

Job 10:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death;

Analysis

Job contemplates approaching death: 'Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death.' The phrase 'whence I shall not return' (לו אשׁוּב, לֹא אָשׁוּב) emphasizes death's irreversibility. 'Land of darkness' (ארץ חֹשֶׁךְ, אָרֶץ חֹשֶׁךְ) and 'shadow of death' (תְּשַׁׁמְּרָה מוֹתָא, תְּשַׁׁמְּרָה מוֹתָא) describe Sheol, the grave's dark realm. Job envisions imminent departure to the realm of death from which none return to earthly life.

Job's description reflects Old Testament's limited understanding of afterlife. Sheol was conceived as shadowy, joyless existence—not hell's punishment but death's darkness. The phrase 'land of darkness' suggests permanent separation from light, life, and God's active presence. Job sees death as final loss, lacking resurrection hope that later revelation provides.

Christ's resurrection transforms Job's dark vision. Death's 'land of no return' becomes transition to glory for believers. The 'shadow of death' becomes valley through which the Good Shepherd leads (Psalm 23:4). What Job perceives as permanent darkness becomes temporary passage to eternal light. Resurrection hope revolutionizes death from irreversible loss to temporary sleep before awakening.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern underworld concepts portrayed afterlife as shadowy, diminished existence. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and early Hebrew concepts shared this pessimism about post-mortem existence. Later biblical revelation, especially after Christ's resurrection, radically transforms this understanding.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does resurrection hope transform our understanding of death from Job's dark pessimism?
2. What does Job's limited revelation teach about progressive revelation's nature?
3. In what ways does Christ's victory over death provide the hope Job lacked?

Interlinear Text

מֵאַתְּ בָּטְרַם אֵלֶּنֶת אַלְכָשׁוּב אַלְכָשׁוּב אַלְכָשׁוּב
H2962 H1980 H3808 **whence I shall not return** H7725 H413 **even to the land** H776

חַשְׁךְ מְאוּתָה
of darkness and the shadow of death
H2822 H6757

Additional Cross-References

Job 3:5 (Darkness): Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.

2 Samuel 12:23 (Parallel theme): But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

Psalms 23:4 (Parallel theme): Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Job 16:22 (Parallel theme): When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.

2 Samuel 14:14 (Parallel theme): For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.

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