

HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE ON THE IDEA OF RESURRECTION
IN JEWISH APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Stephen J. Bedard

Meaford, Ontario

Introduction

In the study of religion, there is perhaps no concept more important than that of the afterlife. Not only do afterlife beliefs tie together most of the world's religions, a study of the development of the afterlife is often useful for tracing out the evolution of a particular religion or a group of related religions.¹ While scholars concur on the importance of the afterlife, agreement on the origins of specific afterlife beliefs is another matter.

While it has often been assumed that the Judeo-Christian belief in a bodily resurrection was a natural Jewish development, Stanley Porter has suggested that it is time to rethink the possible Greco-Roman influence on the idea of resurrection.² Porter looked at numerous Greek and Roman myths related to some sort of bodily resurrection and concluded: 'It appears that both Jewish thought and then, inevitably, Christian thought came under the influence of Greek and Graeco-Roman assumptions regarding resurrection.'³

This suggestion of foreign influence is not without its critics. Walter Wifall suggests that 'although Hellenistic culture may have affected Jewish apocalyptic, there is no need to look outside the world and

1. Recent examples include: Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), and Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997).

2. Stanley E. Porter, 'Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament', in Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs (eds.), *Resurrection* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 52-81.

3. Porter, 'Resurrection', p. 80.

history of Israel itself for the emergence of these beliefs'.⁴ Others are willing to accept only very limited influence by Greek thought.⁵ Philip Johnston concedes that 'Greek philosophy may have encouraged Jewish expectations of a meaningful afterlife, but they did not contribute to belief in the resurrection'.⁶

One of the strongest opponents of pagan influence on the doctrine of the resurrection is N.T. Wright.⁷ In his important and lengthy study, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Wright forcefully states:

In so far as the ancient non-Jewish world had a Bible, its Old Testament was Homer. And in so far as Homer has anything to say about resurrection, he is quite blunt: it doesn't happen.⁸

Beyond the views of Homer, Wright speaks more generally of the non-Jewish view of the resurrection when he says 'the pagan world assumed it was impossible'.⁹ In Wright's section on the pagan background, he explicitly disagrees with Porter's claim of Greek influence on the resurrection idea.¹⁰

Porter and Wright, both respected New Testament scholars, have very different ideas about the origin of the bodily resurrection idea. This paper will sort through both Jewish and Greek traditions about a bodily existence after death and attempt to demonstrate that there is much evidence for Greek influence on the biblical idea of the resurrection.

4. Walter Wifall, 'Status of "Man" as Resurrection', *ZAW* 90 (1978), pp. 382-94 (384).

5. Russell is willing to acknowledge some limited influence but rejects any influence on the idea of resurrection (D.S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], pp. 387-89).

6. Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 237.

7. N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 35, explicitly disagrees with Porter on the nature of Greek influence.

8. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 32.

9. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 83.

10. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 35.

1. *Immortality of the Soul*

One of the typical generalizations about afterlife beliefs in the ancient world is that the Greeks believed in an immortal soul, while the Jews believed in a bodily resurrection.¹¹ Wright explains that Greek traditions described different states of the dead, including: witless shadows in a murky world, a disembodied but otherwise fairly normal afterlife, and souls released from prison.¹² What is interesting is that even the ‘witless shadows’ have more of a consciousness and existence than most of the inhabitants of Sheol described in the Old Testament.¹³ Plato, whom Wright calls the Hellenistic ‘New Testament’,¹⁴ has a strong view of the immortal soul. Wright describes Plato’s position in this way:

For Plato, the soul is the non-material aspect of a human being, and is the aspect that really matters. Bodily life is full of delusion and danger; the soul is to be cultivated in the present both for its own sake and because its future happiness will depend upon such cultivation. The soul, being immortal, existed before the body, and will continue to exist after the body is gone.¹⁵

2. *Two-Stage Afterlife*

Wright defines the resurrection as ‘life after life after death’,¹⁶ that is, there is a two-stage afterlife. At the same time, Wright claims that the resurrection is not found in Hellenistic literature. Wright accurately sees a passage from the *Iliad* where Achilles encounters the shade of his recently killed friend Patroclus as an important witness to the Greek view of death. In the passage from the *Iliad*, Patroclus begs Achilles for a proper funeral as his unburied body is causing much grief for his soul:

11. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 129, considers this a ‘half-truth’ that is both misleading and informative, and concedes: ‘The old half-truth had got a hold of something which is in itself quite remarkable.’

12. Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 39, 45, 47. The fourth category of becoming a god will be dealt with later.

13. The closest parallel would be the raising of Samuel by the medium of Endor (1 Samuel 28).

14. Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 47-48.

15. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 49.

16. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 31.

Afar do the spirits keep me aloof, the phantoms of men that have done with toils, neither suffer they me to join myself to them beyond the River, but vainly I wander through the wide-gated house of Hades (*Il.* 23.72-74).

What seems to happen is that, until a person experiences a proper funeral, their shade wanders around in a restless state. After the funeral, the deceased is released to cross the river Styx to find their proper place of rest. Wright uses this passage as support for the great difference between the Greek and the Jewish view of the afterlife. However, Porter is correct in noting the significance in this story of ‘the inclusion of an intermediate period between death and being able to enter fully into Hades’.¹⁷ While the details are different, it is significant that the Greeks could contemplate a two-stage afterlife, such as the example in the *Iliad* of being a wandering spirit preceding resting in the underworld, much as some Jews would much later.

This two-stage afterlife would later become modified by Plato and become even closer to the Jewish apocalyptic view. Plato’s teachings on the afterlife appear in a number of places, but most important for this discussion is the myth of Er found at the conclusion of the *Republic*. Er is killed in battle but, unlike the other soldiers, his body does not decay. Twelve days later, as Er is placed on his funeral pyre, he wakes up and tells the people that he has seen another world. In his vision, Er saw a place with entrances leading upward and downward. There were judges who determined each soul’s direction based on their past deeds. Periodically, people who had been sent into the heavens and people who had been sent into the earth returned to this place and shared their experiences with each other. The wicked shared how they had suffered in the underworld for a thousand years, while the souls from heaven had only wonderful experiences. Er then began a journey to a beam of light that binds the heavens together as well as to an elaborate mechanism made of adamant that causes all the fixed stars and planets to rotate. The souls were then brought before the Fates and were given tokens to determine their position in the lottery to choose their next life. Er witnessed a number of famous figures from the past as they chose the life, animal or human, they would be reincarnated in. The souls then drank from the water that causes forgetfulness before they were sent out as shooting stars on their way to rebirth.

17. Porter, ‘Resurrection’, p. 69.

What is amazing about this story is that, with a few modifications, this could be a Jewish apocalyptic revelation worthy of Enoch. Many of the common themes in Jewish apocalyptic are found in this story, including a cosmological survey, development of belief in life after death and the increasing significance of the individual in resurrection, judgment and eternal bliss.¹⁸ Particularly significant is the belief that existence as a disembodied soul is only temporary and that the soul must return to some sort of bodily form.¹⁹ While there are details such as the return to a non-transformed earth and individualized judgments rather than a general last judgment, the parallels are striking. It would not take much imagination to see how this fifth-century BCE work could affect Jewish apocalyptic writers in the few centuries that followed as they were inundated by Hellenistic culture.

3. *The Egyptian Connection*

One possible source of influence for the development of the idea of resurrection is from Egyptian beliefs. While Egyptian religion is very important for understanding ancient beliefs, it must be remembered that there was no official Egyptian theology but rather collections of myths and stories that have been pieced together. Unlike the Greeks who laid greater stress on the immortal soul, the Egyptians had stronger beliefs in a resurrection. For a long time, the Egyptian idea of resurrection would have held little attraction for the Hebrews as it originally was a privilege only for the Pharaoh, and later for the very wealthy who could afford the elaborate burial procedures. However, the Middle Kingdom brought great theological advancements as described by Rosalie David:

Moral fitness and worship of Osiris were now more important factors than wealth in ensuring an individual's access to eternity. This became one of the most significant beliefs in the Middle Kingdom. The afterlife

18. Russell, *Method and Message*, p. 105. John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 5, defines an apocalypse as 'a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.' Plato's story of Er could easily fit within this definition of apocalyptic literature.

19. Porter, 'Resurrection', p. 70, notes the importance of metempsychosis in his article on Hellenistic influence on the resurrection.

was no longer limited to royalty: an exemplary life, and the knowledge of the correct responses and actions to be taken when facing the gods and demigods in the underworld—these qualifications made immortality accessible even to the humblest worshipper.²⁰

Thus, the Egyptian worshipper was able to join in Osiris's victory over death and to share in his resurrection.

There is some controversy about the term 'resurrection' in Egyptian religion. Egyptologist Christiane Zivie-Coche states, 'There was no resurrection, either after death or at the end of time.'²¹ N.T. Wright, agreeing with J. Davies, states that "'resurrection" is an inappropriate word for Egyptian belief'.²² This is true in that it was not believed that the mummified corpse would return to life and walk around, that is, experience resuscitation. Johnston explains, 'While the dead are pictured in human form and the underworld is portrayed as an extension of this life, there is never any hint of a return to earth in renewed human bodies.'²³ Egyptian resurrection was much more complicated than that. Resurrection was closely tied to the myth of Osiris. Osiris had been killed by his brother Seth. Horus, who was conceived by Isis after Osiris's death, made war on Seth. This family conflict was brought before the gods and the divine tribunal favoured Horus and Osiris. As a result, Osiris was resurrected from the dead, although he remained in the underworld.²⁴ This is the key, as the Egyptian hope of an afterlife was to identify with Osiris and join in his resurrection. That Osiris experienced resurrection is demonstrated by E.A. Wallis Budge:

When Osiris stepped from the ladder into heaven, he entered in among the company of gods as a 'living being', not merely as one about to begin a second state of existence with the limited powers and faculties which he possessed upon earth, but as one who felt that he had the right to rule heaven and the denizens thereof. He possessed a complete body,

20. Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 159.

21. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 169.

22. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 47, quoting J. Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 34-35.

23. Johnston, *Shades*, p. 232.

24. David, *Religion and Magic*, pp. 156-57.

the nature of which had been changed by ceremonies which Horus, and his sons, and the assistant Tcherti goddesses, had performed for him.²⁵

Although the Egyptian ‘resurrection’ was not exactly a raised physical body, it was more than just an immortal soul and it included the union of several aspects of the person’s personality.²⁶ The resurrection was a step away from the second death and a step towards enjoying an eternity in the next world, which was conceived of along the same lines as the present world.²⁷

As long as these beliefs were strictly Egyptian, they seemed to have little influence on Judaism. However, after the Hellenization of the Mediterranean world in the wake of Alexander the Great, many Egyptian gods, especially Osiris and Isis, became absorbed into the Greek pantheon, even being identified with Greek gods.²⁸ One significant event in the Hellenizing of the Osiris myth was the creation of Serapis, a god largely based on Osiris but including the traits of a number of Greek gods.²⁹ In this way, one form of resurrection idea was present in the Hellenistic culture that was introduced into the Jewish world.

4. *Of Stars and Angels*

Wright has an intriguing section on one of the Greek options for an afterlife.³⁰ While most people ended up in Hades at death, there were some exceptions.³¹ For some special individuals such as Hercules, Dionysus, the twins Castor and Pollux, and Asclepius, there was an opportunity to attain divinity and to enjoy fellowship with the gods. There are even some examples in the authoritative Homer:

25. E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection: Osiris* (2 vols.; New York: University Books, 1961), I, p. 77.

26. Edwin Yamauchi, ‘Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East’, in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *Life in the Face of Death* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 21-50 (27-28).

27. Dunand and Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men*, p. 183.

28. Dunand and Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men*, p. 216.

29. David, *Religion and Magic*, pp. 325, 411.

30. Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 55-60.

31. Porter, ‘Resurrection’, pp. 69-70.

... godlike Ganymedes, who was born the fairest of mortal men; and the gods caught him up on high to be cupbearer to Zeus because of his beauty, so that he might dwell with the immortals (*Il.* 20.232-35).³²

Wright notes the nature of this transformation:

In one or two isolated cases, when a mortal was taken to be with the immortals, at least in mythology, his or her body was supposed to be taken away along with the soul. But the normal supposition seems to have been that apotheosis, or the taking of the soul to the land of the immortal gods, was completely consistent with dissolution, often burning, of the physical body.³³

While Wright attempts to downplay the transformation of the body, Adela Yarbro Collins notes in reference to these examples from Homer:

All of these traditions imply that the human beings translated became gods, i.e., immortal. They seem to assume that in these cases, the soul ($\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$) was never separated from the body.³⁴

Although the physical bodies were not always transported to heaven, the new gods did not exist as shades but lived in god-like bodies in which they could interact with one another.³⁵ Apotheosis,³⁶ which Wendy Cotter defines as ‘a human hero’s elevation to immortal life among the gods after his/her death’,³⁷ was an important theme in Greek literature.³⁸

Related to being transformed into a god is the idea of becoming a star, sometimes called astral immortality. Wright points out that this

32. Cf. the story of Tithonius in *Il.* 11.1.

33. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 57.

34. Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘Apotheosis and Resurrection’, in Peder Borgen and Soren Giversen (eds.), *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 88-100 (92).

35. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 501, acknowledges that the early Christian apologist Justin Martyr (*1 Apol.* 21–22) saw some analogy between apotheosis and resurrection, although not necessarily a relationship of dependency.

36. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 77, strongly rejects any connection between apotheosis (translation) and resurrection.

37. Wendy Cotter, ‘Greco-Roman Apotheosis Traditions and the Resurrection Appearances in Matthew’, in David Aune (ed.), *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 127-53 (131).

38. This theme also appears in the Roman traditions, including the apotheosis of Romulus, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar. See Cotter, ‘Greco-Roman Apotheosis’, pp. 133-46.

was an ancient belief going back to Pythagorean philosophy and Orphic religion, as well as Babylonian and Egyptian sources.³⁹ One of the best examples is from Plato's *Timaeus* where the ideal destiny of the dead is described: 'He who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star, and there he would have a blessed and congenial existence.'⁴⁰ For those who lived extraordinary lives, death was not a shadowy Hades to be dreaded, but an eternity to be enjoyed either as a star or as a god.

But does this have anything to do with the Jewish apocalyptic view of resurrection? One of the earliest and clearest descriptions of the resurrection in Jewish texts is from Daniel:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 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. 12.2-3).

The parallels with the Greek beliefs are obvious. Not only are the people who experience this transformation called 'the wise', exactly as Plato would expect, but the image is that of being transformed into stars forever, just as some Greeks believed. However, this reference to 'stars' is not just a connection to Plato's *Timaeus*. In Daniel an identification of stars with angels is implied and as John Collins comments, 'it is quite clear that to "shine like the stars" is to join the heavenly host'.⁴¹ The image of resurrection given at this defining moment in Jewish apocalyptic literature is that of becoming like the stars, of becoming angels. If Daniel was indeed composed in the wake of the struggles with Antiochus IV, there is a sense of irony in that those who resisted the Hellenizers and held true to the Torah would in fact receive the ideal Hellenistic afterlife.

This identification of angels and stars is found in other contemporary literature. Stars are used to describe existing angels such as in this description of the fall of the wicked angel Azazel: 'as I looked, behold, a star fell down from heaven' (*1 En.* 86.1). This is followed by a multitude of falling stars (86.3), which represent the rest of the angels who were coming down to mate with human women. The image of a

39. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 58.

40. Quoted by Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 58.

41. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 113.

star by itself had no moral quality to it, but the idea of a falling star carried the idea of a loss of position. Whatever the moral situation, Jewish texts often identified stars with angels.

The star connection to Hellenistic thought is obvious, but what about the angels? I would like to propose that angels in Jewish thought played a parallel role to that of the gods in Greek thought. Referring to the theme of certain angels ruling over the nations, L.T. Stuckenbruck comments on the role of angels:

Hebrew Scriptures...place Yahweh at the pinnacle of an assembly of deities called 'sons of God'....In Psalm 82 this arrangement of the pantheon is further elaborated. The assemblage of deities is, as members of the divine council, responsible for the rule over and the dispensation of justice among the nations.⁴²

Psalm 82.6 (LXX 81.6) says, presumably to the angels: 'You are gods (אלהים, Θεοί), children of the most high, all of you.' Angels in Jewish literature seem to play a similar role to gods in Hellenistic literature, with the exception of receiving worship.⁴³ The angels bring messages from the supreme God, act as agents of punishment and give guidance to mortals. It must be remembered that Jewish monotheism did not rule out the existence of other divine beings, it only rejected the worship of gods other than Yahweh.

If, as seems the case, angels were understood in terms parallel to the gods, it must be asked: is Daniel the only text that makes the surprising connection between resurrection and joining the stars/gods/angels? *First Enoch* 104.2 tells the righteous, 'you shall shine like the lights of heaven', and then in 104.6, 'you are partners with the good-hearted people of heaven', or as Collins has it 'companions to the host of heaven'.⁴⁴ Another passage that suggests the destiny of the righteous is to join the angels is *1 En.* 39.5, which says, 'So there my eyes saw their dwelling places with the holy angels, and their resting places with the

42. L.T. Stuckenbruck, 'Angels of the Nations', in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 29-31 (29).

43. While angels did not receive organized worship, they were sometimes venerated. See Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "'Angels" and "God": Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism', in Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E.S. North (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 45-70 (52-53).

44. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 113.

holy ones.’ There is a sense in the Enochic literature of a reversal of fortune, with the fallen angels (Watchers) losing their role as astral divinities and the righteous being lifted up to take their place. This theme is also found in the *Apoc. Abr.* 13, where Abraham seems to exchange angelic status with the fallen angel Azazel.⁴⁵ *Fourth Ezra* 7.97 explains the fate of some people after death, how ‘they are to be made like the light of the stars, being incorruptible from then on’. *Second Baruch* 51.10, in describing the resurrection, brings this all together when it says, ‘For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars.’ In the Hellenistic Jewish work *Pseudo-Phocylides* (102–104) we read these intriguing words: ‘It is not good to dissolve the human frame; for we hope that the remains of the departed will soon come to light (again) out of the earth; and afterward they will become gods.’ Commenting on this passage, Adela Yarbro Collins states:

The coming to light of the remains of the departed out of the earth is a clear expression of hope in the bodily type of resurrection....The statement that the dead become gods after being raised is an expression of the idea of resurrection in Greco-Roman terms. The word ‘god’ in Greek is synonymous with the word ‘immortal’. So Pseudo-Phocylides is using typical Greek language of the blessed dead to express the idea that the resurrected faithful are exalted to the angelic state.⁴⁶

That the resurrection was a transformation to be with the angels in Jewish thought may also be reflected in Jesus’ words in Mk 12.25 that when people rise from the dead they are like the angels in heaven.⁴⁷ Perhaps the connection between the resurrection and angels is hinted at in Acts 23.8 where the Sadducees are said to deny both the resurrection and angels despite clear references to angels in the Torah.

It has been shown that there are a number of passages in *1 Enoch* that speak of angelic fellowship. There is another aspect of angelic transformation in the Enochic literature that must be examined. In *1 Enoch*

45. ‘For behold, the garment which in heaven was formerly yours has been set aside for him, and the corruption which was on him has gone over to you’ (*Apoc. Abr.* 13.14).

46. Collins, ‘Apotheosis and Resurrection’, p. 96.

47. Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 417, sees angel transformation in this passage as a misunderstanding based on ‘popular folk-religion’. Wright’s interpretation, however, is questionable considering the number of parallels in Jewish apocalyptic literature.

14, there is a fantastic vision of Enoch's approach to the presence of God. In this passage we are told: 'None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him' (*1 En.* 14.21). Despite this, Enoch is called to come to God and speak to him face to face. In this, some have seen a suggestion that Enoch is transformed into some sort of angelic being.⁴⁸ The implications of Enoch's experience go far beyond that of one individual. As Collins points out: 'In view of the importance of Enoch in early apocalypticism it is reasonable to assume that his translation was paradigmatic for righteous humanity.'⁴⁹

If angelic transformation is only hinted at in *1 Enoch*, it is made explicit in *2 Enoch*:

The LORD said to Michael, 'Take Enoch, and extract (him) from the earthly clothing. And anoint him with the delightful oil, and put (him) into the clothes of glory.'...And I gazed at myself, and I had become like one of the glorious ones, and there was no observable difference (*2 En.* 22.8, 10).

Andrei Orlov comments on this passage by saying: 'In *2 Enoch* therefore the patriarch is depicted not as one of the visionaries who has only temporary access to the Divine Presence, but as an angelic servant permanently installed in the office of *sar happanim*.'⁵⁰ Although this is not a specific reference to the resurrection, it does demonstrate that the lines between human and angelic existence are not as distinct as often thought. It is very likely that the Jews adopted the theme of divine transformation from the Greeks, rejecting the idea of angelic worship and using this as a matrix in which to develop the resurrection in the light of their preexisting eschatological ideas about the Day of the Lord.

That some Jews believed they could become angels/gods is seen clearly at Qumran in the *War Scroll* where in one fragment the author claims:

my glory [is incomparable] and besides me no one is exalted. And he does not come to me, for I reside in [...], in the heavens...I am counted

48. Andrei A. Orlov, 'Celestial Choirmaster: The Liturgical Role of Enoch-Metatron in *2 Enoch* and the Merkabah Tradition', *JSP* 14 (2004), pp. 3-29 (10-12).

49. John J. Collins, 'A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in pre-Christian Judaism', in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (eds.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 43-57 (47).

50. Orlov, 'Celestial Choirmaster', p. 24.

among the gods and my dwelling is in the holy congregation...For I am counted among the gods, and my glory is with the sons of the king (4Q491 11.13, 14, 18).⁵¹

According to Collins, ‘Despite its fragmentary nature, it seems clear that the author claims to have sat on the mighty throne in the congregation of the gods and to have been reckoned with the gods, to have undergone a virtual apotheosis.’⁵² While this does not connect angelic exaltation with the resurrection, it does demonstrate that some Jews held out hope for an almost divine exalted state. Although this is an extreme example, there are other instances, such as in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where people were identified as angels, even in this life.⁵³

5. Supporting Hellenistic Influence

In some ways it seems unnatural to suggest that Jewish beliefs about the afterlife could be influenced by Hellenistic ideas. Throughout the Hebrew Bible there are strong warnings against foreign idols (e.g. Exod. 23.13). Could Jewish writers, writers who believed that they were being inspired by God, have incorporated the ideas of other religions? The influence presented so far suggests that it is indeed possible.

The existence of the body of literature known as the *Sibylline Oracles* is itself evidence that Jews could use pagan forms for their own purposes. The sibyl was used by such authors as Ovid and Virgil in their mythological epics. There were a number of different pagan collections of the *Sibylline Oracles*, including one that was influential in Roman politics.⁵⁴ The fact that Jews (and later Christians) could take

51. Translation taken from Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

52. Collins, ‘A Throne in the Heavens’, p. 53.

53. In *Jos. Asen.* 16.16, Aseneth is promised an immortal transformation, which is fulfilled in 18.9 and 20.6. Commenting on these passages, C. Burchard states: ‘She comes close to being an angelic creature’ (C. Burchard, ‘Joseph and Aseneth’, in James H. Charlesworth [ed.], *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1985], II, pp. 177-247 [232]). George J. Brooke, ‘Men and Women as Angels in Joseph and Aseneth’, *JSP* 14 (2005), pp. 159-77 (160-65), examines angelomorphism in the Dead Sea scrolls as well as Joseph and Aseneth. Cf. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 174.

54. John J. Collins, ‘Sibylline Oracles’, in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, p. 1107-12 (1107).

this obviously pagan literary genre and use it as a vehicle to promote biblical values is quite relevant to the present discussion. Some Oracles could even include mythological figures by name, including the Titans and the Zeus (4.110-55). It is ironic that Hellenistic thought is often equated with a very spiritual view of an immortal soul, and yet this very Hellenistic genre contains some of the most detailed descriptions of the actual resurrection of the body in all of apocalyptic literature (2.220-50).

In addition to this, Brook Pearson has done an interesting study on the LXX version of the important Isa. 26.19 and its possible connection to Greek mythology. In translating the Hebrew Bible, the translators had to make decisions on how to interpret **רַפְּאִים**. According to Pearson, ‘the translator was, either consciously or subconsciously, ignoring the translation “shades” for **רַפְּאִים**, and choosing “giants” because of the growing traditions concerning giants in the Jewish literature of the period (*1 Enoch, Jubilees, etc.*)’.⁵⁵ **רַפְּאִים** was often translated as γίγας, but twice was translated as τιτάν (2 Sam. 5.18, 22). Pearson surveys some of the Jewish texts that seem to allude to the myth of the Titans, including *Jub.* 5.6, where the binding of the Watchers seems to parallel the binding of the Titans, as well as *Sib. Or.* 2.228-32, which seems to explicitly identify the Titans with the ‘sons of God’ from Genesis 6.⁵⁶

This brings us to the LXX translation of Isa. 26.19. The MT and the LXX are significantly different on this verse:

Your dead will live, their bodies will rise; sing, dwellers in dust, for your dew is like a dew of light, *and on the land of shades you will cause it to fall.* (MT)

The dead will arise and those in the tombs will be awakened—those that are in the earth will rejoice, for the dew from you is a means of healing to them; *but the land of the unholy/ungodly/profane ones will fall.* (LXX)⁵⁷

In Isa. 26.19, the translator chooses to use for **רַפְּאִים** not γίγας or τιτάν but rather ἀσεβής. This creates a contrast between the resurrected who rejoice and the fall of the land of the ἀσεβής. In the

55. Brook W. Pearson, ‘Resurrection and the Judgment of the Titans’, in *Resurrection*, pp. 33-51.

56. Pearson, ‘Resurrection’, pp. 45-46.

57. Translations taken from Pearson, ‘Resurrection’, p. 33.

light of the popularity of the Titan myth in Jewish literature at the time of this translation, Pearson suggests that this ‘land’ is in fact Tartarus, the place of the Titans’ imprisonment.⁵⁸ With this interpretation, Pearson comes to these two conclusions:

(1) If this is the case, the paradigm of resurrection for the translator/redactor of LXX Isaiah was a Greek one—his cosmology and even theology were highly influenced by the Greek conceptions of the underworld.

(2) Read in tandem with *Sib. Or.* 2.221-37, which follows the exact same pattern in what is also a discussion of the resurrection, first with dead being raised (using the Ezekiel 37 tradition), and then the leading forth and destruction of the Titans, it could be that the resurrection to which LXX Isa. 26.19 refers is something already associated with the final judgment, and may even be a bodily resurrection.⁵⁹

Pearson’s study does two things: (1) it strengthens the argument that the Jewish view of the resurrection was strongly influenced by Greek ideas, and (2) it shows that the adapting of Greek ideas was not done just by a few fringe apocalyptic eccentrics but rather by those who were given the duty to translate the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Traditionally, Greek thought has been put in the category of the immortal soul and Jewish thought in the category of a bodily resurrection. However, this oversimplification disguises the true picture. In reality, both Greek and Jewish writings express both an immortal soul and some kind of transformation of the body or at least a second stage of afterlife. Plato’s Myth of Er is particularly useful in drawing comparisons. Not only is the style of the story very similar to the later Jewish apocalypses, it teaches a judgment of the dead, rewards and punishment, and some kind of bodily existence after a limited time as a disembodied soul. Egyptian views of the resurrection would also have been encountered by the Jews, mediated through Hellenistic culture. Perhaps the most convincing evidence is the tradition within Greek religion that it was possible for mortals to be transformed and either

58. Pearson, ‘Resurrection’, p. 50.

59. Pearson, ‘Resurrection’, pp. 50-51.

60. It is assumed that the ‘Prophets’ were considered authoritative Scripture at this time.

live among the gods or become stars. Both the transformation into gods/angels and into stars are found in the earliest and most influential apocalyptic works of Daniel and *1 Enoch*. The sheer weight of evidence from such a range of Jewish texts including the MT, LXX, Apocrypha, Wisdom and apocalyptic literature seems to demonstrate that the Jewish doctrine of the resurrection was heavily influenced by Hellenistic thought.

Despite the best efforts of scholars such as N.T. Wright, foreign influence on Jewish theological development cannot be denied. The fact that Greek language was being introduced into the Jewish religious world such as by the translation of the Septuagint, required an influx of other Greek concepts. As Adela Yarbro Collins states, 'One does not learn and use a language without being influenced by the culture of which it is a part.'⁶¹ The only reason to deny Greek influence, as Wright attempts to do, is the mistaken notion that Jewish equals truth and Greek equals falsehood. Ironically, the Apostle Paul, with all his Jewish training and background, would likely have seen Greco-Roman apotheosis as being closer to his understanding of resurrection, as described in 1 Corinthians 15, than the pessimistic view found in Jewish texts such as Eccl. 3.19-21.

The Jews, who had a less than fully developed doctrine of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible, looked for means to express and develop that which had long been dormant. The source of their inspiration was Hellenistic culture, that mixture of Greek, Persian and Egyptian ideas that flooded Israel after Alexander the Great with a force so strong that even the fiercest foes of the Hellenizers could not fully escape.⁶² The development of the doctrine of the resurrection, as seen in Jewish apocalyptic literature, was the application of Hellenistic images to a Jewish need.

61. Collins, 'Apotheosis and Resurrection', p. 100. Collins speaks here specifically of the Gospel of Mark but the principle is the same for Jewish intertestamental literature.

62. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 36-37, argues that the Hellenistic world provided some of the codes for Jewish apocalypses and that even the use of older biblical traditions was modified according to the concepts of the Hellenistic age. Even Paul Hanson, who argued so well for the Jewish parentage of apocalyptic eschatology, admitted the influence and appropriation of foreign teachings (Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], p. 402).