

In discussing the research I'm doing on (human) journeys to the realm(s) of the dead, I have so far mentioned two in particular that occur outside of Christian circles and much earlier: the famous account of Odysseus's vision of the dead in Homer's Odyssey book 11 and Aeneas's journey to the underworld in Virgil's Aeneid, book 6. These are very similar to one another (since Virgil was basing his account on Homer's) but also very different: in particular, whereas in Homer every spirit has the same uninteresting and boring forever in Hades, in Virgil the righteous are given fantastic rewards and the wicked graphic torment, with the possibility of reincarnation to have another go at it.

. Now I introduce a Jewish version of this kind of journey, found in the non-canonical book of 1 Enoch, which has many similarities to Virgil (though not so much with Homer). Here too the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished. But there are (a couple of) gradations from one kind of sinner to the next. And moreover, in this case there is no reincarnation; instead, and quite significantly, the punishments after death are only temporary, leading up to the Last Judgment, when a permanent end will be determined. For the righteous, the End will entail being raised from the dead, for all eternity (completely unlike either Homer or Virgil). This in fact is the first book from Jewish antiquity that promotes the idea of a future resurrection (earlier even than the OT book of Daniel)

Here is what I say about 1 Enoch in my forthcoming trade book Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife.

The idea of a future bodily resurrection of the dead first occurs in a book that was not included in the Bible, but was nonetheless one of the most popular Jewish writings in the final two centuries BCE, a book known today as 1 Enoch. The pseudonymous author of the book claims to be none other than Enoch, the first person never to have died. According to Genesis 5:24, "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him." Who better to pen an apocalypse, an account of the heavenly secrets that could explain earthly realities? A man who actually lived with God above! The book of 1 Enoch contains a number of special revelations given to this human resident of the heavenly realms.

There are in fact ...

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