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# Life without Resurrection: Two Perspectives from Qoheleth

The fact that J. M. Myers has often spoken of Ecclesiastes as his favorite biblical writing, plus a strong attraction to this member of the megilloth felt by the present writer, influenced the choice of topic for this contribution to the Myers Festschrift.

The paper will focus on two important aspects of the thought of the book of Ecclesiastes, hereafter called Qoheleth, and will relate them to similar attitudes that appear in the New Testament. The passage of time between the writer of this ancient book of wisdom and the first century A.D. saw a marked spread and development of beliefs concerning resurrection. Few would deny that the doctrine of the resurrection was basic to both Pharisaic Judaism and early Christianity. This paper does not attempt to trace the history of the doctrine of resurrection. The goal is, rather, to examine two main points in Qoheleth with respect to his outlook on life, in the context of his negative attitude toward belief in resurrection. Then we shall turn to the New Testament, where essentially the same viewpoints are present, but now standing in the context of resurrection faith.

The initial point to come under attention is Qoheleth's realism with respect to conjecture about the fate of the dead. The teachings of Jesus and Paul will then be examined for evidence of a similar outlook.

The second perspective from Qoheleth is a positive appreciation of this present life. Here too, we will look at the New Testament for signs of expression of a similar discernment of immanent good. To maintain such an attitude along with belief in a resurrection was necessary if Christians were to have a sense of proportion between eschatological expectations and values available here and now.

Tempting as it is to seek the origins of the belief in resurrection, the writer views that quest as off limits for the purposes of this paper. Nor does he intend to raise questions about the validity of the doctrine. We shall aim, instead, toward concentrating on the two aspects of Qoheleth's wisdom mentioned above, because they convey meaningful truth to those who have come after him under the sun.

## Resurrection in the Old Testament Outside Qoheleth

The Old Testament, as has been pointed out many times, typically thought of a form of survival in Sheol, a sort of non-life existence. Possibly this concept rested on the common-sense observation that after the heart stops beating, the body remains and influences of the personality also persist. However that may be, the idea of a sort of shadow survival in Sheol is far removed from the later concept of a general resurrection from the dead.

There are, to be sure, in some Psalms, especially 16 and 71, what might deserve the description "intimations of immortality."[1] While such passages show the kind of faith that gave to belief in resurrection its deepest meaning, they fall far short of formulating it. They are at most faint rays of light before the dawn.[2]

When we talk about belief in resurrection, what is in mind is the full-blown conviction that the dead will be raised. We must observe the distinction between real belief that this will happen and the mere imaginative idea of the dead coming back to life. Just as men imagined that humans could fly long before the idea became a reality, so the thought of a return from the grave was abroad much earlier than general acceptance of it as a future event.

For instance, the Israelites wrote poetically of a figurative sort of resurrection when they pictured sickness or distress as descending to Sheol or experiencing death (Pss 88; 18: 4, 5; 116: 3; 143: 7) and correspondingly viewed deliverance as being redeemed from the pit, or place of death (Pss 116: 8; 103: 4; 30: 3; Job 33: 30; Jon 2: 7). This feature of the Hebrew poetic vocabulary has received much attention, and needs only to be noted here.[3]

The book of Job goes beyond the psalmists, in vividness and suggestiveness. In a passage reminiscent of the realistic pessimism of Qoheleth, Job's mind dwells on the irresistible and arbitrary power of God which summarily topples the plans of short-lived man. Despair drives Job to fantasy, and he calls on God to hide him temporarily from his anger in Sheol, that place of no return, and then to remember him and release him:



> If a man dies
> can he live again?
> I would wait out all the time of my enlistment
> until my replacement should come.
> You would call
> and I would answer;
> you would yearn
> for the one whom your hands have made. (Job 14: 14 f)

But Job quickly moves from this breathtaking thought, so tentatively expressed that one hesitates to call it a hope, back to the older view of the finality of death. As the book continues, he demands, and at last receives, answer and vindication from God in this life before dying an old man and full of days (Job 42: 17).

We have in the book of Ezekiel an allegory that describes a mass resurrection with striking profusion of detail. The passage (Ezek 37: 1–14) provides the basis for the Negro spiritual "Dry Bones," which, with a literalness entirely in keeping with Ezekiel, musically tells of the rearticulation of the skeletons bone by bone from foot to head. Of course this still lies in the realm of symbolism. Ezekiel was really predicting restoration of the nation from exile in Babylon to new life in Palestine, the homeland.[4]

Less prolix and also less obviously allegorical is the reference to a resurrection of the people in Is 26: 19:

> Your dead ones will live,
> their corpses will rise
> —awake and rejoice
> O sleepers in the dust—
> for your dew
> is a dew of purest light,
> and earth
> will bring forth alive
> those reposing there.

The dating of Is 24–27 remains uncertain. Clear indications are simply lacking, and nothing is gained by being dogmatic. In any case, we can see from the context that while the language specifically refers to resurrection, there is no real clue as to whether it is meant to be understood literally. Fortunately, a decision on this point is not necessary for the purpose of this paper. We need only observe that the language of resurrection is here, without resolving its ambiguity.

While it is not a certainty that the passage in Isaiah just quoted poetically refers to a national reawakening, there is a fantasy in Jeremiah that unmistakably describes the Babylonian exile:

Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon,
has devoured me,
he has finished me off,
he has held me up like an empty dish;
he has swallowed me up
like a sea monster;
he has filled his belly
with my choice parts;
he has thrust me out. (Jer 51: 34)

And I [Yahweh] will see to Bel in Babylon
and draw forth from his mouth
what he has swallowed. (Jer 51: 44)

Here Hebrew imagination has depicted the dismal fate of exile in quite different terms from the allegory of the dry bones in Ezekiel. Inventiveness such as this cautions us against assuming too easily that the language of resurrection, as in Is 26: 19, always had a literal intent.

To be sure, instances of the resurrection of individuals do occur in the Old Testament, as in the New (Heb 11: 35). Both Elijah (1 Kings 17: 17–24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4: 17–37) restored the dead to life. But these miracles did not confer immortality. Those who had been raised would at some time go to Sheol, as all men were expected to do.

Only one passage in the Old Testament—Dan 12: 2—presents the resurrection hope in a prediction of an actual event connected with a coming eschatological deliverance of the chosen people. Dating from about 167 B.C., this prophecy came from one of those pious Jews who resisted to the death the ruthless attempt of their Hellenistic Syrian ruler Antiochus IV (175–163 B.C.), to stamp out Judaism in Judah. Possibly the pressure of extreme crisis impelled faith to lay hold of belief in a real, large-scale resurrection of the dead. It fell short of envisaging a universal resurrection of all mankind. Fortunately for us, the writer of Daniel was quite explicit on this point. He expected some to arise to everlasting life (*ḥayye ʾolam*), while others would arise to everlasting reproach and repugnance.

The writer of Daniel looked beyond the well-known individual exceptions to the rule of death that appear in the Old Testament to a return of many at the end of present history. Yet his brief statement, specific as it was, left room for later diverging ideas to develop. It lacked the authority of dogma.

Qoheleth probably originated before the Maccabean revolt of about 168 B.C. and the book of Daniel.[5] Because the written evidence from the Old Testament for views on resurrection or immortality is so tenuous, we cannot identify the form in which Qoheleth encountered them. However, he had a clear perspective on the subject of death and survival. To this, the first of the two subjects of this paper, we now turn.



## Qoheleth on Life After Death

With respect to life after death, Qoheleth's thinking was an interaction between ideas current in his day and his own empirical observations and deductions. His realistic bent of mind led him to accept death as inevitable and final. However, he denied neither God's existence nor action, holding that man's wisdom is just great enough to realize its own limits, which fall far short of fathoming God's purposes. Qoheleth derided any trust in some form of survival of the individual in society, for instance as a memory among the living. He also abstained from trying to see what may lie beyond the grave, asking, characteristically, Who knows?

### Inevitability of Death

Desire for eternal life permeated the ancient world long before the emergence of the Hebrew nation. Its presence in Israel is evident from the J account in Gen 3, the Hebrew version of the denial of immortality to man:

And the Lord God said,
"See, man has become like one of us,
knowing good and evil.
And now, lest he reach out his hand
and take also from the tree of life
and eat
and live forever" (*le ʿolam*)—
So the Lord God sent him
out of the garden of Eden. (Gen 3: 22, 23a)

While the writer of this passage implicitly recognized the desire of men for eternal life, and presents the tantalizing thought that it once lay within man's grasp, he categorically ruled out the possibility forever. This fits with the preceding account in Genesis of the Lord's judgment that man must return to the dust from whence he had come (Gen 3: 19).

Qoheleth agreed fully with this tradition. In the following passage, he reaffirms that man's destiny is to return to dust:

For the lot of the sons of men
and the lot of the animal
are the same;
as one dies, so does the other.
And they all have the same spirit;
so the superiority that man has over the animal
is nothing—
it is all a delusion.
They are all headed for the same place;

they all came from the dust
and they all return to the dust. (Eccles 3: 19 f)

Of course Qoheleth's observation is hardly original. But the acceptance of death colored his attitude toward life. And his matter-of-fact attitude led him to avoid speculations about the fate of the dead, as we shall see.

### SHEOL

Qoheleth used the word "Sheol" just as it appears throughout the Old Testament, to refer to the shadowy nether realm of the dead:

Take part energetically
in everything that you find to do.
For there is no activity
no thinking
no knowledge
no wisdom
in Sheol,
and that is where you are going. (Eccles 9: 10)

He mentions Sheol only this once, and in a completely negative way. With reference to the fate of all men and of animals, he seems to employ a substitute phrase in two other passages (with identical Hebrew wording) which may be translated "they are all headed for the same place" (3: 20; 6: 6). Apparently Qoheleth had no interest in Sheol, and since he was a keen observer and certainly knew of the colorful traditions concerning it (see, for examples, 1 Sam 28; Is 14: 9–20; Ezek 31, 32), he seems to have ignored it intentionally. It was simply the state of death, empty of all the positive qualities which make up life. One might also say that, beyond the fact that Sheol was the place of the dead, Qoheleth's observations took him little farther than believing that there is no knowledge there (9: 10).

### RESIDUAL INDIVIDUAL IMMORTALITY ON EARTH

According to popular thinking, often expressed in Jewish writings (Prov 10: 7; 13: 22; Job 18: 15–19; Wis 4: 1; Sir 30: 2–6; 37: 26; 39: 9–11; 40: 19; 41: 13; 44: 8–15), the righteous and wise individual enjoys a sort of survival on this earth in what he leaves behind at death, especially his name and his family. Qoheleth shot this hope full of holes, using his own observations for ammunition:

And I saw that nothing is better
than that man should enjoy his activity
for that is his inheritance;



for who can enable him to see
how things will be after him? (Eccles 3: 22)

For the remembrance of neither the wise man nor the fool
is perpetual.
because in the days that follow them
all will be forgotten,
and so the poor wise man
perishes along with the fool. (Eccles 2: 16)

With extensive illustrations and with terse sayings, Qoheleth repeatedly drove home his point (6: 12; 7: 14; 9: 5). No one can control what happens after his death. Let no one comfort himself with the thought that his family will persist, his wealth endure, or his plans mature. Death barricades the future against all human wishes and desires.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INDIVIDUAL?

Just as death seals off knowledge of the future on earth from those whom it takes away, so it prevents those on earth from seeing what befalls those who have died:

Who knows whether the spirit of the sons of men
rises upward on high
while the spirit of the animal
descends downward to the earth? (Eccles 3: 21)

This sounds much as if Qoheleth were arguing against some sort of theory of survival. We have seen that statements on this subject in the Old Testament are few and uncertain, and that Dan 12: 2, dating from about 167 B.C., offers the first unmistakable example of resurrection faith. If he was indeed refuting a current idea, Qoheleth does not bother to describe it.

Qoheleth went just as far as the facts allowed. He had learned from his own observation that men and animals alike undergo death and physical dissolution. But what about the nonmaterial factor, the spirit? This, he says, remains a question. However, Qoheleth did accept that man is a working combination of an earthly element—dust—and an enlivening power—the spirit.

When the Lord delivered judgment on man in Gen 3: 19, he condemned him to return to the dust. Nothing was said about the spirit in man.[6] The silence about the spirit may well be intentional, although one should not make too much of the fact that it is passed over in this passage. However, a later passage, the difficult Gen 6: 3, does deal with the matter of the spirit:

And the Lord said
"My spirit shall not abide[7]
in man forever,
inasmuch as he is flesh;
so his days shall be
one hundred and twenty years."

Surely it is significant that in this case as well as in Eccles 3: 21 the only clear fact is that man shall not keep the spirit forever. No clue indicates what happens to the spirit, except that when the Lord calls it "my spirit" here the inference seems to be that he will reclaim it.

The later passage in which Qoheleth speaks of the dissolution of man at death needs to be understood in the light of Genesis:

And the dust returns
to the earth as it was before,
and the spirit returns
to God, who gave it. (Eccles 12: 7)

Here he poetically describes man's death in terms of the separation into dust, and spirit, the divine vital force. That is a remarkably open-ended description, and, in the light of Qoheleth's respect for facts and his refusal to speculate, we may accept it as expressing Qoheleth's realistic agnosticism about what happens at, and after, death. He stuck with the evidence. The Lord gives the spirit, and the Lord takes it away. Qoheleth left the matter where it belongs: in the hands of the Lord.

### THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

Qoheleth understood very well that the human mind can form concepts opposed to reality or beyond testing. His own experience taught him that life is full of mystery, and that man asks questions without being able to understand the answers. One of his most important insights is that wisdom recognizes the human mind's limitations as well as its potential:

When I bent my mind to the knowledge of wisdom
and the observation of the pursuits
which are carried on in the earth
—for indeed day and night
His eyes do not shut in sleep—
then I observed all the activity of God,
and saw that man is not able
to grasp the activity
which goes on under the sun;
however man works at investigating it,
he cannot comprehend it. (Eccles 8: 16, 17)



Qoheleth could utter the words "all the activity of God," but he found it simply impossible to grasp the manifold details included in that divine activity. It is like seeing the stars at night or looking at the sands of the sea and trying to count them—a feat beyond the power of man, though not of God (Ps 147: 4; Jer. 33: 22)

Not only are God's actions too vast in number to be grasped by the human mind, their nature in itself is baffling.

Just as you do not understand
how the spirit comes into the bones
in the pregnant womb,
so you do not understand
the activities of God,
who is active in all things. (Eccles 11: 5)

God brings life in the womb by his spirit, and he, in some way or other, takes it at death (Eccles 12: 7). But both the beginning and the end of human existence lie veiled in the secrecy of God's incomprehensible wisdom.

This, then, is the first perspective from Qoheleth. Within the context of a faith in God, he accepted the fact of death as the end of life, a step into the unknown. Both the giving of life and the ending of life are part of the manifold activity of God which extends beyond the power of man's mind to probe.

### QOHELETH'S PERSPECTIVE AS SEEN IN THE THOUGHT OF PAUL AND JESUS

Both the early Christian Church and pharisaic Judaism made the resurrection a pivotal article of faith.[8] In this they took a step from which Qoheleth held back. But while the concept of the resurrection of, or from, the dead won acceptance, those who held it differed widely on the details of the event. And since it lies in the future, the resurrection must always be an object of faith rather than of sight.

To apply the perspective of Qoheleth's realism to resurrection faith means to accept the concept but to make no claim of knowledge about the various specific features of that momentous event that will attend it when it happens. These are undisclosed mysteries. We turn now to see how, according to the record of the New Testament, Paul and Jesus shared the wisdom of Qoheleth in this respect.

Paul argued vehemently for the factuality of the resurrection, particularly because for him the resurrection of Christ had become of crucial importance. However he pragmatically relied on the evidence, passed on to him through tradition, that Christ had first appeared to Peter, to the twelve,

to more than five hundred believers, to James, and to "all the apostles." Furthermore, his own life had undergone a radical transformation because he himself had been confronted by the risen Lord—an experience which Acts tells three times (9: 1–9; 22: 6–11; 26: 12–20). Paul places the resurrection of Christ, attested by the eyewitnesses mentioned above, including himself, at the beginning of his long chapter on resurrection, 1 Cor 15. In the following passage, he closely links the resurrection of the dead, the resurrection of Christ, and salvation:

> If Christ is proclaimed to have risen from the dead,
> how can some among you say
> that there is no resurrection of the dead?
> If, indeed, there is no resurrection of the dead,
> Christ was not raised either.
> But if Christ was not raised,
> then our proclamation is void of truth
> as is our faith.
>
> We are then also found to be false witnesses of God,
> because we have testified about God
> that he raised Christ,
> whom he did not raise
> if in fact the dead are not raised.
>
> But if Christ was not raised,
> your faith is worthless;
> you are still saddled with your sins.
> It also follows that those who fell asleep in Christ
> have perished.
>
> If our hope in Christ is limited to just this life,
> we are the most pitiful men in the world. (1 Cor 15: 12–19)

Paul could hardly have been more radical about the importance of the resurrection. He did not, however, specify in full the ingredients that will constitute the event. In response to objections to the idea of a resurrection of the physical body, he did say that those who are raised will be changed and will have spiritual bodies instead of their present ones:

> But some one will say,
> "The dead will be raised? Just how?
> With what sort of bodies
> will they come back?"
>
> You simpleton, what you sow
> will not germinate
> unless it dies first.
> And what you sow—
> well, it is not the bodily form
> that it will have in the future
> at the time when you sow it,
> but a bare grain—
> whether it happens to be wheat
> or one of the others.
>
> But God decides what
> bodily form to give it,
> and for each of the seeds
> there is its own particular body. (1 Cor 15: 35–38)



Applying this to the case of the human body, Paul went on to say:

> It is sown a physical body,
> it is raised a spiritual body;
> if there is a physical body
> there is a spiritual one too. (1 Cor 15: 44)

Of the resurrection bodies, Paul said that they will be incorruptible, glorious, strong, and immortal (1 Cor 15: 42 f). Yet by means of the analogy between the change in appearance of the plant from the seed that was sown and the change in the body that is to be raised from our present ones, the apostle strongly suggests that God alone knows just what the new, changed spiritual bodies will be like. We can know that we will be changed. We know that we must pass through death to that change. But beyond the general terms just cited, Paul does not reveal the how or what of the change. That is up to God. At this point, Paul has the same realistic perspective that Qoheleth had. He did not go beyond the evidence, or his trust in the power of God, for the sake of answering questions which arose from curiosity or doubt.

Nor, on the evidence of the Gospels, did Jesus himself disclose information about the resurrection or conditions pertaining to it, beyond the famous saying that in the resurrection there is neither marrying nor being married (Mk 12: 25). Even in this case, Jesus was not discoursing to his disciples on the subject of resurrection, but gave his statement as an answer to the Sadducees who were arguing that there is no resurrection. When they proposed the absurd situation of a woman who had lived as wife with seven brothers in succession, and asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection (Mk 12: 18–23), Jesus disposed of their trick question without going into lengthy teaching about the subject. The fact that the most explicit sayings from Paul and Jesus on resurrection came as answers to objections to belief in the resurrection deserves our notice. Neither of the two was, as far as our evidence goes, concerned with delving into the secrets of the

beyond. They believed in the resurrection but trusted in the power of God rather than an explanation tailored to human specifications.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19–31) may seem on the surface to offer new revelation of the intermediate state between death and the general resurrection. But deeper reflection shows that it is not so. Jesus, as he usually did in his teaching, was employing familiar ideas of his time[9] to convey teaching to those who heard him about their life on earth before death. The conclusion to the teaching seems to warn us away from seeking support for resurrection faith by direct revelation. For when the rich man asks that Lazarus go back to earth to warn the rich man's brothers, he is told that if his brothers will not believe on the strength of the witness of Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if one comes back from the dead.

The very paucity of Jesus' teaching about the life hereafter left a vacuum which inevitably attracted curiosity and led to the introduction of strange ideas. The statement in Acts 1: 3 that Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days after the crucifixion, speaking to them about the kingdom of God, provided an opportunity for later writers to supply their own versions of what Jesus said during that period. A number of apocryphal works, often gnostic in tendency, offer accounts of private revelations attributed to Jesus. Their divergence from the New Testament tradition and from each other betrays their inauthenticity.[10]

The early Church, then, faced the future with a firm faith in the resurrection, but without detailed information from either Jesus or Paul on the matter. Many questions were unanswered. Here is where Qoheleth's pragmatic realism seems to have been echoed by both Jesus and Paul. While they were not agnostic about the resurrection, as Qoheleth had been, they nevertheless rested their faith on the power of God rather than on explanations which by the very nature of the case must always be speculative.

## The Second Perspective: God Desires Man to Find the Goodness of Life Now

Although Qoheleth had no hope for life beyond the grave, he did find positive values to be a present potential. With the same clear-eyed realism that he applied to theories of survival, he sifted the axioms and values that he perceived men guiding themselves by. He concluded that in their folly men overcapitalize the worth of riches, fame, and pleasure. They strive to heap up, to hold on to, to control, and thereby to find satisfaction in what they conceive to be the good things of life. All this he labeled vanity, or emptiness (NEB), or futility (Berkeley version), or vapor (Scott, in *Anchor Bible*)



(2: 1–11; 18–23; 4: 7, 8; 5: 10, 11, 13–17; 6: 1–7, 11, 12; 8: 9, 11; 9: 1–3, 11, 12).[11] Life yields its treasures only to those who in wisdom accept and use with enjoyment what God gives them, ever conscious that the quality of life depends on how it is lived:

> I know that there is nothing better
> than to be joyful
> and get the most out of life.
> Whenever a man eats and drinks
> and gets satisfaction from all his toil
> it is a gift from God. (Eccles 3: 12 f)
>
> Go ahead and eat your bread with pleasure
> and drink your wine with gladness;
> since before you ever do them
> God looks with favor
> on these activities of yours. (Eccles 9: 7)
>
> Experience life to the full
> with the wife whom you love
> all the days of your fleeting life
> which he has given you under the sun;
> for that is your destined reward from life
> and from the toil in which you engage
> under the sun. (Eccles 9: 9)[12]

Qoheleth was advocating neither seeking pleasure for its own sake nor trying to satisfy oneself with physical or material things. His own experiments had shown him that this is folly (2: 1–11). Here he gives his mature view that the wise man balances active participation in life with an appreciation of its immediately apprehended, and transitory, goodness. Qoheleth, it seems, had learned to accommodate himself to the limits of the range of action and time allotted him by God, within which he found the best advice to be, "Take part energetically in everything you find to do" (9: 10). Echoes of this perspective are heard in the New Testament.

## Qoheleth's Perspective Seen in the New Testament

The New Testament reflects eager expectancy of the day of the Lord. Writer after writer reminds his audience that the eschaton looms on the horizon of history.[13] While the eschatological passages of the New Testament fail to agree on the precise nature and sequence of all the components connected with the one great event—the eschaton—they apparently expected that Christ would return and gather his own, both those then still living and those who had died (1 Cor 15: 23, 24, 51, 52; 1 Thess 4: 13–17; Rev 20:

4; Mk 13: 26, 27; Acts 1: 11). The ordinary course of history would be interrupted by divine intervention, and a new order would begin (2 Pet 3: 10–13 f).

In view of the anticipated shortness of time left before the eschaton, and the futility of human efforts to perpetuate business as usual in the face of the coming radical change, what did the present have to offer the Christian of the first century? Passing years quickly brought about positive answers to that question.

### THE RISEN CHRIST DWELLS IN HIS BELIEVERS

Without ever giving up hope for the future great day of the Lord, the New Testament points to an immediate fellowship with Christ here and now:

> For where two or three
> come together
> invoking my name
> I am there
> among them. (Mt 18: 20)

The same thought occurs at the end of the first Gospel:

> Go then and make disciples
> of all the nations . . .
> And hear this!
> I am with you
> through all the days
> until the end of the world. (Mt 28: 19, 20)

The gospel of John places in the context of the discourse at the Last Supper Christ's assurance that after his death he will return to his disciples while they are still on earth:

> I will not abandon you
> like orphans;
> I will come to you.
> Just a little while longer
> and the world will see me no more,
> but you will see me
> because I am alive
> and you will be alive.
> At that time you will realize
> that I am in my father
> and you are in me
> and I am in you . . .
> He who loves me



> will be loved by my father,
> and I will love him
> and show myself to him. (Jn 14: 18–21)

### BELIEVERS NOW ENJOY FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

So evident is this fact to the writers of the New Testament that it is mentioned here briefly because proof is hardly necessary. It has, however, great importance for our line of thought.

In Acts, the Spirit is given at baptism (Acts 2: 38) and by the laying on of hands (Acts 8: 14–17; 9: 17). Paul, who did not always keep clear the distinction between the risen Lord and the Spirit (2 Cor 3: 17; Rom 8: 2), at one point lists this inventory:

> The fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace,
> patience, generosity, goodness,
> faith, humility, self-control. (Gal 5: 22 f)

Indeed, the gifts of the Spirit proved to be something of an embarrassment of riches to the Corinthians, to whom Paul had to send rather lengthy instructions concerning the proper attitude toward them (e.g., 1 Cor 12).

### A WEALTH OF SHARED RELATIONSHIPS AND POSSESSIONS OPEN TO BELIEVERS

The book of Acts reports that:

> all the believers
> stuck together
> and shared everything;
> they sold both their livestock
> and their goods
> and made distribution
> to each according to his need. (Acts 2: 44, 45)[14]

This practice of togetherness and sharing evidently lies back of a striking speech of Jesus to Peter in the gospel of Mark. After Peter had pointed out that the disciples had given up everything to follow him, Jesus replied:

> There is no one who has left home
> or brothers or sisters
> or mother or father or children
> or fields
> on account of me and the gospel
> without getting back
> a hundred times over

in this present time
homes
and brothers and sisters
and mothers and children
and fields
—with persecutions—
and in the world to come,
eternal life. (Mk 10: 29 f)

While much more could be said on the subject of what was immediately available to Christians in the interim between the first and second comings of Christ, what has been adduced suffices, I hope, to make clear that what distinguished the Christian from the nonbeliever was not just resurrection faith and a future orientation connected with that faith but a very present difference in the quality of life experiences. The Christian already enjoyed fellowship with his risen Lord; he possessed, at least potentially, charismatic gifts; and he lived in a support system of family concern that included both his bodily needs and his emotional needs.

To put the situation in another way, the Christian was already living by, and participating in, the values of eternity. He did not need to wait or to deprive himself of what mattered most to him. Qualitatively, he already had eternal life (Jn 5: 24; 14: 6; 17: 3). His present relationships—with Christ, the Spirit, and the community—were, indeed, established in this worldly sphere, but partook of eternal values and were of infinite worth.

The second perspective of Qoheleth, then, reappears in the New Testament. The Christian awaiting the eschaton already lived in eternity, but in such a way that he experienced it within the limits God has drawn. He could strike a balance between engagement in present activities and his hope for the future. The need of such a perspective remains to this day.

## Notes

[1] See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. by John Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) II, pp. 520–22; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), pp. 308 f).

[2] M. Dahood finds reflection of belief in resurrection and immortality in some forty Psalms, in his commentary on Psalms in the Anchor Bible. See especially his remarks in *Psalms III 101–150* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. xli–lii. Bruce Vawter, "Intimations of Immortality and the Old Testament," *JBL* 91 (1972) 158–71, presents a searching critique of Dahood's philological method and his conclusions. (Vawter's article appeared too late for use in the writing of this present article. It includes a valuable appreciation of the Hebrew view of life, under God, in this world.) A characteristically well-balanced discussion of the subject of what lies beyond the grave in OT thinking appears in H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1956); see especially pp. 153 f and 170–75.



[3] See, for example, A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), pp. 94 f. Also, J. Pedersen, *Israel* (Copenhagen and London: 1926) I–II, pp. 466–70; and C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), pp. 11–17.

[4] For a poetic conjunction of exile and descent into Sheol, see Is 5: 13 f.

[5] An excellent discussion of the problem of the date of the book of Ecclesiastes stands in R. Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World* (New York: Bloch, 1955), pp. 63–68; for bibliography of a general nature, see R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 207 f.

[6] The term "Sheol" does not occur in Genesis until the Joseph saga, Gen 37: 35.

[7] E. A. Speiser, in *Genesis* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 44, translates the Hebrew *ydwn* as "shield"; his reasons are given in an article in *JBL* 75 (1956), 126–29. This is hardly the place, nor am I expert enough, to argue cogently on the basis of linguistics; however, I cannot resist thinking that perhaps the person or persons responsible for the Hebrew text of Gen 6: 3 may also have been less than expert linguists with respect to Akkadian, and have used *ydwn* to mean "dwell" anyway. Certainly the contrast between "spirit" (*ruaḥ*) and "flesh" (*bśr*), as well as the limitation set on man's life, imply that the spirit will be withdrawn, and man will die; for the contrast of flesh and spirit, cf Is 31: 3; for the connection of spirit and life, see Gen 6: 17 (P), where God announces that he is bringing the flood "to destroy all flesh in which is the breath (*ruaḥ*) of life." A. R. Johnson, *op. cit.*, has an excellent discussion of the meanings of *ruaḥ*, pp. 26–39. On Gen. 6: 3, see also H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (7. Auflage; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), pp. 57 f, who thinks it probable that this verse refers to the spirit of life given men by God, and that God's purpose is to limit the duration of man's life to one hundred and twenty years.

[8] A. Oepke, *TWNT* I, 370; R. Gordis, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 f.

[9] See W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1936) pp. 203–11; Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck, 1924) II, pp. 222–33.

[10] For information about some of these writings and English translations of some of the texts, see Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Eng. trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, vol I, 1963; vol II, 1965) I, pp. 82–84; 243–48; 250–59; 314–31; 486–503; II, pp. 663–83.

[11] Qoheleth's pet expression *hbl* is too rich to submit to translation by a single English equivalent. W. E. Staples has written a fine article, pointed out to me by J. M. Myers, entitled "The 'Vanity' of Ecclesiastes" *JNES* 2 (1943), 95–104.

[12] Cf Eccles. 5: 18–20.

[13] Examples: "You see the day approaching" (Heb 10: 25); "The coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas 5: 8); "See, the judge stands at the gates" (Jas 5: 9); "The end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet 4: 7); "I am coming shortly" (Rev 2: 16; 3: 11; 22: 7, 12, 20); "The kingdom of heaven (or God) is at hand" (Mt 3: 2; Mk 1: 15; Lk 10: 9, 11; cf also Rom 13: 11 f; 1 Cor 7: 29; 10: 11).

[14] Cf Acts 4: 32–5: 11; also 1 Tim 6: 17: "To those endowed with the riches of this world, direct this charge: 'don't become haughty, nor trust confidently in ephemeral wealth, but in God, who offers everything to us richly for our enjoyment.'"