Chapter 6

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE AND GUIDELINES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

There are some common threads in the practices of ancestor worship in Korea, Japan and Africa. From the previous chapters, it is evident that ancestor worship is essentially based on the relationship between the living and the dead. This belief is intrinsic to the cosmology of the Japanese, Koreans and Africans and thus in turn informs their ritual practices. In all three cases, there is the underlying belief that the dead will benefit from the actions of the living descendants. This is essentially a symbiotic relationship, since the living descendants are believed to gain protection and blessings in return for their veneration of the ancestors.

This synergy is also based on the underlying beliefs about death and the afterlife. In all three cases, death is not considered to be a barrier between the living and the dead. In Japanese, Korean and African culture, the dead are believed to interact and communicate with the living members of the family. For example, in African culture, all deceased members of the family are believed to become part of the collective ancestor group and have the ability to influence the lives of their descendants for the better or to the detriment of the family. Interestingly enough, the actual physical location of the ancestors is unspecified. It is not clear whether they are considered to be living under the earth, in the sky, beyond the horizon or in the homestead (Nxumalo 1981:66-67; Amanze 2003:44; Chidester 1992:11; Mbiti 1971:133).

There are clear parallels to be drawn between the beliefs of these three groups. We now have to ask what the Biblical perspective is on these issues. More pertinently:

- What does the Bible say about the relationship between the living and the dead?
- What does the Bible say about death and the afterlife?
- Which passages in the Bible are the cause of dogmatic controversy?

The answers to these questions will provide a clearer picture of what a Christian's attitude towards ancestors ought to be.

The fundamental point of departure of this study is *sola Scriptura.* Therefore, the perspective espoused by the Bible should fundamentally determine the Christian answer to ancestor worship. In this chapter we will endeavour to identify and interpret scriptural evidence that may help us to formulate such answers.

6.2 THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The most prominent issue to discuss in the light of the Scriptures is the relationship between the living and the dead. As said before, the relationship between the living and the dead is the cornerstone of the ancestor worship. In many countries which practise ancestor worship, notably Japan, Korea and Africa, it is believed that the relationship between the living and the dead is one of inter-dependent synergy. There is an intimate and interdependent association in which the dead and the living are believed to communicate and interact. The question arises as to what the Bible says about the condition of the dead and the relationship of the living with the dead. Is it possible for the dead to exert an influence on the lives of the living? Is it possible for the living to exert an influence on the salvation of the dead?

6.2.1 Communicating with the dead (spiritism)

Spiritism is founded on the idea that the living can communicate with the spirits of the dead by means of mediums (individuals who act as intermediaries between the material and physical world). It is the contention of this study that such practices are neither "spiritual" nor approved of by God.

The Bible has a negative view of necromancy or attempts to communicate with the dead. In fact all contact with the spirit world is expressly forbidden irrespective of the nature of the spirits concerned (Leviticus 19:26-31; Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Job 7:7-10; Isaiah 8:18-20; Luke 16:19-31).

Kim (1999:86; 1996:76) points out that those individuals who practice ancestor worship have an essentially pragmatic belief system which is primarily concerned with ensuring good fortune and avoiding misfortune. Shamanism is inextricably intertwined with the ancestor cult (Eliade 1964:461). Shamans are supposed to be experts in communication with the spirits of the dead. They also use divination to ascertain the best ways of doing things as well as the most opportune moment to act. Kim (1999:87) and O'Donovan (1996:242) point out that it is by this means that the Korean and African people attempt to find guidance and solace.

What is the Biblical view on divination and conjuring spirits? This section will attempt to find a Biblical perspective on these issues and how it can be applied to the African, Korean and Japanese contexts.

6.2.1.1 Leviticus

Leviticus 19:26

Leviticus 19:26 commands: "Do not eat meat with the blood still in it. Do not practise divination or sorcery." (NIV)

This scripture has particular relevance. Grintz (1972:85) argues that the meaning of slaughtering practices similar to kosher slaughtering, was ritual and sacrificial: draining the blood onto the ground would nourish chthonic deities or spirits. If it was performed as part of a divination ritual it involved sacrificing the animal on the ground rather than

on a stone, draining the blood into a deep trench and allowing the blood to soak in before the meat of the sacrificial beast could be consumed. The significance of this blood rite was that it was believed to draw the spirits to the surface and that it enhanced their powers of foretelling future events.

So Leviticus 19:26 specifically prohibited a chthonic interpretation of kosher slaughtering.

The prohibition on divination covers augury and necromancy. Ronald (1980:685) suggests that נחשׁ may denote "augury," which involves predicting the future by looking at the movement of animals, smoke or metals. An example of this can be found in Genesis 44:2 where the account describes how Joseph used a goblet (גביע) for divination (נחשׁ; Gen 44:25,15). The other interpretation is that this term may be related to עָנָן, "cloud," a word with the same consonants. Hartley (1992:321) argues that if this proves to be correct, it could mean that it includes predicting the future by looking at the movements of the clouds. The other interpretation is that the term is an onomatopoeic word for the sounds which a necromancer makes when he/she is communicating with a spirit.

Kaufmann (1960:21–24, 32–33) state that Scriptures consistently reject divination because it is founded on the notion that there is an intangible force (fate) which exerts an influence on the destiny of all things. It negates the omnipotence of God and the Sovereign creator. This is evident in Deuteronomy 18:9–12.

Leviticus 19:31 prohibits the Israelites from interacting with אבת, "ghosts," and ידענים, "departed spirits" for guidance and/or divination. Hartley (1992:321) further asserts that this was necessary since many nations in the ancient Near East sought spiritual guidance from the dead through mediums and spiritists. In Scriptures the word פנה, "turn," is used to denote turning to God but more often refers to turning to other gods in worship (v4; Deut 31:18, 20; Hos 3:1). The second term, בקשׁ, "seek," in a religious context denotes making a significant effort in the worship of God (2 Sam 21:1; Hos 5:6, 15; Zech 8:21–22; but in Isa 8:19; 19:3 with אבות and ידענים). In this regard, Wagner (1975:238) states that it is only used to refer to spirits of the dead.

The exegetical analysis therefore implies that these individuals who approached mediums are seeking divine guidance through contact with dead spirits. The Biblical account of Saul's visit to the witch of Endor is an example of this. He sought out Samuel's dead spirit for guidance. The Bible strongly condemns such practices (1 Samuel 28). Yahweh abhors such practices because it denies Him as the Sovereign Creator and Living God.

One of the major premises underlying the justification of ancestor worship is respect for the elder members of the community and family. Some have used Leviticus 19:26b-32 to justify the veneration of ancestor spirits. It reads: "*Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD."* (NIV)

However, it is important though that these texts do not state that the deceased elderly members of the community are included. It refers clearly to the living members of the family. This is particularly important since immediately before Leviticus 19:32 the

Bible exhorts Christians not to consult the dead. There is nothing inappropriate about a fitting burial to honour those who have died. Note also the admonition of Leviticus 19:31 which states "*Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God" (NIV)*

The Bible expressly forbids consulting mediums or spirits of the dead and also forbids certain practices which were associated with the dead. Notably the command in Leviticus 19:28 which warns "*Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD" (NIV)*. This warning relates to the ancient practices of the living who scratched themselves or made markings on their bodies associated with sacrifices to the dead. Gehman (1999:150) thus argues that some of these traditions which were Babylonian (e.g. cutting of the hair and beards as a sign of mourning) were forbidden, although some Jews continued to practice it (cf Jeremiah 16:5f, 41:4).

The Bible expressly forbids any practices which have a remote connection with any form of idolatry. Ancestor worship which has the notion of divine appellation intrinsic to it is therefore clearly forbidden by the Scriptures.

Leviticus 20:6, 27

Hartley (1992:338) argues that Leviticus points out that God turns his back upon any person who זנה אחרי, "prostitutes himself" (cf. v5) by pursuing communication with אבת, "ghosts," and ידעונים, "departed spirits" (Lev 19:31). Hartley (1992:340) asserts that the penalty the Scriptures prescribes for such behaviour is ostracism from the people (Lev 7:21). Furthermore, the Bible prescribes the death penalty for a necromancer and spiritist.

6.2.1.2 Isaiah 8:19

This text is very clear about God's view on spiritism: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (NIV)

Gehman (1999:151) mentions that this text uses the word *darash* in two ways namely, an acceptable and an unacceptable way of asking God for guidance. At Mount Sinai they were formed into a nation with a special relationship with God, their Redeemer. Israel was chosen by the Lord, who said, "…out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). Any "seeking" or "enquiry" by Israel was to be directed to Him alone. This exclusive relationship between God and His people was for the glory of God and the good of Israel.

According to Watts (1985:126) the scripture is translated as "*Seek out the fathers*". This is a clear reference to the ancestor worship in which the living believe that the dead ancestors have a bearing on their current earthly existence. This is a clear condemnation of ancestor worship.

Watts (1985:126) says that this scripture also contains a fairly derogatory reference to the practices of necromancy when it describes the diviners/mediums/spiritist who

"chirp and mutter"(הַמְצַפְצְפִים וְהַמַּהְגִּים). This implies a garbled gibberish which the necromancer utters in his/her trancelike state.

The text explicitly refers to people who consult the dead and therefore to the belief that the dead have the ability to help the living. This was necessary since the Ancient Near East (including Israel) was drawn to divination as much as any other group of nations in the history of mankind. The context here suggests that Isaiah had to defend his prophetic calling and role against diviners and spiritualists.

Gehman (1999:152) refers to Gesenius who defined a medium as someone with "a familiar spirit". The Hebrew word *ob* denotes in its simplest terms, "a leather bottle" which was typically used for water or wine. It later also denoted a "necromancer, sorcerer, conjurer who professes to call up the dead by means of incantations [magic words] and magic formulas, in order that they may give response as to doubtful or future things". This clearly compares the medium to a leather bottle, filled with a spirit. From the belly of the medium come the gurgling, bubbling sounds of the spirit which possessed him/her.

The Greek word ἐγγαστρίμυθος ("ventriloquist") was used by the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew term אוֹב (Leviticus 19:31; 1 Samuel 28:3-9). Today the term "ventriloquist" denotes a person who has the ability to project his/her voice so that it appears to be coming from another person or puppet. However, among the Greeks it denoted someone who had a distinct involvement with spirits. Therefore, Langton (1942:178) argues that in the ancient world a ventriloquist implied a person who was virtually "pregnant" with a god or spirit.

6.2.1.3 Job 7:7-10

> "As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more." (NIV)

These words must be interpreted against the context in which it was originally used. Clines (1989:186) mentions that in chapter 7 Job reflects on the fleeting nature of life and appeals to God not to forget about him. He implies respectfully that God may have temporarily overlooked him, comparing his life to the insubstantial being of a dead person, like air (רוּחַ), whether as breath or as wind.

Clines (1989:186) further argues that the fleeting nature of life is sometimes compared to the exhaled breath (הֶבֶל; cf. v16; Ps 78:33; 39:6, 12 [5, 11]; 62:10 [9]; 144:4). In other cases it is compared to a "wind" (usually רוּחַ), more pertinently, "a wind that passes and returns not again" (Ps 78:39; cf. Eccl 1:14). Clines (1989:186) points out that there is a particularly close parallel with Ps 78:39 which states ("He remembered [זכר] that they were… a wind [רוּחַ]"), but either sense is appropriate here. The crux of the matter here is that Job is aware that his life is bound to end at any moment and is aware that he has a very tenuous and tentative grasp on life. The only certainty he has is that he will never return to his former happy state: he will never again "see" (cf. Ps 4:7 [6]; 34:13 [12]) "happiness"(NIV), "good days"(NEB) (elsewhere in Job in this sense at 9:25; 21:13; 36:11 and cf. 17:15).

Job is very aware that his fortune will never return and that he is destined to die. He anticipates that he is soon to die and that his friends and family are expecting his death.

Job further describes this state of "nonexistence" (אינני, v8) as the dissolution of his being (כלה, "be at an end, be spent, vanish"), a departure (הלך), a descent (ירד) from which there can be no ascent (עלה) or return. Thus the regular daily routine in which one returns home at the end of the day to be welcomed by members of the household will no longer apply to him. This description of his death is metaphorically likened to the way in which clouds disperse and disappear into the ether – he will sink into שְׁאוֹל in a weakness that does not allow him to rise again to go home.

Job's views of the underworld which are evident from these verses are typical of the Old Testament and indeed of much of the ancient Near East.

When Job speaks of his own imminent death, he mentions that the dead do not return from the grave. Elsewhere, he speaks of death as the "place of no return" (Job 10:21; Samuel 12:23; Genesis 37:35). From these verses it is evident that death is an ending in itself. There is no return to this life once you have died. It implies that life is finite.

The view of the underworld which is evident from Job's words is typical of the Old Testament. Clines (1989:187) states that death is essentially a place of rest and signifies the end of earthly distinctions. There is no suggestion of any contact or communication between the living and the dead.

From these verses it is evident that the Bible teaches that the dead are not able to return and influence the lives of the living or interact with the living.

6.2.1.4 Deuteronomy 18:10-14

Deuteronomy 18:9-14 provides extensive guidelines on God's view on practices associated with ancestor worship and divination.

"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving to you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium of spiritist who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practise sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so." (NIV)

The Hebrew word for wizard or spiritist used in this passage, יִדְּעֹנִי denotes a wise and knowing person who is supposedly familiar with the secrets and mysteries of the unseen world. The King James Version translates this term as "the knowing one." The female counterpart of the wizard is the witch. Both practise divination by the same means. Gehman (1999:155) points out that the Hebrew word actually denotes a "familiar spirit." This points to the connection the wizard or spiritist had with the spirit realm

(cf. Leviticus 19:3 1; 1 Samuel 28:3,9; Isaiah 8:19). This is not different from the role the shaman plays in primal religions and the role of the priest in ancestor rituals in Japan and Korea.

From the exegetical analysis of these scriptures it is evident that a variety of terms have been used to denote anyone who has any contact with spirits. Christensen (2001: 408) provides a fairly exhaustive analysis of the scope of the practices associated with necromancy to which the prohibition applies. Notably, he mentions that "one who practises divination" (קֹסֵם קְסָמִים~) would further include practices such as hepatoscopy (the "art" of reading the liver from a sacrificial animal), belomancy (use of arrows from a quiver), necromancy consulting spirits of the dead), and also false prophecy (Ezek 21: 29; Jeremaih 14:14).

Christensen (2001:408) further points out that the meaning of the term "soothsayer" (מְעוֹנֵן) cannot be delimited with absolute certainty mainly because all interpretations are essentially founded on etymology. To support this statement, Christensen (2001:408) refers to Ibn Ezra who derived the term from *'anan*, "cloud," and asserted that it should be understood to denote "those who draw omens from the appearance and movements of clouds" (Tigay 1996:173).

Furthermore, the term "omen reader" (מְנַחֵשׁ) appears to refer to oleomancy which is essentially divination based on mixing liquids, such as oil and water. This could refer to the manner in which Joseph's silver goblet was used in matters of divination (Genesis 44:5). On the other hand, Christensen (2001:408) mentions that a "sorcerer" מְכַשֵּׁף could denote a practitioner of black magic as it is used in Exod 22:17, where it is described as a capital offence.

Christensen (2001:408) further mentions the phrase חֹבֵר חָבֶר (a "caster of magic spells") (v11) as it is used in Psalm 58:5. In this scripture it is understood to refer to magic of some sort used against venomous snakes. However, Finkelstein (1956:328-31) suggests the meaning "muttering" a spell and compares it to Akkadian *habaru* ("be noisy"). He also refers to "one who asks of a ghost" (שֹׁאֵל אוֹב) as a reference to the practice of necromancy (v11).

Christensen (2001) describes the common interpretation of the term אוֹב as that of a hole in the ground where offerings and requests for information were made to the dead. He mentions that "medium" (יִדְּעֹנִי) may be translated as a "familiar spirit". He points out that it always appears with the term אוֹב and therefore may simply have an adjectival function to the term שֹׁאֵל אוֹב to describe a spirit or ghost functioning as a medium. This appears to be congruent with the account of King Saul and the "witch of Endor" in which the ghost of the dead (Samuel) ascended from the depths of the earth and is seen by the medium. Consequently, Christensen (2001:408) argues that the phrase "one who inquires from the dead" (דֹּרֵשׁ אֶל־הַמֵּתִים) more than likely means one who performs necromancy by any other means than the two previous terms mentioned (Tigay 1996:173).

As Wright (1953:446) states, every possible term available is used to ensure that the prohibition extended to all practices, customs and persons who had any affiliation with the spirit realm. This ensures that the prohibition is fairly exhaustive.

6.2.1.5 Luke 16:19-31

Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16, provides further insight into the condition of the dead and what happens after death. O'Donovan (1996: 220) points out that this passage clearly indicates that it is impossible for the living to communicate with the dead.

Luke 16:25-28 clearly shows that the rich man wanted Lazarus to warn his brothers against making the same mistakes he had made. Nolland (1993: 831) indicates that the usage of ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις which translates as "besides all this" in this verse appears to be consistent with Lukan usage. It further confirms the fixed determination of the will of God and the topology of Hades which objectifies the will and purpose of God. It is also emphatic that no momentary surge of sympathy can change this will and purpose of God.

Nolland (1993:830) further mentions that only ἐρωτῶ… ἵνα in verse 26 appears to be Lukan diction. This is translated as "I ask … that" used in a petitionary manner which indicates that although he acknowledges that his fate is sealed and unchangeable, something may yet be done for those for whom he harbours affection. As Nolland (1993:831) points out, the plea for a personal warning indicates that the rich man is aware of his moral accountability for his own actions and that he realises too late that he could have acted differently.

However, as verses 19 to 31 shows, this request was not granted. From this account it is evident that there is a clear divide between the righteous and the unrighteous dead and that the dead do not have freedom of movement as suggested by the underlying beliefs of ancestor worship. Clearly then, the dead are not able to exert an influence on the lives of the living. From this passage it is clear that the dead cannot communicate with the living on any matter. The response to the rich man's request was that his brothers needed to believe what God had said to save themselves from torment. Yamaguchi (1985:46) argues that the belief that the ancestors are able to communicate with the living members of the family is meaningless.

Clearly then, the Bible does not encourage or support a relationship between the living and the dead. Furthermore, these scriptures indicate that the fear of the ancestors is unfounded.

6.2.2 What is the Biblical view of powers and spirits?

6.2.2.1 Magic powers

The Biblical perspective on witchcraft is clear and unambiguous. Gehman (2005:159) points out that the Scriptures clearly indicate that any form of witchcraft is strongly condemned by God. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 18:9-14 is clear in its admonition

to guard against witchcraft and encompasses all known forms of occultist practices with which the Israelites were familiar at the time. The admonition to abstain from all practices related to witchcraft, magic and sorcery is related to the context of God giving Israel the land of Canaan on the condition that Israel would remain unblemished and untainted by false religion and remain loyal to God. The New Testament continues the condemnation of magic practices as manifestations of rebellion against God and is clear in its rejection of such practices as found in Galatians 5:20; Acts 8:9-24; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Acts 13:6-12.

6.2.2.2 Ancestral spirits

Very little reference is made in the Bible to ancestral spirits or ancestor worship, although indirect inferences or suggestions could be teased from the etymology of words, as above, or perhaps from behind or between the lines.

Gehman (1999:178) points out that the righteous dead cannot return and communicate with the living as 2 Samuel 12:23 and Job 19:27 clearly state that when a person dies the relationship between the living and the dead is irrevocably broken. The righteous dead are in the presence of God and therefore cannot be called back to earth. The only scripture which could possibly suggest that it would be possible for a person to return to communicate with the living is the passage at 1 Samuel 28. He also argues that Mosaic Law equated communication with the dead as a form of idolatry, which is in essence a sin of spiritual prostitution (1999:180).

However, the mere fact that a prohibition on necromancy or communicating with the dead was considered necessary suggests that the phenomenon could be more of a problem and widespread than described.

6.2.2.3 King Saul at Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-19)

The encounter between King Saul and the Witch of Endor is often cited to indicate that the living can communicate with the dead. From the foregoing scriptures it is evident that God condemns any attempt to contact the dead. However, 1 Samuel 28:3-19 appears to suggest that it is possible for the living to contact the dead.

This passage is open to numerous interpretations but does not prove conclusively that the dead are able to communicate with the living. Even if Samuel were able to speak with Saul, this was an unusual instance of the special power of God and needs to be examined closely.

6.2.2.3.1 Context

The incident with King Saul at Endor needs to be understood in the historical context in which it occurred. Fischer (2001:28) points out that before the imminent battle against the Philistines, Saul's loneliness and desperation is evident as recorded in 1 Samuel 28:3-6 and Saul's sense of alienation is reinforced by the recollection of Samuel's death at 1 Samuel 28:3. After Samuel's death, Saul no longer had the advantage of Samuel's prophetic revelations to guide him. As a result, Saul prayed to God but God

did not speak to him in the conventional ways – i.e in his dreams, Urim or prophets. Instead, Saul's questions were met with silence. In desperation, Saul turned to the woman at Endor. Previously, Saul had acted morally by expelling mediums and wizards from the land, but ironically at this point he regresses and seeks a medium's counsel.

Because of his previous actions, Saul disguises himself and seeks the counsel of a necromancer or spiritist who conducts a séance to communicate with the late Samuel.

The scriptures describe Samuel coming out of the ground and speaking with Saul, The late Samuel tells Saul that the next day his sons will be "with" him.

6.2.2.3.2 אֹבוֹת and יִדְּעֹנִים

When one considers an exegetical analysis of the account it is significant that the scriptures' description that Samuel appeared to rise from the ground is supported by the Hebrew term for medium (אוֹב) which Hoffner (1974:133) relates to the Akkadian "pit" (*ab*) which denotes the ritual hole in the ground where spirits of the dead were believed to reside and exit from when they were invoked.

However, Lust (1974:134) argues that אוֹב is often used in the plural which etymologically connects the spirits of the deceased ancestors or the instruments of the ancestral ghosts which are used to represent them. Kim (1996b:26) concurs and argues that Lust's proposal appears to be convincing because in some passages these two terms are closely related to the necromancer and spirits of the dead (cf Deuteronomy18:10-11; Isaiah.8:19; Isaiah.19:3). This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Arnold (2004:201) argues that the use of the word is often linked with the term used to denote "spiritists" (יִדְּעֹנִים) which suggests the necromantic practices involved in communicating with the dead and by implication the phenomena associated with the ancestor cult in general (cf Milgrom 2000:1768-85; Albright 1990:141-42).

Lewis (1989:114) argues that the terminology used in 1 Samuel 28:8 may indicate that Saul's night visit may have been a military necessity but night time may also have been the preferred time for such séances since the darkness of night was considered to be the most appropriate time to communicate with the dead. Horsnell (1997:45-51) further mentions that Saul's explicit instruction to the woman to "consult a spirit for me" is essentially a *terminus technicus* for divination. Furthermore, the necromantic ritual concerned here is also indicated by the recurring use of words which means to "bring up" (אַעֲלֶה־לָּךְ) a spirit. Therefore, the terminology is not peculiar to necromancy alone but extends to all forms of divination.

6.2.2.3.3 Representative interpretations

This account of Saul's visit to the woman at Endor sparked controversy among scholars for centuries. Some questions have still not been answered satisfactorily and scholars have not reached consensus on the interpretation of this passage. Did anything or anyone actually appear to Saul? What is the appropriate interpretation of this incident? There are three different interpretations of this scriptural account.

6.2.2.3.3.1 Psychological interpretation

Figart (1970:20) proposes a psychological interpretation and uses ecstasy as the means of producing the illusion of Samuel (cf Fokkelman 1986:606; Figart 1970:20; Erdmann 1960:332). Therefore, according to this interpretation, the medium would have allowed herself to become emotionally involved and psychologically identified with Samuel that the vision was produced. Narcotics may not necessarily have been used here. This is not an uncommon experience of modern day mediums who claim to have had visions of people. Fokkelman (1986:606) on the other hand approaches the text from an ontological perspective and denies the existence of a spiritual world and assumes that Saul saw nothing. This points to the possibility that the medium was just particularly adept at guessing and used her general knowledge and psychological insights to convey Samuel's message.

Gehman (1999:145) points out that the medium herself appeared to be frightened of what she saw (1 Samuel 28:12). At the outset, the meeting with Saul appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary and she asked Saul the same questions she would have asked any other person who sought her services. She asked Saul: "Whom shall I bring up for you?" (28:11) This implies that she believed to have power over the dead (Gehman 1999:145). Figart (1970:20) further argues that this is contrary to the plain statement of the text, which when read without presuppositions of a narcotic trance on the part of the woman, resembles a normal conversation between Saul and Samuel.

6.2.2.3.3.2 A deliberate deception

Some scholars (Buswell 1962:310; Davies 1955:186) argue that the work of the medium was a case of "a mere deception". Their argument is based on the fact that the medium of Endor was in fact a law breaker and adept at deception. Since mediums were expelled from the land, she would have had no alternative but to practise deception. Therefore, she was the only one who saw the vision of "Samuel" and Saul saw nothing. To indicate that it was definitely Samuel because it was an old man in a robe could refer to any elderly male. However, Saul immediately decided that this was Samuel.

The words of Samuel to Saul may be interpreted as generic statements an experienced fortune-teller could use to deceive many people. She may also have used ventriloquism to project her voice to resemble the voice of Samuel. Although the prediction proved to be true this may be ascribed to Saul's emotionally depressed state and because of his emotional state the prophecy's fulfilment was unavoidable (Gehman 1999: 144).

Figart (1970:23) points out that the scriptures to not indicate that the woman reported Samuel's words but that Samuel and Saul communicated without an interloper. Furthermore Figart (1970:23) argues that it would have been difficult to guess the outcome of the battle and the penultimate fate of Saul and his sons.

6.2.2.3.3.3 A Satanic impersonation

The third group of scholars (Fischer 2001:35; Gehman 1999:148; Roberts & Donaldson 1963:234) believe that it was not Samuel who appeared to Saul but Satan. Most of the early church fathers believed that this was another manifestation of the battle against demonic powers and that the apparition of Samuel was none other than demonic trickery.

Fischer (2001:35) points out that according to Augustine the apparition of Samuel was formed by some phantom or mock apparition from the Devil (Ad Simplic. ii, 3, quoted in Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, vol 3.95.4.2).

This notion was historically taught during the 16th and 17th centuries by the church fathers who believed that by divine ordering Saul saw under the form of Samuel a ghost, an illusion produced by demonic devilish powers" (Erdmann 1960:335). Thus, Luther referred to the appearance of Samuel as "a devil's ghost," and Calvin said it was not the real Samuel but a spectre (awesome looking ghost) (cf. Gehman 1999:148).

The Bible indicates that demons do have the ability to assume any form and be visible to people (2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelations 16:13). They therefore also have the ability to assume the form of someone who has died and would therefore be recognisable to the person to whom they are appearing. Although this interpretation of Saul's encounter with the woman of Endor has been endorsed by many scholars there are some illogicalities.

Erdmann (1960:335) refers to 1 Chronicles 10:13 to prove that the LXX actually teaches that Samuel appeared to Saul. Erdmann argues that there is no indication in the text that an evil spirit assumed the form of Samuel. This is supported by Beuken (1978:10) who suggests that Samuel "had come up as a prophet of the living God before she could conjure up a dead ghost". See the references below:

> So Saul died for his transgressions, wherein he transgressed against God, against the word of the Lord, forasmuch as he kept it not, because Saul enquired of a wizard to seek counsel, **and Samuel the prophet answered him** (LXX 1 Chronicles 10:13).
>
> So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance (RSV 1 Chronicles 10:13).

Moreover, Eaton (1995:112) and Klein (1983:269) contended that the spirit of Samuel was clearly not familiar to the woman because she cried out with a loud voice as soon as she recognised the deceased Samuel. In other words, she was afraid of an apparition which she had not anticipated (Keil 1956:262). Pigott (1998:438) argues that the situation was not in her control.

Whether or not the woman recognised Saul after the appearance of Samuel is not clear. Fischer (2001:32) and Fokkelman (1986:606) argue that the reason why the woman was afraid is not so much because of the appearance of the spirit of Samuel but because she recognised Saul as the king who prosecuted mediums. She had not expected him or recognised him and was afraid that he would expel or kill her (Brueggemann 1990:193). It may be that she made the mental connection after she saw Samuel's apparition and then only recognised her visitor as Saul.

Keil and Delitzsch (1963:263) argue that the fact that the medium used the term אֱלֹהִים (28:13) to describe Samuel: "I see a divine being coming up out of the ground" is significant. The term can be translated as a "divine being" or simply a "godlike being". More pertinently, in respect of ancestor worship, the dead are sometimes referred to as "god" in an attempt to denote a form of transcendental character which exists beyond the here and now (Lewis 1989:112-16; Johnston 1994:417).

Arnold (2004:203) points out that אֱלֹהִים may also denote the sense of "ancestral" preternatural being, rather than simply the "shades of the dead". This is even more evident if one relates the Hebrew term for "medium" (אוֹב) etymologically to אב (ʾāb), "father, ancestor" as Lust (1974:135-139) proposes. The parallel use in Isaiah 8 appears to confirm that the use of אֱלֹהִים in such contexts can be understood to denote the ancestral dead, and not simply ghosts or the spirits of the dead.

Therefore, it stands to reason that it is plausible that it was Samuel and not Satan who appeared. This can be construed to be as a result of God who allowed a special working of His power similar to the fates of Enoch and Elijah who never actually died.

6.2.2.3.4 Contemporary interpretations

The more contemporary interpretation is that it was in fact the spirit of Samuel who appeared to Saul. Scriptures clearly state that Samuel appeared to Saul and does not indicate anything to the contrary. Therefore, Fischer (2001:35) concludes that Samuel appeared as an ancestor and therefore follows a literal interpretation of the text. Gehman (1999:145) states that most Biblical scholars since the 18th Century have supported the belief that it was Samuel himself who appeared to Saul. However, there are some scholars who believe that this can occur at any time under normal circumstances and those who are of the opinion that this is only possibly by a special working of the power of God.

Some scholars (Anold 2004:201; Fischer 2001:32; Manyeli 1995:108; Robinson 1993a:143; Setiloane 1986:18) believe that necromancy is prevalent today and that some mediums do have the ability to communicate with the dead on behalf of the living. This is clearly the view held by people in Africa and elsewhere.[25] In other words, they believe that the world of the living and the dead are not so far apart and that it is possible for the living to communicate with the dead. Oleka (1998:127) and Gehman (1999: 145) believe that they can appear to the living in dreams and vision or via mediums.

On the other hand, some evangelicals (Pigott 1998:438; Eaton 1995:112; Klein 1983:271; Beuken 1978:10) find this difficult to believe because they state that it is not plausible to believe that any medium has the ability to command a righteous spirit to leave their rest and appear before the unrighteous. They contend that mediums who are not complying with God's prohibition on necromancy do not have sovereign power

[25] Fischer (2001:27) commented on this passage in the African perspective which is legitimate because of its animistic background not shaped by Western post-enlightenment rationalism. According to his opinion, that is to say, the belief systems of African societies are comparable to those of ancient Israel and can provide similar insight into texts and practices of the Israelites.

over the lives of the saints. Therefore, Klein suggests that Samuel himself did appear but through the special working of God's power.

There are numerous instances in the Bible which indicates that it is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living. The incident with Saul and the woman of Endor is an exception and the ultimate interpretation must be logical and aligned with the scriptures as a whole. The fact that Samuel appeared to Saul should be seen as an exceptional manifestation of God's power in which God chose to rouse Samuel for His divine purpose. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this text has been used to substantiate African exegesis. Thus, some scholars consider the deceased Samuel as an ancestor in this text (Arnold 2004:203; Fischer 2001:203; Lust 1974:139).

The pertinent question which needs to be answered now, is what happens to those who die? What implications does death have for non-Christians and Christians?

6.2.2.3.5 Own interpretation

It is important to bear in mind that Saul never actually saw Samuel himself but experienced him as it were through the woman's eyes. Pigott (1998:438) rightly points out that the situation was not in medium's control. He argues that God used her séance as a tool to convey a message to Saul. From Saul's perspective and that of his commanders it may have appeared to be Samuel's message of what the future held for Saul but in reality it was God's judgement.

Consequently, one must bear in mind that the woman was used as a vehicle for God's expression as evident from the following points. Firstly, the medium was the only one who saw Samuel. The fact that she was alarmed when she saw the apparition indicates that she realised that she was not in control and may have recognised "Samuel" as God's messenger. Secondly, she did not anticipate what would happen next. She was chastened and realised that something had happened much larger and far outside the normal scope of her experiences.

6.3 DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

One of the most significant differences between the Christian view and that of ancestor worship relates directly to the different views on death and afterlife.

The traditional African view is that death constitutes a transition which is followed by a mode of existence which differs only marginally from one's earthly existence (cf Bae 2004:352). The Christian perspective of death is very different from this. In the Biblical context, death marks a complete break with earthly existence. Schwarz (1979:172) argues that the new form of existence is a radical departure from the tempero-spatial realities of natural existence and facilitates a closer union with God. Therefore, although both Christian and African traditional religions acknowledge the existence of life after death, it is imperative to take a closer look at what the Scriptures say about death and life after death.

6.3.1 Predestined death

Human beings are synthesis of body and spirit. It is suggested in Scriptures that when the body decomposes after death the spiritual element survives (e.g. Psalm 16:10; 17: 15; Hebrews 12:23). Death appears to be inevitable when one considers the way in which the human body has been created. Physical demise and ultimate dissolution are an inescapable part of God's punishment of human sin. A common understanding of death in the Bible is that is signifies a separation from God. The unbeliever who dies, is eternally separated from God, i.e. suffers a second death.

6.3.1.1 Physical death as the first death

Gulley (1992:111) points out that the Old Testament connects death to sin (Psalm 90:7-10) where God said to Adam, "on the day that you eat of it you will die" (Genesis. 2:17). The New Testament develops this connection between death and sin and Paul clearly states that "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Romans 5:12), and that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and again that "Death came through a man" (1 Corinthians 15:21). John speaks of that "Death is linked with God's judgment" (Revelations 2:11; 20:6; 21:8).

However, the Bible teaches that physical death is not the fait accompli of God's punishment. When one examines the matter closely it is clear that Adam did not die immediately on the day that he committed sin. Similarly, in Romans 5 and 6 Paul contrasts death as a result of Adam's sin and the life that Christ brings to mankind. Morris (1982: 273) argues that the possession of eternal life does not nullify physical death. It is opposed to a spiritual state rather than a physical event. Therefore, death which is a result of sin extends beyond a physical death of the body.

Gehman (1999:218) argues that physical death is a result of spiritual death and is the separation of the body from the spirit. Spiritual death on the other hand is as a result of the separation of man's soul from God. This relationship was severed when Adam and Eve chose to sin. Therefore, death involves more than the dissolution of the physical body. Man dies as a spiritual and physical being.

6.3.1.2 Eternal death as the second death

The New Testament underscores the serious consequences and repercussions of sin when it refers to the second death (Jude 12; Revelations 2:11, etc). The second death signifies eternal damnation and perdition. These references must be understood together with passages in which God speaks of "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels", into which the wicked will be cast (Matthew 25:41), "eternal punishment" (set in contrast to "eternal life", Matthew 25:46), and such. Jesus repeatedly warned the people to take care to avoid being cast "into hell, where the fire never goes out" (Mark 9:43). Morris (1982:273) indicates that the final state of impenitent man is described as death, punishment and being lost.

The instances where the second death is mentioned as such in the NT is in Revelations 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8. These scriptures speak of it as "lake of fire" (20:14; 21:8)

and is juxtaposed with receiving a crown of life (2:10) and life lived in the presence of God (21:3–7; 22:3–5). The second death constitutes a final destruction of anything which belongs to the realm of evil. It therefore includes those individuals who do not have their names written in the Book of Life (20:15), the unrighteous (21:8), the false prophet and the beast (19:20), the devil (20:10), and Death and ᾅδης (*Hades*) (20:14). In Jude 12 the second death is also alluded to.

Watson (1992:111) thus argues that Jesus also warned against the second death, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4–5; RSV).

From these points, it is evident that the Bible's portrayal of death is not positive, but rather as a result of God's judgement, as a result of sin. The second death and eternal torment follows eternal severance with God in Christ.

6.3.1.3 Death as a thorough severance

Mbiti (1970:264) states that African peoples believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter. Kim (1999:61) concurs when he argues that in terms of ancestor worship death is considered to be a summons to the hereafter and death is accompanied by a death messenger from the hereafter. In other words, the deceased person is believed to continue to exist just as he or she did in this world. Lim (1984:230) thus states that in terms of the ancestor worship, this constitutes the belief that the living are able to have communion with the living spirit of the dead.

Thus, death is considered to be a transition, or a threshold into a new world. Gehman (1989:54) points out that for followers of the ancestor cult it means that the dead person becomes part of the living-dead which entitles him/her to funerary rites and rituals. Death is not viewed in a positive light but on the other hand not as a catastrophe either (except in case of the untimely death of a most important or strategic person).

The question is whether or not the Bible opposes this view? Ecclesiastes 9:4-10 clearly rejects the notion of communion or interaction between the living and the dead when it states that "the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun... There is no activity or planning or wisdom in שְׁאוֹל where you are going."

Beyerhaus (1966:137-145) further contends that Jewish and Christian scholars agree that it is dangerous to pursue communication with the dead. This perceived danger lies in fears that the spiritual forces at work in such activities are "not the souls of the departed but the power of the fallen angels or demons who are masters of disguise." (Bae 2004:352)

Therefore, it stands to reason, that the state of the dead does not constitute a continuation of life on earth or a parallel reality to live on earth in which individuals have the same physical needs for food, shelter, clothes (Bae 2004:352). Thus, the ancestor cult's notion that the ancestors are able to influence and help their living descendants are unscriptural and irreconcilable with the Christian view of God and death. The an-

cestors clearly do not have any supernatural powers which enable them to bestow benevolence or inflict suffering upon their descendents.

What does the Bible teach about the state and place of the dead once they have died a physical death? What is the Biblical view of the afterlife? Where do the dead live? Do they have a physical abode?

6.3.2 Where are the dead?

The Hereafter has been a central theme in the Christian faith. Death constitutes the beginning of torment for the unrighteous and a blessing for the righteous. Thus as Dabney (1972:820) points out, death marks the irrevocable destiny for those who have died. When an unbeliever dies, he or she is removed from the presence of God and any blessings which emanated from God's grace. (Psalms 6:5; 30:9; 31:18; Isaiah 14: 11; 38:18–19 and Job 3:13–19).

It is important to bear in mind, that in the Old Testament the dead are believed to enter the underworld known as שְׁאוֹל. The Old Testament closely relates the afterlife to שְׁאוֹל. Thus, one cannot conceive of where the dead live without considering what שְׁאוֹל meant.

6.3.2.1 Two beliefs about the dead

When one discusses שְׁאוֹל, one needs to look at the pervasive beliefs about the dead. There are generally two beliefs related to beliefs about the dead in the Bible. The first belief is that people are judged immediately after death, and the spirit of the person will be present with Christ and joins those who are saved or those who have been condemned (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Revelations 20:14-15; Luke 23:43 Philippians 1:21-23). For those who agree with this view שְׁאוֹל was to become the abode for the condemned (Penelhum 1997:36). This appears to be supported by Philippians 1:21-23 in which Paul states that there is an instant transition of his spirit from this world to the presence of Christ. This interpretation appears to corroborate Christ's statement to the criminal on the cross (Luke 23:43).

The second view is concerned with the expectation of personal resurrection. The Hebrew Scriptures contain only a few number of scriptures which appear to substantiate this view, namely Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2 ("Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt"). In these two texts personal resurrection is mentioned and envisaged for those long dead and has become a pervasive concept in Judaism.

6.3.2.2 The abode of the dead

There are numerous terms which are used in the Old Testament to denote the abode of the dead. The most common of these is שְׁאוֹל which occurs approximately 66 times. Lewis (1992:105) points out that. Several terms are used to describe the abode of the dead in the New Testament as well. The word ᾅδης most commonly translates שְׁאוֹל in the LXX and is used ten times in the New Testament. It shares many of the physical

characteristics of שְׁאוֹל, and it too can designate either the underworld or the personified lord of the underworld.

6.3.2.2.1 Various depictions of שְׁאוֹל

There are different understandings of what the word שְׁאוֹל denotes. Rosenburg (1980: 12) and Oppenheim (1956:221) indicate that שְׁאוֹל is usually translated as the underworld. Although there is not much consistency in the translation of the term, Morris (1982:273) and Lewis (1992:107) agree that it is generally depicted as a place to which one "goes down" (Numeri 16:30; Job 7:9; Isaiah 57:9; Isaiah 29:4; Psalm 88:3–4) and therefore appears to represent the lowest place possible (Deuteronomy 32:22; Isaiah 7:11) in contrast with the highest heavens (Amos 9:2; Psalm 139:8; Job 11:8). Furthermore, Job 17:16 describes it as a place of dust, darkness (Jb 10:21), silence (Psalm. 94:17) and forgetfulness (Psalm 88: 12). Thus שְׁאוֹל indicates a realm of sleepy, shadowy existence in the depths of the earth.

However, some scholars (Gehman 1999:231; Tan 1985:82; Otto 1990:147) have suggested that שְׁאוֹל should be interpreted semantically to convey the grave as the destination for all who die (Genesis 42:38; Hosea 13:14), both the wicked (Numeri 16:30; Psalm 9:17) and the righteous (Genesis 37:35). There is a close connection between שְׁאוֹל and the grave, although there has been some debate about the nature of the connection. Harris (1986:71) for instance believes that שְׁאוֹל always denotes simply "grave" and never "underworld" (as quoted in Lewis 1992:108).

This appears to be consistent with the scripture which states that Samuel came up from the earth when the woman of Endor summoned him (1 Sam 28:8,11,13). It was generally accepted that Samuel came up from שְׁאוֹל (as Arnold (2004:202) and Fischer (2001:35) asserted). If so, it follows that שְׁאוֹל at that stage was not understood to be a place of punishment. Thus, Payne (1962:528) asserts that this explains passages in which the righteous are described as going down into שְׁאוֹל.

The question arises as to how one should interpret the expression of the phrase "to be gathered to one's people" which generally occurs with notices of death and burial and appears to imply that one joins one's ancestors in the afterlife. This phrase occurs ten times in the Scriptures and only in reference to Israel's ancestors and leaders (Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron). Elsewhere there are a few similar, probably derivative phrases (Judges 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; Psalm 49:19). Another phrase, "To sleep with one's fathers", also occurs and is used restrictively in reference to the kings of Israel and Judah who died peacefully, irrespective of whether they were considered good or evil and irrespective of their place of burial.

Johnston (2001:cd) therefore argues that regardless the origins of the phrase, the usage and context suggest a type of death rather than a reunification in the afterlife as suggested by the tenets of ancestor worship.

6.3.2.2.2 Who are the denizens of שְׁאוֹל?

Penelhum (1997:35), Lewis (1989:5;1992:107) indicate that the *rephaim*, or inhabitants of שְׁאוֹל can be referred to as "shades." They further describe their state of existence as being "dim, lethargic, and unenviable; they are cut off from the fullness of life as it is known to those still in the body." However, Lewis (1992:107) points out that dimness and lethargy are not the same as non-existence.

There has been a lot of controversy around who it is that resides in שְׁאוֹל. Johnston (1995:213-222) states that is a commonly held thought that שְׁאוֹל in the Hebrew Scriptures is the place where all the dead (righteous and wicked) reside. Gehman (1999: 302) on the other hand contends שְׁאוֹל to be the residence of the wicked only.

Aside from the nature of those who reside in שְׁאוֹל, one has to ask whether or not it is possible to communicate with them. Deuteronomy 18:11 expressly forbids necromancy and similar practices, hence Lewis (1992:106) argues that it is entirely understandable that there was no cult of the dead in ancient Israel. Job 10:21 further describes שְׁאוֹל as the place of no return, the land of gloom, deep shadow and disorder. It also describes the dead as being conscious of nothing at all (Job 7:9; 14:21). There is no possibility that the dead can return to the living on earth from שְׁאוֹל. There is no parallel with the beliefs in African and East Asian contexts that the honourable ancestors return from the grave to the living.

Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 103:4 are famous texts in the Old Testament for suggesting that God will not allow the righteous to perish in שְׁאוֹל and were later used to argue a resurrection of the righteous dead. These texts however do not imply that the sharp divide between the living and the dead would be bridged or that the resurrected would return to this side of the grave (even in spiritual form).

6.3.2.2.3 ᾅδης (*Hades*) in the New Testament

The Greek equivalent for שְׁאוֹל which is used in the New Testament, is ᾅδης. Gehmann (1999:289) argues that שְׁאוֹל was to the Old Testament saints what ᾅδης was to the Greek speaking New Testament church.

In this regard, Lewis (1992:107) points out that as is the case with שְׁאוֹל, ᾅδης is understood to mean a place to which one goes down (Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15). Sometimes ᾅδης is used to denote the abode of righteous and the wicked (Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27), a temporary holding place for the dead until the resurrection when ᾅδης will give up its dead as recorded in Revelations 20:13. However, ᾅδης is used with a definite connotation of judgement and punishment as conveyed in the account of the rich man and the Lazarus (Luke 16:23). There is a further distinction to be drawn between ᾅδης and Gehenna which is understood as the eschatological fiery hell in which the ungodly will be punished after death (Matthew 5:22).

6.3.2.3 Afterlife: what happened to Christians who die?

As discussed שְׁאוֹל and ᾅδης have been interpreted to denote (1) the underworld as the place of the dead, or (2) the grave which indicates the state of the dead. This study is

aligned with the latter view. The reason for this is because there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that the Bible strongly supports an intermediate state as the place where all died lie and await the final judgement. On the contrary, the New Testament indicates that the believer will be united with Christ immediately after death. This denotes a blissful state beyond our present understanding and expectations.

6.3.2.3.1 Intermediate state

Kreitzer (1987:107-112) contends that the "intermediate state" is understood to indicate the state in which the believer is between physical death and consummation of the recreated order at the *parousia* of Christ, at which point in time a new bodily existence will begin.

The notion of an intermediate state is essentially an attempt to find a compromise between two seemingly contradictory theological viewpoints which postulate either an immediate reunion and consciousness of being in Christ's presence or a waiting stage of souls between death and Parousia (which will also be the time of resurrection). Therefore, the question of what exactly happens to believers after death is a problematic one.

The Westminster Larger Cathechism (Q. 86) summarises the position of the Reformed Churches on the intermediate or disembodied state as follows:

> The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory; waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness; and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, until the resurrection and judgment of the great day.

When one considers this extract it appears to indicate that the Reformed perspective rejects the notion of a realm outside of heaven and hell where dead spirits go and exist in a disembodied state until the appointed time for the resurrection. The Reformed view asserts that the righteous souls immediately ascend into heaven to be in the presence of Christ while the wicked are condemned to hell.[26]

Gehman (1999:223) argues that the intermediate state of the believer should be understood to be a conscious existence in heaven without a body, and the intermediate state of the unbeliever is a conscious existence in hell without a body. The state of the believer culminates in a conscious existence in heaven with his or her body which he or she will receive at the Second Coming of Christ, while the final state of the unbeliever will be a conscious existence in hell with his body received at the last judgement (Revelations 20:4-15).

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[26] Cf. also the Scots Confession (Chap. 17): "… the chosen departed are in peace,… not that they sleep and are lost in oblivion"; the Heidelberg Cathechism (Q. 57): "… after this life my soul shall be immediately taken up to Christ"; and the Second Helvetic Confession (Chap. 26): "… the faithful, after bodily death, go directly to Christ" and "unbelievers are immediately cast into hell".

Gehman's view (1999:223) is supported by the words of Jesus to the dying criminal (Luke 23:41-43), and according to Paul's words (2 Corinthians 5:1-8) which both indicate that Christians are immediately transported into the presence of Christ in Paradise (heaven) at their physical death. O'Donovan (1996:221) claims that the Bible suggests that in this intermediate state before the resurrection of all the dead, believers have a heavenly identity which allow them to communicate and relate to one another (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

O'Donovan (1996:221) points out that this (Protestant) view is different from the Catholic perspective which indicates that very few, if any, Christians will be with the Lord directly at death. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christians are first sent to purgatory (a place of purging or cleansing by fire) for their earthly sins and only later ascend to heaven. The notion of purgatory is however contrary to numerous statements in the New Testament.

Firstly, Jesus' words to the criminal at Calgary recorded in Luke 23:43 indicates that he would be in Christ's presence that same day because the dying man had repented and pleaded with Jesus to remember him when He came to his kingdom (23:42). Gehman (1999:226) interprets this plea was a declaration of faith. Jesus' response to the criminal's plea was: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Nolland (1993:152) asserts that the intermediate state for the blessed is heaven itself because this criminal who pleaded for mercy and grace was told that he would be with Jesus in paradise. Gehman (1999:226) describes it as a place of joy and delight – heaven itself.

Secondly, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 is probably one of the most important passages on the intermediate state in the New Testament. In this scripture, Paul stated that he desired, "to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul understood that "if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1). In this scripture Paul metaphorically compares two houses. Smith (1996:18) interprets that the earthly tent constitutes a metaphorical reference to the physical body which is destroyed at death, and the eternal house in heaven is a metaphor for the eternal resurrection body that will be received at Parousia. The obvious implication of this interpretation is that if Paul were to die before Parousia, he would enter into a bodiless state. Others (Gundry 1987:150; Harris 1974:324; Hodge 1972:112) support Smith's viewpoint and assert that we dwell now in an earthly tabernacle and after death we shall dwell in a heavenly house. This is all that the figure conveys. Gehman (1999:230) thus argues that when the soul loses its body at physical death, it will not wander in a lost and disembodied state without a resting place. Rather the soul has a lodging place in the presence of Christ.

Gehman (1999:230) continues and states that Paul extends the metaphor to one of clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:2-4. The meaning is essentially the same. He states that to be "found naked" (5:3) is to be without a house or to be without clothing. In other words, while we have our present physical body, living in this "tent", we groan with many diffi-

culties. In spite of the fact that this body is mortal and imperfect, it does serve as a form of dwelling for our soul. Paul yearns for heavenly clothing which can be construed to be "a heavenly house" which is immortal and eternal in heaven itself.

Gehman (1999:231) further argues that Paul simply indicates that he would prefer to be absent from the body to enter his heavenly home immediately after death to be with Christ. Gehman argues that there is no indication of an intermediate state or reference to purgatory.

Thirdly, Phillippians 1:21-23 contains Paul's testimony about an attitude towards death:

> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

Although most people fear death, Paul indicates that it represents immediate gain in the sense that when he "departs" he will be with Christ. Thus death represented a release to be with Christ and the reference to "paradise" can only be understood to indicate heaven. This is clearly a contradiction to the teaching of purgatory or an intermediate state in the underworld (1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelations 14:13).

Therefore, it is clear that the Bible teaches that the believer is immediately reunited with Christ in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Philippians 1:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; John 11:25; Luke 23:43; Luke 16:19-3; Luke 20:27-38; Mark 12:18-27; Matthew 27:52-53; Revelations 14:13). The believer exists in Christ's presence as a disembodied being while the physical body returns to the ground and becomes dust again. Therefore, this contradicts the premise of ancestor worship which implies that the righteous dead will return and communicate with the living.

Therefore, the spirit of the dead cannot be recalled by a medium who is acting contrary to the will of God (Hebrews 9:27; Revelations 20:13-15; Romans 2:6-8; Genesis 18:25). Furthermore, the dead ancestors do not remain on earth to interact with the living.

This brings one to the problematic question of the references to Christ's descent into φυλακη. How should one interpret 1 Peter 3:18-22 in the light of this? The fact that the scripture states that "He went and preached to the spirits in prison" has influenced some African, Korean and Japanese Christians' understanding of the possibility of salvation of ancestors (Oak 2002:346; Mullins 1998:153; Mosothoane 1973:92).

The flawed interpretations of this scripture has given rise to questions such as: Could it be that Christ is giving a second chance to people who have died? What does it mean that these beings are in prison? Could there be some type of purgatory after death where people are given a second chance?

6.3.2.3.2 The descent of Christ into Hell

Gehman (1999:307) and Otto (1990:143-144) agree that one of the main supporting struts of the notion of an intermediate state is the Descent Clause in the Apostles' Creed ("He descended into hell"). Interestingly enough, Leith (1963:25-36) points out

that none of the early orthodox creeds made any reference to Christ's "descent into hell" until about AD 700. Hence, the idea that Christ descended into hell came relatively late in the history of the Christian church.

Generally, there are two interpretations of this. Some commentators (Hanson 1980: 122; Reicke 1964:109; Scaer 1992:92) assert that the term is derived from the clause in the Apostle's creed, *descendit ad inferna* which is translated as "Christ descended into hell', Hell is understood to refer to the realm of the dead (ᾅδης or שְׁאוֹל) rather than the hell of eternal punishment. As a result, modern translations of the Creed read: "He descended to the dead."

Dixon (1999:177) on the other hand, believes that Christ bore our hell on the cross and that John 19:30's declaration ("It is finished") indicates the completion of his atoning work. Grudem (1986:6-7) argues that Jesus Christ needed to suffer hell to complete the work of salvation rather than a literal descent to the place of the departed dead.

Grudem (1986:23) points out that the Bible does not hold out hope of conversion after death. He cites Hebrews 9:27 which clearly states that "man is destined to die once and after that to face judgement". Furthermore, Grudem (1986:23) argues that Luke 16 is emphatic that there is no possible return from hell once one has gone there.

6.3.2.3.2.1 1 Peter 3:18-20

According to Mullins (1998:148), in understanding of this passage, not a few Japanese Christians tend to consider Christ's descent into ᾅδης as a last proclamation of the Gospel, either "to all the pious dead of the old dispensation, who there believed on Him and shared in Christian salvation," or to the wicked dead who are thus given another opportunity to repent. This explains why many Japanese Indigenous churches believe that it is acceptable for their congregation members to pray on behalf of their ancestors to ensure that the Gospel may reach them in the underworld.

Dixon (1999:177) interprets 1 Peter 3:18-20 to mean that Christ preached through Noah to the people of the time. The preaching to the spirits in prison does not refer to something that happened between the death and resurrection of Jesus but to something that happened during the time of Noah to those individuals who are now (when Peter was writing) "spirits in prison". He (1999:178) on the other hand supports the interpretation that Jesus was resurrected by the Spirit of God and after that went (in the Spirit) to proclaim triumph over the fallen spirits.

The following three dominant interpretations of this text have been the most commonly held:

1. Jesus preached to the dead in ᾅδης between his death and resurrection in the realm of the dead (Best 1971:140-147; Hanson 1980:122-156; Pinnock 1992: 171).
2. Before or after his resurrection Jesus travelled to hell and proclaimed his triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood (Blum 1981:241-243; France 1977:264-281; Kelly 1967:151-158).

3. Christ preached repentance and righteousness via Noah to unbelievers who lived in Noah's day but who were "spirits in prison" in Jesus' time (Dixon 1999: 177; Erickson 1995:131-144; Grudem 1991:103-113; Guthrie 1981:842; Kaizer et al 1996:714).

The first perspective of this text means that Christ went to Hell and preached to the spirits who were there, either proclaiming the Gospel or offering a second chance to repent or proclaim that he had triumphed over them and that they were condemned for eternity. But, as Erickson (1995:140-143) points out, this interpretation does not fit the context or the passage itself. He continues to say that Peter does not say that Christ preached to spirits in general but to those who did not obey during the building of the ark. The context of 1 Peter 3 also makes a preaching in hell highly unlikely. In this chapter, Peter encourages his audience to witness to unbelievers without fear or restraint. He concludes by telling them "to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you." (1 Peter 3:15). Even more difficult, as have seen above, is the fact that this view is contrary to the Scriptures which clearly indicate that there is judgement after death (Hebrews 9:27) and that the wicked are condemned without reprieve as suggested by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Also if Christ proclaimed his triumph, if he offered a second chance for salvation, why only to these sinners and not to all? (Grudem 1991:109).

The second view which has become entrenched in the West implies that the descent of Christ implied a conquest of Death and Satan (cf. Grudem 1986:4; Pannenberg 1972:94). France (1977:264-281) has postulated that "spirits in prison" could be understood to denote demonic spirits or fallen angels and that Christ condemned these demons. The Lutherans are particularly disposed to this interpretation. Luther considered the descent of Christ into ᾅδης as a triumph over Satan, In his famous sermon at the Castle of Torgau, which is cited in article 9 of the Formula of Concord, he says: "That is the power and usefulness of this article, the reason for its happening, being preached and believed, namely, that Christ destroyed the power of hell and took away all power from the devil" (Bauckham 1988:194). In this text, however, Peter emphasises hostile persons who hear the message rather than demons or fallen angels in the context of the passage.

The third interpretation implies that this passage is aimed at the Christians in Asia Minor who were facing severe persecution and martyrdom in hermeneutical terms. Kaizer et al (1996:714) states that Peter encourages them to look at Jesus' example who was killed (from the human perspective) but rose to a renewed physical and transformed life in the spiritual world. In doing so, He proclaimed his victory to the fallen angels who were disobedient in Noah's day. Kaizer et al (1996:714) thus argues that this may have occurred at this ascension and that the text does not point to the exact location of this prison. Some Jews located it in the "second heaven" and therefore in between earthly existence and heaven where God dwells. Thus, Kaizer et al (1996:714) concludes that 1 Peter 3:18-22 does not support the notion that Jesus descended into ᾅδης.

The most acceptable handling for this passage is to acknowledge that it represents "perhaps the most difficult to understand in all of the New Testament" (Mounce 1982: 54, as cited by Erikson 1995:144). In fact it is nearly impossible to arrive at an acceptable interpretation and therefore cannot be used by any of the three interpretations mentioned above. Likewise a doctrine of purgatory cannot be supported by it.

6.3.2.3.2.2 Ephesians 4:9

In this scripture, Paul writes "In saying, "He ascended", what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" (RSV)

What exactly "τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς" (the lower parts of the earth) denotes is unclear. It is not clear whether or not it means that Christ descended into hell. This text indicates "lower regions of the earth" to denote "lower regions that are the earth". However, Hoehner (2002:531) points out that the traditional interpretation has been that the descent means Christ's descent from heaven to earth at the time of his incarnation (coming to the earth as a baby) and that the ascent means Christ's ascent from earth to heaven after the resurrection. According to Grudem (1991:108) Paul, in this scripture, is saying that Christ who ascended into heaven is the same one who descended from heaven (verse 10). The "descent" from heaven occurred when Christ incarnated as a man and does not refer to a descent into hell.[27]

6.3.2.3.2.3 Acts 2:27

The NIV translates this text as "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." The context of this scripture is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost during which he quoted Psalm 16:10 (cf also p 141). According to Grudem (1991:107) it does not mean that Christ descended into ᾅδης (or שְׁאוֹל as in Psalm 16:10). Ἅδης (as well as שְׁאוֹל) denotes in this context simply the grave or death. The context emphasises the fact that Christ's body rose from the grave whereas David's body remained interred in the grave. Paul's intention here is that Christ's body did not decay.

How, then, can we interpret passages tied into the dogmatic controversy in the New Testament, such as 2 Timothy 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:29? These verses seem to support that prayers and baptising for the dead is in order. In the next section we will examine these and other affected passages.

6.4 PASSAGES OF DOGMATIC CONTROVERSY

As discussed in previous chapters, followers of the ancestor worship believe that the actions of the living ancestors can influence the destiny of the ancestral spirit in that the ancestor can earn merit from the actions of his/her descendants. Thus, the belief is that if the ancestral rites are adhered to faithfully they will have protection from bad luck,

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[27] Another view is proposed by scholars such as Caird (1976:74-75), Harris (1994:204-214) and Lincoln (1990:246-247). They suggest that the descent refers not to Christ's descent at the incarnation but to Christ's descent at Pentecost to give his spiritual gifts to the church.

adversity and danger. If they are faithful in carrying out the required ancestral rites, they will be protected from ill luck, adversity and danger and gain blessings, fortune and good health. Furthermore, the shaman is believed to have the ability to communicate with spirits including those who are able to bring about disaster and misfortune on the living

As we have shown in the previous section, this is contrary to the teachings of the Bible since the Bible clearly teaches that the dead are conscious of nothing at all and do not have the power to influence the living. Furthermore, the Bible prohibits necromancy and idolatry. There are however, two passages in the Bible which are problematic which have influenced the doctrines of AIC and JIC as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

6.4.1 Praying for the dead

6.4.1.1 2 Timothy 1:16, 18

> "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16) - NIV
>
> "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus" (2 Timothy 1:18) - NIV

According to Grudem (1994:817) 2 Timothy 1:18 may constitute the only precedent in the New Testament which Roman Catholics use to support their notion that it is acceptable to pray for the dead. This is based on the assumption that Onesiphorus had already died when this letter was written and thus informed the establishment of the Roman Catholics' doctrines of prayers for the dead and purgatory theologically. Berkhof (1960:686-687) and Mounce (2000:497) state that rituals such as prayers for the dead, mass and indulgences thus became a means for Catholics to ensure that the duration and intensity of the suffering in purgatory can be diminished while the soul is purified through suffering in preparation for heaven.

This is problematic, since it is not clear that Onesiphorus had actually died and therefore as Mounce (2000:494) points out it would be a mistake to base a theology of prayers for the dead on this passage (Also Hendriksen 1957:238-39; Knight 1979:386). Furthermore, Mounce asserts that verses 16 and 18 do not imply intercessionary or petitionary prayer. He argues that the passage does not contain a clear petition to God (e.g. "Lord, grant them mercy") but is rather to be construed as Paul's general wish for Onesiphorus and his family's welfare (similar to Romans 15:5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16) (Wiles 1974:45-155; Fee 1991:237; Knight 1979:386).

The question which arises is whether or not this constitutes sufficient evidence to conclude that Onesiphorus was still alive at the time of this letter? Scholars such as Hendriksen (1957:238-39) and Knight (1979:386) argue that Onesiphorus was alive at the time. They assert this for numerous reasons:

Firstly, verse 16 speaks of Onesiphorus' household in the present tense and thus implies that Onesiphorus may have been part of the household at the time and not

necessarily deceased as some would like to believe. The possibility that Onesiphorus could still have been alive is evident from 1 Corinthians 1:16.

Secondly, the fact that the wish is addressed directly to Onesiphorus in the future tense in the time frame of the Day of Judgement suggests that Onesiphorus had died and would next face judgement. However, Paul could have pronounced an eschatological blessing on a church while the people were still alive as evidenced by 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Furthermore, he could have spoken in general about "that day" without requiring the person to have actually died already (1:12; 4:8). It is also possible that Onesiphorus was absent from his family because he had just left Paul and Paul could therefore have been thinking of his family as they were currently without him.

Thirdly, the use of past-tense verbs throughout this passage is used by some scholars to suggest that Onesiphorus had since died. However, each event which is recounted in the epistle was written in the past tense and therefore these verbs need not signify anything specific.

Fourthly, some scholars reason that Onesiphorus had died because in the final greeting in which Paul names each individual, he does not mention Onesiphorus' name. Instead, Paul greets his household. Considering the nature of their relationship it is peculiar that he does not greet Onesiphorus by name. This is used by some to suggest that he had already died. However, another possibility must be considered. Onesiphorus did not return home immediately and the letter would have arrived at Ephesus before him. Thus, it is plausible that Paul would greet the household instead. Mounce (2000:495) cautions against arguing on the basis of consistency of style when one considers that Paul's writing may not necessarily have conformed to the modern notions of consistency and style. Thus, from these points it is clear that there is insufficient concrete evidence to conclude that Onesiphorus had died (Mounce 2000:495).

6.4.1.2 Maccabees 12:39-45

The Apocryphal books have often been used to justify prayers for the dead. 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 is one of those scriptures which are often used to justify this doctrine. Kelly (1960:171) argues that prayers for the dead were essentially part of Pharisaism following the events of 2 Maccabees 12:43-45. Bernard (1980:114) further points out that an inscription in Rome clearly indicates that this practice was accepted by Christians. Let's consider it closely.

A synopsis of the account is necessary for clarification. Gehman (1999:122) summarises it by saying that Judas Maccabeus, after the victory over Gorgias who was governor of Idumea in 163 BC, returned to claim the bodies of a "few of the Jews" who had been mortally wounded in battle. During this process, they discovered that some of these slain Jews were wearing "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jew to wear" under the coats on the bodies. They then came to the conclusion that these Jews had perished because they had committed idolatry. As a result of their discovery they collected 2 000 drachmas of silver to send to Jerusalem for "a sin offering." Gehman (1999:122) refers to the conclusion in verse 45 which states that

they attempted to atone for the sins of the dead in the hope that they might be delivered from their sin.

Consequently, Metzger (1965:287) observes that "this is the first known statement of the doctrine that a sin offering and prayer made atonement for the sins of the dead (v 45)."

This passage is problematic because it teaches more than the doctrine espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. Although it is one of the few passages which theologians cite to support the belief in prayers for the dead, it is not orthodox teaching.

In this case, the prayers and offering to atone for their sins was made for individuals who had committed idolatry. The Catholic Church teaches that idolatry is a mortal sin. Bartlett (1973:319) consequently suggests that the "idols" may actually have been amulets which were worn as a protective charm. These amulets more than likely, bore a representation of the Dagon of Azotus" (Bartlett 1973:319). In spite of the fact that these Jews had committed idolatry, the Jews made a sin offering on their behalf because they had died for the cause of the Maccabees. Maccabean Jews believed that those who fought for their cause would be resurrected to share in the kingdom which would succeed the Syrian domination over them. Thus, Gehman (1999:122) argues that the sin offering was made in the hope that they would be forgiven for their idolatry and may share in the kingdom for which they had fought.

In spite of this, this is contrary to Catholic doctrine. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that it is wrong to pray for those who die in mortal sin. However, Catholics believe that it is honourable to pray for those in purgatory but wholly inappropriate to pray for those who have been condemned to hell. Gehman (1999:122) thus supports Goldstein (1983:450) who states that this was also contrary to rabbinic laws of the time and that Catholic doctrine merely followed.

It is important to bear in mind that evangelical Protestants reject the Old Testament Apocrypha as being non-canonical or not authoritative and by implication therefore also reject the doctrines which are based on the teachings espoused by these texts. The rejection of these Aprocryphal books are also based on the fact that Jesus never indicated in his teachings that they were acceptable – He never cited them, while He often mentioned the Old Testament canon of the Jews and frequently quoted from the three parts of the Jewish Scriptures, namely, "the Law of Moses, the Prophets and Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Furthermore, The Apocrypha, and especially 2 Maccabees, contains historical and doctrinal errors which are not consistent with the Bible (Gehman 1999:123).

6.4.2 Vicarious baptism for the dead?

The notion of vicarious baptism for the dead emanates from the controversial interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:29. In this scripture Paul writes: "Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν."

Numerous scholars have proposed interpretations and Reaume (1995) provides a useful synopsis of the most widely accepted theories on this matter. Reaume (1995: 495) classifies the theories into three broad categories namely:

1. Vicarious baptism which is a water baptism undertaken by a living person for the benefit of an unbaptised deceased person;
2. Metaphorical baptism which could refer to Paul's suffering or martyrdom for the Gospel; and
3. Christian baptism which is a water baptism of new believers.

The first of these, vicarious baptism is generally supported by most commentators (i.e. Fee 1987:767; Walvoord & Zuck 1983:544; Meyer 1980:365). The notion of vicarious baptism is founded on the premise that those who were involved in this practice held that baptism was a prerequisite for entry into the eschatological kingdom and/or a requirement for salvation (Orr & Walther 1976:337). Beasley-Murray (1974:187) points out that the crux of this interpretation is derived from the plain reading of the verse because the words βαπτίζω, νεκρός, ὑπέρ are understood to denote their most fundamental meanings. However, Reaume (1995:459) rightly argues that the greatest challenge for this interpretation is the fact that there is no historical or Biblical evidence which suggests that this was the practice in Corinth or the ancient near East during the first century. He further argues that it is highly unlikely that Paul would have openly supported a practice which was upheld by marginal heretical groups and which was contrary to his theology without commenting on it.

The second group of theories tend to assert that it can be construed to refer to metaphorical baptism. Godet (1977:818) points out that in this paradigm it is thought to refer metaphorically to martyrdom or to Paul's suffering for the Gospel. He indicates that Paul referred to those who had been "baptised by blood" (martyred) with the hope of the resurrection to support his argument about the certainty about the resurrection. Reaume (1995:461) refers to Godet's argument which cites Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50 in support of the former hypothesis. In these scriptures Jesus mentions the baptism He had to endure which appears to be a metaphorical reference to his death and martyrdom. He (1995:461) acknowledges that this appears to suit the context because Paul refers to his suffering until his death for the sake of the Gospel as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:30 – 32.

Yet according to Bruce (1982:140) and Cairns (1982:90), the fact that there were no apparent martyrdoms in Corinth at that time invalidates the notion. Murphy-O'Connor (1981:534) logically considers that Godet's use of ὑπέρ to mean "for entering" does not appear elsewhere in Greek literature. Furthermore, although Jesus clearly used βαπτίζω to allude to "suffering or martyrdom" in metaphorical terms, Paul does not.

Simultaneously Reaume (1995:462) further discusses the notion that it could be understood to refer to Paul's sufferings. He refers to Murphy-O'Connor's assertion that "baptism for the dead" could be construed to be a slogan used by agitators in Corinth in an attempt to denounce the resurrection and Paul's efforts for those who were spiritually dead. He (1995:462) argues that the metaphorical understanding of βαπτίζω refers

to Paul's trials and tribulations for the Gospel while νεκρός refers to the "spiritually dead" or "spiritually unenlightened". Therefore, as Reaume (1995:462) states, the verse would then read as "Why are they (Paul and other apostles) being destroyed while working for the sake of the lost? If dead believers are not raised, then why are they suffering for the lost?"

This interpretation avoids the theological problems which accompany the notion of vicarious baptism and that it further neatly fits into the context since Paul refers to his tribulations in the verses which follow this one (15:30–31).

However Reaume (1995:462) acknowledges that it does have some difficulties. The first problem emerges in the exegetical analysis of the text. Different nuances of νεκρός could denote not only "the spiritually dead" but also the "physically dead". He further argues that it is highly unlikely for the writer to use such subtle nuances without commenting on it. Moreover he (1995:462) argues that the effect such a slogan would have had on Paul's case for the certainty of the resurrection is dubious at best. Reaume continues that if this were the case it is unlikely that Paul would have included the slogan in a context where his struggles for the spiritually dead are given as evidence for the certainty of the resurrection. The notion that the phrase "baptised for the dead" is to be understood as a slogan is problematic because it lacks the key characteristics of slogans which include brevity, sustained qualification and an unambiguous response (Cf. Carson 1987b:55).

The third interpretation of the verse is that it could indicate Christian baptism with water in the normal ritual sense. This category of interpretations does however encompass a variety of interpretations which Reaume (1995) clusters into six subviews. These include:

i Baptism because of dead believers

This group interpret the phrase "baptism for the dead" to mean unbelievers who are being baptised because of believers who have died. Therefore, these unbelievers are baptised because of the influence of Christians who have died recently (MacArthur 1984:425). Reaume (1995:462) points out that the exegetical analysis reveals that Paul used νεκρός with and without the definite article with some consistency. It is thus proposed that τῶν νεκρῶν refers to dead Christians. Furthermore, the use of the preposition ὑπέρ with the genitive can have the causal sense of "because of". And finally, this interpretation is consistent with the context in which Paul returns to his previous argument on the absurdity of denying the believers' resurrection.

ii To be reunited with the dead at the resurrection

This presents a slight variation on the previous notion. Some scholars suggest that the preposition ὑπέρ functions with the final sense of "for." Reaume (1995:463) refers to Schnackenburg (1964), who asserted that verse 29 is a reference to "pagans who take baptism upon themselves." Therefore ὑπέρ τῶν νεκρῶν is understood to denote "with the purpose of becoming united with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection." Reaume (1995:463) acknowledges that this preposition may have a final sense but the usage of it is rare in the New Testament. He further points out that this interpretation

requires filling a significant ellipsis to convey this message, as Meyer (1980:367) cited as “baptised in order to be united with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection.”

iii To take the place of dead believers

Reaume (1995:464) cites another interpretation which holds that Paul was probably referring to individuals who converted and were baptised to take the place of deceased believers. The problem with this interpretation is that the notion of new believers who replace believers who had died is not readily evident from the context.

iv With reference to the resurrection of the dead

Reaume (1995:464) cites a fourth interpretation of the scripture which states that “baptism for the dead” could be referring to the general baptism of all believers in which they are baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead. This interpretation is dependent upon an ellipsis of “resurrection” to refer to “baptism with reference to the resurrection of the dead.” (Cf. Barnes 1962:793)

Some who subscribe to this interpretation state that Paul used the preposition ὑπέρ elsewhere to convey the meaning of “with reference to” as used in 2 Corinthians 1:7 and 8:23. Others however object to the implied ellipsis of “resurrection”. Reaume adds by saying that Paul would have included the term “resurrection” if that is what he had wanted to convey. However, as Paul used the expression ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν in verse 12 and verse 13, it is not far-fetched that he presupposed the same expression here.

Kaiser et al (1996:616) contended that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul develops an elaborate apologetic argument for both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of the dead. It seems that among the Corinthian Christians were some who denied the very concept of resurrection. Such a denial seems to have emerged out of a view of reality which denigrated physical life and held that only the human spirit or soul (the immaterial aspect) was the object of redemption. Thus among the superspiritualists in Corinth there were the “libertines” for whom concrete, bodily realities, including sexual relations, had no ultimate significance. Paul’s discussion of the resurrection responds to questions raised in the congregation by the views of these hyperspiritualists.

Paul’s apologetic argument is expressed in a series of “if/then” arguments: If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised (1 Corinthians 15:13). If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching and your faith are futile (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17) and those Christians who have already died are lost (1 Corinthians 15:18). If the dead are not raised, then “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” and that’s the end of it (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Our text is part of this series of arguments. Though the Greek of the first part of 1 Corinthians 15:29 does not contain the phrase “no resurrection” (as in NIV; compare NASB, RSV), the preposition *epei* (“now if” or “otherwise”) clearly carries this sense from the previous “if/then” series, as well as from the latter part of verse 29, “If the dead are not raised, why then …?” (Kaiser et al 1996:616)

From all the explanations proposed this is the most acceptable.

v For their dying bodies

Some early Church Fathers (including Tertullian and Chrysostom) and the Humanist theologian, Erasmus, believe that 1 Corinthians 15:29 refers to Christian baptism in which an individual is baptised for the benefit of his own "dying" body.

Reaume (1995:465) points out that Calvin (1979:38) suggested a more specific nuance of unbelievers who repented and were baptised on their death beds. This view understands βαπτίζω ὑπέρ in accordance with common Pauline usage. However, the major difficulty of this interpretation is that viewing νεκρός to denote "dying bodies" has no parallel with the New Testament.

vi Christian baptism based on alternative punctuation

The last subview which Reaume (1995:466) cites proposes that some scholars list differences in punctuation. According to Reaume (1995:466) Foschini argues that verse 29 consists of four rhetorical questions, namely:

- Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι, "If there is no resurrection, what is the point of being baptised?"
- ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν, "Is it only to be united with the dead?"
- εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, "If the dead do not rise again, why are they baptised?"
- τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, "Is it only to be united with them (i.e., with the dead who will never rise)?"

Reaume (1995:466) asserts that the crux of the matter lies in understanding the usage of ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. He argues that verse 29 appears to resume Paul's previous argument in which he demonstrated the absurdity of denying the resurrection of dead believers and in which he concluded by referring to deceased believers specifically (cf verses 18 and 19). He continues that when one considers Paul's apparent distinction between "dead believers" and the "dead in general", it appears that the object of the preposition is more than likely a reference to dead believers.

Furthermore, when one considers that the normal practice of the early church was that baptism took place immediately after conversion as reflected in Acts 10:47–48; 16:31–34; 18:8; 19:5, then it is not plausible to conclude that a believer could have died before being baptised. Reaume (1995:466) further argues that baptism generally involved more than one person and it would have been exceptional for a convert to have died before he/she had the opportunity to be baptised. Thus, the use of the prepositional phrase, ὑπὲρ, generally has the genitive use which generally translates as "on behalf of," which conveys the notion of representation as used in Ephesians 5:2, 25; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Titus 2:14. Alternatively, it is used as "instead of" which further emphasises the concept of substitution as in John 11:50; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15; Galatians 3:13; Philemon 13. In these texts the person is used as the object of the preposition. This also occurs in other scriptures such as Romans 5:6, 8; 8:32; Galatians 2:20.

Here the preposition is used to denote favour or advantage particular to a person. Reaume (1995:469) points out that as a result contemporary scholars consider the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν to denote a rather esoteric practice of vicarious baptism in which an individual was baptised in place of another deceased individual.

Although this interpretation may be plausible in exegetical terms, it is entirely rejected on the lack of historical evidence and the theological issue of Paul appealing to a practice which implies that baptism has redemptive qualities. Furthermore, Reaume (1995:469) asserts that considering that the object of the preposition τῶν νεκρῶν is more than likely a reference to dead believers, the notion of vicarious baptism is implausible because these dead believers had more than likely been baptised before their death, immediately upon their conversion as was customary at the time.

Reaume (1995:472) further argues that another suggestion which maintains the substitutionary denotation of ὑπὲρ indicates that Paul was likely referring to individuals who had been converted and baptised in the place of deceased believers. He asserts that scholars who subscribe to this view consider this interpretation to be parallel to the usage in Philemon 13, in which Paul refers to Onesimus as "ministering in the place of Philemon." However, Reaume (1995:472) points out that the emphasis is on substitution rather than any benefit to Philemon (cf. Col 1:7).

Furthermore, Reaume (1995:472) argues that the usage of the preposition ὑπὲρ can indicate a causal action as in "for," "because of," or "on account of" (cf Romans 15:9 ; 2 Corinthians 12:8). He further argues that the New Testament usage of this preposition generally occurs in the sense of denoting the cause of suffering of slander (cf Acts 9:16; 21:13; 1 Corinthians 10:30; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Phillipians 1:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:5) or the cause of praise and thanksgiving as used in Romans 15:9; or to denote the reason for prayer as used in 2 Corinthians 12:8. He (19995:473) thus indicates that in this context it would more than likely denote new believers being baptised as a result of the permeating influence of dead believers.

Reaume (1995:473) does however acknowledge that the main criticism which theologians have against this interpretation lies with consistency of Pauline usage of the preposition in which the object of the preposition is a person whereas "because of" or "on behalf of" or "on account of" is preferred when the object of the preposition is an inanimate noun. However, as he (1995:4732) rightly points out, the causal sense of ὑπὲρ is consistently used by Paul with a person as the object whether it is implicitly or explicitly on a few occasions. Examples of this can be found in Acts 9:16; 21:13; Romans 15:9; Philippians 1:29.

Another usage of the phrase ὑπὲρ which is closely related to this understanding of the phrase, is the notion that this preposition function in the final sense of "for" as in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Here it could be construed to denote being baptised to be reunited with their deceased Christian relatives at the resurrection. This is evident from the context of Paul's sufferings for the Corinthians' comfort as in 2 Corinthians 1:6. The biggest problem with this usage is that the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν would imply a significant ellipsis or require additional explanation to arrive at a plausible and coherent interpreta-

tion. However, other passages utilizing the final sense of ὑπὲρ similarly have to be filled out by the exegesis of the text.

Other scholars (Luther 1973, Grosheide 1974) have suggested that this usage of the preposition denotes the local sense of “over” as used in “over the graves of the dead.” This interpretation is dubious because there is no historical evidence for this practice in the first century. Reaume (1995:274) further mentions that some scholars have construed this to denote the sense of “concerning” or “with reference to” which means that believers were baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead. Again, this interpretation is implausible because it also requires a significant ellipsis (“baptised with reference to the resurrection of the dead”).

Consequently, after the analysis of 1 Corinthians 15:29, a few conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Reaume (1995:474) asserts that the baptism referred to is more than likely a literal water baptism of Christians. He also concludes that the phrase “the ones who are baptised” is more than likely a reference to a small group of individuals rather than the church as a whole. Reaume (1995:474) further concludes that the “dead” for whom these individuals are baptised were more than likely deceased believers. Finally, he (1995:474) asserts that these deceased believers must have been baptised before they died when one considers the practice of baptism immediately upon conversion. If these assumptions are believed to be true, it is highly unlikely that the preposition preposition ὑπὲρ denotes vicarious baptism for the benefit of the dead. There would have been no value in this practice because the dead in question would already have been “saved” and more than likely baptised. Thus, the notion of vicarious baptism is implausible on the grounds of its incompatibility with Pauline theology.

Finally Reaume (1995:475) supports the notion that ὑπὲρ translates as “because of” which denotes that new believers are baptised because of the pervasive influence of deceased Christians. He concludes that this is the most plausible interpretation because it makes sense without a significant ellipsis and it is plausible that many individuals in the early church were influenced by the testimonies of deceased and/or martyred believers. Paul is a prime example of this when one considers that he may have been influenced by Stephens’s testimony when he was arrested and stoned (cf Acts 7).

Reaume (1995) also points out that proposed punctuation changes may have some validity when one considers that accents, breathing marks and punctuation were not used in the New Testament times. He does point out that there is one insurmountable problem with these interpretations namely that they still are based on Foschini and Thompson’s interpretation of the preposition ὑπὲρ and the noun νεκρός.

Therefore, based on the exegetical and hermeneutical analysis of this passage it is reasonable to conclude that the dead cannot be saved by prayers and rituals, or any other action, of living relatives. In addition, the Bible clearly does not support the fact that the dead have the ability to contact the living or that they can exist in an interdependent relationship. This clearly puts to rest the theological precepts which underpin the theology of ancestor worship in the countries we have discussed.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The practices associated with ancestor ritual are heavily reliant on the premise that the dead are able to return to the living and have an influence on the lives of the living; that it is acceptable for the living to communicate with the dead and lastly that the living are able to exert an influence on the destiny of the deceased ancestor.

In fact the preceding sections have made it clear that the Bible condemns necromancy and associated practices, and therefore it is not in alignment with the Bible's principles. Secondly, the discussion has pointed out that although some individuals do experience what appears to be the spirits of deceased ancestors, the Biblical evidence which has been presented makes it clear that these experiences or apparitions should not be taken "at face value".

Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that once a person has died it is impossible for him or her to return to communicate with the living. It is clear from Romans 6:23 that all men die and that death is the wages of sin – an inevitable consequence. The only incident in the Scriptures which has been the source of dogmatic controversy is the incident where Samuel "appeared" to the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). The explanations which have been put forward have made it clear that what was "seen", was a result of the special working of God's power, and by His permission for His purposes. As the Bible clearly admonishes, those who dapple in necromancy or spiritism commit what is considered to be spiritual prostitution.

The abode of the dead which is expounded in the Scriptures is known as ᾅδης or שְׁאוֹל. The aforementioned sections have conclusively shown that ᾅδης and שְׁאוֹל refer to the common grave of mankind where all souls are destined to go once they have died a physical death. The final destination of the righteous souls is heaven and therefore the analogy of Lazarus and the rich man cannot be construed to prove that the living can communicate with the dead or that the living can have a bearing on the destiny of the dead. It was not possible for the rich man to communicate with his living relatives to warn them of their imminent fate if they did not mend their ways.

The Scriptures clearly indicate that the righteous who die, are immediately reunited with Christ (cf. Luke 23:43, Philippians 1:23). At the resurrection those who have died will be changed and resurrected with a spiritual body to allow them to enter into a fuller state of fellowship with God. The notion of the immortality of the soul is a major precept of the ancestor cult. However, the New Testament's promise of a resurrection refers to the resurrection of the whole body. The notion of the soul existing in an intermediate state or a deep sleep which is fundamental to the ancestral rites is contradictory to the teachings of the New Testament. Passages in the Bible which deal with death as a sleeping state such as Matthew 9:24 and 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 could be construed as a metaphorical description to ensure that mankind do not fear death rather than a description of an intermediate state.

Some scholars have tried to prove that Christ descended into ᾅδης after his death to minister to the dead or to proclaim his victory over them. It became clear however that

scriptural proof of such doctrine is contentious and that the meaning of 1 Peter 3:18-20, the classical scriptural reference, is obscure.

The living are not able to effect a change for the good of the dead. The salvation of mankind is based on Christ's ransom sacrifice on the cross and therefore sacrifices which are made for the dead are of no value. The notion of vicarious baptism which has been suggested by some scholars does not have sufficient evidence in exegetical or hermeneutical terms to make it a credible argument. Paul denies the interpretation of vicarious baptism when he says in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."

Therefore, it is clear that the final destination of each individual is dependent on their own faith and actions while they were alive. Each individual is accountable to God and once a sinner has died the wages of his or her sins cannot be paid by the living. In other words, the central premise which underpins the theology of ancestor rituals is flawed. It is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living and it is impossible for the living to improve the destiny of the deceased ancestor. The New Testament is clear that there is no way for the dead to change their fate.