

## “Whom he raised from the dead”

### INTRODUCTION

The key statement at the heart of 1 Thess. 1:9b-10 is the claim that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Everything else Paul notes concerning the activities of the Thessalonians or the expectations of the actions of Jesus himself all follow from this precipitatory statement. It is therefore necessary to place our investigation of this phrase at the head of the book. What may have Paul intended to be understood by “whom he raised from the dead”? That is, what can we expect the Thessalonians to have understood as hearers of the announcement of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and thereby what conclusion and action would have proceeded from this? In order to understand the significance of this statement, I shall pursue a number of lines of enquiry. First, I shall consider whether Paul may have been taking on board a belief or understanding of resurrection from within the Greco-Roman world. Are there perhaps examples in Greco-Roman literature where something similar to that which Paul claims has happened to Jesus? In this way, we may be able to discern Paul’s intention here. What might have been the resonance of the statement of resurrection? How would it have been understood? A further line of enquiry takes us into the Hebrew Scriptures, LXX, and Pseudepigrapha, asking if it is from here that Paul has taken inspiration for his bold and radical proclamation.

Ultimately, in this section, I am seeking to understand Paul’s specific intention in his gospel announcement. Indeed, we see Paul’s emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead spread so liberally through his writings that we would have to agree with Küng, “‘He who raised Jesus from the dead’ becomes practically the designation of the Christian God.”<sup>1</sup> This study, however, is not the place to examine every mention of resurrection that occurs in the Pauline literature. For what I am concerned about is how the gospel announcement will have been heard and received in Thessalonica. My assertion is that, for Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead fundamentally

usurps imperial claims to ultimate power. The gospel announcement that Jesus has been raised appears to be a declaration that imperial power has been fundamentally subverted, thus precipitating a clear and profound response from the Thessalonians and giving impetus to their decisions to live their lives for God.

### RESURRECTION IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

The first question we need to ask here is straightforward: Is there any possibility that Paul's perspective on the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was influenced or inspired by ideas in the Greco-Roman world?

Wright is forthright on this, perhaps even overstating the case: "Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed that the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection."<sup>2</sup> And then, "Nobody in the pagan world of Jesus' day and thereafter actually claimed that somebody had been truly dead and had then come to be truly, and bodily, alive once more";<sup>3</sup> and, as if we had not got the point, "A great many things supposedly happened to the dead, but resurrection did not!"<sup>4</sup> Wedderburn affirms this view from the perspective of Greek literature, "If the idea of *resurrection* of the dead is found in *non-biblical Greek literature* it is perhaps most frequently found as a statement of the impossible: the dead are not raised."<sup>5</sup> Although Winston makes reference to the inscription "There is no boat in Hades, no ferry man Charon, no Aeacus keeper of the keys, nor any dog called Cerberus. All of

1. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977), 361. So, for example: 1 Cor. 6:14: "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power."; 2 Cor. 4:14: "because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence."; Gal. 1:1: "Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead"; Rom. 4:24: "but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead"; 8:11: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."; 10:9: "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."; Col. 2:12: "when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."; Eph. 1:20: "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.."

2. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, COQG 3 (London: SPCK, 2003), 35.

3. *Ibid.*, 76.

4. *Ibid.*, 83.

5. A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology Against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 181.

us who have died and gone below are bones and ashes: there is nothing else,”<sup>6</sup> Lattimore confirms that this inscription is from the third or fourth century ce.<sup>7</sup> But earlier inscriptions say much the same thing: ΟΥΔΕΝ ΓΑΡ ΠΛΕΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ (ΘΑΝΟΝΤΑ ΓΑΡ ΕΓΕΙΡΕΙ) Η ΤΕΙΡΕΙ ΨΥΧΗΝ ΙΩΝΤΩΝ ΜΟΝΟΝ ΑΛΛΟ ΓΑΡ ΟΥΔΕΝ.<sup>8</sup> (“There is nothing left—for nothing awakens the dead—except to afflict the souls of those who pass. Nothing else remains.”)<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Klauck makes an exhaustive study of the mystery cults and their attitudes and practices concerning the afterlife and concludes, “There is nowhere anything exactly comparable to the Christian hope of resurrection.”<sup>10</sup> Bowersock concurs with this view, “The consultation of deceased spirits has a long and lurid history in classical antiquity, but once again it is palpably not the same thing as resurrection in the flesh. For that there are virtually no examples before the second half of the first century of the present era.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, he cites Oepke, who “states categorically that the whole concept of resurrection, although attested among other peoples, was altogether alien to Graeco-Roman thought.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, Meggitt is adamant on this: “What I take to be the fundamental Christological datum, that which is generative of all subsequent Christological developments, the resurrection (Rom. 1.4, 10.9 etc.) has no parallel in imperial ideology whatsoever.”<sup>13</sup>

Not that all scholars go along with this perspective of course. Crossan, for example, insists that the biblical writers were not calling on ancient ideas for inspiration to understand and articulate what they claimed had happened to Jesus, but rather merely contemporary views. “That the dead could return and interact with the living was a commonplace for the Greco-Roman world, and neither pagans nor Jews would have asserted that it could not happen.”<sup>14</sup>

6. D. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, AB 43 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 115.

7. R. A. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1942), 75.

8. W. Dittenberger, ed., *Inscriptiones Graeciae Septentrionalis Voluminibus VII et VIII Non Comprehensae* (Berlin: G. Reimerum, 1897), 168.

9. Lattimore, *Themes*, 77.

10. H. -J. Klauck and B. McNeil, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 151.

11. G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 102.

12. *Ibid.*

13. J. Meggitt, “Taking the Emperor’s Clothes Seriously: New Testament and the Roman Emperor,” in *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd*, ed. C. E. Joynes (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2002), 143–69 (156–57).

14. J. D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xv.

Furthermore, “Why, against that early-first century context, does vision, apparition or resurrection explain anything, since such events were not considered absolutely extraordinary let alone completely unique?”<sup>15</sup> In this, Crossan appears to be following Riley’s lead, who claims, “The Church moved gradually towards a doctrine of the fleshly postmortem body of Christ, away from the ‘spiritual’ conception,”<sup>16</sup> and continues with the assertion: “The writers of Luke and John were careful to include physical demonstrations, the offer of touching the body of Jesus, to obviate the interpretations already current among Christians that Jesus had raised as a spirit.”<sup>17</sup> “The authors hereby attempt to support the late first century Christian claim that the resurrection of Jesus was unique in kind, bodily and substantial.”<sup>18</sup> Riley describes the fellowship meal that would be shared with the dead in the graveyard and makes the assertion, “The dead participant in the meal apparently enjoyed the experience”; “Offerings were poured into the graves . . . yet these dead without bodies were able to eat, drink and talk with the living. . . . It seems but a small step to the post-Easter events.”<sup>19</sup> Small step to Riley, perhaps, but surely the attempt to link these descriptions with the disciples’ post-Easter encounters with Jesus is surely a step too far, a step that strains credulity to breaking point. What appears to be clear is that those whom Riley describes are fully aware that their dead relatives or friends are still in their graves, and remain bodily dead. There is no suggestion at all in any of the accounts Riley draws on that the “dead participant” might walk out of the grave, or share meals in homes, or walk along roads, or cook breakfast for hungry fishermen as we have described so clearly for us in the Lukan and Johannine accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. And yet, Riley’s comments on the Lukan and Johannine accounts of the postresurrection Jesus come in the context of his description of the “normal state of the Homeric dead . . . the soul remains alive in the underworld.”<sup>20</sup> Is it not true, then, that the Gospel account of Jesus’ resurrection body is precisely different from that described by Homer—no body in the grave, raised physically, and so on? Surely Crossan and Riley miss the point, for the Gospel writers are quite clear that Jesus had physicality (or, as Wright puts it, “transphysicality”<sup>21</sup>). Nothing in the

15. *Ibid.*, xviii.

16. G. J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 9.

17. *Ibid.*, 68.

18. *Ibid.*, 53.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.

20. *Ibid.*, 53.

21. Wright, *Resurrection*, 609.

Gospel accounts of the resurrected Jesus is anything like the impalpable souls that Homer or Lucian describe. The resurrected Jesus is intended to be seen as physical (“transphysical”) and most definitely not the impalpable spirit that Riley and Crossan are so fond of referring to. Porter continues in Riley and Crossan’s footsteps: “There is a shockingly strong tradition of contemplation of the soul’s destiny in the afterlife, along with examples of bodily resurrection.”<sup>22</sup> But he then seems to contradict this view when he later says, “From the evidence, one can see that there is a persistent theme in Graeco-Roman cults of belief in some form of soul life, even if bodily resurrection is not a part of it.”<sup>23</sup>

### RESURRECTION IN CLASSICAL FICTION

We turn now from rituals and traditions in the ancient world that might have been interpreted as examples of a belief in resurrection to specific instances of stories of resurrection in classical fiction. I note here cases that may have a certain similarity to the story concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

In Euripides *Alcestis*, for example, Heracles informs the bereaved Admetus that his dead wife Alcestis is back from the Underworld. But Admetus may not hear her voice “until she has been purified from consecration to the gods below and till the third day comes.”<sup>24</sup> Herodotus displays a certain agnosticism in his telling of the story of Salmoxis. Salmoxis was apparently trying to promulgate a new doctrine and lived underground for three years, during which time his friends mourned him, but Salmoxis reappeared in the fourth year as if from the dead.<sup>25</sup> Achilles Tatius has Leucippe apparently return from death on several occasions, but the text does not make entirely clear that Leucippe was dead in the first place.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, we note the teaching of Plato, who is categorically against any idea of bodily resurrection and argues for the indissolubility of the soul, contending, “The soul is most like the divine and immortal and intellectual and uniform and indissoluble and ever unchanging,” whereas the body meets with a “speedy dissolution” “disrupted and decomposed and dissipated by the winds.”<sup>27</sup> Among all of this we have Bowersock, who makes the claim: “Among the most conspicuous features of the fiction of the Roman empire . . . is resurrection after death in the original body.”<sup>28</sup>

22. S. E. Porter, “Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament,” in *Resurrection*, ed. S. E. Porter, M. A. Hayes, and D. Tombs, JSNTSup 186 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 52–81 (68).

23. *Ibid.*, 77.

24. Euripides, *Alcestis* 1145 (ed. and trans. D. J. Conacher [Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988]).

25. Herodotus, *The Histories* 4. 95 (ed. and trans. A. D. Godley, LCL).

26. Achilles Tatius. *Leucippe and Clitophon* 3. 15, 3. 17, 5. 7, 5. 19 (ed. and trans. S. Gaselee, LCL).

27. Plato, *Phaedo* 80c (trans. R. S. Bluck [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955]).

However, Bowersock is speaking here about the *Scheintod*, the “apparent death,” whereby in terms of the ancient fiction the credulity of the reader is not unduly strained.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this is very much a key theme in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, where “the heroic stories about the men alleged to have descended to Hades and returned from there are fantastic tales”<sup>30</sup> and “cock-and-bull stories.”<sup>31</sup> Origen asserts that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be compared with such tales and argues on the basis of the overt death of Jesus and also the behavior of the disciples, “devoting themselves to a teaching which involved risking their lives.”<sup>32</sup> Bowersock considers that it may well be that for some of the *Scheintod* tales that emerged in the latter half of the first century, “the Gospel stories themselves provided the impetus for the emergence of that fiction in the first place.”<sup>33</sup>

What appears to be clear is that when Paul spoke to the Christians in Thessalonica about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he was most certainly not speaking about an event that was either commonplace in the ancient world or even an event of which the possibility might be affirmed. Paul was introducing an idea that was at best uncommon and novel. Indeed, Louw and Nida make the point that it may sometimes, in certain cultures, be difficult to formulate an understanding of what was meant by resurrection. For, “such a phrase may refer to what is technically known as metempsychosis, that is to say, the rebirth of the soul in another existence.”<sup>34</sup> This Platonic concept<sup>35</sup> is precisely what Paul would not have said about Jesus, for Jesus was living again in his own—transformed—body. It is most likely that the message concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead would have been heard by the Thessalonians precisely as we have suggested, a novel, unique event, and perhaps even shocking.

#### RESURRECTION IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, LXX, AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Charlesworth defines resurrection as “denoting the concept of God’s raising the body and soul after death (meant literally) to a new and eternal life (not a return

28. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 99.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2. 55 (trans. H. Chadwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953]).

31. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2. 58.

32. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2. 56.

33. Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 118.

34. L&N 23. 93.

35. Plato articulates this concept particularly through the story of Er in *Republic*. Plato, *Republic* 10. 13–16 (trans. P. Shorey, LCL).

to mortal existence).<sup>36</sup> This is an appropriate place to begin our consideration of the background to Paul’s understanding and interpretation of the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For, although individual words may give rise to the appearance of resurrection, that is not always the case in reality. Besides, on some occasions, as we shall see, the “resurrection” in view does fall within the bounds of the above definition, which I wholeheartedly affirm. Charlesworth himself lists sixteen different variations of the understanding of resurrection in the writings he considers.<sup>37</sup> I will not list them all now but suffice to note that Charlesworth dismisses fourteen of the sixteen and even then considers one of the two remaining sections ambiguous texts. My concern is, then, not to examine texts that may speak of the raising of a nation (Ezekiel 37), heavenly visions (*1 Enoch* 14:8), or even the raising of someone from death to life (1 Kgs. 17:17–24), or even the raising of Christ out from Sheol (*Odes of Solomon* 42:11), and so on.<sup>38</sup> I am concerned with those texts that speak more overtly of the resurrection of specific individuals from death in the manner defined above. In this way, we are more likely to be able to perceive Paul’s perspective and perhaps begin to understand his own thinking as to what he is concerned to communicate regarding the event of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

*DANIEL 12:2-3: “MULTITUDES WHO SLEEP . . . WILL AWAKE”*

In searching for the possible background to Paul’s thinking and interpretation concerning resurrection, perhaps the most obvious text to turn to is Dan. 12:2–3. There are three particular issues that we need to consider briefly. First, although it has generally been accepted as “the only clear attestation of a belief in resurrection in the Hebrew Bible,”<sup>39</sup> the situation is not as clear as at first glance. Nonetheless, Charlesworth emphasizes that this is “the only undisputed passage”<sup>40</sup> concerning bodily resurrection in the Hebrew Bible, while Chester affirms, “It is generally recognised that Daniel 12 is the only place in the Old Testament where the idea of literal, physical resurrection is unequivocally expressed.”<sup>41</sup> Wright insists that what we have here is “concrete,

36. J. H. Charlesworth. “Where Does the Concept of Resurrection Appear, and How Do We Know That?,” in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 1–21 (2).

37. Charlesworth considers examples within the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Jewish apocryphal literature. *Ibid.*, 1–19.

38. C. Brown, “Resurrection,” in *NIDNTT*, for example, discusses various passages that may or may not be considered as alluding to resurrection, 3:259–75.

39. J. J. Collins. *Daniel: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 394.

40. Charlesworth, “Where Does the Concept of Resurrection Appear,” 12.

bodily resurrection,”<sup>42</sup> and Lacocque suggests, “Here . . . Daniel is a pioneering work. . . . This is the most precise text concerning the resurrection of (some of) the dead in the Hebrew Scriptures.”<sup>43</sup>

But the text is at very best ambiguous when we ask whether it speaks of “literal, physical resurrection”:<sup>44</sup> “And many of those who sleep in the flat of the earth will arise [ἀναστήσονται],<sup>45</sup> some to everlasting life but others to shame and others to dispersion [and contempt] everlasting. And those who are intelligent will light up like the luminaries of heaven, and those who strengthen my words will be as the stars of heaven forever and ever”<sup>46</sup> (Dan. 12:2-3). Although some have suggested that it is too clear and specific in its reference “to be able to be taken in any other sense”<sup>47</sup> than a reference to bodily resurrection, I find it difficult to disagree with Collins when he says, “The emphasis on the star-like transformation of the wise suggests exaltation to heaven.”<sup>48</sup> Now, of course, we could consider that what is intended to be understood is literal, physical, bodily resurrection, followed by exaltation to shine like the stars, but that is not so clear. Further, we would follow Goldingay, who advises, “We must avoid treating it as a piece of theological ‘teaching’: it is a vision or a flight of the imagination, not a ‘fully developed’ belief in resurrection.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, while Daniel may indeed be breaking new ground in terms of articulating resurrection, what does not appear to be so clear is whether bodily resurrection is in view.

A second issue is the view that Daniel is taking other texts and adapting them for his own specific situation. For example, Isa. 26:19, “The dead shall rise,

41. A. Chester, “Resurrection and Transformation,” in *Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium. Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 47–78 (59).

42. Wright, *Resurrection*, 109.

43. A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. D. Pellauer (London: SPCK, 1979), 243.

44. Chester, “Resurrection and Transformation,” 59.

45. Although it is clear that ἀνίστημι can refer to many types of rising, that ἀναστήσονται was accepted classically to refer to precisely this rising from the dead, appears to be shown in Homer’s *Iliad* 24. 551 (LSJ 144). We should note that Homer regards resurrection as impossible.

46. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in English from the LXX are taken from A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in Greek from the LXX are taken from A. Rahlfs and R. Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

47. Chester, “Resurrection and Transformation,” 59.

48. J. J. Collins, *Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees*, OTM 15 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1981), 110–11.

49. J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 306.



and those who are in the tombs shall be raised, and those who are in the earth shall rejoice!,” is reminiscent of “many of those who sleep in the flat of the earth will arise.” While it seems clear that the Isaianic passage is a “prediction of the restoration or revivification of the nation”<sup>50</sup> following the memorable metaphor expressed in Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37), Daniel appears to give hope to individuals—to martyrs who would “lay down their lives rather than comply with the demands of the tyrant.”<sup>51</sup> It is perhaps important to accept that as the concept of the raising of a nation lay in the consciousness of the people, then there is the possibility that this might have been extended in the hopes of the people to embrace the idea that if God can raise a nation from the dust, then why not individuals?

*First Enoch* 104:2, “As stars of heaven you will light up and shine. The windows of heaven will be opened to you, and your cry will be heard, and your judgment, for which you cry will also appear,”<sup>52</sup> expressed in a context of persecution, is evocative of Daniel’s “the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” If Daniel and Enoch are in fact speaking a similar metaphorical language, then Martin-Achard may be correct that “the theme of the resurrection asserted itself in the Jewish milieu at the very moment when apocalyptic views were developing in answer to the distress being undergone by faithful Jews.”<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, Nickelsburg makes the point that in the Isaiah passage, “Resurrection is not a means by which all parties involved are brought to judgment, but an appropriate vindication of the righteous,”<sup>54</sup> while “for Daniel resurrection is *a means* by which both the righteous and the wicked dead are enabled to receive their respective vindication or punishment.”<sup>55</sup>

50. R. A. Anderson, *Signs and Wonders: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 147.

51. Collins, *Daniel, First Maccabees*, 111.

52. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Pseudepigrapha in English are from C. A. Evans et al., trans. and ed., *The Pseudepigrapha (English)* (Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia Divinity College, 2009). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Pseudepigrapha in Greek are from C. A. Evans, *The Greek Pseudepigrapha* (Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia Divinity College, 2009).

53. R. Martin-Achard, “Resurrection (OT),” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:680–84 (683).

54. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, HTS 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press for Harvard Theological Studies, 2006), 18.

55. *Ibid.*, 19.

Indeed, as the context of resurrection in Daniel is quite specifically set in the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes<sup>56</sup>—which prompts Porteous to speak of the “remarkable prediction of resurrection”<sup>57</sup> as “a flash of inspired insight”<sup>58</sup>—we can clearly see the cause of a great hope that springs up in the midst of difficulty and tragedy. It is at this point that we can draw a line of connection between the resurrection hope in Daniel and the affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in 1 Thessalonians. For, in both contexts, struggle and suffering is in some manner lightened by the mention of resurrection. What we must, however, be clear about is the fact that Daniel’s apparent assertion of resurrection is for the righteous—maybe even a mass communal resurrection of all those people who have suffered under persecution—while Paul is specifically speaking of the resurrection of one man, Jesus Christ, from the dead. Although, I concede that in both cases there is the possibility that what the respective authors intend to affirm is God’s power and desire to raise the faithful from death. Even considering this comment, while Paul *may* have been inspired by Daniel, we must conclude that there is something different going on in the two passages. Paul’s statement of resurrection in 1 Thess. 1:9b-10 concerns God raising one particular individual—Jesus, his son—from the dead, and Paul does not appear at this point to be speaking about the communal resurrection of the believers whom he is addressing.

*2 MACCABEES 7: “I HOPE TO GET THEM BACK AGAIN”*

The situation we encounter in 2 Maccabees 7 is straightforward. Antiochus is threatening seven brothers with death unless they break their ancestral laws and eat the flesh of a pig (2 Macc. 7:1). Each in turn, the brothers refuse to accede to the tyrant’s demands, and each in turn dies a torturous death. Two aspects of this story may be important in seeking the possible inspiration for Paul’s words of encouragement to the believers in Thessalonica.

First, the Maccabean brothers appear to have physical resurrection in view as they resist the tyrant. When the third brother is threatened with the cutting off of his tongue, he courageously holds out his hands and confidently asserts, “I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again” (2 Macc. 7:11). There is, then, a clear parallel with the experience and example of Jesus, who suffered and died. We cannot say for

56. Collins, *Daniel*, 396.

57. N. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1979), 170.

58. *Ibid.*, 171.

sure whether Jesus held this same hope of physical restoration, but the Gospels speak of Jesus having an intact (transphysical) body.

The second aspect comes in 2 Macc. 7:24, where Antiochus appeals to the youngest brother, promising him wealth and status in his government, if only he will turn from his devotion to his traditional beliefs. The interesting aspect here is the notion that Antiochus is presented here not simply as a bloodthirsty ruler delighting in the death of his enemies but seemingly reveals his true concern here: envy at the brothers' loyal devotion to their traditions. Antiochus wants the brothers to be loyal and devoted to him. Now, if I am correct in my assertion that Paul is principally concerned with encouraging the believers in Thessalonica in their imperial context to devote themselves to the living and true God rather than acceding to the demands of empire and offering devotion in some form to the imperial culture and in turn to the emperor himself, then we do have here in 2 Maccabees a pertinent inspiration. Jesus died under the power of empire, but God raised him from the dead. It may be that Paul is taking inspiration from the story of the brothers recorded in 2 Maccabees 7 and encouraging the believers in Thessalonica to hold on to the living God and his ability to raise the dead. But it is the imperial parallel that is most significant for us here: the refusal of the brothers to accede to the imperial demands, confident that God will give back to them everything the empire takes away.

*PSALMS OF SOLOMON: “THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD SHALL RISE”*

Concluding his survey of the various suggestions regarding the dating of the *Psalms of Solomon*, Atkinson tentatively suggests, “It is therefore perhaps best to consider these psalms as the product of an unknown Jewish sect residing within Jerusalem during the first century bce.”<sup>59</sup> Our interest is immediately stirred, for this sets these writings immediately before Paul's own time and thereby will potentially have had a similar background of thought and cultural influence to Paul himself. Indeed, Embry describes these writings as “a masterfully wrought defense of the Jewish faith in a time of crisis—one intended, as much as anything else, to produce hope in the readership.”<sup>60</sup> The possibility is that these psalms are set at the time of the sacking of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 bce, with various allusions to those events in the texts themselves. For example: 17:12 speaks of those conquered being expelled to the west, having initially welcomed the conquerors “with joy” (8:16). But then the conquerors resorted to the

59. K. Atkinson, “Towards a Redating of the Psalms of Solomon: Implications for Understanding the *Sitz im Leben* of an Unknown Jewish Sect,” *JSP* 17 (1998): 95–112 (112).

60. B. Embry, “The Psalms of Solomon and the New Testament: Intertextuality and the Need for a Re-Evaluation,” *JSP* (13, no. 2 (2002): 99–136 (101).

“battering-ram” (2:2) to quell resistance, and then they “defiled the sanctuary of the Lord” (2:3).

Three passages in the *Psalms of Solomon* give rise to the question of resurrection: 3:12: “Those who fear the Lord shall rise to everlasting life, and their life is in the light of the Lord and shall never end”; 13:11: “For the life of the righteous is forever, but sinners shall be taken away into destruction, and their memorial shall never be found”; and 14:10: “But the devout of the Lord shall inherit life with joy.” Wright comments—I would suggest perhaps evasively—that for each of these references “it is unclear whether this is the resurrection of the body (arising from the grave), or immortality of the spirit (rising to God), or indeed, if this author distinguished between the two.”<sup>61</sup> While the reference to resurrection in the latter two passages may only be slight, it is interesting to note in 3:12 what looks like a parallel with Dan. 12:2. First, the same word is used to describe the rising (ἀναστήσονται), and second, both verses contain an identical reference to eternal life (εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον). Furthermore, it is probably worth noting that Paul twice describes resurrection in 1 Thessalonians using ἀνίστημι. First, when speaking of Jesus Christ, “We believe that Jesus died and rose [ἀνέστη] again” (4:14), and second, when speaking of the anticipated resurrection of the dead believers, “For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise [ἀναστήσονται] first” (4:16). Paul’s intention is, I would argue, to describe here bodily resurrection, although I recognize that this is not an exclusive use of the term, as Paul does elsewhere use ἀνίστημι to describe pagans getting up to engage in revelry (1 Cor. 10:7).

It may be, then, that in the *Psalms of Solomon*, the author’s intention is indeed to encourage a sense of hope set against the terrifying context of the Roman siege and overwhelming of the city. It is evidently not the intent of the psalmist to suggest that “those who fear the Lord” will not die resisting the invasion, but rather to confidently assert that God is able to raise those who die having remained faithful to God.

*JOB: “HE WILL RISE AGAIN WITH THOSE THE LORD RAISES UP”*

Where we encounter resurrection in Job, its occurrences are striking. At first, there is only a hint of resurrection: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (13:15 NIV). This hope—while not precisely resurrection hope—certainly

61. R. B. Wright, “Psalms of Solomon,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 2:639–70 (655n. o).

is trust in God to do that which is good. There is then the suggestion here, translating this into the Thessalonian situation, that even if the Christians there should die as they wait, they can still—like Job—trust God, who raises the dead and will do what is good. However, this hint of hope appears to be dashed in Job 14:14, where he asks, “If a man dies, will he live again?” But, in an extraordinary move, the LXX appears to eliminate the doubt by changing the question into a statement: “If a person died, then he would live again,” which actually contradicts the Hebrew text.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, there is the extraordinary change in 42:17 from “and Job died, old and full of days” to the hopeful addition in the LXX: “And it is written that he will rise again with those the Lord raises up.”<sup>63</sup> Commenting on this passage, Cavallin asserts, “There is no doubt that this statement refers to a *post-mortem* resurrection.”<sup>64</sup> A further example of resurrection in Job may be found in Job 19:25–26, “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.” The meaning of these verses is much debated. Clines insists that “it remains preferable to read vv. 25b–26 as expressing Job’s desire for an encounter in this life,”<sup>65</sup> describing alternatives as “a leap of faith”; Gordis asserts that any suggestion that this verse affirms faith in bodily resurrection has been “rightly surrendered by modern scholars”;<sup>66</sup> and Habel concedes, “Job is not proposing the idea of a universal resurrection, but the radical hope that he will see his divine adversary face to face.”<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, Hartley counters this stream of thought with the suggestion, “Job is working with the same logic of redemption that stands as the premise of the NT doctrine of resurrection.”<sup>68</sup> What is not clear in the text is whether a bodily Job will see God. The text is explicit that Job’s skin will be destroyed, yet the translation of *וּמִבְּשָׂרִי* as “in my flesh” could be translated as “from my flesh”<sup>69</sup>—meaning “aside from or free from my flesh, I will see God.”<sup>70</sup> In the face of both this stance against resurrection in these verses and the apparent uncertainty about a bodily, postmortem encounter with God, it is interesting that in the LXX

62. H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life after Death: Paul’s Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in I Cor. 15. Part I. An Enquiry Into the Jewish Background* (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1974), 105.

63. This is highlighted by R. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 223.

64. Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 106.

65. D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 434.

66. R. Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 204.

67. N. C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1985), 309.

68. J. E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 297.

69. BDB (142) regards this as a reference to Job’s flesh “in disembodied state.”

we have a subtle shift: “May my skin, which patiently endures these things, rise up” (ἀναστήσαι), thus emphasizing the possibility Cavallin insists is a clear reference to resurrection.<sup>71</sup>

Needless to say, Job otherwise appears to weigh against an affirmation of resurrection. We could take 7:9, “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up” or 10:21, “before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness,” as evidence of the view that for Job death is the end. Add to this 17:15-16, “where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?” and the picture seems complete: there is no return from death. However, even though Hartley objects to the notion of resurrection in Job, arguing, “The claim that resurrection is the focal point . . . seems to be a reading back of the NT into the OT,”<sup>72</sup> and Wright sums up the evidence in Job, “the dead have no future, so God’s judgement must take place here and now,”<sup>73</sup> I insist that the extraordinary changes in the text in 14:14 and 42:17 be taken seriously; and I contest that the author of these changes was strongly proposing the very real possibility of resurrection from the dead.

In my assessment of resurrection in Daniel, 2 Maccabees, and the *Psalms of Solomon*, I have suggested that the rise of resurrection hope occurred in the context of imperial oppression and tyranny. Resurrection provided the profound encouragement that when all is said and done the righteous will stand and experience vindication. Therefore, we must necessarily ask whether there might even be a hint of a context of imperial oppression in Job that might have led to the editorial changes I have highlighted here. The following section is thus a necessary consideration of the imperial background to the editorial changes in Job.

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF JOB

The historical context of Job inevitably rests on the dating of the book. There are three possibilities that I put forward here, all of which, as we shall see, seem to support the notion that the editorial changes we have seen may possibly have taken place at a time of suffering under some kind of tyrannous rule.

70. Driver considers this phrase “ambiguous.” Furthermore, he contests, “Job implies his conviction that he will see God recognizing his integrity, and reconciled to him” (S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *The Book of Job*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 174.

71. Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 106.

72. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 296.

73. Wright, *Resurrection*, 97.

First, there is the suggestion that we should think of Job as having an exilic dating. Although Clines declines to date Job,<sup>74</sup> Hartley suggests that “the interplay between this book and other OT books, especially Isaiah, can best be accounted for by placing this work in the seventh century b.c.”<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, Hurvitz argues that linguistic considerations make “the final shaping of the extant Prose Tale incompatible with a date prior to the Exile”;<sup>76</sup> and Crenshaw suggests that “the abundance of Aramaisms may indicate a date in the late sixth or fifth century.”<sup>77</sup> A later dating, in the context of the postexilic period, places this book in a time of imperial domination, as the exiles sought to come to terms with the extraordinary suffering and humiliation of their situation. This circumstance then suggests a basis for understanding Job, which in Perdue’s view “is one response to these crises that threatened the survival of even a small, faithful remnant.”<sup>78</sup>

Job is introduced to us as a farmer who has what appears to be an abundance of animals (Job 1:3), and, no doubt, tremendous wealth. If we follow the proposals above and place Job at the time either of the exile itself or postexile, then we can possibly see a cause for Job’s suffering. If Job is to be dated at the time of exile itself, then it may be appropriate to suggest that Job’s suffering consists in his loss of wealth due to the tumultuous events that take place. Job is not pictured as a ruler, or an aristocrat who could perhaps have dealt directly with the imperial authorities in order to protect his position, but rather as a straightforward landowner who loses out as a result of the imperial dominance. As Perdue contests: “That Job is a wealthy farmer, likely occasioned by the ravages of exile and the loss of his household, should be taken seriously as an important context for the social setting.”<sup>79</sup>

Alternatively, if Job is dated in the postexilic period, then Job’s suffering may be put down to the consequences of the excessive taxes levied on the landowners, which satisfied the imperial rulers but removed Job’s wealth from him. Horsley articulates a view of a temple-state “as a means of generating increased production as an expanded base for taxes as well as a way of securing

74. Clines, *Job 1–20*, lvii.

75. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 20.

76. A. Hurvitz, “The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered,” *HTR* 67, no. 1 (1974): 17–34 (33).

77. J. L. Crenshaw, “The Book of Job,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:858–68 (863).

78. L. G. Perdue, “The Vitality of Wisdom in Second Temple Judaism During the Persian Period,” in *Passion, Vitality and Foment: The Dynamics of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. L. Luker (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2001), 119–54 (142).

79. *Ibid.*, 143.

imperial control with the presence of a Persian governor and military detachment.”<sup>80</sup> Those living on the land would be severely oppressed by ever-increasing demands for taxes, while the aristocratic “priesthood maintained order and appropriated revenues for the imperial regime to which they owed their position of power and privilege.”<sup>81</sup>

A second consideration concerns the LXX and a story that tradition tells regarding a letter written in the late second century bce by a certain Aristeas to his brother Philocrates. The letter alleges that the Greek Pentateuch was produced at the request of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–247 bce) by seventy-two elders—six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—in Alexandria, Egypt. Philadelphus made this move having been informed by his librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, that the royal library lacked a copy of the laws of the Jews.<sup>82</sup> Although this tale is generally regarded as legend, the LXX was nevertheless almost certainly written at a time of imperial subjugation, this time under the Ptolemaic Empire. Thus editorial changes that may reflect this context are not wholly implausible.

A third consideration is that the date of the Greek Job is later still. Reed contends that “as currently extant, LXX Job reflects two discernible stages of composition: the Old Greek translation, composed around 150 b.c.e., and the Greek version that is associated with Theodotion, composed in the early first century c.e.”<sup>83</sup> It may then be that the editing of the LXX text—42:17–18—was added after the original “Old Greek” translation. A date for this edition could plausibly then be as late as mid-first century bce.<sup>84</sup> Historically, this is a very interesting time in terms of the Jewish nation. The Hasmonean kingdom, established following the Maccabean revolt in 165 bce, held sway in Judea during the period in view, ruling over the only independent Jewish state since the breakup of the kingdom of Judah, in 586 bce. However, it is also clear that this period was not a time of unity. By the time of Pompey’s invasion of Jerusalem, “a civil war had split and agitated the Hasmonean Kingdom.”<sup>85</sup> Josephus records<sup>86</sup> the story of how Aristobulus promptly declared war on

80. R. A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 17.

81. *Ibid.*, 17.

82. M. K. H. Peters, “Why Study the Septuagint?,” *BA* 49, no. 3 (1986): 174–81 (174).

83. A. Y. Reed, “Job as Jobab: The Interpretation of Job in LXX Job 42:17b–e,” *JBL* (120, no. 1 (2001): 31–55 (33–34).

84. “Given the use of the appendix by Aristeas the Exegete, the *terminus ad quem* is the quotation of Aristeas by Alexander Polyhistor, circa 60 B.C.E.” (*ibid.*, 40).

85. J. Efron, *Studies in the Hasmonean Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 227.

86. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.8 (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray et al., LCL).



his elder brother Hyrcanus and gained the crown. The ensuing struggle, also involving Antipater and Aretas, ultimately led to their audiences with Pompey; both men were hoping for his help in securing power. Diodorus Seculus, however, also records that at this same time while Aristobulus and Hyrcanus were petitioning Pompey with the dispute over the kingship, more than two hundred leading men came to Pompey to complain about those fighting over the throne and claimed rather that “these men were lording it over them, having overthrown the ancient laws and enslaved the citizens in defiance of all justice.” They further claimed that the Jews were “to be free and autonomous, their ruler being called High Priest not King.”<sup>87</sup>

These three possibilities all go toward supporting the idea with which we entered this section: that the historical context of Job may have involved imperial oppression of one sort or another and therefore may possibly in turn have given rise to the editorial changes that I have described. These editorial changes give a sense of hopefulness and expectation rooted in the possibility of the resurrection of the dead.

*DEUTERONOMY 32:39: “I KILL AND I MAKE ALIVE”*

The author of Deuteronomy boldly declares concerning God, “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god beside me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand” (32:39). Driver is quick to insist that this “reference is not, of course, to the resurrection of the dead, but to Jehovah’s power to rescue from mortal peril.”<sup>88</sup> Driver may possibly be correct here, as **אֶחָיִים** is indeed used on other occasions to describe what is obviously rescue from mortal peril. So, for example, Jer. 27:17: “Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live [וַחַיִּינָה]. Why should this city become a desolation?” Or Ps. 41:2: “The Lord protects them and keeps them alive [וַיַּחַיֵּהוּ]; they are called happy in the land. You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.” But it is worth bearing in mind that in Ezekiel 37 we find **חַיִּים** used to describe the “new” life that will inhabit the dry bones. So 37:5-6 says,

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live [וַחַיִּיתֶם]. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live [וַחַיִּיתֶם]; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

87. Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 40.2 (trans. F. R. Walton, LCL).

88. S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 378.

And then again in 37:9-10,

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live [יְרִיבֵי].” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived [יְרִיבֵי], and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Although Wright considers Deut. 32:39 simply “to be a prediction of the eagerly awaited return from exile,”<sup>89</sup> I would argue that a closer examination of the correlation between this passage and 1 Thess. 1:9 reveals a greater possibility that Paul was inspired by such a text as this. First, there is the reminder in the LXX version of 32:4 that “God—his works are genuine [ἀληθινά] and all his ways are justice. A faithful god, and there is no injustice, righteous and holy Lord.” This is very similar to the way in which Paul describes θεῶ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῶ in 1 Thess. 1:9. There is a stress here on the unchanging nature of the faithful God of the covenant, which certainly comes into play in Paul’s reflections on the basis for confidence that God will remember and rescue those who serve him. Second, there is the reminder in 32:36: “For the Lord will judge his people and be comforted over his slaves. For he saw them paralyzed, both failed under attack and enfeebled.” In 2 Macc. 7:33, this same confidence that God will surely remember and be reconciled to his slaves (δούλοις) is expressed by the brothers who are facing extreme torture and death. This can be linked with the phrase δουλεύειν θεῶ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῶ (1 Thess. 1:9), which expresses the Thessalonian believers’ confidence that God would help his slaves in the face of imperial tyranny. Third, there is in Deuteronomy 32 a reminder of the gods whom the people once served, and in verse 39 we have the assured declaration, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν ἐμοῦ. Although εἰδῶλων is not found here, the sense is most surely is false gods, idols, those who are not real compared to the power and magnificence of the one God, who gives life. And we remember of course that the Thessalonians have turned from idols to God. Fourth, there is this possible mention of resurrection. While of course we must be careful making this enquiry from the standpoint of the twenty-first century not to read back into the Hebrew Bible what is understood from the New Testament, there nonetheless does seem to be, as I have noted, a close correlation between Deuteronomy 32 and 1 Thess. 1:9. Paul speaks of the God who raises the dead, which—when seen in alignment with ἀληθινῶ, εἰδῶλων,

89. Wright, *Resurrection*, 139.

and δουλεύειν, found in both passages in sense if not in literal fact—seems to suggest that the Deuteronomist may well have had resurrection in mind.

*SIRACH 4:10: “GOD SHALL . . . DELIVER THEE FROM THE PIT”*

Sirach was originally written in Hebrew (Sir. 0:22) by Jesus ben Sira (Sir. 50:27) and then later translated into Greek by ben Sira’s grandson (Sir. 0:5), with the implied dating of “somewhere between 120 bce and 117 bce,”<sup>90</sup> accepting that the translation was completed by the death of Euergetes (Sir. 0:27) in 117 bce. Ben Sira’s grandson himself acknowledges, “What was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is in fact rendered in another language” (Sir. 0:22), and it may be that this has given rise to something rather peculiar but, I believe, extremely significant in 4:10.

The English translation of the Greek text of Sir. 4:10 reads, “Be like a father to orphans and instead of a husband to their mother, and you will be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother.” It is this final phrase, “he will love you more than does your mother,” that is most significant in our enquiry here. For the Hebrew text says something markedly different: “Be as a father to orphans; and instead of a husband to widows and God shall call thee Son and *shall be gracious to thee, and deliver thee from the pit.*”<sup>91</sup> What is clear in this text is that sonship of God relates specifically to a fatherly care of orphans. But what is not so clear in the comparison between the Greek and Hebrew text is what then follows. Smend suggests that the Greek text, with its “love you more than does your mother,” was “due to a desire to beautify the text on the basis of such passages as Is. xlix. 15, [Will a mother forget her child so as not to have mercy on the descendants of her womb? But even if a woman should forget these, yet I will not forget you, said the Lord].”<sup>92</sup> But this is surely so far removed from the meaning of the Hebrew—even bearing in mind Ben Sira’s grandson’s comment about the difficulties of translation—that it has to be held very lightly. There appears rather to have been a deliberate editing out of the Hebrew text, which contains a clear reference to resurrection, “and deliver thee from the pit [תַּחַת].”<sup>93</sup>

90. M. D. Nelson, *The Syriac Version of the Wisdom of Ben Sira Compared to the Greek and Hebrew Materials*, SBLDS 107 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 2.

91. S. Schechter and C. Taylor, eds., *The Wisdom of Ben Sira. Portions of the Book Ecclesiasticus from Hebrew Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah Collection Presented to the University of Cambridge by the Editors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 17. Schechter and Taylor’s text is MS A.

92. G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, “Sirach,” in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 268–517 (328).

Before we consider this text any further, we must touch upon the dating issue. For, as Beentjes comments, “Whereas MS A and D are dated almost unanimously in the eleventh century,”<sup>94</sup> the provenance of other Ben Sira manuscripts are entirely different, dating, as Beentjes points out, between the second half of the first century bce and the first half of the first century ce.<sup>95</sup> However, the oldest Hebrew text of 4:10 is MSS A. So we can logically argue that the Hebrew text of 4:10, while having been copied in the eleventh century, must have been copied from an older text that we no longer have or at least we have not yet discovered in some other dusty storeroom. Furthermore, as Beentjes goes on to show, there are surely enough parallels between the younger and the older texts<sup>96</sup> to suggest that even where we do not have a Hebrew text from the first century bce or ce, what we do have can be considered to be “reasonably authoritative.”<sup>97</sup>

There are, then, two questions we must ask of the Hebrew text. First, what does “from the pit” mean? From death, or from some other difficult situation? Second, if “from the pit” does refer to death, is the deliverance from the dead, or is it intended to imply that death would be avoided? It should also be stressed that, to my knowledge, this text has been almost completely ignored by scholars as a possible reference to resurrection.

The first query concerns the meaning of “from the pit [מִשְׁחָת].” Is this phrase intended to refer to death? Psalm 16:10 declares, “For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit” (שְׁחָת), which implies that death is in view. As Gunkel comments, “The petition for liberation from sheol does not mean life after death, but a return to earthly life upon which the psalmist hangs every fibre of his being.”<sup>98</sup> Admittedly, other texts, such as Ps. 103:4, are perhaps not so explicit: “who redeems your life from the Pit [מִשְׁחָת], who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” So “pit” may be understood to be a difficult, even “near-death” experience rather than death itself, as Terrien makes clear: “Literally, ‘he redeems life from death’ is an ambiguous statement; it may allude to the healing of a mortal sickness, or it may allude to life everlasting, after death.”<sup>99</sup> However, many other texts make clear that death is in view. For

93. It is obvious that this is a reference to death and the place of the dead. For example, Job 33:18, 24, 30; Ps. 16:10; 103:4; and Isa. 38:16 all use שְׁחָת to refer to Sheol and death.

94. P. C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 5.

95. *Ibid.*, 6.

96. *Ibid.*, 129–78.

97. *Ibid.*, 6.

98. H. Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, completed by J. Begrich, trans. J. D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 132.

example, Ps. 30:9, “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit [אֵל-שְׁחַת]? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” seems to imply again that death is in mind. After all, the reference to “dust” implies that the psalmist’s body has been buried and turned to dust. Job 33 makes a number of references to “the pit,” all of which imply that it is intended to mean death or Sheol. Examples of this (Job 33:18, “to spare their souls from the Pit [שְׁחַת], their lives from traversing the River”; and Job 33:30, “to bring back their souls from the Pit [שְׁחַת], so that they may see the light of life.”) make the point clear. Accepting that this passage is not intended to speak about resurrection, we observe Wright’s comment, “In keeping with the rest of Job, it is best to see it as referring to rescue from an early, untimely death, rather than to a rescue which happens afterwards.”<sup>100</sup> Although it is interesting to note also that Wright then continues, “However, both these passages [Job 33 and Psalm 16] could well have been read with post-biblical Judaism in the sense of a post-mortem rescue.” The point is well made by Clines: “The ‘pit’ is a common term for Sheol (33:18, 22, 24, 30; Ps. 16:10; Jonah 2:7 [6]), or perhaps a burial pit lying within the land of Sheol.”<sup>101</sup> And commenting on 33:22, he says, “God has brought the sufferer back from the edge of death.”<sup>102</sup> Hartley concludes his comments on 33:30 by saying, “God’s purpose is . . . to keep a person from going down to the grave.”<sup>103</sup> A further text, Jonah 2:6, “at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit [מִשְׁחַת], O Lord my God,” is an explicit reference to salvation from beyond the grave, as Sasson asserts: “Just as Jonah’s perilous descent brings him almost beyond return, God rescues him from beyond the grave.”<sup>104</sup> Thus I conclude at this point that when Sir. 4:10 speaks of the “pit,” death is most likely intended.

A second query concerns whether the deliverance spoken of in Sir. 4:10 is a postmortem deliverance itself, or whether a deliverance that involves only an avoidance of death is intended. Many verses would suggest that such a deliverance as is described in Sir. 4:10 is in fact an avoidance of death and peril. So, for example, we have 2 Kgs. 17:39, “But you shall worship the Lord your God; he will deliver [יַצִּיל] you out of the hand of all your enemies,” or the words of David in 2 Sam. 22:18, “He delivered me [יַצִּילֵנִי] from my strong

99. S. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 703.

100. Wright, *Resurrection*, 105.

101. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 400.

102. *Ibid.*, 733.

103. Hartley, *Book of Job*, 448.

104. J. M. Sasson, *Jonah*, AB 24B (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 182.

enemy, from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me.” In both cases, the sense is obviously that the deliverance is intended to be understood as an avoidance of defeat or death.

However, Exod. 3:8, “I have come down to deliver them [לְהַצִּילֵנִי] from the Egyptians,” Exod. 6:6, “Say therefore to the Israelites, ‘I am the Lord, and I will free you [וְהִצַּלְתִּי] from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment,” and Deut. 32:39, “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god beside me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver [מִצִּיל] from my hand,” all make a different point. In the case of the Exodus texts, it is plain to see that the deliverance in mind is from slavery to a new life of freedom, rather than an avoidance of slavery in the first place. The strength of the Deuteronomy text is that no one can take out of God’s hand what he already holds in his hand. It appears unmistakable, therefore, that in the Exodus and Deuteronomy examples we have clear evidence that the deliverance Sir. 4:10 speaks of could well be intended to be understood as being from beyond death rather than the avoidance of death in the first place.

Why the text may have been changed from the Hebrew allusion to resurrection in 4:10 to the almost nondescript Greek version is a more difficult question. Two alternatives may be proposed. First, that the albeit subtle reference to resurrection in 4:10 was deemed by later transcribers to be too otherworldly given the “considerable political interest” that Ben Sira otherwise shows, culminating in a “completely this-worldly expectation of salvation for his people.”<sup>105</sup> A second alternative is that the grandson of Ben Sira and those who followed him were working in a particular political, cultural, and even religious context wherein ideas of resurrection were deemed inappropriate.

Skehan dates Sirach at about 180 bce,<sup>106</sup> while Snaith argues that “Ecclesiasticus was originally written in Hebrew about 190 bce,”<sup>107</sup> and Coggins concedes, “In any case it seems that the main body of work can be dated c. 190–180 bce.”<sup>108</sup> Coggins later comments that “Sirach dates from the period when Judaism was finding its way in the encounter with the Hellenistic civilization which developed throughout the Mediterranean world following

105. M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM, 1974), 1:134.

106. P. W. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Introduction and Commentary by Alexander A. Di Lella*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 10.

107. J. G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1.

108. R. J. Coggins, *Sirach* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 18.

the conquests of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century bce.”<sup>109</sup> This latter note is particularly interesting in that when we consider the context of 1 Thessalonians, we see that the new Christians are not simply seeking to find their way under the power of the Roman Empire, but in fact are seeking to come out from under the might of that empire and live an alternative life.

The suggestions on dating mean of course that Ben Sira will have experienced nothing but imperial rule. He will have known the Ptolemaic Empire stemming from Egypt and then the Seleucid Empire from Syria from about 198 bce. It seems a valid conclusion, then, to suggest that even without living into and experiencing the “wrath” and evil of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Skehan has Ben Sira’s death at about the time Antiochus came to power),<sup>110</sup> Ben Sira surely experienced life under the weight of imperial might. The reference in 4:10 to resurrection is thus a strange but fascinating allusion to the possibility that ultimate power lies elsewhere than in the imperial rulers.

I am aware of course that even the insinuation that Ben Sira was making reference to resurrection goes against an entire stream of scholarship. Gilbert makes it plain: “In his [Ben Sira’s] doctrine of the last things, he simply takes traditional notions for granted, and these have a very limited range: man’s life does not go on in the hereafter, only Sheol awaits mortal man, and ‘the expectation of man is worms’ (7:17b Hebrew MS.A). . . . when he speaks of death it is in the tone of a man who has no illusions (4:11–19; 40:1–11). Posthumous fame is the only afterlife the wise or just man can hope for (41:11–13).”<sup>111</sup> And Wright makes it plainer still: “the Ben-Sirach point of view (forget about a life after death, concentrate on getting this one straight),”<sup>112</sup> as does Schechter: “There is no distinct reference to the doctrine of immortality or resurrection in Ben Sira.”<sup>113</sup> Levenson continues in this same vein: “There is no sense that God’s intervention involves any resurrection whatsoever,”<sup>114</sup> while Skehan speaks of “the strong evidence that Ben Sira did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>115</sup> Harrington concurs with all this, stating that in

109. *Ibid.*, 42.

110. Skehan has Ben Sira’s death at the time about which Antiochus comes to power (Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 10).

111. M. Gilbert, “Wisdom Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. M. E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 301–13 (298).

112. Wright, *Resurrection*, 150.

113. S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2003), 2:68–69.

114. J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 195.

115. Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 532.

Ben Sira's view, "the best route to 'immortality' is to lead a good and virtuous life (which means observing the law of the Most High God) and so to deserve a virtuous and good 'name' (reputation, memory) that will last forever."<sup>116</sup> And, finally, Crenshaw, "Ben Sira continued his predecessors' resistance to the notion that the dead return from the grave."<sup>117</sup> Indeed, it would appear that the issues of immortality and the afterlife in Ben Sira are obvious and readily understood, when we read, "When a person dies, he inherits creeping things and beasts and worms" (Sir. 10:11); "Do not rejoice over a corpse; remember that we all pass away" (8:7); and "Everything that is from the earth will go back into the earth; so impious persons are from a curse to destruction" (41:10). But we must not ignore Ben Sira's reference to Elijah's raising the dead (48:5)—although this is clearly not resurrection—and also the reference to Enoch who, as an example of repentance, "was changed" (44:16).

The evidence, then, while appearing to weigh against a doctrine of resurrection in Ben Sira, does not mean nonetheless that we should ignore or preclude 4:10 from consideration. The reference to resurrection in this verse as a reward for treating the orphans as a father would his own children must be taken seriously, and in particular, we should regard the Greek translation with caution.

*WISDOM OF SOLOMON 5:1: "THE RIGHTEOUS WILL STAND WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE"*

A final mention here concerns Wisd. of Sol. 5:1. The Wisdom of Solomon is generally accepted as having Egyptian provenance,<sup>118</sup> whereas there appears to be little consensus regarding its date of origin, with dates ranging from 220 bce to 50 ce.<sup>119</sup> Turner reviews the alternatives<sup>120</sup> and in turn agrees with Winston, who considers that the "only acceptable *terminus post quem* for the composition of Wisdom is the beginning of the Roman period in Egypt (30 bce)."<sup>121</sup> Grabbe agreeably comments, "It seems to me that the best time is the reign of Augustus,"<sup>122</sup> at the same time noting the excellent review of the

116. D. J. Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005), 124.

117. J. L. Crenshaw, "Love is Stronger than Death: Intimation of Life beyond the Grave," in Charlesworth et al., eds., *Resurrection*, 53–78 (70).

118. Winston, *Wisdom*, 25.

119. *Ibid.*, 20–25.

120. M. Turner, *God's Wisdom Or the Devil's Envy: Death and Creation Deconstructing in the Wisdom of Solomon* (Adelaide, Australia: ATF, 2009), 67–71.

121. Winston, *Wisdom*, 23.



arguments supporting this view found in Larcher.<sup>123</sup> The significance here is of course that this dating sets this text in the context of imperial rule.

In *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Wright makes a great deal of Wisd. of Sol. 5:1: “Then the righteous will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted them and those who make light of their labors.” Wright argues that “the word ‘stand’ (*stesetai*) does not by itself indicate resurrection, but it is closely cognate with the word that would have done (*anastasis*), and since the point is that formerly dead people are now, surprisingly, confronting and judging the wicked, it is safe to say that resurrection is what is meant.”<sup>124</sup>

Wright may well have a case in what he says,<sup>125</sup> although Bockmuehl argues that Wright squeezes Wisdom “a good deal harder than by most commentators” and suggests that some of Wright’s lines of argument “are at times close to a sleight of hand.”<sup>126</sup> However, in his defense, Wright does emphasize that his argument concerning Wisd. of Sol. 5:1 depends not simply on the interpretation of one isolated verse but rather on “the entire narrative of the first six chapters.”<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, although sparse agreement for Wright’s view although there appears prior to his *Resurrection of the Son of God*, there are now examples of scholars accepting his view wholesale, seemingly without any critique.<sup>128</sup> For example, Gregg considers this text and affirms: On the day of final judgment, “the righteous dead will be resurrected and will confront those among the ungodly who are alive face to face.”<sup>129</sup> Elledge agrees but is a little more circumspect: “The text accentuates immortality of the soul, without explicit mention of a return to the body.”<sup>130</sup>

122. L. L. Grabbe, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 90.

123. Grabbe, *Wisdom*, 88–89. Grabbe cites Larcher at length: C. Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse, ou, La Sagesse de Salomon* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1983–1985), 148–61.

124. Wright, *Resurrection*, 171.

125. Interestingly, Wolter points out that Luke uses ἐστῶτα in Acts 7:55 to describe Jesus standing at the right hand of God, thus possibly alluding to the resurrected state (M. Wolter, “Ἰσθημι,” in *EDNT* 2:205–7 [206]).

126. M. Bockmuehl, “Compleat History of the Resurrection: A Dialogue with N. T. Wright,” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 489–504 (492).

127. Wright, *Resurrection*, 506.

128. Levenson, *Resurrection*, 106.

129. B. H. Gregg, *The Historical Jesus and the Final Judgment Saying in Q* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 69.

130. C. D. Elledge, *Life after Death in Early Judaism: The Evidence of Josephus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 28.

Wisdom 2:1 demonstrates a sense of realism, “There is no remedy when a human being dies, and no one is known who has returned from Hades,” and 2:6 calls the reader to enjoy life while one can. Reider considers that the sense here is very much to enjoy the things “that have real being . . . tangible sources of enjoyment,”<sup>131</sup> while Winston considers this a version of the ancient and popular motif: “Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”<sup>132</sup> There is, then, in 3:7 a confident assertion that even after what is apparently their death, the righteous “will shine out. . . . They will judge nations and rule over peoples.” Accepting that the imagery here may well have been taken from Zech. 12:6, I consider that, unless there is some heavenly court in view here that is somehow removed from earthly things, the author is considering the possibility of a postmortem existence and vindication of the righteous. Further, in 4:16, the “righteous who are dead will condemn the impious who are living.” This may sound like a good idea, but how so? How does the author envisage that the dead righteous will condemn the impious living? Here Wright’s interpretation of Wisd. of Sol. 5:1 gives us the possibility of resurrection.

Lining such a text up alongside 1 Thess. 1:10, we must ask about inspiration. It does not seem obvious that Paul, in seeking to encourage the Thessalonian believers, took up the affirmation that may well be being proposed in Wisd. of Sol. 5:1, unless we accept Wright’s assertion as potentially being paralleled in Thessalonica: “Wisdom thereby offers, too, an example of resurrection as a counter-imperial theme. It is the story of the righteous martyrs coming back from the dead that confronts the rulers of the world with the need to find true wisdom.”<sup>133</sup>

### THE RESURRECTION AS AN ANTI-IMPERIAL EVENT

I have sought thus far to outline two key factors: first, that bodily resurrection was generally novel in terms of Greco-Roman culture and classical writings in particular. Second, we have seen from our examination of the scriptural sources that ideas of resurrection emerged in places and situations where Jews were suffering under imperial rule and beginning to dream of vindication and liberation. We thus have an indication here as to what might have influenced Paul’s own thinking and inspiration as he communicated the event of the resurrection to the Thessalonians.

131. J. Reider, *The Book of Wisdom*, JAL (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 63.

132. Winston, *Wisdom*, 118.

133. N. T. Wright, ‘Incomplete (but Grateful) Response to the Review by Markus Bockmuehl of *The Resurrection of the Son of God*,’ *JSNNT* 26, no. 4 (2004): 505–10 (507).

It is now necessary to consider how Paul’s announcement of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead will possibly have resonated within the first-century life and culture of imperially dominated Thessalonica; that is, what would the Thessalonians most likely have been hearing? For the inevitable process of contextual interpretation demands that events and ideas be understood against the backdrop of what is already known and appreciated. Some scholars have dismissed 1 Thess. 1:9b–10 as a later edit.<sup>134</sup> Wanamaker even suggests that this phrase “may have been an afterthought.”<sup>135</sup> This section, consequently, lays out some alternatives as to what Paul’s intention might have been here.

First, it may be that Paul is declaring plainly and clearly that Jesus is Lord—the new emperor. After all, this is also how Paul introduces Jesus in his letter to the church at Rome. He says that Jesus “was declared to be son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4). Significantly, Paul links the lordship of Jesus with his resurrection from the dead.<sup>136</sup> This is also the case in the Acts of the Apostles: when the apostle Peter stands before a bemused crowd on the day of Pentecost, he declares that “God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

It seems that Paul speaks so purposefully about resurrection because he wants to make the direct statement that, as the risen one, Jesus is Lord. It would indeed be a straightforward explanation in the context of the Thessalonians’ radical change of lifestyle and its political implications and their awaiting a new emperor or Lord. As Wright contends: “‘Lord’ expresses both the exalted humanity of Jesus, including his superior position to all other ‘lords’ in the world”;<sup>137</sup> and also Jewett: “The pre-existent Son of God celebrated in the credo is to be seen as the Lord of the world.”<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Paul’s opening words to the church at Rome make clear the intrinsic way in which Lordship and resurrection are bound together for Jesus: “who . . . was declared to be son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from

134. I. I. Havener, “The Pre-Pauline Christological Credal Formulae of 1 Thessalonians,” in *SBLSP*, ed. K. Richards, 105–28 (109).

135. C. A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 87.

136. This theme, Jesus as Lord linked with the resurrection, is seen in others places in Paul; e.g., Rom. 4:24; 2 Cor. 4:14.

137. N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, *Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 393–770 (419).

138. R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 107.

the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4). Nonetheless, however powerful these words are in Paul’s letter to Rome, it seems that this connection between Jesus’ resurrection and his lordship might not be Paul’s primary intention here in 1 Thessalonians. For if Paul wanted to make clear here that Jesus is Lord on the basis of the resurrection, then why did he not say so? Rather, in this section Paul refers to Jesus as God’s *son* and as plain *Jesus*—as in Jesus of Nazareth—but not Lord. Thus the powerful statement in the opening verses of Romans concerning the position of Jesus on the basis of the resurrection cannot be uncritically transferred to 1 Thessalonians. It may of course be that Paul intended the subtlety of his statement in 1 Thess. 1:10 to intrigue the curiosity of the readers and cause them to follow the trail that he had set up, but this seems unlikely. Furthermore, this proposal, while perhaps making a clear statement about the person of Jesus, does little more than that. It does not, for example, make any additional contribution to the explanation for the radical shift in the Thessalonians’ lifestyle.

Second, it may be that Paul is speaking of resurrection here as a picture of a patron–client relationship, whereby God—the patron—has reached down, even into death, to save Jesus—his client—who is deserving of his benefaction. Hendrix makes very clear that the culture of patronage and benefaction was prevalent in Thessalonica,<sup>139</sup> and that for the Thessalonian believers to step out from under this vast and complex matrix of benefaction was to step into the unknown. A life of potential struggle and difficulty lay ahead if they did not have the covering patronage of a good benefactor. Paul might be speaking of resurrection here in order to communicate the idea that God was Jesus’ benefactor—and, indeed, a very good benefactor—and thus to encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians’ resolve and determination to trust in the living and true God. In this case, God would be their benefactor, if indeed they remained faithful and were deserving of his benefaction. That this is an example of political subterfuge might only be seen if we had the title “Lord” here—which, as we have seen, we do not. As Longenecker makes clear, “Caesar was the benefactor of ‘the whole world,’ the ‘lord’ of the empire,” and thus to address Jesus as “Lord” “was a political and soteriological statement—one that underscored one’s ultimate loyalty not to Caesar but to the Lord Jesus.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, while the suggestion of a divine patron–client relationship is pastorally

139. H. L. Hendrix, “Benefactor/Patronage Networks in the Urban Environment: Evidence from Thessalonica,” in *Social Networks in the Early Christian Environment: Issues and Methods for Social History*, ed. L. M. White, *Semeia* 56 (1992): 39–58.

140. R. N. Longenecker, *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 199.

attractive, it does not say anything to us about resurrection as an act subversive of the imperial structures unless in some way it could be argued that to look for benefaction from God was in itself a rejection of the benefaction available from the imperial culture in which the Thessalonian believers lived.

Third, it may be that Paul is stressing the power and strength of God to the Thessalonians. While they struggle to remain faithful in the midst of persecution, Paul reminds them in 1:10 that if God is able to raise the dead then surely he is able to guarantee the arrival of his son to deliver them from their troubles: “to wait for his son from the heavens, whom he raised from the dead.” As Campbell makes clear, “Christ’s resurrection from the dead and ascension to lordship are the new, definitive revelation of salvation, of life, and of God’s ‘deliverance.’”<sup>141</sup> Barnett makes this point made even more clearly and specifically in his comments on 1 Cor. 4:9-13: “Paul’s missionary suffering and God’s deliverances from them replicate the death and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>142</sup> So it may be that Paul intends the believers to hold to the hope that God will presently deliver them from their troubles through the coming of the resurrected Jesus.

A fourth possibility is that, by means of the mention of resurrection, Paul may be assuring the believers that they are in community with God, and that God will not let go of them, as to do so would be to relieve himself of his own life. Crenshaw suggests that the beginnings of resurrection hope lay with two seeds: “(1) a profound sense of community with Yahweh that could withstand any obstacle and (2) the conviction that there was no limit to this object of devotion’s power.”<sup>143</sup> In that same volume, C. D. Elledge contends that Paul “consistently . . . interprets the resurrection in the context of the believer’s unbreakable unity ‘with Christ.’ The believer’s unity with Christ is one that embraces both the death and the resurrection of the Messiah.”<sup>144</sup> In the light of our awareness of the Thessalonian believers’ suffering, this idea might have given great encouragement to them. They had given themselves to God, God had placed his Spirit within them, and now would ensure that they would remain with him—in life and in death. This explanation is attractive and might well be an indication as to the encouragement Paul gives. Maybe it is that

141. D. A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 810.

142. P. A. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 236n46.

143. Crenshaw, “Love Is Stronger Than Death,” 56.

144. C. D. Elledge, “Resurrection of the Dead: Exploring our Earliest Evidence Today,” in Charlesworth et al., eds., *Resurrection*, 22–52 (43).

the believers in Thessalonica had given themselves to God, turning from idols, taking the lower place as slaves of God and waiting patiently, because their desire was to live out their faithfulness to God in the hope of this reciprocal help from God in time of trouble and, ultimately, postdeath.

Fifth, there is the explanation that Paul mentions the resurrection of Jesus to remind the disciples in Thessalonica that a day is coming when they will be vindicated in the view of their enemies and those who have persecuted them. This suggestion takes us back to the Maccabees. Second Maccabees 7 makes clear that the hope of the seven brothers and their mother is for vindication in the face of suffering and death. They have remained faithful, and yet they are about to die while the wicked succeed in their evil ways. This is once again an attractive proposal. For the Thessalonians—as also the Maccabees—the struggle ultimately may well come down to theodicy—the question of God’s goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil. Resurrection would be the answer to that struggle. God raised Jesus from the dead as the sign that he would indeed one day raise the righteous to life and vindicate the faithful. In this regard, Elledge cites *On Resurrection* 4Q521 in his investigation into the origins of resurrection hope and makes clear that the Jewish writers considered resurrection to be part of a grand reversal, resulting in both the resurrection of the righteous dead and an act of divine justice for the righteous.<sup>145</sup>

Sixth, Paul may be raising and solidifying the hope of the Thessalonians with mention of resurrection. Wanamaker suggests that “to the extent that the Thessalonians accepted the resurrection as an act of God, it would give them confidence in the prospect of Christ’s coming in power.”<sup>146</sup> This idea that Paul is speaking of resurrection here in the context of his return in order to give the believers a deeper hope in the light of that return is a line followed by several scholars. Wanamaker himself further suggests, “Belief in the parousia of Christ is what gave the resurrection its real significance by promising the realization of Christ’s messianic rule on the place of human history.”<sup>147</sup> Neil simply views the mention of resurrection here as a necessary link in a chain of events: “Historical Jesus—Ascended Lord—Coming Son, for at once the Risen Lord is identified with the historical Jesus who rescues us from the Wrath to come.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, Marshall submits: “The mention of resurrection here is probably motivated by the desire to give a basis for the future hope. If God

145. *Ibid.*, 34.

146. Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 87.

147. *Ibid.*, 87.

148. W. Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, MNTC (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950),

raised Jesus from the dead, it follows that he is now where God is, namely, in heaven, and the God who raised him can and will bring him back to earth for his people.”<sup>149</sup>

Interestingly, Richard posits that this phrase may well be “a Pauline ‘afterthought’ intent on correlating the coming Son with the risen Jesus” whereby Paul is seeking to “ground in God’s raising activity the believers’ hope in future deliverance.”<sup>150</sup> Finally here, I note that Malherbe argues: “Paul does not mention Jesus’ resurrection in order to say something about how it showed him to be God’s son (Rom. 1:4), but because Christ’s resurrection was preparatory to his return and the resurrection of Christians at his coming.”<sup>151</sup>

However attractive this thought might be that Paul is *simply* mentioning resurrection here in order to strengthen the Thessalonians believers’ hope in the future coming of Jesus, I contend that it is not sufficient. This explanation does not give sufficient weight to the imperial environment, which, as I argue, is the decisive context for Paul’s words here.

The final proposal here is, I would suggest, perhaps the critical one, for it pays attention specifically to the immediate context of “whom he raised from the dead,” and it also brings into sharp focus the challenge of the way in which the resurrection resonated within Thessalonica’s imperially dominated culture.

Paul makes clear in 1 Thess. 1:10 that the resurrection of Jesus is ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν. This small detail gives us a clue as to the significance and also the intended interpretation of the preceding phrase, ὃν ἤγειρεν: by examining the death of Jesus, we might come to a clearer understanding of Paul’s statement of resurrection.

Hengel, in his definitive work on crucifixion, describes how “the *crux* is put at the head of the three *summa supplica*. It is followed, in descending order, by *crematio* (burning) and *decollatio* (decapitation).”<sup>152</sup> As Isidore of Seville makes clear, it is not simply that crucifixion was an effective form of punishment, but it also served as a severe form of torture up to and including death. “But hanging is a lesser penalty than the cross. For the gallows kills the victim immediately, whereas the cross tortures for a long time those who are fixed to it.”<sup>153</sup> As Hengel then contends, “Crucifixion was and remained a political and military punishment.”<sup>154</sup> He continues, “The chief reason for its use was

149. I. H. Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 59.

150. E. Richard and D. J. Harrington, *First and Second Thessalonians*, SP 11 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 57.

151. A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 121–22.

152. M. Hengel, *The Cross of the Son of God*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), 125.

153. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia* 5.27.34. Quoted by Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 121.

its allegedly supreme efficacy as a deterrent; it was, of course, carried out publicly.”<sup>155</sup> Related, Quintilian, writing in the latter half of the first century ce, pointed out, “When we crucify criminals the most frequented roads are chosen, where the greatest number of people can look and be seized by this fear.”<sup>156</sup> Potter discusses the penalties that could be brought upon the guilty—flogging, crucifixion, exposure to the beasts in the arena, burning at the stake, or decapitation and comments: “What these penalties have in common is that they were all carried out in public.” “The power of the state was thus brought home through exemplary action.”<sup>157</sup> As Hengel concludes on this point, “There was doubtless a fear that to give up this form of execution might undermine the authority of the state and existing law and order.”<sup>158</sup>

Crucifixion was seen and understood as a horrific, disgusting business. It was used to humiliate enemies and to denigrate the status of individuals, and there was the added humiliation of the denial of burial for the deceased so that the carrion birds and the dogs could strip the body of flesh. For example, on this specific point, when Augustus avenged the murder of Julius Caesar, he denied the burial of Brutus and his supporters.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, when Tiberius had Sejanus executed amid suspicions of conspiracy, he also denied his body burial.<sup>160</sup> Horace mockingly noted that crucifixion was food for the crows.<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, it is striking that “the extraordinary paucity of the theme of crucifixion in the mythical tradition, even in the Hellenistic and Roman period, shows the deep aversion from this cruellest of all penalties in the literary world.”<sup>162</sup> Not that the Romans invented this utterly offensive form of execution. Hengel lists a line of barbarian peoples who are known to have executed by crucifixion, including the Indians, the Assyrians, the Scythians and the Taurians the Celts, the Germani, the Britanni, the Numidians, and especially the Carthainians, who, Hengel suggests, may have been the people from whom the Romans learned it.<sup>163</sup> But, accepting Gorman’s assertion that

154. Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 178.

155. *Ibid.*, 179.

156. Quintilian, *The Lesser Declamations* 274 (trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, LCL).

157. D. S. Potter and D. J. Mattingly, eds., introduction to *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 9.

158. Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 179. See also E. Brandenburger, “Cross,” in *NIDNTT*: “Punishment by crucifixion was seen as a disciplinary measure for the maintenance of existing authority, intended more as a deterrent than as a means of retribution” (391–403 [392]).

159. Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus* 12.1 (trans. J. C. Rolfe, LCL).

160. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.29 (trans. J. Jackson et al., LCL).

161. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, bk. 1, ep. 16.46 (trans. H. R. Fairclough, LCL).

162. Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 106.



“imperial power meant the power to crush opposition, to expand borders, to colonize, to enslave, and to crucify,”<sup>164</sup> and Elliott’s additional comment that “it was within this civilization of terror that crucifixion played its indispensable role” as “the deterrent effect that makes social control possible,”<sup>165</sup> we must consider that crucifixion was not simply a means by which the empire executed their criminals. Rather, crucifixion was a key element in the empire’s arsenal of intimidation and “peacekeeping.” Crucifixion was, as Evans puts it, “an assertion of power and specifically *Roman* power,”<sup>166</sup> and “Rome did not expose its own citizens to such reprehensible punishment but reserved crucifixion above all for those who resisted imperial rule.”<sup>167</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to consider a right interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus within this understanding of the means by which Jesus was executed—at the hands of imperial tyranny.

Now, of course, there is no mention in 1 Thessalonians of the cross (σταυρός) as such, but there was simply no need for Paul to expound upon “from the dead.” Everyone would know and understand that the death of Jesus was by means of crucifixion, this “cruellest of all penalties,”<sup>168</sup> this “utterly offensive affair, ‘obscene’ in the original sense of the word.”<sup>169</sup> And there would have been a clear understanding that death by crucifixion was a demonstration once again of the extent of imperial power and indeed, *critically*, that crucifixion was the epitome of that extensive and often brutal power. Thus I argue that the key reason why Paul speaks about resurrection in 1 Thess. 1:10 is in order to deliberately and specifically counter the show of power articulated in crucifixion. Paul is seeking to demonstrate that the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead exposes the empire’s vast power as merely provisional, and there is in fact a greater power at work that will ultimately vindicate those who are faithful to it.

163. *Ibid.*, 114–15.

164. M. J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 270.

165. N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006), 98.

166. C. A. Evans, *The Historical Jesus: Jesus’ Mission, Death and Resurrection*, CCRS 3 (New York: Routledge, 2004), 254.

167. J. Beilby and P. R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

168. Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 106.

169. *Ibid.*, 114.

## CONCLUSION

My examination of Paul's first recorded mention of resurrection has led to this conclusion—that resurrection must be seen as a deliberate counter to the claims of the empire. My analysis of resurrection within the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day demonstrates that there seemed to be no straightforward and natural resonance that would easily be understood by the Thessalonians. It does not appear likely that Paul took some kind of inspiration from the imperial culture in which he lived and was familiar with in order to articulate what had happened to Jesus following his crucifixion. However, in my consideration of the scriptural texts, a theme began to emerge—that there was a background of imperial tyranny against which the Jewish writers were inspired to speak of resurrection as a vindication of the faithful, a reminder to their readers and listeners that there was a power greater than the imperial rulers who presently held sway over them. Thus for both Paul and his readers—in this case the Thessalonians themselves—the notion of the resurrection of Jesus following execution by means of the epitome of imperial power would have had a similar resonance. In Paul's mind then, as he drew on these scriptural texts, there appears to be have been a clear anticipation of vindication of the faithful through resurrection. While in the perspective of the Thessalonians, from their standpoint of an imperially dominated culture, and no doubt with an awareness and understanding of the significance of crucifixion, this resurrection event subverted and usurped the apparently supreme power of the empire.

As Wright makes clear: “Death is the ultimate weapon of the tyrant; resurrection does not make a covenant with death, it overthrows it”;<sup>170</sup> and as Carter also asserts: “Resurrection exposes the empire's limited power in not being able to keep him dead.”<sup>171</sup> While I agree completely with Wright and Carter, I go further still in expounding Paul's message of resurrection specifically here in 1 Thess. 1:9b-10. While we can make certain assertions concerning resurrection itself, analysis of the context in which this statement of resurrection is made provide clearer indications for Paul's own understanding of resurrection as a key element of his anti-imperial gospel.

Two initial conclusions follow. First, the resurrection of Jesus, following execution by crucifixion, fundamentally subverts and usurps the notion of the supreme power of the imperial ruler and the empire itself, nullifying its claims of right to rule. This subversion and usurpation occurs at the point of resurrection

170. Wright, *Resurrection*, 730.

171. W. Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 129.

by exposing the limited ability of crucifixion—which is the epitome of imperial power—to render Jesus permanently dead.

Second, while not necessarily inevitable, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead nonetheless of itself makes the claim that Jesus himself is holder of—or has access to—a far greater power than that exercised either by any of the emperors or by the empire itself.

As we continue through this book and through the analysis of the context of the announcement of resurrection and thus of the terms and phrases used by Paul in 1 Thess. 1:9b-10, it will become clear that there are yet further assertions to be made. The key elements are as follows: As a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the believers in Thessalonica have turned to God from idols; they have chosen to become slaves of the living and true God; they are waiting for the coming of the Son from the heavens; and finally, they are demonstrating a profound confidence in the resurrected Jesus to be able to defend and help them in their present circumstances. All of these actions have their roots in the precipitatory statement made concerning resurrection in 1 Thess. 1:10.