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SHEOL, THE TOMB, AND THE PROBLEM OF POSTMORTEM EXISTENCE*

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It is well recognized that the modern concept of immortality is generally incompatible with ancient concepts of death, dying, and the dead. Yet, given this incompatibility, can one speak of "life after death" in the Hebrew Bible? Regarding this point the New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann once asserted,[1] "it can, to be sure, somehow lead a shady existence without the body, like the dead in Sheol according to the Old Testament, but that is not a *genuine life*." Cullmann was not specifically concerned with Sheol, but rather the problem of embodiment and death, which is evident in the title of his Harvard University Ingersoll Lecture on Human Immortality in 1955: "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament."[2] Years later, the Hebraist and biblical scholar James Barr would respond at length to several of Cullmann's problematic assertions in his own lecture on immortality, the 1990 Read-Tuckwell Lectureship at the University of Bristol.[3] Among other ideas found in Cullmann's work, Barr

* The article represents the culmination of a series of talks and papers I have given over the past few years. During this time, I benefited greatly from comments and constructive critique offered by several people. I would like to particularly thank Jeremy Smoak, Jacqueline Vayntrub, Christopher Hays, Seth Sanders, Sarah Imhoff, and Simeon Chavel. Any faults contained within this paper, however, are my responsibility alone.

[1] O. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 33, emphasis in the original. The "it" in Cullmann's quote refers to his concept of the "inner man" in New Testament thought, and the problem of its disembodiment from the "outer man" in death.

[2] The title itself states Cullmann's thesis, which was first published in English in the *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* (1955–56), and in German in *Theologische Zeitschrift* (1956).

[3] J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). The Cullmann quote is found on p. 29 of Barr's monograph. In a similar way to the present article, R. A. Di Vito ("Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," *CBQ* 61 [1999], 217–37) also used Cullman and Barr as prompts for his study of the self. Di Vito's focus was not on death and the body (which

dismissed the assumption that death was considered unnatural in the literature of the Hebrew Bible.[4] Barr's critique, rather acutely, challenged cultural assumptions about death and its definition. Yet regarding Sheol he could only suggest that it "was not 'life after death' but was part of the reality of death itself."[5] The nature of Sheol is directly related to the embodiment of the dead (a point that Cullmann's quote raises), which is undeniably tied to distinct cultural attitudes towards death (a point taken up in Barr's critique). Yet neither Cullmann nor Barr were able to offer any specific insight into the cultural practices that informed the depiction of death in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, archaeological research from the past-half century has provided much insight regarding the treatment of the dead in ancient Israel/Judah. The archaeology of the Judahite bench tomb, interpreted as ritual space, offers important insight into the cultural definition of death in the Hebrew Bible. This insight, by extension, can be used to explicate the meaning of post-mortem existence in problematic texts such as Ps 88 that depict suffering in a tomb-like setting called Sheol.

1. SHEOL AND THE MEANING OF DEATH

Understood to be the biblical place of the dead, Sheol is described in various ways in biblical literature. For example, it can be a watery abode, a subterranean realm, or an area of abandonment.[6] Yet among the different images the most prevailing is that of the tomb.[7] Despite this, the nature of Sheol remains ambiguous even

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are the interests of this article), but for him Cullmann's work exemplified the problems associated with selfhood in the Hebrew Bible, and the tension of dualism with monism (which Cullmann had sought to resolve).

[4] Barr (*Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 23–24) showed that Cullmann's interpretation of death in the Hebrew Bible was dependent upon the New Testament writings of Paul (specifically, the Christian notion of the Fall). Furthermore, resurrection in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism was often collective (e.g., Ezek 37:1–14), although Cullmann treats it as an individual ideal.

[5] Barr, *Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 30.

[6] See, e.g., Job 7:9; the sense of abandonment is most stark in Jonah's prayer in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2:6). The combined idea of subterranean abandonment appears in several Psalms; see Ps 6:6 as well as Ps 88. For a survey of the biblical terminology for the realm of the dead, including Sheol along with other terms found in Ps 88 (בּוֹר and אֲבַדּוֹן), see C. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 176–79.

[7] See the extensive discussion in L. Wächter, "שְׁאוֹל; *šĕʾôl*," in *TDOT* 14:239–48. For example, the parallel of Sheol with words for pit (e.g., שחת in Ps 16:10 and בור in Ps 30:4) reflects the reality of the grave, Wächter, "שְׁאוֹל; *šĕʾôl*," 243. The notion of descent into Sheol is sometimes conveyed through the root √ירד ("to go down") and other verbs of motion that reference lowering or descending, Wächter, "שְׁאוֹל; *šĕʾôl*," 242–43. See the assessment of T. J. Lewis ("Dead, Abode of the," *ABD* 1:103) reviewing the various views of Sheol as a grave. For an earlier

though the biblical images of death clearly reflect the empirical realities of the entombment. The perceived paradox of Sheol is due to its depiction as a dreary and dismal place for all humanity,[8] which (seemingly) contrasts with the idea of a peaceful reunion with dead kin inside the tomb.[9] In lieu of a solution, an earlier generation of scholars such as Johannes Pedersen concluded that the ancient Israelites lacked any positive notion of postmortem existence.[10] In some ways, this conclusion is not dissimilar to Cullmann's negative assessment. Nevertheless, Pedersen does find limited support in the ancient Near Eastern concept of the netherworld (widespread in the Levant and Mesopotamia), where the dead shared a common existence. Furthermore, the suggestion by the noted Danish biblical scholar offers a constructive basis for studying Sheol. Pedersen explained death and Sheol as an "Ur" grave; that is to say, it stood for the great collectivity of the dead.[11]

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survey, see A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1946), 170–91. Sheol can also be personified in the Hebrew Bible, usually in wisdom texts, though this does not necessarily imply that the term is a reflex of some earlier type of chthonic deity (such as the Ugaritic god Mot); B. Becking, "Sheol," *DDD*, 768–70.

[8] Qoh 9:10; cf. the words of Jacob in Gen 37:25, and Samuel's return as a revenant in 1 Sam 28:13, 19.

[9] The apparent contradiction was often discussed in older treatments of death in biblical literature, see H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. D. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 243; and R. H. Pfeiffer, *Religion in the Old Testament: The History of a Spiritual Triumph* (New York: Harper, 1961), 104.

[10] J. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, vols. I–II (London: Oxford University, 1959), 460–70. See the discussion in J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 52–55. Note also the brief remarks by J. Gray (*I & II Kings: Commentary* [London: SCM, 1970], 102), and the response by J. Levenson (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006], 35–36). Pfeiffer's views prove exceptional because he rejected the equation of Sheol and the tomb (see Pfeiffer, *Religion in the Old Testament*, 18). In his book, Pfeiffer wrote (ibid., 104): "All the dead, without discrimination of race, nationality, religion, social position, and moral character, go to a dark, gloomy, underground enormous cave, called . . . the house of *Hades* ('invisible') by the Greeks, and *Sheol* in the Old Testament." Yet, because he rejected the equation of Sheol and the tomb, he seemed forced to postulate a separate and earlier belief in reunion with dead kin inside the family tomb. This earlier concept of postmortem existence was a "rather dismal idea . . . [that] survived in the following expressions: 'he was gathered to his people' (Gen 25:8); 'bury me with my fathers' (Gen 49:29); and the like" (ibid., 104). This, of course, is a minority opinion (and quite outdated), yet it serves as a cogent example of the complicated and problematic nature of the Hebrew Bible's description of death and the afterlife.

[11] Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 462.

To quote Pedersen,[12] "The grave is both good and bad. In it dwell the fathers, and the family keeps its graves close by it; nevertheless, it is the home of death and in so far the enemy of life." This comment anticipated in some ways the discovery of Judahite burial practices, which involved the mass interment of multiple generations within a single setting. Archaeologists have associated such practices, communal burial, with the images of the collective dead that are found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Thus, it would seem that the best approach to the problem of the tomb as "both good and bad" is to look at the complex set of rituals that occurred inside the family tomb.

The problem with our understanding of Sheol comes from three issues that are often left unquestioned. These issues begin with the embodied perception of the dead; specifically, how this perception is reflected in attitudes towards the corpse. This issue directly relates to the manner by which funerary rituals (re-) construct identity, which in turn leads to the wider problem of how death is to be defined. In short, Sheol reflects the existential problem of death and identity. Archaeologists have related communal burial practices with a concept of identity that is embedded within biblical idioms for death: "gathered to his peoples" and "lay down with his fathers."[13] To be sure, the connection here between literary idiom and cultural practice is conceptual; that is, they both reflect a common ideal in death based upon collective representation.[14] Yet

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[12] Ibid.

[13] G. Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," in I. Singer (ed.), *Graves and Burial Practices in Israel in the Ancient Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzak Ben-Zvi: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 106–15 [Hebrew]. See also E. M. Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 33 (1970), 15–17. See further, M. J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 32–49. The thesis here may seem to contrast with the statement by Levenson (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 73–74): "the expression itself gives no grounds whatsoever for assuming that one who 'slept/lay with his fathers' did so in Sheol, which is . . . almost always the destination of those who die violently, unjustly, in punishment, or with a broken heart." In fact, the point of this essay is to clarify the nature of Sheol in relation to the ancestors.

[14] For this reason, Jacob can be "gathered to his peoples" in Egypt before he is buried in Canaan (Gen 49:29–33; and 50:13). The specific reference to burial in the family tomb confirms the ideal at work in the expression. Although some biblical scholars continue to dismiss any cultural connection between burial practices and the formulaic idioms for death ("gathered to his people" and "lay with his fathers"), it should be noted that this point is rather confused. Earlier scholars such as B. Alfrink, G. Heidel, and G. R. Driver clearly saw that these expressions originated in burial customs, even if they did speculate that the phrases developed a separate literary meaning. Yet this is the point, for the common culture shared by text and artifact is ideological, not practical. That is, the expression "lay with his fathers" is not meant to be a literal

individual expressions of death and dying also play an important role in biblical literature,[15] seen notably in poetic passages such as Ps 88 where the psalmist cries out to the deity from Sheol. The interchange here, between representations of death that are both individual and collective, reflects the complex ways in which identity is negotiated.

The portrayal of the netherworld in Near Eastern and Classical sources, which Barr saw as the background for biblical Sheol,[16] reveals the intricate means by which past cultures viewed identity and the dead. Although the dead dwell together, they were not equal in the netherworld.[17] This is made clear in the well-known depiction of the dead found in Tablet XII of the Standard Epic of Gilgamesh.[18] Enkidu's description of the realm of the dead reveals that existence here was dependent upon proper post-mortem treatment and, importantly, progeny. The variable nature of the afterlife (the netherworld) reflects the differing circumstances of ones' fate, and this dialectic calls into question the nature of death itself in ancient Near Eastern thought.

Given the Near Eastern background of the Hebrew Bible, what does "death" mean in biblical literature? Barr reviewed the poetic descriptions of death and questioned the nuance of the word in biblical literature, coming to the tentative conclusion that the term was inconsistent with the modern biological definition of death.[19] Influenced by the important work of Christoph Barth,[20] Barr stated,[21] "the conceptual boundaries of 'death' are serious but

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description of interment practices. Rather, it is reflective of the ideology generated by communal burial customs, where the collective presence of the dead inside the family tomb is consonant with the evocation of collective ancestors. What the idioms represent, through burial imagery, is a sense of completion. See Barr, *Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 28; and Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings*, 26–50; idem, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," *JBL* 129 (2010), 56–59.

[15] A. C. Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

[16] Barr (*Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 30) saw Sheol as a vestige of an earlier belief that predated Yahwistic religion.

[17] S. M. Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology," *JBL* 124 (2005), 608–9 nn. 23–24.

[18] For the text and translation of both the Akkadian and earlier Sumerian versions (Bilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld), see A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[19] Barr, *Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 21–56; see specifically, 32–34.

[20] C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode in den Individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testamentes* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947).

[21] Barr, *Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 34. F. Crüsemann ("Rhetorische Fragen!? Eine Aufkundigung des Konsenses über Psalm 88:11–13 ünd seine Bedeutung für das alttestamentliche Reden von Gott und Tod," *BibInt* 11 [2003], 353), in his discussion of Barth's work, also

differently defined." It is important to note that for both Barth and Barr, the concept here spanned peril (generally speaking) and sickness.[22] But what were these conceptual boundaries and how were they defined? The application of ritual theory to the Judahite bench tomb will explore ways by which the conceptual boundaries of death were given substance through mortuary practices. The interpretation of the tomb as the locus of ritual activity will reveal distinct cultural attitudes towards dying and the body.

The tomb, as ritual space, represented a controlled environment (to use Jonathan Z. Smith's term),[23] within which the uncontrollable and chaotic aspects of death could be contained.[24] Similarly, Catherine Bell spoke of "ritualized bodies" and their environment, defining ritual through embodied practice.[25] For Bell, ritual (or rather, ritualization) could be observed through the movement of the body. This aspect (ritualized bodies) can be combined productively in the study of Judahite mortuary practices with classical transition-ritual theory. As such, it will serve as the explanatory framework for the series of meaningful actions that began with the corpse as a marginalized entity, involved the liminality of the corpse resting on the burial bench, and ended with the aggregate nature of the bone-filled repository. The interpretation of mortuary practices as the ritualization of death inside the bench tomb (and hence, the tomb as ritual space) will suggest new ways of reading ambiguous biblical terminology used for death and dying, most notably Sheol. As a state of limbo, Sheol stood at the margins

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comments on the somewhat fluid boundaries between life and death.

[22] Barr states (*Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 33): "The realm of death expands and seizes people through the power of sin, through sickness, through hostility and injustice, perhaps through magic and other chaotic forces." See C. Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 51. This basic view is followed also by Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 71–78.

[23] J. Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *HR* 20 (1980), 124–25.

[24] R. Hendel ("Other Edens," in J. D. Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009], 188) quotes Smith ("The Bare Facts of Ritual") in his brief discussion of a particular funerary artifact: the Ketef Hinnom silver amulet. For Hendel, the ideal invoked in the amulet's blessing (cf. Num 6:24–26), is the power of Yahweh over death that is articulated in a priestly benediction that draws from the motif of the temple.

[25] C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 98–101. This was part of Bell's work in defining ritual through practice, what she called "ritualization," rather than describing it as an objective category. In this sense, "ritual" is understood as the formalization of meaning and action through performance; see N. Laneri, "An Archaeology of Funerary Rituals," in N. Laneri (ed.), *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 2–3; and M. J. Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:1–6, and the Early History of the Soul," *JAOS* 134 (2014), 388.

of fixed identities that were established by both the living and the dead.[26] The conceptual link between Sheol and the process of death/dying forefronts multiple aspects that are interrelated:

1. A concept of death that is relational, dynamic, and constructive.
2. A liminal notion of Sheol that is ritually defined within the context of the tomb.
3. Sheol as a process of death that is marginalizing (dying), and hence paradigmatic for experiences of individual suffering and isolation.

The rituals of interment brought organization and clarity to the enigmatic nature of death. By negotiating the margins that separated the living from the dead, these rituals established categories of identity that defined the postmortem ideal: the status of ancestors. The categories of identity here are socially defined in both life and death, and involve the individual and the collective. In ancient Israel/Judah and early Judaism, forms of identification were embedded within tightly constructed filial boundaries, and the conception of death was perceived in such terms.[27] Accordingly, the ideal of death was collective, rather than individual, and as such it was embodied in the well-known biblical traditions of ancestry. In the social process of dying,[28] beginning with biological death, the physical changes in the corpse demarcated conceptual boundaries (the living and the dead) and reorganized social contexts (the individual and the collective). The contours of this process can be traced through the application of ritual-theory to the Judahite bench tomb, which in turn can shed further light on the symbolic significance of death and interment in the Hebrew Bible.[29]

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[26] Rather than "identity," however, the problem here is really one of "identification" as a cultural process that negotiates both the strong and weak senses of the term; following R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 1–47.

[27] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 108–22; see also S. L. Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," *RC* 1 (2007), 668.

[28] For a description of the social process of dying, see I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992), 3–24. Several scholars have noted that the body's physical changes can serve as a component of ritual transformation; see E. R. Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 39; J. S. La Fontaine, *Initiation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 26; and S. M. Olyan, "What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish and What Do They Signal in Biblical Ritual Contexts?" *JBL* 117 (1998), 613–16.

[29] The term "symbolic" refers to the abstracted representation of ideas along with physical actions and processes that are bound up in wider networks of social meaning. This definition is informed, in part, by the work of C. Geertz; see *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89–91.

Figure 1. Schematic of a Judahite Rock-Cut Bench Tomb

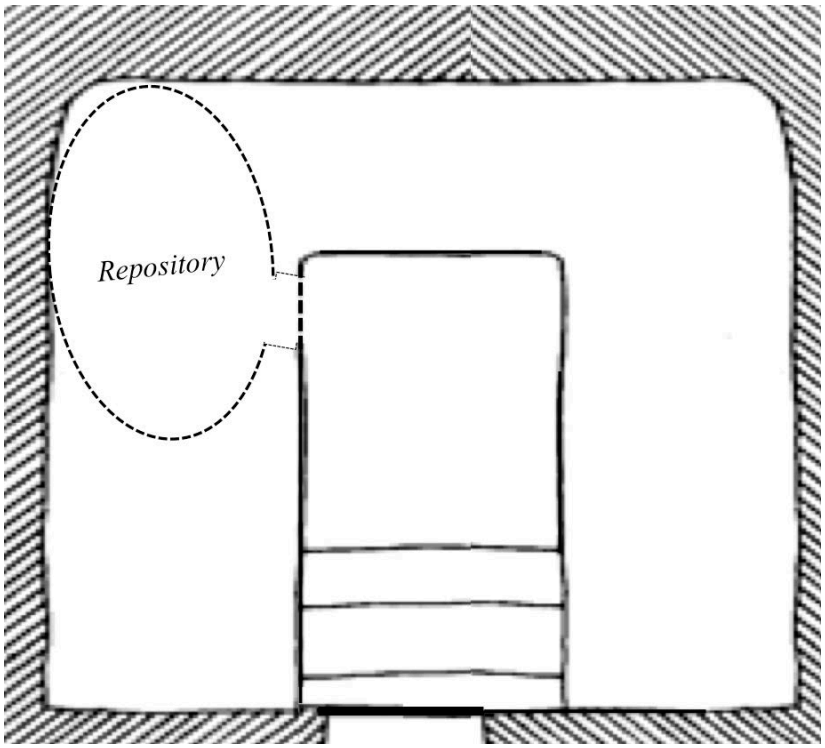

Image created by the author

2. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DYING

Archaeological surveys and excavations have revealed hundreds of rock-cut bench tombs that date to the ninth-through-sixth centuries BCE (ca. Iron Age IIb-c).[30] Located in the geographical area

[30] The work of E. Bloch-Smith (*Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992]) represents the most thorough collection of material. Note also that A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz ("The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb: Family Response at a Time of Change," *IEJ* 58 [2008], 152) list 39 burial sites, containing 395 bench chambers in 278 rock-cut tombs. Faust and Bunimovitz draw their numbers primarily from I. Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah toward the End of the Iron Age," *TA* 26 (1999), 253–54, a study that is current through the mid-1990s (based on her unpublished MA thesis). The number has certainly increased since Bloch-Smith's and Yezerski's work, and will continue to do so with ongoing archaeological exacavations and surveys. Chronologically, this tomb-type was predominant in the eighth-seventh centuries; see Faust and Bunimovitz, "Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb," 153; and A. Fantalkin, "The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation," in A. Fantalkin and A. Yasur-Landau (eds.), *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of*

that corresponds to the Kingdom of Judah,[31] this type of tomb is a hewn cave that consists of benches carved into the walls and a large niche,[32] crawlspace, or pit that served as the repository (see Figure 1, above).[33] The bench tomb certainly represents a social stratum that can be termed elite,[34] yet it still serves as a useful basis for the study of death and dying in ancient Judah for two reasons.[35] The

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Israel Finkelstein (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 17–44.

[31] Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah," 253–70; and Faust and Bunimovitz, "The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb," 152–53. Hence, the term "Judahite," as opposed to Israelite, is preferred here.

[32] Given the amount of work that has been published on the Judahite rock-cut bench tomb, it is not possible to list a complete bibliography. Note, however, the work of G. Barkay, "Burial Caves and Dwellings in Judah During Iron Age II: Sociological Aspects," in A. Faust and A. M. Maeir (eds.), *Material Culture, Society and Ideology: New Directions in the Archaeology of the Land of Israel* (Ramat Gan: Yad Ben-Zvi, Bar-Ilan Unversity and the Ingeborg Rennert Center, 1999), 96–102 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Necropoli of Jerusalem in the First Temple Period," in S. Ahituv and A. Mazar (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: The Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2000), 233–70 [Hebrew]. See also Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*; idem, "Burials, Israelite," *ABD* 1:785–89; and idem, "Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead," *NEA* 65 (2002), 120–30; and A. Kloner, "Iron Age Burial Caves in Jerusalem and Its Vicinity," *BAIAS* 19–20 (2001–2002), 95–118.

[33] For a survey and discussion of the rock-cut bench tomb, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*, 41–52; Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," 106–32; and J. Kamlah, "Grab und Begräbnis in Israel/Juda," in A. Berlejung and B. Janowski (eds.), *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). For further descriptions, see Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah," 254–57; and Faust and Bunimovitz, "The Judahite Rock-Cut Tomb," 151–52. These studies all note that there are different types and styles of the bench-tomb. It is not necessary to describe each style of tomb, and space does not allow it. The archaeological remains, however, indicate that the tombs' basic architecture accommodated the same ritual actions regardless of type.

[34] Fantalkin, "Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah," 22–23. While this identification is valid, it should be noted that there is variation not only in the style of the rock-cut tomb, but also the quality, which indicates that some may belong to different strata within the so-called elite of Judah. In Jerusalem, for example, the Mamilla tomb hardly compares with the nearby tombs of Ketef Hinnom and St. Etienne.

[35] Though most of the surveyed and excavated tombs were empty, or repurposed, some have been discovered undisturbed. For example, at Tel Halif, see A. Biran and R. Gophna, "An Iron Age Burial Cave at Tel Halif," *IEJ* 20 (1970), 151–68; and O. Borowski, *Lahav III: The Iron Age II Cemetery at Tell Halif (Site 72)* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013). For the extensive cemeteries in Jerusalem, see G. Barkay, "Excavations at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," in H. Geva (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 85–106; R. Reich, "The

first is the wide attestation of the bench tomb within a culturally defined area (Judah),[36] and the second is the fact that the bench tomb represents a continuation of cultural practices that go back to the third millennium and extend into late antiquity; specifically, secondary burial.[37] As such, these material remains should be approached as the vestige of ritual action: the funerary rites.[38]

The application of transition ritual theory to the bench tomb will reveal a multi-stage program of interment. The purpose of this study is to examine one aspect of this program, the medial stage, in order to elucidate the significance of the process as a whole. The place of the dead (i.e., the tomb), and the ritualization of death that

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Ancient Burial Ground in the Mamilla Neighborhood, Jerusalem," in Geva (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 111–18; and A. Kloner and D. Davis, "A Burial Cave of the Late First Temple Period on the Slope of Mount Zion," in Geva (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 107–10.

[36] See Yezerski, "Burial-Cave Distribution and the Borders of the Kingdom of Judah," 254–70.

[37] The classic study on secondary rites in the southern Levant, beginning already in the Neolithic period, is Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," 2–29. For a discussion of the Late Bronze Age precursor to the Iron II bench tomb, see R. Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 23–24. On the continuation of MB–LB mortuary practices into the Iron Age, see R. S. Hallote, "Real and Ideal Identities in Middle Bronze Age Tombs," *NEA* 65 (2002), 105–11. The custom of secondarily storing remains inside a communal tomb goes back at least to the Middle Bronze Age, seen notably in the Jericho tombs as well as the LB cemetery at Dothan; see R. E. Cooley and G. D. Pratico, "Tell Dothan: The Western Cemetery, with Comments on Joseph Free's Excavations, 1953 to 1964," in W. G. Dever (ed.), *Preliminary Excavation Reports: Sardis, Bir Umm Fawakhir, Tell El-'Umeiri, the Combined Caesarea Expeditions, and Tell Dothan* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1994), 147–90. Essentially, the Bronze Age cave-tombs involved the placement of the corpse at the center of the tomb (primary burial), and then the secondary removal to the sidewalls of the cave of these remains along with associated grave goods. The repository and burial benches of the typical Iron II Judahite tomb represent an architectonic "crystallization" of cultural practices that involve secondary rites, see Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," 58.

[38] This essay will use the term 'funerary rites' to signify the ritual act of burial. See I. Morris, "The Archaeology of Ancestors: The Saxe/Goldstein Hypothesis Revisited," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 1 (1991), 150; and B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 4–12. The discussion of death and burial here should not be confused with necromancy. The singular figure of Samuel's defunct spirit (1 Sam 28) was the product of a ritual process of divination (necromancy) that falls into an entirely separate category. In fact, the biblical descriptions of necromancy do not seem to involve the mortal remains of the dead, any specific funerary location, or even ancestral terminology (in addition to 1 Sam 28, see Lev 19:31 and Deut 18:11).

occurred within this place, held multiple meanings. The process of identification played a critical role in the constellation of meanings here. The significance of identification explains the actions that took place inside the tomb, as the status of the interred underwent a transition from corpse to ancestor. In the archeological study of Judah, the evidence for Iron Age mortuary practices is widely known and well documented. Nonetheless, there have been few attempts to understand these mortuary practices as transition rituals.[39] Furthermore, there have been even fewer attempts to interpret the Iron Age bench tomb as ritual space.[40] Therefore, it is necessary to contextualize mortuary practices through transition ritual-theory. This interpretive model will not only serve as a general guide for discussing the multi-stage activities evident in the Judahite bench tomb, but will also present the critical framework for understanding the role of the body that is central to the act of interment.[41]

The multiple phases of transition rituals are manifest in the tomb's extramural location, its architectural design, and the objects it contained. Each of these components can be related to various phases of a process, phases such as the rites of separation or the rites of aggregation. The point is not simply to utilize theory to apply new definitions to known phenomena, but rather, to define more precisely ritual action in order to elucidate the meaning that is encoded in each practice. In ancient Judah, the symbolic power of the tomb was directly related to ancestral claims, something well noted among scholars in the field.[42] A careful analysis of the

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[39] For a rare example, focused on an earlier (LBA) Canaanite tomb discovered at Dothan, see R. E. Cooley, "The Contribution of Literary Sources to a Study of the Canaanite Burial Pattern," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1968), 190–98; and idem, "Gathered to His People: A Study of a Dothan Family Tomb," in M. Tuchand and R. Youngblood (eds.), *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 56–58.

[40] See, however, Suriano, *Politics of Dead Kings,* 16–21; and J. F. Osborne, "Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah," *JNES* 70 (2011), 35–53.

[41] For theories of the body, see M. Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Sociology and Psychology: Essays* (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), original French publication 1935; and M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2005), first published in 1966. See also the discussion of these works in T. Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42–51; as well as Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 94–117. With specific reference to death and dying, see additionally E. Hallam, J. L. Hockey, and G. Howarth, *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999).

[42] Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," 106–10. L. E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985), 23. To quote H. Brichto's classic essay ("Kin,

individual components of mortuary practices, interpreted within a ritual context, will reveal manifold aspects of this conception and the wider cultural significance of this process.

2.1. TRANSITION RITUALS AND MORTUARY PRACTICES

The concepts reified through the process of identification (such as "ancestorhood") are associated with cultural notions of dying, and these notions can be delineated along the lines of transition rituals. In other words the *rites de passage*, as first devised by Arnold van Gennep,[43] can be adapted to the various components of mortuary practices evident in the Judahite rock-cut bench tomb. This model breaks down important life-cycle events (such as death) into three phases: separation, liminality, and aggregation. Van Gennep applied this generalized schema to a broad range of rituals, such as marriage, initiation rites and funerals, and observed that in each type of event the three stages (or phases) occurred with particular emphasis placed on one of the three. What van Gennep discovered, however, was that funerary rites often emphasized the middle phase, the rite of liminality, rather than the final phase.[44]

The work of van Gennep corresponded with that of his contemporary Robert Hertz who also discussed death as a social process. The extended essay by Hertz, a student of Emile Durkheim, examined the social response to death by focusing on funerary rituals.[45] Hertz looked at the rituals of primary and secondary burial (or reburial) in order to demonstrate how a culture's response to death could be measured by their treatment of the body. Using the natural process of decay as a metaphor for the soul's journey

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Cult, Land and Afterlife—a Biblical Complex," *HUCA* 44 [1973], 23): "Death does not constitute dissolution but rather a transition to [another] kind of existence, an afterlife in the shadowy realm of Sheol. The condition of the dead in this afterlife is, in a vague but significant way, connected with proper burial upon the ancestral land and with the continuation on that land of the dead's proper progeny." For more recent works, see T. J. Lewis, "The Ancestral Estate (נַחֲלַת אֱלֹהִים) in 2 Samuel 14:16," *JBL* 110 (1991), 608; Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," 671; and F. Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 1–12.

[43] A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 [French publication, 1909]).

[44] A. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 146; see P. Metcalf and R. Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (2nd ed.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32–33.

[45] Hertz's essay was originally published in *Année Sociologique* in 1907, but was later translated from French to English by Rodney and Claudia Needham and published as "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," in *Death and the Right Hand* (Glencoe, IL.: Free Press, 1960).

through the afterlife, Hertz suggested that the complete putrefaction of the corpse marked the finality of death.[46] Thus, within a course of action that involved the body's "wet" stage (as a corpse) and "dry" stage (as bones), Hertz was able to trace the means by which a society could establish new identities and readjust itself.[47] Transition rituals, specifically the model defined by van Gennep, became the basis for Victor Turner as he focused on the rites of marginality, giving it an almost autonomous sense separate from the other phases.[48] For Turner, the marginal phase was the most critical phase in the ritual process and represented a temporary status endured by the initiate that he famously described as "betwixt and between."[49] In other words, the individual involved had left his/her former status but had not yet assumed their new status. Turner stressed the tenuous nature of the marginal identity, describing it as an unstable state that is otherwise isolated from society. Here, Turner's notion of marginality (or "liminality" as he called it) compares with Hertz's description of the temporary status of the body before the performance of secondary burial. Furthermore, Turner's work provided a corrective to the earlier models in that it stressed the creative purpose of the ritual actions (generating social significance) as opposed to a solely protective function (preserving social order).[50] Rather than describing the effect that ritual had on society as a whole, Turner was able to highlight the individual within the ritual process.[51] Turner's interest in the fluidity of

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[46] D. J. Davies, "Robert Hertz: The Social Triumph over Death," *Mortality* 5 (2000), 97–102. As was typical of Durkheim's students, Hertz analyzed society as an organic whole and saw their use of ritual as a means to confront death in order to insure its own survival; R. Parkin, *The Dark Side of Humanity: The Work of Robert Hertz and Its Legacy* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996), 87–88. For Hertz ("A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," 56–57) secondary burial-customs served as a type of ritual locus for the development of his theory; cf. Davies, "The Social Triumph over Death," 97–98.

[47] M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (College Station: Texas A&M, 2002), 50.

[48] Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, 32–33; cf. also J. Hockey, "The Importance of Being Intuitive: Arnold Van Gennep's the Rites of Passage," *Mortality* 7 (2002), 215–16. See V. W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 94–96.

[49] See the chapter of the same title in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111; idem, *Ritual Process*, 94–130.

[50] La Fontaine, *Initiation*, 27.

[51] See Hockey, "Importance of Being Intuitive," 215–16. This point is sometimes missed due to Turner's concept of *communitas* and its reification during the ritual process. In fact, much of the critique of his work is aimed primarily at *communitas*. See for instance the review of Turner in light of his critics, found in D. Weber, "From Limen to Border: A Meditation on the Legacy of Victor Turner for American Cultural

status during the ritual process (defined by him as "state") was essentially a question of identity.

The outline of these earlier theories is useful if it is carefully tailored to the particularities of the respective culture. Furthermore, it is necessary to qualify certain aspects of the theoretical model. For instance, the three-part division in van Gennep's theory is often criticized.[52] Yet the emphasis on one or another phase of the transition, which played a critical role in van Gennep's work, implies in itself that each individual phase encompassed varied cultural action.[53] The three-part model serves as nothing more than a heuristic framework for organizing a constellation of cultural action into its basic components: beginning, middle, and end.[54] But this organization is only useful if it acknowledges the internal dynamics of each phase, along with the messiness of their external boundaries. Furthermore, these classic models of transition ritual should also be adapted to more recent efforts to theorize the body and understand its role in demarcating and determining space.[55]

Studies," *American Quarterly* 47 (1995), 529–32. See also J. D. Kelly and M. Kaplan, "History, Structure, and Ritual," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990). In the last essay, Turner is grouped with "structural-functionalists" and negatively assessed due to the problematic interpretation of ritual as creating social structure. Indeed, the regenerative power that Turner assigned ritual, and its role in *communitas*, can be ahistorical and idealistic (as Weber along with Kelly and Kaplan assert). Yet it still produces a useful paradigm in the study of ancient cultures—especially ones that are flatly depicted in written sources.

[52] On this point, within a general critique of van Gennep's work, see La Fontaine, *Initiation,* 26–27. More trenchantly, see L. Meskell, "Cycles of Life and Death: Narrative Homology and Archaeological Realities," *World Archaeology* 31 (2000), 423–41.

[53] Regarding the generality of these theoretical concepts, Hertz drew from a wide range of cultural examples in making his observations, although he focused on one ethnographic example in order to make his theoretical observations (the Dayak of Borneo). Conversely, van Gennep surveyed a broad range of cultures in search of basic patterns; see Davies, "Social Triumph over Death," 101; and Hockey, "Importance of Being Intuitive," 211–12. Moreover, Hertz's work was concerned entirely with death-rituals (largely funerary-rites), while Van Gennep's book dealt with the full range of life cycle events; Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, 33.

[54] See also Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, 111–12; and Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, 22.

[55] See bibliography on the body is immense; for a review, see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 94–117. Still, I will note here that the body as a point of orientation in ritual is driven by how a culture conceptualizes embodiment. This allows scholars to understand the material aspects of the body, and bodily action, through cultural practice rather than ideology. Compare, for example, the different uses of *habitus* applied to the body by Asad ("Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," 43–47), following Marcel Mauss, as compared to Meskell ("The Irresistible Body and the Seduction of Archaeology," in D. Montserrat [ed.], *Changing Bodies,*

The embodied experience of the dead,[56] and the narratives that cultures assigned to such experience, were often reflected in the physical manipulation of the corpse.[57]

Carefully qualified, and properly adapted, the ritual analysis of the Judahite bench tomb can identify cultural attitudes toward the dead (through the treatment of the body), and can shed light on concepts of eschatology (that is, existence beyond biological death). It is largely accepted that Iron II mortuary practices in Judah consisted of specific phases.[58] What can be debated is the meaning that the ancients assigned to each phase, along with the meaningful complexity of the ritual actions. In order to approach the question of meaning, it first must be acknowledged that the primary concern of the activities was identification. The foundation of these activities is a distinct attitude towards the body, and the concerns here are ineluctably bound within the embodiment of the dead as either an individual corpse or a collective mass of bones. Identity was the main point of transition rituals as first noted by van Gennep.[59] Similarly, Turner's interest in the fluidity of status within the ritual

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Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity [London/New York: Routledge, 1998], 151–52) who follows Pierre Bourdieu's definition. It further allows us to sidestep problems inherent, for example, in Hertz's two-body assumption of corpse and "soul."

[56] For example, Meskell ("Cycles of Life and Death") sought to replace the "rites of passage" model with a theory of *life cycles* that was driven by biography rather than ritual. Meskell's concept works well when applied to Egyptian sources, but is limited in its application to Judahite mortuary remains. See also the use of "narrative" in relation to the body by Hallam, Hockey, and Howarth (*Beyond the Body*, 5), which is comparable to Meskell's "biography." The focus on the body's experience parallels the shift in religious studies away from essentialized belief and toward lived experience. See, for example, C. M. Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," *JAAR* 80 (2012), 7–33. For an excellent analysis of the materiality of funerary inscriptions, and how this relates to the construction of space inside the tomb, see J. Smoak and A. Mandell, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *JANER* (forthcoming). The article complements this study in that it focuses on the embodied experience of the living as they enter the space of the tomb.

[57] J. Robb, "Burial Treatment as Transformations of Bodily Ideology," in N. Laneri (ed.), *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient near East and Mediterranean* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007), 288–89. For instance, how does a given society's concept of "good death" structure their mortuary practices? Robb's emphasis highlights the importance of recognizing the cultural implications involved in variable practices of disposing the dead.

[58] Barkay, "The Iron Age II–III," 359; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 148–49; Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," 12–15; and Osborne, "Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb," 39–45.

[59] Again, the work of van Gennep searched not only death rites, but any "life cycle" event that involved a change of identity; Hockey, "The Importance of Being Intuitive," 212.

process is essentially a question of identity, and for him the crux of this status was the rite of liminality. Hertz's work traced the body through a process of death-rites where each phase signified a transformative event for the entities involved, be it the corpse, the soul, or the bereaved.[60] Thus, the utility of transition ritual theory in the interpretation of Iron Age mortuary practices is not to distinguish a three-stage program, but to understand the dialectic of meaning that took place within the ritual process.

2.2. THE BENCH TOMB AS RITUAL SPACE

The material evidence recovered through the excavation of tombs represents the vestige of action; therefore, mortuary remains are the primary level of data in the study of funerary rituals. This fact makes it possible to foreground ritual activity in order to allow the object of study to stand on its own, as opposed to the reliance upon texts to shape the study in a more-or-less subjective manner. The work of Turner on the rites of liminality will inform the following explication of transition rituals in general, and the medial phase of these rituals in particular. The terms "liminality" and "marginality" are both applied to this middle phase, yet each has a separate nuance. Marginality refers to the status of the individual involved in the medial stage, while liminality signifies the span of time that this intermediary phase occupies. In order to delineate the middle phase, it is important to distinguish what comes before and after it: the rites of separation and aggregation, respectively.

Burial in Iron Age Judah was always conducted in an area outside of the settlement, as seen at sites such as Tel Halif,[61] Khirbet el-Qom,[62] Khirbet Za'aq,[63] and most notably in the external cemeteries of Jerusalem.[64] The existence of extramural cemeteries signifies the partition of the dead from the living, implying an aspect of separation rites that are inherent in the disposal of the corpse. The body's transportation to the tomb and the subsequent

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[60] Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington (*Celebrations of Death*, 79–85; cf. 83, Fig. 73) offer three explanations that associate each entity to the other. First the living relate to the corpse through mortuary practices (disposal of the dead), which can reflect aspects of social order that are symbolized by burial sites and tomb architecture. Secondly, the corpse relates to the soul through certain mortuary practices, such as secondary treatment of burial remains, which transfigure the image of the dead through the manipulation of the body. Finally, the people (i.e., the living) disassociate themselves from the dead through acts of mourning and commemorative rites, allowing social order to be restructured.

[61] Biran and Gophna, "An Iron Age Burial Cave at Tel Halif," 151–68.

[62] W. G. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from Khirbet El-Qom," *HUCA* 40–41 (1970–71), 139–204.

[63] I. Yezerski, "The Burial Ground at Ḥorbat Za'aq," *Atiqot* 76 (2013), 1–23.

[64] Barkay, "The Iron Age II–III," 369–17; and idem, "The Necropoli of Jerusalem in the First Temple Period," 233–70.

primary burial (the initial act of placing the body on the bench) all belong to the rite of separation. The rite of aggregation is marked by the final act of gathering the remains from the burial bench and storing them elsewhere inside the tomb (ideally, the repository). In this final rite, the disarticulated remains of former burials would be cleared from the burial bench (along with all associated grave goods) and transferred to the repository. Typically, repositories were carved out spaces underneath a burial bench or built into the corner of the tomb (Figure 1).[65] Here, the collective remains of previous burials resided in an undifferentiated mass. Thus, the initial rite of separation covers the transportation and interment of the body inside the tomb, while the final rite of aggregation coincides with the repository. The actions that occur between these phases reflect the rites of liminality.

The ritual space of this liminality (or rather, the liminal phase) can be clearly distinguished in the funerary architecture of Iron II Judah. During this phase, the bench served as the temporary resting place of the deceased. The individuality of this place is apparent in the headrests that are found in some instances, carved into benches.[66] This observation holds even in cases where the space was wide enough for multiple burials, placed side-by-side, such as at Ketef Hinnom.[67] The individual dead would be placed in the supine position upon the burial bench,[68] each occupying his/her own space inside the tomb. In this position, the incumbent dead was reposed inside the tomb, effectively separated from the living as well as the collective ancestry in the repository. During this period of repose, the living would place items beside the incumbent dead, often lining the burial bench with lamps, bowls and other vessels. Although the exact purpose of grave goods is unclear, certain assumptions are reasonable. The large number of items suggests that they were primarily symbolic. Furthermore, it should be noted that these grave goods seem to be mainly directed at the dead bodies reposed upon the benches, and less often at the collective gathering of mortal remains inside the repository.[69] It is

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[65] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 41–52. Occassionally secondary remains will line the floor of a tomb that lacks a repository, such as at Mamilla.

[66] G. Barkay, "Burial Headrests as a Return to the Womb—a Re-Evaluation," *BARev* 14 (1988), 48–50.

[67] Barkay, "Excavations at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," 93–105.

[68] Barkay, "Burial Headrests as a Return to the Womb," 217; and Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 48.

[69] The argument made in this present essay is that bones represented a transcendent state of the decedent as he/she was reunited with dead kin (i.e., "gathered to one's people"). Meyers ("Secondary Burials in Palestine," 15–16) makes a similar observation in his discussion of the status of the corpse inside the tomb (body versus bones). The point here is not to argue that the dead no longer required care once they were reduced to bones. The diminution of the dead should be associated with the natural

possible that these items reflect a belief that the dead required appeasement in order to placate their restless manner.[70] An alternative is to see the defunct individual in a deprived state, requiring grave goods for sustenance.[71] A third approach is to consider the grave goods (particularly items related to food) as aspects of commensality, where the dead were dependent upon the living. In this scenario the provision of goods would have affirmed the bonds between the two groups.[72] It would seem that the last two suggestions are most possible, since the status of the corpse would have required attendance and accommodation.

Turner has shown that the liminal phase is the most tenuous part of the ritual process.[73] It is during this phase that the actor exists without an identity. Thus, liminality represents the dangerous period in which the very existence of the ritual actor is at stake (in this case, the entombed corpse). The rites of marginality represent the conditions endured by the dead during their temporary status, as the natural decay of the body was allowed to take place inside the tomb.[74] The presence of grave goods, at the very least, indicates a belief in Iron Age Judah that the dead continued to exist inside the tomb.[75] More to the point, they suggest a complexity during this middle phase of the funerary ritual, implied by the fact that they were associated with the burial bench and effectively term-based. It is unclear when the grave goods would have been deposited, although it seems likely that it was done during the initial act of burial (primary interment). Yet there were certainly a host of actions during the middle phase, which would have culminated with the removal of the grave goods in order to make room for the

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decay of the flesh and, as such, it represented a vulnerable state. In contrast, the disarticulated remains of the dead inside the repository represented a stable status, and thus, a less vulnerable state. Thus, there are a few cases in which goods were deposited next to a repository, such as at Tel Halif and Ketef Hinnom.

[70] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 122–23.

[71] Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead* 6, 10–11 and 259 n. 540.

[72] On feeding the dead in the ancient Levant, see Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead," 385–405.

[73] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 96–99.

[74] That is, the bodies were not embalmed and mummified, nor were they encased inside a sarcophagus which would effectively hide the deteriorating state of the corpse. For an interesting discussion of the sarcophagus and embodiment that draws from Ernst Kantorowicz's concept of king's "body natural" versus "body politic," (used in the analysis of a Phoenician royal sarcophagus) see H. Niehr, "Der Sarkophag des Königs Aḫirom von Byblos," in N. Kreutz and B. Schweitzer (eds.), *Tekmeria. Archäologische Zeugnisse in Ihrer Kulturhistorischen und Politischen Dimension. Beiträge Für Werner Gauer* (Münster: Scriptorium, 2006), 240–41. Note also the role of the body's decay and the form of cadaver tombs in Medieval Europe, as discussed in Hallam, Hockey, and Howarth, *Beyond the Body*, 30–31 and Fig. 1.

[75] Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 148.

next burial. In other words, the necessity of the items deposited inside the tomb was only temporary, as the grave goods would be relocated into the repository along with the human remains. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the dead (associated with the grave goods) endured a temporary existence inside the tomb as well. The gradual decay of the corpse was symbolic of the inability to control death. Therefore the presentation of the body inside the bench-tomb, where it was accommodated with grave goods and attended to by the living, demonstrates the importance of ritual. By allowing the natural course of action to take place (the decomposition of the flesh), the living were able to control the uncontrollable, giving power to ritual through periodic routine.[76] Thus, within the funerary rituals that took place inside the Judahite bench-tomb, liminality related directly to the biological changes that were visible in the dead body, representing the marginality of the dead as it transformed from corpse to ancestor.

The temporary status of the dead is congruent with the secondary rites that conclude with the repository. These rites involved the gathering of bones (or *ossilegium*) and their redeposit into a collective setting within the tomb.[77] The transfer of disarticulated remains and associated grave goods into the compact space of a repository is seemingly destructive, and the apparent contrast of this act with the care and provision observed at the initial stages of burial has been interpreted as a shift in attitudes towards the dead body.[78] Although the remains are not removed from the tomb, the final phase is marked by the disassembly of the corpse. During this phase, bones and grave goods are broken and dispatched to a peripheral part of the tomb; the remains of former burials are literally pushed aside to make room for each new interment. What is important to note is that this act marked the end of the decedent's individual identity. This is the main aspect of the rites of aggregation: the former status is literally broken down as the dead are subsumed into a corporate, ancestral identity. The importance of this corporate identity underlies the deliberate plan of the tomb, spe-

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[76] Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," 124–25.

[77] The term *ossilegium* is used for bone gathering in archaeological studies; with regards to ossuaries, see L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *BA* 44 (1981), 175–76; idem, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Four," *BA* 45 (1982), 109–19.

[78] Cooley, "Gathered to His People: A Study of a Dothan Family Tomb," 52; and R. E. Cooley and G. D. Pratico, "Gathered to His People: An Archaeological Illustration from Tell Dothan's Western Cemetery," in M. D. Coogan, C. J. Exum, and L. E. Stager (eds.), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 89. See also P. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 62; and R. E. Tappy, "Did the Dead Ever Die in Biblical Judah?" *BASOR* 298 (1995), 59–68.

cifically the repository, which is a space purposefully designed for the collective storage of multiple generations.[79] The bones of previous burials were not removed or disinterred; instead they were safely stored.[80] The intention of the repository was not merely to pay respect to the formerly buried, nor was it solely limited to facilitating multiple burials over an extended time-period. Both concerns were certainly satisfied, yet the repository's ultimate purpose was to create and preserve an ancestral identity that was bound to a specific space—the tomb.

3. SHEOL AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF DYING

The analysis of mortuary remains from Iron II Judah, within a ritual context, makes it possible to approach the complicated image of death in the Hebrew Bible in a discursive manner. Attitudes towards the (dead) body and the basic recognition of identity are the keys to understanding the ritual space of the Judahite bench-tomb, and each factor into the process of dying that takes place during the funerary ritual. The complexity that occurs during this ritual process, which corresponds with the transition of identity encoded in the body's decay, offers valuable insight into the themes of social alienation and theological isolation that are associated with the tomb-like enigma of Sheol in literature such as Ps 88.

The paradoxical nature of death and Sheol can be observed in two conflicting aspects of Sheol's description: its universality, and the concept of impermanent tenure within its confines. The former problem is described in Job 7:9 and 17:13–16 as well as Qoh 9:10, and is alluded to in Gen 37:25 and 1 Sam 28:13, 19.[81] The latter

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[79] Barkay, "Burial Caves and Burial Practices in Judah in the Iron Age," 110.

[80] Meyers, "Secondary Burials in Palestine," 15; and Kamlah, "Grab und Begräbnis in Israel/Juda," 275.

[81] The account of the necromancer of En-dor in 1 Sam 28 describes Samuel as ascending from Sheol. Sheol in this account is a liminal realm that separates the living from the dead, and is breached by the necromancer. Jacob's words (Gen 42:38) are metaphorical, or at least conditional upon his perception of Joseph's fate; see Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 78. In reference to Jacob's statement in Gen 37:35, Levenson comments that "Joseph's [presence in Sheol] is owing to his having died a violent and premature death that is not followed by a proper burial or mitigated by the continuation that comes from having children." Jacob's words stand in contrast to the end of his life as he is "gathered to his people" (Gen 50:29, 33; cf. 47:30). The notion that the nature of death qualifies existence in Sheol (i.e, violent death) is challenged by Cook ("Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," 669–70), who correctly recognizes the problematic aspect of eschatology that misdirected previous scholarship. The proof texts that Cook assembles (such as Ezek 32:23; Isa 14:15; and Job 18) can just as easily be taken as expressions of the undesirable aspect of abandonment in Sheol. See also the observations of N. Wyatt ("The Concept and Purpose of Hell: Its

problem is apparent in passages that imply that an individual can be rescued from Sheol, which is a theme found in several psalms, notably Ps 88.[82] It is possible to interpret both issues as reflections of death as a process, here termed dying, that are at once socially conditioned and inevitable for all. As a postmortem destination, Sheol is described in unambiguously dreary terms that stand in contrast with the otherwise benevolent concept of reunion with one's ancestors. The recognition that death in Judah was a dynamic process, and not singular and finite, can reconcile the tension between these two eschatological themes. The social process of dying, which is architectonically captured in the design of the Judahite bench-tomb, can explain the complex imagery of death and Sheol found in biblical texts such as Ps 88.

3.1. PSALM 88 AS A TEST CASE

It is not possible to analyze every occurrence of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible; therefore Ps 88 will serve as a test case, particularly because of its enigmatic nature. The starkest representation of Sheol in the psalter is found in this text,[83] which represents an exegetical problem because it is a lament without any relief. The psalmist cries out to Yahweh, hence its interpretation as an individual complaint,[84] yet there is no apparent divine deliverance. Not surprisingly, there has been little agreement over the general interpretation of Ps 88. The death imagery of the psalm has led scholars to interpret it as intense peril, a near death experience, or a response in which the psalmist imagines him/herself being in death's realm (metaphorically).[85] The tone and structure of Ps 88 has led some to view it as an overall image of an inattentive and indifferent deity,[86] or even expressive of misfortune in the absence

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Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought," *Numen* 56 [2009], 166–68) regarding Sheol in Numbers 16:31b–32a, 33–34.

[82] See, for example, Pss 6:5–6; 16:10; 49:16; cf. Jonah 2:3.

[83] B. Janowski, "Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht: Psalm 88 und das Alttestamentliche Todesverständnis," in F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Auferstehung = Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 9–10; Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 95; idem, "Distress in the Psalms" in P. Johnston and D. G. Firth (eds.), *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 79–80.

[84] F. Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 201–4. H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 132–34. According to Gunkel, the individual complaint differed from the song of thanksgiving in its deliberate avoidance of words such as שְׁאוֹל; however, Ps 88 proved to be an exception.

[85] Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode*, 88–89 and 110–11; and S. L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 627.

[86] See W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological*

of Yahweh.[87] If anything, these interpretations indicate a lack of an assured afterlife.

The motifs of abandonment and isolation (from God and humanity) consistently accompany the funerary imagery found throughout the psalm. In light of these interpretations, it is possible to read the psalmist's condition as a process of dying. This coincides nicely with readings of illness that are often applied to the psalm.[88] When they are associated with symbols of mortuary practices, images of ill health are easily understood as components of an expiring life. Conversely, the process of dying is paradigmatic of marginalizing experiences that affect the body, specifically sickness and disease. The broader depiction of physical marginalization calls into question the definition of death. As medical sociologist Allan Kellehear has suggested,[89] in modern western-thought the concept of dying has been transposed to a position that is pre-mortem. In other words, the process of dying is now projected into the realm of the living, for example in the life struggle of a terminally ill patient.[90] Considering that the embodied rhetoric of Ps 88 presents itself in a tomb-like setting,[91] Kellehear's observation is especially striking.

Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 78, where Ps 88 is described as "an embarrassment to conventional faith."

[87] E. Zenger, "Psalm 88," in K. Baltzer (ed.), *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 397–98. This interpretation is objected to by Brueggemann (*The Message of the Psalms*, 78–79). Note Crüsemann's ("Rhetorische Fragen!?," 349–50) concern with the rhetorical structure of the psalm, and how it relates the psalmist to Yahweh. See also J. Schnocks's ("Vergänglichkeit und Gottesferne," in Berlejung and Janowski [eds.], *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt*, 3–23 [here 5–7]) recent suggestion that Ps 88 is a statement of divine wrath understood through the transience of life and human mortality, and experienced by the psalmist. In spite of Schnocks's difficult equation of death and the wrath of God, his emphasis on mortality is insightful. The separation of God from the psalmist here brings the concept of death's realm to the forefront, and although this separation may have initially applied to the God of Israel, it eventually led to different redefinitions of the deity as well as Sheol; see G. Eberhardt, "Die Gottesferne der Unterwelt in der Jhwh-Religion," in Berlejung and Janowski (eds.), *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt*, 292–93.

[88] See for example, K.-J. Illman, "Psalm 88 - A Lamentation without Answer," *SJOT* 1 (1991), 112–20; and Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity*, 29–57. For further sources, as well as a counter argument, see Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 196–97 (and n. 55).

[89] A. Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15–17.

[90] According to Kellehear (*Social History of Dying*, 9–65), in some cases, death could initiate a process of dying that was mythologized through journeys to the netherworld.

[91] Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity*, 18–28.

The psalm begins by evoking Yahweh by name, and the speaker identifies the poem as a "prayer" (vv. 1–2). The shift to the next strophe (vv. 4–5) establishes the setting for the psalm.[92] In this first of three stanzas (vv. 2–10a), the plaintiff reveals the details of his/her plight by opening with a כִּי clause in v. 4a.[93] Here, v. 4a serves as a link between the introductory remarks (vv. 2–4a) and the subsequent statements of affliction and entombment (vv. 4b–13). In vv. 4–5 the setting is expressed through an A B // B' A' pattern that is built on themes of "condition" (A // A') and "location" (B // B'):[94]

v. 4a (A)	כִּי־שָׂבְעָה בְרָעוֹת נַפְשִׁי	Because my soul is sated with calamity,
v. 4b (B)	וְחַיַּי לִשְׁאוֹל הִגִּיעוּ	And my life reached Sheol,
v. 5a (B')	נֶחְשַׁבְתִּי עִם־יוֹרְדֵי בוֹר	I am reckoned with those who descend into the pit;
v. 5b (A')	הָיִיתִי כְּגֶבֶר אֵין־אֱיָל	I am like a man with no strength.

This pattern is important because it provides the foundation for the images of death found in the first stanza and the rhetorical questions of the second stanza (vv. 10b–13).[95] Furthermore, the established location is undeniably linked to burial practices. It is apparent not only in the twice-used term "pit" (בוֹר; vv. 5aβ and 7a), but also the obvious example of "tomb" (קבר; v. 6bα, and also v. 12a). The verbs that govern both בוֹר (in v. 5a) and קבר are also typical of burial descriptions: √ירד ("to descend") in v. 5a and √שׁכב ("to lie [down]; to sleep") in v. 6bα.[96] In addition, the verb √זכר ("to

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[92] J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 109. Following Fokkelman, the shift marks a change from presence to absence. In addition, the verbs change to suffix forms.

[93] The use of this כי clause is followed by the occurrence of the interrogative –ה in vv. 11–13 and למה in v. 15; see Janowski, "Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht," 8; and Lindström, *Suffering and Sin,* 197.

[94] Additionally, Ps 88:4 parallels synonymously נפשׁ and חיי, which underscores the problem of existence. The parallelism here is discussed in J. Steiner, *Disembodied souls: the Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 73.

[95] The rhetorical questions of vv. 11–13 have been interpreted as a pattern of person (v. 11) and place (in vv. 12–13); see Janowski, "Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht," 21.

[96] It is important to recognize that the verbal clause here is allusive to the phrase "lay with his fathers," which appears throughout Kings and is cognate with "gathered to his peoples." Though Ps 88:6 speaks of isolation in the tomb, the verb relates the antipode of Sheol with ideal forms of death. For the burial sense of √שׁכב, see Suriano, *Politics of Dead Kings*,

remember") in v. 6bβ, "you no longer remember [those lying in the tomb]," is used to invoke the names of the dead (cf. 2 Sam 18:18).[97] Indeed, the next clause expands this further,[98] "those cutoff [√גור] from your hand (v. 6bγ)." The imagery of the first stanza sets up the series of rhetorical questions in vv. 11–13 that are set within the realm of the dead. The negative implication of the rhetoric is that there is no place for Yahweh in this chthonic realm.[99] The wonders and works of Yahweh, along with the deity's worship, are excluded in v. 11 from the dead (מֵתִים) as well as the netherworld's denizens (רְפָאִים).[100] This realm is the tomb in vv. 12–13, where it is described as the place of destruction (אֲבַדּוֹן = Abaddon) and a place of darkness that is called the "land of forgetfulness" (נִשְׁיָּה בְּאֶרֶץ).

Since the work of Hermann Gunkel, the poetic pattern of Ps 88 has been delineated into three stanzas (2–10a//10b–13//14–19).[101] The framework of complaint // motive // complaint, that runs through the stanzas, is guided by direct references to the psalmist's core of being in vv. 4a and 15a, which is the self (literally,

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38–39 and 71–72.

[97] The phrase that ends the first strophe in v. 10a, עֵינִי דָאֲבָה מִנִּי עֹנִי ("my eye languishes from my affliction"), recalls the use of the ocular imagery found in Job 11:20 and 17:5; see Tappy, "Did the Dead Ever Die in Biblical Judah?" 63, following Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 179.

[98] The same word, the *niphal* of √גזר, is used in Ezek 37:11 to describe the complaint of the exilic community. In this passage (Ezek 37:1–14), the plight of the exiles is famously symbolized through bones, "Our bones are dry, our hope destroyed, we are cutoff (v. 11)." S. M. Olyan ("Unnoticed Resonances of Tomb Opening and Transportation of the Remains of the Dead in Ezekiel 37:12–14," *JBL* 128 [2009], 493–94) has compared Ezek 37:11 to Ps 88:6. With regards to being cut off from one's ancestors, note the use of √כרת (comparable to √גזר in Ps 88:6) in the phrase "that *soul* shall be cut off from its people" (מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּהּ וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא) in Num 15:30 (see also Lev 18:29; cf. 22:3). Some have suggested that this phrase is the antonym of the biblical death-idiom "gathered to one's peoples," see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 459–60; followed by Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 98–100.

[99] Zenger, "Psalm 88," 395.

[100] The only appearance of the Rephaim in the Psalms is in this verse.

[101] H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: Überseht und Erklärt von* (5th edition; Göttingen,: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 381–82; see Zenger, "Psalm 88," 391–93; and Crüsemann, "Rhetorische Fragen!?," 349. For a different interpretation, see B. Weber, " 'Jhwh, Gott Meiner Rettung!' Beobachtungen und Erwagungen zur Struktur von Psalm LXXXVIII," *VT* 58 (2008), 595–607; and Terrien, *The Psalms*, 624–30. See the assessment of Gunkel's interpretation of the psalm, as well as that of M. Dahood, found in O. Loretz, *Psalmstudien: Kolometrie, Strophik und Theologie ausgewählter Psalmen* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2002), 285–309. Lindström (*Suffering and Sin,* 197–98) subdivides the units according to bicola (and tricola) into twelve "strophes." For a reading of three stanzas (vv. 1–7; 8–13; and 14–19); also Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry*, 108–15.

"my soul" [נַפְשִׁי]).[102] The psalmist also includes self-reference in vv. 8a and 17a ("upon me"), which interplays with the repeated third-person references: "among the dead" (vv. 6a, 11a).[103] The degenerative processes of time and mortality are evoked in v. 16, which begins: "I am afflicted, and perishing from my youth" (עָנִי אֲנִי וְגוֵֹע מִנֹּעַר).[104] The supplication of the sufferer occurs in vv. 2–3 and 14–16, and these strophes frame a set of verses (4–13) that are filled with funerary images. Indeed, the prevailing images of death increase in intensity throughout the poetic text,[105] which presents a dynamic image and suggests an active process. The imagery that is encountered in this psalm is not random, but occurs in a manner that conveys the marginalized condition of the psalmist. The individual complaint (vv. 2–3, 11, and 14) correlates the psalmist's isolation (vv. 4 and 19) with the relative oblivion of death (vv. 6 and 13), which are both symptomatic of the psalmist's state of being and physical presence (suffering and located in death's realm in vv. 4–5, 7, and 17–18).[106] In the latter case (v. 13), the reference to darkness is part of the psalmist's rhetoric, which comprises the heart of the complaint (vv. 10b–13).

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[102] See the form critical analysis by Lindström, *Suffering and Sin,* 200. Lindström breaks down the first and third unit according to appeal (vv. 2–3 and 14) and complaint (4–10a and 15–19), respectively. A key component of the complaint is the opening reference to the psalmist's self (נַפְשִׁי) in vv. 4a and 15a.

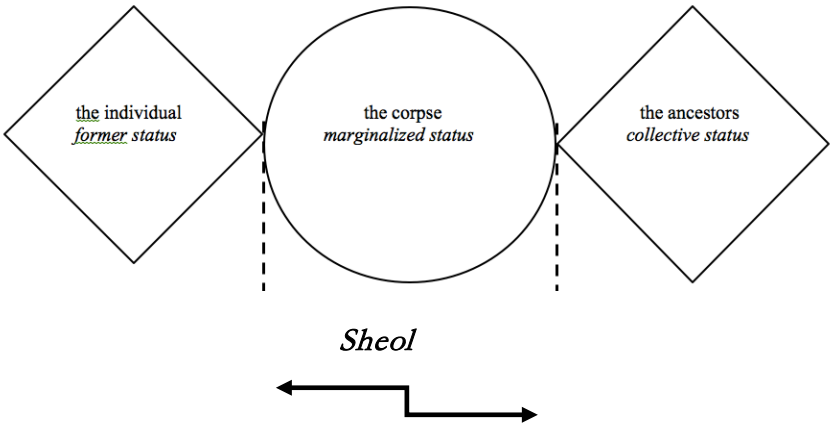
[103] This interplay is the reason for Fokkelman's division of the psalm into three stanzas (I in vv. 2–7; II in vv. 8–13; and III in vv. 14–19). For Fokkelman (*Reading Biblical Poetry*, 112–13), the second stanza (and vv. 8a and 11a) structures the psalm, directing attention back to the dead (v. 6a) and forward to the psalmist (v. 17a).

[104] Lindström (*Suffering and Sin,* 206) recognized in v.16 an image of dying (instead of illness). Rather than long-term illness, the word נער (here translated "youth") metaphorically implies the vitality of one's early life, from which the psalmist is separated.

[105] Janowski, "Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht," 15.

[106] According to Terrien (*The Psalms*, 626): "These motifs seem to be placed at random—which is understandable for a patient at death's door."

Figure 2. Liminality and Status in Funerary Rituals



The point of the complaint is the psalmist's isolation from both Yahweh and living "acquaintances" (v. 9a). This interpretation offers an explanation for his/her condition that is consistent with the symbolic location inside the realm of the dead (either the pit or the tomb). The condition implies a process that is comparable with the dying body inside the tomb. During this process, or period of liminality, the marginalized subject (the psalmist) cries out to the deity to be saved from isolation and impending annihilation in Sheol (see Figure 2, above).

A lack of assurance in death is the psalmist's eschatological problem, yet this problem does not require the absence of any benevolent concept of life-after-death. The "land of forgetfulness" that is referenced at the end of the rhetorical refrain in vv. 10–12 (v. 12b) relates back to the question of those whom Yahweh no longer remembers, where the nuance of the verb √זכר strongly suggests commemorative rites associated with the dead. Verse 19, in particular, starts with a statement of remoteness (הִרְחַקְתָּ מִמֶּנִּי), before concluding with the *nomen loci* מַחְשָׁךְ as the final word.[107] The synthetic parallelism of v. 19 (remoteness // darkness) is anticipated by the isolation expressed in v. 9 and the occurrence of darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) in v. 13. Throughout these verses the psalmist's identity is expressed in a relational manner, and his/her isolation is a defining feature of their personality.[108] The relational aspect of the psalmist's

[107] Johnston ("Distress in the Psalms," 79) notes that the psalm ends with "darkness" (חשך); see also Janowski's ("Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht," 8) discussion of this term and its role in the structure of the psalm.

[108] For the communal context of the individual in the Hebrew Bible, see Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," 217–37. For other works that address the social con-

identity is recognized through the context of physical placement, evoked in an assortment of images that are undeniably funereal.[109] The funerary location of the psalm and the marginalized condition of the psalmist together suggest an image that poetically relates the experience of the corpse. The process endured by the individual dead inside the tomb, as he/she transitioned from corpse to ancestor, is synonymous with the marginalized condition of the protagonist seen in Ps 88:4–10 and 14–19. These verses are framed by direct references to the psalmist's נֶפֶשׁ in vv. 4a and 15a, which are found in other individual complaint psalms.[110]

3.2. SHEOL AND THE PROCESS OF DYING

Due to the prevalence of death motifs, one commentary has termed Ps 88 a "theodicy lament."[111] The disruption of the social process of dying would result in the attenuation of identification (if not the complete denial).[112] In light of the collective and relational frameworks for identification, its disruption meant separation from one's kin, community, and deity. Lack of kinship affiliation would also mean alienation from the divine covenants that shaped such communities. Estrangement from one's ancestors and ancestral covenants can explain the divine disaffection that appears in vv. 8, 16, and 17. Divine anger in these verses is related to social alienation in vv. 9 and 19.[113] For these reasons, the term theodicy is

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struction of identity in the Hebrew Bible, see Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 112–21. Cottrill (*Language, Power, and Identity*, 18–28) identifies the individual in the rhetoric of suffering found in the lament psalms. Identity for her is relational and defined through the social construct ("figured world") within which the psalmist identifies him/herself. Note also the current shift in religious studies toward relational aspects of bodies and selves, Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," 7–33. Materially, identity could be relationally defined through the placement of grave goods, see for example I. Hodder, "The Archaeology of the Self," in J. W. Van Huyssteen and E. P. Wiebe (eds.), *In Search of Self: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Personhood* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 50–69.

[109] See also Janowski, "Die Toten Loben Jhwh Nicht," 15–16. Cf. O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. T. J. Hallett (Winona Lake; Eisenbrauns, 1997), 63–69, and 80, Fig. 91. Keel, who otherwise applies an interpretation of infirmity to the supplicant of Ps 88, still utilizes the psalm in his discussion of the grave and funerary imagery.

[110] Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 200. In light of the funerary imagery used throughout this psalm, it is interesting to point out that the term נֶפֶשׁ can mean "corpse" in certain ritual texts (Lev 21:1; and Num 19:11–13). See Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead," 389–93.

[111] Zenger, "Psalm 88," 397–98.

[112] The so-called "death after death," see B. B. Schmidt, "Afterlife Beliefs: Memory as Immortality," *NEA* 63 (2000), 236–39. This fate can occur when the dead are denied burial or disinterred.

[113] Lindström (*Suffering and Sin*, 203) also combined social alienation

appropriate for Sheol and the process of dying.[114] Here, the treatment of the body becomes the central focus in establishing a positive eschatological outcome. As described in Ps 88:4–7, the tomb becomes a controlled environment for the body during the theodicy of dying.[115] Theodicy and the anti-ideal of death are similar to the description of Sheol as a "place of personal engagement" found in recent works.[116] To be more specific, according to Jon Levenson, if the defunct individual failed to achieve a good death, they would be "in the domain of Sheol."[117] That is, personal suffering and pain associated with dying, along with any apprehension regarding a potentially bad death would surface as problematic encounters. The process of dying inside the family tomb situates and assumes this "place of personal engagement" that is referred to in biblical literature as Sheol. As such a place, Sheol is coincident with episodes that occur in wider cultural narratives enacted through ritual; the individual could transcend these problematic encounters through rites of passage.

The problem of death here is predicated by differing fates: joining one's ancestors in the afterlife, versus being "among the dead" and consigned to Sheol. The dead in vv. 6 and 11 are not ancestors, they are disassociated from the living, and they are incapable of experiencing divine presence.[118] In Judah, the ideal death

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and divine absence within the larger point stressed by the psalm, as seen in vv. 9 and 19.

[114] P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 53–55. To quote Berger (ibid., 54): "Rights [*sic*] of passage, to be sure, include happy as well as unhappy experiences. It is with respect to the latter ones that they involve an implicit theodicy." The term "theodicy" was applied to any explanation of suffering that invoked a wider sense of social order (his meaningful reality, or "nomos"), ibid., 53. As such, Berger was interacting with the categories established by Max Weber in his work on religious legitimation.

[115] According to Smith ("The Bare Facts of Ritual," 124–25), "among other things, *ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment* where the variables (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life have been displaced *precisely* because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful."

[116] Johnston, *Shades of Sheol,* 72, followed by Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel,* 72. M. Leuenberger ("Das Problem des Vorzeitigen Todes in der Israelitischen Religions- und Theologiegeschichte," in Berlejung and Janowski [eds.], *Tod und Jenseits im Alten Israel und in Seiner Umwelt*, 162–63) has argued for a pattern of development that in its early stages attributed the curse of an early death (and thus an unfulfilled life) to a denial by Yahweh. In this sense, the focus becomes one of divine power over death rather than a problem of separate spheres.

[117] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel,* 78. Barr (*Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 30), again following Barth, similarly discusses "[t]he idea of the realm of death as a powerful domain which can intrude into this life."

[118] In v. 6, the dead are described as "slain" (חֲלָלִים); their natural lives are disrupted by a premature fate. See N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of*

(as opposed to Sheol) included proper burial, progeny, and the preservation of one's name.[119] Yet, progeny and name are qualities that were bundled within larger concepts of ancestry that the tomb symbolized.[120] Thus it is critical to acknowledge the tangible sense of ancestry formed through the collective storage of bones found in the repositories of the bench tomb. To lament the dead was to remember their names, and it is possible that the *Sitz im Leben* of Ps 88 was the evocation of the dead during funerary rituals. The ritual agent here, the corpse, is passive and requires active participants to provision it with goods.[121] As such, the active participant of the funerary ritual could also serve as a type of surrogate for the dead, uttering prayers and words addressed to the deity.[122] Indeed, the relative isolation from Yahweh that is expressed through motifs of abandonment offers an explanation for the invocation of protection and care for the dead seen in funerary texts from Kh. el-Qôm, Kh. Beit-Lei, as well as the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets.[123] Ulti-

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Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 159.

[119] Barr, *Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 27–28; Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel,* 78–79; see also Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," 676.

[120] A continued lineage, through progeny, insured that the mortuary remains of the family tomb would be cared for and attended to by future generations.

[121] The Akkadian term *pāqidu* is used for a person who cares for the dead; see *CAD* P, 137–38 (s.v., *pāqidu*). In Hebrew, the verbal root פקד carries the same meaning, with regard to burial practices, see 2 Kgs 9:34, Sir 49:15 (cf. Gen 50:24–25); see T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 120–22.

[122] Mourners often emulate the dead in order to identify with the deceased, and as a display of solidarity with ancestors, which would explain the first person voice of the psalm. S. M. Olyan (*Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 39–45) points out that the dead and the mourner share the same liminal experience. See also his discussion of shaving rituals and liminality (idem, "What do shaving rites accomplish and what do they signal in biblical ritual contexts?," 611–12). Olyan offers a detailed description of the ways by which mourners mimic the dead through debasement and other means, suggesting that the actions serve to create new relationships between the living and the dead.

[123] On Kh. el-Qôm, see Suriano, "Death, Disinheritance, and Job's Kinsman-Redeemer," 53–55. The funerary interpretation of the Kh. Beit Lei inscriptions is often disputed, however see Smoak and Mandell, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah." On the silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom, see J. Smoak, "May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil: The Rhetorical Argument of Ketef Hinnom Amulet I and the Form of the Prayers for Deliverance in the Psalms," *JANER* 12 (2012), 202–36; and id., *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24–26* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Note also the comments in Hendel, "Other Edens," 188; and B. B. Schmidt, "The Social Matrix of Early

mately, the ritual activity inside the tomb symbolized a process of ancestral identification that was operative throughout life and society in the Kingdom of Judah. These rituals, which included provisions for the marginalized corpse, counteracted Sheol's anti-ideal and assuaged the theodicy of dying that is so aptly depicted in Ps 88.

4. CONCLUSION

One of the particular problems in biblical exegesis is that the Hebrew Bible lacks any systematic discussion of death. At the least the biblical discourse on death was obscure and difficult to recognize because it involves competing images, one of which is the concept of joining one's ancestors, and the other abandonment in Sheol. These are hardly separate notions of an individual's fate, as Ps 88:6bα even alludes to the ideal while describing its antipode. In fact, both the ideal and its antipode are combined in the story of Jacob, albeit from different sources.[124] Furthermore, in Ps 49 the problem of Sheol (Ps 49:15–16) is followed by the statement that, ultimately, one "goes to the generation of his fathers" (Ps 49:20).[125] The interpretation of the tomb as ritual space reveals a processual concept of dying that allows for the reconciliation of these disparate themes.

Archaeologists and biblical scholars alike have related the mortuary practice of communal burial with the biblical ideal of joining one's collective ancestry. Additionally, the ritual analysis of the bench tomb reveals how the problem of Sheol was accommodated through mortuary practices. Therefore, the interpretive framework of the Judahite bench tomb demonstrates that the embodied realities of the dead determined both the ideal and its antipode.[126] The provision of the corpse reflected the isolation and peril of Sheol, while the hope of joining one's ancestors related directly to the collection of bones inside the repository. The ritual

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Judean Magic and Divination: From 'Top Down' or 'Bottom Up'?" in B. J. Collins and P. Michalowski (eds.), *Beyond Hatti: A Tribute to Gary Beckman* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2013), 291.

[124] Gen 37:25, where Jacob evokes the negative image of Sheol, is typically assigned to the J source. Gen 49:29–33 belongs to the P source, though it could belong to a supplementary source that framed and redacted the patriarchal narratives. The question, however, is beyond the parameters of this article.

[125] The imagery of Ps 49 is quite complicated, particularly where it addresses the problems of mortality and materialism in Ps 49:17–21. Note that Ps 49:20 continues with an image of darkness. That is to say, joining one's ancestors involves a place where one "will not see light." Space does not allow a full discussion of these issues, however the author is preparing a separate study of this psalm.

[126] In some ways this is comparable to the concept of "embodied rationality" that Y. Feder ("Contagion and Cognition: Bodily Experience and the Conceptualization of Pollution (*ṭum'ah*) in the Hebrew Bible," *JNES* 72 [2013], 155–66) applies to corpse impurity.

space of the tomb provided an intimate setting for the dead, both singularly and collectively, and the symbolic significance of the actions that took place inside this space related directly to the transcendence of individuality.[127] The ritual activity of the tomb was a means of creating social structure,[128] and this structure was instantiated through a collective totality evoked in biblical idioms for death: the "fathers" and the "peoples."

Recognizing the importance of the ancestors provides a corrective to previous discussions of Sheol and the Tomb, such as Pedersen's. He was certainly right in observing that the universal fate of humanity and the eventuality of burial both echo a belief in the common existence of the dead. But more precisely, these factors emphasized the importance of collective representation in death. Sheol was not the sum total of all burials; it was a metaphor for the marginalizing experience of dying. The ancestors, collectively, were the sum total of all burials. An ideal death meant reunion with the ancestors inside the tomb, and the tomb offered a sense of closure that was a type of qualified immortality. But the ritualization of death inside the tomb also contained Sheol; the tomb was a controlled environment for the transitional experience of the dying body. Sheol was the intermediary stage that every person endured in death. Failure to pass through this liminal phase meant abandonment, and Sheol became a potential paradigm for episodes of peril and danger. To quote Levenson, Sheol stood for the "prolongation of the unfulfilled life."[129] It was both the "reality of death" (with Barr) and the opposite of "genuine life" (regardless of what Cullmann meant by the phrase). Put more succinctly, Sheol stood in contrast to life after death as the opposite of an ideal fate.

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[127] That is the survival of the individual through the collective, Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 53–55.

[128] Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure,* 2–21; see also Berger, *Sacred Canopy,* 54–55. Although Berger (*Sacred Canopy,* 193 n. 3) started with the categories of theodicy defined by Max Weber (see n. 114, below), his work on the transcendence of the individual by means of a larger social order was influenced by Emile Durkheim. It is worthwhile to quote Durkheim (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. C. Cosman [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], 318): "the collective ideal that religion expresses, then, is not due to some innate power of the individual, but rather to the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize."

[129] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 78.