

AFTERLIFE IN BIBLICAL TRADITION: JACOB'S BURIAL CAVE AND SAMUEL'S PRESENCE IN SHEOL

I. AFTERLIFE IN MODERN JUDAISM

"Judaism celebrates life and the living. It dwells on life here rather than on the hereafter as other religious faiths do. Life is precious, the here and the now."

Jean Herschaft, "Patient Should Not Be Told of Terminal Illness: Rabbi," Jewish Post and Opinion 13 March 1981, p. 12.

Dead is dead - "what lives on are the children and a legacy of good works."

Rabbi Terry Bard, Director Pastoral Services, Beth Israel Hospital, quoted by Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven", Newsweek, (March 27, 1989) pp. 52ff.

"...it is certainly true that Judaism gives us no details about what happens after death".

[Dennis Prager, "Life would be cruel if Judaism made no religious room for 'afterlife'" *Jewish Exponent*, October 22, 1989, p. 35ff.]

2. DEATH OF JACOB - CAVE OF MACHPELAH - ANCESTRAL FAMILY TOMB

Then [Jacob] gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. 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 were bought from the Hittites. *"When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people. (Gen 29:28-33)*

3. SPIRITISM/EISHET Ba'ALAT OB - KING SAUL & WITCH OF EN-DOR

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of Y*H*V*H, but Y*H*V*H did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium*, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Saul swore to her by Y*H*V*H, "As surely as Y*H*V*H lives, you will not be punished for this."

Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself... face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do." (I Sam. 28:3-15)



REACTIONS TO SPIRITISM/CONDEMNATION OF CONTACT WITH DEAD

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium [*sheol ov*] or spiritist [*v'yidoni*] or who consults the dead [*doresh el hamatim*]. (Deut. 18:10-11)

[Furthermore, Josiah got rid of] the necromancers [*ha'ovot*] and the mediums [*ha'yidanim*], the household gods [*teraphim*], and the fetishes - all the detestable things that were to be seen in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. (2 Kings 23:24)

The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments... must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother... because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am Y*H*V*H. (Leviticus 21:10-12)

I have not eaten of it [consecrated food] in my mourning, neither have I consumed any part of it when unclean, nor given of it for the dead, but have hearkened to the voice of Y*H*V*H my God. (Deut. 26:14)

4. IMAGES OF SHEOL

i) SHEOL - AN A-MORAL UNDERWORLD REALM

Says Jacob - "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" (Gen. 42:38).

ii) SHEOL - A DARK SUBTERRANEAN REALM

"Your magnificence has been flung down to Sheol... underneath a bed of maggots and over you a blanket of worms" (Isa. 14:11).

iii) SHEOL - A REALM OF SILENCE (GOD'S POWER EXTENDS TO SHEOL)

The living know they shall die: but the dead know nothing, nor do they have any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecc. 9:5).

iv) SHEOL - A REALM IN WHICH GOD'S POWER CAN OPERATE

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, and will receive me. (Psalm 49:15)

5. COLLECTIVE ESCHATOLOGY AS PREDOMINANT MOTIF IN BIBLE

Visions of a Future Era of Socio-Political Redemption (8th cent. BCE):

Behold the days are coming, says Y*H*V*H, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt..and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. (Amos 9:13-14).

A Universal Vision of Redemption (6th cent. BCE):

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Y*H*V*H's house shall be established on top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of Y*H*V*H, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of His ways so that we may walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go for Torah and the word of Y*H*V*H from Jerusalem'. (Isa. 2:2-3)



6. RESURRECTION

National Resurrection in Ezekiel (6th century B.C.E)

The hand of Y*H*V*H was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of Y*H*V*H, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and he caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord Y*H*V*H, thou knowst. Again he said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of Y*H*V*H. Thus says the Lord Y*H*V*H to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am Y*H*V*H. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone... So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. (Ezek. 37:1-8; 10)

Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord Y*H*V*H; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am Y*H*V*H, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and have brought you up out of your graves (Ezek. 37:11-13).

Resurrection in Isaiah (4th cent. BCE)

The dead men of thy people shall live, my dead body shall arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew on herbs and earth shall cast out the shades of the dead. (Is. 26:19)

Resurrection in Daniel (2nd cent. BCE)

There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation till that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one who shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:1-2)

