

In thinking about Sheol and death in the Hebrew Bible, it is worth reflecting on passages where the dead come back to life or are contacted by the living. This does not happen much at all - a couple of instances of resuscitation and one of necromancy.

Probably the most famous resuscitation - the bringing back to life of a dead person - involves the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17:17-24. Elijah has been helping an unnamed widow from the town of Zarephath, miraculously providing her and her son with food during a divinely-mandated drought/famine (which the prophet brought to teach the wicked King Ahab a lesson). But the boy dies. The widow is understandably distraught - the prophet was supposed to be helping her and now her son has died. Some help.

Elijah takes the boy, though, and raises him from the dead. The woman responds appropriately, declaring him Elijah a man of God who speaks the word of God.

In 2 Kings 4:32-37 a similar story is told about the prophet Elisha - who, had been Elijah's protégé and then "took up his mantle" when Elijah flew off to heaven without dying): he too raises a boy from the dead (using a similar technique to Elijah).

(SIDENOTE: Elijah in 2 Kings 2:1-12 and much earlier Enoch - apparently, not quite so obviously - were both taken up to heaven without dying. Christian readers often take this to mean that they were distinct among humans because they were allowed to "go to heaven" still as mortals, as opposed to everyone else who has to die first. But actually that may not be what is going on. Rather, these are the two figures in the Hebrew Bible who do not end up in Sheol. They end up with God up above, instead of with the dead down below. That is SO much more significant than simply going to heaven ahead of time.)

(SECOND SIDENOTE ...

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