

Living Resurrected Lives

Living Resurrected Lives

What It Means and Why It Matters

Veronica Mary Rolf
and Eva Natanya



CASCADE Books • Eugene, Oregon

LIVING RESURRECTED LIVES
What It Means and Why It Matters

Copyright © 2020 Veronica Mary Rolf and Eva Natanya. All rights reserved.
Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book
may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the
publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3,
Eugene, OR 97401.

Cascade Books
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-7252-5324-7
HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-7252-5325-4
EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-7252-5326-1

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Names: Rolf, Veronica Mary, author. | Natanya, Eva, author.

Title: Living resurrected lives : what it means and why it matters / Veronica Mary
Rolf and Eva Natanya.

Description: Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020 | Includes bibliographical refer-
ences and index.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-1-7252-5324-7 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-7252-5325-4 (hard-
cover) | ISBN 978-1-7252-5326-1 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Jesus Christ—Resurrection. | Paschal mystery.

Classification: BT872 .L4 2020 (print) | BT872 (ebook)

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

OCTOBER 8, 2020

Copyright Notices

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible,
copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council
of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.

Quotations designated (NET) are taken from the NET Bible®, copyright ©1996–
2018 by BiblicalStudies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com>. Quoted by permission.
All rights reserved.

For all those who yearn
To live their lives—even now—
As sons and daughters of the resurrection.

Table of Contents

Preface ix

Introduction xi

PART ONE: *The Basis for Belief in Resurrection*

By Veronica Mary Rolf

1. What Does Resurrection Mean? 3
2. Looking Into the Empty Tomb 22
3. "We have seen the Lord!" 51
4. Questions, Doubts, and Faith 82
5. Paul and the Resurrected Body 98
6. Dust, Bones, and Identity 132
7. Living Resurrected Lives 167

PART TWO: *A Contemplative Practice*

By Eva Natanya

1. Preparing to Meditate 189
2. Meditations on Resurrection 200
- Epilogue: The Resurrection Body 229

Bibliography 233

Index 239

Preface

WHEN I FINISHED WRITING the last chapter of my previous book, *Suddenly There is God: The Story of Our Lives in Sacred Scripture* (Cascade Books, 2019), I knew I had only begun to develop the theme of resurrection and its immediate relevance to our lives. The topic of resurrection is often fraught with confusion and controversy, grave misunderstanding and sharply divergent views, even among faith-filled Christians. My extensive research for *Suddenly There is God* had raised more questions about resurrection than I could address in that book. I had to write a companion volume.

During lengthy conversations with my daughter and coauthor, Eva Natanya, I realized that there were many aspects of resurrection that needed to be re-confronted, re-clarified, and re-defined so that laity and students, as well as preachers and spiritual guides, might have a clear and contemporary explanation of what resurrection means and why it matters. Eva and I bounced ideas off each other for months; then I wrote and we revised, editing together with great energy and enthusiasm. Over several years of creative collaboration, Eva's challenging questions and insightful answers contributed immeasurably to the ideas and arguments in this book. Her academic training as a systematic theologian and a scholar of comparative religion suggested fresh and exciting ways of reinterpreting ancient Christian teachings on the nature of identity and the resurrected body, while remaining true to apostolic tradition.

In addition, Eva's many years of contemplative practice and solitary retreat inspired her to record the guided meditations on resurrection in Part Two, which I then transcribed. These highly imaginative meditations, combined with Eva's instructions on how to create a daily contemplative practice, offer readers a deeply personal way to experience Christ's resurrection. They also serve to affirm faith in our own resurrection as

a vibrant reality here and now, rather than merely a distant promise. I am forever grateful that Eva was willing to collaborate with me on this project. Her contribution has been invaluable.

I also want to acknowledge the theologians, historians, and Scripture scholars whose masterful works on resurrection have challenged and inspired my own thinking and writing: Gerald O'Collins, N. T. Wright, Michael Licona, Xavier Léon-Dufour, Caroline Walker Bynum, Stephen T. Davis, Sandra Schneiders, Rowan Williams, Pheme Perkins, Luke Timothy Johnson, Brant Pitre, Richard B. Hays, and Joachim Jeremias, to name a few.

Once again, I am indebted to Rodney Clapp, my editor for *Suddenly There is God*, for guiding this new manuscript through the editorial process with his usual expertise and kind appreciation. Great thanks are also due to the entire production and marketing team at Wipf and Stock Publishers, especially Matthew Wimer and Joe Delahanty, for their thorough professionalism, courtesy, and good humor.

Finally, I want to express my boundless gratitude to my husband, Frederick, and our son, David. Their loving and unconditional support of the work Eva and I have undertaken has been a source of immense courage and creativity. Thank you!

Introduction

THROUGHOUT THE FORTY DAYS of Lent, Christians fast and pray, do penance and give alms in anticipation of Easter. On Holy Thursday we celebrate the Last Supper and first Eucharist, keep watch with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, and lament over the reality of suffering in every age. On Good Friday we stand at the foot of the cross with the women and the Beloved Disciple, and when Jesus gives up his spirit, we feel utterly bereft. Then, at the Holy Saturday Vigil and on Easter Sunday morning, we switch abruptly into singing “Alleluia!” and wishing each other “Happy Easter!” We know that our joy is not only about the return of warmer weather, the beauty and abundance of spring flowers, family reunions, and children hunting for colored Easter eggs. We proclaim that because Christ is risen, he has conquered death once and for all. He will never die again. Even more pertinent to our immediate situation, we are told that if we have been like Christ in our sufferings and eventually our own deaths, we shall also rise with him.

But do we believe it? And do we live as if we believe it?

Perhaps we are much too realistic, too caught up in the demands of daily life in our materialist culture, to begin to fathom what resurrection might mean. We are only too aware that even if Christ *has* risen, right now our personal suffering, our family problems, and our own fear of dying are definitely not solved. The death and burial of every loved one has been utterly convincing. Death certainly looks and feels awfully final to us. Indeed, from our perspective, death appears much more real than the hope of resurrection.

But is it?

What is death, after all? What actually dies? What lives on? What transforms? Do we have any idea? Just because we cannot see the persons we love becoming “a new creation” after their final breath, does that mean

it is not happening? When we breathe our last, will our awareness suddenly stop? Will the spirit that has informed our body simply disappear into thin air? Will we continue to exist? Can any disease, accident, or natural disaster kill that which is not physical, namely the mind, or spirit? But if spirit does continue, does that mean it is immortal? Are we not just a little bit curious about *how* one might die and still continue to be aware? When the body returns to the dust, where does the spirit dwell? Even more, how can a decomposed or cremated body ever be reunited with the spirit at the resurrection of the dead? What kind of body would it be? A resuscitated body, a transfigured physical body, or a spiritual body? In short, *what has Christianity revealed about the process of death and resurrection?*

To become authentic and relevant to our daily lives, Easter faith must go far, far deeper than mere wishful thinking that at some moment in a timeless eternity, God will reassemble our scattered ashes from the four winds, reunite them with our disembodied souls, put new flesh on our dry bones, and give us bodies that can no longer sin, suffer, or die; bodies that will be reunited with our loved ones in heaven forever. While this may in some sense be true, we must try, no matter how challenging it may be, to anticipate what it might actually *mean* to enter a glorified body that is capable of dwelling in the timeless vision of God. And even more immediately, *How might we live our whole lives for this glorious purpose?*

Furthermore, can we believe in resurrection enough to be ready to give our lives to it? That's the biggest hurdle by far. As we see throughout the world right now, thousands of people are being brutally martyred for their faith in the risen Christ. Like Christian witnesses throughout history, they die in the hope that they will rise again and be united with God for eternity. What about the rest of us who live mostly normal lives? What would it take for us to believe so passionately in resurrected life that our lives would change radically *right now*?

To attempt answers to these questions, we must first dig into the history of Judeo-Christian thought in order to understand the roots of the ideas we might almost take for granted from church teaching today. Only then may we examine what elements of those ideas form the rock-bottom foundation of our faith, and what parts developed later, evolving across the complex history of theological reflection. Only when we can understand something of the cultural context in which philosophical interpretations of Christian revelation developed in the past, may we legitimately imagine how those ideas might continue to be reinterpreted

and re-understood in the context of our contemporary global cultures and worldviews.

Thus our exploration in Part One will seek to build the basis for belief in resurrection, both the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our own. If resurrection is to become for us what the Gospels tell us it is—the foundation, inspiration, and goal of our sojourn on earth as Christians—then we must be informed about how the idea of resurrection first developed from the Old to the New Testaments. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork with a brief historical overview of what has been meant by resurrection since ancient times. It explores a range of notions about what might happen after death, from the philosophical theories of the Greeks and Romans to the references (or implied references) to resurrection in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 2 examines in detail the Gospel narratives depicting the discovery of the empty tomb, discusses the inconsistencies, and questions whether the accounts might still agree in principle. We evaluate the fear and silence of the women in Mark's account and the possibility that they were delusional or even visited the wrong tomb and found it empty. We touch on persistent debates concerning what might have happened to Christ's body and whether or not the idea of an empty tomb was a pious legend added later by the evangelists. We also consider whether the empty tomb stories can ever actually serve as "proof" of Christ's resurrection—or whether they simply establish that the preponderance of historical evidence does not contradict but rather supports our faith. In chapter 3, we address some revisionist theories of "what happened" at the resurrection, then delve into the dramatic accounts of Christ's appearances to the two Marys, to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples on their way to Emmaus, in the upper room, and on the beach by Lake Tiberias. Along the way, we examine convincing reasons for accepting their authenticity.

Chapter 4 investigates what many modern Christians tend to believe about the resurrection and how some contemporary scholars seek to explain the resurrection appearances in more "rational" terms. Were they a mass hallucination? Self-delusion? Group fantasy? Or real experience? In contrast, we establish the bedrock of Christian faith about resurrection: what we *can* believe. In chapter 5, we look at Paul's letters to the skeptical Corinthians in response to their own questions about bodily resurrection: "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (1 Cor 15:35). We enter into the apostle's heated debate

with the doubters of his time and consider his understanding of what the resurrection body will be like. We discuss Paul's crucial distinction between the natural body and the spiritual body as well as his sublime teaching about the glorified body. We also examine the process of divinization and consider what it promises for believers.

Then in chapter 6, we grapple with the philosophical problem that traditionally lies at the root of all discussions of resurrection: how can continuity of the same bodily matter be assured, given the complete *discontinuity* that occurs through the decaying process of the corpse? In addition, how can the unique identity of the individual person be restored from scattered dust and bones? This leads to the all-important existential question: Wherein does identity lie? Based on logic used by several theologians of the past, we propose a new way of understanding resurrection as a radical transformation of both body *and* mind, which must begin even now in our active practice of the spiritual path in this life.

In chapter 7 we seek to discover how we might begin to inhabit a divine dimension on a daily basis. We consider the essential virtues that, once developed, might empower us to think, feel, and act as liberated sons and daughters of the resurrection. We explore the eucharistic liturgy as the supremely transformative process by which we become incorporated into the mind and mystical body of the risen Christ. And we reflect on the necessity of weaving a daily practice of contemplative prayer into our busy lives.

Part Two goes on to outline an actual method of contemplative practice and offers guided meditations on the resurrection experience that can help us to prepare our minds and hearts for the daily journey towards resurrected life. We contemplate scenes, characters, and key moments of coming to faith in resurrection as these are dramatized in the Gospel narratives. Practicing such meditations in a progressive sequence and on a consistent basis can bring us to a deeper confidence in the reality of Christ's resurrection and, by extension, our own. Such meditations may also inspire greater experiential clarity about what we, as Christians, profess to believe.

One thing appears certain: if we confess that Christ really died on the cross on Good Friday and really rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, then this affirms that he has in fact defeated death once and for all. Church teaching has always assured us that this means Christ has vanquished our own death as well—in a dimension beyond our current perspective.

But what does this mean for us now? Easter faith proclaims that since the Lord is risen, we, too, shall rise. If this is true, then our efforts to do Christ's work of love on earth take on an entirely new significance. Once we dare to believe what we profess to believe—namely that God raised Christ from the dead as the “first fruits” of all the rest of us—we cannot go about our lives anymore as if nothing had changed. *Everything* about our human situation has changed in light of our faith, whether we are fully aware of it yet or not.

If we seize the opportunity to make our resurrected destiny the driving force behind every aspect of our earthly lives, then our entire being will expand in capability, deepen in certainty, and soar in divinely grounded expectation. We will love more intensely, savor our joys more thankfully, and find meaning in our struggles and sufferings. We will be able to trust in the dark what has been revealed in the light. Most of all, we will develop a more intimate relationship with the risen Lord that no one can ever destroy. That is why faith in the resurrection of Jesus—combined with the longing for it to become actualized in each one of us—matters so much! Without it, we have no ultimate hope; with it, nothing is impossible.

The challenge before us is to discover how an informed, vibrant, well-considered belief in resurrection might enable us to see everything in our world through a more enlightened mind and more compassionate heart. Such a faith will allow us to begin living our lives in a new dimension: a divine dimension. Nothing less.

PART ONE

The Basis for Belief in Resurrection

By Veronica Mary Rolf

What Does Resurrection Mean?

“I BELIEVE IN THE resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” This statement of belief is what Christians profess when reciting the ancient Apostles’ Creed. But do we understand what it implies? Even if we do, let’s be honest with ourselves: Do we really believe it? The Nicene Creed (325 CE) goes even further: “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” Do we really *look forward* to resurrection, in spite of having to die to experience it, and “the life of the world to come,” even if we cannot possibly imagine what it will be like? The first Creed of Epiphanius (c. 374 CE) states: “He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven.” The second Creed of Epiphanius specifies that Christ “suffered in the flesh; and rose again, and went up into heaven in the same body.”¹

What do these phrases, “resurrection of the dead,” “life of the world to come,” and rising “in the same body” actually mean? Even more, what might resurrection mean *for us*? Not only after we and our loved ones die, but right here and now, while we are alive on this earth? Moreover, if we can understand what resurrection implies and accept its personal relevance, how are we to live every day of our lives actually looking forward to being resurrected from the dead? Before we attempt to answer these crucial questions, we need to consider how the age-old idea of resurrection was understood, disbelieved . . . and believed.

1. Epiphanius, “The Creeds of Epiphanius.”

Ancient Ideas about the Afterlife

The noun “resurrection” (Greek, *anastasis*) means a “raising or standing up,” either from a seated position or from the dead. As a verb, “to resurrect” implies causing someone to stand up, to awaken, or to rise again, either from sleep or from death. For Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians living in the first century of the Common Era, the term *resurrection* referred specifically to a human being “rising up” from the dead in bodily form with the same personal identity as before. However, resurrection did not imply a state of new life immediately following death, but rather, “new life *after* a period of being dead.”² It is important to note that the Jewish people never expected *anyone* to rise from the dead until the end of the world.

Greeks and Romans emphatically denied the possibility of any such phenomenon as resurrection. For them, as for postmodern skeptics, once people died, they stayed dead. It was understood as far back as the Greek poet Homer (c. eighth century BCE) that resurrection simply could not and did not happen. Achilles warns Priam (after having killed Priam’s son, Hector): “Bear up and do not grieve ever ceaselessly in your heart; for nothing will you accomplish by grieving for your son, and you will not bring him back to life; before that you will suffer some other ill.”³ Similarly, the playwright Aeschylus put these definitive words into the mouth of Apollo: “But when once a man has died and the dust has sucked up his blood, there is no rising again.”⁴ Indeed, for the ancient Greeks the very idea of a resurrection of a rotted corpse was abhorrent: “Resurrection of the flesh appeared a startling, distasteful idea, at odds with everything that passed for wisdom among the educated.”⁵ The dead might live on through tales of their brave deeds in war, or through their philosophical writings, or in mythic stories, but the commonsense thinking was: “Dead men don’t rise.”

Moreover, they cease to exist. Greek Epicureans considered that the soul, like the body, was composed of the smallest particles of physical matter. When the matter of body and soul disintegrated at death, so did the person.⁶ The dead became no more than a shadow of their former

2. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 31, emphasis added.

3. Homer, *The Iliad*, Vol. II, 24:549–51, 603.

4. Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, 437.

5. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 12.

6. Wright, *Resurrection*, 34.

selves or “shades” (Greek, *skiai*); wandering ghosts (*psychai*); or phantoms of the imagination (*eidola*). Though they might “appear” in human form in various myths and tales, they were never considered to be real, nor could they be grasped and held onto, for the appearance was only an illusion, utterly deceptive.⁷ These non-bodily phantoms were thought to dwell forever in Hades, where they existed in a miserable inhuman state, sometimes tormented for earthly crimes, with no hope of escape or salvation. “Death did not mean complete oblivion for the individual, but the conventional notions of the afterlife offered little comfort for the dying or the bereaved.”⁸ Hades, then, was certainly not a place one longed to reach after death. It was deemed a place of hopelessness and despair—a ghostly hell.

Egyptian mythology, on the other hand, told stories about the reemergence of the dead back into this life (after an indeterminate period of being dead). “The Egyptians were essentially religious optimists, believing fervently in the ‘resurrection’ of the dead as an individualised, embodied self, with the whole purpose and point of the funeral rite being to rejoin the *ba* (soul) with the body. Cremation was abhorrent, reserved for evil-doers who would thereby be rendered totally non-existent.”⁹ The Egyptian practice of mummification implied that the dead person was still “alive” in a bodily sense (in spite of appearances to the contrary) and would, at some future date, reemerge as an embodied self. “The point of the funeral was to accomplish the ‘going out into the day’, the new life with Osiris and as Osiris, in the delights of eternity.”¹⁰ Thus, for Egyptians, the boundaries between life and death were indistinct, even amorphous. Death was thought to be merely a continuation of earthly life. Since the mummy was not considered technically dead, its reemergence could not be called a resurrection *from* the dead. Rather, it would signify a sort of mummified resuscitation among the gods.

Immortality of the Soul

The influence of the philosopher Plato (late fifth to early fourth century BCE) cast a startling new light on Greek views of the afterlife. Plato

7. Wright, *Resurrection*, 43.

8. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, 101.

9. Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 34.

10. Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 34–35.

inquired whether death was nothing but the *separation* of the soul from the body: “The body’s having come to be apart, separated from the soul, alone by itself, and the soul’s being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body? Death can’t be anything else but that, can it?”¹¹ He also suggested: “Isn’t the body liable to be quickly dissolved, whereas soul must be completely indissoluble or something close to it?”¹² Thus in Plato’s worldview, it was not the body but the *soul* that was destined for immortality. Whereas in Homer, the locus of the individual “self” was the physical body rotting in the ground while the phantom ghost descended into the kingdom of the shades in Hades, for Plato it was exactly the opposite: the locus of the self was in the soul.

In Platonic thinking, the soul is the form that temporarily “informs” matter, awakens its potential to form a body, and enables the human being to exist at all. The “true self” resides in the non-corporeal soul and the corpse in the grave is merely the physical remnant, the cast-off clothing as it were, of the real person. Plato taught that the soul is superior precisely because it is immaterial and immortal. Furthermore, “given that the immortal is also indestructible, wouldn’t soul, if it proves to be immortal, be imperishable as well?”¹³ Plato considered that the soul existed before the body and will continue to exist eternally after the body decays. Throughout its earthly existence, however, the soul (Greek, *soma*) remains imprisoned in the body as in a living tomb (Greek, *sema*), forgetting its true origin, and longing to be set free by death. “For some say that the body is the grave of the soul which may be thought to be buried in our present life . . .”¹⁴

Thus for Plato, it was *earthly* life that was full of delusion, fraught with suffering and constant danger.

For there is no radiance in our earthly copies of justice or temperance or those other things that are precious to souls: they are seen through a glass dimly; and there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty.¹⁵

11. Plato, *Phaedo*, 64c, 8–9.

12. Plato, *Phaedo*, 80c, 29.

13. Plato, *Phaedo*, 106e, 61.

14. Plato, *The Dialogues: Cratylus*, Vol. 2, 400c, 148.

15. Plato, *The Dialogues: Phaedrus*, Vol. 2, 250b, 267.

Because of human ignorance, injustice, and intemperance, Plato judged it essential to educate and discipline the human soul. He was convinced this could only be done through the study of philosophy and the practice of virtue. He argued that the quality of happiness or misery the soul would experience in the next life depended on its accomplishments or failures in this one. "But the company of gods may not rightly be joined by one who has not practiced philosophy and departed in absolute purity, by any but the lover of knowledge."¹⁶ Plato held that if the soul is in that "pure state" at death: "then, does it not depart to the invisible, which is similar to it, the divine and immortal and wise; and on arrival there, isn't its lot to be happy, released from its wandering and folly, its fears and wild lusts, and other ills of the human condition, and . . . does it not pass the rest of time in very truth with gods?"¹⁷

According to the Platonic scenario, death should be anticipated as the liberation of the immortal soul from the sufferings of earthly life, much to be desired. For those who had become wise, fulfilled their civic duties, and shown courage in battle, dying was deemed the *triumph* of a good life, not a tragedy. Furthermore, for those who had lived good lives on earth, Hades was considered a place of extreme pleasure and a center for philosophical discourse. For those who had been wicked, however, Hades meted out severe punishments. Still, these sufferings were considered to be necessary for the triumph of justice and therefore, distinctly positive.¹⁸ In the afterlife, righteous souls would finally be set free from their bodies and might ascend to the place of the immortal gods and become divine. Such divinized souls were believed to be so content they did not even want to return to the world of space, time, and matter.

In Plato's dualistic philosophy, immaterial and immortal forms (ideas) took precedence over material and thus mortal matter. Hence, there was no need nor was there any desire for bodily resurrection after the soul had finally escaped the prison of the body. Why would there be? It would have been absurd to hope for the soul to be weighed down yet again by another physical body. According to Plato, even the great pleasures of the human body could not be compared to the pure bliss of the soul's contemplation of eternal forms in the Isles of the Blessed. Why

16. Plato, *Phaedo*, 82b, 32.

17. Plato, *Phaedo*, 81a, 30.

18. Wright, *Resurrection*, 52.

should an immortal soul ever long for a resurrected body? Indeed, the world of abstract and pure ideas was, for Plato, the only *real* world.

Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, attempted to undercut the Platonic dualism of soul and body by teaching that the soul (form) was not independent of or superior to the physical matter of the body. He defined soul as the *substantial form* of the body, the organizing principle of the matter—that which, in fact, enlivened the body. Therefore, the individual person was essentially made up of *both* body and soul. Nevertheless, Aristotle still acknowledged the innate superiority of mind over matter: “the highest aspect of reason might be immortal and divine.”¹⁹ Even with Aristotle's respect for the nature of matter and his understanding of the complete human person as consisting of both soul and body, he did not suggest the possibility of resurrection and the reunification of soul and body in a life after death. It was too bizarre to bear discussion.

Transmigration of Souls

Another ancient theory that needs mentioning is that of transmigration or reincarnation (Greek, *metempsychosis*) of souls into new bodies. This passage of a disembodied soul into a *different* body might occur immediately or it might take place at any time from a few years to a millennium after death. Based on the ideas of Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), the notion of the transmigration of souls gained popularity within the secret Greek Orphic religious cults as well as among some philosophers. It was also a tenet of the Druids in Gaul. However, it never seems to have caught on with the general populace.²⁰

Ancient Greek theories of matter and form, body and soul, may appear tiresomely dualistic to us postmodern people who try to focus on the wholeness and integrity of the individual. Nevertheless, we can appreciate that Greek philosophers sought to define the nonmaterial dimension of the human person, the spiritual aspect that thirsts for continuance in some form after death. They articulated the yearning of the human heart for immortality (preferably one that would involve eternal happiness, not everlasting punishment) and the longing of the human mind to contemplate reality with true wisdom. The idea of becoming “one with the stars,” which is found in ancient Babylonian,

19. As quoted in Wright, *Resurrection*, 53.

20. Wright, *Resurrection*, 78.

Egyptian, and Greek sources, became a potent expression of the universal hope of transcending death in a new and exalted life.

However, while the majority of ancient people may have wished for some kind of life in another sphere (after a period of being dead), no one ever expected the dead to return to *this* earth, their spiritual identities preserved but their once-mortal bodies radically transformed into glorified bodies. Such a concept would have been unthinkable, as unthinkable as resurrection of the body would seem to a contemporary materialist. Although the souls of emperors, statesmen, philosophers, and the virtuous might be said to dwell among the stars with the immortal gods, their bodies were either buried or burned. No one expected the fresh graves of national heroes to be found empty and the bodies of rulers did not customarily rise from their funeral pyres.

From our brief overview, we may deduce that among ancient philosophers there was no consistent thinking about what happens after death. The one thing everyone seemed to agree upon was that there was no such thing as the bodily resurrection of a human being who had previously died and been buried. That would have been thought impossible.

Biblical Ideas of Resurrection

Now we turn to theistic views of resurrection. What did the ancient Israelites believe about resurrection? How did they develop a unique understanding of what might happen after death? Are there prophecies of bodily resurrection in the Hebrew Bible?

For those expecting to find a host of statements about the afterlife, it is somewhat disappointing to realize that the concept of resurrection never became a central issue in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is scant mention of the word for resurrection (Hebrew, *techiyah*). Nevertheless, it is possible to trace, albeit circuitously, a gradual development in beliefs about the afterlife and bodily resurrection. Biblical scholars suggest that, in the earliest phase of Hebrew thought, the dead were thought to descend into Sheol, the realm of eternal darkness, gloom, and endless sleep (a place similar to Homer's idea of Hades), from which they would never emerge. In the next phase, devout Israelites began to hope that the mutual love between Yahweh and the Israelites was so strong and enduring that nothing could break that bond, not even death. Yahweh,

the God of loving-kindness and abounding in mercy, simply would not let such love perish. Psalmists suggested there might be a disembodied but nevertheless blissful afterlife with Yahweh following death. Finally, in the third phase, prophets envisioned that, after an interim period of waiting, the dead would rise to a new and *bodily* life.²¹ Admittedly, none of these phases of thought was clear cut or moved directly from one interpretation of the afterlife to the next in a sequential development. However, if we examine these different positions we might recognize the range of ideas that Israelites of the first century CE entertained about resurrection from the dead.

Psalmic Intuitions

Some of the psalmic literature may date back to the reign of King David in the tenth century BCE. Surprisingly, many of these ancient psalms hold no promise for resurrection, but suggest only an endless state of despair and forgetfulness following death, where one is irrevocably cut off from the presence of Yahweh forever: “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?” (Ps 6:5). And again: “The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence” (Ps 115:17). These gloomy predictions do not seem to be that different from Homer’s desolate view of the afterlife. The dead were “asleep” in their graves, unaware of having ever been alive, and cut off from the memory of Yahweh. King David was said to have “slept with his ancestors” which implies that he had gone to a nether world to rest with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While the dead might be given food and other provisions at the time of burial, thereafter any effort to communicate with or “awaken” the sleeping dead to gain knowledge of the future was considered extremely dangerous and strictly forbidden. An injunction against veneration of the dead was deemed necessary to protect Israel from Canaanite necromancers and the cult of ancestor worship. Israel’s God was believed to be the sole source and arbiter of life and death, the only one who could know the future. It was considered an insult to Yahweh to consult the dead for signs and prognostications.

Other psalms, however, convey a buoyant hope that eventually the dead would be rescued from the eternal death of Sheol through the all-powerful Creator of life:

21. See Wright, *Resurrection*, 86.