



Afterlife in the

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Old Testament

## John's heavenly vision reveals. . .

“And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, . . .”

Rev. 7:4

The holy city “. . . had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; . . .”

Rev. 21:12

## Jesus reveals. . .

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, . . .”

Matt. 8:11

His statement implies. . .

- 1) event will be in the future
- 2) “many,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be together

- John's and Jesus' statements indicate that the righteous of both the Old and New Testament eras will share eternal life
- Did the people of the Old Testament have any understanding of an afterlife?
- Many scholars (and the popular press following their lead) argue that ideas of the afterlife and judgment only came late in the Old Testament era

- It is popular to argue that the Hebrews made no significant contributions to religion, but that they borrowed everything—hence the Bible did not come from God
  - The creation account from Mesopotamia
  - The flood epic from Mesopotamia
  - The Mosaic law from Mesopotamia
  - Even monotheism! from Egypt
- Modern “mainline” scholarship argues that the OT is a late production (i.e., during the Exile and after)

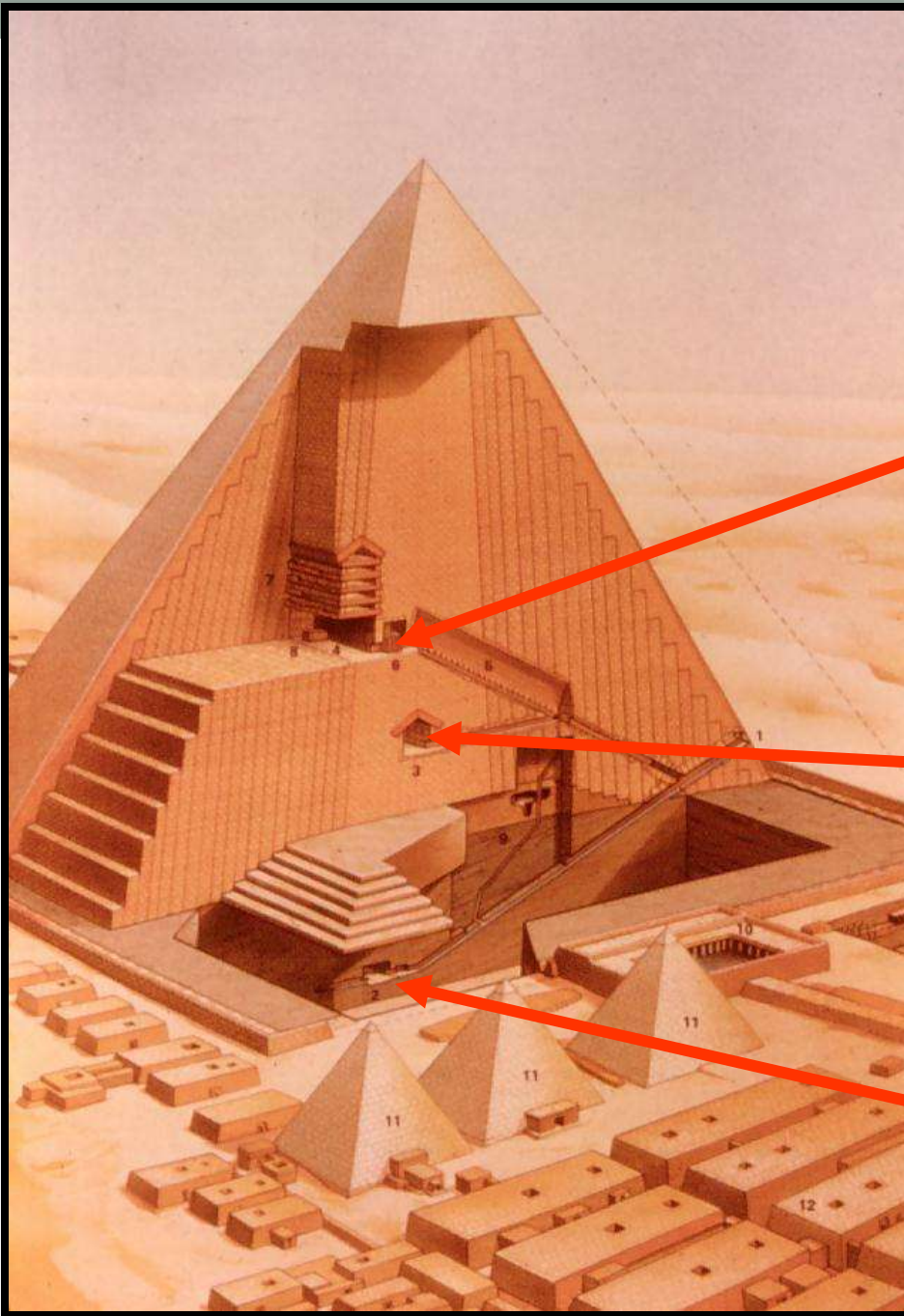
- Modern scholarship often argues that Hebrew ideas of the afterlife came from Israel's contacts with Zoroastrianism while they were in Exile
- Assumes that all Scripture is late production
- Fails to recognize the progression of revelation

- “starlight to sunlight” imagery
- “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, . . .” (Heb. 1:1-2)
- Even the angels desired to look into the revelation and understand, but they could not until Jesus made it clear (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12)

# Egyptian Afterlife: The Great Pyramid







King's chamber

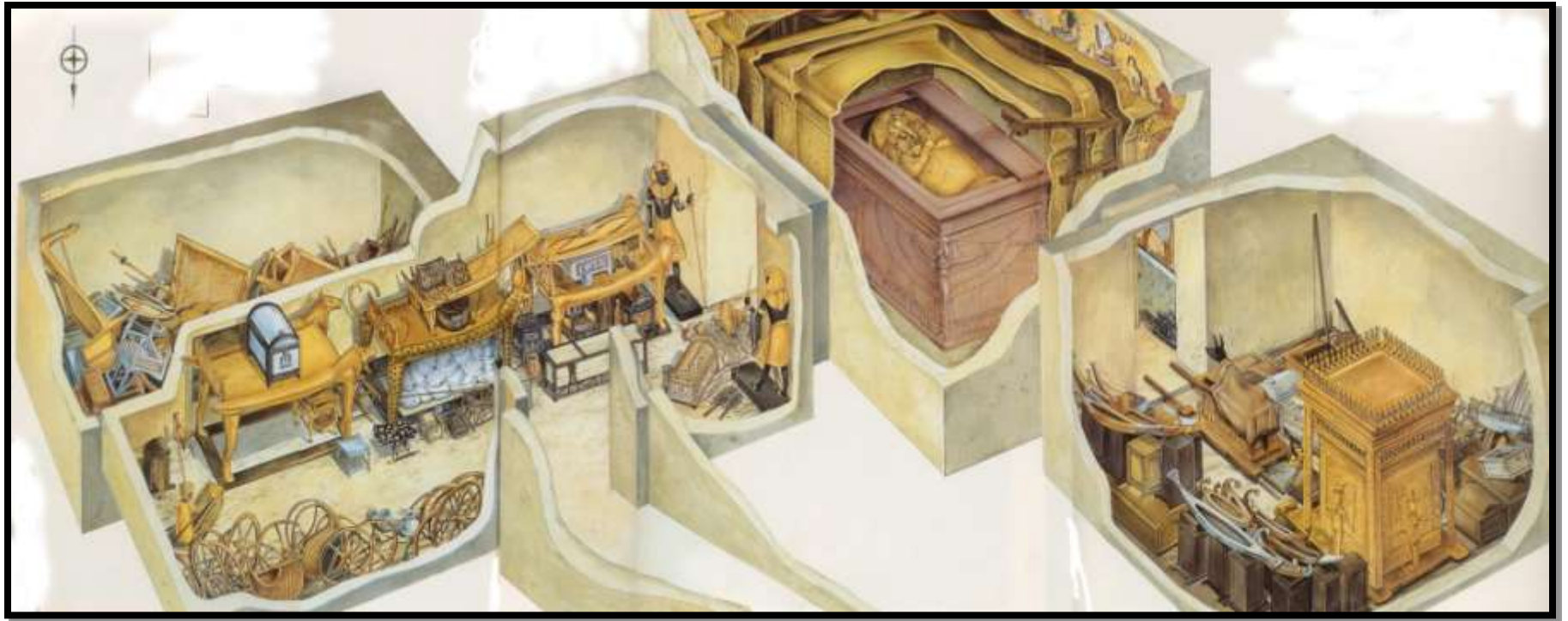
Queen's chamber

Original burial chamber  
*ca.* 2550 B.C.



The King's royal barque for the afterlife

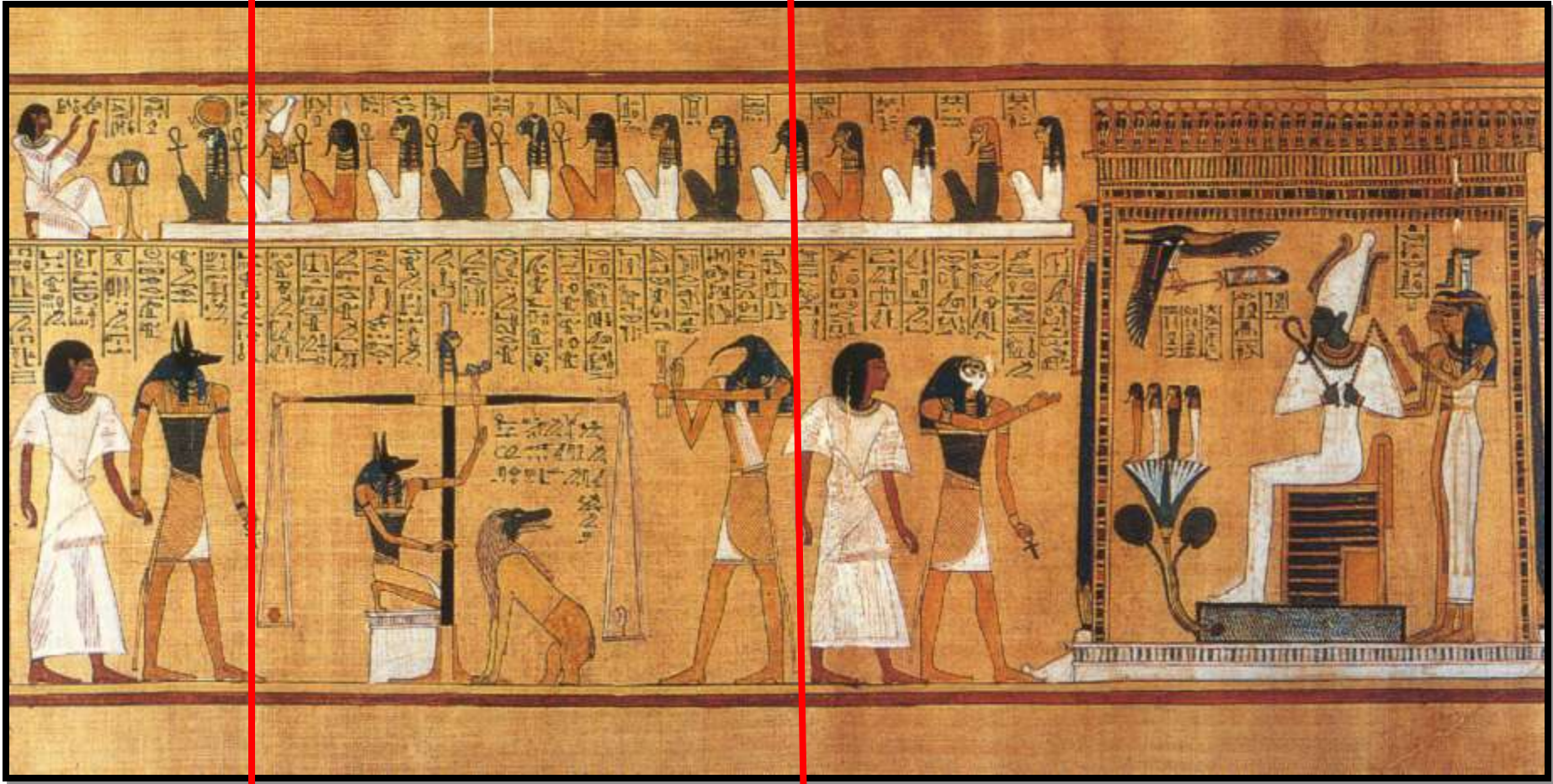
# Tutankhamun (ca. 1330 B.C.)





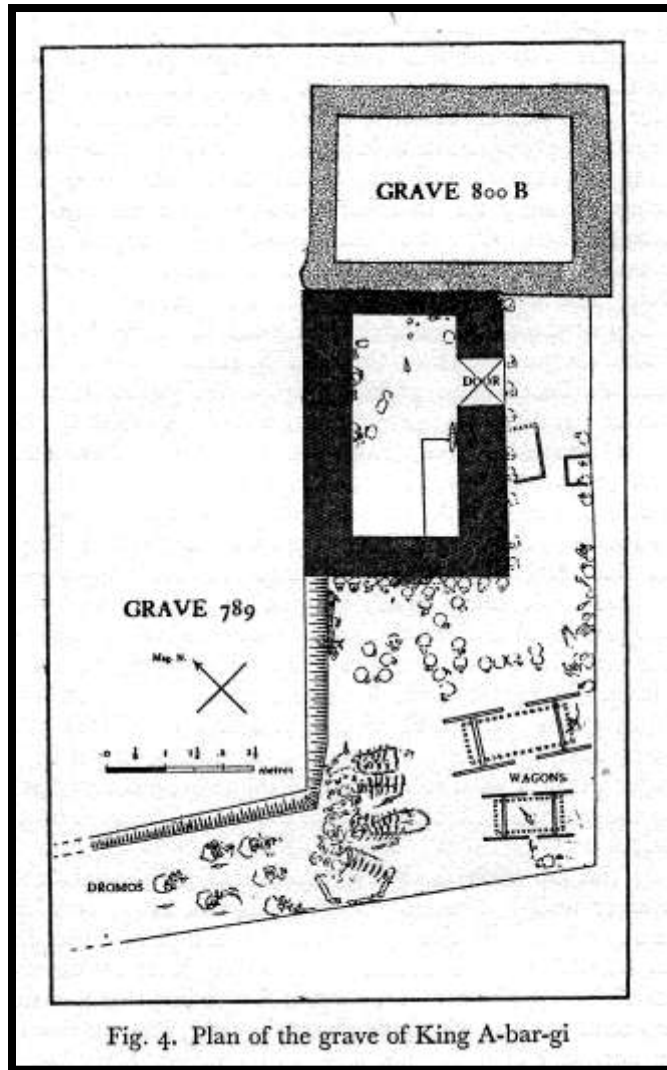
over 400 ushabtis in Tutankhamun's tomb

# Weighing the Heart



ca. 1150 B.C.

# Mesopotamian Afterlife: Royal Cemetery of Ur



ca. 2500 B.C.

Fig. 4. Plan of the grave of King A-bar-gi

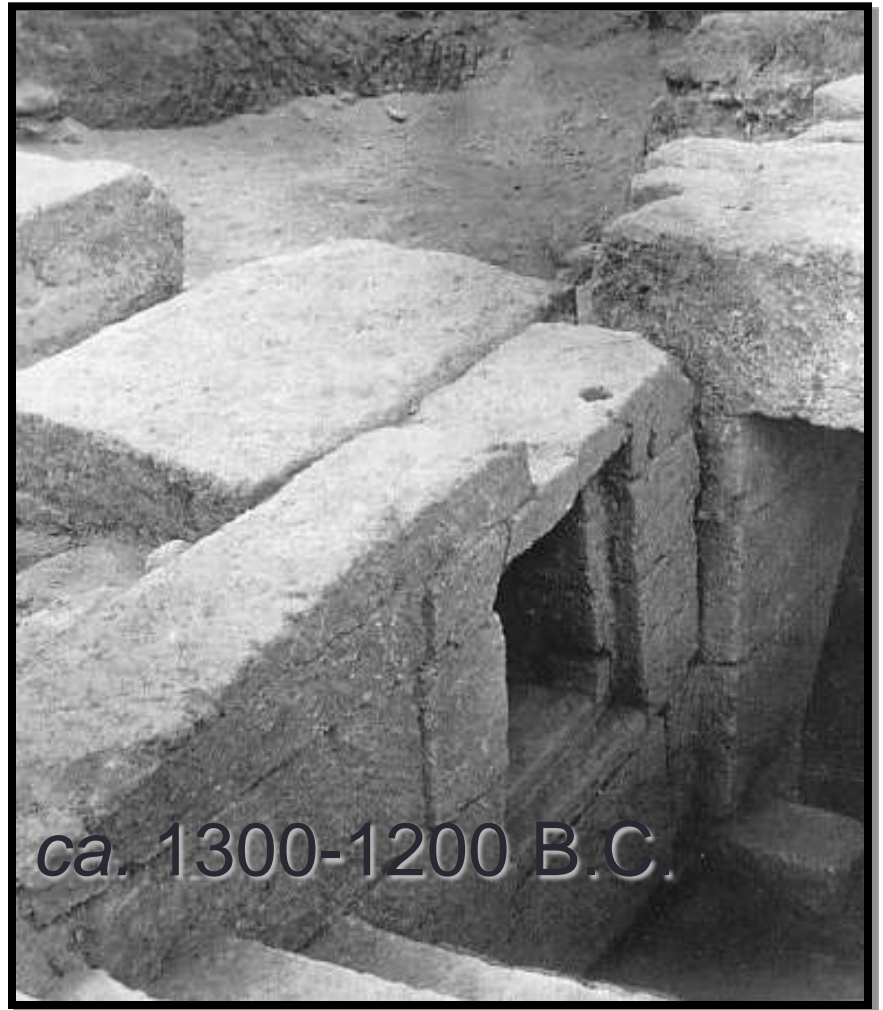
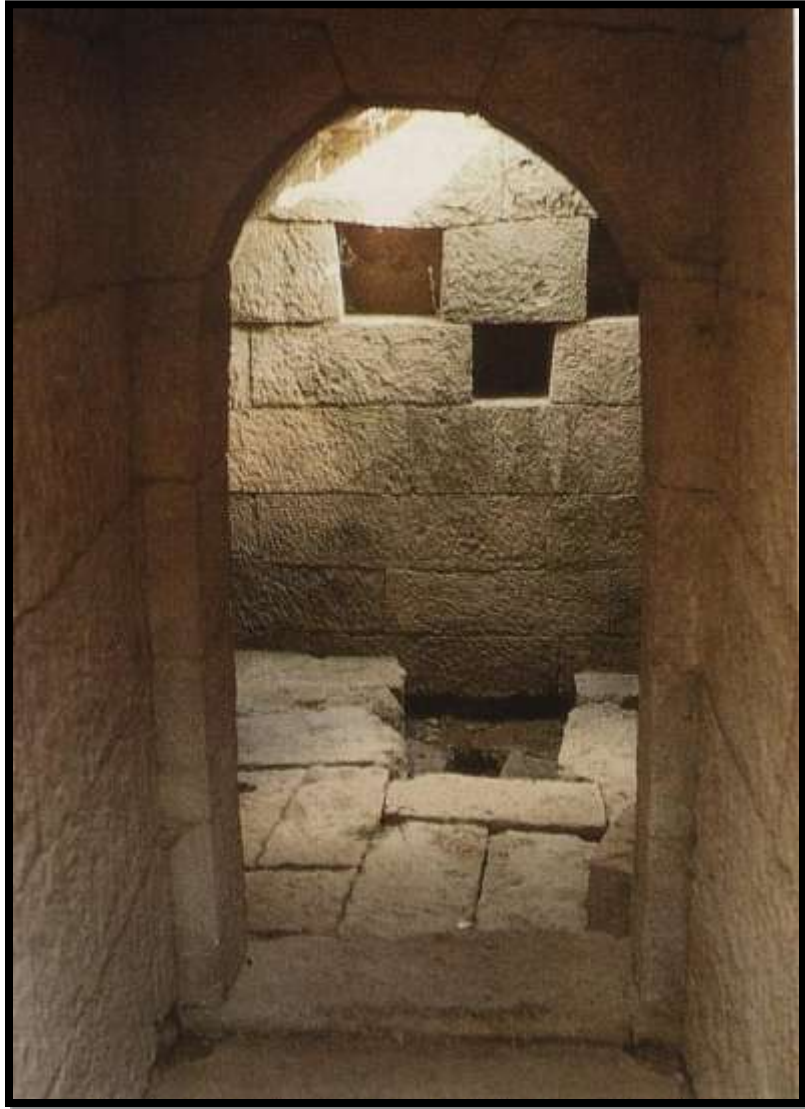
# Grave goods in tombs







# Afterlife at Ugarit



ca. 1300-1200 B.C.

# Afterlife in the Pentateuch

- Jesus and the Sadducees (Matt 22:23-33)
  - Exodus 3:6 is proof of resurrection
  - “I am the God of. . .”
- Isaac’s sacrifice (Gen 22)
  - “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:8)
  - Abraham understood God could raise the dead (Heb 11:19)

# Afterlife in Historical Books

- Death of David's son (2 Sam 12)
  - “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me” (vv. 22-23)
- Elijah raises a young boy (1 Kgs 17:17-23)
- Elisha raises a young boy (2 Kgs 4:32-27)
- A postmortem Elisha involved in resurrection (2 Kgs 13:21)

# Afterlife in Poetic Books

- Job 19:25-26

- “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, . . .”

- Hosea 13:14

- Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?  
Shall I redeem them from Death?  
O Death, where are your plagues?  
O Sheol, where is your destruction?  
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

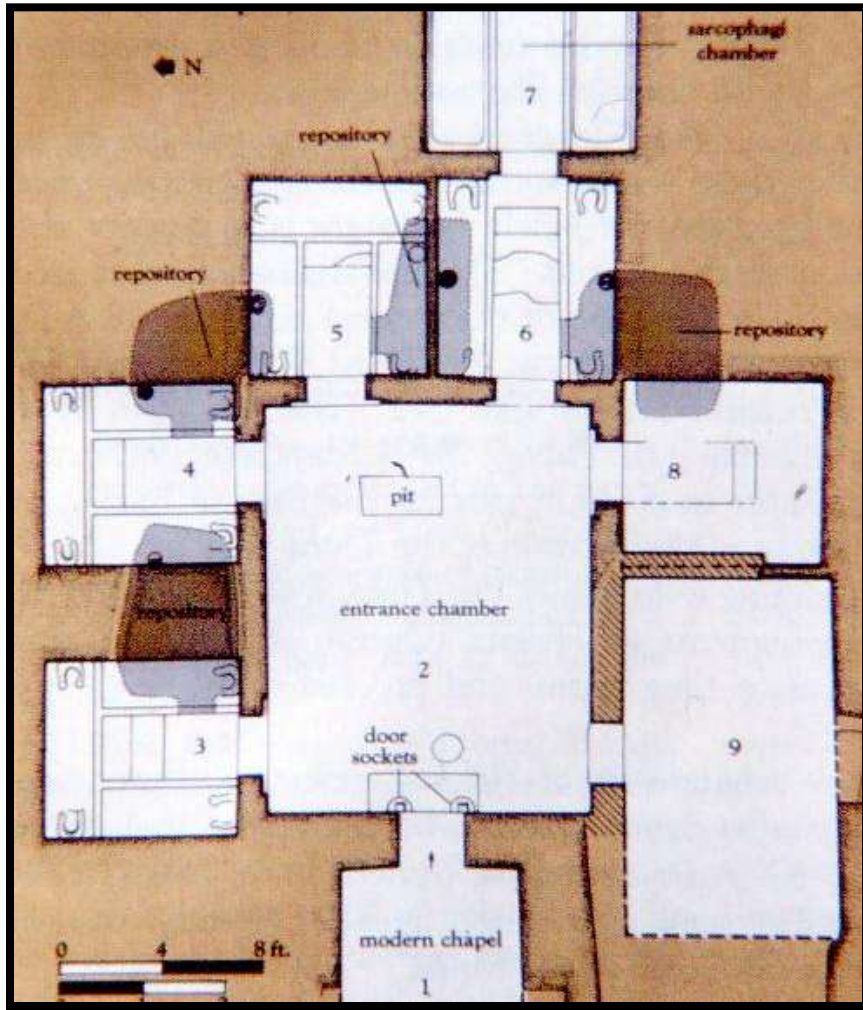
# Some Old Testament Phrases

- “he was gathered to his people” (Gn 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Num 20:24, 26)
  - Is this just a reference to the family burial plot?
  - Or does it entail more?
- “he slept with his fathers” (1 Kg 2:10; 11:21, 43; 14:20, 31; 15:8, 24; 16:6, 28; 22:40, 50 et al.)
  - Sleeping denotes concept of waking
  - Jesus makes this explicit in the Lazarus episode (John 11:11-14)

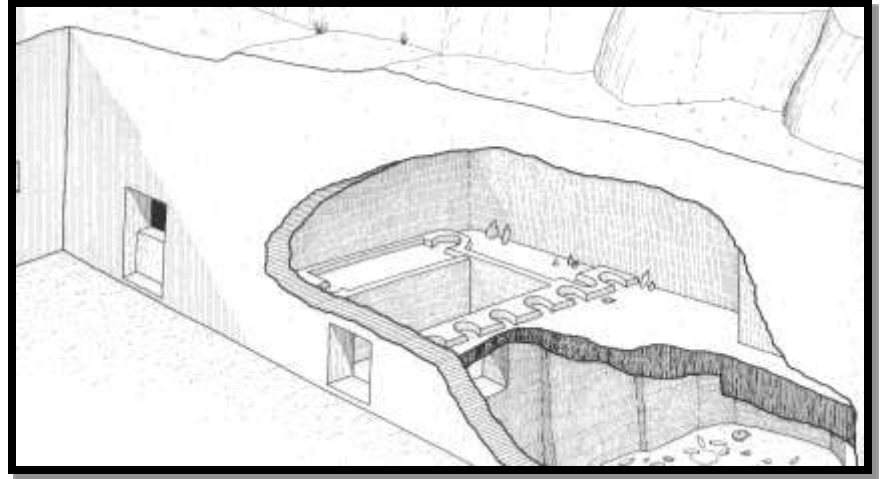
# Patriarchal Period Burials



# Burial in Judah (Jerusalem)



# Tomb in Ketef Hinnom (Jerusalem)

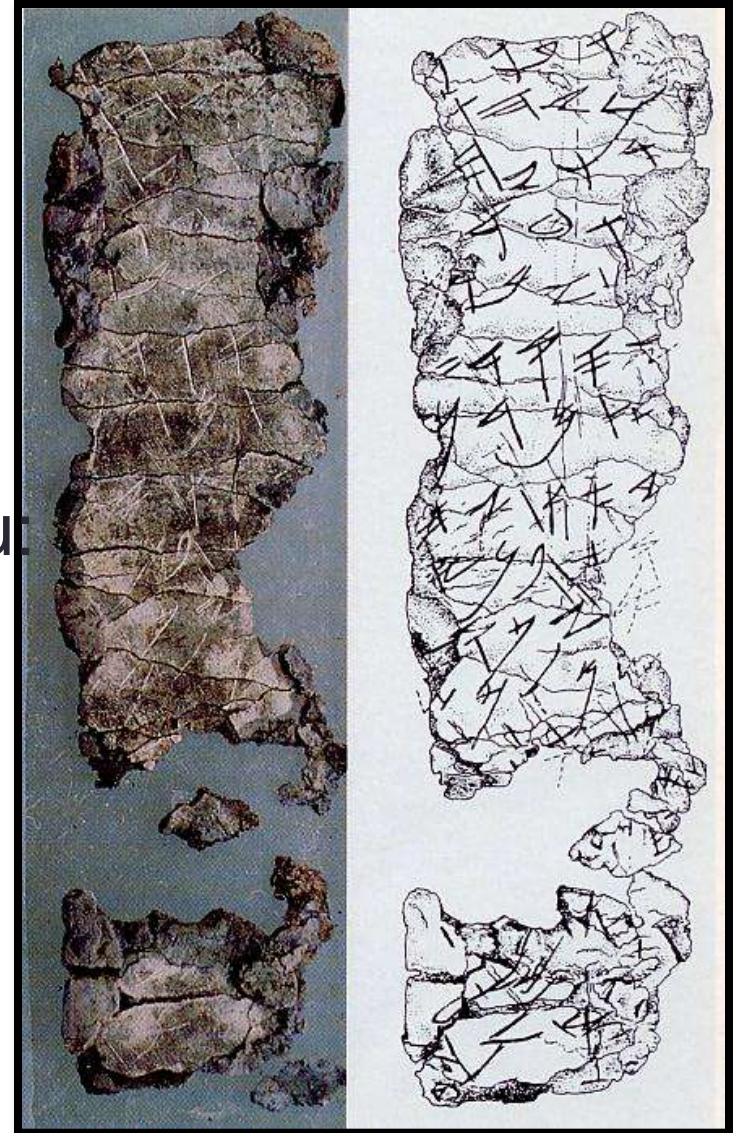








7<sup>th</sup> century BC amulet



“The Lord bless you and keep you  
The Lord make his face to shine  
upon you, and be gracious  
to you:  
The Lord lift his countenance  
upon you, and give you  
peace.” [Num. 6:24-26]