

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE FROM A
BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY PERSPECTIVE COMPARED TO THE LEVEL
OF SOPHISTICATION AMONG THE LAITY.

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ABSTRACT

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Several key aspects of eschatology and their treatment appear to be under-explored in contemporary preaching. Within the context of individual eschatology, notions of death, the intermediate state, and the eternal state vary widely. A clearer understanding of these facets of the faith are necessary to fully understand the full measure of the work of Christ, the hope Christians have in Him, and the ability to convey these essentials to the lost. In this project, the writer will seek to discover and examine the key aspects of this doctrine and measure the level of sophistication among a sample of the laity. The measurement will be conducted via a confidential online survey of professing believers. At a practical level the goal of the project is that both pastors and laity would be edified on the central issues of the doctrine and that per its content pastors could utilize the data to craft sermons and lessons that take into consideration the identified weaknesses in knowledge as expressed by the participants.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Death is a profound and complex subject. It is the one universal and undeniable fact of life irrespective of age, culture, ideology, or belief. And yet it evokes a wide variety of human responses, whether emotional, physical or material. Variety can be seen not just across different cultures, but also within any one particular culture. Death is universal, but reactions to it are distinctive.¹

To the question, “What happens to you when you die?” one will likely get a fairly small range of answers. There are quite simply not that many options that would come to mind. If that question is asked in the United States, depending on the person’s faith, or lack thereof, one could expect hear a variety of responses. Perhaps some people would say that the departed go to heaven, or that they go to a place of punishment, either temporarily or permanently, i.e. purgatory or hell. Some may hold a more atheistic perspective and believe that the dead simply cease to exist, that death is the end of the line, as it were. Given the increasing influence of Eastern religions, some may hold that the dead will be reincarnated or will become a part of the universe. There is a good chance that the person will say he simply does not know what lies in store beyond this present life. Still, data indicates that they do believe in some sort of continuation of existence after death, and the research also shows that this general belief has held steady over time, at least in the United States.² In some instances this trend is actually on the rise in recent years:

A significantly greater fraction of American adults believe in life after death in the 1990s than in the 1970s. According to data from the general social survey (hereafter GSS) there

¹ Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 23.

² Glenn Firebaugh and Brian Harley, “Americans’ Belief in an Afterlife: Trends Over the Past Two Decades,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 32, no. 3 (1993): 269-78.

has been a marked change in some groups beliefs in the life after death all the Protestants who say they believe in life after death have remained stable at about 85% (very high to begin with, anyway), Catholics, Jews, and people of no religious affiliation at become more likely to report beliefs in the afterlife. For instance, the percentage of Catholics believing in an afterlife rose from 67% to 85% for those born between 1900 and 1970.³

But, as noted, responses would also reflect a variety of beliefs, some of which do not line up with what the Bible actually teaches on the matter, even among professing Christians.

For most people these attitudes are affected at least partially by religious views, yet even within the same religion quite different beliefs about death can coexist. For instance, self-confessed Christians differ over who will be in heaven: whether all of humanity or all the baptized, or all of those with personal faith in Christ.⁴

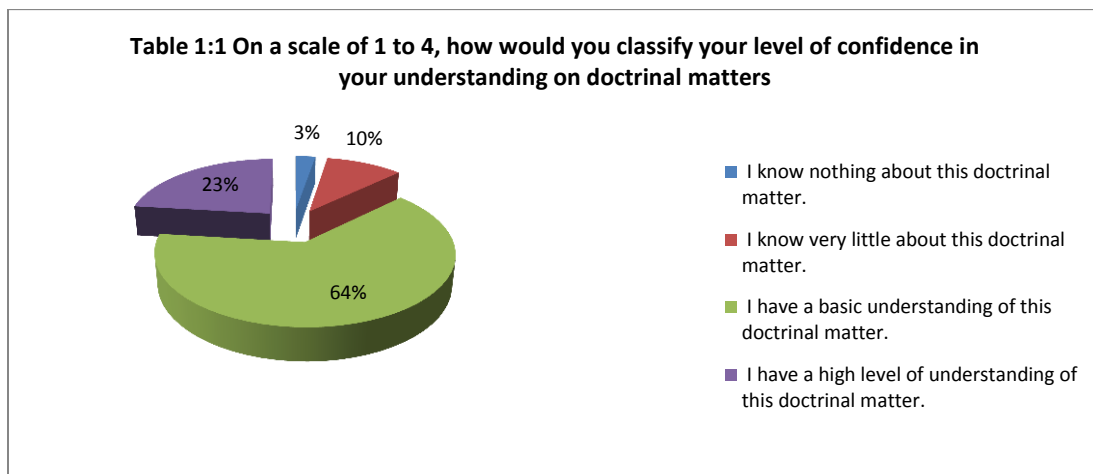
This work will focus upon how professing Christians in the United States answer that question. Do their answers on this questions line up with what the faith identifies as orthodox? Do their views line up with what the Bible teaches on the matter? Have extra-biblical concepts and beliefs worked their way into their understanding of the central and or peripheral items in this doctrine? This thesis project will seek to measure the laity's understanding of the relevant issues related to this doctrine and to measure the level of confidence they have in their professed knowledge of the related matters. These findings will be compared with the biblical and historical theology of the applicable facets of individual eschatology. Finally, the ramifications of a lack of sophistication among the laity regarding the applicable aspects of this doctrine will be considered, and suggestions will be made of a number of practical steps the church can take to raise their level of understanding.

³ Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 8.

⁴ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 23.

Statement of the Problem

Professing Christians have a very low level of sophistication on the key biblical and theological teachings related to the afterlife. The survey tool for this project, which will be explained in the methodology sections below, reflected that only 23% of respondents to the survey claim a high level of understanding on this essential doctrinal matter. Indeed, the study will show that the self-assessment is correct; only a small percentage seem actually to have a high level of sophistication.



Granted, this problem is understandable to some degree. Clearly, the eschatological doctrinal items pertinent to death and the afterlife, as they relate to the Christian faith, can be complicated and difficult to understand. This lack of understanding with the biblical material and historical theology, compounded with social taboos related to discussing death in general, shifting social norms on how the church and secular society interact with death and dying, and a decline in biblical and theological literacy among the populace exacerbate this problem and hinder edifying discussion. The canon of scripture does not give its readers an abundance of detail on exactly how the post-mortal existence will unfold. “While the Bible takes death seriously it does not develop a theology of death. The scene of death is expressed descriptively (as history), poetically (as lamentation and complaint), theologically (as the outcome of sin) and

eschatologically (as overcome through the resurrection of Jesus Christ). Yet there is no single ‘theology of death’ to be found as a thematic development.”⁵ Nevertheless, the Scriptures do provide quite a bit of clarity on a number of the cornerstone issues related to the afterlife.

To this point, and as this project will explore, there is a notable divide between what the Old Testament and New Testament reveal on the topic. In sum, one cannot simply begin to read the scriptures front to back and walk away with one cohesive afterlife narrative. There is also a contrast between the imagery of the afterlife in the Old Testament versus that found in the New Testament. The former, by and large, illustrates a virtually meaningless existence, separated from God, and devoid of activity. Granted this project will show that there are glimpses and hints of something more, but the overwhelming picture the Old Testament paints is captured by the author of Ecclesiastes, who observes, “But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun” (Eccl. 9:4-6, ESV). In contrast the New Testament clearly reflects an existence in the afterlife that is the embodiment of being with God, ruling with God, and perhaps even the perfection of existence and creation. As in this new age, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:3-5, ESV).

⁵ Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death, and Dying* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 38.

Granted these two pictures do not fully convey the range of complexities this project will uncover, nonetheless, even factoring in progressive revelation, this is quite a chasm. How are these vast differences to be reconciled? And do the church laity even have a sense of the tension and difficulty associated with these divergent views? This research and its findings will highlight these complexities and the variety of beliefs found throughout the professing church.

If the basic biblical journey on this front is a complicated one for laity then the theological path, rife with pitfalls and innuendo, is all the more difficult. Millard Erickson captures well the core of the theological problems: “Many of the issues of eschatology are obscure and difficult to deal with. Consequently, some teachers and preachers simply avoid the subject.”⁶ He also thinks it may simply be the case that the study of ‘last things’ tends to come last. Avoidance of the topic of death and its related issues is a very real problem.

Further complicating the matter is the issue of the intermediate state. One can infer from certain passages of scripture, both and Old New Testament, that human existence continues upon the death of our physical body and yet prior to the resurrection. The intermediate state is rife with interesting and complicated metaphysical issues, as is the eternal post-intermediate state. Additional complication to both the intermediate state and eternal state is that each must deal with two populations, i.e. those who are in Christ and those who are not. That is, what does the intermediate state entail for the believers and what does it entail for the non-believer? And what does the eternal state hold for these two populations?

Another problem is the lack of continuity of teaching within Christianity over these matters. Clearly there is a great deal of variation between what the Catholic Church holds on these matters versus what Protestants believe. Protestants, on the other hand, lack what the

⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 1159.

Catholics have in terms of a rather tight theological packaging, due to that fact there are now several thousand different Protestant dominations. Given the lack of a cohesive perspective of the most basic doctrinal aspects of the afterlife and the lack of focus upon teaching this issue, it is not surprising that the laity does not have a high level of sophistication on the matter.

Surrounding this weak foundational understanding are the influences of heretical variations, the influences of other world religions, and perhaps most important, the role of other extra-biblical concepts that are introduced into the dialogue via the media, the arts, and culture. As this work will attempt to show, many of these concepts are not new, but rather are ancient in their origins and never fully left the conversation.

Statement of Importance of the Problem (Theoretical Basis for the Project)

While the nuances of Eschatology that will be reviewed in this work are not the most important doctrinal items of the faith, they are nonetheless anchored to many of its core foundational aspects. Therefore, drift away from these concepts is likely connected to the greater drop in biblical knowledge that has been afoot in western culture for the past several decades. “One of the most serious problems facing the Church in the 21st century is the problem of Biblical illiteracy. Simply put, most professing Christians do not possess a sound and coherent understanding of the Bible, beginning with sound doctrine and general Biblical history. Evidence for this sad reality is quite overwhelming.”⁷ If a professing Christian is not familiar with, or very sure about, the clear biblical promise of the resurrection of believers, what does that imply about what they understand about the work of Christ? What does it say about their biblical literacy? What does it say about the teaching effectiveness of the local church and of the church

⁷ Henry B. Smith, “Biblical Illiteracy,” *Bible and Spade (Second Run)* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 1.

universally? If they know nothing, or very little, about the fate of non-believers, will this not have an impact on how they view people or how they seek to fulfill the Great Commission?

While the repercussions of what one believes about the intermediate state may be minimal, that lack of even knowing that there is some tension and difficulty related to that matter again shows a failure to grapple with the issue.

While this doctrine is not the only doctrine in the Christian faith where there is a lack of understanding on the basics and peripheral aspects, for the reasons mentioned above it may be, of the more front-and-center aspects of the faith, the area where sophistication is among the lowest. In a recent *Christianity Today* article several key doctrines were explored in terms of what Evangelical Christians understood about them. Evangelicals pride themselves on certain things, often in contrast to Mainline Christianity, such as having a high view of scripture and biblically based teaching in their churches. Still the survey “reveals a significant level of theological confusion.”⁸ The article continues, “Many evangelicals do not have orthodox views about either God or humans, especially on questions of salvation and the Holy Spirit.”⁹ In some of the more disheartening findings, 31% held that God is more divine than Jesus, 27% that Jesus was created by God, 18% that the Holy Spirit is less divine than God the Father and Jesus, and a clear majority of 58% held that the Holy Spirit is a force and not a personal being. “Evangelicals did score high on several points. Nearly all believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (96%), and that salvation is found through Jesus alone (92%). Strong majorities said that God is sovereign over all people (89%) and that the Bible is the Word of God (88%).”¹⁰ Granted, “Evangelical” is a widely used term encompassing numerous groups and denominations, but nonetheless these

⁸ New Poll Finds Evangelicals’ Favorite Heresies, Survey finds many American evangelicals hold unorthodox views on the Trinity, salvation, and other doctrines, Kevin P. Emmert/ October 28, 2014.

⁹ Ibid.

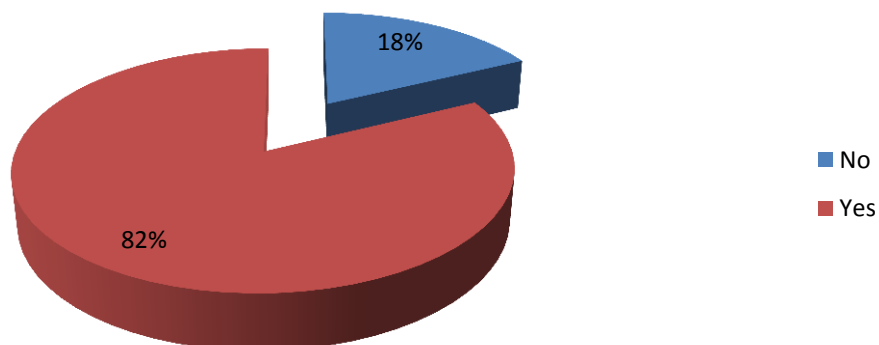
¹⁰ Ibid.

findings make the point that doctrinal sophistication is low within professing Christianity on several tenets of orthodoxy.

Given the decline of biblical literacy in the United States on many of the more apparent pillars of the faith it stands to reason that the complex issues related to death and the afterlife, already an often overlooked area of study, would reflect this downward trend all the more. In the ramp up of considering this area of study the writer queried many friends and acquaintances for a number of years, questioning how often, if ever, they had sat through of study of the doctrine of death and the afterlife. Had their pastor done a series on the matter? Had their Sunday school class or small group systemically approached the matter? Have they ever sat through a single sermon on the topic? Time and time again the answer was “never” or “no...nothing.” Granted a few had, but this was an overwhelming minority.

Table 1:2 below presents the striking testimony, from the laity themselves, that the church has a problem pertaining to the teaching of this doctrine. No other question in the survey for this thesis yielded such a consensus as this item. While this work will breakdown this question a bit more in our conclusion in Chapter 5, it does seem appropriate to anchor this introduction with such a finding. Eighty two percent of the survey respondents state the church needs to spend more time on this doctrinal matter. Herein lies the key motivation for this project, the church is not teaching about this doctrine, sophistication on the matter is low, and the laity themselves are overwhelmingly hungry for teaching in this doctrinal area.

Table 1:2 Do you think the church needs to spend more time and effort teaching over the doctrine of the afterlife?



Statement of Limitations

There are six noteworthy areas of limitation in this study. The first relates to the historical and theological scope of the study. Given the variety of views and interpretations on these matters this work cannot cover the full scope of variation that exists either in ancient or contemporary times. The work will seek to convey the core expressions of these matters as conveyed in scripture, explain the Old Testament descriptions from the perspective of the original audience, and track the shift of opinion during the Intertestamental Period that was later expanded in the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the apostles. In addition, this work will track the most pertinent opinions on the matter via the historical theology from the Early Church Fathers to the present. This work will not explore views outside the borders of accepted orthodoxy, or views that have not gained a noted audience within orthodoxy. The survey tool questions will be anchored to concepts within this, still broad, scope.

A second limitation relates to the scope of philosophical issues this topic opens up for consideration. While the metaphysical questions on this issue are most complex and ample this

work will not seek to delve too deeply into issues related to the mind-body problem. This project will have to touch upon aspects of that issue, especially in the section exploring opinions on the intermediate state, but this exploration will be brief and properly practical.

The survey tool seeks to only measure what is considered to be the most basic pillars of the matter. That is, capture the most basic aspects of the respondents' views and comprehension of the resurrection, the intermediate state, the eternal state, the fate of the lost and those in Christ, Annihilationism, Universalism, and understanding of the relevant common terms.

Another limitation involves the racial and denominational makeup of the survey respondents. While the survey tool sample size exceeded the goal of 200 respondents, the pool was largely made up of Caucasians Protestants. Efforts were made to reach out to various groups to increase diversity in both of these areas, but met with little success.

Next, this work will not seek to clarify how the bodily resurrection of believers, the intermediate state, the eternal state, the fate of the lost and those in Christ, Annihilationism, and Universalism intersect chronologically with the various views of the return of Christ, specifically theories of a rapture event and views of the millennial reign. On the contrary it is the goal of this work purposely to move away from these aspects of the eschatological discussion, aspects that have perhaps taken up too much of the attention of certain niches of the professing church at the cost of knowledge of the equally important items that will be reviewed. This work will spend some time regarding the theories around the timing of the bodily resurrections of the righteous in Christ and the unsaved, but primarily to make the point that scripture does teach a resurrection of all of humanity.

Additionally, this work will not spend a great deal of time grappling with the theological nature of death itself, or theories of man's conditional or potential immortality. It is worth noting

that over the centuries there has been important scholarship on the question of would Adam have lived forever had the Fall of Man not occurred. It was a matter of noted concern as far back as the Council at Carthage in AD 418. Whether man had natural immortality prior to the event in the Garden of Eden has long been debated. “Traditional Protestant theology, finding its roots in Augustine and fortified by the thought of Calvin, has generally held that death was not a condition to which Adam was subject prior to the fall.”¹¹ All of orthodoxy agrees that sin was the central factor in ushering in this age of death. However, here is a divide whether or not that sin led to banishment from the garden and therefore no access to the tree of life, thus ending our potential immortality or that sin itself simply destroyed that potential reality. This project’s survey tool findings reflect a sophistication gap on much more straightforward questions. It is presumed this final area of limitation has not been greatly explored the laity and this work will not seek to prove that reality.

Finally, it is not the purpose of this work to determine an action plan that will seek to remedy any sophistication gap among the laity by the local or universal church on the applicable doctrinal matters. As stated earlier this work will offer some practical thoughts in the conclusion as to how the church could react to these findings and some basic strategies to meet an established need among the body of believers. This project’s mission is to primarily clarify the laity’s understanding of the core issues of individual eschatology in light of borders of orthodoxy.

Statement of Methodology

Above all else the data collected for this project was meant to be practical so that it might be of some use to pastors, teachers, and laity. The presumption that the laity lacked a basic

¹¹ Anderson, *Theology, Death, and Dying*, 51.

understanding of this doctrine, its key terms, the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and the tension and complications within was factored into the questions themselves, the order in which they appeared, and in the wording of how certain questions were reframed and asked again. The tool used to measure the professing Christian respondents understanding and beliefs on these doctrinal matters was specifically written for this project. It was an anonymous and secure 31 question survey that was a mix of multiple choice and “Yes” or “No” answers. The questions were discussed, crafted, and reviewed by Dr. Rick Rasberry (Mentor), Dr. Leo Percer (Reader), Dr. Mark A. Tinsley (Peer), and Pastor Jon Dupin, (Teaching Pastor Brentwood Church) through the fall and winter of 2013. The sample was crafted using a Google Survey which was administered via social media, i.e. Facebook, in February and March of 2014. This methodology was approved by The Liberty University IRB. This social media approach was used in an effort to capture a wide variety of the population and secure an ample sample size. In addition, the survey was anonymous as to ensure the respondents would not be intimidated by the perceptions associated with showing a potential limited knowledge of a key doctrine within their professed faith. In sum, the respondents were “free” to do poorly with confidence no one would know their identity, even the administrator.

The goal sample size for the project was 100-200 respondents. This goal was met with 225 viable submissions within the first few weeks of deploying the tool. The only submissions that were not calculated in to the data results were those who’s respondent did not answer the question verifying they were a Christian in the affirmative. Since the stated mission of this work is to clarify what believers understand about this doctrine, the results of the few non-believers that took the survey were not factored into the final results. It is worth noting that there were less than ten submissions that were not viable. In an effort to insure the questions were

understandable and that the tool were performing properly a number of previously targeted respondents were approached upon completions of the survey and asked if they any issues or questions. From these interactions there were no noted problems with the questions themselves or with the functionality of the tool. It is worth noting that each of these initial early test respondents mention, in some similar fashion, “I did not know any of that stuff.” Clearly this was both discouraging and encouraging at the same time. It was discouraging in the sense that one would hope many of these items would be known to professing Christians. Conversely, it was encouraging in the sense that the early returns showed this project’s hypothesis to be true, that many believers were not very knowledgeable of the issues in question.

Besides the questions that sought to measure the respondent’s basic understanding of some of the key aspects of the Christian doctrine of the afterlife, respondents were also asked a number of biographical and socio-economic questions. Additional questions sought to quantify aspects of their faith such as whether they were Christians, how long they had been believers, the status of their church membership, their denominational association, the frequency of their church attendance, and whether they had any specific courses or educational training over this doctrine. Before engaging the specific doctrinal questions, respondents were also asked to rate their level of confidence in their understanding of this doctrine on a 1 to 4 Likert scale. All of these preliminary questions were set to create a point of comparison to the latter doctrinal portion to see if there were notable trends between those caveats and doctrinal knowledge.

The doctrinal questions centered primary on measuring their understanding or affirmation of the bodily resurrection of believers and non-believers, the eternal state, the intermediate state, Universalism, and Annihilationism. Respondents were also asked questions to measure their understanding of what the Old and New Testaments taught regarding the intermediate state and

the eternal state. That is, the questions sought to measure their understanding of the very limited expression of these items in the Old Testament. Also included in the survey were questions related to how well the respondents understood the role and concept of Sheol in the Old Testament. This was done in order to juxtapose any teaching related to resurrection in the Old Testament, and their understanding of the basic timeline and tension between the two testaments on these concepts. That is, for example, do they understand the necessity for an intermediate state in light of the reality that people have departed and yet the resurrection has not occurred?

The introductory chapter of this work is based upon the stipulation of the project guidelines set forth by the Doctor of Ministry Program at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and has sought to answer the relevant questions relating to purpose, problem, methodology, limitations, etc. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this project will seek to clarify the biblical and historical theological aspects of the major areas touched upon in the survey questions to distinguish the strength of weaknesses of the respondents' answers. Below is a breakdown of the chapters and their major areas of review and engagement.

Chapter 2 explores "What does the Old Testament express about the Afterlife?" The content will deal with the general treatment of death and the afterlife in the Old Testament. In that portion of the project the work will look at the concept and imagery related to Sheol, the fate of the righteous and wicked, and the future hope of the departed or lack thereof in ancient Israel. The chapter will begin with showing the distinctiveness of ancient Israel's beliefs in this area by comparing and contrasting them with those of her ANE contemporary cultures, including the Egyptians, Greeks, and Mesopotamians. After the work's treatment of the ancient Israelites' beliefs on this front, the work will review how the respondents answered the applicable portion of the survey tool questions that related to the Old Testament.

Chapter 3 will look at the afterlife in the Intertestamental Period and New Testament. There the work will deal with the transition from the limited picture of this doctrine presented in the Old Testament to that which developed from the Intertestamental Period through the New Testament and Apostolic Era. It will trace the emerging view of resurrection as the focal point of Jewish and Christian belief during this time, via the Second Temple Literature and the relevant passages in the Gospels, epistles, and Revelation. It will explore the nature of the resurrection (spiritual v. bodily) and who will be resurrected. Next, the work will look at what the Bible teaches about an intermediate state and review the notable theories about what this entails. Finally, the chapter will compare and contrast each of these areas with the relevant questions on the survey to see how the respondents replied and measure their level of sophistication.

Chapter 4 will dig into various doctrinal issues of the afterlife in the church era and will deal with a number of questions and theories that primarily came to light from the end of the apostolic age through the Reformation. This will continue an aspect of the discussion related to the intermediate state by reviewing the doctrine of purgatory, looking at this from both the Catholic and Protestant perspective. This will segue into a discussion about the eternal fate of those not in Christ, a journey into the theology of hell. Along those lines the chapter will review the arguments for and against Annihilationism and Universalism, once again via the relevant biblical passages. This portion will also look at some more recent notions about the fate of the departed, some observations about the shift in burial practices over the past century or so.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, will analyze the findings of some of the yet to be reviewed survey data and explore some of the more interesting nuances that came to light in the data. Questions focusing upon the bodily resurrection of humanity will be at the core of this final review. The work will seek to offer some concluding thoughts of the level of sophistication the

findings suggests the laity hold on these issues. Finally, this chapter will explore options as to how the findings might be addressed by the church.

Literature Review

So much of the reading for this project was steeped in the backstory of how the various ANE cultures understood the fate of the departed. Understanding this historical-cultural background was essential since it was the backdrop for the story of the Old Testament. The ancient Israelites knew these other systems of belief as did the early church. The original Israelite audience was tempted and swayed by these cultures. The early church was also tempted by competing doctrines. And this continues to this very day. So texts that provided a fairly extensive overview of these competing beliefs were core to the project.

The literature review phase for this project began some years ago, in 2005, with a reading of Phillip S. Johnston's *Shades of Sheol*, to gain a sense of the contrasting views of the afterlife in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is recognized as a key reference to any study of the afterlife in ancient Israel. This text essentially acts as the anchor to this work's treatment of the Old Testament in Chapter 2. Its robust treatment of Sheol and associated terms, The Pit, the grave, death, and Abaddon, helped to juxtapose the views of the Old Testament audience to those of the Intertestamental and New Testament Period. In addition the text compares and contrasts the beliefs of Israel's ANE neighboring civilizations.

N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* was also an essential tool for digging not only into ancient Israel's backstory on the underworld and the fate of the departed, but also that of the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, and others. Wright's text is a virtual history of concepts of the afterlife for the whole Greco-Roman world from the time of the Old Testament writers

through the apostolic era. His respect and focus on the original ancient audience and their understanding of these issues was most helpful in keeping the modern slant out of the cultural and hermeneutical picture. Wright's journey of tracing the bodily resurrections of Christ and the belief that humanity will also be raised from the dead helps punctuate how antagonistic this belief was to the prevailing Greco-Roman theology of the time. The text is used throughout the whole of this work.

Surprised by Hope was another book from N. T. Wright that, much like Johnston's *Shades of Sheol*, provided more of the core understanding for the various areas of the text that deal with the intermediate state (i.e. Paradise) and explanations related to the reality of the general bodily resurrection of humans, both the righteous in Christ and the lost. The work was also helpful in that Wright acknowledges the shortfall in professing believers' understanding of the doctrine of the afterlife and that bodily resurrection has somehow fallen off the doctrinal radar for that last few generations. This helped validate the rationale for this project. While the sample group for the project was disproportionately Protestant Wright's work help to establish a lack of understanding of this doctrine across the whole of the professing church.

Jacques Le Goff's *The Birth of Purgatory* was essential for the sizable section over the doctrine of purgatory in Chapter 4. It has been recognized as the superlative work on the doctrine since its original publication in 1981. His study in the historical development of the doctrine begins with its ancient (Pre-Christian) origins and works through its various phases of official church recognition.

Jerry L. Walls' *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* gives not only an historical overview of the doctrine of purgatory, but also an explanation of the philosophical and theological principles that undergird its admittedly sparse scriptural foundations. It is truly a

thoughtful apologetic work for belief in purgatory. But given this project's focus on the correlation between scripture and the laity's understanding of the doctrine of the afterlife Walls' more philosophical treatment of the purgatory was of limited use.

Walls also wrote *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* and *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. Both of these works were utilized in sections dealing with the intermediate state, heaven, and hell. Like *Purgatory*, these texts gave thoughtful biblical, theological, and philosophical angles to the work. In addition, they were utilized in the project's dealings with Universalism and Annihilationism, regarding the difficult questions of the eternal state of the wicked. Still, both works though edifying and informative, were more philosophical, like his work on Heaven, and therefore did not have as much utility as other resources on the topics.

Ray S. Anderson's *Theology, Death, and Dying* was utilized in the introduction and was helpful, like *Surprised by Hope*, in showing much of the problem with a lack of edification on the afterlife is, in part, related to how much modern society, in the West, has distanced itself from the whole process of dying and death. Not only is it not dealt with it in church, western culture tends to outsource the whole of the process. It is a strange and yet resourceful little text.

Randy Alcorn's *Heaven* was essential in clarifying the journey and existence of the departed from a Protestant Evangelical perspective. Written as a tool to and for the grieving, it is a very practical, well laid out text. It was utilized in clarifying aspects of the immediate nature of the intermediate state, i.e. being with the Lord in Paradise. The text is a virtual "Biblical Encyclopedia meets Frequently Asked Questions" resource on virtually every detailed aspect of the Christian afterlife. The text was also helpful in hashing out the theory that sophistication on this doctrine is low within the Evangelical ranks due to the disproportionate attention given to rapture theology. It was interesting to note how much Evangelical Alcorn had in common with

Anglican N. T. Wright on the need to refocus the church on the bodily resurrection of believers and of the New Earth. The text is utilized in the introductory chapter, chapters three, four and five, in the sections over the intermediate state, bodily resurrection, and the nature of existence in the eternal state.

Millard J. Erickson's *Christian Theology* was an invaluable resource to gain a cursory sense of the range of views on the many topics this project engaged. Erickson's text was a great tool to explore the historical, Protestant, Catholic, peripheral, and sometimes outlandish positions on the full measure of items in this study of the afterlife. Erickson work, like this work, does not seek to beat up on the church and laity for a lack of understanding on these matters, but rather to be open about the layers of complications a foot in this mix of scripture, theology, and philosophy.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was a key resource to help show that regardless of the doctrinal divide on many key issues between Catholics and Protestants that on many of the core aspects of the afterlife there is general agreement. Granted there is little common ground on the matter of purgatory, nonetheless the *Catechism* helped greatly in shaping the contents of that subject's section in chapter four. But beyond that point of contention this resource helped to more often show the common and time tested ground that the two camps share on the ultimate fate of the righteous and unrighteous, the doctrine of hell, upon Universalism and Annihilationism.

It is hard to capture fully the range of biblical passages included in this work, given the rather broad scope of this project. However, the bookend scriptures that form the boundaries are, "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Cor.15:55 ESV) and "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the

memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5 ESV). For in these two passages can be seen the great divide between the Old and New Testaments and the tension and confusion that abounds with the doctrine of the afterlife. Isaiah 66:22 is the verse that may tie all of the components of both resurrection of the departed and of the new creation together: “‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so will your name and descendants endure.’” Here are seen the layers of hope Christians have in the sustaining work of God, including a future existence that “endures” and of a new creation in which the faithful will dwell.

Much of this project is devoted to clarifying the beliefs of the original biblical audience in ancient Israel. To that end a major treatment of Sheol is engaged with an exploration of many of the applicable verses, including: Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; 44:31, Num. 16:33, Job 21:13, Is. 14:9; 37:35; 38:10, 1 Sam. 2:6, 2 Sam. 22:6, Ps. 6:5; Ps. 18:5; 71:20; 88:6; 89:48, Eccl. 9:10, and Ezek. 32:21. A small portion of work relates to passages relating to the burial practices (Deut. 26:14 and Ez. 43:7). Verses dealing with the concept of national or individual resurrection within Israelite culture are always reviewed, including the key passages Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Isaiah 26:19; Psalm 16, 49, 73, 139; Proverbs 15:24, 23:14; and Job 19:25-27.

The Second Temple Literature, 2 Maccabees 7:9, 11, 14, 23; 1 Enoch 51:1, 61:5; 2 Esdras 7:32; 2 Baruch; and 4 Ezra are utilized to explore the transition between the Old Testament and New Testament beliefs regarding the departed, especially the popularization of the belief in individual bodily resurrection. 2 Maccabees 12:38-46 is also utilized in the section regarding purgatory.

New Testament passages related to showing the foundational aspects of the bodily resurrection of the departed are heavily utilized, including John 5:25-29, 6:38-40, 44-45, 11:25-

26; Matt. 22:23, Mark 8:34-38, 9:9-19, 43-50, 10:29-31; Acts 17:18, 23:6-9, 24:14-21; Rom. 1:1-4, 6:5; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor.5:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Heb. 6:1-2; and Rev. 20:4-6.

Passages that are explored in the treatment of the intermediate state include Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-32, 6:19-31; 23:43; John 17:24; 2 Cor. 5:8, 12:4; Phil. 1:21-23; and Rev. 2:7. Passages that are utilized in the arguments for the doctrine of purgatory include Matt. 5:25-26, 12:31-32; Rev 21:27, and 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

There is a sizable focus on the fate of the wicked and with that, many passages exploring and clarifying the applicable notions and terms (Hades, Gehenna, Hell, and Lake of Fire) are utilized including Isa.25:8; 1 Cor. 15:26, 20:15; Matt 5:29–30, 10:28, 23:15, 23:33, 18:8–9; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 12:4–5; and Rev. 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15.

The project's exploration of the New Heaven and New Earth includes Is. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; and Rev. 21:1. Finally, the charge to laity and leadership alike is in the convicting 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

CHAPTER II

WHAT DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT EXPRESS ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE?

This chapter will look at what the Old Testament teaches about death and the afterlife. One thing that will become apparent is that how the Bible presents the afterlife in both the Old Testament and New Testament is unique. When compared against the prevailing practices of the contemporary cultures there are stark differences. Granted, there are some similarities, but these are of a general nature and somewhat rare. If professing Christians struggle with many of the basics of this doctrine and how it is expressed in the New Testament, and they do, then the Old Testament's distinct and contrasting treatment of it is a flat-out mystery to a clear majority of the laity.

It seems, while questioning people in preparation for the survey, that often the rank and file believer simply imports his understanding about what the New Testament teaches on the matter and exports that same system back to the Old Testament setting. For example, in such a scenario, one might assume that Abraham, in his own time, would have anticipated his afterlife just as it is depicted in the New Testament and Church Era. By the close of this work it will be seen that the Old and New Testaments have very contrasting, even divergent expressions on the matter. As Johnston puts it, "Old and New Testament perspectives on human state after death are significantly different. Indeed for many scholars they are not just distinctive, but actually contradictory."¹ The laity appear to be unaware of this tension and difficulty.

To this end this chapter will compare what is found in scripture with the responses to the applicable questions of the survey tool. The applicable questions are:

¹ Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 16.

1. Do you believe Sheol is a place only for the wicked?
2. Do you believe that Sheol and Hell are the same place?
3. Does the Old Testament directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection”?
4. Do you believe that the resurrection of the body is primarily an Intertestamental (i.e., time between the writing of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament) and New Testament concept?

In this journey of comparing and contrasting these topics this chapter will explore how the ancient Israelites viewed death, their understanding of the fate of the faithful and the wicked, and whether Sheol and hell are the same thing. If contemporary Christians believe that Sheol is only for the wicked and that it is synonymous with hell, then this would show a clear lack of understanding of the tension and difficulty found in the biblical data on this matter. Does the Old Testament indeed explicitly teach about the bodily resurrection of the faithful, or did this clarity come about much later? If respondents are not clear on the picture that the Old Testament paints of the afterlife then they are likely, as mentioned above, to simply export their New Testament understanding back to those times as well. This chapter will look at the relevant passages related to death and Sheol in the Old Testament and spend some time comparing and contrasting what the Old Testament teaches via historical theology with what the participants expressed they understood about what the Old Testament teaches on this doctrine. Sometime will also be spent looking at how the ancient Israelites viewed the afterlife by engaging the key texts on the matter and breaking down their descriptions of Sheol and the state of existence of its inhabitants. To highlight the uniqueness of the amount of focus Ancient Israel placed on these matters, or lack thereof, this section will also look at the important feature of how they focused on the living and the current world versus the existence and situation of the dead.

Death and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East

“The ancient Israelites, like almost every other people, believed in some form of afterlife. But the precise nature of their belief, the extent to which it affected their life and faith, and its development through time, remain subjects of scholarly discussion.”² Contrasting with her neighbors and other ancient cultures, Israel’s theology and traditions were not rich in detail as to what existence for the dead was like in the next world. To begin to clarify the nuances between the Old and New Testament on the issues noted above, this section will begin with a general overview of how death itself is presented in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East, looking at both Israel and a number of her contemporaries, including the Greeks, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians. The order in which these cultures are examined in the sections below is not chronological, but rather is the order of priority of their influence on or interaction with Judea-Christian beliefs about the afterlife.

If the battle cry of the New Testament on death is the hopeful and victorious, "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Cor.15:55 ESV) then the plethora of verses to counter that uplifting cry in the more somber Old Testament message would overwhelm it on sheer volume alone. Perhaps Ecclesiastes 9:5 (ESV) captures the general antithetical tone, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.” Granted, there are some Old Testament verses that offer some hope to the departed, but they are the exception and not the rule. Those will be explored later in this chapter.

² Philip Johnston, “The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994): 416-19.

The Greeks

“In so far as the ancient non-Jewish world had a Bible, its Old Testament was Homer.”³

Between the Iliad and the Odyssey the reader is given a picture of a vast world beyond this age; nothing of the like, in scope or imagery, can be found in the Old or New Testament. Wright continues:

The Two Homeric narratives that left deep imprints on the Greco-Roman imagination throughout the period are worth looking at closely. They offer not only a wealth of detail which is then picked up by later writers and, at a popular level, in epitaphs and funeral practices; they convey a mood which may safely be seen as the basic assumption, the working point from which other views diverged.⁴

While Sheol is seen as “the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek *Hades*, which means underworld,”⁵ there are no extended narratives describing in any great detail what existence is like in Sheol, unlike the numerous detailed treatments of Hades. For ancient Israel and the Old Testament “the logical bedrock is that faith in Yahweh is experienced in this life, not after death: death and the dead lie largely outside the sphere of their religious beliefs. So to expect the Old Testament to have a uniform view of death would be quite wrong. And even to expect its perspectives on death to form a recognizable whole may be inappropriate.”⁶

In the theology of the Greek contemporaries of ancient Israel, while Hades is gloomy and its inhabitants would rather still be among the living,⁷ much like the attitude of the Israelites, there are some details as to the thoughts and activities of heroes in the afterlife, such as Achilles

³ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ Herbert Lockyer, Sr., F.F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, eds., *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), s.v. “Sheol.”

⁶ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 25.

⁷ Od. 11.488-91.

and Hercules, among others. Through the eyes of Odysseus Homer presents a fairly elaborate description of Hades' characteristics and social order, via the rule of its king, Hades. There are also glimpses of "elements of normal life"⁸ in the Greeks' notions of the underworld in the form of "riding, gaming, gymnastics, and especially drinking parties feature in writing, painting and other decorations illustrating the life of the dead and the subsequent classical period."⁹

Greek notions about death and the afterlife go through a series of re-examinations and transitions from the time of Homer, approximately 8th century BC, to the time of Plato, approximately 428-347 BC. "Despite widespread fear of gloomy Hades, practices, pictures and stories indicated the hope for a continuing life not too different from the present one."¹⁰ And these Platonic transitions away from the Homeric depictions are of no small scale, according to Wright:

Here is the central difference between Homer and Plato. Instead of the 'self' being the physical body, lying dead on the ground, while the soul flies away to what is at best a half-life, now the 'self', the true person, is precisely the soul, while it is the corpse that is the ghost. At the risk of oversimplifying what is inevitably a complex matter, we may suggest that Plato has radically modified three central interlocking concepts; the soul, Hades itself, and the fate of the dead.¹¹

This is an enormous and influential transition. Not only does this further delineate and distance the Greek view of the afterlife, i.e. existence in the underworld, from ancient Israel's, but Plato's notions about the superiority and distinctness of the soul over the material physical body will later have a notable influence on what later Christians believe about the state and condition of the departed. Chapter Four of this work will touch upon this extra-biblical influence.

⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 45.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹ Ibid.

So in this new shifting construct who were the dead for Plato, and where were they?

They were souls who had been released from their temporary embodiment. Where were they? In Hades, but a very different Hades, and for many of much pleasanter one, than the Homeric version. What was wrong? Nothing: this was a far better place and condition for them to be. Of course, wicked souls were being punished, but that, though unpleasant for them, was not a bad thing, since it represented the triumph of justice at last.¹²

Other Greek thinkers and their works would continue to push and expand options and notions of the afterlife, almost always with more pleasant or desirable outcomes for at least a portion of the departed. Given the vast expansion and influence of Hellenistic culture, later borrowed by the Roman Empire, and even later by the Renaissance and Enlightenment, these notions, imagery, and concepts of the afterlife continue to have their place in the contemporary conversation.

Ancient Egypt

Another group with a rich and detailed narrative related to the afterlife was the ancient Egyptians. “Egyptians had extensive views on the afterlife, which gradually evolved over nearly three millennia of dynastic rule.”¹³ Given this vastness this section will not delve too deeply into the long and complex array of beliefs that span thousands of years, but will look closely enough to show some contrasts with the Old Testament that once again highlight how distinct ancient Israel’s beliefs were on these issues and how little focus they placed upon the world of the departed. Like the Greeks, compared to ancient Israel’s treatment of matters related to death and the afterlife, the Egyptians are most prolific. Segal captures the spirit of this, observing that “the complexity of Egypt’s religion is sometimes dizzying.”¹⁴ As with the Israelites’ and Greeks’

¹² Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 53.

¹³ Johnston, 230.

¹⁴ Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 33.

beliefs in the afterlife, there were developments and some notable transitions in the Egyptians' views over a long period of time. There are ample data and numerous points of comparison via the available texts and pictorial expression, in the form of hieroglyphics, to show the few similarities and more importantly the vast difference between the theologies these two ancient peoples. "These are recorded primarily in various related texts: the Pyramid Texts from the Old Kingdom (third millennium BCE), the Coffin Texts from the Middle Kingdom (early second millennium) and the Book of the Dead from the New Kingdom (mid to late second millennium), as well as many other books of the netherworld..."¹⁵ "The enormous literary and artistic endeavor invested in the afterlife implies that it held an important place in Egyptian life, one which elicited fascination, hope and fear."¹⁶

As with other ancient cultures contemporary with Israel, and like Israel itself, Egyptian beliefs on the afterlife changed over time; but the picture the Old Testament paints remains very consistent for over a millennium, in both the limited attention it is given and in the lack of detail the key passages give. The details with which the scriptures engage the afterlife are never as descriptive as the Greeks, Mesopotamians, or Egyptians. While the Greeks picture of the afterlife became somewhat rosier in the time, from Homer to Plato, the opposite may be the case with regards to how the inhabitants of the Nile River Basin understood their fate in the next world. Still this is hard to nail down empirically. "As with most cultures, the Egyptian view of the afterlife contained many different and often conflicting opinions at the same time."¹⁷

The best anchor or points of reference in these deep and sometimes murky waters are the various narratives related to the tales of Osiris and Isis. "The Osiris-Isis mythology was central to

¹⁵ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 230.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁷ Segal, *Life after Death*, 47.

the Egyptian notions of the afterlife and also helped to unify Upper and Lower Egypt into one single political and religious unit.”¹⁸ That is, there was great continuity on how the ancient Egyptians comprehended the afterlife. For the purposes of this work the focus will be predominantly on Osiris, who was seen as the lord of the underworld and ruler of the dead. Like Hades, he rules a subterranean abode, called Duat by the Egyptians, that is depicted in different ways through the various centuries. The Osiris myth “is one of the most complete of the religious myths of antiquity, and its exquisite pathos suggests the notion that much of the old nature-worship, which we regard as a sign of spiritual degradation, may have sprung from a poetic sympathy with nature as symbolizing the highest spiritual ideas.”¹⁹ The first mention of Osiris can be found in the Pyramid Texts,²⁰ which date to 2400-2300 BC, making it among the oldest religious texts in the world. For context, “The Pyramid Texts contain references to conditions of civilization which were older than the age of the pyramids.”²¹ Alongside the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead these collections of writings give details on the purpose and imagery of this realm of the dead. The story of Osiris is captured, in part, with:

After Osiris had ruled benignantly over Egypt for many years, and had given laws and customs to her people, he was slain by the evil Typhon, with the help of his seventy-two confederates, was enclosed in a mummy-case and thrown into the Nile. With sorrowing heart Isis sought the corpse of her brother and spouse Osiris, till she found it at Byblos on the coast of Phoenicia, where the waves had tossed it. From here she carried it back again to Egypt, and buried it herself. Meanwhile Horus, their common son, had grown up, who slew Typhon, and so avenged his father Osiris; he however was not dead, but had only descended to the under-world to establish his dominion over that...²²

¹⁸ Ibid., 39

¹⁹ Joseph P. Thompson, “The Egyptian Doctrine of a Future State,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 25, no. 97 (Jan 1868): 71.

²⁰ Andrey O. Bolshakov, “The First Mention of Osiris?,” *EGYPTE PHARAONIQUE*, LXVII 1992 134, 203.

²¹ F. S. Thompson, “The Book of the Dead,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 87, no. 345 (Jan 1930): 91.

²² Thompson, “The Egyptian Doctrine of a Future State,” 71.

The descriptions of what the dead would experience, or hope to experience, in Duat vary. Where “one recent study of Egyptian customs has argued strongly that the dead were thought of as continuing into a still very complete life,”²³ others present a more bleak existence navigating a maze of tunnels in the darkness of the underworld. The wicked, enter the dominion of Osiris only to be eaten by “crocodile, snakes, dragons, and other monsters.”²⁴ Still, the fact that their burial rite included adorning their tombs and burial space with objects and supplies that could be used, and were even deemed necessary, in the afterlife points to their belief in “the hope or a continuing life not too different from the present one.”²⁵

When one thinks of ancient Egyptian images of mummified kings and gold laden tombs, all housed in the great pyramids or on the Valley of the Kings, come readily to mind. All of this relates to their great focus on continued existence beyond this world. The pyramids were a gateway for, initially, only the kings to reach the heavens, to certain planets and certain stars. “The ancient pharaohs were at first the only ones to climb to heaven with the sun because they were the only one who could organize the community and pay to construct the great pyramid, the great stone machine that propelled heaven.”²⁶ But regardless of social status, whether in a future state in the underworld with Osiris or in the heavens among the stars, according to the view of the Egyptians “the souls of all men continued to exist after death,”²⁷ whether they be good or evil.

²³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 46.

²⁴ Thompson, “The Egyptian Doctrine of a Future State,” 82.

²⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 47.

²⁶ Segal, *Life after Death*, 38.

²⁷ Thompson, “The Egyptian Doctrine of a Future State,” 82.

At death all souls alike descend to the under-world. The good cannot escape the necessity of passing through that region of gloom and of mysterious terrors. As the sun descending toward the west encounters the fiends of darkness, and seems for a time to succumb to their power, and to be dragged by them into the realms of night, so the soul descends at first into “a land of darkness, where no light is.” But if fortified by a just and pure life it cannot be vanquished in Hades. Like its great prototype Osiris, it will gain dominion over the under-world; like the sun, having traversed the twelve hours of the night, it will emerge again with the light of a new day.²⁸

“Various texts record in great detail the progress of the deceased through the underworld, until their eventual arrival in the Great Hall of Judgment, where Osiris presided. Here a dead person’s heart was weighed against the feather symbol of the Ma’at, the goddess of order, harmony and truth.”²⁹“Especially, from the New Kingdom onwards, the focus of Egyptian interest in the afterlife appears to have concentrated more and more of the realm of Osiris underground.”³⁰ The ancient Egyptians were not sitting around waiting for an enhanced existence in the afterlife. Clearly, “death is avoided and life is loved,” just like the attitude the Old Testament reveals in the Israelites; but again a culture is seen with more emphasis and literature of what the world beyond will entail.

Mesopotamians

There is also an enormous amount of material that covers the beliefs of the various ancient people groups of Mesopotamia regarding death and the afterlife. Once again one will find certain central commonalities of beliefs between these cultures and Ancient Israel, but there is much written by the Mesopotamians about the afterlife, in contrast to the sparse treatment given it by the Hebrews. The beliefs and notions of Sumer, Babylon, Assur, and Persia for a

²⁸ Ibid., 84.

²⁹ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 231.

³⁰ Segal, *Life after Death*, 50.

period of two thousand years are well documented. As the Greeks had Homer and Plato, and the Egyptians had the Book of the Dead, the Mesopotamians had the Epic of Gilgamesh. This tale is central “for getting a view of the Mesopotamian concepts of death, the netherworld and its denizens...”³¹ The epic is broad reaching and touches upon many of life’s biggest questions. The hero Gilgamesh, king of the city of Uruk, is “searching for life without death”³² and on that journey he learns this is not really possible, but that transition to “a habitation in the netherworld”³³ does occur.

The Mesopotamian departed exist in a netherworld, called Irkalla, among other names. A glimpse of this destination is given in a dream of Enkidu, the companion of Gilgamesh:

[Then into a dove he totally} transformed me
So that my arms were [feathered] like those of a bird.
Looking at me, he leads me to the House of Darkness, the abode of Irkalla,
To the house which none leave who have entered it,
On the road from which there is no way back;
To the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light,
Where dust is their fare and clay their food.
They are clothed like birds, with wings for garments
And see no light, residing in darkness.
In the House of Dust, which I entered,
I looked at [rulers}, their crowns put away;
I [saw princes}, those (born to) the crown, who had ruled the land
from the days of yore.

[These doubl}es of Anu and Enlil were serving meat roasts;
They were serving bake [meats} and pouring cool water from the waterskin.
(Gilg.VII.iv.31-44)³⁴

³¹ Klass Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, West Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 96.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 98.

³⁴ Sandars, N. K. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

One can discern from this and other passages in the epic that this netherworld existence is bearable, but not necessarily a joyful, happy, blissful existence. The overall tone and reality could be described accurately as negative. Irkalla is a place where the inhabitants feast on dust and clay and rulers have lost their crowns and kingdoms. In addition, there is no possibility for the dead to leave this world of the dead as it is a land of no return. “Not even the gods can simply travel from heaven to the netherworld and then backwards.” Even in instances where the tale speaks of the dead interacting with the living, they are still dead. So there are no contractions there according to Spronk:

The idea of the world of the dead as a place no one can leave seems to be contradicted by the many texts speaking of malign spirits of the dead causing distress to the living, because this implies that it was possible for these spirits to leave the netherworld. Also the fact that the spirits of the dead are described as birds (Gilg. VII.iv.31.38) may have to do with their ability to leave the netherworld. However, we should not put too much stress on this manner of speaking, because a spirit of a dead person roaming about in the world of the living still belongs to the world of the dead.³⁵

Other portions of the epic make it clear that the dead are “totally dependent on the living for their well-being in the hereafter,”³⁶ for clothing, food, drink, etc. That is why the grave or tomb itself was so important, as it was the means by which items could be given to the departed, and with that it was “the proper place to bring the food- and libation-offerings to the dead. There were probably special rooms connected with the grave which were used for this purpose.”³⁷ And there was great motivation on the part of the living to be diligent in supplying such goods and services to the departed:

Spirits lacking a place to rest and regular sustenance would become hostile to the living who neglected their task towards the dead. They would leave their world in order to revenge themselves on the living. This was felt as a great threat to the order of the world

³⁵ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 100.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

of the living. The world of the dead and the world of the living are each other's counterparts. They are in perfect balance. This balance *is* lost, however, when inhabitants of one world invade the other. For this reason nobody can leave the netherworld without a substitute. This is an important element in the story of Ishtar's descent into the netherworld and in the myth of Enlil and Ninlil. Consider also the following menacing words of Ishtar: "I will smash the doors of the netherworld, I will place those above below, I will raise up the dead eating the living, so that the dead shall outnumber the living" (Gilg.VI. 96-100; "Descent of Ishtar", obv.17-20; "Nergal and Ereshkigal", V.11-12.26-27).³⁸

Again there seem to be instances where there are glimpses one can escape death,³⁹ but though one may leave the underworld to interact with or menace the living one is still dead and a diminished version of the living self. "Gilgamesh is advised to stop looking for immortality and at least to enjoy the things he can obtain as mortal man:

Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
Make thou merry by day and by night.
Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing.
Day and night dance thou and play.
Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,

Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom.
For this is the task of [mankind].
(Gilg.X.iii.6-14).⁴⁰

In the end Gilgamesh accepts that what he is looking for cannot fully be obtained and he eventually sees that he can only find immortality in the remembrance of his great works on earth, for to be remembered is immortality. Eventually in subsequent Sumerian texts, i.e. "The Death of Gilgamesh," Gilgamesh is known as the ruler of the underworld, but not surprisingly, given

³⁸ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 105.

³⁹ Utnapishtim and Utuabzu are mentioned as having escaped death and gone on to the place where the gods dwell.

⁴⁰ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 111-112.

the nature of his quest, this falls short of satisfying him. "So Gilgamesh apparently means to say that he does not want to be a god in the netherworld; he prefers life without death."⁴¹

Spronk identifies a common thread woven together amongst the various cultures and narratives thus far considered:

For this reason the promise of a prominent place in the netherworld, to which the added tablet XII refers, would probably not have been accepted by Gilgamesh as a consolation for the bitter fate of death either. Even the highest position in the netherworld cannot compensate for life. As we noticed above, the same idea is found in the Egyptian literature: Osiris is described as complaining that he cannot see the sun. And in Greek mythology Achilles takes the same point of view: he declares that he prefers being a humble farm worker rather than being a king of all the dead (Od. II, 489-491). A parallel to Gilgamesh's refusal of the offer of Ishtar can also be found in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat. Here we are told that Aqhat does not accept an offer of the goddess Anat to give him immortality, because he knows that even with this offer he cannot escape death.⁴²

One cannot miss the clear notions expressed in these tales that regardless of how similar the next world might have been in relation to the land of the living, or how much power might be given to some, such as Gilgamesh, life was superior. The common man, within these civilizations, could not hope for such things as these heroes, kings, and gods attained. They would never escape their netherworld, they would never dwell in the heavens as planets or stars, they would never fully be their former selves again, and although existence would continue the reader can feel the angst of their notions of such an existence in these tales.

All this leads to the conclusion that real beatific afterlife was exceptional according to the belief of the people of ancient Mesopotamia. In this regard Jeremias was certainly right when he called their religion "das Gegenstück der ägyptischen Religion". The only thing one could hope for was a well-cared for existence in the netherworld. More general positive expectations with regard to the afterlife can be found in this region from the sixth century B.C. on, when it was under Persian rule". As a result of the syncretistic religious policy of kings like Cyrus, the ancient Mesopotamian conceptions were intermingled

⁴¹ Ibid., 114.

⁴² Ibid.

with elements from Persian religion. According to Bottero the belief in the gods as stars became prevalent in the later Babylonian religion.⁴³

The civilizations mentioned above all have very similar notions of the afterlife. Their myths contain tales of dead heroes and kings who would rather be in the land of the living. Their commoners and royalty alike are relegated to an existence in a shadowy underworld. Sometimes these abodes are perilous and meaningless, while at others they appear to entail glimpses of activity in line with those of the living. Some are going to the stars to dwell with the gods. Finally, and most importantly, some of the greatest literary works of antiquity spend a great deal of time pondering, expressing, and grappling with what the existence of the departed will be like.

Ancient Israel

Ancient Israel is unique in many ways, most obviously in her monotheistic view of God. Israel is also unique in the existence of the Old Testament; the oral traditions that form its foundations are as old as recorded history. Regardless of one's view of the origination and authority of these texts, at the least, the collection is recognized as one of the most important literary works of mankind. Yet, unlike the notable prolific ancient texts of the Greeks, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians, little detail is given in the Hebrew Scriptures to the fate of the dead and what their existence is like.

The Hebrew Bible rarely refers to the dead, and portrays them as lifeless and impotent. רַפְּאִים (rəp'āim) occurs only 8 times in this sense. The רַפְּאִים are cut off from Yahweh, a flaccid assembly which must be roused to greet a newcomer. Never are they linked with a founder/patron, named individually, invoked as protectors, invited to feasts or consulted in necromancy, in marked contrast to the Ugaritic *rpum* (as often interpreted). Similarly, אֱלֹהִים ('ēlōhîm) occurs only twice of the dead, both times in non-Yahwistic usage, and one of these in a possible necromantic formula (1 Sam. 28:13). Other proposed references are unclear or unlikely. Thus the Hebrew writers are largely unconcerned with the dead.⁴⁴

⁴³ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 124.

⁴⁴ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 418.

The one passage mentioned above might be called the epicenter of the Old Testament's focus upon the dead. "Largely unconcerned with the dead" is a variation of a phrase one sees time and time again in reviewing literature related to Israel's focus on the matter. For each of the areas engaged via the various cultures above on their thoughts, concepts, rituals, interactions, care for, and notions about the dead the counter point in the Old Testament is silence, virtual silence, lack of detail, lack of interest, or formulaic language. Johnston observes, "Old Testament descriptions of death are often imaginative and evocative rather than prosaic and specific"⁴⁵ Unlike their ancient counterparts, Israel does not have a narrative that details a perilous journey or quest of, say, Jonathan and David in Sheol. There is no extended imagery or texts of the kings of Israel establishing practices in the domain of the underworld once they have departed the world of the living. As Johnston says, "Existence in Sheol is sketchily drawn."⁴⁶ No Israelite epic suggests life in the underworld is just slightly different than existence among the living. "In the underworld, in Sheol, there is no real life, even though the person continues to 'exist' ..."⁴⁷ There is no evidence that suggests the dead were thought by the Israelites to be at the mercy of the living to supply their needs, but there were some who likely held to this belief. Although some may have feared retribution for not keeping the departed supplied with essentials for existence in the netherworld, "we find no clear references to the malign influence of unhappy spirits of the dead."⁴⁸ Still, per Deuteronomy 26:14, the notion of giving food to the dead was known to the Israelites: "I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Theology, Death, and Dying*, 39.

⁴⁸ Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 251.

unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.” In the larger sense, “there is little record of funerary practice, and burial location is never linked to consultation or veneration of the dead, except possibly in Ezekiel 43:7ff. Thus neither archaeological nor textual evidence concerning burial suggests continuing interaction with the dead.”⁴⁹

It would not be fair or accurate to say that ancient Israel’s contemporaries put more value on the afterlife simply because they wrote more about it. Although Israel is unique it has much in common with its contemporary cultures. They, too, clearly thought about and pondered death. “In all societies death elicits a profound response. Often this is articulated in words and gestures. Sometimes it remains unarticulated, yet has a visible effect on the well-being of the living. In ancient Israel, according to the Hebrew Bible, people reacted to death much as elsewhere.”⁵⁰ It has been shown that ancient Israel’s contemporaries seemed to believe, like ancient Israel, that living was more meaningful and fulfilling than most anything one would experience in the netherworld. But these cultures’ inhabitants would be with their gods in death, and would even be directly ruled by them in some instances. Yet in the Old Testament the worst feature of death that was clearly expressed was separation from God after a life of fellowship with Him. Just what does the Old Testament teach about the afterlife?

Sheol

The logical place to begin regarding what ancient Israel believed about the afterlife is to dig into the very place where they believed the departed existed, and that destination is Sheol.

⁴⁹ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 418.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

The term “Sheol” appears in the Old Testament 66 times. The origin of the word is not completely known to scholars,⁵¹ but its meaning is clear:

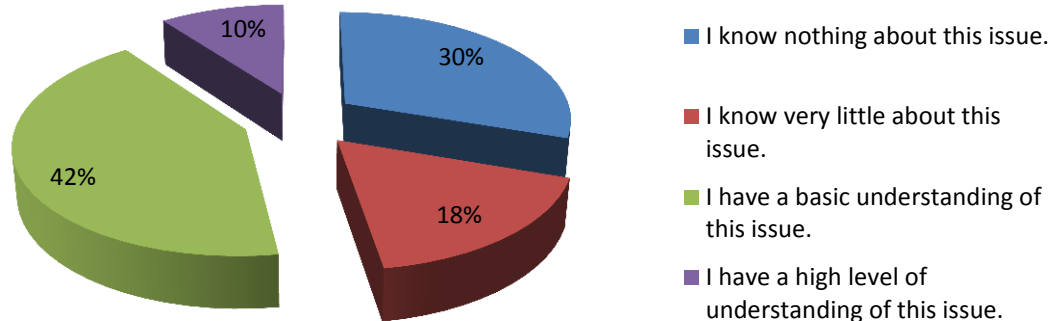
The meaning of the word Sheol is important both in Old Testament theology and cosmology. It is usually said, e.g. in the ISBE, Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, Hastings Bible Dictionary, etc., that Sheol is the place of departed spirits. Inasmuch as Sheol is often located as “down” in the Old Testament, the Hebrew cosmology is said to include a subterranean gloomy place like the Babylonian netherworld or Greek Hades.⁵²

A number of respondents to the survey tool for this project, most of whom were self-identified long-time believers, expressed themselves afterwards and declared that they had never heard the term Sheol. Of all the discussions that served as prelude to the development and implementation of the survey tool, both before and after its deployment, a lack of knowledge of virtually anything related to the term Sheol was the most apparent takeaway. Respondents were asked to express how confident they were in their understanding of how Sheol was presented in the Old Testament. Per Table 2:1 below, out of the 225 viable responses to the survey, slightly more than half stated they felt they had a basic or high level of confidence in their understanding of how the Old Testament presents Sheol. Their responses are scattered, with a full 30% selecting “I know nothing about the issue.” Only 10% claim to have a high level of understanding of the issue.

⁵¹ Johnston states, the word Sheol occurs almost exclusively in the Old Testament Hebrew... For over a century scholars have puzzled over the origin of the Hebrew term... The distinctiveness of Sheol in Hebrew is frequently noted in discussion of its etymology, but seldom in consideration of its meaning. 77-79.

⁵² R. Laird Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 4, no. 4 (Dec 1961): 130.

Table 2.1 How confident are you in your understanding of Sheol as presented in the Old Testament?



What should believers know about Sheol? What does the Old Testament present? And what do the respondents that claimed a basic or high level understanding of this issue really know in light of what is actually clearly, and sometimes not so clearly, expressed in the 39 books of the Old Testament?

Sheol was not specific to any one period of Israel’s literary endeavour. It occurs in texts from the Pentateuch, the early historical books, and various prophets, psalms and wisdom books. Regardless of the precise dating of these texts, references to Sheol are scattered across centuries of Israelite writing. Clearly the term did not belong to any one particular period, but remained a constant (if occasional) term for the underworld.⁵³

Consistently Sheol is depicted as a place one went down to:

Gen 37:35 All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.

Gen 42:38 But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”

⁵³ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 72.

Gen 44:29	If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’
Num 16:33	So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.
1 Sam 2:6	The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
Job 21:13	They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol.

These are just a few examples of the depiction of an abode to which a person went down. In addition, Sheol is depicted and described in various negative ways, such as a prison (Is. 38:10), a trap (Ps. 18:5; 2Sam. 22:6), a place of no memory or knowledge (Ps. 6:5), a place of inactivity (Is. 14:9; Ezek. 32:21), and it is surely not a paradise that the living were anticipating with any sense of eager anticipation.

Often the term is used in a way that means “the grave” as in the place one’s body lies after death and not some netherworld abode:

Many times Sheol clearly means just “grave.” Its parallels are “death,” “pit” (which predominantly means a hole dug in the earth), or “sepulcher.” Its accoutrements are worms, dust, armor, etc. Its characteristics are darkness, being forgotten (the phrase “land of forgetfulness” does not mean the deceased forgets, but that he is forgotten), lack of wisdom, lack of work, and absence of praise.⁵⁴

Judah uses Sheol in this way as he contemplates the mourning of Jacob for his youngest son:

...as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol.

Sheol is used four times in Genesis. Jacob is said to be in danger of going down to Sheol, mourning for his son. Genesis 44:31, though not poetic, has “death” in parallel

⁵⁴ Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol,” 135.

with “going down to Sheol.” The translation “grave” as in AV is suitable and widely acknowledged as correct.⁵⁵

The verses mentioned in the reference below also refer to Sheol as a grave, but there is some dispute over these verses as when read through the presuppositions of the New Testament. That is, often they are cited as Old Testament support for resurrection.

There are two passages in Samuel, both poetic: 1 Samuel 2:6 says that the Lord “brings down to Sheol and brings up.” In the context, Hannah is exalting the Lord’s power and goodness. The poetic parallel is “the Lord kills and makes alive,” i.e. saves alive. “Bringing up from Sheol” has nothing to do with shades or with resurrection. It merely means preserving from death, in this context. The usage for “grave” is quite like that in Genesis. 2 Samuel 22:6 is a passage parallel to Psalm 18:5.⁵⁶

In *Shades of Sheol* Johnston denotes 1 Samuel 2:6 as a reference to the underworld, as in abode of the dead, versus the grave or place of confinement. Herein lies some of the struggle as there is some variance and debate as to when Sheol means underworld versus its other usages, i.e. “grave” or “pit.” While there is debate on certain instances on how the word is used and what its best rendering is in those rather sparse cases, there is the reality that within the larger scheme of the Old Testament, the underworld “was not a particular important concept for the Israelite writers.”⁵⁷ Sheol, in whatever context in the Old Testament, is an “infrequent theme and an unwelcomed fate.”⁵⁸ But who is destined for such a fate and place in the Old Testament?

Is Sheol a Place Only for the Wicked?

In looking at the use of Sheol in the Old Testament as a destination for the dead, it seems that this abode’s inhabitants, like the other cultures reviewed previously, include both the

⁵⁵ Harris, “The Meaning of the Word Sheol,” 130.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁷ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 85.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

righteous and the wicked. “Most scholars agree that the Old Testament portrays the underworld as the fate of all regardless of their moral or religious standing in life, in contrast with later Jewish and Christian views of differentiated post-mortem fate”⁵⁹; however, in most of these cases Sheol is depicted as the destination of the wicked. As Johnston clarifies regarding the usage of the term Sheol, “By far its most frequent use is to indicate human destiny, and predominantly the destiny of the ungodly.” He goes on to quantify it is used in this way, referring to the post mortem existence of the ungodly, in half of its occurrences in the Old Testament. Still, a host of individuals few would consider to be examples of the ungodly anticipate a future in Sheol, including Jacob (Is. 37:35), Hezekiah (Is. 38:10), Job (Job 17:13-16), Joseph, the psalmist (Ps. 18:4; 40:2; 71:20; 88:6).

In correlation to those incidents of anticipation by these Old Testament saints, “twice Sheol is apparently presented as the destiny or all”⁶⁰: Psalm 89:48, “What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?” and Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

But again there is great tension here, as Johnston clarifies:

In conclusion, Sheol cannot be identified as the Hebrew term for the underworld which awaits all. It is almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment, whether the wicked, the afflicted righteous, or all centers. It seldom occurs of all humanity, and only in contexts which portray human sinfulness and life’s absurdity. Thus Sheol is not used indiscriminately to describe human destiny at death.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Johnston, “The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament,” 416.

⁶⁰ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 82.

But even if the term itself is not used indiscriminately, it does appear to be the immediate destination for all in the Old Testament. N. T. Wright makes a sort of argument from the standpoint that no other alternative destination is given; Sheol is the understood destination of all:

Their minds, and their hopes, were on other things. When Jacob declares that losing another son ‘would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol’, he does not mean that such a tragedy will result in him going to Sheol rather than somewhere else, but that his passage there will be accompanied by sorrow rather than by event at a long and worthwhile life. The description eventual death does not mention Sheol, but rather says that he ‘was gathered to his people’; there is no reason, though, to suppose that his descendants thought he was anywhere other than Sheol.⁶²

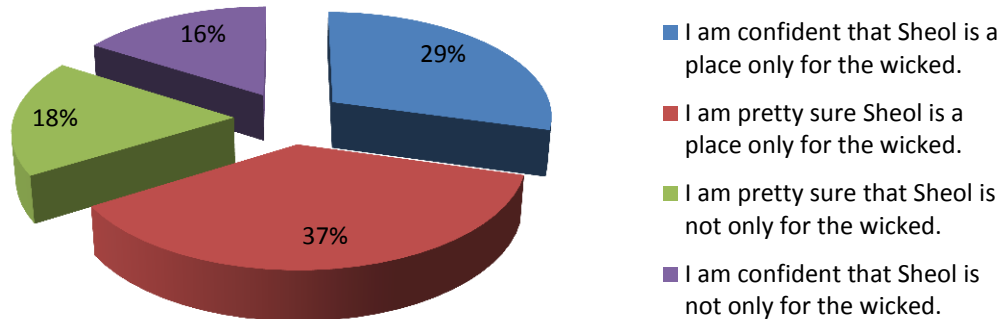
This argument in absentia example (variations of which are peppered throughout the Old Testament), the noted verses wherein the fate of all upon death is Sheol, and the absence of an alternative immediate destination for the departed all point clearly to the understanding that Sheol was not only for the wicked or ungodly. “Thus in the Hebrew Bible the good and the bad alike are destined for Sheol, but in later Christian texts and Christian scriptures the righteous and the unrighteous awake opposite destinies in heaven and hell.”⁶³

The survey data in the table below on this specific question shows that, in contrast to the findings above, 66% of the respondents, within the two levels of confidence, believed that Sheol was the destination of only the wicked, while 33%, with either a high or lower level of confidence, believed that Sheol was the destination for all. Only 16%, or 36 of the 225 respondents, expressed a high level of confidence on the issue where most of orthodoxy and scholarship land on this aspect of our study.

⁶² Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 90.

⁶³ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 16.

Table 2:2 Do you believe Sheol is a place only for the wicked?



Are Sheol and Hell the Same Place?

Some of the notions in the findings of the first question in the previous section, “How confident are you in your understanding of Sheol as presented in the Old Testament?”, likely relate to how some understand Sheol, i.e. they think of Sheol and Hell as one in the same. As has been seen, some have simply, somehow, missed the term “Sheol” and its meaning in their Christian walk and related studies. In retrospect, a question asking the respondents to properly identify the term Sheol would have been a nice control. Nonetheless, via the survey questions, “Are Sheol and Hell the Same Place?”, “How confident are you in your understanding of Sheol as presented in the Old Testament?”, and “Do you believe Sheol is a place only for the wicked?” one should be able to triangulate some of how the respondents processed the questions related to both Sheol and Hell. While this project will grapple with the term “hell” in greater detail in chapter four, for the purposes here, and there, it should be noted that Sheol appears to be a temporary abode while hell has futuristic and eternal connotations.

As is seen in the “Common Terms” section of this work, numerous terms are used regarding the destination of the departed, both the wicked and the righteous, and their intermediate and eternal state. Johnston likely hits upon a major part of the confusion here as it relates to Sheol and Hell as he observes, “Because Sheol is often associated with the wicked, the term was frequently translated as ‘hell’ in the authorized for King James Version however, the Hebrew Bible never indicates any form of punishment after death, so this translation is inappropriate.”⁶⁴ So what is hell, in contrast to Sheol?

Generally speaking the word “hell” is used in Scripture to refer to a place of future punishment for the wicked dead. However, there are other meanings also. There are times when the word is used to refer to the grave or to the place of the dead. Also, “hell” is used to speak of the place of disembodied spirits without any implication of either bliss or torment.⁶⁵

So in the narrower sense, it appears fairly clear that the Sheol and hell are indeed not the same. Highlighting a few distinctive items between the two terms should clarify this reality. “The Old Testament does not sound a clear bell with respect to distinctions between the wicked and the righteous in the death.”⁶⁶ The Old Testament picture of the netherworld Sheol includes people across the socio-economic spectrum, to include the righteous and the wicked. If Sheol and hell are exactly one in the same, then the heroes and saints of the Old Testament are in hell, being punished, and seemingly *eternally* punished. But, in part, per Hebrews 11 that does not seem to be their fate:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had

⁶⁴ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 73.

⁶⁵ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 547.

⁶⁶ Christopher Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 58.

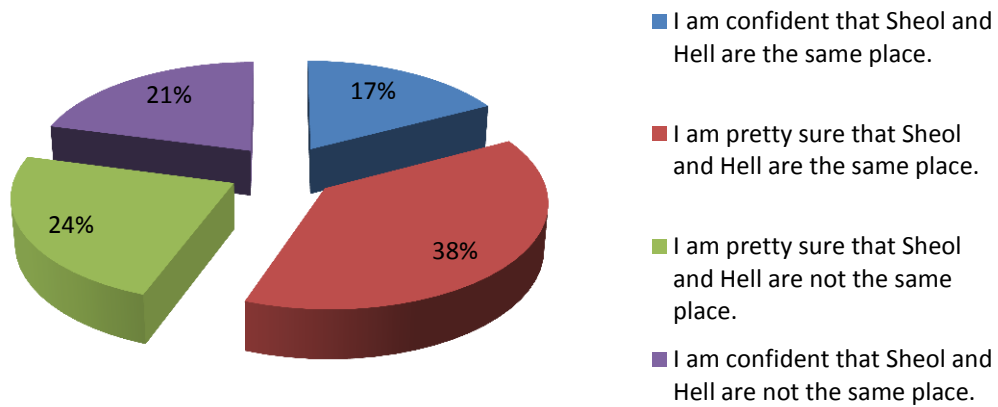
opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:13-16 ESV).

As far as the Old Testament is concerned “hell,” within its proper context and translation, is indeed distinct from the hell of the New Testament. As Block states, “Prior to Daniel 12:2 we find no clear evidence of belief in hell, if by hell we mean a place of eternal torment and judgment for the wicked.”⁶⁷ Taken on its own Daniel 12:2 does not give great insight to the nature of hell or its punishments beyond declaration that some will experience “shame and everlasting contempt.” It does, however, give a glimpse of the resurrection.

There are understandable reasons for the laity to be confused about the relation of Sheol to hell. This study has only begun to touch upon the difficulties and tensions afoot on this matter, but it has attempted to show that there is a difference between Sheol and hell, based upon the nature of the activity of each and its intended inhabitants. Per Table 2.3, the survey’s respondents are clearly split on the question “Do you believe that Sheol and Hell are the same place?” 38% of the respondents were pretty sure that Sheol and Hell are the same place, with another 17% selecting they were confident they were the same place. Altogether 55% believed to some degree that Sheol and Hell were the same. 45% held to some level that they were not the same, with 24% selecting they were confident Sheol and Hell are not the same place. Regardless of what the scriptures suggest and the scholars have to say, the laity are all over the place on this question.

⁶⁷ Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 65.

Table 2:3 Do you believe that Sheol and Hell are the same place?



Resurrection in Ancient Israel

This section will review what the Old Testament has to say about the bodily resurrection of individuals and review what survey respondents believe it says on the matter. It has been seen that the Old Testament gives very little detail and attention to the afterlife, especially in light of the applicable treatment given the topic by its ancient neighbors and contemporary cultures. The concept of the resurrection in the Hebrew Bible is even harder to directly discern. Bodily resurrection, as later expressed in the Intertestamental Period and New Testament, was and still is a rather unique belief. It was also unique in relation to Israel’s ancient neighbors. In the ancient world, though they placed an enormous focus on the preservation of the body, “The Egyptians never envisaged a bodily resurrection.”⁶⁸ In addition, neither the Mesopotamian nor Ugaritic texts reflect a belief in bodily resurrection for those ancient people groups. A subsequent chapter will show that the idea of bodily resurrection was abhorrent to the Greek

⁶⁸ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 232.

world. It is only in the Persian Empire within Zoroastrianism that is found a belief in individual bodily resurrection.

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of texts that deal with the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible have no connection to the concept of bodily resurrection. What is clearly and directly taught in the Old Testament is that the departed went to Sheol, a place that is distinct from hell, at least in the eternal aspect, and is the abode of both the godly and ungodly. Undoubtedly the Old Testament writers express the reality of God's power over life and death and in this power over death there is a stated and or implied hope in something beyond Sheol. "This suggests that Yahweh's power to 'raise up from Sheol' is a potentiality which is affirmed rather than an actuality which has been witnessed."⁶⁹ By and large passages such as Psalm 16, 49, 73, 139; Proverbs 15:24, 23:14; Job 19:25-27, and others, which do speak of a brighter future or a hope beyond Sheol, never clarify to any degree what that reality might look like. Granted, once viewed through the hope and message of Jesus Christ, these verses become clearer, but within their original historical and literary context they speak more to the power of God than of an established alternative to Sheol. In fact, many of the verses in the Old Testament that are often cited as being references to a bodily resurrection are not referring to individual resurrection.

An example of this dynamic is found in the popular passage Ezekiel 37:1-14. Here "Ezekiel is taken by the hand/spirit of Yahweh to see a valley littered with dry and dusty bones."⁷⁰ Verses 7-10 capture the full imagery of this encounter:

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath;

⁶⁹ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 219.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army (ESV).

Block clarifies that Ezekiel’s audience is “fellow Israelites in exile with whom he shared a particular worldview, but whose minds he was seeking to change. Given the apostate condition of his countrymen, it is conceivable that many of them had bought into pagan beliefs concerning the netherworld.”⁷¹ While Block makes a stronger line of connection between this passage and individual bodily resurrection, he does express that its primary function to its original audience is in highlighting the return of the Jews from exile. A fuller and more complete picture of bodily resurrection would have to be developed by Ezekiel’s successors, i.e. “a clearer picture of an eschatological individualized revivification”⁷² would have to emerge. Johnston’s stance sees no reference to individual bodily resurrection in Ezekiel’s vision: “The vision of reconstituted and revived bodies clearly indicates a reconstituted, revived and restored people, interpreted to the prophet in vv. 11-14. It is a dazzling parable of a return from exile. But it says nothing about personal resurrection, even if it was later interpreted in that way.”⁷³ N. T. Wright agrees that this text is accurately depicting the reconstitution of the nation of Israel itself, but that, “Ezekiel is no more envisaging actual bodily resurrection than he envisaged, when writing chapter 34, that Israel consisted of sheep rather than people.”⁷⁴

A verse that seems to move a step closer to individual resurrection is Isaiah 26:19. The proper context of the verse is set Isaiah 24-27. Skjoldal summarizes its focus:

⁷¹ Daniel I. Block, “Beyond the Grave: Ezekiel’s Vision of Death and Afterlife,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2, no. 1 (NA 1992): 136.

⁷² *Ibid*, 141.

⁷³ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 223.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 120.

The ungodly people of the world, especially the apostate nation of Israel, were put on notice that God is still in complete control over man and the elements. For the godly—that is, those who trusted God and were waiting on him—God provides great encouragement. He has promised that he will conquer all his enemies, including death, and that the sinful nation, after its conversion, will eventually prosper and become the center of universal worship. The “new world order” has been introduced: God is King. He must punish sinners and bless the faithful.⁷⁵

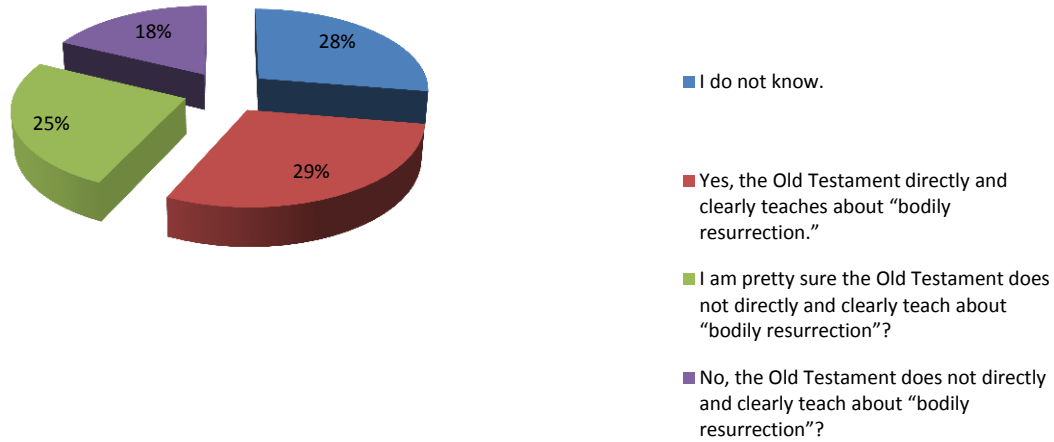
So it is within that oracle that the audience is given Isaiah 26:19, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” According to Johnston, while national restoration of Israel is also in view here, the verbiage “clearly envisages the personal resurrection from death of at least some Israelites.”⁷⁶

Clearly from Table 2.4 below the laity from the survey are quite spread out regarding what they believe in terms of what the Old Testament teaches regarding the resurrection. Perhaps there is a degree of subjectivity within the phrasing of the questions. Some may take 26:19 and Daniel 12:2 to be teaching that is both direct and clear. Even if that is the case almost 28% of the respondents openly stated that they did not know if the Old Testament taught directly and clearly about the bodily resurrection. 29% stated they thought “the Old Testament directly and clearly teaches about “bodily resurrection.” Another 25% selected “I am pretty sure the Old Testament does not directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection””? And finally only 18% believed the Old Testament does not directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection””? It does appear this is the most sophisticated answer based upon the data in the above sections.

⁷⁵ Neil O. Skjoldal, “The Function of Isaiah 24-27,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 2 (Jun 1993): 118.

⁷⁶ Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 225.

Table 2.4 Does the Old Testament directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection”?



Conclusion of Chapter Two

As noted in the data throughout this chapter beliefs about the afterlife varied with each of the ancient culture that were reviewed, yet there were many commonalities. Life seems to be preferred, even over the best hopes of a beatific afterlife. The netherworld, under differing names, is often depicted in similar ways, where often an existence similar to that of the living is envisioned. Still, the ancient Israelites were the clear outlier. They simply did not have a complex or developed view of the existence of the departed.

The findings of the survey tool reflect a fractured understanding of some of the most basic aspects of what the Old Testament has to say on the matter. The topic of the nature of the afterlife and eternal state may not be often explored in weekly church services. It is often on the back end of any systemized study of theology, given how that discipline is often approached, due to it literally being related to “last things,” i.e. eschatology. It is

understandable that a sole focus on how the Old Testament treats the afterlife would in fact be a rare thing for laity in light of the message of the New Testament.

CHAPTER III

THE AFTERLIFE IN THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD AND NEW TESTAMENT

In the last chapter, it was shown that the belief in the bodily resurrection was not very well developed in the Hebrew Bible and did not represent the normative view of the future state of the departed by the close of the Old Testament. Even to more liberal scholars, “The origins of the concept of resurrection have been pushed back at least to the Hellenistic period (Daniel 12:2; 2 Maccabees 7:9, 11, 14, 23; cf. 1 Enoch 51:1, 61:5; 2 Esdras 7:32), and perhaps to the Persian period (Isaiah 26:19).”¹ Granted, conservative scholars would place Daniel to the Babylonian era and Isaiah prior to that and therefore notions of bodily resurrection. Nonetheless, with these notions dating back possibly as far as the 8th century BC even by the Intertestamental Period it had not exactly become a front-and-center doctrine.

Intertestamental Period

In the 400 years between the close of the Old Testament--with the events Ezra and Nehemiah and the penning of Malachi--and the era of the New Testament, two positions developed regarding the idea of individual resurrection. “It is not surprising that at the time of the New Testament there were those who, clinging faithfully to the conservative orthodoxy of their faith, refused to admit the possibility of any kind of resurrection.”² There were likely numerous sects that did not hold to the resurrection; most well-known were the Sadducees and

¹ Death and Afterlife in Ugarit and Israel, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* by K. Spronk; *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, I* by M. Dietrich; O. Loretz; J. Sanmartín, Review by: Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1988), 277.

² J. W. Drane, “Some Ideas of Resurrection in the New Testament Period,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (1973): 102.

the Samaritans. Still it appears the more prevalent view was that there would be some type of resurrection, although there was no consensus regarding the form the resurrection would take,

i.e. bodily or spiritual. Drane clarifies:

On the one hand there was the view that the literal, physical body would be raised, a view which was largely associated with Palestinian Judaism; while on the other hand, a more spiritual resurrection was often envisaged, sometimes associated with the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, a view which had its most eloquent exponents in Alexandrian Judaism.³

Differences of interpretation about the type of resurrection, i. e. physical or spiritual, existed among the Jews and persist through the church era until the present day. Nonetheless, it is in the Second Period Temple era literature, in works such as 2 Maccabees, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, that the imagery of Daniel 12:2, Isaiah 26:29, and even the passages previously discussed that were more about national resurrection, are developed into a more cohesive and further expressed view of individual resurrection.

The materialistic view of resurrection evidently developed in the same kind of apocalyptic context as is presupposed in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. 2 Maccabees has a frequently expressed hope of resurrection for those who had been martyred in the struggle against the enemies of God, a resurrection which was expected to take the most material form possible, of a simple restoration of what was there before death. The crude picture of Razis (below) is typical.

When as his blood was now quite gone, he plucked out his bowels, and taking them in both his hands, he cast them upon the throng, and calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to restore him those again, he thus died. 2 Macca 14:46⁴

Other Second Temple literature, such as 4 Ezra 7:32, has a Daniel 12:2 connotation to it. “And the earth shall restore those that are asleep in her, and so shall the dust those that dwell in silence, and the secret places shall deliver those souls that were committed unto them.” Although a Jewish pseudepigraphical text from the late first century AD, 2 Baruch 49–51 gives a clearer

³ Drane, “Some Ideas of Resurrection in the New Testament Period,” 101-102.

⁴ Ibid., 103.

picture of the development of this belief as it would have progressed to this level in the period between the testaments. Clearly, the similarities with the canonical New Testament notions are apparent:

Nevertheless, I Will again ask from you, O Mighty One, yea, I will ask made all things.

"In what shape will those live who live in Your day?
Or how will the splendor of those who (are) after that time continue?
Will they then resume this form of the present,
And put on these entrammelling members,
Which are now involved in evils,
And in which evils are consummated,
Or will you perchance change these things which have been in the world
As also the world?"

And He answered and said unto me:

'Hear, Baruch, this word,
And write in the remembrance of your heart all that you shall learn.
For the earth shall then assuredly restore the dead,
[Which it now receives, in order to preserve them].
It shall make no change in their form,
But as it has received, so shall it restore them,
And as I delivered them unto it, so also shall it raise them.

For then it will be necessary to show the living that the dead have come to life again, and that those who had departed have returned (again). And it shall come to pass, when they have severally recognized those whom they now know, then judgment shall grow strong, and those things which before were spoken of shall come.

And it shall come to pass, when that appointed day has gone by, that then shall the aspect of those who are condemned be afterwards changed, and the glory of those who are justified. For the aspect of those who now act wickedly shall become worse than it is, as they shall suffer torment. Also (as for) the glory of those who have now been justified in My law, who have had understanding in their life, and who have planted in their heart the root of wisdom, then their splendor shall be glorified in changes, and the form of their face shall be turned into the light of their beauty, that they may be able to acquire and receive the world which does not die, which is then promised to them. For over this above all shall those who come then lament, that they rejected My law, and stopped their ears that they might not hear wisdom or receive understanding. When therefore they see those, over whom they are now exalted, (but) who shall then be exalted and glorified more than they, they shall respectively be transformed, the latter into the splendor of angels, and the former shall yet more waste away in wonder at the visions and in the beholding of the forms. For they shall first behold and afterwards depart to be tormented

(2 Baruch 49–51).

This and other texts, such as 4 Ezra 7:32, point to “this was also the kind of view held by the Pharisees at the time of Jesus.”⁵ Finally, 2 Maccabees 7 presents the account of a Jewish mother and her seven sons that were arrested for defying the rules that outlawed various Jewish religious practices during the Seleucid occupation of Israel. The family was beaten in an attempt to force them to “partake of unlawful swine's flesh” (v.1). In short order members of the family were scalped, had their tongues cut out, had their arms and feet cut off, and were finally fried alive in a caldron. When the second brother was about to die in this fashion the text reports, “And when he was at his last breath, he said, ‘You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws’”(v.9). The next brother upon being tortured and clearly losing his limbs uttered, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again"(v.11). And the next brother, unbroken, declared, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!”(v.14). Although in the end all seven of her sons endured and perished in such a way, the mother spoke this message:

Though she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their fathers. Filled with a noble spirit, she fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws(v. 21-23).

Antiochus, further enraged by her words, then tortures and kills her last son, who also refused to turn from the ways of his fathers. He, as defiant as the rest of his family, said to the king:

⁵ Drane, “Some Ideas of Resurrection in the New Testament Period,” 102.

But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation (v. 34-38).

So here in the midst of the Maccabean Rebellion is evidence of a very strong future hope in the form of individual personal resurrection, along with strong language asserting future justice and eternal punishment. These events transpired in the late 160s BC and help clarify the depth of the development of such teachings between the Old and New Testaments. There also appears to be the notion that only the righteous would be resurrected “to life” (v.14). Still, by the close of the Intertestamental Period, as seen in the Second Temple Literature, the very limited picture of afterlife in the Old Testament, with its apparent co-mingling all the departed in Sheol and virtual silence on divine punishment and judgment, has evolved into to the contrasting concepts above.

As Wright puts it:

If the Bible offers a spectrum of belief about life after death, the second temple literature period provides something more like an artist’s palette: dozens of options, with different ways of describing different ones. The more texts and tombstones we study, the more there seems to be. Almost any position one can imagine on the subject appears to have been espoused by some Jews somewhere in the period between the Maccabean crises and the writing of the Mishnah, roughly 200BC to AD 200.⁶

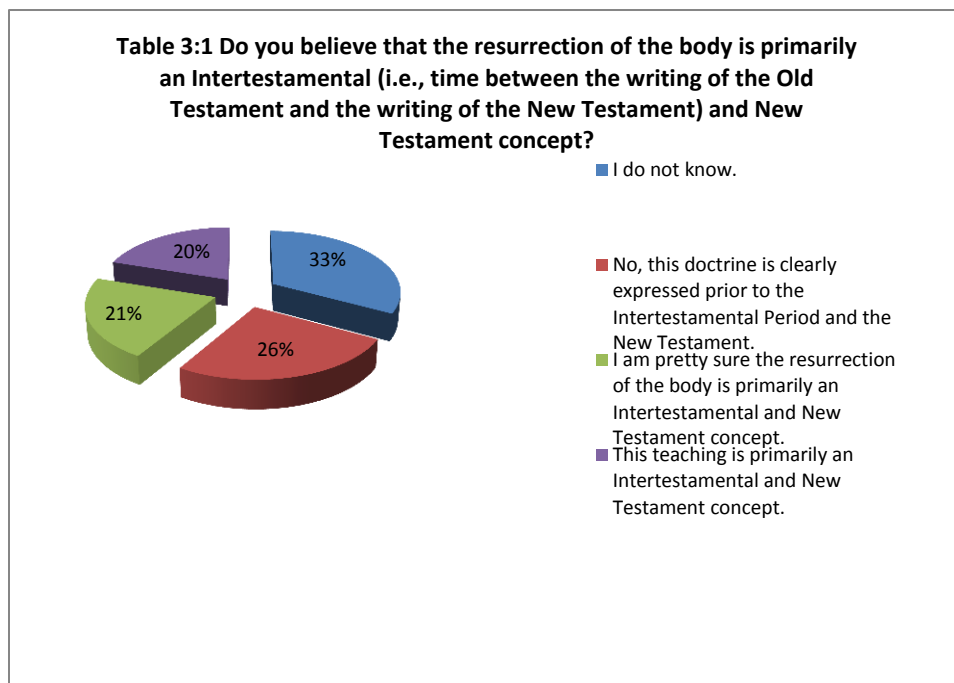
Data suggests that by the first century, within Judaism, “most Jews either believed in some form of resurrection or at least knew that it was standard teaching.”⁷

In conclusion, individual bodily resurrection can most accurately be understood as an Intertestamental and New Testament concept. Per Table 3.1 below, the survey findings on this

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 129.

⁷ Ibid.

question reflect a fairly even distribution of responses, with a full third of the respondents selecting “I do not know” to the question, “Do you believe that the resurrection of the body is primarily an Intertestamental (i.e., time between the writing of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament) and New Testament concept?” 41% were “sure” or “pretty sure” that the concept is “primarily an Intertestamental and New Testament concept.” Even if one does not agree that the best answer to the question is that the resurrection of the body is primarily an Intertestamental and New Testament concept, it does seem per the fractured responses the respondents may not be clear on the nuances as to when the teaching of bodily resurrection did come onto the scene.



The New Testament

In his work *Surprised by Hope* N. T. Wright explains some of the dynamics on the topic of belief in resurrection in the transition between the Old and New Testament.

In second-Temple Judaism, resurrection is important, but not that important. There are lots of lengthy works that never mentioned the question, let alone the answer. It is still difficult to be sure what the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls thought on the topic. Apart from occasional highlights like 2 Maccabees 7, resurrection is a peripheral topic. But in early Christianity resurrection moved from the circumference to the center.⁸

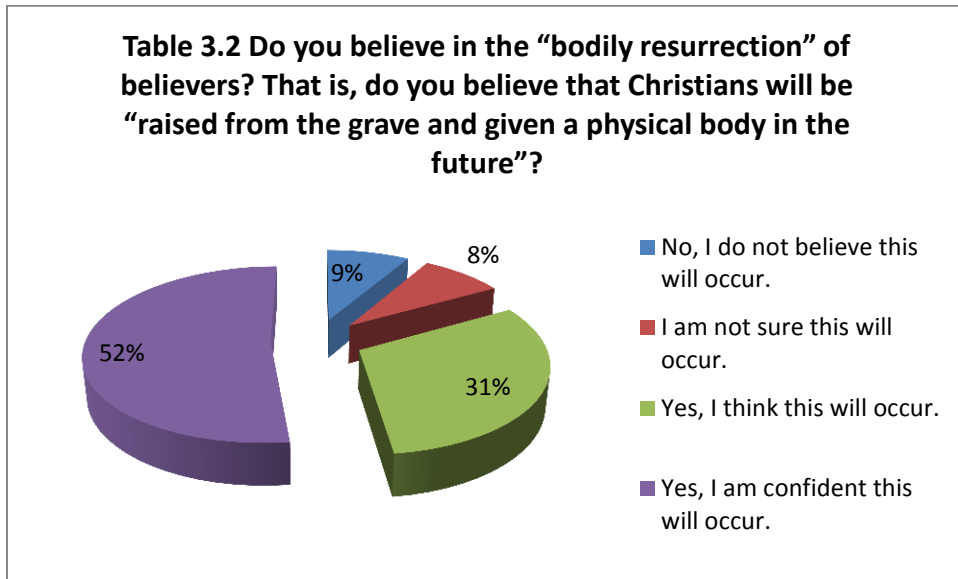
If resurrection did move to the center, many a professing Christian then and now missed the memo. If believers do not know about, or cannot comprehend, the centrality of the role of resurrection within their professed faith, then a rather important nuance of that faith is altogether missing. “The cornerstone of Paul’s faith was the resurrection of the Messiah. Indeed, the apostle had built his entire ministry on knowing that the Father had raised the Son from the dead after his crucifixion.”⁹ That only 31% of respondents professed a high level of confidence that the bodily resurrection would occur more than suggests a low level of sophistication on the single most straightforward doctrinal question in the survey. One commentator observes, “Furthermore, Paul had endured all sorts of hardship because of his commitment to the risen, living Lord. Therefore, the apostle was dismayed that some in the fledgling church at Corinth were denying the bodily resurrection of the dead.”¹⁰ Paul’s dismay would be properly placed in the modern era as well. If the Old Testament is vague and non-interested in the afterlife and the Intertestamental Period is a catch-all of various views that in part homed in on aspects of

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 42.

⁹ Dan Liroy, “Jesus Resurrection and the Nature of the Believers Resurrection Body (1 Cor 15: 1-58),” *Conspectus* 12, no. 1 (Sept 2011): 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

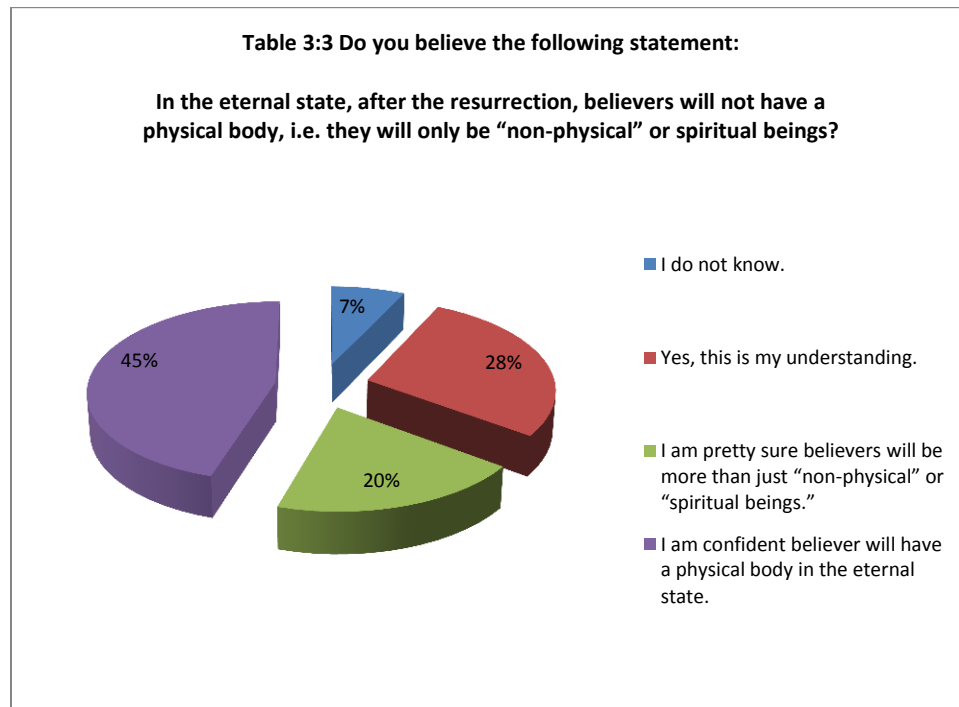
resurrection, then the New Testament is emphatic on the matter. As Erickson puts it, “The Bible clearly teaches the resurrection of the believer...The New Testament, of course much more clearly.”¹¹ Still, only 31.11% of respondents have a high level of confidence in this teaching.



In the follow up question (Table 3.3), a few things are going on. Some have had a chance to revise their answer on the resurrection question with the confidence level of a bodily resurrection going from 31.11% to 45%. Still, there is a sizable percentage not knowing or committing to the idea that the resurrected will be “non-physical” or spiritual beings only. The point of this question was not to re-measure their response on the front and center resurrection aspect, but rather to see if they really understood or believed in a physical bodily resurrection. So the question was a red-herring, but it does show that 28% believe not in a physical empirical body in the eternal post resurrected state, but that the departed will be spirits or ghost-like, etc. In the conclusion of this work the data will show that some of the 31.11% that answered with a

¹¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 1200-1201.

confident believe in a physical body upon resurrection then gave answers on the follow up question contrary to that initial reply.



One basic statement of orthodoxy, The Apostles’ Creed, based on Scripture and recited weekly in numerous denominations, includes a direct clarification of this doctrine: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Yet, there is apathy and confusion on the matter.

Bodily Resurrection in the Gospels and Teachings of Jesus

N.T. Wright remarks, “Considering that the canonical gospels undoubtedly reflect the beliefs and hopes of the early Christians, one of the abiding surprises they present is how little

they have to say about the topic of resurrection.”¹² Here Wright is speaking about the topic of bodily resurrection of humanity, not the Gospels’ treatment of Christ’s own victory over death. The phrase “the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus” in many ways encapsulates the gospel message. At the very least, every Easter believers are reminded about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Clearly Jesus believed in and taught about the resurrection. However, he primarily spoke of, taught about, and alluded to his own resurrection. The Gospels’ Easter narratives also focus on Jesus and the empty tomb and his post resurrection appearances. Christ’s resurrection is the ultimate statement about his deity, and his deity is the cornerstone of Christian orthodoxy. So the Gospels and their witness to his deity and his resurrection are clearly front and center. But the resurrection of Jesus is not the focus of this project. One trusts that the laity has an understanding of the centrality of this issue within the Christian faith. Rather it is a lack of understanding pertaining to the role of resurrection in the individual Christian’s own future that is in question.

Jesus, in the Gospels, does not give the bodily resurrection of humanity an enormous amount of attention. When the matter is engaged its impact upon humanity often has to be inferred, i.e. it is not explicitly taught and covered. As Wright puts it, “Jesus certainly believed in resurrection as the promised future for God’s people, but it does not seem to have played a significantly larger role in his teaching than it did in most of the Judaism of the time...”¹³ Surely, as one peruses the Scriptures concerning this doctrinal matter, the overwhelming majority of key passages come from outside the Gospels. Still, it is there. In the passages below from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, Jesus touches upon the reality of the resurrection and, as in other passages, ties it to his deity and authority..

¹² Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 401.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 402.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment(John 5:24-29).¹⁴

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:38-40 ESV).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (John 6:44-45 ESV).

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26 ESV).

But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:29-30 ESV).

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would

¹⁴ In this passage Christ as savior and judge is looking to the events of Revelation 20:4-6, where John writes, “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”

save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:34-38 ESV).

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’ (Mark 9:43-50 ESV).

Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:29-31 ESV).

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean (Mark 9:9-19 ESV).

So bodily resurrection is taught in the Gospels more implicitly than explicitly, building upon the original audience’s understanding of what had been a widespread belief within Judaism for hundreds of years. For more explicit teachings on the matter one would have to turn to the other New Testament texts. As the gospel began to spread to cultures not familiar with, or even antagonistic toward, the concept of bodily resurrection, the teachings of the apostles would serve as the ultimate apologetic for such a future existence.

Bodily Resurrection in the Pauline Epistles

Clearly, Jesus taught about the bodily resurrection, if not in great detail, then in a very matter of fact fashion. His approach shows that much of his audience clearly had knowledge of the issue in line with the developed Second Temple era understanding(s) of the matter. However, it is the Pauline epistles that provide far greater detail than found either in the Second Temple literature or in the teaching of Jesus. Paul, as a Pharisee, unlike the Sadducees “who say that there is no resurrection” (Matt: 22:23), would have been in line with what Jesus expressed on the matter of resurrection.

The high water mark of Paul’s treatment on the issue is First Corinthians 15. Here Paul systemically explains the need for and impact of the literal bodily resurrection of Christ. It is the epicenter of the gospel message, without which it collapses. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:17-19 ESV). But Christ is only the first of what is to come for all of the departed. Paul continues in verses 20-22, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” To put a bookend on how clear the bodily resurrection is here, “I Corinthians 15 sets before the reader in unmistakable terms the truth of a bodily resurrection in which all believers have part. This resurrection occurs at the return of Christ (vs. 23).”¹⁵ “Unmistakable,” yet only 31% of respondents have a high level of confidence this will occur.

¹⁵ Norman Shepherd, “The Resurrections of Revelation 20,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (Fall 1974): 36.

In Paul's greeting to the church in Rome he opens by declaring the deity and authority of Jesus Christ through the prophets, lineage, and the power of his resurrection.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead...(Rom. 1:1-4).

Paul then spends the next several chapters systematically clarifying the state of humanity, its condition (whether Jew or gentile), its condemnation, its guilt, and then ultimately the solution, i. e. justification via the atonement of Jesus Christ. Granted, this is a radical simplification of these key doctrinal items. But when Paul begins to transition to this message of hope, the hope that believers have in Christ, he ties Christians to Christ's work on the cross, that they died with him as did their sins. Granted, most believers seem to have a grasp of this cornerstone of the gospel message, but many seem to miss a key association with Christ, via Romans 6:5, where Paul ties this hope and "newness of life" to the bodily resurrection of believers. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Though not as focused a treatment as Paul presents in 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 6, like the whole of the text, is peppered with its centrality.

Romans is suffused with resurrection. Squeeze the letter at any point, and resurrection spills out; hold it up to the light, and you can see Easter sparkling all the way through. If Romans had not been hailed as the great epistle of justification by faith, it might easily have come to be known as the chief letter of resurrection (not, of course, that the two are unrelated); the Corinthian letters would be strong contenders for such a title, but Romans would give them a good run for the their money.¹⁶

Conducting a full treatment of the epistle to the Romans pertaining to its resurrection-based underpinning is beyond the scope or goals of this project. Suffice to say it is an openly declared

¹⁶ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 241.

front-and-center aspect of this key theological New Testament text--one the contemporary laity, in a very high percentage, seemed to have not homed in upon.

Still there is more. The New Testament is not just punctuated with a few complex treatises on the matter of the bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians and Romans. All told there are some 40 to 45 passages in the New Testament that mention and clarify the bodily resurrection of Jesus and of humanity. Most of these are of the non-Easter variety. That is, their context is of the concept of general resurrection, not of the resurrection of Jesus alone. Often in Acts and the other epistles, like in Romans and 1 Corinthians, the two are tied together, and rightly so.

In Acts 17: 18, as Paul engaged the citizens of Athens, “Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” Acts 23 and 24 depict Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea speaking about the resurrection of Jesus and of the bodily resurrection in general to the masses and to the Sanhedrin. Acts 23:6-9 clarifies Paul’s teaching on the matter, what he holds in common with at least some of his fellow Pharisees, and the divide between their position and that of the Sadducees.

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man.”

Granted, the Pharisees had a variety of beliefs about the afterlife. For example, some held that this future existence could be as some “angelic type or form”¹⁷ in a sort of intermediate state.

Nonetheless, such groups still had more in common with Paul’s eschatology than the Sadducees,

¹⁷ Darrell L. Bock, Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 673.

who “believed death either brought a complete end to life or a shadowy existence in Sheol apart from the angels and God.”¹⁸ Despite their differences with Paul on the deity of Christ, the Pharisees cannot argue with him in the areas of the angelic realm¹⁹ and the resurrection. In Acts 24:14-21 Paul picks up the topic and, in a seemingly clear reference to Daniel 12:2,²⁰ he speaks about the resurrection pertaining to both the just and unjust.

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’

Finally, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul encourages grieving believers by clarifying that those who have already died have a future in the resurrection, which is yet to come:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

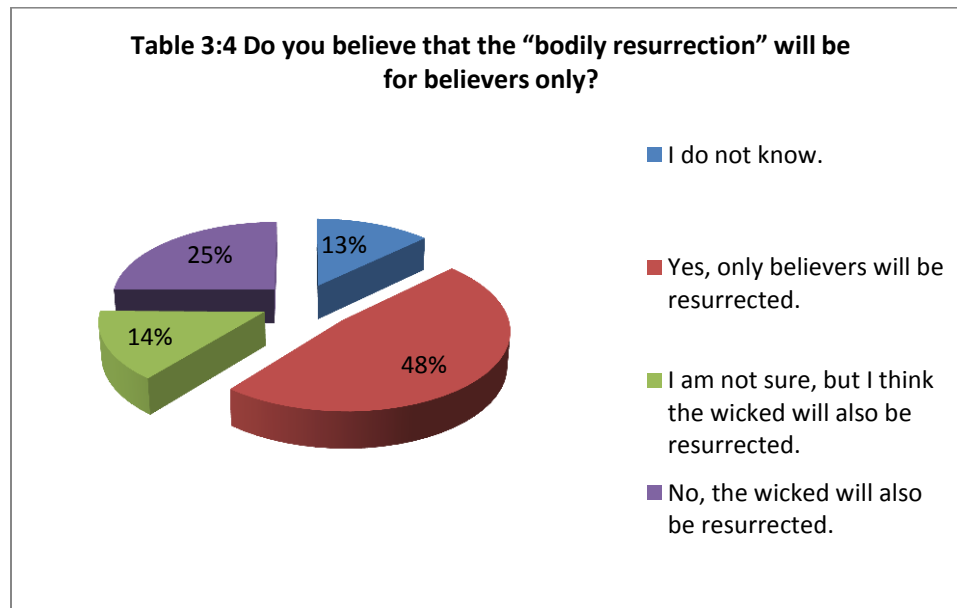
¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 673.

¹⁹ The Pharisees believed in an angelic or spiritual realm while the Sadducees rejected this outright.

²⁰ And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The Righteous and the Wicked Resurrected

Only 24.89% of respondents to the survey expressed a high level of confidence that the wicked, or non-believers, would be resurrected. With 12.89% expressing they did not know and 48% clearly stating that resurrection was only for believers, 60.89% of respondents, all professing Christians, were not clear on the biblical teaching of the fate of the wicked with regard to the general resurrection.



Granted, this is not that surprising given the overall low level of sophistication on their level of assurance on the resurrection of believers. And it is perhaps understandable because, “Most of the references to the resurrection are the resurrection of believers... On the other hand, a number of passages do indicate a resurrection of unbelievers.”²¹ The goal in this section is not to take a position regarding the debate as to when the timing of this resurrection, or these

²¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 106.

resurrections, is to be,²² but rather to simply clarify the position that there is necessarily also a bodily resurrection of those not in Christ and that this is the historical, orthodox understanding of this issue. Beyond the foundations already laid with Daniel 12 and Acts 24, this dynamic is seen in Revelation 20:

Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (v.4-6).

Reviewing this passage one can once again clearly see, “The wicked are, indeed, also raised in the body, and the Bible does speak of a resurrection of the unjust.”²³

Looking back toward the Gospels, in John 5:25-29 Jesus speaks about the resurrection of the all of the dead:

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

The bodily resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous is also implied in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Prior to this Paul speaks of the resurrection body and “his point is that we must all appear before the judgment seat of the

²² A great deal of the theological discussion around the bodily resurrection of the unrighteous focuses more on when this will occur, i.e. it is often connected to the various millennial views and the final judgment. This is a very nuanced aspect of the question of the bodily resurrection of the unrighteous. Given the already low level of sophistication on the basic questions, no attempt was made in the survey to measure what level of understanding professing Christians have regarding the views of this subject area.

²³ Norman, “The Resurrections of Revelation 20,” 37.

Messiah, and for that we shall need bodies.”²⁴ Wright continues, regarding the implied nod to a support of a resurrection of the wicked, “Here Paul, like John, is on track with Daniel 12 and other similar Jewish texts. Indeed, it may be at this point that all hints after all at a resurrection of the wicked (in order to be judged in the body) as well as of the righteous.”²⁵ Finally, although Hebrews 6:1-2 does not explicitly mention resurrection of the wicked, it can be inferred here as well. “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” The writer of Hebrews includes resurrection and eternal judgment side by side among these very basic elements of the faith, implying not only the resurrection of the just, but also of the unjust who will then face eternal judgment.

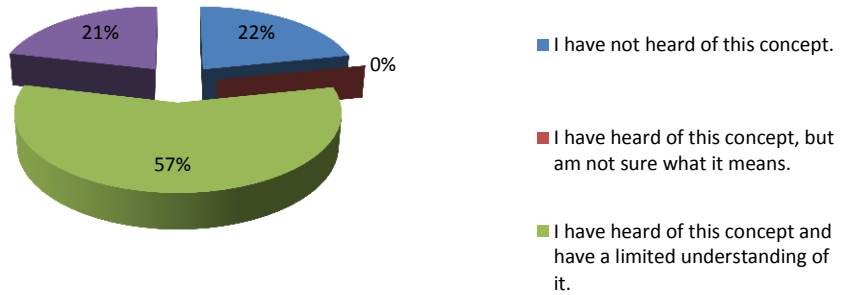
The Intermediate State

The intermediate state is a term that clearly not many people are familiar with within professing Christianity. Put simply, it means the state of existence between death and resurrection. In the survey only 21.33% of respondents claimed to be very familiar with the concept. Almost the same number (21.78%) stated they had never heard of the term or even the concept. Granted, it most assuredly is not as explicitly covered in scriptures as many of the items reviewed so far, but once again this is not some far-out fringe item on the frontiers of orthodoxy. Like a number of other questions prepared for this project, questions about the intermediate state were vetted by peers, friends, family, acquaintances, etc.

²⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 154.

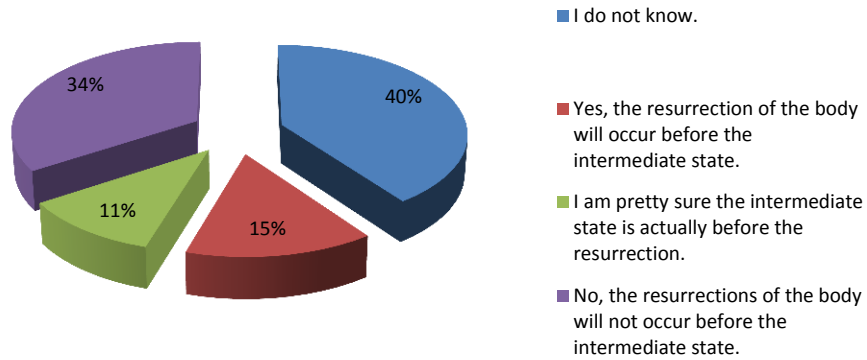
²⁵ Ibid.

Table 3:5 Some believe there is a period of existence between physical death and the eternal state, what some denominations call the “intermediate state”. Have you heard of this concept?



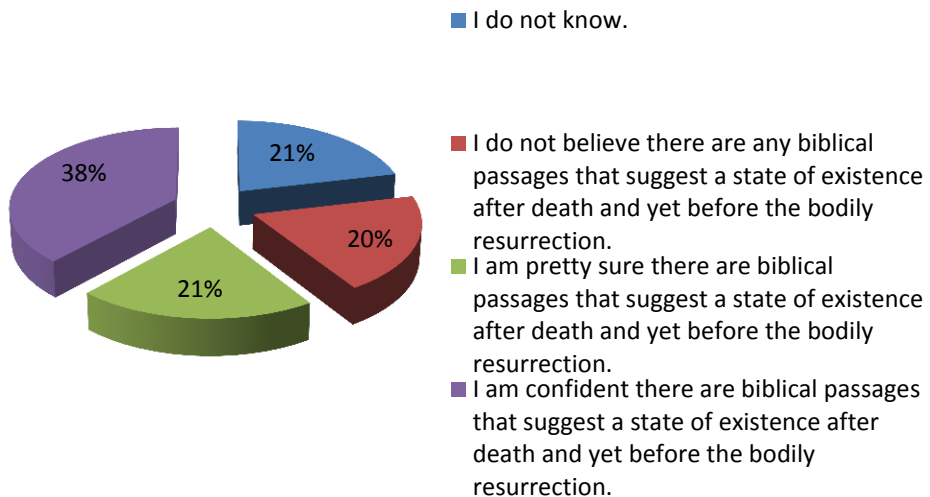
To more sharply define the level of understanding on this point, a third question was asked, reflected in Table 3.6, relating to the basic sequence of events of the intermediate state and resurrection. 40% responded that they “do not know.” This number includes the 8.44% who did not profess to believe in the bodily resurrection (see Table 3.2). Taken together, these two responses reveal that over 31% do not know what comes first, the intermediate state or the resurrection.

Table 3:6 Do you believe that the bodily resurrection will occur before the intermediate state? If you stated earlier that you do not believe in the "bodily resurrection" of believers please select "I do not know".



Per Table 3.7 a total of almost 41% did not know or did not believe that there are passages in Scripture that suggest an intermediate state.

Table 3:7 Do you believe that there are any Bible passages or concepts in the Bible that suggests a state of existence after death and yet before the bodily resurrection?



No other topic area was as perplexing, unknown, and greeted with as many “what’s that?” moments as this. It appears to be the case that many assume that what existence seems to be in the intermediate state, per Scripture and other sources will be the sum of afterlife experience. It is rather obvious that many hold to a view that finds them dying, departing earth, and then existing eternally in a distant, ethereal, heavenly realm. Such a place may exist, or some variation of it, but it appears such a place is not a permanent eternal abode. So where are the departed, in the church age, prior to the general resurrection? Enter stage right the perplexing metaphysical juggernaut that is the intermediate state.

The New Testament picture of believers’ future hope is exponentially clearer than that of the Old Testament, but it is this tension of what happens to the departed prior to the resurrection, yet after death, that makes things get complicated and confusing for many. While there are not many verses nor much imagery on this season, what is there is comforting and powerful. If one tells a small child, “In one week you will receive the greatest present ever!”, he will not likely be peppered with questions from the child about any gifts he might receive in the interim. “The NT offers no sustained reflection on the intermediate state, and this is probably because the parousia was perceived as so real and imminent that it would have seemed irrelevant to reflect upon the state of the dead.”²⁶ Still, there is a situation regarding this gap, between death and resurrection, that necessarily must be dealt with and the scriptures tell us what we need to know. So the core of the question is, “When a Christian dies, is he then in an unconscious state awaiting the

²⁶ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 609.

resurrection? Or does he have a conscious existence living in heaven in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection?”²⁷

There are a number of positions regarding what the intermediate state entails. Three views will be considered. The first two views are not widely held in scholarship, and it is safe to say they are even less known among the laity. First, there is the view of Materialism, or Physicalism. Within this theory human beings are only material beings. “This theory does not deny that humans have both mental and physical attributes but says that both are attributes of the same thing—namely, the living human organism.”²⁸ So Materialism basically holds that the mind and body are one and indivisible, so when people die they completely cease to exist; however, via the resurrection they will exist again in the future. So in this first view there really is no intermediate state. One simply does not exist until the Lord returns and the dead shall be reconstituted, as it were.

Soul Sleep is another theory of what existence is like in the period between death and resurrection. “Psychopannychy, the doctrine that the soul sleeps between death and resurrection, has been held sporadically in the church. It is not a heresy in the narrower sense, due to the paucity of Scripture teaching on the intermediate state, but it may be called a doctrinal aberration.”²⁹ Again like Materialism, this is not a widely held view within scholarship or among the laity. It has some of the same rational underpinnings as materialism, holding that since the soul and body are one and the body is inactive at death, then the soul is as well and therefore it, the soul, is asleep until the resurrection. However, unlike Materialism, this view holds that the

²⁷ Larry J. Waters “The Believer’s Intermediate State after Death,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169, no. 675 (Jul 2012): 284.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1130.

soul still exists. Soul Sleep has never held widespread support, despite advocacy from the likes of Martin Luther. In contrast it has been widely panned and condemned across the spectrum of orthodox denominations.³⁰ One writer from the middle of the 19th century captures the essence of the history of this view in his response to the published lectures of Richard Whately:

There is and always will be a certain irrepressible desire to know where the soul, when it has left the body like a piece of kneaded clay, has instantly gone. What is its immediate condition? It is said at the outset of the lectures that there are two views of the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, the one that it is a condition of consciousness, the other, of unconsciousness. The arguments are then given in full for the two theories, the writer leaving them both standing without his decided approbation of either, but strongly leaning towards the theory of unconsciousness. Was this the way, we venture to ask, “to clear and settle” so obscure a point to plain minds? Was the point itself one to say so much upon theoretically, when the Word of God, which was to be the sole guide, says so little upon it? These chapters are really unsettling. How many of those unlearned hearers knew before that there was such a theory as that the “intermediate state of the soul was one “of profound sleep, of utter unconsciousness”? There is no proof adduced that this theory has ever been a general one.³¹

There is a vast history and scores of volumes allocated to the views noted above beyond this short treatment. This long dialogue, which has transpired over hundreds of years, is often steeped in thoughtful hermeneutical opinions and advanced philosophical principles, grappling with vast complexities of “the mind body problem.” Nonetheless, the next theory of the intermediate state enjoys a great deal of theological consensus and biblical and philosophical support.

Luke 23:43 presents a key passage regarding the intermediate state, recording Jesus’ words to the criminal that hung beside him at Golgotha: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” There has been some debate over this verse and the position and understanding of “today.” To clarify, “Some say Jesus said, ‘I say to you today, you will be with

³⁰ Belief in Soul Sleep was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church in the Fifth Council of the Lateran in 1513.

³¹ Hoppin, “The Future State,” 387.

me in Paradise.’ Others say Jesus said, ‘I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’ No punctuation is in the Greek, but the natural reading of the verse agrees with the second rendering. “Today” means “this very day,” and “with me” means a beautiful place associated with genuine, close fellowship with Christ (cf. John 17:24).”³² So here is clarification that the criminal will be with the Lord in a place, i.e. Paradise, and since the resurrection of the dead has not yet occurred, by definition Jesus is referring to the intermediate state. This is the only instance in the New Testament where Jesus uses the term “paradise” “The NT employs *paradeisos* three times, to denote the place of blessedness promised to the thief, Luke 23:43, the third heaven, (2Cor. 12:4), and the location of the promised tree of life (Rev. 2:7).”³³ It would seem Jesus is speaking about a heavenly realm, where he will be. It is not Sheol and one cannot in any way infer from this passage that the criminal is going to a place where he will cease to exist for a period of time prior to the resurrection.

Paul presents this same picture in Philippians 1:21-23. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” Again he asserts in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” The whole context of this passage, throughout chapter five, is steeped in resurrection language. Granted, an intermediate state is a bit more implied than the direct assertion of Luke 23. Still, upon his death Paul fully expects to be with Jesus, prior to resurrection.

³² Waters, “The Believer’s Intermediate State after Death,” 296.

³³ Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 891.

There are a few other passages that point to an intermediate state as well. Luke 16:19-31 presents yet another narrative packed full of items related to various aspects of the afterlife, including the state of the unjust, the state of the righteous, imagery reflecting a great divide in Sheol (or Hades), and a foreshadowing of the resurrection of Christ.

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

In this section Jesus depicts a type of existence post mortem and pre-resurrection, i.e. intermediate state. The imagery here, in terms of the situation of the righteous and unjust, is the clearest picture, moving chronologically through the books of the canon, that appears until that point in the Scriptures. And regardless of the various theories as to what this passage means in terms of the current situation of the departed, in their own time, despite the lack of detail, it seems the work of Christ and the coming general resurrection shifted Sheol and Hades from what was largely perceived as the eternal state into an intermediate state.

Lastly, there is the Transfiguration of Christ, recorded in three of the Gospels, where Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only (Matthew 17:1-8).

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him (Luke 9:28-32).

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only (Mark 9:2-8).

Again, while the narrative speaks to many doctrinal matters, Moses and Elijah exist and are conscious prior to a general resurrection, further nullifying the materialist and soul sleep positions. They have bodies, the disciples can see them as they acknowledge their presence, they speak with Jesus, and then they are gone. There has been a similar appearance before in Scripture, in 1 Samuel 28: 8-14, Samuel's post-death appearance almost a millennium before at Endor. Saul has the medium there agree to bring him up:

And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my

life to bring about my death?” But Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” He said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul.” The king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a god coming up out of the earth.” He said to her, “What is his appearance?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

Granted, this is a totally difference sort of appearing, one that was even illegal in ancient Israel. Nonetheless, it is an appearing of an Old Testament prophet who continues to exist after his death and prior to the general resurrection. Whatever the intermediate state was in the past, or is since the work of Christ, it is in Scripture, and despite being largely ignored by contemporary laity it falls well within the boundaries of orthodoxy.

Throughout history, the ecumenical Christian tradition—Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most historic Protestant churches—has affirmed that God created humans as unities of body and soul but that disembodied souls exist in an intermediate state between death and resurrection. In other words, body and soul are distinct and normally integrated, but the soul can exist separately, sustained by God.³⁴

Despite this scriptural and historical position, the data regarding the status of the resurrection in the minds of American professing Christians clearly points to a lack of sophistication on this doctrine. Segal sums it up nicely:

Today, most American Christians of all denominations continue to assent to a belief in resurrection. But closer scrutiny shows that many do not believe that the physical body will be resurrected, as Tertullian preached, but that the soul will dwell in heaven after death. What they call “resurrection of the body” actually refers technically to “immortality of the soul”. The notion of resurrection is only strongly characteristic of a sizable minority of Americans. A traditional, strong, and a liberal view in resurrection of

³⁴ John W. Cooper, “The Current Body-Soul Debate: A Case for Dualistic Holism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 33.

the body is, in fact, a very strong indicator that the person is on the evangelical, fundamentalist, or Orthodox Jewish side on the line.³⁵

Conclusion of Chapter Three

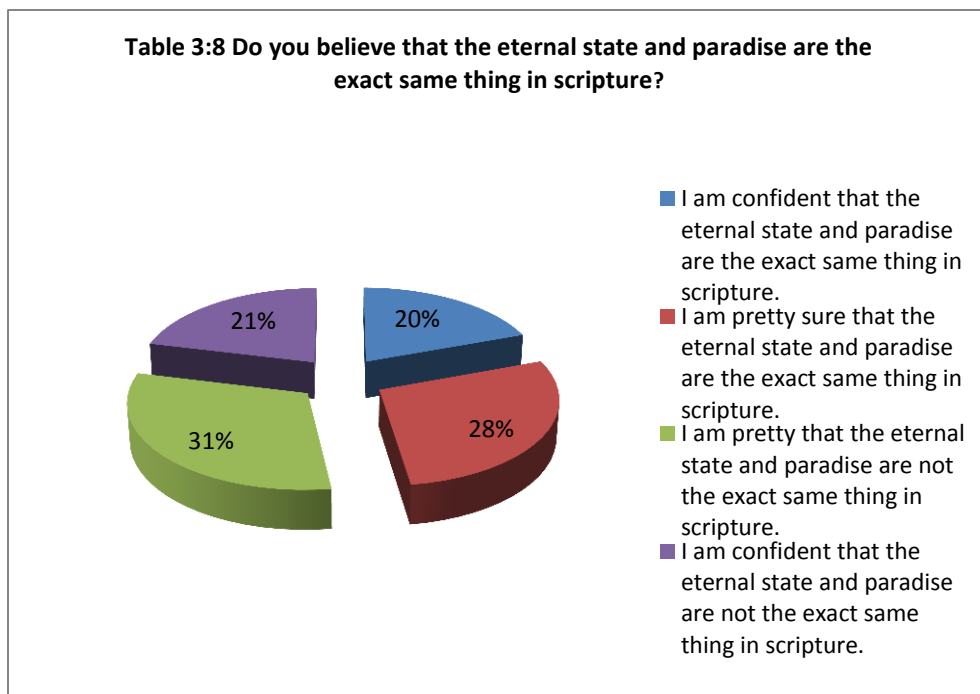
This chapter has traced some of the key aspect in the development of afterlife theology within Christianity, via its transition from the Old Testament, through the Intertestamental Period, to the close of the New Testament. From the limited picture from the close of chapter two, as resurrection sat on the periphery of Judaism, to the full measure of its role found in the hope of the gospel message, there is a long standing doctrinal foundation with which to know these things the scriptures teach. These teachings, built upon scripture, some explicitly taught, other aspects clearly implied, and from which the foundation of age-old creeds, i.e. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, have been penned and established for almost two millennia. Yet, this project's survey data and the findings of others reflect thus far a lack of confidence and sophistication of the basic matters reviewed, i.e. resurrection in general and the nature of the post-resurrection body; and surely there is a shortfall in the more outlying aspects, such as items related to the intermediate state, fate of the unjust, etc. Each of the tables contained in this chapter present responses that reflect a lack of knowledge and confidence.

Table 3.1 shows that the respondents have little understanding as to the time frame and development of the doctrine of the resurrection. Only 20% properly identified resurrection as primarily an Intertestamental Period and New Testament teaching, with almost 33% plainly stating they did not know. Table 3.2 shows that only 31.11% of respondents were fully confident in the future bodily resurrection of believers. Granted, 52% selected "Yes, I think this will occur," still this reflects less than full confidence on what is a key focus of Christians' future

³⁵ Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 5.

promised existence and is likely tied to a general decline in biblical literacy. In Table 3.4 only 24.89% profess a confident understanding of the biblical teaching that all will be resurrected, both the righteous in Christ and the unjust. Table 3.5 shows a low level of understanding, or even acknowledgement, of the existence of the intermediate state despite it being an aspect of the doctrine of all of professing orthodox Christianity, across the major denominations.

To get a sense of if the respondents understood the difference between paradise as an intermediate state and the eternal state a question, “Do you believe that the eternal state and paradise are the exact same thing in scripture?” was asked. Again, the responses were scattered, this time very evenly.



The data that has been reviewed to this point has demonstrated what the researcher anticipated: a low level of laity understanding related to these aspects of the afterlife. As this

project turns its focus to a number of questions related to the afterlife that gained attention and have been debated throughout the church age more of the same will be found.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF THE AFTERLIFE IN THE CHURCH ERA

At the close of the Apostolic Era there was the church, one church, universal, both visible and invisible. Then there emerged the Latin and Greek schism of AD 1054: alas, two visible churches. Then there was the steady build up to the split within the Roman Church. The eventual full-blown spark of the Reformation came with Luther's 1517 posting of The Ninety Five Theses, yielding three major divisions of the faith. Since the Reformation to the current day there have arisen some 10,000 distinct Christian denominations. These divisions, whatever the reasons, whether they are good or bad, have resulted in a bit of a colorful doctrinal landscape, to say the least. If someone has a slight disagreement on a nuance of a core or peripheral doctrine, or in the style of worship, or whatever issue, the response seems to be simply to start a new denomination. Problems solved! Not exactly, whether this division is the full measure of the problem or not, as noted in the introduction of this work biblical and doctrinal literacy is on the decline.

One need only to read the epistles to come to the conclusion there was never a golden era of the church being robustly edified. Almost immediately John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and the author of Hebrews were busy edifying and correcting these early followers of Christ of erroneous beliefs and warning of false teachers and their doctrine. From those times to the faith conquering the Roman Empire, the early church councils, the closing of the canon, the rise of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the great controversies, more councils, all the way to today; there has been discussion and disagreement on the core and peripheral aspects of the faith.

While the topics to be explored in this chapter could have also been addressed in chapter three in light of the debate over a few of these topics that has occurred in part against the backdrop of the denominational situation mentioned, i.e. throughout church history, it seems practical to explore them in this fashion. As ever the mission is to measure the most basic tenants of the orthodox faith in light of the findings of the project's survey data. This chapter will examine how the Catholic and Protestant churches differ in their understanding of the Intermediate State, exploring notions of purgatory and paradise. In addition, a number of issues related to Annihilationism and Universalism will be considered. Finally, the chapter will explore a number of more contemporary notions about death and the afterlife that have influenced the way believers understand this aspect of their future existence.

The Intermediate State: Purgatory and Paradise

As seen in chapter three, the Scriptures indicate a state of existence in the period between death and the general resurrection; however, there is disagreement as to what this experience is like for believers and one of the main areas of divide comes in the understanding of the intermediate state by Catholicism and most of Protestantism.

When, between the second and fourth centuries, Christianity set itself to thinking about the situation in which souls find themselves between the death of the individual and the last judgment, and when, in the fourth century, the greatest fathers of the church conceived of the idea shared with minor differences as we shall see by Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine that certain sinners might be saved, most probably by being subjected to a trial of some sort, a new belief was formed, a belief that gradually matured until the 12th century it became the belief in purgatory; but the place where these souls were to reside and where this trial was to take place was not yet specified. Until the end of the 12th century the noun *purgatorium* did not exist: *the* purgatory had not yet been born.¹

¹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1986), 3.

Even though there was a small number of Non-Protestant respondents, it is evident that there is still some work to do in this area. For most Protestants, purgatory is a completely foreign concept. In the 500 years since the Reformation it emerges as one of the key eschatological differences between the Catholic and Protestant factions of the faith.

In Jerry Walls' text *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* the reader is given a solid overview of the background and development of this doctrine. He starts out:

The doctrine of purgatory did not drop, fully formed, out of heaven, or hell, or for that matter out of somewhere in between. To the contrary, the doctrine has a long and complicated history and a significantly longer gestation period than many other formally approved doctrines. Indeed, critics of purgatory sometimes seize on the fact that it emerged relatively late in the history of the church in order to emphasize that it cannot claim the same vintage as classic consensual Christian teaching. And it is true that the doctrine was not first officially affirmed in conciliar fashion by the Roman Catholic Church until the second Council of Lyons in 1274. This was several hundred years after the ecumenical councils that defined central Christian doctrines such as the incarnation and the Trinity. Moreover, the first great split in the church between Rome and Constantinople had already occurred over 200 years earlier in 1054, and the Protestant Reformation was still a few centuries away.²

Based upon this complicated history this little introduction most likely contains more data about the advent of the official recognition of the doctrine than perhaps most Catholic laity are familiar with, let alone their Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ. But if this is the doctrine's inception, what is its backstory, its biblical moorings? Why did the vast majority of Protestantism purge itself of the belief?

The word itself is from the Latin "purgare"³, meaning to make clean, or to purify. The doctrine itself is not formally called purgatory, but rather "final purification."⁴ It seems expanded

² Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

³ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 390.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 355.

theological definitions of purgatory are flavored one way or the other depending on who is writing them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the doctrine as such:

III. THE FINAL PURIFICATION, OR PURGATORY

1030. All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

1031. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.⁵

Protestant discussions on the matter tend to focus on the suffering and punishment aspects whereas Catholic descriptions focus on the purging and purification aspects. Still, on the basic theological definition there is great continuity. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* segues in with, “The teachings of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches set forth a place of temporal punishment and the intermediate realm known as purgatory, in which it is held that all those who die in peace with the church but who are not perfect must undergo penal and purifying suffering.”⁶ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* states that purgatory “refers to a post-mortem state of temporary, disciplinary purification for those faithful who upon death have

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm (Accessed February 14, 2015)

⁶ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 972.

not made complete satisfaction for their sin and thus are not yet ready to experience the beatific vision. The fact that purgatory is a place of painful discipline distinguishes it from heaven; the fact that its pains are temporary rather than eternal distinguishes it from hell.”⁷ Protestants’ lack of knowledge on the concept and doctrine of purgatory aside it typically is not viewed with anticipation to say the least or understood to be such a wonderful place. It is not altogether uncommon when one is in a bad situation in this world, whether he is Protestant or Catholic, to discouragingly utter, “I am in purgatory.” But what is purgatory? Where is Purgatory?

In 1254, Pope Innocent IV sent a letter to Cardinal Eudes of Chateauroux of the Greek Church in which he defined purgatory in a way that he hoped the Greek church could accept. Le Guff describes this letter, which follows, as “the birth certificate of purgatory as a doctrinally defined place”.

Since the truth asserts in the gospel that, if anyone blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, this sin will not be forgiven either in this world or in the next: by which we are given to understand that certain faults are pardoned in the present time, and others in the other life; since the apostle also declares that the work of each man, whatever it be shall be tried by fire and that if it burns the worker will suffer the loss, but he himself will be saved yet as by fire; since the Greeks themselves, it is said, believe and profess truly and without hesitation that the souls of those who die after receiving penance but without having had the time to complete it, or who die without mortal sin by guilty of venial (sin) or minor faults, are purged after death and may be helped by sufferings of the Church; we, consider that the Greeks assert that they cannot find in the works of their doctors any certain and proper name to designate the place of this purgation, and that moreover, according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers, this name is purgatory, we wish that in the future this expression be also accepted by them. Four, in the temporary fire, sins, not of course crimes and capital errors, which could not previously have been forgiven through repentance, but slight and minor sins, are purged; if they have not been forgiven during existence, they weigh down the soul after death.⁸

⁷ Richard Fenn, "Purgatory." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁸ Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, 23.

This was subsequently further legitimized “by Pope Benedict the XII in 1336.”⁹ Still, while these were its formal inceptions as the position of the Latin Church it is clear that purgatory had long been the informal position of the church. They would say this doctrine, like other doctrines of the faith, had been believed prior to the meetings of the councils that formally validated them in earlier centuries. In the subsequent centuries the doctrine has been solidified by Catholic theologians and reaffirmed by the church. But what exactly are its biblical foundations?

Protestants say there is little to no scriptural support for purgatory. Of course Catholics do not fully agree, but these passages seem to come more in the form of the conceptual support versus clear direct explanation. The primary support for the doctrine is most often cited as 2 Maccabees 12:38-46, which in context reflects a scene in the aftermath of a series of Jewish victories over their oppressors.

Then Judas assembled his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was coming on, they purified themselves according to the custom, and kept the sabbath there. On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchres of their ancestors.

Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen.

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life after Death: A New Approach to Last Things* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 129.

Jerry L. Walls comments on this cornerstone text in his thoughtful overview of the doctrine

Purgatory: The Joy of Total Transformation:

The meaning of this text is hardly transparent, and this is further complicated by the fact that it refers to practices that are not yet referred to elsewhere in scripture. What is reasonably clear, however, is that Judas Maccabeus and his fellow Jews believed that sins could be forgiven after death, and that prayers by the living could achieve this. At any rate, this text was often cited in support of these beliefs and the attendant practice of praying for the dead, a practice that figured significantly in the latter history of purgatory.¹⁰

Another passage utilized by proponents of the doctrine is Malachi 3:2b-3, “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.” Here again are seen the concepts of purification and the tradition that, drawing upon texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire referenced in the catechisms.

Four primary New Testament proof texts for purgatory include:

1. Matthew 5:25-26, “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” The notion here is that this judgment or sentence, as it were, would need to be paid in the next life if not settled during one’s lifetime.
2. Matthew 12:31-32, “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” The reference to

¹⁰ Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, 12.

forgiveness “in the age to come” is taken by proponents of the doctrine to indicate that some sins are forgiven in the afterlife.

3. Revelation 21:27, “But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” This verse is understood by Catholics as indicating that one will not be able to enter heaven if he does not die in a sinless state, that there will have to be first a purging of that sin, and purgatory is the “place” for that transformation.

4. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15,

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Catholics believe this to be the clearest passage in Scripture for a defense of the doctrine. As Walls puts it, “The fifth crucial text is from the apostle Paul, and is particularly noteworthy because it was commented on perhaps more extensively than any other during the formative period in which the doctrine of purgatory was formulated and given its classic shape.”

In this passage is seen the language associated by Catholics with the purifying cleansing one must experience in purgatory. There are a few other passages commonly noted in a defense of

purgatory,¹¹ but the items above are the essential biblical passages. The balance of support comes from church doctrine and theological considerations. No two people had more influence on its acceptance, explanation, solidification, and visualization than Thomas Aquinas and Dante Alighieri. The doctrine was thoughtfully and intellectually explained and defended famously by Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, whereas Dante's treatment in the *Divine Comedy* put literal faces, landscapes, and dialogue where the biblical narratives did not. Speaking of Dante's work, Walls notes, "It is hard to exaggerate the long-term significance of this poem for the fortunes of the doctrine of purgatory."¹² These weighty treatments helped to entrench the doctrine in the theological market place of the Renaissance and beyond. Aquinas, "the prince of Catholic theologians,"¹³ gives the rationalization for the doctrine in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, as noted by Walls:

This purgation, of course, is made by punishments, just as in this life their purgation would have been completed by punishments which satisfied the debt; otherwise, the negligent would be better off than the solicitous, if the punishment which they do not complete for their sins need not be undergone in the future. Therefore, if the souls of the good have something capable of purgation in this world, they are held back from the achievement of their reward while they undergo cleansing punishments. And this is the reason we hold that there is a purgatory.¹⁴

Walls observes that there are different models of purgatory. Anthony C. Thiselton writes, "Some modern Catholic theologians have perhaps modified the traditional doctrine of purgatory. Karl Rahner stresses the grace of God, resurrection, and the qualified universalism, but insists that purgatory remains an official Catholic doctrine, allowing for post mortal growth and

¹¹ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace of Daniel 3, Hezekiah's fear of death in 2 Kings 20, 1 Sam. 2:6, and Zech. 9:11 are other notable examples as historic arguments for purgatory.

¹² Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

development or ripening”.¹⁵ All that said, the doctrine is still clearly intact within Catholicism, and although it has undergone some modifications and thoughtful reconsiderations, there is no real move toward having it removed as official doctrine.

Obviously the doctrine of purgatory did not survive the Reformation on the Protestant side of the aisle. In the research for this work, surveying the landscape of opinion on this matter, there was a discernable level of disdain between the two camps, at least in certain circles. There were Protestants and Catholics in scholarly journals, blogs, and websites alike that were clearly agitated by the alternative position and how their view was treated. It is hard to express the Protestant denial of the doctrine and applicable rationale without coming across as somewhat snippy. The divide on this issue is not a singular divide, but strikes multiple disagreements on some very core issues, most of which go to the heart of the Reformation itself. It is beyond the scope of this project to unpack the whole of the affair that led to the Catholic and Protestant schism of the 16th century, but its most foundational aspects will be noted.

First, on the grounds of *Sola Scriptura*, Protestants believe that there is no biblical foundation to the doctrine of purgatory. The 2 Maccabees text is not considered to be canonical within Protestantism,¹⁶ so that one immediately falls by the wayside. And although the other texts referenced above as an apologetic for the doctrine are in the canon, their interpretations are seen as overtly spiritualized. Essentially, the two camps adopt different and conflicting hermeneutical grids altogether. Next, there is a pretty radical divide in what each camp even sees as authoritative, i.e. “scripture alone” for Protestantism versus scripture and church doctrine in Catholicism. Given the lack of perceived scriptural evidence, disagreement on the noted texts,

¹⁵ Thiselton, *Life after Death: A New Approach to Last Things*, 70-71.

¹⁶ The Apocrypha was not fully accepted by the Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in 1546.

and Protestants' lack of interest in what theologians Augustine, Boniface, or Aquinas, or subsequent popes wrote on the matter, there is "no common ground" in the conflict. Still, it goes further than that as at the two parties hold radically different ideas on ecclesiastical order and differing views on one huge particular doctrine, justification. The Protestant concept of *Sola Fide* (faith alone) is a monumental aspect in the divide here as well:

In the Reformation purgatory is of course a flashpoint, with Luther and Calvin and other reformers rejecting it on multiple grounds. Among these are its prima facie inconsistency with the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone (which was viewed as being in tension with the supposed need for postmortem penance), and its connection with the abuses involved in the sale of indulgences. Discussions of purgatory continue in later Protestant thinkers, with objections made by Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (among others), and a staunch rejection enshrined by the Anglican Church in article 22 of its 39 Articles of Religion.¹⁷

Over the intervening 500 years since the Reformation, the Catholic Church has solidified its position and Protestants have literally almost forgotten about purgatory, at least in laity circles. "Obviously there is far more to this history than has been presented here, as space constraints necessitate a truncated treatment."¹⁸ This is true and this issue shows no sign of crossing the denominational divide.

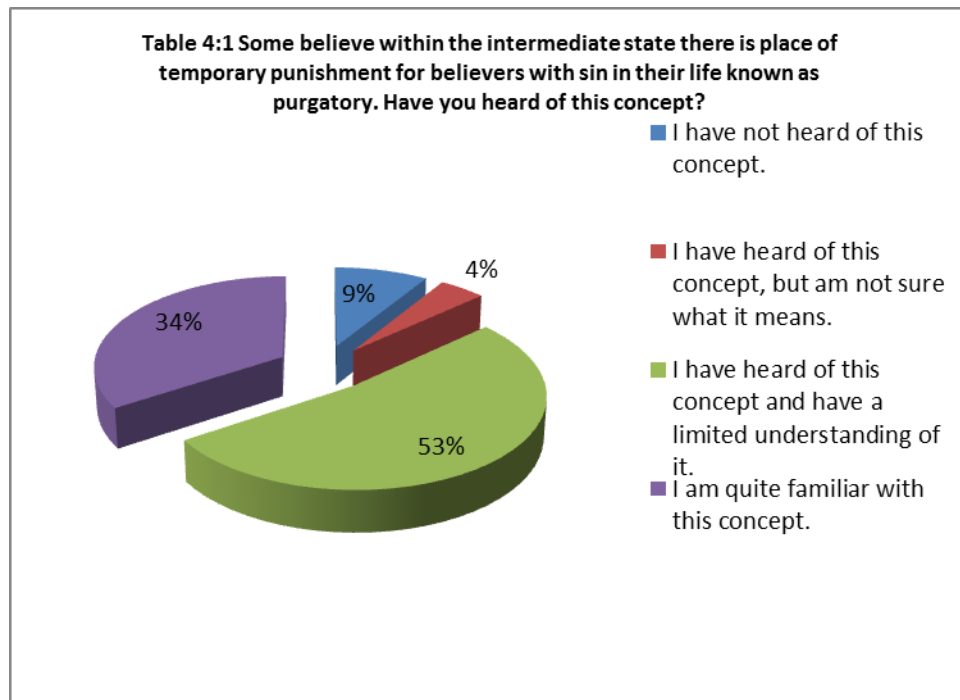
The primary mission for this aspect of the project was to show that the survey respondents lined up with their particular denominational affiliation's view of this issue. As can be seen in the table and data below, that is clearly the case. Only 6 of the 225 respondents, or 4%, identified as being Catholics. Of the six Roman Catholics in the pool of respondents, one did not believe in purgatory and one had never heard of the concept. Interestingly enough a number of respondents identifying with groups that do not teach the existence of purgatory reported a belief in that view including five Southern Baptists, four Other, three Non-Denominational, two

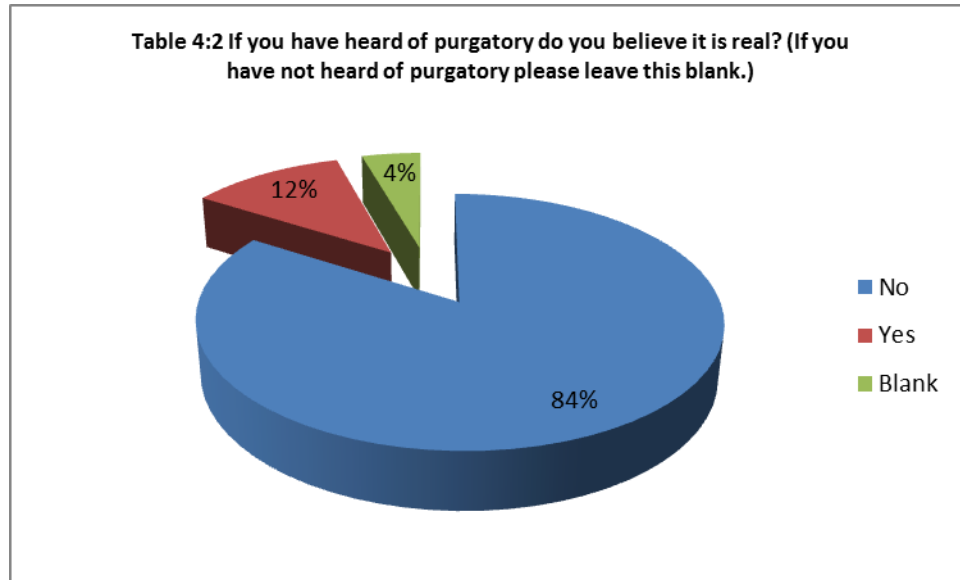
¹⁷ Travis Dumsday, "Purgatory," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 10 (2014): 734.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Presbyterians, one Church of Christ, one Nazarene, one United Methodist and one Independent Baptist.

By and large the respondents had heard of purgatory, with only 8.89% reporting not having heard of it. But only 34.22% reported being quite familiar with the doctrine. It is not surprising, given the overwhelming percentage of Protestant responses, that 84% reported not believing in the doctrine.





The Final State of the Wicked

A lot of focus on the afterlife by believers is on the fate of those in Christ; meaning thinking about or visualizing their existence, and or using language to describe their future existence in heaven or a beatific eternal existence. Whatever these ponderings and expectations are, as seen through the lack of continuity of opinion reflected in this project’s survey responses, their understanding about that existence is not altogether sophisticated and clear. But what do professing Christians believe about the fate of non-believers, the unjust, the unrighteous, the wicked? What is the orthodox Christian doctrine on the eternal fate of this group? Is it eternal torment? Do they cease to exist? Can they be reconciled to God postmortem?

It has long been noted there are three possible positions concerning the extent of the salvation of human kind: (1) none will be saved; (2) some will be saved; or (3) all will be saved. The traditional Christian teaching concerning the hereafter has been the second option: only some will be saved. Within this position debates are ongoing as to exactly who will be saved (must one have explicit faith in Christ?) and what the final condition of the lost will be (will they suffer eternal conscious torment?).¹⁹

¹⁹ Timothy K. Beogher, “Are All Doomed to Be Saved? The Rise of Modern Universalism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 7.

It is a difficult topic. In the conversations related to this series of questions and research a number of contributors mentioned the difficulty of imagining someone suffering eternally. "I do almost wish they could just cease to be," said one observer. It is one thing to imagine a tyrant, a scourge, a "Hitler," or a child murderer, to suffer such a lasting fate, but what of others?

Orthodox Position of the Fate of the Unsaved

While there is obvious disagreement among Christians regarding purgatory, the professing church is quite united on the future state of the wicked. Below is the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the doctrine of hell.

IV. Hell

1033: We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren. To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."

1034: Jesus often speaks of "Gehenna" of "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost. Jesus solemnly proclaims that he "will send his angels, and they will gather . . . all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire," and that he will pronounce the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!"

1035: The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire." The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

1036: The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth."

1037: God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance."²⁰

Gone are the more vague notions of purgatory. They are replaced with clear biblical support and exacting language and imagery of an eternal place of punishment and separation from God.

Granted, there is discussion and contemplation, as ever, on matters relating to the doctrine of hell across the scope of orthodox Christianity. But given the centrality of ecclesiastical authority within the Catholic Church, it is a bit of a different discussion in contrast with Protestantism. As previously mentioned, there are now some 10,000 Protestant denominations in the world. Some of these would not be considered orthodox for one doctrinal reason or another, but as the project's attention shifts to the Protestant view of the doctrine of hell, the focus will be upon the main points of cohesion within the many Protestant denominations. A few doctrinal outliers will also be considered for the sake of helping draw the doctrinal distinctions. On that front it is worth mentioning that some niches of the faith, call them certain theological circles, have done away

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm (Accessed February 14, 2015)

with hell; aspects of their arguments will be examined in the next few sections, but the focus will be to measure what laity know about each of the related survey questions as it relates to traditional orthodoxy. If a particular group, or sect, or theologian has decided to do away with this pillar of orthodoxy, then so be it; but the standard of measurement for this project will be the historical doctrinal position of the church, period. And there is a great deal of continuity on these matters, especially as it relates to hell. But what if hell has been undermined? Is it such a pillar of the faith after all?

After all, the doctrine of hell certainly is not central to the faith in the way the Incarnation and Trinity are. It is not explicitly affirmed in either the Apostles' or the Nicene Creed. It appears to be a peripheral matter which is isolated from the main body of Christian teaching and could be lopped off without changing much of anything.

A little reflection reveals, however, that the doctrine of hell is closer to the heart of traditional Christian belief than we may initially think. This is most evident when we recall that Christianity is primarily a scheme of salvation. Its main thrust is a message of how we can be saved from our sins and receive eternal life.²¹

And if this is the thrust, and it is, what are people being saved from? It is a complex answer, but part of that answer is, they are being saved from hell. As Walls puts it, hell, “is the alternative to salvation.”²²

Below is a matrix of views that encompass the vast majority of opinions on the matter of hell.

Traditional Popular View. This is the view that hell is God's eternal punishment which falls irreversibly on all who die in a state of sin. The punishment includes corporeal or physical distress and it will be the fate of the great majority of the human race. This understanding of hell has been held not only by many ordinary believers, but also by a number of theologians.

²¹ Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (London: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 3.

²² *Ibid.*

Traditional Orthodox View. The essence of this view is that hell is God's eternal punishment of all who obstinately refuse his grace to the end of life. We cannot know the proportion of the saved to the lost nor do we know the nature of God's punishment, though it could include physical pain.

The Traditional Calvinistic View. What distinguishes this view from the previous two is the belief that God has chosen who will be saved and who will be damned. The accent here is not on human freedom to reject God's grace, but upon God's sovereign right to damn whomever he will.

The Modified Orthodox View. On this view, our eternal destiny is not sealed at death; rather, God continues to offer grace after death, so there is no end to the opportunity to receive salvation. Nevertheless, some will forever reject God's grace and experience the corresponding pain of being forever separated from God.²³

Hell, Hades, Gehenna, Lake of Fire

Hell, like other items this project has reviewed, as both a term and as an abode of the dead, can be confusing. Sheol, Hell, Hades, Gehenna, and Lake of Fire are often used erroneously and interchangeable when people discuss the fate of the wicked. In chapter two of this project notions of Sheol were reviewed, compared, and contrasted against other ANE beliefs about the netherworld, including the Greek Hades. The term Sheol and Hell are likely often tied together because of “the Septuagint’s consistent rendering of the Hebrew term”²⁴ Sheol as Hades (ᾗδου). For example:

But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit(Is. 14:15 ESV).

νῦν δὲ εἰς ᾗδου καταβήσῃ καὶ εἰς τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς (Is. 14:15 LXX).

In turn, in discussions on the fate of the departed and in various translations, Hades is often used interchangeably with Hell.

²³ Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, 12-13.

²⁴ Christopher Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 44.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:14 ESV)

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:14 KJV)

So given this it does not seem like much of a literary jump from Sheol to Hades to Hell. But it is quite a conceptual jump, as “the Old Testament understanding of the place called Sheol bears little resemblance to the Gehenna/hell we read about in the New Testament.”²⁵ Given this dynamic the future eternal notions of Hell are often then erroneously imported back to Hades and Sheol and vice versa--blurring or erasing the fairly legible lines between Hades and Sheol as an intermediate state and the eternal notion of Hell, Gehenna, and the Lake of Fire. Some of the mixing of terms and associated confusion caused are by the translation of both *Hades* and *Gehenna* as “hell” in certain translations, such as the Latin Vulgate, Authorized Version, and New King James Version. Examples of this are reflected in the various treatment of James 3:6 below, with *gehenna* and *γεέννης* being used in the first two translations and hell being used in the second grouping:

Et lingua ignis est, universitas iniquitatis. Lingua constituitur in membris nostris, quæ maculat totum corpus, et inflammat rotam nativitatis nostræ inflammata a gehenna (Jas.3:6 VUL).

καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα πῦρ· ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας ἡ γλῶσσα καθίσταται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν, ἡ σπιλοῦσα ὅλον τὸ σῶμα καὶ φλογίζουσα τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως καὶ φλογιζομένη ὑπὸ τῆς γεέννης (James 3:6 *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition*).

Versus:

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell (James 3:6 ESV).

²⁵ Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 44.

And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell (Jas. 3:6 KJV).

So, as ever, translation and context are crucial in engaging these various terms. Moreover the New Testament makes a distinction between Gehenna and Hades.

Hades receives the unrighteous for the period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is the place of punishment assigned permanently at the last Judgment. The torment of Gehenna is eternal (Mark 9:43, 48). Further, the souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades, whereas in Gehenna both body and soul, reunited at the resurrection are destroyed by eternal fire (Mark 9: 43-48; Matt 10:28). This is a counter view to the view of some of the early church fathers that all who die, righteous and unrighteous alike, descend to Sheol or Hades, a sort of gloomy, dreamy state where they await the coming Messiah.²⁶

In the traditional view touting *Hell under Fire* Daniel Block writes, “Prior to Daniel 12:2 we find no clear evidence of belief in hell, if by hell we mean a place of eternal torment and judgment for the wicked.”²⁷ So the common usage of both Sheol and Hades suggest they are, in the proper sense, both distinct from the concept of an eternal hell. But clearly, it is a common notion and saying, within the laity, that when an evil person dies, immediately he is “burning in hell.” Are such people immediately transferred, upon physical death, to such an eternal abode? And can this occur prior to the resurrection and final judgment? Breaking down Hell, Gehenna, and the Lake of Fire in Scripture will give a little more clarity to these lines blurred by history.

The term “Gehenna” is related historically and etymologically to the Valley of Hinnom.

This valley acquired an evil reputation because of the idolatrous practice of child sacrifices offered to Moloch there during the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, two of the most notorious kings to ever lead Judah, the southern part of the divided monarchy (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Later, during the reign of Josiah, this faithful king had the valley desecrated in order to prevent a recurrence of this abominable practice (2 Kings 23:10). Still later the Prophet Jeremiah announced that this valley would become a place of

²⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 1188.

²⁷ Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Hell under Fire*, 65.

God's future judgment, where the Lord would recompense the kings of Judah and the people of Jerusalem for their abominable deeds.²⁸

In the Intertestamental Period the term was sometimes used interchangeably with Sheol, although Gehenna was increasingly seen as a place of retribution for just the departed wicked, distinguishing it from Sheol. By the time of Christ "gehenna came to be used metaphorically for the hell of fire, the place of everlasting punishment for the wicked."²⁹

The word γέεννα occurs 12 times in the New Testament with 11 of the occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels (all spoken by Jesus) and with one reference being James 3:6. The 11 references may be seen in three groups: (a) warnings addressed to the disciples concerning stumbling blocks (Matt 5:29–30; 18:8–9; Mark 9:43–48); (b) warnings addressed to the disciples in relation to their personal destiny (Matt 5:22; 10:28; Luke 12:4–5); and (c) condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:15, 33).³⁰

So one can differentiate between a place of eternal suffering, Gehenna, and a place of inactivity, Sheol. Granted, Sheol's intermediate status can only be seen primarily through the lens of the New Testament and the resurrection. That is, within the context of the original audience it appeared to be eternal. Not only can the two terms be distinguished via this intermediate and eternal contrast, but also by the fact that Sheol, unlike Gehenna, is never depicted as an abode where divine justice is carried out. In the literature of the era of the Second Temple are seen several emerging concepts, including a hope of future individual resurrection, which necessarily supposes an intermediate state, which yields imagery and beliefs that show a different quality of existence for the righteous versus the wicked in the afterlife.

Sheol, Hades, and Paradise are necessarily an intermediate state due to the looming impact of bodily resurrection. Gehenna and Hell are most often used within the context of an

²⁸ Hans Scharen, "Part 1: Gehenna in the Synoptics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 595 (Jul 1992): 328.

²⁹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 480.

³⁰ Scharen, "Part 1: Gehenna in the Synoptics," 330.

eternal dwelling place with clear descriptions of suffering and punishment. As noted this distinction, first made possible by Daniel 12:2, is all the more discernible by the Second Temple Period. The same passages from 2 Maccabees 7 (reviewed in Chapter Three of this thesis) that spoke of the flourishing belief in individual bodily resurrection also reflect the belief in divine justice and judgment. As the seven brothers are being tortured and killed it is clear that a belief that a divine reckoning will come is in place by that time. *“For we, through this severe suffering and endurance, shall have the prize of virtue and shall be with God, on whose account we suffer; but you, because of your bloodthirstiness toward us, will deservedly undergo from the divine justice eternal torment by fire”* (2 Macca 7:8-9). The writer then follows up with, *“for great is the struggle of the soul and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God”* (2 Macca 13:15). The inactive, boring shadows of Hades and Sheol as depicted in the Old Testament are replaced with eternal torment by fire.

The imagery of fire here is a nice segue to yet another term in the lexicon of the fate of the wicked, “Lake of Fire”.

The phase occurs six times in Revelation and nowhere else in the NT or in Jewish literature. It is the place of eternal punishment for the wicked. The beast and false prophet are thrown alive into it before the millennial reign (19:20). After the final battle they are joined by Satan (20:10), and after the final judgment death and Hades are also cast in (20:14; cf. Isa.25.8, 1 Cor. 15:26), as well as those whose names are not in the book of life (20:15).

The imagery of this lake of fire eternal abode is brief, consistent, powerful and horrifying.

“And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur” (Revelation 19:20 ESV).

“and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10 ESV).

“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14 ESV).

“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15 ESV).

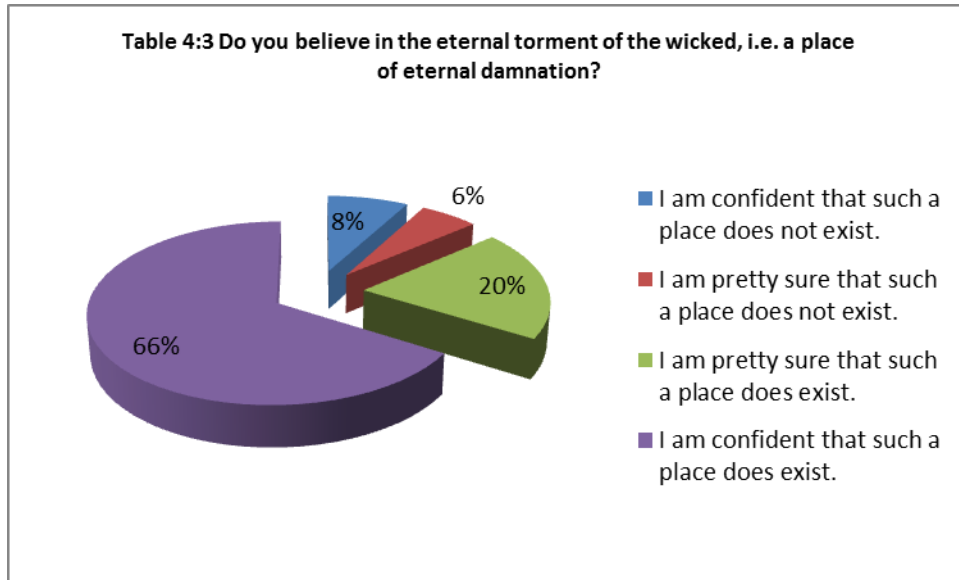
One has to go to some lengths in the academic literature to find a direct connection to the fact that Hell, Gehenna, and the Lake of Fire are one and the same. That is, the connection is hard to find. One does have to deduce this for the most part based upon their similar eternal aspects, versus the implied temporal aspects of Sheol and Hades discussed earlier. Still, the lake of fire is clearly the eternal hell that most people reference within the Christian common vocabulary. It is the final abode of all of those not bound to Christ. The source below does make the rare direct connection:

They are cast into the lake of fire (see Rev. 20:10, 14–15), the final and permanent place of punishment for all who refuse to submit to Jesus Christ. “The beast” and false prophet are the first persons to be cast into hell. Satan will follow 1,000 years later (Rev. 20:10), to be joined by those whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15).³¹

So within the context of the New Testament, hell goes by a few different names. And despite some confusion related to that and some nuances of the intermediate and eternal state, the respondents of the survey express a high level of confidence that such a place does exist. This finds those respondents in line with traditional orthodoxy on the matter and basically aligned with other findings on the topic; for example, “In a 1990 Gallup poll, 60 percent of Americans professed belief in hell, which is more than affirmed the doctrine four decades earlier.”³²

³¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol.2* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 618.

³² Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, 6.



Annihilationism

A question about Annihilationism was asked in the survey to see if there was much flexibility on the “eternal” aspect of punishment expressed in that question; that is, would respondents see an out, as it were, from eternal torment in the form of ceasing to exist?

Annihilationism and Universalism both present a potential out or alternative to such a fate. The treatment of these items will be brief since this aspect of the work is only seeking to measure whether or not the respondents were certain of their previous response.

Basically, Annihilationism has several versions and variations. These include pure mortalism, conditional immortality, and annihilationism. It gets further complicated; as one writer observed, “because the advocates of the three views are not always careful to keep within the logical limits of their position, mixed versions of the theories are often held.”³³ Still, at the most basic level the position holds that those not redeemed by Christ will not face real physical

³³ Jeffrey M. Spencer, “The Destruction of Hell: Annihilationism Examined,” *Christian Apologetics Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 3.

eternal torment, but will “simply cease to exist.”³⁴ The belief is necessarily tied to one’s notions about the status human immortality: are humans created immortal or do they have a conditional mortality? One’s view on that question can hem one in regarding Annihilationism. It is unlikely by the surveyor that many of the laity are pondering conditional mortality, so no such related questions were included in the survey. Moving forward, Annihilationism is further complicated by notions about divine justice and God’s authority to impart justice for his creation. Finally, there are interpretive aspects to matter in the plethora of related passages in scripture. Some passages might seem to allow for an opening on this front, but other verses clearly speak of eternal suffering. And that is the problem, at least in part, for Annihilationism.

Despite the discussion on the matter of Annihilationism within the church age the belief has never held much of a doctrinal foothold. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists both hold to versions of Annihilationism, along with a few well-known theologians throughout the church era, from early church apologist Arnobius to contemporary scholar Clark Pinnock, but within traditional orthodoxy it is not the accepted position of any single denomination. Terence Nichols, no card-carrying traditionalist, hits the core of the issue: “Annihilationism has little or no support in Scripture or tradition.”³⁵ Erickson agrees, “The problem with all forms of annihilationism is that they contradict the teaching of the Bible. Several passages assert the endless punishment of the wicked.”³⁶

Of course proponents of this belief assert they do have biblical and theological rationale for their case. The core of these arguments is four-fold:

³⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1244.

³⁵ Terence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 180.

³⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1245.

First, the New Testament terms for the fate of the lost might mean annihilation. Second, everlasting punishment is not required by God's justice and would in fact be needlessly cruel. Third, the harmony of the new heaven and earth will be marred if somewhere the lost continue to exist in impenitence and distress. Fourth, the joy of heaven will be marred by knowledge that some continue under punitive suffering.³⁷

Along the lines of the first argument, this question is raised:

Both annihilationists and traditionalists freely admit that the Bible teaches "eternal punishment." Where they differ is over what this punishment entails. Is it eternal torment, as the traditionalist believes, or is it eternal (and literal) destruction, as the annihilationist believes?³⁸

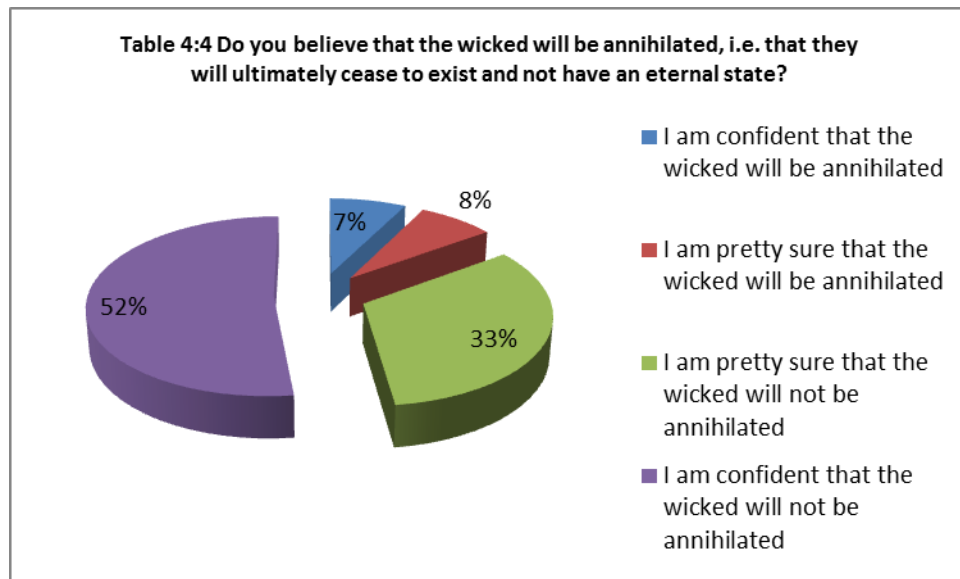
With this the battle, at least along the scriptural front, largely comes down to what does "destroy" and similar language mean. To the Annihilationist the following passages, among others, point to "ceasing to exist": *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matt. 10:28). *But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly* (2 Peter 3:7). There are others passages that speak of destruction, perishing, or the lack of eternal life, including Rom. 2:7, John 3:16, 2 Thess. 1:9, 1 Cor. 15, and numerous Old Testament passages. In addition there is the argument that a loving God, the same God that sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world, would not torture someone forever, but would end that person's existence instead. Along these lines falls the counter argument that God's divine justice in light of his holiness cannot simply forgo such a reckoning. To annihilate the sinner would nullify the consequences the wicked were to face. Regardless of these views and arguments, as seen in preceding sections of the chapter, Scripture does teach eternal torment of the wicked, and the pillars of interpretation and tradition of neither

³⁷ Williams E. Arp, "Tormented or Terminated," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 78.

³⁸ Glenn Peoples, "Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate: A Critique of Robert Peterson and Other Traditionalist Scholarship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 347.

Catholicism nor Protestantism have been shaken by the arguments against this long held doctrine.

It seems the respondents to the survey have not been exposed to these arguments against the traditional view of eternal torment or swayed by this camp either as only about 15% hold to some level of confidence that the wicked will indeed cease to exist after judgment. This leaves some 85% believing that the wicked will not be annihilated. This lines up very closely with responses to the previous question, “Do you believe in the eternal torment of the wicked, i.e. a place of eternal damnation?” to which over 86% responded to some level in the affirmative. So it does seem the respondents fall heavily in line with the traditional historic understanding of the doctrine of Hell.



Universalism

In similar fashion to the survey question on Annihilationism the question on Universalism was asked in order to further determine what level of confidence respondents had

regarding their response on the question of eternal torment. Where Annihilationism seeks to solve the issue of eternal torment by having the ungodly utterly destroyed, whereby they cease to be, Universalism goes to another extreme.

Universalism may be defined as the teaching that though hell may exist it will eventually empty as God's will to save all persons individually will finally triumph. All human beings ultimately will be saved. Hell thereby becomes a "means of grace" where God's love eventually wins everyone, even Judas (and some would say even Satan), back to Himself.³⁹

One could call it the more optimistic option in lieu of the traditional view of hell. And, like Annihilationism, it has a long history. "Church historians generally agree that universalism first appeared in the Alexandrian School, especially with Origen (A.D. 185-254)."⁴⁰ His views of the punishment of the wicked sounds much like purgatory. After a period of temporal suffering, for the purposes of purification, would come to an end, "all things will be restored to their original condition. This is Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*."⁴¹ What's not to like with the concept? In a faith where grace aboundeth all the more, is it not appealing? Yes, it is appealing. The emotional arguments for Universalism are surely powerful. Virtually everyone has a loved one who did not walk with Christ in life, that he would surely like to see restored, blissful, and glorified in the eternal state, delivered of all his pain, sin, and woes. Nonetheless, the concept of universalism was condemned at the Synod of Constantinople in AD 543. "The condemnation of 'Origenism' discredited universalism in the theological tradition of the East. In the West, the combined influence of Augustine's writings against universalism and Origen's heretical reputation insured that the Augustinian version of the doctrine of hell prevailed almost without

³⁹ Beogher, "Are All Doomed to Be Saved? The Rise of Modern Universalism," 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1025.

question for many centuries.”⁴² However, it does still garner support among some scholars as an alternative to the traditional view of hell than Annihilationism. Even Karl Barth was hopeful of a universal salvation event, but he was not dogmatic.⁴³ Still, the primary reason that the belief has never fully breached orthodoxy, beyond the lofty halls of liberal scholarship, is that the biblical case is simply very lean. As Walls puts it, “There are important philosophical considerations against universalism, but the main reason it has been rejected is because it seems to be incompatible with clear New Testament teaching, including the words of Jesus himself.”⁴⁴

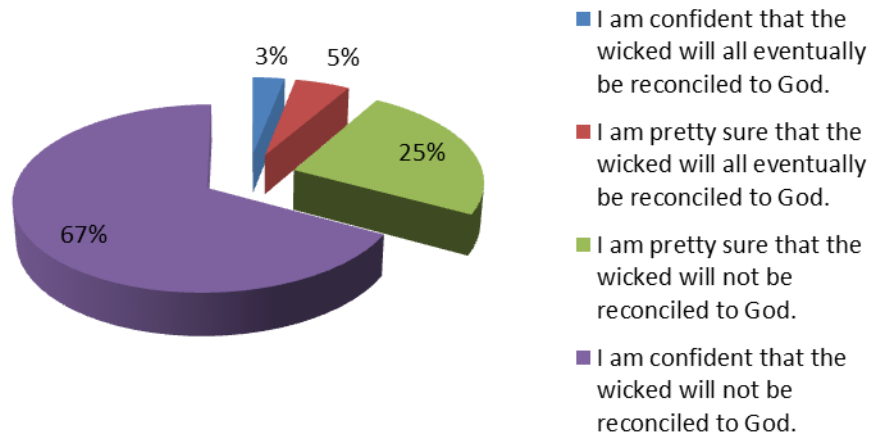
The purpose of this section was not to explore fully the notion of Universalism, but rather to clarify its place within the faith and compare that with the respondents’ answers on this item. Clearly the belief is outside the parameters of traditional doctrine, and emotions aside, the case for it is weak. Per the data below over 90% believe that not everyone will be reconciled to God, i.e. they do not believe in universal salvation. Fewer than 4% of the respondents express a high level of confidence that all will eventually experience salvation. So across the spectrum of questions that related to the traditional view of eternal punishment, a clear majority of the respondents fell within those parameters with a high level of confidence.

⁴² Beogher, “Are All Doomed to Be Saved? The Rise of Modern Universalism,” 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

Table 4:5 Do you believe that the wicked after they die will all eventually be reconciled to God, i.e. that they will not suffer eternal torment, but after death will be restored and experience eternal fellowship with Christ ?



Conclusion of Chapter Four

It seems that, despite the scope of the issue covered in this chapter and the points of confusion with respect to the doctrines and terms already considered, the respondents have a clearer understanding of the concepts of purgatory and the eternal fate of the unsaved than of other areas surveyed. Although the sample size of Catholic respondents was small, they, by and large, fell in line with the Catholic Church's teaching on the matter. In the same fashion the large Protestant sample did not believe the doctrine to be true, which lines up with what one would expect, given what Protestant churches believe on the topic. In addition, it does seem the respondents had a clearer understanding of the ultimate final state of lost souls, more so than their responses indicate that they have about the fate of those in Christ. Perhaps this shows how little teaching is taking place in congregations on the topic of the afterlife, at least as far as the saints are concerned. On the other hand, the data seem to suggest they are being sufficiently taught about the fate of those not in Christ.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Final State of the Righteous in Christ

As the record here indicates these are complicated concepts. There are layers to the complication compounded by numerous factors. Hermeneutically, the temporal and cultural distance from the original audiences is a basic problem. The general background narrative of the various views of the afterlife in the ANE in which these doctrines were originally formulated and explained is gone, or not readily known to laity or pastors. Biblical competency and literacy is at an all-time low, likely since the advent of the printing press, or shortly thereafter, because the church and the Bible were the center of Western life until the 20th century. The professing church is radically decentralized with an ever growing number of denominations, often led by untrained clergy or clergy trained in schools that are no longer anchored to the authority of Scripture and certain essential traditions. These dynamics are additionally compounded by the pace of modern life, which does not often lend itself to great reflection on such things. So the quick answer is the least common denominator: Heaven, Hell, bliss, torment, etc. This work has only sought to scratch the surface of the myriad of nuances within this broad theological study. The mission was to compare the survey group to the orthodox understanding of the most basic terms and concepts associated within this doctrine. In the sections below this work will look at some final demographics and interesting facets of the survey data and offer some practical thoughts as to how knowledge of this topic can be expanded upon by those in ministry; but first a brief picture will be painted of what the Believer should know about the Final State of the saints.

During the collection of this data numerous conversations were held, and it was often expressed by Christians that they made little distinction between the intermediate state and the Final State. That is to say, many, or most, did not know the difference or make a distinction between the two; a distinction whose dividing line, from one to the other “state,” is made stark by the rather enormous event of the bodily resurrection. A number of times when this was explained by the author, the person would simply ask, “The what?” In all the confusion and layers of complication it seems the resurrection of the body of the departed was somewhat lost, misunderstood, or spiritualized. Nonetheless, it is with the resurrection of the body that the ultimate demonstration of Christ’s power over sin and death is manifested, but there is more to this restoration.

The entire physical universe was created for God’s glory. But humanity rebelled, and the universe fell under the weight of our sin. Yet the serpent’s seduction of Adam and Eve did not catch God By surprise. He had in place a plan by which he would redeem mankind –and all of creation–from sin, corruption, and death. Just as he promises to make men and woman new, he promises to renew the earth itself.

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. (Isaiah 65:17)

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure.” (Isaiah 66:22)

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:13)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away. (Revelation 21:1)

Many other passages allude to a new heavens and New Earth without using those terms.¹ “Heaven,” like many of the terms reviewed in this thesis, has a number of uses in Scripture and conjures various images in the minds of believers. The term “Heaven” was intentionally left out of the survey language as was a specific question about Heaven as a specific future eternal

¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 86.

abode. The term is thrown around rather loosely and so the question, “Do you believe in the ‘bodily resurrection’ of believers? That is, do you believe that Christians will be ‘raised from the grave and given a physical body in the future’?” was used as a measurement to see if respondents made the connection that the eternal/final state required a physical resurrection. It is believed that if such a question as, “Do you believe heaven is the future abode of the righteous?” would have been asked it (1) would have been answered with a very high level of affirmation and certainty while (2) not really informing the study as to what people truly understood about the eternal state. It does appear, per the literature and even this survey, that most people do not think of the planet earth, even a fully restored earth joined with heaven, as the eternal state, or as Heaven.

It seems as clear as people are on Hell, they are not very clear on Heaven. Walls writes, “And while many still profess belief in heaven, that belief seems to be more vague and ambivalent now than it has ever been.”² Even Walls’ own text on the matter seems to be rather vague, with many of the notions ringing of an ethereal heavenly existence versus bound toward renewal, restoration, and resurrection. A common question about heaven is: Is it a place, a condition, or a state or being? But as Alcorn points out above, in the end, or perhaps better put as “in the new beginning” heaven and earth are made one. So, yes, it is a place, where the inhabitants exist in a resurrected condition, and in a new state of being, be it glorified or perfected. He continues, “We won’t go to Heaven and leave earth behind. Rather, God will bring heaven and earth together in the same dimension...”³ Wright further clarifies this:

As in Philippians 3, it is not we that go to heaven, it is heaven that come to earth; indeed, it is the church itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, that comes down to earth. This is the

² Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007). 9.

³ Alcorn. *Heaven*, 89.

ultimate rejection of all types of Gnosticism, of every worldview that sees the final goal as separation of the world from God, of the physical from the spiritual, of earth from heaven. It is the final answer to the Lord's Prayer, that God's Kingdom will come and his will be done on earth as in heaven.⁴

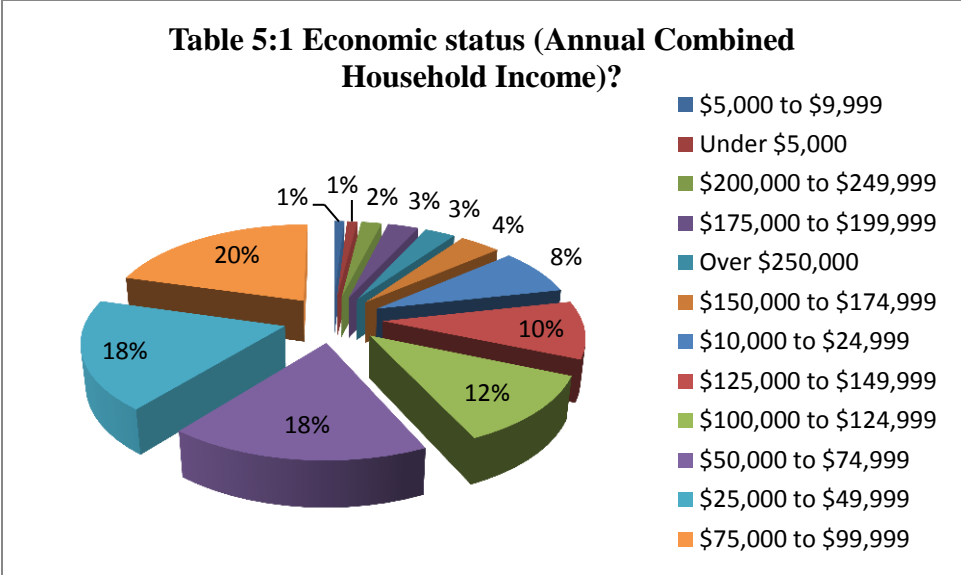
Granted, there are those that do not hold to such a view, but it seems they are stuck on the other side of the bodily resurrection that will occur at the return of Christ. Just as Adam was raised from the dust in the old earth, the redeemed will be raised from the dust into a New Earth and will be with the Lord.

Various Demographics

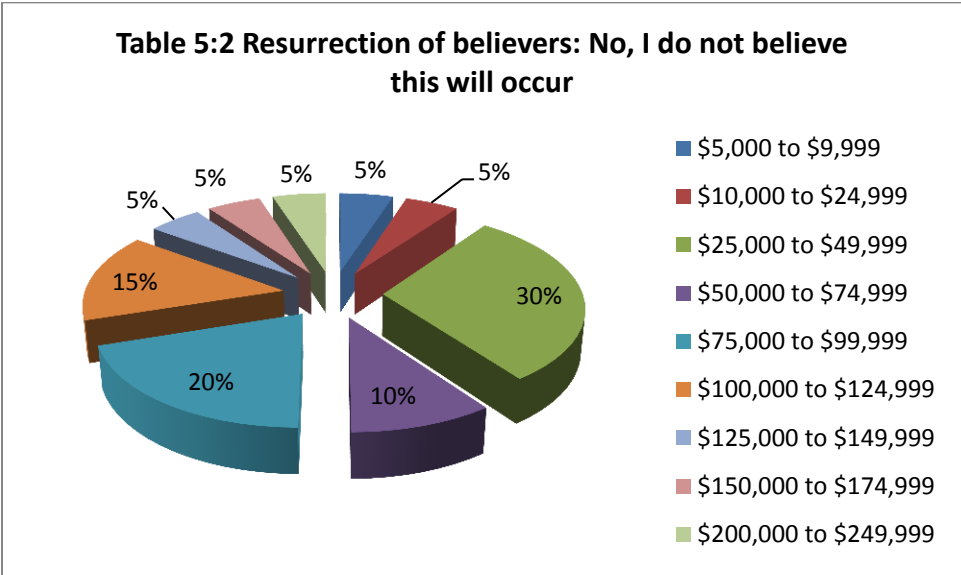
Much of the data below will relate to the cornerstone questions in the survey tied to the general resurrection. As has been seen in the past few chapters, it is an essential part of the hope believers have in Christ. This section will use the corresponding questions to ascertain what various groups within the survey seem to understand on the matter.

As noted in the limitation section of chapter one, the sample group for this project was predominately white and Protestant. However, there was diversity in the representation of the various economic categories, per Table 5:1 below. On one of the key questions, "Do you believe in the 'bodily resurrection' of believers? That is, do you believe that Christians will be 'raised from the grave and given a physical body in the future'?" only 9 of 19 respondents that came from the three highest income brackets answered with the highest level of confidence. At 47% that is below the overall 52% for the whole survey group.

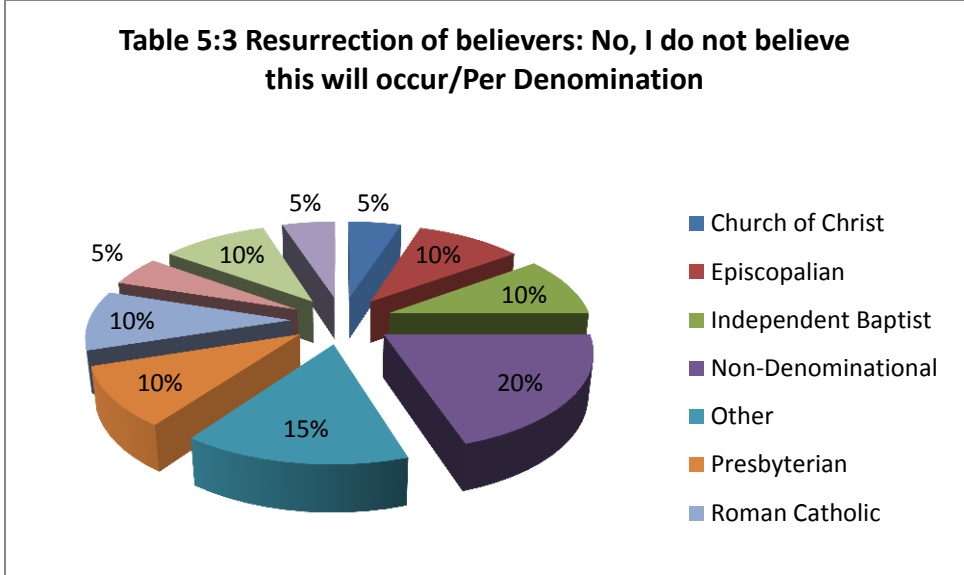
⁴ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 104.



Of the respondents that answered “No, I do not believe this will occur” on the Resurrection of believers question, 60% of the constituency came from the \$25,000 to \$99,000 bracket. The economic breakdown is seen in Table 5.2:

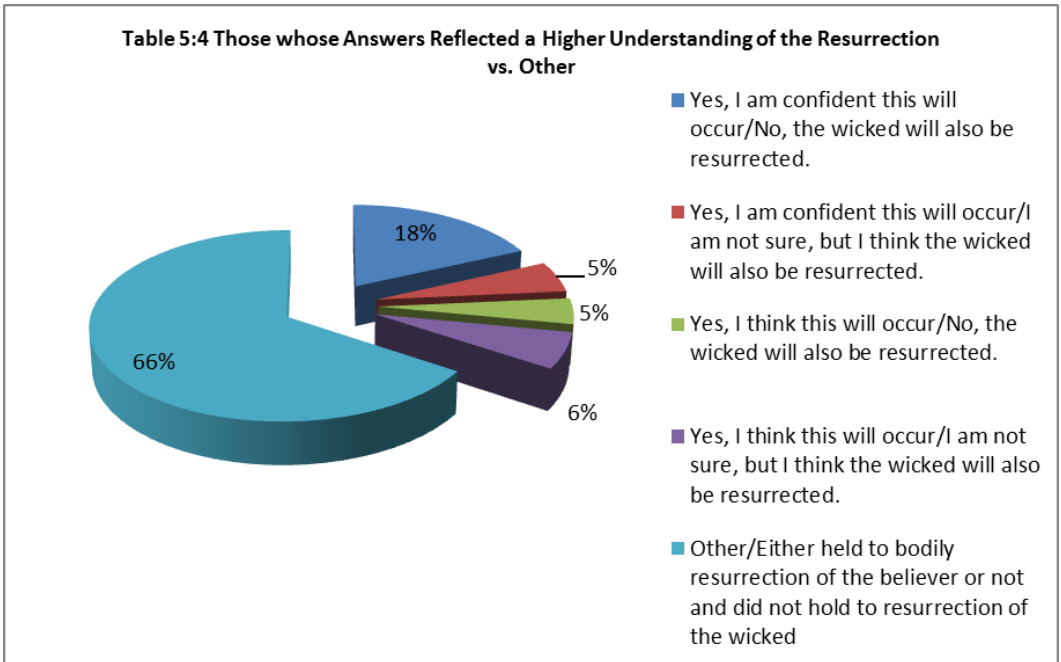


Of this group 16 of the 20 stated they were members of a local church, with the denominational breakdown of the 20 coming as follows:

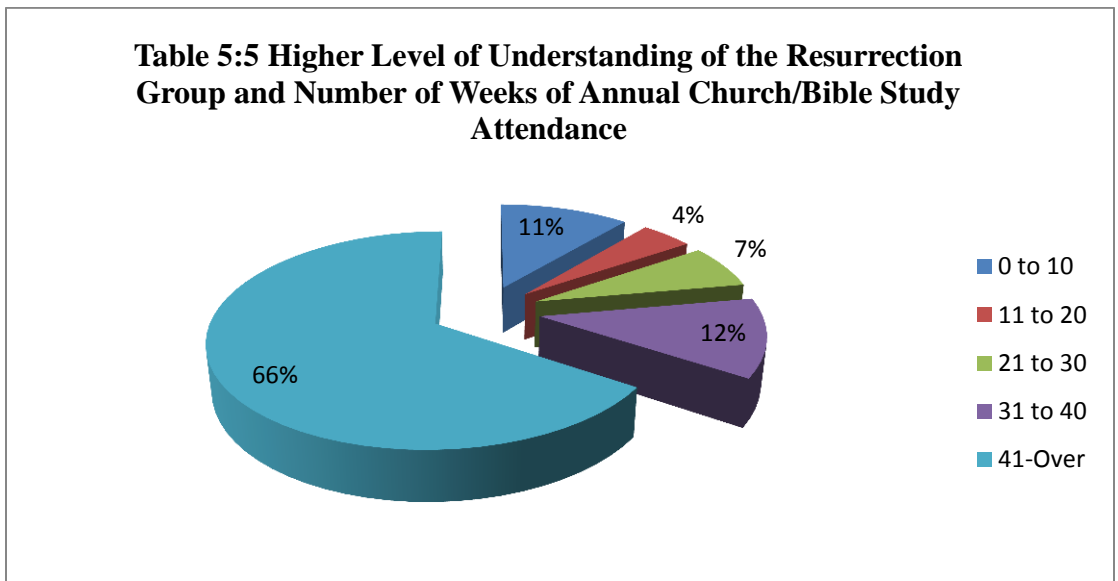


Of those 52% that did hold, with a high level of confidence, to the bodily resurrection of believers, almost 51% stated that they did not believe in the resurrection of the wicked. So while they were in line with the traditional position with regards to those in Christ and bodily resurrection, there was some disconnect as to the nature of the over scope of the event. This seems to be a common misconception across the board--that is respondents were often unclear or off target regarding the role of the unsaved in the resurrection.

77 respondents, or 34%, held to both the bodily resurrection of the righteous and the wicked to some degree, which would be on the higher side on a level of sophistication on the combination of these two questions. It was the case that a high percentage of those that were fairly confident about the resurrection of believers, selected “I think...” versus “I am confident...” were also largely on target regarding the fate of the wicked. These 77 respondents are shown below within the context of the whole sample group of 225.

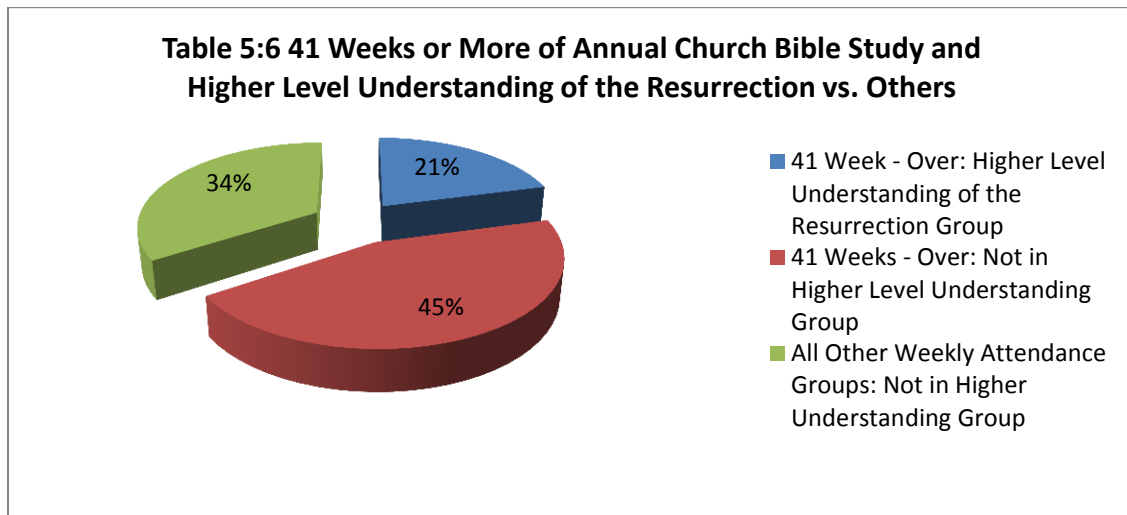


Among those that reflected a higher level of understanding on the reviewed aspects of the resurrection in the chart above there was a clear trend of much higher levels of regular annual church and or Bible study attendance. Details of this group are clarified in Table 5:5.



Still of the 148 total number of respondents that reported “41-Over” weeks in terms of annual church or Bible Study attendance 101, or 45% of the entire survey sample, were not in the higher level of understanding of the resurrection group. So while church attendance and Bible study had

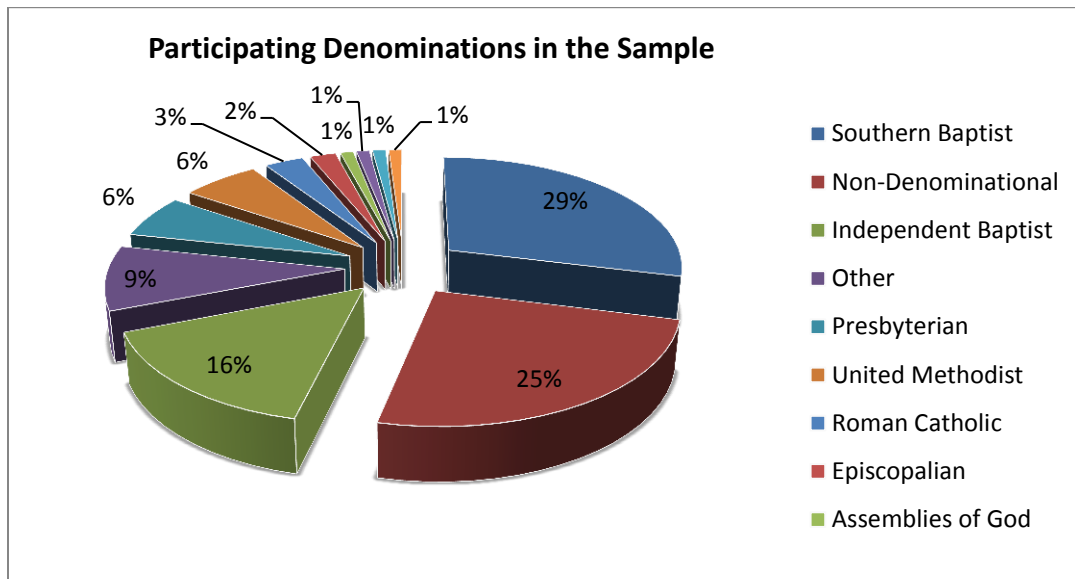
a notable impact on the dynamics within the higher understanding of the resurrection group, this did not hold across the whole of the survey.



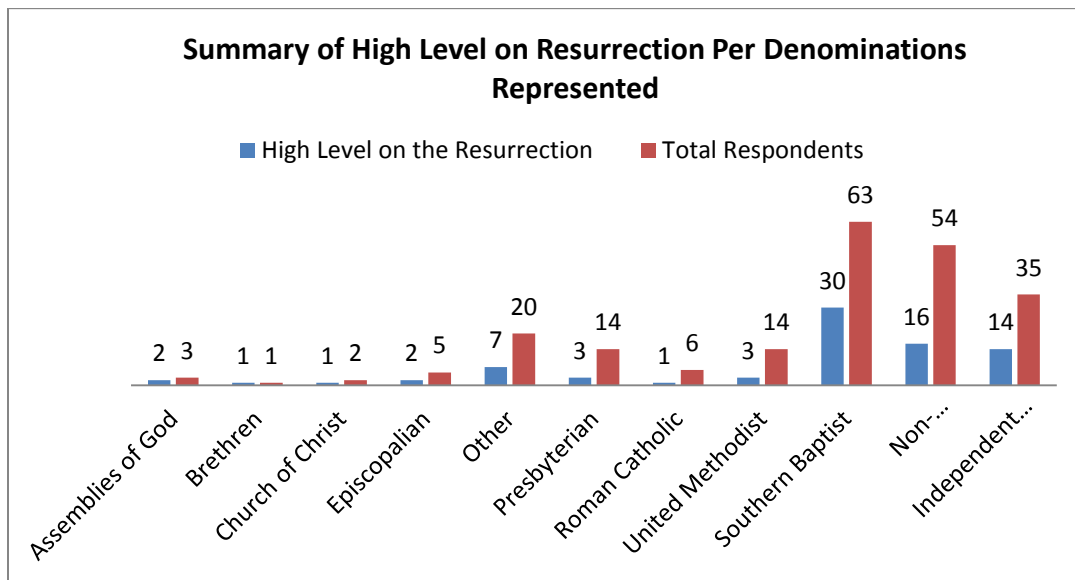
The Role of the Church

This project was designed to be practical and have some utility to the church, both laity and pastors alike. The biblical doctrine of the afterlife is often misunderstood and overlooked for the vast array of reasons that have been reviewed herein and beyond. One could blame the rank and file church member for lapsed church attendance or general apathy regarding the topic; however, the number of people in this survey with high church attendance still yielded low levels of understanding about most tenants of a core issue within the doctrine, resurrection. In addition the survey group was made of a clear majority of people who not only regularly attend church and Bible study, but come from conservative denominations that are very vocal about being Bible teaching churches. Factoring in the “Non-Denominational” respondents, since data indicates such congregations tend to be disproportionately conservative and evangelical, and including the Independent Baptists and Southern Baptists, finds 69% (155 individuals of the survey group) comes from circles that tend to focus biblical preaching and teaching. This group

makes up 69% of the total survey group and makes up 76% the previously discusses “High Level of Understanding of the Resurrection” group, but overall only 38% (59⁵ of 155) of



Non-Denominational, Southern Baptists and Independent Baptists fell into the “High Level of Understanding of the Resurrection” group.



⁵ This number falls to 54 when taking into account the follow up question “Do you believe the following statement: In the eternal state, after the resurrection, believers will not have a physical body, i.e. they will only be “non-physical” or spiritual beings?” 5 of the 59 seem to back track and stated, “Yes, This is my understanding,” suggesting some confusion on the nature of the resurrected body.

So it would seem across the spectrum represented, where the sample size is large enough to draw a conclusion, that there is work to do here for the church.

As Erickson noted early in this work often seminaries simply do not cover the broad, or narrow, aspects of the doctrine.⁶ In his work *Heaven* Alcorn speaks to one aspect of this problem:

I attended a fine Bible college and seminary, but I learned very little about Heaven. I do not recall a single classroom discussion about the New Earth. In my Hebrews-to-Revelation class, we never made it to Revelation 21-22, the Bible's most definitive passage on eternal Heaven. In my eschatology class we studied various views of the Rapture and the Millennium, but almost no attention was given to the New Earth. In fact, I learned more about the strength and weaknesses of belief in a mid-Tribulation Rapture than about Heaven and the New Earth combined.⁷

N. T. Wright and Alcorn come from vastly different theological backgrounds and their training on these matters was also very different, but Wright also sees a general eschatological focus on rapture theology among American Evangelicals, what he calls "The American obsession."⁸ Although he does clarify exactly who is driving the focus, laity or leadership, etc.

This purpose of this work is not to investigate the influence of rapture theology on the laity's understanding on all of the items covered in this work. Granted, a focus on rapture theology as an issue can only be a small part of the problem in the church because most of professing Christianity does not hold to rapture theology. Still, a large portion of the sample group for this project came from denominations within the faith that traditionally hold to some view of the rapture. The point here is, for those congregations, if a pastor happens to be trained on nuances of eschatology it may well be the case that the related teaching is not focused on how the afterlife unfolds in the Scriptures, clarifying the transition from the Old to New Testament;

⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1159.

⁷ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 9.

⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 119.

and the clarifying of terms Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, Hell, Heaven, and Lake of Fire. It may also be the case that the teaching in those sermons is not seeking to clarify aspects of the intermediate state for the lost or saved' or the eternal fate of either group in any detail. The survey suggests, as does the literature, that the doctrine is often just not adequately covered.

So what is the solution? First, it must be acknowledged that there is a weakness on this front. The results of this study reflect a low level of knowledge on a range of issues. For example, the reality is that among respondents, lifelong Christians, people of the Word, 30% knew “nothing” about Sheol. Another 18% professed to “know very little” about it, with almost 50% declaring a lack of knowledge on the Old Testament’s teaching about the afterlife. Their expressed understanding of Sheol in the subsequent follow up questions validated this lack of understanding. Is an understanding of Sheol essential for the Believer? No. But an understanding of Sheol, and even Hades, juxtaposed with an understanding of bodily resurrection and the eternal state of the righteous, punctuates the work of Christ on the cross and what his bodily resurrection truly points toward. This must be taught to the masses. It seemed to resonate in the early church, again in a time where the worst thing one could be was a physical being, yet a gospel of resurrection conquered the Greco-Roman world and beyond.

The first step to filling any void in knowledge is simply to begin to study the topic. Both pastors and laity alike must learn the relevant scriptures, the history, the backstory, and the various views of the many nuances of eschatology. They must grapple with the difficulties and the tension, because they are there, as all bring their baggage of notions to the topic. Pastors would serve their churches well to work aspects of at least a portion of the items from this work into their sermons or series rotations. The laity could build upon that foundation via their own private study of these matters. While no efforts were made to ascertain to what level various

pastors and denominations cover particular preaching topics, such a study of any exiting data may further reflect upon the need here. Still, this project seems to make it clear that whatever is being systematically covered in sermons and Bible studies, this topic is low on the rotation. And if the church is not teaching on these issues then people will cobble together their own version of things. The problem and solution, noted in this passage, is not limited to just this doctrine:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV).

Many of the texts utilized in this project and a review of the applicable Scriptures would benefit both laity and pastors should they seek to explore the topic. Randy Alcorn's *Heaven* was very popular and sold some 750,000 copies. Its simple question and answer approach is both practical and scalable. In addition, N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope* not only offers insights on the foundational aspects of many of the items covered in this project; it also effectively traces the slow decline of the focus on bodily resurrection. Finally, *The Reality of the Resurrection* by Stefan Alkier has a practical section about working the bodily resurrection into funeral services and religious instruction. Should a pastor or church leader seek to engage this topic in his own ministry, it might be beneficial to utilize the survey tool questions from this project to get a pulse of the congregation's understanding of these matters. The researcher for this project would be willing to advise and eager to add additional respondents to the existing data pool.

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APPENDIX A

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE SURVEY

Are you a Christian?

Yes

No

At what age did you become a Christian?

1-10

11-15

16-20

21-30

31-40

41-50

51-Above

How old are you?

Under 18

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

Over 65

Are you a male or female?

Male

Female

What is your Race?

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Hispanic

White

Economic status (Annual Combined Household Income)?

- Under \$5,000
- \$5,000 to \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$124,999
- \$125,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$174,999
- \$175,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 to \$249,999
- Over \$250,000

Are you a member of a local church?

- Yes
- No

With which Christian denomination are you affiliated?

- African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Anglican
- Assemblies of God
- Independent Baptist
- Southern Baptist
- Brethren
- Church of Christ
- Church Of God
- Congregational
- Episcopalian
- Greek Orthodox
- Holiness
- Lutheran
- Nazarene
- Non-Denominational
- Presbyterian
- Russian Orthodox
- Roman Catholic
- United Methodist
- Wesleyan
- Other

How many weeks of out of the 52 week year do you attended church services or Bible study?

- 0-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-Over

Have you had any formal educational training (certificate or college courses) related to the doctrine of the afterlife? Please specify.

- 1 I have had no formal training in this area.
- 2 I have taken a certificate-level course related to this doctrine.
- 3 I have taken a college-level course related to this doctrine.
- 4 I have taken seminary- level course related to this doctrine.

On a scale of 1 to 4, how would you classify your level of confidence in your understanding on doctrinal matters relating to death and the afterlife?

- 1 I know nothing about this doctrinal matter.
- 2 I know very little about this doctrinal matter.
- 3 I have a basic understanding of this doctrinal matter.
- 4 I have a high level of understanding of this doctrinal matter.

Do you believe in the “bodily resurrection” of believers? That is, do you believe that Christians will be “raised from the grave and given a physical body in the future”?

- 1 No, I do not believe this will occur.
- 2 I am not sure this will occur.
- 3 Yes, I think this will occur.
- 4 Yes, I am confident this will occur.

Do you believe that the “bodily resurrection” will be for believers only?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 Yes, only believers will be resurrected.
- 3 I am not sure, but I think the wicked will also be resurrected.
- 4 No, the wicked will also be resurrected.

Does the Old Testament directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection”?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 Yes, the Old Testament directly and clearly teaches about “bodily resurrection.”
- 3 I am pretty sure the Old Testament does not directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection”?
- 4 No, the Old Testament does not directly and clearly teach about “bodily resurrection”?

Do you believe that the resurrection of the body is primarily an Intertestamental (i.e., time between the writing of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament) and New Testament concept?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 No, this doctrine is clearly expressed prior to the Intertestamental Period and the New Testament.
- 3 I am pretty sure the resurrection of the body is primarily an Intertestamental and New Testament concept.
- 4 This teaching is primarily an Intertestamental and New Testament concept.

Some believe there is a period of existence between physical death and the eternal state, what some denominations call the “intermediate state.” Have you heard of this concept?

- 1 I have not heard of this concept.
- 2 I have heard of this concept, but am not sure what it means.
- 3 I have heard of this concept and have a limited understanding of it.
- 4 I am quite familiar with this concept.

Some believe within the intermediate state there is place of temporary punishment for believers with sin in their life known as purgatory. Have you heard of this concept?

- 1 I have not heard of this concept.
- 2 I have heard of this concept, but am not sure what it means.
- 3 I have heard of this concept and have a limited understanding of it.
- 4 I am quite familiar with this concept.

If you have heard of purgatory, do you believe it is real? (If you have not heard of purgatory please leave this blank.)

- 1 No
- 2 Yes

Do you believe that the bodily resurrections of the will occur before the intermediate state?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 Yes, the resurrections of the body will occur before the intermediate state.
- 3 I am pretty sure the intermediate state is actually before the resurrection.
- 4 No, the resurrections of the body will not occur before the intermediate state.

Do you believe that there are any Bible passages or concepts in the Bible that suggests a state of existence after death and yet before the bodily resurrection?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 I do not believe there are any biblical passages that suggest a state of existence after death and yet before the bodily resurrection.
- 3 I am pretty sure there are biblical passages that suggest a state of existence after death and yet before the bodily resurrection.
- 4 I am confident there are biblical passages that suggest a state of existence after death and yet before the bodily resurrection.

Do you believe the following statement: In the eternal state, after the resurrection, believers will not have a physical body, i.e. they will only be “non-physical” or spiritual beings?

- 1 I do not know.
- 2 Yes, this is my understanding.
- 3 I am pretty sure believers will be more than just “non-physical” or “spiritual beings.”
- 4 I am confident believer will have a physical body in the eternal state.

Do you believe that when young children die they become angels?

- 1 I am confident that when children die they become angels.
- 2 I am pretty sure that when children die they do become angels.
- 3 I am pretty sure that when children die they do not become angels.
- 4 I am confident that when children die they do not become angels.

Do you believe that when adults die they become angels?

- 1 I am confident that when adults die they become angels.
- 2 I am pretty sure that when adults die they do become angels.
- 3 I am pretty sure that when adults die they do not become angels.
- 4 I am confident that when adults die they do not become angels.

How confident are you in your understanding of Sheol as presented in the Old Testament?

- 1 I know nothing about this issue.
- 2 I know very little about this issue.
- 3 I have a basic understanding of this issue.
- 4 I have a high level of understanding of this issue.

Do you believe Sheol is a place only for the wicked?

- 1 I am confident that Sheol is a place only for the wicked.
- 2 I am pretty sure Sheol is a place only for the wicked.
- 3 I am pretty that Sheol is not only for the wicked.
- 4 I am confident that Sheol is not only for the wicked.

Do you believe that Sheol and Hell are the same place?

- 1 I am confident that Sheol and Hell are the same place.
- 2 I am pretty sure that Sheol and Hell are the same place.
- 3 I am pretty that Sheol and Hell are not the same place.
- 4 I am confident that Sheol and Hell are not the same place.

Do you believe that the eternal state and paradise are the exact same thing in scripture?

- 1 I am confident that the eternal state and paradise are the exact same thing in scripture.
- 2 I am pretty sure that the eternal state and paradise are the exact same thing in scripture.
- 3 I am pretty that the eternal state and paradise are not the exact same thing in scripture.
- 4 I am confident that the eternal state and paradise are not the exact same thing in scripture.

Do you believe in the eternal torment of the wicked, i.e. a place of eternal damnation?

- 1 I am confident that such a place does not exist.
- 2 I am pretty sure that such a place does not exist.
- 3 I am pretty sure that such a place does exist.
- 4 I am confident that such a place does exist.

Do you believe that the wicked will be annihilated, i.e. that they will ultimately cease to exist and not have an eternal state?

- 1 I am confident that the wicked will be annihilated
- 2 I am pretty sure that the wicked will be annihilated
- 3 I am pretty sure that the wicked will not be annihilated
- 4 I am confident that the wicked will not be annihilated

Do you believe that the wicked after they die will all eventually be reconciled to God, i.e. that they will not suffer eternal torment, but after death will be restored and experience eternal fellowship with Christ?

- 1 I am confident that the wicked will all eventually be reconciled to God.
- 2 I am pretty sure that the wicked will all eventually be reconciled to God.
- 3 I am pretty sure that the wicked will not be reconciled to God.
- 4 I am confident that the wicked will not be reconciled to God.

Do you think the church needs to spend more time and effort teaching over this doctrine?

- 1 No
- 2 Yes

APPENDIX B

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS

Greetings:

My name is Wayne Patton, and I am a D. Min. candidate at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary. As part of my D. Min. program, I am conducting a research study on how well professing adult Christians understand issues related to the doctrine of death and the afterlife.

Your participation would involve filling out an anonymous, online survey. I estimate it should take no more than 20 minutes. If you do happen to go over that time frame you can still complete the survey.

The survey is completely anonymous. I will not be able to link survey answers to participants.

If you are interested and available to help me out by participating in my study, I would greatly appreciate it.

If you are able please proceed.

Below you will find an assortment of demographical questions followed by a number of questions that seek to collect data on your understanding of issues related to the afterlife from a Christian doctrinal perspective.

A number of the items are multiple choice or “yes/no” questions.

Most of the doctrinal questions require that you select the answer that best correlates to your position or understanding of the stated issue. These answers appear in the form of a drop down list. On these items, after reading the question, click the down arrow and select the answer that best fits your position or understanding.

Each question is required.

The survey is not timed.

Please feel free to forward this survey on to others.

Please proceed, answer each question, and then hit submit and the end of the survey.

January 24, 2014

Wayne A. Patton

IRB Exemption 1773.012414: An Examination of the Doctrine of Death and the Afterlife from Both a Biblical and Historical Theology Perspective to Establish a Standard by Which to Measure Levels of Sophistication among the Laity

Dear Wayne,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling



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