bind the psychic shackles of the Holocaust and begin a process of integrating traditional Jewish wisdom on death, dying, mourning, and the spiritual journey of the soul in the afterlife with new emerging perspectives on the psychology of death and dying.

Circumstances of the times necessitate reclaiming the wisdom of Jewish death traditions. We are living in an era in which people live longer; as a result, there is an increased concern with both the quality of life and the quality of de: ı. Within the Jewish community there are increasing numbers of elderly Jews, and this will be the trend of the coming decades, as the baby-boom generation deals with parents who are aging and dying. In our communities, the debilitating illnesses of Alzheimer's, cancer, and AIDS continue to directly affect the lives of countless families. As a society, we desperately need all the information and resources available to enable us to deal more effectively with death.

There is a great need today for a spiritually oriented, community-based approach to death and dying. The spirit of the times requires a conscious method for empowering individuals and families to deal effectively with terminal illness, dying, funerals, mourning, and bereavement. I believe that one of the best ways to meet this need is to tap into the rich, unmined legacy of Jewish afterlife teachings. These are found not only in the Bible, rabbinic literature, and in Maimonides, but also in ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings, in medieval Midrash, in the *Zohar* and other texts of Jewish mysticism, and in the teachings of the hasidic masters.

Fifty years after Auschwitz it is time to resurrect the ancient Jewish tradition on the afterlife journey of the soul and to make those teachings available in a language and style appropriate for contemporary Jewish life, in the metaphor of the psychology of consciousness. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* may well be sufficient for Tibetan monks. But now there is a need to develop a Jewish Book of the Dead, or more appropriately a Jewish Book of Life, that will be a manual for dying Bubbys and Zaidyes and their children and grandchildren. Now we need to bring to life Jewish wisdom on the mysteries of death and the immortal soul, so that the next generation of Jewish life will be lived with greater fullness and with a profound sense of the spiritual significance of life and death. This book is one man's humble attempt in that direction.

Chapter 3

Biblical Roots of Jewish Views of the Afterlife

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Our journey through Jewish history begins in the biblical period, an era of almost two thousand years during which time Judaism emerged as a religious force in the ancient Near Eastern world. For the sake of chronological understanding, the biblical period can be divided into three distinct eras, reflecting the changing historical circumstances of the Israelite people: (1) *early biblical period*—from Abraham to the Exodus from Egypt, c. 1800–1250 B.C.E.; (2) *preexilic biblical period*—from the conquest of Canaan at the time of Joshua to the Babylonian exile, c. 1250–586 B.C.E.; and (3) *postexilic biblical period*—from the Babylonian exile to the Hellenistic era, c. 586–200 B.C.E.[1] During each of these eras, a plethora of biblical traditions developed and were encoded in written form; it is generally assumed that biblical texts were written from the tenth to the fifth century B.C.E.[2]

The task of understanding the earliest layers of Jewish afterlife teachings is not a simple one. Throughout the biblical era, ideas about survival beyond the grave were in a process of constant flux. From the time of Abraham, there were various traditions about contact with the dead in a hereafter, often paralleling similar beliefs and practices among other ancient Near Eastern cultures. However, with the development and

strengthening of monotheism, after the year 1000 B.C.E., new beliefs about the afterlife emerged. In some instances, early ideas about the fate of the dead continued to persist for centuries, lingering reminders of the antiquated past. In other instances, ancient and newly fashioned perspectives blended and formed radically innovative conceptions of the afterlife. Absolutely nowhere in the Bible do we find a unified view about life after death that reflects postmortem beliefs of the entire biblical era, or even of any one period.

The biblical text is a historical amalgam, a melange of centuries of experience, and it is very common to encounter early and later conceptions of the afterlife subtly interwoven within the various strata of sacred writings. Because of this, it is not possible to present a strictly chronological delineation of biblical teachings on the afterlife. Instead, we will look thematically at the origin and evolution of various confusing and contradictory notions of survival after death during successive periods of biblical history.

In textual writings describing life in the early biblical period, we find no specific philosophical teachings about the afterlife. In exploring this period, the best way to understand beliefs about life after death is through an examination of burial and funerary practices, and an examination of attitudes toward death and dying reflected in biblical narratives. By looking at various ritual practices associated with death and burial, almost in an anthropological sense, we will be able to deduce attitudes toward immortality and life after death in the centuries prior to and soon after conquest of the land of Canaan.

In the later biblical periods, with the more philosophically oriented writings of the prophets and the Psalmist, we begin to see the emergence of notions of individual immortality and postmortem survival. Through an analysis of biblical writings, we can discover the earliest philosophical development of Jewish afterlife beliefs and chronicle the progressive transformation of these beliefs over a period of almost a thousand years.

This book has as its predominant focus the postmortem destiny of the individual. In this chapter, we will explore what the Hebrew Bible teaches about the afterlife fate of each unique human being. However, it is essential to understand that within the biblical worldview the ultimate fate of the individual cannot be understood apart from that of the entire nation. Simply put, within the biblical context, it is impossible to study Jewish views of the individual afterlife experience without reference to Judaism's prophetic teachings on the eventual destiny of all the people

of Israel at the end-of-days. As we noted earlier, throughout the Bible individual and collective eschatology, or teachings on the fate of individual Israelites and on the national collectivity of Israel, are intimately intertwined.

From its inception, biblical Judaism, or Israelite religion, divinely inspired by the monotheistic God YHVH,[3] was concerned exclusively with the collective destiny of the nation and not at all with the postmortem fate of the individual Israelite per se. In patriarchal and Mosaic times, even in the days of the Israelite tribal confederacy, the Bible has nothing to say about the fate of the individual after death, and there is certainly no notion of an individual afterlife experience for the soul. There is not even a clear conception of an individual apart from the collective, nor any idea of a soul separate from the body.[4] These are notions that emerge later in the biblical era.

In exploring the terrain of biblical texts, we will see that only after the sixth century B.C.E. do any conceptions of an afterlife fate for the individual begin to appear within Judaism. Even then, concern with the collective destiny of the Israelite nation—eschatological teachings on messianic redemption and resurrection of the dead—remains the central foundation of Judaism's worldview.[5]

In this chapter we will demonstrate early Israelite concerns about the fate of the dead and document specific stages in the development of Jewish conceptions of the postmortem destiny of the individual person. In doing so, we will map out the biblical foundation for all later Jewish teachings on the afterlife journey of the soul.

THE EARLY BIBLICAL PERIOD

The Family Tomb

The patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are the founders of biblical Judaism. For almost three thousand years people have been reading, rereading, and remembering the tales of their lives, chronicled in Genesis. By closely examining how our biblical ancestors lived, and even more, how they died, we can sense how they related to the inevitability of human mortality and the ways in which they conceived of life after death.

An excellent place to start our exploration of biblical Judaism is in

the seventeenth or sixteenth century B.C.E., around the time when Jacob supposedly lived. Imagine this scene: Jacob, father of thirteen children and leader of the Israelite tribes, is on his deathbed. Knowing the end of his life is at hand, he calls together his sons to bestow his parting blessings. Then, in a noble and dignified fashion, Jacob gives final instructions:

> "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave which is in the field of Makhpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites." When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people. (Genesis 49:29–31, 33)

With an acute clarity, this passage portrays—at least symbolically—the biblical notion of death. Like Abraham (Genesis 25:8) and Isaac (Genesis 35:29) before him, Jacob was "gathered to his people." To die, in the language of the Bible, is to return to the company of one's ancestral family.

This conception of death is evident for most of the biblical era. After granting Moses a glimpse of the Land of Canaan, God tells him: "You too will be gathered to your kin, just as your brother Aaron was" (Numbers 27:13). And it is said of King Solomon, that at the time of his physical demise, he "slept with his ancestors" (1 Kings 11:43).

As an ancient Near Eastern civilization, biblical Judaism was tribal in nature. The central social organism was the family clan. Like the Bedouins of today, the early Hebrews traversed the deserts in large extended families, living, working, and worshiping together. The individual clans or tribes were led by a patriarch who had experienced a divine revelation and established a family-based cult of worship.[6] And as they lived, so they died—in the company of all family members—and were buried in family tombs.

Upon his deathbed, Jacob is surrounded by members of the family clan. We can imagine that not only his children but his grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and other extended family were present to hear the final words of this great patriarchal leader. In his final exhortations, Jacob unequivocally emphasizes the importance of being buried in the family

sepulcher, the Cave of Makhpelah. With a deliberate precision, he repeats the specific details regarding the purchase and location of Makhpelah and names those family members already buried there. What we see is that here Jacob is saying more than "Listen, children, this is where I own a burial plot!" Through his parting words, Jacob communicates to his sons what is essentially a spiritual request: "Just as I lived my life as part of an ancestral clan, make sure I am buried with my ancestors at Makhpelah." For Jacob, and for the early biblical Hebrews, death meant entering the ancestral realm of the family tomb so that upon departing from this world he would be "gathered to his people."[7]

All the patriarchs and matriarchs, with the exception of Rachel (see Genesis 35:19–20), were buried in the family grave, the Cave of Makhpelah. This phenomenon of a family tomb recurs for centuries in biblical times. King David was laid to rest in the Citadel of David, another family tomb (1 Kings 2:10), where later kings of Judah, including Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:31), Asa (1 Kings 15:24), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:51), Uzziah (2 Kings 15:7), Jotham (2 Kings 15:38), and Ahaz (2 Kings 16:20) were also buried. And the first king of Israel, Saul, and his son Jonathan were buried in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish. In this case, heroic effort is made by Saul's concubine, Ritzpah, to protect the bodies of those desecrated by the Gibeonites, until they are recaptured and given proper burial with their ancestors, in the family tomb (2 Samuel 21:1–14).

The family tomb is the central symbol for understanding early biblical notions of the hereafter. Over and over, in the Torah and in later biblical writings, great importance is placed on being buried beside one's family members. As Herbert Brichto suggests, it is "not mere sentimental respect for the physical remains [that is] . . . the motivation for the practice, but rather an assumed connection between proper sepulture and the condition of happiness of the deceased in the afterlife."[8]

Burial in the family grave served to reconnect the departed one with a society of previously dead ancestors. This society was believed to exist in the tomb itself or perhaps in the surrounding locality.[9] Death itself was not seen as a cessation of existence. On the contrary, to be gathered to one's ancestors implied but a passage to another realm where departed family spirits cohabited and the activities of kith and kin continued within the sacred ancestral society of the family tomb.

Through the image of the family tomb, traces of a belief in a continued postmortem experience can be found in the early biblical period. However, as in life, so in death; as yet, there is no individual self-con-

sciousness apart from the group, tribe, or family clan. The individual is conceived of as property of the family, with no sense of separate, individualized existence. Even though there are individual leaders—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon—their individuality is important only insofar as they represent the nation as a whole. At this stage in biblical history, the notion of a personal immortality does not yet exist.

Feeding the Dead

The Hebrews, or as they were later called, the Israelites, shared common patterns of religious expression with other peoples of the ancient Near East. Therefore, by looking at funerary practices described in the Bible as well as in extrabiblical sources, we can discover additional information on postmortem beliefs in the early biblical period.

One rather curious phenomenon that appears throughout the ancient Near East is the ritual act of feeding the dead. Family clan members sensed a continued contact with the deceased, who were believed to be residing in the locale of the family tomb. Since the dead were removed from the earthly domain, the living felt it necessary to provide for their ongoing well-being, and they would do so by bringing food and drink to the burial ground. For us today that may seem quite strange, but within the ancient world, it was a mutually beneficial arrangement between the living and the ancestral dead. The living would provide physical sustenance to the dead; in turn, the deceased ancestors would be expected to provide guidance and protection to the living.[10]

There is abundant evidence attesting to various forms of this practice of feeding the dead. Egyptian funerary art frequently depicts the image of a deceased person seated at a lavish banquet table, surrounded by food presented to him by family members. Farther to the north, excavations at Gezer, dating from c. 4000 to 2000 B.C.E., demonstrate that the Canaanites similarly evolved a custom of serving food and drink to the deceased. Graves have been unearthed, with hollow tubes at the headstone that allowed for depositing foodstuff in the tomb. This practice seems to have been normative in the ancient Near East for centuries; and as late as the seventh century B.C.E., we find an inscription in the name of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal proclaiming: "The rules for making offerings to the dead and libations to the ghosts of the kings my ancestors . . . I reintroduced. I did well unto god and man, to dead and living."[11]

Further archaeological finds reveal that the custom of feeding the dead was also practiced by the biblical Israelites. For example, a sepulchral chamber unearthed at Megiddo contained a cone-shaped trough, undoubtedly designed for transporting some form of liquid food substance to the subterranean antechamber below. Similar archaeological evidence has been found elsewhere, suggesting this may have been a common practice.[12] Certainly the textual material of the Hebrew Bible substantiates this view.

Thus, for example, Deuteronomy 26:14 describes a ritual confession recited when presenting agricultural tithes to the Temple priesthood. As part of the prescribed confession, the person bringing the tithe would publicly disclaim having given any food to the dead:

> I have not eaten of it [the consecrated food] while in mourning; I have not cleared out [consumed] any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the voice of YHVH, my God; I have done just as You commanded me.[13]

Two other texts refer to special foods that were offered to the dead. Hosea 9:4 reads: "It will be for them like the food of mourners; all who partake of which are defiled." Jeremiah 16:6–7 clearly states: "Great and small alike will die in this land. . . . They will not break bread for a mourner, to comfort him for bereavement, nor offer one a cup of consolation for the loss of his father or mother." Much later, the Apocryphal author Ben Sirach ridicules the custom of feeding the dead: "Good things spread out before a mouth that is closed are like piles of food spread on a grave" (Ecclesiasticus 30:18).

The condemnatory attitude toward feeding the dead reflected in the Bible indicates that this particular type of mourning ritual was in all likelihood carried out in the early biblical period. Why would the act need to be condemned so strongly if it hadn't been practiced by the people of Israel? It may be that this ritual took the form of a sacrifice presented as an offering when consulting the dead.[14] However, with the passing of time, as prophetic monotheism became the dominant religious force, this practice was subsequently condemned as idolatrous.

Nonetheless, the combination of archaeological information and textual material indicates that throughout the early centuries of the biblical period there was a sense of ongoing interaction between the living and the dead. Although one cannot speak of a philosophical conception of the afterlife, there is nonetheless a simple, unsophisticated perception

that existence continues after the physical body has been laid to rest in the family tomb.

Funerary Practices: *Bamot*

Another element from the early biblical period that sheds light on beliefs in a postmortem realm are the *bamot*, or "high places." The *bamot* were sanctuaries of cultic worship, both Canaanite and Israelite, at times dedicated to deities other than YHVH. Although monotheistic in its founding revelation at Sinai, Israelite religion retained elements of Canaanite worship for centuries. Kings of Israel and Judah—Solomon, Rehoboam, Jehoshapat, and Jehoash, to name a few—built and offered sacrifices and incense on the *bamot*.[15] Condemned repeatedly by later biblical writers, the *bamot* nonetheless were important centers of Israelite religious worship.

Structurally, the *bamot* were large elevated platforms, ranging from six to twenty-five yards in diameter. They were built of stone, approximately six feet above the surrounding ground, with a flight of stairs leading up to the platform.[16] The *bamot* were altars used for cultic worship, often adorned with an *asherah*, or sacred pole associated with the goddess Asherah or Anath, and a *massebah*, an upright stone that symbolized the male deity.[17] 1 Kings 14:23, for example, lists all these elements of religious worship together: "For they also built high places [*bamot*] for themselves and pillars [*massebot*, plural of *massebah*] and Asherim, on every high hill, under every leafy tree."

Archaeological research demonstrates the structural similarity between the *bamot* and funeral mounds in the ancient Near East, and a number of biblical scholars have suggested that the *bamot* may have also functioned as burial sites where specific funerary practices were carried out.[18] Certain textual passages support this point of view. For example, the way in which Ezekiel 43:7 refers to both *bamot* and burial suggests the use of *bamot* as a place for burial: "The House of Israel and their kings must not again defile My holy name by their apostasy and by the corpses of their kings in their high places [*bamot*]." Furthermore, the *massebah*, or stele, associated with the *bamot* was often utilized to mark a grave. For example, Jacob erected a *massebah* on Rachel's burial site (Genesis 35:20). The Canaanite sanctuary excavated at Hazor revealed the existence of numerous *massebot*, which were likely used to mark a burial ground.[19]

Although speculative, it may well be that certain cultic acts associated with the *bamot* were utilized to commune with the realm of the deceased ancestral family. Perhaps sacrifices and the dispensing of food and drink to the dead were carried out upon the *bamot*. Certainly the evidence suggests that there was a concern with the realm of the dead during early biblical times, and it is clear that some form of ritualized interaction between the living and the dead was inherent to the earliest historical layers of Judaism.

Funerary Practices: *Teraphim*

Another phenomenon that may be associated with biblical funerary practices were the *teraphim*, translated as "household gods," or "images." In a somewhat cryptic story in Genesis 31, Rachel steals the *teraphim* of Laban, her father; she hides them in a camel saddle and sits upon them. When Laban comes searching for them she innocently responds: "Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you; for the way of women [the period of women] is upon me" (Genesis 31:35).

What exactly were the *teraphim*? From the Genesis story of Rachel, they appear to be small and portable carved images, with an apparent religious significance. However, in 1 Samuel 19, they appear as life-size, perhaps even having a human form. When David is being pursued by King Saul's men, his wife Michal helps him escape through a window. Then "she took the *teraphim* [household idols] and laid it on the bed, and covered it with a cloth; and at its head she put a net of goats' hair" (1 Samuel 19:13) to deceive Saul's messengers into believing it was David's figure. When they arrive looking for David, she tells them: "He is sick," and quickly sends them away.

It may be that the *teraphim* were associated with death and the postmortem ancestral realm. Etymologically, the Hebrew word *teraphim* can be related to the word *rephaim*, meaning "ghosts" or "shades."[20] R. H. Charles has suggested that the *teraphim* were actual images of dead ancestors utilized as oracular devices when consulting the deceased.[21] There is certainly indication that the *teraphim* were used for some sort of divinatory purposes. According to the medieval biblical commentator Nahmanides, the *teraphim* were used to gain knowledge of future events.[22] This is inferred in both Judges 17:5 and Hosea 3:4, which mention the *teraphim* along with the *ephod*, a known ancient divinatory device. In Zechariah 10:2 divination is even more clearly implied: "The *teraphim* speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false,

they give comfort in vain."[23] These passages do not specifically intimate any connection to the postmortem realm of the dead; however, 2 Kings 23:24 lists necromancers, wizards, *teraphim*, and idols as abominations to God, and thus links the *teraphim* with the condemned practice of necromancy, consulting the dead.[24] While these activities and ritual objects were not sanctioned by the prophets, they persisted as cultic remnants of early Israelite religion.

Both the *teraphim* and the *bamot*, as well as the existence of family tombs and the practice of feeding the dead, all point to an early biblical belief in the postmortem survival of an ancestral family clan. But there is no detailed information offered on just what occurs after death, nor is there any description of the nature of the postmortem realm. What we can say, however, is that in the early centuries of the biblical era there existed at least a primitive conception of a relationship between the living and the dead. There is additional textual evidence to suggest this was the case.

Necromancy, *Ob*, and Familiar Spirits

The story of Saul and the witch of En-Dor is a classic example of biblical evidence alluding to an ancient practice of communing with the dead. In the face of a military crisis, King Saul sought out a woman who could contact the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel on his behalf. Of significance in this narrative is the term used in the Hebrew text. In 1 Samuel 28:7, Saul gives explicit instruction to his courtiers to find for him a *baalat eishet ob*, literally "a woman who has mastery over *ob*." The term *ob* can be translated as "familiar spirit" or "ghost." What is implied by *baalat eishet ob* is an individual who has the ability to contact and communicate with ghosts, or spirits of the deceased. It is very clear here that Saul solicited the services of a medium.

Although *ob* occurs repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible, there is some variation in its use. In a number of places, *ob* is specifically a spirit or ghost of the dead; elsewhere, it is understood as the individual who engages in contact with these spirits, that is, a medium or necromancer.

Thus, for example, in the following passages *ob* is used to indicate a spirit of the dead. Deuteronomy 18:11 condemns the individual who casts spells or consults ghosts (Hebrew: *shoel ob*) or familiar spirits (*yidd'oni*, from the verb *yada*, "to know"), or who inquires of the dead (*doresh el ha-metim*). Similarly, we find in Leviticus 20:27 this injunction: "A man or woman who has a ghost (*ob*) or a familiar spirit (*yidd'oni*) shall be put

to death. They will be pelted with stones—their bloodguilt will be upon them."

On the other hand, in the following passages *ob* is used in a different sense, as one who communicates with the dead. Thus, in 2 Kings 23:24 Josiah also did away with the necromancers (*ha-ovot*, plural of *ob*) and the mediums (*ha-yidd'onim*), the household gods (*teraphim*), and the fetishes—"all the detestable things that were to be seen in the land of Judah and Jerusalem." And Isaiah 8:19 states: "And when they will say to you consult the mediums (*ha-ovot*) and the wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?"

W. O. E. Oesterley attempts to clarify various uses of the term *ob* by suggesting that "first it was believed that a ghost, or *Ob*, actually appeared to the diviner; [later] the diviner believed himself or herself to be 'possessed' by the ghost, and thus came to be called by the same name."[25] These seem to be types of spiritualistic communication, and when the term *ob* appears, what is implicit is a process of interaction between the living and the dead. The repeated biblical indictment of this otherworldly communication suggests that necromancy was likely a time-honored tradition, one with a widespread folk-level interest.[26] Even more, there was probably a thriving guild of En-Dor-type practitioners of the condemned art of spiritualistic mediumship. Thus, there is little doubt that we have here yet another ancient phenomenon indicative of a belief in life after death. Put together, all the evidence—on ancestral family tombs, feeding the dead, the cultic use of *teraphim* and *bamot*, and the practice of necromancy—undoubtedly suggests that our biblical ancestors were not only cognizant of a hereafter realm, but found various means to engage in an ongoing interactive process of communication with the dead.

SHEOL—THE AFTERLIFE PHILOSOPHY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION

Origins

From the twelfth century B.C.E. onward, new conceptions of life after death began to emerge among the Israelites. Developing slowly and in successive stages, these new conceptions formed the historical basis for later Jewish teachings on the afterlife.

With the traditions of the Mosaic revelation at Sinai, a nation was born. Referred to as B'nai Yisrael—the Children of Israel—this new nation was characterized by a monotheistic theology and a national-political consciousness: belief in one God who had taken upon Himself to redeem and sustain His elected people. Progressively, the nomadic family clan and the tribe were superseded by the notion of the unified Israelite nation as the primary social unit. This shift in the political-social consciousness of the nation had a direct bearing on conceptions of death and the postmortem realm.

As the idea of collective Israel evolved, it was believed that all the graves of family, tribe, or nation united into one. This was a logical extension of existing beliefs: multiple tribes and family clans; many family graves and different ancestral realms for the dead; one tribe, or rather, one nation; hence, one postmortem ancestral realm. Just as the living tribes unified, so the realms of the ancestral dead merged; this unified collectivity of the dead became known as Sheol,[27] a conception that became increasingly important in the Israelite worldview.

Sheol was a subterranean realm in which the relations and customs of earthly life were reproduced. Upon death, one descended deep beneath the earth and entered the depths of Sheol. In an early biblical text, Jacob says to Reuben: "If any harm came to him [Benjamin] on the journey you are to undertake, you would send me down to Sheol with my white head bowed in grief" (Genesis 42:38).[28] Later, by the time of Isaiah, the subterranean imagery associated with Sheol becomes even more descriptive: "Your magnificence has been flung down to Sheol . . . underneath a bed of maggots and over you a blanket of worms" (Isaiah 14:11). Even more, Sheol is envisioned as an all-consuming, cavernous beast, whose "bones are strewn at the mouth of Sheol" (Psalm 141:7); Sheol "has enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure" (Isaiah 5:14).

The etymological origins of the word *Sheol* are not very clear. One possible derivation is from the Hebrew root *shaal*, "to ask." Hence, Sheol is a place of inquiry where one inquires of the dead, an obvious reference to the condemned practice of necromancy. A second possible derivation is from the Hebrew word *sho'al*, "a hollow hand"; thus, Sheol is a hollow place (beneath the ground). However, neither of these etymological conjectures are considered definitive.[29]

Mythologically, the notion of Sheol has parallels in other religious traditions. The biblical Israelites and the ancient Babylonians shared

common beliefs in a postmortem underworld: both Sheol and the Babylonian Aralu are conceived of as being located beneath the earth.[30] Similarly, S. G. F. Brandon suggests that the description of Sheol, particularly in Job 10:21–22, is a Hebrew equivalent of the Mesopotamian *kur-nu-gi-a*, the "land of no return."[31] And finally, the Israelite notion of Sheol has a resemblance to the Greek Hades, the underworld domain depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[32]

Characteristics of Sheol

One of the main attributes of Sheol, at least in the early stages of development as a postmortem concept, was its amoral character. Existence in Sheol was neither good nor bad; it was an underground domain of the dead, completely beyond the care and control of God. YHVH was a national God, dedicated primarily to His people, the Israelites, and to the land He had promised for generations. According to the three-tiered ancient biblical worldview, YHVH dwelt in the heavenly sphere, human beings inhabited the earthly realm, and the ancestral dead resided deep within the depths of Sheol.[33] After death, the individual was completely removed from the human realm in which God's moral jurisdiction was operant.[34] Thus, Samuel is found in Sheol after his death (1 Samuel 28:3ff.), but it is not a realm of torment or punishment; it is simply the domain of the dead. The negative, punitive aspects that later characterized Sheol were almost completely lacking in its original conception. Therefore, rich and poor, kings and sinners (Job 3:11ff.), all went to Sheol upon their death.[35]

Some additional images depicting the character of Sheol in both the pre- and postexilic biblical periods include the following: It was considered a land of dust (Daniel 12:2) and disorder (Job 10:22). Sheol had different divisions or chambers (Proverbs 7:27), was provided with gates (Psalm 9:14, 108:18), and was secured with bars (Job 17:16). And, finally, Sheol was below the sea (Job 26:5) and without light (Job 10:21). Put together, these images paint a picture of Sheol as a bleak and forlorn subterranean realm.[36]

Abbadon, Bor, and Shakhat

While *Sheol* is the term most frequently used to describe the underground domain of the dead, on occasion in later biblical texts three other

synonymous terms are used: *Abbadon*, meaning "ruin" or "destruction"; *Bor*, meaning "the pit"; and *Shakhat*, meaning "corruption."

Abbadon, from the root word meaning "to perish," appears four times in the Hebrew Bible, in juxtaposition with either Sheol or death. The congruence between Abbadon and a postmortem underworld is apparent: "Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Abbadon [Destruction]"? (Psalm 88:11). "Abbadon and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears'" (Job 28:22). "Sheol is naked before him and Abbadon has no covering" (Job 26:6). Finally, in Proverbs 15:11, there is a very clear correlation between the two terms: "Sheol and Abbadon lie open before YHVH—how much more the minds of men!"

In Isaiah 14:15, Sheol and Bor appear in parallel juxtaposition, again suggesting a similarity of usage: "You will be brought down to Sheol; to the depth of the Pit [Bor] (Isaiah 14:15). Elsewhere in Isaiah we find: "And they will be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the Pit" (Isaiah 24:22). In Ezekiel Bor is clearly a reprehensible underground realm:

> I will bring you down, with those who go down to the Pit [Bor], to the people of old. I shall set you in the lowest parts of the earth, like places desolate of old, with those who go down to the Pit, and you shall not be inhabited and shall not radiate splendor in the land of the living. (Ezekiel 26:20)

The term *Shakhat* appears in Isaiah 38:17: "You saved my life from the Pit of Destruction [Shakhat]." Most English translations of the biblical text do not make a clear distinction between *Shakhat* and *Bor*, suggesting the similarity of meaning in the two terms; nonetheless, a netherworld of torment is implied. Shakhat, like Sheol, is beneath the earth: "They will bring you down to the Pit [Shakhat], in the heart of the sea you will die a violent death" (Ezekiel 28:8). "I sank to the base of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed on me forever; Yet you brought my life up from the Pit [Shakhat]" (Jon. 2:6). Finally: "For you, O God, will bring them down to the nethermost Pit [*Be'er Shakhat*], those murderous treacherous men" (Psalm 55:24).

Abbadon, Bor, and Shakhat all connote the negative, abysmal aspects of the after-death realm of Sheol. From their occurrence in the biblical text, it is clear that ideas of an underworld abode of the dead were inherent to the ancient Israelite worldview.

The Inhabitants of Sheol: The *Rephaim*

Those beings in Sheol were given a specific name, at least in later biblical texts, where they are called *rephaim*—ghosts, shades, or literally, weak ones, powerless ones. In eight different passages, the term *rephaim* refers quite specifically to the ghostlike inhabitants of Sheol. Thus, for example, Psalm 88:10 states: "Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the *rephaim* rise up to praise You?" In Isaiah and Job we find the statements "They are dead, they can never live. *Rephaim*, they can never rise" (Isaiah 26:14) and "The *rephaim* tremble beneath the waters and their denizens. Sheol is naked before Him . . ." (Job 26:5–6). Proverbs, also a late text, uses the same term in speaking of the dead in Sheol: "He does not know that the *rephaim* are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (Proverbs 9:18); "A man who strays from the path of prudence, Will rest in the company of *rephaim*" (Proverbs 21:16).

There is also another context for the term *rephaim*. According to ancient biblical myth, the *rephaim* were originally a people of great physical stature—giants—dwelling in the Land of Canaan prior to the Conquest. They are mentioned in Genesis 14:5 and 15:20. It has even been suggested that the *rephaim* may be equated with the antediluvian race, the *nephilim*, referred to in Genesis 6:4.[37] A juxtaposition of Deuteronomy 2:10–11 and Numbers 13:33 bears this out. Deuteronomy 2:10–11 states: "It [the wilderness of Moab] was formerly inhabited by the Emim, a people great and numerous, and as tall as the Anakim. Like the Anakim, they are counted as *rephaim*; but the Moabites called them Emim." In the words of Numbers 13:33: "We saw *nephilim* there—the Anakites are part of the *nephilim*—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, so we must have looked to them." Thus, as later rabbinic Midrash claims, the equation is *nephilim* equals Anakim equals Emim equals *rephaim*.[38] All well and good, but what does this have to do with the abode of the dead?

Ancient Hebrew myth propounds that the original antediluvian race of giants, called at different times *nephilim* or *rephaim*, was destroyed by God and banished to the underworld.[39] According to the conjecture of Oesterley, "In the course of time, when this ancient myth had been gradually toned down, the name of *rephaim* was used as a general designation of all the departed in the underworld."[40] Thus, the *rephaim*, at a certain point in history, came to be known as the dead, the shades in the underworld of Sheol. But most references to *rephaim* as the ghostly dead come

from the postexilic period, so what we have here is really a later notion, dating from after the sixth century B.C.E.

Before we can travel the next step of the journey historically, we need to understand one other important aspect of the ancient biblical view of Sheol.

Sheol, *Nefesh Met*, and the Biblical Conception of Death

Associated with the biblical conception of Sheol was a very specific understanding of death. Death was not conceived of as a complete annihilation, the termination of existence, but rather as a diminution of energy. Life and death were seen as poles of a continuum of vital energy. In life, the energy, or *nefesh*, was dynamically present; in sickness, it was weakened; and in death, there was a maximum loss of vitality. As Johs. Pederson puts it:

> Life and death are not sharply distinguished spheres, because they do not mean existence or nonexistence. Life is something which one possesses in a higher or lower degree. If afflicted by misfortune, illness or something else . . . then one has only little life, but all the more death. He who is ill or otherwise in distress may say that he is dead, and when he recovers, he is pulled out of death.[41]

Within the biblical context, death was perceived as the progressive depletion of the *nefesh*—breath, vital energy, life force, or spirit. But the Hebrew word *nefesh* does not imply a soul, or spirit, in contradistinction to a body. The differentiation between body and soul, with the accompanying notion of a soul exiting the body upon death, was totally foreign in early biblical times and did not emerge in the Jewish consciousness until many centuries later. *Nefesh* was understood in a unitive way as the totality of being—"man does not have *nefesh*, he is *nefesh*, he lives as *nefesh*."[42] While alive, a human being is considered a *nefesh hayyah* (Genesis 2:7), a living *nefesh*, a vital psychophysical entity. Once dead, the individual becomes a *nefesh met* (Leviticus 21:11; Numbers 6:6), a dead *nefesh*, a depotentiated psychophysical entity.

The *nefesh hayyah*, the living person, dwelt with family clan, tribe, or nation in the terrestrial realm. Upon death, the individual descended into the subterranean realm and as a *nefesh met* dwelt in the grave, in the family tomb, and eventually in Sheol, the abode of the ancestral dead.

Thus, for our biblical ancestors, the termination of earthly life was not in any way a complete or final cessation of being. After the energy required to sustain life dissipated to an extreme, the individual claimed a place in Sheol where existence undeniably continued, but in a weakened, faded condition.[43]

In ancient Israel at this time—between the tenth and eighth centuries B.C.E.—there is still no conception of a postmortem judgment associated with Sheol, nor any philosophy of an individual soul. Death is regarded as a depotentiated state of being—*nefesh met*—and Sheol, an afterlife realm of devitalized existence removed from God's control. This conception of death and the afterlife reflects the fusion of early ideas about the postmortem survival of the ancestral family clan with the newer concept of Sheol. However, this particular understanding of Sheol is only one stage in the evolution of a concept of life after death. Biblical teachings on Sheol did not remain static but began undergoing numerous changes concurrent with changing theology. As the God of Israel eventually became the God of the entire world, the power of YHVH extended throughout the created universe, including Sheol. This theological shift paved the way for the development of an individual postmortem eschatology and a notion of personal immortality.

THE TRANSITION TO YHVH'S MONOTHEISM

Monotheism and Changing Conceptions of Sheol

The monotheistic ideal heralded in the Sinai traditions was not instantly and unequivocally accepted by the Israelite people. For centuries following the settlement of Canaan, Baal, Asherah, and other deities were worshiped along with YHVH. As late as the seventh century B.C.E., nonmonotheistic elements of religious practice continued to exist, although they were repeatedly condemned by the spiritual leaders of Israel and Judah.

The religious history of the biblical period prior to the Babylonian exile is a chronicling of the progressive evolution of monotheism. It is a history of over six centuries during which time the monotheism of YHVH became the predominant religious force. Throughout this period, Jewish conceptions of the postmortem realm likewise evolved and were directly affected by the successful emergence of monotheism.

As indicated above, originally Sheol was the netherworld where the deceased ancestors dwelt, a realm often associated with nonmonotheistic aspects of worship such as the *bamot* and *teraphim* and related cultic practices. However, as YHVH's monotheism came to predominate in the religious life of the Israelite people, idolatrous practices and the accompanying beliefs were purged. Consequently, the understanding of Sheol underwent a radical shift.

First of all, it was necessary to eliminate the earlier notions of Sheol as a nonmoral realm beyond God's dominion, in which the dead possessed superhuman knowledge of earthly events and communicated with the living. Subsequently, Sheol came under YHVH's control and became moral and retributive; that is to say, Sheol became a place of punishment for the wicked. And finally a new development in the evolution of Jewish afterlife philosophy emerged: incorporated into the conception of Sheol was the notion of a spiritualized, individual postmortem future, attainable through direct communion with YHVH. Over the course of centuries, the conception of a personal life after death eventually made its appearance within Jewish tradition.

We will now travel a journey of approximately three to four hundred years documenting the specific stages involved in the emergence of biblical Judaism's conception of an individual immortality.

YHVH's Power Extends to Sheol

The first important shift in the Israelite conception of Sheol came about with the increase and strengthening of YHVH's power. Once YHVH came to be regarded as the one and only God of the universe, God's power widened and could now save human beings from the clutches of Sheol. Thus, Psalm 49:15 states: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, and will receive me." And a similar point of view appears in Psalm 116:2: "The cords of death surrounded me and the pains of Sheol seized me. And I called upon the name of YHVH . . . and He saved me."

In the Book of Kings, YHVH's power over Sheol and death is expressed through His prophets Elijah (1 Kings 17:22) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:35), both of whom are able to bring the dead back to life.

Of Elisha, the story is told that

> Elisha came into the house, and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to YHVH. Then he mounted [the bed] and placed himself over the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands: as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm. He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:32–35)

In a similar vein, the story of Elijah reviving a dead child expresses with certainty how it is YHVH's power, more than Elijah's, that is at the core of this supernatural feat:

> After a while, the son of the mistress of the house fell sick, and his illness grew worse until he had no breath left in him. She said to Elijah, "What harm have I done to you, O man of God, that you should come here to recall my sin and cause the death of my son?" "Give me the boy," he said to her; and taking him from her arms, he carried him to the upper chamber where he was staying, and laid him down on his own bed. He cried out to YHVH, and said: "O YHVH, my God, will you bring calamity upon this widow whose guest I am, and let her son die?" Then he stretched out over the child three times, and cried out to YHVH, saying: "O YHVH, my God, let this child's life [*nefesh*] return to his body!" YHVH heard Elijah's plea; the child's life [*nefesh*] returned to his body, and he revived. (1 Kings 17:17–22)

Sheol: A Land of Forgetfulness and a Realm of Silence

In consequence of the establishment of God's authority over the domain of Sheol, there was a radical alteration in the power attributed to the inhabitants of the underworld. In its earliest conception, Sheol was a world unto itself paralleling the human realm; those in Sheol were not inert but rather possessed life, knowledge, and the power to interact with and even counsel the living.[44] Thus, faced with military adversity, King Saul summoned the prophet Samuel from Sheol, soliciting guidance (1 Samuel 28:12–20); and Rachel, long after her death, is said to weep for her children, the exiled Israelite nation, refusing to be comforted (Jeremiah 31:15).

However, according to a later view, the dead in Sheol have absolutely no knowledge of what transpires in the earthly realm. Job 14:21 speaks of how a dead man's "sons come to honor [him], and he knows it

not. . . . Only when his flesh is on him does he feel pain, and while his soul is within him does he mourn." Or, in the words of the Psalmist: "I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care" (Psalm 88:5). In this new conception of Sheol, the dead "shall not awake nor be raised out of sleep" (Job 14:12). Ecclesiastes, dating from the late biblical period, also echoes this conception of Sheol: "The living know they will die: but the dead know nothing, nor do they have any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Thus, Sheol is completely and totally depotentiated. In the words of the Psalmist, "the dead cannot praise YHVH" (Psalm 116:17), for Sheol is a "land of forgetfulness" (Psalm 88:12) and a realm of silence (Psalm 94:17).

Sheol Becomes a Realm of Postmortem Retribution

At this point, a number of important conceptual changes take place in the biblical understanding of Sheol. YHVH has gained control over the subterranean realm of the dead, and the occupants of Sheol no longer have personal power. Next, Sheol begins to take on a retributive quality—it becomes a realm in which the adversaries of Israel receive due punishment.

Recall that originally, Sheol was simply a habitation of the ancestral dead with no special moral, retributive function; there were no distinct realms for the wicked and the righteous, and no reward or punishment. The ideas we often take for granted today when thinking about life after death were not even in the consciousness of the Israelite people at this point in history. However, by the end of the sixth century B.C.E. Israel had encountered a series of formidable foes. Assyria had vanquished the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C.E., and less than two hundred years later, Babylonia conquered and exiled the southern kingdom of Judah. These sociopolitical circumstances were reflected in a radically transformed conception of the postmortem underworld. What surfaced at this time was a philosophical notion envisioning eventual chastisement, even decimation, of Israel's enemies in Sheol. In response to the reality of military defeat and exile, by the sixth century B.C.E. Sheol came to be seen as a place of punishment for the enemies of YHVH and of Israel.

At first, this retributive conception of Sheol was seen only within the context of the collective historical-political destiny of Israel. For

example, Isaiah 14 speaks of how the king of Babylon and "all the kings of the nations" (Isaiah 14:9) who have risen up against Israel will "be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit" (Isaiah 14:15). Similarly, Ezekiel 32 condemns Israel's enemies Egypt, Assyria, and "the daughters of mighty nations" (Ezekiel 32:18)—they will all be destroyed, cast down to Sheol.

What we encounter here is the very first layer of afterlife teachings in which there is an association of Sheol, death, and retribution. What later becomes central to Jewish conceptions of life after death arises for the first time only in the sixth century B.C.E. But even here, this notion of retributive punishment in the hereafter is bound up exclusively with collective eschatological thinking. At this point, the rebuke of the afterlife is not for the individual, but for the wicked nations. Those punished in Sheol are enemies of the Israelite community, punished for a national iniquity against God's chosen people, and not at all because of any personal sin.[45]

Retribution and Individual Responsibility

In the next stage, an evolutionary breakthrough occurs in Jewish teachings of the afterlife; it is a slight, yet profound shift representing a distinct turning point in the creation of a philosophical conception of individual immortality.

At the time of Jeremiah—who was a likely witness to the Babylonian conquest[46]—the concept of individual retribution, and hence individual responsibility, finally enters Jewish thought. In the Book of Jeremiah, every person is to be held responsible for his or her own sin. It is a theme first glimpsed in prophetic literature and echoed repeatedly throughout the later history of Judaism.

Jeremiah, heralding the words of God, proclaims: "In those days they will say no longer, 'Parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But every one shall die for his own sins: whosoever eats sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29–30).

With this declaration by Jeremiah there emanates a new notion of the individual in relation to God. For the first time, we glimpse the possibility of an individual destiny set apart from the collective fate of the entire nation. John Hick explains this shift in terms of the unfolding history of Judaism in the sixth century B.C.E.:

> So long as the stream of national life continued in full spate the individual was carried along in it, and the immortality of the nation did not require an individual immortality for its separate members. But with the crushing Babylonian conquest of Judah in the sixth century and the exile of so many of Jerusalem's leading citizens, faith in continuing national existence was shaken and the individual became more conscious of his own personal status and destiny.[47]

In place of the collective Israelite nation, with the Babylonian exile the individual person becomes the primary religious unit. A similar shift is evidenced elsewhere during this period—for example, in the Greek world, with the creation of the individual citizenship within the Greek *polis*, or city-state, and in India, with the appearance of Buddhism. At this point in history the uniqueness of the individual is recognized over and above that of the collective.[48] As a result of this shift, for the first time in biblical history each individual is given a degree of moral freedom and hence, the ability to shape his or her ultimate fate.

In Ezekiel, this notion of individualism is carried even further. As a prophet whose writings also date from the time of the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel teaches that every soul is the property of God, not merely that of the family and nation. "Consider," says YHVH, "all lives are Mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine. The person who sins, only he will die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

Now, instead of one's destiny being mediated through the destiny of the nation, every unique individual stands in a direct and immediate relationship to God. Thus, if each individual stands apart from the collectivity, a new question emerges: who will be punished and who will be saved by YHVH from Sheol? According to Ezekiel, it depends entirely on the quality of the individual life lived:

> The person who sins, he alone shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone. (Ezekiel 18:20)

Here, the doctrine of an individual moral retribution is articulated very explicitly. From this time onward, each individual is to be punished or rewarded in direct proportion to their sin or righteousness during their lifetime.[49] Proverbs teaches that "for an intelligent [righteous] man, the

path of life leads upward, In order to avoid Sheol below" (Proverbs 15:24); but those who are wicked are condemned by YHVH to the reprisals of the subterranean refuge. Elsewhere it is taught that the one who seeks a path of righteousness achieves life, "but to pursue evil, leads to death" (Proverbs 11:19).

The concept of individual responsibility is a necessary transitional step in the creation of a Jewish notion of a personal afterlife. However, at this point, Sheol is not yet that postmortem spiritual immortality for the righteous. Reward for the God-abiding person, although it is a "delivery from death" (Proverbs 10:2), is experienced through divine reward in earthly life, not in the hereafter. The righteous individual is given due reward within the earthly sphere (Proverbs 11:31), not through an immortal existence in the afterlife. Thus, at this stage the polarity of divine retribution is as follows: the good live, the wicked die and are condemned to Sheol. In neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel is there any direct reference to the notion of a divine life beyond the grave for the righteous. That is glimpsed for the first time only in the Book of Job, a text dating from the late biblical period.

The Dawning of an Individual Immortality

Jewish philosophical thinking, in the period surrounding the Babylonian exile, contained within it one essential problem: how could one account for the suffering of the righteous? The doctrine of divine retribution, which taught that there was a direct correspondence between one's actions and one's life situation, guaranteed Sheol for the wicked and a blessed earthly existence for those who faithfully abided by the ways of YHVH. As long as the righteous experienced good fortune and divine benevolence, this doctrine presented no problems. However, when the upright and faithful were plagued by suffering and anguish, the doctrine began to break down. How could the suffering of the righteous be explained if YHVH was truly a god of justice? This is the problem addressed in the Book of Job.

Job was a "blameless and upright [man] who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1). Yet a series of calamities befell Job, killing his family, destroying his property, and leaving him physically pain-stricken. All along, in spite of his suffering and grief, he was convinced of his innocence. Believing his life was one of exemplary piety, Job could find no justice in the circumstances of his fate. Bitterly tormented, he struggled

to understand the ways of divine retribution and to maintain faith in the face of a perceived desertion by God.

The Book of Job is a classical allegorical text focusing on the themes of faith and divine justice in Judaism. One passage in this text seems to some, especially R. H. Charles, to point toward the possibility of an immortal spiritual existence subsequent to death. From the depths of his anguish, Job exclaims:

> For I know that that my Redeemer lives,
> And at last he will stand upon the earth;
> and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
> Then from my flesh shall I see God. (Job 19:25–26)[50]

For the first time in biblical literature, the possibility of an immortal, spiritual existence subsequent to physical death may here be glimpsed. Job, if Charles is right, envisions a postmortem life wherein the soul, after death, continues to exist in a spiritual relationship with God—"after my skin will have been peeled off, I would behold God."

This is a seed for later developments in the evolution of Jewish afterlife teachings. However, at this point the notion of a transcendental, spiritual afterlife for the righteous is still not given full expression, nor is it central to Job's worldview. The possibility of an individual postmortem immortality is at most glimpsed for a fleeting moment by Job.[51] But this seed idea later flowers and becomes central in Jewish afterlife philosophy.

Although the value of the individual had been proclaimed by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Job, this dawning notion of a personal postmortem immortality did not become the predominant Jewish view of the afterlife in biblical times. Even while the incipient notion of a personal spiritual hereafter was infusing itself into the consciousness of Judaism, it never replaced or eliminated the pervasive concern with the postmortem fate of YHVH's Israelite nation.

COLLECTIVE ESCHATOLOGY AND THE END-OF-DAYS

Background

Thus far we have traced the early development of a biblical philosophy of personal immortality. As we noted above, teachings on the collective destiny of Israel influenced all later beliefs about the afterlife in Judaism. Therefore, to complete our historical trek through the biblical period, we have to backtrack in time and examine the broader collective eschatology found within the Hebrew Bible—in particular, conceptions about divine judgment and the end-of-days. Although the textual depictions of these collective notions do not impart information on the individual postmortem experience, they are important philosophical and eschatological dimensions of the biblical world. As such, they are central in the evolution of all subsequent Jewish teachings on life after death.

Historically, the idea of a national collectivity was central to the biblical worldview. According to the Book of Genesis, Abraham was promised that his descendants would become as numerous as the heavenly stars and would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8). The covenant between Abraham and God was symbolically engraved in the flesh by circumcision and reaffirmed for Isaac (Genesis 26:24), Jacob/Israel (Genesis 28:13ff.), and Moses (Exodus 3:13ff.). In the mythic understanding of ancient Israel, the covenantal relationship between YHVH and the Israelite nation was reasserted at Sinai. Through the giving of the Ten Commandments, a group consciousness was formed: one nation, one Torah, one God who had promised the people they would inherit the Land of Canaan. This notion of a collective destiny for the entire nation underlies all eschatological thinking throughout the biblical period.

Prophetic Visions of the Future: Nationalistic and Universal

After the conquest of Canaan, a nationalistic theology developed in which YHVH's connection with the land and the people remained central. With the creation of the political entity of the Israelite monarchy, eschatological visions of the future took on a nationalistic-political character. The prophets envisioned a future time of blessedness for the Israelite nation. Through divine intervention, the awaited "day of YHVH" would come about, and Israel's foes would be conquered and defeated (Isaiah 13:9). In turn, a new era would be inaugurated in which the nation would enjoy ongoing material prosperity:

> A time is coming—declares YHVH—when the ploughman shall meet the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who holds [the bag] of seed; when the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills

shall wave [with grain]. . . . and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; they shall till gardens and eat their fruit. (Amos 9:13–14)

During the eighth century B.C.E. the doctrine of the coming kingdom of YHVH entered prophetic literature. It was envisioned that the future would bring about God's dominion upon earth and a time of peaceful social and political existence for the entire nation of Israel (Hosea 14:6–8). Originally, no mention was made of a Messiah in connection with the coming kingdom. In later times, however, it was believed that a descendant of the Davidic lineage would herald the coming of a messianic period (Jeremiah 23:5) and preside over a kingdom in which the former glory of ancient Israel would be restored.[52]

In the preexilic biblical period, conceptions of the end-of-days were exclusively nationalistic. Since YHVH was a national God, concerned only with the fate of the nation, it was Israel alone that would be redeemed. Alongside this nationalistic conception of the end-of-days, there gradually developed a conception that YHVH's power had extended to include the whole world. Thus, certain prophetic writings reflect a more universal image of the end-of-days. In Isaiah, for example, it is envisioned that YHVH would eventually become the God of all the nations, with Jerusalem becoming the spiritual center of the entire world:

In the days to come,
The Mountain of YHVH's house
Shall stand form above the mountains
And tower above the hills;
And all the nations
Shall gaze on it with joy,
And the many peoples shall go and say:
"Come, Let us go up to the Mountain of YHVH
To the House of the God of Jacob;
That he may instruct us in His ways,
And that may walk in His paths."
For Torah [the instruction] shall come forth from Zion,
The word of YHVH from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2–3)

Conceptions of Divine Judgment

The notion of a divine postmortem judgment, which is central in rabbinic Judaism's teachings on life after death, has its roots in the collective eschatology of the biblical period. What later becomes a complex and elaborate afterlife conception was originally understood exclusively in terms of the national destiny of the Israelite people.[53]

In early prophetic literature, divine judgment is spoken of in national-political terms. YHVH judges the nations: Israel; Israel and Judah; and the "other nations," *goyim*, gentiles. There is no sense of individual judgment; all the people of the nation merit the punishment or reward collectively.

In Amos and Hosea, judgment is directed against Israel: "You alone have I singled out, of all the families of the earth—that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). In Isaiah and Micah, judgment for iniquities is levied against the southern kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 1:1–20; Micah 3:12). Isaiah prophesies the coming of a divine kingdom (Isaiah 1:26); but first, there will be a divine judgment and a purging of evil before the nation can be restored (Isaiah 2:12–22).

An important development in the notion of divine judgment takes place in the Book of Zephaniah. Here, YHVH's judgment is universal, directed against all the inhabitants of the earth: "I will sweep everything away from the face of the earth" (Zephaniah 1:2); "I will also punish on that day everyone who steps over the threshold" (Zephaniah 1:9).

In Ezekiel, judgment is conceived of in a dual sense. YHVH's judgment will be directed against both Israel and the other nations. For the nations, judgment will be collective; all will be punished and/or destroyed (Ezekiel 25:8ff.). For Israel, however, judgment will be based on the merit of each individual. The sinful wicked will be annihilated by God's wrathful vengeance. The righteous Israelite will be saved, and thereby selected to participate in the coming kingdom of YHVH (Ezekiel 11:17–21; 36:25–32).

With Ezekiel, an important and subtle philosophical transformation takes place: individual and collective conceptions of divine judgment merge for the first time. God's judgment and retribution, according to Ezekiel, will take into account the accrued merit of each individual Israelite. Participation in the future redemption of the nation will depend upon the merit of each individual person's life. The righteous individual Israelite will be awarded a share in YHVH's messianic collective. This is a significant development in the evolution of an individual philosophy of the afterlife.

Thus far, there is no sense that God's collective judgment will occur in a postmortem realm. Judgment takes place in the human realm and through the unfolding of history, not in an afterworld. There is, however, the beginning of a sense of divine judgment for the individual,

corresponding with the rise of the doctrine of individualism and individual retribution in the sixth century B.C.E.

The Final Transition

After Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Job, individual and collective conceptions of divine judgment begin to blend and mutually influence each other. On the one hand, the individual finally emerges out of the nation and can now stand before God in individual judgment. On the other hand, through Zoroastrian influence, a cosmic, dualistic, transcendental, and universalistic eschatology enters Judaism.[54] As a result of the meeting of these two philosophical trends, Jewish postmortem teachings in the late biblical period become incredibly complex, permeated with conceptions of the Last Judgment, the mythic-historical end-of-days, and the doctrine of resurrection. It was believed that the individual, the nation, the world, and ultimately the entire cosmic order would be subjected to divine judgment. After centuries of concurrent but separate development, collective and individual eschatology—notions about the nation and the individual—finally merged into one elaborate system.

What evolved was a new philosophical synthesis that totally transformed Judaism's understanding of the postmortem world of Sheol. In the final centuries of the biblical era, Sheol came to be seen as a temporary abode of rest for the righteous, where they awaited the eventual coming kingdom of YHVH.

The key in this new transition was the emergence in the late biblical era of the doctrine of resurrection. The righteous who merited redemption waited for an indefinite time in Sheol; then they were resurrected from the dead to participate in the flowering messianic kingdom. This new conception was an evolutionary leap in Jewish postmortem eschatology and radically affected all subsequent Jewish teachings on life after death.

RESURRECTION—THE SYNTHESIS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ESCHATOLOGY

Introduction

The doctrine of resurrection is a belief that the dead will live again at some future time, be united with their physical bodies, and participate

in the triumph of a divine messianic kingdom on earth. This conception—which in rabbinic terms is called *tehiyyat ha-metim*[55]—originated in the late biblical period and to this day remains central to traditional Jewish teachings on the afterlife.[56]

Resurrection was an organic and necessary next step in the development of biblical conceptions of the afterlife. We have seen the broader background of a belief in the collective redemption for the entire nation; we have also noted the slow evolution of a conception of individual immortality after the sixth century B.C.E. Resurrection was a philosophical integration of all that had come before. First of all, it synthesized two prevailing beliefs of the postexilic biblical period: (1) the belief in the future redemption of the Israelite nation and the establishment of a divinely inspired social order and (2) the notion of divine retribution for the righteous.[57] Second, it was based on the ancient Hebrew belief in the organic unity of the human person: although there was a temporary separation from the body at the time of death, according to the doctrine of resurrection, body and spirit, or consciousness, would eventually be reunited.

The doctrine of resurrection provided a satisfactory philosophical answer to prevalent questions about divine justice and vindication for the righteous individual: If there would eventually be a redemption for the righteous, what would happen to the God-abiding person prior to the inauguration of YHVH's kingdom? Would he or she be condemned to suffer in Sheol? According to the doctrine of resurrection, the righteous were guaranteed God's justice and a place in the coming messianic kingdom. However—and here again there is a new development in the Jewish afterlife philosophy—first there would be a period of waiting in Sheol. Then, at the end-of-days the dead would be revived and return to full physical vitality as participants in the divine kingdom of YHVH. At this point, even though there is a sense of postmortem existence, recompense for the righteous is not with an individual, solitary immortality, but with a blessed resurrected life together with the entire nation.[58]

National Resurrection in Ezekiel

The image of the resurrection of the dead appears for the first time in the Book of Ezekiel, which dates from the early sixth century B.C.E. In a well-known passage, Ezekiel envisions a valley of dry, dismembered bones being transformed into animated, life-filled human bodies:

> The hand of YHVH came upon me. He took me out by the spirit of YHVH, and set me down in the valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "O mortal [son of man], can these bones live again?" I replied, "O Lord YHVH, only you know." And He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of YHVH. Thus says the Lord YHVH to these bones: I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form with skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again. And you will know that I am YHVH." I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone. . . . I prophesied as He commanded me. The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude. (Ezekiel 37:1–8, 10)

Here, Ezekiel's vision of a resurrection is a national/collective one.[59] Written subsequent to the Babylonian exile, what is envisioned is the total revivification of the fallen Israelite nation. No doubt, this image of the redemption of the fallen dead provided a sense of hope and vision to the dispirited exiles.

Interestingly, the scene of the dead bones in this vision is reminiscent of a Zoroastrian funeral ground. Zoroastrian religious practitioners did not bury their dead, but rather allowed bodies to lie exposed to the elements and to birds of prey, believing that after the Judgment Day, Ahura Mazda would gather together all the scattered bones.[60] This is certainly the motif in the above-quoted passage, and it is likely that during his sojourn of exile in Babylonia, Ezekiel himself was influenced by these Zoroastrian ideas.[61]

The text continues and describes a return to the soil of Israel:

> And he said to me, "O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy therefore and say to them: 'Thus said the Lord YHVH: I am going to open your graves, and lift you out of your graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am YHVH, when I have opened your graves, and lifted you out of your graves.'" (Ezekiel 37:11–13)

In symbolic form, the message here is that although it appears impractical for dismembered bodies and piles of dead bones to be brought to life, and similarly, it may seem doubtful that the exiled nation of Judah can ever be returned to the land, in both cases the impossible is made possible through the miracle of divine intervention.[62] The nation will be brought to life; the people will be returned to the land.

Although this prophecy is a new departure in the eschatological beliefs of the postexilic period, it is nonetheless consistent with earlier notions of collective redemption. According to prophetic teachings, the people have been promised redemption at the end-of-days. But if the bodies are dead and the bones remained scattered, how can people participate in God's promised kingdom? In Ezekiel's teachings, to revive the dead is simply the means by which to guarantee Israel's national redemption and the coming messianic kingdom.

In this passage from Ezekiel we encounter another notable development in the evolution of biblical conceptions of the afterlife. Here, Ezekiel envisions that God's redemptive powers will operate within a postmortem realm. From this point on, God's judgment and its results are no longer limited to the earthly domain. Even after death, the entire national collectivity can be rewarded by YHVH, with an eventual complete and total physical resurrection from the realm of the dead.[63]

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead first appeared in the early postexilic period and gained increasing popularity and acceptance.[64] But it took at least three full centuries until this notion became widely recognized as a normative doctrine in the Jewish world.[65]

Resurrection in Isaiah

The conception of resurrection appears again in Isaiah, in a passage that can be dated as late as 334 B.C.E.:[66]

> Oh, let your dead revive! Let corpses arise! Awake and shout for joy, You who dwell in the dust!—For your dew is like the dew on fresh growth; You make the land of the shades come to life. (Isaiah 26:19)

Here, associated with resurrection, we find the image of dew as a life-giving force—a motif familiar to Canaanite mythology.[67] This passage contains the first biblical reference to the notion of resurrection for

the individual person, apart from the national collectivity. It is the righteous Israelite who, at the end-of-days, will be redeemed through physical resurrection. But together, both the nation and the righteous individual will receive the blessedness of YHVH. Thus, we see that here Isaiah successfully blends individual and collective postmortem conceptions into a coherent unity. Through physical resurrection the individual, as part of the redeemed Israel nation, is guaranteed a divine postmortem existence.

At this point, the righteous dead must remain in Sheol, awaiting the advent of the coming kingdom. In Isaiah, Sheol is conceived of as a godless, unspiritual realm where the dead are cut off from communion with God and, at least for a limited time, exist in an interim realm awaiting the time of resurrection. Once again Jewish afterlife philosophy goes through an evolutionary shift. With Isaiah, the beginnings of the final transformation of the postmortem realm of Sheol are evidenced: Sheol now becomes a resting, intermediate abode for the righteous of Israel.[68] This conception was developed more fully in the subsequent two to three centuries.

Resurrection in Daniel

The Book of Daniel, dating from the second century B.C.E., is one of the latest additions to the Hebrew Bible. It is an apocalyptic text with elaborate mystical speculation on the end of time and history.[69] The historical context for this book is the era of the Syrian king Antiochus IV, who had conquered Jerusalem, desecrated the Temple, and prohibited Jewish worship. In this book, Daniel envisions a mythical end-of-days, a major battle against the forces of destruction, which will culminate in deliverance and include a postmortem resurrection:

> There will be a time of trouble, the like of which has never been since the nation came into being. At that time, your people will be rescued, all who are found inscribed in the book. Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence. (Daniel 12:1–2)

By the time of Daniel, the doctrine of resurrection was familiar to the Judean people living under Hellenistic rule. But here, an important new dimension is added. For the first time, not only the righteous, but

likewise the wicked will be resurrected from the depths of Sheol. While the righteous Israelites will be included in the coming messianic kingdom—"your people will be rescued" (Daniel 12:1)—the wicked will be punished and condemned "to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence" (Daniel 12:2).

Thus, with the Book of Daniel, Jewish postmortem teachings become apocalyptic and dualistic in nature. The ultimate fate of each individual person will be determined by a final judgment that will take place after death—at the end-of-days. Then, reward or punishment will be dispensed as merited. At this stage there emerges a clear dualistic conception of judgment—the possibility of reward or punishment—applied for the first time specifically to the postmortem world.

Daniel's vision of resurrection for both the righteous and the wicked is a seed idea for the notion of heaven and hell that characterizes later Jewish and Christian afterlife teachings. Thus, at the very end of the biblical period, that which was to be of central importance in apocryphal and rabbinic literature—a clear dualistic sense of postmortem punishment and reward—was first conceived.

The Importance of Resurrection in Jewish Eschatology

Soon after its inception, the doctrine of resurrection assumed a position of primary importance in Judaism. Although originally a product of Zoroastrian influence, resurrection was rapidly integrated into the mainstream of Jewish postmortem philosophy.

With the evolution of the philosophy of resurrection, three important developments took place in Jewish afterlife eschatology over a period of three centuries. First, resurrection transformed the understanding of Sheol into an intermediate realm where the righteous await divine redemption at the end-of-days. Second, the doctrine of resurrection envisioned that the result of God's divine judgment would occur within a postmortem realm. And finally, with the Book of Daniel, divine retribution developed a dualistic aspect to it, teaching that eventually there would be a postmortem judgment for both the righteous and the wicked.

Even with these innovative aspects, the doctrine of resurrection assumed a position of primary importance in Judaism soon after its inception. Over the course of two to three centuries resurrection was rapidly integrated into the mainstream of Jewish postmortem philosophy. The reason for this successful inclusion within Jewish thought is that the

philosophy of resurrection provided a bridge between the past and the future, between collective and individual eschatology. By linking the basic Israelite notion of a collective, national redemption with the newly evolving doctrine of individual retribution and personal immortality, the new doctrine of resurrection encompassed all existing eschatological conceptions.

Resurrection was an evolutionary development totally consistent with Judaism's past, yet, at the same time, it provided an impetus toward the future. With Daniel's teachings on the resurrection came an entirely new view of a final postmortem judgment. This was a notion that acknowledged the importance of the individual's relationship to God, without sacrificing the long-standing sense of collective identity that had always been fundamental to Judaism. It is precisely because it synthesized individual and collective eschatology that the doctrine of resurrection came to hold such an important place in the subsequent course of Jewish conceptions of the afterlife. As we continue our journey through Jewish history, we will see that the biblical doctrine of resurrection continues to play a significant role in subsequent Jewish teachings on life after death.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have traced the evolutionary development of the postmortem philosophy of the biblical period. Before we travel the next stage on our historical journey, let us summarize what we have discovered until now about the nature of Judaism's conceptions of life after death in biblical times.

1. In the early biblical period, there is no written philosophical speculation on the postmortem experience. However, there were a number of ancient traditions—burial in ancestral family tombs, feeding the dead, use of *teraphim*, cultic worship on the *bamot*, and forms of necromancy—all of which suggest that there was an ongoing concern with the existence of the dead in a subterranean netherworld.
2. Throughout the biblical period, the notion of Sheol, as a realm of the dead, underwent a series of successive transformations. Originally, it was conceived of as a godless, amoral eternal abode for all who had died. In the second stage, it became an eternal abode for the wicked. And finally, in the third stage, Sheol was seen as an intermediate resting abode for the righteous Israelites, and a permanent abode for the wicked. The transformations of Sheol corresponded to the changes in the theology of Judaism.
3. There are only scant traces of the notion of individual immortality throughout the Bible. Because of the collective vision upon which Judaism was founded, the collective redemption of the nation always remained as the primary concern for the Israelite people.
4. In the postexilic biblical period, the incipient idea of individualism brought forth at least a preliminary conception of individual immortality. But this never emerged as a dominant theme in biblical times, and textual references to an individual postmortem world are rarely found in the Hebrew Bible. Throughout the biblical period, individual and collective eschatological notions coexisted and were eventually blended together.
5. With the doctrine of resurrection of the dead, individual and collective eschatology became synthesized. The result was a new conception of a postmortem judgment for both the wicked and the righteous. This was an evolutionary step paving the way for the idea of heaven and hell in later Judaism.
6. Notions of the hereafter developed in biblical times remained as the foundation for all future Jewish conceptions of the afterlife experience.