

## AFTERLIFE HOPE BEFORE THE NEW TESTAMENT: A DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY

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What happens to us when we die? Most cultures and religions seek to offer answers to this question. Whereas earlier texts in the Hebrew Bible envisaged a shadowy existence for the dead in the underworld, the final two centuries before the New Testament saw belief in the resurrection take hold among many Jews.<sup>1</sup> What was the reason for this major change in belief? At the risk of oversimplifying a complex process of development, this article will suggest that the martyrdom of numerous devout Jews by King Antiochus Epiphanes during the Maccabean crisis (2nd century BCE) served as a turning point. If the virtuous did not receive blessings in the present life, God would reward them in the resurrection, when God would recreate his faithful people.

### Underworld in Job, Qoheleth & Tobit

“I know that my Redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25 KJV). This soprano aria is a key element within Handel’s oratorio, *Messiah*, which was premiered in 1742 in Dublin’s Fishamble Street. Within its musical context, a Christian interpretation is presumed, and the text is understood to be referring to the second coming of Christ to the earth.<sup>2</sup> Handel’s aria quotes from Job’s hopeful declaration: “I know that my Redeemer (גאלי) liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:25-27 KJV).

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<sup>2</sup> On Handel’s use of Scripture, see Kerry Houston, “Handel’s *Messiah* – The First Coming or the Second Coming?”, in *The Cultural Reception of the Bible*, ed. Salvador Ryan and Liam M. Tracey (Dublin: Four Courts, 2018), 232-9, esp. 238.

The King James Version (1611) here employs the noun “redeemer” (rendered λυτρωτής in LXX Ps 19[18]:14), which Christians often use as a title for Jesus. Thus, Job’s affirmation may be understood as conforming to a belief in Christ’s second coming and the final resurrection (1 Thess 4:16-17). Moreover, the Septuagint version of Job 19:25-26 speaks of resurrection (NETS): “To be sure, I know that he who is about to undo me on earth is everlasting. May my skin, which patiently endures these things, rise up (ἀναστήσῃ)”. Moreover, after the notice of Job’s death, the Septuagint adds the statement: “And it is written that he will rise again with those the Lord raises up” (Job 42:17 NETS).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Augustine interpreted Job 19:25-27 as alluding to the resurrection, most scholars nowadays affirm that Job’s declaration refers to hope upon earth, as John Chrysostom recognized (*Second Epistle to Olympias*).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Job 19:25-27 does not necessarily refer to the afterlife. We could expand the NRSV to explain the general understanding: “I know that my Redeemer [= God] lives, and that at the last [= after these sufferings] he will stand upon the earth [= intervene]. And after my skin has been thus destroyed [= by these afflictions], then in my [= restored] flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”.<sup>5</sup> John Eaton offers this explanation of Job’s declaration: “There is one [= God] who will take his part, vindicate his innocence, and punish those who have maligned him”.<sup>6</sup> Eaton also states: “This is not a

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<sup>3</sup> Donald H. Gard, “The Concept of the Future Life According to the Greek Translator of the Book of Job”, *JBL* 73 (1954) 137-43. Hereafter, biblical (including deuterocanonical) quotations are generally from the NRSV, sometimes adapted. While scholars dispute the interpretation of some passages, the overall trend of a developing belief in the afterlife is clear.

<sup>4</sup> Such was the view of Jerome and Augustine (though not Chrysostom); cf. James K. Zink, “Impatient Job: An Interpretation of Job 19:25-27”, *JBL* 84 (1965) 147-52, here 147. Speaking of the beatific vision, Augustine (*City of God*, 22.29) declares: “As for the words of the above-mentioned Job, as they are found in the Hebrew manuscripts, ‘And in my flesh I shall see God’ [Job 19:26], no doubt they were a prophecy of the resurrection of the flesh”. On diverse interpretations of Job 19:25-28, see Aron Pinker, “A New Interpretation of Job 19:26”, *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 15:2 (2015) 1-23 (online).

<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1939), 120-1, discusses four possible meanings but rejects the idea of an afterlife reference in Job 19:25-27. Similarly Katharine J. Dell, *Job: An Introduction and Study Guide: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (London: T & T Clark, 2017), 45-6. While the date of Job is very difficult to establish, a Qumran MS (4Q101 = 4QpaleoJob\*) is older than 150 BCE, and Sir 49:9 mentions Job around 180 BCE. The book dates from the 6th century BCE during the Babylonian exile, according to Leo Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 118, but from the first half of the 5th century BCE, according to Jean Lévêque, *Job et le drame de la foi*, LD 216 (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 67-81.

<sup>6</sup> John H. Eaton, *Job*, OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 13.

doctrine of resurrection”.<sup>7</sup> As the story unfolds, ultimately we discover that the reprieve for Job will occur on earth, because Job does indeed see God. While on earth, Job eventually experiences a transformative encounter with God beyond his imagining, leading to his restoration (Job 38–42). After God has appeared to Job in the whirlwind, the long-suffering patriarch admits: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5).

Job has previously expressed his doubt about an afterlife in Job 14:7–12. He begins by noting: “There is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease” (Job 14:7). He then draws a contrast with the situation of human beings: “But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they? As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep” (Job 14:10–12; cf. 7:9–10).<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere Job asks: “Are not the days of my life few? Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort, before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness” (Job 10:20–22). The Hebrew Book of Job ends by narrating the protagonist’s death: “And Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:17), without any mention of the resurrection—even if the Septuagint here adds the statement that “he will rise again with those the Lord raises up”.

In fact, Hebrew Job’s view of a shadowy post-mortem state, matching what we find elsewhere in the Old Testament, appears in his first lament: “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest” (Job 3:17). Many ancient Israelites viewed Sheol as a place of darkness and gloom (e.g. Ps 88:4–13; 115:17; cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 10.495). Although the dead have some kind of existence, they lack strength and awareness. The distressed Psalmist imagines himself in the underworld: “I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand” (Ps 88:4–5). Israelites reckoned that there is no conscious existence in Sheol, because death finishes all meaningful contact with the world, and even with God. Thus, Ps 6:5 declares before God: “In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?”

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the wise woman of Tekoa says to King David: “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up” (2 Sam 14:14).

Similarly sceptical about an afterlife is the author of Ecclesiastes or Qoheleth, which probably dates from the 3rd century BCE. He declares: “The fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Qoh 3:19-20). Here Qoheleth describes human mortality by using biblical imagery of returning to dust (Gen 3:19; Ps 104:29). While questioning whether there is an afterlife, the author adds: “Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?” (Qoh 3:20-21).<sup>9</sup> A similar statement occurs at the end of the famous depiction of old age: “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it” (Qoh 12:7). Elsewhere Qoheleth expresses doubt about afterlife: “Whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost” (Qoh 9:4-5). The pessimistic sage adds: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (Qoh 9:10). Nevertheless, Qoheleth also speaks of a time of judgment, warning that “God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter and for every work” (Qoh 3:17). The epilogue also asserts that “God will bring every deed into judgment” (Qoh 12:14), but probably both these statements refer to judgment that occurs on earth rather than after death.<sup>10</sup> In fact, James Crenshaw suggests that “Qoheleth himself probably equates divine judgment with death”.<sup>11</sup>

A comparable outlook appears in the Book of Tobit (probably from the late 3rd century BCE), which includes a major focus on the burial of the dead, sometimes echoing stories of burial of the Genesis patriarchs.<sup>12</sup> Tobit’s piety is evident in his interment of the deceased, and he even defies the Assyrian regime to bury a victim of imperial violence, an act that leads to his suffering (Tob 1:17-19; 2:7). After his despairing prayer for death (Tob 3:1-6), he commands his son to give him a good burial (Tob 4:3). Later, a grave is dug for Tobiah and his bride Sarah on their wedding night, though it is not used (Tob 8:9-18). Finally, Tobit and Hannah are buried when they die in their old age (Tob 14:11-12). Yet despite the prominence

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2004), 93-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 91 (Qoh 3:17), 213-14 (Qoh 12:14).

<sup>11</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 1987), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Francis M. Macatangay, *When I Die, Bury Me Well* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2016), 47-55.

of death and burial within the narrative, the text makes no mention of any hope of afterlife. Instead, out of his distress, Tobit prays to rest peacefully in Sheol: “Command my spirit to be taken from me, so that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust.... Command, O Lord, that I be released from this distress; release me to go to the eternal home” (Tob 3:6 NRSV). As in the Books of Job and Qoheleth, retribution in Tobit concerns reward in this life, rather than hope of an afterlife.

### No Afterlife in the Original Ben Sira

Early in the second century BCE, Ben Sira composed his book of wisdom instructions in Jerusalem, close to the temple. Much of his teaching develops material from the earlier biblical writings, although he also sometimes reflects ideas from Greek culture. As a sage, Ben Sira observes that death is inevitable for human beings, and even somehow natural. He makes a comparison to the cycle of leaves forming on trees and later falling from them: “Like abundant leaves on a spreading tree, that sheds some and puts forth others, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born” (Sir 14:18). Similarly, in Homer’s *Iliad* (6:146-149), Glaucus declares: “Even as are the generations of leaves, such are those also of human beings. As for the leaves, the wind scatters some upon the earth, but the forest, as it burgeons, puts forth others when the season of spring has come; even so of human beings one generation springs up and another passes away”.<sup>13</sup>

As the common fate of humanity, death might initially seem also to be presented as something natural in Sir 14:17: “All living beings become old like a garment, for the decree from of old is, ‘You must die!’” Within the Greek cultural world, the mention of the “decree from of old” could be understood as an echoing of the idea of the “fate of death” (θανάτου μοῖρα) found in Aeschylus (*Pers.* 917; *Ag.* 1462).<sup>14</sup> From a Jewish perspective, however, the description of death as the “decree from of old” alludes to God’s warning to Adam and Eve that death will follow if they eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17; 3:19).<sup>15</sup> Yet

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from A. T. Murray, *Homer: The Iliad*, vol. 1, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1924), 273.

<sup>14</sup> Theophil Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Lutz Schrader, *Leiden und Gerechtigkeit: Studien zu Theologie und Textgeschichte des Sirachbuchs*, BBET 27 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1994), 275; Bradley C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 117.

human death almost appears as something planned by God: “Do not fear death’s decree for you; remember those who went before you and those who will come after. This is the Lord’s decree for all flesh; why then should you reject the will of the Most High? Whether life lasts for ten years or a hundred or a thousand, there are no questions asked in Hades” (Sir 41:3-4).<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Greek version of Sir 41:3 (just quoted from the NRSV) speaks of death as the “will of the Most High”, the Hebrew text even calls the decree of death the “Torah of the Most High”, presumably referring to God’s sentence on Adam in Gen 3:19.

Similarly, death appears as somewhat natural for human beings in the description of God’s creation of humanity, where Ben Sira immediately mentions human mortality: “The Lord created human beings out of earth, and makes them return to it again” (Sir 17:1). While the first half of the verse echoes Gen 2:7, the second half recalls Gen 3:19: “Until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (cf. Gen 6:3).<sup>17</sup> Human beings share mortality with other creatures, because “all that is of earth returns to earth” (Sir 40:11). Accordingly, like Qoheleth, the sage advises his students to enjoy their present lives: “Give, and take, and indulge yourself, because in Hades one cannot look for luxury” (Sir 14:16; cf. Qoh 9:9-10). Moreover, the sage speaks bluntly of what happens after death: “When one is dead, one inherits maggots and vermin and worms” (Sir 10:11). Hence, Ben Sira draws a further moral lesson about the folly of human presumption, according to the Hebrew text of his aphorism: “Humble yourself to the utmost, for the expectation of mortals is worms” (Sir 7:17 NRSV margin). Interestingly, *Mishnah Abot* 4:4 ascribes this saying to Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh.

Such passages show that the perspective of Job and Qoheleth, whereby there is no meaningful life after death, continues in Ben Sira, whom Roland Murphy dubbed “wisdom’s traditionalist”.<sup>18</sup> A clear expression of the sage’s viewpoint occurs in another place: “Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades, in place of the living who give thanks? From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing the Lord’s praises” (Sir 17:27-28). These two verses encapsulate the outlook of pre-Maccabean Jewish authors that

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<sup>16</sup> The Epicureans also taught that death is not to be feared; cf. Jeremy Corley, “Sirach’s Hymn to Logos (Sir 37:16-18) in Light of Hebrew and Greek Thought”, in *Sophia – Paideia: sapienza e educazione* (Sir 1,27), Miscellanea di studi offerti in onore del prof. Don Mario Cimosà, ed. Gillian Bonney and Rafael Vicent (Rome: LAS, 2012), 237-55, esp. 249-50.

<sup>17</sup> Shane Berg, “Ben Sira, the Genesis Creation Accounts, and the Knowledge of God’s Will”, *JBL* 132 (2013) 139-57, here 147.

<sup>18</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 65.

after death there is no worthwhile life in which people can praise God. Thus, Ps 115:17-18 asserts: “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord, from this time on and forevermore”. Likewise, in his canticle of praise after recovering from serious sickness, King Hezekiah declares: “Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you. Those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, they thank you, as I do this day” (Is 38:18-19).

The conclusion of the sage’s treatment of sickness and bereavement (Sir 38:1-23) is another text clearly demonstrating that the original Ben Sira had no expectation of a meaningful afterlife. Here he advises against excessive grieving for the deceased: “Do not give your heart to grief; drive it away, and remember your own end. Do not forget, there is no coming back; you do the dead no good, and you injure yourself” (Sir 38:20-21). Ben Sira’s advice is akin to Achilles’ speech in Homer’s *Iliad* (24.549-51): “Bear up, neither wail ever ceaselessly in your heart; for nothing will you avail by grieving for your son, neither will you bring him back to life (ἀνστήσεις); but sooner you shall suffer some other ill”.<sup>19</sup> Ben Sira continues with a reminder that all humans are mortal: “Remember his fate, for yours is like it; yesterday it was his, and today it is yours. When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance rest too, and be comforted for him when his spirit has departed” (Sir 38:22-23). Similarly, Sir 8:7 offers a reminder of common human mortality: “Do not rejoice over anyone’s death; remember that we must all die”. This reminder recalls a pagan slogan also found on many ancient Jewish tombstones: “Take courage, no one is immortal” (θάρσει, οὐδεις ἀθάνατος).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, there are two mysterious biblical instances where a person was taken up to heaven, Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:9-10). Surprisingly, despite his lack of hope of an afterlife, Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors mentions the cases of both Enoch (Sir 44:16; 49:14) and Elijah (Sir 48:9), as well as the resuscitation of a corpse thrown into Elisha’s grave (Sir 48:13; cf. 2 Kgs 13:21).

Although he has no expectation of the resurrection, Ben Sira believes that a person survives death through being remembered favourably (37:26; 41:11-13). The statement about the virtuous dead in Sir 44:14 KJV, “Their

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<sup>19</sup> Adapted from A. T. Murray, *Homer: The Iliad*, vol. 2, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1924), 603.

<sup>20</sup> Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, CBET 2 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 121. Many of the sage’s longer statements about death occur in the latter part of his book, suggesting that they were written later in his life, doubtless when he had to face his own mortality, and probably the loss of his relatives and friends.

name liveth for evermore”, found a poignant usage on the Stone of Remembrance set up in many battlefield cemeteries in Belgium and Northern France, where British and Commonwealth soldiers perished during the First World War. Rather than envisaging individual survival after death, Ben Sira declares that the devout person’s good reputation will endure among the people.<sup>21</sup> The sage asserts: “The human body is a fleeting thing, but a virtuous name will never be blotted out. Have regard for your name, since it will outlive you longer than a thousand hoards of gold. The days of a good life are numbered, but a good name lasts for ever” (Sir 41:11-13).

Ben Sira applies this notion to an insightful teacher: “One who is wise among his people will inherit honour, and his name will live forever” (Sir 37:26). Indeed, the Hebrew of 37:26 declares that “his name continues in eternal life”—not affirming the eternal life of the person but rather of his (or her) remembered reputation. Likewise, Sir 44:14-15 also commends the value of an honourable reputation: “Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name lives on generation after generation. The assembly declares their wisdom, and the congregation proclaims their praise”. Ben Sira regards an enduring posthumous reputation as a way of transcending death, just as 1 Macc 6:44 praises a brave Jewish fighter named Eleazar: “He gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name”. Such thinking has Greek parallels, since Plato refers to persons who willingly suffered any hardship, including death, because they “expected to win a deathless memory for valour” (*Symposium* 208D).<sup>22</sup>

In Ben Sira’s view, a person also survived in his or her descendants (30:4; 40:19).<sup>23</sup> Whereas the original Ben Sira does not display an interest in individual life after death, he is instead concerned with survival through one’s offspring. According to Sir 40:19, the family name continues in a person’s descendants: “children and the building of a city establish one’s name”. Within the prologue to the Praise of the Ancestors, the Israelite heroes of faith survive through their faithful progeny: “Their descendants stand by the covenants; their children also, for their sake. Their offspring will continue forever, and their glory will never be blotted out” (Sir 44:12-13). What is important for Ben Sira is the survival of the chosen people:

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 86.

<sup>22</sup> Walter R. M. Lamb, *Plato, vol. 3: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1925), 197-9.

<sup>23</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 85.

“The days of a person’s life are numbered, but the days of Israel are without number” (Sir 37:25; cf. Jer 31:36).

The Hebrew Book of Ben Sira was translated into Greek by the author’s grandson in Egypt, probably Alexandria, near the end of the 2nd century BCE. In a few cases, the grandson updated his grandfather’s work (e.g. Sir 50:22-24).<sup>24</sup> Sometimes the grandson modified the text to be more open to belief in the afterlife. Thus, Ben Sira’s Hebrew text refers to the decay of a human corpse buried in the earth after death: “The expectation of mortals is worms” (Sir 7:17 NRSV margin). However, the grandson supplied a possible reference to punishment after death by mentioning fire as well as worms (as in Jdt 16:17 and Mk 9:48), so that the Greek translation reads: “The punishment of the ungodly is fire and worms”.<sup>25</sup> This change may have been motivated by the Greek translator’s belief in the afterlife, even though this belief was not shared by Ben Sira himself.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the later Greek manuscripts of Ben Sira exhibit what the Irish Dominican Conleth Kearns called an “Expanded Text”.<sup>27</sup> Kearns argues that the subsequent additions to the Greek text make increased mention of a developed belief in the afterlife. Such a belief is evident in the term *ἀθανασία* (immortality) in the Lucianic manuscripts of 19:19b: “Those who do what pleases him [=the Lord] will enjoy the fruits of the tree of immortality”.<sup>28</sup>

### Ezekiel’s exilic idea of God recreating the Nation

Whereas Jewish wisdom authors before the Maccabean era had no firm belief in the afterlife (beyond a shadowy existence), some prophetic texts hinted at death being somehow overcome, though initially for the nation rather than for the individual. One of the most famous passages in the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the valley or open field of dry bones, revived by the spirit or breath of God. Here I do not think the prophet is speaking directly about any individual post-mortem resurrection, but rather about the collective revival of a weakened and scattered nation. The scene begins

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>25</sup> Conleth Kearns, *The Expanded Text of Ecclesiasticus: Its Teaching on the Future Life as a Clue to Its Origin*, DCLS 11, ed. Pancratius Beentjes (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 137-9.

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Gilbert, “Immortalité? Résurrection? Faut-il choisir?”, in *Le Judaïsme à l’aube de l’ère chrétienne*, LD 186, ed. Philippe Abadie and Jean-Pierre Lémonon (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 271-97, esp. 276-8.

<sup>27</sup> Kearns, *The Expanded Text*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 159-62. Cf. Severino Bussino, *The Greek Additions in the Book of Ben Sira*, AnBib 203 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2013), 285-96.

thus: “The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones” (Ez 37:1). The dry bones would recall the many corpses of Israelites slain by the Babylonians during their destruction of Jerusalem in the year 587 BCE. Unburied bones indicate the disgrace of the conquered people of Israel, as Jeremiah had previously warned: “The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air and for the animals of the earth” (Jer 7:33).

Seeing these dead bones, Ezekiel is told: “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath/spirit (רוּחַ) to enter you, and you shall live” (Ez 37:4-5). Just as the original Adam came to life when God breathed into the dust (Gen 2:7), so now God would recreate his people. Ps 104 includes a comparable idea of the role of God’s breath or spirit in sustaining life: “When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps 104:29-30). Ezekiel’s vision continues: “As I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath (רוּחַ) in them. Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath (רוּחַ), prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath (רוּחַ), and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath (רוּחַ) came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude” (Ez 37:7-10). The arrival of the breath or wind or spirit revives the dry bones.

Finally, the prophet receives an interpretation for the vision: “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel... I will put my spirit (רוּחַ) within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil” (Ez 37:11-14). Commenting on v. 12, John Wevers explains that the prophet is referring to a revival of the nation: “The reference is, of course, not to a physical resurrection, but to a restoration to political existence”.<sup>29</sup> Even though, in a derived sense, we could understand this passage as speaking of God’s power to revive the dead, in its original context Ezekiel employs the image of dry bones to

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<sup>29</sup> John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, NCB (London: Nelson, 1969), 279.

promise the revival of the nation, rather than to describe individual post-mortem resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

### **Maccabean-era innovation of God recreating the Martyrs**

Although Jewish sages from Job to Qoheleth and Ben Sira denied a meaningful afterlife, some prophetic texts (Hos 6:1-3; Ez 37:1-14) employed language of re-creation to describe a revival of the nation. When the idea of a future resurrection for individuals clearly emerges in Jewish tradition, it first applies to those martyred for keeping their faith in Israel's God during the Maccabean era. King Antiochus Epiphanes engaged in persecution of the devout Jews (1 Macc 1:41-64), and Torah-observant Jews were killed by the Seleucid forces after refraining from fighting on the Sabbath (1 Macc 2:31-38). Within its context, Dan 12:1-3 speaks of resurrection for the devout who suffered martyrdom.<sup>31</sup> With repeated affirmations of faith, chapter 7 of Second Maccabees emphasizes the hope of resurrection expressed by the seven sons and their mother, martyred by Antiochus Epiphanes for their obedience to God's law.

According to Alan Segal, the religious conflict of the Maccabean crisis led to the popularization among the Jews of a combination of Persian ideas of apocalyptic afterlife and Greek ideas of immortality.<sup>32</sup> Otto Kaiser explains the reasoning by which the persecuted Jews began to envisage a resurrection: "Was the God who demanded unconditional loyalty and unconditional obedience from Israel, and tolerated no other god beside himself, no longer keeping the promises which he had made to the obedient?"<sup>33</sup> Thus, devout Jews were led to "accept that God's righteousness is exercised within a horizon which goes beyond the limits of a single life". Similarly, George Nickelsburg identifies the theological problem of these martyrdoms, when the faithful Jews had died because of their obedience to the Torah, whereas the apostate Jews survived: "Thus piety caused death, and disobedience led to life. Clearly, this confounded

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<sup>30</sup> A similar interpretation is valid for Hos 6:1-3 in its historical context, though the text was later understood as applying to the resurrection; cf. Andrew A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 222-3.

<sup>31</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, HTS 56, 2nd edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 36-7.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religions* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 270.

<sup>33</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, OTL (London: SCM, 1974), 220, commenting on Is 26:19 (both quotations).

the standard Israelite canons of justice and retribution. Resurrection to life, on the one hand, and to punishment, on the other, was an answer to this problem".<sup>34</sup>

The question of theodicy is the issue here. Earlier works such as the Books of Job and Tobit narrate the stories of severe suffering undergone by a devout figure, but the sufferer eventually receives a happy outcome on earth. But what about the righteous who died for the sake of God? If God is just, surely he would reward the devout sufferer. And if God is Creator, surely he could restore the martyrs to a new life, while also punishing the cruel tyrants. Thus, the perceived lack of justice, evident when the faithful Jews were martyred, finds its redress in the notion of a final judgment, where the good will receive their reward and the evildoers their punishment. In a somewhat comparable fashion, Plato states that following a post-mortem judgment, the virtuous will go to the Isles of the Blessed while the wicked will depart to Tartarus (*Gorg.* 524a).<sup>35</sup>

Although it is easy to see how resurrection belief could be a theological response to the martyrdom of devout Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, the situation may not be quite so simple. Jon D. Levenson notes that Israelite history included many other stories of the devout being martyred (e.g. Abel and Naboth) without a resurrection belief developing, while other Jews around that era (e.g. Ben Sira and the Sadducees) did not accept such a notion of the resurrection.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Nickelsburg acknowledges that a resurrection idea predates Dan 12, since it occurs in the Enochic *Book of the Watchers* (probably composed in the 3rd century BCE).<sup>37</sup> Thus, *1 Enoch* 22:3-4 describes hollow places existing "that the spirits of the souls of the dead might be gathered into them... until the time of the day of the end of the great judgment that will be exacted from them".<sup>38</sup> The text goes on to speak of a place of eternal punishment: "This cursed valley is for those who are cursed forever... Here they will be

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<sup>34</sup> Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Finney, *Resurrection, Hell and the Afterlife: Body and Soul in Antiquity, Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2016), 10. On Greek beliefs about the afterlife, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 190-208, 293-301.

<sup>36</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 192-6.

<sup>37</sup> Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 5. Cf. Casey D. Elledge, "Future Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: Social Dynamics, Contested Evidence", *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2011) 394-421, here 407.

<sup>38</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2004), 42.

gathered, and here will be (their) habitation” (*1 Enoch* 27:2).<sup>39</sup> Despite these caveats, it is reasonable to think that theological reflection on the Maccabean-era martyrs served as a stimulus for the growth of resurrection belief among the Jews.<sup>40</sup> Even if the interpretation of individual verses is open to dispute, the shape of the general trend is clear. Whereas at the time of the return from the Babylonian exile, few Jews believed in the resurrection, by the time of Jesus it was a common Jewish notion. Rabbinic belief in the afterlife is affirmed in the Mishnah, compiled at the end of the 2nd century CE: “Those who are born are [destined] to die, and those who die are [destined] for resurrection. And the living are [destined] to be judged” (*m. Abot* 4:22).<sup>41</sup>

### Daniel and First Enoch

We have seen that, using the image of dry bones, Ezekiel speaks of the revival of the nation, and in its original context, the prophecy does not speak of individual post-mortem resurrection. However, a few authors in the late OT period took up this idea of re-creation and re-applied it to refer to those faithful Jews who had died as martyrs. Most scholars think the resurrection belief entered the mainstream of Jewish belief around 165 BCE, at the time of the Maccabean martyrs (*Dan* 12:1-3; *2 Macc* 7:9). If the Creator God could revive a moribund exiled nation, he also had the ability to restore life through the resurrection of the dead. Thus, the resurrection promise in *Dan* 12:1-3 is a theological response to the case of the Maccabean martyrs (167-164 BCE), who died for their obedience to God’s laws. Daniel focuses on the non-military victims rather than the Maccabean fighters. Ostensibly the book contains stories and visions involving Daniel and his companions during the Babylonian exile (605-539 BCE), but most scholars think that the book is using coded language to describe the persecution unleashed by Antiochus Epiphanes. This

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 vols (London: SCM, 1974) 1, 196. For an overview see now Casey D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE-CE 200* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Although resurrection belief is not prominent at Qumran, it might be present in 1QH 14:29-34; 19:10-14; 4Q418 69.ii.4-15; 4Q521 5/7.ii.4-6; cf. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 186-9. However, resurrection language in 1QH 14:29-34 and 19:9-12 is viewed as probably metaphorical by Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 186-7, 191-3. Doubts about a Qumran resurrection belief are also expressed by John J. Collins, “The Otherworld in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions*, JSJSup 143, ed. Tobias Nicklas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 95-116.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 684.

persecution was opposed militarily by the Maccabees but peacefully by some Hasidim (“devout ones”) – including the author or editor of the Book of Daniel. The oppression ended in 164 BCE, when the temple was cleansed after the military revolt of the Maccabees (1 Macc 4:54), and the same year saw the demise of the great persecutor, Antiochus Epiphanes.

Daniel has a vision of the course of Jewish history, from the Persian Empire till the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan 11:2-45). During the vision, the prophet mentions Antiochus Epiphanes: “A contemptible person shall arise, on whom royal majesty had not been conferred. He shall obtain the kingdom through intrigue” – after his brother’s murder in 175 BCE (Dan 11:21).<sup>42</sup> The prophet then refers to the way Antiochus named himself Epiphanes (meaning ‘God manifest’): “He shall exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god” (Dan 11:36). However, the prophet predicts the tyrant’s death: “Yet he shall come to his end, with no one to help him” (Dan 11:45). While on a military campaign in Persia in 164 BCE, Antiochus was struck down by a mysterious fatal disease (1 Macc 6:1-16). This was viewed as divine punishment for his persecution of the Jews and his profanation of the Jerusalem temple. As it turned out (2 Macc 9:28-10:5), the rededication of the Jerusalem temple took place in the same month that Antiochus died (December 164 BCE), and the Jewish people still celebrate this rededication in the annual feast of Hanukkah.

At this point in Daniel’s vision, Dan 12:1-2 looks forward to a national deliverance and a resurrection after the time of severe anguish for the chosen people: “At that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth (עפר - אדמת) shall awake, some to everlasting life (חיי - עולם), and some to shame and everlasting contempt”. Daniel’s mention of “the dust of the earth” recalls the creation of the first man out of the dust in Genesis: “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground (האדמה - מן - עפר), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (נשמת - חיים); and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7).<sup>43</sup> John Goldingay comments on the meaning of Daniel’s promise: “The seer could be promising a revival of the nation after the Antiochene persecution (cf. e.g., Ez 37). But the revival is to ‘lasting life,’ which suggests more than that”.<sup>44</sup> It seems that Daniel has given a resurrection interpretation to a verse from the so-called Isaiah apocalypse: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the

<sup>42</sup> Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 294.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>44</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas TX: Word Books, 1987), 307.

dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead” (Is 26:19).<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, in Daniel’s vision of the resurrection, the virtuous will shine brightly: “Those who are wise (*maskilim*) shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3). The departed do not become stars but rather the text compares them to stars.<sup>46</sup> This partly parallels the teaching of the Book of Wisdom on the afterlife: “In the time of their visitation they will shine forth” (Wis 3:7). So too the New Testament speaks of the righteous shining in the afterlife: “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43). Similar imagery appears in works written at the end of the 1st century CE (4 Macc 17:5; 4 Ezra 7:97; 2 Bar 51:10).<sup>47</sup>

Enochic literature also knows this imagery of glorious light for the beneficiaries of the resurrection. The 2nd century BCE *Epistle of Enoch* (1 *Enoch* 92-105) refers to the risen brightness of those who were once oppressed: “Formerly you were worn out by evils and tribulations, but now you will shine like the luminaries of heaven; you will shine and appear, and the portals of heaven will be opened for you” (1 *Enoch* 104:2).<sup>48</sup> Thus, a hope of the resurrection appears clearly in the *Epistle of Enoch*, which may possibly date from the generation before the Maccabees.<sup>49</sup> After describing the judgment that awaits sinners, the Epistle speaks of the resurrection for the devout: “The souls of the pious who have died will come to life, and they will rejoice and be glad; and their spirits will not perish, nor their memory from the presence of the Great One for all the generations of eternity” (1 *Enoch* 103:4).<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the Ethiopic text of 1 *Enoch* 91:10 declares: “The righteous will arise from his sleep, and wisdom will arise and be given to them”.<sup>51</sup> The concluding chapter of the Enochic collection ends with a sharp post-mortem division between the virtuous and the wicked: “The righteous, as they shine, will see those who were born in

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<sup>45</sup> Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 30; cf. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 217-18; Finney, *Resurrection*, 27-9. In my view, Is 26:19 originally refers to a national restoration rather than personal resurrection.

<sup>46</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1993), 394; Wright, *Resurrection*, 110-12.

<sup>47</sup> See van der Horst, *Epitaphs*, 138.

<sup>48</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, 1 *Enoch*, 161. Cf. Alexey Somov, *Representations of the Afterlife in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 556 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 172.

<sup>49</sup> Randal A. Argall, 1 *Enoch and Sirach*, SBLEJL 8 (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, 1 *Enoch*, 159; cf. Argall, 1 *Enoch and Sirach*, 186-8; Finney, *Resurrection*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Nickelsburg and VanderKam, 1 *Enoch*, 138.

darkness cast into darkness. And the sinners will cry out and see them shining; and they for their part will depart to where the days and times are written for them” (*I Enoch* 108:14-15).<sup>52</sup> Finally, the latest section of the Enochic Pentateuch, the *Book of Parables or Similitudes* (perhaps 1st century CE) speaks of the splendid eternal light of the righteous: “The righteous will be in the light of the sun, and the chosen, in the light of everlasting life. The days of their life will have no end, and the days of the holy will be innumerable” (*I Enoch* 58:3).<sup>53</sup>

## Second Maccabees

One of the clearest expressions of faith in the resurrection occurs in the story of the martyrdom of the mother and her seven sons in 2 Macc 7. The book was composed in Greek at the end of the second century BCE. The chapter focuses on the mother with her seven male children, all martyred for their Jewish faith while holding on to the hope of being recreated in the resurrection. This hope of personal resurrection forms an individual counterpart to the idea of national revival in Ez 37. Language of “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις) is prominent in the expressions of faith made by the sons. The declaration by the second son employs the verb “raise up” (ἀνίστημι), as well as a Septuagintal hapax, the noun ἀναβίωσις (“renewal of life” or “revivification”). He boldly addresses King Antiochus Epiphanes: “You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up (ἀναστήσει) to an everlasting renewal of life (ἀναβίωσιν), because we have died for his laws” (2 Macc 7:9).<sup>54</sup> With great clarity, the fifth son asserts: “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised (ἀναστήσεσθαι) again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection (ἀνάστασις) to life!” (2 Macc 7:14).<sup>55</sup> Without using the noun “resurrection” or the verb “raise”, the third and seventh sons express comparable ideas in different words. The third brother stretches out his hands to his persecutors, saying: “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again”

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> The language makes use of an archetypal orientational metaphor, in which “health and life are up; sickness and death are down”; cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd edition (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15. On 2 Macc 7 see John Granger Cook, *Empty Tomb, Apotheosis, Resurrection*, WUNT 1.410 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 470-2.

<sup>55</sup> The verb and noun also appear in 2 Macc 12:43-44, speaking of praying for the dead.

(2 Macc 7:11). Finally, the youngest son affirms: “Our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life (ἀεναίου ζωῆς), under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance” (2 Macc 7:36 NRSV).<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, the rare adjective ἀεναός, meaning “ever-flowing” or “eternal”, appears in the Septuagint version of Job 19:25 (NETS): “To be sure, I know that he who is about to undo me on earth is everlasting (ἀεναός)”.

The statements by the martyrs envisage the resurrection as a new creation. Expressing the mystery of God’s creative action, the mother’s profession of faith declares: “I do not know how you came into being in my womb” (2 Macc 7:22). This statement plays on the agnostic affirmation in Qoh 11:5: “Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything”. Jonathan Goldstein sees the mother as responding to Qoheleth’s scepticism: “[Human] ignorance should lead, not to doubt but to affirmation of God’s creative power!... God, who fashioned her sons there, knows how he did so, for he created the universe and also the process of human reproduction. Consequently, he can fashion them again and resurrect them”.<sup>57</sup> Creation language is also evident in the next statements made by the mother: “It was not I who gave you life and breath (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὴν ζωὴν), nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind (ὁ πλάσας ἀνθρώπου γένεσιν) and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὴν ζωὴν) back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws” (2 Macc 7:22-23). The mother’s statement employs language partly reminiscent of the second creation story. According to the Septuagint, Gen 2:7 narrates: “God formed man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life (ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς), and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7 NETS).<sup>58</sup>

The dialogue several times draws parallels between the creation of the cosmos and the begetting of the human person. Indeed, Robert Doran comments on the narrative: “The emphasis on God as creator of the world

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<sup>56</sup> Whereas NRSV here accepts an emendation (πεπτώκασιν = “they have drunk”), the Septuagint reads the verb πεπτώκασιν (“they have fallen [heir]” or “they have come” into God’s covenant), a reading accepted by Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 317.

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, AB 41A (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1983), 309.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2012), 159.

in this contest about life and death explains the extraordinary emphasis in this story on the resurrection of the complete human, body and soul”.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the mother declares to her youngest son: “I carried you for nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being.... Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers” (2 Macc 7:27-29).<sup>60</sup> Goldstein explains the logic of these words:<sup>61</sup>

Resurrection only seems to be impossible. Human beings, if they had not already seen the existence of the universe and human reproduction, would declare them, too, to be impossible, for they can fathom neither. Yet the universe came into being after previously not existing, and so does every member of the human race. A dead human being has indeed ceased to exist, but he existed previously. Surely it is more conceivable that existence can be restored to what previously existed than that existence should be conferred on what did not exist!

Thus we can see that Second Maccabees reapplies creation language to express the hope of new life in the resurrection, available for those martyred because of their faithfulness to God.

## The Book of Wisdom

As the final deuterocanonical text before the New Testament, we will consider the Book of Wisdom. This work was probably the latest book of the Septuagint to be written, perhaps in the first century BCE or possibly the beginning of the first century CE.<sup>62</sup> Its composition in Greek doubtless took place in Alexandria, where many of the large Jewish population had

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>60</sup> Some (but not all) scholars regard 2 Macc 7:28 as teaching the concept of creation *ex nihilo*; cf. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 307-15; Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 161 n. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>62</sup> See discussion of dating in David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, AB 43 (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1979), 22-3; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 178-9. For a date in the reign of Augustus (30 BCE-14 CE) see Luca Mazinghi, *Weisheit*, Internationaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum AT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), 31-3. Paul’s Letter to the Romans has striking parallels to the Book of Wisdom, according to David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 157-8.

adopted the Greek language and Hellenistic culture. One of the striking elements in the Book of Wisdom is its hope of an afterlife. The book's first section, dealing with eschatology, teaches that the gift of immortality may be gained by following wisdom's ways (Wis 1-6).<sup>63</sup> Even though the book is heavily influenced by Greek thought, this affirmation of an afterlife differs from much Greek thinking. The dramatist Aeschylus (d. 456 BCE) wrote: "When once a man has died, and the dust has sucked up his blood, there is no rising again (οὐτις ἔστ' ἀνάστασις)" (*Eum.* 647-48).<sup>64</sup> The philosopher Epicurus (d. 270 BCE) also doubted the possibility of an afterlife: "There is nothing fearful in living, for one who genuinely grasps that there is nothing fearful in not living" (*Letter to Menoeceus* 124).<sup>65</sup> Many Greek tombstones, both pagan and Jewish, had the resigned inscription: "Take courage, no one is immortal" (θάρσει, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος).<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Wis 2:1-3 presents the perspective of the unbeliever, who denies life after death:

Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been, for the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.

In spite of these widespread sentiments, the Book of Wisdom promises immortal life to the faithful Jews. The reference to immortality in chapter 3 of the Book of Wisdom follows immediately after the description of the persecution of the righteous person in chapter 2. However, it is unclear if the author of Wisdom is looking back to the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, or alternatively referring to something closer to his own times, such as the events around the time of Flaccus (38 CE), as David Winston claims.<sup>67</sup> Although the persecuted Jews suffered pains in this present life, "their hope is full of immortality (ἀθανασία)" (Wis 3:4). Rather than expecting merely a shadowy future existence in the underworld (Job 3:13-19), the author speaks of the hope of a glorious future life with

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<sup>63</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 182-3.

<sup>64</sup> Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus, vol. II: Oresteia: Agamemnon. Libation-Bearers. Eumenides*, LCL (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 437. Cf. David A. Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You a Mystery: Cross, Resurrection, and Paraenesis in the Rhetoric of 1 Corinthians* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 81.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 93.

<sup>66</sup> See van der Horst, *Epitaphs*, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Winston, *Wisdom*, 23-5.

God. Yet instead of making later distinctions between immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body, the author combines these ideas, albeit rather imprecisely.

Some scholars regard Wisdom as teaching immortality without resurrection.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, John Collins asserts: “At no point does [the Book of] Wisdom speak of resurrection of the body, or even of resurrection of the spirit, in such a way as to imply that life is interrupted at death. The righteous only seem to die (3:2), but are at peace”.<sup>69</sup> However, Maurice Gilbert thinks there is no need to choose between these two concepts, because both ideas occur in the Book of Wisdom.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, noting that “the concepts ‘resurrection’ and ‘immortality’ are not in themselves antithetical”, Tom Wright finds both immortality and resurrection ideas in the Book of Wisdom.<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere, however, the Book of Wisdom echoes Platonic thought, since it five times employs the term ἀθανασία, meaning “deathlessness” or “immortality” (Wis 3:4; 4:1; 8:13, 17; 15:3). One of the influences on the Book of Wisdom is Plato (d. 347 BCE), for whom only the soul is immortal (*Phaedo* 73a). Josephus also reflects Platonic ideas: “All of us, it is true, have mortal bodies, composed of perishable matter, but the soul lives forever, immortal (ἀθάνατος); it is a portion of the Deity housed in our bodies” (*B.J.* 3.8.5 §372).<sup>72</sup> Platonic philosophy conceived of immortality for the soul but not for the body. According to Plato (*Cratylus* 400b-c; cf. *Phaedo* 82c), the body is the tomb [or prison] of the soul (σῶμα σῆμα). A comparable notion occurs in Wis 9:15: “A perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind”. Immortality is a

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<sup>68</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 185. Cf. Michael Kolarcik, *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom 1-6*, AnBib 127 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), 187.

<sup>69</sup> John J. Collins, “The Mysteries of God: Creation and Eschatology in 4QInstruction and the Wisdom of Solomon”, in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Biblical Tradition*, BETL 168, ed. F. García Martínez (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 287-305, here 292.

<sup>70</sup> Gilbert, “Immortalité?”, 283-4. Similarly, Josephus presents the Pharisees’ belief in the resurrection using the vocabulary of immortality (*A.J.* 18.1.3 §14; *B.J.* 2.8.14 §163). On Josephus’ complex view, see Casey D. Elledge, *Life after Death in Early Judaism: The Evidence of Josephus*, WUNT 2.208 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Henry St John Thackeray, *Josephus: The Jewish War, Books 1-3*, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1927), 681. Cf. Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees: A Composition-Critical Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 158.

divine gift linked with righteousness in a kind of realized eschatology, since “righteousness is immortal” (Wis 1:15).<sup>73</sup>

While the book alludes to persecution of the Jews (Wis 2:12-20), scholars dispute which historical event the author had in mind. Although it would be possible to see a reference to the earlier persecution of the devout Jews in Palestine by Antiochus Epiphanes (167-164 BCE), Lothar Ruppert has proposed that the historical context is the persecution of the Pharisees by Alexander Jannaeus around 86 BCE.<sup>74</sup> However, David Winston points to the reign of Caligula (37-41 CE), when the Roman prefect Flaccus proclaimed that the Jews were aliens and foreigners in Alexandria.<sup>75</sup> Still others consider the reference to be general rather than specific.<sup>76</sup> Like the Second Book of Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom solves the puzzle of theodicy by teaching that the earthly sufferings of the devout martyrs are recompensed by a glorious afterlife. While acknowledging that earthly life can be unjust and cruel, it expresses faith that the God of justice will reward the righteous in the next life: “Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself. Like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt-offering he accepted them” (Wis 3:5-6).<sup>77</sup> Whereas the immediately preceding passage (Wis 2:12-20) describes the suffering inflicted on an innocent just person, condemned to a shameful death, the martyr is now rewarded for having suffered on earth.

While Wis 3:4 refers to the hope of immortality, 3:7 speaks of a future “visitation” leading to the new life of the righteous, as Tom Wright explains: “Verses 7-10 are describing a further event which follows upon the state described in verses 1-4”.<sup>78</sup> The passage envisages the glorified martyrs shining: “In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble” (Wis 3:7). Here the author seems to echo the prophet Malachi: “See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes

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<sup>73</sup> Alexander A. Di Lella, “Conservative and Progressive Theology: Sirach and Wisdom”, *CBQ* 28 (1966) 139-54, here 152. Like John’s Gospel (Jn 11:25), the Book of Wisdom has a sort of realized eschatology.

<sup>74</sup> Lothar Ruppert, *Der Leidende Gerechte*, FzB 5 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1972), 70-105.

<sup>75</sup> Winston, *Wisdom*, 22-3.

<sup>76</sup> The historical context of Wis 2:12-20 cannot be determined according to Maurice Gilbert, *La Sagesse de Salomon / The Wisdom of Solomon*, AnBib 189 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 76-7.

<sup>77</sup> The sacrificial language of Wis 3:6 may partially reflect the fourth song of the Suffering Servant (Is 53:10); cf. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 246.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 167.

shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings” (Mal 3:19-20 [NRSV 4:1-2]).<sup>79</sup> Unlike the wicked, who will be burned up like stubble, the righteous will shine out, as in Daniel’s vision of the afterlife: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

Although Wis 2:12-20 describes how the faithful Jews were condemned to death by Gentiles, the tables will be turned in the afterlife, where the author envisages the martyred Jews exercising authority over Gentile nations: “They will govern nations and rule over peoples (κρῖνοῦσιν ἔθνη καὶ κρατήσουσιν λαῶν), and the Lord will reign over them for ever” (Wis 3:8). The author may be recalling Daniel’s vision of the arrival of the Ancient of Days: “Judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom” (MT Dan 7:22 NRSV).<sup>80</sup> Here the Septuagint has the statement: “He gave the verdict for the holy ones of the Most High (τὴν κρίσιν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῦ ὑψίστου), and the time was given, and the holy ones gained possession of the seat of empire (τὸ βασίλειον κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι)” (LXX Dan 7:22 NETS). It would be possible to understand the Septuagint differently here: “He gave the [power of] judgment to the saints of the Most High (τὴν κρίσιν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῦ ὑψίστου)”. Such an understanding may underlie Wis 3:8. A comparable idea of reversal appears in the interpretation of Hab 1:12 in the Qumran pesher: “God is not to destroy his nation at the hand of the peoples, but in the hand of his chosen ones God will place the judgment over all the peoples” (1QpHab 5:3-4).<sup>81</sup>

While clearly the Book of Wisdom has the idea of immortality, a notion of post-mortem judgment is closer to the idea of resurrection than immortality. For those envisaging the Book of Wisdom’s eschatology as mere immortality without any resurrection hope, there may be a problem interpreting Wis 3:8, where the author envisages the martyred Jews judging the pagan nations: “They will govern nations and rule over peoples”. The context parallels the New Testament Apocalypse, where the visionary speaks of those martyred for the sake of the Lamb: “they will reign on

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<sup>79</sup> Gilbert, *La Sagesse de Salomon*, 390.

<sup>80</sup> Similarly Theodotion: “He gave the judgment for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived, and the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom” (Theod Dan 7:22, NETS).

<sup>81</sup> Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1997-1998) I, 15. Cf. Helmut Engel, *Das Buch der Weisheit*, NSKAT (Stuttgart: KBW, 1998), 83.

earth” (Rev 5:10). To be sure, the Bible knows of Jewish figures who ruled over Gentiles on earth, such as Joseph in Egypt (cf. LXX Prov 29:9). But Wis 3:8 is referring to the virtuous having rule over Gentiles beyond death. Whereas a vague concept of immortality might just be possible here, it is more likely that this statement (like perhaps Dan 7:22) presupposes some kind of belief in the resurrection, as in 1 Cor 6:2: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”<sup>82</sup>

The expectation of final judgment matches the developing theology of the resurrection: “Then the righteous will stand (στήσεται) with great confidence in the presence of those who have oppressed them” (Wis 5:1).<sup>83</sup> The Book of Wisdom here develops the thought of Dan 12:1-3, where the resurrection serves the judicial function of punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous, as Nickelsburg observes: “This [Danielic] resurrection is in the service of judgment”.<sup>84</sup> The injustice previously experienced by the faithful martyrs is overturned in the final judgment, when the faithful will receive an eternal reward but the wicked will experience punishment. Overall, the Book of Wisdom attempts to combine Greek notions of immortality and Jewish ideas of resurrection, but without totally harmonizing them.

## Conclusion

This survey has sought to trace the general lines of development concerning Jewish post-mortem belief during the centuries before the New Testament. Indeed, we have seen something of Israel’s faith journey through several centuries of its history. The traditional belief found in most of the Hebrew Bible was that the dead had a shadowy existence in Sheol, as Job 3 and Ps 88 attest. Following this tradition, several wisdom books (Job, Qoheleth, and Ben Sira) have no belief in any meaningful personal afterlife. To be sure, prophets like Ezekiel spoke of a collective revival of the suffering nation using the language of resurrection or re-creation.

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<sup>82</sup> Paul M. Hoskins, “The Use of Biblical and Extrabiblical Parallels in the Interpretation of First Corinthians 6:2–3”, *CBQ* 63 (2001) 287–97, here 288. Similarly, Rev 20:4 declares: “Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge”. However, while the Greek of Sir 4:15 says of wisdom, “those who obey her will judge the nations”, the Hebrew text probably means at 6:00; “one who listens to me will judge truly (נִמְצָא)”, as in a Qumran text (4Q381.76.12). Cf. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom*, 172.

<sup>83</sup> Wright, *Resurrection*, 171.

<sup>84</sup> Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 37; Collins, *Daniel*, 390.

It seems that the persecution of devout Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes led to the growing belief in individual resurrection, especially for martyrs. Such a resurrection belief is evident in Dan 12 and 2 Macc 7, as well as Wis 3, before it becomes predominant in the New Testament. A Christian rereading of Job 19:25 may find a fuller sense (including the resurrection) in Job's declaration that the Redeemer lives, but belief in the afterlife is hardly present in the original meaning of that text.

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