

Back, for a post, to the scholarly project I'm now doing on the "katabasis" traditions in early Christianity - the stories of people being given tours of / visions of both heaven and hell. Some readers of the blog may be confused about why, on a blog devoted to the study of the New Testament and Early Christianity, I would want to discuss the Odyssey of Homer or the Aeneid of Virgil, etc. It's because I very much want to understand where the Christian ideas of the afterlife come from.

In the traditional Christian view, after death a person is taken off to be rewarded with paradise or punished with the torments of hell came from. In my book I'll be arguing that idea did not come either from the Old Testament or from Jesus. Then whence?

My last post on this was on the Odyssey, where Odysseus goes to the underworld and there are no heaven and hell there either, just a place called Hades where everyone - whether great or small, valiant or cowardly, vicious or virtuous - leads a kind of bodiless and banal existence, being bored for all eternity. So Christians didn't get the idea of heaven and hell from the most ancient Greeks. Whence then?

I'll be arguing that the view did develop within the Greek tradition after Homer. Afterlife rewards and punishments can be found with especial poignancy in the writings of Plato, especially in several myths that he tells of those who see what the afterlife is like and come back to tell the tale. The best known of these myths involves an ancient Near Death Experience.

Plato discusses it ...

The rest of this post is for blog members only. If you had access to the blog you could read the whole thing, along with every other post every week, with archives going back for seven years. It won't cost much, and the funds all go to help those in need. So why not?

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