The following is just a small chunk that I’ve written up for my Bible Introduction on the idea of “resurrection” — in relationship to other views of afterlife in the Bible. It’s short, but it’s the last sentence that is very much worth thinking about (most people haven’t thought about it; I know I never did, until fairly recently).

Many readers of the Bible are surprised to learn that the ideas of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible are not closely related to what most people think today. The idea that after you die, your soul goes either to heaven or hell (or even purgatory) is not rooted in the Jewish Scriptures. The few passages that refer to an afterlife in the Hebrew Bible assume that after death, a person goes to “Sheol.” That is not the Hebrew equivalent of “hell” – a place of punishment for the wicked. It is the place that everyone goes, good or evil. It is sometimes spoken of as a place of rest (remember how Samuel was not pleased at having his rest disturbed in 1 Samuel 28); but as a rule it is not thought of as a pleasant place (think of all the horrors associated with going to Sheol in the book of Psalms). It is a shadowy kind of netherworld that everyone goes to when they die, like it or not.

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