Cor 15:55 and Isa 25:8 (וְנָתַןְנוּ לַגְּדוֹלָהָלִים בְּנֵי חוֹשֵׁן, “He will swallow up death forever”), where “death” has the definite article.
characterized by common qualifications. According to the current exegesis of the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol, it is much easier to detect the common characteristics of Sheol with its entities ("grave," "pit") than its proper characteristics. In the current case the proper noun Sheol is featured by a specific common quality that allows it to be applied to a number of entities without ceasing to be proper.

Accordingly, it means that the term Sheol as an abstract concept not necessarily or exclusively always points to an individual grave in a literal sense, but rather to the general place of the dead. Although the literal grave, which functions as a common noun, is not exactly the same as Sheol, there is no better way to designate every imaginable grave, every place of death and destruction by a single term, as by the proper noun Sheol. Grammatical analysis shows that the basic difference between Sheol and the grave is generality, not specificity. This leads to the conclusion that from whatever angle the term Sheol is analyzed, there is absolutely nothing inherent or proper in it to assert that Sheol denotes the place of existence.

Because of the specific characteristics and function of the proper noun, it can be argued that where the grave is, there is Sheol, and where Sheol is, there is a grave; thus, contrary to Morey’s arguments, almost all of the twenty points of his references to the literal grave are applicable also to Sheol as the place of the dead. In order to clarify the issue even more, it is necessary to look briefly at another aspect of the question, that is, the terminology of death, the interrelationship of which functions as a unifying principle to represent the organic whole.

For instance, the idea of dying or death can be expressed by a number of different words and formulas: יָדוֹת ("to die," "kill"), מְמוֹרֵא or מַמֵּאָה ("death"), בּוֹשָׁה.
("die," "expire"), לְרָעַת ("kill"), לְקֵנָה ("kill," "murder"), לַקּוֹד ("slay"), לַפְּאָר ("perish," "be destroyed"), לָרָעַת ("go down"), or מְזֶה ("you will go to your fathers"), and many others.

The dead person can be designated by מַתִּים ("dead"), מַזִּים ("corpse"), מַזֶּה ("corpse"), מַפְלָח ("corpse," "carcass"), מַפִּיל ("carcass"), מַפְרָע ("dead soul"), מַפְרָע ("Rephaim," "the dead"), etc.

The same is true concerning the depiction of the place of the dead, which can be denoted by various terms: מַפְרָע or מַפְרָע ("grave," "burial"), מַפְרָע ("pit," "grave"), מַפְרָע ("pit"), מַפְרָע or מַפְרָע ("dusty soil" or "soil of dust"), מַפְרָע ("earth below"), מַפְרָע ("Sheol," "grave"), and so on.

Each term of this paradigm contains some unique semantic nuances and each word, depending on the particulars of the context, functions in its own group as a synonym. Cumulatively, each set targets one and the same subject, namely, whether death/dying, the corpse, or the place of the dead. All three verbal groups are directly interrelated with each other, as all of them belong to the sphere of death.

Consequently, there is neither reason nor logic to isolate the single term Sheol from the whole verbal cluster, which pertains to the place of the dead, and then to refer to Sheol as the place of a miserable, half-conscious existence. The current exegetical investigation clearly demonstrates that the term Sheol not only is synonymous with the grave in its general sense, but also has nothing to do with the so-called underworld, where the spirits or souls of the dead would continue their miserable existence in a disembodied state:

1Exactly the same is done with the term Rephaim, which is isolated from the whole word-cluster, designating the dead body or corpse, and then interpreted as "spirits" or "shades" of the dead.
1. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that its
direction is downward (Gen 37:35).

2. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that its
location is in the earth (Job 17:16).

3. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is
never connected with the living, except by contrast (Deut 30:15).

4. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is
associated with death, punishment, murder, and exclusively with the dead in it
(Gen 37:35; Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9).

5. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that by
analogy it points to the pit (Isa 14:15).

6. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that that
is where both the righteous and the wicked go (Ezek 31:15, 16, 17; Ps 88:49; Job
14:13).

7. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it
unceasingly exerts its destructive power (2 Sam 22:6; Pss 88:3; 116:3).

8. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is
the place of maggots, worms, and decay (Isa 14:11; Job 17:14).

9. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is
the place of dust and not fire (Ezek 31:14, 16, 18; Ps 30:10; Job 17:16; Dan
12:2).

10. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is
the place of darkness (Job 17:13).
11. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it may remain open and the bones of the unburied may be strewn at its mouth, which means that Sheol is visible (Ps 141:7).

12. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is always insatiable (Isa 5:14; Prov 30:16).

13. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is totally subjected to Yahweh who exercises full authority over it (Deut 32:22; Am 9:2; Ps 139:8; Job 26:6; Prov 15:11).

14. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is the place of a temporary rest (1 Sam 2:6; Job 11:8; Hos 13:14).

15. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it can be referred to as being in the desert, sea, or at any other place (1 Kgs 2:34; Jonah 2:3).

16. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that those "who go down to Sheol do not come up," unless resurrected (Job 7:9).

17. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that only the corpse goes there, but the spirit of life returns to Yahweh (1 Kgs 2:9; 34; Qoh 3:19:21; 12:7).

18. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it is the place which every person tries to avoid (Prov 15:24; 23:24).

19. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that no existence is possible there as "there is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom" (Isa 38:18; Qoh 9:10).
20. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that it awaits its own eschatological destruction in the context of the resurrection of its dead (1 Sam 2:6; Hos 13:14; Job 19:25-27; Dan 12:2).

21. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that the Hebrew Scripture does not contain the slightest allusion that “the grave” would function as the “door” or “opening,” leading to Sheol, which is traditionally labeled as the place of departed spirits.

22. Sheol is synonymous with the grave as the place of the dead in the sense that there is no allusion in the entire Hebrew Scripture that the human soul or spirit would go down to Sheol and continue existence there.

In light of the conflicting views expressed above, the question should be asked how these views harmonize with the rest of the Scriptures, as “there is one system of truth or theology contained in Scripture, and therefore all doctrines must cohere or agree with each other. That means that the interpretation of specific passages must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a point.”

1 R. McQuilkin also puts strong emphasis on the unity of Scripture and coherence of truth: “Since the Bible is true in every part, when studying a specific passage the student must seek the unity of that passage with all other Bible teachings relating to it.”

2 To do otherwise “would leave

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one biblical teaching unnecessarily in conflict with other biblical teachings,”¹ and this is the case with the popular view.

The dualistic view, including its variations, propagates immortality of the soul and its after-death existence, the judgment of God upon the souls of the wicked in Sheol, and the soul’s reunification with its body at the general resurrection. However, all these ideas are rooted in the philosophy of the so-called intermediate state, which is defined as the period between death and the resurrection and is characterized by the soul’s conscious or semi-conscious existence in a bodiless form.²

Practically, this view not only neutralizes the impact of the explicit warning given by Yahweh in Gen 2:17, מָלוֹת (literally, “dying you will die”), including other straightforward theological and anthropological statements concerning human death, soul, and spirit, but also vigorously supports the contra-argument of the serpent in Gen 3:4, לֹא יַפְתֹּחַ, which literally means “dying you [plural] will not die” or “certainly, you will not die.” It is obvious that both verbal concepts “to die” and “not die,” where the latter means “to live,” qualitatively and functionally operate as an antithesis. In the light of these observations, it is no wonder that the most

¹McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 209.

controversial and crucial debates revolve around the anthropological-theological issues concerning the condition of the dead during the interim period in Sheol.

The theological implications of this view are far reaching as is clearly formulated by J. Cooper: “For if the dualistic reading is incorrect, then the beliefs of most Christians down through the ages about what would happen to them at death are simply mistaken,” and again, “If dualism is mistaken, then so is the belief that we exist with Christ between death and resurrection,” and once more, “But if the traditional belief in temporary personal existence from the earthly body is false, . . . What does happen when we die?”

In light of the above question, it is paramount to note that, in the current debate about death and the state of the dead in Sheol, the answer is found in a scriptural paradigm which harmonizes various intrinsically interrelated aspects of theological anthropology into one organic whole. In this connection E. Ellis provides the following summary:

The Scripture represents the departure into Sheol as the end of individual being, a returning to the common earth and “virtual annihilation.” While one may continue to “live” in one’s name or progeny, viewed as a corporate extension of one’s own soul, there is no longer any personal life or being. The “spirit [that] returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12:7) is not, as Platonists read it, a part of the individual’s personality, much less his essential ego, but rather “the spirit of life” (Gen 7:22; cf. 2:7) that God grants and, at death, takes back (e.g. Job 34:14f.). Man’s end is “like water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again” (II Sam 14:14). Death levels him with all other dying life: man and beast, righteous and wicked, wise and foolish. Sheol is then both the natural end of all mortal creatures and also God’s judgment on the disobedient Adamic race.

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In other words, according to the scriptural paradigm, qualitatively human origin and end are inherently interconnected with two elements: the dust and the breath of life (Gen 2:7; 3:19). At death the creation order is reversed as the body becomes again the dust of the earth, but the spirit of life, or the divine energy that animates all living beings, returns to God (Eccl 3:19, 20; 12:7).¹

The purpose of death is not to extricate the soul from the corpse in order to take it to Sheol or heaven for further existence, but to destroy and annihi- late every function of human life. The view that humans are wholistic beings or "living souls" in life, but in death they retain their wholeness as "dead souls," and as such the whole person goes to Sheol, dissolves into dust with nothing left, is clearly substantiated by the entire Hebrew Scriptures.²

Furthermore, as this anthropological paradigm is rooted in the Word of Yahweh, its formulation of the bodily resurrection of the dead from Sheol is completely consistent and compatible with the scriptural perspective, which, in turn, is in conflict with the traditional view of the immortality of the soul. It should be noted that nothing less than a totally new creation, including literal bodily resurrection of the dead, can constitute the culminating eschatological fulfillment, which is the counterpart of the first creation out of nothing. "To reduce the resurrection to an immaterial symbol of new life is to rob . . . the dimension of world transformation, and


²Isa 38:18, 19; Pss 6:6; 30:4, 10; 88:4, 11; 115:17; 146:4; Qoh 9:5, 6. See also Ray S. Anderson, On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 213; idem, Theology, Death and Dying, 104-123.
to push it in the direction of Greek thought.”

It should be emphasized in particular that, “Contrary to a widespread scholarly tradition, a resurrection hope was not a late-appearing conception since it is found in pre-Exodus Egypt.” As was repeatedly seen during the process of the current exegesis a number of texts, such as, 1 Sam 2:6; Hos 13:14; Job 19:25-27, Pss 49:16; 73:24; Isa 25:8; 26:19, Ezek 37:1-14, and Dan 12:2, unambiguously refer to Yahweh’s purpose and power to deliver the dead ones from Sheol. In this connection Ellis points out that, “in the Psalms, some of which are among the most ancient Old Testament literature, the hope of resurrection is repeatedly expressed by Michael Dahood, Derek

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For the resurrection hope as a late-appearing idea see, for example, J. Barr who writes, “It is well known that the emphasis on bodily resurrection is not evident in the Old Testament, but is a product of the late development, with a heavy stress on the time of the Maccabean martyrs.” James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 52.
It is noteworthy to recall the fact that “Dahood concluded not only that the biblical Psalter was pre-Exilic (III, xxxiv-xxxvii) but also that these ancient Psalms contain ‘a deep and steady belief in resurrection and immortality’ of righteous (III xli-lii; cf. I, xxxvi).” In other words, as life breath is given for a purpose, and death has its purpose, so even more the bodily resurrection.

The systematic and comprehensive investigation of the nature, function, and purpose of the term Sheol as a part of the scriptural paradigm of theological anthropology makes it impossible to accept the view of a disembodied personal existence in Sheol, which by its strong emphasis on the immortal nature of the soul nullifies one of the main core reasons and essence of the resurrection, which is the “resurrection to immortality and everlasting life in ‘a new heavens and a new earth.’”

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1 Ellis, *Christ and the Future*, 189.

2 Ibid. See also Kidner, *Psalms*, 1:74, 86, 90; 2:263, 466.


4 See Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). For the opposite view see Edward William Fudge, “The Final End of the Wicked,” *JETS* 27, no. 3 (1984): 325-334. Commenting on the traditional view of unending conscious torture Fudge writes: “Is the OT silent concerning the wicked’s final fate? Indeed it is not. It overwhelmingly affirms their total destruction. It never affirms or even hints at anything resembling conscious unending torment. The OT uses about 50 different Hebrew verbs to describe this fate, and about 70 figures of speech. Without exception they portray destruction, extinction or extermination. Not one of the verbs or word-pictures remotely suggests the traditional doctrine,” 326.

"The resurrection is not merely the transition from one form of life to another; it is nothing less than the re-creation of that which had ceased to exist, and which now lives again through God’s immortal power."1

The summary of the current exegesis leads to the basic conclusion that the term Sheol refers to the place of the dead, which by its nature, function, and purpose entirely harmonizes with the anthropological, theological, and eschatological paradigm of the Hebrew Scripture. At the same time, the Hebrew Scripture provides no support for the idea that the term Sheol is somehow associated with one’s after-death existence in the so-called underworld.

In spite of the fact that there is slight but extremely important distinction between an individual grave and Sheol, the common noun “grave” functions as the miniature model or prototype for the term Sheol, which, in turn, as the proper noun points to the general place of the dead, regardless of its location, form, type, or content, and that is why it is best to associate it with the grave.

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