

**OCFORD CHURCH
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FUTURE STATE**

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Oxford Church Text Books. The Future State by S. C. Gayford

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S. C. GAYFORD

**OCFORD CHURCH
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FUTURE STATE**

Oxford Church Text Books

The Future State

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book professes to deal only with the teaching on the subject of life after death which is contained in the Jewish and Christian revelation. The treatment of the subject from the side of philosophy or natural theology or comparative religion does not fall within the scope of the work. If it comes in at all here it is only incidental.

I wish to thank the following especially for personal help of various kinds:—the Very Rev. Dr. Mortimer Luckock, Dean of Lichfield; the Rev. Dr. R. H. Charles, Professor of Biblical Greek, Trinity College, Dublin; the Rev. Dr. C. Taylor, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge; and Canon J. O. Johnston, Principal of Cuddesdon College. Of books dealing with the subject of the Future State, I have found the following most useful: Professor Salmond's *Christian Doctrine of Immortality*; Professor Charles's *Eschatology, Hebrew, Jewish and Christian*; and Principal Agar Beet's *The Last Things*.

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PART I

JEWISH BELIEF BEFORE CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE BELIEF IN A FUTURE LIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

It will be well at the outset of this chapter to state the purpose which we have in mind. Our object is to find out what the Old Testament writers themselves understood and believed about the state of the soul after death. Under the influence of the Spirit which was in them these men were inspired to write many things of which they themselves only partly understood the meaning. Thus, for instance, our Lord draws out a hidden meaning from the words 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exodus iii. 6; see Matt. xxii. 32, Mark xii. 26, Luke xx. 37). With teaching like this, contained by implication in the sacred writings, and left for later ages and teachers to perceive

¹ Readers who wish to study this question further may consult the following works:—Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, Book II., 'The Old Testament Preparation'; Charles, *Eschatology—Hebrew, Jewish and Christian*, chaps. i.-iv.; A. B. Davidson, article on 'Eschatology of the Old Testament' in *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible*; J. B. Mozley, 'Essay on Jewish and Heathen Conceptions of a Future State' in his *Lectures and other Theological Papers*. A chapter on the subject will be found in books dealing with the theology of the Old Testament: see e.g. Burney, *Old Testament Theology* in this series, chap. viii.

and disclose, we are not at present concerned. Our present purpose is the purely historical one of tracing and describing those beliefs which the saints of the Old Dispensation were conscious of possessing.

The Hebrew nation was a branch of that family of the human race which is known as Semitic. From their origin they derived not only their peculiarities of face and language, but also their earliest religious beliefs. And when they were chosen to be the recipients of a special revelation from God, it did not mean that all their old religion was to be cleared away with one sweep, and the page left blank for the new religion to be imprinted on it. So far as we are allowed to perceive the workings of God in revelation, they are not of this kind. The old religion was allowed to remain at first; then, one by one, new truths were revealed and allowed to work upon the old beliefs, until gradually the old was purged, first of its coarsest, least spiritual elements, and then by degrees of its other errors. A great truth was disclosed, and left to work in men's minds, to be assimilated, examined from this side and that, followed out in all its consequences, until it broke down all the old ideas which were inconsistent with it, and the way was cleared for a further and still fuller revelation.

This truth is well illustrated by the early Hebrew beliefs about the Future State. To the east of the Hebrews there lived another Semitic people known to us as the Babylonians. From their kinship with the Hebrews, we should expect to find resemblances between the religious beliefs of the two peoples. And it happens that on the subject of the life after death a tolerably full account of the Babylonian belief has come down to us. In brief outline it was somewhat as follows:¹ As

¹ For a fuller account see L. W. King, *Babylonian Religion* (1899), pp. 35-52; and Hommel's article on 'Babylonia' in Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible*.

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soon as the dead man is buried, his 'shade' goes beneath the earth to the 'House of the Dead,' a land of murky darkness, filled with choking sand, barren and desolate. Here, clothed with birds' feathers and feeding upon dust, all the 'shades' are gathered together. No distinctions of any kind appear between them: earthly rank and character make no difference in the lot of the dead.¹ This unhappy kingdom is ruled by a queen with a body-guard of horrible demons. High walls and vigilant guardians prevent escape.

The Hebrew view of the state of the dead has many points of striking similarity with the Babylonian. Let us consider first the ordinary popular conception. The Hebrew never thought of death as the total extinction of existence. The soul, in which resides the man's personality, that which thinks and feels and desires, is separated from the body at death, but it does not therefore cease to exist. But, on the other hand, the existence after death is never called 'life': for 'life' to a Hebrew meant a much more than mere conscious existence. It included many blessings, and especially the blessing of communion with God, from which the man was cut off by death. In the Hebrew belief, when a man died his soul went down beneath the earth to 'Sheol' (probably = 'the hollow place'), the land of the 'shades' (literally, 'feeble ones'). Here it found the 'shades' of all who had died before: hence the common expression, 'gathered unto his fathers.' 'Sheol' is also called by other significant names. As a cavern far under the earth it is called 'the pit,' *e.g.* Ps. xxx. 9; also 'the lower parts of the earth,' *e.g.* Ps. lxxiii. 9. As a land of gloom and darkness, cut off from all communication with life

¹ The 'judges' mentioned are probably not those who pass judgment on the earthly life, but rulers and arbitrators amongst the dead in the under-world.

and gladness, it is called 'the pit of destruction' (Ps. lv. 23); 'the land of darkness and of the shadow of death' (Job x. 22); 'silence' (Ps. cxv. 17). As the land of inhospitable desolation, disorder and dreary confusion, it is called 'the dust' (Ps. xxii. 29), and its inhabitants 'they that dwell (Isa. xxvi. 19) or sleep (Dan. xii. 2) in the dust.'

The condition of the dead is such as we should infer from this conception of Sheol. The descriptions are not, however, quite consistent. Sometimes the 'shades' are pictured as continuing in some measure their former occupations. The dead kings in Isa. xiv. 9 still sit on their thrones. The dead Samuel (1 Sam. xxviii. 11-19) still prophesies. In both cases these dead ones know what is happening in the world above, and retain their interest in the fortunes of their survivors. But the more general view of the dead gives a more gloomy picture of their condition. According to this view the dead lose all knowledge and interest in the affairs of the living. Even the father ceases to follow the fortunes of his children (Job. xiv. 21).¹ The dead 'know not anything' (Ecc. ix. 5). All hope of return to the upper world is cut off. The cases of restoration to life are exceptional and miraculous. Such a hope is indeed suggested, but only to be set aside at once as impossible (so Ps. lxxxviii. 10, Job xiv. 12). Yet, hardest of all to bear was the dreadful thought that death put an end to all communion with God. The dead have no knowledge of God. They cannot praise Him (Ps. vi. 5, xxx. 9; Is. xxxviii. 18-19). Some passages even speak as if Sheol were outside the dominion of Jehovah. The dead are no more remembered of Him, cut off from His hand (Ps. lxxxviii. 5). His wonder-working power and His love are unknown in Sheol. Other passages, however, equally early with these, rise to a higher level, and assert the

¹ That is on the possible though uncertain supposition that this verse refers to the state after death.