

Tasting Death: Sensory Metaphors & Other Worlds

Dr Meredith J C Warren
University of Sheffield
m.j.warren@sheffield.ac.uk

Primary Source Handout

1. Non-Jewish / Non-Christian Sources

a. Theocritus, *Epigram* 16

This girl went to Hades untimely in her seventh year, before she had lived out most of her life; poor child, she was pining for her brother, who **tasted** cruel **death** (γευσάμενον θανάτου) as an infant aged twenty months. Ah, Peristere, your suffering is pitiful. How near to mortals god has placed the most grievous unhappiness!

2. Pre-Rabbinic Early Jewish Sources

a. 4 Ezra 6:26

And they shall see those who were taken up, who from their birth have not **tasted death**; and the heart of the earth's inhabitants shall be changed and converted to a different spirit.

b. Pseudo Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 48.1

At that time also Phineas laid himself down to die, and the Lord said unto him: Behold thou hast overpassed the 120 years that were ordained unto all men. And now arise and go hence and dwell in the mount Danaben and abide there many years, and I will command mine eagle and he shall feed thee there, and thou shalt not comedown any more unto men until the time come and thou be proved in the time. And then shalt thou shut the heaven, and at thy word it shall be opened. And after that thou shalt be lifted up into the place whither they that were before thee were lifted up, and shalt be there until I remember the world. And then will I bring you and ye shall **taste** what is **death**.

3. New Testament & Early Christian Sources

a. Mark 9:1

And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not **taste death** until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

b. Matthew 16:28

“Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not **taste death** before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

c. Luke 9:27

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“But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not **taste death** before they see the kingdom of God.”

d. John 8:50-52

Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” οἱ ἰουδαῖοι said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never **taste death**.

e. Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might **taste death** for everyone.

f. The Gospel of Thomas 1

These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas recorded.

1. And he said, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not **taste death**."

g. The Gospel of Thomas 18

18. The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us, how will our end come?" Jesus said, "Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning; that one will know the end and will not **taste death**."

h. The Gospel of Thomas 19

19. Jesus said, "Congratulations to the one who came into being before coming into being. If you become my disciples and pay attention to my sayings, these stones will serve you. For there are five trees in Paradise for you; they do not change, summer or winter, and their leaves do not fall. Whoever knows them will not **taste death**."

i. Acts of Thomas 42

And as Judas was led away to the prison they all followed him ... And Judas began to say: O liberator of my soul from the bondage of the many, because I gave myself to be sold ; behold, I rejoice and exult, knowing that the times are fulfilled for me to enter in and receive . Lo, I am to be set free from the cares that are on the earth; lo, I fulfil mine hope and receive truth; lo, I am set free from sorrow and put on joy alone; lo, I become careless and griefless and dwell in rest; lo, I am set free from bondage and am called unto liberty; lo, I have served times and seasons, and I am lifted up above times and seasons; lo, I receive my wages from my recompenser, who giveth without reckoning (number) because

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his wealth sufficeth for the gift; and I shall not put it on again; lo, I sleep and awake, and I shall no more go to sleep; lo, I die and live again, and I shall no more **taste of death**; lo, they rejoice and expect me, that I may come and be with their kindred and be set as a flower in their crown; lo, I reign in the kingdom whereon I set my hope, even from hence; lo, the rebellious fall before me, for I have escaped them; lo, (unto me) the peace hath come, whereunto all are gathered.

4. Rabbinic Sources

a. Genesis Rabbah 9:5

Adam, the first person, was deserving to not **taste the taste of death** (הֲלָטַעַם טַעַם מִיָּתָה).

b. Genesis Rabbah 21.5

“Behold, the man has become...” R. Pappas lectured: Behold, the man has become like one of us (*mimmennu*) means like one of the ministering angels. Said R. Akiba to him: Let that suffice thee, Pappas. How then do you interpret *Mimmennu*? It means that the Holy One, blessed be He, set two ways before him, life and death, and he chose the other path.¹ R. Judah b. R. Simon interpreted: Like the Unique one of the universe, as it is written, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’ (Deut 6:4). Our Rabbis said: Like Gabriel: ‘And one man in the midst of them clothed in linen’ (Ezek 9.2): like a snail whose garment is part of its body. Resh Lakish said: [He has become] like Jonah [of whom it is written,] ‘But as one was felling a beam,’ etc. (2 Kgs 6:5): just as the latter fled [from God’s command], so the former fled; just as that one’s glory did not stay the night with him, so this one’s glory too did not stay a night with hi. R. Berekiah said in R. Hanina’s name: Like Elijah: just as he did not experience the **taste of death**, so [Adam] too was not meant to **taste death**. The view of R. Berekiah in R. Hanan’s name is that as long as there was [only] Adam he was one,² but when his rib was taken from him, it was ‘to know good and evil.’

c. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Deuteronomy 32:1

And when the last end of Mosheh the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from among the world, he said in his heart: I will not attest against this people with witnesses that taste of death in this world, behold, I attest against them with witnesses which do not **taste of death** in this world, and whose destination is to be renewed in the world to come. Isaiah the prophet, when he prophesied in the congregation of Israel, attributed hearing to the heavens, and attentiveness to the earth; because (in his case) earth was nearest and heaven more remote: but Mosheh the prophet, when he now prophesied in the congregation of Israel, attributed hearing to the earth, and attentiveness to the heavens;

¹ “R. Akiba treats *mimmennu* as 3rd sing. (of himself) not 1st pl (of us), translating, Behold, the man has become as one who knows good and evil of himself, of his own free will, and thereby has himself chosen the path of death” Footnote to Gen Rabbah 21.5.

² i.e. wholehearted in his devotion to God.

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because (in his case) heaven was nearest and earth more remote; for so it is written, Attend, ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

d. Leviticus Rabbah 18.1

It says not 'eternal home,' but 'his eternal home,' which teaches us that every righteous man has an eternity of his own. This may be compared to the case of a king who enters a city accompanied by generals, governors, and soldiers; though they all enter by the same gate, everyone is accommodated in accordance with his rank. Even so it is that although all experience the **taste** of **death**, every righteous man has an eternity of his own.

e. Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 51:2

All its inhabitants shall **taste** the **taste** of **death** for two days, when there will be no soul of man or beast upon the earth, as it is said, "And they that dwell therein shall die in like manner"

5. *Church Fathers*

a. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Psalm 75* TLG 55.597.33

For it was not until Cain, through jealousy, brought forth murder, that humanity **tasted death**.

b. John Chrysostom, *On Penance* TLG 49.346.60

ἡ ζωὴ **θανάτου γεύεται**.

c. John Chrysostom, *On the Ascension* TLG 52.802.14

And he was nailed to the cross, and **tasted death**; he who is from the beginning immortal stripped Hades of its spoils, and the proven winner rose from death.