

Immortality in Job and Elsewhere in the OT

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I. Introduction

In regard to immortality, as with a number of other subjects, liberal and conservative OT scholars take a different approach. Both see development of ideas in the course of time, but the former take an evolutionary approach and the latter that of progressive revelation.

In the evolutionary view, development is from lower to higher, from more primitive to more modern, from less accurate to more accurate. The whole development is the result of human reflection and speculation.

In the progressive revelation view, development is from hints to statements, from lesser to greater detail, and the whole is the result of God's gradual unfolding of his plan to mankind.

So here, liberals see in the concept of immortality evolution and contradiction, but Bible believers see gradual growth in detail.

II. Continued Existence of the Individual Beyond Death

A. In the Book of Job

Job 3:13-19 (NASU) [Job speaking] *"For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, 14 With kings and [with] counselors of the earth, Who rebuilt ruins for themselves; 15 Or with princes who had gold, Who were filling their houses [with] silver. 16 Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, As infants that never saw light. 17 There the wicked cease from raging, And there the weary are at rest. 18 The prisoners are at ease together; They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. 19 The small and the great are there, And the slave is free from his master. "* Note 3:16 and compare with 7:18, 21.

Job 14:7-15 (NASU) [Job again] *"For there is hope for a tree, When it is cut down, that it will sprout again, And its shoots will not fail. 8 Though its roots grow old in the ground And its stump dies in the dry soil, 9 At the scent of water it will flourish And put forth sprigs like a plant. 10 But man dies and lies prostrate. Man expires, and where is he? 11 [As] water evaporates from the sea, And a river becomes parched and dried up, 12 So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep. 13 Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, That You would conceal me until Your wrath returns [to You], That You would set a limit for me and remember me! 14 If a man dies, will he live [again]? All the days of my struggle I*

will wait Until my change comes. 15 You will call, and I will answer You; You will long for the work of Your hands. " Note especially verses 13-15.

B. Elsewhere in the Old Testament

2 Sam 12:23 (NASU) [David regarding his dead son] "*But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.*"

Ezek 32:31 (NASU) [speaking of dead Pharaoh] "*These Pharaoh will see, and he will be comforted for all his hordes slain by the sword, [even] Pharaoh and all his army,*" declares the Lord God.

Eccl 12:6-8 (NASU) [*Remember Him*] *before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; 7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"*

Psa 23:1-6 (NASU) *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. 3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* Note change in speech figure at nightfall, from shepherd/sheep to host/guest.

III. Sheol, the Place of the Dead

A. Introduction

1. Liberal view (from Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:146ff, article by Joachim Jeremias on *hades*)

In the LXX *hades* is almost always a rendering of *sheol*. In the OT this signifies the dark (Job 10:21f) "realm of the dead" which is set beneath the ocean (26:5) and which consigns all men indiscriminately (Ps 89:49) behind its portals to an eternal (Job 7:9f; 16:22; Qoh 12:5) shadowy existence (Is 14:9), cf. 38:10; Job 38:17. This OT *sheol* idea is in essential agreement with the conception of the future world found in popular Babylonian belief.
2. Word study of *sheol*

The word occurs 65x in the Masoretic Text.
The LXX translates this by *hades* 61x, elsewhere by *thanatos*.
The vulgate always uses *infernium* or *inferi*.

B. Job and elsewhere in the OT compared re/ the nature of *sheol*

1. Location

Down: 7:9; 11:8

Hidden: 14:13 (but 26:6)

Gen 37:5

Dig: Amos 9:2 (but John 2:2)

2. Inhabitants

Wicked: 24:9

Righteous: 14:13

All: 30:23

Ps 9:17

Jacob: Gen 42:38

Hezekiah: Isa 38:10

Ps 89:48

3. Conditions

Sudden entry: 21:13; 27:19-21

No activity: 3:13-19

Destruction: 17:13; 24:19

No escape: 7:9-10
(but deliverance?)

Swallowed up alive:

Num 16:30,33; Ps 55:15;

Pr 1:12

Ps 6:5; 31:17; Eccl 9:10

Ps 16:10; 49:14; Pr 15:11; Is 14:11

Ps 89:48

IV. Resurrection

A. In Job

See Job 14:12-15, above (under IIA)

Job 19:25-27 (NASU) [Job speaking] *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27 Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!"*

B. Elsewhere in the Old Testament

1 Sam 2:6 (NASU) *The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

Psa 17:13-15 (NASU) *Arise, O Lord, confront him, bring him low; Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword, 14 From men with Your hand, O Lord, From men of the world, whose portion is in [this] life, And whose belly You fill with Your treasure; They are satisfied with children, And leave their abundance to their babes. 15 As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake. Note how verse 15 contrasts with 13-14: "this life" vs "when I awake"*

Psa 49:14-15 (NASU) *As sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; And the upright shall rule over them in the morning, And their form shall be*

for Sheol to consume So that they have no habitation. 15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive me.

Hos 13:14 (NASU) *Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion will be hidden from My sight.*

Isa 26:19 (NASU) *Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew [is as] the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.*

Isa 25:6-8 (NASU) *The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, [And] refined, aged wine. 7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken.*

Dan 12:1-2 (NASU) *Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands [guard] over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace [and] everlasting contempt.*

V. Judgment Beyond This Life

A. In Job

Not a major feature, but seems to arise twice:

1. with respect to Job's vindication;
2. later, in solving the problem of the prosperity of the wicked.

Job 19:23-29 (NASU) [Job speaking] *"Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! 24 "That with an iron stylus and lead They were engraved in the rock forever! 25 "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27 Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me! 28 "If you say, 'How shall we persecute him?' And 'What pretext for a case against him can we find?' 29 "[Then] be afraid of the sword for yourselves, For wrath [brings] the punishment of the sword, So that you may know there is judgment." Note especially how verses 23-24 and verses 28-29 fit the passage between them into this context.*

Job 21, whole chapter, as Job seeks to deal with the prosperity of the wicked.

B. Elsewhere in the Old Testament

Psa 1:4-6 (NASU) *The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.* Note how verses 5 and 6 work, in the context of verse 4.

Psalm 73 doesn't make sense in a model of judgment only here and now:

Psa 73:15-19 (NASU) *If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. 16 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; [Then] I perceived their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!*

It looks like the Psalmist in Psalm 73 understands when he sees the animals being sacrificed (verse 17-19), realizing that this is a picture of the divine judgment we deserve.

Prov 14:32 (NASU) *The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing, But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.*

Ecc 8:8 (NASU) *No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it. 9 All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over [another] man to his hurt. 10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are [soon] forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred [times] and may lengthen his [life], still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. 13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God. 14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. 15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils [throughout] the days of his life which God has given him under the sun. 16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), 17 and I saw every work of God, [I concluded] that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.* Note the play on the phrase "lengthen his days" in verses 12-13, and especially the idea of lengthening one's days "like a shadow" (presumably near sunset, when the length of the shadow becomes arbitrarily long).

Dan 12:1-3 (NASU) *Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands [guard] over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace [and] everlasting contempt. 3 Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

VI. Conclusions

I suggest we see in these passages examples of the growing awareness of survival after death, of the intermediate state between death and resurrection, of the resurrection, and the last judgement. It is not as clear as it comes to be in the centuries following the completion of the Old Testament, but neither is the earlier information discarded as mistaken.