

Death and Resurrection in the Old Testament

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If Morton Kelsey is right, many theologians today[1] are like the writers who gave us the Old Testament: They have little interest in and have less to say about hopes for an afterlife. We may wish it were not the case, but we will have to accept what appear to have been the views of the majority in ancient Israel. Death is a lively concern of many writers now, but it may not be too late to remedy the dearth of interest in resurrection.

This is not the place to write a history of Old Testament traditions regarding death and resurrection.[2] Instead, it will suffice to indicate something of the diversity of views preserved there and to propose that some of them appear to be early while others are late. It should not surprise us that a composite volume containing materials from so long a period of Israel's history should speak with many voices rather than one. This diversity also results from the fact that kings and commoners, priests and prophets, poets and historians all speak to us via this literature. Fortunately, we are living in a day when scholars look for and appreciate the theologies rather than insist upon finding a single theology of the Bible. So we need not propose or try to defend a unified Old Testament perspective on death and resurrection. Yet the differences between writers within the Old Testament are generally not as great

[1]Morton T. Kelsey, *Afterlife: The Other Side of Dying* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 2.

[2]Several studies cover the whole or parts of the subject. Both Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960) and Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen - Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) do very well. Matthias Krieg, *Todesbilder im Alten Testament* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1988) provides a comprehensive picture of the many ways death is understood in the Old Testament and a brief history of the traditions on pages 588-611. Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 25, considers attempts to show an evolution from lower to higher views neither helpful nor accurate. Othmar Schilling, *Der Jenseitsgedanke im Alten Testament* (Mainz: Rheingold Verlag, 1951), shows the development of views of the afterlife and the forces which contributed to it. Edmund Sutcliffe, S.J., *The Old Testament and the Future Life* (Westminster: Newman Bookshop, 1947) 20, considers the development of Israel's doctrine to have been slow and belonging mostly to the end of the Old Testament period.

as the contrasts of the Old Testament with the New. Belief in resurrection from the dead had become central and virtually unanimous for the first Christians,[3] and the majority of Jews by that time held to it as well. Something significant must have happened in the intertestamental period which brought about this major change in the way death was viewed.

I. REPORTS OF DEATHS

We begin with a cursory look at the way deaths are reported in the Old Testament. If we did not skip them or fall asleep while reading the genealogies in the Genesis prehistory (Chap. 1-11), we perhaps remember that, not only did the antediluvians live an inordinately long time, they all with but one exception also eventually died. Their deaths are reported in a quite matter-of-fact fashion: "All the days of _X_ were _Y_ years; and he died."[4]

Such reporting continues, appearing in various places such as in Kings and Chronicles, where the much shorter lives of the monarchs ended likewise in death. "And _X_ rested with his ancestors and was buried." The numbers who fell in battle are likewise summarily reported in statements like: "And David killed of the Arameans seven hundred chariot teams, and forty thousand horsemen" (2 Sam 10:18). Occasionally, deaths are said to be the outcome of divine judgment: "That very night the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35).

For various reasons, certain deaths are regarded as tragic and are recorded as such. For example, after Naboth's death Elijah confronted Ahab with a word from the LORD, "Have you not murdered a man and also seized his property?" (1 Kings 21:19). In another case David wept over his son: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you..." (2 Sam 18:33).

It is clear the ways of reporting deaths in the Old Testament are varied. Some reports are mere notations; a few are connected with moral judgments regarding the deceased; others may take the form of a dirge or mourning song, as in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1:17-27. Rarely, deaths may even be reported in a jubilant mood, as are those of Pharaoh's troops in Moses' and Miriam's Songs by the Sea (Exod 15:1-18, 21). The common assumption is that all people who live will also die. So it must have been as surprising to the reporters as it is to us to note that two people did not die, but instead were taken directly from this world to heaven by God (Enoch, Gen 5:24) or by a chariot of fire (Elijah, 2 Kings 2:11).

II. THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DEAD

There is much about the dead in the Old Testament,[5] some of it quite alien to our present way of thinking. With no knowledge of the heart's real function and no way to monitor brain waves, how did they know when someone was dead?[6] Quite

[3]In 1 Cor 15:12 Paul argues with some in the church who contend that there is no resurrection. We will not speculate as to how many they were or what their problem with resurrection may have been.

[4]All Biblical citations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).

[5]As the more than six hundred pages of Krieg, *Todesbilder*, testifies.

[6]Gilgamesh in the famous epic refuses to accept the death of his friend, Enkidu, even though worms have begun to invade the corpse. "Six days and seven nights I wept over him, until the worms fell out of his nose." James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1955) 91-92.

simply they knew that a person was dead if there was no breath. Though its purpose was mysterious to them, blood was also known to be necessary to life. Persons who had lost their blood supply were dead. "The life is in the blood" was one way priests spoke of this importance of blood for life (Lev 17:11,14). Since God alone had created life, breath and blood were both considered sacred. One wisdom writer said that at death the *ruah* (spirit, breath, wind) "returns to

God who gave it" (Eccles 12:7). Blood belonged to God alone and thus shed human blood demanded vengeance (Gen 9:6; Lev 17:4; Deut 19:11-13). Innocent blood could be said to cry out from the ground into which it had flowed (Gen 4:10). Even animal blood was not to be consumed (Lev 3:17; 7:26f.; 17:10, 12). Sacrificial blood was carefully collected and then used for making atonement, for finalizing the covenant, or at the very least for pouring around the base of an altar. Anything less was a serious offense against God. The life which is in the breath and blood is God's gift; accordingly, it is God alone who determines when a person shall live or die (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6). Murder and suicide are both serious breaches of this divine prerogative over life and death. Murder was thus a capital offense (Exod 20:13; 21:12) and suicide was extremely rare (1 Sam 31:4; 2 Sam 17:23).

In our Western culture, little is now done by the family to prepare the corpse for burial. Then, all burial preparations were a family responsibility. It was considered horrible to be left unburied (Deut 21:22-23; Jer 22:19) and possibly be consumed by wild animals (Jer 7:33; 16:4; 19:7). Each family needed its own burial cave or plot in which to place their dead (Gen 23). After the flesh had decomposed, the bones of the more recent dead were placed in a pit chamber with those of earlier generations. Thus it was more than simply a figure of speech to say that X was now sleeping with the ancestors or had been gathered to them (Gen 35:29; 1 Kings 2:10).

Forthrightness in the way the Old Testament speaks about the dead was coupled with a hands-on approach to mortuary procedures, since apparently there were no professional morticians then. The family carefully prepared and buried their own dead and there was no mystery as to where the body was or what was happening to it. People may have been unaware of the high percentage of the body which is water, but they were well aware that dust or earth was its substance (Gen 3:19). With no preservatives to hinder it, that returning to dust was a relatively swift process aided by worms (Job 17:14; 21:26; 24:20).

Since each family had to prepare its own dead and bury them, it is unlikely that sheer revulsion of the dead would have kept them from touching a corpse. But doing so rendered a person unclean (Num 5:2; 19:11-16). This consideration may have been Israel's response to the widespread cult of the dead which was off limits to them for religious reasons (Deut 18:11).[7] Customs such as disfiguring oneself to prevent recognition by the dead were also forbidden (Lev 21:5; Deut 14:1). Yet some of the accepted mourning rites such as tearing one's clothing, donning sackcloth, and covering one's head with dust may have originated in this same later forbidden cult of the dead (Gen 37:34; Lev 10:6; Deut 14:1). The breaking of dishes in a home where death had occurred must likewise have originally presupposed the powerful, dangerous presence of the dead after death (Num 19:15). How long such customs

[7]Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 215.

persisted may be inferred from the fact that even late legislation is so explicit in outlawing them (Lev 19:27f; 21:5; Deut 14:1).

This same strong rejection of ancestor worship in Yahwism may account for the few beliefs not shared with neighbors concerning the nether world. In general, Israel's views differed little from theirs. Although the dead were known to be in the tomb, they were also thought to be in an underworld as the Mesopotamians believed. This place is known by various names such as the pit, the depths, destruction, Abaddon or Sheol, the latter two being proper names. There the

dead are not bones and dust but a shadow of their former selves. So, though they are weak and miserable, the dead still have some existence. The myths of Ishtar's or Inanna's descent into the nether world give us details of this place.[8] It is a place of gloom and darkness. Its inhabitants are sleepy. There is an entrance, but no exit. The fare of this place is dirty water and mud.

Where Israel disagrees regards the neighbors' beliefs that the world of the dead is ruled by deities. Accordingly, the fertility god died and went down to the nether world each year as the dry season began in the world above. Instead of this, some early Yahwists seem to have believed that God had no relationship with Sheol at all (Pss 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; Isa 38:18). Only once, in the case of Samuel (1 Sam 28), is someone conjured up by a witch to be consulted. If God is absent from Sheol, then the dead have no relationship with God anymore, and this dismal prospect is not lost on the Psalmist, who fears he is not long for this world. Paraphrased, his lament might well be worded, "You'll miss my praises when I am gone" (Ps 30:9). Such meaningless partial existence is to be distinguished from a later, far more negative concept of Hades as a place of torment for the wicked.

More positive are some voices who contend that even in Sheol one is in Yahweh's domain (Ps 139:8; Job 26:6). But this view was probably not widely shared, for there seems to be no hope or future for the dead in most of the Old Testament. After some generations, all that will be recalled on earth regarding a particular person will be the name appearing in some descendant's genealogy. Do the shadowy figures themselves eventually disappear? No one has preserved for us ancient Israel's answer to this question. We know only that these denizens of the deep were roused occasionally by the arrival of new weak ones (*rephaim*) like themselves (Isa 14:9,10).

Meanwhile there are on earth some whom we may call the as-good-as-dead. They are the sick, women in childbirth, warriors in battle, the exhausted from labor, and the hopeless. These, unless God delivers, heals, preserves, or renews them, will also join the dead. Often these are the ones who address God in the lament Psalms, pleading for rescue. Once delivered, they are the ones who sing God their thanksgiving Psalms. Yet created from dust all humans are mortal and will one day die, if not sooner, then in old age. There is no sense of tragedy or divine punishment as long as one dies at a ripe old age. But knowing what we know about longevity in the ancient world, there must have been many lamenters; very few reached the age of sixty or seventy.

[8]"Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" and "Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World," in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 52-57 and 106-109 respectively.

III. THINKING ABOUT DEATH

The noun "death" and the verb "to die" are frequent words in the Old Testament.[9] Most often the references are to the biological death of individuals or of groups. Although Walter Brueggemann refers to two other kinds of usages which he calls mythological and symbolical,[10] there has been considerable agreement in recent years that biological death is total death.[11] No one now speaks for the view that an attenuated version of the person continues to exist in the nether world after biological death, though some still hold that an immortal soul survives the dissolution of the body.[12] This latter view was probably held by the majority of Christians and persists now as well even after the advent of a differing present world view. Yet today most scholars seem to advocate a "When you are dead, you are dead" position. Accordingly, the

Hebrew word once translated as "soul" (*nephesh*) is now generally rendered "self" or "being," because of the view that no immortal soul is joined to a mortal body to comprise a human being. The person is a unity. When death comes, it destroys the total person. Nothing remains alive. The person has ceased to exist. This view claims to represent the Old Testament which is said to view the person as a unity rather than a duality of body and soul.[13] This unity may, however, be seen from a number of aspects such as flesh or spirit. What is to be said to this? Basically this: The Old Testament does not view death as annihilation or the total cessation of existence.[14] Survival in Sheol, however, should not be equated with the immortality of the soul.

What attitudes did Old Testament people have toward death? For the most part, they seemed to be resigned to it as inevitable and normal, provided the person facing it was old, with family grown and an inheritance to pass on to heirs, was held in honor by the community, and had a grave at hand for burial. What we might call a good death[15] was one where the above criteria were met and the end came quietly in the presence of the family. Even one description of the ideal future era expects its blessed people to die at one hundred years of age (Isa 65:20).[16] A bad death was resisted or lamented (Ps 55:4-8; 1 Sam 1:17-27). On the other hand, one whose life had become meaningless or very painful might actually long for death as an escape (Job 3; Jer 20:14-18).

Why do people die? Is it because they are simply made of non-durable materials and with parts which wear out? Is it similar to modern industry's planned obsolescence? To say, as certain passages do, that humans are dust does suggest

[9]J. Barton Payne lists the verb as occurring between five hundred and five thousand times, while the noun occurs one hundred to two hundred times (*Hebrew Vocabularies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956]).

[10]See "Death, Theology of," *Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible*, Supplement (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 219-222.

[11]See the discussion by Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

[12]See, for example, Harry A. Wolfson, "Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers" and Werner Jaeger, "The Greek Ideas of Immortality" in Stendahl, *Immortality and Resurrection*.

[13]Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (Copenhagen: Povl Branner, 1926) 179. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 111.

[14]See Eichrodt, *Theology*, 210-215, for a balanced view of the way life in the underworld was understood.

[15]For this good death/bad death dichotomy, see Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives*, 48-52.

[16]Even the Messiah is expected to die according to 4 Ezra 7:29-31.

that mortality was planned by God from the beginning (Gen 18:27; Job 4:19; 10:9; Ps 90:3; 103:14; Eccles 3:20; 12:7). Even the Yahwist's story of the first couple in the garden uses this imagery (Gen 3:19). The account of the tree of life in the garden appears to imply that continuing life would have been possible (Gen 2:9; 3:22-24). Expulsion from the garden cut off access to the tree and death was the consequence. But the expulsion was not a capricious act on God's part. It came about as a result of disobedience: eating from yet another tree whose fruit was off limits. The story is thus complicated by the interweaving of the motifs of these two trees. The tree of knowledge is so tempting that its forbidden fruit leads to disobedience, expulsion, and ultimately death. The tree of life, on the other hand, presupposes that humans were created mortal and needed to eat of its fruit to keep them alive. The rest of the Old Testament is silent regarding this story, yet both of its motifs foster a common presupposition: Death is the normal end of all

mortal creatures. In other contexts, however, humans die because they are sinners. The prophets and the wisdom writers call upon people to avoid an early death by living morally and turning from evil. Meanwhile, no one promises immortality for living a good life.

We turn now to what Brueggemann calls the mythological portrayals of death, in which death is quite often described or addressed as if it were a power with its own independent existence (Pss 49:14; 55:15; 116:3; Job 28:22; Hos 13:14). Such an attitude is not surprising, considering the Ancient Near Eastern views in which Israel was immersed.[17] If nothing else, idioms learned or brought along from earlier contexts would sound as if death were such a power or person. In all of Israel's surroundings the nether world was believed to be ruled by gods and goddesses, whose provinces included war and pestilence as well as death. In the Ras Shamra Texts, Mot (the same word as "death" in Hebrew) is the god of the underworld. Thus it is no wonder that death and Sheol are sometimes alluded to in the Bible as if they were persons with gaping mouths and clutching arms, grasping for victims who are still alive in this world (Deut 32:24; Ps 18:4, 5; Prov 1:12; Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5). Such a personified force was in keeping with Israel's view that death invaded life not only when a person actually died, but also when life was weakened or threatened.[18] Illness was a kind of near-death or brush-with-death experience.

Nevertheless, those who gave us the Old Testament are careful not to legitimize the polytheism of Israel's neighbors. Israel knows Yahweh to be the sole source of life and Lord of death. Thus death, war, Sheol, hunger, and pestilence are not gods, however much they are a threat to life and may be spoken of in a personified way. In similar fashion the role of demons is severely restricted in orthodox Yahwism. Sometimes pestilence is said to be sent by God as if it were an evil spirit (Exod 9:15; Lev 26:25; Deut 28:21; 2 Sam 24:15), but death cannot act independently or autonomously. Human agency may also be the cause of deaths which God did not intend. Thus the more either human or divine causation are named, the less accidents and diseases are apt to be blamed for death.

Because it is so important to Christian theology, we need to take a special look at vicarious death. Though death is viewed as inevitable and normal, few voices in

[17]For a good discussion of the subject in its Canaanite context, see Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 129-30, 137-8 and also Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*.

[18]Wolff, *Anthropology*, 110-117.

the Old Testament are heard expressing a willingness to die right now. Exceptions include those whose lives have become unbearable, or certain others who risk their lives through bravery or recklessness. Quite different is the servant portrayed by Second Isaiah in the so-called Servant Songs, especially in the fourth (Isa 52:13-53:12). This servant of Yahweh willingly gives his life as a sin offering on behalf of others. Who the servant was supposed to be has been the subject of much scholarly debate.[19] It seems unlikely that the servant is simply Israel since the servant has a mission to Israel (Isa 49:5-6; 53:3-6, 8). At most he may be a group within Israel, but most likely he is some idealized individual. What is most surprising, in light of the Old Testament's relative silence regarding survival of death, is the way the servant's death is not the last word about him. His life and career continue, for "He will see his offspring and prolong his days" (Isa 53:10).

IV. SURVIVING DEATH

A major reason Old Testament people accepted death so quietly was probably their emphasis on the community rather than on the individual. In keeping with this, parents were comforted to be survived by their children who carried on their names. Even a man who died childless did not lack an heir if his brother married the widow and begot a son, who then took his name as a son of the deceased. According to the Levirate marriage custom, it was actually the duty of the nearest of kin to marry the wife of the deceased (Ruth 3:2, 9, 12, 13; 4:1-12). In this way the family, if not literally the offspring, of the dead lived on.

It was also of some comfort that God continued to remember those who had died (Exod 2:24; 28:12; Lev 26:42; Ps 105:8, 9; 132; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:60). We note that it is the whole people and not just individuals who are involved, since the people of God survive the death of any one person. If something should happen which might threaten the nation's existence, then God took action to keep it alive. God proposed a fresh start from Moses when it seemed necessary to destroy Israel (Exod 32:10). Of course, Moses' successful intercession made that unnecessary. Ezekiel regarded the disastrous war with Babylon and exile as a national death. His associated vision of the revival of the dry bones was thus not an early promise of a general resurrection of humans from the dead, but a vision of God's revival of the nation from utter powerlessness and despair to full potential as a living people again (Ezek 37).[20]

V. ESCAPING DEATH

Since two persons, Enoch and Elijah, were reported to have been translated directly into the heavenly world, the idea of escaping death altogether was at least known. Further, the reason why one of them was blessed in this way was also known: "Enoch walked with God" (Gen 5:22). His had been such an intimate relationship that God chose to continue it. In the heavenly world where the living

[19]See Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah* (London: Oxford, 1964); H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 3-60; and Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

[20]See Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1970); John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, Century, New Series (London: Nelson, 1969); and Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

God dwells, there is no death. Of this people were reminded each time they took an oath: "As Yahweh lives." Though they fully expected to die, more than once they were also urged to "choose life rather than death" (Deut 30:19; Prov 3:2, 18, 22; 4:10, 13, 22; 8:35). Those who had witnessed so many horrible deaths of fellow citizens in war were assured by Ezekiel: "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone," so "Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek 18:31-32; 33:11). Finally, at a rather late period the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse promises that God "will swallow up death forever" (Isa 25:8).

Of all the gifts enjoyed in life, the relationship with God was found to be the best of all and the most difficult to surrender at death. So it may be that some of the psalmists who plead for an escape from Sheol are in reality asking for more than a temporary reprieve from death. Job wistfully wondered whether he might not hide out a while in Sheol so that he might return again to the world to witness his vindication (Job 14:13). Certain of the psalmists' faith and hope

apparently were so strong that they actually expected God not to let them die (Pss 16:10; 49:15; 73:23-28). Martin-Achard is convinced that such intense faith is the route which finally led to belief in personal survival.[21] In fellowship with the living God death has already been overcome. Eventually, of course, such people also died, but they died confident that death would not sever their relationship with God.

VI. RESURRECTION

There are a few cases where people who had died were resuscitated in Old Testament times (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4). Since God created all living things, it was not considered impossible that God could resuscitate someone who had recently died. Was it the case that these persons had not yet gone down to Sheol? The corpse had not yet decomposed and those who knew the deceased welcomed back the same person they had just lost to death. These special gracious acts showed that Yahweh was God and verified the authority of the prophets involved.

To be sure, those who returned from death later died a second time. Yet these resuscitations may well have been a model for views in the late Old Testament period, which finally affirmed promises of resurrections for the future. By New Testament times the hope of a general resurrection of all the dead seems to have become the dominant view in Judaism. Some think that this came about through Iranian influence.[22] Zoroastrians apparently believed in such a general resurrection even before Israel did, but sure evidence of such influence is lacking. It seems unlikely considering the centuries-long struggle of Yahwism against the dying-rising gods Baal, Osiris, and Tammuz. Worship of Baal was especially tempting, but Yahweh was a jealous God. Second Isaiah's sarcastic portrayal of the gods of Babylon (Isa 40:18-20; 41:21-29; 44:6-19; 46) well expresses this continuing polemic. It is difficult to imagine how such a firm rejection of Mesopotamian religion could have opened the door to influence from the state religion of Iran.

It is rather better to assume that belief in the resurrection probably came to be seen as a promised solution to a faith crisis within Israel. Which crisis? Very likely

[21]Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 147-181.

[22]A good example of this view is Harris Birkeland, "The Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead in the Old Testament," *Studia Theologica* 3 (1949) 60-78. See also Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 186-205.

the one caused by Antiochus IV when he forced Jews to worship Zeus.[23] Those who refused were martyred, calling faithfulness to God into question. If this world were all there is, then why not compromise and stay alive? Daniel as a whole is a call to faithfulness. At its end (Dan 12:2), those who give their lives as faithful martyrs are promised resurrection from the dead. On the other hand, apostates are told of their post-death, grim reward. But this is not yet hope of a general resurrection.

Nor does Job have such a confidence, though we all regularly sing his words with that in mind: "I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25). If Job had indeed come to such a conclusion, it is hard to understand his continuing depression and his ongoing argument with his friends. Further, we note that he had earlier on (14:7-12,14) seriously entertained the possibility of living again, but was forced to abandon it. The epilogue with its happy ending (42:7-17) also speaks against Job's having come to a resurrection hope in 19:25-27. For it seems rather that he now speaks as a desperate man, entertaining a fleeting hope that somewhere in the heavenly

world a *goel* ("redeemer") figure can be found to espouse his cause and bring about his vindication.[24] But this vision passed without resolving Job's problem. His relief came only when God appeared and assured him that a wise creator still runs the universe.

The Isaiah Apocalypse (Isa 24-27) also promises resurrection from the dead. Just what faith crisis is addressed there is not known. Since the discovery of the Qumran Isaiah Scrolls, it is no longer possible for us to date any part of Isaiah as late as the Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. It is quite unlikely that chapters 24-27 are eighth century or even as early as the exile. Apocalyptic ideas found there suggest a late post-exile date, yet at least a century before Daniel. The thoughts expressed in 25:8 and 26:19 are most unexpected and surprising, and their contexts do not help us much in their interpretation.[25] Yet they are the clearest, least ambiguous witnesses in the Old Testament to the promise of a general resurrection from the dead. "God will swallow up death forever.... Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy."

We who grew up with a resurrection hope firmly in place may have supposed there were many such passages in the Old Testament. But it is not so. Why, we do not know for sure. If God had such plans for us from eternity, why wait until a few centuries before Christ to reveal them? How could people live the joyful, meaningful lives which the Old Testament discloses without such a hope until near its end? Could I? Could you?

[23]Good commentaries on Daniel include the following: Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1978); Raymond Hammer, *The Book of Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976); and Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).

[24]An excellent comprehensive commentary which espouses this view is Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985). See also J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).

[25]A couple of good commentaries are: Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39* (London: SCM, 1974) and R. B. Y. Scott, "The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39," *Interpreters Bible*, Vol. 5 (New York: Abingdon, 1956).