

## THE GENESIS OF RESURRECTION HOPE: EXPLORING ITS EARLY PRESENCE AND DEEP ROOTS

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This article will explore passages in Genesis that are roots to the tree of resurrection hope. In our investigation we will not find explicit statements such as Isa 26:19 (“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise”) or Dan 12:2 (“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake”), but those expressions are not sudden intrusions into a biblical vacuum. Wright is right to call belief in resurrection a “re-expression of the ancient Israelite worldview,” a hope “sown in the same soil as the beliefs of the Patriarchs; seed and soil, indeed, are important clues to the continuity, as well as the discontinuity, between (for instance) Genesis and Daniel.”<sup>1</sup>

By looking at certain passages in Genesis, we will be putting our ear to the ground to hear the faint but discernible rumblings of what will arrive later and louder in the words of the prophets. Even though some scholars insist that “there can be no suggestion that belief in resurrection was implicit in the Old Testament before Daniel,”<sup>2</sup> I will contend otherwise. The roots of resurrection hope go deep, and the seeds were sown early. First, I will show NT validation for looking in the Torah for a belief in resurrection, and then I will examine ten passages from Genesis.

### II. NEW TESTAMENT VALIDATION OF RESURRECTION HOPE IN THE TORAH

1. *The words of Paul in Acts 24.* When Paul once again found himself in a public forum listening to accusers hurl their charges, he labeled the allegations untrue and unprovable (Acts 24:11–13). But he did have something else to confess: “I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (24:14–15).<sup>3</sup> The participial

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<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 3; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 87.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Collins, *Encounters with Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 32. See also C. D. Elledge, “Resurrection of the Dead: Exploring Our Earliest Evidence Today,” in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: T&T Clark, 2006) 26; Lloyd Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 73.

<sup>3</sup> The translations in this article are from the ESV.

phrase “having a hope” was the result of “believing everything laid down,” which means his belief in the OT led to and stirred his hope. His belief was resurrection-focused (“that there will be a resurrection”) and involved everyone (“both the just and the unjust”).

But what was the source of Paul’s hope for resurrection? It came from believing what is written in the Law and Prophets (Acts 24:14). Most scholars find semblances of resurrection hope in the Prophets,<sup>4</sup> but that is not the only or even the first place Paul names. He refers to the *Law*. This notion is not uniquely his; such a hope “these men themselves accept” (Acts 24:15a), a reference to the Jews accusing him before Felix (Acts 24:1, 9), for they affirmed the authority and validity of Torah.

2. *The words of Jesus in Matthew 22*. Thirty years earlier a group of Sadducees—who did not believe in a future bodily resurrection (cf. Matt 22:23; Acts 23:8)—questioned Jesus about that topic in order to trap him (Matt 22:23–28). They articulated a scenario to show that belief in resurrection is problematic: if a man dies without having children, and then none of his seven brothers—each of whom marries the widow (according to the practice of levirate marriage in Deut 25:5–10)—were able to leave their first dead brother any children, whose wife would she be at the resurrection? (Matt 22:24–28). Jesus said their question did not apply to the future, for there was no marriage in heaven (Matt 22:30).

After Jesus exposes the Sadducees’ misunderstanding, he exposes their ignorance: “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:31–32, quoting Exod 3:6).<sup>5</sup> The opening words indicate the subject Jesus is going to prove. The significance of his citation was *where* in the Scripture it originated. Jesus showed the hope of resurrection *from their Scriptures* (*sola* Torah).<sup>6</sup> Commentators typically explain the connection between Exod 3:6 and a future resurrection by pointing out that the

<sup>4</sup> See Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* 118–19; Edwin Yamauchi, “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East,” in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the NT* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 46; George Eldon Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 48; Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the OT* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002) 225; idem, “Death and Resurrection,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 446; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 26; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) 18–19, 41.

<sup>5</sup> Hays explains, “Presumably, in fact, their rejection of the resurrection rests precisely on appeals to the authority of Scripture: no such belief was taught by Moses, so it should not be accepted. By challenging them at this point, Jesus creates the expectation that he will produce scriptural evidence to discredit their skepticism” (Richard B. Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture* [ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 226).

<sup>6</sup> As Wright points out, the rabbis insisted on the presence of resurrection hope in the Torah, and the main Talmudic discussion in *Sanh.* 90–92 offers many examples (Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 197). According to the Mishnah, nothing less than eternal inheritance is on the line: “And these are the ones who do not have a share in the World-to-Come: He who says that the resurrection of the dead is not in the Torah, [he who says] that the Torah is not from Heaven, and the skeptic” (*m. Sanh.* 10:1).

verb is *am* and not *was*: “I *am* the God ...”<sup>7</sup> This means, apparently, that the patriarchs are currently alive and, by implication, will see bodily life once more.<sup>8</sup> To argue that the patriarchs are currently alive is to affirm an afterlife (a disembodied immortality), but how would this affirmation imply a future bodily resurrection? The typical interpretation of Jesus’ words is unsatisfying. Pointing to disembodied immortality would not be an effective argument for the Sadducees.

The key to interpreting Jesus’ words is probably elsewhere. At the beginning of the hypothetical scenario, the Sadducees posited a man who died with no seed and whose brothers married the widow to raise up offspring (ἀναστήσει σπέρμα) but failed (Matt 22:24–25).<sup>9</sup> The Sadducees thought this story showed that resurrection was ludicrous, but Jesus told them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt 22:29). He proceeded to recount a statement to demonstrate both “the Scriptures” they should know and “the power of God” that should be evident. His statement mentions the patriarchs who each had their own struggles raising up seed. Jesus’ citation of Exod 3:6 is a direct response to the kind of scenario the Sadducees described, which was about the failure to raise up descendants.

The stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were stories of God preserving the Abrahamic line. Hays writes, “God’s faithfulness in securing the future of his chosen people is the sure basis on which the descendants of the patriarchs can continue to hope for the future.”<sup>10</sup> When Jesus quoted Exod 3:6, it became clear that in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God had been displaying his “power” and raising life from the dead.<sup>11</sup> Jesus’ appeal to Exodus “makes more explicit what is already there for those who have eyes to see.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Morris, as a representative of the typical interpretation, says, “The threefold repetition is most impressive, and presumably the Sadducees, like many others, had been so attracted by the majesty of the words and what they told them of the experiences of the patriarchs that they had never stopped to think of the implications of the saying. So Jesus points out that the present tense is important” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] 561).

<sup>8</sup> Hagner comments, “If God is the God of the patriarchs, they are by implication alive after their death ... and thus the ground is prepared for the reality of the future resurrection” (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* [WBC 33B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995] 642). But Jesus effectively rebukes the Sadducees in Matthew 22 not by bringing up a passage that only lays the *groundwork* for the reality of resurrection but by calling to mind a text that, to him, *actually suggests* resurrection hope.

<sup>9</sup> J. Gerald Janzen, “Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3.6 in Mark 12.26,” *JSNNT* 23 (1985) 46–48. “What is unambiguous is the fact that the Sadducees play on two meanings of the verb ‘raise up’ and its noun cognate ‘raising up/resurrection’” (p. 47).

<sup>10</sup> Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection” 227. Eugene Boring is moving in the right direction when he says of the Markan parallel, “In any case, there is no verb in the Hebrew text of Exodus or the Markan citation. ... [The point] is not grammar but the faithfulness and power of God, who had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who would not allow even death to annul it” (M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* [NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006] 340). Keener is right: “If God was still God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and if his power was unlimited, then he would ultimately fulfill his promise to them—not only corporately through their descendants, but personally to them” (Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* [IVPNTC 1; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997] 328).

<sup>11</sup> See Janzen, “Resurrection and Hermeneutics” 55.

<sup>12</sup> Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection” 228.

Our highly individualistic culture may easily separate people from their immediate social context, but the Hebrew culture made no such fine distinction.<sup>13</sup> A person's identity continued on in the survival and propagation of progeny. Levenson is right to note that this was the logic undergirding the practice of levirate marriage,<sup>14</sup> which, interestingly enough, was the very practice employed in the illustration the Sadducees gave to Jesus (cf. Matt 22:24; Deut 25:5). The experience of barrenness (Gen 11:30; 16:2; 18:11–13) or the loss of children (e.g. Gen 37:33–35; 48:11; Jer 31:15) were devastating obstacles for a couple to face.<sup>15</sup> Life was bound up partly in social identity, meaning that the end of a family line was the functional equivalent of death (cf. Gen 15:1–3; 30:1).<sup>16</sup>

Reversing the death of the family line can stir hope for reversing the death of those who are in that line. The arc of life propelled by God through the Abrahamic line encountered more than once the threat of sterility that put divine promises in jeopardy. Each time, Yahweh, the covenant-making and promise-keeping God, raised the family line from the dead.<sup>17</sup> The line then advanced until the next case of barrenness arose, causing a functional death. Again God would overcome this obstacle, causing a functional resurrection, corporately speaking, but with individual implications because of how the Hebrews conceived of personal identity.<sup>18</sup>

3. *Three lessons to learn from Paul and Jesus.* The words from Paul in Acts 24 and from Jesus in Matthew 22 teach at least three lessons. First, resurrection hope appears in the Torah. Second, the logic of Jesus' use of Exod 3:6 suggests that resurrection hope can be present even if explicit expressions are absent. As long as in-

<sup>13</sup> See Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006) 109.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 120. He later says, "By a kind of legal fiction, his family brings something of their dead kinsman back to life, birth again reversing death. Levirate marriage is a mode of redemption of the dead" (p. 121).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 109–10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 113. As Levenson later says, "In other words, given the construction of personal identity in the Hebrew Bible, infertility and the loss of children serve as the functional equivalent of death. Striking at each generation of the patriarchs of Genesis, and then at Judah in the next, childlessness in one or both of these modes threatens to terminate the family, thus evoking the terror that later generations (including our own) feel in the face of their personal deaths" (pp. 119–20).

<sup>17</sup> Corporate resurrection will be seen most clearly later in Israel's history when they are exiled from the Promised Land and return by Persian permission. Their exile and restoration is a national death and resurrection, and individual hopes are wrapped up in what happens on a larger scale (e.g. Ezekiel 37; Hosea 6). The corporate family unit serves as something that can undergo a death and resurrection, in which individual hopes are also intricately and inseparably interwoven. Jordan says it this way: "death and resurrection can be and often is a wider concept, applying to nations and to individuals in ways that are analogous to actual physical death and resurrection" (James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2007] 80).

<sup>18</sup> As Dempster puts it, "the overcoming of sterility in new life with the birth of children . . . [is] the renewal of life—resurrection!" (Stephen G. Dempster, "The Resurrection of Christ on 'The Third Day' According to the Scriptures" [paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Milwaukee, WI, November 14, 2012] 6). For a more in-depth treatment of functional death and resurrection as well as the development of resurrection in the OT, see Mitchell L. Chase, "Resurrection Hope in Daniel 12:2: An Exercise in Biblical Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

terpreters insist on affirming resurrection only if certain words are present, Jesus' argument to the Sadducees will seem nonsensical. Third, the concepts of death and resurrection are more dynamic than is sometimes recognized. "To know the Scriptures and the power of God is to discern in Israel's story the working of the same God who raised Jesus from the dead."<sup>19</sup>

### III. SEEDS OF RESURRECTION HOPE IN GENESIS

With the cement of the hermeneutical foundation still drying, the purpose of this section is to explore ten passages from Genesis for seeds of resurrection hope. Some passages may be more compelling than others as my cumulative case unfolds.

1. *The life-giving God who makes the world* (Gen 1:9–13; 2:7). God is a God of life, and the acts narrated in Genesis 1 make his life-giving power public.<sup>20</sup> After the first account of how God made the world (Gen 1:1–2:3), a more detailed record of man's creation begins in 2:4. The order is significant: God forms man from the dust and then imparts the breath of life (Gen 2:7). The author is teaching the first readers of Genesis about the kind of existence for which God made humankind. God designed image-bearers to be *embodied* beings.<sup>21</sup> God did not create Adam as a spirit and then build a body for him; he formed a body and imparted the breath of life. Once God exiled the first couple from Eden, bodies died as part of sin's wage.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, according to the opening chapters of Genesis, the divine design was embodied people who were infused with the breath of life. Resurrection is a reasonable hope when two truths are combined: "the good creation and the promise that the same creator God will one day sort it all out."<sup>23</sup>

Crucial for a belief in resurrection is the confidence in God's power to grant life, and Genesis 1–2 lays the foundation for this conviction. While the creation of a body (which God then animated) speaks to God's good design in making embodied image-bearers, that body was formed out of "dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7), and dust will become an important part of resurrection hope. Those who sleep in the dust will awake (cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). In Wright's words, "The fresh gift of

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<sup>19</sup> Hays, "Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection" 229. And later, "Reading in light of the resurrection is figural reading. Because the Old Testament's pointers to the resurrection are indirect and symbolic in character, the resurrection teaches us to read for figuration and latent sense. The Sadducees were literalists, but God seems to have delighted in veiled anticipations of the gospel. . . . Resurrection-informed reading sees the life-giving power of God manifested and prefigured in unexpected ways throughout Scripture" (p. 234).

<sup>20</sup> Dempster calls God "the great life-giver *par excellence* in Genesis 1 and 2" ("Resurrection of Christ" 4).

<sup>21</sup> According to Ladd, "The idea of man as an animated body, and the faith in a sovereign God whose power and promises could not be broken by death, led to the belief in the eschatological resurrection of the body" (*I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* 49).

<sup>22</sup> For the notion of death as punishment, see T. D. Alexander, "The OT View of Life After Death," *Theo* 11/2 (1986) 42.

<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential* (New York: HarperOne, 2013) 152.

his breath will then bring the dust to life. The promise of resurrection is thus firmly linked to creation itself.”<sup>24</sup>

2. *The tree of life and immortal physicality (Gen 2:9; 3:22)*. God filled the Garden of Eden with trees pleasing to the eye and good for food (Gen 2:9). Two trees had unusual significance and stood in the middle of the garden: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life (Gen 2:9). After Adam and Eve ate of the former, God prohibited access to the latter. He exiled our disobedient representative from the garden “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen 3:22).

Consider what the tree of life seems to suggest: immortal bodily existence. This tree held out hope for something Adam and Eve did not yet have. Their mortal bodies died in the conditions outside Eden. But the teaching of the biblical author in Gen 3:22 is that if Adam and Eve had eaten of the tree, they would have lived forever.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, barring them from the tree of life ensured their death, which God promised if they ate the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17). The cherubim and flaming sword were visible reminders that God kept his promise. If God created the tree of life for his image-bearers to eat from, would God ever reopen access? If the tree of life offered immortal bodily existence, would image-bearers ever attain it? If Adam’s exile meant death, what would return from exile mean?<sup>26</sup>

The OT teaches that God will make all things new and restore the world to an Eden-like state,<sup>27</sup> even surpassing the original quality and scope of the garden, so man will get the chance to feast from the tree of life. In Rev 22:2 the “tree of life” is in the New Jerusalem. Though people were once barred from accessing it, this tree will dwell amidst the nations for their healing (Rev 22:2b). Its name is identical to the tree in Genesis 2–3, so there is no reason to believe that what its fruit represents has changed. This tree *will* live up to its designation, bearing fruit of immortality.<sup>28</sup> That fruit in the garden did not grow for show; it was meant to be eaten, and John says that in the New Jerusalem the tree of life will yield fruit each month (cf. Rev 22:2), probably indicating the replacement of what is eaten. Waltke concludes, “This highest potency of life was available in the garden and ... will be experienced consummately in the resurrection of our bodies.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 122.

<sup>25</sup> Presumably this state would have been bodily as well. This implication is reasonable because God exiled them to ensure their bodily death.

<sup>26</sup> In Genesis 3 the important themes of exile and death are linked, the former meaning the latter. This observation matters for future occasions when God’s people are exiled and thus undergo a kind of death. This equation (exile=death) prepares for an even more important one (return=resurrection).

<sup>27</sup> Defending this assertion is beyond the scope of this article. For an explanation of the purpose of the Garden and God’s intention to fill the world with image-bearing people, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 29–122; T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008) 13–73.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* 156.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An OT Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 257; idem, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 86.

3. *The defeat of the serpent (Gen 3:15)*. Between Adam and Eve's disobedience (Gen 3:6) and exile (Gen 3:24), God promised the serpent's defeat: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). The woman's future offspring would have victory. What would this mean for the seed of the woman?

At present the seed endured difficulty and travail (Gen 3:16–19), but the future judgment of the serpent was certain. The serpent was the deceiver in the garden and instigator of the image-bearers' rebellion. Since his crafty snare had implications for the image-bearers, his defeat may also have implications for them. When that defeat would be accomplished, the seed of the woman would find relief from the curse.<sup>30</sup>

Beale believes that the promise in Gen 3:15 likely implies a reversal of the serpent's work and sin's curse.<sup>31</sup> If this implicit reversal is true, and since part of sin's curse involves the death of bodies, then undoing the curse will mean the reversal of death. Beale states, "The first possible hint of resurrection life may be discernible in Gen 1–3."<sup>32</sup>

4. *The death of Abel and the birth of Seth (Gen 4:1, 8, 25)*. God promised to defeat the serpent through Eve's descendent (Gen 3:15). Collins notes that the singular pronouns ("he," הוּא; "you shall bruise *him*," הַשֵּׁפֶן) point to a single descendant as the fulfillment of Gen 3:15, and the LXX renders them with masculine singular pronouns ("he," αὐτός; "his," αὐτοῦ).<sup>33</sup> Since this person is the offspring of the woman, he will be human; and since he overcomes the serpent, he will have power extraordinary enough to win.<sup>34</sup>

In light of this promise, when Eve bore Cain, she said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen 4:1), which probably means she thought the defeat of the serpent must be soon. Her offspring increased when she birthed Abel (Gen 4:2). Now with two descendants, surely one would be the promised victor. But the unexpected happened when Cain murdered Abel, an event that manifested the hostility between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed (cf. Gen 3:15). After the murder of Abel, two things became clear: Cain belonged to the seed of the serpent (cf. 1 John 3:12), and the seed of the woman was now dead. The serpent's offspring seemed to have prevailed—the reverse of what Gen 3:15 said would happen. But Eve conceived again and named her new son Seth because "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him" (4:25). She

<sup>30</sup> See later in this article when I discuss Gen 5:29, which interprets the Gen 3:15 promise as having implications for the curse of death.

<sup>31</sup> G. K. Beale, *ANT Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the OT in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 228–29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 228.

<sup>33</sup> C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006) 156.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 157. See also James M. Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10/2 (2006) 30–54.

believed Seth was the replacement for the son who perished. Her belief was significant because it showed a hope based in Gen 3:15.<sup>35</sup>

In Gen 4:25 the word “appointed” is from תִּשָּׂא, which the LXX renders as ἐξάνιστημι (“raised up”). In one sense, God appointed Seth to the stage of history by bringing him into the world through the woman. In another sense, the birth of Seth is the reversal of the death Eve endured with Abel’s murder. Seth’s birth is a reversal of death not because Seth is Abel reincarnate, nor because someone was raised bodily from the dead, but because the *promised seed* experienced a death when Abel was murdered, and now the family line of promise and hope can continue because God granted Eve another son. The line lived again.

The theme of obstacles to the line of promise surfaces again and again in the Pentateuch, and the earliest attestation of the pattern (birth reversing the death of the woman’s line) is found here in Genesis 4.<sup>36</sup> Remember, personal identity was both individual and familial, meaning that the fate of the individual was conceptually related to what happened to his family. The line meets the functional equivalent of death in circumstances like barrenness or—as in Eve’s case—the loss of a child. In one sense life is lost, but in another sense God brings restoration. God’s restoration of the promised seed is analogous to resurrection because the line once dead now lives again. The biblical author shows that God keeps his promises: Eve was told that from her would come a victor, a seed who would crush the serpent, and the text shows that death will not force God to rescind his promise.

5. *The unusual departure of Enoch (Gen 5:24)*. Genesis 5 has a predictable rhythm of someone being born, fathering sons and daughters, and dying at the end of a long life. In this ten-member genealogy, the seventh name is Enoch, and he breaks the pattern profoundly. When compared with the other life spans listed, his is the shortest (Gen 5:23). There is also a brief but exemplary report on his life: he walked with God not for a few years or decades but for *centuries* (Gen 5:22, 24; cf. Heb 11:5b). But most unusual is Enoch’s last day on earth: when he was 365 years old, “he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24).

Unlike the other members of the genealogy, Enoch’s earthly life did not end in death. One day, at a particular latitude and longitude, Enoch was gone. The manner of his exit was fodder for speculation about his heavenly departure and what he must have beheld and learned.<sup>37</sup> One indisputable point for Jews, though, was this: God did not “take” Enoch *through* death but *before* death. The author of Hebrews confirms this interpretation: “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him” (Heb 11:5a).

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) 71.

<sup>36</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* 116, 133.

<sup>37</sup> See the pseudepigraphal book of *1 Enoch*.

Kaiser contends that Enoch's removal probably started "a whole new line of thinking" about afterlife issues.<sup>38</sup> This assertion is possible, though the OT does not directly incorporate Enoch's story into a development of afterlife theology, nor did this unusual departure become a story that Jews believed God would repeat for devoted people.<sup>39</sup> Wright observes, "Nobody suggested that if someone lived an exceptionally holy life, or accomplished some great deed, they might be similarly treated."<sup>40</sup>

Enoch's rapture did say something important, however, about death and God's power: God can close the mouth of the grave whenever he wants for whomever he wants, a truth stemming from his cosmic lordship. Death was not a power that bound God's hands, for he could overrule its apparent inevitability. If his power could take a person before death, could he with that same power resurrect a person after death? It is not a great leap to hope that God's power to close the grave's mouth (to spare a person from it) can also open the grave's mouth (to deliver a person from it).

The writer of Hebrews appears to have paired Abel and Enoch together (in Heb 11:4–5) to establish a pattern for the subsequent heroes of faith.<sup>41</sup> Those who follow Abel's pattern experience suffering as Heb 11:34b–37 narrates, whether painful persecution or even death. Those who follow Enoch's pattern experience deliverance as Heb 11:33–35a narrates, whether from enemies or fire or even death. Most significantly, the pairing of Abel and Enoch anticipates Christ's experience of ultimate suffering and ultimate triumph.<sup>42</sup> The story of Enoch, then, testifies to exaltation, something Jesus experienced after his resurrection and something believers will experience after theirs.

6. *Lamech's hope for his son Noah (Gen 5:29)*. Lamech, the grandson of Enoch, fathers Noah and expresses great hope for him: "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen 5:29). Where does Lamech get the ideas of cursed ground and toilsome work? They are unmistakable references to God's words in Gen 3:17–19.<sup>43</sup> There God told Adam the ground is "cursed ... because of you; in pain you shall eat of it" and "by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken" (Gen 3:17b, 19a). The biblical author indicates that the content of the curse had been transmitted generation after generation, from Adam down to Lamech. The ground would be a source of difficulty (Gen 3:18), and in the end it would subdue the image-bearers in dust (Gen 3:19).

<sup>38</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching the Last Things: OT Eschatology for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 1.

<sup>39</sup> See, however, 2 Kgs 2:11 where God takes Elijah apart from death. Since this event lies outside the Torah, I will not address it in this article.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* 95. See also Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* 200, 216.

<sup>41</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 525.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 526.

<sup>43</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) 88.

No matter how hard or how long they worked, they would return at death to the ground God cursed.

With knowledge of this curse on the ground, why did Lamech hope Noah would bring an end to its effects? Apparently not only was the content of Adam's judgment passed from one generation to the next but also the content of the serpent's punishment. In Gen 3:15 God promised that a seed of the woman would defeat the serpent, and Lamech's words in Gen 5:29 suggest his knowledge of both the judgment *and* the deliverance God promised in the garden. What the victor did would benefit image-bearers ("this *one* shall bring *us* relief," Lamech said) by reversing the curse under which humanity lived ("from our work and . . . toil").

Lamech's reasoning in Gen 5:29 is understandable: Noah is part of Eve's offspring, so perhaps he will be the seed of the woman who will defeat the serpent and bring rest from the curse.<sup>44</sup> Lamech may not speak explicitly of Noah being the catalyst for *death's* reversal, but the allusion in Gen 5:29 to Gen 3:17–19 includes an effect on death. Just as the reference to a coming individual implies the promise of the woman's seed and serpent's defeat, so relief from the curse means more than only rest from toil.<sup>45</sup> The curse of toilsome work ends in death (cf. Gen 3:19), for toil outside the garden never brings the rest inherent to life inside it.

The work Adam initially performed was without toil and not heading toward death (Gen 2:5, 15). His rest was compromised by his disobedience, and the lot of man became toilsome until the grave. If the victor's work (foretold in Gen 3:15) will turn back the curse, then he will undo the power of death. In Gen 5:29, Lamech hoped for the day when rest would once more come to God's image-bearers, and others clearly shared that hope.

7. *The death and resurrection of the world (Genesis 7–8)*. The flood was destruction tantamount to de-creation. In the beginning, when God's Spirit hovered over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2), he separated waters (Gen 1:6), made dry land appear (Gen 1:9), and filled the land with plant, animal, and human life (Gen 1:11, 25–27). With the flood God destroyed life on the land and covered the terrain with water. More than just a family's line was in jeopardy; anything and anyone not on the ark was destroyed.

After the deluge, God's Spirit again hovered over the waters and caused them to move (Gen 8:1). The waters receded (Gen 8:3), dry land appeared (Gen 8:4–5), plant life returned (Gen 8:11), and then animals and man filled the land once more (Gen 8:18–19). In the artistry of the biblical author, this watery recession is like creation all over again.<sup>46</sup> From the barren earth the power of God's Spirit brought

<sup>44</sup> According to Walton, "It may have been Lamech's hope that Noah would somehow bring about the reversal of the curse" (John H. Walton, *Genesis* [NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001] 281).

<sup>45</sup> According to John Calvin, "work" and "painful toil" are a synecdoche because this labor represents the "whole miserable state into which mankind had fallen" (*Genesis*, Crossway Classic Commentaries [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001] 65).

<sup>46</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) 162–63.

back life. Noah—the new Adam—and his family exited the ark and entered a new world.

The events of the flood and restoration are a picture of resurrection, of new creation, of life from death. Though the ark found “rest” on the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4), the image-bearers were not restored to the garden-rest Adam and Eve knew. Though Noah and his family went through the waters of judgment without perishing, they emerged from the ark still in mortal bodies. God cleansed the earth externally, but the problem of sin and curse remained (Gen 8:21; 9:5–6, 20–27).

8. *Life granted to a dead womb* (Gen 21:1–2). God promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen 12:2–3), but an obstacle at the giving of the promise was his barren wife (Gen 11:30). God promised a land to Abraham’s offspring (Gen 12:7), but how could there be offspring when Sarah could not have children? Yet God promised that Abraham’s offspring would be more numerous than the stars (Gen 15:5), and in the fullness of time he fulfilled his word: “The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen 21:1–2).

As I tried to establish previously, in Israelite culture sterility was the functional equivalent to death.<sup>47</sup> Agur the sage says, “Three things are never satisfied; four never say, ‘Enough!’: Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says, ‘Enough!’” (Prov 30:15–16). Sheol is a realm of the dead, the barren womb cannot house life, parched land cannot sustain life, and unquenchable fire destroys what it touches. The four insatiable things that Agur mentions are, in one way or another, functional equivalents of death.<sup>48</sup> When God reverses these situations, his triumphant power is on display, and it is only the God of life who can restore and raise up.

God’s reversal of Sarah’s infertility brought life from death in the same way Seth’s birth brought hope after Abel died. When Paul reflected on this episode he said Abraham’s body “was as good as dead” and Sarah’s womb was barren (Rom 4:19). God, Paul said, “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:17). Out of expired reproductive organs, God did the impossible (cf. Heb 11:11–12). This pattern is repeated when God opened the wombs of Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Leah (Gen 29:31), and Rachel (Gen 30:22).

These reversals of barrenness strengthen the confidence that God has the power to reverse destruction and to overcome any obstacles impeding the advance of his promises and the seed of the woman. When it comes to death, then, the momentum established by the biblical author in these stories of reversal leads readers to expect God’s power to remain uncontested. Abraham was “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (Rom 4:21).

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<sup>47</sup> Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* 114–15.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

9. *Abraham's trust in God to preserve the seed* (Gen 22:5). Genesis 22 narrates Abraham's compliance to a shocking divine command: "Take your son, your only son Isaac ... and offer him there as a burnt offering" (Gen 22:2). Readers feel conflict at this point, for years earlier God promised Abraham and Sarah a son (Gen 15:4; 18:14) who would begin fulfilling the plan of blessing the nations through the family line (Gen 12:2–3). Now that the long-awaited heir of Abraham had arrived (Gen 21:2–3), God put his own promises in jeopardy when he commanded the patriarch to sacrifice the offspring. Why would God promise Abraham descendants who would outnumber the stars (Gen 15:5) and then set up the demise of that promise?

The Genesis account reports Abraham's response with fast-paced narration: he rose early, saddled his donkey, took two men and his son, cut wood, and went to the predetermined place (Gen 22:3). When the time came to offer the sacrifice, Abraham spoke to the two men words that warrant close reflection: "I and the boy will go (וַלְכֶה) over there and worship (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה) and come again (וַיָּשׁוּבָה) to you" (Gen 22:5). All three verbs are plural, conveying that Abraham would be returning with Isaac.<sup>49</sup> Why did Abraham speak about both of them coming back? Did he secretly intend to disobey God's command? Was there an unnarrated conversation between God and Abraham where God told him what would transpire on the mountain? Were Abraham's words to the two men a ruse to prevent their possible intervention on Isaac's behalf?<sup>50</sup>

The best explanation of the plural verbs is to see the biblical author highlighting Abraham's faith that God would keep his word to preserve the seed.<sup>51</sup> Years earlier God had promised Abraham an heir (Gen 15:4) and had kept his word with the birth of Isaac (Gen 21:1–3). God specified Isaac as the one through whom "shall your offspring be named" (Gen 21:12), so according to God's promise Isaac would be the father of other descendants. Therefore, when Abraham ascended the mountain, he intended to obey God's command to offer his son on the altar, but he did not believe the death of Isaac would nullify the promise of offspring through Isaac. Maybe Kaiser is right that "Abraham's servants ... knew that their master's mission was to sacrifice his only son on Mount Moriah," and they did not intervene because they also held (or at least were confident in) his hope in God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* 88. According to Schreiner, "In a narrative such as this, carefully constructed and dramatically effective, the inclusion of such words cannot be waved off as insignificant" (Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013] 21).

<sup>50</sup> Wenham says, "It seems likely that none of these rival interpretations need be ruled out. White lie, prophecy, hope, even disobedience, can surely coexist in the believer, especially in times of acute crisis. The enigmatic ambiguity of 'we shall return' perhaps gives an insight into the quite contrary ideas agitating Abraham's mind at this time" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* [WBC 2; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994] 108).

<sup>51</sup> As Waltke says, "Although he does not know how God will work it out, his faith harmonizes God's promise that in Isaac his offspring will be reckoned (21:1–13) with God's command to sacrifice Isaac. According to Heb 11:17–19, he expresses a type of 'resurrection' faith" (*Genesis* 307).

<sup>52</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the OT* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1987) 142.

The writer of Hebrews provides a lens through which to view Abraham's reasoning: if God said there would be offspring through Isaac but also wanted him as a sacrifice before any such offspring were born, then God must intend to raise him from the dead (Heb 11:19). What would give Abraham such confidence? Perhaps the very fact of Isaac's birth bolstered Abraham's faith. He and Sarah had experienced the miracle of procreation after they both had passed the reasonable biological expiration date for it (Gen 17:17; 18:11–12). They both expressed skepticism at the notion of conceiving a child in their old age, but God said, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen 18:14a). So even though God's command to kill Isaac seemed simultaneously to kill God's promise, perhaps Abraham raised the knife over his son on the mountain because God's question still echoed in his mind: "Is there anything too hard for the LORD?" If God could bring life to a dead womb, he could bring it to a dead boy.

Hughes says, "So dramatic was the sequence of events that it was as though Isaac really had died and been raised up to life again."<sup>53</sup> The story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is a picture of resurrection,<sup>54</sup> an observation the author of Hebrews validates. Abraham offered his son on the altar because he "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" (Heb 11:19). Important to distinguish in the explanation is *what Abraham was thinking* and *what the figurative result was*. In this unusual verse, interpreters are granted access to the patriarch's thoughts. Our interest, though, is in how the author of Hebrews interprets the outcome: Isaac's deliverance was a picture of resurrection. This interpretation is remarkable given the fact that Isaac did not actually die; he simply *neared* death and was delivered from it. Also clear is that the author of Hebrews conveys the patriarch's conviction that God had the power to reverse the terminal act. This conviction is implied in the plural verbs Abraham spoke to his servants, for he said that he and Isaac would be returning from the mountain.

10. *The burial of bones in Canaan (Gen 25:9)*. When Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah which was in Canaan (Gen 25:9). When Isaac died, Esau and Jacob buried him in the same cave (Gen 35:29; 49:31). As Jacob was dying he instructed his twelve sons to "bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah" (Gen 49:29–30; 50:13). And near his own death Joseph instructed that his bones be carried from Egypt to Canaan too (Gen 50:24–25; Heb 11:22).

Why did the patriarchs and Joseph want burial in the land of Canaan? Their instructions were expressions of faith, for God promised Abraham, "And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God" (Gen 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18). When Abraham died, he did not own more than a burial plot in

<sup>53</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 484.

<sup>54</sup> Beale calls God's preservation of Abraham's seed through the deliverance of Isaac a "type" of the future resurrection of the dead (*NT Biblical Theology* 320).

the Promised Land.<sup>55</sup> At their respective deaths, the patriarchs and Joseph no longer dwelled in the land of Canaan,<sup>56</sup> but they believed burial there was important so that they would receive the land as an everlasting possession. Their conviction was that God would keep his word. Somehow not even death would stop God from fulfilling his promise that they would possess the Promised Land.<sup>57</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD?

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The goal of this article was to explore various statements and stories in Genesis so that we might discern seeds of resurrection hope. This cumulative case suggests confidence in God's power over death and the presence of hope, even if implicit, that God will do something about death. While not every chapter in Genesis (or in the Bible) contains resurrection words or imagery, I am suggesting that the seeds of such hope were sown earlier and more frequently in Israel's history than many scholars concede. As Bronner puts it, "The clear expression of a belief in bodily resurrection as described in Daniel ... could not have emerged spontaneously without significant precursors."<sup>58</sup> If Dempster is right that death and life can be viewed in more dynamic ways, ways not reducible to "biological continuity or discontinuity," then truly the stories cited in this article show that "God is at work to reverse the forces of death that have entered the world."<sup>59</sup> So when building a biblical case for the doctrine of resurrection, why focus only on evidence late in Israel's history? Why not start where the OT does? In the beginning.

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<sup>55</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 17.

<sup>56</sup> At death the patriarchs were gathered to their people. The phrase "gathered to his people" (Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33) meant more than interment in a grave, for Abraham was not united with his physical ancestors in a family tomb, and Jacob was "gathered to his people" (Gen 49:33) months before being buried in the ground (Alexander, "The OT View of Life After Death" 45). See also Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* 33–34.

<sup>57</sup> Wright says that no rabbi "supposed that the patriarchs, Moses, Reuben or anyone else had yet been given this resurrection life. The point of demonstrating that there were promises yet outstanding to the patriarchs was that God must be capable of fulfilling them in the world yet to come" (*Resurrection of the Son of God* 199–200).

<sup>58</sup> Leila Bronner, "The Resurrection Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Allusions or Illusions?," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 30/3 (2002) 143.

<sup>59</sup> Dempster, "Resurrection of Christ" 5, 9.