

VII. Judgment, Punishment, and Hell in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Apocalypse of Peter*

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If anyone knows anything about the *Apocalypse of Peter*, it is probably the fact that it describes many punishments in hell. However, it is interesting that in this writing, before the “tour of hell,”¹ the question is first discussed whether it would be better for sinners if they had never been created than suffering punishment in hell (*Apoc. Pet.* 3:4, corresponding to a word of Jesus from Mark 14:21). The *Apocalypse of Peter* thus discusses two options for the deceased who are not among the righteous: either non-creation or the punishments, described afterwards drastically in the vision of hell.

On the one hand, it is remarkable that with this alternative the question of hell is combined with the notion of creation. Grace and judgment are not weighed against each other but existence in hell and non-existence. Jesus’ answer additionally emphasizes this focus, according to which mercy is not up for discussion, for God as creator will certainly not condemn his creation merciless for no reason (*Apoc. Pet.* 3:6). His answer leads back to the fundamental question of being created and existence: “for he created them and brought them forth where they did not exist”² (*Apoc. Pet.* 3:6). It seems, if one exists, there is no longer the possibility of not existing. If once the existence is given by God, then the only question for sinners is which punishment one will suffer according to his deeds (*Apoc. Pet.* 1:8; 6:3).

¹ So, the famous work of M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell. An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia, 1983).

² Translation here and following by E.J. Beck, *Justice and Mercy in the Apocalypse of Peter. A New Translation and Analysis of the Purpose of the Text* (Tübingen, 2019).

Therefore, this alternative suggests that a third option, namely extinction, the so-called annihilation on the Day of Judgment, is not considered, even though “the wicked will be rooted out for ever and ever” (*Apoc. Pet.* 3:2). The view of the *Apocalypse of Peter* is unambiguous: there is a necessity of the punishment of hell for sinners. Hence, Jesus’ answer: “But when you saw the grief that will happen to the sinners in the last days and because of this your heart was sorrowful. But they who have transgressed against the Most High, I will show you their works” (*Apoc. Pet.* 3:7). In the face of their sins against God, the urgency of hell’s torment is recognized. So, the final annihilation of the unrighteous in judgment is either not a satisfactory theological answer or the option is entirely outside of theological imagination, though we might speculate about the reasons for this.

This implication is not undisputed in ancient texts. Rather, the relationship between judgment, hell, and punishment is described in controversial concepts. What is expected from judgment? What is the purpose of punishment and what is the function of hell? With these questions in mind, I turned to the Qumran writings. And the results surprised me, because the answers in these writings differ at crucial points from the message of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. The idea of an eternal torment in hell was not a matter of course in early Jewish writings.

I would like to present these findings in three steps. I begin with the texts from Qumran, whose origin are assumed to be in the *yahad*. Then, I bring in insights from *I Enoch*, which reveal a different understanding in certain aspects. Finally, I evaluate these insights from the texts of the *yahad* and *I Enoch* in relation to the study of the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

1. *The Yahadic Tradition*

The subject of judgment and hell has received relatively little attention in Qumran scholarship. Often, the claim stands that the Dead Sea Scrolls have little information to offer on life after earthly death. John Collins writes exemplary: “But in the pre-Christian period, the topography of the afterlife was still unclear, and the Scrolls give surprisingly little information on the subject.”³ This view requires a revision,

³ J.J. Collins, ‘The Otherworld in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in T. Nicklas *et al.* (eds), *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World. Early Jewish and*

which I offer in the following. What is presented here, however, is only on a case by case basis and is focused on the question of the judgment and the damnation of the wicked. For this purpose, I will take a closer look at three texts (1QS, 4Q511, and 1QH^a) and the use of the term Sheol.⁴

1.1. *1QS Community Rule*

The second column of the *Serekh ha-Yahad*, usually called the Community Rule, contains words of blessing, which the priests are to speak over their community members, and words of cursing, which the Levites are to speak over their opponents. With the words of cursing, the theme of judgment comes into focus. Thereby the judgment on the “sons of iniquity” is expected in the present time. Thus, 1QS II 4b–9 reads:

The Levites in turn shall curse all those foreordained to Belial. They shall respond, ‘May you be damned in return for all your wicked, guilty deeds. May the God of terror give you over to implacable avengers; may He visit your offspring with destruction at the hands of those who recompense evil with evil. May you be damned without mercy in return for your dark deeds, an object of wrath licked by eternal flame, surrounded by utter darkness. May God have no mercy upon you when you cry out, nor forgive so as to atone for your sins. May He lift up His furious countenance upon you for vengeance. May you never find peace through the appeal of any intercessor.’⁵

The judgment shall fall upon the ungodly in their earthly existence. In everyday life the vengeance of God shall be felt. Just like the blessings for the “sons of light” (i.e., the members of the *yahad*), the

Ancient Christian Traditions (Leiden, 2010) 95–116 at 95–96. See also J.J. Collins, ‘Eschatology’, *EncDSS* 1 (2000) 256–61, wherein the topic of the “day of judgment” is barely addressed. Similar K.E. Pomykala, ‘Eschatologies and Messianisms’, in G.J. Brooke and C. Hempel (eds), *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London, 2019) 496–504.

⁴ A solid introduction to the eschatology of the *yahad* texts is provided by A.L. Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End. A Comparative Traditio-Historical Study of Eschatology, Apocalyptic and Messianic Ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Leiden, 2009) 43–76.

⁵ Translation here and following, unless otherwise noted, from M. Wise, M. Abegg, and E. Cook with N. Gordon from <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com> (accessed 17.03.2022).

curse for the apostates or non-members are initially aimed at the present and not only at a future eschatological judgment. Here the blessing and the curse are expected during one's earthly existence (cf. also V 6–7; VIII 6).⁶ A few lines later this thought is taken up again.

It shall come to pass, when he hears the words of this Covenant, that he shall bless himself in his heart, saying 'Peace be with me, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart' (Deut 29: 18–19). Surrounded by abundant water, his spirit shall nevertheless expire thirsty, without forgiveness. God's anger and zeal for His commandments shall burn against him for eternal destruction (לכלת עולמים). All the curses of this Covenant shall cleave to him, and God shall separate him out for a fate befitting his wickedness. He shall be cut off from all the Sons of Light because of his apostasy from God, brought about by unrepentance and the stumbling block of sin. He shall cast his lot with those damned for all time (ארורי עולמים). The initiates are all to respond in turn, 'Amen, amen.' *Vacat* (1QS II 12b–18).

These lines also show that the punishments are requested now and are to strike the wicked in the present time. So, one hopes for separation of the stubborn within the community in the present. Curse and forgiveness, vengeance and peace, wrath and grace are contrasted. But the final state of the "sons of darkness" is destruction. Therefore, the root כלה is to be found several times in this text.⁷ The extermination of the godless people is deserved. Hence, they are removed from the community of the sons of light. At this point we can observe that the focus is not on the punishment of the sinners, but on the purification of one's own community. The curses should help to clarify who belongs to the covenant and who has become apostate. This idea is also found in 1QS V, where it is written of "eternal destruction with

⁶ This becomes particularly evident in the liturgical community with the angels, see M.R. Jost, *Engelgemeinschaft im irdischen Gottesdienst. Studien zu Texten aus Qumran und dem Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, 2019) 72–85 and 199–200 and id., 'The Liturgical Communion of the Yahad with the Angels. The Origin of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice Reconsidered', *DSD* 28 (2022) 52–75. This aspect has also been emphasized by J.J. Collins, 'Conceptions of Afterlife in the Dead Sea Scrolls', in M. Labahn and M. Lang (eds), *Lebendige Hoffnung – ewiger Tod? Jenseitsvorstellungen im Hellenismus, Judentum und Christentum* (Leipzig, 2007) 103–25.

⁷ Vgl. H.-J. Fabry, כלה, *ThWQ* II (2013) 390–6.

none spared” (לכלת עולם לאין שרית) (1QS V 13) and that they shall be destroyed “from upon the face of the earth” (ישמיד מתבל); 1QS V 19). Judgment nevertheless opens an eschatological horizon because the fire (1QS II 8) and destruction (II 15) are to last forever, so that the wicked is eternally counted among the damned (II 17). The thought of the eternal punishment leads beyond the present time. This is formulated even more clearly in the final hymn. There, the execution of judgment is seen entirely as God’s responsibility:

Then shall I know that in His hand resides the judgement of all the living, and all His works are truth. When distress breaks out I shall praise Him, and in His salvation shall I rejoice. To no man shall I return evil for evil, I shall pursue a man only for good; for with God resides the judgement of all the living, and He shall pay each man his recompense. My zeal shall not be tarnished by a spirit of wickedness, neither shall I lust for riches gained through violence. The multitude of evil men I shall not capture of vengeance;⁸ yet my fury shall not abate from men of the pit, and I shall never be appeased until righteousness be established. (1QS X 16b–20)

Following this prayer, the judgment is expected from God alone. One can speculate whether with it simply the time is meant, at which the fate meets the sinner in this earthly life. Accordingly, the vengeance of God would consist in the distress which God lets meet him (similar to the curses in 1QS II 6). Or one can emphasize the eschatological judgment, “for with God resides the judgement of all the living, and He shall pay each man his recompense.” A dazzling answer to this ambiguity is given by a passage from the so-called *Two-Spirits-Treatise*:

The judgement of all who walk in such ways will be multiple afflictions at the hand of all the angels of perdition, everlasting damnation (לשחה)

⁸ A scribe introduced here “until the day” (עד יום), thereby proposing the reading “until the day of vengeance.” These words point even more clearly to the judgment to come. But this is undoubtedly an interlinear correction. See the manuscript on <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/community> (17.03.2022). The translation of Charlotte Hempel shows very well the complicated nature of the text: “I shall not {...} ^{seize (opportunities to)} quarrel with a person (intent on) ^{de}struction ^{until the day of} vengeance.” C. Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran. A Commentary* (Tübingen, 2020) 280 and 288 (words in superscript according to Hempel to indicate corrections and additions).

עולמים) in the wrath of God's furious vengeance, never-ending terror (לועזות נצה) and reproach for all eternity (והרפת עד), with a shameful extinction in the fire of Hell's outer darkness (כלה באש מהשכים). For all their eras (וכול קציהם), generation by generation, they will know doleful sorrow, bitter evil and dark happenstance, until their utter destruction with neither remnant nor rescue. *Vacat* (1QS IV 11b–14).

One can read two things from this text: Either one emphasizes the everlasting damnation and the continuing lamentation. Or one emphasizes that here, too, everything ultimately boils down to the fact that no one escapes, but is completely destroyed and extinct, which would emphasize the finality of this state. Thus, the two aspects of the word עולם are indicated: on the one hand an infinite amount of time or a final state.⁹ But because here, as mostly in the writings of the *yahad*, judgment is connected with the word כְּלָה, which means “end, destruction, annihilation, completion,”¹⁰ in my opinion the focus is also on the latter in this passage, with which no eternal punishment in hell is taught, but a judgment that leads to the final annihilation of the wicked, as it is regularly emphasized in the Community Rule.

1.2. 4Q511 Rule of the Maskil

It is similar in the so-called Songs of the Maskil.¹¹ The theme of judgment is significant in it. The judicial action can be related to the present time.¹² This is especially true where the judgment is connected

⁹ The basic meaning is usually called “everlastingness, furthest time” (see DCH 6, 300). But E. Jenni, ‘עולם’, *THAT* 2 (2004⁶) 228–43, here 230 adds to this that “im Gebrauch von ‘*ōlām*’ auch allerlei qualitative Konnotationen wie ‘Dauerhaftigkeit, Endgültigkeit, Unabänderlichkeit’ usw. mitschwingen können.”. The aspect of finality or irreversibility is surprisingly completely missing in Christian Stadel’s article, ‘עולם’, *ThWQ* II (2013) 61–68. The whole article is oriented towards a durative understanding, which is why Stadel translates with “dauerhafte Vernichtung” or “dauerhaftes Feuer” (p. 63). See also DCH 6, 302 which translates כלה עולמים “destruction of everlastingness, i.e. everlasting destruction.”

¹⁰ DCH 4, 418.

¹¹ For a reconstruction see J.L. Angel, ‘The Material Reconstruction of 4QSongs of the Sage^B (4Q511)’, *RevQ* 27 (2015) 25–82.

¹² See also M.R. Jost, ‘Das Selbst- und Wirklichkeitsverständnis der Lieder des Maskil (4Q511)’, *RevQ* 34 (2022) 115–35.

with the activity of the Maskil. Exemplary of this are the statements in 63 iii 3–5, spoken by the Maskil: “in order to justify the righteous one in Your truth and to condemn the wicked one *vacat* in his guilt, to proclaim peace to all the men of the covenant and to e[*xal*]t with a terrifying voice, ‘Woe to all who break it!’” The judgment, however, is based on the judicial action of God and thus also affects the worshipper himself. Thus, the Maskil confesses in 4Q511 18 ii 7b–10:

And I have hated all the works of impurity, for God has shined the knowledge of understanding in my heart. Righteous instructors correct my sins, and faithful judges correct all my guilty transgressions. For God is my judge.

Thus, on the one hand, the judgment applies to his own people for purification. On the other hand, it also applies to the godless, whom God destroys in his wrath. This is formulated in fragment 35 as follows (4Q511 35 1–5):

against all flesh, and a judgment of vengeance to exterminate wickedness (לכליות רשעה), and for the rag[ing] anger of God. Some of those seven times refined and some of the holy ones God will sancti[fy] for Himself as an eternal sanctuary (למקדש עולמים) and (as) purity among the cleansed. They shall be priests, His righteous people, His host, and ministers, the angels of His glory. They shall praise Him with wondrous marvels.¹³

The text begins with the judgment of God, which means the end-time eradication of godlessness. The use of the imperfect indicates the still expected realization.¹⁴ At this point, therefore, an eschatological perspective undoubtedly comes into view. Among the purified and the

¹³ Translation J.L. Angel, ‘Maskil, Community, and Religious Experience in the Songs of the Sage (4Q510–511)’, *DSD* 19 (2012) 1–27, here 22–23. Similar J.R. Davila, ‘Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in P.W. Flint and J.C. VanderKam (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years. A Comprehensive Assessment*, Vol. 2 (Leiden, 1999) 461–85, here 478–79.

¹⁴ Joseph Angel sees a similar eschatological view in 4Q511 37, a rather fragmentary text: “It is reasonable to suggest that this part of the text deals with the events of the eschatological day of judgement, which will witness the disappearance of demonic evil.” J.L. Angel, ‘Reading the Songs of the Sage in Sequence. Preliminary Observations and Questions,’ in M.S. Pajunen and J. Penner (eds), *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period* (Berlin, 2017) 185–211, here 198.

saints who are not affected by the annihilation, God will consecrate some for himself to an eternal sanctuary. Thus, here too, the destruction of the wicked corresponds to the eternal life of the righteous.

Finally, a special spotlight is cast in frg. 10 on the subject, which Joseph Angel places much later in column 11 and is reconstructed with the help of 4Q510 1 7–8. Here it is emphasized that destruction does not occur eternally, explicitly: “not for eternal destruction, [bu]t for an era of humiliation for transgression” (4Q510 1 7–8). The passage paints an understanding of an evil age that will one day be overcome, which is why the incantation of evil spirits spoken by the Maskil will not continue indefinitely, probably “as a deliberate limitation upon the power of magic itself.”¹⁵ If this reconstruction and interpretation are correct, then the destruction by the Maskil should not be understood as “everlasting”, because there is God’s “judgment of vengeance to exterminate wickedness” (4Q511 35 1).¹⁶

1.3. *1QHodayot*^a

The Hodayot also speak several times of judgment, which is first referred to the present. As for example in 1QH^a X 25–26:

By Your mercies You save my life, my steps are with You. But because of You they attack me, that You may be honoured through the judgment of the wicked, and that You may strengthen me against the children of men, for I stand in Your mercy.

Corresponding to this, the rescue or elevation from the pit is also a present experience of the person praying, as 1QH^a XI 20–24 indicates:

I give thanks to You, O Lord, for You have redeemed my soul from the pit. From Sheol and Abaddon You have raised me up to an eternal height, so that I might walk about on a limitless plain, and know that

¹⁵ B. Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, trans. J. Chipman (Leiden, 1994) 249.

¹⁶ Similar Angel, ‘Maskil, Community, and Religious Experience’, 5: “Presumably, God himself will see to the absolute destruction of the demons and the redemption of the sons of light at the end of the ‘present dominion of wickedness’ on the day of eschatological judgment. In a sense then, the protection effectuated by the Maskil’s hymns in the present anticipates the world as it will be after the final punishment of the forces of darkness.”

there is hope for him whom You created from the dust for the eternal council. The perverse spirit You have cleansed from great transgression, that he might take his stand with the host of the holy ones, and enter together (or in the *yaḥad*) with the congregation of the sons of heaven. And for man, You have allotted an eternal destiny with the spirits of knowledge, to praise Your name together with shouts of joy, and to recount Your wonders before all Your creatures.

These lines describe the present experience of the members of the *yaḥad*, who already saw themselves raised to the heavenly heights, such that they praised God in community with the angels.¹⁷ And yet, an eschatological perspective is already indicated here. Shortly after, the wrath of God is prayed for with apocalyptic words:

The earth shouts out, because of the disaster which comes about in the world, and all its plotters scream. All who are upon it behave as if mad, and they melt away in the gr[ea]t disaster. For God thunders with the roar of His strength and His holy dwelling roars forth in His glorious truth. Then the heavenly hosts shall raise their voice and the everlasting foundations shall melt and quake. The war of the heroes of heaven shall spread over the world and shall not return until an annihilation that has been determined from eternity is completed (עַד כֹּלָה וְנַחֲרָצָה לְעַד). Nothing like this has ever occurred (1QH^a XI 34–37).

This idea is deepened later when it is announced that God will cut off all men of deceit in judgment:

But You, O God, shall answer them by judging them in Your strength [according to] their idols and the multitude of their transgressions, in order that they, who have turned away from Your covenant, might be caught in their own schemes. You shall cut off in ju[dgem]ent all deceitful men; seers of error shall no longer be found. For there is no deception in any of Your works, and no deceit in the deliberation of Your heart. Those who are in harmony with You shall stand before You for ever, and those who walk in the way of Your heart shall be secure for evermore (1QH^a XII 19–23).

This clearly no longer means the present experience, but the future “ages of wrath” and the “day of slaughter”, for which they are destined (see 1QH^a VII 30–32). This age does not aim at punishment, but

¹⁷ Detailed exegesis Jost, *Engelgemeinschaft*, 96–100.

at extermination.¹⁸ False prophets shall simply no longer exist. While the men of deceit are exterminated, eternal life in the presence of God is expected. The total extinction (annihilation) of sinners is thus opposed to eternal life.

If we now return to the question of what is meant by “eternal destruction,” it seems to me that the yahadic texts as a collection, and the Hodayot in particular, do not have in mind a continuing punishment in hell, but a final state of annihilation. Eternal life does not correspond to eternal punishment, but to the extinction of the person, thus the idea of annihilation is present here.

This understanding can be supplemented by further evidence, such as 1QH^a XIV 21–22, in which the consuming fire of judgment is spoken of in a drastic way, the result of which is annihilation: “In its bright flames all the children of [iniquity] will burn, [and it will become] a fire that burns up all the guilty until they are utterly destroyed (עַד כְּלֵה)” (trans. C. Newsom, DJD 40). This formulation even indicates an end in a temporal way and shows that it is not about an everlasting event (see also 1QH^a XIV 32–36). There is a court, in which the punishment is carried out, but whose goal is the destruction of the sinners.

1.4. *Sheol in the Dead Sea Scrolls*

The topic of the judgment is not yet completely described in the Hodayot. It was pointed out rightly that Sheol is mentioned in 23 places, which can be connected with the idea of hell, “die eine Brücke zur Vorstellung einer brennenden Unterwelt sowohl in zwischentamentlichen Texten (1 Hen 102,1–3; 103,7f.; 4 Esra 7,36–38; 4 Makk 99; 12,12) als auch in Mt 25,41; Lk 16,23f. bildet.”¹⁹ But a distinction must be made here. Sheol is mentioned above all in the Hodayot. And there, Sheol is first of all the present experience of

¹⁸ Overall, the end times are stretched out, so that even the “Day of Judgment” is not a punctual event (11QMelch); see H. Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg, 1994³) 288–89. Contrary, “the end of days would be a time of testing and purification for the community”, Pomykala, ‘Eschatologies and Messianisms’, 498. See also É. Puech, ‘Messianisme, eschatologie et resurrection dans les manuscrits de la Mer Morte’, *RevQ* 18 (1997) 255–98, here 257–65.

¹⁹ L. Lee, שאול, ThWQ III (2016) 798.

affliction from which the person who is praying knows to be saved. Exemplary for this view is 1QH^a XI 20–22, which was quoted earlier. Sheol is not to be associated primarily with the afterworld, but with the destruction of the present world. The person praying compares his afflictions, which he perceives as experiences of death or Sheol,²⁰ as 1QH^a XVI 28–33 reads:

I have become like a man who is forsaken by [] there is no refuge for me. For my agony breaks out to bitterness, and an incurable pain without stopping, [ro]ars over me, like those who descend into Sheol. Among the dead my spirit searches, for [my] li[fe] goes down to the pit [] my soul is faint day and night without rest. And my agony breaks out as a burning fire shut up within [my] b[ones] whose flame consumes for days on end, putting an end to my strength without ceasing and destroying my flesh without end (cf. XVII 4).

At the same time, Sheol is also associated with talk of judgment. When one rejoices in the covenant of God, one flourishes. But the groaning penetrates into Sheol, where the judgment of God is heard, 1QH^a XVIII 34–38:

My groaning enters the depths and completely searches out the chambers of Sheol. I am terrified when I hear of Your judgements with powerful warriors, and Your dispute with the hosts of Your saints in [] and judgement against all Your creatures, and righteousness [].

Sheol here stands for the world of the dead. It is true that in the Qumran writings also a connection of Sheol with fire can be seen, which Lydia Lee has emphasized in an informative article and in which she recognizes a new aspect in contrast to the Hebrew Bible.²¹ However, the three passages she uses for this purpose should not be weighted too heavily. For two of them are only fragmentarily preserved and therefore have to be reconstructed, which makes it difficult to define in which way the fire is to be understood in these passages (cf. 1QH^a IV 25–26a; 1QM XIV 16–18; 4Q184 1 6–11).

²⁰ Emphasized by W. Nebe, ‘Scheol in den Schriften vom Toten Meer’, in J. Tubach *et al.* (eds), *Sehnsucht nach der Hölle? Höllen- und Unterweltsvorstellungen in Orient und Okzident, Beiträge des Leucorea-Kolloquiums 2010* (Wiesbaden, 2012) 169–98, here 181.

²¹ See L. Lee, ‘Fiery Sheol in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *RevQ* 27 (2015) 249–70.

1.5. *Conclusion Regarding the Yahadic Texts*

Yahadic texts attest to a present judgment and a communion with the angels of the earthly community, yet expect a judgment at a certain future time, the day of wrath and vengeance, which leads to the destruction of the ungodly on the one hand and to the purification of the righteous on the other, thus beginning a new age. The judgment accordingly becomes the final word on the ungodly, determining their final fate. Eternal destruction therefore does not mean eternal torment in hell, but the final state of extinction.²² This also makes it possible to understand why no hell or punishments in hell are executed.

Hence the first half of the statement of John Collins is comprehensible: “the topography of the afterlife was still unclear ...”²³ However, the second part seems too pessimistic: “and the Scrolls give surprisingly little information on the subject.” In my opinion, the Dead Sea Scrolls speak much more about judgment and punishment than is often claimed. My short summary of some important paragraphs proves that. But they do not draw a topography of hell, because the judgment of the wicked aims at destruction. Therefore, there is no need for tours of hell. Nevertheless, the *yahad* looked into the judgment and the destiny of the righteous and the sinners after the earthly life.

Finally, the general observation is important that the judgment and destruction is contrasted with grace and mercy, for which the members of the *yahad* give thanks to God: “In your anger are all punishing judgments, but in your goodness is abundant forgiveness, and your compassion is for all the children of your good favour. For you have made known to them the secret counsel of your truth” (1QH^a XIX 11–12; trans. C. Newsom, DJD 40). The members of the *yahad* have a deep awareness that it is only by grace that they can stand before God and that it is God’s mercy that keeps them alive. The reason some experience mercy and others do not is explained with the providence of God, in which he sovereignly designs the different lives and destinies (e.g., 1QH^a VII 25–35 or 1QS III 13–IV 26). The individual deeds have much less impact on one’s eternal destiny than they do in later apocalyptic writings.

²² Lee, ‘Fiery Sheol’, 266–70 also argues for the idea of annihilation in the Qumran writings.

²³ Collins, ‘Otherworld’, 96.

2. *First Enoch*

In addition to these yaḥadic texts, compositions were also collected at Qumran that did not originate from the *yaḥad* itself. Among these is *1 Enoch*. John Collins recognizes similarities between the two traditions, especially in the question of the fate of the godless: “The continuity with the Enochic literature is most readily evident in the fate of the wicked”,²⁴ quoting 1QS IV 11–14. A special proximity can be seen in the idea of annihilation. In *1 Enoch*, however, a greater interest in punishment can be perceived and the underworld is described in a much more concrete way, which I briefly outline following.

2.1. *The Judgment of Annihilation*

Already the opening sentence tend to compare the living righteous and the annihilation of the sinners: “The blessing of Enoch: with which he blessed the elect and the righteous who would be present on the day of tribulation at (the time of) the removal of all the ungodly ones”²⁵ (*1 En.* 1:1). This general view is amplified later in the text (*1 En.* 1:8–9), and again and again the destruction of sinners and ungodliness is emphasized (e.g. *1 En.* 10:15,20; 45:6; 52:9; 53:2; 62:2; 69:27–29; 92:5; 98:3; 99:16; 107:1; 108:3). Especially significant is *1 En.* 22, where the four-part underworld in the west is described. One of these four places is bright and has a water source, which is the place of the deceased righteous. But then there are other spaces for the unrighteous. A distinction is made between those who have already been punished during their lifetime. These will no longer be punished on the Day of Judgment, but they will not be resurrected either. Those of the remaining unrighteous in the other space, on the other hand, who have not yet experienced judgment in their lifetime, will be punished on the Day of Judgment.

²⁴ Collins, ‘Otherworld’, 102.

²⁵ Translation by E. Isaac, ‘(Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch (Second Century B.C.-First Century A.D.)’, in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (Garden City, 1983) 5–89, here 72.

The idea that where judgment has already taken place on earth, there is no longer a need for resurrection fits with the previous remarks of the yahadic writings. The decisive thing is accomplished as soon as the judgment has taken place. Thus, the idea of an eternal torment in hell loses relevance and the perspective ends with the last judgment, which can certainly be combined with the yahadic texts.²⁶

A similar idea is also found in *1 En.* 91, part of the Epistle of Enoch. There it is announced that injustice will once again increase.

Then a great plague shall take place from heaven upon all these; the holy Lord shall emerge with wrath and plague in order that he may execute judgment upon the earth. In those days, injustice shall be cut off from its (sources of succulent) fountain and from its roots – (likewise) oppression together with deceit; they shall be destroyed from underneath heaven. All that which is (common) with the heathen shall be surrendered; the towers shall be inflamed with fire, and be removed from the whole earth. They shall be thrown into the judgment of fire, and perish in wrath and in the force of the eternal judgment (*1 En.* 91:7–9).

This destruction is contrasted with the resurrection of the righteous from the sleep of death (91:10). While the unrighteous are facing destruction, the righteous are being brought to life.

2.2. *The Judgment of Punishment*

Nevertheless, the Enochic literature shows more interest in eschatological images. Among these is the place where the fallen angels will be punished. This place is described with horrific illustrations of an environment of fire.²⁷ They will be bound there “until the time of the completion of their sin in the year of mystery” (*1 En.* 18:16). The

²⁶ R. Bauckham, ‘Early Jewish Visions of Hell’, *JThS* 41 (1990) 355–85 at 375 recognizes here “a transition from the belief that the punishment of the wicked will begin after the last judgement to the belief that it is already taking place in the intermediate state before the last judgement coincides with the emergence of visions of the punishments taking place in hell.” See also id., ‘Hades, Hell,’ *AYBD* 3 (1992) 14–15. However, I would not interpret the waiting room already as punishment before the judgment. Rather, judgment and punishment belong together, which is why the person whom judgment has not already struck in earthly life must still wait for the final judgment. That this cannot be the place of bliss is self-evident.

²⁷ Comparable to the description in *Apoc. Pet.* 5:1–9.

angels who have transgressed with the women will also be bound there “until the great day of judgment in which they shall be judged till they are finished” (19:1). This statement shows that the idea of hellish punishments does not contradict the concept of annihilation. It is precisely the punishments that lead to destruction.

Elsewhere it speaks of eternal captivity, so that the idea of annihilation is relegated to the farthest reaches. *First Enoch* 21:10: “This place is the prison house of the angels; they are detained here forever” (see also 18:14). Other texts speak accordingly of eternal torment in the fire, as 10:13: “In those days they will lead them into the bottom of the fire – and in torment – in the prison (where) they will be locked up forever.” But here too, the notion of the destruction follows immediately afterwards. Thus, it is called to “destroy all the souls of pleasure and the children of the Watchers, for they have done injustice to man. Destroy injustice from the face of the earth. And every iniquitous deed will end, and the plant of righteousness and truth will appear forever, and he will plant joy” (10:15–16).

In general, there is an eschatologization of the judgment in *I Enoch*. Certainly, there is also the possibility mentioned, that the punishment took place already during one’s earthly life (*I En.* 22). However, the focus shifts on individual punishment after the earthly death, where it has not already taken place during life. This environment of fire in the afterworld is the place, where the judgment is realized. Nevertheless, also here the narrative points to the annihilation. Through the destruction of injustice, the new age of salvation is implemented.

2.3. Conclusion Regarding *I Enoch*

If we therefore return to the thesis of John Collins at this point, it is confirmed that there is definitely a continuity between the Enochic and yahadic tradition. *First Enoch* 22 expresses a judgment leading to annihilation, so that after the judgment no further confrontation with the godless would be necessary, as it is the case in the texts from Qumran. *First Enoch* 92:5 sums it up: “Sin and darkness shall perish forever and shall no more be seen from that day forevermore.”

Nevertheless, in contrast to the *yahad*, the judgment is more consistently transferred to the afterlife. Thus, communion with the angels

is not a present experience of the congregation, but a visionary-eschatological expectation.²⁸ Moreover, the focus shifts from judgment to punishment and thus from the enforcement of justice to the punishment of sinners in the afterworld. This is particularly evident in *I En.* 90. This chapter describes the execution of punishment in a way that is not found in the yahadic texts. That is why the closest proximity to the idea of an eternal torment in hell exists here:

Then his judgment took place. First among the stars, they received their judgment and were found guilty, and they went to the place of condemnation; and they were thrown into an abyss, full of fire and flame and full of the pillar of fire. Then those seventy shepherds were judged and found guilty; and they were cast into that fiery abyss. In the meantime I saw how another abyss like it, full of fire, was opened wide in the middle of the ground; and they brought those blinded sheep, all of which were judged, found guilty, and cast into this fiery abyss, and they were burned – the abyss is to the right of that house; thus I saw those sheep while they were burning – their bones also were burning. Then I stood still, looking at that ancient house being transformed: All the pillars and all the columns were pulled out; and the ornaments of that house were packed and taken out together with them and abandoned in a certain place in the South of the land (*I Enoch* 90:24–28).

These lines do not explicitly speak of annihilation, but of burning. The statement foreshadows the notion of an eternal conscious suffering in hell, especially if one combines it with the idea of the eternal prison house (*I En.* 10:13; 18:14; 21:10). It is therefore not surprising that the youngest part of *I Enoch* also talks about this place where there “is no peace” for sinners (*I En.* 102:3), “they shall experience evil and great tribulation” (*I En.* 103:7), which underlines a conscious experience of hell.

But if one analyzes this passage on the basis of the other statements in *I Enoch*, a perpetual suffering in the hell is not necessarily in view here. If we read these on the basis of the statements in *I En.* 22, according to which those who are judged on earth do not rise again and the statement in *I En.* 91, that the sinners will be destroyed in the wrath of God, the idea of final annihilation is not unreasonable. Certainly, the punishment is now emphasized, and with it the act of suffering. Nevertheless, it aims at removing “the old house” to make

²⁸ See Jost, *Engelgemeinschaft*, 28–30.

way for the messianic kingdom (*I En.* 90:28–38). Also here, one thing is destroyed to make place for another.

So we are facing the interesting question in which context we want to interpret *I Enoch*. In my opinion we should do this in the context of the early Jewish writings of the 1st/2nd century BCE and not in the context of later apocalyptic writings. We should be careful to not read *I Enoch* through the lens of later “tours of hell.” Therefore, with regard to eschatology, Uhlig rightly emphasizes the notion of annihilation in *I Enoch*, which stands in contrast to the eternal joy of the righteous.²⁹

3. *Early Jewish Concepts of Judgment, Hell, and Punishment and the Apocalypse of Peter*

If we finally compare the *Apocalypse of Peter* with the yahadic texts and *I Enoch*, then a clear shift in the notion of judgment and hell can be observed. In the *Apocalypse of Peter* there is no talk of judgment as the enforcement of God’s justice and the eradication of ungodliness. Instead, the question of the punishment of sinners is decisively accentuated, combined with an individualization and focus on one’s deeds. In two respects, a changed view can be detected in this.

First, different conceptions of the relationship between judgment and punishment can be identified. On the one hand, we find a judgment that consists of annihilation in the texts of the *yahad* and the Enochic literature. In this view, judgment and punishment coincide because punishment is carried out along with God’s judgment. The goal of the judgment is the destruction of evil and purification of God’s people and thus has a cosmological-eschatological dimension.³⁰ We find this understanding in a special way in the texts of the *yahad*. On the other hand, a judgment that consists in punishment can be distinguished from it. In this case, judgment and punishment are successive actions. First, there is the judgment in the sense of a verdict on the deeds committed. The aim is to determine the chastisement due

²⁹ S. Uhlig, *Das äthiopische Henochbuch* (Gütersloh, 1984) 493.

³⁰ See further C. Stettler, *Das letzte Gericht. Studien zur Endgerichtserwartung von den Schriftpropheten bis Jesus* (Tübingen, 2011) 130–38. He speaks of the “enforcement of the reign of God” (“Durchsetzung der Gottesherrschaft”).

to the sinner. Then follows the corresponding suffering of the punishments. Exemplary for this stands the *Apocalypse of Peter*. This no longer speaks of “eternal destruction” but now explicitly of “eternal punishment” (*Apoc. Pet.* 6:6, 9) and of “darkness that cannot be extinguished” (*Apoc. Pet.* 6:5).³¹ The judgment is oriented entirely on the individual’s past and has no future-oriented meaning, which is why it now lasts forever.

The view of *1 Enoch* contains both aspects. One finds the thought of a judgment unto annihilation that precedes a new age of salvation. But one also finds the thought of individual judgment based on past sins. Taken together, however, the views of *1 Enoch* are closer to the texts of the *yahad* than to the *Apocalypse of Peter*, because the thought of annihilation is leading.³²

³¹ Also in Matt 25:46; Heb 6:2; Rev 20:10. For a discussion whether *Apoc. Pet.* discusses *eternal* punishment, see, e.g., T.J. Kraus, ‘Fürbitte für die Toten im frühen Christentum. «Ich werde ... den gewähren, den sie aus der Strafe erbitten»’, in H. Klein *et al.* (eds), *Das Gebet im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, 2009) 355–96; T. Nicklas, ‘Petrusoffenbarung, Christusoffenbarung und ihre Funktion. Autoritätskonstruktion in der Petrusapokalypse’, in J. Frey, F. Tóth and M. Jost (eds.), *Autorschaft und Autorisierungsstrategien in apokalyptischen Texten* (Tübingen, 2019) 319–35

³² See further J.N. Bremmer, ‘Descents to the Underworld from Gilgamesh to Christian Late Antiquity’, *Studia Religiosa* 50 (2017) 291–309. He concludes: “This underworld was appropriated by Hellenised Jews, who also made use of their own Jewish tradition in the measure-for-measure punishments, the demonstrative pronouns and the prominence of fire. Somewhere between *1 Enoch* and the middle of the second century AD, a Jew invented the genre of the Apocalypse, which contained features of classical Descent literature but also a number of ethical transgressions, with fire being the instrument of punishment for anonymous sinners.” See also P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter. Nach den Quellen der rabbinischen, apokalyptischen und apokryphen Literatur* (Hildesheim, 2003 [reprint]) 309, who emphasizes the notion of destruction, but at the same time recognizes a connection with the notion of punishment: “Das Gericht als Vernichtung hat überwiegend einen vorbereitenden Charakter, es sollen durch dasselbe, damit das Heil kommen kann, zuvor alle feindlichen Elemente aus der Welt geschafft werden, z.B. Hen 1 1. [...] Nicht selten weiss aber der Fromme von einem Strafzustand der Verdammnis, in den die Gottlosen versetzt werden, oder man beliebt, beides, Vernichtung und Verdammung, miteinander zu verbinden”.

Second, these two views are based on different concepts of how life is defined. In the texts of the *yahad* as well as in *1 Enoch*, judgment is primarily equated with annihilation. Whoever is removed from the community of God perishes, as 1QH^a XI 18 quotes: there is “destruction without your mercy” (כלה בלוא רחמיה). Therefore, eternal life is opposed to annihilation. Human life is a gift that depends on God’s judgment and can therefore be taken away. In the *Apocalypse of Peter*, however, the meaning of death is limited to corporeality and the earthly loss of life. After the judgment there is only the possibility of being, either in a state of damnation or heavenly glory.³³

This brings us back to Peter’s question following a word of Jesus from Mark 14:21, to which I referred in the introduction. Would not being uncreated be better for sinners than suffering eternal hell? From this comparison, it can be concluded that the existence of human beings can no longer be erased. Life is not defined in dependence of a relationship with God but is simply grounded in being created. The consequence of this is that not life and death are combined, but creation and punishment. Not mercy is juxtaposed with punishment as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but being created is contrasted with punishment.³⁴ The only fate for the soul of the sinners in the *Apocalypse of Peter* is the destiny in hell, or alternatively the (partial) apocatastasis, as Daniel Maier argues in his contribution to this volume.³⁵ Both

³³ Platonic influences can be suspected behind this shift. N. Artemov, ‘Erfindung Platons? Zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte der Hölle in der griechischen Antike’, in Tubach, *Sehnsucht nach der Hölle?*, 9–33, here 31 concludes in this way: “Die Geburtsstunde der Hölle scheint daher in einem gewissen Sinne mit der Geburtsstunde der ‘Seele’ in der europäischen Tradition zusammenzufallen.” But, we find this shift to the soul or human spirit also in *1 Enoch*. The souls go down to Sheol and the souls enter into the great judgment (e.g., *1 En.* 103:7–8).

³⁴ It is striking how the concepts of grace and mercy are almost completely absent from *Apoc. Pet.* Mercy is mentioned only from ch. 24 on in the Ethiopian version (except Prologue and 13:4). This is in striking contrast to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

³⁵ In the *GreekPetrApk* (P.Vindob.G 39756) one can also find the idea that sinners can be saved from punishment through the prayers of the elect; see Kraus, ‘Fürbitte’, 355–96; id. and T. Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse. Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (Berlin and New York, 2004).

conceptions give an answer to the question of the fate of the created immortal souls. But with it the greatest possible contrast to the conception of annihilation for the sinners is reached.

Thus, it can be acknowledged that Qumran cannot be regarded as the primary context of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Not only is the catalog of punishments for eschatological judgment so typically offered in the *Apocalypse of Peter* missing.³⁶ The differences are even more deeply located in different eschatological and anthropological concepts. The analysis of the Qumran writings, however, contributes decisively to obtaining a differentiated picture of the eschatological worldviews at the time of the Second Temple, in which such different concepts as annihilation and eternal torment in hell can be found.

Moreover, these insights show that we should be highly cautious about genealogical explanations of individual *topoi*, as judgment of sinners or descriptions of hell. The problem can be exemplified by an essay by Richard Bauckham, who, while himself critical of Martha Himmelfarb's account, looks for "transitions". In doing so, he draws a transition from the notion that punishment follows judgment to a notion that judgment happens immediately after death in the intermediate state before judgment.

The preceding four sections have shown how, within the tradition of four apocalypses, a transition from the belief that the punishment of the wicked will begin after the last judgement to the belief that it is already taking place in the intermediate state before the last judgement coincides with the emergence of visions of the punishments taking place in hell.³⁷

The insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to problematize this explanation. The visions of eternal punishments in hell are not primarily to be connected with the intermediate state, but much more with the understanding of judgment, punishment, and life. It is not only a temporal transition regarding the time of the punishment. I see rather a tendency that the notion of annihilation has shifted to the

³⁶ Particularly emphasized in the works of Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, *passim* and J.N. Bremmer, 'Orphic, Roman, Jewish and Christian Tours of Hell. Observations on the Apocalypse of Peter', in T. Nicklas *et al.* (eds), *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World* (Leiden, 2010) 306–21, updated in his *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 2017) 281–93.

³⁷ Bauckham, 'Early Jewish Visions of Hell', 375.

notion of suffering in hell. This ideological rupture can probably have been favored by the eschatologization of the notion of annihilation, but it cannot yet explain the redefinition of the content of the judgment. Therefore, a genealogy of the visions of hell is usually much more complex than the proposals want to make it.³⁸

³⁸ I wish to thank Daniel Maier and Christian Stettler for commenting a draft of this contribution and Jacob Cerone for reviewing the English of this article.