What do the Dead Know?

Ancestor Worship and Necromancy in Ancient Israel

Daniel Sarlo

SMB 5064

Professor J. McLaughlin

May 6, 2013

"The living know they will die, but the dead know nothing.
There is no longer a reward for them, for their memory has been forgotten."
(Eccl 9:5)

In ancient Israel, life and death were simply terms used to refer to the state of the human body. An individual was alive when their body was animated by the soul (Gen 2:7), and dead when the soul had departed (1 Kgs 17:17-22). While death signified the finality of the flesh, by no means was it thought to be the end of existence. Upon leaving the land of the living, souls were imagined to travel to the netherworld. There they were no longer actively involved in the affairs of the world, but communication was made possible through certain human rituals. The Hebrew Bible attests to this belief, most famously in the story of Saul and the medium of Endor (1 Sam 28:7-19). There is also evidence that the living gave the dead food, drink, furniture, oil lamps, and other items in exchange for blessing, advice, and protection. Why then do exilic and post-exilic texts insist that the dead know nothing and cannot be roused (Eccl 9:5; Job 14:12)?

In the seventh century BCE, the Yahwist king Josiah sought to prohibit the worship of all other gods. For this same reason, he was opposed to all forms of communication with the dead. This reform was a concentrated effort to centralize power, therefore it does not reflect the popular view of mortuary rituals in ancient Israel. This paper will demonstrate that ancestor worship and necromancy were common practices in ancient Israel, as they were in the rest of the Ancient Near East (ANE). This will be accomplished by appealing to archaeological and textual evidence from various time periods, with a particular focus on the biblical text. The first section will discuss the ancient Israelite belief in the continuation of the soul in Sheol. The second section will look at the methods used to contact the dead and the general attitude towards such practices. The final section will address the seventh century prohibitions and evaluate the impact they had on later biblical authors.

1. 'Life' after death in Ancient Israel

The Hebrew Bible contains various interpretations of death. In some cases, it is portrayed neutrally (Eccl 3:2; Ps 90:5), in others it is said to be a relief (Job 3:3, 17) and in others still, a curse (Ps 55:4; Eccl 7:26). For the most part, it appears that the manner in which one is said to have died is directly related to their piety, as it is perceived by the author. If the individual in question was wicked, death is untimely and/or terrifying. Conversely, death is stripped of all negative imagery when one is righteous [see table below].

Victim	*Description of death*	*Backstory*
Abraham	"Abraham expired and died, in a good old age, an old man, and satisfied." (Gen 25:8)	Abraham trusted Yahweh and followed all his commands. (Gen 15:6)
Gideon	"Gideon, son of Joash, died in a good old age." (Judg 8:32)	Gideon was a judge in Canaan, faithful to Yahweh.
David	"He died in a good old age, satisfied with days, riches, and splendour." (1 Chr 29:28)	In 1 Chronicles, David is presented as a flawless person and king.[1]
Abiner	"Joab took him aside to the gate to speak with him in secret. There he struck him in the stomach, and he died." (2 Sam 3:27)	Abner was responsible for his brother Asael's death in battle, thus Joab avenged him.[2] (2 Sam 3:27)
Spies	"Those men… died by plague before Yahweh." (Num 14:37)	The spies returned to Moses with a bad report about the land of Canaan. (Num 14:36)
The Korahites and their supporters	"The netherworld opened its mouth and swallowed them… they descended alive into Sheol." (Num 16:32-33)	The Korahites did not support Moses exalting himself as "prince over the people," as Yahweh had appointed him.[3]
The Korahites and their supporters (version ii)	"Fire went out from Yahweh and consumed the 250 men." (Num 16:35)	The Priestly version of the story suggests the Korahites were a rival class of priests to the Aaronite priesthood.[4]

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[1] David M. Howard, "David," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 2*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 46.

[2] Peter K. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9; Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 99.

[3] Rodney R. Hutton, "Korah," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 4*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 101.

[4] Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 413, 417.

Absalom	"He (Joab) took three spears in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's heart while he was still alive… Then ten young men, Joab's armor bearers, slaughtered Absalom." (2 Sam 18:14-15)	Absalom conspired against his father, king David for the throne, causing him to flee Jerusalem. He took his throne and his concubines and plotted to have him killed.[5]
Jezebel	"Two or three eunuchs… threw her down (from the palace window). Some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses; then he (Jehu) trampled her… They went to bury her but found nothing…" (2 Kgs 9:32-35)	Jezebel was the queen of the Northern Kingdom. She supported the worship of Asherah and Baal,[6] and is also said to have practiced necromancy. (2 Kgs 9:22)

1.1 The universality of Sheol

Some scholars, like Johnston and Bar, appear to have falsely linked these different kinds of death to the destination of the soul; they claim that Sheol is the abode of wicked souls exclusively.[7] To be sure, the Hebrew Bible consistently defends the notion that all souls go to Sheol after death, regardless of piety. Several passages make this clear. Psalm 89:49 asks (rhetorically): "What man who is alive will not see death? What man can rescue himself from the hand of Sheol?"[8] In his opening speech, Job reveals many important facts about this place. There, he says, "the wicked stop causing trouble" (Job 3:17). This implies that they are docile, but not absent. He confirms this by describing Sheol as a place for small and great alike, and where the slave is no longer required to serve his master (Job 3:19). Death is the great equalizer; there are no ranks in Sheol. Job questions the morality of this system (21: 23-26), and asks why

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[5] David M. Howard, "Absalom," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 45.

[6] Gale A. Yee, "Jezebel," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 3*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 848.

[7] Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 81-83; Shaul Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life: Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 158-159.

[8] Here, Sheol is imagined as a chthonic god who reaches up and snatches souls from the surface of the earth. Notice the parallel with Death (Mawet/Mot).

the poor and rich, righteous and wicked, should end up in the same place. Even Jacob (Israel) will end up in Sheol, despite being a chosen one of God. When he hears the rumour that his son, Joseph, is dead, he refuses to be consoled and says "No. I will go down to Sheol mourning!" (Gen 37:35)[9] The misery is so overwhelming that he cannot be comforted, and he imagines he will feel this way for the rest of his life.

As Johnston points out, the word Sheol is conspicuously absent from the death reports of righteous men in the Bible.[10] However, this can be explained without resorting to radical conclusions. We have seen that when the author's intent is to promote the behaviour of the individual, negative language is avoided. Thus, David is not going to the 'place of no return,' where he will be unable to pray to his god – instead he will 'sleep with his fathers' (1 Kgs 2:10). Ultimately, these are descriptions of the same place; certain aspects of Sheol are emphasized over others depending on the situation.[11]

To defend his argument that Sheol is for the wicked, Johnston also refers to Psalm 31:17.[12] This is a classic example of misinterpreting the biblical text. The context here is that the psalmist is distraught due to mistreatment by his peers,[13] whom he refers to as his enemies and harassers, and labels them 'wicked':

> "Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and my harassers… O Yahweh, let me not be humiliated for I have called to you, let the wicked be humiliated and let them perish in Sheol" (Ps 31:16, 18)

He requests immediate relief from their persecution but there is no indication that he is concerned with the fate of their souls. Simply put, he wants them to die so they can no longer

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[9] That is, according to Ephraim A. Speiser's translation; *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 289.

[10] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 71-72, 82.

[11] Perhaps for the author of 1 Kings, the word Sheol is too closely tied to the ideas of darkness, filth, and separation from Yahweh, which he does not want to emphasize for David. Instead, he highlights a positive feature of Sheol, reunion with one's ancestors.

[12] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 81.

[13] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50* (AB 16; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 187.

bother him. This is easily demonstrated if 'death' is substituted for Sheol: "let the wicked be humiliated and let them perish in death" or, even more concisely: "let the wicked die." In fact, it is fairly common for Yahweh to kill the wicked so that the righteous can live in peace (Josh 23:16; Ps 37:34-40), but this should in no way affect the nature of Sheol.

Several passages seem to suggest that individuals can avoid Sheol by turning to God. Psalm 30:4 reads: "O Yahweh, you brought my soul up from Sheol; you kept me alive, so that I did not go down to the pit." The author of this psalm likely recovered from a fatal illness miraculously, which meant he could continue to live on the earth rather than having to descend to Sheol (die) prematurely.[14] Not once does the text make reference to the ultimate fate of the oppressor. Thus, what can be interpreted as the ultimate deliverance of the soul should instead be undersood as temporary deliverance.

Throughout Israelite history, Sheol was the universal abode of the dead. We find this even in the Roman period. The Book of Parables (chapters 37-71 of 1 Enoch), written sometime between 40 BCE and 40 CE,[15] asserts that on the Day of Judgment Sheol will give up its dead and the righteous will be chosen from among them (1 En 51:1-2). The author of Second Baruch uses death and Sheol in parallel without any qualification: "Why do we mourn those who die? Why do we weep for those who depart to Sheol?" (2 Bar 52:2)[16]

1.2 Sheol as the grave

While other biblical terms for the netherworld, like ʾereṣ 'earth,' have cognates in surrounding ANE cultures, the word Sheol appears to have been unique to the Israelites. This

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[14] Dahood, *Psalms I*, 182.

[15] George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 37-82* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 62.

[16] The text probably dates to the end of the first century CE – specifically 95 CE if 2 Bar 1:1 is taken literally; Daniel M. Gurtner, *Second Baruch: A Critical Edition of the Syriac Text* (JCTCRS; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 16-18.

has made it difficult for scholars to determine the meaning of the word. Nonetheless, at the present time there appears to be essentially a consensus that Sheol is an infinitive construct of *šāʾal* 'to inquire', thus *šěʾôl*: 'inquiring' or 'the place of inquiry.'[17] What exactly does this mean? The verb (*šāʾal*) is used several times in the context of consulting the dead (Deut 18:11; 1 Chr 10:13, suggesting that Sheol is the place where the dead are asked questions. Thus, the theory that Sheol originated as a deity[18] is probably false. Though in poetry, Sheol is often equated with *Māwet* 'Death'[19] and depicted as a ravenous beast that devours the living (Prov 1:12; 27:20; Isa 5:14), this may be explained as the personification of the location itself.

The various descriptions of Sheol provided in the Hebrew Bible reveal that the most likely origin of the concept is the physical grave itself. Sheol is deep underground (Num 16:30; Amos 9:2)[20] and is full of dirt (Job 17:16) and worms (Job 17:14; Isa 14:11). It is also a very dark place (Job 10:21; Lam 3:6; Psa 143:3), where sleeping is the typical activity (2 Sam 7:12; Job 17:14). It is clear that these are actually just descriptions of the grave. The biblical authors must have been aware of this – they use the words *bôr* and *šaḥat* 'pit' synonymously with Sheol (Prov 1:12; Isa 14:15; Ezek 31:16). Naturally, the soul was imagined to go somewhere similar to the body. Sheol, the communal place of the dead, was an extrapolation of the much more rudimentary personal grave. This has also been supposed by Bar: "It is possible, of course, that the original sense of *šeʾôl* was indeed "grave" and that only later did it come to mean the

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[17] This has been more or less universally accepted. Sheol is a place, not likely a deity; Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 73. In form, Sheol is clearly an infinitive construct, making this the most probable etymology; John Jarick, "Questioning Sheol," in *Resurrection*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs (JSNTSup 186; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 25.

[18] Johannes C. de Moor has linked Sheol to an unknown deity named Šuwala (Akk.), possibly to be identified with Ereshkigal; "Lovable Death in the Ancient Near East," *UF* 22 (1990): 239.

[19] J. F. Healey, "Mot," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 598-603.

[20] Sometimes it is said to be beneath the water table, the primeval *tehom* (Jonah 2:3-4, Job 26:5).

netherworld."[21]   This helps to explain why Sheol was conceived as the place righteous and wicked alike, rather than a place of punishment or paradise.

2. Necromancy in ancient Israel

That the grave is in fact the 'place of inquiry' meant by the word Sheol is demonstrable using archaeological and textual evidence. While the concept certainly developed, the physical location of the dead body, perhaps for convenience, remained the link between the two worlds.

2.1 Burial types in the Levant

Throughout ancient Israelite history, various types of burials were used to contain the dead. Bloch-Smith outlines seven: pit, cist, cave, bench, jar, anthropoid coffin, and bathtub coffin[22]; of which pit graves are the simplest and most common, found throughout the Levant but particularly in the lowlands. It appears that the most common items buried with the dead, regardless of grave type, belonged to the category 'pottery.'[23] Lamps were also fairly popular grave goods, found most often, but not exclusively, in cave and bench tombs.[24] It is interesting that lamps are found in regular burials. Had they only been found up in the highlands in caves, it would be much easier to argue that they were used by the living to find their way to their dead ancestors – but now we can be fairly certain that these light sources had some other function.

Before discussing the function of grave goods, though, we should briefly discuss cave and bench tombs. These types of burials first appeared in the Levant at the end of the fourth

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[21] Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 156.
[22] Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 25.
[23] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 72.
[24] Ibid. Lamps were also found alongside ceramic vessels in jar burials; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 32.

millennium BCE, and have been linked to foreign tribes who migrated to the region.[25] They were either deliberately hewn out of rock or made from natural, pre-existing hollows. Their primary function was to serve as a family plot, which allowed the living to feel a sense of community with their dead ancestors and also facilitated ritual pilgrimages. This arrangement explains the meaning of the expression "gathered to his kin" in the Bible (Gen 25:8; 35:29; Num 20:24; Judg 2:10). Likely, this communal grave was in mind when Sheol was first conceptualized as a universal grave.

2.2 Archaeological and textual evidence from pre-Yahwist societies

We have seen that regardless of the method of burial, grave goods were popular in ancient Israel. In addition to food and drink,[26] the living offered a variety of items such as furniture and lamps in order to improve their ancestors' existence in Sheol.[27] While taking care of the dead was certainly important in and of itself, ensuring the wellbeing of the living family must have been of greater concern. Ultimately, comforting and sustaining them was a small price to pay for what they believed to be getting in return. This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

2.2.1 Ugarit

Before the worship of Yahweh was introduced in the Levant, the so called Canaanites believed that the dead were important members of the community and were regularly in contact with them through prayer and necromancy. At Ugarit, words for family included not only *betu* (house), but *ḫtk* (offspring), *mknt* (family line), *špḫ* (descendants), and *yrṯ* (heirs). Thus, the

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[25] Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Paleolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, ed. D. Edelman (JSOTSup 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 113.

[26] Niches in tombs found in Samaria, the capital of Israel, are similar to those found at Ugarit that were known to hold food and drink for the dead; Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 266.

[27] Stephen L. Cook, "Death, Kinship, and Community: Afterlife and the חסד Ideal in Israel." In *The Family in Life and Death: The Family in Ancient Israel: Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. P. Dutcher-Walls (LBHOTS 504; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 114.

notion of family extended further than in most modern conceptions. Anyone who shared any part of the bloodline, alive or dead, was seen as a member of the household. In fact, in the earliest times the dead were buried within the perimeter of the home, usually beneath the floor.[28] This practice continued in ancient Israel – Samuel was buried in his house (1 Sam 25:1), as was Joab (1 Kgs 2:34) and Manasseh (2 Chr 33:20).[29] Many family shrines were discovered in Ras Shamra,[30] suggesting that there were various local cults that existed throughout the Levant.

Unfortunately, there are limitations to reaching a proper understanding of these religions. Most of the inhabitants at Ugarit were illiterate, and would not have been likely to produce documents even if they were literate. This means that despite the wealth of information that has been uncovered from Ras Shamra, we know very little about the religion practiced by the non-elite.[31] This does not mean that we should not attempt to reconstruct the family religions of lower classes. In religious texts, the god Ilu was portrayed as the father of the gods and the king, though it is not unlikely that common people who were aware of these stories would put themselves in the king's position, understanding that he was a human being too. Thus, they might have also prayed to Ilu as 'father'. We do not know. Lewis imagines they must have, and uses the example of Catholics appellation of Mary as their 'mother.'[32] "Everyone in Ugarit would have petitioned the gods to help them in nearly every aspect of their lives, be it for

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[28] Theodore J. Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion at Late Bronze Age Ugarit," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. J. Bodel and S. Olyan (The Ancient World: Comparative Histories; Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 61.

[29] Interestingly, the Temple scroll at Qumran condemns burials anywhere in the proximity of homes for reasons of purity. This demonstrates how much things change from the early Monarchy to the Second Temple Period; Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 307-308.

[30] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 79 – "Domestic cults are attested by the great number of small idols dispersed throughout the residential areas."

[31] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 62.

[32] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 65.

nourishment, safety, remedy, longevity, prosperity, et cetera. In this regard, there was a large

overlap between the religion of the elites and the non-elites."[33]

Though very little has been preserved from the commoners, we do have an interesting

personal letter, found in the home of an upper class citizen:

> "Peace be upon you. May the gods of the land of Tibat, and the gods of the lands of
> Ugarit, and all the gods of our family keep you in good health and give you favor and
> satiate you with old age, before the gods of our family, forever" (RS 20.178 = Ugaritica
> V #55).[34]

This demonstrates that the non-royalty worshiped various gods at Ugarit, as well as their own

traditional family gods. Might the 'gods of our family' refer to the ancestors themselves? We

cannot say. Elsewhere, the dead are certainly called gods. In KTU 1.6, the *rpim* are paralleled

with *mtm* 'dead ones' and *ilm* 'gods.'[35] In KTU 1.109.11-13 and KTU 1.130.12, sacrifices are

offered to *Ilu-ibi* at the temple of Baʿlu.[36] *Ilu-ibi* is listed first, ahead of all the other gods in

pantheon lists at Ugarit. Evidently, this suggests that this god had the highest degree of

importance.[37] But who is this *Ilu-ibi*? KTU 1.17, a text that outlines the best qualities a son can

have, reads:

> "Let there be a son in his house, a descendant in his palace; one who sets up the stela of
> *Ilu-ibi* in the local sanctuary, the marker of his clansman; one who delivers his life from the
> underworld, one who guards his footsteps from the dust; one who squelches his detractors'
> slander, one who drives away those who act against him; one who holds his hand when he
> is drunk, one who supports him when he is full of wine; one who eats his grain offering in
> the temple of Baʿlu, his portion in the temple of Ilu; one who patches his roof on a rainy
> day, one who washes his clothes on a mucky day" (l. 125-134).[38]

Lewis sees the erecting of a stela for *Ilu-ibi* as "the devotion to one's ancestor as a god," not

simply the worship of one's ancestor's god. However, scholars are divided on the interpretation

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[33] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 63.
[34] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 67.
[35] Karel van der Toorn, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms," *ZAW* 108 (1996): 5-6.
[36] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 73.
[37] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 69.
[38] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 68-69.

of this passage.[39] Lewis sources KTU 1.161 in his defence, which describes the petitioning of

deceased kings to bless the monarchy.[40] There may be something to his claim. The passage

(quoted above) says that the perfect son will deliver his father from the netherworld, which could

be a reference to providing offerings at the grave. At the end of the day, we do not know much

about the religion of the commoners. We can only assume that these few hints scattered

throughout the texts at Ras Shamra have some basis in reality, and that some of the religious

beliefs of the royalty carried over to the commoners.

2.2.2 Egypt

Now that we have looked at Ugarit, we should briefly examine some Egyptian beliefs

about the dead and their potential influence on the ancient Israelites. Egyptian involvement in

the Levant goes back to at least 3000 BCE when they became interested in various resources in

the region and engaged in a mutually beneficial trade relationship.[41] Around 2000 BCE,

Megiddo became an Egyptian fortress. Palestine was not conquered at this time, but its location

en route to Syria in the North and Assyria in the East made it an extremely important city for the

Egyptians to secure.[42] After the invasion of the Hyksos and their subsequent expulsion in around

1500 BCE, trade relations between Egypt and the Levant grew even stronger, though much of it

was enforced by the Pharaoh.[43] This was the case until 1200 BCE when the Sea Peoples took

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[39] The alternative is that *Ilu-ibi* is the family's god of choice, or one whom the ancestor had a special relationship with – worshiping this god shows solidarity with the family. A similar problem exists in Biblical scholarship with the interpretation of the 'god of the fathers;' Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion, 70.

[40] Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion," 69.

[41] Egyptian pottery has been found at Arad dating to 2900 BCE; Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 123; and we know that cedars were being imported from Lebanon at least as early as 2700 BCE; Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 128.

[42] Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 161.

[43] Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 217-218. The Canaanites of the region became Egyptian vassals and were required to trade certain resources.

over the Levant and pushed back the Egyptians. In short, from 3000 BCE until at least 1200 BCE,

Egypt was quite influential in the Levant and likely impacted Israelite beliefs about the dead.

Many Egyptian artefacts have been discovered in Levantine tombs, some of which carried

religious significance. Furniture made in the Egyptian style was found in many tombs excavated

at Jericho.[44] This demonstrates not only the awareness of, but the appreciation for, Egyptian

culture and custom – Egyptians also buried furniture with the dead.[45] This would have fit well

with the ancient Israelite concern for comforting the dead, thus it may well have been accepted

simply because it was not radically different from what was already being done in the Levant.

Scarabs were also found in Middle Bronze Age II burials at Hazor, Megiddo, Tell el-ʿAjjul, and

Jericho.[46] In Egypt, the image of the scarab was commonly found on various kinds of jewelry,

especially amulets that were thought to protect the wearer from evil, perhaps due the scarab's

association with the sun god (as Khepri-Re).[47] Pre-Israelite (Canaanite) artists used the image of

the Egyptian scarab to represent their beliefs about the dead as early as the Middle Bronze Age.[48]

Another Egyptian practice common to ancient Israel was feeding the dead. In both cultures,

families traveled to the grave where vessels of food and drink were deposited. "Because the

deceased lived forever in the afterlife, these offerings had to be provided in perpetuity."[49] The

vessels may not have always been filled – apparently the mere presence of these containers

symbolized a constant supply of food.[50] We know that the Egyptians provided their dead

ancestors, believed to be divine, with such items in exchange for their advice, blessing, and

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[44] Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 168.
[45] Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2011), 145.
[46] Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 167.
[47] William A. Ward, "Beetles in Stone: The Egyptian Scarab," *BA* 57.4 (1994): 194.
[48] Ward, "Beetles in Stone," 191
[49] Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, 128.
[50] Wolfram Grajetzki, *Burial Customs in Ancient Egypt: Life in Death for Rich and Poor* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 39.

protection.[51]   We have already seen this at Ugarit as well.   This raises the question, contra

Schmidt, is Assyria really to blame for the Israelites' obsession with the dead?[52]   Instead, we

should suppose that the ancient Israelites were accepting of these kinds of beliefs and were, in

particular, engaged in necromancy long before the Assyrian takeover of the North.

2.3 Biblical evidence

Unfortunately, there are only several positive references from the Bible itself that we can

use to support our assumption. This is because there is very little discussion in the Bible about

the benefits of necromancy and ancestor worship.[53]   The Endor story, though it is part of the

Deuteronomistic History (DH) and therefore reflects a late view of earlier events,[54] alludes to the

reason Israelites might have engaged in such practices. Saul inquires of the dead prophet Samuel

using a medium.   When Samuel asks him why he has raised him up, he gives the following

response:

> "It is very tight for me; and Philistines are making war on me; and God has turned from me
> and has not answered me still – even by hand of the prophets, even by dreams; and I called
> you to let me know what I should do." (1 Sam 28:15).[55]

Saul is in dire need of advice, but it is unclear how Samuel is able to provide him with such

information. Is it because he has passed over to the netherworld where he has become privy to

future events, or is it simply because he is a prophet? Green suggests that there is a blurred line

here – the DH emphasizes the important connection between the king and his prophet (who

happens to be dead in this case), but at the same time forbids all communication with the dead.

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[51] Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, 148.

[52] Brian Schmidt argues that prior to King Manasseh's reign, the Israelites and the Jews did not take part in the cult of the dead or any necromantic practices. His position is summarized on 241-245 of *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996).

[53] As we will see, this is a result of the exilic authors and editors who had contempt for these practices.

[54] Barbara Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen?: A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (JSOTSup 365; London: Sheffield, 2003), 1-2.

[55] A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 322.

Thus, it is difficult to determine whether this particular episode serves to condone or condemn Saul.[56] Regardless, the text clearly shows that a) Saul sought advice from Samuel about the battle with the Philistines in order to potentially change the future and avoid an early death, and b) although necromancy had been made illegal, it was still effective.

A passage that may explain the many offerings found in graves is Exodus 20:12: "Honor your mother and father so that your days will be long on the land Yahweh has given you." Though it has traditionally been interpreted in reference to one's actions during life, we have seen that in Egypt dead ancestors were still thought of as active members of the family. Also, the verb *kabēd* holds a range of meanings from 'honour' to 'obey' and even 'revere.' When used in conjunction with *ʾĕlōhîm* or Yahweh, it can mean 'worship.'[57] Perhaps a fresh interpretation of the fifth commandment, which was written prior to Josiah's reforms, may well demonstrate that the living were required to continue to care for their parents in the netherworld – if they did not, they might upset the balance of the universe and upset the gods.

2.3.1 Ancestor worship and necromancy in the Hebrew Bible

Despite the lack of information surrounding the reasons people performed these rituals in ancient Israel, we can be sure that they were in fact performed. There are many examples of ancestor worship and necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, some more explicit than others, and some highly interpretive. We should begin by looking at some that are less certain and work towards those that definitely refer to communication with the dead.

In 1946, Albright suggested that the *paḥad* in Genesis 31:42 should be translated 'kin' rather than 'fear.' His theory requires that the ancient Israelites adopted the Palmyrene word

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[56] Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen?*, 427.

[57] Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 74.

paḥdâ – no Semitic root with the meaning 'kin' is known. Although his theory has been more or less rejected by modern scholarship, Albright did raise several interesting points.[58] The verse describes the patriarchs' belief in "the god of my father, the god of Abraham, and the *paḥad* of Isaac," would 'ancestor' not make more sense in this context? What should we understand the 'fear of Isaac' to mean? We have evidence that in the early monarchy, and presumably earlier, the ancient Israelites worshiped their family members.[59] Perhaps Albright's work could be re-evaluated. It may not be completely out of the question, despite the philological issues.

Another questionable, yet intriguing idea is the re-interpretation of the *naḥălat ʾĕlōhîm* in 2 Samuel 14:16, proposed by Lewis. The text reads: "The king will hearken, delivering his servant from the hand of the man seeking to wipe me and my son out together from the estate of God."[60] Lewis substitutes 'ancestral estate' for 'estate of God' because elsewhere *ʾĕlōhîm* can refer to the dead (1 Sam 28:13; Isa 8:19).[61] Is this enough reason for such a proposition? Arguably, the passage makes sense either way, but God's chosen people / inheritance is a common theme in this particular book. The *naḥălat yhwh* is referred to in 2 Sam 20:19 and 21:3, suggesting that perhaps the author of 14:16 also meant Yahweh, not the dead, with the term *ʾĕlōhîm*.[62]

1 Samuel 20:5-6 is perhaps a deliberately ambiguous passage. David is a wanted man, and so he is actively on the run from the king and his men. He tells Saul's son, Jonathan, that although it is customary for him to attend the royal feast on the first of every month, he will not be attending this time. The excuse Jonathan is to tell his father is that he needed to return to his

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[58] Matthias Köckert, "Fear of Isaac," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Second Edition, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 329.

[59] Refer to section 2.3.3 of this paper: *Evidence from Personal Names*

[60] Translation based on Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 491.

[61] Theodore J. Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate (*naḥălat ʾĕlōhîm*) in 2 Samuel 14:16," *JBL* 110 (1991): 597-612. We have seen that in the Ugaritic texts, the *ilm* are paralleled with the *rpim* and *mtm*; refer to footnote 35.

[62] Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 493.

hometown, Bethlehem, for the 'yearly sacrifice.'[63] This has been understood by many scholars

as a reference to the Mesopotamian *kispu* ritual, a regular family reunion where offerings were

provided for dead relatives to keep their spirits at bay.[64] If this is true, it shows that these

practices were understood and to some degree accepted. David would not have provided such an

excuse if it would not be believable to Saul, thus at the time of the monarchy Israelites likely

took part in such rituals, which can be classified as ancestor worship. This interpretation of the

passage may actually shed light on why some of the prophets criticize the New Moon (Isa 1:13;

Hos 2:13). As Hallo notes, this is rather intriguing. If the ancient Israelites were not involved in

kispu rituals, there is no reason the New Moon should be spoken of with disdain.[65]

Psalm 106:28 contains the accusation that ancient Israelites "joined themselves to Baʿal

Peʾor and ate the sacrifices of the dead." This links many pre-Yahwistic people to ancestor

worship. A parallel passage, Numbers 25:2, connects the dead ancestors with the gods. "They

called the people to sacrifice to their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods."

ʾĕlōhîm As we have already seen, the are sometimes human beings who have passed on to the

netherworld. Thus, dead spirits were not only worshiped before Josiah's reform, but were likely

believed to be just as powerful and important as non-human deities.

2.3.2 *Methods of communicating with the dead in the Hebrew Bible*

The variety of words for mediums and the methods by which they communicate with the

dead attest to the popularity of these practices in ancient Israel. Deuteronomy 18:10-11 contains

the most comprehensive list in this regard:

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[63] Bloch-Smith thinks it is, and gives good reason to support her conclusion; *Judahite Burial Practices*, 124; while Bar is not convincing in arguing the passage does not allude to the *kispu*; *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 271.

[64] This ritual is also known from Mari; Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 270-271.

[65] William W. Hallo, "Royal Ancestor Worship in the Biblical World," in *"Shaʿarei Talmon":Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. M. Fishbane and E. Tov (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 386.

"There will not be found among you a person who passes his son or daughter through the fire, a *qōsēm qěsāmîm*, a *měʿônēn*, a *měnaḥēš*, a *měkaššēp*, a *ḥōbēr ḥāber*, an inquirer[66] of an *ʾôb* or *yidděʿōnî*, or one who calls up the *mētîm*."

Additionally, there are unique titles like the *bʿǎlat ʾôb* of 1 Samuel 28:7 and the *ḥăkam ḥărāšîm* of Isaiah 3:3. Despite the number of different titles given in the Bible, scholars have found very little to distinguish them from one another. The various modern English translations reflect this interchangeability; for example, *měkaššēp* is rendered 'sorcerer' by the NRSV, 'witch' by the KJV, and 'one who engages in witchcraft' by the NIV.[67]

Because of the ambiguity, we can only make educated guesses as to the methods these practitioners used to contact the dead. There is a great debate in scholarship over what these practices might have entailed. We will briefly look at the discussion surrounding two of these practices: a) those who inquire of the *ʾôb*, and b) those who inquire of the *yidděʿônim*. Since the actions taken by these individuals are not described in any significant detail, we must begin with an examination of the *ʾôb* and the *yidděʿônim* themselves.

It is generally agreed that the *ʾôb* are the spirits of dead ancestors and/or the anthropomorphic figurines made to represent them. However, "interpreters are uncertain about the precise understanding of the term… this uncertainty arises from the variety of contexts in which the term appears, leading to its proposed connection with a wide range of different concepts – spirit, ancestral spirit, the person controlled by a spirit, a bag of skin, the pit from which spirits are called up, a ghost, a demon."[68] The idea that the *ʾôb* is an ancestral ghost originates from the theory that the word is a corruption of *ʾāb*. This idea is attractive because of the frequent expressions in the Bible that frame Sheol as the place where one goes to be with

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[66] Note that the verb used here is *šāʾal*.

[67] Harold Remus, "Magic, Method, Madness," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999): 265.

[68] Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Magic (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 4*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 469.

their fathers or is gathered to their kinsmen.[69] Hoffner has argued that instead the word is linked

to the Hittite *abi*, a pit used specifically for accessing the dead in the netherworld. He also notes

similarities with the Assyrian *abu* and the Ugaritic *ilib*.[70] This idea is controversial, since the

way the word ʾôb is used in the Hebrew Bible does not seem to fit with the meaning 'pit,'[71] but it

is unclear how the word could refer to a spirit in some contexts either. For example, King

Manasseh makes an ʾôb and a *yiddĕʿônim* (2 Kgs 21:6), and Josiah burns them as part of his

reform (2 Kgs 23:24). It is certainly not obvious how one can simply create and destroy a dead

ancestor, unless of course this is a reference to a statuette that represents them. Leviticus 20:27

further confuses this issue, as it mentions someone who has an ʾôb inside of them.[72] Perhaps the

only solution is to assume that there are various meanings to the word that depend on the time

period or region in question.

There are different problems with the interpretation of the *yiddĕʿônim*. We can agree on

the etymology of the word – it comes from the verb *ydʿ* 'to know.' The question is who are these

yiddĕʿônim 'ones who know'? They could be the ancestral dead, who have knowledge of future

events for example, or they could be the mediums, the ones who know the dead (who are able to

converse with them).[73]

Finally, we should address the false association of the *terāphîm* with necromancy. The

terāphîm are known from 16 biblical passages; eleven of these clearly place them in the context

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[69] Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 247-248.

[70] Harry A. Hoffner, "Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew ʾôb," *JBL* 86 (1967): 385.

[71] Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 252.

[72] Recognizing this, as well as the idioms "to be defiled by" and "to whore after" used elsewhere in conjunction with the ʾôb and *yiddĕʿônim*, Jacob Milgrom argues that the reference must be to the spirit of the ancestor rather than a physical object; *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1738. However, this does not completely solve the problem – he does not explain how one could create and destroy ghosts.

[73] Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Magic (OT)," 469.

of divine consultation, while the remainder make no mention of their use.[74] Micah made an *ēpôd*

and *terāphîm* (Judg 17:5). We know that the *ēpôd* was a cultic garment used to consult Yahweh

(Judg 17:5; 18:17-18, 20; Hos 3:4) – in this context, the *terāphîm* were probably used to consult

with other gods. They would later be critiqued by the prophet Zechariah as having "spoken

falsely" (Zech 10:2).

Several times, the word *ʾĕlōhîm* is used to refer to the *terāphîm* (Gen 31:30, 32; Judg

18:24), suggesting that they were personal or household gods. This has also caused scholars to

consider whether they might represent dead ancestors. We know that they were small enough to

carry around, and were sometimes carried along by individuals who were traveling (Gen 31:19;

Judg 18:14).[75] These two facts about the *terāphîm* led to Hoffner's conclusion that the word

originated from the Hittite *tarpi*, a word for protective spirits often associated with the

netherworld.[76] Because they are listed along with the *ʾôb* and a *yiddĕʿônim* in the list of Josiah's

ritual reforms (2Kgs 23:24), other scholars have proposed that the *terāphîm* were used for

necromancy as well.[77]

While van der Toorn has suggested a possible connection to dead ancestors at Nuzi and

Emar, Flynn rightly points out that if even this were true, it would not be reason to conclude that

this is the meaning of *terāphîm* in the Hebrew Bible. "We must assess the interpretation of

teraphim as dead ancestors instead according to the biblical evidence."[78] However, there are

three verses that mention *terāphîm* in the context of necromancy (Ezek 21:26; 1 Sam 15:23;

Zech 10:2). Flynn explains these as post-Josianic texts written for the sole purpose of

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[74] Shawn W. Flynn, "The Teraphim in Light of Mesopotamia and Egyptian Evidence," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 708.

[75] Not only did Rachel bring her father's *terāphîm* with her when she traveled, the Danites, en route to their new territory in the North, stole *terāphîm* from Micah's house (Judg 18:14); Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 263.

[76] Harry A. Hoffner, "Hittite Tarpiš and Hebrew Terāphîm," *JNES* 27 (1968): 66.

[77] Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 261.

[78] Flynn, "The Teraphim," 701.

illegalizing practices that were previously acceptable.[79] The authors connected the *terāphîm* to

the dead, though they originally had no such connotation.

2.3.3 Evidence from personal names

We may also be able to extract a good deal of information about the religious beliefs of the

ancient Israelites by analyzing the personal names of individuals. While religious traditions

evolved, and texts were often modified as a result, we can be sure that generally the names of the

characters in these texts were unaffected.[80] Ancient names were largely theophoric. This means

that the name of the deity was embedded in the name itself, for example: *Joshua* 'Yah[81] saves,

Zechariah 'Yah remembers,' *Uzziel* 'my strength is El.'[82] Because of the clan mindset, there

was a strong connection to family in the ANE, and this of course extended beyond the grave.

Pre-Yahwistic West Semitic names attest to the worship of the dead. The names of family

members often appear in the theophoric position.[83] Some examples of names are *abī-ilum* 'my

father (is) a god,' *ammi-el* 'my ancestor (is) a god,' and *abī-nāṣir* 'my father protects.'[84] These

names also show that the dead were believed to intervene in the daily lives of their families; they

not only took their offerings but answered their prayers.

Out of 61 theophoric names found in the Bible that date to the early monarchy, 32% have a

family member as the divine element, 19% are El, 19% are Yahweh, and 6.5% are Baal.[85]

Interestingly, after Josiah's reform, these statistics completely change. Of the 57 biblical names

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[79] Flynn, "The Teraphim," 703.

[80] van der Toorn, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms," 1.

[81] Note that in personal names, Yahweh appears in its abbreviated form 'Yah.'

[82] Johann Jakob Stamm, "Names: In the Bible," in *Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 14*, ed. M. Berenbaum and F. Skolnik (Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), 765.

[83] Stamm, "Names: In the Bible," 766.

[84] van der Toorn, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms," 7.

[85] The other 3% are old epithets; Rainer Albertz, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, ed. J. Bodel and S. Olyan. (The Ancient World: Comparative Histories; Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 104.

that date to this period, only 2% contain a divinity identified as a relative – 78% are Yahwistic.[86]

While the evidence we gather from these names is interpretive, we can use it to learn some things

about the religion of the ancient Israelites: a) they engaged in ancestor worship, b) in the late

monarchy, most of the population shifted exclusively to Yahwism, likely under pressure from the

state.[87]

3. Josiah's Reform

According to the Bible, after the Assyrians took over in the northern kingdom, many

refugees fled south to Judah. Hezekiah, concerned about foreign influence, made an attempt to

reform society.[88]   He centralized the worship of Yahweh, destroying the high places and

breaking the standing stones, he cut down the Asherah, and destroyed Nehuštan (2 Kgs 18:4).

This progress was short-lived though. Everything that Hezekiah had done was undone by his

son, Manasseh, who permitted religious diversity once more.[89] 2 Kings 22-23 gives the account

of the great Josiah, who discovered a scroll, referred to only as "the scroll of the law" (22:8, 11),

during temple renovations and sought from then on to do everything properly in the eyes of God.

Scholars have long debated what this scroll might have been.[90] Most modern scholars have

concluded that it was some early form of the book of Deuteronomy that is no longer extant.[91] 2

Kings 23 describes Josiah's many reforms, which eclipse the work of Hezekiah and make him

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[86] Ibid.

[87] van der Toorn, "Ancestors and Anthroponyms," 8.

[88] Mark Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2006), 50.

[89] Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform*, 51.

[90] In fact, some do not even believe it even existed. Philip R. Davies says "there is a possibility either that the law book motif was inserted into a reform narrative or a reform narrative developed after a story of the discovery of a law book;" "Josiah and the Law Book," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (LHOTS 393; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 68.

[91] Lauren A. S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 4.

the favoured king of the DH. His reforms concerning necromancy and magic are outlined in

verse 24:

> "Also, he burned all the ʾōbôt, the yiddĕʿônim, the terāphîm, the gilulîm, and all the
> abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem…"

We should assume that ʾōbôt and yiddĕʿônim are grouped together because they are two objects

associated with necromancy, while the terāphîm and gilulîm are figurines representing deities /

protective spirits. Josiah's destruction of many kinds of religious practices seen as incompatible

with the proper worship of Yahweh must really have frightened the Jews, no king before him had

undertaken such a comprehensive reform. This great societal revolution must have had a

considerable impact on later authors, that is if it ever took place.

3.1 The historicity of the reform

The historicity of Josiah's reform has been called into question by modern scholarship. If

such an event did in fact happen, might it have been on a much smaller scale than is described in

the Bible? First of all, there is the issue of sovereignty. At the time Josiah is said to have

completely reformed Judah and shut down all rival temples – for which he presumably

encountered a considerable amount of violent resistance – the Egyptians had jurisdiction over the

whole of Palestine.[92] Did Josiah exercise enough power in the region so that this event to be

historically plausible? Davies suggests that Egypt may not have been totally invested in Judah,

save for the territory along the coast.[93] This may have given Josiah the ability to do what he

wanted without interference. Zvi makes a compelling argument: "there is no clear, concrete

reference to that [Josiah's] reform in any prophetic book, even those that are set in that period

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[92] Immediately after the fall of Assyria, the Egyptians moved in and filled the power vacuum so that no other lurking powers had the chance to; Davies, "Josiah and the Law Book," 65.
[93] Davies, "Josiah and the Law Book," 66.

and even those that include quotations from the book of Kings."[94] The story of Josiah's reform

in 2 Kings is quite obviously a piecemeal composition that has had multiple redactions.[95] It has

been attributed to the DH,[96] which dates to around 550 BCE.[97] The reform it describes, were it

true, would have taken place between 622 and 609 BCE.[98] This means that the authors of the DH

were writing only seventy years after the purported events. They would have had to be very

cautious about what they invented and what they embellished. The children and grandchildren

of eye-witnesses would be keen to any great discrepancies between what they know to have

taken place and what was reported in the DH. There may well have been eye-witnesses alive as

well. Therefore we should suppose that, if these dates are correct, the story in 2 Kings is fairly

accurate and thus, that a fairly substantial reform took place around the time of Josiah's reign.[99]

3.2 Influence on later biblical authors

Many exilic and post-exilic passages express contempt for practices that were once

accepted, and even widespread, in ancient Israel. We will look at just a few of these as they are

relevant to our discussion. Let us begin by addressing the enigmatic passage from the book of

Ecclesiastes which was referenced at the beginning of this paper:

> "The living know they will die, but the dead know nothing.
> There is no longer a reward for them, for their memory has been forgotten" (14:12)

This makes no sense in any context prior to Josiah's reform, when only one of these four

statements would have been true. We should not be surprised then to find that Ecclesiastes was

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[94] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Josiah and the Prophetic Books: Some Observations," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (LHOTS 393; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 48.

[95] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 4.

[96] Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 312.

[97] Rainer Albertz, "Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (LHOTS 393; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 37-39.

[98] Albertz, "Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," 40.

[99] Albertz, "Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," 41.

composed quite late, perhaps in the 3rd century BCE.[100]   One commentator's remarks are particularly revealing, either of his ignorance or an unreasonably apologetic stance.   In an attempt to explain the rhetoric of the passage, he says "material reward, like knowledge of death, no longer concerns the dead,"[101] and "no account of remembrance will produce a material reward for the dead."[102]   He does not make mention of the fact that at one point in Israelite history, material things were given as gifts to the dead – that is how remembrance translated into reward. Whether it was depositing food for the dead regularly beneath the home or at the family shrine, or annually as part of the *kispu* ritual, the dead were given things because they were believed to need them.   This passage can only be understood after Josiah, when all practices associated with the dead or other gods were made illegal and abominable.

Another similar case is Job 14:12:

"Man lies down and will not rise again, before the heavens are no more he will not awake, nor be roused out of his sleep."[103]

Though Job is difficult to date, and the righteous sufferer motif is clearly very ancient, the manner in which the author questions the universality of Sheol (Job 21:23-26) and claims that the dead cannot be awoken (14:12) reveals an exilic or post-exilic provenance.   Thus, the reference to the impossibility of contacting the dead was clearly a result of the Josianic reforms. Jeremiah 51:39, which dates to the same time period as Job – around 587 BCE – also implies that the dead cannot be roused.[104]

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[100] James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 50.

[101] Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 149.

[102] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 150.

[103] David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 278.

[104] Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

The final pertinent biblical passages that we will discuss here are the sections of legal code

that prohibit ancestor worship and necromancy. These are found in Deuteronomy 18 and

Leviticus 19. It may be useful to compare and contrast them here:

"There will not be found among you a person who passes his son or daughter through the fire, a *qōsēm qěsāmîm*, a *měʿônēn*, a *měnaḥēš*, a *měkaššēp*, a *ḥōbēr ḥāber*, an inquirer of an *ʾôb* or *yidděʿōnî*, or one who calls up the *mētîm*, for all who do these things are an abomination to Yahweh…" (Deut 18:10-12).	"Do not turn to *ʾōbôt* and do not search for the *yidděʿōnîm* to become impure by them…" (Lev 19:31).[105] "And if any person turns to *ʾōbôt* and *yidděʿōnîm* to whore after them, I will set my face against that person and I will cut him off from among his kin" (Lev 20:6).[106] "A man or a woman who has an *ʾōb* or *yidděʿōnî* in them shall be put to death; they shall be pelted with stones…" (Lev 20:27).[107]

We see that the author of Deuteronomy gives the reader a much more comprehensive list of

offensive practices, though both contain the *ʾôb* and *yidděʿōnî*. As we have seen, many of the

other terms appear to be interchangeable, perhaps displaying a concern over semantics that we

cannot fully appreciate at this point in our scholarship. The author of the Leviticus passages in

question, H,[108] may not have felt it was necessary to list all these variations of essentially the

same thing. However, his great distress over the subject is apparent for a different reason; he has

included the same prohibition against consulting mediums three times within two chapters.

Though we cannot pin down an exact date for either of these authors, we do know that they both

date from around the time of exile, and were clearly influenced by the Josianic reforms.

"Necromancy was as pervasive in Israel as in the ANE. Because it was associated with ancestor

worship, it was deemed a form of idolatry in the biblical codes and therefore banned."[109]

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[105] Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1595.
[106] Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1726.
[107] Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1727.
[108] Leviticus 17-27 belongs to the Holiness (H) source; Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1319. Milgrom claims that, with the exception of a few verses, H is pre-exilic; *Leviticus*, 1361; however Monroe believes the Holiness Code was reshaped by an exilic or even post-exilic Deuteronomistic redactor; *Josiah's Reform*, 6.
[109] Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1700.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated several important aspects of the ancient Israelite belief in life after death, and the necromantic rituals that connect the living to their ancestors. At death, the inanimate body was interred in a man-made pit, which appears to have been symbolically linked to the netherworld. The grave served as the model for the description of the netherworld, that is its characteristics were extrapolated in order to conceptualize the state of existence deep below. Although the biblical authors highlight the difference between the way the righteous and wicked die, it has been shown that all souls were believed to go to Sheol, without distinction. Archaeological evidence has shown that all burials in the Levant, regardless of type, have included grave goods. At the very least, vessels were included with the dead, and other comforts were given according to the wealth of the particular family. This is not only true of ancient Israel, but Ugarit and Egypt as well, demonstrating a common ANE belief in the continuation of life after death and the requirement of families to take care of the ancestors. This was thought to be beneficial to the living as well; the dead were useful in telling the future, blessing and protecting those who treated them well. In the Bible, we find that there are many methods of communicating with the dead, however these are all prohibited. King Josiah's seventh century BCE reforms functioned to centralize worship in Jerusalem and prevent the reverence of other gods, including dead ancestors. After this time, many biblical passages were written that reflected these reforms, perhaps even unconsciously, and led to the popular (but false) view that ancestor worship and necromancy were always unacceptable and incompatible with Yahwism.

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