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# Death, the Dead and the Underworld in Biblical Theology – Part 2

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## THE NEW TESTAMENT

### 1.1. Introduction

With the New Testament's presentation of death, the dead and the underworld there is significant continuity with the Old Testament, but there are also significant changes made by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This second part of the paper continues to investigate the nature and significance of death, the dead and the underworld from a biblical theological perspective in a way that rightly apprehends both the continuity and discontinuity expressed in the writings of the New Testament.

### 1.2. The Gospels and Acts: A new beginning

In the move from the Hebrew Old Testament to the Greek of the New Testament, the term Hades is significant. In the Septuagint the term Sheol is always translated as Hades. This seems a fatal blow to Harris's thesis that Sheol means 'grave', for when afforded the opportunity to translate the word in this manner, the Jews did not do so. Rather they chose Hades, the Greek word for the underworld. This is not evidence of either syncretism or Greek influence, rather by translating the unique Hebrew word this way, we see that the meaning of the term Hades in the New Testament derives not from Greek literature but from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Thus the New Testament use of Hades shall be considered equivalent to, and shown to be consistent with, the Old Testament use of the term Sheol.<sup>2</sup>

To fully appreciate the nature of Jesus and his ministry in relationship to the topic of death, death must be recognised as the context into which the Gospels speak. As Bolt suggests: 'death was a grim reality in the first-century Graeco-Roman world [...] its shadow hung heavily over every aspect of human life and endeavour'.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true if we recall that the Old Testament presented death as an assault upon the fullness of life, of which illness and demonic possession can be considered vehicles in this assault. Elsewhere Bolt

argues that the thirteen suppliants in Mark's gospel reveal that life and the world is under the shadow of death.<sup>4</sup> Into this world strides Jesus, who decisively overturns death at each and every turn, seen explicitly in the raising of the dead little girl (Mark 5:40-42), the son of the widow (Luke 7:11-15) and Lazarus (John 11:14-44), and implicitly in every healing of the sick, every rescue from peril, and every exorcism. Thus, death is foregrounded as the fundamental problem facing the persons of the Gospels, to which Jesus is the solution. Without doubt this is good news.

With tragic irony, the Lord of Life submits himself to death. Jesus' death (and resurrection) is of great significance to the Gospel writers. It occupies between a quarter and a third of the Synoptic Gospels and the Passion dominates the second-half of John's Gospel. Jesus' death is not only a tragedy, but also the plan of the Father and the Son (John 17:1-5). The Son of Man must die (Mark 8:31), and it is at this point that Peter rebukes Jesus because 'he understood only too clearly the meaning of the words of Jesus'.<sup>5</sup> With most scholars, Lane locates the motive for this rebuke in the fact that 'a rejected Messiah was incompatible with Jewish convictions and hopes',<sup>6</sup> but another possibility is that Peter has understood the biblical presentation of death as non-bodily relationlessness and inactivity, and that he objects not to a 'rejected Messiah' but a 'dead Messiah'. Indeed, the anguish and sorrow of Jesus as he confronts his imminent demise suggests that he is all too aware of the horror of death (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:33-34; Luke 22:44). Peter fails to grasp what Jesus apprehends, that in the words of Cullman—

He must indeed be the very one who in His death conquers death itself. He cannot obtain this victory by simply living on as an immortal soul, thus fundamentally not dying. He can conquer death only by actually dying, by betaking Himself to the sphere of death, the destroyer of life, to the sphere of 'nothingness', of abandonment by God.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus' death is a necessity to deal with the fundamental human problem of death, for it is through his death that Jesus deals with sin and defeats death.

Many would contend that Jesus' response to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43) refutes the notion that the bible teaches that Sheol-Hades is the destiny of all and is akin to a coma. Marshall represents this position: 'Jesus' reply assures

him [the thief] of immediate entry into paradise'.<sup>8</sup> Plummer correctly recognises the implication of this as the continuance of consciousness after death.<sup>9</sup> And while Morris sees 'no reason' to translate these verses any other way,<sup>10</sup> UBS translation consultant Hong raises a very good reason to do just that. Hong notes that grammatically there are two ways to translate this verse; the first way is Today+Verb ('I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise'), the second way is Verb+Today ('I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise'). From surveying the Gospels and Acts, Hong finds that the structure of Verb+Today outnumbers the alternative Today+Verb, such that 'from a strictly textual point of view, it is impossible to determine which of the clauses before and after it the word "today" should be associated with it.<sup>11</sup> While we do not base our exegetical decisions on mere percentages, what this does reveal is that from a grammatical perspective there is good reason to consider the second way as a legitimate translation. While the difference is but a comma, if taken this way Jesus' promise is not for immediate entry into paradise nor does it imply consciousness after death. The thief would have heard Jesus' words as a promise to enter into paradise with him at some unspecified time in the future.

Furthermore, this reading does not consign the use of the term 'today' to the role of redundant temporal marker. Ellis' linguistic work on the word 'today' reveals that it does not need to be understood as a literal twenty-four hour period, but can function as a technical expression for the time of messianic salvation.<sup>12</sup> Thus the use of the term 'today' indicates Jesus' promise to the thief is to join the messiah in his eschatological day.

Recognising this wider use of the term 'today' should also prompt us to consider whether an immediate translation of both Jesus and the thief into paradise is in fact consistent with Luke's overall presentation of Christ's resurrection and ascension. The sweet insight of Cadbury concerning the Lukan portrayal of Jesus is: 'the exaltation follows a series of earthly appearances. It is a separate event, or at least occurs in two stages, the resurrection from the grave to earth, the ascension from earth to heaven'.<sup>13</sup> Luke is very careful not to blur the resurrection and the parousia by placing the exaltation to heaven prior to the appearances on earth of Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus was not in heaven (or paradise) for the three days prior to the resurrection, but rather he was in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31).<sup>14</sup> This also fits with Jesus' saying that he would 'be three days and three nights in the heart of the

earth' (Matt. 12:40). What seems to lie behind the concern for an immediate translation of the thief to paradise is Plummer's view that 'if the dead are unconscious, the assurance to the robber that after death he would be with Christ is empty consolation'.<sup>15</sup> Along these lines is Calvin's objection to the notion of soul-sleep, for 'if you hold that souls sleep because death is called sleeping, then the soul of Christ must have been seized with the same sleep': for David thus speaks in his name 'I laid me down and slept' (Ps. 3:6).<sup>16</sup> But this appears to be exactly Peter's point when he states that David died and was buried but did not ascend to heaven (Acts 2:29, 34). The difference from David is not that Jesus avoided death and Hades, but that death and Hades did not hold him because he was raised to resurrected life (Acts 2:31-32). Thus we must object to Plummer's view, and see that Jesus' promise to the thief is that his experience would be the same as Jesus; first death, then Hades, but after that, resurrection to new life.

Thinking along these lines pushes us to consider the theological implications of Jesus' death with respect to the Trinity. Stott is surely right when he says 'there is no suspicion anywhere in the New Testament of discord between the Father and the Son'.<sup>17</sup> Thinking along such lines prompts Bolt to say, 'God is one [...] Father, Son and Spirit, are united together and cannot be divided or opposed or set on against the other. There *is* no separation of persons'.<sup>18</sup> However, Bolt also notes that our thinking 'should travel not from the Trinity to the cross but from the cross to the Trinity'.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, if we say nothing else about Jesus, we must affirm that Jesus died, and in doing so we must feel the full theological weight of death that has been argued in this project—that death is both relationlessness and inactivity. Given that relationlessness is seen primarily in regards to God, we must, in some sense and to some degree, conceive of the death of Son as a breach in relationship with the Father. Thinking along these lines enables Stott to say: 'an actual and dreadful separation took place between the Father and the Son'.<sup>20</sup> What this does to the Godhead is not addressed by the New Testament. What must be noted is that such questions arise when death is rightly apprehended in regards to humanity generally and to the person of Jesus specifically, and in doing so what has been restored is the shock of the New Testament's claim that Jesus died.

Death is encountered and overturned in the life and ministry of Jesus. As the Christ Jesus does not avoid death and Sheol, and in that respect his experience

is thoroughly in line with the pattern set forth in the Old Testament for all of humanity. But his death is different from all others, for he does so as the second person of the Trinity, defeating sin and death on behalf of humanity. Death and Sheol do not hold him; instead he is resurrected as the first of many, the ‘firstfruits’ (1 Cor. 15:20).

## 1.2. Romans

Romans stands as Paul’s great theological, missiological and pastoral letter and so it is unsurprising that it is in many ways the high point of New Testament reflection upon death. In Romans the personification of the Old Testament gathers strength, with Gaventa serving us well by taking Paul’s frequent use of sin as the subject of a verb to indicate that “Sin” is a major character in the letter. Sin enters the world, enslaves humanity and unleashes its cosmic partner—the second major character—“Death” (Rom. 5:12-21). Sin and Death are thus the twin cosmological powers whose work in this world establishes them as the enemy of both humanity and God. Their influence is such that they cannot be avoided or passed over, but must either be served or defeated.<sup>21</sup> Thus the Old Testament portrayal of death and sin reaches a crescendo in the the book of Romans.

Where the death of Jesus might have seemed to have been the victory of these cosmological forces, his resurrection challenges appearances. Romans 1:1-4 is clear that the resurrection is the work of the triune God—Father, Son and Spirit—who stands in opposition to Death and Sin. The strength of the link between Death and Sin is such that ‘death can be conquered only to the extent that sin is removed’,<sup>22</sup> and this is exactly what occurs in the death and resurrection of Jesus. ‘The strange—and apocalyptic—import of the gospel is that God destroys the power of sin to effect death precisely at the point at which sin seems to have triumphed, in the crucifixion of Christ’.<sup>23</sup> To achieve this Jesus had to share in the death of those who are ‘in Adam’ so that those who are ‘in him’ share his life, such that he is the Lord of the new age who offers the free gift of righteousness that brings eternal life (Rom. 5:15-21). Thus in the death and resurrection of Jesus he is both the victorious and the vindicated Messiah, in whom the new age (the age of resurrection and life) breaks into the old age of Adam (the age of sin and death), which shall fully and finally be revealed in the eschaton when Jesus shall be judge (Rom. 2:16). Paul gives a two-fold answer to the question of how the lordship of Jesus and

his resurrection is appropriated to those who are still in Adam, and subject to Sin and Death. Firstly, by faith, which: is a gift from God dependent on grace (Rom. 4:16); is in the God who could bring life from the dead (Rom. 4:18-19); is concurrent with those ‘who believed (lit. faithed) in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 4:24; 10:9); such that it is abundantly clear that the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is the decisive and characteristic belief of Christians.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, by a baptism in the spirit, which unites us to Christ (Rom. 6:3-5 cf. 8:9-11),<sup>25</sup> such that the believer shares in Christ’s death and ensures that the believer shall share in his resurrected life (Rom. 6:5-6), with the effect that the Christian has been set free from the other cosmic power Sin (Rom. 6:7), and will not face condemnation in the final judgment (Rom. 8:1). The hope of the righteous in the Old Testament is the hope of the faithful in the New Testament, for they are the ones who trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and hope for a resurrection like their Lord.

The spectre of death looms large in the book of Romans. United with its twin power Sin, Death stands opposed to a helpless humanity. However, the almighty triune God (Father, Son and Spirit) stands opposed to these cosmic forces—and definitively defeats them in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now, through the gift of faith and the Spirit, many will be brought under the lordship of the resurrected messiah—the Lord Jesus. Under this new rule, as those who are now in Christ by the Spirit, Christians participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. Death shall not ultimately separate them from God, but in the eschaton they shall enjoy life that lasts into eternity. Death and sin are no longer the certainties of life. Rather what is sure, is that Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

### Contrary Passages on Death

Space constraints have prevented the case for death, the dead and the underworld being established more widely from the New Testament. However, it seems wise to deal specifically with those passages generally understood as being contrary to the the view that all die and descend to Sheol-Hades, where their minimalist existence is coma-like.

In regards to the Gospels, the transfiguration is found in each of the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36) and at first glance appears to provide evidence for an active intermediate state. However, the focus of the

transfiguration is not on the intermediate state but rather upon Jesus, with Moses and Elijah as witnesses to him.<sup>26</sup> The topic of conversation (Luke 9:31) and the command not to tell others of this event until after the resurrection (Matt. 17:9) support Bock's assessment that the transfiguration foreshadows 'the entire death-parousia career of Jesus'.<sup>27</sup> Lane is correct to say: 'the presence of Elijah with Moses thus has eschatological significance in the specific sense that they proclaim the coming of the end'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed the closest biblical parallel is the necromantic encounter which saw the slumbering Samuel stirred from Sheol.<sup>29</sup> As such, the passage does not speak directly or indirectly about the post-death intermediate state of Moses.<sup>30</sup>

Potentially problematic for the conclusion that the dead are comatose in Sheol is Jesus' statement: 'God is not the god of the dead but of the living' (Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38). In isolation it is easy to see why many hold this to mean that some (if not all) who have died are not in fact dead but are 'alive to God'. Two things caution against such a view. The first is Paul's statement that Jesus is Lord of both the living and the dead (Rom. 14:9), which must mean that some (if not all) who have died are in fact dead. The second more compelling caution, is the context of Jesus' statement, which reveals that his conflict with the Sadducees is not concerning the intermediate state, but the resurrection.<sup>31</sup> In speaking of the resurrection, the point Jesus seems to be making is not that some dead people are necessarily alive right now, but rather that they will live in the resurrection.<sup>32</sup> Ellis points out that Jesus' entire argument would break down 'if Abraham is now personally "living" [for] no resurrection would be necessary for God to be "his God"'.<sup>33</sup> The point is simply 'that God will raise the dead because he cannot fail to keep his promises to them that he will be their God'.<sup>34</sup> The eschatological resurrection age, and not the intermediate state, is on view.

Another passage from the Gospels that is used to support the notion of the conscious intermediate state is Jesus' statement: 'In my Father's house are many rooms [...] I am going there to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2). Wright suggests that 'house' is an over-translation, better is 'half-way house', such that the intermediate state is a temporary dwelling between death and resurrection.<sup>35</sup> Problematically for Wright, if his argument is followed then the session of Jesus is not at the right hand of his Father in heaven (*contra* Heb. 9:24 & 10:12). More significantly, Jesus' emphasis is not upon the temporary



nature of the dwelling, but the provision of comfort to the disciples, in that Jesus' will 'come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am'. As Carson states: 'the simplest explanation is the best: my Father's house refers to heaven, and in heaven there are many rooms, many dwelling places'.<sup>36</sup> Barrett is thoroughly conventional in suggesting that Jesus comes to the believer 'presumably at his death, to take him into the heavenly dwelling'.<sup>37</sup> However, such a presumption is undercut when we recognise that the phrase 'I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am' indicates that Jesus is here speaking of the winding up of the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> The focus on comfort and not apocalypse is unsurprising, for John's Gospel is 'wholly unapocalyptic: rather it is eschatological'.<sup>39</sup> As per the Old Testament hope that arises in the Psalms, Wisdom Literature and Isaiah, the hope of the New Testament is eschatological. The intermediate state is simply not held out here as the Christian hope. What is hoped for is the return of Christ and the consummation of (in other writers' terms) the 'city of the living God' (Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21:9-22:5).

Another passage pointed to as supporting the conscious activity of the dead is Jesus' parable about Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31).<sup>40</sup> However, as Harris points out, the parable was not told 'to satisfy our natural curiosity about man's anthropological condition after death'.<sup>41</sup> If one persists in trying to glean some information about the afterlife problems arise, for the timing of the parable is clearly prior to the final resurrection,<sup>42</sup> and yet the characters act as human agents with a corporeal existence (e.g. the rich man desires to drink water). Furthermore, Bauckham is able to show that this parable uses two narrative motifs familiar from ancient writings: firstly, a reversal of fortunes experienced by a rich man and a poor man after death and secondly, a dead person's return from the dead with a message for the living. Jesus subverts these motifs to produce the unexpected outcome of the rich man being barred from returning, and in doing so attention is directed away from the afterlife, towards the inexcusable injustice between rich and poor and the need for repentance.<sup>43</sup> As such, we need not conclude that Jesus is endorsing in any way the veracity of these motifs. In this parable Jesus no more provides information about the intermediate state than, in other parables, does he provide instruction on correct agricultural practices (Luke 15:4-6) or investing tips (Luke 16:1-13). Given all of this, we concur with Green that any sense of a disembodied state must be read into the story.<sup>44</sup>

The epistles have been used to support a conscious intermediate state specifically of Jesus and the dead more generally, with 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 being an example. This is seen by the sequence of events Scaer identifies from 1 Peter: death [humiliation], alive in the spirit [glorification], resurrection, gone into heaven. He argues that this sequence reveals that ‘Jesus did go somewhere after his burial and before his resurrection appearances’.<sup>45</sup> However, not all scholars are as confident about when Jesus ‘preached to the spirits’; Reicke is ambiguous saying it is at ‘the time of death and resurrection’,<sup>46</sup> Cranfield hedges, saying it could have been before or after the resurrection,<sup>47</sup> and Lenski is adamant that it was after the resurrection.<sup>48</sup> This certainly suggests the possibility of other readings.<sup>49</sup> The most widely held view amongst scholars today is that 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 speaks of a post-resurrection ministry of Jesus, where the ‘spirits’ to whom Jesus preached were not human souls, but rather fallen angels (cf. Gen. 6:4-5).<sup>50</sup> This view avoids the tenuous nature of Scaer’s schema and seems to fit better with both the Genesis and Gospel material. While a certain humility must apply to the passage that Luther apparently described as ‘one of the most obscure places in the whole Bible’, it would seem that this passage does not speak of the intermediate state, whether of Jesus or anyone else. The contention that all who die are unconscious in Sheol-Hades remains intact.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul employs his most frequently used term to describe those who have died in Christ; they are *asleep*.<sup>51</sup> The plain meaning of this phrase fits almost seamlessly into the Old Testament depiction of the dead in a somnolent existence. However, Kaiser and Lohse claim that this phrase does not indicate sleep but is merely a Hellenistic euphemism.<sup>52</sup> Wright’s more nuanced view sees the term arising from Jewish origins, with the meaning that it is ‘the body that sleeps between death and resurrection [...] Paul is using the language of sleeping and waking simply as a way of contrasting a stage of temporary inactivity, not necessarily unconsciousness’.<sup>53</sup> What we must ask is whether such a rendering does justice to the term ‘sleep’ or the situation in Thessalonica. The concern of the Thessalonian Christians is for those Christians who have already died prior to the return of Christ: ‘had they forfeited their share in the wonderful happenings of the End?’<sup>54</sup> If this was the case, then those left alive were in danger of grieving like the world, that is without hope. Paul’s solution is to provide comfort to the distraught living Christians, emphasising the fact that if a Christian dies ‘in Christ’ then they

remain ‘in Christ’, thus they will not forgo the day of the resurrection.<sup>55</sup> The Christian is united to Christ, and this is a union which not even death can break.<sup>56</sup> As such, sleep is a particularly apt description for dead Christians, for it maintains a connection to, and radically transforms, the Old Testament depiction of death as coma. From merely the externals there appears to be no difference between the comatose and the sleeping, but the reality is profoundly different. In death the Christian sleeps covered by Christ, a sleep from which they will surely awaken to enjoy the new resurrection life with their Lord Jesus. ‘Death has been transformed into sleep through Jesus [...] for the Christian it is completely without terrors’.<sup>57</sup> As Cullman states, ‘we wait and the dead wait. Of course the rhythm of time may be different for them than for the living: and in this way the interim-time may be shortened for them’.<sup>58</sup> As Augustine says: ‘Now, for the time that intervenes between man’s death and the final resurrection, there is a secret shelter for his soul’.<sup>59</sup> Paul grounds the Christian hope in a union with Christ that is anchored in Christ’s resurrection and that awaits the final resurrection.

Typically 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23 are held together in support of a particular view of the intermediate state. Of these passages Wright says they are ‘as close as Paul ever comes to an account of the intermediate state between death and resurrection’.<sup>60</sup> This connection is seen in the way which Paul speaks; in the former he says that he ‘would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord’ and in the latter that he ‘would rather depart and be with Christ, which is better by far’. For Wright the positive nature of these phrases is so strong that he considers ‘it is impossible to suppose that he [Paul] envisaged it as an unconscious state’.<sup>61</sup> However, by itself Philippians 1:23 does not support any one view of the intermediate state, for it speaks only of Paul’s desire to be ‘with Christ’. The “when and where” of this being with Christ is not stated, and even Wright must concede that from this verse alone ‘we could be forgiven for thinking that Paul held to a one-stage view of life after death’.<sup>62</sup> As such, attention shall be focused upon 2 Corinthians 5:8.<sup>63</sup> On 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 Witherington takes a fairly traditional line stating: ‘Paul speaks of three states: the present condition in the tent-like frame, the intermediate state of nakedness, which he does not find desirable, and the future condition in which a further frame will have been put on’.<sup>64</sup> Witherington notes that Paul’s description of the intermediate state is framed not solely in positive terms but also in negative ones, for nakedness corresponds to being without a body. These positive and negative

elements fit well with our conception of the Christian's intermediate state as non-bodily sleep which is 'with Christ' that awaits the resurrection.

A weakness of Witherington's position is that if Paul is speaking about three states of being, then this represents a significant digression from his wider argument. Furnish suggests a reading more consistent with the overall argument of Paul. He shows that the contrast is between the tent-body in the here-and-now and with being either 'naked' or 'clothed' in respect to the final judgment, but that this being clothed takes place in the here-and-now.<sup>65</sup> Seeing the passage this way thus reflects the typically Pauline eschatological tension of 'now but not yet', and fits with Barnett's recognition that here the focus is upon, not the intermediate state, but the contrast between this age and the new age.<sup>66</sup> This eschatology is consistent with Paul's other writings as well as the developments we have noted in both the Old Testament and the Gospels. For Paul the Christian can be confident of the end, the new age, because Christ covers them in the here and now.

While these passages have been taken as speaking of a conscious intermediate state of the dead, doing so is problematic. When the various issues are addressed it is seen that none of these passages contradict the view that all die and go to Sheol-Hades. If they speak at all concerning the intermediate state, it is to say that Christians are asleep. This is both continuous with, and also a radical subversion of, the Old Testament formulation of the existence of the dead in the underworld as being akin to a coma.

#### 1.4. Revelation: In the end....

Turning now to the final book of the bible, three features of Revelation need to be addressed.

(1.) The personification of death. This is in an even stronger manner than in Romans, for here Death is one of the horsemen of the apocalypse (Rev. 6:8) and is always accompanied by Hades (Rev. 6:8, 20:13-14). Thus John maintains the Old Testament connection between Death and Hades, and presents them as the enemies of God and humanity.

(2.) The way in which Death and Hades give up all those who are in them, for the purposes of the final judgement (Rev. 20:13).<sup>67</sup> Morris rightly notes that in

Revelation 20:12 the reference to ‘great and small’ indicates that none were excepted from this rising to judgement.<sup>68</sup> Such an insight is supported by Wright’s point that in Revelation there is no distinguishing between ‘the souls’ (Rev. 20:4) and ‘the saints’ (Rev. 17:6), all Christians are ‘saints’.<sup>69</sup> As Barnett says, ‘John recognises only one kind of Christian: those who are faithful to death!’.<sup>70</sup> Thus Revelation 20:11-15 refers to everyone who has ever died. This creates a tension with Revelation 20:1-6 which presents the first resurrection as already having occurred, and thus sees all Christians as already being alive and reigning with Christ. Calvin resolves this tension by arguing that ‘John has described a twofold Resurrection as well as a twofold death; namely, one of the soul before judgment and another when the body will be raised up, and when the soul also will be raised up to glory’.<sup>71</sup> The forcefulness of Calvin’s argument at this point is belied by the fact there is no explicit reference to a ‘second resurrection’ in Revelation. In fact, the immediate reference in the passage of ‘second’ is not to a ‘second resurrection’ but is rather to the ‘second death’ (Rev. 20: 6,14). Recognising this reveals the very real possibility that the ‘second death’ is the contrast to the ‘first resurrection’. This would seem to a better fit with John’s other writing where he notes that all will rise—some to life and others to judgement (John 5:28-29). If we recall Goldsworthy’s general statement concerning Revelation that ‘there is no question of chronological sequences being strictly observed either within or between the several series of visions’,<sup>72</sup> then this is not a sequence of events but the coterminous occurrence of the first half of Revelation 20 with the second half. In terms of the final judgement, if any chronological significance is to be drawn it is only at the level that the raising to life occurs prior to the raising to death (Rev. 20:5). Revelation maintains the conception of the underworld as the destiny of all who have died, and that in the eschaton all shall be raised to judgement.

(3.) Note that both Death and Hades, along with those whose names are not written in the book, experience the ‘the second death’, that is ‘the lake of fire’ (Rev. 20:6, 20:13, 21:8). Given that John uses the term ‘second death’ as the primary phrase to communicate the nature of this destination, there must be a sense in which this term is able to adequately convey something of the severity of this final judgment. Again we are reminded of the negative portrayal of death in the entirety of the bible, and how it strikes at the very nature and purpose of humanity. To rightly apprehend the weight of the entire bible’s teaching on death, is to rightly appreciate the horror and finality of the divine verdict.

The book of Revelation continues to develop the presentation begun in the Old Testament and furthered by the New Testament. Death and Hades are fully personified as the enemies of both God and humanity in the apocalyptic genre of Revelation. Significantly there is nothing in Revelation that overturns the view that all who die will depart to a somnolent Hades where they await the final eschatological day of judgment. The righteous (Christian) hope is for the resurrection life in the new age, knowing that a deprivation of life, the second death, awaits the wicked (non-Christians).

### Conclusion

At the outset of this two-part paper it was observed that death is the one sure constant of life, and as such has been the source of much concern and reflection. This paper has sought to contribute to our understanding of the nature and significance of death, the dead and the underworld. By adopting a biblical theological approach we have sought to hear in the Scriptures both the voice of its human authors as they wrestled with the meaning of death as they lived in its shadow, and the authoritative voice of God.

Death is an all too prevalent reality in the time of the Gospels. Jesus the Christ, the Lord of Life, confronts this reality in the lives of those he meets, rolling back the incursion of death at each and every turn. Ironically, Jesus dies and goes to Hades (Sheol). But neither Death nor Hades hold him, and Jesus is bodily resurrected. It is in the death and resurrection of Jesus that death and sin are defeated. The embryonic apocalypticism of the Old Testament is further developed in Romans. Paul shows how the triune God defeats the old overlords of Death and Sin in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Where before humanity was under the rule of Sin and Death, now there is a new lord—the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation develops the apocalyptic portrayal even further, showing how the eschatological day of the Lord has been inaugurated in Christ's resurrection and how this will be finally consummated upon his return. On this day the saints will undergo the first resurrection to life, whereas the fate of the enemies of God (including Death and Hades themselves) shall be the second death.

As the righteous ones of the Old Testament reflected upon the problem of death and the character of their God, there arose a hope that they would not be left in the underworld but would rise again to new life in the day that God

himself would defeat death. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ death and sin, the great enemies of humanity were defeated by the triune God, and a tentative hope was made secure. The righteous in the Old Testament did not seek to avoid death and Sheol but hoped that there would be redemption from the comatose underworld. Similarly the Christian does not seek to avoid these things, but knows that because of Christ they have been covered by Christ, such that in death they sleep. The sure hope of the Christian is to be like Christ and awoken from this sleep unto resurrection life. This shall occur on the eschatological day with the ushering in of the resurrection age.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. R. Laird Harris, "The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts," *JETS* 4(4) (Dec. 1961): 134.
2. Following the pattern set concerning Sheol (see "Death, the Dead and the Underworld in Biblical Theology Part 1"), traditionally Hades has been translated as Hell (Latin: *infernus*). This seems integral to Calvin's thinking, for he considers the doctrine of soul-sleep as a denial of hell. J. Calvin, 'Psychopannychia; or, a refutation of the error that the soul sleeps in the interval between death and the judgment' in John Calvin's *Tracts and Treatises* Volume III. (trans. Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958 [1542]), pp. 479-83.
3. Peter Bolt, "Life, Death and the Afterlife in the Graeco-Roman World," in *Life in the Face of Death*, Richard N. Longenecker (ed.); Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 51-79, 51.
4. Peter Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p. 38.
5. R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1989), p. 205.
6. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: the English text with introduction, exposition and notes* (NICNT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 304.
7. Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), p. 25.
8. I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 873; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 344; cf. S. Morrison, *Prayer Evangelism* (Croydon: SMMI, 2006), p. 2.
9. Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St Luke: A critical and exegetical*

- commentary (ICC) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922), p. 535.
10. Leon Morris, *Luke: An introduction and commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: London: IVP 1974), p. 329.
  11. Joseph Hong, "Understanding and Translating 'Today' in Luke 23:43," *The Bible Translator* 46:4 (1995): 408-417, 416.
  12. Earle E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Century Bible New Edition: London: Butler & Tanner, 1974), p. 268. In support of his case he cites Luke 2:11; 3:22; 4:21; 19:9; Matt. 6:11 & 2 Cor. 6:2.
  13. H. J. Cadbury, "Acts and Eschatology," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), pp. 300-21, 305.
  14. D. B. Knox, *D. Broughton Knox Selected Works Volume 3: The Christian Life* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2006), p. 45. Note also: the NIV translation of 'Hades' as 'grave' is particularly misleading at this point.
  15. Plummer, *St. Luke*, p. 536.
  16. Calvin, "Psychopannychia," p. 458.
  17. John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), p.151.
  18. Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, p. 135 (italic his).
  19. Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, p. 135.
  20. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, p. 81.
  21. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition," *Interpretation* 58/5 (2004): 229-40, 232-5.
  22. Cullman, *Immortality or Resurrection?*, p. 20.
  23. Martinus de Boer, "The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5," *JSNTS* 22 (1988): 185.
  24. C. E. B Cranfield, "The Resurrection of Christ," in *On Romans and other New Testament Essays*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 137-50, 137-8.
  25. J. D. G. Dunn, "Salvation Proclaimed, VI. Romans 6:1-11: Dead and Alive," *Expository Times* 93 (1982): 259-64, 261; pace: Vincent P. Branick, "Apocalyptic Paul?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47.04 (1985): 664-75, 673.
  26. D. A. Carson, *Matthew Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 383-6.
  27. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* Vol. 1, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 870.
  28. Lane, *Mark*, p. 319.
  29. See: 1 Samuel.
  30. Elijah did not die (2 Kings 2:11).
  31. Supported by Acts 23:8; following Benedict T. Viviano. & Justin Taylor,



- “Sadducees, Angels and Resurrection (Acts 23:8-9),” *JBL* 111 (1992): 496-8; pace David Daube, “On Acts 23, Sadducees and Angels,” *JBL* 109/3 (1990): 493-7 (followed by Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 133) & Floyd Parker, “The Terms ‘Angels’ and ‘Spirits’ in Acts 23:8,” *Biblica* 84/3 (2000): 344-65.
32. In this area George Joye’s impact should not be underestimated, for he amended Tyndale’s English translation in line with his dualistic anthropology, changing numerous references to the resurrection (which were considered to be incomprehensible or illogical) to references to the afterlife in an intermediate state of consciousness; G. Juhasz “Translating Resurrection: the importance of the Sadducees’ Belief in the Tyndale–Joye Controversy,” in *Resurrection in the New Testament* R. Bieringer, V. Koperski & B. Lataire (eds.), (Belgium: Leuven University, 2002), p. 107-21.
  33. Ellis, *Luke*, p. 235.
  34. Marshall, *Luke*, p. 743.
  35. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 446.
  36. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), p. 489.
  37. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: an introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek text* 2nd edn., (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 455.
  38. Carson, *John*, p. 489.
  39. George Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 249.
  40. See the discussion in A. J. Matill Jnr, *Luke and the Last Things* (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 26-32.
  41. Murray J. Harris, “*The New Testament View of life after death*,” *Themelios* 11:2 (1986): 47-52, 48.
  42. The word here is Hades and not Hell, revealing the NIV’s inability to consistently translate ‘Hades’ as ‘grave’.
  43. Richard Bauckham, “The Rich Man and Lazarus: The parable and the parallels,” *JNTS* 37 (1991): 225-246.
  44. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 168.
  45. David P. Scaer, “He did descend to hell: in defense of the Apostles Creed,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 35 Mr (1992): 91-99, 95.
  46. B. Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1946), pp. 90-91.
  47. C. E. B. Cranfield, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude: An introduction and commentary* (London: SCM, 1960), p. 85.

48. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), p. 161.
49. While novel, the argument that the reference is to the preaching of Christ through Noah is dismissed on the grounds that the Genesis account lacks evidence of Noah preaching or of the ark ever being intended to carry anyone other than Noah and his immediate family; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1988), pp. 204-39; John Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18-20," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 303-36.
50. William Joseph Dalton, "Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6," *Analecta Biblica* 23 (1989): 17-241, 141-2; extending the work of Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1946), pp. 197-203 & 314-362.
51. A term also employed by Jesus (Mark 5:39).
52. Otto Kaiser & Eduard Lohse, *Death & Life in the Old Testament* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981 [1977]), p. 127.
53. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 216. (italic his).
54. Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1984), p. 89.
55. William Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), p. 99.
56. Morris, *Thessalonians*, p. 93.
57. Morris, *Thessalonians*, p. 91.
58. Cullman, *Immortality or Resurrection?*, p. 57.
59. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, §109 in *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* (trans. & ed. Albert C. Outler. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955 [421]).
60. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 369.
61. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 226; John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Thessalonians: Preparing for the Coming King* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), p. 96.
62. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 226.
63. In regards to these two passages, it is worth noting that Hoekema, who holds a similar view of the intermediate state to Wright, bases his argument in large part on the aorist tense as suggesting 'momentary, snapshot action'; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 104, 107. Wallace labels this view of the aorist as 'the error of saying too much'; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 557.
64. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 391.

65. Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (The Anchor Bible: Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 292-302.
66. Today's New Testament Series: Leicester: IVP, 1988), pp. 100-101; cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New London Commentary: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 177.
67. Bauckham helpfully notes that here 'sea' is simply a synonym for Sheol (reflecting the way the Old Testament at times closely associates the subterranean ocean with Sheol (e.g. 2 Sam. 22:5-6; Job 26:5; Ps. 69:15; Jonah 2); Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p. 68.
68. Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Leicester: IVP, 1987), p. 234.
69. N. T. Wright, *For All The Saints?* (London: SPCK, 2003), pp. 24-27.
70. Paul Barnett, *Apocalypse Now and Then: Reading Revelation Today* (Sydney: Aquilla, 1989), p. 147.
71. Calvin, 'Psychopannychia,' p. 446.
72. Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Gospel in Revelation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1984), p. 97.