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Arbiters of the Afterlife: Olam Haba, Torah and Rabbinic Authority

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Author
Levy, Candice Liliane

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Arbiters of the Afterlife:

Olam Haba, Torah and Rabbinic Authority

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Candice Liliane Levy

2013
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Arbiters of the Afterlife:
Olam Haba, Torah and Rabbinic Authority

by

Candice Liliane Levy
Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
University of California, Los Angeles, 2013
Professor Carol Bakhos, Chair

As the primary stratum of the rabbinic corpus, the Mishna establishes a dynamic between rabbinic authority and olam haba that sets the course for all subsequent rabbinic discussions of the idea. The Mishna Sanhedrin presents the rabbis as arbiters of the afterlife, who regulate its access by excluding a set of individuals whose beliefs or practices undermine the nature of rabbinic authority and their tradition. In doing so, the Mishna evinces the foundational tenets of rabbinic Judaism and delineates the boundaries of ‘Israel’ according to the rabbis. Consequently, as arbiters of the afterlife, the rabbis constitute Israel and establish normative thought and practice in this world by means of the world to come.
There have been surprisingly few studies on the afterlife in rabbinic literature. Many of the scholars who have undertaken to explore the afterlife in Judaism have themselves remarked upon the dearth of attention this subject has received. For the most part, scholars have sought to identify what the rabbis believed with regard to the afterlife and how they envisioned its experience, rather than why they held such beliefs or how the afterlife functioned within the rabbinic tradition. This dissertation will seek to fill the lacuna in the treatment of this topic.

The central argument of this dissertation is that rabbinic discussions of olam haba can be situated within the larger discourse of rabbinic authority and that the rabbis’ purported regulation of olam haba is part of a constellation of efforts by the rabbis to assert their authority and define post-Temple Judaism. This dissertation will demonstrate the complex interplay between rabbinic authority, Torah and theodicy and the ancillary function of olam haba for each of these. My analysis of rabbinic sources will demonstrate that, whether as a means of delineating the boundaries of Israel, as a reward for Torah study or as a mechanism of theodicy, olam haba served to establish, reinforce and perpetuate rabbinic authority and the tradition of the rabbis.

This dissertation approaches the afterlife with an altogether different set of questions and contends that the examination of what the rabbis sought to uphold or negate by means of olam haba and their reasons for doing so can provide essential clues about the rabbis themselves, how they constructed their tradition and how they conceived of Israel.
This dissertation of Candice Liliane Levy is approved.

Yona Sabar

Aryeh Cohen

William M. Schniedewind

Carol Bakhos, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013
I dedicate this dissertation to

Rachel Ouaknine ṭ'rh

my beloved grandmother.

May she be welcomed into olam haba with the same grace and warmth

that she showed to all those who came into her home.
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I have had the extraordinary privilege of calling Dvora Weisberg both a teacher and a friend. Whether it involved obtaining a source, discussing a passage of Talmud or sharing an insight on a text, Dvora’s willing assistance was always accompanied by a smile and words of encouragement. I am honored to be your friend and I thank your for being such a great mentor.

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The death of my grandmother, Rachel Ouaknine הָלַא, during the final stages of writing this dissertation brought me to the realization that its seeds were planted 13 years ago, as I prepared a *derash* for the first *yahrzeit* of my grandfather, Salomon Ouaknine הָלַא. I recall reading Abraham Joshua Heschel’s essay, “Death as Homecoming” and being struck by the way in which the rabbis discussed olam haba and how reflective it was of the way in which they imagined life in this world. Though neither of them lived to see this work completed, they are both present in spirit, in the spaces between the letters.
Most of all, I would like to thank Diana Reiss for her constant and abundant love, support, encouragement and patience as I pursued my graduate studies and wrote this dissertation. I would not have been able to do this without her, nor without the luminous smile of our son, Eliezer.

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Candice Levy

August 2013

Los Angeles, CA
VITA

1997     B.A., Political Science
         Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University
         New York, NY

2004     M.A., Rabbinic Studies
         Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, University of Judaism
         Los Angeles, CA

2008     M.A., Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
         University of California, Los Angeles

2006-2012 Teaching Assistant
         Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
         University of California, Los Angeles

2012     C. Phil., Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
         University of California, Los Angeles
1. “ALL ISRAEL HAS A SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME”: UNCOVERING A DYNAMIC OF AUTHORITY
m. Sanhedrin 10:1 - All Israel Has a Share in Olam Haba

All Israel has a share in the world-to-come, as it is said, and your nation, all of them righteous, shall inherit the land. They are the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, so that [I] shall be glorified. (Isaiah 60:21). And these [are the ones] who have no share in the world-to-come: the one who says that the resurrection of the dead is not [derived] from the Torah, and [the one who says] the Torah is not from the heavens, and the apikoros. Rabbi Akiva says, also the one who reads from the heretical books, and the one who whispers over a wound and says, ‘all of the ailments that I have put over Egypt, I shall not put over you for I am the Lord who heals you.’ (Ex. 15:26) Abba Shaul says, also the one who recites the divine name as it is spelled out.1

Uncovering a Dynamic of Authority: Assumptions and Questions

As the primary stratum of the rabbinic corpus, the Mishna establishes a dynamic between rabbinic authority and olam haba that sets the course for all subsequent rabbinic discussions of the idea. In order to extract this dynamic, we must take note of the assumptions that the text makes as well as its content. The Mishna makes two fundamental assumptions: first, olam haba is something that is known and desired; second, the rabbis have the authority to regulate access to it. Turning to the content of the text, a number of observations must be noted. The mishna situates olam haba within a construct of merit, such that one stands to have a share or lose their share. In addition, the mishna isolates a set of persons who, through their beliefs or actions, forego their share in olam haba. Lastly, all of the persons who merit olam haba are designated as

1 This is the version of the printed edition. I will discuss the textual variations of the mishna in my close reading of the text, in the second chapter of this dissertation. All translations, unless stated otherwise, are my own.
Israel. The inverse statement is also implied by the mishna; whoever merits exclusion from olam haba is, by definition, no longer Israel.

Having deconstructed the text, we proceed to reconstruct the dynamic that the mishna evinces by assembling its various elements. The desired post-mortem realm is regulated by human rabbis who have the authority to act as its arbiters. In doing so, the rabbis constitute Israel and establish normative thought and practice in this world. As such, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between olam haba and rabbinic authority. The rabbis exercise their authority as arbiters of olam haba; in turn, the desirability of olam haba incentivizes adherence to rabbinic norms, thereby reinforcing their authority. Although there is a clear dynamic of rabbinic authority, the rabbis are, to an extent, unknown. The most precise element of the mishna concerns the individuals that it has excluded from olam haba. However, the text does not disclose its rationale for doing so. Thus, the natural question is why? What is it about these individuals that is so troublesome? Why do these specific beliefs and practices make them ‘other’?

Reframing the question vis a vis the rabbis - how have the rabbis chosen to exercise their authority? In other words, what are the things that the rabbis decide to uphold or oppose by means of olam haba? These are the fundamental questions that drive this inquiry. The answers to these questions provide essential clues about the rabbis themselves, how they constructed their tradition, and how they conceived of Israel.

The fundamental issue that underlies the mishna’s discussion of olam haba is rabbinic authority. This dissertation is aimed at exploring the dynamic between the two as well as the specific elements that the rabbis sought to negate or reinforce by means of olam haba. In situating the topic of olam haba within a discourse of rabbinic authority, this dissertation is
restricted to the questions outlined above. As such, there are questions that this study will not seek to answer. In particular, the question of what is olam haba? How did the rabbis imagine it? Where did they situate it temporally or spatially? While these are certainly valid and important questions, they are beyond the scope of this study, which is interested in a different set of questions.

Rabbinic texts demonstrate that the presentation of the rabbis as arbiters of olam haba is part of a constellation of efforts by the rabbis to establish their authority and define Judaism. As such, this dissertation argues that rabbinic discussions of olam haba can be situated within the larger discourse of rabbinic authority.

This dissertation does not portend to be an exhaustive study of all of the sources that discuss olam haba. The variegated nature of rabbinic discussions and the frequent appearance of olam haba in the literature preclude such a work. The nature of olam haba as the locale of divine justice and retribution, prompts its entry within a multitude of contexts, where it finds expression as the consequence of sinful or virtuous behavior. However, in surveying the vast number of sources that mention olam haba, three key themes emerged: rabbinic authority, Torah study and theodicy. I will now briefly outline the other two themes and their relationship to olam haba and rabbinic authority.

Among the many things that are rewarded with a share in olam haba, Torah study stands out as a consistent element throughout the rabbinic corpus. In addition to maintaining that the Torah is a form of worship and a means of communing with God, rabbinic texts also portray Torah study as a path to the world to come. It stands to reason that the rabbis, whose central occupation was the study of Torah, would bestow the highest reward on this activity. That is not
so remarkable. However, the Torah was not only the primary rabbinic activity, it was the very means by which they established their authority, which they then exercised through the interpretation of the Torah and the establishment of halakha. Thus, Torah study necessarily sustained rabbinic authority and ensured the perpetuation of the rabbinic tradition. Furthermore, as masters of Torah, the sages became vehicles to olam haba. This complex interplay between Torah study, rabbinic authority and olam haba is evident in numerous sources irrespective of their genre or provenance.

Rabbinic sources also demonstrate a consistent use of olam haba as a mechanism of theodicy. There is an inherent relationship between olam haba, as a post-mortem reward, and divine justice and retribution. The rabbinic conceptions of divine justice and reward and punishment were informed by the Torah, which outlines a system of retributive justice on the basis of the covenant. However, when the rabbis were confronted with injustice, rather than abandon the framework of the Torah, they maintained it, but displaced the locale of retribution from this world to the next. Thus, olam haba served an important theodical function, enabling the rabbis to maintain a belief in divine justice and retribution and the promises articulated in the Torah. In doing so, olam haba also upheld the validity of the Torah and the covenant, as well as rabbinic authority, which rested on the Torah.

The inherent dynamic between authority and the afterlife is certainly not unique to the rabbinic tradition. Despite the varying conceptions and functions of the afterlife that exist within each culture or religious tradition, it has a universal function as an incentive for adherence and as a means of maintaining the systemic values of each religion or culture. My intention is not to be

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2 As I will demonstrate in chapter 3, when the rabbis referred to Torah study, they meant rabbinic traditions and not just scripture.
reductive, nor to collapse the complex ways in which each tradition or culture conceived of and discussed the afterlife, or the way in which it responds to the particular theological needs of each religion. Rather, my point is simply that each tradition presents the afterlife as the reward on the basis of what it values. While the particular notions of the afterlife may have differed from culture to culture and religion to religion, there is an inherent relationship between what was expected of adherents and the promise of the afterlife. Consequently, those individuals who articulated that relationship became the arbiters of their tradition. In other words, each tradition has its own authority figures that claimed to be imbued with a unique knowledge that enabled them to lead their adherents to a blessed afterlife. In doing so, they shaped and defined their respective traditions by means of the afterlife. Thus, the rabbis were no different than their Christian counterparts, the authors of the Hellenistic mystery texts, and others who claimed to be able to direct their followers into the afterlife. The way in which each of these figures differed is in how they articulated their authority and what they chose to reinforce or negate within their tradition. For example, while the rabbis consistently reinforced the value of Torah study, the Church Fathers reinforced the belief in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, the

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3 In fact, despite the universalistic aspects that I am pointing out, the particular function that the afterlife serves within a religion is highly intricate and often intersects with a series of complex, interrelated issues such as, doctrinal belief, divine retribution, salvation, resurrection of the dead, divine justice, authority to interpret scripture, reward and punishment, theodicy, etc. In light of the intricate nature of the afterlife within each religion, I will not venture into how the afterlife functioned within Christianity or Islam in this dissertation. Doing so would first necessitate a sustained analysis of what each tradition believes about the afterlife, which is its own undertaking. Only then would it be possible to ascertain how the afterlife functioned within each tradition. This dissertation would not be served by a cursory comparison between the traditions, as it would necessarily be reductive and fail to account for the distinct formulations both of and within each tradition. That is to say, were we to attempt such a comparison, would we compare the rabbinic tradition to Pauline conceptions of the afterlife? Or those found within the Gospels? Or perhaps Augustine? While a comparative analysis of how the afterlife functioned in Judaism, Christianity and Islam would certainly be a worthwhile endeavor, it seems to me that a sustained analysis of how olam haba functioned in the rabbinic tradition is necessary before it can be compared to another tradition. Until such a time, this dissertation will proceed with its study of the rabbinic tradition while bearing in mind that the dynamic of authority that is at the center of this work is not, itself unique, but rather it is the manner in which it is expressed and exercised that is distinctly rabbinic.
afterlife serves an important theodical function in many religions, as Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and others believe that God and his righteous will be vindicated and that the ills of this world will be rectified in the coming world. However, as each tradition has its own concept of reward and punishment, salvation, divine justice, etc., the particular way in which the afterlife resolves the problem of theodicy is different in each religion. Therefore, this dissertation recognizes that the dynamic between authority and the afterlife is prevalent in other religious systems, and is therefore not unique to the rabbis. However, the particular way in which this dynamic was articulated and reinforced by the rabbis is unique to them and speaks to the way in which they perceived their role within their tradition.

Survey of Scholarship

In light of the tremendous attention that rabbinic literature has received in the last century, the lack of attention to the afterlife within the field is rather surprising. Many of the scholars who have undertaken to explore the afterlife in Judaism have themselves remarked upon the dearth of attention this subject has received. A number of works have been produced as attempts to correct the view that Judaism does not subscribe to the idea of an afterlife. As such, they present a survey of texts in an attempt to demonstrate that the Jewish tradition indeed has much to say on the topic. In general, there are two types of studies on the subject: broad surveys of the afterlife, either within Judaism or across different religions, and more focused studies that examine a particular aspect of the afterlife, a specific text/genre of literature, or historical period. The broad surveys generally devote a limited amount of attention to the rabbis, allocating a chapter (or two) to the rabbinic period. Within the more defined studies on the topic, while the
biblical and inter-testamental periods have received much attention, the rabbinic period has remained relatively unmined by scholars seeking to do more than compile sources or reconstruct the concept of the afterlife within the literature. A thorough study of how and why the rabbis presented their ideas on the afterlife and its function within the system of rabbinic Judaism is lacking.

Alan F. Segal’s impressive volume *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* presents a social history of the afterlife and traces complex beliefs and formulations of the afterlife over a broad historical and cultural landscape which covers the Ancient Near East, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Segal seeks to trace the presently held views on death and the afterlife and uncover their roots in the history of western religions and texts. Segal sets out to do more than report the various beliefs about the afterlife. “I want to not only ask what was believed, but to ask why people wanted an afterlife of a particular kind and how those beliefs changed over time.” Segal achieves his goal, and the book is useful for understanding the development of the afterlife across religious and cultural lines. However, the questions that Segal poses and addresses are different than the ones that we seek to address in this work. He devotes a chapter to the early rabbis and though Segal deals with a range of themes related to the afterlife in the rabbinic period, pointing out their relationship to Early Christianity, Second Temple Judaism and modern-day Jewish conceptions of the afterlife, the chapter is intended to be a

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5 Segal, *Life After Death*, 3.
survey rather than an in-depth study. Segal acknowledges the fluidity of the afterlife in rabbinic texts and the multiple, often contradictory opinions of what it entailed, which he attributes to the anthological nature of the texts. He distinguishes the midrashic collections in particular, for their rich and imaginative depictions of the afterlife. “Each picture really depends on the imagination of individual Rabbis, who mirror the issues of different times and places as well as tell us of their own hopes.” Despite its limited scope with regard to the rabbinic period, Segal’s contextual presentation and historical approach distinguishes this study from other works that survey Judeo-Christian views of the afterlife.

Simcha Paull Raphael’s *Jewish Views on the Afterlife* provides a vaster array of sources that discuss the afterlife in Judaism. The work is not academically oriented and Raphael envisions a practical dimension to his study, as an aid to dealing with death and loss, which is reflected in his approach. “Ultimately, I see this book as a contribution toward evolving a ‘soul guiding’ approach to all our death rituals and practices.” Like Segal, Raphael notes the multiplicity of opinions and the inclusion of contradictory traditions regarding the afterlife in the rabbinic corpus. His study covers the ideas of the world to come, the experience of death, encounters with the angel of death, divine judgment, the realms of *gan eden* and *gehenna* as well as the rabbinic ‘doctrine’ of the resurrection of the dead. Raphael argues that there was a

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6 The chapter considers a relatively small selection of texts, which Segal acknowledges, referring readers to the works of Raphael, Urbach, Gillman and others. The absence of midrashic texts is notable, though Segal states that the existing studies obviate the need for their inclusion in his work. Segal, *Life After Death*, 623; 774 n. 17.

7 Segal, *Life After Death*, 623. The third chapter of this study will demonstrate how the rabbis projected their value of Torah study onto the past as well as the future in olam haba.


pervasive belief in the survival of the soul after death and the prescience of the dead among the rabbis.\textsuperscript{10} He notes that the later rabbinic sources demonstrate an increased interest in the nature of \textit{gehenna} and \textit{gan eden}, as postmortem realms for the wicked and righteous, though he does not venture a reason for the increased attention that they received. Raphael notes the central role that a collective resurrection of the dead played in the rabbinic ‘doctrine,’ but does not discuss why the rabbis placed such a premium on the belief. One problematic aspect of Raphael’s study is his presumption of rabbinic authority following the destruction of the Temple, which impacts the way in which he reads and discusses the texts in his study. Furthermore, he consistently fails to account for a text’s provenance and does not consistently distinguish between the various stages of the rabbinic period. Other than the practical dimension, which is beyond our present concern, the value of this work lies more in its ability to provide the reader with a compilation of rabbinic texts on the afterlife than its analyses of said texts.

Neil Gilman’s \textit{The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought}\textsuperscript{11} stands somewhere in between Segal and Raphael’s works. Although it is not intended for an academic audience per se, Gilman’s study is more rigorous than Raphael’s and his reading of texts is more skeptical than the latter’s overly positivistic approach. However, his treatment of the rabbinic period is rather sparse, despite the pivotal role he assigns to it.\textsuperscript{12} Gilman approaches the study from an anthropological perspective, and argues that all eschatologies are “imaginative

\textsuperscript{10} This was also convincingly argued by Aryeh Cohen in "Do the Dead Know? The Representation of Death in the Bavli," \textit{AJS Review} 24 (1999): 45-71.

\textsuperscript{11} Neil Gillman, \textit{The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought} (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 1997).

\textsuperscript{12} Gilman’s chapter on the rabbis is entitled “the canonization of a doctrine” and he argues that the rabbinic period marks the formalization of a doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and immortality of the soul in Judaism, which shaped the way in which Judaism subsequently developed and is practiced today. Gillman, \textit{The Death of Death}, 113-142.
constructs” or myths that function as structuring or ordering devices.\textsuperscript{13} As a “living myth,” belief in the afterlife imposes a framework on human existence, enabling the individual to make sense of the world, giving meaning to individual and corporate life.\textsuperscript{14} Gilman’s inquiry aims to consider the effect of the afterlife on the individual, that is, the Jewish faithful, as recipients of these of these beliefs.

David Castelli and A. Marmorstein’s "The Future Life in Rabbinical Literature,"\textsuperscript{15} and “The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead in Rabbinical Theology,"\textsuperscript{16} respectively, are representative of earlier scholarship in the field. Marmorstein and Castelli survey rabbinic texts in an attempt to formulate a rabbinic theology or doctrine of the afterlife. They each equate olam haba with the resurrection of the dead and consider the idea within the larger context of divine judgment and retribution and divine providence. Urbach’s \textit{The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs}\textsuperscript{17} and Heschel’s \textit{Heavenly Torah},\textsuperscript{18} also display the tendency to discuss the afterlife within other subjects. These two expansive studies do not have discrete sections on the afterlife; Urbach opts to discuss the afterlife in the context of reward and punishment, while Heschel does so within a chapter on the rabbinic idea of the “Torah from heaven.” Thus, while these works and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Gillman, \textit{The Death of Death}, 25-27.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Gillman, \textit{The Death of Death}, 29-36.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} David Castelli, "The Future Life in Rabbinical Literature," \textit{The Jewish Quarterly Review} 1, no. 4 (1889): 314-352.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Urbach, Efraim E. \textit{The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs}. (trans. by Israel Abrahams;. 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975).
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Abraham Joshua Heschel, \textit{Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations} (trans. Gordon Tucker; New York: Continuum, 2005).
\end{itemize}
the astute observations of their authors help inform our discussion, their concerns are different from those of this study.

Saul Lieberman’s “Some Aspects of Afterlife in Early Rabbinic Literature”\textsuperscript{19} discusses the afterlife within the context of posthumous divine retribution. Within his treatment of \textit{gehenna}, the resurrection of the dead and the prescience of the dead, Lieberman considers some of the similarities between rabbinic traditions and contemporaneous Greek and Latin texts in an attempt to discern the extent to which the rabbis were familiar with external conceptions of death, the afterlife, resurrection and post-mortem realms. Though the title might suggest that Lieberman’s study is restricted to the tannaitic or early amoraic period, his study extends beyond that, using the Bavli significantly. Despite the fact that it bears markings of an older approach, Lieberman’s desire to identify traces of Greco-Roman ideas in rabbinic texts is a worthwhile endeavor, which persists in modern scholarship. Despite Lieberman’s unique approach, his study is nonetheless aimed at understanding what the rabbis believed about the afterlife and what influences contributed to their conceptions of the idea.

The more recent volume edited by Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, \textit{Judaism in Late Antiquity: Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-To-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity},\textsuperscript{20} is more narrowly focused than the above-mentioned surveys on the afterlife. In “Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources: The Mishna, Tosefta, and Early Midrash Compilations,” the first of two chapters devoted to rabbinic texts, Avery-Peck remarks upon the


\textsuperscript{20} Avery-Peck, Alan J., and Jacob Neusner, eds., \textit{Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity} (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
rabbinic silence regarding the nature of death, the resurrection, and the afterlife in the texts.

“Rabbinic authorities in the Mishnah and Tosefta… express absolutely their belief in the resurrection of the dead and their expectation of a world-to-come. But the extremely limited and unsystematic discussions of these topics means that the exact nature of the resurrection and the character of the world-to-come remain unexplored, as does the character of the individual’s existence after death, a topic that never enters the picture. So we learn that all people will be judged, that the righteous will be resurrected, and that at some undisclosed time and under undisclosed circumstances, a ‘world-to-come’ will exist. But beyond these assertions, the rabbis show little concern for the issues raised by the resurrection…”

However, Avery-Peck’s sweeping conclusion is disproven by texts such as t. Sanhedrin 13:3-5. Nonetheless, he rightly points out that the texts focus upon the implications of these notions on life in this world, and impart the value of living a life of Torah. Avery-Peck contends that the rabbis’ preoccupation with matters of this world is a product of their belief that death terminates the individual’s ability to observe the commandments. “In the legal texts of early rabbinic Judaism, thinking about death thus evokes not questions about afterlife and resurrection but about the application of rabbinic law in the ongoing, living community of Israel.” Thus, the Mishna concerns itself with the ritual familial and economic issues surrounding death rather than the theological meaning of


22 Avery-Peck, "Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources,” 246. Although the individual may not be able to fulfill the commandments, the third chapter of this dissertation will demonstrate that the rabbis believed that study of Torah, which was arguably the highest spiritual activity for the rabbis, continues in the world to come.

23 Avery-Peck, "Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources,” 245.
death. This may be a function of the legalistic nature of the mishna and is all the more reasonable if we consider the Mishna as an attempt to establish rabbinic authority and normative practice. While Avery-Peck makes the important observation that rabbinic discussions of the afterlife are oriented towards promoting rabbinic values, his overwhelming concern is to demonstrate what the texts are lacking rather than consider the implications of what they contain.

The volume’s second chapter devoted to the rabbinic period, “Death and the Afterlife in the Later Rabbinic Sources,” suffers from a number of methodological and conceptual issues that compromise the essay as a whole. First, Neusner suggests that there is a unitary theology of the Oral Torah regarding death and the afterlife, which he characterizes as “restorationist eschatology.” I suspect that this is due in part to his overwhelming emphasis on the resurrection of the dead as if it were the predominant element of the afterlife in rabbinic thought. This appears to be the result of his reading of m. Sanhedrin 10:1, which leads him to equate olam haba with the resurrection of the dead. In addition, his tendency to conflate death, resurrection, the world-to-come, and messianic times with each other and to import pre-determined notions about their meaning and importance into the texts compromise his conclusions. Thus, per Neusner, rabbinic discussions of the afterlife are entirely about the resurrection and its function as the means of restoring the communal Israel to God and the land of Israel. In addition, Neusner formulates the unequivocal conclusion that “to be Israel means to rise from the grave” based upon his reading


25 This idea will be discussed at greater length towards the end of the second chapter of this dissertation. See also, Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

of m. Sanhedrin 10:1 and the corresponding discussion in the Bavli Sanhedrin. Consequently, according to Neusner there is no unifying principle among the individuals that the mishna excludes from the world to come other than their sins have denied them the benefit of the resurrection. In contradistinction to Neusner, I would argue that the text conveys that to be Israel is to believe in the resurrection of the dead, rather than to be resurrected. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in my close reading of the mishna there is a commonality among those that the rabbis exclude from olam haba. Neusner’s identification of Israel by means of the resurrection engenders his conclusion that gentiles are necessarily excluded from the afterlife, a matter that is debated in the sources themselves. Furthermore, Neusner’s overwhelming emphasis on the resurrection and its characterization in his essay seems to reflect a more Christian conception of the resurrection than a rabbinic one. This piece is reflective of Neusner’s later scholarship, which attempts to construct theologies or philosophies of rabbinic Judaism as a whole. Here, he presents a unitary theology of the Oral Torah on the afterlife across the various “documents” of the later rabbinic period. Beyond the problematic aspects of his approach as a whole, his reading of the sources in and of themselves is overly deterministic, as if his reading is the only way to understand a text, while ignoring contradictory sources altogether. He summarizes the essay as follows: “The later Rabbinic sources, which reached closure from the fifth through the seventh centuries, form a doctrinally-coherent corpus, in which the framers set forth the same coherent message about many, diverse topics. Their governing concern focused upon the definition of Israel as a super natural community, continuous with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and heir to their merit. Hence, the death of an individual found its meaning within the encompassing and

27 Neusner, "Death and Afterlife in the Later Rabbinic Sources," 271.
nourishing community.” Even if Neusner had managed to prove this convincingly, his certitude that rabbinic sources reflect a single coherent doctrine about the resurrection of the dead is untenable.

In his voluminous study, *L'au-Delà et la Résurrection dans la Littérature Rabbinique Ancienne*, José Costa investigates the presentations of the afterlife in rabbinic literature. Costa does well to distinguish between the individual post-mortem realm, which immediately follows death, and the collective post-mortem realm, which follows the resurrection of the dead. He designates *l’au-delà* (the hereafter) to refer to the individual post-mortem realm and *le monde de la résurrection* (the world of the resurrection) to refer to the era of salvation or the messianic period. In the first part of the work, Costa makes a case for the differentiation of the two ‘worlds’ and then develops criteria for distinguishing them, which he subsequently applies to the sources in order to reconstruct the conception of the two domains within rabbinic literature (parts II and II). One rather problematic aspect of the study is Costa’s conclusion that the terms *olam haba* and *atid lavo* categorically refer to the messianic period. Costa devotes a chapter to the examination of these terms and acknowledges that the terms are ambiguous in rather numerous texts, that they explicitly refer to the ‘hereafter’ in a few texts, and that they have a dual sense in yet other texts where they refer to both the ‘hereafter’ and the ‘world of the resurrection.’ Nonetheless, he makes the puzzling conclusion that there is a definitive link between the two

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29 “The reading of rabbinic texts obviously shows that these two terms are used to designate the era of salvation.” Costa, *L’au-Delà*, 9. (translation mine)


terms and the ‘world of the resurrection.’\textsuperscript{32} Even more puzzling, Costa seems to support his conclusion through the same texts that suggest that the terms may refer to the ‘hereafter’ as well. Costa’s determination that olam haba refers to the ‘world of the resurrection’ and not the ‘hereafter’ has implications on the work as a whole, as a major portion of his work is devoted to describing the various aspects and themes of the ‘hereafter’ and the ‘world of the resurrection’. Costa insists on the importance of distinguishing the ‘hereafter,’ which he contends, has an important role in rabbinic eschatology. However, his exclusion of certain texts as a result of his understanding of the terminology necessarily impacts his portrayal of the ‘hereafter.’ In the last part of the work, Costa examines the two worlds from an anthropological and cosmological perspective and discerns the influence of Greek culture in the rabbinic representations of the ‘hereafter’ and the ‘world of the resurrection.’ Costa’s study is notably vast and the sheer scope of the work, while praiseworthy, compromises his ability to advance a particular argument. He sets out to determine whether there is a shift between the early and late rabbinic traditions regarding the two worlds, however, though he notes some distinctions within specific areas of his work, he does not demonstrate such a shift cohesively, perhaps as a result of the multitude of themes under consideration within the work. Furthermore, even where Costa observes a shift between the tannaim and amoraim, he neglects to account for what may have prompted such shifts. Ultimately, Costa aims to explore what the rabbis had to say about the process and experience of the afterlife and uncover what may have influenced their presentations. While these may be important questions to consider, this dissertation is interested in a different set of questions altogether.

\textsuperscript{32} “The hereafter is therefore rarely called olam haba explicitly and the other texts that are susceptible to the establishment of a relationship between ‘the hereafter’ and the term olam haba are either ambiguous (…) or general (…).” Costa, \textit{L'au-Delà}, 71.
The discussion above was intended to highlight some of the methodological difficulties that have undermined the existing scholarship and establish that there is a *lacuna* in the treatment of this topic. The idea of olam haba is interspersed throughout the rabbinic corpus, appearing frequently irrespective of a text’s genre or provenance. Although scholars have moved away from attempting to reconstruct rabbinic doctrines or theologies, the relative lack of attention that olam haba has received as its own subject of inquiry is nevertheless surprising. Perhaps the methodological difficulties that arise in attempting to deal with this broad concept are to blame, or perhaps the way in which the idea often appears, as a peripheral element of the discussion within the text, has prompted scholars to focus on the other, more primary elements of the text rather than olam haba. Though there is an obvious relationship between olam haba and rabbinic authority, which has been observed in many studies that refer to m. Sanhedrin, it has not, to my knowledge, been the primary subject of a study such as this one.

**What Do We Mean by Olam Haba?**

The idea of a collective judgment and resurrection at end times that would usher a new, transformed world was an accepted belief among the rabbis. However, there was a difference of opinion concerning the fate of the soul in the temporal space between individual death and the collective resurrection. The use of the term olam haba to refer to that temporal space *as well as* the new world that follows the resurrection has complicated the reading of rabbinic texts and compromised efforts to ascertain what the rabbis intended with their use of the term in any given text.
The term olam haba appears throughout the literature, as if it had a defined reference point that was known to the rabbis who discussed, transmitted and redacted these traditions. The vagueness of the term, combined with the absence of an explicit definition forces the reader to look for contextual clues in order to determine what the term olam haba designates. For the most part, the m. Sanhedrin’s reference to the resurrection of the dead is what gives rise to the equation of olam haba with the resurrection by many scholars. However, it is also possible to read the mishna in such a way that preserves the distinctiveness of these two concepts. Furthermore, the variety of opinions espoused by the rabbis regarding the afterlife, albeit by means of the same terminology, further compounds the problem and makes it exceedingly difficult to determine with a degree of certainty what olam haba refers to in each text. In his Mavo le-Masekhtot Avot ve-Avot de Rabbi Natan, Louis Finkelstein argues that the term olam haba has two meanings in the talmudic and midrashic literature.

33 As one of the earliest rabbinic texts, the Mishna is generally the starting point for most discussions of olam haba.


35 Finkelstein, Mavo le-Masekhtot Avot ve-Avot de Rabbi Natan, 213 (translation mine)
determine whether it would be resurrected, destroyed or remain in Sheol. Conversely, according to the opinion of Beit Hillel, a soul undergoes judgment immediately after death, and they are assigned to gan eden or gehennom. At the end of days, the body will be resurrected, and there will be another collective judgment. Finkelstein explains that according to Beit Hillel, the judgment of each individual is immediately upon death and the principal reward or punishment of an individual is conferred in the ‘world of the souls’ and not at the end-time, at the resurrection of the dead. According to Finkelstein, this debate persisted as both views took hold among the rabbis. Thus, while m. Sanhedrin 10:1 reflects the view of R. Joshua who understood olam haba as the ‘world of the souls,’ the domain of individual judgment and recompense prior to the resurrection of the dead, other parts of the chapter reflect the other view as well.

Although I am skeptical of Finkelstein’s early dating of the mishna, I find his argument regarding the circulation of two differing notions of olam haba compelling. It certainly helps to account for the reflection of these two views within the texts of the rabbinic corpus. Whether olam haba refers to the ‘world of the souls’ or the ‘world of the resurrection,’ their shared aspects of merit, retribution and judgment, obviates the need for this study to distinguish what the term refers to in each text that we examine. In both conceptions of the term,

36 This is the view articulated by Maimonides in his commentary on the 10th chapter of m. Sanhedrin and the Guide to the Perplexed. Saadia Gaon disagrees with Maimonides and says that olam haba refers to the world of the resurrection of the dead in Emunot ve De’ot 6:7.

37 Finkelstein, Mavo, 217.

38 Finkelstein, Mavo, 218-219.


40 Finkelstein dates this mishna to the period of the men of the great assembly. Finkelstein, Mavo, 212. However, even if we do not accept this view, there is no reason to disregard his explanation that two different conceptions of olam haba circulated among the tannaim, and that the text bears traces of that makhloqet.
olam haba stands as a reward that is assigned on the basis of merit followed by divine judgment. As such, when the rabbis state that a certain individual is excluded from olam haba as a consequence of a particular belief or practice, they are regulating access to that reward, and, for our purposes, it is irrelevant if that reward is in ‘the world of the souls’ or the ‘world of the resurrection.’ There is a consistency with regard to the exercise of rabbinic authority in relation to olam haba. In nearly every text, olam haba is presented in terms of merit - one has a share, loses their share, or merits a share in the world to come - and the rabbis profess to know how that share is obtained, lost, or maintained. Furthermore, as both the individual and the collective domains involve divine judgment and recompense, merit remains the basis for entry and there is no indication that one realm is attained differently than the other. Furthermore, nowhere is there an indication that the rabbis would claim to facilitate and regulate entry into one domain but not the other. Thus, if two texts assert that Torah study is rewarded with a share in olam haba, one source may intend ‘the world of souls’ and the other may intend ‘the world of the resurrection,’ but in both cases, the post-mortem realm is attained by means of Torah, at the say-so of the rabbis.

For the purposes of this study, the role of the rabbis in regulating olam haba, what they have determined to be the terms for entry and how it functions to uphold their tradition is more important than the details of the reward itself. This is not to suggest that how the rabbis imagined the experience of olam haba is unimportant. The field would certainly benefit from a methodical study of the sources that attempts to distinguish between the two conceptions of olam haba in a consistent manner. However, that is not the task of this study, nor would doing so help to answer the questions that this work seeks to address. Until such a study is undertaken, and there is a
determination of which domain each text refers to (to the extent that this is possible), I find it more prudent to abstain from venturing into this matter. Therefore, this study will to use the term olam haba along with the general designation of afterlife or post-mortem realm allowing whichever conception of the term that was intended by the text to remain unchanged.

Methodology

Rabbinic studies have undergone a dramatic shift with regard to the way in which rabbinic texts are read, how scholars assess the information that the texts convey, and the conclusions that have been drawn about the authority and position of the rabbis in late antiquity. The 19th century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* opened the door to the critical study of rabbinic literature. Prior to this, the study of rabbinic texts was largely restricted to the religious context, where the thrust of these studies was to discern the *halakhic* meaning of the texts. As such, the rabbinic corpus was often viewed through the lens of the Babylonian Talmud whose primacy was established over the Palestinian Talmud and midrashic collections. In contrast, modern scholarship looks at each collection of rabbinic literature on its own terms and within the unique context of the location and date of its composition or redaction.

The early works\(^41\) of scholars like Gedalyah Alon and Ephraim E. Urbach approached rabbinic literature as if it was a transparent reflection of the social and historical reality of its time. Both Alon and Urbach used rabbinic texts to construct histories of the period under the

\(^{41}\) Seth Schwartz classifies rabbinic historiography along geographic/cultural lines rather than on the basis of chronology. He observes that Zionist and Israeli scholars have a tendency to read rabbinic texts far more positively than their counterparts in the diaspora as a result of the different social and cultural assumptions of each group. Seth Schwartz, "Historiography on the Jews in the 'Talmudic Period' (70-640 CE)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (eds. M. Goodman, et al.; Oxford University Press, 2002), 81.
assumptions that the rabbis had authority and that narrative accounts of the tannaim were authentic and true. These works yielded the romanticized notion that the rabbis emerged to save Judaism amidst the ruins of the Temple, uniting a previously fractured population under their authority. Although rabbinic stories of the destruction and the post-Temple period may suggest such a narrative, we must ask the fundamental question of whether these accounts were intended to transmit history prior to using them to extrapolate a history of the period. Isaiah Gafni is among the scholars who have posed this question, and he concludes that although the rabbis were aware of and possessed traditions relating to the historical past, they were uninterested in recounting ‘history.’ “Indeed not only did the rabbis refrain from producing historiographical literature; they seem to have consciously steered away from seeking support for a historical agenda even in those scriptures that, at first glance, might have provided for an active encouragement of one.” This is an important realization for the reader of rabbinic texts. Thus, if the rabbis do not intend to transmit ‘history.’ what do they intend to convey? To whom are these texts, or more precisely, the traditions contained therein, directed at? Can the scholar deduce anything from these texts? These were among the questions posed by Jacob Neusner, who advocated for the historiographical and literary study of rabbinic literature.


Jacob Neusner’s skeptical approach stands in stark contrast to the highly positivistic approaches of Urbach and Alon and transformed the way in which rabbinic literature is read, and consequently, how scholars situated the rabbis within the historical context of their time. As a result of this approach, the rabbis went from being the unrivaled leaders of post-temple Judaism to a marginal class of individuals whose texts reflect the concerns of a small group of Jews. However, as instrumental as Neusner has been for the development of a more historically accurate portrayal of the rabbis, his approach dramatically limits what can be deduced from rabbinic texts. Noting the significant imprint of redactors on rabbinic texts, Neusner argues that their contents must be considered within the context of the work as a whole and he is extremely skeptical about the reliability of attributions. Although Neusner acknowledges the diversity of materials within rabbinic texts, he argues that they are so significantly reworked and re-contextualized that it is impossible to recover any information about the original social, historical and cultural settings of these materials. Thus, the texts stand as discrete entities that are reflective of their redactors, but not the various layers within the text. Shaye Cohen is among the many scholars who have argued that Neusner’s method “despairs much too easily of the value of rabbinic documents for historical purposes.” Cohen attempts to find a middle ground between

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44 Neusner has articulated and defended his approach in many parts of his vast library of work. He summarizes his theories and refers to other works that discuss them at greater length in Jacob Neusner, *The Documentary Foundation of Rabbinic Culture: Mopping up after Debates with Gerald L. Bruns, S.J.D. Cohen, Arnold Maria Goldberg, Susan Handelman, Christine Hayes, James Kugel, Peter Schaefer, Eliezer Segal, E.P. Sanders, and Lawrence H. Schiffman* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

45 Christine Hayes, charges that Neusner’s approach neutralizes rabbinic texts, which, she argues, contain diachronic markers in the form of attributions, their use of sources and citations as well as temporal markers. Thus, per Hayes, “a diachronic method is inherent in the very composition of rabbinic texts, the redactors producing a text that is to be read not as a synchronic work but as a diachronic construction.” Christine Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11-13.

the extreme positivism of Urbach and Alon and skepticism of Neusner. In doing so, he provides an important model for this work. Rather than asking what rabbinic sources have to say about the world beyond rabbinic circles, Cohen proposes that we ask what they can tell us about how the rabbis perceived themselves, and others in relation to them as well as the positions that the rabbis assigned themselves.\footnote{Ibid.}

Our approach to the question of rabbinic authority is informed by the work of Seth Schwartz and others who have convincingly argued that the rabbis were a relatively marginal group who did not have any formal authority.\footnote{Seth Schwartz, \textit{Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).} One of the effects of Neusner’s approach was the idea that multiple “Judaisms” existed during the second-temple and rabbinic periods. Seth Schwartz argues against this idea, which was based on the assumption that the diverse literature of these periods was the product of communities whose practices and beliefs were reflected in the texts. Schwartz certainly admits the diversity within the literature, but he argues that the texts are reflective of their authors rather than communities at large. “The notion that each piece of evidence reflects a discrete social organization is obviously wrong. Communities do not write books, individuals do…”\footnote{Hayes, \textit{Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds}, 9.} Consequently, in his important history of Jews in antiquity, Schwartz maintains that there was a normative core of Judaism before 70 CE,\footnote{Schwartz points out that this core is difficult to describe and that it had no connection with Pharisaic/rabbinic Judaism, which is assumed by Neusner and Israeli scholars. Schwartz, \textit{Imperialism}, 10.} and though Judaism “shattered” as a consequence of the destruction, failed revolts and the reconstitution of the Jewish nation under the Roman empire, its “shards were preserved in altered but recognizable
form by the rabbis.” However, Schwartz maintains that the rabbis had no formal authority and, despite the fact that they may have had some “residual prestige” and a small number of adherents, “it is far from certain that the post-Destruction Torah scholars par excellence - the rabbis - actually enjoyed much authority before the Middle Ages.” According to Schwartz, the Christianization of the Roman Empire prompted the reconstitution of the Jewish community as a discrete religious entity that was Torah and synagogue centered, and though he does not see this as the product of rabbinic influence, he suggests that it may have ultimately contributed to the establishment of rabbinic authority in the Medieval period.

Daniel Boyarin and Adiel Schremer have provided important frameworks for our examination of the rabbinic use of olam haba as a means of delineating the boundaries of Israel. Boyarin has argued that that the rabbis and the Church Fathers were engaged in a “discourse of heresy” in the nascent stages of Judaism and Christianity. This discourse resulted in the erection of “border lines” which effectively created the two religions. Adiel Schremer challenges Boyarin’s assumption that the rabbinic ‘discourse of heresy’ was necessarily directed at Christians and that it developed as a result of the interaction with the Christian ‘discourse of heresy’.

51 Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 15. Describing the period between 135-350 CE, Schwartz remarks, “The striking characteristic of this period is the disjointed nature of the evidence: on the one hand, the literature, which is entirely rabbinic, demonstrates the preservation of Judaism by a segment of the Palestinian Jewish population; on the other, the archeological remains, and some literary hints suggest that at least in the cities and large villages Judaism had disintegrated and was replaced, as other local identities elsewhere in the Roman Empire were, by the religious, cultural, and social norms of the Greco-Roman city.” Ibid. Thus, for Schwartz, the radical difference between rabbinic literature and archeological remains suggests, not the existence of different “Judaisms,” but rather, the collapse of Judaism altogether, beyond rabbinic circles as Jews integrated into their social and cultural milieu.


54 This is the thrust of m. Sanhedrin’s discussion of olam haba, and is also evident in the Talmuds. As such this framework will inform our discussion of the second chapter of this dissertation.

55 Boyarin, *Border Lines*.
Thus, whereas Boyarin imagines the rabbis looking out in order to define the borders of Judaism, Schremer imagines them looking in and responding to the problematic aspects within the Jewish community. Schremer contends that the reflexive identification of minim with Christians resulted in the interpretation of the rabbinic polemic against minim as one that was motivated by doctrinal concern. However, Schremer argues that this polemic was motivated by social and communal concerns. “Very frequently, behind the high theological language and denunciation of ‘heretics’ stands a concern for social and communal cohesion.” Schremer observes that the sources indicate that the minim had different ways of practicing Judaism and that this posed a problem for the rabbis who sought to instill communal solidarity. This study rejects the notion that there is a binary opposition between Schremer and Boyarin’s approaches. Where Boyarin and Schremer differ most significantly is on whether Judaism was being created anew by the rabbis (Boyarin) or whether it underwent a transformation, but was not necessarily a new construction (Schremer). I am not prepared to make such a determination. While the rabbinic collections contain some very old traditions that pre-date the mishnaic period, the Mishna certainly indicates an attempt to systematize normative practice (and some beliefs). Thus, without necessarily saying that the Mishna represents a newly formed Judaism, it does indicate that there it was a deliberate articulation of rabbinic Judaism, whether it was a new or pre-existing entity. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that the rabbis could not have been concerned with matters of doctrine and communal practice simultaneously.

56 Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 14. Schremer argues that Boyarin’s approach necessarily views the Judaism of the rabbis as a new one that was being created in concert with Christianity.

57 Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 144. Schremer argues that in the tannaitic literature, “minut is frequently spoken of as social segregation and minim are depicted by various sources not only as expressing dissenting views but also as having different customs and ways of practicing their Judaism.” Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 16.
Lastly, Schremer’s work serves as a caution against importing facile assumptions onto the texts, as doing so leads us to overlook the concerns and anxieties that these texts evince. This study will proceed accordingly, conducting close readings of texts with restraint and considering the individuals that the mishna excludes from olam haba on their own terms.

Claudia Setzer’s study on the resurrection of the dead as a symbol and strategy has also contributed to the conceptual framework of this study. Setzer tries to ascertain why a belief in the resurrection of the dead was so prevalent in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. She argues that the resurrection served as a ‘symbol’ for the integrity of a community as well as a ‘strategy’ for addressing the theological crises of that community. Setzer contends that as a symbol, the resurrection condenses a worldview, which serves to draw boundaries between groups, construct community, confer legitimacy onto those who preach it and solve a set of problems. Setzer’s symbolic model lends itself to the concept of olam haba. Her notion of a symbol as a recognized entity and the ‘worldview’ that it represents is certainly assumed by the Mishna and other rabbinic texts. Although this study is not focused on the resurrection of the dead, thus negating the applicability of the anthropological aspects of Setzer’s study, her historical-critical


59 Setzer points out that a number of beliefs adhere to the symbol, and become an inherent part of what that symbol represents. She outlines the Jewish beliefs that were associated with the resurrection as follows: “the belief in God’s power and involvement in human affairs, the primacy of the Torah, the crucial role of those who interpret the Torah correctly, the legitimacy of groups that espouse resurrection, a particular set of practices associated with these groups, and a concern for ultimate justice.” Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body*, 44.

60 For example, the loss of Jewish sovereignty, suffering under gentile domination and the apparent withdrawal of God from Israel. As a symbol, the resurrection could ease the discomfort of the cognitive dissonance engendered by the events that the Jews experienced after the destruction of the Temple, failed revolts, and the triumph of Rome. Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body*, 49-51.
method and use of sociology of religion inform this work’s approach and my understanding of how the value of olam haba contributed to its use within the rabbinic community.\textsuperscript{61}

This dissertation is an exploration of ideas and their matrices within the rabbinic corpus. The study is thus structured thematically rather than textually or chronologically. The discursive nature of the literature means that a thematically based study such as this one will necessarily engage a number of sources of varying length that appear within the context of larger, often unrelated discussions. While I am fully aware of the methodological issues associated with incorporating material from disparate rabbinic compilations, doing so will not only allow for a more comprehensive study, but also strengthen the essential argument that is being proposed. In evaluating a number of divergent texts in concert with each other, this study seeks not to obfuscate their differences but rather to note the surprising thematic consistency within discussions of olam haba, \textit{despite} their differences. In other words, despite the heterogeneous nature of the rabbinic corpus, which comprises multiple genres of texts and spans large periods of time and geographical areas, there is a remarkable consistency in the presentation and use of olam haba, particularly with regard to rabbinic authority, Torah study and theodicy.\textsuperscript{62}

As a result of its thematic structure, this dissertation will use a range of sources rather than a discrete text or genre. The use of different genres of texts necessitates the use of multiple

\textsuperscript{61} i.e., to establish boundaries, reinforce authority and marginalize those who threatened that authority.

\textsuperscript{62} Despite this thematic consistency, my work does not attempt to present a rabbinic theology or system \textit{a la} Neusner. In stating that the elements of rabbinic authority, Torah study and theodicy are at the forefront of the rabbinic expressions of olam haba, my aim is not to string together these ideas into a unitary system, but rather explore the dynamic of these ideas in relation to each other as they appear in rabbinic sources. This study does not argue that these three themes constitute a particular discourse, nor that they encompass the entire range of ideas connected to the subject of olam haba. Rather, these are three ideas that are central to the rabbinic tradition, which are often expressed in conjunction with and sustained by olam haba. As such, they warrant a closer examination so as to uncover how they relate to one another and what they can tell us about how the rabbis chose to construct their tradition and their role within it.
approaches and methods within this dissertation. While a singular method and approach is often beneficial, in this case, it would hinder my ability to give each text the due consideration that it deserves. Consequently, each source will be approached on its own terms, accounting for its literary context, geographic and chronological provenance and the unique traits of its genre. The first chapter will conduct a lexical study of the word עולם and construct a historiography of the afterlife up to the mishnaic period. The latter three chapters will be centered around rabbinic texts, wherein I will conduct close readings of texts using the tools of historical criticism, as well as literary and rhetorical criticism, where appropriate. Additionally, the interpretative nature of rabbinic texts affords the opportunity to explore the intertextual relationships within the text and how they generate and inform the exegetical process.

Ultimately, this study approaches rabbinic texts with a skeptical positivism. Although this approach is skeptical of the text’s claims of authority and the extent to which rabbinic prescriptions were observed, it does believe that there is something to be discerned from the text about its authors, redactors, and socio-historical context. Certainly, the texts are instructive to understand how the rabbis conceived of themselves and their authority within the tradition. The transformation of Judaism by the rabbis was a process that was achieved in large part by the rabbinic interpretative endeavor, which is recorded in these texts. That is to say, the texts were part-and-parcel of the process that they reflect. Thus, according to Fraade, “…these texts, when viewed in the historical context of the time of their creation, might be seen not so much as reports of a transformation already completed as part of the very work of that transformation - as the discursive media of their will to socioreligious power and its self-justification.”63 As this

dissertation is interested in the question of how the rabbis exercised their authority in establishing the tenets of their tradition through olam haba, Fraade’s observation is an important one that we bear in mind as we examine the sources that attest to this transformative process.

**On Authority and Strategy**

Despite the fact that the texts suggest a concerted effort to establish rabbinic authority, it would be erroneous to assume that this was an entirely self-conscious strategy on the part the rabbis. The rabbis recognized the need to adapt the tradition and they did so, believing, that their authority and traditions were continuous with the Torah. It was the Oral Law, which originated at Sinai, that was authoritative, and their access to it extended that authority onto them. Christine Hayes makes the important point that rabbinic literature is fundamentally a literature of interpretation. Therefore, although the historian can observe that the rabbis transformed Judaism in some very important ways, and that they did so for the most part by means of interpretation, one must resist the urge to project an agenda onto the exegetical process too easily. Although some rabbinic sources indicate an awareness of the gap between the rabbinic tradition and the Bible, the rabbis did not see their tradition as completely detached from it either. “The point is that the rabbis apparently did not perceive themselves and certainly do not present themselves as imposing new, historically and ideologically conditioned values upon a received text, but rather as elucidating and unfolding meanings inherent in that text. It is true that the

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64 Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 17.

modern scholar may feel compelled to assess critically the accuracy of that self-perception; nevertheless it must not be dismissed out of hand as a pious fraud. The modern scholar is surely obliged to understand how it is that the rabbis might have perceived their discussion or development of biblical or tannaitic texts as an interpretation of those texts rather than as an amendment to or distortion of them." This dissertation will attempt to follow the directive of Hayes. My consideration of the texts will observe the points of innovation within rabbinic discussions of olam haba while also resisting the impulse to read into them an agenda that the rabbis may not have had.

To say that the literature presents the rabbis as arbiters of olam haba is quite different from saying that the rabbis latched on to the idea of olam haba as a calculated attempt to establish their own power. I do not believe that the rabbis did so any more than Paul did when he claimed to have been visited by the resurrected Jesus. Paul’s visions of Jesus led him to preach that the era of the resurrection had arrived. Paul’s authority derived from his vision of the resurrected Jesus. Segal suggests that Paul’s use the Gospel’s terminology of vision to describe his own may have contributed to his apostolic authority. Should that be taken as an indication of a conscious attempt by Paul to establish his own authority? Or does it indicate that Paul believed that his experience of Jesus was no less real or valid than the apostles’ experience with Jesus when he was alive in the flesh? There is no way to prove Paul’s intentions with regard to the former, short of an acknowledgement of some sort, which does not exist. Suppose we

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66 Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 18.


68 Of course, one would hardly expect Paul, or any other authority figure, to acknowledge a self-conscious effort to establish or legitimate their own authority. People claim to have authority and they may justify that authority, however, a confessional statement of the desire to establish authority is counterproductive to establishing its legitimacy.
assume the latter position, Paul’s sincere belief does not negate the fact that his use of the Gospel’s language may have also contributed to his authority. Similarly, while a discourse of power is perceivable within rabbinic discussions of olam haba, it ought not be taken as an indication of a strategic attempt on their part to seize power. However, neither should the dynamic of power and authority be dismissed entirely. In her work on the resurrection of the dead as a symbol and strategy for communities, Setzer remarks, “In using the language of strategy, I am not suggesting that its adherents did not genuinely believe in resurrection, nor that their strategy was necessarily conscious or intentional. Beliefs perdure because they work. People use ideas, consciously or unconsciously, because they allow them to live in the world as it is.”

Examining the dynamic of authority within rabbinic discussions of olam haba affords us an opportunity to understand how rabbinic authority was established, reinforced and perpetuated in the rabbinic tradition, whatever their motives may have been. In addition, we may also glean something about the way in which the rabbis perceived themselves and their role within the tradition, not necessarily as an artificial construct, but as a consequence of their self-perception as links in the chain that ties God and the Torah to the people Israel.

The source of Paul and the rabbis’ authority within their respective traditions lay in something that their works indicate they deeply believed in, the appearance of the resurrected Jesus for Paul and the revelation of an Oral Law for the rabbis. On the basis of that authority, Paul and the rabbis professed to know the means by which their adherents could attain the post-mortem rewards of the afterlife and they articulated them in their texts, which prescribed certain beliefs and actions that would either enable or prevent access to the afterlife. In doing so, they

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69 Setzer, Resurrection of the Body, 6.
became the arbiters of the afterlife for their religious communities. The dynamic of authority and its relationship to the afterlife is present in both cases. What is unique to each of them is how they conceived of that authority and what they claimed was necessary to access the afterlife. As I have already stated, this dissertation does not argue that the presentation of the rabbis as arbiters of the afterlife who defined their religious community by means of it is unique. This is a common element in many religious traditions. However, the terms of olam haba were unique to the rabbis, informed by the beliefs and practices that they valued. Put differently, the specific elements that the rabbis isolated as reasons for inclusion or exclusion to olam haba were unique to them and speaks to how they understood their relationship to God and Torah, their role within the tradition, and the nature of their authority.

The ability of any person or group to successfully claim to lead anyone into the afterlife relies on a belief in the idea and the value that it holds. Rabbinic texts do not indicate that the rabbis invented the idea of olam haba, nor is there a systematic attempt to instill a belief in the concept. Rather, the texts present the rabbis as regulating olam haba, determining the terms of inclusion or exclusion to the post-mortem realm. The texts presuppose a belief in the idea of the afterlife and its desirability. The first chapter of this study will explain how such a supposition was possible, by demonstrating how and why a belief in the afterlife entered the Jewish tradition, such that the rabbis could so easily claim to be at its helm in the mishnaic period.

In the second chapter, I will argue that, as arbiters of the afterlife, the rabbis sustained their authority by designating those beliefs and practices that undermined the source of that authority and the tenets of their tradition. Whereas the second chapter discusses the terms of exclusion from olam haba, the third chapter will focus on the Torah study as a means of inclusion.
in olam haba. In that chapter, I will argue that in their capacity as arbiters of olam haba, the rabbis placed a premium on the practice of Torah study, which sustained and perpetuated their tradition and authority while also rendering them as vehicles to olam haba. Thus, the third chapter demonstrates that the rabbis established the Torah as the means to olam haba, while the fourth chapter of this study will show how the rabbis sustained the Torah and its promises through olam haba as a mechanism of theodicy. These latter chapters of this dissertation evince the interplay between rabbinic authority, Torah, theodicy and olam haba, demonstrating the complex relationship that is expressed in the texts that present the rabbis as arbiters of the afterlife.
2A. The Emergence of the Afterlife in Judaism: Tracing the Linguistic Evolution of ‘Olam
This chapter will begin with a lexical study of the word עולם in an attempt to trace its development into the term הבא עולם that is so commonly found in rabbinic literature. This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive study. However, my aim is to demonstrate, through the evolving uses of the word עולם, that a belief in an afterlife emerged and developed significantly over time and that it was firmly established by the mishnaic period, so that the rabbis could avail themselves of the concept in establishing their own authority and tradition. The evolution of the term from non-specific, cyclical time to its use with the modifiers הזה עולם (this) and הבא עולם (the coming/future) to refer to a specific time and space, allows a window into the development of eschatological expectations beyond the lifespan of the individual. The second part of this chapter will trace the conceptual roots of this emergent belief and explore the social and historic circumstances that may have contributed to its establishment within the Jewish tradition.

**Lexical Study: Tracing the Linguistic Evolution of עולם**

Although the etymology of the word עולם is uncertain, a connection to the root עלם has been suggested, though it is not universally accepted. Most scholars follow Ernst Jenni and take the word to mean “most remote time,” “farthest time,” or “long time.” Though it has also been rendered as ‘eternity’, it must be noted that in the Hebrew Bible, עולם cannot be taken to

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72 H. D. Preuss, "‘ôlām, עולם; ‘ôlâm עולם," *TDOT* 10:530-545.

mean eternity in the philosophical sense. Rather, it is used to express the ongoing duration of something. The use of אֲלֹמָ in the Hebrew Bible is relative to the present and serves to extend the duration of something with a view to the past as well as the future. If we understand אֲלֹמָ as a temporal term, relative to the lifespan of the individual or present generation, its connection to the root עָלָם ‘to be hidden’ may suggest that אֲלֹمָ denotes something that exceeds human perception, extending to the remote past or future.

74 Jenni argues against the translation of olam as eternity for many of the passages in the Hebrew Bible, as this suggests ‘a preconceived concept of eternity, burdened with all manner of later philosophical or theological content.” Instead, Jenni renders olam as “most distant time, either with a view to the past, to the future, or both.” Jenni, TLOT n.p.

75 Jenni, TLOT n.p.; Jenni, "Das Wort ‘֚o֥לָם im Alten Testament"

76 Use of עָלָם to denote “as long as one lives” is demonstrated in Exod 21:6; Deut 15:17; 1Sam 27:12, etc.; Preuss, TDOT 10:535. Also, Heleen M. Keizer, Life Time Entirety: A Study of Οἰκον in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo (Amsterdam: Heleen M. Keizer, 1999), 121 ff.
Olam in the Hebrew Bible

Despite numerous instances (440 in Hebrew and 20 instances of the Aramaic equivalent עלמא) the Hebrew Bible does not attest to the use of עולם to designate ‘world’ as a physical space suggesting the expectation of life after death as it does in later texts such as apocalyptic and rabbinic literature or in the New Testament. It is possible however, to distinguish a shift in the use of עולם as it is used theologically as well as to denote a more specific spatial or temporal sense.

In the Hebrew Bible there are 60 occurrences of the term עולם to indicate past time, 21 times with the preposition מ. Generally, this expression is used to indicate the origin of

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77 There are two instances in Ecclesiastes (3:11, העלם as an object and 12:5, עולם with a suffix) that may designate a specific space. Nonetheless, these expressions do not imply any sort of belief in a future life, nor is the term עולם here used in a way to designate ‘world’ as distinct from the present one or any other. With regard to Ecclesiastes 3:11, Jenni argues that it must be understood within the context of other usages of ‘olam in Ecclesiastes and does not denote a new meaning for the term. Keizer remarks on the unique use of the term in this verse and notes that a variety of translations and interpretations have been ventured. “Any one-word translation of ‘olam in this context will remain enigmatic, but the context, I believe, gives enough clues for interpretation. On the one hand Qohelet speaks of the well apprehensible ‘times for everything’, and on the other hand of ‘the work God has done from beginning to end’, which is unapprehensible. Ha’olam is somewhere between the two: between partial times and God’s work as a whole. The work of God from beginning to end is more than a human being can grasp, we have apprehension of it, but not comprehension… We infer that the ‘olam is time/history/the world as a whole, to the extent we have an idea of it.” Keizer, Life Time Entirety, 145-6. The use of עולם here is highly suggestive of the etymological root of עולם in that the term denotes the time, and possibly space up to the limits of human perception while maintaining that there is more which the human cannot perceive or imagine, and which is thus, hidden. According to Preuss “Ecclesiastes 3:14 can merely underscore that v. 11 in its own turn is saying that the ‘duration’ of which God has made human beings aware is not nor can it be a consciousness of human existence as such, but rather again the torment of existence as a burden through the passing of time and through the experience of the burdensome, inaccessible, and incessant nature of existence.” Preuss, TDOT 10:542. The term מ בית עולם in Ecclesiastes 12:5 which has been translated as “eternal abode” (JPS) or “eternal home” (NRSV) refers to the grave. Preuss notes the special significance of the term here as it is the only instance עולם appears with a suffix with the clear meaning of a grave. Preuss, TDOT 10:542. Per Jenni, “the expression stems originally from Egypt; it occurs widely since Hellenistic times in grave inscription and other texts… The expression does not contain a hope for eternal life.” Jenni, TLOT n.p.
something in the most remote past or from time immemorial. However, the term is more often used to refer to the future. The Hebrew Bible contains over 260 such uses, most often in combination with the prepositions ל and עד. Whereas עולם takes on a more static meaning ‘forever, ever, always,’ שָׁלֹשׁ has a more dynamic aspect, indicating temporal progression into the future. As with uses of ‘olam to denote the past, there is no designation of a specific time in the future, but rather a sense of perpetuity. Both the past and future are designated with the combination of the prepositions עולם and with the term עולם to mean since eternity and until eternity. The word שָׁלֹשׁ also appears in phrases as a governed noun to indicate the ongoing validity or duration of something into infinity. The theological use of ‘olam does not, for the most part diverge from other uses previously discussed. Thus, the expressions שָׁלֹשׁ אל and שָׁלֹשׁ are used to signify eternal God or king. Additionally, though there are passages that wish for

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80 this is seen in the phrases - in Jer 7:7, 25:5; Ps 41:14, 90:2, 103:17, 106:48; Neh 9:5; 1 Chron 16:36, 29:10. The Aramaic עולם appears in Dan 2:20.

81 Jenni, TLOT n.p.

82 For example, שָׁלֹשׁ, שָׁלֹשׁ, שָׁלֹשׁ, שָׁלֹשׁ, שָׁלֹשׁ, etc. Jenni, TLOT n.p. It should be noted that the use of the term שָׁלֹשׁ is used to refer to the covenant with the patriarchs, in particular, the Abrahamic covenant as well as the Davidic covenant rather than the Sinaitic covenant. Preuss, TDOT 10:537.

83 Per Jenni, “pre-exilic literature occasionally uses ‘olam in more or less theologically significant contexts, although theological language has not yet adopted and changed the word.” Jenni, TLOT n.p.
the eternal life of the king, Jenni maintains that these are examples of courtly speech and do not indicate any expectation of an afterlife or immortality.  

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**Shift in the Use of יָמִּים**? Daniel and Deutero-Isaiah

According to Jenni the association of יָמִים with judgment as part of the description of God’s final eschatological act in Jeremiah and Ezekiel paves the way for a new use of the term.

Sasse argues that the term acquires the sense of endless time or eternity (as such) in and after Deutero-Isaiah and, noting its similarity with the concept of *zrvan* in Zoroastrianism, suggests a “common origin in an oriental and probably Babylonian concept of time and eternity.” Conversely, Jenni maintains that, “in the proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah, ‘olam acquires no new meaning but a somewhat new theological status. The word is placed in the service of the doctrine of the universal God of history.” Thus for Jenni, the unique phrase יָמִים אָלָם, “eternal God,” which appears in Isaiah 40:28 signifies God’s independence of temporality, and dominion over all time. Preuss suggests that perhaps the verse is in fact referring to Yahweh as ‘king of the world’ and that this is the beginning of the shift into what the word יָמִים comes to mean in post-exilic, particularly apocalyptic texts. If so, then this phrase imposes a spatial designation on

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84 For example, 1 Kings 1:31; Neh 2:3; Dan 2:4, 3:9, 5:10, 6:7, 6:22. Wishes in the royal psalms for the continued life of the king should also be taken as such (or as the hope for the continuation of the dynasty) rather than wishes for immortality. Jenni, *TLOT* n.p.


89 Preuss, *TDOT* 10:539.
as God’s world\footnote{Jenni states, “The more the absolute uniqueness of this God and, simultaneously, his eternity as lordship over all time was recognized, the closer “eternal” drew in proximity to “divine” and the greater grew the tendency to reserve the word for religious language. ‘olam becomes the code word for God’s world and God’s activity that will survive as solely determinative in the eschaton.” Jenni, \textit{TLOT} n.p. Keizer, drawing upon Jenni and Preuss suggests “we might interpret ‘olam here as God’s creational realm seen under its temporal aspect.” Keizer, \textit{Life Time Entirety}, 133.} which might be what allows for the phrase \textit{עולם} which we find in later texts to designate the current physical realm, as distinct from \textit{עולם הבא} which also has both a temporal and spatial aspect. Scholars note a further shift in the book of Daniel, which contains 5 occurrences of the word in Hebrew and 18 in Aramaic; at this point, \textit{עולם} acquires the meaning of ‘world’ or ‘age of the world’\footnote{Preuss, \textit{TDOT} 10:543.} to be further developed in later Jewish texts. The eschatological concerns of Daniel shift the focus to a new future that will begin once the present age ends. Hence, “\textit{olam} became a constant attribute of the world beyond.”\footnote{Jenni, \textit{TLOT} n.p.}

\textbf{Plural Forms of \textit{עולם} and \textit{עלמא}}

The plural forms of \textit{‘olam} and \textit{‘alma} appear 12 times in the Hebrew and 8 times in Aramaic. In general, scholars are in agreement that the plural serves as an intensification of the singular form, serving to extend the duration of time rather than to signify more than one temporal realm.\footnote{Jenni, \textit{TLOT} n.p.; Jenni, ”Das Wort ‘ōlām im Alten Testament”; Preuss, \textit{TDOT}. The notable exception would be Ecc 1:10 where it appears as a true numeric plural and means “time period, age, era” which Jenni suspects is the result of the influence of the greek aion, although there is also the possibility that “Qoheleth has independently used the word as an appellative and in a slightly altered meaning.” Sasse understands the use of ‘olam in Ecclesiastes as “periods of the world in their infinite succession,” and accredits the use of the plural form of ‘olam to the influence of Babylonian ideas of time. Sasse, \textit{TDNT} 1:204-5.} Though Heleen Keizer does not diverge from this view, she suggests that “\textit{‘olamim} (plural) may bear reference to the past, in contradistinction to singular \textit{‘olam} referring to the future… This observation, however, is not meant to imply an \textit{exclusive} reference of...
‘olamim to the past; it may rather illustrate the ‘inclusive reference of ‘olam (both in singular and plural), i.e., that ‘olam includes past and future.” Preuss, Jenni and others have noted the increased frequency of the plural form in Aramaic sections of the Bible. Preuss suggests that occurrences of the plural in Daniel may be indicative of a shift in the use of עולם, where the existence of the plural form refers to “period of time” or “ages.” One may speculate whether the increased use of the plural, though not necessarily referring to multiple worlds as such, might be indicative of a growing awareness of, or expectation of a temporal realm distinct from the present.

Within the Apocrypha, the Hebrew text of Ben Sira contains over 40 instances of the word עולם. For the most part, the meanings correspond to those already present in the Hebrew Bible, although there are some instances where עולם may mean ‘world,’ (3:18) ‘time,’ (4:23) ‘cosmos or ages,’ (36:22) or ‘future.’ (48:25) Preuss remarks, “Sirach stands clearly in a transitional situation with regard to the development of the term ‘olam with traditional meanings continuing, new ones announcing themselves, and many texts clearly hovering between the old and the new and thus eluding unequivocal determination.”

‘Olam in the Qumran Texts

The Qumran texts follow the trend of an increased use of the term עולם, including an increased frequency in the use of the plural. Though Preuss remarks on the increased use of the

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94 Keizer, Life Time Entirety, 132 n.84.

95 Preuss, TDOT 10:531-532. Furthermore, from the existence of the plural form, Preuss deduces that it is possible that the singular form may itself refer to a “period of time.” However, he notes that though this may be the case in Daniel, it primarily applies to later use in the Jewish texts.

96 Preuss, TDOT 10:543-544.
plural in 1QM and 1QS relative to other parts of the Qumran texts, he concludes that there is no discernible semantic change.\textsuperscript{97} The Qumran texts continue to use עולם in a manner similar to the Hebrew Bible. However, the increased eschatological concerns of the texts serve to intensify the meaning of the word as it often appears within these contexts. Hence, though the constructs are similar to those of the Hebrew Bible, phrases with עולם as a governed noun are infused with the eschatological implications of the text.\textsuperscript{98} The term is also present in the doxologies as in the Hebrew Bible. Preuss remarks, “occupies a unique place within the numerous self-designations and self-qualifications of the Qumran community. Accordingly, ‘ולם serves in a larger sense both to express the generally intense eschatological faith of the Qumran community and to qualify this group itself as an eschatological entity.”\textsuperscript{99} Ultimately, though the Qumran literature does not necessarily use the term in dramatically different ways as the Hebrew Bible, it is able to use it within attested or similar constructs and phrases to express new ideas that are not found in the Hebrew Bible.

\textit{עולם} as \textit{אומן}

In attempting to trace the use of the term עולם and discern its shift from the original meaning found in the Hebrew Bible to the one that becomes commonplace in rabbinic texts, it is

\textsuperscript{97} Preuss, \textit{TDOT} 10:544.

\textsuperscript{98} (For example, עולם, עולם, זור עולם, מנה עולם, חת עולם, etc.) Ibid.

\textsuperscript{99} Preuss, \textit{TDOT} 10:545.
worth devoting some attention to the Greek word *aion*. Doing so may shed some light on the development of the ideas of the afterlife in the Hellenistic period, which is attested in Jewish works of the Second Temple period. Sasse notes that the Greek word *aion* is infused with the Persian concept of unlimited time and that the term acquires religious significance in the Hellenistic period as the name of a god of eternity. He and other scholars note the external influences on the development of the idea of the afterlife in Early Judaism.

**Septuagint**

The natural place to begin is with the third century BCE translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, which uses *aion* and *aionios* as the standard terms to translate the Hebrew *‘olam* and Aramaic *‘alma*. Per Keizer, the LXX has 430 *aion/aionios* phrases, which should be understood in the context of the Hebrew word *‘olam* more so than the Greek *aion*. While the

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100 Keizer’s study distinguishes between the biblical and philosophic meaning of *aion* by examining its use in Greek literature and philosophy, the Septuagint and the works of Philo. In Greek literature *aion* means ‘lifetime’ as a complete(d) life, or “all time” (including past, present and future). Sasse notes, “Plato distinguishes between *aion* as timeless, ideal eternity in which there are no days or months or years,” while for Aristotle, *aion* is the “relative period of time allots to each specific thing. Sasse, *TDNT* 1:198. Keizer notes that the Greek *aion* has connotations that are not present in the biblical term *ברל.* Although both *‘olam and aion* denote time which bears relation to life, the implied ‘views’ of time (and life) are different… In *aion*, life and time is seen as a whole (total, complete), which implies a view ‘from outside’. *‘olam too refers to all of time, but this in a view from inside the temporal, and human horizon. Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 149-50.

101 particularly in Alexandria from around 200 BCE where the god *aion* is known to have been celebrated. Sasse, *TDNT* 1:198.

102 It is uncertain whether the LXX is a translation of the MT or a different version of the Bible.


104 Keizer also notes 50 additional instances of *aion/aionios* that correspond to phrases in the MT which contain semantically related terms such as ‘*ad, as well as 228 phrases with *aion/aionios* in the extra-canonical books. Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 151.

105 Keizer argues that *aion* in the LXX is a “stereotyped” rendering of *‘olam*. As such, in the LXX, *aion* is more of a symbol representing the Hebrew word than an ordinary Greek word with a Greek meaning. Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 114.
use of \textit{aion} in the (canonical portions of the) LXX for the most part corresponds to the meanings associated with ‘\textit{olam} in the Hebrew Bible, the influence of the Greek concept of \textit{aion} is perceivable. In passages from Proverbs and Psalms, Keizer observes that the LXX’s deviation from the Hebrew by substituting “before (\textit{aion})” for the Hebrew “from” or “since (\textit{olam})” implies a new meaning for \textit{aion}/‘\textit{olam}. Here, “\textit{aion} designates (created) time as it accompanies the (created) world. Thus translators have exploited connotations of \textit{aion} (‘whole of time’ and ‘surveyable from the outside’) which are peculiar to the Greek but absent from the Hebrew ‘\textit{olam}.’\textsuperscript{106} The net effect is that while the translators of the biblical text may not have intended to do so, the ideas that were associated with the Greek term \textit{aion} found their way into the biblical text as the Greek version was read and transmitted. Thus, ideas that may not have initially been in the Bible entered via the Greek translation of the text.

\textbf{\textit{aion} in the Extra-Canonical Parts of the Septuagint}

As is the case with \textit{עולם} in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX displays not only an increased frequency of the term in general, but also the increased frequency of the plural in the later (extra-canonical) books.\textsuperscript{107} The extra canonical sections of the Septuagint display the continuing shift in the conception of ‘\textit{olam}/\textit{aion} as specific physical and temporal domains. While the Wisdom of Solomon is a text that speaks to a belief in an immortal life, it does not necessarily use the term to signify this idea.\textsuperscript{108} However, we do find that \textit{aion} means ‘world’ as a physical entity or with a

\textsuperscript{106} Keizer, \textit{Life Time Entirety}, 199; also, see lengthier discussion in 193-99.

\textsuperscript{107} Keizer, \textit{Life Time Entirety}, 163.

\textsuperscript{108} Keizer, \textit{Life Time Entirety}, 188-191.
Keizer’s study highlights the unique use of *aion* in 4Maccabees where “both the noun aion and the adjective aionios are reserved for the situation *after* death.” The text, which centers on the trial and martyrdom of Eleazar and a mother and her seven sons, promises a reward for their faithfulness and affirms, “they now stand beside the divine throne and live the life of the blessed aion.” (4 Maccabees 17:18) This use of aion to refer to life after death, especially as a reward for the righteous, is an important precedent of the idea of הָאָבֶּר עַלְכֶּם, which is found in later rabbinic literature. It is safe to assume that the rabbis were aware of this idea as the story of the mother and her seven sons is retold a number of times (albeit recast during the Hadrianic persecutions) in rabbinic texts, most notably in Lamentations Rabbah, and b. Gittin 57b.

**αἰῶν in the Works of Philo**

Keizer’s study analyzes the use of the term aion in the works of Philo and draws a distinction between its use in relation to a biblical text and Philo’s independent use of the word. Though there is a difference between the ‘biblical’ and ‘secular’ use of the word, such that the former “denotes time which has an intrinsic relation to humankind and to the created

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110 Keizer draws a particular distinction between this text and the Wisdom of Solomon, where aion “precisely regards the present world of men.” Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 193.


world as a whole,” while the latter means ‘all time,’ ‘lifetime,’ and is related to the unchanging aspect of time, neither category presents aion as “world” denoting a particular space or referring to a specific ‘age.’ The works of Philo do not contain the idea or phrase of ‘two aions’ that appears in other texts.

**Aion in the New Testament**

The term *aion* has a variety of uses in the New Testament. The idea of *aion* as prolonged time or eternity, is similar to the use of *עולם* in the Hebrew Bible. Though, like *עולם*, *aion* is used in theological contexts, the development of different notions of time has implications on its meaning in the NT. According to Sasse, this is particularly the case when *aion* is used in connection to God to denote the eternity of God in the absolute sense. Where the Hebrew Bible expresses the idea of the eternity of God - God has always been and will always be, beyond the limitations of human life and perception - the NT reflects the changes in the meaning of *עולם* and subsequently, *aion*, such that God is presented not only as the creator of the world but as the God/king of aeons (understood as periods of time or spheres of the cosmos) who both precedes and surpasses creation and existence. Sasse argues that the concept of two *aions* that is found in the NT is borrowed from Jewish apocalyptic texts, where similar expressions of this idea can be traced back to the first century BCE. In addition, phrases containing the plural

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114 Rom 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:17; Sasse, *TDNT* 1:200-2.

115 Ibid. See John 17:25; Eph. 1:4; 1 Cor. 2:7. This idea may have its roots in the expression of “before the aion” found in the LXX, since Keizer remarks that the phrase is “applied precisely where the texts speak about God in relation to his works of creation: God and his Wisdom were there before the world was created.” Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 203.

form of *aion* impart the meaning of ‘age’ as a long period of time with an end point. In this sense, *aion* is connected with the idea of the duration of the world that has a fixed starting and end point as a result of the belief in God’s creation of it. Consequently, the term *aion* in the NT is used to express both the idea of eternity of God (without temporal limitation) and the duration of the world (which is limited).\(^{\text{117}}\) The meaning of *aion* as the duration of the world is also found in eschatological passages that express the expectation of the end of the world/age.\(^{\text{118}}\) The sense of *aion* as the ‘world’ itself seems to be a natural extension of its meaning as the ‘duration of the world.’ This lends a spatial dimension to the term, which is evident in instances where *aion* is equated with cosmos.\(^{\text{119}}\) The NT contains references to present and future *aions* in the Synoptic Gospels, Pauline writings and in Hebrews.\(^{\text{120}}\) The NT parallels rabbinic sources in its use of phrases such as the ‘present *aion*’ and ‘the coming (future) *aion.*’ While it is true that this new formulation of *aion* as distinct worlds diverges from the biblical meaning as unending and eternal time, “the New Testament indicates that ‘this’ and the ‘coming’ *aion* are not simply successive ‘ages’ or ‘periods’: the coming *aion* as a restored, reborn, world will in the future completely *replace* the present one, while as a new ‘horizon’ of life it is already present now.”\(^{\text{121}}\)

\(^{\text{117}}\) Sasse, *TDNT* 1:202-03. Sasse notes that in Zoroastrianism and Judaism as well, the belief in creation forces a separation of the concepts of eternity and duration. However, while Zoroastrianism developed new terminology to express these two concepts, the Bible did not.


\(^{\text{119}}\) He compares Mark 4:19 and 13:22 with 1 Cor 7:33, as well as equivalent expressions in 1 Cor. 1:20, 2:6, 3:19, where the descriptions of the beginning and end of the world correspond to each other but where one uses aion the other uses cosmos. Ibid.

\(^{\text{120}}\) Sasse, *TDNT* 1:205. For example, “in this aion… and in the coming aion” appears in Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30; “in this aion and in the coming aion” appears in Matt 12:32; The phrase “in this aion (world)” appears seven times in Paul (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20, 2:6, 2:8, 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4) while “the future/coming aion” is found in Eph 1:21. Hebrews 6:5 also shows the “the future/coming aion”.

\(^{\text{121}}\) Keizer, *Life Time Entirety*, 252.
Hence, perhaps this notion of *aion* is not entirely discontinuous with previous meanings. The NT, like rabbinic literature, did not conceive of this formulation of ‘this world’ as distinct from a ‘future/coming world’. This phrase is attested in earlier Jewish apocalyptic texts that seem to have influenced the NT. What is unique to the NT however, is the idea that the new world begins in the here and now, even though it may be imperceivable to humans.122

**First and Second Enoch**

John Collins situates the first appearance of the hope for a differentiated afterlife for the righteous and the wicked within the Jewish tradition in the texts of Enoch and Daniel.123 The concept of two distinct worlds that finds its way into the NT and rabbinic literature has precedent in the Jewish apocalyptic texts that evince such ideas starting in the first century BCE. 1 Enoch demonstrates the idea of two worlds as distinct from one another in the Book of the Similitudes (105-64 BCE)124, referring to ‘this world of oppression’125 or ‘this world of unrighteousness.’126 The earliest equivalent of the phrase יָדוֹת הָעָלָם appears to be in Enoch 71:15,127 which states “in the name of the future world,” alternatively translated as “in the name of the world that is to

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122 If the future aion begins with the resurrection of the dead, then the resurrection of Christ as a precursor to the general resurrection marks the start of the future aion. Sasse, *TDNT* 1:207.


125 Isaac, “1 Enoch,” 49.


become”\textsuperscript{128} or “in the name of the world that is to be.”\textsuperscript{129} Although the author of the Similitudes “never uses terms like last, latter, and end in a temporal sense, the events described clearly constitute the end of the present time and the beginning of a new and permanent order.”\textsuperscript{130}

2 Enoch (late first century CE)\textsuperscript{131} indicates both a spatial\textsuperscript{132} and temporal distinction between the worlds. The text presents the two aions as diametrically opposed to one another, not only in terms of their duration but also in their experience. Hence, “this aion of woes”\textsuperscript{133} or “this age of suffering”\textsuperscript{134} as opposed to “the never-ending age.”\textsuperscript{135} (2 Enoch 66:6) The text also indicates a belief that the present aion will end to be followed by judgment upon which the righteous will “be collected together into the great age”\textsuperscript{136} (2 Enoch 65).

\textsuperscript{128} Isaac, “1 Enoch,” 50.

\textsuperscript{129} George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, I Enoch: A New Translation (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2004), 95.


\textsuperscript{132} Sasse notes the use of aion and cosmos in relation to each other in the original Greek. Sasse, TDNT 1:206.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” 194.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{136} Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” 191-192. The end of the present age will also mark the end of the division of time and the great age that the righteous will enjoy is eternal. (2 Enoch 65 6-8) “The two aions here are the time between the creation and conclusion of the world and the endless eternity which follows. though this temporal dualism is interfused with the spatial dualism between the visible world and the invisible, between this world and the world to come.” Sasse, "αἰώνα," 206
‘Olam in the Mishna and Tosefta

While the Mishna and Tosefta maintain prior uses of עולם, they also introduce new expressions and present their own articulation of the idea of two worlds. The Mishna and Tosefta contain over 500 instances of the word ‘olam (218 and 388, respectively). Both texts retain the older, sense of עולם as ongoing time that is expressed in the Hebrew Bible. The most common occurrence is with the preposition ‘ל’ to denote an ongoing or perpetual state, “always” or “under all circumstances”.137 Other forms found in the Hebrew bible are attested as well.138 The use of the phrase שנים עולם is interesting since, on the face of it the expression might suggest a spatial connotation. However, the expression is used to express a temporal dimension or status that is never ending.139 The Mishna and Tosefta also introduce the phrase פמנון תורם עולם generally, as a rationale for a divergence or exception from the law. Besides the reference to the world as its own entity with an article, the phrase also conveys something about the rabbinic belief in the imperfection of this world, which may suggest an implicit comparison to the next world.140 Although the Mishna and Tosefta attest the use of עולם to express ongoing or continued time, the term is also used to express a specific time or age, and perhaps even spatial dimension. There is

137 Marcus Jastrow, "עולם," Sefer ha-Milim: Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature (New York: Title Publishing, 1943. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 1052. העלם appears 70 times in the Mishnah and over 140 times in the Tosefta. In addition to extending the duration of something, in certain contexts this form is also used to indicate the state/status/condition of an individual.

138 Including העלםמן, העלם עד, העלם אחוזת, העלם גאולת in m. Arakh., m. Tem.

139 This phrase appears 8 times in the Mishna: Yeb. 1:1; Naz. 1:3; Sanh. 4:5; Tem. 3:2, 3, 5; Par. 4:4; and 7 times in the Tosefta: Pisha 9:18; Qid. 1:9; Bek. 2:5; Tem. 2:4,16; A closer analysis may determine whether the particular state or status is valid only in this world. In other words, when the Mishna uses this phrase in connection with nazirut, is there an assumption that matter only concerns this world and therefore歳 is through the end of this life.

140 The phrase appears 14 times in the mishna (Git. 4:2-7, 9, 5:3, 9:4, Ed. 1:13) and 10 times in the tosefta (Ter 1:12, 13, Git. 3:5, 7-9, 6:9, BB 6:20, 21) This world, as a result of its imperfections or the limitations of humans, demands that some allowances be made with regard to the law. Perhaps these will not be necessary in the future?
no question that the Mishna and Tosefta hold the view of עולם as a world, including the idea of two worlds, which it refers to as עולם הזה ‘this world’ and עולם הבא ‘the coming world’ or ‘the world to come’. This is evident not only with the repeated use of these phrases, appearing 24 times in the Mishna and 46 times in the Tosefta,141 but also given the explicit polemical statement against the minim who maintained that there was only ‘one world.’142 In addition, an exegetical passage in the Tosefta (t. Hullin 10:16) uses עולם ויברוכ and עולם הבא to refer to the next world143. The literature also expresses death as the exit or passing from the world, as if the individual takes leave of a physical dimension in death.144

**Plural forms of עולם in the Mishna and Tosefta**

The plural form of עולם appears twice in the Mishna, and both are in the context of a future reward. m. Tamid 7:4 has the phrase עולמים חיי to describe “a world in the future which is entirely Sabbath-like, a rest for eternity (lit. For the lives of [the] worlds).”145 m. Uq tzin 3:12 promises 310 worlds (עולהות) to the righteous as a reward. Though we might have expected to find more instances of the plural, as has been the trend in later texts, perhaps the fact that the Mishna has specific terminology to express the notion of multiple worlds obviates the need for the plural form. Furthermore, the Mishna seems more interested in presenting these worlds as distinct

141 m. Ber. 1:5; m. Pea 1:1; m. Qid. 4:14; m. Bava Metzi’a 2:11; m. Sanh. 6:2, 10 (7x); m. Avot 2:7, 3:11, 4:16, 4:17. Though m. Tamid 7:4 does not use the phrase ‘olam haba directly, it is clear that it is being referred to when it speaks of a future world which is entirely (like) shabbat. (שבת שכולו עולם לבא שעתיד) 142 m. Ber 9:5 This text will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4 as part of the discussion of how the rabbis utilized the afterlife to establish the ideological boundaries of their tradition.

143 These two constructions appear nowhere else in either the mishna or tosefata.

144 t. Hullin 2:23 “that you have exited the world in peace”; also, t. Pe’ah 4:14; Nid. 5:15, “depart from the world” meaning, to die.

145 translation mine.
entities or in contrast with each other, than in grouping them together.\textsuperscript{146} The Tosefta contains 8 instances of the plural \( \text{עולם} \), however these are construct phrases and not instances of the plural ‘world’ in its own right.\textsuperscript{147}

The above lexical study has shown the evolution of the term ‘\textit{olam}/aion’ from indeterminate, cyclical time to a specific time and, in some cases, space. Each of the texts surveyed in this study present the term ‘\textit{olam}/aion’ in a number of ways. In most cases, the texts continue to use the term in familiar ways even as they innovate and infuse it with new meanings, which reflects the development and progression of ideas regarding time, the conception of the world and eschatology. The language demonstrates the development of a belief in some type of life or existence after death and expresses some of the eschatological expectations of the authors. Where death was once the end of the human experience, the sources indicate a growing belief that perhaps death was not so final and that there was an expectation of life after death. As such, this lexical study has demonstrated that the concept of \textit{olam haba} that appears in rabbinic literature was certainly not a novel invention of the rabbis. Although the rabbis expressed this idea in a unique manner, as we will see in the following chapters, the idea itself was certainly not unprecedented. Having traced the linguistic evolution of \( \text{עולם} \), we will now proceed to examine the conceptual evolution of the idea of the afterlife and account for its emergence within Judaism.

\textsuperscript{146} The Mishna expresses repeatedly that one must earn their place in the world to come. Consequently, is it not a given that every person will progress from this world to the next, as some people do not merit a share in the world to come. As such, it would not make sense to group the ‘worlds’ together.

\textsuperscript{147} bet ‘olamim - cemetery appears 7 times: t. Ber. 3:24; t. Zevah. 13:6-8; t. Hul. 1:16; t. Kippurim 2:12; t. Sanh. 4:11 has \( \text{מלכות עולמים} \) - eternal kingship (referring to David and Solomon).
2B. THE CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF THE AFTERLIFE IN JUDAISM: INFLUENCES AND CAUSES
Despite the fact that there is debate amongst scholars about how to understand the passages of the Bible that seem to refer to a resurrection of the dead, there is a general consensus that the Hebrew Bible, as a whole, does not evince an expectation of a post-mortem existence, certainly not in the doctrinal sense that later emerges in Judaism and Christianity. On the contrary, much of the biblical literature reflects a belief in the finality of death and the cessation of life upon the death of the individual. Nonetheless, later Jewish literature is rife with depictions of ascents to heaven, post-mortem judgment and recompense, the survival of the soul beyond the expiration of the body and the eventual resurrection of the dead. The lexical study of the term ‘olam presented above reflects the development of the belief in a spatial and temporal horizon that commences upon the death of an individual. The movement from a belief in the absolute finality of death to the expectation of an afterlife demands an explanation. Scholars have advanced a number of arguments to account for this apparent shift, including, external cultural and religious influence, altered political and social landscapes, and the need to respond to the theological crisis precipitated by religious persecution. In the section below, we will briefly survey these arguments in an effort to understand the development of the notion of the afterlife in Judaism. The purpose of this discussion is not to argue for a particular geographic origin or circumstantial cause definitively, but rather to demonstrate that a belief in the afterlife emerged and took hold within Judaism, such that the rabbis of the mishnaic period could easily integrate it into their tradition and present themselves as its arbiters.

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The exact origin of the Jewish belief in the afterlife is uncertain and remains the source of debate among scholars. While some scholars argue for an early entry into the tradition, others argue that the Babylonian exile and subsequent Persian conquest was pivotal for the formation of the Jewish belief in the afterlife as Jews came into contact with Zoroastrianism. At the same time, the prevalence of the afterlife in Hellenistic Jewish literature has prompted scholars to argue for the influence of the Greek tradition. In addition to the difficulty of isolating, and then proving, exact points of contact and influence, it seems more likely that the concept of the afterlife that emerges in Jewish texts is the result of an amalgamation of influences and circumstances, rather than a singular influence or cause. Due to the traces of both Zoroastrianism and Greek thought in Jewish conceptions of the afterlife, we will briefly survey their conceptions of the afterlife and then proceed to examine what Jewish texts convey about the afterlife and the historical circumstances that may have generated the development of such beliefs.

**Influences: Persia**

The Babylonian exile brought Jews under foreign rule where they were exposed to new cultures and ideas. The Persian conquest brought the Jews under the control of a vast empire where they encountered a variety of religious traditions along with their Gods and eschatologies. The similarity between Zoroastrian and Jewish views of the afterlife has led scholars to attribute
shifting notions of the afterlife in Judaism to Persian influence. However, the difficulty in dating ancient Persian texts impairs scholars’ ability to definitively establish points of contact and influence between the two traditions. Nevertheless, scholars note that the imagery and dualism of the ancient Persian tradition are mirrored in later Jewish and Christian thought. Consequently, in light of these similarities and the historical circumstances, Persian influence is assumed.

Dualism is at the forefront of Zoroastrianism, which presents history as an epic battle between the forces of good and evil. Angra Mainyu, the god of darkness and evil, opposes Ahura Mazda, the God associated with goodness, wisdom, light, purity and fire. The inability of a good god to be marred with evil or darkness necessitates the dualism, which scholars understand to have an important function for theodicy. The ongoing struggle will eventually result in a cosmic battle where the forces of good will emerge triumphant. Early Persian traditions prophesy

149 According to Yaakov Elman, “The official religion of the Persian Empire, Zoroastrianism, was comfortable and even familiar to the Jews, with its theological doctrines of creation by the benevolent and omniscient Ohrmazd, the fight against evil, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, judgment, creation, the coming of three pivotal “messianic” figures, the ultimate defeat of evil, the resurrection of the dead, and the renewal of creation.” Yaakov Elman, “Middle Persian Culture and Babylonian Sages: Accommodation and Resistance in the Shaping of Rabbinic Legal Tradition,” in The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature (ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165. Elman has heralded a new avenue of study on the Babylonian Talmud by placing it within its Sassanian context. He and others have argued that doing so illuminates aspects of the Bavli that were heretofore unappreciated when considered within the Greco-Roman context as was the tendency prior to such studies. For a summary of these studies, see the introductory comments and literature cited in Shai Secunda, “Talmudic Text and Iranian Context: On the Development of Two Talmudic Narratives,” AJS Review 33, no. 1 (2009): 45-46.

150 For further discussion on the difficulty studying Iran, see Segal, Life after Death, 175.

151 Though contained in two distinct entities, these forces originate from a singular divine source, which leads scholars to argue that Zoroastrianism was monotheistic despite its prominent dualism. Furthermore, the dualism helps to account for the existence of evil as a result of forces external to the good God. This dualism follows to the sphere of individuals who face the choice to follow the path of good or evil, similar to the later rabbinic idea of theKrāv Ha-Tzve and Krāv Ha-Rez. See Segal, Life after death, 173-203; James W. Boyd and A. Donald, "Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic Or Monotheistic?," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 157, no. 4 (1979), 557-588; Norman Cohn, Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 77-115.
the arrival of a savior figure\textsuperscript{152} (likely the \textit{saoshyant} of later texts) at the time of the cosmic battle that will usher in the resurrection of the body.\textsuperscript{153} Yasht 19 states that when the dead arise, the “undying” or “living incorruptible one” will come to restore the world and transform life.\textsuperscript{154}

Zoroastrianism includes a belief in the afterlife, where the person survives death and transforms into the \textit{urvan} (soul or self) to be judged and recompensed for their actions in this life. Upon death, the soul remains around the body for three days and then travels to the heavens for judgment and reward. All persons have the potential to enter heaven, where access is granted based upon the moral and ethical conduct of the individual.\textsuperscript{155} Passage into heaven requires crossing the Chinvat bridge where the deeds of a person are weighed\textsuperscript{156} and the good person is rewarded with entry into the “House of Good Thought” with \textit{Ahura Mazda} while the wicked go to the “House of the Lie” or “House of the Worst Thought.”\textsuperscript{157} Eventually, the souls will be...

\textsuperscript{152} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 182-183. Segal is careful to warn against ascribing the Jewish notion of the messiah to the Persian saoshyant, arguing that the term is used throughout the first temple period, albeit in reference to the present, anointed king rather than a future king. However, he does allow for Persian influence to explain the cosmic imagery and supernatural powers associated with the messiah in later Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman period.

\textsuperscript{153} According to Segal, “this is the most important and interesting candidate for borrowing by the Hebrews, for resurrection does not truly enter Jewish life until they have made contact with Persian society.” Though Segal acknowledges that parallel vocabulary is not a definitive indication of “borrowing”, he notes that the language of Yasna 54 “the dead will rise in their lifeless bodies” is quite similar to Jewish depictions of the resurrection (though he does not specify a particular text or texts). Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 185-186.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{156} In later traditions, the soul stands before a tribunal composed of three gods (Mithra Sraosha and Rashnu). The just soul is led before other divinities including the Ahura Mazda who reside on golden thrones. Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 186. The imagery of the soul on trial is present in later rabbinic texts such as Sifre 307, while Jewish apocalypticism also describes the righteous basking in the glory of God in the heavens and the divine throne.

\textsuperscript{157} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 184-185; Cohn, \textit{Cosmos}, 96.
reunited with a more perfected body at the time of the resurrection.\textsuperscript{158} In Zoroastrianism, the resurrection was a collective one, where the \textit{Saoshyant} will reunite the dead bodies with souls. The Bundahishn details the unification of the body and soul as well as the process of refinement that follows it, which is a painful process for the wicked while the righteous pass through easily. Nonetheless, all persons emerge purified and free from sin to enter into the “newly reconstituted earth.”\textsuperscript{159} The Bundahishn imagines a completely transformed existence and world following the resurrection. \textit{Ahura Mazda} will come into the world to offer a final sacrifice, of which the righteous will partake and as a result, their bodies will become eternally young and immortal. \textit{Angra Mainyu} will be forced to retreat and the world will be devoid of evil. The earth will be flattened by a fiery flood that will leave the earth as a perfect environment where people will be reunited with their families and live in harmony as a unified community.\textsuperscript{160} Later texts of the Persian tradition not only maintain the resurrection and postmortem reward and punishment, but these ideas are substantially developed and described in great detail including narratives of the soul’s journey to the afterlife, depictions of the final judgment and the apocalyptic battle.\textsuperscript{161}

\textbf{Influences: Greece}

In addition to Persian influence, scholars have attributed changing notions of death and the afterlife in Judaism to the influence of Greek literature and philosophy. There is a progression within the literature regarding the representations of death and the afterlife. In the period

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{158} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 190.
\textsuperscript{159} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 191.
\textsuperscript{160} Cohn, \textit{Cosmos}, 98-99.
\textsuperscript{161} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 195 ff.
\end{flushleft}
between ca. 800-480 BCE, there is a sense that something survives the body in death. While the Greek term *psyche* refers to the soul in later periods, in the works of Homer it is more aptly understood as the shade or shadow, an insubstantial entity that survives the body and goes to Hades upon death. There is no sense of Hades as the locale for post-mortem retribution, nor is there a differentiated experience for the virtuous or the sinners, it is simply the locale for the dead. Literature of this period does not attest to the notion of the prescient dead as independent entities that enjoy full lives after death. Rather, funerary rites and offerings to the dead indicate that the dead were dependent on the living for proper access the land of the dead as well as for information about the land of the living. The dead retain some semblance of their former physical appearance; yet exist in a muted state, removed from the world of the living.

The dualism of the body and soul, which emerges in classical Greek literature, gives rise to a developed sense of the immortality of the soul. The doctrine of reincarnation introduced by Pythagoras and the Orphics, contributed to the augmentation of the *psyche*, or soul, as the

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162 Segal notes the exceptional cases of Tantalus, Tityus, and Sisyphos along with a few other mythical characters in Homer’s works. Segal, *Life after Death*, 211. In this sense, the Homeric Hades resembles the biblical Sheol.


164 Though Segal points out that the idea of the immortality of the soul is not unique to the Greeks, in that the separation and survival of something beyond the body upon death has precedent in Egypt Mesopotamia, Canaan and even Israel, he argues that the “radical dualism in which the immortality of the soul was seen to be provable, beatific, and the natural goal of existence,” is an innovation of the Greeks, particularly Plato. Segal, *Life after Death*, 205.

165 Metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls articulated the idea that an individual soul might cycle through a number of lives with the possibility of eventually escaping incarnation after a long period of time in order to return to its original state. Plato later adopted these ideas. North, “Death and Afterlife,” 57. For further discussion on Pythagoras’ influences and the popularization of his views, see Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24-26.

essence of an individual\textsuperscript{167} which outlasts the body in the fifth century BCE. The immortality of the soul and the expectation of retribution following death are developed in the writings of Plato and his followers. The superiority of the soul over the body is maintained by Plato as Socrates declines to avoid death, and advocates for the amelioration of the soul above that of the body.\textsuperscript{168} In the Phaedo, Socrates maintains that death should not be feared, but seen as an opportunity to be freed from the limitations of the body. Hence, for Plato death is not the cessation of life, but rather the separation of the soul from the body.\textsuperscript{169} Plato also advances the idea of judgment after death such that upon death, souls are brought to trial following which, some suffer for their sins while others are rewarded for a fixed period of time until their second incarnation.\textsuperscript{170} Though Aristotle did not completely abandon the dualism of Plato, his notion that knowledge was the result of perception by the senses necessitated a certain unity of the body and soul.\textsuperscript{171} In contrast to Plato, Aristotle denies the pre-existence of souls,\textsuperscript{172} and seems to deny the immortality of the soul. Nonetheless, Plato’s ideas continued to influence the Greek philosophic tradition, as evidenced in the works of Cicero and Virgil.\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, these later works describe visitations to the realms of the dead, revealing not only the fate of the dead, but also the various

\textsuperscript{167} “What was the breath-soul that leaves the body at the moment of death, in homer, what was the vehicle of passion, emotion, fear, anxiety, hope or desire in tragedy (especially that of Sophocles and Euripides), now becomes the center of intellectual and moral activity.” North, “Death and Afterlife,” 58.

\textsuperscript{168} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 224-225.

\textsuperscript{169} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 225-226. As such, this prompted notions of asceticism in this life as a means of effectively preparing for death.

\textsuperscript{170} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 235

\textsuperscript{171} Furthermore, Aristotle’s idea of the tabula rasa directly challenged Plato’s notion of recollection, which is one of his arguments for the immortality of the soul.

\textsuperscript{172} This fundamentally challenges the doctrine of reincarnation found in Plato’s works.

\textsuperscript{173} Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, 240-244.
spatial dimensions of the afterlife. The Platonic notions of judgment and recompense after death continue in later Greek works as well. The Homeric Hades as the universal locale of the dead gives way to differentiated experiences and destinations for the souls of righteous and the wicked.¹⁷⁴ Plutarch’s *Moralia* not only shifts the abode of the souls to the heavens, but its ascent to the heavens functions as a theodicy and advocates for ethical conduct in this world.¹⁷⁵ Each of these elements is also present in contemporaneous Jewish literature.

**Beyond Influence: Causes and Adaptations of Belief in the Afterlife**

Although scholars have remarked upon a number of similarities between Jewish views of the afterlife and those of the Greco-Roman and Persian traditions, inferring their influence on Judaism, the assimilation of external cultures is insufficient to fully explain how and why Jewish views on the afterlife developed in the way that they did. Furthermore, even where we might suppose “cultural borrowing” occurred, it must be noted that the Jews did not simply adopt foreign ideas in a wholesale manner.¹⁷⁶ Rather, Jewish notions of the afterlife transformed over time, and it would seem that when external ideas entered the Jewish tradition, they were adapted and tailored not only to coincide with traditional beliefs but respond to particular social, political and theological needs.¹⁷⁷ The section below will briefly trace the development of the Jewish views of the afterlife and discuss the various theories advanced for why these views emerged.

¹⁷⁴ This is particularly evident in the works of Virgil and Plutarch. Segal, *Life after Death*, 242-247.
¹⁷⁶ “There is surely some influence from these [i.e., Egyptian, Greek and Persian] sources on the early Jewish apocalypses. But the ideas of immortality that we find in these texts cannot be categorized as simple borrowings. They adapt motifs from the surrounding cultures, but they re-configure them in a distinctive way.” Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," 128.
Explaining the Biblical Silence on the Afterlife

The absence of any clear statements on the afterlife in the Bible has been understood as an indication that there was no such belief among ancient Israelites. However, scholars have explained the ostensible biblical silence on the afterlife in a number of ways, with some arguing that it may not necessarily be indicative of the absence in such a belief. Segal contends that if the Hebrews had no expectation of an afterlife, it would make them “absolutely unique among the world cultures and especially strange in the ancient Near East, where elaborate ideas about postmortem existence and even more elaborate rituals were everywhere part of literature, myth, and social life”.178 David Castelli contends that “a belief in the existence of a life beyond the grave was popularly current among the ancient Hebrews, but their early writers and law-givers never transformed the crude popular doctrine into a moral and religious doctrine.”179 Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Rachel Hallote have argued that there was an established cult of the dead in Ancient Israel despite the biblical prohibitions and attempts to suppress it.180 Segal speculates that the biblical silence on the afterlife may be a concerted effort to avoid anything that would challenge the supremacy of Yahweh,181 while Blenkinsopp argues that the legislation against the cult of the dead was motivated by the desire of the state to shift allegiance away from lineage

178 Segal, Life after Death, 123.


181 Segal, Life after Death, 123 ff. Although Segal acknowledges that this may be an argument of silence, he notes that the Bible does contain language, which is suggestive of ancestral veneration and necromancy.
towards the state. Friedman and Overton also note the disparity between the archeological evidence and the language of the Bible (including discrepant views within the Bible) and argue that there was a popular belief in an afterlife among ancient Israelites, which was suppressed and prohibited by the priesthood and undermined by centralization campaigns of Hezekiah and Josiah and their resultant impact on familial structures in Judah. Hence, for Friedman and Overton, the Bible is not so silent on the afterlife as a whole, but indicates a distinction between the priesthood and laity regarding belief in the afterlife. In contrast, Brian Schmidt argues that

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182 Blenkinsopp reads Deuteronomy as an official state document so that the laws contained therein can be taken as indications of the programmatic efforts of the state. “Since ancestor cult was an essential integrative element of a social system based on lineage, it was opposed in the name of a centralized state cult which claimed the exclusive allegiance of those living within the confines of the state. The laws concerning death rites and forbidding commerce with the dead in Deuteronomy were therefore part of a broader strategy of undermining the lineage system to which the individual household belonged.” Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Polities of Post-Mortem Existence," Vetus Testamentum 45, no. 1 (1995): 1.

183 They argue that the practice of ancestral veneration attested by archeological remains such as multi-generational burial places as well as ties to ancestral lands indicates a belief in post-mortem existence. Their study also conducts a review of terms that are suggestive of belief in the afterlife such as sheol, reflow, teraphim, elohe avotav, etc. Friedman and Overton point to authorship as a means of accounting for the disparity within the Bible with regard to the afterlife. They argue that there is a continuous work within the Hebrew Bible that includes all of J and is embedded within the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible from genesis to 1 Kings 2. This work contains a large portion of the references to the afterlife as well as imagery and terminology that is distinct from other portions of the Bible. According to Friedman and Overton, this author was not a priest, but rather a layperson while all other strands of the Hebrew Bible were composed by priests. They conclude that this work indicates a popular belief in the afterlife among the people that was de-emphasized by the priesthood as it was threatening to income, status and their role as intermediaries of god. Per Friedman and Overton, the references to the afterlife in the priestly documents are either in the context of prohibitions or limitation on these practices, or source material that the authors had and included but did not alter with their own language or style. Richard Elliot Friedman and Shawna Dolansky Overton, “Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence,” in Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 35-59.

184 Ancestral veneration, so linked to the ancestral lands in rural Judah was compromised by the distance from these lands as a result of the centralization campaigns. In addition, the Josianic reforms aimed at the centralization of worship in the Temple through the priesthood, further compromised these ancient beliefs and customs. Friedman and Overton, Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence, For a more detailed discussion on the impact of the religious and political campaigns undertaken in response to the Assyrian threat, see Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century B.C.E.: Kingship and the Rise of Individual and Moral Responsibility," in Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel (ed. B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson: JSOT Press, 1991), 11-107.
ancient Israelites understood immortality as the preservation of memory and that what has been interpreted as ancestral worship as a part of a cult of the dead was, in actuality, an ongoing concern with perpetuating the names and deeds of the deceased in the minds of the living.\footnote{Schmidt argues that necromancy was only introduced in the latter stages of pre-exilic Israelite religion and this was the result of the adaptation of Mesopotamian necromancy to late Iron Age pluralistic Israelite religion. Furthermore, Schmidt contends that some texts have been erroneously understood to indicate ancestor cult practices, where they should be viewed as mourning rites. “The idea that the ancient Israelites observed a longstanding death or ancestor cult as conventionally understood (to include the worship or veneration of the dead) simply has no basis in reality… What the ancient Israelite did fear was the dreaded ‘death after death,’ the possibility that the memory of his name and the recollection of his deeds accomplished while living might be forever forgotten by his descendants, his community, or, in the case of the royalty, even his nation.” Schmidt notes that a significant shift occurred in the 6th century BCE, following the Babylonian Exile where notions about bodily resurrection, ascension and immortality become a part of the Jewish tradition as a result of a number of factors. Brian B. Schmidt, "Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded ‘Death after Death’ in Ancient Israelite Society," in \textit{Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity} (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 87-100.}

Finally, though he concedes that there may have been a (limited) practice of consulting the dead in ancient Israel, Jon Levenson draws upon the biblical text itself to challenge the contentions of ancestral worship and necromancy advanced by Halpern, Blenkinsopp and others.\footnote{Jon D. Levenson, \textit{Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 58 ff. With regard to ancestral worship, Levenson insists that had this indeed been a practice, surely the biblical narratives discussing the deaths of the patriarchs, Moses and others would have indicated as much. He calls into question the notion that the prohibition of necromancy was a late development and part of a programmatic campaign in Judah arguing that there may be indications that it was prohibited in earlier texts such as Exodus 21. Furthermore, he questions the extent to which necromancy was in fact as widespread Halpern and others imagine it to have been, on the grounds that a royal decree would hardly be efficacious in completely removing an entrenched practice among the populace. Instead of interpreting the biblical and archeological evidence to indicate a disparity between the priesthood and laity or between the palace and the people, Levenson espouses the view that there was a diversity of religious views among the Israelites, which extended to their practices and beliefs concerning the dead.}

Furthermore, Levenson departs from the general consensus that the Bible presents death as absolute with Sheol as a universal locale for the dead,\footnote{Levenson challenges the portrayal of Sheol as the universal locale for the dead, arguing that the Bible presents a blessed death as well as an unfortunate death and Sheol is the destination for those who experience the latter. Levenson, \textit{Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel}, 35-66.} arguing that there is a strong biblical foundation for the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead as a central component of the
covenantal relationship between God and the Israelites. Levenson’s position and varying notions about the cult of the dead aside, the Bible does not articulate an overwhelming belief in life after death. In fact, there are statements that explicitly deny such a belief, particularly within wisdom literature. Second Temple era works such as Job, Ecclesiastes and Ben Sira are unequivocal about the finality of death. Segal explains their denial of the afterlife as the result

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188 Although Levenson acknowledges the innovative aspect of a general resurrection of the dead as a single event, he rejects the notion that this was a novel, post-biblical development induced by the infiltration of foreign ideas or historical events. While he does recognize that Zoroastrianism and religious persecution may have played a part in the development of the Jewish views on the resurrection, they were not the root cause. Rather, Levenson argues that the origin of the resurrection lies in the Bible itself, which is rife with antecedent traditions that emerged slowly over time. For Levenson, the resurrection functions as more than a mechanism that assures that the dead will receive their proper recompense. It is central to the belief that God will keep the promises made to Israel and that the covenant will be upheld. Death is not an indication that the biblical promises will not be fulfilled, since God can and will conquer death. Hence the resurrection of the dead is a necessary and intrinsic part of the eventual restoration of Israel, which is a central part of the Bible. Levenson, Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel.

189 Though wisdom literature refers to Sheol as the abode for the dead, Roland Murphy maintains that the attenuated existence in Sheol does not constitute an afterlife, as it does not meet the standards of ‘life’ set forth in wisdom literature. Roland E. Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," in Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 101-102.

190 According to Murphy, it is precisely the finality of death that makes it so appealing, as it will bring an end to the suffering experiences in this world. Death is a relief, not a harbinger of a future reward, but as the cessation of this life and the suffering associated with it. Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," 105.

191 Though Qohelet seems resigned to the finality of death, Murphy ventures that the arbitrary nature of life and death with its complete lack of differentiation between the righteous and the wicked are troublesome for Qohelet. Nonetheless, there is no expectation of an afterlife other than Sheol. Murphy notes that G. Ogden and D.A. Garret insist that there is an intimation of something beyond death for the wise, but concludes that they are mistaken and likely “consider ‘non-life’ in Sheol as some kind of afterlife.” Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," 107-109.

192 As a second century BCE work, Sirach provides an alternative to other Hellenistic works that emerge after the Maccabean revolt in that it does not espouse a belief in the afterlife. It is steeped in the biblical tradition, and while the author acknowledges the polarity of life and death, righteousness and wickedness, etc., he asserts his faith in the goodness of God. Sirach uses the finality of death to exhort the living to repent and conduct themselves well. Though no one escapes death, the quality of one’s life corresponds to their attitudes toward death. While the righteous welcome death, the wicked live in fear of it, though not because of an expected reward or punishment after death. Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," 109-114.

193 For example, see Job 10:20-22, 14; Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, 8:8, 9:3-10; Ben Sira 14:16-17.
of an awareness and rejection of Persian and Greek notions of the afterlife. The Wisdom of Solomon stands as a notable exception within this literary tradition as a result of its statements on the immortality of the soul as a reward for the righteous who are persecuted by the wicked in this world.

Apocalypticism, Persecution and the Resurrection of the Dead

The intertestamental period (2nd century BCE - 2nd century CE) is marked by what Gillman terms “the death of death” within the Jewish tradition. In addition to depictions of ascents to the heavens, Jewish literature of this period also reflects an emerging belief in the resurrection of the dead as well as the differentiation between the body and soul, where the latter enjoys a continued existence following their separation upon death. John Collins argues that the most important contribution of apocalyptic literature to the Jewish tradition lies in its shaping of the latter’s views on the afterlife. He notes that the first appearance of the hope for a

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194 Segal, *Life after Death*, 249.

195 Gillman notes that this work reflects Hellenistic dualism and that its views on the immortality of the soul are the result of a blending of Platonic and classical biblical doctrines. Gillman, *The Death of Death*, 109-111. While Murphy allows for the influence of Greek thought, he cautions against the assumption that the author of the Wisdom of Solomon has completely adopted the Greek notion of the soul in the philosophical sense. Murphy, "Death and the Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," 115-116.


197 While some of these ideas may have roots in other cultures as discussed above, they were adapted and molded not only to be consistent with existing beliefs and traditions but also to respond to the particular needs of their Jewish authors and their realities.

198 “Hope for a differentiated afterlife, where the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished, first appears in the Jewish tradition in the apocalypses of Enoch and Daniel, and it is in this area that the apocalyptic literature makes its most significant contribution to the Jewish tradition.” Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," 119.
differentiated afterlife is in the texts of Daniel and Enoch. No longer was the biblical Sheol the indefinite abode of the dead. Instead, apocalyptic literature imagines multiple heavens with special locations for the righteous and the wicked.

Although scholars readily acknowledge the permeation of Greek and Persian elements into the Jewish tradition, many argue that the increasing eschatological preoccupation was in direct response to the specific challenges of the times. The religious persecutions under Antiochus IV presented Jews with a profound theological dilemma posed by the death and suffering of the righteous, precisely for their faith in God and adherence to the commandments. Whatever the basis for the Antiochan ban of the Torah and its practice, this crisis demanded a response beyond the attempts at theodicy that had been previously ventured, as these were

199 Collins differentiates second temple apocalyptic literature (of the second and third centuries BCE) from the late prophetic texts or ‘proto-apocalyptic’ literature on the basis of their understanding of life after death. While the late prophetic texts contain references to the resurrection, Collins argues that these are metaphorical and that belief in the resurrection was not widely accepted, if at all, during the Persian period. Hence, while the language of Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 65:17-25 may suggest the resurrection of the dead, Collins argues that this reflective of the Jewish familiarity with Persian thought rather than an actual belief in the resurrection of individuals. Furthermore, according to Collins, Daniel predicts the resurrection of certain individuals, but not a universal resurrection. Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," 119-120, 125-127. Levenson argues that Collins’ distinction between individual and collective resurrection is an artificial imposition of modern thought and that it is anachronistic to the biblical world. In addition, Levenson notes that Isa 52:13-53:12 and 26:19 are scriptural antecedents to the general resurrection of Daniel 12. While the Isianic texts have been dates to the late sixth or early sixth centuries BCE, he maintains that there are even earlier precedents within the Bible for the expectation of an eschatological resurrection and final judgment. Levenson, Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel, 200 ff.

200 Enoch’s lack of death and assumption into the heavens in Genesis allows for his resurgence within later texts that imagine his ascent and revelation of divine secrets that seek to make sense of the world.

201 Initially, the place of punishment for the wicked was thought to be in the heavens as well, although this eventually shifts to a different locale. John J. Collins, "The Otherworld in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions (eds. T. Nicklas, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 95.

insufficient to explain the suffering and martyrdom of the righteous. The retribution theology of
the Hebrew Bible, with its promises of reward for those who upheld the covenant, was not only
inadequate but also called into question the validity of the Torah and its commandments as well
as the omnipotence and justice of God. Set against this backdrop, Daniel 12 emerges as an
attempt to vindicate God’s justice and resolve these challenges.204 Preuss argues that the
expectation of a coming age and resurrection in the book of Daniel “function here as a solution
to the problem of theodicy and as an instrument for balancing things out between the good and
the wicked, neither of whom will or may be permitted to end with death only.”205 Though Collins
suggests that the expectation of the resurrection arises as a solution to the problem of the
persecution of the righteous during the Maccabean Era, he acknowledges that a belief in the
afterlife cannot be seen solely as a response to religious persecution. Both Collins and
Nickelsburg suggest that the Enochic literature was written as a “response to cultural trauma and
offered an alternative reality in its visions of hidden places and life beyond death.”206 Ra’an
Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed grant that while individual anxiety and disenfranchisement
may have been a factor in certain texts, the variety of depictions obviates a singular explanation
for the intensified interest in the heavenly realms in late antiquity.207

204 Gillman, The Death of Death, 89.
205 Preuss, TDOT 10:542-543.
206 Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," 127. Collins argues that neither the Book of the
Watchers nor the Epistle of Enoch are “set in a time of persecution, but both depict a world out of joint…
The account of the Watchers can be read plausibly as an allegory for the Hellenistic age, and the impact of
western culture on a traditional Near Eastern society.” Collins highlights the emphasis of social tension
within the Epistle of Enoch and the Similitudes.
207 Ra’an S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Introduction: ‘In Heaven as It Is on Earth,’” in
Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions (ed. Ra’an S. Boustan and Annette
Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-4.
The apocalypses of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch continue in the tradition of Daniel in that they envisage a general resurrection at the end of history. Composed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, these texts predict the coming of a messianic age that will be followed by the resurrection of the dead as well as judgment and recompense. Everyone will be judged according to his or her merits such that the righteous will bask in the glory of God and rejoice while the wicked will suffer. 2 Baruch imagines that the resurrection will restore people to their original forms and that following judgment, the righteous will be transformed to shine like stars (as in 4 Ezra) while the wicked will degrade in appearance. In contrast, the diasporic apocalypses generally take the form of heavenly ascents, and while they also discuss reward and punishment, there is no expectation of a general resurrection. Collins observes, “the focus on individual afterlife in these apocalypses was compatible with the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul, but it is expressed in mythological rather than philosophical idiom”. Hence, there are indications of external influence, but the texts bear the imprint of their Jewish authors as well.

The covenantal relationship between God and the Israelites established in the Bible engendered the expectation of justice. While the retribution theology exemplified in the book of Deuteronomy is maintained by the prophets, perceptions of injustice presented a challenge to the tradition. Consequently, theodicy is a central element in many of the Apocryphal and non-

209 See 4 Ezra 7:11-12, 17, 21.
210 Although 4 Ezra establishes a link between suffering and sin which is also present in the rabbinic tradition, E. P. Sanders notes that the rabbis also valorize suffering while there is no benefit to suffering in 4 Ezra. E. P. Sanders, "R. Akiba's View of Suffering," The Jewish Quarterly Review 63, no. 4 (1973), 334.
213 Ibid.
apocalyptic pseudepigraphic works.\textsuperscript{214} Whereas Job and Ecclesiastes abandon the expectation of justice, Jewish writers of the Greco-Roman period maintain the belief in God’s justice and its enactment in the lives of the individual and the collective. In order to account for the reality of injustice, these texts defer divine judgment and recompense until death. In doing so, these texts maintain that not only is death not an indication of God’s abandonment of the people, but that true reward and punishment are reserved for the afterlife. Hence, divine justice is intact despite the suffering of the righteous in this life.\textsuperscript{215} While some of these texts include the resurrection, most adapt Hellenistic notions of the immortality of the soul to suit their needs.\textsuperscript{216} Once again, we encounter the expansion of Jewish views of the afterlife in response to a particular problem in such a way that it incorporates external elements while remaining continuous with the Jewish tradition.

**Eschatology at Qumran**

While the community at Qumran was certainly concerned with eschatology, the diversity of materials in the Dead Sea Scrolls makes it difficult to ascertain the precise views of the

\textsuperscript{214} Nickelsburg includes the following texts within this rubric: The Book of Tobit, Baruch, 1, 2, and 4 Maccabees, The Wisdom of Solomon, as well as the Psalms of Solomon Pseudo-Phocylides, Pseudo-Philo. He also includes pseudepigraphic texts of questionable provenance such as The Testament of Job, Joseph and Asnath, and the Testament of Abraham. George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Judgement, Life-after-Death, and Resurrection in the Apocrypha and the Non-Apocalyptic Pseudepigrapha," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 141-162.

\textsuperscript{215} This use of the afterlife as a solution to the problem of theodicy is prevalent in rabbinic literature and will be explored thoroughly in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

community regarding the afterlife. Davies places the Qumran community within the continuum of the biblical tradition that expects divine justice and maintains the belief in eschatological vindication, yet its notion of righteousness attained via esoteric knowledge restricted to the maskili\[217\] denotes a shift from the wisdom tradition which is marked by the universal accessibility of human wisdom and righteousness.\[218\] The preservation of multiple copies of the books of Enoch and Daniel among the Dead Sea scrolls has led scholars to assume familiarity with and influence of these texts on the community.\[219\] Like Daniel, the Scrolls anticipate the end of the world in their time, rather than at a distant point in the future. The War Scroll depicts the community, together with the angels of God, engaged in the battle between the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness”. Good will triumph over evil in the earthly and heavenly spheres, and the messianic age will follow where a priestly messiah and a royal messiah will preside over a new age with worship in an ideal Temple. For Collins, the influence of Enochic literature is particularly evident in discussions on the fate of the wicked. The association of the place of punishment with darkness and fire and the descent of the wicked to a valley, pit or netherworld, leaving no remnant are elements common to Enoch, the Damascus Document and the Serekh ha-

\[217\] The afterlife bolstered the belief of those who saw themselves as divinely elected (such as the Qumran community) as they expected to be vindicated in the hereafter and enjoy eternal reward from God. The special knowledge granted to the teacher of righteousness and other maskilim conferred them with the authority to lead their communities so that they would achieve that reward. “No longer was righteousness, as in proverbs, learned from human wisdom and available to all who cared to look and learn. It was now esoteric wisdom, learned from God and imparted by ‘those who turn many to righteousness’ - in Daniel, ‘those who are wise,’ maskilim.” Philip R. Davies, "Death, Resurrection, and Life after Death in the Qumran Scrolls," in Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity (ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 195.


There is a lack of clarity in the expression of the fate of the righteous. Though the texts indicate that there is an expectation of eternal life, it is unclear whether this will take the form of a continuous existence or one that follows a restoration of the body after death. It seems that the writers of the scrolls distinguished the soul from the body (such that the soul or life dwelt within the body), however, it is uncertain whether they believed that the soul could continue to exist without the body. Although it may be difficult to determine the precise beliefs on immortality, the abode of the righteous and whether there would be a resurrection of the dead, the scrolls indicate that there is a definite expectation of divine judgment and recompense with a differentiated fate for the wicked and the righteous. In that sense, despite the sectarian nature of the community, their notions of the afterlife fall within the spectrum of Jewish notions of the afterlife in this period.

**Philo and Josephus**

Philo and Josephus have greatly contributed to our understanding of Judaism in the Greco-Roman age. Both of these Jewish writers exemplify Hellenism, as they are immersed in the Greek world while remaining distinctly Jewish. Their views on the afterlife are an amalgamation of Jewish and Greek elements. Philo incorporates Greek notions of immortality while adapting them to correspond with Jewish traditions on death and the afterlife. This is consistent with the overall attempt of his writings to harmonize Greek philosophy and Jewish

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220 The more traditional view of Sheol remains in the Hodayot, but Collins warns against the inference of cosmological beliefs from this poetic composition. Collins, "The Otherworld in the Dead Sea Scrolls," 102-105.

221 Collins, "the otherworld in the dead sea scrolls," 105-109; Davies, "Death, Resurrection, and Life after Death," 207-209.

belief and practice. Philo assumes the immortality of the soul and distinguishes its existence from that of the body. While he does not discuss the resurrection of the body, Philo does maintain that an eternal afterlife is the reward of the righteous while the wicked have no afterlife. Philo does not articulate a particular national or cosmic eschatology. Unlike Philo, Josephus does not discuss his theological views in a systematic way. Scholars must cull his works for passing comments and mentions of his views. Josephus’ supposed speech at the fall of Jopata indicates a number of his views regarding the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. It appears that Josephus distinguished between the body and soul, where the latter was the essence of the person. Upon death, the soul separates from the body and continues an immortal existence where the good souls are rewarded while the evil souls are punished. Josephus also believed in the transmigration of souls. Like Philo, Josephus does not discuss the resurrection of the dead, however, Grabbe suggests that he may nevertheless have believed in it. Grabbe finds subtle hints of a belief in a messianic figure in Josephus’ works and suggests that Josephus may not have articulated this belief explicitly out of concern for offending the Romans.

Josephus’ works are also significant for their presentation of the Jewish sects of the Second Temple period, where the question of the resurrection of the dead figures prominently.

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223 Gillman, The Death of Death, 111.
224 This is consistent with the valorization of the soul over the body in Plato and other Greek philosophical works.
225 For example, see Alleg. Interp. 1 105-108; Heir 237-240, 275-283; Cher. 113-114.
228 Grabbe, "Eschatology," 173.
229 Grabbe, "Eschatology," 177-183.
One of the key ways in which Josephus distinguishes the sects is on the basis of their views on
the afterlife and the resurrection.\textsuperscript{230} The varied sectarian notions of the afterlife correspond with
the diversity of views on the afterlife in the Jewish tradition as a whole. That Josephus knew of
these competing notions and that he chose to feature them so prominently suggests that there was
awareness of differing notions of the afterlife and that it may have been a part of a larger
discourse among the Jews of the time. Furthermore, Josephus’ distinction of the sects on this
basis may also indicate that differing views on the afterlife could serve as the basis upon which
boundaries were drawn from one group to the next.\textsuperscript{231}

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that within Judaism, the afterlife was never a
simple, independent strand of religious thought that sought to imagine human experience beyond
death. Rather, varying notions of time and space, the nature of existence, questions of good and
evil, divine justice and power combined with external influences and historical circumstances to
yield the rich mosaic of ideas on the afterlife found in early Judaism. If the belief in the afterlife
emerged as a response to multiple issues facing the Jews during the Second Temple period, there
is no reason that this belief was subsequently restricted to one small part of religious life in the
centuries following the destruction of the Temple. In other words, the multifaceted function that
the belief in the afterlife served the Jews of the Second Temple period continued in the rabbinic
tradition. Furthermore, the divergent notions of the afterlife within the rabbinic corpus may be

\textsuperscript{230} Whether these groups would distinguish themselves on this basis or whether this was the view of
Josephus as an outsider, imposing a distinction that the insiders would not necessarily have emphasized
remains to be seen. Nonetheless, for Josephus to highlight this as a dividing line among the sects
demonstrates that there was a certain awareness and controversy on the question of the afterlife.

\textsuperscript{231} as is the case in the Mishna and later rabbinic works.
reflective of the fact that the Jewish tradition historically tolerated diverse views and formulations on the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead.\textsuperscript{232}

We have therefore demonstrated that the belief in the afterlife was not a new development of the rabbis, but that it entered the tradition centuries prior. The notion of the afterlife both as a locale for retribution and as a means of vindicating God was already entrenched within Judaism. As such, the rabbis need not have instilled this belief in the people; if the literature surveyed above is an indication, they likely subscribed to the idea already. Thus, rabbinic texts do not demonstrate a concerted attempt to instill a belief in the afterlife, but rather, to establish that it was attained through the rabbis and their tradition. Consequently, as the following chapter will argue, the Mishna presents the rabbis as the arbiters of the afterlife who extend it as a reward for those who conform to their values and authority. The familiarity and appeal of the afterlife allowed the rabbis to establish the parameters of belief and practice for life in this world by regulating access to the life in the world to come.

\textsuperscript{232} Although the following chapter that the rabbis insisted on the belief in the resurrection of the dead, the rabbinic corpus contains a number of different and conflicting opinions of precisely when and how this process will unfold.
3. **Arbiters of Olam Haba:**
A **Close Reading of M. Sanhedrin 10:1**
The central argument of this dissertation is that rabbinic discussions of olam haba can be situated within the larger discourse of rabbinic authority and that the rabbis’ purported regulation of olam haba is part of a constellation of efforts by the rabbis to assert their authority and define post-Temple Judaism. The tenth chapter of m. Sanhedrin is perhaps the central text on olam haba in the tannaitic period and is indicative of the overall manner in which the rabbis discuss the idea. The secondary nature of olam haba itself and its functionary role in asserting the basic tenets of rabbinic Judaism and authority is aptly demonstrated in this section and persists in other texts which purport to discuss the afterlife in the rabbinic corpus. The opening statement, “all Israel has a share in the world to come” speaks to the universality of the rabbinic conception of olam haba, but more importantly, the subsequent listing of those persons excluded from olam haba evinces the foundational tenets of rabbinic Judaism, thereby delineating the boundaries of the people Israel, normative belief, and consequently, practice as the rabbis conceived it. A close reading of the mishnah will reveal how the sages understood “Israel” as well as their attempt

233 There are some textual variants among the different manuscripts of m. Sanhedrin. While the phrase, “all Israel…” does not appear in MS Kaufman, considered to be most reliable manuscript, it does appear in the Bavli and in most modern editions of the Mishnah. Nevertheless, even where the phrase is absent, I would argue that the phrase, “and these are the persons who do not have a share in the world to come” (which is how the mishna begins in MS Kaufman) allows the inference that all others do in fact have a share in olam haba.

234 Whereas sectarians reserved the blessed hereafter for their adherents alone, the rabbis opt for a decidedly anti-sectarian approach, by allowing for all Israel to have a share in the world to come. This is noteworthy, since the subsequent listings of individuals seems to be a response to the Sadducees, as will be discussed further below. Furthermore, the willing inclusion of all Israel may be seen as an indication of the rabbinic attempt to steer away from sectarian divisions to emerge as leaders of all the people. Alon Goshen-Gottstein also observes that the starting point of the rabbinic discussion on olam haba is that all are included, unless or until they do something to warrant their exclusion. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac: the Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 100-101.

235 In his analysis of b. Haggiga, Goshen Gottstein remarks that upon realizing that he had been excluded from the world to come, Elisha b. Abuya also understood that he has been excluded from Israel. Goshen-Gottstein concludes, “Thus exclusion from the world-to-come is related to the exclusion from Israel.” Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 100-103.
to establish normative beliefs, which, not coincidentally, would also help to institute rabbinic authority. In determining which persons are excluded from olam haba, this mishnah does not address individual practice\footnote{Aside from those whom R. Akiva and Abba Shaul exclude, although even those can be understood as indicative of challenges to rabbinic authority as I will discuss below.} or even adherence to the commandments. Rather, it delineates the boundaries of theology for Judaism as the sages understood it. Daniel Boyarin remarks that, “this passage... seems to be promulgating, perhaps for the first time in Judaism, a rule of faith to adjudicate who is orthodox and who not, one that would exclude from salvation many Jews who considered themselves both faithful and traditional.”\footnote{Boyarin, \textit{Border Lines}, 58. Boyarin is interested in heresiology, in particular, the simultaneous development of the boundaries of Judaism and early Christianity by the rabbis and church fathers by means of identifying heretical beliefs and practices. As such, this text is an important part of that discussion. However, this work seeks to explore the rabbinic discussions that were developed around olam haba and how it contributed to the establishment of rabbinic authority and what they deemed to be normative beliefs.} Furthermore, it should be noted that the sages have chosen to do so by means of the afterlife. In other words, the rabbis have opted to articulate and establish the basic tenets of rabbinic Judaism as normative by means of olam haba. Hence, the mishnaic section on the afterlife has more to do with this world than the world to come. While this may be true of many texts that discuss the afterlife, the rabbinic expression of the afterlife is unique in the values and ideals that it evinces. Furthermore, whereas other texts may deliberate on the imagined experience of the afterlife,\footnote{For example, the Enochic ascents, apocalypses such as 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra. While these texts may be responding to the realia of their day, whether new socio-political realities or the theological crises prompted by destruction or the persecution of the righteous, the writers do envisage the post-mortem realm. Though the descriptions of the fate of the dead were certainly intended for the living, either to comfort the suffering righteous that they would ultimately be vindicated or to serve as a warning for the wicked, these texts are far less grounded in the present realm than our mishnah. Stylistic differences aside, the mishna conveys next to nothing about olam haba.} it appears that the means by which olam haba is accessed is the primary concern of the compiler of the mishna. Thus, the Mishna’s
discussion is framed around rabbinic authority, and identifying those beliefs and practices that undermine that authority.

The Context of the Mishnah

The tenth chapter of m. Sanhedrin is notable for its unique theological content. While the form of this section, with its delineation of categories and assignment of status, is in line with the rest of the Mishnah, its content seems to be out of place within the tractate of Sanhedrin or even the Mishnah as a whole, which is predominantly concerned with matters of halakhah. As Claudia Setzer notes, “This mishnah is peculiar in its inclusion of transgressions that are transgressions of belief and imposing a penalty that cannot be carried out in this world.” Nevertheless, the inclusion of this section within tractate Sanhedrin suggests a number of things with regard to the conception and function of olam haba within the rabbinic system as well as how they conceived of its relationship to human life. First, the envelopment of this chapter within the order of Nezikin (damages) and tractate Sanhedrin (sections of the mishnah that are devoted to civil and criminal law and procedures) raises the question of the relevance of the afterlife to civil and criminal court proceedings. The context suggests a similarity between the functionary role of olam haba and that of the courts; just as the procedures and laws established

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240 Finkelstein argues that an early form of the mishna was originally an introduction to Pirke Avot, a contention which is not accepted by all scholars. Finkelstein, *Mavo*, 212-213. See also Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?*, 90 n.1.

241 Whether one understands the Mishnah as a collection of sources, a teaching manual or a law code, the thematic content of m. Sanhedrin 10:1 is nonetheless rather unique. See H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 136-138.


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in the previous chapters are essential to a just and ordered society as the rabbis imagined it, so too is the afterlife. If the courts enable a society to designate the boundaries of behavior and maintain them by imposing punitive measures, olam haba enabled the rabbis to designate the boundaries of faith and maintain them through the threat of exclusion from the afterlife and, by extension, the people Israel. Furthermore, if the rabbinic courts provide a forum to address transgressions of action, olam haba provides the rabbis a means to address and redress transgressions of faith and subversion of authority. Second, the rabbinic assertion that “all Israel has a share in the world to come,” is rather extraordinary given the fact that the preceding chapters list individuals liable for capital punishment. Thus, while the murderer and others may be deserving of death by the hands of the courts, they nonetheless remain a part of Israel both here and in the world to come. On the other hand, those who cannot conform to the articles of faith outlined by the rabbis forego not only their share in the hereafter, but are rendered outsiders among their people. It may be because while the murderer causes the loss of individual lives, those who undermine rabbinic authority threaten not only rabbinic status but also the spiritual well being of the collective community. Third, this chapter presents the rabbis as the authoritative arbiters of olam haba despite their inability to actually enforce that authority. The previous chapters of the tractate outline the Sanhedrin’s procedures regarding capital cases and execution as if the rabbis were enacting them, despite the fact that the rabbis may never have had the opportunity to witness them - let alone the authority to implement them.243 Likewise, this

243 For further discussion on the historicity of the legal proceedings detailed in Sanhedrin, see Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and invention: death penalty discourse in early Rabbinic and Christian cultures* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Berkowitz’s argument that the rabbinic discourse on the death penalty is in actuality their attempt to establish their own power and authority in the wake of the destruction of the Temple situates this mishnah and its treatment of olam haba within a larger context of authority and power.
mishna presents the rabbis as arbiters of an otherworldly domain, where it is impossible for them to enforce that authority in any discernible way. Nonetheless, as with capital cases, the rabbis declare their authority to regulate access to the world to come. Lastly, although the mishnah is generally characterized by its detachment from scripture, (particularly in comparison with the midrashic texts of the same period) this chapter of m. Sanhedrin is rife with scriptural citations. The underlying theme of rabbinic authority that informs the discussion of olam haba may be what prompts the rabbis to ground these teachings in Scripture. In their attempt to establish normative beliefs, the citation of Scripture not only lends authority to their teachings but it suggests that they are continuous with the biblical tradition. The preceding observations have highlighted the atypical nature of this chapter and suggest that there is something unique about the way that the rabbis conceived of olam haba and how they chose to discuss it. These ideas will be further explored in the close reading of the text.

m. Sanhedrin 10:1

ואילו שאה אל חק לעלום הצבאות האנויי מהים ואינן המתים תחיית אינן האומר אל עולמי לארץ את השםфессורני אפיוריה, עקרית
ואימות שאה מפרשים זוה עובד נברשת על המבחנים וארום משלים אחר שמטים בהצטיר לא אשם
עליהם כל של של העם אפרים אהיה שאה ואת המ siti והולמים:

And these [are the ones] who have no share in the world-to-come: the one who says that there is no resurrection of the dead, and [the one who says] the Torah is not from the heavens, and the apikoros. R. Akiva says, also the one who reads from the external books, and the one who whispers over a wound and says, ‘all of the ailments that I have put over Egypt, I shall not put over you for I am the Lord who heals you.’ (Ex. 15:26) Abba Shaul says, also the one who recites the divine name as it is spelled out.

244 In the following chapter, I will explore how the Bavli intensifies the rabbis’ authority over olam haba by contending that their authority exceeds that of the heavenly court.

245 Text based upon the Kaufmann A 50 manuscript

246 Although the term apikoros has been commonly been translated as ‘epicurean,’ I have opted to leave the term as is in my translation so as to not import a pre-determined meaning into the mishna. The close reading below will demonstrate that the mishna was referring to a specific type of individual, though the term was redefined in later rabbinic texts.
Resurrection of the Dead

Although the previous chapter has demonstrated that there was a pervasive belief in the afterlife and the immortality of the soul, there were varying notions regarding the resurrection of the dead. The mishna indicates that, for the rabbis, a belief in the resurrection of the dead was essential. Like the rabbis, Paul and the Church Fathers also insisted on the idea of the resurrection of the dead, albeit for entirely different reasons. As Early Christianity developed and extended beyond Jewish circles, its leaders had to contend with the deeply entrenched Greek notion of the immortality of the soul, which challenged the necessity of the resurrection of the dead and consequently, their religion as a whole. Although Paul may have believed in the resurrection of the dead as a result of his Pharisaic roots, his insistence on the doctrine was due to the pivotal role that it played in his life as a follower of Jesus. Unlike the other apostles who had learned from Jesus while he was alive, Paul encountered the resurrected Jesus, which signaled to him that the resurrection had begun. Thus, the idea was a central part of his theology as well as his authority. Although the Church Fathers may not have articulated the resurrection in quite the same way as Paul, the idea was a central part of the Church’s doctrine. “[The earliest fathers preached the resurrection of the dead] steadfastly, fixing on immortality of the soul as a hostile doctrine because immortality of the soul vitiated the special salvation that the cross brought to the faithful alone.”

While rabbinic texts do not display the same opposition to the idea of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection was also an essential part of the rabbinic conception of divine retribution and salvation. Thus, as the framers of their respective traditions, the rabbis and their Christian counterparts insisted on belief in the doctrine, which was

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248 Segal, *Life after Death*, 534.
fundamental not only for the traditions themselves, but also for their own authority within their tradition.

The mishna attests to the significance of the resurrection for the rabbinic tradition, to the extent that belief in the resurrection was a prerequisite for inclusion within Israel in this world and the next. There are a number of textual variants for this mishna as a whole. With regard to the resurrection, there are two versions of the phrase where one excludes the individual who denies the resurrection itself, while other versions add “from the Torah” thereby designating persons who deny the biblical source of the resurrection. We will consider each of these versions in turn.

The exclusion of individuals who deny the resurrection of the dead is a testament to the Second Temple sectarian divide over the issue. Most scholars view this statement as a response to the Sadducees in particular, who denied the doctrine of the resurrection. According to Josephus, one of the major controversies between the Jewish sects was with regard to the belief in the resurrection of the dead. New Testament sources also indicate that the Sadducees denied the resurrection, and that it was a point of contention among Jews at the time.

While one can hardly deny the vestiges of sectarianism in the debate over the resurrection, it would be remiss to simply leave it at that. Despite the fact that the Pharisees may

249 MS Kaufman, MS Parma do not have “from the Torah” however the phrase appears in both the PT and BT and the latter has a lengthy discussion on the matter. The inclusion of the phrase in most printed editions is like a result of the influence of the talmudim.


251 See, Josephus Antiquities 18:16; Wars 2:164-165


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have been the precursors to the rabbis as we have come to know them, rabbinic texts indicate the rabbis were disinclined to identify themselves or their predecessors as Pharisees. Even texts depicting debates between the Pharisees and Sadducees, portray these as historical groups or individuals rather than as their immediate predecessors.253 Shaye Cohen, Hayim Lapin and others have argued that there was a concerted effort on the part of the rabbis to distance themselves from their Pharisaic origins.254 We must then consider whether there was another reason why the rabbinic tradition placed such a premium on the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Beyond the need to isolate rival sectarians, we must ask why the resurrection of the dead was so central for the rabbis. Jon Levenson has argued that the resurrection was a key component of the covenant between God and the Israelites. As such, belief in the resurrection denotes faith that the covenantal promises of God would be realized when God would conquer death and

253 Martin Jaffe, “The general lack of rabbinic interest in drawing historical connections between Pharisaic and rabbinic intellectual lineages is surprising, given the great value assigned in the Mishnah and all later rabbinic compilations to delineating patterns of intellectual tradition through chains of transmission. It is therefore curious that, while there are a number of rabbinic texts that refer to the Pharisees as an identifiable Second Temple community, there is little suggestion in them that the transmitters of these texts found here references to their own immediate predecessors.” Martin S. Jaffe, Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 B.C.E - 400 C.E. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 55.

254 “Rabbinic texts, particularly from Palestine, do not identify rabbis with Pharisees. They do claim as early or proto-rabbinic certain individuals identified by Josephus and the New Testament as Pharisees; they give perushim (presumably ‘Pharisees’) the last word in traditions about disputes and present their views as corresponding to rabbinic rules; in addition, they echo concerns about purity and tithing that the Gospels assign to Pharisees. It is possible that early rabbinic literature minimizes or suppresses a strong genealogical connection with Pharisees as a group. If such is the case, this suppression may be due to a rabbinic interest in claiming to speak to and for all of Israel, to shifts in ideology or in the memberships that distinguished ‘Pharisees’ from their post-70 rabbinic successors, or to the concerns of the much later tradents who formulated, transmitted, or edited the material.” Hayim Lapin, “The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel,” in The Cambridge History of Judaism IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period (ed. Steven T. Katz; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 208. See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," in Hebrew Union College Annual 55 (1984), 27-53.
restore the Israelites to their land.255 While Levenson makes an astute argument, I would like to argue for an additional motivation behind the rabbinic assertion of the resurrection.256 I propose that the link between the resurrection of the dead and divine justice257 may be a contributing factor in the stress placed on the resurrection in our mishna. The emergence of the afterlife in the Second Temple period has often been perceived as a mode of theodicy in light of the suffering and persecution of the righteous. As such, the resurrection of the dead is a testament to divine justice, wherein souls of the righteous are recompensed and rise to a beatific post-mortem existence. This idea is reflected in 2 Maccabees 7 where the righteous go willingly to their death, believing that they will ultimately be vindicated and rewarded in the hereafter. In rabbinic literature, the resurrection is an intrinsic part of a system of reward and punishment and follows the collective judgment of all persons by God. The interconnectedness of the resurrection and divine justice is evident in the text of m. Avot 4:22:

והוא י Davidson, "Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources," 248-249.

255 “The classical doctrine expresses the faith that the God who created will also re-create, and the miraculous potentials he activated at the beginning will again be seen at the end, when he restores the flesh-and-blood people Israel to their land and station, renders justice to Jew and Gentile alike, reverses the very real tragedy of death, and ushers in a better world without it.”Levenson, Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel, 22.

256 To be sure, the idea of divine justice does play a role in Levenson’s conception of the resurrection of the dead. However, his argument stresses the covenant and the restoration of the collective Israel, while I am focusing on the aspect of divine justice and retribution as it pertains to the individual.
the creator, He is the one who understands, and He is the judge, he is the witness, 
He is the opponent in court, and He [is the one] who will ultimately judge for 
there is no falsehood before Him, nothing forgotten, and no partiality, and no 
bribe-taking. For everything is His and know that everything is taken into account 
and do not trust your inclination that Sheol is a place of refuge. For without your 
will you are formed and without your will your are born and without your will 
you live and without your will you die and without your will you will ultimately 
be given to judgment and accounting before the king of kings of kings, the Holy 
One, blessed be He.

In this passage, divine judgment and the resurrection of the dead are as inevitable as life 
and death. They are all part and parcel of human existence. Furthermore, it is possible to read 
this passage in such a way that it is the resurrection of the dead that allows for divine judgment 
following death. People who live will die, the dead will be resurrected and the living (i.e., those 
who were resurrected) stand in judgment.\textsuperscript{258} Hence, the one who denies the resurrection 
especially denies the justice of God, and human accountability. The significance of divine justice 
and human accountability for the rabbinic framework cannot be understated. It informs the 
rabbinic conception of human and divine relationships, the nature of human existence and lies at 
the core of the system of halakhah.

The resurrection of the dead becomes an increasingly important element as it becomes the 
venue for retribution. The crucial role of the resurrection and the repercussions of its denial are 
illustrated in b. Qiddushin 39b. The gemara begins with a debate concerning an apparent 
contradiction whether a person’s deeds are recompensed in this world or the next and how a 
person’s merits are calculated. R. Jacob\textsuperscript{259} is quoted saying, “there is no reward for

\textsuperscript{258} This is not the only reading possible here. Even if one were to read it differently, such that “the living” 
does not refer to the resurrected dead, but instead to those who live (all people), the equation of the 
resurrection with life, death and divine judgment is sufficient to demonstrate the link between the 
resurrection of the dead and divine justice.

\textsuperscript{259} 4th generation Tanna
commandments in this world.” The gemara further cites a baraita in which R. Jacob states that any commandment for which the Torah specifies a reward is dependent on the resurrection of the dead. R. Jacob proves his point by way of a situation where a person dies while engaged in the fulfillment of a commandment that promises long life. He argues that since the person died, the Torah’s promise must refer to the resurrection (i.e., the lengthening of days in the next world). To deny the resurrection, would in effect call into question the veracity of the Torah, thus dismantling the entire system. R. Joseph concludes that had Elisha b. Abuya followed the opinion of R. Jacob, he never would have left the fold. In my mind, this narrative of the Bavli functions on two levels. On the one hand, the text attests to rabbinic anxieties concerning the theological problem of theodicy, which are given a voice through the figure of Elisha b. Abuya. On the other hand, there is a didactic element to the tale, where even a Torah scholar, as a result of his misinterpretation of the verse, succumbed to his doubt and went astray. Thus, the resurrection is not only the venue for divine recompense, but it is also what enables the rabbis to maintain faith in God and the promises of the Torah. Without it, when faced with the reality of injustice in this world, one would have to conclude, as Elisha b. Abuya did, that there is no judge and there is no justice. Hence, Elisha’s apostasy is presented here as the result of his denial of the

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260 i.e. the reward indicated by the Torah is that the person will merit the afterlife. R. Jacob seems to be of the opinion that the world to come is the world of the resurrection of the dead.

261 The departure of Elisha b. Abuya into a life of sin is explained here and in y. Hagigga 2:1 to be a result of his inability to reconcile the suffering of the righteous with the Torah.

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resurrection as a mechanism in the system of divine justice. Consequently, the mishna’s exclusion of the person who denies the resurrection of the dead is understandable on its own terms, beyond a relic of the past, given its implications and what its denial engenders for the rabbis.

**Resurrection from the Torah**

We shall now consider the reference to the resurrection with the addition of the phrase “from the Torah” as it appears in later texts. It seems that the mishna has undergone some changes and additions, whereby the persons to whom the mishna was directed shifted in light of the current realities of the sages. In other words, while the category of “those who denied the resurrection” is indicative of a controversy regarding the resurrection, the addition of the phrase “from the torah” suggests that at some point it was not sufficient to simply believe in the

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262 Alon Goshen Gottstein contends that this is the most vague account of Elisha b. Abuya in the literature and that this story has little to do with the historical figure of Elisha. The text refers to him as Aher and not his given name, and though it states that he sinned, it does not specify any of his wrongdoings, as other sources do. As such, this is not a personal story of what led him astray, but an account of heresy. According to Goshen-Gottstein, the figure of Elisha b. Abuya has been drawn into this text that is primarily concerned with theodicy as a heretic who denies the basic tenets of the tradition. I would agree with his assessment. The lack of historicity furthers my point that there is a didactic element to this text, which brings in the rabbinic archetype of heresy who was once a Torah scholar, and suggests that his apostasy was the result of his failure to recognize one of the basic tenets of the tradition. Without understanding that future reward, in the form of the resurrection, is what is promised by the Torah, Elisha is left with a system which promises justice but does not deliver, prompting his crisis of faith. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 73-78.

263 The version of the mishnah which appears in both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli adds “from the Torah” and the Bavli’s subsequent discussion indicates that by the amoraic period, the biblical roots of the resurrection were at issue more so than the resurrection itself. Segal, *Life after Death*, 606.
resurrection of the dead, but one also had to accept the biblical derivation of this doctrine.264 This is demonstrated in the lengthy midrashic exposition in b. Sanhedrin 90a-92b that seeks not to establish the existence of the resurrection of the dead, but rather, to cement its biblical roots.

Levenson also understands the later formulation of the mishna as a response to the Sadducees who did not believe in extra biblical traditions.265 Hence, per Levenson, the rabbis insist not only on the resurrection, but also on its biblical origin stressing the idea that its foundations are biblical and not from the oral tradition. However, as Levenson notes, while these interpretations are theologically powerful, they are tendentious and often times forced. Put differently, while the rabbis may argue that there are allusions to the resurrection in the biblical text, this is not the way in which scripture had been interpreted historically. “They are, in a word, derash, the product of midrashic interpretation and not historico-grammatic exegesis.”266 Consequently, I would argue that the exclusion of those who do not believe that the resurrection of the dead is from the Torah does not specifically target the Sadducees, but rather seeks to substantiate the authority of rabbinic biblical interpretation. Scholarly debates on the extent to which such a belief existed in biblical times notwithstanding, the Hebrew Bible hardly

264 Boyarin notes a relationship between those who deny the resurrection and those who deny the Torah in the mishna. (He understands the mishna’s statement to refer to the Oral Torah) “Resurrection and the revealed Oral Torah are the major doctrinal points at issue between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Moreover we can see how these issues might be directly related, since it is an enormous stretch - if not impossibility - to find a doctrine of resurrection in the Torah, so one who does not hold with an Oral Torah might well be led to deny any such doctrine. Border Lines, 58.

265 Levenson, Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel, 26 ff.

266 Levenson, Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel, 34.
establishes a doctrine of the resurrection as the mishna in its later form and the Bavli suggest.\textsuperscript{267}

That is not to say that the rabbis believed that they were inserting the resurrection into the biblical text. Rather, the Torah contained allusions to the resurrection that the rabbis were able to reveal through the midrashic process. In their exegesis of the biblical text, the rabbis employed a variety of hermeneutic techniques to derive the resurrection of the dead from the Bible. Consequently, in stipulating the belief in the biblical roots of the resurrection, the mishna and gemara institute rabbinic authority to interpret scripture, which is the foundation of rabbinic authority in general. With the disappearance of the sects, the doctrinal controversy with regard to the resurrection of the dead may have faded. However, questions of how to interpret scripture, by what means and on whose authority not only persisted, but were of a central concern to the rabbis. The text of the Bavli confirms that this was an essential part of the discussion at hand, since this is the primary focus of the talmudic deliberation of the mishna.

\textbf{Torah from Heaven}

Our mishna evinces the fundamental belief of Torah from heaven, which included the Oral Law that was the foundation of rabbinic authority. The juxtaposition of the mishna’s statement with R. Joshua’s emphatic declaration that the Torah “is not in the heavens”\textsuperscript{268} reveals a great deal about how the rabbis understood their role \textit{vis a vis} the Torah. R. Joshua’s re-

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{267} This statement should not be taken as an indication of a position on whether there is any biblical precedent for belief in the resurrection. This is the topic of a debate amongst scholars, which I have discussed in the preceding chapter, and is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I am simply arguing that the interpretations presented in the Bavli as proofs of the fact that the resurrection is derived from the Bible are the product of rabbinic midrash. Although Levenson aptly demonstrates that the resurrection was not quite the late innovation, nor the simple result of cultural borrowing that others have argued for, even he acknowledges that the “proofs” in the Bavli and elsewhere are midrash and were not the only way in which these texts were understood or interpreted.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{268} b. Bava Metzi’a 59b
interpretation of Deut 30:12 confirms the divine origin of the Torah, but argues that it is now in the hands of the rabbis. In other words, while the Torah originated in the heavens and was at one time within the purview of God, it was necessarily relinquished to the rabbis so that they could interpret it and establish law. The divine origin of the Torah not only confers authority on the rabbis who present themselves as the inheritors of traditions that originated at Sinai, but also, the divine quality of the text is what prompts and generates the interpretative enterprise of the rabbis. In other words, rabbinic authority hinges on the divine origin of the Torah. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the rabbis of the mishna highlight this as one of the central principles that one must adhere to in order to be considered ‘Israel’.

While the mishna appears to take it for granted that the reader knows and understands what is meant by ‘Torah from heaven’, this is the only occurrence of the phrase in the Mishna and Tosefta, which leaves us with the task of discerning exactly what the rabbis intended with this statement. Abraham Joshua Heschel remarked on the ambiguity of the phrase itself in that it could be understood as ‘there is no Torah from heaven’ or ‘the Torah (as we have it) is not from heaven’. While the former iteration denies the divine origin altogether, the latter may accept the divine origin of some but not all of its parts. It seems clear that the word ‘heaven’ is synonymous here with God. However, what the mishna specifically means with the word ‘Torah’ is unclear. In the narrowest sense, Torah can refer to the ten commandments or in the broadest sense, the entire Torah including all of the oral traditions associated with it and the teachings of the rabbis. Rabbinic literature uses ‘Torah’ to refer to both of these conceptions as

269 The peshat sense of the verse implies that the Torah is not beyond the reach of anyone, and that there is no need for an intermediary between the people and the Torah. R. Joshua’s statement, as an assertion of the rabbis’ authority to determine practice, completely changes the original sense of the verse.

270 Heschel, Heavenly Torah, 369 ff.
well as a variety of gradations in between the two. Judah Goldin notes that the mishna says, ‘Torah’ and not ‘haTorah’. According to Goldin, the expression התורה (with the definite article) referred to the written Torah or Torah of Moses, whereas תורה (without the definite article) also included the oral traditions on the written Torah. Goldin posits that the mishna was aimed at the Sadducees, and since they accepted the notion of the divinity of Scripture, the mishna attempts to establish the oral tradition, which they denied, as authoritative. Lawrence Schiffman who maintains that “it is most likely that our mishna is directed against those who, perhaps under Hellenistic influence, had come to deny the divine origin of the Torah” challenges Goldin’s contention that the divinity of Torah was a foregone conclusion. Schiffman argues against the understanding of ‘Torah’ in our mishna to refer to the Oral Law (תורה שביעל פה) since, following Neusner, he holds that the expression ‘Oral Law’ cannot be dated any earlier than the Yavnean period. Furthermore, Schiffman connects the mishna’s statement on the divinity of 

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271 Goldin, Judah. "The Three Pillars of Simeon the Righteous." Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 27 (1958): 48-50. "In the time of Simeon the Righteous, Torah without the article was intended to express what we express by Oral Tradition, תורה שביעל פה." Goldin, “Three Pillars,” 48. The first Mishna in the first chapter of About has come to validate the authority of the Sages, to demonstrate that what they teach and say is not of their own invention, but can be traced back through successive links to Moses. That the written Torah was authoritative nobody questioned.

272 i.e., the written law


274 Schiffman, Who was a Jew?, 43. “It is known from Greco-Roman sources that some classical authors attacked the Torah, claiming that Moses had made it up and that he ascribed divine authorship to it only in order to assure observance of its laws. Indeed, from Philo of Alexandria and from some much later midrashic sources it seems that some Jews came to believe the same thing.” Ibid.

the Torah with the one on the resurrection arguing that both stem from the idea of retribution - specifically, the principle of ‘measure for measure’. Hence, if observance of the commandments articulated in the Torah was the basis of reward and punishment, where the ultimate reward was a beatific afterlife following the resurrection, one could hardly attain that without recognizing the Torah and the divine origin of the law.²⁷⁶ However, it seems there is something else at stake here beyond perpetuating this quid pro quo paradigm. Perhaps the rabbis are trying to establish something other than the eligibility of the individual for the afterlife. For if the rabbis were only trying to instill the importance of adherence to the commandments as a means of attaining the afterlife, then the mishna could have stated as much. This mishna not withstanding, rabbinic sources determine that merit is assessed upon practice and action rather than belief.²⁷⁷ Hence, it is conceivable that a person who fulfills the commandments will be judged favorably, whether they perceive those commandments to be divine in origin or not. Observance of Pentateuchal law is not necessarily predicated upon a belief in its divine origin. However, rabbinic interpretation of the Pentateuch is dependent on an understanding of its divine origin.

Heschel, Michael Berger, Shmuel Safrai, David Weiss Halivni, and Marc Hirschman are among the many scholars who have analyzed the concept of Oral Torah in an effort to establish the extent of what it encompassed.²⁷⁸ Though rabbinic texts unequivocally convey a belief in a divinely revealed oral tradition that accompanied the written law at Sinai, sources differ on the

²⁷⁶ Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?*, 43.

²⁷⁷ Sifre 307 and other sources detail the process of divine judgment upon death, where the individual must account for what they have done rather than what they believed. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

contents of that tradition and how far it extended. A range of positions from the maximalist view
that everything was revealed at Sinai including all of the (rabbinic) the laws and
interpretations,²⁷⁹ to the minimalist view that only the written law and a few elements of the oral
tradition were revealed at Sinai.²⁸⁰ The intermediate positions vary in terms of the extent to
which the hermeneutical principles and their methods of application were revealed to the
sages.²⁸¹ It is beyond the scope of this work to resolve this question. However, even if we assume
that the minimalist position is reflected during the period of the mishna, there is a clear
relationship between the authority of the rabbis and the divinely revealed written law. In the
words of Halivni, “Even the most conservative scholars concede that the literal surface of the
scriptural Torah is such that adjunct non scriptural traditions are required to enable actual
observance.”²⁸² The assumption of a singular divine source by the rabbis means that the whole of
Torah is viewed as a complete and perfect document. Any inconsistencies or difficulties in the
text can be resolved by means of interpretation and the unique nature of divine speech allows the
rabbis to extract multifarious meanings through the exegetical process. The Mishna itself is a
testament to the rabbinic attempt to systematize and define the laws of the Torah so that they can
be practiced. Furthermore, the rabbinic claim to be the inheritors of the divinely revealed law
expressed in m. Avot 1:1 links their authority to that of Moses.²⁸³ Boyarin remarks that the chain
of transmission is a “technology for the establishment of orthodoxy that seems to appear in

²⁷⁹ For example, in Sifra Behukotai 2; Lev. Rab. 22; b. Berakhot 5a.
²⁸⁰ For example, in b. Hag. 6b; Seder Eliyahu Zuta 4.
²⁸² Halivni, Revelation Restored, 75.
²⁸³ Boyarin, Border Lines, 30.
Judaism at about the same time (or slightly later than) its appearance in Christianity, *apostolic succession*, the claim to an unbroken chain of tradition from a foundational moment of revelation and a founding figure of a religious group.” Hence, even if the Mishna and other rabbinic texts do not originate with Moses at Sinai, the authority of the rabbi does, by means of their access to the Oral Law.

While the doctrine of Oral Torah and its Sinaitic origins may not have been definitively articulated by the tannaim, this notion was made explicit and amplified by the amoraim as is evident in the talmudic discussions of our mishna. Where m. Sanhedrin takes the expression of ‘Torah from heaven’ as a given, the rabbis of the Talmud Yerushalmi extend the scope of what was included in the ‘Torah from heaven.’

y. Sanhedrin 10:1, 27d:

It is written, “For he has spurned the word of God.” (Numbers 15:31) I have only [a scriptural proof for] when he showed contempt for the words of Torah. From where [can it be derived] if he denied even one verse, one targum, or one argument *a fortiori*? Scripture teaches, “and he violated His commandments”. Another interpretation: “for he has spurned the word of God” (Numbers 15:31), this is one who pronounces the words of Torah in a filthy place. Like this: R. Illa and his friends were sitting in front of an inn in the evening. They said, what is [the law with regard to] speaking a word of Torah? They said, since if it were daytime we would be able to see what is before us, it is therefore forbidden.
And the one who says the Torah is not from heaven. Our rabbis taught in a *baraita*:

“Because he has spurned the word of God and he violated His commandments, his soul shall surely be cut off” (Numbers 15:31)

This is the one who says the Torah is not from heaven…

“[his soul] shall surely be cut off” - in this world, and in the world to come.

It was taught in another *baraita*: “for he spurned the word of God” - this is the one who says the Torah is not from heaven. And even if he said, the whole Torah is from heaven except for this verse, which was not said by God, but by Moses, of his own accord - this is “for he spurned the word of God.” And even if he said, the whole Torah is from heaven except for this one single point, or this one argument *a fortiori*, or this argument based on analogy - this is “for he has spurned the word of God.”

Both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli perceive the individual who denies the divinity of Torah as refracted through the lens of the verse in Numbers 15:31. The verse serves as the biblical derivation of the prohibition as well as the consequence - he will be cut off from the people Israel in this world and in the world to come. Both of the Talmuds maintain the divinity of the written Torah in its entirety, but they also confer the same status onto the minutiae and hermeneutic rules upon which the rabbis base their interpretations. In addition, the Yerushalmi establishes that this is not a simple matter of how one conceives of the Torah, the absolute divinity of its teachings demands that the Torah and its teachings be afforded the utmost respect, which extends to the physical setting of its study. A parallel passage to the one in the Bavli is found in Sifrei Numbers 112. A comparison of the two texts reveals that the Bavli adds to the tradition found in the midrash and emphasizes that every detail of the text, including those derived by means of (rabbinic) interpretation are as sacred as the written Torah. David Kraemer argues, “By claiming that rabbinic traditions, too, were part of the Torah revealed at Sinai, [there is] a self conscious willingness of the rabbinic authors to equate the authority of their own
teachings with written scripture and indicates the self-assured admission of these teachings into
the canon of ‘Torah’. I am not convinced that the rabbis had quite the self-consciousness that
Kraemer imposes onto them. The rabbis believed that their interpretations elicited aspects that
were already embedded within the Written Law. As such, the rabbis did not perceive their
teachings to be so distinct from the Torah that they had to extend its authority onto them. Rather,
their interpretations were Torah, and the rabbis were simply elucidating it. Eventually, ‘Torah’
becomes an inclusive term that includes not only the Written and Oral Laws but also rabbinic
teachings.

In tracing their traditions back to Moses, the rabbis lay claim not only to the content of
the revelation, but also to Mosaic authority in elucidating the law for the people. Furthermore,
the sources attest to an intentional effort on the part of the rabbis to supplant the authority of the
prophets and the priesthood with their own. Priestly lineage was no longer a source of authority
as evidenced by the absence of priests in the chain of transmission in m. Avot. Instead,
knowledge of the law and access to interpretative traditions was the new standard by which
authority was established. Though the chain of transmission includes the Prophets, their
leadership was assumed by the sages following the cessation of prophecy. Furthermore, not only
do the rabbis claim to be prophets, but they surpass the classical prophets in that God did not


285 There can be no doubt that when the rabbis refer to Torah study that they mean more than just the
written law. This idea will be discussed further in the next chapter.
withdraw from them in the absence of the Temple. The rabbis are poised to emerge as the leaders and authorities following the destruction of the Temple because of their roles as interpreters of the Law, which stems from their belief in its divine origin. Hence, the person who denies the divine origin of even a single detail, threatens the very foundation of rabbinic authority. As such, the rabbis cannot allow such a person to remain a part of the community.

**Apikoros**

The next individual that the mishna excludes from the world to come is the *apikoros*. Scholars have noted that the term is used differently at various points in the rabbinic period. However, as the apikoros is excluded from olam haba in the Mishna, Tosefta and Talmud, we must consider whom the rabbis sought to designate with the use of this term as well as the reasons why in both the early and later literature. As will be discussed below, in both cases, the *apikoros* is fundamentally excluded for their denial of the basis of rabbinic authority.

**Apikoros as Epicurean**

The use of the term *apikoros* in tannaitic literature suggests that it is the denial of divine providence and, consequently, divine reward and punishment, which renders this person unworthy of a share in the world to come. The consensus among most scholars and philologists

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286 This startling claim is expressed as follows in b. Bava Batra 12a: R. Abdimi from Haifa said: “Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from the prophets and given to the sages.” Is not a sage also a prophet? What he meant was this: “Although prophecy was taken away from the prophets, it has not been taken from the sages.” See the following chapter for more on the cessation of prophecy.
is that the term *apikoros* is a Hebrew transliteration for the Greek Epicurean.\(^{287}\) Judah Goldin takes the infrequent use of the term *apikoros* in the Mishna to indicate that the rabbis were referring to Epicureanism here, in particular, Jewish Epicureans.\(^{288}\) Though there is some debate about the extent to which the rabbis were familiar with the philosophical schools\(^ {289}\) and the intricacies of their views, it appears that the denial of divine providence was a central and readily identifiable aspect of Epicureanism.\(^ {290}\)

In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus writes:

> All these things did this man leave in writing, as God had showed them to him, insomuch, that such as read his prophecies, and see how they have been fulfilled, would wonder at the honor wherewith God honored Daniel; and may thence discover how the Epicureans are in an error, who cast providence out of human life, and do not believe that God takes care of the affairs of the world, nor that the universe is governed and continued in being by that blessed and immortal nature, but say that the world is carried along of its own accord,


\(^{288}\) Goldin, "A Philosophical Session," 5-6. Goldin and Labendz also note the lack of definition of the term apikoros in tannaitic texts, concluding that there was no need to define the term as the audience understood what was meant. Later texts from the amoraic period include a definition as the popularity of Epicureanism fades and the audience is no longer familiar with the term. Labendz, "Know What to Answer the Epicurean," 178.

\(^{289}\) Saul Lieberman insisted that the rabbis’ knowledge of Greek Philosophy was limited and came as a result of interactions with Greeks and Greek scholars. Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine/ Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994), 1-2.

\(^{290}\) Labendz writes that despite Lieberman’s contention of a limited exposure to Greek philosophical schools and Goldin’s contention that the rabbis’ knowledge of Epicureanism was rather elementary, “Even so, this level of knowledge was certainly enough for them to grasp doctrines which they considered to be heretical, such as the Epicurean denial of divine providence.” Labendz, “Know What to Answer the Epicurean,” 178.
without a ruler and a curator; which, were it destitute of a guide to conduct, as they imagine, it would be like ships without pilots, which we see drowned by the winds, or like chariots without drivers, which are overturned; so would the world be dashed to pieces by its being carried without a Providence, and so perish and come to nought. So that, by the forementioned predictions of Daniel, those men seem to me very much to err from the truth, who determine that God exercises no providence over human affairs; for if that were the case, that the world went on by mechanical necessity, we should not see that all things would come to pass according to his prophecy. (Antiquities 10:277-280)291

Per Schiffman, “The chronological proximity of the mishnah under discussion to the works of Josephus would lead us to the conclusion that the meaning of ‘apigoros in our mishnah is one who denies God’s involvement in the affairs of men and the world.”292

Goldin’s contention that the mishna refers to Jewish Epicureans fits the context of our mishna in Sanhedrin as it is concerned with those members of ‘Israel’ who have no portion in olam haba.293 The mishna singles out a group of Jews who, under the influence of Epicureanism, denied divine providence and the involvement of God in the affairs of humans.294 Adiel Schremer remarks, “The stress on God’s presence was a vital religious issue for the rabbis, which was raised to the degree of rabbinic creed, as can be inferred from m. Sanhedrin 10:1, in which one who holds a view of God as divorced from this world, the Epicurean, is denied a share in the


292 Schiffman, Who was a Jew?, 44.

293 Finkelstein notes that the mishnah here is not concerned with whether gentiles are eligible for olam haba. He understands that the reference to Bilam may be taken as an allusion to gentile nations, but argues that his exclusion on account of his deeds suggests that other deserving gentiles do have a share in the world to come. b. Sanhedrin 105a includes a debate on the status of gentiles where R. Joshua refutes Rabbi Eliezer’s contention that gentiles have no share in olam haba. Finkelstein, Mavo, 223.

294 Here again, the issue for the rabbis is not a particular set of behaviors or a lack of observance, but rather a set of views that fundamentally jeopardizes the rabbinic system.
world to come.”295 If olam haba is the reward for a life well lived conferred by God, then reasonably, those individuals who deny this type of divine interest would not merit such a reward. Furthermore, it stands to reason that their exclusion from olam haba would not be troublesome for them due to their repudiation of divine providence. If that is the case, we must ask why the rabbis felt the need to exclude a set of individuals who would undoubtedly reject the very notion of olam haba as the rabbis understood it. It seems unlikely that the *apikoros* is simply excluded from something that he would certainly reject in the first place. Rather, the *apikoros* is excluded not for his own sake, but for the danger that he presents to others. The Tosefta presents a complementary list of individuals who are relegated to *gehennom*, where the unifying characteristic is the threat, be it physical or spiritual, that these individuals pose to the community.

*t. Sanhedrin 13:5*:296

But the sectarians, and the apostates, and the informers, and the Epicureans, and those who denied the Torah, and those who separate from the ways of the community, and those who do not acknowledge the resurrection of the dead, and whosoever sinned and caused the majority to sin, for example Jeroboam and Ahab, and those who tyrannize the land of the living, and those who extended their hands towards the Temple,297 *gehennom* is locked before them and they are judged there for generation after generation.

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296 This tosefta’s spelling of *apikoros* is found in the editio precept of the Tosefta from the 1521-22 Venice edition. The Zuckermandel edition has *ואפיקורסין*.

297 i.e., stole from or stripped the Temple
In this text, the *apikoros* joins the ranks of those who negate fundamental beliefs, willfully diverge from communal norms, or otherwise imperil the community. In his analysis of the parallel to the tosefta in Seder Olam, Chaim Milikowski emphasizes the theological nature of the list and argues that, for the most part, the list is composed of individuals who deviate from rabbinic faith.\(^{298}\) Schremer, disagrees with Milikowski and differentiates the religious sinners from social-national offenders. “Once, however, we understand the deep relation between doctrinal sin and social national separatism and collaboration with the enemy, the inclusion of both categories in one list is better understood.”\(^{299}\) Schremer emphasizes the social separateness of these individuals, particularly the minim, whom the rabbis perceived as impediments to the formation of a group identity.\(^{300}\) While it is true that the rabbis are attempting to constitute ‘Israel,’ they are doing so, in the tosefta, Seder Olam and the mishna, by means of their authority to regulate access to olam haba.\(^{301}\) Consequently, communal concerns co-mingle with the dynamic of authority within these texts. This passage conveys that for the rabbis, the threat posed by the *apikoros* who eschews divine providence, is no less severe than those who deny the resurrection of the dead or the Torah altogether. Furthermore, the text equates these with the very real threat posed by the traitorous informant to the Romans. All of these individuals stand to have a debilitative effect on the people and the community, and as a result, their fate is identical. What is so potentially damaging about the Epicurean? The assertion of God’s disinterest in human

\(^{298}\) Milikowski, “Gehenna,” 331-337. Schremer notes that Milikowski is hard pressed to account for the inclusion of the informer and the one who stretches his hand against the temple among the others who expose theologically problematic views. Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 179 n. 61.

\(^{299}\) Ibid.

\(^{300}\) Schremer, *Brothers Estranged*, 144.

\(^{301}\) In stating that these individuals are locked in gehennom for generations, the tosefta means that they do not emerge from there (as others do once their sins are expiated) and enter into olam haba.
affairs calls into question the very basis of the covenantal relationship between God and the people. The Sinaitic covenant, which is reiterated in the book of Deuteronomy, not only establishes the obligation to follow the law, but also promises divine retribution on the basis of its maintenance or lack thereof. As interpreters of the Law, the rabbis provide the measures and guidelines that enable the people to fulfill the will of God. Hence, the *apikoros*’ denial of divine providence has the potential to undermine the entire rabbinic system, which is based upon the notion of commandedness and human accountability.\(^3\) It appears that the subversiveness of the *apikoros* posed a significant problem for the rabbis who not only excluded such a person from their ranks, but also felt the need to instruct their disciples on how to respond to them.

\[m.\ Avot 2:14:\]

\[יר\ אליעזר אומ\' hộiי שקד למאת מק שתsignificant ר\' לאפיקורוס וודו לפקמי מית אהת unlawful מית אהב מית מית\\

R. Eliezer says, be eager to learn [Torah], and know what to respond to an *apikoros*, and know before whom you toil, and who is your employer\(^3\)

In this text, R. Eliezer’s exhortation for diligence in Torah study is accompanied by the admonition to be prepared with how to respond to the challenge of the *apikoros*. Goldin astutely observes that unlike other passages in m. Avot, the text does not say ‘beware of the Epicurean’ but rather be learned so that you may know what to respond to the Epicurean.\(^4\) This indicates that not only were the rabbis aware of the challenge posed by Epicureanism, but that the *apikoros*...

\(^{3}\) Setzer writes that the acceptance of Epicurean ideas “undercuts the rabbinic system where God is the creator and sustainer, who rewards and punishes humans for their deeds.” Furthermore, the Jewish Epicurean posed a particular problem for the rabbis since they probably had a number of shared ideals but for their denial of divine providence. For Setzer, the “Rabbis probably experienced ambivalence towards Epicureanism as a popular, competing philosophy that outwardly shares their ethics and way of life, but dangerously removes Providence from the world of human affairs.” Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body*, 42-43.

\(^{3}\) Other versions also add: *שמעת ל\' שכר פ𝖖ולתך* - who will pay you the reward for your labor.

was likely in their midst\textsuperscript{305} and that the inevitability of contact with Epicurean views necessitated a systematic response. The latter part of R. Eliezer’s statement alludes to the relationship with God, offering a counterpoint to the Epicurean denial of divine providence. Jenny Labendz notes that whereas the m. Avot text seeks to provide a response to the \textit{apikoros}, the m. Sanhedrin text warns of the consequences of being an \textit{apikoros},\textsuperscript{306} namely the loss of olam haba. The aspect of divine providence was such a fundamental part of the rabbinic system that its denial automatically rendered the individual as non-Israel.

\textit{Apikoros in the Talmud}

While tannaitic literature excludes the \textit{apikoros} for the denial of divine providence, the evolution of the term in later literature suggests that the \textit{apikoros} is excluded from olam haba for their refusal to recognize rabbinic authority. As discussed above, scholars are in agreement that it is likely that the tannaim were familiar enough with Epicureanism to find fault with its rejection of divine providence. In later centuries, the dwindling influence of Epicureanism and other Greek philosophical schools resulted in some ambiguity in the use of the term \textit{apikoros}, as the amoraim likely had no contact with actual Epicureans. As Labendz writes, “A gap of a century or more separated amoraim from popular Epicureanism. Therefore, neither Palestinian nor Babylonian amoraim ever encountered any Epicureans, a fact which either generated or reinforced the sense that these Rabbis were not bound to maintain that \textit{’apiqoros} meant

\textsuperscript{305} Labendz maintains that Epicureans were not only present in Palestine during the Tannaitic period, but that they avidly missionized. “Every adherent and convert was charged with the task of missionizing, and many travelled with Epicurean pamphlets to distribute.” Labendz argues that the rabbis would have been targets of Epicurean missionizing. Though she acknowledges that the mishnah does not indicate that such debates took place in actuality, Labednz finds significance in the text’s indication that the rabbis imagined such debates. Labendz, ” Labendz, “Know What to Answer the Epicurean,” 177-180.

\textsuperscript{306} Labendz, “Know What to Answer the Epicurean,” 181.
Epicurean, even if they understood the historical and philological meaning of that term."

Consequently, according to Labendz, the rabbis discerned the negative aspect of the term and they were free to redefine it as they saw fit. The amoraic redefinition of the term is evident in the Yerushalmi and the Bavli, as the examples of what constitutes an *apikoros* in both texts diverges from that of our mishna. Labendz’s diachronic study of the term reveals that while initially, the early amoraim identified an apikoros as one who rejected the divine origin of the Torah or neglected Torah study, “over the course of subsequent generations, the meaning of ‘*apiqoros* focuses increasingly upon an irreverence for learning or for teachers.”

*y. Sanhedrin 10:1 (27d):*

אפילו רבי יהודה הלוי, והאמר רבי אבר בא בר אבר לבוש של אברים כים, שתרבון אחר
והיה אמר רבי רבה של אבר, אמר רבי יוחנן רבי האפיקורוס
וכלן נתרעמו מהן, אחד שנתרעםokies ימים
אמר חד נחמיה בר שמואל ורבי אלעזר ורבי.mar
הוא דבגויה מוצא אתן מינה ליה מעבר דאת
גבי על אף תבן מלא,他说 הוא לביית
אמר וחהנה כהלא
The *apikoros*. R. Yohanan and R. Eleazar; one said, like those who say, ‘that book’ and the other said, like those that say ‘those rabbis’. R. Eleazar and R. Samuel b. Nahman; one said, [This is likened to] a pile of stones, when one of them is shaken all of them are shaken. The other one said, [this is likened to] a house full of straw, even if you remove it from there, you will find that it has weakened the walls.

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307 Labendz, “Know What to Answer the Epicurean,” 176.

308 As noted earlier, the mishna does not actually define the meaning of apikoros, it appears that a definition was unnecessary. However, this is not the case when the term appears in the Bavli and Yerushalmi, where not only is there a need to define the term, but it comes to signify something other than an Epicurean or follower of Epicureanism. “The tannaitic suggestions that the ‘*apiqoros* is a denier of divine providence or retribution are nowhere to be found in amoraic literature. Rather what survived in amoraic literature was [a] tradition about Epicurean irreverence.” Labendz, “Know What to Answer the Epicurean,” 193.

309 Ibid. Labendz argues that there is a foundation for the association of Epicureanism with irreverence that can be found in Cicero’s criticism of Epicurus. She also demonstrates that the conflation of the term apikoros with the (unrelated) Aramaic word ‘*afqiruta*, meaning irreverence or disrespect for a teacher, in the Bavli solidified this perception of the apikoros.
In this text, the *apikoros* is identified as one who demonstrates disrespect for authority. He dismisses the Torah and the rabbis by speaking of them in a contemptuous manner. The text continues to explain why this is problematic in that the disrespect seems to indicate the rejection of authority that has the potential to undermine the entire group from within just as an unstable pile of rocks or a house full of straw. The identification of Korah as an *apikoros* in the subsequent discussion of the Yerushalmi is also very telling. The text presents a dialogue between Korah and Moses regarding the details of the laws concerning *tzitzit*, *mezuzah* and leprosy. Korah does not dispute the commandments themselves, but rather the interpretations of the laws that dictate their observance. Furthermore, Korah’s dialogue is with *Moshe Rabbeinu*, our rabbi/teacher Moses. The biblical narrative presents Korah as vying for authority and prompting others to question the legitimacy of Moses and Aaron as leaders. Korah and his followers charge Moses and Aaron, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord’s congregation?”

(Numbers 16:3) The identification of Korah as an apikoros confers a particular dimension to the term, namely the repudiation of rabbinic authority. If Korah is an individual who questions the authority of Moses, the paradigmatic rabbi, charging that he is no different from any other in the group, then the apikoros is an individual who questions the authority of the rabbis who incidentally, trace their authority back to Moses.

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310 JPS Translation

311 The Yerushalmi labels Korah an apikoros and has Korah declare that “the torah is not from heaven and Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not a high priest” following his debate with Moses. (y. Sanhedrin 10:1, 27d) While the apikoros may share the views that the Torah is not from heaven, this alone is not the distinguishing characteristic of the apikoros for the Yerushalmi. What is at issue is the apikoros’ refusal to recognize the authority of the rabbis, or in the case of Korah, that of Moses and Aaron. Furthermore, the text’s juxtaposition of Torah from heaven with authority of leaders may suggest the relationship between these two elements in that the rabbis’ (and Moses’) authority stem from their unique access to the traditions attached to the Torah from heaven.
The characterization of the *apikoros* as someone who shows contempt for the sages continues in the Bavli. In this section on b. Sanhedrin 99b-100a, a number of different opinions are presented for what constitutes an *apikoros*:312

Rav and R. Hanina said, this is one who denigrates a sage.
R. Yohanan and R. Joshua said, this is one who denigrates his fellow in front of a sage.313
R. Joseph said, like one who says ‘how have the rabbis benefitted us? They study scripture for themselves and they learn/teach [the oral law] for themselves’.
Abaye said, this is like one who sits in front of his teacher and he recalls a tradition from another source and he says, ‘we said this over there’ and he did not say, ‘thus said master’.
Rava said, it is like the household of Benjamin the doctor who say, ‘how have the rabbis benefitted us? They have never permitted for us the raven nor prohibited for us the dove’.315
Rav Papa said, like the one who says ‘those rabbis!’
R. Nahman said, this is one who calls his teacher by his name.

As with the Yerushalmi, there is no trace of the denial of divine providence, instead, the essential characteristic of an *apikoros* is that he shows disdain for the sage. At first glance, none of these acts seem so egregious that one ought to lose their share in the world to come. However, there is an underlying denial of the sages’ authority and status that is expressed in these behaviors. Kalmin argues that the Bavli’s antagonistic portrayal of interactions between the *apikoros* and

312 The Bavli also contends with a tradition from m. Avot 3:11 which includes a different list of individuals who forego their share in the world to come. (Unlike our mishnah, these individuals commit sins of action rather than faith) The gemara here engages in a discussion that attempts to distinguish between the *apikoros* and *מתליגים פנים התורה* - alternatively translated as one who teaches things not in accord with the Law, or one who acts brazenly in front of Torah sages. In the interest of clarity, I have opted to single out the statements that refer to the *apikoros* as the remainder of the Bavli’s discussion is not relevant to our discussion.

313 Acting improperly, even to a friend, in front of a sage is a mark of disrespect.

314 By failing to attribute the teaching properly, he shows disrespect to his teacher.

315 Since the Torah already prohibits eating the raven and allows the consumption of the dove, they are saying that the rabbis are useless, they have taught nothing since these are already the laws of the Torah.
the rabbis is reflective of the Babylonian rabbis' seclusion from non-rabbis.\textsuperscript{316} In the Babylonian context, the rabbis were set apart by their knowledge and mastery of Torah. As such, the rabbi was the living embodiment of Torah and needed to be treated accordingly. Those who refused to do so were essentially denying the unique stature of the sage and denouncing their authority in the community.

The tradition that the \textit{apikoros} has no share in the world to come was maintained throughout rabbinic literature even as the term was redefined to reflect the current opponents of the rabbis. In other words, the amoraim inherited a tradition that an apikoros has no share in the world to come. With no point of reference for what the historical \textit{apikoros}/Epicurean may have been, the rabbis must explain what is so egregious about the apikoros that he merits to be excluded from olam haba. Their conclusion, that the apikoros has no share due to his failure to abide by rabbinic authority, is indicative of the rabbinic attempt to establish authority and the central tenets of rabbinic Judaism by means of olam haba.

\textbf{External Books}

R. Akiva says, also the one who reads from external books

In light of the overall context, the mishna’s addendum, which excludes persons who read from ‘external books’, should be understood as a statement about the rabbinic authority to establish canon. Consequently, the person who denies this authority forsakes their portion in the world to come. This conclusion will be explained below as we consider two important elements

\textsuperscript{316} Richard Kalmin, \textit{The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity} (New York: Routledge, 1999), 35.
of the mishna’s statement; namely, what is meant by חיצונים ‘external books’ and what is the nature of the prohibition.317

Much has been written about the establishment of canon by the rabbis. Early scholarship318 adhered to the idea that a group of rabbis convened at Yavneh following the destruction of the Temple around 90 CE and established a definitive canon. This theory was based upon a few rabbinic texts319 on the canonical status of several books of the Hebrew Bible. Current scholarship is more skeptical,320 and while scholars acknowledge that the rabbis debated the canonical status of certain books at various points in time, they understand that the canonical

317 i.e., what does the mishna mean by כריא ‘read’?

318 “H. Graetz first cautiously proposed and defended the theory in his Excursus to Qoheleth (1871:155–56), a theory later stated positively by F. Buhl, H. E. Ryle, Robert Pfeiffer, O. Eissfeldt, and others. By the hypothesis, based on an interpretation of m. Yad. 3:5, the OT canon was closed for all time by the specific religious authority of 72 elders when R. Eleazar ben Azaria became head of the Academy at Yavneh about A.D. 90.” Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia (Jabneh), Council of," The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary 3:634. Though there was no definitive proof for this hypothesis, early scholars readily accepted the idea.

319 m. Yad. 3:5; t. Yad. 2:13-14; b. Meg. 7a; b. Shabbat 13b, 30b; b. Bava Batra 14b contains a list of the canonical books and their order, though there is no mention of a council or voting.

320 There is no indication of such a council in Josephus or any other external sources. While there are a few rabbinic texts that debate the canonical status of certain books, even scholars like Schaefer who find these to be historical in nature, caution against drawing expansive conclusions that are not supported by the literature. The sources attest a debate on the status of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, hence scholars have noted that the discussions on canon are restricted to very few books rather than a large scale deliberation on all the books that comprise the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, Lewis and others have noted that there is no indication of a vote or any other decision being made in these texts. It seems that the rabbis took up the discussion on the status of these books at different points in time, even well after they seem to have been accepted into the canon. Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," in The Canon Debate (ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 152-153; On the question of the council at Yavneh, see Lewis, "Jamnia (Jabneh), Council of"; Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," 146-162; D. E. Aune, "On the Origins of the "Council of Javneh" Myth," Journal of Biblical Literature 110, no. 3 (1991): 491-493; Sid Z. Leiman, “The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence,” Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 47 (2nd ed.;1991):1-242; Jack P. Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?," Journal of Bible and Religion 32, no. 2 (1964): 125-132; James A. Sanders, "The Issue of Closure in the Canonical Process," in The Canon Debate (ed. Lee M. MacDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 252-263; James A. Sanders, “The Canonical Process,” in The Cambridge History of Judaism IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period (ed. Steven T. Katz; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 230-243; Solomon Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures," in Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 3 (1931) 121-158; Solomon Zeitlin, "Jewish Apocryphal Literature," The Jewish Quarterly Review 40, no. 3 (1950):223-250.
process was a gradual one that was initiated well before the rabbinic period\textsuperscript{321} and finalized during the tannaitic period.\textsuperscript{322} Some scholars believe that the canonization of the Torah and Prophets took place at an early stage (mid-fifth century BCE), while others, prompted by the literature found at Qumran, argue that the Hebrew canon was more fluid and remained that way for quite some time.\textsuperscript{323} Furthermore, the existence of numerous Jewish groups and communities throughout Palestine and the Diaspora resulted in a number of different lists\textsuperscript{324} of sacred texts as each group produced and maintained literature that was meaningful to them and suited their


\textsuperscript{322} “Near the end of the second century the authorities become explicit in giving the number of biblical books as twenty-two or twenty-four. This evidence begins with the list of books of Melito but it is also continued in Church Fathers like Origen and Jerome who were directly influenced by Palestinian sources. The Bavli, in Baba Bathra 14-15, and a host of Midrashic texts also speak of twenty-four books. These would prohibit our thinking of an open canon as late as the latest talmudic discussions.” Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?,” 132. Lightstone states, “The tripartite division of scripture into Torah, Prophets and Writings is already assumed by the Mishnah (ca. 200CE), the first Rabbinic document.” He argues that the statements of m. Rosh Hashanah 4:6 on verses to be read during the musaf service on Rosh Hashanah assume the tripartite division of scripture. Lightstone, "The Rabbis' Bible," 180.

\textsuperscript{323} Kraemer, "The Formation of Rabbinic Canon," 614.

\textsuperscript{324} I do not mean to imply that each group had an explicit “canon” or even a formal list of books they deemed to be sacred. Rather, each group would turn naturally to those texts that reflected their needs and/or experiences. In addition, some groups also produced their own literature, such as the Qumran community, which became a part of that community’s “canon”. Zevit argues for the distinction between implicit and explicit canon. This is an important point, as the formal and deliberate establishment of canon by a council is a later phenomenon. Nonetheless, there were texts that were deemed sacred and maintained long before any such process occurred. Zevit’s notion of an implicit canon, which may or may not have been formalized and closed at a later point, is a better model given the historical and social realities of the time. Zevit, "The second-third century canonization of the hebrew bible and its influence on christian canonizing,"
particular needs.\textsuperscript{325} James Sanders states, “review of the full spectrum of Early Jewish literature and history has shown that the canonical process was ‘highly multiform’ in the scattered and diverse Jewish communities in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods.”\textsuperscript{326} In addition, “the diversity within early Judaism clarifies the evidence indicating a multiple-track canonical process.”\textsuperscript{327} This is not to say that each of these canons was entirely unique.\textsuperscript{328} Not only is there an indication that a core set of texts was shared among various groups, but the division of Hebrew Scriptures into Torah and Prophets is attested.\textsuperscript{329}

As one of these such groups, the rabbis also determined which of the literature they deemed sacred. Despite the unlikelihood of the council at Yavneh, it is safe to say that the tannaim were engaged in the process of canonization.\textsuperscript{330} The rabbis excluded a number of texts on the basis of their belief that prophecy had ceased,\textsuperscript{331} and engaged in the interpretation of

\textsuperscript{325} Zevit discusses the different collections of Jewish groups and communities and concludes that “this attests to the emergence of different ‘literary entities among contemporaneous Jewish groups.” Zevit, "The Second-Third Century Canonization of the Hebrew Bible," 140-141.

\textsuperscript{326} Sanders, "The Canonical Process," 238.

\textsuperscript{327} Sanders, "The Canonical Process," 241.

\textsuperscript{328} “Statements in Philo, Josephus and Ben Sira along with the various Greek scriptures and Qumran texts do indicate that different Jewish communities in geographically diverse locations share a core collection of books.” Zevit, "The Second-Third Century Canonization of the Hebrew Bible," 150.

\textsuperscript{329} A group of texts that would later comprise the Writings, or Hagiographia, also existed although this division of texts remained rather fluid and this title came about at a later point in the rabbinic period. Sanders, "The Canonical Process," 234, 237-238.

\textsuperscript{330} Lewis notes, “Albert Sundberg recognizes that the ‘Council of Jamnia’ hypothesis is dead. At the same time, still contending that the Hebrew tripartite canon was probably fixed between 70 and 135 CE.” Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," 162. Sanders gives a slightly later date, arguing that the Ketuvim were fixed following the Bar Kokhba revolt. “Given that the Ketuvim of the Jewish canon, excepting only the book of Daniel, have as a major common trait reflection on God’s past involvements in Israel’s history, or on wisdom, but not on any further or future divine intervention in history, the closing of the Jewish canon would make most sense after the Bar Kochba debacle.” Sanders, "The Issue of Closure," 258.

\textsuperscript{331} “A tenet of rabbinic Judaism that separated it from other forms of Judaism (those at Qumran, those who produced the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Christianity) was the rabbinic belief that prophecy or divine revelation/intervention in history ceased in the Persian period.” Sanders, "The Canonical Process," 235.
Scripture in their own way. While George F. Moore understood R. Akiva’s prohibition of external books to be directed at heretical books, specifically the Christian Gospels, Louis Ginzberg convincingly argues against such a view and understands this statement to be solely about books that were deemed outside the canon by the rabbis despite not being heretical in nature. Steven T. Katz argues against Ginzberg noting that “R. Akiba’s ire, mentioned in this context, could hardly be generated merely by the non-canonical status of these ‘outside’ books, and suggests that the books were offensive for still other reasons. This inference is particularly reinforced by the context, that is, by the other “heretical” acts mentioned in the Mishnah… Moreover, it is hard to conceive of being punished with ‘no share in the world to come’ merely for reading non-heretical ‘outside books’.” Contra Katz, I would argue that, if we understand m. Sanhedrin 10:1 in the context of rabbinic authority, then the exclusion of someone who denies the rabbis the authority to determine the canon of the tradition is quite fitting. This mishna does not attempt to regulate behavior, but rather to establish the boundaries of the tradition and its central tenets. R. Akiva’s statement concerning external books is a clear indication that the rabbis had demarcated the boundaries of the canon and that they expected their adherents to abide by it. To continue to engage with literature that the rabbis deemed ‘external’ to the tradition was, essentially, to negate the rabbis’ authority to establish canon. It should be noted that this is not a blanket prohibition against all non-sacred works, as the rabbis do allow the reading of secular

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literature. Rather, this is a ban against books that might otherwise be considered sacred but for the rabbis’ determination that it was not a part of the canon.

The distinction between what the mishna terms ‘external books’ and secular literature is evidenced in y. Sanhedrin 10:1, 28a:

R. Akiva says, also the one who reads from external books such as the books of Ben Sira or Ben La’ana. However, the books of Homer and all books that are written from now on, one who reads from them it is as if he reads from a letter. What is the reason for this? ‘And further, from these, my son, be careful’ (Ecc 12:12) They are given for reading [but] for painful study they are not given.

The Yerushalmi clearly understands R. Akiva’s statement to refer to extra-canonical rather than secular books. In explaining the mishna, the Talmud specifies Ben Sira as an example of what is prohibited. The status of Ben Sira as a non-canonical work is established in t. Yad. 2:13:

The Gospels, and the books of heretics do not defile the hands; The books of Ben Sira and all books written from now on do not defile the hands.

The tosefta equates Ben Sira with other works composed during the time of the rabbis. Unlike heretical works, these are excluded on the basis of when they were composed. In other words,

334 This reference is unclear. Moore understands this as a reference to Jesus, and therefore the reading of the Gospels is prohibited. However Ginzberg disagrees with his reading. See Ginzberg, "Some Observations," 121-122 n.18. Lieberman has based upon Ginzberg’s Yerushalmi Fragments from the Genizah) and states, “We are not able to identify the man, nor can we accept the various emendations of modern scholars.” Lieberman, Hellenism in Jewish Palestine, 108 n.53. See also Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture, 181-182 n. 370.

335 Jastrow translates the phrase “they are good for recitation, not painful study”. This denotes a lesser quality to these books, which may be read, but should not be a source for serious study.
Ben Sira is not in the same category as the Gospels or other heretical works, suggesting that the issue is not its content, but rather its composition after the cessation of prophecy. The text of the Yerushalmi distinguishes Ben Sira from the works of Homer and other secular literature. Hence, Ben Sira is neither entirely profane nor is it sacred. Perhaps this is precisely the problem, in that were it not for the rabbis’ designation of its non-canonical status it might otherwise have been considered an important source of Jewish wisdom. This is evident as the rabbis are not only familiar with the work of Ben Sira, but there are references to the work in rabbinic literature. The simultaneous prohibition and use of the work by the rabbis is puzzling. Solomon Zeitlin argues that the ban against Ben Sira was made as the rabbis were engaged in establishing the canon. However, “when the Hebrew Canon had been well established and there was no longer any fear of introducing other books into the canon, the ban automatically disappeared and therefore we find that the rabbis in the Talmud and the Midrash quote passages

336 Labendz notes, “The Book of Ben Sira is separate from the Christian and heretical books, probably because the rabbis consider it a Jewish book (That is, it was written and studied by Jews and is a legitimate source of Jewish wisdom), but it is still unequivocally not canonical.” Jenny R. Labendz, “The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature,” *AJS Review* 30, no. 2 (2006): 351.

337 “The Book of Ben Sira was excluded on the principle that it was written after prophecy had ceased in Israel. Haggai, Zecharia and Malachi were the last prophets.” Zeitlin, "Jewish Apocryphal Literature," 232.

338 Zeitlin remarks: “a book like Ben Sira was under the ban because it was a book of wisdom similar to the Book of Proverbs.” Zeitlin, "Jewish Apocryphal Literature," 232. Labendz argues that the Yerushalmi includes Ben Sira in the ban while excluding Homer and other works because “Ben Sira posed a particular threat because it was, in fact, being confused with scripture or was particularly strongly determined as canonical by the Christians in Palestine.”Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 355 n.37. In other words, the rabbis singled out Ben Sira because Jews might have otherwise deemed it as sacred, or they did so as a reaction to its inclusion in the Christian canon.

339 “… rabbis certainly were reading and citing Ben Sira as Scripture.” Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture*, 88. For further on the use of Ben Sira in rabbinic texts, see Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 347-392.
from Ben Sira.” Unlike Zeitlin who understands the ban to arise out of a particular time, Sid Z. Leiman and Labendz resolve the contradiction by explaining that the nature of the prohibition was not to ban Ben Sira altogether but to differentiate it from sacred scripture. Therefore, the use of the verb קרא, in R. Akiva’s statement suggests that one may not read from Ben Sira in the same manner that one reads from מקרא, or scripture. As Ginzberg argues, “not the reading of the Apocrypha was prohibited by Rabbi Akiba, but their use in the synagogues and houses of study for public service or instruction.”

Whereas the Yerushalmi construes Rabbi Akiva’s statement to refer to extra-canonical books, the text of the Bavli is not quite as clear.

b. Sanhedrin 100b:

רב אליעזר אוסר: את הכתבים מן ספרי ווסמאר learners. חכמים: ספרי מניין. רב יוסף אוסר: ספרי בן

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340 Zeitlin, "Jewish Apocryphal Literature," 232-233. Zeitlin acknowledges that the Bavli preserves a statement from R. Joseph (Amora, 4th century) which forbids the reading of Ben Sira, which he assumes is based upon R. Akiva’s statement in m. Sanh. 10:1. However Zeitlin remarks that in the ensuing discussion in the Bavli (Sanh. 100b) R. Joseph is unable to provide a reason for the prohibition and concludes that the “good” passages of Ben Sira may be read and interpreted.

341 “The purpose of the ban was to maintain the integrity of Scripture by differentiating it from uninspired literature; the two were not to be treated alike.” Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture, 87. Also, Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 355.

342 Labendz’s careful study of the use of Ben Sira in rabbinic literature draws upon Yaakov Sussman’s work on orality in rabbinic literature and argues that Ben Sira is used and referred to as an oral source rather than as a written source (reserved only for scripture). “Sussman brings abundant evidence to show that the rabbis only refer to themselves reading, citing from a written source, or looking at a ‘book’ with reference to the Bible. All else was ‘said’ or ‘recited’ or ‘taught’ orally… The citations of Ben Sira in Palestinian literature therefor mark Ben Sira as non canonical.” Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 354-355. Labendz’s study distinguishes between the use of Ben Sira in Palestinian and Babylonian sources in that the Palestinian rabbis had uninterrupted access to the text and were far more familiar with it than their Babylonian counterparts, whose citations of the text were far less accurate according to Labendz. Nonetheless, though the Palestinian rabbis had access to the actual written text, Labendz argues that their tendency to cite Ben Sira as if he were a rabbi (Ben Sira said, or so-and-so said in the name of Ben Sira) was polemical in nature so as to avoid legitimizing a book that the Christians considered sacred.

R. Akiva says, also the one who reads external books, etc. It was taught: [one who reads] heretical books. R. Joseph said: from the book of Ben Sira one is also forbidden to read.

This passage suggests that there may have been some confusion about what Rabbi Akiva meant by ‘external books’, perhaps because by the time of the Bavli, the canon had already been established and the rabbis were no longer concerned with non-canonical books. Hence, the Stam introduces a baraita that renders R. Akiva’s statement into a prohibition against heretical materials. The statement by R. Joseph forbidding the reading of Ben Sira is a testament to the earlier tradition that associated R. Akiva’s statement with matters of canon. However, where previously, the issue was about canonical status, the Bavli has now framed the discussion around problematic content. As a result, when Abaye inquires about the reason for the prohibition against Ben Sira, the gemara is at a loss to explain what is so problematic about the book. In an attempt to explain the prohibition, a series of passages from Ben Sira are quoted, and each of these is shown to be a valuable teaching that is also taught by the Torah or the rabbis.

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344 Freedman translates this as ‘books of the Sadducees’ (reflecting some versions of the Talmud) though he acknowledges that there were no Sadducees following the destruction of the Temple and that this should therefore be taken to refer to Jewish Christians. (Sadducees was a common replacement for heretics by censors) Consequently, the Bavli prohibits the reading of the New Testament according to Freedman.

345 This would suggest that any reading or knowledge of these books is unacceptable.

346 Ginzberg argues that the Yerushalmi’s reading is more consistent with the mishnah and argues that R. Joseph’s statement reflects his knowledge of the tannaic tradition that understood Ben Sira as one of the ‘external books’. “The Babylonians identified פんですけどים ספרי with heretical books’ and Ben Sira could not well be described as heretical, while the Palestinian authorities correctly explain the term used by R. Akiba as referring to ‘outside books’ i.e. Apocrypha, especially those among them which were very popular, like Ben Sira.” Ginzberg, "Some Observations," 129. Alternatively, R. Joseph’s statement may reflect the fact that while Ben Sira is not technically a heretical book, it is nonetheless forbidden. This statement is necessary in light of the Bavli’s modification of ‘external books’ to ‘heretical books’. Labendz contends, “R. Joseph felt that ‘external books’ and ‘books of heretics’ did not clearly include the Book of Ben Sira and that the latter needed to be added explicitly. We cannot say with certainty why he felt this way, but perhaps this had to do with its special status - more on practical grounds than theological grounds - as a wisdom book that suddenly became important to the Christians in or near Babylonia.” Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 359.
Finally, a series of inane maxims from Ben Sira are quoted, perhaps in an attempt to detract from its value.\(^{347}\) To which R. Joseph makes a declaration, which has been preserved in two versions.\(^{348}\) In one version, he says: מִיָּלִילִיתֶּם דוֹאָה בָּהָרְשִׁי לְהַזָּה - we expound on the good passages that are in it. In other words, though he cannot necessarily explain why the work has been prohibited, there are valuable lessons to be learned from it, but its use is still restricted to certain passages.\(^{349}\) In another version,\(^{350}\) R. Joseph says: אֲנָה דַּעְתָּנוּ הָבָן לֵאמֶר הָהֵו רֶשֶׁי לְהַזָּה - had the rabbis not removed\(^{351}\) this book, we would expound on it, for there are good passages in it. In this version, R. Joseph acknowledges that there is no reason not to expound on this valuable source of wisdom other than the fact that the rabbis have taken it out of the tradition. Ultimately, both versions of this statement recognize that this text has been deemed non-canonical and aim to maintain a clear distinction between Ben Sira and other (canonical) scriptures and R. Joseph recognizes the need to submit to rabbinic authority. For the Bavli, the authority of the rabbis to determine canon stands even when there is no justifiable objection to the contents of the book. Furthermore, the Bavli’s understanding of ‘outside books’ to mean heretical material changes the nature of the prohibition. Where it would appear that the mishna and Yerushalmi prohibit the public recitation of non-canonical books,\(^{352}\) presumably

\(^{347}\) Although they are innocuous, they seem to be rather nonsensical. Thus, the Bavli implies that the book is a waste of time, which could surely be put to better use engaging in matters of Torah.


\(^{349}\) Labendz argues that R. Joseph “decides that Ben Sira may ultimately be incorporated into the rabbinic tradition, so long as it is done orally and selectively.” Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira," 362. For more on Labendz’s reconstruction of the statement, see p. 360-362.

\(^{350}\) This variant is found in R. Meir Abulafia’s work, the Yad Ramah. Freedman notes that this version is also attested in many manuscripts. Ginzberg also follows this version.

\(^{351}\) alternatively, hidden or stored away.

\(^{352}\) understanding "outside" in a technical sense. See Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture, 87.
permitting private reading, the Bavli’s prohibition of certain books on the basis of content, extends the ban to private reading as well. As with matters of canon, the rabbis of the Bavli assume the authority to designate certain books, and the ideas contained therein, as outside the bounds of ‘Judaism’ as they conceived it.

The examination of R. Akiva’s statement in light of the traditions concerning Ben Sira highlights the underlying issue of rabbinic authority in the mishna and two talmuds. The permissibility of other books, such as the writings of Homer, indicates that the rabbis are not seeking to restrict all external works. Rather they aim to safeguard the boundaries of the canon as they have established it. The mishna’s tradition that excludes an individual who engages with outside books from olam haba is reflective of an early period when the canon was being established. The Yerushalmi maintains this tradition as is, perhaps reflecting an awareness of competing canons by other Jews or the emergence of the Christian canon. The Bavli’s rendering of ‘outside books’ to ‘heretical books’ may reflect the fact that matters of canon had been resolved. Nonetheless, in preserving an older tradition concerning Ben Sira, the later text upholds the rabbinic authority to determine the boundaries of the tradition. Those who defy this authority, step outside the bounds of ‘Israel’ and lose their portion in the world to come.

Healing and Divine Names

[Hebrew text]

[R. Akiva says] Also the one who whispers over a wound and says ‘all of the diseases which I have placed in Egypt, I shall not put over you, for I am the Lord

353 understanding קרא in the broad sense of the word, as reading. See Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture, 87-88.
your healer.’ (Ex. 15:26) Abba Shaul says, also the one who pronounce the [divine] name as it is spelled.

We will explore the latter part of R. Akiva’s statement in tandem with Abba Shaul’s statement since these prohibited practices are related. Our examination will reveal the presence of a similar dynamic between the two prohibitions, in that the rabbis did not contest the validity of such practices per se, but rather sought to restrict their use to particular individuals or settings. As will be discussed below, the rabbinic discourse on magic discloses an anxiety about the potential danger that it poses to individual rabbis, communities and rabbinic authority while at the same time, the use of magic by rabbis demonstrates their superiority and authority.  

R. Akiva prohibits whispering over a wound and reciting the verse Exodus 15:26. Hans-Jurgen Becker argues that this verse was thought to be powerful due to the presence of the Tetragrammaton in connection with the healing powers of God and that the mishna is concerned with the “magical misuse of the divine name”. Consequently, according to Becker, the mishna adds Abba Shaul’s statement which prohibits the pronunciation of the divine name altogether. Belief in the extraordinary power of the divine name is evident in rabbinic texts that relate Moses’ use of the divine name in connection with the exodus from Egypt and rabbinic

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356 According to rabbinic sources, Moses used the name to kill the Egyptian man mentioned in Ex 12:2 (ARN A 20; Lev. Rab. 32:4, with parallels in Ex. Rab. Tanhuma and PRE), he split the Red Sea by extending his staff which had the divine name on it towards the water (Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 19:6), and he raised Joseph’s bones from the Nile by casting a tablet with the divine name into the water (Mekhilta Beshalah 1). Becker, "The Magic of the Name," 393-397.
traditions that God redeemed the Israelites by means of the divine name. As such, its use was absolutely restricted to specific times and settings. The Mishna relates that the High Priest pronounced the divine name during the Yom Kippur service and during the priestly benediction at the Temple. For the Mishna, the pronunciation of the divine name was restricted to the Temple since, when the priestly benediction was recited in the provinces, the Mishna states that a substitute for the name should be used. Furthermore, the Babylonian Talmud relates that R. Hanina b. Teradyon, who was martyred under the Hadrianic persecutions, was liable for death because he had pronounced the divine name, and that his wife was also liable because she had not prevented him from doing so. However, the text reveals that the problem was not so much that R. Hanina pronounced the divine name, but that he did so in a non-proscribed manner. Hence, where the context of the exodus implies a sanctioned use of the name, R. Hanina used the name improperly and suffered the consequences. The prohibition against

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358 "At least until the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. this name was regularly pronounced with its proper vowels, as is clear from the Lachish Letters, written shortly before that date. But at least by the third century B.C.E. the pronunciation of the name YHWH was avoided, and Adonai, "the Lord," was substituted for it, as evidenced by the use of the Greek word Kyrios, ‘Lord,’ for YHWH in the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was begun by Greek-speaking Jews in that century.” Louis F. Hartman, et al., “God, Names of,” Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 7 (2nd ed.; ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik; Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 675.

359 m. Yoma 6:2

360 m. Sotah 7:6

361 b. Avoda Zara 17b-18a

362 see also Sifre Deut 307.

363 When the Gemara states that R. Hanina was liable for death for pronouncing the divine name, a challenge is raised as to how he could have done such a thing given the prohibition against doing so in m. Sanhedrin 10:1. The Gemara resolves this by introducing a baraita that allowed the study of magical practices. However, R. Hanina went beyond acceptable practices and pronounced the name in public, and that is why he was liable for death.
pronouncing the divine name stems from the third Sinaitic commandment, which forbids taking God’s name in vain. However, as there are other commandments whose violation does not result in exclusion from olam haba, we must consider why the violation of this commandment is of such concern for the rabbis. I would argue that the rabbis, being aware of the tremendous power of the divine name and fearing its use by unapproved persons, sought to categorically restrict its use.

The complementary texts of the Tosefta, Yerushalmi and Bavli add the element of spitting to the mishna’s prohibition, which raises a number of issues:

1. Sanhedrin 12:10
   אבב שאלא אאמר משם ר' יעקב הלוחש על המכה ואומר כל המחלות כו ורורקAIN לי חלך לעולות
   Abba Shaul says in the name of R. Akiva, the one who whispers over a wound and recites ‘all the diseases, etc.’ and spits, has no portion in the world to come.

Similarly, y. Sanhedrin 10:1, 28a reads:
   רב אמר ברלכ ברורקAIN רבי חויי בנו לא אמר אפלי אמר גני הפרעה כו והיה בראשו ורורקAIN לי
   Rav said, only one who spits. R. Joshua b. Levi said, even if he said, ‘when the mark of leprosy is on a person’ (Lev. 13:9) he has no share in the future world.

2. Sanhedrin 100b:
   הלוחש על המכה וכיו אומר רב יוחנן: וורוקAIN ברלכ ברלכ. הלוחש על המכה וכיו אומר רב יוחנן: וורוקAIN ברלכ ברלכ.
   And the one who whispers over a wound, etc. R. Yohanan said, and if he spits into it, because we do not recite the heavenly name over spit.

The Tosefta, Yerushalmi and Bavli all refine the mishna’s statement by R. Akiva, maintaining that one also has to spit as part of the healing ritual for the prohibition to apply. Ginzberg argues that this prohibition is directly aimed at the practice of Christian healers, Jesus in particular, as the Gospels of Mark and John relate Jesus’ practice of spitting in relation to healing.364

Furthermore, he maintains that the problematic aspect of the Exodus 15:26 verse is that the last three words ‘I am the lord your healer’ have the same numerical value as the name of Jesus in Hebrew, and that crypto-Christians who may have been afraid to employ the name of Jesus for healing openly, availed themselves of this verse to do so secretly. Therefore, according to Ginzberg, this healing ritual was an expression of heretical beliefs and that is why such a person would be excluded from olam haba. While I agree with Ginzberg that the prohibition is aimed at a particular healing ritual, likely because of its association with Jesus and early Christianity, I am not as convinced by his contention regarding Exodus 15:26. It seems, to my understanding, that the spitting combined with the recitation of a biblical verse is what is problematic rather than the fact that Exodus 15:26 may have been used as an allusion to Jesus. For if that were the case, how are we to understand R. Joshua b. Levi’s prohibition of the practice with an altogether different verse in the Yerushalmi?  

Peter Schafer argues that m. Sanhedrin 10:1 identifies heretics that no longer belong to Israel. Consequently, R. Akiva’s prohibition is directed at the practice of healing by heretics rather than the practice itself.  

In other words, while Ginzberg makes the case that the practice itself was the issue, Schafer holds that it is the person performing the healing ritual that renders the act heretical. I find Schafer’s claim to be incongruous with my understanding of the mishna as the mishna establishes a set of beliefs that render a person heretical according to the rabbis. The mishna makes no distinction whether these views are maintained by regular Jews, rabbis or actual heretics. The element of spitting which is brought to

365 Becker remarks: “While Rav’s comment was concerned with maintaining the possibility of using the name of God for healing, this dictum hardly shows any special interest in the power of the divine name, but rather in healing through scripture recitation in general, combined with spitting. This is clear from the fact that the incriminated verse Lev 13:9 does not contain the name at all.” Becker, ”The Magic of the Name,” 399.

emend the mishna suggests that the rabbis were referring to a very specific practice that was problematic either because it was the habit of Christians or because of the illegitimate use of the divine name. However, despite the fact that I am not entirely persuaded by Schafer’s argument, I would agree that rabbinic texts display differing attitudes with regard to healing and magic.

If R. Akiva’s statement refers to a specific healing ritual, then we must consider Abba Shaul’s prohibition against the pronunciation of the name on its own. As discussed above, the association of magical powers with the divine name compels the rabbis to restrict its use. The mishna does not challenge the efficacy of the divine name, but it does prohibit its use in no uncertain terms, perhaps out of concern for the misuse of its power. With regard to the use of the divine name in the Talmud, Becker argues that while Palestinian authorities are relatively uninterested in the matter, Babylonian authorities interpret the mishna in such a way that allows for its use, albeit with restrictions. He notes that the Yerushalmi quotes Rav, a Babylonian amora who prohibits whispering a verse with the divine name over a wound only when combined with spitting, while R. Joshua b. Levi, the Palestinian amora prohibits whispering any verse. Presumably, for Rav, one may recite a verse that includes the divine name so long as they do not spit. The subsequent comments in the Yerushalmi indicate that the pronunciation of the divine name

367 Schafer notes an apparent contradiction between the absolute prohibition of R. Akiva and traditions found in the Tosefta and both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds that seem to allow the practice of whispering over a wound. I do not believe that there is a real contradiction between these texts and our mishna. The tosefta allows waving an object over the belly and whispering over an eye, etc. even on the Shabbat. However, our mishnah prohibits whispering over a wound while reciting a specific verse (and, according to the Tosefta and Talmuds also spitting). There is no indication that the tosefta allows whispering this particular verse. Moreover, one would expect the Bavli to raise such a contradiction, as it does with the tradition concerning R. Hanina. However, no such contradiction is raised and the text is more concerned with addressing how and why one would be allowed to perform these acts without desecrating the laws of the Sabbath.

name, as the Samaritans were apt to do in their oaths, is forbidden and that one should substitute *adonai* when reading the tetragramaton. Conversely, the Babylonian Talmud maintains that reciting the divine name over a wound is prohibited only when combined with spitting,\(^{369}\) and that Abba Shaul’s prohibition against pronouncing the divine name applies to the country\(^ {370}\) and in a blasphemous manner.\(^ {371}\) Becker notes a similar trend in his comparison of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds’ discussions of multi-lettered names of God.\(^ {372}\) He remarks that the Palestinian sources deemphasize the magical aspect of the name of God and stress its secrecy, while Babylonian sources systematize the various forms of the divine name as well as the process by which the sages transmitted them. The element of secrecy remains in the Babylonian texts, however the special names of God are accessible to the sages. Similarly, study of the magical aspects of the Merkavah is a carefully guarded discipline, restricted to a select few and highly regulated. This trend is also present with regard to magic in general.

While scholars have noted differing attitudes towards magic in Palestinian and Babylonian sources, it appears that acceptable use of magic is dependent not on the nature of the particular act itself but on the person who is performing it, when it is being performed and for what purpose. The use of magic and belief in its powers is attested in the prevalence of amulets and magic bowls that scholars have discovered. Although these amulets and magic bowls display Jewish characteristics in terms of language, the use of biblical verses and magical names, this

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\(^ {369}\) The Bavli includes the opinions of Rav and R. Hanina, who prohibit the use of a verse even without the name of God or association to healing, respectively. However, the initial opinion is in the name of R. Yohanan, and the Rif, Rosh and Yad Ramah all rule that his opinion holds.

\(^ {370}\) as opposed to the Temple

\(^ {371}\) such as Samaritan aga (swearing)

appears to be a “Judaism” that is distinctly different from the one portrayed in rabbinic literature. Michael D. Swartz argues that “of all forms of discourse among the wide variety of peoples under the Mediterranean basin, magic was perhaps the most cosmopolitan.”\footnote{Michael D. Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," in \textit{The Cambridge History of Judaism IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period} (ed. Steven T. Katz; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 699.} Magic texts and other remains display a high level of influences across religious and cultural lines.\footnote{“From the libraries of ritual instructions, prayers, incantations, and recipes known as the Greek Magical Papyri, one can detect an astonishing variety of influences. Archaic Egyptian deities and rituals, Olympian gods, Mithraic mysteries, and such biblical heroes as Moses and Solomon rub elbows in these cryptic documents. At the same time, Jewish magical texts from the same period invoke Helios and contain whole sentences in Greek transcribed into Hebrew. Magical names are used to lend power to incantations derived from Hebrew and Greek. Thus, the Greek Magical Papyri contain names like Iao, Raphael, and Sabaoth, as well as Jewish magical texts that often derive their names from such Greek figures as Dionysus.” Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," 699.} Despite the apparent external influences and the biblical prohibitions against sorcery, the knowledge and use of magic by the rabbis is attested in numerous narratives throughout the Talmud. In his analysis of contest narratives between rabbis and magicians, Joshua Levinson argues that that while the Yerushalmi presents the rabbis as triumphant, in order to demonstrate their supremacy they must engage in the magical practices of the “other” which is troublesome as “the justification and demonstration of rabbinic prestige by means of magic undermines the distinctiveness of their identity… It would seem that the representation of magic in the Yerushalmi is fractured by a tension between a discourse of power and a discourse of identity; the more that the sage proves his magical prowess, so the difference between him and the heretic sorcerer diminishes.”\footnote{Joshua Levinson, "Enchanting Rabbis: Contest Narratives between Rabbis and Magicians in Late Antiquity," \textit{Jewish Quarterly Review} 100, no. 1 (2010): 64.} In other words, while the rabbis can successfully out-magic their opponents, in order to do so they have to become like ‘them’ which is contrary to their efforts to marginalize the ‘other.’ The resistance of Palestinian rabbis to magic may also be the result of the association of Jesus with
magic. Schafer has demonstrated that while the New Testament portrays Jesus positively, with supernatural and healing powers, rabbinic sources consistently denounce Jesus and his magical powers. The discomfort of Palestinian rabbis with magic has also been noted by Stratton, who suggests that this is the result of the negative perceptions of magic in the Hellenistic world, which deemed these practices as marginal and subversive. Stratton proposes, “the same Greek constellation of ideas and practices identified vaguely as ‘magic’ and perceived as dangerous or subversive also left its mark on Palestinian Jewish attitudes where it easily reinforced opposition to foreign religion and ‘idolatry.’” Hence, Stratton argues that Palestinian rabbis tend to downplay magic as a source of rabbinic power or prestige, opting to emphasize the unique piety or devotion of the rabbis. Furthermore, even when rabbis engage in magic triumphantly, their success is attributed to the piety of the sage rather than the magic itself. In contrast, Babylonian sources consistently depict rabbis as powerful, superior magicians owing to a special knowledge that they alone possess. As with the Palestinian sages, Stratton attributes the attitude of the Babylonian rabbis towards magic to their cultural milieu. “During the Talmudic era Zoroastrianism and its dualistic belief in demons influenced the religious and cultural landscape of Jewish Babylonia.” Furthermore, the perception of the danger posed by demons necessitated knowledge and skill by the rabbi to defend against these forces. Consequently, “in

376 Schäfer, Jesus in the Talmud.

377 “Beginning from an association with the ‘enemy’s’ religion during the Persian war, such terms as magus and mageia increasingly came to signify people and practices regarded suspiciously as anti-Greek, barbaric, and even dangerous in Greek thought. This terminology for marginal and subversive ritual practices was taken over into Roman thought as well - in the guise of the magus.” Stratton, "Imagining Power," 379-380.

378 Stratton, "Imagining Power," 380.

379 Stratton, "Imagining Power," 382.
their ability to successfully manipulate demonic forces with an arsenal of ritual technology, Babylonian rabbis gained religious credibility and authority.\textsuperscript{380} In Babylonia, magic was a form of knowledge that needed to be acquired, and the rabbis did so masterfully. Levinson remarks that the “process of constructing magic as a discourse of knowledge, of creating knowledge about an inferior Other, places the Babylonian sages in a position of authority, structuring magic as an object to be known.”\textsuperscript{381} The Babylonian model of power rested on knowledge and this is reflected in the Babylonian presentations of rabbis as scholars imbued with distinctive knowledge and understanding and the overwhelming focus on Torah study in Babylonian sources. Both rabbis and non-rabbis engage in magic, but where the Palestinian sources attribute rabbinic mastery to piety or devotion, the Babylonian sources attribute it to their superior knowledge. Nonetheless, in both the Palestinian and Babylonian sources, the successful practice of magic is wholly dependent on the practitioner.

Whether the result of piety or superior knowledge, the rabbis emerge as superior magicians while non-rabbinic practitioners are marginalized for their use of magic. Where the rabbis’ use of magic is lauded, the use of magic by non-rabbis is condemned and portrayed negatively. As Swartz notes, “knowledge of methods to prevent witchcraft and of ways to cure by means of incantations was no less a function of the rabbi’s wisdom than was legal or ethical insight. On the other hand, ritual experts who were not members of the community risked being branded as sorcerers.”\textsuperscript{382} The magician is often portrayed in an adversarial role, challenging the rabbis or their tradition. Levinson observes, “magic in the Bavli, and especially women’s magic,

\textsuperscript{380} Stratton, "Imagining Power," 383.
\textsuperscript{381} Levinson, "Enchanting Rabbis," 71.
\textsuperscript{382} Swartz, "Jewish Magic," 705.
is presented as a carnivalistic threat to the culture of the house of study. “The frequent association of women and magic and their depiction as sorceresses prompts the marginalization of women for engaging in subversive activity.”

The dynamic of power and authority is present in our mishna as well. The rabbis are aware of certain practices, and while they are (or perhaps, precisely because they are) efficacious, the mishna curtails them. Furthermore, in designating the people who engage in these practices non-Israel, the mishna is consistent with the general depiction of magic as practices of the “other” throughout rabbinic literature. “In both halachic discussions and magical tales, discourse about magic serves to discredit other forms of cultural action and authority. At the same time, such stories can serve to reinforce the magical power of the rabbi.” The exercise of magic by non-rabbis to effectuate change or healing appeals to a wholly different type of power, bypassing that of God or the rabbis, which is unacceptable. In contrast, the rabbinic use of magic harnesses divine power to the extent that rabbinic prowess as ‘magicians’ is the result of their piety and knowledge of Torah. Consequently, mishna identifies certain practices that were either reserved for specific persons (at a set time and place), or altogether problematic and marginalizes those who engage in them.

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383 Ibid. See also Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rçising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2001): 343-375. Lesses argues that though women do not figure disproportionately as clients or practitioners of magic, there is a pervasive stereotype which associates them with magic.


385 Levinson argues that magic, which he characterizes as carnivalesque, “challenges hegemonic discourses and suspends normative hierarchies, usually expressing itself in three forms - transgression of bodily and spatial barriers, inversion of hierarchy, and degradation of the sacred. These three elements work to destabilize or defamiliarize the normative codes of hegemonic culture by presenting alternative ways of constructing cultural life.” Levinson, "Enchanting Rabbis," 75.

386 such as the pronunciation of God’s name at the Temple.
Our close reading of m. Sanhedrin 10:1 has revealed the underlying dynamic of power and authority in the central rabbinic discussion on olam haba. This analysis of the persons that the rabbis excluded from olam haba has allowed us to identify a number of core beliefs that were central to the rabbinic conception of the Judaism that they sought to establish. The mishna conveys the essential rabbinic belief in a singular God who is engaged in the world and metes out reward and punishment both in this life and in the hereafter. In addition, the Torah is not only an expression of the Israelites’ past, but it is the word of God that was revealed to Moses and inherited by the rabbis who determine the boundaries of canon and continue the process of revelation by means of interpretation. The expulsion from Israel of those who undermine rabbinic authority or usurp their power by engaging in magical practices safeguards the position of the rabbis as the exclusive authorities of the community. The mishna represents the attempt of the rabbis to establish normative beliefs and while we cannot assume that this was reflected in actuality or accepted by anyone beyond rabbinic circles, it certainly reflects how the rabbis envisioned the ideal community of Israel. Boyarin has argued, “at the first stage of its existence, at the time of the initial formulation of rabbinic Judaism, the Rabbis, at least did seriously attempt to construct Judaism as an orthodoxy and thus as a ‘religion,’ the product of a disembedding of certain realms of practice, speech, and so on from others and identifying them as of particular circumstance. If you do not believe such and such or practice so and so, you are not a Jew, imply the texts of the period.”\[387\] Although Adiel Schremer has argued against the notion that the rabbis were creating Judaism anew, he does acknowledge that a transformation of

\[387\] Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 10. Though Boyarin argues that in the later rabbinic period the rabbis opted to move away from orthodoxy and that they refused the option of becoming a “religion,” he acknowledges that the earlier stage, represented by our mishnah, there was a deliberate attempt to define normative Judaism.
Judaism occurred following the destruction of the Temple. Martin Jaffee has observed that the rabbis, like the Jesus communities emerged to fill the institutional vacuum of Jewish religious life in the wake of the Temple’s destruction. Jacob Neusner contends that the rabbis, like Augustine, responded to fundamentally altered realities by constructing “messages about the correspondence of the individual’s life to the social order, the centrality of relationship, the rule of God and the response of God to what transcended all rules.” In addition to the void created by the absence of the Temple, Boyarin has hypothesized that the rabbis transformed Judaism into a “religion” in response to the threat posed by Gentile Christianity. Doing so entailed the establishment of orthodoxy and its heresy and identifying the rules of faith by means of a discourse, which established the boundaries of Judaism. In his words, “The epistemic shift marked by the emergence of rabbinic Judaism in the second century included the production of ‘outsiders’ defined by doctrinal difference. Jewish sectarianism as a form of decentralized pluralism by default had been replaced by the binary opposition of Jewish orthodox and Jewish heretics. Those who are Jews and say or do the wrong things may, therefore, no longer be called ‘Israel’- at least in rabbinic intention… Sectarianism had not disappeared, but rather one group began to achieve hegemony and could now plausibly portray itself as Judaism tout court - or at any rate, wishfully project itself as such.” In some ways, this Mishna epitomizes the process

388 Schremer, Brothers Estranged, 5.
391 Boyarin, Border Lines, 29.
392 Boyarin, Border Lines, 65.
articulated by Boyarin. In identifying ‘outsiders’ who no longer have a share in the world to come, the rabbis have demarcated the boundaries of Judaism, thereby creating an ideal Israel that abides by rabbinic authority and subscribes to the fundamental tenets upon which that authority is based.

This chapter’s close reading of the mishna and its complementary texts has demonstrated how, as arbiters of the afterlife, rabbis excluded individuals whose beliefs or practices fundamentally undermined their authority and their tradition. As we move onto the next chapter, we will shift away from the grounds for exclusion from olam haba to focus on Torah study as one of the principal means by which a share in olam haba is attained.

\[\text{393}\] Boyarin argues that the rabbis defined orthodoxy as part of the discourse of heresy that they engaged in with the Church Fathers. I am not necessarily arguing that this Mishna was directed at Christians, but rather than the process described by Boyarin, is present here. That is, the identification of beliefs and practices that undermine the tradition, and the exclusion of those persons from the community. Putting Boyarin aside for a moment, Schremer has argued that the rabbis were concerned with establishing communal cohesiveness, and that their marginalization of the minim was due to their social separatism. The persons identified in this Mishna, in rejecting rabbinic authority, would necessarily be separate from the rabbinic Israel that the rabbis imagined. This chapter is not necessarily arguing that the Mishna was directed at actual persons, whether Christian or Jew. Rather, the Mishna displays a concern for rabbinic authority and the establishment of an ideal Israel. Thus it identifies the persons that might challenge the authority upon which the rabbis could constitute such a community, whether real or imagined.
4. Olam Haba by Means of Torah
   OR
   Torah by Means of Olam Haba
The preceding chapter demonstrated how, as arbiters of the afterlife, the rabbis demarcated the boundaries of their tradition by means of olam haba. In considering the value ascribed to Torah study and its role within the rabbinic tradition, this chapter will argue that the elevated status conferred onto the sages owing to their mastery of Torah, combined with the designation of a share in olam haba as the reward for Torah study, rendered the rabbis as vehicles to olam haba and reinforced their position as its arbiters. Consequently, the repeated association of olam haba with Torah study secured the position of Torah study as one of the central aspects of the rabbinic tradition and may have contributed to the establishment of rabbinic authority.

Despite rabbinic claims of continuity with the biblical tradition, Judaism was, in many ways, utterly transformed by the rabbis. This transformation was partly due to the exigencies of a new historical reality marked by the absence of the Temple, exile and subjugation, but it was also the result of a particular understanding of revelation that enabled the rabbis to assume the role of the biblical prophets as well as challenge the regnant institution and authority of the priesthood. As the centerpiece of the rabbinic tradition, the Torah was the record of divine revelation, comprising not only the Written Law, but also the Oral Law. As the inheritors of the Oral Law, the rabbis claimed to be privy to a set of traditions that enabled them to elucidate the Written Law and discern the will of God by engaging in its continued interpretation. In doing so, the rabbis constructed a tradition that fundamentally redefined worship and the source of religious authority, although they maintained that their interpretations extracted the manifold meanings that were already embedded within the Torah. The study and interpretation of Torah was the central activity of the rabbis and, though it was necessary for the proper fulfillment of the commandments, the rabbis insisted that Torah study should not be regarded as a means to an end,
but rather, as a pursuit in its own right. Although the rabbis repeatedly assert the idea of תּוֹרָה לְשֵׁם or, Torah for its own sake, the rabbis also accorded of a special reward in olam haba upon the sages and those who pursue the study of Torah. Consequently, as masters of Torah, the rabbis themselves become vehicles to olam haba by imparting their wisdom and teaching the words of Torah to others. Moreover, as embodiments of Torah, the literature asserts that the sages were worthy of respect and deference, to the extent that even tending to a sage imparted a reward in the world to come. Ultimately, though it may not have been a self-conscious attempt on their part, the rabbinic emphasis on the primacy of Torah study and its link with olam haba secured the rabbis’ authority and ensured the perpetuation of their tradition.

Our examination of the relationship between Torah study, olam haba and rabbinic authority will begin with an outline of how the rabbis established their authority by means of Torah. The rabbinic concept of the Oral Torah not only allowed the sages to trace their authority to the moment of revelation at Sinai, but also enabled ongoing interpretation of the Written Torah, which yielded voluminous laws and traditions. The rabbinic ideology regarding the boundless depths of the Torah and the lifetime commitment to its study is conveyed in m. Avot 5:20: “Ben Bag Bag would say: study it [the Torah] over and over again, for everything is within it. Contemplate it and grow old and frail in it, and do not depart from it for you have nothing better than it.” The notion of turning or studying Torah over and over again to uncover all that is contained within it stems from the rabbinic understanding of the Torah as the word of God. The term Torah, from the root הָרִים, meaning instruction, denotes that its contents are meant

\footnote{394 See for example, m. Pe’ah 1:1; m. Avot 6:9; b. Bava Batra 10a-b, 75a; b. Bava Metzi’a 85b; b. Hag 12b (=b. Avod. Zar. 3b, b. Ned 8b); b. Hul. 44b; b. Meg. 28b (= b. Nid. 73a); b. Sanh. 88b; b. Qidd. 82a-b (=y. Qidd. 4:12).}

\footnote{395 lit., turn. My translation follows Jastrow.}
to be received, studied and followed. Hence, the Torah is not only meant to be a source of passive reflection and thought but also a manual for action, necessary for successfully maneuvering through the world and fulfilling the word of God. The well-known chain of transmission articulated in m. Avot 1:1 traces the Torah back to Sinai and presents the rabbis as its inheritors. Rabbinic tradition distinguishes between the Oral Law and the Written law, but contends that both were revealed to Moses at Sinai. In its interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:10, לישׂראל ותורתך ומשׁפטיך ירו - “And they shall teach your ordinances to Jacob and your laws to Israel,” Sifre Deut. 351 understands the word Torah in the plural form\textsuperscript{396} and concludes, “this shows that two Torahs were given to Israel, one oral and one written.”\textsuperscript{397} In his commentary on this midrash, Steven Fraade remarks that this is perhaps “the central tenet of the rabbinic sages’ self-understanding: two Torahs were revealed by God to Israel at Mt. Sinai, one written and one oral, the latter containing the continually unfolding, \textit{rabbinically} transmitted, yet divinely authorized explications of the former.”\textsuperscript{398} Gary Porton remarks that while the Written Torah was given to everyone at Sinai, the rabbis claimed that it was a sealed document that could not be fully understood without the oral Law. Consequently, as the sole inheritors of the Oral Law in their time, only the rabbis could impart the true meaning of the Torah, and furthermore, only they had access to the full revelation.\textsuperscript{399} While rabbinic sources universally uphold the idea of the Oral Law, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what it was believed to have contained, as the

\textsuperscript{396} Steven Fraade notes that the Samaritan Pentateuch has בתרותיך (your Torahs), which is also suggested in the Peshitta and Targum Pseudo Jonathan. Fraade, \textit{From Tradition to Commentary}, 239 n.64.

\textsuperscript{397} See also, Sifra Behukotai 2; ARN A 15, 61; b. Shabbat 31a.

\textsuperscript{398} Fraade, \textit{From Tradition to Commentary}, 88.

literature attests to a wide range of views. Some sources limit the contents of the Oral Law, emphasizing the creativity of the rabbis, while others go so far as to state that even the gemara was revealed to Moses at Sinai. Elizabeth Shanks Alexander attributes these differences to a distinction between the ‘literary’ and ‘oral’ conception of the Oral Torah in rabbinic sources. Whereas the literary conception of the Oral Torah emphasizes the oral method of transmission, which ensures the intact preservation of a discrete body of tradition, the oral conception emphasizes the dynamic (oral) engagement of the sages with the text in elucidating the Written Torah. In the former, the tradition is fixed and unchanging, while in the latter, it is fluid. The fluidity of the Oral Torah is evidenced by the divergence between the original text of the Written Torah and rabbinic laws and interpretations. And yet, although rabbinic sources such as b. Menahot 29b and Seder Eliyahu Zuta 2 acknowledge “profound discontinuities between the


For example, m. Hag 1:8; Seder Eliyahu Zuta 2;

b. Ber 5a; Lev. Rab 22;

Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 40-41.

In this conception, represented in m. Avot 1:1 and b. Eruvin 54b, “Oral Torah begins, and remains throughout the course of its transmission, a discrete and defined body of material, which each trident is responsible for producing in a verbatim manner for the next recipient.” Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 39.

See Christine Hayes’ insightful comments on this text in Hayes, Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, 19. Per Hayes, the story discuses an anxiety regarding the distance between the rabbis and Moses. However the anxiety is not absolute. “The portrayal of God as R. Akiva’s partner betokens at least a desire on the part of the author(s) to believe that despite the gulf that appears to separate the teachings of the rabbis from the divine Torah of ancient Israel, there is an organic unity between them and in Moses’ mouth are placed words of praise and approbation for R. Akiva. Through this story the rabbis assert their faith in kinship, connection, transmission, and tradition, despite - or rather because of - their awareness of a profound transformation through time.” Ibid.

See also m. Hag. 1:8.

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original revelation at Mt. Sinai and the traditions articulated and transmitted by the rabbis.\textsuperscript{407} the very same sources also trace the source of rabbinic interpretations, and their authority, to Moses and Sinai. These discontinuities\textsuperscript{408} are explained by the claim that the ongoing engagement of the rabbis with the Written Torah results in the “actualization of interpretative possibilities already embedded within the text of the Written Torah.”\textsuperscript{409} In other words, the rabbis uncover the manifold meanings of the divine word as they continuously turn and study the Torah over and over again. Consequently, whether they served as faithful transmitters of a divinely revealed tradition, or as interlocutors who, through their engagement with the text and its traditions, uncovered the interpretations embedded within the Written Torah, the rabbis occupied a central role in imparting the Torah and its teachings to others.

Access to the Oral Law and its traditions not only conferred authority onto the rabbis, but it also allowed them to assume the role of the prophets in revealing the word of God. Despite considerable debate, most scholars are in agreement that prophecy ceased in the period following the Babylonian exile.\textsuperscript{410} Rabbinic sources repeatedly assert the cessation of prophecy\textsuperscript{411} and Benjamin D. Sommer argues, “the presence of this tradition in several texts indicates that it is not the opinion of an individual but reflects a widespread notion - one commonly accepted and

\textsuperscript{407} Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 42.

\textsuperscript{408} b. Ber. 20a acknowledges the ongoing innovations of the rabbis, detailing the gap between the tannaim and later generations.

\textsuperscript{409} Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 42.


\textsuperscript{411} t. Sot. 13:3; y. Sot. 9:13; b. Bava Batra 12a; b. Sanh. 11a; b. Yoma 9b; b. Sota 48b;
repeated in rabbinic Judaism.” However, although the rabbis believed that prophecy had ceased, they maintained that it was still possible to discern the will of God by means of interpretation. This notion was not unique to the rabbis, as Sommer observes that prophecy underwent a transformation in the Second Temple period. “Throughout the period and also after it, the reading and use of existing prophetic texts also helped take the place of prophecy itself.” Following this trend, the rabbis also engaged in the reading, interpretation and application of ancient texts, although their attention was primarily focused on the Torah rather than the prophetic books. The role of the prophets in communicating the word of God is reflected in the chain of transmission of m. Avot 1:1, which presents the prophets among those who transmit the Torah in a process that culminates with the rabbis. Accordingly, Fraade argues that the rabbis are not only a horizontal link in the chain of transmission, but also an essential link in the vertical chain that connects God and Israel. However, although a few individuals were said to have

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412 Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease?" 34.


414 Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary, 79.
The rabbis do not claim to be prophets. Their authority and that of their teachings derive from their ability to interpret scripture, based on their inherited traditions and the transmission of the Oral Law. The following passage in b. Bava Batra 12a-b describes the transition away from prophecy while claiming the superiority of the rabbis and their methods of interpretation:

R. Abdimi of Haifa said: From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the sages. Do you mean to say that a sage is not a prophet? He meant to say: even though it was taken from the prophets, it was not taken from the sages. Amemar said, and a sage is greater than a prophet, as it is said, ‘a prophet has a heart of wisdom’ (Psa. 90:12) Who is compared with whom? You have to say that the lesser is compared with the greater. Abaye said, you should know this from the fact that when a great man says something, and the same is said in the name of another great man. Rava said, and what is the difficulty? Perhaps they are both of the same constellation! Rather, Rava said, you should know this from the fact that when a great man says something and the same is said as a halakhah from Moses at

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415 The term הוה הקדוש, is often analogous to prophecy in rabbinic literature. Sources state that it departed following the destruction of the Temple (b. Yoma 21b, Num. Rab 15:10) and after the last of the prophets (t. Sota 13:3, b. Yoma 9b) respectively. Elsewhere, it is stated that some charismatic figures and pious individuals are imbued with הוה הקדוש, however this refers to the ability to foretell the future, rather than prophecy in the classical sense. Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease?," 31-47; Alan Unterman, et al., "Ru'ah Ha-Kodesh," Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 17 (2nd ed.; ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik; Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 597. On the relationship between prophecy and the holy spirit, see Cook, On the Question of the “Cessation of Prophecy,” 168-172.
Sinai. And perhaps he is like a blind man finding his way down from the opening?\textsuperscript{416} Did he not provide reasoning?

I propose that in this passage, prophecy corresponds to authority. As such, the text claims that the sages had authority prior to the destruction of the Temple and that the sages are greater than the prophets.\textsuperscript{417} Furthermore, a distinction is made between the prophecy/authority of the rabbis and that of the prophets in that the sage can provide reasoning for his statement. The gemara’s claim that the rabbis had prophecy after the destruction of the Temple contradicts the numerous statements elsewhere that prophecy had ceased after the destruction. These two traditions can be reconciled by supposing a qualitative difference between the prophecy of the sages and that of the prophets. In other words, while revelatory prophecy ceased, prophecy by means of interpretation and reasoning continued via the sages.\textsuperscript{418} This is suggested in the last proof of the gemara, “and did he not provide a reasoning?”, which is offered as a demonstration of the continued prophecy of the sages. However, it also makes the sage an active part of that process. Therefore, the gemara prioritizes the sages over the prophets, owing to the wisdom or intellectual nature of the sages’ prophecy. Consequently, if prophecy is the ability to make known the will of God, then not only can the rabbis assume the role of the prophets and fill the void created by the cessation of revelatory prophecy, but also, the manner in which they do so is perhaps superior to the prophets. Ultimately, the text juxtaposes rabbinic interpretation and argumentation with

\textsuperscript{416} i.e., perhaps he took a guess and was correct by chance

\textsuperscript{417} The superiority of the sages to the prophets is also expressed in t. Hor. 2:8-9; y. Hor. 3:5; y. Avod. Zar. 2:7.

\textsuperscript{418} This idea is raised in the commentaries of the Rishonim on the daf.
revelatory prophecy and it displays a clear preference for the former over the latter.\textsuperscript{419} This text, and the sugya as a whole displays the rabbis’ discomfort with prophecy, as evidenced by its presentation as a process void of reason, such that even a child or a fool can foretell the future.\textsuperscript{420}

In assuming the role of the prophets, the rabbis assert their ability to make the will of God known, but make a clear distinction between their method, which they claim is superior, and that of the prophets. Consequently, the rabbis assume the function that the prophets once held for the people, however they do not claim to be prophets per se. Furthermore, rabbinic sources elsewhere\textsuperscript{421} restrict the prophets’ ability to make halakhic changes or innovations. Whether the

\textsuperscript{419} This is also suggested in b. Bava Metzi’a 59b, where R. Eliezer’s miraculous proofs and the voice of the bat kol are rejected in favor of the majority opinion. R. Eliezer’s proofs are rejected with the statement, “we do not bring proof from a tree or river” and also “we do not rely on the bat kol” meaning, that this is not the proper method for determining halakhah. While there miraculous events and a heavenly voice may indicate that R. Eliezer was objectively correct, the era of revelatory prophecy had passed, and halakhah was to be determined by means of interpretation and reasoning.

Judah Goldin attributes the intransigence of R. Eliezer and the sages in this dispute to the fact that they were not simply disagreeing over the status of an oven, but rather on the fundamental issue of received tradition by an individual vs. majority opinion. Goldin argues that while, in the early period, received tradition (שמועה) was a governing principle in the academy, the failed revolts, move from Jerusalem to Yavneh and the loss of tradition to forgetfulness prompted the sages to develop new methods for interpreting and deciding the law. “…there is increasing uncertainty with regard to received traditions, and ‘majority rules’ is being encouraged as both a principle and method for the academy - to overcome doubts as well as disagreements.” Judah Goldin, "On the Account of the Banning of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: An Analysis and Proposal," \textit{Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society} 16-17 (1984): 95.

\textsuperscript{420} The gemara continues on 12b with a statement attributed to R. Yohanan that “From the day the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was removed from the prophets and given to fools and children.” The gemara illustrates this with two stories of how a fool and a child foretold the future, albeit seemingly unknowingly.

\textsuperscript{421} t. Sanh. 14:13; y. Meg. 1:5; b. Shab. 104a; b. Meg. 14a; b. Hor. 4b; b. Tem. 16a; b. Yev. 102a; b. Avod. Zar. 36a; b. Yoma 80a.
rabbis belittled prophecy for polemical\footnote{Noting the chronological gap between the cessation of prophecy and the rabbis who declared it, Urbach contends that the rabbinic pronouncement was polemical in nature. In response to Christian claims that prophecy had been removed from the Jews as a result of their denial of Jesus. Efraim E. Urbach, "When Did Prophecy Cease?," in Hebrew, \textit{Tarbiz} 17, no. 1 (1945): 9-10. See also Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease?," 31-47; Stone, “The Transformation of Prophecy,” 167-188.} or for more practical\footnote{Frederick E. Greenspahn argues against the cessation of prophecy and contends that the rabbis purposely dismissed in an attempt to secure their authority and discredit others who might claim a more direct link to God. Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased," \textit{Journal of Biblical Literature} 108, no. 1 (1989): 47-49. Although the scholarly consensus does not support Greenspahn’s contention that prophecy persisted, his points concerning the destabilizing effect of prophecy on the rabbinic system are sound. Therefore, even though prophecy may have ceased, the rabbis had to contend with this formulation of authority and distinguish their own claims as authoritative figures within the same tradition. Furthermore, though formal revelatory prophecy may have ceased, individual charismatic figures posed a threat to the establishment of a system based on reason. The insistence of methods of interpretation and primacy of the majority over the individual had a practical element as the rabbis attempted to construct a coherent and consistent tradition. This is evident in the excommunication of R. Eliezer as discussed above.} reasons, the rabbis assert that they are the only ones who can interpret scripture and convey the will of God, thereby assuming the position previously held by the prophets.

Sifre Deut. 41 bypasses the prophets altogether and interposes the sages between God and the people. The midrash states that if a person hears a teaching even from a lowly person in Israel, it can be considered as if he had heard it from a sage. It then proceeds to demonstrate how this same teaching can be considered as if it were taught by all the sages, the elders, Moses and even God. According to Fraade, while at first glance the midrash displays a certain egalitarianism - any Israelite can teach Torah - it elevates the rabbis by positioning them in between God and Israel and creates a hierarchy with regard to the study of Torah. “By stressing that that which a humble Israelite teaches might be regarded as though it comes from a sage, and successively from God Himself, our text does not equate, and certainly not in normative terms, that which one of little learning teaches with that which a sage teaches, but rather emphasizes that the sages presently fill the communicative place that according to Scripture was previously occupied by
Moses and the inspired elders in mediating God’s will and teaching to the people.”

Suzanne Last Stone observes that the midrash depicts a reversed chain of transmission, although here, the prophets are excluded from the authoritative chain of the Oral Law. “As prophecy is deemphasized and drained of its function as part of the interpretative, oral law, it becomes increasingly a written literary form - not a part of the oral tradition at all.”

Hence, although the prophets once occupied an important position in conveying the will of God to the people, that era has passed and the rabbis claim to be the sole authorities that can interpret the tradition, determine law, and make the will of God known to the people.

In addition to assuming the role of the prophets, the sages also supplanted the religious authority of the priesthood with their own in shifting worship from the Temple to the house of study. The assimilation of Torah study to sacrificial worship in the Temple is attested in numerous sources that assign an expiative function to Torah study, often claiming that it is superior to sacrifice.

Burton Visotzky and Steven Fraade have demonstrated the methodical attempts within Leviticus Rabbah and Sifre Deuteronomy to replace the Temple and priesthood with Torah and the rabbis. Both Fraade and Visotzky note the intentionality behind the selection of Leviticus and Deuteronomy to promote this agenda. According to Fraade,

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424 Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary, 81-82


426 Sifre Deut. 306; Lev. Rab. 35; ARN A 4; b. Meg. 31b; b. Ta’an.. 27b.

427 For example, b. Eruv. 63b; b. Shabb. 30a; b. Meg. 16b; Torah study is greater than the building of the Temple, in b. Mak 10a.

428 The idea that Torah study and the rabbis replaced the Temple and its priesthood is also found elsewhere in rabbinic literature, however Fraade and Visotzky have argued that this is the central concern of Sifre Deuteronomy and Leviticus Rabbah, respectively. Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary; Burton L. Visotzky, Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah (vol. 145 of Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
Deuteronomy’s emphasis on the role of priests as authoritative teachers and judicial authorities presented “the early rabbinic exegetes and the redactors of the Sifre with numerous opportunities to assert the importance of the study of Torah as a central religious obligation upon which Israel’s covenantal fortunes rest, while challenging them to express their claims to be the paramount authorities in matters of Scripture and Jewish law in exegetical engagement with a biblical text that associates that authority with the hereditary priesthood.”\textsuperscript{429} With regard to Leviticus, Visotzky observes a shift between the attitudes of the tannaim and the amoraim toward the Temple cult and its officers. He notes that by preserving the language and agenda of the Temple, tannaitic literature presents the rabbis as the new priesthood. “The rabbis co-opted the time frames of the Temple, the tithes of the priesthood, the system of purities of the cult, etc. The message of the early literature, and particularly the Tannaitic rabbinic work on Leviticus - Sifra DeBei Rav or Torat Kohanim - seems to be that the rabbis are now the guardians and interpreters of the Temple cult.”\textsuperscript{430} Conversely, in the amoraic midrash Leviticus Rabbah, “the rabbis seem less concerned with the details of the long gone cult than they are with the minutiae of their own curriculum. Torah and its study - and this means rabbinic oral Torah - replaces the earlier focus on the Temple and its cult.”\textsuperscript{431} Visotzky observes that unlike the Sifra, Leviticus Rabbah is not a line-by-line commentary on Leviticus,\textsuperscript{432} and it displays a certain ambivalence toward the

\textsuperscript{429} Fraade, \textit{From Tradition to Commentary}, 74.

\textsuperscript{430} Visotzky, \textit{Golden Bells}, 2.

\textsuperscript{431} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{432} Visotzky, \textit{Golden Bells}, 59. Furthermore, Visotzky contends that “In LR, the biblical book of Leviticus was but a pretext for prompting a thoroughly rabbanized agenda.” \textit{Golden Bells}, 75.
Temple and the priesthood. Noting the oral, narrative character of the text and its homiletic form, Visotzky maintains that, “whether or not these expositions are sermons per se, or academic teachings, the implication is the same: the rabbis are the authentic interpreters of Scripture. It is they who should determine the meaning of the biblical text and, therefore, the function and future of Jewish institutions.” That the rabbis sought to establish themselves as religious authorities is not particularly remarkable, especially given their socio-historic milieu, which saw a number of groups and figures vying for power and authority. However, it is interesting to note that whether the rabbis sought to assume the position of the priesthood, or replace the institution altogether, they did so by means of Torah. In other words, the rabbis redefined worship and established themselves as religious authorities through interpretation of the Torah. Hence, the value of Torah study was established and sustained by the very act itself. Ultimately, the rabbis positioned themselves as the primary religious authority, filling the void of the priesthood that was created by the absence of the temple and augmented by the interpretative efforts of the rabbis themselves. Having established how they assumed the role and authority of the prophets and the priests, we will now turn our attention to how the rabbis established the primacy of Torah study and its merits.

Although the Written Torah was fundamental, the rabbinic ideal of Torah study referred to engagement with the Oral Torah and rabbinic teachings, which were prioritized over the reading of scripture. “It was taught in a baraita: one who occupies himself with scripture, it is

433 “…the rabbis vacillate on their earlier attempts to co-opt the priesthood. In LR we can watch the rabbis abandon the priests as their vehicle for legitimizing their own teaching role. Instead they offer some perfunctory praise for the priests, observe that perhaps the priesthood is replaceable, and also criticize the priests.” Visotzky, Golden Bells, 60.

434 Visotzky, Golden Bells, 85.
meritorious and it is not meritorious;\textsuperscript{435} [one who occupies himself] with Mishna, it is
meritorious and he is rewarded; [one who occupies himself] with Talmud, there is nothing more
meritorious.\textsuperscript{436} For a tradition that often held that authority decreased with each generation’s
distance from revelation,\textsuperscript{437} it is worth noting that the most praiseworthy area of study is the one
that is the most removed from scripture, both chronologically and materially. However, the
gemara melded together the Written Law with the Oral Law and the traditions of the rabbis.
Consequently, the study of gemara actualized the word of God, as its discussions educed the
multiple layers of meaning and established halakhah from scripture. Furthermore, in studying
gemara, the student became a part of the rabbinic endeavor by perpetuating its methods of
interpretation and traditions. Although there was a clear hierarchy of study, the rabbis maintained
that this was not an activity reserved for the rabbis themselves.

The rabbis transferred the obligatory nature of sacrifice onto the practice of Torah study
and maintained that it was incumbent upon all Jews. The determination that a blessing was
required for Torah study\textsuperscript{438} demonstrates that the rabbis conceived of it as a sacred and
commanded act. Given the rabbinic concern over saying a blessing and God’s name in vain, the

\textsuperscript{435} i.e., it is adequate, but there is better

\textsuperscript{436} b. Bava Metzi’a 33a. R. Yohanan’s warning against taking pride in Torah study in m. Avot 2:8 may
appear to contradict this baraita. However, R. Yohanan does not say that there is no merit to be had for
the study of Torah, simply that one should not be prideful for having done something that, for R. Yohanan,
was elemental.

\textsuperscript{437} Although some sources indicate that the authority of the leaders in each current generation is as valid
as the authority as those from previous generations, rabbinic texts display a hierarchy of authority on the
basis of chronology. The superior authority of the tannaim is evidenced by the fact that an amora could
not challenge a mishna or accepted baraita without citing another tannaitic opinion. Daniel Sperber,

\textsuperscript{438} See b. Ber. 11b.
rabbits had to justify the blessing for Torah study. Within a lengthy discussion in the Bavli regarding the grace after meals, the sages turn their attention to the obligation of Torah study. Having established that blessings for food can be derived from the Torah, the gemara asks where the blessing for Torah study can be derived. R. Ishmael responds that it can be derived from an argument *a fortiori*. “If a blessing is said over that which sustains life in the moment, is it not all the more so for something which sustains life in the world to come?” R. Ishmael ventures a logical argument, where the relationship between Torah study and the world to come is asserted. It should be noted that while two other arguments are offered, neither is the obligatory nature of Torah study, nor the need for a blessing being disputed. The gemara’s question pre-supposes both. Rather, the disagreement lies in the source for the blessing. Furthermore, alternative sources following R. Ishmael’s argument are introduced by the phrase, צֶרֶךְ אינָו which signifies, not that R. Ishmael’s argument is insufficient but, on the contrary, that the obligation can be derived even more obviously. As with other religious observances, the rabbis regulated the study of Torah, delineating the minimal religious requirement, curriculum, and rules for when, where and how Torah should be studied. Furthermore, scholarship was prioritized over

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439 b. Ber 48b.

440 R. Hiya b. Nahmani and R. Yehuda b. Betera each offer an alternative in deriving the need for a blessing from other verses in Scripture.


442 b. Men. 99b indicates a differential standard for non-scholars. See also b. Qidd. 30a (requirements regarding teaching sons Torah); Sifre Deut. 48 (quota of study); Sifre Deut. 46; y. Eruv. 10:1; b. Qidd. 29b (women exempt from study).

443 Varying curricula are outlined in different sources. See for example, m. Avot 5:21; b. Qidd. 30a; ARN A 6; b. Sukkah 28a (areas of R. Yohanan’s scholarship);

444 For example, study restricted on 9th of Av, b. Ta’an. 30a; learning at night in b. Avod. Zar. 3a; b. Hag. 12b; b. Eruv. 65a; Lev. Rab. 19:2; learning should be done out loud, b. Eruv. 53b-54a; learning in case of ritual impurity, leprosy, etc., b. Ber. 22a; learning forbidden in dirty alleyway, b. Ber. 24b.
all other occupations\footnote{445} and neither poverty nor familial obligations were sufficient to exempt a person from their obligation to study Torah.\footnote{446} Despite the fact that the rabbis extended the obligation of Torah study to all Jews, there is no indication that this was recognized, let alone observed, beyond rabbinic circles.\footnote{447} The considerable attention that the rabbis paid to the subject is reflective of the scholastic worldview of the rabbis, which was intensified in the later rabbinic period with the institutionalization of the beit midrash and rabbinic academies.\footnote{448} Nonetheless, since rabbinic texts systematically attempt to establish Torah study as a normative practice for all

\footnote{445} b. Qidd. 82a-b (=y. Qidd. 4:12); b. Yoma 19b; b. Ber. 35b.

\footnote{446} ARN A 6 states that R. Akiva who experienced much hardship and poverty, but nevertheless managed to devote himself to Torah study will be held up as an example when people claim that they were unable to learn as a result of poverty and children. Also, see b. Ta’an. 21a.

\footnote{447} Rabbinic sources indicate that the rabbis were aware of this, despite their tendency to project rabbinic ideals and norms onto Judaism in general. More recent scholarship, which continues to focus on the differences between Babylonian and Palestinian sources has established that these exhibit differing attitudes towards non-rabbis. Palestinian sources indicate that rabbis were in greater contact with and economically dependent on non-rabbis, their Babylonian counterparts who were far more insular, and displayed a greater degree of elitism. The particular disdain shown towards the \textit{am ha’aretz} (referring to an unlearned or non-rabbinic Jew) in Babylonian sources is a prime example. For further on the social location of rabbis, including their relations with non-rabbinic Jews, see Schwartz, \textit{Imperialism}; Urbach, \textit{The Sages}, 630-648; Lapin, "The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement; Kalmin, \textit{The Sage in Jewish Society}; Catherine Hezser, \textit{The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine} vol. 66 of \textit{Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism}; ed. Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); Hayim Lapin, \textit{Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100-400 C.E.} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lee I. Levine, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature}, ed. Charlotte Elishava Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 58-74.

Jews, we must conclude that the rabbinic vision of Israel, idealized as it may have been, consisted of a people dedicated to the study of Torah.\textsuperscript{449}

As the arbiters of their tradition, the rabbis made Torah study obligatory and emphasized its primacy above all else, which created an ongoing tension between Torah study and deeds.

Within its discussion of deeds that have no measure, m. Pe’ah 1:1 asserts the superiority of Torah study and promises a reward in the world to come for those who engage in it.

These are things that have no measure: the Pe’ah\textsuperscript{450}, the first fruits,\textsuperscript{451} the appearance offering, deeds of loving-kindness and the study of Torah. These are the things that a person enjoys their fruits in this world, while the principal remains for them in the world to come: honoring a mother and father, deeds of loving-kindness, bringing peace between people, and the study of Torah is equal to all of them.

The mishnah indicates that, as with certain offerings and deeds of loving-kindness, there is no limit to the amount of Torah a person can study. Furthermore, not only is there a this-worldly \textit{and} other-worldly reward for Torah study, but also, its rewards are greater than that of the others put

\textsuperscript{449} That being said, I am not suggesting that the rabbis envisioned (nor desired) a nation of ‘rabbis’. On the contrary, rabbinic sources consistently demonstrate a certain elitism and with regard to Torah study and interpretation of the Law, such that the rabbis had the exclusive authority to do so. The rabbis imagined themselves as the authority figures upon whom the general populace was dependent upon to establish normative practice and impart the lessons of the Torah. Thus, in stating that the rabbinic ideal of Israel consisted of a nation engaged in the study of Torah, I am not arguing that the rabbis sought to transform the populace into rabbis, but rather that they desired for them to be engaged in the study of Torah with the rabbis at the center of that activity. In doing so, the authority of the rabbis would be reinforced and the people would remain subordinate to the rabbis and dependent upon them for instruction.

\textsuperscript{450} The corner portion of the field reserved for the poor.

\textsuperscript{451} brought to the Temple as an offering
together. Thus, the study of Torah is the most assured path to olam haba. While this mishnah clearly emphasizes Torah study, it also indicates that it is among a number of other laudable pursuits. In contrast, the tension between deeds and Torah is explicit in Sifre Deut. 41, which proclaims the supremacy of Torah study above all else:

And you shall learn them and keep and do them (Deut. 5:1): This indicates that deed is dependent upon study, [but] study is not dependent on deed. And we have found that the punishment for [the failure to] study is greater than [for the failure to do] deeds…

R. Tarfon, R. Akiva and R. Yosi the Galilean were reclining at Bet Aris in Lod and this question was posed before them: Which is greater, study or deeds? R. Tarfon said, deeds are greater. R. Akiva said, study is greater. All of them responded and said, study is greater, for study leads to deeds.

The midrash effectively separates study of Torah from the fulfillment of Torah and, while the latter is dependent on the former, the opposite is not the case. If we take the mishnah and the midrash together, what emerges is that the obligation to Torah study extends beyond simply amassing a sufficient amount of knowledge in order to know how to fulfill the commandments. Instead, the texts convey that the study of Torah is a pursuit in its own right, independent of action and it has no quantitative limit.\(^{452}\) Furthermore, the reward (and punishment) for Torah study exceed that of all other deeds.

\(^{452}\) My analysis differs from that of Marc Hirshman, who contends that while on the surface this text favors study, it ultimately discloses a preference for deeds. “The resolution turns study into the maidservant of action, and in effect tilts the scales toward deed” He continues to say that “study is only the necessary precondition.” Hirshman, "Torah in Rabbinic Thought," 909. However, the earlier part of the midrash notes the necessity of study for deed, but it does so in such a way that, to my mind, makes it clear that not only is study independent, but it is obligatory on its own - even without factoring in the study that is necessary for deed.
The distinction between deeds and Torah and the supremacy of the latter is also apparent in b. Hagigga 15b, where the daughter of Elisha b. Abuya stands before R. Judah the Patriarch and implores him to recall her father’s Torah and not his deeds. A heavenly fire comes down to threaten R. Judah who had been unreceptive to Elisha’s daughter, whereupon he exclaims “if this is what happens on account of those who are dishonored by [the Torah], how much more so on account of those who are honored by her!” R. Judah’s concession demonstrates the priority of Torah study, as Elisha’s Torah study prevails over his sinful acts. According to Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “Elisha functions as a symbol for Torah, and his fate is expressive of the ideological priorities and values of the rabbinic world.” The Bavli’s construction of Elisha b. Abuya as the archetypical heretic does not portray him as a repentant figure at any point. R. Judah ultimately accepts the daughter of Elisha, not because he had repented, but on account of the Torah that he had acquired. This narrative is indicative of an attempt on the part of the Bavli’s authors and redactors to assert the importance of Torah study, which they articulated through the daughter of Elisha b. Abuya and confirm with a heavenly fire.

The tension between Torah study and deeds as well as the interplay between rabbinic authority and the value that they placed on Torah study is featured in another Bavli account concerning Elisha b. Abuya. The post-mortem redemption of Elisha b. Abuya recounted in b.  

453 For a detailed look at this narrative, particularly the interplay between the Torah and deeds of Elisha b. Abuya, see Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 154.

454 Alon Goshen-Gottstein observed that the manuscripts differ and indicate that numerous changes had been made to this story. He suggests that in the primary account, the heavenly fire threatened to consume R. Judah, but this was problematic which prompted attempts to mitigate the threat to R. Judah. Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 152.

455 This is Goshen-Gottstein’s translation. Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 150. In other words, if Elisha, who had learned Torah but also sinned, merited a heavenly fire, how much more would others, who had not sinned, merit.

456 Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 149-150.
Hag. 15b evinces the role of the rabbis as arbiters of the afterlife whose authority exceeds that of the heavenly court.

When Aher died they said: Let us not judge him, and let us not bring him into the world-to-come. Let us not judge him, because he engaged in Torah, and let us not bring him into the world to come, because he sinned. R. Meir said: It would be better if he were judged so that he could be brought into the world to come, when shall I die so that I can cause smoke to rise from his grave? When R. Meir died, smoke came out from the grave of Aher. R. Yohanan said: Such might to burn his master? There was one among us and we could not save him? If I take him by the hand, who will tear him away from me, who? He said: when shall I die so that I can extinguish the smoke from his grave? When R. Yohanan died, the smoke ceased from the grave of Aher. The wailer began [his eulogy] concerning him: Even the gatekeeper could not stand up to, our master.457

The passage begins with Elisha b. Abuya being held in limbo because his study of Torah prevented him from entering hell, but his sins kept him from entering the world to come. The sages’ role as arbiters of the afterlife is apparent in that they seem to be privy to the inner-workings of divine justice and they have the ability to intervene on behalf of Elisha b. Abuya.458

Deeds are once again juxtaposed with Torah study though, within the heavenly realm, neither takes precedence over the other. Goshen-Gottstein perceives a power struggle between the sages who favor Torah study and the heavenly court, which favors deeds. “From the heavenly perspective, total perfection is sought. Therefore, they cannot entertain the possibility of preferring Torah knowledge to religious observance. Only the rabbis, who are the carriers of the

457 My translation is based upon Goshen-Gottstein’s translation of the same text. Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 145-146.

458 Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 146-147.
Torah, can proclaim that the value of the Torah outweighs the value of religious observance, and therefore act on behalf of Elisha and his final redemption.”459 Ultimately, the rabbis emerge as victors, and Elisha b. Abuya is able to expiate his sins and be delivered into the world to come. Although Elisha is referred to as Aher throughout the passage, R. Yohanan refers to him as ‘one among us’. Thus, according to the Bavli, while Elisha remains an ‘other’ for his rejection of the rabbinic tradition, on some level, his engagement with Torah aligns him with the sages in this story.460 Goshen-Gottstein argues that the story is primarily about the dynamic of rabbinic authority and the power of the rabbis and their Torah. “…Elisha is the test case for the power of the sages. By telling the story of a sage who lost and then regained his share in the world-to-come by virtue of the sages, the storytellers can highlight the power of Torah and of the sages, a power that outweighs any transgression and is greater than heavenly decrees, probably greater than heavenly beings.”461 This interplay between rabbinic authority and Torah is particularly significant for our examination of olam haba within the context of rabbinic authority. Torah is not only the means by which the rabbis legitimate their authority, but it is also the means by which they set the parameters of their tradition. In doing so, they established the Torah as a means to olam haba, which not only reinforced their authority in this world, but also extended that authority to the world to come. Thus, as Goshen-Gottstein observes, the rabbis are responsible for both Elisha’s exclusion as well as his eventual inclusion in the world to come. The Bavli affirms that the rabbis are the ones who set the standards for entry into the afterlife and


460 Per Goshen-Gottstein, “Ultimately he is redeemed not by being a member of a guild, in need of collegial support, but because of the Torah he possesses. Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 154-155.

461 Goshen-Gottstein, The Sinner and the Amnesiac, 146.
they have both the power and authority to overcome the heavenly decree. Though we cannot presume an audience beyond rabbinic circles, nor the influence that texts such as these might have had, we can suppose that this reflects the rabbinic self-perception, which contributed to the way in which they conceived of and discussed olam haba.

Thus far, this chapter has established the relationship between Torah and rabbinic authority, which enabled the rabbis to become the arbiters of olam haba. As we proceed, we will consider the rabbinic presentation of the unique attributes of Torah study and how its association with olam haba renders the sages as vehicles to olam haba.

This chapter’s contention that the literature presents the rabbis as vehicles to olam haba is a function of the way in which the rabbis perceived the nature of Torah study and its effects on the individual. The following passage from Sifre Deut. 343 highlights the ability of Torah study to impart and sustain life, its transformative effects, as well as its extension beyond this world and into the world to come. Our close reading of the text will examine how this conception of Torah study informed the rabbinic emphasis on its primacy as well as the role of the sages within that process.

From his right a fiery law for them (Deut 33:2): This teaches that the words of Torah are likened to fire. Just as fire was given from heaven, so too, the words of

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462 In addition to this story, Goshen-Gottstein cites b. Sota 10b and Kallah 2:16 as additional sources where the sages facilitate entry into the world to come. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 346 n. 80.
Torah were given from heaven. As it is said: ‘you have seen that I have spoken to you from the heavens’ (Exod 20:19) Just as fire [brings] life to the world, so too, the words of Torah [bring] life to the world.463 Just as when a person is close to fire he is burnt, and when he is far from it, he is cold, so too the words of Torah, whenever a person toils in them, they [bring] life to him. [If] he separates from them, they cause his death. Just as fire is used in this world and the world to come, so too, the words of Torah are used in this world and the world to come. Just as fire leaves a mark on the body of whosoever uses it, so too, the words of Torah leave a mark on the body of whosoever uses them. Just as those who labor in fire are recognizable among other people, so too the disciples of the sages are recognized by their manner of walking, speech and dress in the marketplace.

The midrash presents the common motif of fire as a metaphor for Torah, depicting it as a primordial element of heavenly origin that brings life to the world. The fundamental tenet of Torah from heaven is affirmed by the midrash, which confirms it by means of a proof-text. It should be noted that this is the only statement within this section that is accompanied by a proof-text. Perhaps the midrash’s rationale is that while the effects of Torah can be readily observed and therefore do not need a proof-text, the heavenly origin of Torah and its existence prior to creation cannot be observed in the same way. Furthermore, the central claim of Torah from heaven which gives rise to the notion of Torah study as a worthwhile endeavor is reinforced by its scriptural support. In addition, the midrash suggests that the unique nature of Torah study and its effects on the individual stems from its heavenly origin. Fraade observes that in stating that the words of Torah originate in heaven and bring life to the world, the midrash presents them

463 Per Fraade’s translation. Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary, 46. Fraade disagrees with Reuven Hammer’s rendering of the phrase לְעֹלָמֵי חָיוֹת as ‘lives forever’, since he maintains that עָלָם appears as a singular noun throughout the text and חָיוֹת as a verb would require a plural object. See Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary, 207 n. 93 In addition, the eternal nature of Torah is expressed in the subsequent phrase which states that the words of Torah are used in this world and the world to come. In my estimation, Hammer’s translation makes the idea redundant, whereas Fraade’s understanding allows the midrash to express two distinct ideas, which I find preferable.
as a link between heaven and earth.\footnote{Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary, 46} The midrash’s notion that Torah brings or sustains life is maintained in numerous sources throughout the rabbinic corpus.\footnote{Torah study as life-sustaining in, Sifre Deut. 306; Mekhilta Vayissa 1; b. Ber. 61b; Torah study offers protection, saves a person from death in, b. Ber. 5a; b. Avod. Zar. 17b; b. Sota 21a; Study of Torah maintains the world in, m. Avot 1:2; b. Sanh. 99b; b. Meg. 16b.} The midrash’s third comparative statement differs from the rest in that a distinction is made between fire and the words of Torah. Whereas fire burns those who approach it, the words of Torah do not burn like fire, but rather bring life those who engage in them. Fraade notes the incongruity and suggests that the comparison of the Torah to a scorching fire originates in the Mekhilta, where there the statement is intended as cautionary.\footnote{Fraade compares this midrash with a close parallel in Mekhilta Bahodesh 4 whose comparison of Torah to fire includes a warning against getting too close to the Torah. Fraade contends that the Mekhilta attempts to discourage the interpretation of the theophany at Sinai in terms of Ezekiel’s vision of the divine chariot, noting the repeated warnings the dangers of engaging in the ma’aseh merkavah in rabbinic sources. Hence, the Mekhilta’s interpretative context yields a cautionary warning against the danger of getting too close to Torah, according to Fraade. From Tradition to Commentary, 46-48 and notes on 209-210.} According to Fraade, the statement is transformed to a wholly positive one in the Sifre as a result of its context, which presents the Torah as the thing that positively distinguishes Israel from the nations.\footnote{Like the Mekhilta, the Sifre’s context is also the revelation at Sinai. However, our midrash is found within a lengthy expose that details Israel’s willing acceptance of the Torah while the other nations rejected it.} However, if we consider the Sifre’s overall attempt to present the sages as the authoritative interpreters of the Torah,\footnote{Fraade had makes this argument about the Sifre Deut. in From Tradition to Commentary.} perhaps our midrash is hinting at something further. In addition to the contextual differences of the Sifre and Mekhilta, there is also a difference in the wording of the texts. While the Mekhilta equates the Torah itself to fire, אֲשֶׁר הָיָה הַתּוֹרָה, the Sifre likens the words of Torah to fire, בָּאָשָׁהּ מְשֹׁלִים תּוֹרָה שֶׁדֶבָּרִי אֲשֶׁר. In other words, while the Torah alone - without the oral traditions and interpretations of the
rabbis - poses a danger to those who get too close to it, the words of Torah - which include the teachings of the sages - sustain those who engage in them and only pose a danger to those who separate from them. Furthermore, in stating that words of Torah are capable of bringing life as well as causing death, the midrash may be alluding to the function of rabbis as arbiters of the afterlife, given the immediate reference to their use in olam haba. If the Torah, which represents the will of God and is the standard by which people are judged and recompensed, remains elusive without the sages, then the sole means of attaining olam haba is by engaging in the Torah of the sages. Thus, the merit attained by engaging in the words of Torah brings life, while separation from them brings death.

The continuity of Torah and its independence from the temporal and geographical constraints of this world prompts the rabbis to project Torah study onto the historical past and the heavenly realm, thereby extending their authority and ideals to the past and future. The midrash’s statement that the words of Torah are used in this world and the world to come denotes that it is not confined by time or space. Although the Torah was revealed at a fixed point in time, a number of rabbinic sources maintain that the Torah preceded and even guided the creation of the world. The belief in the pre-existence of Torah enabled the rabbis to project their ideal of Torah study onto their biblical forefathers, in what Isaiah Gafni refers to as the rabbinization of

469 Since, the rabbis maintained that the Written Torah cannot be properly understood, let alone practiced, without the assistance of the Oral Torah, which they alone are privy to. Thus, without the aid of the rabbis, a person may misinterpret the Torah and fall into sin. Consequently, in the same way that the ma'aseh merkavah poses a danger to the uninitiated, the words of Torah alone, without the proper instruction of the rabbis, are also dangerous since the individual will be unable to decipher and fulfill the will of God.

470 According to Fraade, “the expression words of Torah is sometimes employed to refer to the written Torah as distinguished from the oral rabbinic Torah: Sifre 115, 154; m. Sanh.11:3. Elsewhere, as here [§335], it means either Torah teaching as a whole (scriptural and rabbinic), or its rabbinic component in particular: §41, §48, §306.” From Tradition to Commentary, 258 n.219.

471 Gen. Rab. 1:4; b. Pes. 54a; Lev. Rab. 19:1; ARN A 31; m. Abot 3:14.
the past. "For the sages… the Jewish religious expression of their own day had achieved a spirituality superior to earlier forms, the surest way of expressing reverence for a glorious past would be to paint that past in rabbinic tones." Hence, we find that the rabbis portray Adam, the patriarchs, David and others engaged in the study of Torah. In projecting a life of Torah on biblical heroes, the rabbis reconstructed history as a reflection of their idealized vision of Israel as a nation perpetually engaged in Torah study. Similarly, the rabbis also projected the ideal of Torah study onto olam haba and the heavenly realm. A tradition in b. Ber. 64a states that the disciples of sages have no rest in this world or in the world to come as a result of their continued engagement with the study of Torah.

The universality of Torah study in this world is also paralleled in its projection onto the world to come, as God and the heavenly court are also engaged in the study of Torah. This is illustrated in the idea of the יישוב של ישיבה, or heavenly academy where the righteous engage in

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472 Gafni defines this as “the representation of earlier figures or institutions of Jewish history - primarily biblical but quite a few post-biblical ones as well - in the image of the rabbinic world in which the sages functioned.” "Rabbinic Historiography," 305. Gafni notes that this was a tendency that emerged in the amoraic period, perhaps as a response to the supersessionism of the Church.


474 Sifre Deut. 41; Pirqe R. El. 12.

475 Gen. Rab. 61:1, 63:10, 68:5, 68:11, 84:8, 95:3-4; b. Yoma 28b.

476 b. Ber 4a, as halakhic authority; b. Shabb. 30a-b; b. Eruv. 53a; b. Sanh. 49a, 93b; b. Mak. 10a; b. Mo’ed Qat. 16b; Lev. Rab. 35:1; y. Ber. 1:1; See also Kalmin, The Sage in Jewish Society, 83-93.

477 This tradition also appears in b. Mo’ed Qat. 29a.
the study of Torah alongside God. According to Jeffrey Rubenstein this concept “derives from a long tradition, dating back to the second temple and even biblical periods, which pictures God presiding in a heavenly court, surrounded by angels and righteous humans.” To be sure, ancient traditions did not envision Torah study as the activity of the heavenly court. Rather, the rabbinic emphasis on Torah study, transformed the image of the heavenly court to reflect a utopian vision that was unique to the rabbis. Thus, while the phrase יшеבה של ישיבת is attested in tannaitic sources, David Goodblatt has demonstrated that it does not refer to an academy per se, but rather a heavenly court or session that was the counterpart to the earthly Sanhedrin. As such, the heavenly court/session in Palestinian tannaitic and amoraic traditions is primarily engaged in judicial activity. Rubenstein argues that the character of the heaven court/session undergoes a transformation in the Bavli traditions where it changes into that of a study house or


479 Rubenstein, The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud, 28.

480 Goodblatt, Rabbinic Instruction, 68.
academy whose primary activity is the study of Torah. Although the meets the shifts from a judicial to scholastic institution of sorts, the unifying element between these two formulations is the Torah. David Goodblatt points out that it is unlikely that academic and judicial functions were completely separate in Jewish communities of late antiquity, especially since the courts were responsible for administering what was believed to be divinely revealed law. In addition to the transformation of the heavenly court/session, God himself is portrayed in the image of a rabbinic sage engaged in the study of Torah. Furthermore, in b. Bava Metzi’a 86a, the authority of the sages as masters of Torah is recognized by God as Rabbah b. Nahmani is summoned to resolve a dispute between God and the members of the heavenly session/academy. In this story, not only is God debating points of Torah in a manner similar to the rabbis, but also it appears that with regard to matters of Torah, the sages are on par with God. The debate reaches an impasse as God’s opinion is opposed by the majority. Even though the opinion of God is ultimately upheld, it is remarkable that the debate is resolved, not on the basis

481 Rubenstein states that it is difficult to determine whether the phrase referring to a heavenly study-session or heavenly academy. Rubenstein, The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud, 29. Goodblatt discusses the phrase within his careful examination of the word and its Aramaic equivalent, and concludes that for the most part, it refers to a heavenly court or session rather than a school or academy as such. He does acknowledge that there are instances in the Bavli (b. Pes. 53b, b. Bava Metzi’a 85a) that suggest that the was an academic institution. Goodblatt, Rabbinic Instruction, 63-92. For the purposes of our study, the physical or institutional setting of the heavenly academy/session matters less than its activity, which Goodblatt and Rubenstein both agree included the study of Torah.

482 Rubenstein, The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud, 28-29

483 Goodblatt, Rabbinic Instruction, 66. This supports the point articulated above regarding the use of Torah as the standard by which people are judged and recompensed.

484 Gen. Rab. 49:2; b. Av. Zar. 3a; b. Hag. 15b; b. Bava Metzi’a 86a;

485 Per Rubenstein, “God is portrayed not as the indomitable judge upon his heavenly throne but as a sage engaging in quintessential academic activity: debate over law.” Rubenstein, The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud, 29.
of divine authority, but rather, on the opinion of a sage.\textsuperscript{486} Rabbah b. Nahmani is called up to the heavens to settle the dispute, owing to his exceptional knowledge of Torah on the subject. The heavenly summons of Rabbah b. Nahmani recalls the Sifre’s presentation of Torah as a bridge between heaven and earth. However, the Torah does more than simply bridge the geographic distance between these two realms, it is the connective entity that unifies them and the very element which enables passage from this world to the world to come.

The transformative ability of Torah study enables the individual to achieve piety and merit, thereby attaining a share in the world to come. The Sifre text states that the words of Torah leave a mark on the body of those who engage with them. Although it is difficult to discern exactly what the Sifre intends here, it seems to suggest that the words of Torah leave an indelible mark on the individual. As we have already argued, the study of Torah was regarded as a spiritual exercise in and of itself, as well as a means of understanding how to fulfill the commandments. In both cases, Torah study is not simply an intellectual exercise, but one that is meant to inform the thoughts and actions of the individual. The lessons of Torah were not meant to be read, but assimilated and integrated into one’s life and practice. In doing so, a person is not only able to avoid sin, but also, achieve piety. Ideally, engagement with Torah study was meant to have a fundamental impact on the person. In their opposition to Beit Shammai, who held that Torah study ought to be reserved for the elite few, Beit Hillel cites the transformative process that the study of Torah yields. “Every person should be taught, for there were many sinners among Israel

\textsuperscript{486} There is a striking parallelism between this argument and the one concerning the oven of akhnai in b. Bava Metzi’a 59b. In both cases, the debate centers on a matter of ritual purity, where the majority’s opinion is on the side of impurity, and the minority opinion - voiced by God and R. Eliezer - is on the side of purity. Although the opinion of God is upheld while R. Eliezer’s is not, in both cases, the debate is resolved on the authority of the sages rather than on divine authority. In addition, the central figures of both debates, R. Eliezer (b. Sanh. 68a, ARN A 25) and Rabbah b. Nahmani (b. Bava Metzi’a 86a), are said to have died while uttering the word “pure”.

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and they were brought to the study of Torah and righteous, pious and upright men emerged from them." This statement discloses the relationship between Torah and deeds, such that the study of Torah has the ability to inform the actions of the individual and moreover, transform their very nature. According to Jonathan Schofer, the transformative impact of the Torah lies at the heart of Avot de Rabbi Natan, an ethical manual whose primary aim is to instruct a student in how to become a sage. “…Rabbi Nathan presents complex accounts of what people are at origin or by nature (the rebellious), what ideal people are and do (the righteous, pious and upright), and processes of transformation between the given and the ideal (the study of Torah).” In other words, Torah study is what enables a person to attain the religious and ethical ideal of righteousness. As a prescriptive work which presents an idealized view of the sages who become exemplars of ethical and religious conduct by means of Torah, Avot de Rabbi Natan discloses the ultimate potential of Torah study and its transformative impact on the individual. Its narratives depict the way in which the study and internalization of Torah guides the individual

487 ARN A 3.


490 Schofer argues that Avot de Rabbi Natan presents a far more idealized portrait of the rabbis within its narratives than other texts. “Jeffrey Rubenstein has shown, in his study of talmudic stories, that Babylonian narratives often work out tensions and express ambivalence rather than presenting sages as unambiguous exemplars. Most of the narratives of Rabbi Nathan, by contrast, uphold the sages. While in some cases they appear as flawed or as facing situations that reveal the limits of their virtue, generally in Rabbi Nathan sages define the telos of ethical transformation through modeling right character and action.” Schofer, *The Making of a Sage*, 49.
towards proper and ethical behavior and steers them away from sin.\textsuperscript{491} As a key component of the system of reward and punishment, the world to come is the reward that awaits the righteous for their meritorious conduct.\textsuperscript{492} As such, as a means of attaining merit and avoiding sin, the study of Torah is indispensable for entry into the world to come.

The link between Torah study and olam haba imparts a distinctive status on the sage who, as a master of Torah, becomes a vehicle to olam haba. The last statement of Sifre Deuteronomy 41 declares that the disciples of sages\textsuperscript{493} are recognized by their walk, speech and dress. The internalization of Torah has altered their behavior and demeanor, and they are distinguished from others as a result. As embodiments of the Torah that they study, the sages are not only recognizable but also, elevated in stature. The rabbinic insistence on the necessity of the Oral Law and its traditions to fully understand the Written Torah and the will of God created an inherent need for the sages who claimed to be its sole inheritors. Furthermore, while the study of Torah was incumbent on everyone, sages were an essential and requisite part of that practice.\textsuperscript{494} Avot de Rabbi Natan details four types of people who frequent the \textit{beit midrash}, of whom 2 merit the world to come while the other two do not.\textsuperscript{495} Of the four, two sit close to the sage,

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  \item \textsuperscript{491} According to Schofer, this is a central aspect of the presentation of Torah in Avot de Rabbi Natan. “The compilers of Rabbi Nathan portray Torah as a restraint for transgression, and this feature is crucial for ethical transformation.” Schofer, \textit{The Making of a Sage}, 71. Schofer argues that according to Avot de Rabbi Natan, the Torah is not simply a barrier against sinful impulses. Rather, the internalization of the Torah fundamentally alters the sage such that his fundamental desires are shaped by its precepts. Hence, the sage has no need to overcome certain sinful impulses since he does not have them. Schofer, \textit{The Making of a Sage}, 71-115.
  \item \textsuperscript{492} The essential relationship between the world to come and divine justice and recompense in the rabbinic tradition will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.
  \item \textsuperscript{493} The term חכם תלמיד is used to refer to sages, since every sage had a master.
  \item \textsuperscript{494} b. Ket. 111a states that even a sage should not learn Torah alone, but rather from a master.
  \item \textsuperscript{495} ARN A 40.
\end{itemize}
while two sit at a distance from him. The one who sits close to the sage so that he may learn from him, as well as the one who sits at a distance from the sage in order to show respect to a person of greater stature, merit a share in the world to come. However, the one who sits close to the sage in order to gain status and the one who sits at a distance from the sage to show that he does not need him, have no share in the world to come. While there is no essential difference between the actions of each pair, the underlying intentions, specifically the desire to learn from the sage and show deference are what determine worthiness for olam haba. This text denotes the two aspects of the sage as a vehicle to olam haba, namely, their knowledge and status.

Beyond the Torah that a sage imparts, the sage himself is a vehicle to olam haba, as a number of sources in the Bavli and Avot de Rabbi Natan establish the importance and the particular merit of tending to a sage. While some equate tending to a sage with the study of Torah, there is an opinion that it is even more important than Torah study itself. Furthermore, the very act of tending to a sage is said to be rewarded with a share in the world to come. Corresponsingly, those who disrespect the sages are also punished in the world to come. As is typical for the rabbis, the elevated status of the sage was integrated into the halakhah in m. Bava Metzi’a 2:11:

496 i.e. so that others will be impressed that he sits close to the sage.
497 It is likely that these traditions developed as a result of the scholastic milieu of these texts.
498 b. Yoma 86a; ARN A 2.
499 b. Ber. 7a.
500 b. Bava Metzi’a 85b; b. Hul. 44b; ARN A 36. The wives of sages are said to merit olam haba in b. Yoma 77a, on account of the sleep that they lose in this world, presumably tending to their husbands.
501 b. Bava Batra 75a. See my discussion on the Bavli’s treatment of the apikoros in the previous chapter.
The mishna imposes a hierarchy between a father and a sage. Although we might have expected a father to take precedence over the sage, particularly given the biblical commandment of honoring one’s parents, it is the sage that takes precedence over the father in all circumstances. The only exception to the priority of the sage is if the father is also learned, in which case he takes precedence. The mishna reasons that while a father brings a person into temporal life, the sage brings the person into the world to come. In doing so, the mishna indicates the priority of the world to come, as well as the necessity of Torah study and the sage for its attainment. In addition, the mishna formalizes the role of the sage as a vehicle to olam haba by using it as a basis for halakhic practice.

Although the rabbis may not have had any formal authority beyond their circles, their association with Torah and its study distinguished them among other Jews of their time. The

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502 teacher

503 i.e., Talmud. This is according to Rashi who follows R. Meir’s definition in the baraita, which is introduced by the gemara in order to define who is considered a master, that takes precedence over one’s father. See b. Bava Metzi’a 33a.

504 lit., disciple of sage.
rabbinic tradition, which placed Torah study at its center and promised a share in the world to come for those who engage in it, eventually emerged to redefine Judaism as a whole. As the preeminent occupation of the rabbis, Torah study was not only the means by which the rabbis established their expertise, but it also afforded them status and, eventually, authority beyond their immediate circles. Scholars have adopted a number of approaches in their attempts to trace the emergence of the rabbis and their tradition as authoritative and normative in late antiquity. As one of the scholars who argue for a minimalistic approach, Seth Schwartz limits the extent of rabbinic authority in the early centuries of the common era and portrays the rabbis as marginal figures within Jewish society. Schwartz argues that the rabbis did not wield much formal authority, and characterizes them as functionaries rather than authorities, yet he concedes that the rabbis may have been deferred to as experts in Torah,505 which afforded them a certain, albeit limited, sphere of influence among the Jews of Palestine. In their attempts to trace the evolution of the rabbinic movement, scholars have situated the early rabbis in predominantly urban areas during the early centuries of the common era,506 yet it seems that their expertise in Torah was recognized beyond their own social circles and extended beyond the geographic boundaries of rabbinic centers. For example, while Schwartz situates the rabbis in predominantly urban areas of Palestine in the third and fourth centuries CE, he notes that their knowledge with regard to Scripture and the law was recognized and sought after by Jews residing in rural areas and


villages. This is not to say that the rabbis were recognized as the religious authorities that rabbinic sources themselves would have us believe. Rather, what later emerged as a rabbinic movement began as a small network of relatively independent master-disciple circles without any official authority and very little, if any, religious authority in non-rabbinic circles. However, the rabbis were identifiable as a result of their emphasis on the study of Torah and its interpretation, which garnered them recognition as experts in the law. Hence, perhaps the very means by which they established authority within their tradition was also what allowed them to do so beyond it. All the while, engagement with Torah study continued as each generation of rabbis transmitted and expounded on the traditions of their predecessors so that by the time rabbinic Judaism took hold, the rabbis were already positioned to assume their roles as vehicles to and arbiters of the world to come.

This chapter has demonstrated how the sages’ mastery of Torah not only established their authority in this world, but also extended it to the world to come. Having assumed the role of the prophets and the priests, the rabbis became the primary religious authorities of their tradition. Consequently, they alone were responsible for the interpretation of the Torah and its laws.

Although the rabbis, for the most part, claimed that their interpretations revealed what was already embedded within the Torah, their transformation of Judaism is undeniable. As they defined and refined the laws of the Torah, the rabbis had an active role in determining proper

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507 "The rabbis did not control anything in rural Palestine - not synagogues, not charity collection or distribution, nor anything else. But as acknowledged experts in Jewish law, protégés of the patriarch, and so on, they might be approached (and given that most of them lived in the cities, the villagers had to take the initiative) with some regularity for some purposes.” Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 124.

practice as well as the rewards that would be bestowed for the fulfillment of the commandments. In doing so, the rabbis effectively became the arbiters of olam haba and they bestowed the ultimate reward onto the quintessential rabbinic activity of Torah study. The allocation of a share in the world to come as a special reward for Torah study attests to the premium that the rabbis placed on the activity, which was necessary for the perpetuation of the rabbinic tradition. The variety of sources considered within this chapter confirms that the association of Torah study with olam haba persists throughout the literature, irrespective of genre, chronology and geographical provenance. Furthermore, despite the importance of deeds within the rabbinic tradition and their basis for reward and punishment, the world to come is granted not only for the meritorious conduct precipitated by Torah study, but also for the very act itself. Thus, in addition to the multitudinous benefits of Torah study, its ultimate value lies in its capacity as a path towards the world to come. Consequently, the primacy of Torah study placed the sage at the very center of religious life in this world, and rendered him as indispensable for entry into the world to come. In designating a share in the world to come as the reward for Torah study, the sages harnessed the expectation of a beatific afterlife to foster an ideal that they valued. Although this may not have been a self-conscious effort of the rabbis, it may nonetheless have enhanced the appeal of Torah study and extend its value to those who might not otherwise have been predisposed to consider it without the promise of such a reward.

This chapter has established the mutually reinforcing relationship between Torah study and rabbinic authority, which was reinforced by the association of Torah study with olam haba. Our next chapter will discuss how olam haba, as a mechanism of theodicy, upheld the covenantal promises of the Torah and sustained the rabbinic system of divine justice and recompense. Thus,
if this chapter established the Torah as a means to olam haba, the next chapter will demonstrate how olam haba maintains the Torah in the face of circumstances that fundamentally challenged its validity.
5. Olam Haba as the Quintessential Reward: Covenant, Retribution and Theodicy
This chapter will explore how the notion of olam haba is used to reconcile the conflict that arises out of the encounter between the rabbinic ideal of a just and omnipotent God and the reality of unjust suffering. There are manifold issues that arise out of the question of divine justice, eliciting a variety of responses on the part of the rabbis.\footnote{A thorough examination of the rabbinic system of reward and punishment is beyond the scope of this work. This chapter will focus on the idea of the world to come as it relates to this framework. For a more comprehensive look at the rabbinic conception of reward and punishment, including the role of repentance, the divine attributes of justice and mercy, free will and inclination, see Urbach, The Sages, 420-523; Katz, "Man, Sin, and Redemption in Rabbinic Judaism," in The Cambridge History of Judaism IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period (ed. Steven T. Katz; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 925-945; C. G. Montefiore, et al., "The Doctrine of Divine Retribution in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Rabbinical Literature," The Jewish Quarterly Review 3, no. 1 (1890): 1-51; Jacob Neusner, Rabinic Theology and Israelite prophecy: Primacy of the Torah, Narrative of the World to Come, Doctrine of Repentance and Atonement, and the Systematization of Theology in the Rabbis’ Reading of the Prophets (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008). On the different responses to suffering, see Sanders, "R. Akiba's View of Suffering"; Yaakov Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous in Palestinian and Babylonian Sources," The Jewish Quarterly Review 80, no. 3/4 (1990): 315-339; Heschel, Heavenly Torah, 127-143; David Kraemer, Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Matthew B. Schwartz, "The Meaning of Suffering: A Talmudic Response to Theodicy," Judaism 32, no. 4 (1983): 444-451.} While olam haba is not the only solution provided within the many rabbinic attempts at theodicy, it is nevertheless a central response, which is derived out of the rabbinic understanding of a complex system of reward and punishment that assumes the presence and involvement of God in this world as well as a causal relationship between human action and divine response. Jonathan Schofer aptly describes that causality as follows: “A human act is not a discrete event, but part of a process extended over an undefined period of time in which a person acts, God responds, and in between, there are various possibilities for intervening in the divine judiciary process through petitionary prayer, repentance, and ritual atonement. In this account human activity is given immense significance, because a given act reverberates through divine accounting and affects the future conditions for oneself, others, and the cosmos.”\footnote{Jonathan Schofer, "Protest or pedagogy?: Trivial Sin and Divine Justice in Rabbinic Narrative," Hebrew Union College Annual 74 (2003): 247-248.} In addition, the rabbinic claim that a key attribute of divine
justice is measure for measure - elicits the expectation of a degree of correspondence between human action and divine response. Consequently, the rabbis must contend with the fundamental challenge to their conception of divine justice when events - whether historical or those experienced on a personal level - fail to conform to these expectations.

The mutual obligations of God and the people are the result of a covenantal relationship that, in turn, establishes the system of retributive justice that is articulated in the Hebrew Bible. God promises blessing and prosperity as rewards for maintenance of the covenant, while suffering and death are the consequences of the failure to abide by the covenantal terms. The influence of the covenantal system of justice is evident in the statement attributed to R. Ammi in b. Shabbat 55a, “There is no death without sin and there is no suffering without wrongdoing.” This system, whose validity is dependent on the semblance of justice, is predicated upon the notion of free will that allows for human accountability. Accordingly, the perception of injustice, in the form of disproportional suffering or prosperity, threatens the legitimacy of this system and calls into question the belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and just God as well as the validity of the covenant. As Peter Berger remarks,

511 Halberstam, following Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Michael Satlow, remarks that while they assert the doctrine of ‘measure for measure’, rabbinic texts indicate that at times there is a “correlation in kind for deed and outcome but not necessarily in scale.” Chaya T. Halberstam, Law and Truth in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 124. Similarly, Schofer argues that “Despite the important rabbinic claim that divine justice is ‘measure for measure’ (middah keneged middah), accounts of divine justice present numerous relations between act and result. Correspondence or lack thereof may appear in the nature of the two events, the literary expression in which they are formulated or both. Correspondence may admit of degrees, with sometimes an exact fit between act and response, sometimes a more loose connection, and sometimes an explicit disjunction.” Schofer, "Protest or pedagogy?,” 249. See also, Urbach, The Sages, 438-440.

512 See especially, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 which detail blessings that reward adherence to the covenant and curses for failure to abide by it. Moreover, the Hebrew Bible generally depicts divine wrath and punishment as a response to human transgression.
The problem of theodicy appears most sharply in radical and ethical monotheism, that is, within the orbit of biblical religion. If all rival and minor divinities are radically eliminated, and if not only all power but all ethical values are ascribed to the one God who created all things in this or any other world, then the problem of theodicy becomes a pointed question directed to this very conception. Indeed, more than in any other religious constellation, it may be said that this type of monotheism stands or falls within its capacity to solve the question of theodicy, “How can God permit…?”

Although Freiherr von Leibniz coined the term ‘theodicy’ in the 18th century, the quest to ascribe meaning to suffering and reconcile it with the notion of a just God is already evidenced in the Hebrew Bible. When the prophets of ancient Israel were called upon to explain death, suffering and exile, they did so through the lens of the biblical tradition. The prophets argued that these events were the consequences of sin and faithlessness and called upon the people to return to God and abide by the covenant. The system of retributive justice presented in the Bible and extended in the prophetic books is also maintained by the rabbis. However, the old and new challenges that confronted the sages in the post-temple era demanded an adjustment to the biblical system of retributive justice. The rabbis found precedent in the prophetic tradition to address the subjugation of Israel as well as the destruction and exile. By framing these events as the consequence of shortcomings on the individual and corporate level, they were able to


\[\text{514 Of course, the rabbis were not unique in doing so. The NT Gospels and Paul’s letters display the similar attempts to present Jesus as the fulfillment of biblical promises and prophecy. This is particularly apparent as the followers of Jesus sought to justify their belief in Jesus as the messiah following his crucifixion. Alan Segal remarks, “Since Jesus dies as a martyr, expectations of his resurrection would have been normal in some Jewish sects. But the idea of a crucified messiah was unique. In such a situation, the Christians only did what other believing Jews did in similar circumstances: They turned to Biblical prophecy for elucidation.” Segal, Life after Death, 427. Hence, although the rabbis and their Christian counterparts may have interpreted scripture differently and yielded opposing messages from it, the instinctive turn to scripture in order to reconcile what they believed with what they experienced was shared by both groups.}\]
maintain the system of retributive justice while also buttressing the supersessionist claims of nascent Christianity. The covenant was still intact and the ongoing relationship with God was evidenced in the allocation of these punishments as a result of the Israelites’ failure to maintain the covenant. Hence, these events, while catastrophic, were simply an expression of the promise of retribution by God outlined in the Bible. However, the shift from the model of corporate responsibility to one of individual responsibility engendered the expectation of congruity between merit and retribution on a personal level. While the collective pain of an exiled and subjugated people could be assuaged by promises of restoration and a new world ushered in by a messianic figure, the plight of the righteous individual suffering unjustly could not be resolved in quite the same manner. As such, the rabbis had to account for the apparent lack of justice manifested in the prosperity of the wicked and suffering of the righteous. Furthermore, the *sui generis* nature of the Hadrianic persecutions posed a significant theological problem, which directly challenged the biblical model of retributive justice. Though this was certainly not the first instance of unjust suffering, these circumstances were unique in that pious sages were killed and tortured *precisely because* of their observance of the Torah rather than despite it. This

515 This is the result of a long process, which was prompted by shifting communal and familial structures in Ancient Israel. For further on this subject, see Halpern, “Jerusalem and the Lineages”; Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT 196; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Though the Bible presents a model of corporate responsibility, the rabbis, for the most part, rejected the notion of generational retribution. This is evidenced in b. Berakhot 7a, where Mar’s suggestion that the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous may be explained as a consequence of the previous generation’s deeds or merits is rejected. In its stead, the gemara asserts the personal responsibility of each individual, regardless of their parentage.

516 This finds expression in the rabbinic phrase, *

517 Urbach remarks, “the conventional ‘doctrine of reward and punishment’ underwent a grave crisis in the period of Hadrian’s religious persecution, which led to a change in Rabbinic thinking on theodicy. It was not that the tribulation that came upon the righteous from a higher power that called for an explanation, nor the bitter outcry against the troubles that were equally the lot of the wicked and the righteous that demanded an answer, but the fact that the resolve to observe the commandments was itself the cause of death and suffering!” Urbach, *The Sages*, 442.
inherently undermined the biblical promises of long life and prosperity as rewards for observance of the Law. The phrase, \( \text{שלם זז, וזו תורה זו} \) (this is the Torah and this is its reward?) is uttered incredulously by sages and others who demand a response from God when reality flies in the face of these promises.\(^{518}\)

The rabbinic conception of a just, omniscient and omnipotent God whose Torah is an expression of everlasting truth meant that the rabbis could hardly ignore the discrepancy between its promises and reality, nor could they claim that such suffering was perpetuated without the knowledge and assent of God. Indeed, the failure to reconcile this problem jeopardized the essential nature of God and Torah as the rabbis understood them. Although it is one of many responses to the problem of unjust suffering, the relocation of the locale of divine justice and retribution to olam haba resolves a number of issues for the rabbis. They are able to maintain the biblical system of retributive justice while also accounting for injustice and suffering within that system, giving it meaning and purpose without negating its effects. This will be demonstrated in our close reading of Sifre 307.

I have selected Sifre 307 as the primary source for this chapter, owing not only to its theodical use of olam haba, but also for its articulation within a copious presentation of the rabbinic understanding of divine justice and reward and punishment. Though this text has informed the argument that this chapter seeks to advance, it is by no means the entire basis for my conclusion. The association of olam haba with divine reward and punishment is evidenced in

\(^{518}\) The phrase is found in b. Ber 61b; b. Men. 29b; y. Hag. 2:1; Semahot 8:12. Each of these texts is thematically related to the martyrdom of the sages under the Hadriantic persecutions. In all of these texts the phrase is uttered as a charge against God by those who witness this extreme injustice.
virtually every source where it is presented in the context of merit.\textsuperscript{519} Furthermore, as an earlier work, this text affords us a view into how the rabbinic tradition was formulated and appreciate how the ideas articulated here were maintained in later traditions.

The rabbinic system of reward and punishment along with the theodicies presented in Sifre 307, are based on and informed by the primary text of Deuteronomy 32 and the context of the imminent death of Moses. The Song of Moses presents a survey of Israelite history contrasting the ways of God, which are good and just, with those of the people who are prone to sin and lawlessness. Though Moses reiterates the consequences of the failure to abide by the covenantal terms, he also foretells a future redemption where justice cedes to divine mercy, which allows God to bless the people despite their shortcomings. Remarking on the timeless nature of this song, the rabbis of the Sifre said, “this song is great, for it contains the present, the past and the future, and there is within it [something] of this world and there is within it [something] for the world to come.”\textsuperscript{520} According to Reuven Hammer, “for the Sages, then, this section was multifaceted, even more than the rest of the Torah; it was a specific prophecy which had been fulfilled in the distant Jewish past, which was to be seen in the turbulent events of the present, and which revealed what was to happen in the future. They found in this song a special vehicle which could be used to interpret the meaning of the suffering which the people had

\textsuperscript{519} The world to come as the locale for retribution is maintained throughout the rabbinic corpus and is presented in a variety of sources, including: m. Pe’ah 1:1; m. Avot 2:16; t. Pe’ah 1:2; y. Qidd. 1:9; y. Hag. 2:1; y. Ma’as. 3:4; y. Qidd. 1:9; b. Qidd. 39b-40a; b. Hor. 10b; b. Sot. 3b; b. ‘Avod. Zar. 4a-4b; b. Shabbat 30b; b. Ta’anit 11a; Sifre Deut. 32; Mekhilta DeShira 2; Mekhilta Vayehi 5; Mekhilta DeVayisa 1; Sifra Behukotai 2:5; Gen. Rab. 9, 33:1; ARN A 9, 25, 39, 40.

\textsuperscript{520} Sifre Deut. 333.
endured and continued to endure, and to indicate the anticipated end.”⁵²¹ As a tannaitic work, ⁵²² Hammer and Moshe David Herr argue that Sifre Deuteronomy, specifically its interpretations of the Song of Moses, must be situated within the historical landscape of the failed Bar Kokhba revolt and resultant Hadrianic persecutions.⁵²³ Consequently, Hammer contends that the Sifre to Ha’azinu ⁵²⁴ is the rabbinic response to calamity and Christian claims of supersession, whereby they attribute the suffering of the people to sin, yet maintain Israel’s special relationship with God as well as Moses’ promise of redemption and restoration.⁵²⁵ In addition to the unique nature of the Song of Moses, Hammer suggests that the rabbis’ selection of this text to explain suffering, as opposed to other prophetic works, was prompted by the particular authority of the Torah and Moses as the greatest of all prophets.⁵²⁶ While this very well may be the case, and would have certainly buttressed the rabbinic response to Roman and Christian claims of supersession, Sifre 307 seems to be more concerned with the individual than a collective people. As we will see below, the text outlines the relationship of God with each individual and attempts

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⁵²² Based on the work of Finkelstein, Lieberman, Zeitlin, Epstein and Hoffman, Hammer states that “It is generally agreed that Sifre D. is a tannaitic work compiled, at least primarily, in the middle of the third century in the Land of Israel, containing material from the schools of the second century, as well as much that is considerably older.” Ibid.

⁵²³ “With regard to ‘Haazinu’ specifically, the names of Sages mentioned therein, the historical references found there and, more importantly, the content of the messages of the individual Midrashic units make it reasonable to assume that much of this material originated in the time following the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion.” Hammer, "A Rabbinic Response," 42-43. See also Moshe David Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's days," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 23 (1972): 85-125. The particular role of the Hadrianic persecutions and its impact on the text will be discussed below within the analysis of the account of R. Hanina b. Teradyon’s martyrdom.

⁵²⁴ the Song of Moses.


⁵²⁶ Hammer, "A Rabbinic Response," 42.
to account for the personal experience of injustice and suffering. In addition, this chapter will also argue that the context of Moses’ death and restriction from the Promised Land as consequences of a minor transgression might also have contributed to the manner in which the rabbis understood and discussed divine justice in the Sifre.

The interpretation of Deuteronomy 32:4 presented in Sifre 307, finds Moses standing on the precipice of death while the Israelites are about enter the promised land that he yearns to see. Moses opens his final oration with an unequivocal statement about the absolute justice of God. It is against this backdrop that the rabbis present not only their conception of divine justice, but also a remarkable attempt at theodicy, which hinges on olam haba. The rabbis delineate a system of reward and punishment administered by God that is flawless and beyond reproach. And yet, the text bears signs of an underlying anxiety concerning the absolute justice of this system as it culminates in an account of martyrdom and the observation, by none other than Moses himself, that sometimes divine justice is anything but just. The anxiety generated by the confrontation of a theoretical system with reality is intensified by the personal experience of unjust suffering by not only Moses, but also the rabbis themselves. Furthermore, the challenge to divine justice raised both internally and externally, and experienced on the communal and personal level, demanded a response from the rabbis.

527 Though the Sifre grapples with unjust suffering and its implications for divine justice, the midrash never expresses its doubts concerning the latter explicitly. Yaakov Elman and David Kraemer have argued that the early rabbinic sources tended to engage in theodicy in a less direct way, rarely acknowledging the injustice of the suffering of the righteous. According to Elman, "Generally speaking, the tannaim link the sufferings of the righteous to some spiritual shortcoming or to the presence of the wicked in this world, and are disinclined, at least as portrayed in the surviving material, to allow for exceptions to the rule of ‘measure for measure;” Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous," 316. He notes, however, that while the Palestinian amoraic sources followed the tannaic tendency, Babylonian sources confronted the issue of theodicy far more directly and were willing to acknowledge the existence of unjust suffering. See also, Kraemer, Responses to Suffering; Yaakov Elman, "Righteousness as Its Own Reward: An Inquiry into the Theologies of the Stam," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 57 (1990): 35-67.
Constrained by the biblical tradition, the rabbis attempted to alleviate the problem of suffering and injustice by displacing the locale of retribution from this world to the world to come. Like Moses, who portrayed Israelite history within the context of the covenant-based system of retributive justice of the Bible, the rabbis similarly applied the biblical model to their own times. However, as the Sifre denotes, the rabbis were aware of the limitations of the biblical paradigm. Nevertheless, they could hardly dismiss it altogether since, “being divine and therefore eternal, the Bible was not limited by its history - it was not read contextually. It spoke now and forever…”  

Thus, where Moses promised the Israelites future redemption, the rabbis similarly attempted to offset the very real and immediate suffering of their time with the promise of the world to come. Zachary Braiterman notes, “the Song of Moses foreshadows almost all of the theodicies developed by the rabbis… Combining exegesis and eisegesis, the rabbis retain the biblical text in the face of historical change.”  

However, in using Deuteronomy to explain the disasters of their own era, the rabbis “outstrip Deuteronomy even as they rely upon its discourse of rewards and punishments.”

While the Sifre maintains the system of retributive justice articulated in the Bible and extended in the prophetic books, the introduction of the concept of olam haba into this system marks a significant departure from the biblical tradition that the rabbis seek to uphold. This is an example of the rabbinic tendency to innovate while claiming continuity with the biblical tradition. Hence, in the same way that rabbinic halakhah can be understood as an attempt to

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528 Kraemer, Responses to Suffering, 17.


530 Ibid.

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maintain the relevance and applicability of biblical law in a post-temple world, the incorporation of olam haba into the system of reward and punishment can be understood as an attempt to maintain the biblical system of retributive justice in the face of a reality that fundamentally challenged it. Furthermore, while we may note the myriad differences between biblical and rabbinic Judaism, the rabbis maintained that their interpretations, which formulated rabbinic Judaism, were derived from and firmly rooted in the Bible. The rabbis surely recognized that the system of retributive justice is often not manifested in reality, however, by transferring the allocation of reward and punishment to the afterlife, the rabbis are able to maintain the system and the absolute justice of God despite indications to the contrary. In other words, the world to come serves not only a theodical purpose, but also enables the rabbis to maintain the Bible while presenting themselves and their tradition under its aegis.

The Rock, the artist. For He designed the world and formed man within it, as it is written ‘And the Lord God formed man.’ (Gen 2:7) ‘His deeds are perfect,’ His workmanship regarding all those who come into the world is perfect and there is not even a single cause to criticize His works and there is not a single person who will look [at himself] and say ‘if only I had three eyes, if only I had three hands, if only I had three legs, if only I walked on my head, if only my face was turned backwards, how becoming would it be for me’, for Scripture teaches ‘for all His ways are just,’ [God] sits in judgment of each and every person and gives them that which is fitting for him. ‘A God of faith,’ for He believed in the world and created it. ‘And without fault,’ for humans were not created to be wicked, but
rather, righteous. Thus it says, ‘But see, this I have found, God created mankind upright, but they have sought many schemes.’ (Ecc 7:29) ‘Just and upright is He,’ [God] conducts Himself with uprightness towards all those who come into the world.  

In the first section of this midrash on divine justice the text paints a portrait of a God who is intimately involved with every one of his creations. God the creator is likened to an artist who fashions every individual in a precise and calculated way, giving each person exactly what they need. The midrash dismisses any questions about the perfection of human design. And yet, as Chaya Halberstam points out, it is entirely possible that three eyes or hands would be more beneficial than two. “The midrash here might be subtly implying that perhaps we could imagine a more perfect, more able human body, but that nonetheless we must know with conviction that God has given us what is right and just, no more and no less; that creation is perfect, despite what one might imagine to the contrary.”  

This is the first indication of doubt regarding divine justice, which the midrash resolves by making a distinction between human vision and perceptibility and that of the divine. Not only is human understanding qualitatively different from God’s, but also it may be that it is inherently impossible for humans to ever fully understand God’s justice. Conversely, God knows every one of his creations and is deeply aware of each and every individual from the moment they are created. Furthermore, as the subsequent sections of the Sifre indicate, this relationship is not restricted to the moment of creation, but extends throughout the individual’s life and beyond. This midrash portrays God as a creator and

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531 Hebrew text based on the Finkelstein Ed. of Sifre to Deuteronomy as found at the Bar Ilan Online Responsa Project. My translations throughout this chapter are intended to adhere to the meaning and cadence of the original Hebrew text as possible. The use of masculine pronouns in reference to God is a reflection of the original text and the way that the rabbis imagined God.

532 Halberstam, Law and Truth, 136.
provider who is invested in the well being of people. Just as an artist creates and imbues their art with the very essence of themselves, God has done the same with people. It should be noted that the midrash begins with the notion of perfection, which implies that every creation is תמים, without blemish. However, it appears that this refers to the design of the human body rather than an assertion that all persons are blemish-free. This suggests an awareness that certain individuals may, in fact, be imperfect and suffer the consequences of their disability. Owing to its conception of an omniscient God, the midrash must account for such imperfection. This too is part of a divine plan for the Sifre, in that God gives each person exactly what they need. Hence, rather than the result of oversight, it would seem that there is a purpose to imperfection and that this too is a testament to God’s wisdom and justice, according to the midrash. Whatever limitations or challenges a person faces are by design and fitting to them. Nevertheless, despite any imperfections that may be present, God has created individuals with the capacity and means to be righteous.

The statement that God created the world and believed in it, denotes a certain element of limitation on the part of God. Rather than compel behavior, God chooses to have faith that humans will do what is right and good. The midrash rejects any notion of pre-determinism or any such restriction on human free will. When humans falter, they do so as the result of their own choices, rather than those imposed on them by God. The verse from Ecclesiastes attributes human shortcomings to an intentional divergence from the manner in which they have been created. This is a fundamental aspect of the rabbinic view of reward and punishment and a merit-based afterlife. Absolute free will allows people the capacity and means to determine their actions, and as a result, they can be held accountable for those choices. Perhaps the midrash is
making a pointed argument against the Christian notion of original sin. In contrast, the midrash presents a God who created each individual free of any aspect that would preclude their ability to fulfill the law, granting them absolute agency. Therefore, God can expect people to follow the commandments and uphold the covenant and when they stray, retribution is a manifestation of divine justice. The justice of creation presented in this first section is not only the first instance of divine justice in God’s dealings with humans, but it is also what allows for the exercise of divine judgment and retribution in this world and the next, which are the subjects of the following sections of the midrash.

Another interpretation: ‘The Rock’, the mighty One. ‘His works are perfect,’ His dealings with all those who come into the world are perfect and there is not even a single cause to criticize His deeds. And there is not a single person who will look and say, ‘why were the people of the generation of the flood drowned? Why were the people of the Tower [of Babel] scattered from one end of the earth to the other? Why were the people of Sodom swept away by fire and brimstone? Why did Aaron assume the priesthood? Why did David assume the monarchy? Why were Korah and his congregation swallowed into the earth?’ For Scripture teaches, ‘for all of His ways are just,’ [God] sits in judgment of each and every person and gives him that which is fitting for him. ‘A God of faith,’ a trustee. ‘And without fault,’ He collects that which is due to Him at the end. For the way of God is not like the ways of man [where if] a man deposits a purse of two hundred with his friend and he has with him [a debt of] a maneh, when he comes to collect that which is his, the friend says, take out the maneh that you owe me and here is the rest for you. And similarly, a worker who worked for a master to
whom he owed a dinar. When he comes to collect his wages, [the master] says to him, take out the dinar that you owe me and here is the rest for you. But the One who spoke and the world came into being [God] is not like this. Rather, a God of faith, a trustee without fault, collects that which is His at the end. ‘Just and upright is He,’ corresponding to that which is said, ‘For God is righteous; He loves righteousness.’ (Psa. 11:7)

This section transitions from the idea of the perfection of creation, ‘His workmanship are perfect,’ to the perfection of divine justice, ‘His dealings are perfect.’ The midrash asserts that there is absolute perfection with regard to God’s interactions with humans. Though the midrash emphasizes the singularity of each individual as they stand before God, affirming the individual nature of reward and punishment, the midrash begins with examples of collective divine retribution. The contrast between the two raises the question of whether these are, in fact, examples of justice. Halberstam suggests that each of these are examples of biblical injustice, depicting the suffering of innocents, overly harsh punishments and rewards to those who may have been undeserving of them.533 Furthermore, the repeated categorical denial of any cause to find fault with God, followed by examples that indicate otherwise, alludes to an awareness of such cause even if the rabbis are unwilling to make it explicit. Braiterman contends, “the sarcastic impatience and the word-for-word repetition suggest that perhaps our author protests too much.”534 Ultimately, it seems that the rabbis resign themselves to the fact that they simply are not privy to the way in which divine justice works, but they are willing, perhaps needing, to believe that there is justice to be found even if it is indiscernible. Per Halberstam, “This midrash repudiates a human model of justice which must be transparent and universal, and posits that

534 Braiterman, (God) after Auschwitz, 47.
God’s justice is instead opaque and unreadable.” In doing so, the midrash dismisses any questions regarding the inequity of divine justice. Instead, the midrash stresses timing as a fundamental difference between human and divine recompense. Consequently, the delayed nature of divine retribution renders it imperceptible to humans, thereby creating an illusion of inequity. The midrash illustrates this by comparing retribution to monetary debt. While human creditors seek immediate recompense, God acts as a trustee who carries individuals’ debts on an ongoing basis, until they are settled in the end, in the world to come. The midrash is quick to correct the perception that inequity denotes the absence of divine justice. Rather, the perception of injustice is the result of the limited scope of human vision and understanding which is restricted to this world. By deferring the administration of justice to the world to come, the midrash reinforces the expectation of divine justice but divests us of the expectation that it will be manifested in this world.

Another interpretation: ‘The Rock’, the Mighty One. ‘His deeds are perfect’, the deeds of all those who come into the world are complete before Him. He gives rewards to the righteous and exacts punishment on the wicked; These have taken

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nothing from what is owed them in this world and those have taken nothing from what is owed them in this world. And from where do we derive that the righteous have taken nothing from what is owed them in this world? As it is said, ‘How abundant is your goodness that you have stored for those who fear you’ (Psa. 31:20). And from where do we derive that the wicked have taken nothing from what is owed them in this world? As it is said, ‘Behold it is stored up with me, sealed up in my treasuries’ (Deut. 32:34) When do these and those collect [what is owed them]? ‘For all of His ways are just’, in the future, when He sits on the throne of judgment and judges each and every one and gives him that which is fitting to him.

‘A God of faith’, just as God recompenses the wholly righteous in the world to come for a commandment fulfilled in this world, so too, God recompenses the wholly wicked in this world for a minor commandment fulfilled in this world. And just as God collects on a sin committed in this world by the wholly wicked in the world to come, So too, He collects on a minor sin committed in this world by the wholly righteous, in this world. ‘And without fault’, when a person departs from this world, all of his deeds are brought forth and specified before him and they say to him, ‘such and such you have done on such and such day, do you confirm these matters?’ and he says, ‘yes’ they say to him ‘sign’ as it is said, ‘it shall be sealed by the hand of every man so that all men shall know his deeds’ (Job 37:7). ‘Just and upright is He’, and he justifies the judgment and says, ‘I have been judged well’ and thus it says, ‘that you may be justified in your words’.

In this section, the functional role of the world to come emerges as it serves to simultaneously maintain the biblical system of retributive justice while emerging as a mechanism of rabbinic theodicy. The section begins with the statement that the deeds of humankind are complete before God. Whereas the midrash previously emphasized the perfection of God’s deeds, this section focuses on the deeds of humankind; more precisely, on the unparalleled ability of God to see the entirety of an individual’s deeds. Without any of the constraints that impede human perception, God is able to render judgment based upon the whole of a person’s actions. Building upon the previous section, the midrash contends that delayed retribution is what allows God to deliver perfect justice as it is based upon the context of an individual’s lifetime of deeds.
rather than on an immediate quid pro quo basis.\textsuperscript{536} This is also indicated by the characterization of the wholly righteous and wholly wicked person, for one can only be deemed as such upon the appraisal of the entirety of their actions. It bears notice that the system of retributive justice is not necessarily altered, but rather, the locale of true retribution has been transposed from this world to the next. As Braiterman argues, “even though doctrines of reward and punishment become complex and attenuated, the rabbis never reject them.”\textsuperscript{537} Furthermore, as Halberstam notes, “this midrash not only invokes the afterlife, or world-to-come, as the location of God’s true justice, but it positions this world as a complete reversal of justice - a way station in which individuals receive the opposite of their deserved recompense. The wicked are rewarded in this world for any good deed they may have done so that they can be punished exclusively in the world-to-come; the righteous are punished for every minor transgression so that their future reward will be untainted.”\textsuperscript{538} In addition to allowing for a more complete, and hence, perfect judgment, this allows the rabbis to maintain the veracity of the biblical promises, while also providing a justification for the appearance of inequity in this world. The system of retributive justice articulated in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is in full effect; reward and punishment will be distributed on the basis of a person’s fulfillment of the commandments. However, it will be fulfilled in the world to come.\textsuperscript{539} Per Braiterman, “Deuteronomy’s rewards and punishments occupy a this-worldly, historical frame. In contrast, rabbinic theodicy plays itself out within a fantastical temporal order. The notion of a deferred retribution - messianic or otherworldly -

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{536} See b. Qidd. 39b-40b.
\item \textsuperscript{537} Braiterman, (God) after Auschwitz, 42.
\item \textsuperscript{538} Halberstam, Law and Truth, 139.
\item \textsuperscript{539} See also b. Sota 3b.
\end{itemize}
salvages a system of rewards and punishments within an expanding temporal framework."

Hence, the circumstances of an individual’s life in this world should not be taken as an indication of their merit nor of the absence of divine justice. All accounts will be settled justly and equitably over the course of this world and the world to come. However, the Sifre posits that one cannot reap rewards in both domains. As R. Judah states in ARN A 28, “He who accepts the pleasures of this world shall be denied the pleasures of the world to come; but he who does not accept the pleasures of this world shall be granted the pleasures of the world to come.”

This idea is also illustrated in a story that takes place at the deathbed of R. Eliezer. R. Akiva is among the disciples paying their master a visit, but unlike the others who weep, R. Akiva laughs. When they ask him how he could possibly laugh at the affliction of a sage, R. Akiva responds that it is precisely R. Eliezer’s suffering that brought about his merriment. He explains, “In all the time I have seen my master, his wine does not turn to vinegar, his flax is not smitten, his oil does not spoil, and his honey does not become liquid; I said, perhaps, God forbid, my master has already received his [reward in this] world. But now that I see my master in sorrow, I am happy.”

Troubled by the implications of R. Eliezer’s prosperity in this world, R. Akiva is comforted by R. Eliezer’s suffering which, however tragic, reassured him that his master would indeed receive his share in the world to come. The theodical function of the world to come is evident here as it

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540 Braiterman, (God) after Auschwitz, 42.
541 This is also articulated in b. Hor. 10b.
542 The text illustrates this idea with a parable where the righteous person who suffers in this world is likened to a cook who takes great pains to prepare a meal for himself. The cook is the beneficiary of his own efforts, since he will eventually enjoy the fruits of his labor.
543 b. Sanh. 101a.
provides a means of explaining the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked in this world, since, the midrash states, true recompense is only allocated in the world to come. The absolute nature of divine justice demands that even the most minor transgressions and merits be remunerated, and this world provides God the opportunity to do so, while the world to come is reserved for the principal actions of an individual. The promise of the world to come not only alleviates the anxiety caused by the suffering of the righteous, but it also assigns a necessary expiatory function to that suffering.\footnote{On the expiatory function of suffering, see also b. Yoma 86a; b. Mo’ed Qat. 28a; b. Sanh. 39a, 101a-101b, 107a-107b; Sifre Deut. 32, 333; Mekhilta Bahodesh 10.} Consequently, the world-to-come vindicates God and allows the rabbis to make sense of what they experience in this world.

The last part of the section details a post-mortem judicial process, which culminates in the justification of God’s judgment by the individual.\footnote{This text is paralleled in b. Ta’anit 11a.} Upon death, the individual is made to review the entirety of their deeds so that what was previously obscured by the limitations of human perception is now revealed. Where the midrash emphasizes the imperceptibility of divine justice in this world, “the rabbinic vision of perfect future justice stresses the transparency of God’s judgments, the participation of humans in sealing their own fate, and humans’ full understanding of God’s ways.”\footnote{Halberstam, \textit{Law and Truth}, 140.} Once the individual is afforded such a view, there is no question regarding the justice of God as the individual affirms his acceptance of the divine decree. From a theodical perspective, this serves to alleviate the expectation of justice in this world thereby mitigating the theological dilemma posed by unjust suffering and prosperity. The consummation of divine justice in the world to come is confirmed by the justification of the
God’s perfect design and culminates in the following sections.

Another interpretation: ‘The Rock, his deeds are perfect.’ When they captured R. Hanina b. Teradyon, they decreed upon him that he would be burnt with his Torah.\(^{547}\) They said to him, ‘it has been decreed that you will be burnt with your Torah’, [whereupon] he invoked the verse, ‘The Rock, his deeds are perfect.’ They said to his wife, ‘it has been decreed that your husband will be burnt and that you will be killed,’ [whereupon] she invoked the verse, ‘a God of faith, without fault.’ They said to his daughter, ‘it has been decreed that your father be burnt, your mother killed, and that you will perform labor,’\(^{548}\) [whereupon] she invoked the verse, ‘great in counsel and mighty in deed, for your eyes are open.’\(^{549}\) (Jer 32:19) Rebbi said, ‘how great are these righteous persons that in their time of sorrow they brought forth three verses to justify the divine decree, something that is unparalleled in all the Scriptures.’ The three of them directed their hearts and justified the divine decree upon themselves. A philosopher approached his prefect and said to him, ‘my master do not let your mind become unsettled on account of the fact that you have burnt the Torah, for it has returned to its place of origin, its father’s home.’ He replied to him, ‘tomorrow you will share their fate.’ The philosopher replied, ‘you have brought me good tidings, for tomorrow my share will be with them in the world to come.’

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\(^{547}\) Literally, his book/scroll.

\(^{548}\) In the Bavli version, Rabbi Hanina’s daughter is sent to a brothel.

\(^{549}\) The verse continues, “to all the ways of men, so as to give to [i.e., repay] each man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.”
This section, which recounts the martyrdom of R. Hanina b. Teradyon,\textsuperscript{550} marks the confrontation of the rabbinic conception of divine justice with real life, allowing the rabbis the opportunity to express doubt about the justice of God even as they affirm it.\textsuperscript{551} The fate of R. Hanina b. Teradyon and his family attest to the opaque nature of divine justice as it is inconceivable that a righteous sage deserved to die such a tragic death. Unlike the account of the Bavli,\textsuperscript{552} the Sifre makes no effort to discern what may have prompted R. Hanina’s fate. It is upon this basis that Braiterman distinguishes this text from other accounts of martyrdom in rabbinic literature. “R. Hanina b. Teradion and his family… eschew any explanatory scheme based on this-worldly or other worldly retribution. They simply justify God, accepting death and


\textsuperscript{551} Boustan observes that martyrological accounts in rabbinic literature have consistently been appended with a passage containing the question, “this is the Torah and this is its reward?” which leads him to conclude that this is meant to “serve as a programmatic caution against using the fate of the martyrs as a basis for theological speculation into the nature of divine justice. Boustan, \textit{From Martyr to Mystic}, 69. Our text has not been appended in this manner. However, I would tend to agree that despite this, the rabbis are arguing that the tragic fate of R. Hanina should not alter one’s perception of divine justice. In fact, the author of the Sifre seems to present this account, as if to say, despite this martyrdom, which above all else challenges our conception of divine justice, ‘God is just and perfect in deed…’. Accordingly, the Sifre grapples with the implications of this injustice, but does not allow it to fundamentally alter its conception of divine justice.

\textsuperscript{552} The martyrdom of Rabbi Hanina is recounted in b. \textit{Avod. Zar.} 17b-18a. That account reflects the rabbinic position that suffering is the result of sin, however small the transgression. The Bavli account posits that R. Hanina’s capture and death were the result of his pronunciation of the divine name in public. His wife’s fate was attributed to the fact that she did not stop him from doing so, making her complicit in the act. His daughter’s sentence was attributed to her immodesty.
The object of this narrative is to exemplify the justification of the divine decree rather than ascertain the root of it. The absence of any suggestion of guilt on the part of R. Hanina alludes to the inscrutability of divine justice that is articulated in the previous sections of the midrash. And yet, despite the unequivocal assertion of divine justice and repeated claims that there is no cause to question any of God’s dealings with humanity throughout the text of the Sifre, the account of R. Hanina and his family does provide such a cause. Until the philosopher speaks, there is no justice and God appears to be either unaware of, or worse, unconcerned with the suffering of the righteous who nevertheless go to their deaths maintaining the goodness and justice of God. This narrative account of R. Hanina’s martyrdom is recounted in the third-person, presumably through the eyes of the rabbis who are powerless to do anything but witness the tragedy and grapple with its implications. The rabbinic doubt concerning divine justice finds resolution through the philosopher who, per Halberstam, “becomes the mouthpiece for the rabbis, protesting against the prefect, and invoking a truly compassionate God, who lavishes reward in the world-to-come upon those who suffer the cruelty of the tyrants on earth.” The midrash, perhaps unable - or unwilling - to champion a God who appears to disregard justice so readily, introduces the idea of the world to come as a panacea for the anxiety and doubt that this episode elicits.

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553 Braiterman, *God after Auschwitz*, 44.

554 I do not mean to imply that the account is a historical testimony of those who actually witnessed these events, but rather to make the point that the story is not told through the eyes of R. Hanina or his family, but rather by the rabbis who were left to ponder the implications of these events.

555 Halberstam, *Law and Truth*, 142. Halberstam cites Christine Hayes who has argued that “rabbinic authors introduce or exploit the presence of minim (i.e., heretics or sectarians) and Romans… in order to voice and thus grapple with their own ambivalence and radical doubt.” Ibid.
Despite the deep reverence for R. Hanina and the other sages martyred during the Hadrianic persecutions, the rabbinic tradition did not ultimately demand such sacrifices from its adherents. In most cases, the rabbis opted to value life, thereby limiting the circumstances where one would be required to die rather than transgress the Law. Furthermore, as noted in the Sifre, the absolute justification of the divine decree by R. Hanina and his family was exceptional and unparalleled. This implies that most persons would be incapable of this, nor could they realistically be expected to do so. Perhaps the rabbis were aware that such a system of divine justice was untenable and fundamentally unsustainable.  

Hence, the promise of a share in the world to come provides the rabbis and their adherents with the means to accept injustice and suffering in this world, reassured that divine justice, though delayed, is still in effect. For, unlike R. Hanina who could go to his death without question, the philosopher accepts his fate and that of R. Hanina because of his conviction that the world to come awaits them. The injustice that causes such discomfort for the rabbis is made palatable by the certitude that divine justice prevails in the world to come. As a mechanism of theodicy, the world to come allows the rabbis to make sense of a world where justice is seemingly absent so that they too can justify the divine decree.

556 although there are some traditions that maintain this idea in the rabbinic corpus.  

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It is important to note that the world to come is not presented as a reward for martyrdom. Here, as in the account of R. Akiva’s martyrdom in b. Ber. 61b, the world to come enters the narrative only after the martyr’s death. In both cases, the world to come is offered as a means of comfort, and in the Bavli, following a protest regarding the justice of God. In other words, while these exceptionally righteous individuals may not have needed nor expected any reward, those left behind - namely the rabbis and their followers - who were still living, were in need of some way to reconcile these events with their tradition. The world to come then, provided them with a way to integrate their reality with the biblical tradition of divine justice and allow a continued relationship with a God whose justice was not always apparent.

In addition to using the world to come to respond to the internal dilemma posed by the suffering of the righteous, this section demonstrates how the rabbis also used the idea to rebut external claims that the God of Israel had been vanquished. The absolute justification of God

557 Shmuel Shepkaru traces the evolution between voluntary death and divine recompense and concludes that martyrdom is presented as a means of avoiding transgression rather than as a vehicle to obtain a reward. He demonstrates how the rabbis viewed martyrdom as a last-resort that should be avoided if at all possible. “The Talmud views resurrection as a standard stage following life, regardless of the nature of life. Thus it is not surprising to find the notion of resurrection or the world to come in the accounts of the 400 youths and of Teradyon. Moreover, we have seen talmudic rejections of a connection between martyrdom and reward (Men. 29b; Y. Hag. 2:1; A.Z. 17b; Kid 39b; and also in the midrash in Bet ha-Midrash 2:64-72).” Shepkaru, "From after Death to Afterlife," 42. Boustan argues that the martyrs are afforded an elevated status and reward and contends that Shepkaru’s conclusions are challenged by texts that his study overlooked. Boustan, From Martyr to Mystic, 71 n.68. It is not my intention to weigh in on their debate as the focus of this study is not martyrdom per se, nor its rewards. I simply aim to demonstrate the manner in which olam haba was used to help explain and mitigate the problem of unjust suffering.

558 Even when R. Akiva’s students express doubt about the extent to which he is willing to suffer for God, his response is that his death offers him the ability to fulfill the commandment of “you shall love the Lord your God with all of your soul” (Deut. 6:5). He makes no mention of the world to come or other reward. As Shepkaru remarks, “Akiva’s proclamation of the Shema, despite the Romans’ efforts to stop him, is the reward itself.” Shepkaru, "From after Death to Afterlife," 23.

For a more detailed look at R. Akiva’s response and how he might have conceived of his own death, see Boyarin, “Between Intertextuality and History”; Sanders, "R. Akiba's View of Suffering."

559 While the question is more implied in Sifre 307, in the Bavli, it is the ministering angels who, incredulously ask God, “This is the Torah and this is its reward?!”
within a narrative account of Hadrianic persecution may be the result of the unique nature of the Hadrianic decrees and the way in which the Romans interpreted the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Herr notes the unique nature of Hadrian’s decrees, which, unlike those of Antiochus, did not compel Jews to violate negative commandments. Rather, “the Romans, for various psychological and tactical reasons, only enacted prohibitions against the observance of positive precepts.” These persecutory decrees were enacted by the Romans in response to the failed revolt. Hence, not only were the messianic hopes of restoration shattered, the Romans restricted the observance of the commandments as a means of ensuring that no such aspirations would be pursued again. Herr argues that the manifold effects of the rebellion and edicts were deleterious for the Jews and their God. “The rebellion had caused the destruction of Judea, the construction of Aelia Capitolina, and the erection of an idol where the sanctuary had stood. The failure of the rebellion and the horrors of the persecutions had put an end to the mass proselytization movement - not for the time being but permanently.” Furthermore,

560 Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 101. Herr enumerates 21 prohibitions, which outlawed such things as circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, public readings of Torah, appointment of sages, maintenance of Jewish courts, tzitzit, mezuzah, as well as public gatherings for the purpose of studying Torah. While Herr derives these prohibitions from a number of rabbinic sources, the historicity of each of these prohibitions is not necessarily as important as the perception of the rabbis for our purposes here. For the complete list of prohibitions (and their sources), see Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 94-98.

561 Herr argues that that R. Hanina refused to abide by the decrees, continuing to teach and learn Torah despite knowing that it would likely result in execution, because he understood the implications of the decrees and the way in which Roman triumph was perceived by Hadrian and other gentiles. Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 115.

562 Herr proposes that Hadrian’s decrees were motivated in part by the Romans’ desire to quell Jewish proselytization. “During the two generations intervening between the Destruction and the Bar Kokhba rebellion, the significance of Seneca’s jibe, ‘Victi victoribus leges dederunt’ (The conquered gave laws to the conquerors) became fully manifest. Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire and from the highest to the lowest strata of society, mass proselytization had reached record proportions and Domitian had even endeavored to stem the tide by force at the end of the first century C.E.” Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 86-87.

according to Herr, “the gentiles interpreted the Roman victory and crushing defeat of the Jews as constituting the final victory of the god-emperor over the Jewish God.”

Claims of Roman supersession of the God of Israel was not only an affront to Judaism, but was also regarded as a desecration of God’s name by the rabbis, according to Herr. Hadrian’s status as a god-emperor, secured in part by the prohibition against the commandments, not only prompted a change in rabbinic halakhah regarding martyrdom, but also demanded a coherent response to negate claims that the God of Israel had been overcome and account for how God could allow these events.

In Sifre 307, the rabbis, through R. Hanina’s daughter and the philosopher issue such a response by essentially stating that what is observable in this world cannot be taken as an indication of truth and reality. The verse from Jeremiah invoked by R. Hanina’s daughter serves as a promise to Israel and a warning to her enemies. “Great in counsel and mighty in deed, for your eyes are open to all the ways of humans to repay every man to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Jer 32:19) By quoting the verse, the rabbis (via R. Hanina’s daughter), argue that God is not only present, but also fully aware of what is happening and will ultimately restore justice. Jeremiah 32 lends itself to the present context since it depicts the Babylonians as instruments of God who delivers Israel and her cities to them as a result of Israel’s sins. Hence, the Babylonian conquest, like that of Rome, is not an indication of God’s defeat. Rather, these

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564 Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian's days," 115

565 According to Herr, the perception of the desecration of God’s name by the Romans prompted the rabbis to embrace the idea of dying as a means of sanctifying God’s name. This resulted in a change in the halakhah which expanded the instances of when a person ought to opt for death in times of persecution, as evidenced in t. Shabbat 15:17. Herr, "Persecutions and Martyrdom," 120-121.
events are part of a divine plan and Israel’s covenantal destiny.\textsuperscript{566} The prophet Jeremiah is assured that nothing is too hard for God, and that eventually the people will be restored to God. By introducing the verse from Jeremiah, the rabbis convey this message both to themselves and the Romans. Roman desecration of God’s name and the brutality that they visited upon the sages will be avenged and they will be repaid by God whose eyes are open to the deeds of humans. The belief that this is an absolute, as opposed to subjective, truth is demonstrated by the fact that the philosopher - an outsider - submits to the authority of God rather than his own prefect.\textsuperscript{567} His statement regarding burning of the Torah essentially warns the Romans not to be fooled by external appearances. Though it seems that the Torah is being burnt, and her sages abandoned by God,\textsuperscript{568} they are simply returning to their maker who awaits their return. Furthermore, the philosopher’s acknowledgement of God and his embrace of the world to come, signifies a recognition that Roman power is transient, while God’s is everlasting, encompassing this world and the world to come. Thus, the world to come serves to offset the imbalance of power, allowing the rabbis to maintain the promises of restoration and redemption prophesied by Moses and Jeremiah. In justifying the decree, R. Hanina, his family and the philosopher assert that God

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\textsuperscript{566} The use of olam haba as part of Israel’s ongoing relationship with God to affirm the validity of the covenant is illustrated in b. Menahot 53b, where Israel is likened to an olive tree. The talmud says that just as an olive tree maintains its leaves in summer and winter, so too Israel shall never be lost, neither in this world nor in the world to come. For more on suffering as covenantal destiny, see also Kraemer, \textit{Responses to Suffering}, 18-22.

\textsuperscript{567} This idea is also present in the b. Ber. 61b account of R. Akiva’s martyrdom, where the executioner is also promised a share in the world to come for speeding up R. Akiva’s death and lessening his suffering.

\textsuperscript{568} In fact, the rabbinic concept of \textit{אהבה של אסירים} - (sufferings of love) asserts that suffering is not a sign of rupture with God. On the contrary, the suffering signifies God’s engagement and love. Multiple sources contend that God brings suffering on the righteous in order to increase their reward in the world to come. See b. Ber. 5a; b. Bava Batra 116a; b. Ta’an. 8a; Gen. Rab 9:8, 92:1; Tanna Deve Eliyahu Zuta 3. For further on this idea, see Sanders, "R. Akiba's View of Suffering"; Urbach, \textit{The Sages}, 444-448; Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous"; Elman, "Righteousness as Its Own Reward"; Heschel, \textit{Heavenly Torah}, 127-143; Kraemer, \textit{Responses to Suffering}.
and justice prevail despite all indications to the contrary. Accordingly, the special relationship
with God and the covenantal promises remain intact despite persecution and Roman and
Christian claims of supersession.

Another interpretation: ‘The Rock, his deeds are perfect,’ when Moses came down
from Mt Sinai, the people of Israel gathered upon him and said to him, ‘our
master, Moses, tell us, what is the principle of justice in heaven?’ Moses
responded, ‘I do not tell you that it is to acquit the innocent and make the guilty
liable, but rather even if the matter is reversed, ‘a God of faith and without
fault.’"569

The imminent death of Moses and its underlying cause suggested by the motif of the rock
within the exegetical context of the Sifre elicits the anxiety of its authors and informs their
conception of divine justice. As the faithful servant of God, Moses was the only person who was
granted direct access to God, face-to-face.570 He, more than any other mortal stood to understand
God, which is why the people look to him to explain the principle of divine justice. Moses’
response is that even when it seems that the opposite of justice is taking place, God remains
perfect in deed and without fault. Moses’ attempt to understand divine justice is also recounted in
b. Berakhot 7a. There, Moses is said to have requested three things from God, among them to
understand the ways of God. The rabbis challenge the justice of God through Moses by

569 This phrase has been translated in a number of different ways. Reuven Hammer has “I do not tell you
merely that He does not justify the guilty or punish the innocent, but that He does not even exchange (one
for the other)” but notes that Finkelstein, “following Elijah Gaon, suggests that this is euphemistic
language for ‘justifies the guilty and punishes the innocent,’ meaning ‘I assure you that not only does God
not do this, but...” Reuven Hammer, Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy (Yale
Judaica Series 24; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 312-313, 495 n.18. Urbach renders the
phrase, “I do not only say when the righteous are cleared and the guilty are condemned, but even when
the reverse takes place, ‘(He is) a God of faithfulness and without iniquity.’” Urbach, The Sages, 515.

570 Deut 34:10.
questioning the inequity of reward and punishment. Though a number of explanations are proffered, the text concludes with the following statement from R. Meir: “Two [requests] were granted to him and one [request] was not granted to him. As it is said, “And I shall show favor upon whom I show favor’ (Ex 33:19) - even though he may not be worthy - ‘And I will show mercy upon whom I show mercy’ (Ex 33:19) - even though he may not be worthy.” According to Halberstam, “as the rabbis appeal to Moses, ... we are teased with the possibility of direct insight into the divine mind; instead, Moses seems as bewildered as anyone when it comes to divine reward and punishment.”

Exodus 33:19, which R. Meir interprets to demonstrate the apparent arbitrariness of divine justice, is immediately followed by God’s declaration that no person can see God and live (Ex. 33:20) which implies that while the ways of God are inaccessible to the living, they are accessible in the world to come. Interestingly, though Moses’ request to see the face of God is denied, God instructs Moses to stand on a rock where he will be able to glimpse the back of God (Ex. 33:21-23). The motif of the rock in Exodus 33, Deuteronomy 34 and Sifre 307, three texts that simultaneously reveal aspects of God while maintaining that God is essentially unknowable, is quite telling. Just as a rock is solid, enduring, yet impenetrable, so too is God, according to the midrash. Furthermore, the rock as a symbol of the inscrutability of God, also recalls the rock that Moses struck at the bitter waters incident in Numbers 20. Wandering the wilderness without water, the Israelites protested against Moses, stating that it would have been better if they had been left to die in Egypt. In response, Moses yields water from a rock by striking it. God informs Moses, “since you did not believe in me to sanctify me before the eyes

571 Halberstam, Law and Truth, 143.

572 Sifre Deut. 357, interpreting Deut. 34:10, maintains that though Moses’ request to see God was denied while he was living, but that he would be able to see God in the world to come.
of the people of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation into the land that I have
given to them.” (Num 20:12) The act of striking the rock demonstrated a lack of faith, for which
Moses paid dearly. Despite the fact that the people exhibit not only a glaring lack of gratitude but
also a complete lack of trust in God and Moses, it is Moses that is held accountable. The injustice
of this incident is astounding. The severity of Moses’ punishment for such a minor infraction is
raised by the rabbis in numerous sources. Though the rabbis attempt to rationalize it,
ultimately concluding that Moses was held to a higher standard, there is an acknowledgement of
injustice and its devastating effect on Moses. Unable to accept this decree, Moses repeatedly
blames the people for his denial into the promised land and implores God to reverse the
decision, until God angrily commands him to stop. “But the Lord was wrathful with me on your
account and would not listen to me. The Lord said to me, “Enough! Never speak to Me of this

573 The rabbinic understanding of reward and punishment, prompts the rabbis to maintain that suffering is
the result of sin, however trivial it may be. Minor sins as the cause behind the suffering of the righteous is
a common theme in the literature, particularly within narratives of martyrdom. Schofer discerns a trope of
trivial sin within rabbinic literature that, when viewed within the discourse of spiritual and ethical
teaching, these narratives convey the importance of even the most minuscule aspects of life for the sages.
While that may be the case, within the discourse of divine justice, I submit that these texts serve to
maintain the notion of divine involvement in human life and the expectation of retribution, however
disproportionate, for even the smallest of actions. The following works have further explored the idea of
Doctrine of Divine Retribution"; Elman, "The Suffering of the Righteous"; Kraemer, Responses to
Suffering; Schofer, “Protest or pedagogy?”; Halberstam, Law and Truth; Braiterman, (God) after
Auschwitz; Boustan, From Martyr to Mystic.

574 Among them, Mekhilta De Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai Va’era 6:2; Num. Rab. 19:13; Deut. Rab. 11:10;
Mekhilta Amalek 2; Tanhuma Hukkat 11; Sifre Deut. 26.

575 even if it is often implied rather than explicit.

576 Because of you the Lord was incensed with me too, and He said: You shall not enter it either.
(Deuteronomy 1:37, JPS)
But the Lord was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me. The Lord said to me,
“Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again!” (Deuteronomy 3:26, JPS)
Now the Lord was angry with me on your account and swore that I should not cross the Jordan and enter
the good land that the Lord your God is assigning you as a heritage. (Deuteronomy 4:21, JPS)
matter again!” (Deuteronomy 3:26) The rabbis proffer a number of reasons for why God would order Moses to stop pleading his case, two of which are particularly relevant to our study. According to one of the interpretations in b. Sota 13b, Moses must stop asking “so that they should not say, how severe is the master and how persistent is the disciple”. Thus, while it may be entirely reasonable for Moses to petition God for something he so desperately wants, his inability to accept the justice of the divine decree calls attention to its injustice and God’s merciless rigidity. The idea of bringing shame to God is also present in Sifre Deut. 29, although there, the midrash also introduces the idea of the world to come. Hence, the sin of Moses and its consequences generates an awareness of divine injustice, which is highly problematic for the rabbis who attempt to mitigate the problem with the promise of a share in the world to come.

Given all of this, Moses’ statement acknowledging that sometimes, divine justice may appear to be inverted is understandable. Yet, even so, God’s deeds are perfect. The statement attributed to R. Yannai in m. Avot 4:15 “we do not have within our grasp [an explanation] for the prosperity of the wicked, nor for the suffering of the righteous”, evinces the concurrent admission of injustice and faith in divine justice that is prevalent throughout the Sifre.

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577 JPS translation.

578 See Sifre Deut. 29

579 Tanhuma Vaetkhanan states that Moses’ repeated appeals to God should serve as a lesson against despair and on the need to continue to pray to God.

580 According to this interpretation, God tells Moses, ‘Let it be enough for you’ כ’ לך רב because God has much (הרבה) stored for him in the world to come. The midrash likens it to a person who says to his friend ‘I have so much stored up for you, do not embarrass me’. Mekhila Beshalah 2 also states that Moses has a share in the world to come in an attempt to rationalize Moses’ death and denial of the Promised Land. See also, ARN B 12.

581 m. Avot 4:15.
Our close reading of Sifre 307 has revealed that while the rabbis were profoundly aware of injustice, they repeatedly negate the arbitrariness of suffering and any hint that it may indicate a rupture with God. They preferred to admit their ignorance of the ways of God, owing to the limits of human perceptibility, rather than concede the expectation of divine justice. The rabbinic engagement in theodicy was essential to the relevance of the nascent rabbinic tradition and its ability to withstand the challenges it faced, both internally and externally. Peter Berger argues that a plausible theodicy operates on an individual and societal level in that it “permits the individual to integrate the anomic experiences of his biography into the socially established nomos and its subjective correlate in his own consciousness.”⁵⁸² This, in turn enables the maintenance of a particular institutional order⁵⁸³ as the theodicy allows the religious system to integrate and explain the problem of evil and suffering within the boundaries of its theology. The continuity of rabbinic Judaism with the monotheistic biblical tradition limited the manner in which the rabbis could respond to the problem of unjust suffering and evil. Unlike the Greeks and Zoroastrians, the rabbis were constrained by their adherence to the absolute monotheism of the Bible and therefore, could not resort to dualism nor could they shift the blame onto other divine forces or chance. Hence, they preserved the biblical model of retributive justice but modified it to include the world to come. Among the variety of responses to suffering, the displacement of the locale of retribution from this world to the world to come, enabled the rabbis to confront and respond to unjust suffering and the perceived absence of God and divine justice in this world. In doing so, the rabbis ensured the viability of their tradition and its ability to

⁵⁸² Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 58.
withstand the cognitive dissonance and supersessionist claims that arose when reality proved to be incongruous with their belief in a just, omniscient and omnipotent God.
6. Conclusion
A story recounted in the Bavli ‘Avoda Zara 2a-3b evinces the primary themes that have been the focus of this dissertation: the Torah as the means to olam haba, the theodical function of olam haba and the role of the rabbis as arbiters of olam haba. The setting of this highly imaginative and dramatic account is a trial in a heavenly court whose proceedings resemble an earthly criminal court. The session opens as God “the judge” extends an invitation to those who wish to be judged. The “defendants” approach, arguments are made, witnesses are brought forward and judgment is rendered.

“R. Hanina bar Papa, and some say R. Simlai, expounded: In the world to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a Torah scroll and set it in his lap, and say: ‘Let everyone who busied himself with this come and take his reward.’” Following God’s invitation, the Kingdoms of Rome and Persia approach and attempt to make the case for themselves. In each case, God inquires whether they have busied themselves with Torah and, unable to answer in the affirmative, they enumerate their worldly accomplishments. The same ensues with all nations of the world. The nations contend that they never accepted the Torah in the first place and thus, cannot be held to it; to which, God responds that they did accept the Noahide laws, but failed to fulfill them. Unable to make a case for themselves, the nations indignantly ask whether Israel, who did accept the Torah, fulfilled it. God’s testifies that they did, but his testimony is challenged by the nations who argue that a father cannot testify on behalf of his son. God brings forth witnesses to testify to Israel’s righteousness and observance of the Torah, confirming Israel’s merit for the world to come. The nations then ask God to grant them the opportunity to observe the Torah. God initially resists, arguing that one who does not prepare for the Sabbath has

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nothing to eat on the Sabbath. Nevertheless, God concedes and tells them to observe the simple mitzva of sukka. The nations proceed to do so, but quickly abandon the sukka under the heat of the sun. Each one kicks down the sukka in frustration and departs. The tale ends with God laughing at the nations.

The homilist situates the Torah at the forefront of the world to come. Those who have busied themselves with Torah are invited to approach God, and Torah is the only means by which one attains olam haba. Therefore, despite their vast accomplishments, the gentile nations are denied entry into the world to come. Furthermore, Israel is distinguished by its observance of Torah, not because it is intrinsically different from the gentiles. Had the other nations accepted the Torah and fulfilled it, the text gives no indication that they would have been rejected.

The world to come plays an important theodical role in the story, which presents a complete reversal of roles between Israel and the nations. Israel, who is subordinate to the nations in this world is triumphant in the world to come, while the reigning empires of this world are rejected from the world to come. Thus, Israel is vindicated in olam haba and their ongoing relationship with God is upheld. In an interesting turn, it is not God who asserts his relationship with Israel, but the nations themselves, contending that God’s relationship with Israel precludes him from testifying on Israel’s behalf. The covenant, which binds Israel to the commandments is also upheld as the means of gaining entry into the world to come.585 In shifting the locale of divine justice and retribution to olam haba, the story assures its audience that the injustices of this world will be redressed in the world to come.

This story also speaks to the way in which the rabbis conceived of their role as arbiters of olam haba. In this text, as in others that we have seen, the sages are privy to the procedures of the heavenly court and the criteria for entry into the world to come. Furthermore, the depiction of God in the image of a sage, with a Torah scroll in his lap as he determines who may enter the world to come, mimics the sages who engage in Torah and pronounce who is included or excluded from olam haba in this world.

This story and brief analysis synthesized the themes that we have explored in this dissertation. This study has demonstrated how, as arbiters of olam haba, the rabbis have delineated the boundaries of Israel as they perceived it, and upheld the values of Torah study and divine justice. In doing so, the rabbis established and upheld the central tenets of their tradition and their authority by means of olam haba. As was stated in the introduction, the rabbis were certainly not unique in adopting this role as the arbiters of the post-mortem realm; nor is it unique that they supported their authority and values by means of it. The same dynamic can be observed in other religions and cultures that include a belief in the afterlife. What is unique to the rabbis, is the particular way in which they have constructed their discussions of olam haba and the specific elements that they have chosen to place at the forefront of those discussions.

The first chapter of this study examined the emergence of the belief in the afterlife in Judaism and the circumstances that gave rise to it. As we traced the development of this belief, it became clear that the concept may not have had Jewish origins and that external cultures were

586 Rubenstein observes “Rabbis are routinely described as carrying a Torah scroll in their bosom. See e.g. bAZ 18a, bSuk 41b, and mSot 7:7.” Rubenstein, "An Eschatological Drama," 16 n. 33. (The Bavli uses the word חיק, meaning lap or bosom)

587 For a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of this story, see Rubenstein, "An Eschatological Drama."
influential in its development. Nevertheless, the idea was not imported into the Jewish tradition in a whole-scale manner. The authors of Jewish texts integrated the afterlife with existing beliefs and in such a way that would be consistent with the biblical tradition. Furthermore, our survey of the Second-Temple period demonstrated that while the belief could be found in a variety of texts, each text articulated it differently, which indicates that the idea was adapted to meet the particular needs of the community or the circumstances that gave rise to it. In this way, the rabbis' use of olam haba to address their anxieties about divine justice as a result of personal or communal suffering had a precedent, and the efforts of their predecessors surely influenced the way in which the rabbis did so.

We thus stepped away from the first chapter with the understanding that there was a pervasive expectation of the afterlife, which helps to explain the mishna's ability to use it as a means of establishing normative belief and practice so readily. Our close reading of m. Sanhedrin demonstrated how, as arbiters of the afterlife, the rabbis created their ideal Israel by excluding individuals whose beliefs or practices undermined their authority and the tenets of their tradition. Our diachronic analysis, enabled us to observe that the dynamic that existed in the mishna persisted in the talmudic literature. Thus, while the categories delineated by the mishna shifted and were reinterpreted in light of new circumstances, the use of olam haba as a means of sustaining rabbinic authority was not only remained, but also, intensified in some ways.

Having examined how the rabbis used olam haba as a means of exclusion, we moved to the idea of Torah study and its presentation as a primary means of inclusion into olam haba. This chapter explored the way in which the rabbis redefined worship and assumed the religious authority of the prophets and the priests through their interpretation of Torah. Furthermore, the
reward of the world to come for Torah study not only contributed to rabbinic authority, it also perpetuated rabbinic traditions, and rendered the sage as a vehicle to olam haba. Lastly, the chapter demonstrated how, as arbiters of olam haba, rabbinic authority extended to the heavenly realm, both in the heavenly academy as well as in the heavenly court, where their authority was supreme.

If the third chapter established the value of Torah study by means of olam haba, the last chapter explored the way in which the theodical function of olam haba helped to maintain and sustain the Torah and its promises. Our close reading of Sifre 307 revealed how the rabbis upheld the idea of divine justice while also acknowledging the injustices that confronted them on an individual and communal level. Our reading discerned the profound anxieties that the midrash disclosed and sought to address by means of the world to come. We demonstrated how the world to come functioned to uphold the Torah’s system of retributive justice, the covenantal relationship with God and its important theodical function for the rabbis.

We began our study by observing the two fundamental assumptions of the mishna and posing a set of questions that were generated by the concept. This study has ventured a number of responses to the question of how olam haba functioned within rabbinic Judaism as well as how the rabbis chose to exercise their authority by means of it. With regard to the mishna’s assumption that olam haba was a known entity and was desired, the first chapter of this study explained how such an assumption was possible. The mishna’s second assumption, that the rabbis had the authority to regulate olam haba, demands that we distinguish between how the rabbis perceived themselves within their tradition and how historians perceive the rabbis within Jewish society at large. It is unlikely that the gap between these two perception can be bridged.
prior to the medieval period. Nevertheless, as they preserved the ‘shards’ \(^{588}\) of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis transformed Judaism by means of the recognizable symbols of Torah and olam haba, with themselves at the helm. Though their authority may not have been recognized until much later, these traditions placed the sage at the center of religious life in this world and in the world to come, so that the rabbis were already positioned to assume these roles once that authority became a reality.

This study has posed a new set of questions regarding the idea of olam haba. Heretofore, scholars have been primarily concerned with the question of *what* the rabbis believed about olam haba. Although there are some deficiencies in the scholarship and work remains to be done with regard to this question, quite a few responses have been ventured. In contrast, the question of *how* olam haba functioned within the dynamic of rabbinic authority has not been explored in a sustained manner prior to this study. We emerge with a better understanding of the complex interplay between Torah, authority, theodicy and olam haba within the rabbinic tradition. A comparative analysis of how the afterlife functioned within Christianity (and perhaps Islam) would certainly prove illuminating. However, this study is a prerequisite first step towards such an analysis. It is my hope that this work contributes to a better understanding of the important function of olam haba within the rabbinic tradition and the manner in which it contributed to the establishment of rabbinic authority.

\[^{588}\text{Schwartz, } Imperialism, 15.\]


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