

**The “Shadow of Death” [צלמות] as a Place Name**  
*As Observed in Comparative Epithets of the Netherworld*  
*in Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew:*  
*Notes for Translators*

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Ἐσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος.  
 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.  
 (1Co 15:26)

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 23 the warrior-king of ancient Israel implies that there was something of which to be afraid if one did not have the presence of the LORD. Was David afraid of the dark, or of something more than darkness? Were the subjects of the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9 to be delivered from mere physical darkness, spiritual darkness, or from the darkness of the realm of death? These are only two of the eighteen passages in the Old Testament where any outcome of the debate concerning צְלֻמֹת (tsalmaveth) will have a lasting effect on Biblical interpretation.

D. Winton Thomas pointed out the genre of Old Testament literature where this word occurs:

There are eighteen occurrences of the word צְלֻמֹת in the Old Testament. They all occur in poetical passages -- four times in the prophetic writings (Isa. ix. 1; Jer. ii. 6; xiii. 16; Amos v. 8), four times in the Psalms (xxiii. 4; xliv. 20; cvii. 10, 14), and ten times in Job (iii. 5; x. 21, 22; xii. 22; xvi. 16; xxiv. 17 (bis); xxviii. 3; xxxiv. 22; xxxviii. 17).<sup>1</sup>

With only four exceptions (Jeremiah 2:6, Job 10:20-21, Job 16:16, and Job 38:17), the Septuagint consistently rendered צְלֻמֹת into Greek as the compound concept σκιᾶ θανάτου. This rendering is echoed in Matthew 4:16 and Luke 1:79. Of the four occurrences in the Old Testament that differ, no

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<sup>1</sup>D. Winton Thomas, "צלמות in the Old Testament," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962) 191.

other consistent form of translating the term appears. By far, the most interesting of these four variant translations is found in Job 38:17, where the Septuagint translators rendered the Hebrew parallelism “gates of death, even the gates of *Tsalmaveth*” [שַׁעֲרֵי־מָוֶת וְשַׁעֲרֵי צַלְמוֹת] as πύλαι θανάτου \ πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾗδου. Evidently, in this context, צַלְמוֹת was treated as a proper noun (place name) and was equated with Hades. Considering the number of times that the word is used in Job, capturing the correct concept that is conveyed by this term is imperative for following the flow of poetic metaphors in the book. The force of the imagery conveyed by צַלְמוֹת been a source of discussion intermittently for over a century.

The trend in Bible translation has been to render צַלְמוֹת as “darkness” or “deep darkness” due to a faulty linguistic assumption that it is a common noun. Why does it matter? It is the view of the writer that this is a faulty translation born out of errors in 1) logical consideration of the literary context of צַלְמוֹת in the light of related words and phrases in comparative Ancient Near Eastern parallelism, 2) faulty linguistic assumption yielding a categorization of the word as a common noun, and 3) failure to give due consideration to what was a correct, traditional rendering of the term in the Septuagint. Because this word is found in Old Testament prophecies of Christ, the effect of “deep darkness” versus “shadow of death” in translation is to rob Him of glory related to His power over death. While Christ came to bring light, He also came to give life. The effect of the mistranslation also robs the dying of comfort in the face of death (Psalm 23). There are also implications for inspiration of the New Testament where the text rendered the term as a compound (σκιᾷ θανάτου, “shadow of death”).

### The Traditional View

Though D. Winton Thomas disagreed with the traditional translation of צלמות, he agreed

that there was a strong tradition behind the reading "shadow of death." Thomas wrote:

The traditional view of the word, that it is compounded of צל "shadow" and מות "death"--so "shadow of death"-- has, as has been shown, weighty support in the ancient versions. It is the view also of Saadiah, Kimchi,<sup>5</sup> and Ibn Janah.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>*Radicum Liber sive hebr. lex. bibl.* (1847), p. 313.

<sup>6</sup>*The Book of Hebrew Roots*, ed. A. Neubauer, p. 611.<sup>2</sup>

Others who held to the traditional view in spite of the nineteenth century objections were T. Nöldeke (1867 and 1892), F. Schwall (1892), J. Hehn (1918), H. Bauer and P. Leander (1922).<sup>3</sup>

### Objections to Tradition

With so much support in the ancient versions and from the older Hebrew scholarly world, what brought this etymology into dispute? Walter L. Michal pointed out where the initial disagreement began:

The traditional, Masoretic understanding of *šlmwt* as a compound noun, *šl + mwt*, "shadow" and "death," has been under attack for more than a century. Scholars accepted the view that it is not a compound noun, but derives from a Semitic root *šlm*, "to be dark, black," and therefore understood it as an abstract noun, an intensive plural, vocalized *šlmot*, "darkness," . . . in spite of the fact that *šlm* "dark, black," is very unusual in Biblical Hebrew and some scholars even deny its existence in Hebrew and Aramaic.<sup>4</sup>

In his commentary on Psalm 23:4, H. C. Leupold wrote:

The first is the word which we have rendered "darkest valley," which is literally "valley of deepest darkness." The Hebrew word is *tsalmàveth*, which could, indeed, be broken up into its component parts: *tsal*, "shadow," and *maveth*, "death," **except for the fact that the Hebrew almost never forms compound nouns except in the case of proper names. This has led to the**

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas, 193.

<sup>3</sup>Walter L. Michal, "צלמות, 'Deep Darkness' or 'Shadow of Death'?" *Journal of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research* 29 (1984) 5.

<sup>4</sup>Michal, 5.

**very proper claim that a kind of popular etymology is involved**, one that, perhaps, originated after Hebrew had begun to fade out as a spoken language, and which operated with the idea of the "shadow of death." The Hebrew word used contains no reference to death as such but does refer to all dark and bitter experiences, one of which may be death [emphasis mine].<sup>5</sup>

Other Old Testament scholars of this period who affirmed the correctness of this view included S. R. Driver, G. B. Gray, and A. Dillman.<sup>6</sup> Though following this general train of thought, Thomas takes a "new approach" by attaching the "superlative force" to the word; thus rendering the translation "deep, thick darkness."<sup>7</sup>

### Toward a Solution

The division of consonants, the vocalization of the consonants, the translation, and the interpretation of the various proposals were seen as the crucial areas of focus for Michal while he argued for the traditional view.<sup>8</sup> These are critical items for the debate. However, there was one matter of context that Michal left out of his presentation that would strengthen the argument in favor of the traditional view considerably; and that is the matter of historical, literary context.

In Job 10:20-22 the coming death of the speaker is alluded to through the use of epithets for the place of the dead:

Are not my days few? cease *then, and* let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, Before I go *whence* I shall not return, *even* to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness *itself; and* of the shadow of death, without any order, and *where* the light *is* as darkness [KJV].<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>H. C. Leupold, *An Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) 212-13.

<sup>6</sup>Michal, 7.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, 197.

<sup>8</sup>Michal, 6.

<sup>9</sup>All Scripture translations are the writer's unless otherwise noted.

One of the epithets for the place of the dead that is repeated in this passage is צלמות.

In the history of the argument surrounding the term צלמות, too little emphasis has been placed upon literary context. This term falls within an ancient literary context. Not only should more emphasis be placed upon the context of the Hebrew term within each of the Old Testament passages, but also its relationship to the surrounding phrases should be examined. This is especially true for those words or phrases that are in a parallel relationship with the term that find a concrete tradition in languages such as Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic.

For too long the argument has revolved around whether compound, common nouns occur in Hebrew. If the word צלמות has been misclassified and is in actuality a proper noun (place name with a theophoric element), then the objections to a compound form would be eliminated. It is this writer's opinion that the strongest argument for the traditional understanding of צלמות lies in a poetic tradition that is much older than the Hebrew Scriptures and that described the netherworld (place or land of the dead/departed spirits) by using phrases that often included netherworld deity names. The ancient languages of Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic are replete with such allusions. Through a shared, Ancient Near-Eastern tradition of the language of death and dying, some of these older phrases found their way into the Hebrew Old Testament in passages where they are in a relationship of synonymous parallelism with צלמות.

## II. EPITHETS FOR THE NETHERWORLD IN SUMERIAN

### The Range of meaning for KUR

A frequent word used for the Netherworld in Sumerian is the word *KUR*. However, the same word is used for seemingly diverse concepts. Eleven entries for the word *KUR* appear in P. Anton Deimel's *Sumerisch Akkadisches Glossar*.<sup>10</sup> Because of the obvious breadth of use for this interesting word in antiquity, Samuel Noah Kramer helped to explain the apparent diversity of meaning assigned to the term:

One of the most difficult groups of concepts to identify and interpret is that represented by the Sumerian word *kur*. That one of its primary meanings is "mountain" is attested by the fact that the sign used for it is actually a pictograph representing a mountain. From the meaning "mountain" developed that of "foreign land," since the mountainous countries bordering Sumer were a constant menace to its people. *Kur* also came to mean "land" in general; Sumer itself is described as *kur-gal*, "great land."

But in addition the Sumerian word *kur* represented a cosmic concept. Thus it seems to be identical to a certain extent with the Sumerian *ki-gal*, "great below." Like *ki-gal*, therefore, it has the meaning "nether world"; indeed in such poems as "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" and "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World," the word regularly used for "nether world" is *kur*. *Kur* thus cosmically conceived is the empty space between the earth's crust and the primeval sea. Moreover, it is not improbable that the monstrous creature that lived at the bottom of the "great below" immediately over the primeval waters is also called *Kur*; if so, this monster *Kur* would correspond to a certain extent to the Babylonian Tiamat. In three of our "Myths of *Kur*," it is one or the other of these cosmic aspects of the word *kur* which is involved.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the range of meaning for the word *KUR* was: mountain, enemy territory, and netherworld (with the possibility of the word also referring to a demon or a god of the netherworld).

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<sup>10</sup>P. Anton Deimel, ed., *Sumerisch-Akkadisches Glossar* (Rome: Verlag Des Pöpstl. Bibelinstituts, 1934) 146-47.

<sup>11</sup>Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B. C.*, Revised edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 76.

"Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World"

Of Sumerian epics which deal with creation, Kramer lists the introduction of "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World" as the "major source for the Sumerian conception of the creation of the universe."<sup>12</sup> In Kramer's translation the potential personification of *KUR* is apparent:

After heaven had been moved away from earth,  
After earth had been separated from heaven,  
After the name of man had been fixed;

After An had carried off heaven,  
After Enlil had carried off earth,  
After Ereshkigal had been carried off into Kur as  
its prize;

After he had set sail, after he had set sail,  
After the father for Kur had set sail,  
After Enki for Kur had set sail;

Against the king the small ones it (Kur) hurled,  
Against Enki, the large ones it hurled;  
Its small ones, stones of the hand,  
Its large ones, stones of . . . reeds,  
The keel of the boat of Enki,  
In battle, like the attacking storm, overwhelm;

Against the king, the water at the head of the boat,  
Like a wolf devours,  
Against Enki, the water at the rear of the boat,  
Like a lion strikes down.<sup>13</sup>

In his paraphrase of this introduction, Kramer clearly asserted the personification of *KUR* and he even speculated (possibly from evidence on cylinder seals) about the nature of *KUR* "as a monster or dragon."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 30.

<sup>13</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 37-38.

<sup>14</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 38.

### "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World"

In this epic tale of Inanna, the Sumerian concept of the netherworld finds its greatest expression. Inanna sets her mind toward the "great below" (*KI-GAL*) and descends to the "nether world" (*KUR*).<sup>15</sup> She comes to the "lapis lazuli palace of the nether world" and she commands "Neti, the chief gatekeeper" who is in charge of the "seven gates of the nether world" to "open the house."<sup>16</sup> The two epithets of the netherworld given by Neti in his question to Inanna are "the land of no return" and "the road whose traveler returns not."<sup>17</sup>

The netherworld was also envisaged by the Sumerians as a city of the dead. Enlil commenting on the plight of Inanna says, "She who goes to the dark city stays there."<sup>18</sup> In a study of the journey of Inanna, Giorgio Buccellati uncovered the name of the Sumerian city of the dead (a name that continued into the Akkadian era):

The beginning of the Sumerian version states that Inanna "abandoned" her various temples in a number of Sumerian cities and "descended" to the Netherworld. The cities are mentioned by name; in the order in which they are introduced in one manuscript, they are Uruk, Badtibira, Zabalam, Adab, Nippur, Kush and Akkad. Checking their location on a map, one notices that the sequence corresponds to a line going from the south to the northwest, except for an initial swing to the east from Uruk to Badtibira. The "abandoning" of her cities on the part of Inanna may then be taken not as a simultaneous happening, but as a progression of events: she abandons one city after another as she goes *from* one *to* the next in a generally northward direction. But where does this progression lead? The last city mentioned by name in the sequence is Akkad, yet we know that this is not the destination point, since at the very beginning of the story we are told that the goddess "sets her mind to the Great Below" and "descended to the Netherworld." Now, if we continue on the map in the same northerly direction as is indicated by the sequence of cities, a very natural destination point presents itself

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<sup>15</sup>Samuel Noah Kramer, "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," In *Sumerian Myths and Epic Tales of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d edition with supplement, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 53.

<sup>16</sup>Kramer, "Inanna's Descent," 54-55.

<sup>17</sup>Kramer, "Inanna's Descent," 54.

<sup>18</sup>Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, Art compiled by Elizabeth Williams-Forte (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) 61.



at the end of the line: Kutha. Kutha is the residence of the Netherworld gods, and in point of fact the Akkadian version of the myth refers explicitly to the Netherworld as Kutha: "Enter my lady, that *Kutha* may rejoice over thee," says the gatekeeper to Ishtar when she is about to enter the Netherworld (Obv. 40).<sup>19</sup>

*Kutha* was thus both a literal city (perhaps where the netherworld divinities were venerated) and a mythical city within the territory of *KUR*, which, as previously cited, Kramer designated as "the empty space between the earth's crust and the primeval sea."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Giorgio Buccellati, "The Descent of Inanna as a Ritual Journey to Kutha?" *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*. Vol. 4 (1982) In the *Monographic Journals of the Near East*, G. Buccellati, ed., 3.

<sup>20</sup>Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, 76.

TABLE 1

## A Summary of Terms in Sumerian

Sumerian	English translation
<i>KUR</i>	Mountain, enemy (land), netherworld
<i>KUR</i>	Netherworld creature?
<i>KI-GAL</i>	Great Below
<i>Kutha</i>	<i>Kutha/Cutha/Kutu</i>
epithet	The dark city
sign for house	house, palace, gates
epithet	Land of no return
epithet	Road whose traveler returns not

SOURCES: A summary of information (cited individually earlier) from Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B. C.*, Revised edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 76 and Samuel Noah Kramer, "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," In *Sumerian Myths and Epic Tales of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d edition with supplement, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 53-57.

## III. EPITHETS FOR THE NETHERWORLD IN AKKADIAN

The Reflections of KUR in Akkadian

## "The Epic of Gilgamesh"

In the Akkadian version of the Gilgamesh epic, Gilgamesh goes to a mountain to descend into the earth:

*ša ša-di-i še-mu-šu Ma-šu[šu-u]  
 ana ša-ad Ma-a-ši i-na ka-š[a-a-di-šu]  
 ša ūmi(mi)-šam-ma i-na-a-a-ru a-[i<sup>ilu</sup> Šamši u e-rib  
<sup>ilu</sup>Šamši  
 e-lu-šu-nu šu-pu-uk šamê(e) k[aš-da]  
 šap-liš A-ra-al-li-e i-rat-su-nu kaš-da-at  
 arabu-amelu i-na-a-a-ru bâbi-šu  
 ša ra-aš-bat pu-ul-at-su-nu-ma im-rat-su-nu mu-tu<sup>21</sup>  
 [Tablet IX, Column II, lines 1-7]*

E. A. Speiser's translation of the above lines captures something of the terror of even the entrance to the nether regions:

The name of the mountain is Mashu.  
 When [he arrived] at the mountain range<sup>146</sup> of Mashu,  
 Which daily keeps watch over sun[rise and sunset] --  
 Whose peaks<sup>147</sup> [reach to] the vault of heaven  
 (And) whose breasts reach to the nether world below --  
 Scorpion-men guard its gate,  
 Whose terror is awesome and whose glance was death.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>146</sup>For this passage cf. H. and J. Lewy, *HUCA*, xvii (1943), 13 f.

<sup>147</sup>Since the name means "twins" in Akkadian, it is treated in the text either as singular or plural.

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<sup>21</sup>R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: Text, Transliteration, and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930) 50.

<sup>22</sup>E. A. Speiser, "The Epic of Gilgamesh." *In Myths, Epics, and Legends: Akkadian Myths and Epics of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*. 3d edition with supplement. James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 88-89.

Some of the key words in the passage are *ša-ad Ma-a-ši*, *bâbi-šu*, and *mu-tu*. Stated in the way of an equation  $\text{ša-ad} = \text{šadu} = \text{KUR} = \text{šd} = \text{𐎶}$ .<sup>23</sup> This shows a relation to the Ugaritic epithet of the netherworld *šd šlmmt* that will be dealt with later. The *ša-ad Ma-a-ši* has gates (*bâbi-šu*) like the *KUR*. The very glance of these gatekeepers results in death (*mu-tu*). The Sumerian account did not imply that there was one gatekeeper. To the contrary, Neti was the chief of the gatekeepers.

At another point in the epic, Enkidu uses seven epithets to describe the netherworld to Gilgamesh: *bît ik-li-ti* ("House of Darkness"), *bat<sup>lu</sup> Ir-ka-la* ("the abode of Irkalla"), *bîti-ša e-ri-bu-šu la a-šu-u* ("the house which none leave who have entered it"), *ḥarrâni ša a-lak-ta-ša<sup>4</sup> la ta-a-a-rat* ("the road from which there is no way back"), *bîti ša a-ši-bušu zu-um-mu-u nu-u-ra* ("the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light"), *bît ip-ri* ("the house of dust"), and *iršitim(tim)* ("the netherworld").<sup>24</sup> Because a parallel section used *bîti eḫê* instead of *bît ik-li-ti* (for "House of Darkness"), Ronald F. Youngblood pointed out that "the concept "dark house" was not restricted to one form of expression but could be evoked by either *bîti ekleti* or *bîtu eḫû*."<sup>25</sup> These phrases obviously were influenced heavily from the earlier Sumerian tradition where "house," "road whose traveler returns not," and "land of no return" had been common epithets for the netherworld much earlier.

The climax of this string of epithets, however, is the Akkadian word *iršitim(tim)*.

According to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, the logical equation of semantic development  $\text{eršetu} = \text{KUR} = \text{arš} = \text{netherworld}$  can be substantiated.<sup>26</sup> \*

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<sup>23</sup>*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vol. 17, Š, Part 1: *ša-šap* (1989) 49-61.

<sup>24</sup>The Akkadian is from Thompson, 46-47. The Translation is from Speiser, 87.

<sup>25</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, "Qoheleth's 'Dark House' (Eccles. 12:5), in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, edited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Ronald F. Youngblood (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 221.

<sup>26</sup>*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vol. 4, E (1958) 308-13.  
\*This will be important in the next section on Ugaritic epithets for the Netherworld due to the Ugaritic

"The Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World"

In Akkadian, the descent of the Sumerian goddess Inanna becomes the descent of the Akkadian goddess Ishtar. As Enkidu used seven epithets to introduce the netherworld, so in Istar's epic seven are also used: "the Land of no Return," "the realm of [*Ereshkigal*]," "the dark house," "the abode of Irkal[la]," "the house which none leave who have entered it," "the road from which there is no way back," "the house wherein the entrants are bereft of light."<sup>27</sup> Five of the seven epithets are identical to the words of Enkidu in the earlier cited passage in "The Epic of Gilgamesh."<sup>28</sup>

As in Sumerian, the Akkadian netherworld is also thought of as a city of the dead:

Enter, my lady, that Cutha<sup>13</sup> may rejoice  
 over thee,  
 That the palace of the Land of no Return may be glad  
 at thy presence.

<sup>13</sup>A name of the nether world, the Akkadian city-name *Kutū*.<sup>29</sup>

This city-name not only occurs in Akkadian mythology, but it also occurs in the Nabopolassar historical epic:

*man-nu kīma qarrādi* <sup>d</sup>*Nergal* [...]   
*ad-duk* <sup>lú</sup>*rabūti* <sup>meš</sup>-šú *ut-t[a]-x* [...]   
*sūq (sila) āli ra-a(! text:MIN)-īu in-da-l[u ... ...]*   
*nār(?)* <sup>uru</sup>*Kutê ina da-mu x[... ...]*

'Who like the hero Nergal [... ...]?  
 I killed his nobles, I [... ...]'  
 The streets of the city, the drains, were filled [with  
 blood ...]

parallelism in *KTU* 1.6:II:19-20 between the epithets of the netherworld (*šd šħlmm* and *arš dbr*) which will further highlight the usage of both *šd* and *arš* as designations for the field/land/realm of the dead.

<sup>27</sup>E. A. Speiser, "Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World," In *Myths, Epics, and Legends: Akkadian Myths and Epics of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*. 3d edition with supplement. Edited by James B. Pritchard. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 107.

<sup>28</sup>Thompson, 46-47.

<sup>29</sup>Speiser, "Descent of Ishtar," 107.

The *canal* of Cuthah with blood ... [... ...]<sup>30</sup>

The number of the slain of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar could only be compared by the ancient writer to those of Nergal, king of the mythological "Cuthah." Thus mythological religion and historical reality were inseparably mixed for the ancients.

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<sup>30</sup>Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions Volume I: From the Beginning to Ashur-resha-ishi I*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972) 82-83.

TABLE 2

## A Summary of Terms in Akkadian

Akkadian	English Translation
<i>ša-ad Ma-a-ši</i>	Mountain range of <i>Mashu</i>
<i>uruKutê</i>	[city name] <i>Kutha/Cutha/Kutu</i>
<i>bīt ik-li-ti /ekleti/eṭê</i>	House of Darkness
<i>bat<sup>ilu</sup> Ir-ka-la</i>	House/abode of <sup>ilu</sup> <i>Irkalla</i>
<i>bīti-ša e-ri-bu-šu la a-ṣu-u</i>	house which none leave who have entered it
<i>bīti-ša a-ši-bušu zu-um-mu-u nu-u-ra</i>	house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light
<i>bīt ip-ri</i>	house of dust
<i>harrâni ša a-lak-ta-ša<sup>4</sup> la ta-a-a-rat</i>	the road from which there is no way back
<i>irṣitim(tim)- ša e-ri-bu-šu la a-ṣu-u</i>	the Land of no return
<i>irṣitim(tim)</i>	the Netherworld

SOURCES: A summary of information (cited individually earlier) from R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: Text, Transliteration, and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930) 50; and E. A. Speiser, "The Epic of Gilgamesh." In *Myths, Epics, and Legends: Akkadian Myths and Epics of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition with supplement, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 73-99; and Speiser, "Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World," In *Myths, Epics, and Legends: Akkadian Myths and Epics of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition with supplement, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 107.

## IV. EPITHETS FOR THE NETHERWORLD IN UGARITIC

The Reflections of *KUR* in Ugaritic

In order to descend to the netherworld, as the hero Gilgamesh had to go to *ša-ad Ma-a-ši*, Baal must go to the "Mount of Kankaniya."<sup>31</sup> This place is earlier referred to as "the Mount of Targhuzizza, Unto the Mount of Tharumegi, Unto the Ridge of the Loam of the Earth."<sup>32</sup> Once again the remnant of *KUR* as originally meaning "mountain" is reflected in the imagery of the netherworld. Perhaps Targhuzizza and Tharumegi are the Ugaritic names of the twin peaks that were in Akkadian referred to as *Ma-a-ši*, "twins".<sup>33</sup> H. L. Ginsberg's translation of the epic of Baal's encounter with Mot, KTU 1.5:V:12-19, reads:

There now, be off on thy way  
 Unto the Mount of Kankaniya.  
 Lift up the mount upon thy hands,  
 The elevation upon thy palms,  
 And descend to the depth of the earth,  
 Be of those who descend into earth,  
 And ...  
 Puissant Baal complies.  
 He desires a cow-calf in Dubr,  
 A heifer in Shihlmemat-field [*šd šhlmm*]<sup>34</sup>

In order to reach the netherworld Anath must follow:

Anath also goes and wanders  
 Every mount to the heart of the earth,  
 Every hill to the earth's very bo[we]ls.  
 She comes to the pleasance of Dabr-[land] [*arš dbr*],

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<sup>31</sup>H. L. Ginsberg, "Poems about Baal and Anath," In *Sumerian Myths and Epic Tales of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition with supplement, James B. Pritchard, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 139.

<sup>32</sup>Ginsberg, 135.

<sup>33</sup>Speiser, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," 89.

<sup>34</sup>Ginsberg, 139.



To the beauty of Shihlmemat-field [*šd šhlmmt*].<sup>35</sup>  
[KTU 1.5:VI:26-30]

The concept of the mountains leading to the depths of the earth is again encountered. The tradition of *KUR* being within the mountains, by the time of the Ugaritans, was, perhaps, nearly one thousand years old. Yet, as the Akkadian language had kept alive the Sumerian epic material, so it had kept alive much of its imagery.

The netherworld of Ugarit not only shared the characteristic of the mountainous entrance to the netherworld with the earlier Sumerian and Akkadian tradition, but it also gave a name to their mythical city of the dead. Like *Kutha* of the Sumerians and Akkadians, the realm of *Mot* is also described as "his city Hamriya."<sup>36</sup> He is said to have a "land" and a "throne."<sup>37</sup> It is the two epithets for the land of *Mot*, *šd šhlmmt* and *arš dbr*, which have the greatest relevance for this discussion.

#### *šd šhlmmt* and *arš dbr*

Etymology of *šd šhlmmt* and *arš dbr*

#### *šd šhlmmt*

Both *ar* (land) and *šd* (field) are in obvious parallel. Of *slmmt*, Stanislav Segert has postulated in his grammar:

***šhlmmt*** 1.6:II:20=88.55 "plain of **mmt**"(?)  
GN(?) (cf. Arab. *sahil* "coastal plain"); "plain  
of the dead" (?) or cf. Akkad. DN *Mametu* (?)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ginsberg, 139.

<sup>36</sup>Ginsberg, 138.

<sup>37</sup>Ginsberg, 138.

<sup>38</sup>Stanislav Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language with Selected Texts and Glossary* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 201.

This etymology is fascinating, considering the potential parallel with *Daber* as a deity name, because of the identity of *Mametu*. In Akkadian, *Mametu* appears as a demon of disease and death:

*aššum ma-mit ša ultu ūmē ma'duti arkija raksuma la paṭru* on account of the *m.* demon who has ridden me for many days and does not depart (Schollmeyer No. 18:10).

*ušašbitanni murussu lemnu ša šibit ma-mit* she (the sorceress) has caused her evil disease, the *m.* attack, to befall me (BRM 4 18:6).

NAM.ERÍM *išbassu uzabbalma imât* the *m.* has seized him, he will linger on and die (Labat TDP 2:3, cf. *ibid* 210: 111, 230:119 . . .)<sup>39</sup>

Mammitu corresponds to "DINGER.MA," and is also a month in Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian.<sup>40</sup>

Under the entry in his dictionary of gods and goddesses for the name "**Mamitu** (Mammitu, Mammetu),"

Manfred Lurker wrote:

Originally an Akkadian (old Mesopotamian) goddess of oaths; subsequently, a female judge in the underworld and the spouse of --> Nergal. In one vision of the underworld she is described as goat-headed.<sup>41</sup>

It seems that *Mametu* may be equal to *Erishkigal*, Sumerian goddess of the underworld and wife of *Nergal*, god of the realm of the dead.

A much more likely etymology than Segert's suggestion from Arabic ("coastal plain") should be entertained considering the complications with Arabic etymologies dealing with words of such antiquity.

For the first half of the word *šḥlmmt* (*šḥl*), a poetic word for lion (לשחל) that is also found in the Hebrew

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<sup>39</sup>*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 10, M, Part 1, 196.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid*, 201.

<sup>41</sup>Manfred Lurker, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, trans. G. L Campbell (London: Routledge, 1988), 218.

Bible would make an interesting combination.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the phrase *šd šḥlmmt* would be rendered "field of the lion of *Mametu*."

The reference to "the lion of *Mametu*" would be to her husband, *Mot*. This certainly fits well in the context in the Ugaritic documents where it is found; for it is reminiscent of epithets of female divinities that refer to male divinities like *štrt šm b'l* ("Astarte of the name of Baal") and *tnt pn b'l* ("Dragonness face of Baal").<sup>43</sup> It also provides an interesting parallel to *arš dbr*. The "land of *Daber*" would then be equal to the "field of the lion of *Mametu*," (i.e. the "field of *Mot*").

### *ars dbr*

Early indications

Though דבר is a common Hebrew word ("word, matter, thing"), the phenomenon of occasional homographs can lead to misunderstanding. Albright was one of the first to suggest the possibility that דבר might also be the consonants of the name of an ancient deity on the basis of the parallelism in

Habakkuk 3:5:

A pair of names in Hab. 3:5 has often been mentioned since it was first discovered that Resheph was the name of a Canaanite god. Here Resheph and Deber appear as angels.

Before Him Pestilence marched.  
And Plague went forth at His feet.

On Resheph see above, Chapter II; Deber has not yet been identified as a divine name in Ugaritic literature, but it is quite likely that it was, since divinities of this type tend to appear in pairs in Canaanite mythology.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, Francis Brown, et al. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), 1006.

<sup>43</sup>Segert, 144.

<sup>44</sup>William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968) 186.

Although *Daber* comes first in this parallel pair, it is more desirable to move from the concrete to the less well attested than *vice-versa*. As early as 1919, Albert T. Clay could assert that *Resheph* was well known through late source material:

Resheph "lightning," "flame," the lord of heaven, lord of eternity and ruler of the gods, the warrior, is well known from the late Aramaic inscriptions of northern Syria. As far as known to the writer, this deity is not mentioned in the cuneiform inscriptions. He figures, however, in Egypt, where he is depicted wearing a high conical cap, to which is tied a long ribbon falling over his back, and which is ornamented with the head of a gazelle. He carries a shield, spear, club, and sometimes a quiver on his back.<sup>45</sup>

Though Clay did not yet know of the god *Resheph* from cuneiform sources, later finds would thoroughly document both the antiquity of this god and his prominence in ancient times.

Olmstead described the position of Resheph in relation to a king in northern Judah:

... there ruled in the northern Judah a certain Panammu, son of Qarel [contemporary of Tiglath Pileser], whose inscription is on a huge round figure of the god Haddad. It is Haddad who gave into his hands the scepter when he sat on the throne of his fathers; Reshef, the war-god, stood by his side, he was aided by El and Rekub and Shamash.<sup>46</sup>

The king is flanked by *Resheph*. Such a position points to the prominence of the god as the supporter of the king and defender of his right to rule.

During the period of the Hyksos domination of Egypt, many Asiatic deities were added to their pantheon. On a victory stele of Amen-hotep II, the names "Rashap" (Memphis stele) and "Montu" (Theban stele) are used interchangeably.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in Egypt itself, *Resheph* was identified as the god of war; and he could be used as a descriptive type of the Pharaoh himself.

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<sup>45</sup>Albert T. Clay, *The Empire of the Amorites*, in the *Yale Oriental Series, Researches*, vol. 6 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1919) 182.

<sup>46</sup>A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1951), p. 185.

<sup>47</sup>John A. Wilson, "The Asiatic Campaigning of Amen-hotep II," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd. ed., ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1969) 245, n. 9.

The true nature of this deity that was connected to war in his symbolism, however, was correctly conjectured by Albright even before the concrete evidence was uncovered to prove his assertions:

A god who became very popular as a war-god in Egypt and who appears as the angel of death in the Bible, is Resheph (Hab. 3:5), identified with Apollo in Cyprus. In the Mari texts his name is spelled (following Amorite pronunciation) as *Rasap*, but in Phoenician it was pronounced *Rasop* (modern Arsuf=Apollonia). All these names go back to an original appellation *Raspu*, probably "he who burns," and his sacred emblem was the head of a gazelle. Since 1926 (cf. ARI 79) I have insisted on treating him as a Nergal figure, that is as a god of the underworld, a god of pestilence and destruction, of death and war. At the time he was considered by all to be a storm deity, so my identification was rejected, in spite of arguments which retain their validity. Discovery after discovery has confirmed the correctness of this identification, until, finally, the recent discovery of two equivalent official lists of the Ugaritic pantheon, one in Ugaritic, the other in Accadian, has shown that *Rsp* was directly equated with Nergal.<sup>48</sup>

Regarding the equation of the Ugaritic *Resheph* with the Sumerian god *Nergal*, Mullen wrote:

Though in the mythological texts *Raspu*, like *Yarihu*, plays no important role, the sacrificial lists show that he was a deity with an active cultus. In *Ug. V. 18.26* (RS 20.24), *Raspu* is identified with *Nergal*, the lord of the underworld, the god of pestilence and war.<sup>49</sup>

Evidence from the tablets of Ebla also give the equation "*Nergal=Rasap*."<sup>50</sup> This god of the underworld, of pestilence, of destruction, of death, and of war finds a parallel in the god *Daber*.

Another scholar who made this association between *Daber* and *Resheph* long before any concrete evidence had come along was Umberto Cassuto. Of Habakkuk 3:5, Cassuto wrote, "One of these details is the mention of רָשָׁף (in vs. 5), which appears here, exactly like דָּבֵר, as a destroying angel accompanying the theophany (compare Deuteronomy xxxii 24)."<sup>51</sup> Cassuto was obviously of the opinion that the Israelites changed the idea behind the name from the category of god to that of evil angel.

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<sup>48</sup>Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 139.

<sup>49</sup>Theodore J. Mullen, Jr. *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, Harvard Semitic Monographs Number 24, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Jr. (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980) 180.

<sup>50</sup>Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay*, with an Afterword by Mitchell Dahood (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981) 251.

<sup>51</sup>Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies Volume II: Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts*, Israel Abrahams, translator (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 10.

## Discovery at Ebla

Upon the discovery of the cuneiform tablets of Ebla at *Tel Mardikh*, new light was shed upon the name

*Daber*. Of the pantheon that existed at Ebla, Giovanni Pettinato made these statements:

Two essential points stand out clearly: 1) the Eblaites were polytheists; 2) the divinities of the pantheon of Ebla are predominantly Canaanite. The first point creates no surprise, but the second bears importantly on the history of religions in the ancient Near East. Gods considered recent turn out to be most ancient, as in the case of Baal, and others, such as Chemosh whose origin is unknown, find their natural habitat at Ebla, and still others, such as Dabir, witnessed in the Bible but without divine qualities, are in reality divinities.<sup>52</sup>

Not only was the name of the god *Daber* found, He was found to be the patron god of Ebla:

Thus far divinities mostly known from the Canaanite tradition of the second and first millennia have been mentioned, but at Ebla are also attested gods hitherto unknown. First, there is Dabir, who appears in the Bible as "the plague," who together with Resheph serves as the scourger sent by Israel's God. But at Ebla, Dabir is the patron god of the city:

<sup>d</sup>*da-bi-ir dinger-eb-la*<sup>ki</sup>

"Dabir, the god of Ebla" in the sense that he is the tutelary divinity of the city and of the dynasty.<sup>53</sup>

The formula for the religious syncretism that emerges from these considerations is that Resheph = Nergal = Daber = Mot. They are all gods of disease, pestilence, war, destruction, death, and of the netherworld.

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<sup>52</sup>Pettinato, 245.

<sup>53</sup>Pettinato, p. 247.

TABLE 3

## A Summary of Terms in Ugaritic

Ugaritic phrase	English Category/Translation
<i>Targhuzizza, Tharumegi</i>	Mountain
<i>Kankaniya</i>	Mountainous land [region where two mountains above are located]
Ridge of the loam of the Earth	Mountainous edge of the earth
<i>Hamriya</i>	[City-name] <i>Hamriya</i>
<i>arṣ dbr</i>	Land of <i>Daber</i> [Land of the "Terrible One"]
<i>šd šḥlmmt</i>	Field of the Lion of <i>Mametu</i> [Since the "Lion of <i>Mametu</i> " refers to her husband, "Field of <i>Mot</i> "]

SOURCES: The information in this table is adapted from H. L. Ginsberg, "Poems about Baal and Anath," In *Sumerian Myths and Epic Tales of The Ancient Near East: Relating to the Old Testament*. 3d edition with supplement. Edited by James B. Pritchard. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969) 129-55 and Stanislav Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language with Selected Texts and Glossary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 162. Translations of *arṣ dbr* and *šd šḥlmmt* supplied by the writer.

## V. EVIDENCE OF RELATED CONCEPTS IN HEBREW

### Articular Usage and Abstract State

In order to separate the abstract idea of the state of death from the potentially more concrete conception of death as a deity/angel, it is possible in Hebrew to use the definite article with מוֹת. Twelve times in the Hebrew Old Testament this occurs (Exodus 10:17; Deuteronomy 30:15, 19, and 24; Ruth 1:17; 1 Samuel 15:32; Psalm 13:4, 116:15; Ecclesiastes 7:1, 8:8; Isaiah 25:8; and Jeremiah 21:8).

The vast majority of the occurrences of this noun, however, are anarthrous. Considering the interesting ancient relationship between the more concrete concept of a god of death and the more abstract idea of the state of death, the noun must be approached with more caution in poetic sections to determine any poetic color that may have been intended by the ancient writer. To illustrate this point, in Job 30:22 the speaker reflects upon the coming, future moment in death that his spirit will leave his body. Then in Job 30:23 there follows a classic example of poetic borrowing of imagery from the early concept (shared by Mesopotamians, Canaanites and Egyptians) of being brought before a literal "god of death":

כִּי־יִדְעֵתִי מוֹת תְּשִׁיבֵנִי וּבֵית מוֹעֵד לְכָל־חַי:

For I know that You will bring me to d[D]eath, and to the house appointed for all who live.

Indeed, in Job 18, Bildad even speaks of the wicked being hunted down by emissaries from Death (the firstborn of Death among them, 18:13) in order to be dragged from the land of the living and brought before the one he calls the "king of terrors" (18:14).

### Evidence from Antonyms

The term צֶל is used in a phrase in Genesis 19:8 to indicate the house of Lot. Thus the term may by extension mean "shelter," as is the case in Isaiah 4:6, 25:4, 32:2, and Jonah 4:6. In

Ecclesiastes 7:12 the *New International Version* translated כִּי בְצֶל הַחֲכָמָה בְּצֶל הַבְּסוּף as "for wisdom is a



shelter as money is a shelter." The meaning "shelter" (by extension) for צל may have implications for passages such as Isaiah 30:2 ("the shadow/shelter of Egypt") and Jeremiah 48:45 ("the shadow/shelter of Heshbon").

If צלמות has been misclassified in the past and is in actuality a proper noun (place name) with the inclusion of a theophoric element (מות), then the parallelism in Psalm 91:1 may refer to a kind of antonym place name (opposite of צלמות in location, heaven vs. in the earth):

יֵשֵׁב בְּסִטֶּר עֲלִיוֹן בְּצֵל שְׁדֵי יִתְלוֹנֵן:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High rests in the shadow of the Almighty.

The term here translated "shelter" conveys by poetic extension the concept of temple, palace, or pavilion; while the term "shadow" conveys the dual concepts of the presence and protection afforded by the God of that place. The source for much of the poetic imagery in the rest of Psalm 91 is drawn from the realm of death ("the fowler's snare," מִדְּבַר הַמוֹת "from the deadly pestilence [*Daber*]," מִדְּבַר מִקְטֵב יֵשׁוּד צְהָרִים "from the d[D]estroyer who destroys at midday"). This deadly list of the dangers that surrounded the audience of the Psalm stands in glaring contrast with the security of צל שדי.

Considering both the earlier context of שחל ("lion," as a possible reference to Mot in the Ugaritic epithet for the netherworld) and the possible connection of "dragons" to the netherworld as far back in time as the Sumerian epics, it is noteworthy here to mention that the "delivered ones" of Psalm 91 are pictured treading down both the lion and the dragon:

עַל-שַׁחַל וּפְתָן תִּדְרֹךְ תִּרְמָס כְּפִיר וְתַנִּין:

You will trample upon lion and serpent,  
You will tread down the great lion and the dragon.

Life and death are contrasted in this Psalm. Perhaps the epithet צל שדי (shadow/shelter/house/pavilion of *Shaddai*) is an antonym for צלמות (shadow/shelter/house/pavilion of *Mot*).

Just as an English speaker in the past may have said "by Jove", it did not mean that He believed in the god Jupiter/Zeus. If an English poet mentioned or alluded to the "Grim Reaper" in a poem, it did not mean that he believed in the existence of such a figure in reality. It is simply the language of death in English with its metaphors and images that have developed over much time. In the same way, the use of the poetic force of צלמות by a Hebrew writer did not mean that the writer believed in a "god of the dead" as did the surrounding nations; but the metaphor would not be lost on his understanding of the LORD's power over death.

In contradistinction to the "land of no return" of Sumerian and Akkadian sources, the Hebrew scriptures offer an epithet that may well indicate an "antonym" phrase in contrast to the land of the dead. Mitchell Dahood's suggestion concerning חיים in certain contexts conveying the intended meaning "eternal life" has been quite a debated topic itself.<sup>54</sup> Psalm 27:13, 116:9, and 142:6 speak of a place of life in contrast to death termed the "land of the living" (אֶרֶץ חַיִּים). While this seems to be a reference to the physical world, it is noteworthy that "land of the living" is in contrast to death.

More interesting than the above example is the contrast involved in Psalm 143:

כִּי רָדַף אוֹיְבִי | נִפְשִׁי דָבָא לְאֶרֶץ חַיִּתִּי הוֹשִׁיבֵנִי בְּמַחְשָׁבִים כְּמֵתֵי עוֹלָם:

For the enemy has pursued my soul,  
He has struck down my life to the earth.  
He has caused me to dwell in dark places  
As those who have been long dead.  
[Psalms 143:3].

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<sup>54</sup>Mitchell Dahood, "Death, Resurrection, and Immortality," In *Psalms III: 101-150. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Vol. 17a The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970) xli-lii.

לְמַדְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ כִּי־אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי רוּחַךְ טוֹבָה תִּנְחַנְנִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִישׁוֹר:

Teach me to do Your will  
For You are my God.  
Your good Spirit will guide me  
In the land of the Upright One.  
[Psalm 143:10]

The Lord leads the psalmist from dwelling in darkness as those who had been long dead to "the land of the Upright One" [translation mine]. While most translations render this "land of uprightness" or "level land," a more likely reference here is to God Himself. While the Hebrews thought of the patriarchs as "upright" in the sense of just and lawful, God is so in the ultimate sense. The land on which the psalmist walked was the land of the patriarchs given to them by God, the ultimate owner of it. In verse three the writer used imagery of the netherworld to describe hard circumstances in the physical world. David once fled from Saul in such desolate places. In verse ten the writer uses the epithet "land of the Upright One" in opposition to the place of the dead.

In both examples a good "land" is contrasted to the realm of death. Such epithets may have been intended as imagery to contrast sharply against the "land of the shadow of death."

#### Evidence from Hebrew "Common Nouns"

The designation "common nouns" is in quotation marks because many of the construct phrases under consideration could actually be constructions that originally involved a proper name of a deity. Though the following information (Table 4) is not intended as an exhaustive coverage of common nouns in construct with nouns that may point to netherworld imagery, it does reveal several strong parallels to earlier imagery of the realm of death. Important comparisons may be drawn from concepts like "dust," "gates," "terrors," and "waves" (Table 4).

Delbert R. Hillers wrote of the connection between "dust" and the netherworld:

Dust is used as synonymous for the realm of the dead also in a Ugaritic text (17[2Aqht].I.29), but it is Akkadian literature which provides the closest parallels for the image under discussion. The following phrases are cited under *eperu* in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*. A medical text says

of a child with certain symptoms that it "belongs to the soil." A description of the underworld in the famous myth of Ishtar's descent to the Netherworld gives this picture: "Dust is lying on door and lock"; the world of the dead is where "their sustenance is dust, and clay their food." And as a kenning for "to die" the expression "return to dust" (*târu ana tîttîi*) is well-known and ancient in Mesopotamia, in both wisdom texts and epic literature.<sup>55</sup>

Designations in the Old Testament that make reference to the realm of the dead, like "dust of death" (Psalm 22:15), "dust of the earth" (Daniel 12:2), and "dwellers of the dust" Isaiah 26:19, surely fit into this tradition of poetic language of death.

More significant than the above association is that of the phrases "gates of death," "gates of Sheol," and "gates of the shadow of death" (Table 4). The many references in the earlier literature to the netherworld having gates find a striking parallel in the book of Job. In Job 38:17 the two phrases "gates of death" and "gates of the shadow of death" are in synonymous parallel relationship. Thus "death" (מות) may clearly be argued to be the integral part of an original compound.

In Psalm 9:13-14 the phrase מִשְׁעַרֵי מוֹת ("from the gates of d[D]eath") is being contrasted with the phrase בְּשַׁעְרֵי בַת־צִיּוֹן ("gates of the daughter of Zion"). Accordingly, an epithet for a city of hope ("daughter of Zion" = Jerusalem) is antithetical to the doleful city of d[D]eath.

The next parallel lies in language that is reminiscent of the demonic beings sent by the *Annanuki* to bring back a suitable substitute for the netherworld in "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld":

Inanna was about to ascend from the underworld  
When the Anununa, the judges of the underworld, seized  
her.

They said:

"No one ascends from the underworld unmarked.  
If Inanna wishes to return from the underworld,  
She must provide someone in her place."

As Inanna ascended from the underworld,  
The *galla*, the demons of the underworld, clung to her

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<sup>55</sup>Delbert R. Hillers, "Dust: Some Aspects of Old Testament Imagery," In *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, edited by John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987) 93-100.

side.  
 The *galla*, were demons who know no food, who know no  
 drink,  
 Who eat no offerings, who drink no libations,  
 Who accept no gifts.  
 They enjoy no lovemaking.  
 They have no sweet children to kiss.  
 They tear the wife from the husband's arms,  
 They tear the child from the father's knees,  
 They steal the bride from her marriage home.<sup>56</sup>

These demons "clung to Inanna" and "surrounded" her; while "one walked in front" carrying a scepter and one walked behind carrying a "mace."<sup>57</sup> After passing by several cities and sparing their kings as they pacified her wrath, Inanna "fastened on Dumuzi the eye of death" and the demons "seized him by his thighs," "beat" him, and "gashed him with axes."<sup>58</sup>

In the Old Testament this concept may be reflected in the phrases "messengers of death" and "terrors of death." In Proverbs 16:14 these "messengers" may be appeased by a wise man (much like the kings that appeased the wrath of Inanna). The construct phrase "terrors of death" (Psalm 55:4 and 88:15-18) is echoed in Job 18:11, 14 where Mot is referred to as the king of terrors [this writer's translation is "king of the terrible ones"]. As the construct phrases "gates of death" and "gates of the shadow of death" used these concepts interchangeably, "terrors of death" (Psalm 55:4) and "terrors of the shadow of death" (Job 24:17) seem to be identical concepts.

There is also a possibility that the Sumerian term GAL.LÁ could be related to the Hebrew term through Akkadian. An Akkadian root is not listed in *BDB* for either בלחות or בלח (Arabic and Aramaic

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<sup>56</sup>Wolkstein and Kramer, 68.

<sup>57</sup>Wolkstein and Kramer, 68-69.

<sup>58</sup>Wolkstein and Kramer, 71.

forms are listed).<sup>59</sup> In Deimel's Glossar the Sumerian term GALLÛ ("böser Dämon") is equated to the Akkadian *mulla*.<sup>60</sup> If the labials of the first root letters were interchanged, this might explain the similar concepts that are found with *melammu* and *malāḫu*.

The phrase "*ša pani ezzu melammu kišsu[ru]*" ("whose face is fierce, who is girt with terror") illustrates the similarity between the concepts *mellammu* and בלח.<sup>61</sup> Also, the word *malāḫu* ("sailor, boatman") may represent a similar concept. The boatman of the netherworld, *Uršanabi*, in "The Epic of Gilgamesh" is called LÚ.MÁ.LA; and seems to cross between the realms much like the GALLÛ demons in "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld."

Finally, the concepts "waves of death" and "sorrows of death" find their roots in this poetic tradition as well. As previously noted, the Sumerian conception of *KUR* involved the related ideas (at least to the Sumerians) of mountains, enemies, and the netherworld.<sup>62</sup> Part of the lament over Ur illustrates the relationship between these concepts that seem otherwise disparate to a western mindset:

*uri*<sub>5ki</sub>-*ma šà-bi nam-ús-àm bar-bi nam-ús-àm*  
*šà-bi-a níg-šà-gar-ra-ka i-im-til-le-dè-en-dè-en*  
*bar-bi-a*<sup>giš</sup>*tukul elam*<sup>ki</sup>-*ma-ka ga-nam-ba-[e-til-l]*  
*e-en-dè-en*  
*uri*<sub>5ki</sub>-*ma lú erim*<sub>2</sub>-*e á bí-ib-gar ga-nam-ba-til-e-dè*  
*<en>-dè-en*  
*zi-bi murgu-bi-šè ì-ak-e gù-téš-a bí-in-sí-ke-eš*  
*é-gal a ba-šub-ba šu ba-e-lá-lá*<sup>giš</sup>*si-gar-bi*  
*bí-in-bu-bu-uš*  
*elam*<sup>ki</sup>-*e a ma è-a-gin*<sub>7</sub>*gidim im-ma-ni-áb-gar*

<sup>59</sup>*The New Brown--Driver--Briggs--Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic*, 1979 ed., s.v. "בלחות" and "בלח".

<sup>60</sup>Deimel, 165.

<sup>61</sup>*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vol. 11, M, Part 2, 10-11.

<sup>62</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 76.

Ur--inside it there is death, outside it there is death,  
 Inside it we are being finished off by famine,  
 Outside it we are being finished off by Elamite weapons,  
 In Ur the enemy has oppressed us, oh, we are finished!"  
 They take refuge behind it (the city walls), they were united (in their fear).  
 The palace that was destroyed by (onrushing) waters  
     has been defiled, its bolt was torn out,  
 Elam, like a swelling flood wave, left only the spirits of the dead.<sup>63</sup>

In this passage the poetic relationships between death, the enemy from the mountainous region around Sumer, and "a swelling flood wave" collectively illustrate the related concepts of "enemy" and the realm of the dead (where there was "the primeval sea").<sup>64</sup> In 2 Samuel 22:5 and Psalms 18:4 (respectively) the phrases "waves of death" and "sorrows of death" are parallel with "floods of ungodly men." Hence the imagery of the waves of the realm of death are equated with wave after wave of the ranks of the enemy as in Sumerian. This also may have ramifications for such passages as Psalm 90:5 "you carry them away as with a flood," Isaiah 59:19 "enemy . . . like a flood," Jeremiah 46:7-8 "Egypt rises up like a flood," and Daniel 9:26 "the end thereof shall be with a flood."

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<sup>63</sup>Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, in the *Mesopotamian Civilizations Series*, Jerold S. Cooper, ed., et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 60-61.

<sup>64</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 76.

TABLE 4

## Evidence from Hebrew "Common Nouns"

Reference	Hebrew	English
Pro 7:27	חֲדָרֵי־מָוֶת	chambers of Death [death is personified here, phrase parallel to <i>Sheol</i> ]
1 Sa 5:11	מְהוּמַת־מָוֶת	destruction of Death [Philistine speaking]
Psa 22:15	לְעֹפְר־מָוֶת	dust of death
Dan 12:2	אֲדָמַת־עָפָר	Land of dust
Isa 26:19	שׁוֹכְנֵי עָפָר	dwellers of the dust
Job 18:13	בְּכוֹר מָוֶת	firstborn of Death
Job 38:17	שַׁעְרֵי־מָוֶת	gates of death
Job 38:17	שַׁעְרֵי צִלְמוֹת	gates of the shadow of death
Psa 9:14	שַׁעְרֵי־מָוֶת	gates of death
Isa 38:10	שַׁעְרֵי שְׁאוֹל	gates of <i>Sheol</i>
Psa 68:20	לְמִוֹת תּוֹצְאוֹת	issues from death
2 Sa 19:29	אֲנָשֵׁי־מָוֶת	men of death
Pro 16:14	מְלַאכֵי־מָוֶת	messengers of Death [death is personified here]
Pro 21:6	מְבַקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת	seekers of death
2 Sa 22:6	מְקַשְׁי־מָוֶת	snares of death
2 Sa 22:6	חֲבָלֵי שְׁאוֹל	cords/shackles of <i>Sheol</i>
Psa 18:4	חֲבָלֵי־מָוֶת	cords/shackles of death
Pro 13:14	מְקַשְׁי־מָוֶת	snares of death
Pro 14:27	מְקַשְׁי־מָוֶת	snares of death
Job 18:11	בְּלֵהוֹת	terrible ones
Job 18:14	מֶלֶךְ בְּלֵהוֹת	king of terrible ones
Job 24:17	בְּלֵהוֹת צִלְמוֹת	terrible ones of <i>Tsalmaveth</i> [ <i>Shadow of Death</i> ]
Job 27:20	תִּשְׁיַגְהוּ בְּמִים בְּלֵהוֹת	terrible ones take hold like [flood]waters
Job 30:15	הִהְפְּדוּ עָלַי בְּלֵהוֹת	terrible ones turn in upon me... pursue...
Psa 55:4	וְאִימֹת מָוֶת נִפְלוּ עָלַי	terrible ones of death
Psa 73:19	כִּפּוּ תָמוּ מִן־בְּלֵהוֹת	they come to their final end by terrible ones
2 Sa 22:5	מְשַׁבְּרֵי־מָוֶת	waves of death
Psa 18:4	נַחְלֵי בְּלֵיעַל	torrents of <i>Belial</i>

SOURCES: The Hebrew is taken from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, while the English translations are the writer's.



### Evidence from Hebrew Proper Nouns

The combination of common nouns (often with theophoric elements) to form compound concepts as names of proper nouns (names of people and places) has long been recognized as common practice among the ancient Hebrews and other Semitic groups. Both James K. Barr and W. L. Michal deal with two of such compound names (עֲזֻמֹּת and הַצְרָמוֹת) in relation to צְלָמוֹת.<sup>65</sup>

Most frequently used in the Old Testament among the examples of potential compounds with the theophoric element מוֹת is עֲזֻמֹּת ("strength of death"). This name occurs in 2 Samuel 23:31; Nehemiah 7:28; 12:29; Ezra 2:24; 1 Chronicles 8:36; 9:42; 11:33; 12:3; and 27:25. It occurs as a place name ("house of the strength of death") in Ezra 2:24 and Nehemiah 7:28. Even more fascinating a combination than עֲזֻמֹּת is the other place name suggested by Barr and Michal, which occurs in Genesis 10:26 and 1 Chronicles 1:20. הַצְרָמוֹת is a place name which may be translated "village of death" or "enclosure of death."

Two other potential examples should be considered as well. The first is מְרֻמוֹת "waters of death." This name occurs in Ezra 8:33; 10:36; Nehemiah 3:4; and 10:6. The next example is "Shemiramoth" (so KJV, NIV, NAS render in all occurrences), which in one of the four places it is found in the Old Testament has metathesis with the ם and the ך. In 1 Chronicles 15:18, 20; and 16:5 the reading is שְׁמִירָמוֹת, whereas in 2 Chronicles 17:8 the reading is שְׁמִרְמוֹת. This could possibly mean "guardians of death" or perhaps "keeping of death."

### Other Imagery of Death in the Hebrew Bible

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<sup>65</sup>James K. Barr, *ETL* 33, 54; Michal, 9-12.

### *Imagery of "death" personified*

Some of the instances of death being personified in the Old Testament include: "from the hand of *Sheol*" (מִיַּד-שְׁאוֹל, Psalm 89:20), "let death seize them" (Psalm 55:15), "death shall feed on them" (Psalm 49:14), "swallow up death" (Isaiah 25:8), and the two phrases "agreement with death" and "covenant with death" (Isaiah 28:15). S. G. F. Brandon wrote:

I would end by briefly noting that, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the primitive fear of death as a monster that snatches away its victim found expression also in Israel. Thus while Hebrew monotheism forbade the idea of a death-god, the "angel of Yahweh" fulfilled this grim role, and became in later Jewish thought "*Sammael*", the angel of death . . .<sup>66</sup>

In Proverbs 8:36 "Wisdom" (personified) may be joined by "Death" (personified) in the statement "those who hate me love death."

### *Imagery of the location of the realm of death*

In Sumerian the primary term besides *KUR* for the netherworld was *KI-GAL* ("Great Below"); and the location was designated "the empty space between the earth's crust and the primeval sea."<sup>67</sup> This seems to hold true for the evidence in both Akkadian and Ugaritic, as Ishtar, Baal, and Anat descend to the realm of death. This concept is similar to passages in the Hebrew Bible.

The consequence of the rebellion of Korah was that the earth (אֶרֶץ linked to Akkadian *erṣetu*) opened its mouth and swallowed the rebels as they descended "alive" to שְׁאוֹל. In Proverbs 2:18, 5:5, 14:12, 15:24, and 16:25 the clear direction given to the realm of the dead is "down." The king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:15 is "thrust down to *Sheol*, to the sides of the pit."

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<sup>66</sup>S. G. F. Brandon, "The Origin of Death in Some Ancient Near Eastern Religions." *Religious Studies* 1 (1966) 228.

<sup>67</sup>Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 76.

Both Job 3:21 and Amos 9:2 are curious references to persons trying to dig into the place of the dead:

הַמְחַכְּבִים לַמָּוֹת וְאֵינְנֹו וַיִּחְפְּרוּהוּ מִמִּטְמוֹנִים:

Who long for d[ead] but it [he] does not come,  
Who dig for it [him] more than for treasures.  
[Job 3:21]

אִם־יִחְתְּרוּ בְּשֵׂאוֹל מִשָּׁם יָדֵי תִקְחֶם וְאִם־יַעֲלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם אוֹרִידֶם:

Though they dig into *Sheol*, from there shall my hand take them,  
Though they climb up toward heaven, from there will I bring them down.  
[Amos 9:2]

In these examples it is apparent that the location of the realm of the dead (at least for the purpose of poetic imagery in Hebrew) was thought to be in the same direction as in earlier near eastern languages. The realm of the dead was poetically, and perhaps practically, thought to be under the ground.

#### Imagery of desert places

Drawn from the same tradition of "death imagery" is the use of this imagery to describe places in the physical world that resemble the place of the dead. A prime example is found in Jeremiah 2:6, where seven descriptive terms are used to describe the wilderness (perhaps in much the same way that seven epithets were used in the earlier Akkadian epics that introduced the netherworld):

וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵינָהּ יְהוָה הַמַּעֲלָה אֶתְנֹו מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הַמּוֹלִידָא אֶתְנֹו בְּמִדְבָּר  
בְּאֶרֶץ עֲרֵבָה וְשׁוּחָה בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְצִלְמוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־עֹבֵר בָּהּ אִישׁ וְלֹא־יֹשֵׁב אָדָם שָׁם:

Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt,  
that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits,  
through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death,  
through a land that no man passed through,  
and where no man dwelt? [KJV]

The seven designations are (1) the wilderness (ארץ מדבר "of/from *Daber*"?), (2) a land of deserts (ארץ ערבה), (3) a land of pits (שוהה), (4) A land of drought (ארץ צינה), (5) a land of the shadow of death (צלמות), (6) a land that no man passed thorough (ארץ לא-עבר בה איש), (7) a land where no man dwelt (לא-ישב אדם שם).

### *Imagery of "Death" as a warden*

The multitudes who exist in the land of death are enumerated in Job 3:11-19 as infants, kings, counselors, princes, wicked ones, servants, masters, small, and great. Yet, in Job 3:18, they are all called "shackled ones" (אסירים).<sup>68</sup> This same concept may be seen in a metaphor in Ecclesiastes.

In Ecclesiastes 7:26, a woman of ill repute (much like the descriptions in Proverbs) is compared to d[Death]. She is said to be more bitter than d[Death] whose "heart is snares and nets", and her hands are compared to "shackles" (אסירים). Such imagery is consistent with "Death" being personified as a warden in charge of a prison-house of souls. He hunts the living with "snares and nets" to capture them and bring them back down to the "Land of No Return."

Several Psalms bear this type of imagery as well (Psalm 79:11; 102:20; 107:10, 14, 18; 142:7; and 146:7). Psalm 107 describes those who were exiled as wandering through the wilderness (with the imagery of death applied to the physical world):

יְשִׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ וְצִלְמוֹת אֲסִירֵי עֲנִי וּבְרִזָּל:

Those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
those who are shackled with affliction and iron.  
[Psalm 107:10]

יּוֹצִיאֵם מִחֹשֶׁךְ וְצִלְמוֹת וּמוֹסְרוֹתֵיהֶם יִנְתַּק:

He brought them out from darkness even [as] the Shadow of Death,

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<sup>68</sup>"Shackled ones" is preferred because of several contexts; but especially because of the association of ברזל in Psalm 107:10.

And He broke their shackles apart.  
[Psalm 107:14]

Not only is this type of imagery found in the Writings, it abounds in the Prophets.

The book of Isaiah contains several examples of the use of such imagery (Isaiah 24:22; 42:7, 22; 49:9; 61:1). Of special interest to most theologians, however, should be the messianic sections. In three of the four "Servant songs" in Isaiah, the servant's mission that is accomplished in conjunction with a "covenant" is said to be delivering "prisoners" from the "prison" (Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:9, and 61:1). The first "servant song" of Isaiah introduces one who will be "a covenant for the people" (verse 6) and who will "deliver from prison the prisoner, from the house of confinement those who sit in darkness." This imagery is repeated in Isaiah 49:9 where due to the prophesied covenant relationship he will announce freedom to the prisoners. Also, in Isaiah 61:1 the anointed one is "to proclaim 'freedom' to captives (לְשֹׁבוֹיִם), even to the shackled ones (וְלְאֲסוּרִים) 'complete opening.'"

In Zechariah 9:9-12 this messianic imagery is startlingly similar. The "King" who rules "from sea to sea" is said to have a blood covenant by which יהוה would free his "shackled ones from the pit where there is no water." In verse 12, the prisoners to be freed through the blood covenant of this king are then called the "shackled ones of the hope (אֲסִירֵי הַתְּקוּוּהָ)."

## VI. EPITHETS FOR THE NETHERWORLD IN HEBREW

As with Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic, the major epithets for the netherworld occur in the Hebrew language as well: "Mountains" (*KUR*), "great below" (*KI-GAL*, Sheol below), "land of darkness", "house . . .", and "the way from which there is no return" (TABLE 5). To these recurring themes designating the realm of the dead, the Hebrews added their own unique flavor.

### The Foundations of the Mountains

From the Sumerian cuneiform sign that was shaped like a mountain, to the entrance of the netherworld at the base of the mountains that is recorded in "The Epic of Gilgamesh," to the mountain that was raised up upon the hands of Baal for him to descend into the realm of the dead, the realm below the mountains was long believed to be the netherworld.<sup>69</sup> In Deuteronomy 32:22, the wrath of God is said to set on fire the "foundations of the mountains" (מוֹסְדֵי הַרִים). This phrase is in synonymous parallel relationship with "Sheol beneath" (שְׂאוֹל תַּחְתִּית).

Though the way to render *Sheol* into English is debated, the NIV (which usually renders the word "grave") translated שְׂאוֹל תַּחְתִּית in Deuteronomy 32:22 "the realm of death below." Truly, this is a close parallel to the Sumerian concept *KI-GAL*, "Great Below."

If the phrase "foundations of the mountains" in Deuteronomy 32:22 does refer to the netherworld, then this sheds light on the imagery used by Jonah in his prayer in chapter two. Together with allusions to the "belly of *Sheol*" (2:2), "the earth with its bars" (2:6), and "the pit" (2:6), Jonah is said

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<sup>69</sup>Kramer, 76; Thompson, 50; and KTU 1.5:V:12-19.

to sink down to the "bases [roots] of the mountains" (2:6) in his deadly descent in the water. The phrase "the earth [הָאָרֶץ] with its bars" may be related to the Mesopotamian concept of *iršitim* being a designation for the netherworld (Table 2). In Job 17:16, *Sheol* (as if it were a city with a gate) is said also to have "bars."

### The House Prepared for All Living

In Sumerian the signs for house, palace, and gates were all used in connection with the netherworld (Table 1). The epithets in Akkadian in this category were "House of Darkness," "Abode of Irkalla," "the house which none leave who have entered it," "the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light," and the "house of dust" (Table 2). In the Ugaritic texts, Mot has a land, a province (*Kankaniya*) and a "throne" (Table 3). Considering the palace (temple) of Baal, Yam, and the other Canaanite gods, Mot also had a city, named *Hamriya*, for this "throne."

The echoes of imagery that employ "house" as the integral part of an epithet describing the netherworld, literary echoes as old as Sumerian, reverberate in Hebrew as well. A "house" for a god is the temple precinct or palace of the god. The anticipation of coming death in Job 30:23 presents the dying one being drawn to "d[ea]th," to the "house appointed for all living" (בֵּית מוֹעֵד לְכָל־חַיִּי). In Qohelet 12:5 the verb הִלַּךְ introduces the phrase that describes the one who is dying as going to "his dark house" (עֵלֶם related to Ugaritic *ḡlm*) or "his eternal house" (כִּי־הִלַּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמֹו).<sup>70</sup>

An essential part of the Servant's work, in Isaiah 42:7, was to "deliver from prison the shackled one [אֲסִיר], from the house of restraint [מִבַּיִת כְּלֵא] those who are sitting in darkness." Though often

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<sup>70</sup>The reading "dark house" was proposed and defended by Youngblood, 211-27.

thought of as a reference to freeing the captives of the Babylonian oppression, this is actually the language of the place of the dead.

### The Way of No Return

Two of the earliest epithets for the netherworld that are used in the Sumerian epic material were the "Road [way] whose traveler returns not" and the "Land of no return" (Table 1). The Akkadian language preserved these titles of the realm of the dead as "the road from which there is no way back" and "the Land of no return" (Table 2). In the Old Testament several phrases, all containing the verb הלך (as did Qohelet 12:5), perpetuated this epithet.

Job mourns the thought of his coming death in the string of epithets in Job 10:21-22. In one of these epithets, he exclaims "I walk [*the way/path*] I shall not return" (אֵלֶּךְ וְלֹא אָשׁוּב). Though Job 10:21 merely implies the noun for "way/path," Job 16:22 concretely supplies the noun: "I shall go the way/path that I shall not return" (וְאֶרְחַ לֹא-אָשׁוּב אֶהְלֵךְ). Joshua's farewell address may convey a variant pattern of this epithet; where he announced to the nation "I am going [walking] today in the way of all of the earth," (אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ הַיּוֹם בְּדַרְךְ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ).

### The Land of Darkness

Ten of the eighteen times that צלמות occurs in the Hebrew Bible are in Job; and it is in Job 10 that the premier example of the tradition of imagery of the netherworld is preserved. As Job introduced the apparent nearness of his coming death in 10:21-22, he used seven descriptive phrases for the netherworld (as in the Akkadian epics and as in Jeremiah 2:6):

בְּטַרְסִים אֵלֶּךְ וְלֹא אָשׁוּב  
 אֶל-אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ  
 וְצִלְמוֹת:  
 אֶרֶץ עִפְתָּהּ | כְּמוֹ אֶפֶל



צְלָמוֹת  
 וְלֹא סְדָרִים  
 וְתַפֵּעַ כְּמוֹ-אֶפֶל:

Before I walk [the way] from which I shall not return,  
 Unto the land of darkness  
 even *the land* of the Shadow of Death,  
 The land of obscurity as blackness itself,  
*The land of the Shadow of Death*  
 even *the land where there is* no order,  
*The land where* even the shining *is* itself as blackness.

Because of the explicit context of the end of chapter ten, these epithets are quite clear in their allusion to the place of the dead. The remarkable detail, however, is that צְלָמוֹת is the repeated element in a string of parallel epithets of the netherworld (one of which is as old as the Sumerian epic material). Hence, the "land of the shadow of *Mot*" is equated with the more ancient epithet "the way of no return." Such parallelism of phrases drawn from a rich, shared, literary history deserves special attention in the attempt to categorize צְלָמוֹת.

TABLE 5

## A Summary of Terms in Hebrew

Reference	Hebrew	English
Job 30:23 Qoh 12:5 Isa 42:7	בֵּית מוֹעֵד לְכָל־חַי כִּי־הַלֵּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמוֹ בֵּית כְּלָא	house appointed for all living his dark/eternal house house of restraint
Job 10:21 Job 10:22 Job 10:22 Job 10:22 Job 10:22 Isa 9:1 Psa 23:4 Psa 88:13	אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ אֶרֶץ עִפְתָּה וְלֹא סִדְרִים וְתִפְעַע כְּמוֹ־אֶפֶל צִלְמוֹת אֶרֶץ צִלְמוֹת בְּגִיא צִלְמוֹת אֶרֶץ נְשִׁיָּה	land of darkness land of obscurity land of no order (chaos) " ... shining is as darkness " of the shadow of death " of the shadow of death valley of " " " " land forgotten, forgetfulness, oblivion
Job 33:18 Isa 14:15 Zec 9:11 Isa 42:7	שַׁחַת יַרְכְּתֵי־בּוֹר בּוֹר בֵּית כְּלָא	pit sides of the pit pit house of restraint, prison
Psa 44:20	בְּמִקּוֹם תַּנִּים	place of dragons <sup>71</sup>
Jon 2:6 Deu 32:22	קַצְבֵּי הָרִים מוֹסְדֵי הָרִים	roots of the mountains foundations of the mountains.
Deu 32:22 Job 17:16 Jon 2:3	שְׂאוֹל תַּחְתִּית בְּדֵי שְׂאוֹל בֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל	Sheol below bars of Sheol belly of Sheol
Jos 23:14 Job 10:21 Job 16:22	אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ הַיּוֹם בְּדַרְדָּר כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֵלַי וְלֹא אָשׁוּב וְאָרַח לֹא־אָשׁוּב אֶהְלֵךְ	walking the way of all the earth walk and I shall not return walk the way I shall not return

SOURCES: The Hebrew is from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. The English translations are the writer's.

<sup>71</sup>As previously noted, Kramer suggested that the *KUR* could also have been personified in the form of a dragon. Though such images seem distasteful to a western mind-set, they were nonetheless common in the Ancient Near East. In the Old Testament such passages as Psalm 74:13, Ezekiel 29:2, 32:2, and Isaiah 27:1 are clearly not references to the word that is often (though not always) similarly spelled and that is rendered "jackals" (תַּנִּין).

## VII. CONCLUSION

### Force of Linguistic Arguments

The etymological arguments of the past concerning צִלְמוֹת have left the term in a deadlocked debate over its translation. While Michal's arguments strengthened the case for the traditional view ("shadow of death"), the arguments for the proposed root *š/m* have continued to dominate the arena of debate.

Often the primary objection to the traditional view has been that compound, common nouns do not occur in Hebrew. Proper nouns, on the other hand, are frequently compounds. Examples of such potential compound formations with מוֹת functioning as a theophoric element (such as חֲצֵרוֹת, עֲזֻמוֹת, מֵרְמוֹת, and שְׁמִירוֹת) strengthen the case for צִלְמוֹת potentially being a proper noun (place name). This is further reinforced through the evidence that by extension the word צֶל means "shelter." Accordingly, the translation "Shelter of Death" (with the concept conveying the idea of the house, palace, pavilion, or even city of Death personified) may capture the poetic imagery intended by the Hebrew writers.

The evidence from the parallelisms that interchange צִלְמוֹת with another term (one that is drawn from an apparent historical, literary tradition of epithets for "death imagery") should underline the identification of צִלְמוֹת as a compound place name for the netherworld. Deep darkness is not the only idea conveyed. Death is the integral part of the compound; and it is this that explains the consistent nature of the context of the word in the Old Testament.

### Literary Tradition and Parallelism

Most of the descriptive Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic epithets for the netherworld that have been presented in this paper (Tables 1, 2, and 3) fall into the broad categories of "road," "land," "city,"

or "house." In several parallelisms in the Old Testament these themes occur. In one (Job 10) an epithet for the netherworld that is found in both Sumerian and Akkadian is in parallel with צְלָמוֹת.

The phrase in Psalm 9:14-15 שְׁעַרֵי מוֹת ("gates of d[D]eath") is in an antithetical parallel relationship with the phrase שְׁעַרֵי בִתְ-צִיּוֹן ("gates of the daughter of Zion"). Accordingly, an epithet for a city of hope ("daughter of Zion" = Jerusalem) is antithetical to the city of d[D]eath. In Job 38:17 the two phrases "gates of death" and "gates of the shadow of death" are in synonymous parallel. Thus "death" (צֶלַם\מוֹת) may clearly be argued to be the integral part of an original compound; and שְׁעַרֵי צְלָמוֹת may be said to refer to the gates of the city of the dead.

The most important series of parallel epithets occurs in Job 10:21-22. צְלָמוֹת occurs twice and is parallel to the "way I shall not return" (which is attested in both Sumerian and Akkadian as an epithet for going to the netherworld, and also occurs in Job 16:22). Close examination both of this immediate context and of the historical, literary context of these epithets should tip the scale of evidence in the debate surrounding צְלָמוֹת toward the translation "shadow of D[d]eath" [with a footnote indicating that shadow conveys the sense of shelter, abode, house, palace, precinct, or pavilion] for several of the verses in the Old Testament. James K. Barr prefers "death" in the abstract, and W. L. Michal "Death" as the Canaanite deity "Mot."<sup>72</sup> This writer's opinion is that it is a poetic allusion that would have included both concepts. The perception of the ancient audience (due to the anarthrous nature of the word) would have moved from the concept of deity name to the abstract concept of death. The fear of death was quite concrete in the stories of the Ancient Near East. They were aware of the stories and the use of the imagery of death as a terrifying enemy. It is this poetic tradition that added tremendous power in the Hebrew Bible to their faith in their God who had power over death.

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<sup>72</sup>James K. Barr, *ETL* 33 (1974) 54; and Michal, 10.

### Translating *Tsalmaveth*

Though the majority of occurrences of צִלְמוֹת should be rendered "shadow of Death," at least four of the eighteen occurrences in the Old Testament should be rendered "shelter [abode, house, palace, precinct, or pavilion] of D[d]eath." In the example of the preceding paragraph (Job 10:20-21) this is the case. Psalm 44:20 provides another excellent example with בְּמִקְוֵם תִּגִּים in parallel with בְּצִלְמוֹת. Both have the inseparable preposition attached to a place name with "dragons" parallel with "Mot." The reference to the gates of צִלְמוֹת in Job 38:17 strengthens the suggested translation "gates of the shelter [house] of Death." Finally, the "stones" of צִלְמוֹת (mentioned in Psalm 28:3) point to such a translation as well.

Death was, in the poetic language of Ancient Near Eastern tradition, by metaphor alluded to as if it were a huge dragon inside the earth that was waiting to swallow down the prey brought to him by his minions who went into the land of the living to drag down the dying to his dark realm. To stand in the shadow of D/death was as if to stand in the shadow of this giant, ferocious creature waiting to be devoured. When Baal went to his brother Mot's domain, Mot (Death) crushed Baal in his jaws and swallowed him down like a young lamb or kid goat. King David, however, was not afraid when death was near. David had faith that his God had power over death (Psalm 23).

It is this imagery that stands behind the New Testament hope that is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

As Paul wrote prophetically earlier in the same chapter, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (vs. 26).

The traditional translation found in the Septuagint and quoted in the New Testament was in perfect keeping with the intent of the ancient imagery of death that was, even at the time of translating the Old Testament into Greek *circa* 250 BC, already nearly two millennia old. To maintain the traditional translation “shadow of Death” for תַּלְמוֹתֵי מוֹת gives glory to Christ in the passages that hinted prophetically of His power over death (such as Isaiah 9:1-2), preserves for the non-Hebrew reader the comfort in the face of death that has often been read by the dying or to them with their family gathered around them from Psalm 23, and honors the inspiration of the New Testament scriptures which preserved the word as a compound σκιά θανάτου, “shadow of death.” Jesus Christ came to bring light and life. As the Apostle John wrote, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5, ESV).

TABLE 6

## A Summary of Terms in the New Testament

Verse	Association with "Death Imagery"
Mt 4:16 Lk 1:79	Quote LXX of Isaiah 9:1 (σκιᾶ θανάτου)
Mt 8:22 Lk 9:60	Realm of d. extending to physical world
Matthew 16:18	Gates of Hades (πύλαι θανάτου πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾄδου) (LXX of Job 38:17)
Luke 8:31	Demons beg not to be sent to the abyss
Romans 10:7	Christ rose from "the abyss" cf. Deuteronomy 30:13
Ephesians 4:8-9	"led captivity captive" (cf. Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:9, 61:1)
1 Peter 3:19	"spirits in prison"
Rev. 9:1, 11:7, 17:8, 20:1-3	"the abyss"

SOURCES: The Greek is from *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren. Third Edition. West Germany: United Bible Societies, 1983.

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