DEMONS

WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS
ABOUT THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

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Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness

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What You Know May Not Be So

As familiar as the subject matter of demons might seem, *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* will surprise you. Most readers will expect a lot of discussion on Satan, demons, and the "principalities and powers" of Paul's writings. We'll certainly cover those subjects, but I need to prepare you at the outset that a good bit of what you'll read in this book about those (and other) divine enemies of God will not conform to what you're already thinking. There will be material in here that you've never heard in church or perhaps even in a seminary class.

OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

I'm announcing this at the outset because, when I decided to write this book, I did so despite knowing that there were serious obstacles to overcome. To be blunt, Christians embrace a number of unbiblical ideas about the powers of darkness. The reasons are twofold and are related. First, most of what we claim to know about the powers of darkness does not derive from close study of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Second, much of what we think we know is filtered through and guided by church tradition—not the original, ancient contexts of the Old and New Testaments.

Taken collectively, these two realities mean that our beliefs about Satan and the dark powers are not rooted in these powers' own original

contexts. Bible teachers (including some scholars) are prone to write about the powers of darkness on the basis of English translation. That undermines the nuance found in the original languages. Substituting traditions that emerged *after* the biblical period for ancient context and conflating ancient-language terms into the vocabulary of English translations produces an incomplete and occasionally misleading portrait of the supernatural forces hostile to God and his children. As a step toward rectifying this situation, this book seeks to root a theology of the powers of darkness in the original text, understood on the text's own terms.

You might be wondering what sort of unbiblical ideas I'm referencing. A few illustrations will suffice. Most English translations use the term "demon" three times in the Old Testament (Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37). Christian readers might wonder why demons are mentioned so infrequently in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament Gospels. But that very question erroneously presumes that the "demons" of the Old Testament are the same as those encountered in the Gospels. They are not. Another assumption is that the *śāṭān* figure of Job 1–2 is the devil of the New Testament. That conclusion is not feasible exegetically. Another example is the oft-repeated belief that Satan and one-third of the angels of heaven rebelled against God before the creation of humankind. This idea is prevalent throughout Christian tradition despite the fact that such an episode appears nowhere in the Bible. The only passage that comes close is Revelation 12:4, a passage dealing with the birth of the Messiah, thousands of years after the primeval period.

Aside from certain assumptions reflexively brought to our study, there is also the issue of what we mean by "darkness" and, by extension, the "powers" of that darkness. As with the terminology for hostile supernatural powers, the meaning of "darkness" isn't self-evident. While it is obvious that the literal physical circumstance of the absence of light is *not* in view, considering what the Bible seeks to communicate by its references to darkness matters for framing what it says about certain supernatural powers. In Scripture, darkness is a metaphor for negative, fearful human experiences. There are roughly two hundred references to darkness in Scripture, nearly all of which are used as a contrast to the God of the Bible—the source of love and life. It is no surprise, then, that death, the

threat of death, and the realm of the dead itself are linked to supernatural entities expelled from God's presence and service.

THE ROADMAP FOR OUR STUDY

Despite the fact that it will challenge some cherished assumptions, this book does not focus on criticism of such ideas. Rather, it seeks to inform and intrigue.

The first of four sections examines the Bible's vocabulary for the powers of darkness. The goal is to alert readers to how the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) conflates the wide variety of terms for supernatural powers in rebellion against God, a set of terms inherited by New Testament writers. At the same time, Jewish authors writing in Hebrew and Aramaic in the Second Temple ("intertestamental") period were introducing new terms. Navigating these developments is essential for understanding the meaning (or lack thereof) of New Testament vocabulary.

The second section focuses on how the evil cast of characters in the Old Testament came to be in an adversarial posture against their Creator. Contrary to many popular Christian traditions, there were three divine rebellions, not just one; of these, the first two framed ancient beliefs about Satan, the problem of human depravity, and the origin of demons. The third is the point of reference for the "princes" of Daniel 10 and Paul's teaching on the principalities and powers. These divine rebels are *distinct*—the rebellions were not committed by the same entities.

Our third section focuses on the powers of darkness in the New Testament with a view toward how the material of the Old Testament was processed by New Testament writers. The Gospels, for example, put forth the notion that the Messiah was identified in part by his ability to cast out demons—but no Old Testament passage proposes this idea. Equally mysterious is the connection Paul explicitly draws between the delegitimization of the authority of the principalities and powers to the resurrection of Christ. Once again, there is (apparently) no Old Testament passage that connects these two ideas.

Lastly, the book addresses imprecision and points of confusion in modern Christian demonology. In some respects, this last section will

merge and summarize earlier points of discussion, but in other instances, it anticipates new questions that arise from the material covered in the book.

My hope is that *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* will not only demonstrate why reading the Bible in its own context matters, but how doing so can lead to the excitement of rediscovering Scripture.

SECTION I

BIBLICAL VOCABULARY FOR THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

OVERVIEW

Our study of the powers of darkness logically begins with the Old Testament. From the perspective of English Bible translations, the word "demons" seldom occurs in the Old Testament. The ESV, for example, uses the term only three times. "Evil spirit" occurs only once (Judg 9:23), a passage that may or may not involve a supernatural entity. This creates the impression (and drives the flawed conclusion) that the Old Testament has little to say about supernatural powers of darkness. We simply cannot depend on English translations for an Old Testament study of demons or the infernal powers.

As I noted in the Introduction, the metaphor of darkness is crucial to understanding how Israelites thought about the fearful experiences of life. The Old Testament writers linked the rebellion of supernatural beings with the mirror-opposition to the eternal, joyful life intended by the creation of earth and humanity. A loving God created the earth as his own abode-temple,[1] intending humanity to be part of his family. Supernatural

1. In regard to understanding the creation narratives as temple building, see John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). A more scholarly version of this content is: John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

mutinies brought death, disaster, and disease to earth. Instead of all the earth becoming sacred space, darkness permeated the world.

For the ancient Israelite, the threats of the natural world and the perils of life were consequences of divine rebellions that were in turn catalysts to rebellion, treachery, and idolatry in humanity. Anyone in ancient Israel who heard or read the story of Eden knew that wasn't where they were living. Creation was far from perfect. Life on earth wasn't remotely idyllic.[2] An Old Testament theology of the powers of darkness connects sinister spiritual beings with death, the realm of the dead, and an ongoing assault on the harmony, order, and well-being the good God of all the earth desired in the world he had created for humankind.

This first section of our study briefly surveys how the Old Testament describes hostile supernatural powers of darkness against that backdrop. Chapter 1 covers a range of Hebrew terms, considered in their wider ancient Near Eastern context, that identifies a supernatural being hostile to God whose rebellion led to fear, calamity, depravity, and death in God's world. Chapter 2 explains how the terms of the preceding chapter were translated in the Septuagint (LXX), the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Our examination of the Septuagint will show us clearly that the translators often chose one Greek term to render many *different* Hebrew terms. Since the New Testament was written originally in Greek, the vocabulary of the Septuagint often finds its way into the New Testament. The result is that the New Testament has fewer words for the powers of darkness and loses some of the nuanced presentation of evil spirits found in the Old Testament.

A word on the limits of our study: first, while our investigation will include terms like (plural) *ʾelohim* ("gods"), we won't be concerned with discussing specific gods and goddesses (Baal, Molech, Chemosh, Asherah, etc.). Any rival deity (i.e., other than Yahweh) that was worshiped in antiquity was considered an evil power in the biblical worldview. Eventually we will encounter the Old Testament explanation for the appearance

2. Christians often presume that the entire earth was Eden, but this runs contrary to what we read in Genesis. For a brief discussion of this material, see Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 49–50. For full treatments of this issue, see Hulisani Ramantswana, "God Saw That It Was Good, Not Perfect: A Canonical-Dialogic Reading of Genesis 1–3," (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010), and Eric M. Vail, "Using 'Chaos' in Articulating the Relationship of God and Creation in God's Creative Activity" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009).

of these rival gods. For our study of vocabulary, profiling individual deities is not necessary. We will also not profile specific deities whose mythic story lines are drawn upon by biblical writers (e.g., Typhon for Dan 7–12; Athtar or Phaethon for Isa 14:12–15).

Second, we are not concerned with terms that *might* point to demonic entities that occur in personal names or geographical names. In the ancient world it was common to include names of deities in personal names (e.g., Daniel = "El/God is my judge") and places (Baal-zephon, Exod 14:2). While those examples are clear, others are only speculative. For example, Sismai in 1 Chronicles 2:40 may have been named for a deity known from ancient Syria (Ugarit) and Phoenicia, but there is no way to establish this with certainty. Other intentional omissions include names that could point to sinister divine beings but may only point to humans thought to be empowered by dark powers (e.g., Gog).

Section I therefore aims to introduce Old Testament vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible (chapter 1) and to survey what the Septuagint does with that vocabulary (chapter 2). This will set the stage for subsequent sections of the book, which will focus on understanding the supernatural rebellions in the Old Testament and the inheritance in the New Testament of that dark landscape.

CHAPTER 1

Hebrew Terms for Evil Spiritual Beings

Our task in this chapter is to briefly study Hebrew terms in the Old Testament that describe evil spirits—supernatural entities that oppose God. English Bible readers will presume this means a study of demons. That presents us with an immediate obstacle. Scholars who have devoted considerable attention to this topic have long pointed out that "there is no equivalent expression for the word 'demon' in the Semitic languages."[1] This is indeed the case, which may sound odd. John Walton summarizes the situation concisely:

> No general term for "demons" exists in any of the major cultures of the ancient Near East or in the Hebrew Bible. They are generally considered one of the categories of "spirit beings" (along with gods and ghosts). The term *demons* has had a checkered history; in today's theological usage the term denotes beings, often fallen angels, who are intrinsically evil and who do the bidding of their master, Satan. This definition, however, only became commonplace long after the Hebrew Bible was complete.[2]

1. Henrike Frey-Anthes, "Concepts of 'Demons' in Ancient Israel," *Die Welt des Orients* 38 (2008): 38–52.

2. John H. Walton, "Demons in Mesopotamia and Israel: Exploring the Category of Non-Divine but Supernatural Enemies," in *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus*, ed. Bill T. Arnold, Nancy L. Erickson, and John H. Walton (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 229–46 (esp. page 229). Walton's study is useful, particularly since he is a trusted evangelical scholar. However, as the title of his essay makes clear, his focus is limited to Mesopotamia. Consequently, some of his discussion could unintentionally mislead readers. He excludes, for example, comparative Ugaritic material in his understanding of certain Israelite concepts and Old

Despite this reality, we are not without material! A variety of terms in the Hebrew Bible are relevant to our topic. But in order to understand why the plethora of terms exists and their relationship to one another, they need to be framed in accord with the ancient Israelite worldview.

As noted in the preview to this section, Old Testament writers linked the rebellion of supernatural beings to the hazards and calamities they experienced. The life God desired for human beings on earth had been diverted and corrupted. The fears and threats of the natural world were consequences of divine rebellions, from which death and chaos overspread the world of humanity. For this reason most of the terms we find in the Old Testament can be categorized as either (1) terms that are associated with the realm of the dead and its inhabitants, with fearful places associated with that realm, or with the threat of death itself, or (2) terms associated with geographical dominion by supernatural powers in rebellion against Yahweh, the God of Israel. But before we get to those two categories, we should begin with some general terms related to what an evil spirit is, ontologically speaking.

TERMS DESCRIBING THE NATURE OF EVIL SPIRITS

Ontology refers to what a thing *is*, a thing's nature. By definition, an evil spirit *is* a spirit. What I wrote in another volume about the good members of God's heavenly host is pertinent here, for evil spirits are members of God's heavenly host who have chosen to rebel against his will. Passages such as 1 Kings 22:19–23 make it clear that "the members of God's heavenly host are spirits (Hebrew: *rûḥôt*; singular: *rûaḥ*)—entities that, by nature, are not embodied, at least in the sense of our human experience of being physical in form."[3]

The point of "spirit" language is contrast with the world of humankind. The members of God's heavenly host are not, by nature, embodied,

Testament passages related to divine beings in opposition to Yahweh. Including that material would at times lead to quite different conclusions than he draws.

3. Michael S. Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 2. See pages 2–7 in that source for a discussion of the "spirit" terminology of this passage and its relationship to Pss 103:20–22; 104:4. Note that in 1 Kgs 22:19–23 the spirit being that steps forward with a workable solution to deceive Ahab is never called evil. God's judgment of evil (supernatural or human) is not to be construed as evil itself. There is neither indication nor logical requirement that divine agents who carry out God's judgment of the wicked are themselves evil.

physical beings of our terrestrial world.[4] This is why the Old Testament writers occasionally use Hebrew *šamayim* ("heavenly ones"), *kōkebîm* ("stars"), and *qedōšîm* ("holy ones"). The first two terms typically refer to the visible sky and celestial objects in that sky. Using such language of entities in God's service metaphorically places them in the nonterrestrial spiritual realm, the plane of reality in which God exists (Ps 115:3; Isa 66:1; Job 38:7–8). A designation such as "holy ones" situates these beings in God's presence—as opposed to the world of humankind (e.g., Ps 89:5–7; Job 15:15).

One frequently misunderstood term that identifies a being as a member of the nonhuman, nonterrestrial world is *ʾelōhîm* ("god"; "gods"). I've written extensively on this term and how the biblical writers affirmed the existence of multiple *ʾelōhîm*—that is, a populated spiritual world.[5] Since the biblical writers identify a range of entities as *ʾelōhîm* that they explicitly differentiate from Yahweh and emphasize as lesser beings than Yahweh, it is clear that the term *ʾelōhîm* is not a label for only one Supreme Being. As I have noted elsewhere:

> A biblical writer would use *ʾelōhîm* to label any entity that is not embodied by nature and is a member of the spiritual realm. This "otherworldliness" is an attribute all residents of the spiritual world possess. Every member of the spiritual world can be thought of as *ʾelōhîm* since the term tells us where an entity belongs in terms of its nature.[6]

4. In a footnote in *Angels*, I wrote: "This point is not contradicted by passages that refer to angels as men and that have them performing physical acts (e.g., Gen 6:1–4; 18:1–8, 16, 22; 19:1, 10–11, 16; 32:24 [compare Hos 12:4]). When angels interact with human beings, appearance in human form or actual embodiment is normative in Scripture. Without taking some form that could be detected and parsed by the human senses, angelic presence and interaction would be incomprehensible" (*Angels*, 2, note 2). For how this relates to passages like Gen 6:1–4 and Matt 22:23–33, see Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, chapters 12–13, 23, and Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Crane, MO: Defender, 2017), 37–54.

5. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 21–27. For my peer-reviewed work on the subject, see Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18.1 (2008): 1–30; Heiser, "Should *ʾelohim* with Plural Predication Be Translated 'Gods'?" *Bible Translator* 61.3 (July 2010): 123–36; Heiser, "Does Deuteronomy 32:17 Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods?" *Bible Translator* 59.3 (July 2008): 137–45.

6. Heiser, *Angels*, 12.

The term *ʾelōhîm* simply means "divine beings"—residents of the supernatural world.[7] By choosing *ʾelōhîm* to describe a particular being, the biblical writer was not denying the uniqueness of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Rather, the term helped them affirm that there was an animate, spiritual world, of which Yahweh was a member. Yahweh was, of course, unique in that he was the uncreated Creator of these other spiritual beings and superior to them in his attributes.

The word *ʾelōhîm* is vocabulary that works in concert with terms such as *rûḥôt* ("spirits"). Some of the spirit beings created by God to serve him in the spiritual realm rebelled against him.[8] Their rebellion did not mean they were no longer part of that world or that they became something other than what they were. They are still spiritual beings. Rather, rebellion affected (and still characterizes) their disposition toward, and relationship to, Yahweh.

Beyond these ontological terms, it is helpful to group terms describing evil spirits in the Old Testament. These can be broadly categorized as: (1) terms that are associated with the realm of the dead and its inhabitants; (2) terms that denote geographical dominion of supernatural powers in rebellion against Yahweh; and (3) preternatural creatures associated with idolatry and unholy ground. The vocabulary explored in these categories derives from the divine rebellions described in the early chapters of Genesis.

It is important to note that the vocabulary for evil spirits in the Old Testament appears to have no unifying principle. Recognizing and understanding the supernatural nature of what unfolds in Genesis 3; 6:1–4; and 11:1–9 (compare Deut 32:8–9) provides the framework for how Old Testament writers thought about the unseen spirit world and its relationship to the terrestrial world.[9] We will also need to consider the matter of "pseu-

7. The term *ʾelōhîm*, while morphologically plural, is used over two thousand times in the Hebrew Bible to describe the singular God of Israel. This is not unique to the Hebrew Bible. For example, the Amarna tablets, written in Akkadian, use the morphologically plural *ʾilāni* ("gods") to address the singular pharaoh of Egypt. For some discussion, see Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 24; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 185.

8. We will examine those rebellions and how the supernatural rebels are differentiated in Scripture in Section II of the present study.

9. See chapters 3–7 of the present study.

do-demons" in the academic discussion of certain terms in the Hebrew Old Testament.

Terms Associated with the Realm of the Dead and Its Inhabitants

The coherence of this category extends from divine rebellions described in Genesis 3 (the fall) and Genesis 6:1–4 (the transgression of the sons of God). We must content ourselves at this point with cursory observations in that regard. The fall brought death to humankind. Its supernatural antagonist, described with the term *nāḥāš* ("serpent") in that passage, was cast down to *ʾereṣ*, a term most often translated "earth" but which is also used for the domain of the dead (Jonah 2:6; Jer 17:13; Ps 71:20). Jonah 2:6 is especially instructive in this regard, in that the word *ʾereṣ* is found in parallel with the term *šaḥat* ("pit"), a term frequently employed to speak of the grave or underworld (Job 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30; Ps 30:9; Isa 51:14).

The most familiar evil supernatural figure in the biblical underworld is the serpent of Eden—known later, beginning in the Second Temple period, as "Satan." My wording here suggests that the serpent is never called "Satan" (*śāṭān*) in any verse of the Old Testament. That is, indeed, the case. The subject of why this is so, how the characterization of this figure developed, and how passages other than Genesis 3 contribute to a theology of this figure is very complicated and controversial, and it will be addressed in more detail later.[10]

The realm of the dead—that afterlife destination for all mortals—is referred to by a variety of terms in the Hebrew Old Testament, including *sheʾôl* ("Sheol"; "the grave"), *māwet* ("death"), *ʾereṣ* ("land [of the dead]"), and *bôr* ("pit").[11] As the realm of the disembodied dead, this place has no literal latitude and longitude. Nevertheless, the association of death with burial led biblical writers to describe the dead as "going down" (Heb. *y-r-d*) to that place (Num 16:30; Job 7:9; Isa 57:9). Lewis summarizes this conception: Sheol "represents the lowest place imaginable (Deut 32:22;

10. See chapters 3–4 and 9.

11. The term "Sheol" is used the most frequently, "occurring some 66 times" (Theodore J. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of the," *ABD* 2:101).

Isa 7:11) often used in contrast with the highest heavens (Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8; Job 11:8)."[12]

In Old Testament theology this realm was populated by spirit inhabitants in addition to the disembodied human dead. While the Old Testament credits God with sovereign oversight over the dead and the power to raise the dead, the realm of the dead is not equated with the presence of God. In fact, the domain of God (the "heavens") was *opposite*, far above, that of the dead. It was the hope of the righteous to be removed from the underworld. Consequently, these nonhuman residents of Sheol were understandably perceived as sinister and fearful.[13]

1. "Rephaim" (*rĕpāʾîm*)[14]

As Lewis has noted, "A great deal of literature has been written on the nature of the Rephaim especially since the publication of Ugaritic texts where they are mentioned extensively."[15] The biblical conception of the *rĕpāʾîm* was related to, but differed from, their characterization (*rpʾum*) at ancient Ugarit.

The English Standard Version renders *rĕpāʾîm* as "giants," "shades" (meaning "spirits of the dead"), or "the dead," depending on context (see,

12. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of the," *ABD* 2:102. On the connections between Sheol and the physical grave, Lewis adds: "Sheol is intimately connected with the grave, although the degree to which it is identified with the grave has been debated. On one extreme we have those who see the grave behind every reference to Sheol, while on the other extreme Sheol and the grave are kept totally separate" (103).

13. The nature of the Old Testament afterlife (positive and negative) is a matter of scholarly debate. For a recent overview of the topic, see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002). I am on the side that argues that biblical writers had a positive view of the afterlife for the righteous—that, though all mortals wind up in Sheol, the righteous hoped for removal from it to be with their Lord. Sheol was perceived as oppositional to the presence of God. It is the realm of death, not life. To be in the presence of the Lord was life, not death. While God is not prevented from being in Sheol (or any place), it is not his abode. That is, there is biblical evidence that the righteous hoped to be with the Lord upon death—they did not presume there was no positive alternative to the cadaverous existence in the underworld. Any view that seeks to exclusively equate Sheol with a generic realm of the dead and argue that biblical writers had no view of the positive afterlife must demonstrate that Sheol was the home of Yahweh in the Old Testament mind. For further discussion, see Michael S. Heiser, "Old Testament Theology of the Afterlife," in *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

14. This Hebrew term is often translated "the dead" (ESV: Job 26:5; Prov 21:16) or "the shades" (ESV: Isa 14:12; 26:19) in English Bibles. We will use the transliterated term here. For more information on the Rephaim, see Michael S. Heiser, "Rephaim," *LBD*.

15. Lewis, "Dead, Abode of the," 103–4. See his article for textual references in the Ugaritic material. Cho points out that at Ugarit, due to their clear association with the underworld, the *Rapiʾuma* are "warrior deities or divinized dead kings," pointing out that some scholars regard them as "minor gods who serve the higher gods." See Sang Youl Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study of Their Nature and Roles* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 218–19.

e.g., 1 Chr 20:4; Isa 26:14; and Job 26:5, respectively). This variation in translation highlights the main interpretive difficulty surrounding the term: were the Rephaim humans (whether living or dead), quasi-divine beings, or disembodied spirits? Biblical usage ranges across all of these possibilities while extrabiblical sources like the Ugaritic tablets do not present the Rephaim as giants. The Ugaritic *rpʾum* are clearly divine residents of the underworld. The term *rpʾum* occurs in parallel to *ʾilnym* ("underworld gods") and *ʾilm* ("gods"), and other tablets place the *rpʾum* in the underworld.[16] The English translation of *rĕpāʾîm* as "shades" captures the "otherworldly, shadowy nature of the living-dead residents of the underworld."[17]

For the purposes of the present study, the point to be made is that the biblical Rephaim are supernatural residents of the underworld, a place in the spiritual plane of reality dissociated with the presence of God.[18] To

16. The parallel usage is in *KTU* 1.6 vi:45–49. Texts that place the Rephaim in the underworld include *KTU* 1.20–22; *KTU* 1.108; *KTU* 1.161.

17. Michael S. Heiser, "Rephaim," *LBD*, n.p. Elsewhere in this article I note: "Scholars believe the most likely Semitic root for *repha'im* is רפא (*rpʾ*). This is the consensus despite the transparent links between the term and Hebrew רפה (*rph*). For example, in 2 Sam 21:16–22, Goliath is linked to other giants, other "descendants of the giants" (ESV; the latter term in Hebrew being הָרָפָה, *haraphah*). However, in the parallel account in 1 Chr 20:6–8, the term rendered 'giants' is הָרָפָא (*harapha'*). This makes clear that, at least for these biblical writers, רפא (*rpʾ*) and רפה (*rph*) were alternate spellings of the same root."

Note that the Hebrew root *r-p-ʾ* means "to heal" in the vast majority of instances where it is used in Old Testament Hebrew. According to Michael L. Brown, the root *r-p-ʾ* "occurs 67 times in verbal conjugations … and 19 times in derived nominal forms" (Brown, "I Am the Lord, Your Healer": A Philological Study of the Root RAPAʾ in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East" [PhD diss., New York University, 1985], 37). While most scholars accept the root *r-p-ʾ* as underlying *rĕpāʾîm*, the connection does not help us determine the meaning of Rephaim in the Bible. Brown asks the obvious questions that seem to have evaded others: Are there any biblical, Ugaritic, or other Northwest Semitic texts that cast the Rephaim/*rpʾum* as healers? Was the Canaanite deity *rāpiu* a healer? The answer to both questions is no (Brown, "I Am the Lord, Your Healer," 124–27).

Aubrey Johnson offers one of the more coherent discussions of the alternative roots for *rĕpāʾîm* (Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* [Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964], 89). While noting the uncertainty of the Ugaritic material, Johnson first discusses Biblical Hebrew *rph* as an option. Among the glosses offered in the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament [HALOT]* for the verb *rph* are "to grow slack," "wither, collapse," and "to slacken, let loose" (*HALOT*, s.v. רפה). Other sources include "sink down" as a possible gloss (*TWOT*, s.v. רָפָה). Since ancient Israel, along with other surrounding cultures, considered the dead inhabitants of the underworld to still be experiencing some sort of subterrestrial life, the rationale for this root as the basis for *rĕpāʾîm* is that the term denotes "weakness or loss of energy" (Johnson, *Vitality of the Individual*, 89). This would aptly describe the cadaverous existence of life in the underworld; passages like Job 26:5 describe the dead (*rĕpāʾîm*) beneath the surface of the cosmic waters under the earth, sinking listlessly in the realm of the dead.

18. The Rephaim are further associated with the underworld in less obvious ways. For example, the geographical area that includes Oboth and Abarim in the Transjordan (Num 21:10–11; 33:43–48)

remain in that place was to be separated from life with God. That idea is evident in passages like Proverbs 21:16: "One who wanders from the way of good sense [i.e., one who is a fool, defined in Scripture as a wicked person or unbeliever] will rest in the assembly of the dead [*rĕpāʾîm*]." The fool misled by the wicked woman Folly into keeping company with her in her home "does not know that the dead [*rĕpāʾîm*] are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (Prov 9:18).

It is noteworthy that, unlike the material from Ugarit, the Old Testament at times uses the term *rĕpāʾîm* for the giant clans of the days of Moses and Joshua. Og, king of Bashan, was said to be the last vestige of the Rephaim (Deut 3:11, 13; Josh 12:4; 13:12). The Rephaim are linked to the Anakim in Deuteronomy 2:10–11: "The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many, and tall as the Anakim. Like the Anakim, they are also counted as Rephaim." According to Numbers 13:33, the Anakim were "from the Nephilim." As we will see in chapters 5 and 6, biblical writers saw the origin of the Nephilim as extending from the rebellion of divine "sons of God" (Gen 6:1–4) before the flood. This became the basis for the Jewish theology of the origin of demons in the Second Temple era.[19] Consequently there is a dark, sinister element to the Israelite conception of the Rephaim as inhabitants of the underworld.[20] The literature and religion of ancient Ugarit lacked a divine rebellion story comparable to Genesis 6:1–4. That element is at the heart of the divergence between Ugarit and the Old Testament with respect to the Rephaim.

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was associated with ancient cults of the dead. These place names mean, respectively, "spirits of the dead" and "those who have passed over [to the Netherworld]" (K. Spronk, "Travellers," *DDD* 876–77). See the discussion of these terms below under "Spirits" on pages 15–17.

19. Genesis 6:1–4 was a theological polemic against the tale of the *apkallu* in Mesopotamian religion. In both the biblical and Mesopotamian material, the divine offenders whose rebellion produced quasi-divine giants are consigned to the underworld as punishment. Second Temple Jewish texts draw on both traditions as the explanation for the origin of demons. New Testament writers were familiar with these Second Temple sources, as well as the classical Greek story of the Titans and the giants. This matrix of texts and ideas are the wellspring from which Peter and Jude draw their theology of "angels that sinned" in the New Testament (2 Pet 2:4–5; Jude 6).

20. This is why it is incorrect to say, as many do, that the Old Testament has no conception of a terrifying afterlife. It is true that the idea of hell—a place designed for punishment of the wicked—is not systematically presented in the Old Testament. But later notions, such as that found in the first century, that there was a place "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41) connects the realm of death with supernatural rebels. While the data points for the idea of hell are not connected in the Old Testament, the data points are nevertheless to be found there. Later Judaism is not contriving the idea.

2. "Death" (*māwet/mōt*)

Since a connection between the realm of the dead and death is obvious, it should be no surprise that death is at times personified in the Old Testament. The less-obvious point is the inclusion in the ancient Canaanite pantheon of the deity known as Mōt ("Death").[21]

Some Old Testament passages referring to death have "mythological overtones in texts which could, however, be read in a totally demythologised way."[22] In Canaanite mythology, Mōt is depicted as "a voracious consumer of gods and men" with an enormous appetite who "dwells in the underworld, which is an unpleasant (muddy) place of decay and destruction."[23]

The observation about Mōt being "demythologised" is appropriate.[24] The biblical writers did not have a "god of death" distinct from Yahweh. Life and death were the purview of the true God alone (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; 2 Kgs 5:7). Death (*mōt*) was under the authority of Yahweh. Nevertheless, biblical writers drew on broad Semitic notions that there was a spirit entity who was lord over the realm of the dead. God may sovereignly send someone to the underworld, but certain texts put forth the idea that the dead would be under the authority of its master.[25]

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21. Some scholars associate Mōt (personified "Death") with the "King of Terrors" (*mlk blhwt*) of Job 18:14 since the preceding verse contains the line "firstborn of death" (Job 18:13). As Rüterswörden notes, the identification is controversial and depends in large part on whether there is an ancient Near Eastern background for "firstborn of death" as a supernatural entity. Efforts have been made to identify the phrases with Mesopotamian Namtar, god of plague and pestilence, Nergal, the god of the Netherworld, and Mōt from the Canaanite pantheon. All these approaches have significant problems. See U. Rüterswörden, "King of Terrors," *DDD* 486–88. It should also be noted that neither the term *mashḥît* ("destroyer") nor *malʾakê rāʿîm* ("angels of destruction") are cast by Old Testament writers as denizens of the underworld or evil spirits. Rather, though signifying supernatural agents of plague and death (Ps 78:48–49), they are loyal members of the heavenly host sent to judge the wicked. A good case can be made that the *mashḥît* of Passover's judgment is Yahweh himself as the angel of Yahweh. See Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 150–52; Heiser, *Angels*, 65–68.

22. J. F. Healey, "Mot," *DDD* 599.

23. Ibid.

24. Some scholars use this term to propose that biblical writers, in some sort of religious epiphany, came to deny the existence of all other divine beings besides Yahweh. This proposition is not coherent. See Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism," 1–30; Heiser, "Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?" *JESOT* 1.1 (2012): 1–24; Heiser, "Monotheism and the Language of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls," *TynBul* 65.1 (2014): 85–100. Another perspective of "de-mythologizing" is to acknowledge that biblical writers stripped foreign deities of autonomy or independent personality without denying their existence. This describes the situation with Mōt.

25. Healey ("Mot," 601) summarizes how the biblical writers accomplished this portrayal: "Death appears, for example, in a personified guise in Hos 13:14: 'Shall I ransom them (Ephraim) from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is

The Old Testament does not specifically associate death with the serpent figure or the term *śāṭān*. The New Testament's reference to the devil having "the power of death" (Heb 2:14) does have roots in Canaanite (and Israelite) thought. In Canaanite religion, the sons of El must fight for the position of coregent with their father. In the Baal Cycle, Mōt initially conquers Baal, so Baal appears to be dead. However, Baal revives and conquers Mōt. "Prince Baal" (Ugaritic: *baʿal zebul*) ascends to the coregency and becomes lord of the underworld in the process. This Canaanite title is the backdrop for Beelzebul, a name for Satan/the devil in the New Testament.[26]

An important idea extends from Mōt's vanquishing of Baal. The latter deity was a storm god and, as such, the bringer of rain, which in turn sustained life and made the land fertile.[27] This meant that Mōt was associated with the opposite—the barren, desert wilderness, which itself was a metaphor of the realm of the dead.[28] In his detailed study of the wilderness motif, Alston observes,

> There is considerable evidence in the Old Testament that an intimate relationship exists between the concept of the "wilderness" and that

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your destruction?' Here the personification is very clear, but there is no need to assume a mythological overtone or to rule it out. … In other texts there is mention of specific characteristics of Death which have some sort of parallel in the picture of Mot painted by the Ugaritic texts. Thus in Hab 2:5 the insatiability of personified Death is mentioned ('whose greed is as wide as Sheol, and like Death he is never satisfied'). … The same idea, though applied to a personified Sheol, is found in Isa 5:14 ('Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite, and opened its mouth beyond measure': and cf. Prov 1:12; 27:20; 30:15–16; Ps 141:7). … Isa 25:8 on the other hand has Yahweh swallowing up Death and this indicates more clearly a parallel with Canaanite mythology: normally it was Mot who did the swallowing, but in this case Yahweh makes nonsense of the law of Canaanite myth by himself swallowing the swallower. … Another case in which there is a close parallel with the Ugaritic texts is Ps 49:15, which says of the over-confident: 'Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend.' Here we have Death leading people into Sheol and this reflects the way the Ugaritic texts convey the idea that it is necessary to beware of Mot, since he can entrap the innocent and is specifically mentioned as consuming sheep (*KTU* 1.4 viii: 17–20)."

26. J. C. de Moor and M. J. Mulder, "בַּעַל (*baʿal*)," *TDOT* 2:194. For Baal as *zbl* ("prince") in Ugaritic texts, see *KTU* 1.5.VI:9–10; 1.6.I:41–43; 1.6.III:2–3, 8–9, 20–21; 1.6.IV:4–5, 15–16; 1.9:18; 1. Mulder and de Moor write: "*Baal-zebub* is mentioned as the god of the Philistine city of Ekron (2 K. 1:2f., 6, 16). The only discernible function of this deity is that of giving advice and help in cases of illness or injury. Baal-zebub ("lord of the flies") is probably a deliberate distortion of *bʿl zbl* or *zbl bʿl*" (194). More will be said about Baal-zebul and Baal-zebub in relation to Beelzebul later in our study. As was noted earlier, while the data points for the later idea of hell are not connected in the Old Testament, the data points are nevertheless present. See Charles F. Fensham, "A Possible Explanation of the Name Baal-Zebub of Ekron," *ZAW* 79.3 (1967): 361–64 (esp. 363).

27. Daniel Schwemer, "The Storm Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies: Part II," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 8.1 (2008): 8–16.

28. See the ensuing discussion for more on the wilderness association with evil spirits.

> of the primordial chaos … that part of reality which cares not for human life and provides not for its sustenance, posing instead the constant threat of extinction.[29]

More specific to Mōt ("Death"), Talmon notes, "In Ugaritic myth it is Mot, the god of all that lacks life and vitality, whose 'natural habitation is the sun-scorched desert, or alternatively, the darkling region of the netherworld."[30]

There are other terms in the Old Testament for spirits who reside in the realm of the dead with the *rĕpāʾîm*. If the hope of the righteous was removal from Sheol to everlasting life with God, then by definition those left to remain in Sheol would abide there with the evil spirits, whose underworld residency is traced to supernatural rebellion.[31] The underworld was therefore quite logically a place where spirits of the wicked human dead and supernatural evil spirits would be found.

3. "Spirits" (ʾ*ôb*; plural: ʾ*ōbôt*, also ʿ*ōbĕrîm* ["those who have passed over"])

Some of the terminology for these fearful spirits derives from place names. For example, the geographical area that includes Oboth and Abarim in the Transjordan (Num 21:10–11; 33:43–48) was associated with ancient cults of the dead. These two place names mean, respectively, "spirits of the dead" and "those who have passed over [to the Netherworld]."[32] The Hebrew root ʿ*-b-r*, behind the name Abarim, means "to cross over [from one side to another]," so the Qal participle ʿ*ōbĕrîm* means "those who cross over."

Spronk notes that this participle "seems to have a special meaning in the context of the cult of the dead, denoting the spirits of the dead crossing the border between the land of the living and the world of the dead."[33] The Ugaritic parallels make this association clearly. The Ugaritic cognate of ʿ*ōbĕrîm* is ʿ*brm* found in *KTU*² 1.22 i:15.

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29. Wallace M. Alston, "The Concept of the Wilderness in the Intertestamental Period" (ThD diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1968), 2–3.

30. Talmon quotes Gaster here. Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31–64 (esp. 43).

31. See chapters 5 and 6.

32. Spronk, "Travellers," 876–77.

33. Spronk, "Travellers, 876.

> In the Ugaritic text *KTU*² 1.22 describing a necromantic session, the king invokes the spirits of the dead (Rephaim) and celebrates a feast, probably the New Year Festival, with them. It is told that they came over traveling by horse-drawn chariots. As they are taking part in the meal served for them, they are explicitly called "those who came over."[34]

The geographical associations with *ʿōbĕrîm* are evident in Ezekiel 39:11, which indicates the "Valley of the Travelers [*ʿōbĕrîm*]" is "east of the sea" (ESV). According to Spronk, the sea "is probably the Dead Sea. So it was part of Transjordan. This is a region which shows many traces of ancient cults of the dead, such as the megalithic monuments called dolmens and place names referring to the dead and the netherworld, viz. Obot, Peor, and Abarim."[35]

The Hebrew term "Oboth" (*ʾōbôt*) likewise has an otherworldly overtone and is associated with the spirits of the dead and those who worked to communicate with those departed spirits. Tropper explains that *ʾôb* is now more commonly understood to refer to the spirits of the dead, deriving the meaning from the Arabic cognate *ʾâba*, "return."[36] Other possible etymologies suggest interpreting *ʾôb* "as 'hostile' (a derivation of the root *ʾyb* 'to be an enemy'); or as 'ancestral.'"[37] According to Tropper, those who argue for the meaning "ancestral"

> assume an etymological connection between *ʾôb* and *ʾāb* "father, ancestor". The meaning "ancestral spirit" for *ʾōb* is based on a number of considerations. In the ancient Orient, necromancy was part of the Cult of the Ancestors. This essentially involved the invocation and interrogation of the dead patriarch from whom a family could seek advice and assistance. Several times in the OT, the Heb term *ʾābôt* "fathers", similar to *ʾōbôt*, designates dead ancestors.[38]

Certain places removed from Canaan, the Holy Land, like Oboth and Abarim, were deemed the destination of those who have passed over to

34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. J. Tropper, "Spirit of the Dead," *DDD* 807.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid. Clearly, to say that the Old Testament has no concept of a threatening afterlife fails to do justice to the data.

the realm of the dead.[39] The reference to the "cult of the dead" or "ancestor cults" is an important aspect of an Old Testament theology of evil spirits. The realm of the dead was filled with the spirits of the human wicked and other evil supernatural spirits. In addition to *ʾôb* ("spirit"; pl: *ʾōbôt*) and *ʿōbĕrîm* ("those who have passed over"), members of that fearful, motley assembly went by various terms associated with ongoing contact with the living.

4. "Knowing One" (*yiddĕʿōnî*)

Deuteronomy 18:9–14 lists a number of "abominable practices" forbidden to Israelites. One prohibition is utilizing the services of *šōʾēl ʾôb wĕ-yiddĕʿōnî* (literally, "one who inquires of a spirit or a knowing one"; Deut 18:11).[40] The term *yiddĕʿōnî* (from *y-d-ʿ*, "to know") means "knowing (one)" and occurs eleven times, always with the term *ʾôb*.

English translations at times render this word as "medium," which obscures something of note about its meaning. Several passages clearly have the terms referring to the spirit entities being channeled, not to the human channeler. Passages in Leviticus illustrate the point:

> Do not turn to the spirits [*ʾôbôt*], to the ones who have knowledge [*yiddĕʿōnî*]; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am Yahweh your God. (Lev 19:31)

> If a person turns to the spirits [*ʾôbôt*], to those who have knowledge [*yiddĕʿōnî*], whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. (Lev 20:6)

> A man or a woman who has a spirit [*ʾôb*] or knowing one [*yiddĕʿōnî*] in them shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them. (Lev 20:27)[41]

The point made here should not escape the reader. While *yiddĕʿōnî*, "knowing (one)," and *ʾôb* may at times be used of human mediums, the

39. This belief is very likely behind the strange New Testament passage that has the devil fighting with Michael for the body of Moses (Jude 9). For a discussion of that passage, see Heiser, *Angels*, 122–23.

40. The literal rendering is the author's. I take the conjunctive *waw* as "or" due to the use of *ʾô* (Heb. "or") in other passages where these terms occur in tandem (Lev 20:27).

41. These three translations are the author's.

failure to note that they also refer specifically to supernatural entities results in missing Old Testament terminology for evil spirits.[42]

5. "The Dead" (*mētîm*)

We can now look at the rest of Deuteronomy 18:11. It contains another term relevant to our study. Israelites were forbidden the services of "one who inquires of a spirit or a knowing one or one who inquires of the dead [*mētîm*]." The word *mētîm* is distinguished from the two preceding terms. Isaiah 8:19, the only other passage where *mētîm* occurs with *yiddĕʿōnî* and *ʾôb*, could be read that way, but it could also be understood as associating the terms:

> And when they say to you, "Inquire of the spirits [*ʾôbôt*] and the knowing ones [*yiddĕʿōnî*] who chirp and who mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead [*mētîm*] on behalf of the living?[43]

The term *mētîm* could therefore be a distinct reference to spirit entities in the realm of the dead or perhaps a subset of *yiddĕʿōnî* and *ʾôb*. The latter choice would still allow the term to retain distinctiveness.

I raise the semantic issue for a reason. Hebrew *mētîm* with definite article (as in the two verses above) occurs twelve times.[44] In all instances where the context does not have divination in view, the clear reference is dead human beings (Num 17:13–14; 25:9; Judg 16:30; Ruth 1:8; 2:20; Ps 115:17; Eccl 4:2; 9:3). The two passages from Ecclesiastes have the afterlife dead in view. I suggest, then, that *mētîm* in passages forbidding divinatory contact refer specifically to the disembodied spirits of dead people as opposed to nonhuman supernatural spirits. This must be the case as well for reasons of logic. It would make sense that "the dead" refers to human beings who have died, for all humans die. The same idea is not applicable to nonhuman spirit beings. There is nothing in the Bible to

42. Examples where these terms are used of the human conduits would include 1 Sam 28:3, 9, where *ʾōbôt* and *yiddĕʿōnî* are both marked accusative objects of the verb *k-r-t* ("cut off"). Saul could not "cut off" spirit entities through any ability of his own, and so he must have the human conduits in view. There are other phrases that have the human conduit in focus, such as *ʾēshet baʿalat ʾôb* ("mistress of the spirit"; i.e., a female medium) in 1 Sam 28:7.

43. The translation is the author's.

44. The definite article is the word "the," expressed in Hebrew most often as *ha-*. For example, *ha-mētîm* = "*the* dead" as opposed to merely "dead," which could be construed in various ways. "The dead" refers to dead humans whose spirits have now passed over to the realm of the dead.

indicate a belief that spirits had determinate lifespans.[45] Their demise would take a specific decision from their creator (Ps 82:6–7).[46] Consequently, a term like *ʾôbôt* may refer to either kinds of disembodied spirit, but *mētîm* speaks of the human dead in the underworld.[47]

6. "Hidden One" (*ḥabî*; *ḥebyôn*)

Our final terms (*ḥabî* and the related *ḥebyọn*) are indeed obscure, occurring only two times in the Old Testament. In both instances the meaning of each term is debated. Nevertheless, both have importance for the development of the underworld and a devil figure in subsequent Jewish thinking.

Isaiah 26:20 reads as follows in the ESV:

45. As I have discussed elsewhere, heavenly spirits (in rebellion or not) share God's attributes as his imagers. There is, in biblical theology, only one eternal being—God—who is the source of all other things, visible and invisible, in the heavens or on earth (Col 1:15–16). This means that "[Spirit beings] are not 'timeless' in the sense of being eternal beings. They had a beginning as created beings. They are immortal (Luke 20:36), but that immortality is ultimately contingent, based on God's authority and pleasure" (Heiser, *Angels*, 170).

46. As we will see in chapters 7 and 11, the judgment in Psalm 82 is eschatological (cp. Isa 24:21–24: 34:1–5) and applies very specifically to one group of supernatural rebels.

47. As Kennedy notes, "There is abundant evidence for cults of the dead in the pagan world that surrounded Israel. … Whether a cult of the dead existed in Israel is more problematic" (Charles A. Kennedy, "Dead, Cult of the," *ABD* 2:106). The term "cult" can be confusing. Its use in this context refers to the practice of leaving offerings of food and drink for the departed dead—i.e., ritual/religious acts that presume the ongoing life of the dead in Sheol. Leaving flowers or favorite objects at a grave is perhaps a useful analogy, though in ancient Israel there would have been more religious significance to the act. Much of the debate focuses on archaeological data (e.g., tombs that have structural features like chapels for food and drink offerings). Textual evidence from the Hebrew Bible for an ancestor cult is scant. Kennedy writes: "In Judg 17:5 an *ʾēpôd* and *tĕrāpîm* are installed in a family shrine at which the son will serve as priest, a combination of factors that strongly suggests an ancestral memorial. The *tĕrāpîm* were ancestral images that could be life-size (1 Sam 19:13) or as small as a mask. Rachel's theft of the *tĕrāpîm* (Gen 19:31) is interpreted as her way of maintaining a controlling influence in her family's affairs. … Food offerings to the dead are specifically condemned (Deut 26:14; Ps 106:28) and yet there are biblical narratives describing family shrines and yearly sacrifices for all the family (1 Sam 20:6). That David can use this excuse to leave Saul's table at the time of the new moon suggests that family sacrifices were more highly regarded than royal feasts" ("Dead, Cult of the," 106–7). That food offerings for the dead are clearly condemned tells us at least that some Israelites engaged in the practice. It also seems clear that funeral banquets involving some sort of "communion" with the dead were also disallowed (Jer 16:5–8; Ezek 43:7–9), likely because such things were similar to death cult practices of pagan religions, such as invoking the Rephaim to mime the dynastic death cult of Ugarit. See Theodore J. Lewis, "Ancestor Worship," *ABD* 1:241; Baruch A. Levine and Jean-Michel de Tarragon, "Dead Kings and Rephaim: The Patrons of the Ugaritic Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.4 (1984): 649–59. David's excuse is, however, not condemned (1 Sam 20:6). Godly Israelites would have avoided, on the basis of passages like Deut 18:11, contacting the dead for divinatory purposes, but it is an open question as to whether food and drink offerings were disallowed in totality. When an Israelite participated in such things, the act should not be necessarily be interpreted as an attempt to contact a wicked disembodied human spirit for idolatrous or nefarious purposes.