

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*"I am the One that lives, but also the One that gives Life. I have died, but do I look at all dead? No, I am alive – not just now, but forever and ever. The keys that open the doors of Death are in my hands. I am the One who decides who stays in the realm of Death, and who comes to life." Rev 1:18.<sup>1</sup>*

#### 1. Revelation: a message of hope

Revelation has long been recognised as a book of hope and comfort (Coetzee 1990b: 265; Shogren 1997a: 656; Pohl 1969: 35). A lot has been written about this wonderful book, with nearly just as many views on the contents of its message. The seemingly mysterious apocalyptic visions and highly symbolic language have brought about much deliberation on the message of Revelation. And this message continues to fascinate readers and scholars today.

In the end one thing stands out amidst all these different viewpoints: Revelation wants to convey a message of hope and comfort. The purpose of John's message was to strengthen believers' faith and courage in the wake of possible persecution and hardship (Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035)<sup>2</sup>. John wants his readers to take comfort from the knowledge that their faith and trust in the Christ-event will eventually lead to them also being resurrected into a new life with the living Christ (e.g. Rev 20:4, 6). They must just hold on to the victory of the Lamb and not let anyone rob them of their victory prize (Rev 3:11). Even if they are rejected by this world they must not lose their faith and courage. The Almighty God is still in control of His creation (Du Rand 1991a: 591-593<sup>3</sup>; Shogren 1997a: 656). His sovereignty is evident in His power as the Creator-God (cf. Rev 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Sweet (1990: 34-35) argues that the actual crises for believers are not so much the physical persecution, but rather false doctrines and "worldly ideas" that have infiltrated into the churches. The letters to the seven churches also suggest that there is more to the message of Revelation than just encouragement in the light of physical persecution (e.g. Rev 2:14, 20-23). In fact, there are a variety of things that could influence believers' courage and faith (Bauckham 1993b: 15; Barnett 1997a: 75).

<sup>3</sup> The title of this article is: "God controls the history: a theological-historical viewpoint according to the Revelation of John" [my translation]. The message of the article is that the sovereignty of God is the centre of the hope that John wants to convey to his readers. God is still in control and has won the

For the faithful believer, however, there is more than just God's sovereign control to hold on to: the new creation, brought about by the eschatological salvation of the Lamb [who was slaughtered, but is now alive – Rev 5:5-6] is their actual destination (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 46). Their hope should therefore not rest upon things in this world, but on the new life [i.e. the new heaven and earth, the new Jerusalem – Rev 21] that God has prepared for them in heaven. John's message of hope runs throughout the text of this Christian prophetic-apocalyptic book<sup>4</sup>.

Although apocalyptic images and symbols play a major role in Revelation, the use of the concepts of *life* and *death* in conveying this eschatological message is striking throughout Revelation. A thorough reading of this Book brings one to the realisation that *life* and *death* are more than just linguistic and theological terminologies used by John [cf. the tables in Annex A.1 to A.3]. They are central theological concepts in conveying this crucial message of hope, as will be argued in the rest of this thesis. It is specifically life that is important, to be more specific, eternal life, life beyond the earthly realm.

The earthly life and death of Jesus Christ is the foundation on which this eschatological message of Revelation is based (Bauckham 1993b: 144; Beasley-Murray 1981: 47). *Life* and *death* in Revelation is for most parts looked at from an eschatological point of view. Therefore physical life and death is not at the centre of Revelation's message, but eschatological life.<sup>5</sup>

Revelation 4-5 is the fulcrum of the book, with the message that the God of creation is also the God of redemption (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). The Lamb who lives

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final battle on the cross (Rev 12:11). This historical victory is the source from which believers can find their hope, regardless of their present situation on earth (cf. also Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035).

<sup>4</sup> A term also used by Du Rand (1991b: 180) for the genre of Revelation [cf. also Schüssler Fiorenza 1985 – Chapter 5 – who refuses to choose between prophecy or apocalypse as genre]. Du Rand also mentions that this rather unique genre is further wrapped in a letter framework, which makes it a complex document, one that as a result of its different faces cannot be boxed and assessed from a single point of view.

<sup>5</sup> Eschatology, of course, plays a major role in the development of the overall message of Revelation. This is not unusual, as eschatology is an integral part of most apocalyptic writings (2 Macc 7:9; 1 En 51:1; Test Jud 25:1; 2 Apoc Bar 82:1-2; [Beale 1997: 332; cf. Du Rand 1991b: 170-183]). According to John Collins "The mysteries they disclose involve a view of human affairs in which major importance is attached to the influence of the supernatural world and the expectation of eschatological judgment" (Collins 1997: 29).

forever and ever (cf. Rev 1:18) has through his own death and resurrection overcome the powers of evil and death. He has got the keys to *life* in his hands [i.e. He is ultimately the One who decides on life and death – Rev 1:18].

The eschatological message of Revelation goes hand in hand with the [ethical] question that confronts the believer in the present age: Am I dead, or am I alive? In the end the answer to this question is **the** deciding factor for believers in their life of faith in this world. The readers must already answer the question in this life. In the eschatological future the result of this “present” life [or death] will come into effect, without the possibility to make any “late changes” to one’s name in the *Book of Life*.

Although on the surface the message sounds threatening, it is not the primary intention of John (Beasley-Murray 1981: 27). He only wants to shift his readers’ focus. They must not be too concerned about the outcome of things in this world, as there is “a better world” awaiting them after this one. Their goal should therefore not be to stay out of the arms of physical death, but rather to ensure that they have grasped the “real life” [i.e. everlasting life – e.g. the letters to the seven churches]. In the words of Jesus Himself: “...do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; but rather be afraid of Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” (Matt 10:28 – Amplified Bible: 1087)

## **2. An overview of research on the subject**

The importance of the concept of life to the message of hope in the Book of Revelation becomes more and more evident when a close reading of the book is done. Even reading through commentaries and other books written on Revelation, the importance of this concept as bearer of the message of hope comes through. However, very little has been written up to now on the extent and influence of the concepts of life [and death] on the message conveyed by John to his readers. Quite a lot has been written, specifically in theological dictionaries, on the understanding of life [and death] in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament and New Testament in general [concluding sometimes with a mention to the application thereof in Revelation], but very little has been written on how Revelation specifically employs these themes within its message of hope and comfort to the believers in Asia Minor.

A survey of articles written on life and, specifically focussing on life [and death] in Revelation, have produced a number of sources on the subject, however focussing only on a limited number of texts within the Book of Revelation. Most of the articles surveyed also did not focus on life and death in Revelation primarily, but only used the subject implicitly or referred to it within the context of the discussion of the specific article.

The following prominent articles reviewing the subject of life and death in Revelation directly or indirectly can be cited:

i. With regard to resurrection

- a. *The first resurrection*: An article by Meredith Kline in Westminster Theological Journal (1975: 366-375). This is a survey of Revelation 20 focussing on the understanding of the first resurrection as a new life exempt from the “second death” or eternal death (Kline 1975: 373). It is compared with the “crown of life” promised to the faithful Christians in Smyrna, i.e. those who are righteous in Christ.
- b. In the same series of the Westminster Theological Journal is an article by Norman Shepherd called “*The resurrections of Revelation 20*” (1975: 34-43). This article evaluates the meaning and timing of the first and second resurrection in relation to the resurrection of Christ. Shepherd (1975: 43) interprets the difference between the first and second resurrection as “the distance between the resurrection of Jesus Christ in whom and with whom all believers are raised by baptism, and the resurrection of all things at the end of the age”<sup>6</sup>.
- c. *After the thousand years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* is a book by JW Meale published in 1992. This book is another exegesis of the millennium as described in Revelation 20. The conclusion of Meale (1992: 248) is twofold: “Those who have rejected

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<sup>6</sup> The resurrection as described in Revelation 20:1-6 in the end seems to be a more heavily discussed issue than any of the other concepts relating to life and death. The differences in interpreting the millennium probably add to the interest in this debate. In 1976 Michaels responded in the Westminster Theological Journal (WTJ) (1976: 100-109) on the work of Meredith Kline, which was again responded upon by Kline in the same issue of the WTJ (1976: 110-119). Cf. also *Millennium as Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* by Paul Rainbow (WTJ 1996: 209-221) and *Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 in its Salvation-Historical Setting* by Don Garlington (BRT 1994: 4-37).

God in their mortal lives, will never be reconciled with Him” in a negative sense, even though they might receive salvation. But positively this exegesis opens up Revelation 20 as the story of the grace of God that never expires but warns and reminds again and again until time finally runs out at the judgment.

- d. A number of books have been written on the subject of resurrection. Again most of them do not focus primarily on life and death in Revelation, but is more set towards understanding the concept of resurrection within the New Testament church in general (cf. Travis 1997a: 1020). Three excellent works on resurrection that will also be used in this study, are:
- *Resurrection and discipleship*, by Thorwald Lorenzen (1995). In his book Lorenzen first discusses different models being used to interpret resurrection in the Bible. He then goes on to discuss resurrection as an act of God. In Part IV of the study he looks at the nature and reality of resurrection and how it affects believers’ understanding of God, Christology, soteriology, etc.
  - *The Fate of the Dead: studies on the Jewish & Christian apocalypses*, by Richard Bauckham (1998a). The fate of the dead plays such an important role in all apocalyptic literature (Bauckham 1998a: 1). Bauckham has put together a study of apocalyptic works from Jewish and Christian origin that give information about visits to the underworld or to heaven in order to determine how the surrounding traditions of ideas and images have influenced thinking in the early Christian world with regard to the fate of the dead.
  - *Life in the face of death* (Ed. Richard Longenecker) is a corpus of studies evaluating how the different New Testament writers interpreted the resurrection of Christ, and “the significance of that message for the living of life, the facing of death, and the longing for the future after death” (Longenecker 1998: ix). Chapter 12 of this book [by Allison Trites] focuses on the resurrection message of Revelation.

- ii. With regard to life metaphors [e.g. the Tree of Life]
  - a. *The Tree of Life: Protological or Eschatological*: An article by Robert Starke in *Kerux* (1996: 15-31). In this article Starke concludes that the tree of life is actually to be linked with the cross as a life giving “tree” (1996: 30-31).
  - b. *The tree of life in Revelation 2:7*: An article by Daniel Wong in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998: 211-226). This is an aspect that has been explored quite a lot in the past. However, Wong summarises the viewpoints, also referring to work done by other scholars on the subject (cf. Wong 1998: 213). The article interprets the tree of life as pointing towards the concept of eternal life in the eternal city (Wong 1998: 226).
- iii. The Lamb of God in Revelation
  - a. *Lion as slain Lamb: on reading Revelation recursively*: An article by Patricia McDonald in *Horizons* (1996: 29-47). This article focuses, as its title suggests, on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and interpreting the victory of believers [even in death] within this context (McDonald 1996: 46-47).
  - b. *The Kerygma of the Revelation to John*: An article by Mathias Rissi in *Interpretation* (1968: 3-17). This article centres on the idea that victory and life in the church is only possible through the victory won by the Lamb. The final victory [i.e. at the judgment], which includes the institution of the new world and the new city, will not be destructive, but rather redemptive.
- iv. The four living creatures
  - a. *Living creatures in the midst of the throne: another look at Revelation 4:6*. An article by Robert Hall in *NTS* 36 (1990: 609-613). In this article Hall reinterprets the phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου as placing the four living creatures on the throne itself, and then using the same formula to place the Lamb also on the throne in Revelation 5:6 (Hall 1990: 613).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This is probably also implicitly stated in Revelation 22:3, when it is said that God **and** the Lamb are on the throne, and his followers will serve **Him**. It is, however, not the focus of the study to explore this here in detail. Cf. Excursion 5 on “the Divine Trinity in Revelation.”



v. Life in the church and the end times

- a. *The hearing formula in the Book of Revelation*: An article by Anne-Marit Enroth in NTS 36 (1990: 598-608). The message of the hearing formula is to encourage believers to live a victorious life, so that they might obtain eternal life in the end (Enroth 1990: 607-608).
- b. *A Kingdom of Priests*: This article by Jose Busto in Theology Digest (1992: 215-219) discusses the priestly life and death of Jesus and how it affects the lives of believers who in the end have to sacrifice their lives for God in martyrdom.
- c. *The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation*: An article by John Paul Heil in Biblica (1993: 221-243). The idea of this article is to prove that Revelation 6:9-11 has a unique position in relation to the rest of Revelation, acting as a core from which the sections preceding and succeeding it can be interpreted. It centres rather on understanding the text from the viewpoint of the coming judgment (cf. Heil 1993: 242). Of course, the judgment also plays an integral part in life and death decisions in Revelation, as will be seen from the main part of the thesis.
- d. Jan du Rand wrote a number of articles [and books] on Revelation. Some of these reflecting on the church in the end times are:
  - *'Now the salvation of our God has come...'* A narrative perspective on the hymns in Revelation 12-15 in Neotestamentica (1993: 313-330). The article focuses on the important role of worship hymns in Revelation. "The readers, representing the faithful, experience a catharsis in associating with the hymns to live from the perspective that...his kingly role and salvation have arrived on earth" (Du Rand 1993: 313).
  - *Van klipkrip tot Armagedon (1999b)*. This is a popular exposition regarding the message of John to the church in Asia Minor about the end times. Another book, with a similar message, was published in 1995 with the title "666 en die eeuwenteling" (Du Rand 1995a).
  - *The New Jerusalem as pinnacle of Salvation: Text (Rev 21:1-22:5) and intertext*, in Neotestamentica (2004: 275-302). In

this article Du Rand explores how the text of Revelation 21:1-22:5 links with the surrounding context of Revelation [and other texts] to bring forth the message of the fulfilment of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem (2004: 299).

As can be seen from the above discussion, research up to now has focussed mainly on specific concepts within selected texts in the Book of Revelation, exploring mainly the meaning of those specific text(s). Sometimes implicit reference is made to the issue of life or death. None of the abovementioned sources focussed on the overall picture, i.e. the impact of the concepts of life and death on the message of Revelation as a whole. Within Revelation most of the attention has been on the theme of resurrection, specifically in Revelation 20:1-6 [as can be seen from (i) above]. On the other hand, sources that did focus primarily on the subject of life and death, only gave a brief overview of the understanding of life and death in the Book of Revelation.

### **3. Reason for this study**

Looking at life [and death] from a theological point of view is definitely not a new discovery that originated with the author of Revelation. Theologically the concept of life [or death?] is important to the Biblical message of salvation as a whole. Of course, in the New Testament it is looked at from a new angle. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes the focus point from which everything else is evaluated, including life and death (Durand 1981: 18).

The hypothesis for this study is that the concept of life, as used in the Revelation of John, is a central theological theme in conveying the message of hope and comfort with regard to God's sovereignty, believers' faith and courage in the wake of the victory of the Lamb, and their life of witnessing and perseverance in obedience to God and the Lamb. Life is mentioned [or at least implied] in nearly every chapter of Revelation [See Annexure A.1].

For the purposes of this study life can be defined as follows:

It is the cognitive existence of a being within a specified framework of time and space with the prospect of participating in the action. Without



the possibility of participative existence no life can exist. The context within which a being operates determines the qualitative nature of life, i.e. if life exists in a physiological sense, a spiritual sense or within an eternal realm. Death, in this sense, is the antithesis for life, i.e. it constitutes what life is not. In Revelation death applies more often to those who do not possess “real life”.

As this is primarily a message of hope, the focus is strongly on life as a central theme.<sup>8</sup> The climax of the Book of Revelation is ultimately life in the New Jerusalem in eternity (Du Rand 1995a: 135; cf. Du Rand 2004: 275-302). It is a look at life from an eschatological point of view, made possible by the death and resurrection of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Rev 1:18; 5:5-6). Life in a physiological sense is not of great importance. This life will eventually come to an end.

Contrary to physical life, eternal life [i.e. the existence in the face and realm of God] lasts forever. This new life offers believers the promise of an eternal existence in the presence of God in a new world order that He has prepared for them (Rev 21:1-22:5). In this new world order death has no part to play (Rev 21:4). Without this existence the new heaven and earth actually would not exist [as will the New Jerusalem], as a perfect relationship with God in his new world order would not be possible.

#### 4. Approach to this study

The study consists of an exegetical review of the terminology used with regard to life [ζῶν, ζῶον, ζωή, ψυχή] and its antithesis, death [ἄδης, ἄβυσσος, θάνατος, ἀποθνήσκω, ἀποκτείνω, νεκρός] in the Book of Revelation. Other related words [and phrases] that support the concepts of life and death [e.g. ἀνάστασις – resurrection, αἷμα – blood, etc] will also be discussed in the exegesis. The study will focus on the Greek text as presented by Aland & Aland (1993).<sup>9</sup> Existing exegetical methods will

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, life as a central theme in the New Testament is not unique to the Book of Revelation. The Gospel of John is commonly known as the “Gospel of life” (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 2; Smalley 1978: 203). Eternal life is also important in Paul’s theology (cf. 1 Cor 15). However, it is interesting to note from Van der Watt’s study that, apart from the Gospel of John, Revelation is the Book in the New Testament where the words ζωή and ζάω occur most frequently (1986a: 56). This just illustrates the importance of this concept for John’s message to the churches in Asia Minor (cf. Durand 1981:18).

<sup>9</sup> The problem with regard to authorship, dating, redaction history, structure, etc will not be discussed in detail. A lot of work has already been put into these areas of study, not least of these the monumental study by David Aune on Revelation [in three volumes issued between 1997-1998] (cf.

be employed in the process to ask relevant questions to the text. The content of the questions will be determined by the text, the context, text-critical notes and evaluations, etc<sup>10</sup>.

The exegesis will also take into account the impact of the Old Testament, Jewish and Judaic literature, and other New Testament Books on the message of life and death in Revelation, where applicable. For this purpose the understanding of the concepts of life and death within these environments will be evaluated upfront. This will provide a broad ecological framework within which exegesis on the texts in Revelation could be done. However, this does not necessarily imply that the understanding of the text in Revelation is entirely dependant on an etymological development of a text. John was certainly free to use [and reinterpret] text and symbols to bring a specific message within a Christological context. The high percentage of allusions to the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2] though, makes it quite possible that John would somehow expect his readers to pick up on some of the Old Testament metaphors [as understood in their time] and to then apply them Christological.

Although all texts identified [cf. Annexure A.1-A.3, B.1] will be explored, each one will not necessarily be discussed in detail. A detailed exegesis will therefore be conducted on those texts where life and death plays the most prominent role in conveying the message of hope. Where applicable, texts will be combined within a discussion of these more prominent themes [specifically where two or more texts convey the same meaning]. This process should be sufficient to prove that life and death are central in John's thought to bring hope and comfort to his readers in Asia Minor. More importantly, it should prove that Revelation is a Book of life, bringing the comforting message of life eternal to the reader.

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also studies done by Charles 1920a; Mounce 1977; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985; Du Rand 1991b; Beasley-Murray 1981; Bauckham 1993a; and many others).

<sup>10</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to evaluate or prove [or even propose] any exegetical method to be used in studies on Revelation. For further reading on exegetical methods, refer to extensive work done by scholars such as Wilhelm Egger: *How to read the New Testament: an introduction to linguistic and historical-critical methodology* (1996); Joel Green: *Hearing the New Testament: strategies for interpretation* (1995); and Stanley Porter & David Tombs: *Approaches to New Testament study* (1995). Cf. also Stanley Porter & CA Evans: *New Testament Interpretation and methods* (1996) and Stanley Porter & Dennis Stamps: *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (2002).

## CHAPTER 2

### LIFE AND DEATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

*"A person who does not live a righteous life has lost life...The righteous person who also loves others has obtained life. People will honour and respect him for that." Prov 21:16, 21.<sup>11</sup>*

#### 1. Importance of the Old Testament for Revelation

Old Testament traditions are evident throughout Revelation [e.g. the Exodus, creation, exile]. Many of the symbols and visions used in Revelation have their roots in specific historical traditions found in the Old Testament. In his study on the influence of the prophetic tradition on the message of Revelation, Jan Fekkes writes:

"(T)he sheer magnitude, variety and consistency of John's use of the OT certainly constitutes this area as a fundamental starting point for the exegete" (1994: 59).

Revelation is actually saturated with allusions to the Old Testament (Bauckham 1993b: 4)<sup>12</sup>. Although no direct quotations from the Old Testament are cited in Revelation [as for instance is done frequently in the Gospel of Matthew – e.g. Matt 1:22-23], the allusions are woven into the text<sup>13</sup> (Moyise 1995: 14; Pohl 1969: 31). Pohl (1969: 32) sees the reason for this in the fact that the message of Revelation is more than the Old Testament prophecies itself<sup>14</sup>. John uses a reinterpretation of prophecies, combining them with each other and with Christology so that in the end "Trotz der Fülle von Anklängen entstand etwas Neues" (Pohl 1969: 32). It is thus important to read the text within the reinterpreted framework that John has created.

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<sup>11</sup> Free translation from "Die Boodschap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Moyise (1995: 137) identifies more than 200 allusions to the Old Testament to be found in the Book of Revelation [cf. also the research by Fekkes: 1994 and Beale: 1998 on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation].

<sup>13</sup> This seems to be typical of the Johannine literature, as the Gospel of John also uses the Old Testament in similar fashion (cf. Du Rand 1990: 5).

<sup>14</sup> As Pohl (1969: 32) puts it so strikingly in his commentary: "Erfüllung ist eben mehr als Weissagung, wie der Baum mehr ist als sein Same. In diesem Bewußtsein haben alle Apostel, die die Erfüllung in Jesus Christus geschaut, betastet und gehört haben, dem Alten Testament gegenüber gestanden. In dieser Vollmacht können sie die alten Worte in einer Freizügigkeit verwenden, die jeden überraschen muß, der von der Höhe, Tiefe, Länge und Breite der Christusoffenbarung nichts begreift".

They take on a new life in the new situations that call for a new revelation from God, i.e. the revelation of Jesus Christ (Michaels 1997: 853).

However, to understand even the reinterpreted message of the prophecies, one still needs to take into account the original Old Testament meaning thereof. It is important to realise that the authors of the New Testament books were part of a world filled with traditions and concepts that we find in the Old Testament. Also: the faith of the early Christians was still very much focussed on the God of the Old Testament (Moyise 1995: 12-13). Therefore, a study on the book of Revelation cannot be complete without taking into account the influence of the Old Testament. On the other hand one must remember that the Christians just could not interpret the Old Testament the same any more. The person of Jesus Christ has now come to stand between them and the Old Testament (Van der Watt 1989a: 62-64; Von Rad 1975b: 328).

The use of the Old Testament [by John] to such a high extent is not incidental. Old Testament concepts are purposefully used as vehicles to convey the message of Revelation. They are, however, now reinterpreted in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ [see above]. What God promised centuries ago has realised in the person of Jesus Christ. Even the historic traditions are reinterpreted Christologically and eschatologically (Sweet 1990: 39).

Reinterpretation of texts is not limited to Christian literature. It is also evident in the eschatological [and apocalyptic] interpretation of texts found in early Judaism and in Jewish apocalyptic literature, where Old Testament texts and traditions also took on new, apocalyptic [and eschatological] meanings (Bailey 1979: 75-76; Allison 1992a: 18)<sup>15</sup>. As Russell (1964: 92) puts it: “Apocalyptic is not a substitute for prophecy...It is *prophecy in a new idiom*”<sup>16</sup>.

John sometimes draws symbols and visions from these traditions. However, he also reinterprets these traditions within the context of the Christ event. Through his subtle use of the Old Testament he wants to inform his readers that the prophecies and

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<sup>15</sup> cf. also Aune 1997: lxxxv; Bauckham 1993a: 38-91; Charlesworth 1985: 64; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 40-41.

<sup>16</sup> My italics.

promises from the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and that He is the One bringing salvation:

“John’s theological and eschatological concepts are firmly rooted in the OT, which he clearly regards as the prime locus of God’s revelation.... John is not only concerned with images, but with promises, and their fulfilment” (Fekkes: 1994: 38-39)

It is therefore important to pay attention to the way the concepts of life and death were understood in ancient Israel, through the window of the Old Testament. Reading the apocalyptic visions and images against this background opens the door to understanding Revelation’s message of hope against a more appropriate backdrop (Beale 1998: 127).

## **2. Life and death in the Ancient Near East (ANE)**

Ancient Israel did not exist in a vacuum. They were part of the ANE, an environment with whom they shared certain values, cultural and even religious customs. There are a lot of comparisons to be made between Israelite thought and that of the other nations from the ANE, also on the issues of life and death (Vosloo 1977: 2-7). A short insight into the way life and death were perceived in the ANE is given here as a background to the Jewish thought on life and death.

However, it must be remembered that Israelite religion was also unique amongst the peoples of the ANE. Therefore, one can’t just apply everything within the ANE onto religious thought and rites prevalent in Israel, or even Christianity for that matter (De Vaux 1973: 271). Furthermore it must be noted that life in the ANE [including Israel] was not static (Collins 1997: 57). There was certain development in the way things were perceived. The view given in this section of the thesis is just an overview, which in a sense represents a very generalised view on life in the ANE.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The following dictionaries have been consulted with regard to the use of the concepts of life and death in the ANE, Old Testament and New Testament: Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD); New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT); New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE); Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT); Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT); Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels; Dictionary of Paul and his letters; Dictionary of the later New Testament and its development, Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (EWNT).

In the ANE life and death was mostly seen as opposites (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death was generally perceived to be something negative, whereas life and staying alive was seen as something very positive. Life was in the hands of the gods. Man had no control over it. The “creator-god” of the people was accepted as the giver of this life. This notion was common throughout the ANE (Ringgren 1980: 325-328).

### *2.1. Life in the ANE*

Life was in most instances limited to the physical existence of a person on this side of the grave. “...life is not something abstract,...but the concrete existence of all creatures.” (E Otto, as quoted by Ringgren 1980: 325). This does not mean that “life” was limited merely to existence within an active body of a person. Health and vigour were also positive signs that life was present (Ringgren 1980: 328; cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849-851). Ill persons were in a sense regarded as dead, and only through healing could they be returned to life (Hendriksen 1973: 390; Nielsen 1982: 168; Bolkestein 1985: 51).

Life was never meant to be eternal for the people of the land. That privilege belonged only to the “creator-god”. The people of the land must just make the best of their lives on this side of the grave, knowing that it will last for a limited period only. Death is the destiny of every person (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 431). The only hope for the people is that the god will grant them a long and healthy life here on earth. That will be their only reward for being “good citizens” in the eyes of the creator-god (Ringgren 1980: 329, 341)<sup>18</sup>.

It was of great importance for the king to have a prosperous life. Life and the king were often associated with each other. The king was perceived to be the “living image” of the gods.<sup>19</sup> He was the visible “bestower” of life on behalf of the god

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<sup>18</sup> The Greeks tried to overcome this negative perception about death by making death part of normal life. They regarded death not as man’s fate, but instead saw it as an achievement. It was thus important to die gloriously, without fear (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 431).

<sup>19</sup> In Mesopotamia, for instance, the king was seen as the one who transmits life and prosperity [which he received from the creator-god] to the land and the people. He was a type of mediator between the god and the people. This made the ongoing life of the king even more important in the eyes of the people (Ringgren 1980: 329). Their prosperity and existence in a sense hinged on the continuing life of the king.



(Ringgren 1980: 326-329). The kings were sometimes called “sons of god”. The people thought of the king as having been begotten by the god. It was thus quite common in the ANE that the kings ended up being honoured as deities (Weiser 1975: 113). In the light of this status it was hoped [or maybe even expected of?] that the king would have immortality similar to the gods (Ps 2:7<sup>20</sup>; cf. Ringgren 1980: 330).

## 2.2. *Death in the ANE*

In a polytheistic environment [the situation within most of the peoples of the ANE] the issues of life and death were complicated by the fact that the “creator-god” was not the only god that existed. There were numerous other gods. These gods were mostly out to attack or kill. Death was seen as an intruder brought about by some of these other gods and, although bound to befall everyone, was something that must be fended off at all cost<sup>21</sup>. Especially premature death was held very negative (Bailey 1979: 8-16; Richards 1992: 108·II -109·II).

Although death was mostly perceived of very negative, it was not necessarily the end for a person. Some form of life was still possible after death, even though only in a spiritual way. The spirits of the dead brought a form of continuity between this life and life after death. They were believed to be in constant contact with the living. The spirits could also be called upon at times through spirit-mediums (e.g. 1 Sam 28). This contact with the spirits was, however, not necessarily positive. The spirits of the dead could haunt the living if they were not treated with the necessary respect (Bailey 1979: 8-16).

For the continuing [positive] existence of [and contact by] the spirit of a dead person to be possible, it was essential that the body be properly preserved after death. Burial ceremonies were very important in achieving this position. The Egyptians specifically put a lot of effort into their burial ceremonies (Hitti 1961: 64-66). For

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<sup>20</sup> Except where specifically indicated, references to texts within the Psalter are with regard to the BHS. The LXX will be mentioned specifically when applicable.

<sup>21</sup> The peoples of the ANE showed a significant interest in a plethora of rituals to fend of the woes of death and the underworld. Many stories and legends have been documented describing efforts to explain the reasons for the intrusion of death into the lives of people. Although it was taken that everybody’s lives were limited, there were still dreams of reaching immortality as the ultimate state for the “good person” in the eyes of the creator-god. Bailey (1979: 6) tells the story of Gilgamesh seeking immortality on behalf of his friend Enkidu (cf. also Hitti 1961: 64-66 and Richards 1992: 109·II), only to find out that death was a part of man since his creation (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 25).

them tombs were not signs of the end of life. Life and death were not to be contradicted. They were no more than two different sides or modes of existence just as day and night exist together in the universe. They were “place(s) of rejuvenated life” (Ringgren 1980: 325-327).<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Life and death in the Old Testament

Israel had a uniquely developed theology and religion amongst the nations of the ANE. Although there were many similarities with the ANE thought, also in terms of religion, Israel was also very different in the way they perceived and approached life. This was influenced strongly by Israel’s theology, their thinking about God and the unique relationship between God and his people (Vosloo 1977: 4). It was a “unique covenant history made up of unrepeatable events” that determined theology in Israel (West 1971: 51). An overview is given in the rest of the chapter of the way life and death was perceived in ancient Israel.

#### 3.1. *The sovereign God controls life*

Monotheism plays an important role in some documents of the Old Testament<sup>23</sup> (West 1971: 146; Von Rad 1975a: 210-211). This is specifically evident from the Book of Deuteronomy. In the strongest possible language Yahweh is depicted as *the* sovereign God and, according to the Credo, the only living God<sup>24</sup> (Deut 6:4). This is also illustrated in no uncertain terms in the creation stories recorded in the Bible [Genesis 1 and 2]. God [Yahweh] is the Creator of everything that exists. It is from this

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<sup>22</sup> These views about death and the realm of death were neither universal nor static. Through the years thinking about life, death, mortality, etc developed. This development is clearly expressed by Joachim Jeremias in his article on ἄδης in TDNT (1965: 146-149).

<sup>23</sup> Von Rad (1975a: 210-211) has shown that monotheism was not always prevalent in Israel. There is evidence from the Old Testament that Israel accepted, and sometimes incorporated, other gods (Gen 31:53; Judg 11:24; 1 Sam 26:19; 2 Kgs 3:27). It is only in the time of the exile [and thereafter] that we find a clear expression of monotheism. Pre-exilic syncretism was then recalled as the main cause for Israel’s downfall and the resultant exile (Dunn 1991: 19). That is why the focus is so strong on the one God. Israel must return to faith in the only living God. In the exilic and post-exilic times monotheism became “a necessary presupposition for and consequence of the narration of Israel’s history: it is the same God who is responsible for all, from beginning to end” (Newman 1997a: 413). In Isaiah 45:5-6 Yahweh proclaims through the prophet: “I am Yahweh, besides me there is no God.” Cf. also Isaiah 44:7-8; 46:1-2 and others (Von Rad 1975a: 212). In this thesis, we will, however, work with the accepted view of monotheism. To discuss its development is, according to Von Rad (1975a: 210-212), complex. It is rather the subject of a separate study.

<sup>24</sup> The gods of the other nations were almost always seen as no more than the dead idols these people worshipped. Where the existence of other gods were recognised, they were inferior to Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf. 1 Chr 16:25-26; Ps 86:8). According to Dunn (1991: 21) the problem of multiple gods were solved by either subordination or absorption (cf. Deut 32:8-9; Sir 17:17).

creation by the Creator [Yahweh] that Israel's relationship with Yahweh stems (West 1971: 51). He is not an absent God who has since disappeared, leaving his creation to function all on its own. He is still in control of creation. The dialogue between God and Job is an excellent example of God's incomparable sovereignty as Creator and Controller of his creation (cf. Job 38-42).

This sovereignty includes Yahweh's control over life and death (2 Kgs 5:7; Deut 32:39). He, as the only acknowledged God, was the Giver of all life. He was also the One who could take life away (2 Kgs 20:1-11; Job 24:18-19). The entire cycle of life was therefore in his hands (cf. Ps 30:15; 138:16 [both LXX]). Man has never possessed the power to decide on the boundaries for life and death. It is Yahweh alone who determines how it is apportioned (Ps 90:3-5; [Von Rad 1975a: 388]).

The creation story of Genesis 2 and the story of the fall of man (Gen 3) could also suggest, contrary to popular believe, that man has never possessed eternal life [cf. however, Genesis 2:16-17, which again seems to imply the contrary]. In Genesis 3:22-24 God chases man away from Eden to prevent him from eating from the tree of life, *thereby* obtaining eternal life in addition to the acquired knowledge (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844).

By accepting this sovereignty of Yahweh over life and death, and man's limitations within God's created order, Israel was able to also accept the mortality of the people, and ultimately the existence of death as something natural (Bailey 1979: 57-59). There was no arguing that every person's life would eventually end up in death. Also, there was no place for the acceptance of any other forces or gods that could influence life for God's people (cf. again Deut 6:4):

“The entirety of Israel's gratitude and attention is focussed upon Yahweh. There is simply no room, indeed no need, to acknowledge the existence of the demonic” (Bailey 1979: 28-29).

Bad things, including death, therefore didn't happen as a result of the intervention by other gods. It is the wrath of God that brings death and punishes people, not the interference by other gods (Num 21:6-9; Am 1-2). It was brought about because the

people of God have turned away from Yahweh to serve the gods of the surrounding nations, or just to serve their own interests (Am 2:6-16). For this disobedient attitude towards Yahweh they will be judged and even destroyed (cf. Mays 1969: 53; Dunn 1991: 19). Yahweh even uses Israel's enemies to punish his people [i.e. Israel] for their disobedience (2 Kgs 17:7-23).

### 3.2. *Life in the Old Testament*

The frequency of occurrences of the roots חיה [life] and נפש [soul, living being]<sup>25</sup> in the Old Testament suggests that thinking about life [and how to hold on to this life] was central to the people of Israel (Ringgren 1980: 331-332). Life is valued very high throughout the Old Testament. God is a God of life and of the living, not the dead (Deut 30:19; [Johnston 2002: 39]). It is often associated with the blessing of Yahweh on a person or nation who lives a righteous life. Life is a gift from Yahweh to all living beings. This is specifically evident from the Wisdom literature (cf. Ps 119:93, 144; Prov 5:21-23; 6:23; 8:35-36; 12:28; Eccl 9:4; [Brensinger 1997: 111-112; Richards 1992: 110-II; McKane 1992: 358-359<sup>26</sup>]).

As a result of this premium placed on life, old age was seen as a blessing. It was a sign that somebody has lived a righteous life before the Lord, and has therefore been blessed by Him with a long and prosperous life. In contrast to this it was taken as a curse from Yahweh if a person came to die at an early age (Deut 30:19-20). It was

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<sup>25</sup> The verb חָיָה and its related noun occur more than 650 times in the Old Testament (Ringgren 1980: 331-332). The Greek words ζῆν and ζωή in the LXX translate nearly all the uses of חָיָה in the Old Testament (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 33). The word נֶפֶשׁ occurs more than 775 times (Jacob 1974: 618). נֶפֶשׁ has a wide spectrum of meanings in the Old Testament of which “life” is only one possibility. For a more detailed discussion of these uses, refer to the article by Seebass in TDOT (1980: 504-517; cf. also Holladay 1988: 242-243; Jacob 1974: 617-631; Fredericks 1997: 133). נֶפֶשׁ is in most instances connected with the saving of life. Verbs of saving frequently have נֶפֶשׁ as their object (e.g. Josh 2:13; Ezek 14:14; Isa 44:20; Jer 20:13; Am 2:14-15). Von Rad (1975a: 153) sees נֶפֶשׁ as that which is essential to man in the broadest terms. The נֶפֶשׁ is sometimes so identified with the whole of man that it denotes a non-breathing corpse (Lev 21:11; [Fredericks 1997: 133]). The נֶפֶשׁ [“life”] of a being was in its “blood”. Therefore, it is wrong to eat meat with its blood still inside (Deut 12:23; cf. Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11; [Seebass 1980: 514]). Life also ceases to exist [i.e. is dead] when the נֶפֶשׁ has departed from a person (Jacob 1974: 619). חָיָה could mean more than just physical life, and is sometimes used metaphorically within different scenarios. There are a number of synonyms which could also denote “life” in the Old Testament, as is shown by Bultmann in his article in TDNT (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849). Harder (1978: 680) in his article in NIDNTT sees נֶפֶשׁ as the sensitive part of life, the seat of emotions (cf. Ps 86:4). From the above it is clear that it is not always that easy to see the difference between נֶפֶשׁ [living being] and חָיָה [life]. The Old Testament in any case didn't make that much of the seemingly complex distinction between body and soul (cf. Bailey 1979: 41-42).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. also McKane (1992) on the texts in Proverbs cited here, where the same notion is reiterated.

perceived of as the result of a life of disobedience to God. A long and fulfilled life was therefore something to be desired (Gen 15:15; Judg 8:32; [Durand 1981: 21]).

However, this was not the only way to look at life. Even in the Old Testament we find that different meanings were attached to the word “life”. This ranged from the physiological life on the one hand to life as a metaphor for being in the presence of Yahweh on the other hand (cf. Ringgren 1980: 332-342; Seebass 1980: 497-519; Holladay 1988: 101-102).

### 3.2.1. *Life as being alive in the body*

Of course, “life” denotes, throughout the Old Testament [as is the case in the ANE], in the first place life in a physiological sense (Brensinger 1997: 108)<sup>27</sup>. The physical life refers to the life span of that person in terms of the number of years he lived in this world, i.e. from birth to death. This interpretation is quite common throughout the Old Testament, and is often referred to, specifically in the genealogies and in the history of the kings, of whom we read in the books of Kings and in the Chronicler (cf. Gen 5; 11:11f; 2 Kgs 14:17; [cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849]).

To be alive you first of all need to be in a “living body”. Physical life is in the hands of the Creator, which for Israel meant Yahweh. Man can only possess this physical life in as far as he receives it from Yahweh. He is the One who possesses of the times of life (Job 10:12; Ps 36:10; [Bultmann Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850]). Life is only a gift, a loan, from Yahweh to all living beings (Link 1976: 478).

The creation stories take the origin of life back to the creative activity of Yahweh as accounted for in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1 and 2) (Brensinger 1997: 108). There it is declared that man was created “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26). He breathed the breath of life so that man could become a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה – a living being (Gen 2:7). It is this *breath of life* received from Yahweh that constitutes life, not the physical body (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). The body is something that, after death,

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<sup>27</sup> Bultmann (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 1-2) is of the opinion that life (חַיִּים) in the Old Testament only denoted physical life. This is, however, a very narrow interpretation and does not take into account the numerous metaphoric uses of the word, which also occur in the Old Testament (cf. in this regard the article by Ringgren on חַיִּים in TDOT [cf. also note 25 above]).



disintegrates and returns to the earth [אָרֶץ] from which man was originally formed (Gen 3:19; cf. Gen 2:7).

Life comes to an end when Yahweh withdraws the breath of life from a person (Job 24:18-24). This deterministic look at the origin and end of life places God in total control thereof and makes man totally dependent upon God for his or her life. Man will only live for the time God allows Him on earth (cf. Job 1:21; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850-851]).

Even though people might be blessed with a long life because of their righteousness, Yahweh never promised anyone unending physical life (Brensinger 1997: 109), not even before The Fall (Gen 3:22-24; cf. Gen 2:9). The Old Testament actually doesn't answer the question [or even ask it!] whether man would have died or not had sin not come into this world (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). Biological immortality is not a natural phenomenon for the people of the Old Testament. It is taken for granted that everybody will die some time or another, even the wise and the righteous (Ps 49:11-12; [Collins 1997: 354-356]).

### 3.2.2. *God and life*

All limitations fall away when the concept of life is applied to Yahweh. God possesses life *per se*; He is אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים - the living God [or חַי־יְהוָה], the forever living (Deut 5:26; 2 Kgs 19:4; Jer 10:10; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 16]). He is Life; but He is also the Source from whom life originates; the breath of life to man.

The phrase “the living God” [חַי־יְהוָה] appears in the Old Testament 43 times (Ringgren 1980: 339). These concepts take Yahweh outside the boundaries of human thought on life and death. It also takes the concepts of life and death outside the boundaries set for man.<sup>28</sup> This everlasting life attributed to God is actually a most difficult concept to understand. It is no more than a human effort to try and explain Yahweh's

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<sup>28</sup> Thinking about life in connection with God actually takes us into another realm, that of the Godly. It is a realm surrounded by the mysterious, where things and thinking are not limited in any sense, where time and distance loses its “logical” meaning [even its existence?]. Time cannot be measured anymore, but can only be appreciated from the viewpoint of faith. It requires a total mind shift on the part of man to envision just something of this realm, which even makes what is written here a humble human effort to just grasp something of God's sovereignty and eternity and try and describe some of the divine characteristics that He chose to reveal to man through his Word (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 45).





unlimited existence. It could be seen as an effort to describe his active presence amongst and salvation of his people on a continuous basis as the forever-living One (cf. Ringgren 1980: 339).

Yahweh is also living in the sense that He is not silent. In contrast to the dead idols of the surrounding nations, Yahweh is an active God, actively participating in his creation: He actively manages, intervenes on behalf of, and delivers his people throughout the Old Testament (1 Kgs 18:25-39). Man must, however, realise that Yahweh is not limited to these “boundaries” of active involvement. Beyond these “boundaries” Yahweh is still the “First and the Last”. “The First and the Last” is a name used by God in Revelation to refer to Himself (cf. Rev 1:8; 21:6), but this way of referring is also quite common in Second Isaiah (Isa 48:12; cf. also Isa 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 46:9f [Beuken 1986: 289]).

The message of Second Isaiah [i.e. Isa 40-55] is a message of hope to the people of God in exile. It is part of a promise to bring a small remnant of righteous people back to the Promised Land where God will establish a new relationship with them<sup>29</sup>. Israel must find comfort and hope in this promise of restoration that comes to them, even right at the start of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:1; [Beuken 1986: 15]). A new life will begin for the “new people” of God. This new life is possible because the living God, the “utterly incomparable One” (Bauckham 1993b: 27; [cf. Isa 40:12-31]), to whom all nations are subjected, will bring it about.

It is important to note that in Second Isaiah the reference is not to physical life, but to a new beginning, a new chance to build a relationship with Yahweh when the people return to the Promised Land. This opportunity is reserved only for the small remnant that wants to come into a personal relationship with Yahweh (Isa 51:11; cf. Isa 11:11). Life thus becomes a metaphor for having a purposeful relationship with Yahweh. Only those that share in this relationship will share in new life promised by Yahweh. Outside of this relationship no life is possible, even though you might be alive in the body (Van der Watt 1986a: 298; Prinsloo 1999: 810).

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<sup>29</sup> A similar metaphor is used in Ezekiel 37, the vision about the valley of the dry bones that comes to life [cf. also Rev 11, which could probably be drawn from this image of Ezekiel’s, although the Old Testament is here reinterpreted in an entire new context, i.e. the context of the resurrection of Christ and therefore the new life that came to his church amidst persecution and suffering].

The Isaiah text is also a message that Yahweh is still in control of everything that exists, even though it might not seem to be the case. Even the Persian emperor Cyrus is just an instrument in the hands of Yahweh to bring back God's people to the Promised Land (Isa 44:28-45:1; [Prinsloo 1999: 810]). This message of hope is at the same time a message of God's infinite existence, and of his sovereignty and overall presence: although Israel was "dead" in exile, God is still and will forever be. And even more: He is even with his people while they are in exile (Isa 43:1-5). The "Living One" cannot die. Instead He controls life [and death]. He is "the One that is" [i.e. without beginning and end]. That is how He has revealed Himself to Moses in the desert (Ex 3:14; cf. Dan 12:7; Rev 1:4c). The existence of the one and only *living* God is illustrated no better than through the doxologies. Worship of Yahweh was a way of recognising the uniqueness and the almighty power of Yahweh amongst the other gods. "God *must be* worshipped; no creature *may be* worshipped"<sup>30</sup> (Bauckham 1993a: 118; [cf. 3.6.5 below]).

From this can be deduced that God and life is one. Because Yahweh is life [or "the living One"], life can be defined only in relation with Him (Van der Watt 1986a: 298). Outside of such a relationship life is absent and therefore death prevails [for a further discussion on this, refer 3.6 later on in this chapter].

### 3.2.3. *The life of the king*

With regard to the life of the king, Israel also differed from their neighbours. The wish was still that the king would have a long and successful life<sup>31</sup> (Ps 21:5). He was the visible image of God's blessing upon his people. If the king prospered and was wise and righteous, the people of the land were evaluated similarly (e.g. 1 Kgs 12:28-30; 2 Kgs 18:5-8). The king and the people should then receive "life" as a blessing from Yahweh (Ringgren 1980: 336).

In Psalm 2:7 [a text later reinterpreted and applied to Jesus as the Messiah] the king is called "my son" by Yahweh. This does not imply that the people of Israel regarded

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<sup>30</sup> My italics.

<sup>31</sup> Referring specifically to physical life.

the king as a deity. This was never the case<sup>32</sup>. The text of Psalm 2 clearly rejects the idea of the king being physically begotten by Yahweh, by using the ancient adoption formula “today...you are my son” (Weiser 1975: 113). The king is therefore only entitled to the title “son of God” because Yahweh is willing to adopt him “today”, i.e. as from the moment of his kingship, as his child. In the light of this the king had a certain status as the “representative” of God in this world.<sup>33</sup> Israel therefore never doubted the mortality of the king. He is as human as any other person. Just like everybody else, the life of the king will also one day end in death. Only God can live forever (Ringgren 1980: 335-336).

#### 3.2.4. *Life is not just physical life*

Living within the physical body is, however, only one way of looking at the Biblical definition of “life”. Life must have a certain quality attached to it before it could be recognised as “real life”. It is not just the absence of physical death, but also the presence of things such as health, strength, and even wealth that determines the presence of life (Brensinger 1997: 109; Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850). Movement or activity also signalled the existence of life, e.g. living water, which is just another way of referring to running water, water from a fountain, stream, etc. (Lev 14:5f; 15:13; Num 19:17)<sup>34</sup>. Life is thus [in terms of the definition in Chapter 1] an active participation in life. Those who cannot actively participate cannot live.

Healing from illness was seen as coming back to life, suggesting at the same time that illness is equal to being dead (Job 27:15; Isa 38:16; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850; Hendriksen 1973: 390]). The Israelites bitten by snakes in the desert looked upon the brazen serpent and lived, i.e. they were healed from the poisoning (Num 21:8f; [Ringgren 1980: 333-334]). Of course, in juxtaposition, looking up at the serpent also prevented them from actually dying physically from the poisoning by the snakes (Jagersma 1988: 88). This text is reinterpreted in the Wisdom of Solomon, where it is mentioned that the healing did not come through looking at the brazen

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. section 2 above.

<sup>33</sup> Man was originally created in the image of God to be God’s representative and reign over God’s creation (Gen 1:26-27). It is only because man himself chose to have a king put between him and God that the title of representative shifted to one single man, the king (cf. 1 Sam 8).

<sup>34</sup> The rivers flowing through the Garden of Eden could also be seen as a symbol of the pulse of life. In this sense the chasing of Adam and Eve from the garden constitutes death metaphorically: they are deprived from the pulse of life, which the rivers represent, as a result of their sins (Vosloo 1999a: 15).

serpent, but through the people of Israel lifting their hearts up in faith to God in heaven (Jagersma 1988: 90).

This connection between illness and death is understandable when one looks at what the Law requires to be done to people who fell ill. Contracting certain contaminating diseases [e.g. leprosy] had the effect that those people had to be expelled from the community until they were healed (cf. Lev 13:46). They had to live an isolated life away from their families and the community for as long as they had this disease (Wenham 1979: 203). Someone who could not participate in everyday community life was deemed dead (Johnston 2002: 32). On the other hand, restoration of health meant that such a person could regain his dignity, rejoin the community life, and thus have “life” restored to him or her (Isa 38:16; [cf. Ringgren 1980: 334]).

On a metaphoric note the people of Israel were also deemed dead while in exile. In Ezekiel’s vision of *The Valley of Dry Bones*<sup>35</sup> the Lord tells Ezekiel that the people of Israel are just as dead as the bones that he sees lying in the valley. The verb נָגַר [cut off] in Ezekiel 37:11 [describing the state Israel find themselves in] is also used in Isaiah 53:8 to describe the servant of Yahweh being “cut off” from the land of the living (cf. Lam 3:54). It describes metaphorically the hopeless situation of the people in exile (Zimmerli 1983: 262).

But He, the Lord, will rise up His people again, just as those bones were brought to life in the vision. Bringing them back to Jerusalem will constitute this new life for them (Ezek 37:12-14 [cf. also 2.1.2 on *God and life* above]). That will only happen because God will graciously bestow his Spirit [רוּחַ] upon his people. Through this God will reveal Himself as the Living God, the almighty One (Zimmerli 1983: 263).

### 3.3. *Life, death and mortality*

The mortality of man was never questioned in Old Testament Israel. Although a long life was the sign of God’s blessing, it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible [or even implied] that man could be granted immortality at any stage of his life (Eccl 1:4; 2:4-11, 13-14, 16-19; [Bailey 1979: 53-55]). It was a given fact that everyone would

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<sup>35</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-14: Caption as used by Good News Bible (1995: 880).

come face to face with physical death, even the king (Eccl 9:5; [cf. 3.2.3 above]). No man could save himself from the claws of Death (Ps 49:9-11; 89:49). “Death sets man bounds which he is not able to overstep by his own efforts” is Weiser’s comment on Psalm 49:7-9 (1975: 388). Only God could break or stretch these boundaries [e.g. in the case of King Hezekiah – Isa 38], but it is never done indefinitely. King Hezekiah was only set a later boundary, and eventually died fifteen years after his illness (2 Kgs 20:1-6; 2 Chr 32:33).

The Bible only testifies about two people who seemingly gained immortal status, i.e. Enoch (Gen 5:24; cf. Heb 11:5-6) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11), both of whom are mentioned as prime examples of a near perfect relationship with God. Enoch was said to have walked with God during his whole life on earth, i.e. always seeking the face of the Lord, always striving to get even closer in his relationship with God. It is a relationship of continuous close contact with God. Elijah was seen as *the* exemplary prophet, the prophet who in every aspect looked to proclaim God’s will in his life. They are the examples that, amidst a troubled world, life in the presence of God is possible after all (Vosloo 1999a: 26). However, it is important to note that even though Enoch and Elijah never died, they did not **achieve** immortality in themselves. They **received** immortality from the hand of God (Van Selms 1989: 97)<sup>36</sup>. The power to decide on life and death therefore still lay with God. He is, throughout the Old Testament, recognised as the Giver of life [cf. 3.2.2 above].

### 3.4. *Death in the Old Testament*

There are a number of words used in the Old Testament to describe death: מוֹת (Ps 6:6); אָבַד (Job 4:7, 9, 11, 20); הָרַג (Gen 12:12; 2 Sam 3:30); תָּמַם (Deut 2:14, 15, 16)<sup>37</sup>. The Old Testament doesn’t seem too concerned about the origin of death. Yahweh was the Source of both life and death and therefore also the Decider on when to give life or take it away (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844; [cf. 2 Kgs 20:1-11]).

<sup>36</sup> The verb לקח [take] in Genesis 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11 suggests that it is God’s hand and decision, and not that of Enoch or Elijah.

<sup>37</sup> The root מוֹת alone appears 200 times in the BHS, while אָבַד appears 49 times and הָרַג 38 times (cf. LLS 1997). Not all of these occurrences denote *death* as such (cf. Holladay 1988: 1, 188). The word מוֹת [generally describing death as such] actually could also denote the chthonic power behind death and anything that is associated with death, e.g. disease, drought, etc (Hos 13:14; Ps 49:15; cf. also Hab 2:5 [Lewis 1992: 104-II]). In addition the word נָשָׁב [sleep] is sometimes used as a metaphor for death (cf. Deut 31:16; Ps 13:3 [Richards 1992: 108-II]).

The problem was rather more to understand the invasion of death into life (Richards 1992: 108·II – 109·II).

#### 3.4.1. *Death or life*

In many instances, life and death are juxtaposed in the Old Testament (Gen 42:2; 1 Kgs 3:22-23; Num 17:13). To live is not to die (Ringgren 1980: 332). Death is, however, not necessarily the end of all life.<sup>38</sup> In some or other form the dead were still alive afterwards, either in the netherworld or “lower grave” (Merrill 1997: 887; (Von Rad 1975a: 276). Seemingly as long as the body still “existed” [i.e. the bones were preserved], the soul also “existed in Sheol” (Job 26:5-6; Isa 14:9-10; [De Vaux 1973: 56]). It was a shadow of the living person, a very weak form of life (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 34; Johnston 2002: 128-130).

Sometimes the spirits or souls of these people were even called upon by those still living on this side of the grave. King Saul for example called upon the spirit of Samuel to ask for guidance in a war (1 Sam 28). While this practice was quite acceptable amongst Israel’s neighbours in the ANE, it was perceived of very negative in the eyes of Yahweh (cf. Lev 19:31; Deut 18:10-12).

According to Bailey (1979: 39) we could divide the concept of “death” into three broad groups: i) As a metaphor for everything that leads man away from life according to the will of Yahweh; ii) As a power in opposition to the creative order; iii) Physical or historical death. Merrill (1997: 887) also mentions the possibility of Death personified in the Old Testament. It is then viewed as a strong enemy of mankind (cf. S. of Sol. 8:6), with the power to kill (2 Sam 22:5-6; Job 18:13; [cf. Johnston 2002: 28-31]).

#### 3.4.2. *Accepting death*

Death was certainly an unfortunate thing, but it was also something obvious that just had to be accepted (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 846). It was not an irrational intruder, but part of an orderly, controlled and harmonious society (Bailey

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<sup>38</sup> There are texts that give the impression that death is the end (cf. Job 14:14; 2 Kgs 13:21; Isa 26:14, 19). Job seemingly longs [or hopes] for a life after death, but is hit by this reality in 14:14: “If mortals die, can they live again?” (Habel 1985: 242).



1979: 57-59). It was the normal end to earthly life, something from which no one could escape (Johnston 2002: 41). However, even amidst all this uncertainty, there seemed to be not much evidence of fear in the wake of death (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433). The inescapable position rather had the effect that anger and grief surrounded the mystery of death that faced man, something that is focussed upon specifically in the Psalter and to some extent the wisdom literature (Richards 1992: 109-II).

Because death was accepted as something normal, it was not necessarily a bad thing. In the following instances, however, it would be deemed to be a problem: i) premature death (e.g. 2 Sam 18:32-33; Isa 38:1-3, 10, 12; Job 36:13-14). In Proverbs sudden death is sometimes even interpreted as punishment from God (Prov 10:21; 11:9; etc); ii) a cruel death [e.g. drowning which was specifically looked upon negatively because the sea was also deemed to be the abode of the dead]; iii) If the deceased had no inheritors. Those who died without any children [or other family] stood to lose their property and even worse, their identity. A person's identity was carried forth through the generations. Someone who died without inheritors therefore ceased to exist in every sense (2 Sam 18:18; Sir 44:1, 7, 9 [Bailey 1979: 47-52]). Although the life of the individual was important to the continuing existence of both the family and the community, it was the survival of the community as a whole [through the next generation] that was most important (Bailey 1979: 59; Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433; [cf. Richards 1992: 110-II; Van Selms 1989: 97]). That is why separation from the community [either through illness or physical death or any other reason] effectively meant death (Johnston 2002: 32).

Later on in Post-exilic times death was seen as something inappropriate. Its origins were sought in the wages of sin (2 Esdr 3:7; Sir 25:24; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433-434]). There also developed a more figurative [spiritual] understanding of death. Death becomes a reality whenever Israel [or any individual] breaks away from God, i.e. terminate their relationship with Yahweh (cf. Ezek 18:21-24; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 434]).

Apart from the physical understanding, death could also be used as a metaphor for any kind of distress that a person might experience, and of course, also for illness or any

other suffering that might threaten someone's life (Ringgren 1966: 181; Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 851). Death can actually mean anything that takes away just something of the full potential of man, which he was originally created by Yahweh to fulfil (Wenham 1979: 212).

It is a judgment of the quality of life that is being lived at this moment (Bailey 1979: 40). Whoever keeps him or her busy with wrong things in life, inevitably ends up in death, or is sometimes regarded as already dead, and according to Proverbs 5:23, is dead for as long as they continue in their ways. In this sense dying is understood as a negative way of living in the present. As Richards (1992: 110-II) says: "It is a mode of living over against the way (*derek*) of life." (Prov 2:19; 5:6; 6:23)

### 3.5. *The realm of Death in the Old Testament*

The realm of Death is, according to the Old Testament, the place where all the dead go. There is no moral distinction between good and bad in this realm (Russell 1964: 355), although there are scholars who perceive of it as a place only for the unrighteous (Lewis 1992: 104-II; Johnston 2002: 81). This is, however, a concept that only evolved later on in Jewish literature.<sup>39</sup> "Israelite faith concerned a living relationship with Yahweh in the present, not speculation about the future" (Johnston 2002: 70; cf. also p 72-73). There is a clear shift in focus in the Jewish apocalyptic literature (2 En 62:2) under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic ideas, where Sheol is seen solely as the destiny for the unrighteous (Jeremias 1965: 147). In the book of Jubilees the realm of the dead becomes the place of condemnation for the unrighteous (Jub 7:29; 22:22; 24:31; [Russell 1964: 360-361]).

#### 3.5.1. *Sheol and death as partners*

The realm of the Dead is most commonly denoted by the word שְׁאוֹל<sup>40</sup> [directly translated into English as Sheol]. The word מָוֶת [generally used for "death"] is sometimes used to refer to the realm of the dead (e.g. Prov 7:27). Actually there

<sup>39</sup> The conception of Sheol has gone through quite a lot of development throughout Biblical times in the ANE (cf. Jeremias 1965: 146-149).

<sup>40</sup> Occurring 66 times in the Old Testament, almost always translated with ᾗδης in the LXX (Lewis 1992: 101-II; Jeremias 1965: 146). See also Lewis's discussion on the etymology of Sheol (1992: 101-II - 102-II) and Johnston (2002: 71) for a breakdown of occurrences. From this Johnston (2002: 71-72) then concludes that Sheol is very rarely used in narrative literature, and is entirely absent from legal material.

seems to be fluidity between Sheol and Death, specifically when they are personified or localised. Sheol goes hand in hand with the grave, to such an extent that some scholars identify the two with each other (Lewis 1992: 103-II; Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349). It is in this sense that we should probably also understand the importance of a proper burial ceremony in Ancient Israel. A person's burial determined his entrance into Sheol (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 50-51).

In Revelation 9 reference is also made to the Hebrew word “Abaddon” as the name for the underworld, or for the ruler of the underworld (Lewis 1992: 101-II). The Hebrew word אֲבַדּוֹן occurs in the BHS only six times (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps 88:12; Prov 15:11; 27:20). There it is used to describe either a “place of destruction” or the “realm of the dead” (Holladay 1988: 1). In the rabbinic literature אֲבַדּוֹן becomes the place of punishment and damnation, which is therefore a place where only the unrighteous and wicked ended up. Whoever ends up there has no chance of a return to “the land of the living” (Lewis 1992: 104-II; cf. Zimmerli 1983: 39).

Other words sometimes used to refer to the underworld are אֶרֶץ (cf. Ezek 26:20)<sup>41</sup>, שְׁחַת (cf. Ps 16:10) and בּוֹר (cf. Isa 5:14; 38:18). The last two specifically refers to the realm of the Dead as the “pit” (Lewis 1992 104-II).

### 3.5.2. *Going down to Sheol*

Traditionally Sheol was perceived to be a place beneath the surface of the earth (Bauckham 1998a: 9). Whoever dies, goes *down* to Sheol (Num 16:30). It even has a shaft down from the earth to the entrance (Rev 9) with entry gates, just like any ancient city (Job 38:17; cf. Rev 9). These entry gates were sometimes perceived to be the graves of the people (Ps 139:18; cf. Job 3:10-16; Jer 20:17; [Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 350]). The entry gates, often depicted as being guarded, underline the inescapable imprisoning power of Sheol (Lewis 1992: 103-II). The sea and water was also at times associated with Sheol, specifically the area below the water surface (cf. Jonah 2:3-6; [Bauckham 1998a: 17])<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> The more common meaning of אֶרֶץ is “earth”. According to Zimmerli (1983: 39) אֶרֶץ in this instance refers to the entire world arranged in different layers, where the mysterious netherworld is regarded as a complete and self-contained country.

<sup>42</sup> With regard to this issue, it is worth reading the extensive work by Johnston (2002) on Sheol that was published recently [specifically chapter 5 of the book].

Perceptions about Sheol have always been very negative. It is the netherworld with gloom and darkness as its key characteristics (Job 10:21-22; 11:8; 26:5-6; Lam 3:6; [Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349; Yamauchi 1998: 44]). It is also a place of disorder (Habel 1985: 201, 540). Sheol is quite often characterised by silence, contemplating the absence of life and movement (cf. Rev 18:21-24). In the Psalms praise and worship are key characteristics of life and of a relationship with Yahweh (Ps 31:17-18; 94:17; 115:17; Isa 47:5). In Sheol this is absent, as one is cut off from being in this relationship with Yahweh (Yamauchi 1998: 44). Sheol is not part of the realm of God. It is, according to Johnston (2002: 75), “at the opposite theological extreme of Yahweh.”

Whoever goes down to Sheol is forgotten by all who is still on earth (cf. Job 24:20; [Ringgren 1966: 244]). Nobody who goes down to Sheol comes up again (Job 7:9; cf. 2 Sam 12:23; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]). Only in a figurative sense does Israel make provision for a return from Sheol. The closest parallel is the story of Jonah (cf. Jonah 2:2-9; [Bauckham 1998a: 16-17]). In the Psalms the poets sometimes feel so close to death that they perceive themselves as already dead (Ps 107:18; Isa 38:10; cf. 3 Macc 5:51; Ps Sol 3:16). Only through the divine intervention of Yahweh can they be brought back to “life” again (Ps 9:3; 30:3; 86:13; Isa 38:17; cf. Sir 51:5; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]). This, according to Bauckham (1998a: 16), was a step towards the belief that God in his sovereign power will bring back the dead to the world of the living through an eschatological resurrection, an idea that developed into the belief in an eschatological life and death at Judgment Day.

In Judaic literature Sheol is a fearful place, a detention for the wicked where they await their punishment on Judgment Day in anguish (cf. 4 Ezra 7:79-87)<sup>43</sup>. According to Bauckham (1990: 359) there is no torment and punishment in the present, but only “anguished fear of the judgment to come”. According to 2 Enoch 40-42 the wicked dead are not being tormented in hell. They only observe it, knowing that they will be condemned thereto at the judgment. It is only later on in the first two centuries C.E.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Johnston (2002: 70-72) who is of opinion that even in the Hebrew Bible Sheol is a place only for the wicked.

that a gradual change became visible and the punishment of the wicked dead was seen to happen directly after death (Bauckham 1998a: 36-38).

### *3.6. Life and death as relational concepts in the Old Testament*

It is clear from the above discussions that there is a lot more to life and death than just the birth or death of a physical person. The understanding of life [and death] in the Old Testament was to a large extent determined by relationships, and specifically the relationship with Yahweh (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). To obtain life [i.e. in Biblical terms], a relationship with Yahweh needs to be established (Van der Watt 2000: 211). Relationship here stands for more than platonic friendships. In relation to Yahweh, it has to do with knowledge, obedience, and love (cf. Johnston 2002: 46). This relationship is only possible because God has taken the initiative to enter into a relationship with man. The Book of Genesis records quite a few instances of God's initiative in such a relationship [e.g. the stories of Noah and Abraham respectively].

As the times of life are in the hands of God alone (Ps 31:15; 139:16), man can only possess life by being in this direct relation to Him (Durand 1981: 21). The fact that God created man "in his image" (Gen 1:27) also implies that a special life-bond between man and God was already formed there [on the initiative of God], right at the beginning of everything. It is a bond that calls man to obedience before the face of Yahweh (Van Selms 1989: 38).

The quality of this relationship determined the quality of the life that is being lived, or the lack thereof, which in the end would constitute death (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death in this sense implies the inability to have a sustained relationship of quality with Yahweh. It is a state of alienation from God (Van der Watt 2000: 211). When the relationship with Yahweh becomes vague, one is only a step away from the final end of life, i.e. entering death (Von Rad 1975a: 388).

#### *3.6.1. The Law as a guide to life*

The Book of Deuteronomy is a good example of how the possession of "real life" is constantly linked up with the relationship with Yahweh (Link 1976: 478-479). Life is to choose Yahweh and to love Him with all of one's heart and soul, i.e. to stand in a

positive relationship with Him (Deut 30:19-20; cf. Prov 19:23; 22:4 [Brensinger 1997: 109]). This love is shown through obedience to God's word and to the Law (Ps 119:9-10, 17; cf. John 15:14). God's words [and his Law] are the foundation and content of "real life" (Westermann 1980: 117-118). Whoever has these words in his or her heart, lives (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 845-846).

Life is thus strongly linked to the teaching in the Torah (cf. Deut 4:4; Ps 119:57<sup>44</sup>). It is only through the words of the Torah that a person hears the voice of the living God speaking directly to him or her (Allen 1983: 143). The words of the Law are the life to the people (Deut 32:47). A long life is promised to those people that keep these commandments of the Law (Deut 4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 30:16,19; [Brensinger 1997: 109; Link 1976: 478]). He who disregards the teachings of the Law will surely die. Life and death thus becomes a matter of decision. Man can choose between the way of life [i.e. obedience to the Law] or the way of death [i.e. disregarding the Word of God] (Sir 15:17; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 851; Collins 1997: 354]).

### 3.6.2. *Relational life can be regained*

As life and death in this sense are relational concepts, it is possible to "recover" from this death. Whoever rebuilds his relationship with Yahweh, receives renewed life from Yahweh. The Psalms talk a lot about Yahweh's intervention to bring his people back to life from the arms of death (Ps 9:13; 30:3; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]).

This is also the message to the people of God in exile. In Isaiah 55:1-3 the Lord invites post-exilic Israel to a new relationship with Him. This new life is to be found in the living water that God Himself provides (Isa 55:1). This water is the grace of God, which He gives to everyone who is in need thereof. If they would listen to Him and turn back to Him, He would re-establish his covenant with them. This renewed relationship would restore life to Israel, however not to all, but only to a faithful remnant of the people (Beuken 1983: 280-281).

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<sup>44</sup> The composition of Psalm 119 is in itself an acrostic lesson in obtaining life through keeping God's word and the Law. In this Psalm life is the result of God's kindness (v. 17) and mercy (v. 77) to those who keeps his commandments. The Lord gives and sustains life, and He gives life meaning. (Brensinger 1997: 111; Allen 1983: 141-145).



### 3.6.3. *Life as a relationship in prophetic literature*

In the prophets, and specifically in the book of Ezekiel, life is linked to the Word of God (e.g. Ezek 14:13-18; 18:1-24; 33:1-6). In Ezekiel 33 a strong line is drawn between obedience and life, when the prophet mentions explicitly that only the righteous [i.e. those who keep the commandments and those who turn back to God] will live. Also: Even if you have lived an obedient life but then later fall away, your righteous deeds of the past will not save you. You will still die as a result of your sin. Only those who seek Yahweh continuously will live. This is a frequent theme throughout the Prophets, and is not just apparent in Ezekiel (cf. Am 5:4, 14; Hos 14:7-8). Although sometimes this could refer to physical death [cf. 3.6.4 below], the absence of a relationship as a result of disobedience to Yahweh already constitutes death in itself, even while someone is still alive in the body (Ezek 37:1-14). In the Wisdom literature keeping the commandments do not only lead to a long life, but is life per se. Also, the notion is that he who has found Wisdom has found life (Ringgren 1980: 334).

### 3.6.4. *Life in the Wisdom literature*

Even physical life and death could be dependant upon the relationship with Yahweh. He or she, who lives in a positive relationship with Yahweh, will be blessed with a long life. This is why a long and prosperous life on earth was of so much importance to the people. It was prove of a life lived in close relationship with Yahweh (cf. Gen 15:15; [Durand 1981: 21]).

A similar notion is found in the Wisdom literature, and specifically in the older forms of wisdom, which often looked at life from a very deterministic point of view (Prov 4:4; 7:2). Living with wisdom and being obedient to the commandments of Yahweh are both relational concepts. Only in seeking Yahweh in a relationship will one find Wisdom and thus life (Collins 1997: 355). Richards (1992: 109·II) is probably right when he says about Proverbs 1-9: “A person who obtains life may possess Wisdom, but more importantly in this portion of Proverbs, long life is not the consequence of wisdom. It [*i.e. wisdom*]<sup>45</sup> is what constitutes life...Death is an expression of a mode of living apart from life”.

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<sup>45</sup> My bracketed italics.

This relationship could be perceived to continue beyond the grave, but it is set on the basis of a relationship that existed in this life before the grave. However, in the netherworld one is cut off from communion with God (Johnston 2002: 46). There it is not possible to have a sustained relationship with Him (Ringgren 1966: 244). That is why death must be delayed for as long as possible.

### *3.6.5. Life and worship in the Old Testament*

A very significant point on life and death in the Old Testament is the close connection that is made between life and the worship of God. Worship of Yahweh was the most elementary sign of life (Ps 30:8-10; Isa 38:16-20). Doxologies, with their confession that the honour and the praise belongs only to the one being addressed therein, was the way that the people of Israel worshipped Yahweh as the only living God (Bauckham 1993a: 140).

But worship is only possible within the context of an existing relationship with Yahweh. Only those who are alive can worship Yahweh. On the other hand silence was often connected with death, as was the case with silence and Sheol (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death took one outside the sphere of worship of God (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 847). In death worship became impossible because a person's participation in the cult came to an end (Von Rad 1975a: 369-370; Collins 1997: 355). In Sheol silence and darkness prevail; there is no life or movement, and thus no relationship with Yahweh (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349).

### *3.7. Resurrection in the Old Testament?*

The idea that God will provide a resurrection from the dead for his people [i.e. Israel] is not central to the Old Testament. It is touched on very rarely, and actually lies more on the periphery of the Old Testament (cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; [Vorster 1999: 101]). Resurrection in Daniel 12:1-3 was expected seemingly as a consolation for the righteous people of Israel who suffered terribly under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes (Vorster 1999: 101). In Isaiah 26:19 resurrection is used metaphorically [cf. below]. Resurrection-belief is a very late development within Jewish theology, one that only surfaced around the second century before Christ in early Judaism (Lohse 1976: 59-60; Yamauchi 1998: 46). In post-biblical Judaism belief in life after death and

resurrection, however, became the general belief, except amongst the Sadducees (Bauckham 1998b: 81-82; Johnston 2002: 231). The belief in a resurrection was based upon God's mercy. "If God is all-just and all-merciful then death in this world cannot be the final end" (Lapide 1984: 54-55).

The belief in resurrection was not the sudden emergence of a new theology in Judaism. Israel's hope for a resurrection is in continuity with the Old Testament portrayal of God's sovereignty. As the God of life he could give and take life, and therefore even restore life that was lost. He is the righteous Judge who will deliver the righteous believers from their oppressors (cf. Dan 12:2-3) and He is also the faithful Father of his people. Belief in resurrection was therefore nothing more than a radical conclusion of Old Testament faith in who God is (cf. 1 Sam 2:6; [Bauckham 1998b: 84-86]).

During the early stages of development it was thought that only the righteous would be resurrected into a new life with God (2 Macc 7:10-11, 23; cf. Isa 14:9-12; Ps 16:10-11; [Bailey 1979: 79]). Later developments then made provision for a general resurrection on Judgment Day. On that day everyone will appear before the throne of God to be judged according to his or her life on earth (cf. Luke 14:14). According to Revelation 20 there seems to be a resurrection of the believers [which seemingly occurs earlier – cf. Rev 20:4-6] and a general resurrection [for the non-believers – cf. Rev 20:12-14].

#### **Excursion 1: The Day of the Lord as a metaphor for life or death?**

Traditionally the concept "Day of Yahweh" had a "well-defined complex of eschatological expectations" attached to it (Von Rad 1975b: 119). It was originally understood as the day when God will judge and punish the wicked [the enemies of his people Israel] and save the elect (Isa 2:10-21; Zeph 1:14-16<sup>46</sup>). It was generally seen as a day of joy for the people of God, when it would be demonstrated that the God of the Exodus is on the side of Israel (Webb 1997: 264; Mays 1969: 43; [cf. Am 5:18-20 where the Day of the Lord suddenly becomes a day of judgment for the

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<sup>46</sup> In total 16 texts were identified by Von Rad that mention this day (1975b: 119). It appears only in prophetic texts in the Old Testament (Mays 1969: 103). The most important of these are Isa 13:6-9; 22:5; 34:8; Jer 46:10; Ezek 7:10; 13:5; 30:3; Am 5:18-20; Obad 15; Zech 14:1 (cf. also the book of Joel). There are of course many other passages that refer to the Day of Yahweh without specifically using this terminology (cf. Von Rad 1975b: 119-125).

people of God themselves]). On this day Yahweh will fight a [holy] war on behalf of his people in a setting of cosmic and historical gloom (Mays 1969: 103-104). This war will take place in the *eschaton*, on a day popularly known as the “Day of the Lord” or Judgment Day. The Lord will then restore everything to his chosen people and inaugurate a new age of righteousness for this world (Zimmerli 1978: 233).

In the post-exilic prophetic literature, the Jewish apocalyptic literature, and the New Testament the “Day of the Lord” was more and more interpreted in terms of being an eschatological judgmental event affecting everyone, not just the enemies of God’s people (Geddert 1992: 20-22). From this eschatological judgment only a faithful remnant would remain. Only this faithful remnant would then partake in the future aeon of Yahweh (e.g. Is 61:1-2; Zech 12-14; Mal 4:1-6). For them God will inaugurate a new age where his will can finally be realised (Zimmerli 1978: 233).

Thinking about the Day of Yahweh became particularly popular in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Questions were asked about the timing, the prevalent signs and the events surrounding this day. It was clothed more and more in mythological phenomena and became very much an eschatological event (2 Apoc Bar 24:1-2; 83:1-7; 1 En 1:3-9; 100:1-6; 2 Esdr 7:38; etc [Webb 1997: 264-265]).

In this context the phrase “Day of the Lord” leaves the impression that a final [judgmental] decision on life and death will be taken one day. The Judge, who is Yahweh, will then decide who will live in the future age and who will end up in eternal death. Very little is said in the Old Testament about the manner in which it will realise. What matters is not the detail, but the presence of Yahweh Himself amidst his chosen remnant from that day onwards (Zimmerli 1978: 185).

This interpretation of the “Day of the Lord” is carried through into the New Testament literature (Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2). The understanding is of course that the “Lord” refers to the person of Jesus Christ, a notion that Paul even incorporates into a new concept, calling it the “Day of Christ” (Phil 1:10; 2:16; [Webb 1997: 265]).

In the Book of Revelation the “Day of the Lord” is the eschatological moment in history when God [or Christ as the Son of Man – cf. Rev 14:14-20] will decide who may enter life in the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev 19:5-10) and who will be cast in the pool of fire (Rev 20:11-15; 21:1-8), very much in line with apocalyptic

interpretations. The words “Day of the Lord” are not used in Revelation, but the “hour of Judgment” is used as a synonym (cf. Rev 14:7; 18:10; [Webb 1997: 266; Aune 1998a: 828]).

Judgment is not just meant for the traditional enemies of God’s people [according to the Old Testament thinking]. The deciding factor in judgment will be if one has lived according to God’s will, regardless of the group or people you belong to. Judgment and the relationship with Yahweh therefore go hand in hand, and will culminate in a vital decision on the Day of Yahweh (Aune 1998a: 828).

It is in the Book of Daniel that we first get a clear mention of an expected resurrection or an afterlife (Dan 12:2; [cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 852; Segal 1998: 97]).<sup>47</sup> Most texts up to then suggested that death is the end for man (Ringgren 1980: 341-342). It is from the time of the Maccabees that the belief in a hereafter, in resurrection and eternal life was accepted wholeheartedly in many circles within Jewish theology (2 Macc 7:9, 14, 23, 26; [cf. Chapter 3 below]). It was, however, not [even in the time of the Christian era] accepted widespread amongst the people of Israel (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 852; Bauckham 1998b: 82-84).

It was not just the resurrection of the individual that was important in Jewish eschatological hope, but also the future of God’s whole creation (Collins 1987: 90-91). The hope on a resurrection was a hope in a new creation that God will bring about in the end times through the coming of his kingdom (cf. 1 En 72:1; 91:16; 2 Pet 3:13; cf. Isa 66:22). This “new creation” will relieve the present status of creation of its shortfalls. The concept of a “new creation” does not necessarily mean that the current creation will be replaced by another one, but that this creation would be restored [revamped] to its original destiny (Jub 1:29; 4 Ezra 7:75; cf. Rev 21:1; [Bauckham 1993b: 49]). In this sense resurrection is usually associated [temporally] with the “Day of Yahweh”.

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<sup>47</sup> It must be noted that Daniel 12 does not envisage a general resurrection [presumably only the extremes of good and bad will be resurrected]. The main function of this resurrection account seems rather to lend support to those who had to lay down their lives for their faith (Porteous 1979: 170). Bauckham (1998a: 277) is of the opinion that Isaiah 26:19 is the only text in the Old Testament [together with Isaiah 26:21] that “makes the place of the dead (here the earth) the subject of the act of resurrection” (cf. also Bauckham 1998b: 81; Vorster 1999: 100-101).

Of course, resurrection could also be understood metaphorically in the present age. When Israel is revived from their religious death, or from exile, the metaphor of a resurrection is used to describe this occurrence. This is quite clear from the context of Isaiah 26:19, where the people of Israel are called “back to life” by the prophet. The same message applies to the vision in Ezekiel 37 about the valley of the dry bones, when the bones are brought back to life [“resurrected”] by Yahweh, symbolising God’s new start with the faithful remnant of his people (Zimmerli 1983: 262-263).

The Jewish hope for a resurrection was not based on man’s inherent capacity to overcome or conquer death. It was fundamentally a trust in God who, as Creator, has the power to give life that ends in death [which was also perceived to be the work of God], and Who therefore has the power to give back life to the dead. He can also give eschatological life that goes beyond the boundaries and threat of Death (Bauckham 1993b: 48-49).

#### **Excursion 2: Immortality or resurrection?**

Immortality, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (SOED), is a state of “exemption from death or annihilation; endless existence” (SOED 1970: 962). Resurrection on the other hand is defined as “the action or fact of rising again from sleep, disuse, etc.; revival; restoration to previous state or vogue” and is applied to Christ’s resurrection and the “rising again of men at the Last Day” (SOED 1970: 1720). Does eternal life in this sense imply that someone has become immortal and will never die?

The Old Testament, although rather thin on the subject, makes it clear that resurrection does not cancel out physical death (cf. Dan 10:13; 12:2-3 [Bailey 1979: 71-74; Collins 1997: 355-356]). The general notion is that death comes into play in every respect when someone dies physically. Even the faithful and righteous will eventually experience death, and will end up in Sheol (Yamauchi 1998: 43). This reality is quite clear from historical writings, and specifically the distinctive genealogy in Genesis 5, where the immortality of Enoch stands out amongst the rest of the people on the list (cf. however Wis Sol 1:15; 6:18; 15:3; [Collins 1997: 364]).

The only way that someone can escape death is through ascension, an idea that comes to the fore only later on in Second Temple Judaism [cf. however the stories of Enoch



and Elijah above]. The dominant notion is death and after that resurrection into a new life. This resurrection occurs, according to the Midrash on Ecclesiasts, immediately after death (3:21, 22a) when all the souls [i.e. righteous and ungodly] are carried to heaven for the judgment (Harder 1978: 682).

It is only the Book of Jubilees that prefers the concept of immortality (Russell 1964: 372). This idea probably stems from Hellenistic thought, where immortality of the soul was accepted (cf. 4 Macc 14:5; 17:12; [Harder 1978: 682]; cf. also 2 Esdr 7:78ff; 1 En 103:4, 7; 71:16). However, as Bauckham (1998b: 86) has shown, the idea of eternal life and resurrection is rather an extension of Old Testament faith in the sovereignty of God than a monotonous following of Hellenistic influences.

In the New Testament the idea of “immortality of the soul” seems stronger, especially when it is linked up with the concept of eternal life [a concept found quite frequently in the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation]. It seems to be an idea that flowed over from Greek Hellenistic thought, and specifically the Platonists. They taught that the soul was immortal and pre-existent, and only connected temporarily to the body, which in the end shaped the thinking of at least the Hellenistic Jews (Wis Sol 2:23; 8:19-20; [Shogren 1997b: 775]).

As will be shown later [in Chapter 4], eternal life in the New Testament is to be understood qualitatively rather than temporally, an idea already prevalent with Sirach (Sir 15:17; 17:11; [Collins 1997: 354]). The New Testament tried to find a midway, whereby eternal life and resurrection hope could be combined with the realisation that this life is but temporary (Shogren 1997b: 775). Eternal life does not imply the extinction of physical death, but only of death’s power over God’s people. The soul in itself cannot be immortal, as it is destined for hell. God in his grace granted eternity to believers, whose souls have already died from the old life and have been resurrected into this new, godly life.

Although it would seem from 1 Corinthians 15:53b-54 that Paul supports the idea of immortality of the soul, the immortal state [*ἀθανασία*] for Paul is applicable only once a person has died of the old life and has been resurrected into a new life (cf. also Col 2:20; 3:1; [Merrill 1997: 887; Harris 1998: 160-164])<sup>48</sup>. When Paul speaks about

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<sup>48</sup> Merrill (1997: 887) in his article in NIDOTTE on מוֹת [death] refers to immortality *after* the grave, which is correct if one thinks in terms of life after the resurrection into the new life (cf. also Bailey 1979: 89). Only then death will have no part to play (cf. Rev 21:4). Metaphorically one gains this

resurrection, he also qualifies it as being a resurrection “of the dead”. However, not all the dead are resurrected, only the believers that have died, “those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:12-13, 22-23, 42-44; [Harris 1998: 149-151]). For Paul it is a case of “resurrection to immortality and immortality through resurrection”, two inseparable concepts (cf. Harris: 1998: 167).

The impression from Revelation 1:18 is that there is still, even where eternal life has been received, a passage through the doors of death that everyone has to pass through. The immortality that the soul receives only means that, even when passing through this passage of death, the soul cannot be destroyed if it has been granted eternal status by God (Matt 10:28).

The timing of the resurrection could be a problem. The question can be asked: if sin comes into this world in every new body that is born, why can’t the resurrection life come into effect with every new death and resurrection that takes place? It is something Cullmann (1958: 50) is reluctant to accept. Resurrection for him is something that happens only on Judgment Day in the *eschaton* [cf. the Jewish apocalyptic thought on life and death – Chapter 3].

Karl Barth [as discussed by Cullmann 1958: 49] is probably more correct. He understands the transformation through resurrection to take place at each individual death (cf. Luke 16:22; 23:43; Phil 1:23). This would mean no waiting period after death, but a direct and immediate transfer from Death’s quarters to the final eschatological destination. This corresponds with Jesus’ teaching in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31; cf. Luke 23:43) and John’s visions of the faithful in heaven (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 20:4-6).

Immortality of the soul therefore only comes into play after the resurrection into the new life has taken effect (cf. John 3:5). The soul could be deemed immortal as it could pass unscathed through the passages of Death or Hades [not necessarily sometime in the future, but more probably immediately after death] unto the realm of God, where life in eternity awaits a person (Phil 1:23). Again, in Harris’ words: “[it is] resurrection to immortality and immortality through resurrection” (1998:167). In this sense Merrill’s (1997: 887) view on immortality after death is more acceptable [cf. footnote 48].

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immortality after salvation into the new life, which constitutes resurrection of the soul. Even though physical death would still occur, it could have no further influence on the life of the soul (cf. Rev 1:18).

Although no explicit mentioning is made thereof, it is this same notion that is put forward in Revelation 1:18, when Jesus says that He has the keys to the doors of Death in His hands (Groenewald 1986: 42-43).

### 3.8. *Conclusion on life and death in the Old Testament*

- i) Yahweh is the sovereign God. The Creator-God has all the power in contrast to the gods of the other nations who are seen as dead idols. He is the sole Decider on both life and death, all of which is in his hands to give and take (Eccl 6:8; [Collins 1997: 353]). Life is a blessing from Yahweh on a person. On the other hand, death could be a curse from Yahweh (Deut 30:19; Ps 119:93, 144; Prov 2:19; 5:23; 8:35-36 etc.).
- ii) Life denotes in the first instance physical life (Brensinger 1997: 108). This life was always meant to be limited for man. Although the Old Testament perception of death was very negative, it was recognised as a natural phenomenon bound to befall everyone.<sup>49</sup> The notion that the existence of death as such was the result of sin probably came from later religious interpretation of texts.
- iii) Life is not always physical life. Health, vigour [sickness, deprivation] could also spell life [or death]. Israel's exile was metaphorically seen as death (Ezek 37:1-14; [cf. Zimmerli 1983: 262]).
- iv) God and life are intimately related. He is the living God [חַי־יְהוָה], the Source of all life (cf. Deut 5:26; 2 Kgs 19:4).
- v) Because God is life, life can only be obtained in relation to God. Outside of such a relationship death prevails (Barrett 1994: 47). The Old Testament frequently speaks about man's existence as a way that leads to either life or death, thereby putting man before a choice (Deut 30:19; 2 Sam 15:21; Prov 14:12; 16:25; Jer 21:8 [Merrill 1997: 886]). Israel must constantly choose between obedience and disobedience to God. This becomes a choice between life and death (cf. Deut 28; 30:15ff [Ringgren 1966: 143]).

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<sup>49</sup> Of course, the Old Testament, and especially the Law, identifies certain sins that do lead unto death or deserve death as a punishment (Lev 24:17; Deut 22:23-26), immediately suggesting that not all sins deserve this very harsh punishment (Merrill 1997: 886). This, however, is referring to physical death as punishment. The spiritual punishment on all sins is death, either spiritually or physically.

- vi) The quality of relationship with Yahweh is what determines life. Death implies that the relationship with Yahweh was terminated. Man is then cut off from the lifeline of God. However, God will resurrect him into a new life if he is willing to turn back to Him. This relational interpretation becomes more prominent in the apocalyptic literature and in the New Testament, and is a strong motive in Revelation.
- vii) Immortality is not an option in Old Testament texts. Texts that talk about man being saved from the claws of death should be read metaphorically (e.g. Ps 16). The only hope for man is to be resurrected into a new life by God (cf. Dan 12). This is an issue that rarely features with regard to the individual. It is, however, frequently applied to the people of God collectively.
- viii) Sheol was the biding place for all the dead. It is a place of gloom, where no glory, movement or praise is possible. Whoever goes down to Sheol, is forgotten and can never return. It is a place outside the sphere of God, where no relation with God, i.e. no life, is possible. The distinction between hell and Sheol does not exist in the Old Testament. In the English Translation [KJV] hell is often equated with Sheol (cf. Hab 2:5).
- ix) Resurrection is very rarely touched upon in the Old Testament with only two vague suggestions (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). The resurrection-belief that developed later on in Judaism, is not a new theology, but just a continuation of the Israelite belief in the sovereignty of God to decide on life and death, which could even include the return of life to a person or nation (Bauckham 1998b: 86).

As said previously [cf. Chapter 1], this does not necessarily mean that John would have the same interpretation in mind when he used these words and symbols in Revelation, even though he might have borrowed them from the Old Testament. However, as Revelation is strongly rooted in Old Testament language and symbols, it is quite possible that John would require his readers to take into account the Old Testament understanding of concepts to fully appreciate the meaning of the message.

### CHAPTER 3

#### JEWISH APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT ON LIFE AND DEATH

*"When that time comes around everyone...whose name is written in God's book will be saved. Many that have died will then rise up; some of them will live eternally while others will come under the eternal punishment and rejection of God...Those who led others on the right path will forever shine like the stars in heaven." Dan 12:2-3.<sup>50</sup>*

This is only a brief overview to sensitise the reader on the shift in religious focus that took place later on in Judaism<sup>51</sup>. As certain of the perceptions and thoughts were still in line with Jewish and ANE thought from the Old Testament times, the entire discussion will not be repeated here. The discussion is, however, necessary, as the apocalyptic influences on the Christian environment, and for this area of study [i.e. the Book of Revelation], cannot be ignored.

The importance of the apocalyptic thought for the Christian centres around the most fundamental of all Christian beliefs, which is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the gift of eternal life to the believers as a result thereof (Collins 1987: 207).

It is important to note that the apocalyptic movement did not replace the Old Testament prophecies. It was just understood as "prophecy in a new idiom". The fulfilment of the prophecies was still of immense importance to the apocalyptic writers (Russell 1964: 92). In the apocalyptic literature the eschatological prophecies about the future are linked to the "salvation history" of the past, and are then applied unto the present situation of the readers (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 40-41). This new outlook can be seen in the apocalyptic literature that started to appear in early Judaism [around 200BC – AD100].

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<sup>50</sup> Free translation from "Die Boedskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

<sup>51</sup> It is not the intention here to discuss in detail the origin and development of apocalyptic and its literature. A lot of work has already been done on this subject in the past (e.g. by John Collins and others). Kreitzer (1997a: 55-68) gives a brief overview of the complexity of this development (cf. Aune 1997: lxxix-lxxxix). As a literary phenomenon Von Rad (1975b: 301) places it within "the group of pseudepigraphical apocalypses from Daniel to IV Ezra." For a discussion of the characteristics of apocalypses, cf. Aune (1997: lxxxii-lxxxvii); Du Rand (1991b: 169-175); Mounce (1977: 19-23); Kümmel (1975: 453-455); John Collins (1979a: 1-20) and others.

## 1. Background

In the post-exilic period we see an unparalleled shift in the way history was perceived. Thoughts about resurrection and life after death came to the fore that was rarely talked about in the Old Testament (Bauckham 1998b: 83). The reigning perception was now that the present world was overcome by evil and darkness (Collins 1979b: 27). Nothing good can possibly come from it. There is no hope that the situation could be overturned for the better in the future. In fact, it is expected that things would rather get worse from now on. This would especially be the case for the faithful believers who tried to stay obedient to God (Du Rand 1991b: 174). Bauckham (1998b: 83) points to the increasing number of martyr deaths during the Maccabean period that could have had an influence on the development and expansion of a belief in eternal life (cf. 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 22-23, 28-29)<sup>52</sup>.

In this situation the conviction grew that salvation actually lies on another level. Under the existing conditions no salvation could be possible in this world; it would only be possible if the current situation is overthrown or totally renewed, which can only be done by divine intervention; and this will only happen in the *eschaton*, i.e. on the Day of the Lord (Kümmel 1975: 454), when the salvation of the faithful remnant is expected to be announced through some or other cataclysmic event brought about through the promised divine intervention (Charlesworth 1985: 64). At the same time eternal death will be announced as the final destination for the unrighteous people.

Apocalyptic trips to and visions about heaven, Sheol, and hell was all part of divine revelations that the apocalyptic prophets received. Eschatology was in the mind of nearly every writer from this age (Russell 1964: 15, 20). It was a transcendent eschatology that asked for retribution and restoration beyond the bounds of this life (Collins 1987: 9). Transcendence is a key word in all the apocalyptic literature. The forms of expected salvation might have been diverse, but one thing was universal: salvation required a radically different existence for the people of this world, “in which all the constraints of the human condition, including death, are transcended” (Collins 1979a: 10).

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<sup>52</sup> John Collins (1997: 59-72) also notes the influence of the political, cultural and religious alienation that people experienced due to the foreign domination during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which led to many of the nations of the ANE who came under this foreign rule to look for salvation on other levels.



People therefore focussed their hope on the expectation that God will grant salvation by bringing history to a final consummation in the near future (Beale 1998: 131). The present aeon will pass away and will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth, or otherwise by a *renewed* heaven and earth that would come about through the total transcendence of the current situation in the *eschaton* (1 En 93:1-10; cf. Rev 21:1-8).

## **2. The concept of eternal life in Jewish Apocalyptic**

In the apocalyptic literature a different view is held regarding the outcome and meaning of life and death. The broad understanding as per the Old Testament is still valid [cf. Chapter 2], however, with some Hellenistic modification (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 858). Both life and death are now transcended to a new aeon, which is an aeon outside the bounds of history (Brensinger 1997: 112). Life in this world is nothing more than a time of preparation for the future world to come (Du Rand 1991b: 164). There is, however, a discontinuity between this life and the transcended aeon to come (Collins 1979b: 27). In the end a person should not be too concerned about the outcome of things in this life, as long as he or she lives in accordance with God's will in preparation for the future world (Link 1976: 479). Having said all this, Collins (1997: 97) reminds us that "for the apocalypticists present experience and the future hope were intrinsically connected and mutually interdependent". In this sense eschatology is rather the "transcendence of death by the attainment of a higher, angelic form of life" (Collins 1997: 97).

### *2.1. Ethical piety and life*

Ethical piety becomes an important aspect within the apocalyptic literature in general. A person just needs to live a life of ethical piety here on earth while waiting on the nearing *eschaton* (Du Rand 1991b: 175). Believers are therefore called up to live a life of devoutness so that they can receive eternal life on the Day of Judgment [cf. the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2-3]. It is the quality of life lived now that will determine the continuance [or the resurrection to a new life] of life in the *eschaton*. In 4 Maccabees 7:18-19 [cf. also Wis. Sol 1:12] the notion is that true life can only be obtained when the physical life corresponds to a transcendent norm, as was the case with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 858).

This strong ethical call comes in the wake of the evil [unethical] that is evident in this world (cf. 4 Ezra 7; 12:32-33; Apoc Zeph). God will bring all this evil to an end on Judgment Day. On that day the eternal judgment will be passed by the Messiah on behalf of Yahweh according to the ethical lives they lived (Collins 1987: 50-52).

The judgment on the Day of Yahweh is central within all apocalypses (Collins 1979b: 25). Not everybody will be condemned on this day. Only the wicked will be punished for their transgressions, while the faithful will be saved. This salvation is not just a salvation from sin, but also a salvation out of this evil world (Charlesworth 1985: 123). Throughout the apocalyptic writings a clear line is drawn between the fate of the righteous and that of the wicked (cf. 4 Ezra 7:75ff; [Rowland 1985: 168]).

## 2.2. *Life as a relationship with God*

As was the case in the Old Testament, life [and living] is linked to the relationship with Yahweh. Ethical piety is only possible within a relationship with God and is also the sign that a relationship with Yahweh exists. It is because of his life of devoutness that Enoch escaped the claws of death (Gen 5:21-24; cf. 1 En 70). Outside of this devoted relationship one is in any case dead, even though you might seem to be alive in the eyes of the world (Rev 3:1c).

Yahweh is a God of life. He does not want death to be part of his new realm. Although His sovereign power over death is still evident in the fact that He casts the wicked into eternal death at the *eschaton*, He primarily wants life to prevail (cf. Rev 21:1-8). He wants to bring life, particularly “new life”, to the people of God, and as the sovereign God He is also able to give back life to the dead through resurrection (Wis. Sol 1:12-13; 2:23-24; [Bauckham 1998b: 83-86]). In the Wisdom of Solomon 1:12 righteousness [and maybe with it the righteous?] is called immortal. God brings the hope of life to his faithful followers about the new aeon where they will live in eternity, which comes through apocalyptic images and visions (Bailey 1979: 75-76).

The warnings about suffering or persecution to come “in the near future” are not supposed to be frightening to the readers, but function to guide the people of God through the constraints they have to endure in this world on their way to their actual destiny in glory in the presence of God (cf. 4 Ezra 7; [Rowland 1985: 126-128]). This

glory is the ζωὴ αἰώνιος that God promises to everyone that persevere in a life of devoutness. Visions about the new heaven and earth, angels, life in the new world, all become part of a comforting message to motivate believers (cf. 1 Enoch).

### 2.3. *Eternal life in early Judaism*

The concept of ζωὴ αἰώνιος [eternal life] was widely accepted within early Judaism and the apocalyptic literature in general (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 859; Bauckham 1998b: 81-82). It grew from a universal belief, evident within the apocalyptic genre, in the existence of a personal afterlife (Collins 1979b: 26)<sup>53</sup>. There is a far greater interest during this age in the possible reality of an existence of, and therefore resurrection to, eternal life (4 Ezra 4:41-43; 2 Apoc Bar 49:2-51:12; 2 Macc 7:36; 4 Macc 17:17-18, 22; 18:23; [Osborne 1992: 674-675]). In 4 Maccabees 17:17-18 the martyrs are resurrected unto eternal life “beside the divine throne”. This eternal life is only possible because God through resurrection from death brings people back to life (4 Macc 7:19; 15:3; 16:25; Ps Sol 3:16).<sup>54</sup> In this new life people will be free from the constraints of the evil world, including death. This ζωὴ αἰώνιος was a life cleansed of all sin and evil (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 43-51). In eternity believers will “live a blessed life” (4 Macc 17:18).

The hope for a resurrection of the righteous therefore becomes more prominent in the apocalyptic literature, specifically in the light of the expectation of the ζωὴ αἰώνιος awaiting the righteous (Dan 12:1-3; 2 Macc 7:29; cf. Isa 26:19; [Bauckham 1998b: 80-81]). The existence of death is still accepted as part of physical life, although now the notion is that Yahweh doesn’t want it. Everybody will still die [although some prominence is now given to the idea of ascension for some righteous believers, e.g. Enoch (cf. Himmelfarb 1993), some of these ascents are only temporary – AscIsa 6-

<sup>53</sup> Explicit mention of an afterlife is absent in only two Jewish Apocalypses, where it is probably implied in any case, i.e. The Apocalypse of the Weeks and Test Levi 2-5 (Collins 1979a: 9). All the other apocalypses describe some form of afterlife. This afterlife is the only place of hope for the believers (cf. also 4 Macc 15:2-3; Ps Sol 3:16; Test A 5:2; Test Jud 25:1; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 859]).

<sup>54</sup> Osborne (1992: 674-675) shows, however, that there is no uniformity in this time on the possibility of a resurrection at the *eschaton*, e.g. Jesus ben Sirach denied the possibility of resurrection, saying that the dead will abide in Sheol, which is “a place of unending sleep” (Sir 30:17; 46:19), while Enoch has an expectation of a resurrection (1 En 92:3-5; 104:2-4). In 4 Maccabees, on the other hand, immortality is mentioned seemingly even without the possibility of linking it to a resurrection (cf. 4 Macc 17:12, 22), although in 4 Maccabees 16:25 it is said, “that they who die for God, live to God” [translation as per *Septuagint Greek & English Old Testament*], implying that resurrection to an eternal life will come after physical death for the righteous believer.

11 (Himmelfarb 1993: 55)]. However, Yahweh is mightier than even Death and Sheol (Ringgren 1966: 246). He can revive His people from death and give them new life (cf. Ezek 37).

### 3. The death-concept in the apocalyptic and early Judaism

#### 3.1. *Death and eternal punishment*

Because, according to the apocalyptic literature, God did not want death, it became a problem to the people (Bailey 1979: 78-79). Death was more and more perceived to be the punishment for the sins of man and was therefore perceived of even more negative than before. As a result of sin physical death awaited each person, but this death was still not the *eternal* punishment for one's sins. After death came a resurrection followed by the moment of judgment, the timing of which is uncertain [although the apocalyptic writers made an effort to divide history into different time periods, including forecasts of the future and even the end times<sup>55</sup> (4 Ezra 4-27; 1 En 93:1-10)]. At this judgment eternal punishment would be meted out to the wicked for their life of unrighteousness (Bultmann 1965: 17).

The punishment for the wicked is that they will suffer everlasting torment in hell. According to 2 Baruch this punishment is nothing more than a fulfilment of the Deuteronomistic Law (Collins 1987: 174). There is thus nothing new in these expectations; the judgment criteria are the same as in the Old Testament. Everybody is judged according to his or her violations of the Law of Moses, which was still the barometer for evaluating a life of devoutness [cf. Rom 7:7-12 and the Sermon on the Mount as an ethical call to obey the Law].

The tours of hell, so often found in the apocalyptic literature, give an impression about the fate of man after judgment (2 En 8-10; 2 Apoc Bar 59:10; [Bauckham 1998a: 33-34]). It also changes the view on man's fate directly after death. The seer [or apocalyptic prophet] is given an insight into the afterlife that awaits every person after his or her death. Punishment of the wicked does not happen at the last judgment [i.e. on the Day of the Lord], but already at death (Bauckham 1990: 357; cf. also Bauckham 1998a: 49-80). Personal death therefore becomes the personal Day of

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<sup>55</sup> Periods of wickedness within this time frame "culminate in the separation of the elect" (Collins 1987: 50-52). In some of these periods the elect will then be chosen and saved (cf. 1 En 93:1-10).

Judgment (cf. Rev 1:18). This view was, however, not universally accepted, not even by the first century CE (cf. Jeremias 1965: 147).

It would seem that there was thus a gradual change in the belief about the fate after death. Some apocalypses proclaimed an interim waiting period until the Day of Judgment, which lies somewhere in the future [this future day will not be too distant, as this evil world must come to pass very quickly]. According to Enoch (1 En 22:11) the wicked dead even suffer punishment in Sheol while waiting for the Day of Judgment. Initially the idea of a future judgment, and an interim waiting period until that time arrived, was still accepted. This notion however developed in time, up to the point where the belief was that punishment was meted out directly after death (Bauckham 1998a: 34). It was actually not yet fully developed [and accepted] by the time of Jesus. This can be seen in Jesus' own teachings, where He sometimes expresses different views on the subject (cf. Luke 16:23, 46 against Luke 16:9; 23:43; [Jeremias 1965: 147]).

The earliest conception of punishment directly after death comes from the Apocalypse of Elijah. In his apocalyptic vision or tour Elijah seemingly sees the wicked after death, being punished in  $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\nu\nu\alpha$ . In the later Apocalypse of Zephaniah the prophet initially ends up in  $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$ , from where he is transferred to heaven. From heaven he observes the punishment of the wicked in  $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$  (Bauckham 1998a: 89-91).

### 3.2. *Sheol in apocalyptic literature*

Sheol did not disappear in the apocalyptic literature. Its existence was still recognised for example in Ecclesiasticus (14:16; 17:27f; cf. also the Book of Revelation). Where a judgment directly after death was not accepted, Sheol played the role of the intermediary "waiting room". In his evaluation of 1 Enoch 12-36 and 4 Ezra 7:79-87 Bauckham (1998a: 33-34) comes to the conclusion that Sheol is not the place of eternal punishment in the mentioned books, but a place where the wicked wait in anguish for the coming judgment [cf. 2.4, Chapter 2 above and Bauckham (1998b: 89)]. However, both the righteous and wicked already knows what will await them at the Day of Judgment (cf. 4 Ezra 7:75-101; [Bauckham 1998b: 89]).



In 1 Enoch 12-36 we have the oldest available account of a visit to the underworld (Bauckham 1998a: 33). Enoch is shown the places in Sheol where man will await the final judgment (1 En 22:1-4, 8-13). The ethical character of one's life will determine the kind of rest that will be experienced while waiting in Sheol (Rowland 1985: 161).

In Revelation Death and Sheol are personified partners (Rev 6:8; [Aune 1998a: 401])<sup>56</sup>. Sheol is not an eternal destiny for every dead person any more. It is a place associated only with the wicked, where they seemingly go until the Day of Judgment. In the *eschaton* both Death and Sheol will be judged and will then also land in the pool of fire (Rev 20:14). The pool of fire, or the hell, now becomes the place of eternal judgment. That is where all the unrighteous people will be sent to after judgment (Aune 1998b: 1103).

#### 4. Conclusion

- i) In the apocalyptic literature life and death are transcended. As this world is evil and will stay evil until the end, believers should rather look beyond that and focus on the life awaiting them in the new aeon. This will be a ζωή αἰώνιος where death and Sheol will play no part, except in the case of the unrighteous that will be judged and condemned to eternal death.
- ii) Specifically in 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees a revaluation of life is made, expecting that believers will participate in an eternal life at the throne of God if they do not forsake their faith (2 Macc 7:36; 4 Macc 17:17-18, 22; 18:23).
- iii) God's sovereignty still stands out in the apocalyptic literature. He is able to even overcome death and bring back the dead to life through resurrection (4 Macc 17:17-18; 2 Macc 7:29). According to Bauckham (1998b: 83-86) the transcendent theology in the apocalyptic literature is more the result of this belief in God's sovereignty than the origination of a new belief taken over from Hellenistic influences.
- iv) Death has become a greater problem. It is perceived more and more to be the punishment for sins and not the normal end to life (Bailey 1979: 78-79).

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<sup>56</sup> Death is sometimes personified alone (cf. Isa 25:8; Jer 9:21; Job 18:13; Prov 13:14). When Sheol is personified, however, it is always in relation to Death and never alone (cf. Isa 28:15; Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; Ps Sol 16:2; 4 Ezra 8:53). In Revelation Death and Hades are personified four times in association with each other (Aune 1998a: 401).



- v) Sheol is not the final destination for all the dead. Only the wicked dead end up in Sheol. There, according to apocalyptic literature (cf. 1 En 12-36), they both await and visualise their punishment (4 Ezra 7:75-101), or they are punished already for their lives of unrighteousness (TIsaac 5) (Bauckham 1998a: 33-34). According to 1 Enoch 22:11 the wicked dead even suffer punishment in Sheol while awaiting the final judgment.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIFE AND DEATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

*"The person that listens to my words and because of that believes in Him that have send me, already has unending life. He will not have to fear the judgment of God one day. The decision on his life has already been taken. He has already gone from the claws of his spiritual death unto the wonderful life that God gives... he will rise up to live with God in eternity. On the other hand: those people that kept on doing wrong, will rise up only to hear that they are condemned forever and ever."*  
*John 5:24, 29.<sup>57</sup>*

#### 1. Background

In the New Testament a couple of factors influence the way life and death were perceived in contrast to that of the Old Testament. The first and most important factor is the person of Jesus Christ. He was the person through whom God chose to reveal Himself anew to this world (Heb 1:1-2). His death and resurrection brought about a major shift in the perception of life and death (Hagner 1998: 99). In the new aeon that He constituted the earthly existence of a person is not that important any more (2 Cor 5:1-4). Eschatology plays a more important role. Life is equalled to eschatological salvation rather than physical existence (Schottroff 1981: 262). Eternity and eternal life are the more prominent themes throughout the New Testament.

The influence of Judaic and Apocalyptic thought is evident in the New Testament, specifically with regard to the afterlife. Teachings on the imminent coming of the Messiah, the woes of the last days, the judgment of the world, the resurrection of the dead, all of these common terms in the apocalyptic literature, would have had a familiar ring in the Christian era (Russell 1964: 34).

#### 2. Life in the New Testament

The word most commonly used in the New Testament to denote life, is ζωή and its derivatives ζῶον and ζῶν.<sup>58</sup> ζωή appears 135 times in the New Testament and ζῶν 140

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<sup>57</sup> Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

<sup>58</sup> The same words are generally used in the LXX to translate "life" from the BHS (Schottroff 1981: 262). Other words used in the New Testament to describe or translate "life" are ψυχή, ἄγιος and βίος. The last two does not appear in Revelation (Johnson 1992: 470-471).

times. The word ζῶον is found 23 times in the New Testament. Twenty of these instances appear in the Book of Revelation, where it is used exclusively to designate the four living creatures. Elsewhere in the New Testament the word occurs only in Hebrews 13:11, where it refers to sacrifices, and in 2 Peter 2:12 and Jude 10, where it refers to wild animals (Petzke 1981: 272).

Another important word in the New Testament denoting life is ψυχή. It occurs 101 times in the New Testament, of which seven occurrences are found in Revelation. It is generally translated into English with the word “soul” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 901-902; Harder 1978: 682), but actually has a number of different possible interpretations (Schweizer 1974: 637-656). Two important meanings are that of physical life (Acts 27:10; Mark 10:45; Matt 6:25) and implying the whole of man, i.e. the combination of body and soul (Acts 2:43; [Schweizer 1974: 637-640]). Soul and body together imply a living body (Barrett 1994: 67).

ζωή in the New Testament has a variety of meanings. The general meaning is of course physical life (Luke 16:25; Acts 8:33; Rom 8:38; Jas 4:14) as opposed to physical death [θάνατος]. This life is limited and corrupted by sin (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862). The life of God or Christ [not just his earthly life] is also proclaimed hereby (John 5:26a), which is actually a move away from the physical [and the sinful nature] to the eschatological, and even further into the eternal divine sphere (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 340-341).

The ζωὴ αἰώνιος is an important concept in the New Testament (cf. Mark 10:17, 30, the Gospel of John). Sometimes ζωή alone is used in the same context as ζωὴ αἰώνιος. ζωή is found 16 times in the Synoptic Gospels, and almost always refers to the future life, which will be entered into at the end of the current aeon (Matt 19:16-17, 29ff; [Johnson 1992: 469]).

ζωὴ αἰώνιος is equal to βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Jesus brought the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15) and thus the ζωὴ αἰώνιος (John 3:16, 36; 6:47). The ζωὴ αἰώνιος belongs to God. He is the God of life and death (Luke 12:20; 2 Cor 1:9; Jas 4:15; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862-863]).

This new eschatological life can be obtained already in this world. Whoever believes the Good News of the Gospel has life (Matt 4:17; John 6:47; [Smalley 1978: 235]). He has died from his old ways and has been resurrected into a new life (Cullmann 1958: 35). But the fullness of this life will only be experienced in the future [at the *eschaton* (cf. Matt 19:29)]. There is thus an eschatological hope and expectation on the future aeon to come (Coetzee 1990a: 51).<sup>59</sup>

### *2.1. The life of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and life*

The existence of Christianity is based on the belief in a real occurrence, in real events, which took place in real time (Cullmann 1958: 16-17). These events are the actual life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the early church these were events that radically changed this world, or at least their world. Jesus Christ was for them the One who has brought ζωή (2 Tim 1:10). He is the Life, the only One that possesses ἀθανασία [immortality] in Himself (1 Tim 6:16; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862]).

Jesus announced the arrival of the new aeon right at the beginning of his ministry on earth (Matt 4:17). It is not an aeon still to come, but one that has arrived (ἤγγικεν in Mark 1:15)<sup>60</sup>. The perfect tense of the verb suggests that the inauguration is a present realisation (Ridderbos 1978: 47-48; Hurst 1992: 211). With this “new world” came a radical reinterpretation of salvation, of the way life should be lived, and of the outcome of this life (John 13:34). The new aeon implied new, eternal life. And the cross becomes “the means by which God has provided for salvation and as the instrument and measure of new life in Christ” (Green 1993: 201, 203). The Law is still important, but with a new impetus. It has been fulfilled [reinterpreted] by Jesus. His example becomes the ethical standard to be adhered to.

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<sup>59</sup> There is a tension [or relationship?] between the fulfilled and unfulfilled [still in progress] eschatology in the New Testament. The new aeon has already been inaugurated by Jesus. The life of Jesus in present is eschatological time for the people. It is possible to share in this eschatological life in eternity now. But it is still also “eschatology in the process of realization” (Jeremias, as quoted by Allison 1992b: 207; cf. Ridderbos 1978: 36-56). This should not be seen as contradictory. A lot of the prophecies have been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus (Luke 17:18-23), but others, like the prophecies regarding the Son of Man’s role in the final judgment still lies in the future (cf. Matt 13:41; 16:28; 25:31). The eschatological expectation was also that the complete fulfilment would be in the near future (Allison 1992b: 207-208). This same tension is also evident in Paul’s eschatology (cf. Barrett 1994: 51).

<sup>60</sup> However, sometimes Mark himself refers to the new aeon as something still to come (cf. Mark 9:47; 14:25; [Hurst 1992: 211]).

### 2.1.1. *The miracles of life Jesus performed*

The one central message of all the miracles Jesus performed is to demonstrate the inauguration of the kingdom through the coming of the long awaited Messiah to this world (Matt 11:2-6; [Du Rand 2001: 102; Blomberg 1992: 301]). When Jesus performs “healing miracles” [either through healing or resurrection], He gives life back to people. Someone who has been healed was able to rejoin his family and go back to work, and therefore participate in community life again [cf. Chapter 2 on life and death in the Old Testament. The same interpretation to life and the community applies here]. His dignity [life] has been restored (Mark 5:23; John 4:50, 51, 52; [cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 336]).

Of course, sometimes Jesus did perform miracles of resurrection that actually brought people back to physical life (Matt 9:25; [cf. Mark 5:40-42; Luke 8:54-55]; Luke 11:14-15). The message of this is still the same, i.e. the coming of the new aeon, which is the aeon of eternal life. It also serves to confirm Jesus’ own power over life and death, thereby providing proof of his divine identity (Van der Watt 2003: 133-134). It is important to note that these resurrections did not represent eternal life or immortality. The persons resurrected by Jesus would still die physically again. But they are signs of the eschatological resurrection, of the new aeon that Jesus brought to this world (Hagner 1998: 101). Healing, resurrection, or other miracles are therefore symbolic of the new spiritual life that comes with the new aeon of Jesus (Luz 1995: 66-68)<sup>61</sup>. It is a way of opening the door to the sphere of God’s new aeon to the people (Matt 11:20-24; 12:28; [Kingsbury 1988: 68]).

### 2.1.2. *The teachings on life by Jesus*

The teachings of Jesus have a twofold purpose: theologically they proclaim God as well as the Good News of salvation coming from God through his Son, Jesus Christ, and ethically they proclaim the expected human conduct that should flow from the correct understanding and acceptance of this Good News (Hurst 1992: 210).

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<sup>61</sup> In the miracle of the calming of the storm for example the disciples’ boat symbolises the “ship of life” for the believer in the community to whom Matthew addresses this book. They could project their lives of faith, but also their being alive, onto these miracles (Luz 1995: 67-68).

The primary focus of Jesus' teaching is the new life, which is possible only if one is "in Christ" [a theme that is used extensively in 1 John]. The focus is specifically on the life after the *parousia*. Jesus' parables and teaching proclaim very little about His Person and his life on earth [neither does He elaborate in the parables and his teaching discourses on his crucifixion or his resurrection], but He has lots to say about the kingdom of God and the eternal life that is linked to it (Gerhardson 2000: 57-62).

Of course, the Gospels utilise the teachings differently so as to suit the theological message each want to convey. But all the teachings have a central message incorporated in them: explaining that the kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus Christ (Matt 4:17), which in itself is a revelation of God to the world, proclaiming the new life that goes hand in hand with this new kingdom. This new life will be fulfilled in the death of Christ, which is the eschatological turning point. Then the enemy, Satan, will be defeated and death, as the enemy of darkness, will be overcome (Luke 10:18; 11:22; [Allison 1992b: 205]).

This new aeon has implications for living in the present. Obtaining this new life goes hand in hand with a reframing of life in the present aeon in order to fit in with the ways of the new life brought by Christ with the inauguration of the new aeon. In this sense the Law has a part to play as God's pathway to life (cf. Matt 5:17-20). The ways of life lies in the fulfilment of the commandments of the Law, according to the will of God and the example of Jesus (Matt 7:14; [Ridderbos 1978: 275]; cf. chapter 2, 2.6). Living the Law in obedience and in relationship with God is what constitutes life in the new aeon (cf. Hurst 1992: 221). Only those who follow in the footprints of Jesus accordingly, have eternal life (Matt 16:24-28; cf. John 15:9-17). Obeying the commandments and following in Jesus' footsteps are not works that "buy" the passage to the new life, but are "signs" of a life in faith in acceptance of the new aeon that God has already bestowed upon this world through Jesus Christ (Johnson 1992: 471).

### 2.1.3. *The resurrection of Jesus as a life-giving occurrence*

The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to Christian faith. Without the resurrection the Christian faith would have no foundation for their existence (Lorenzen 1995: 115). It is the resurrection of Jesus that has brought the new life to this world, says Paul (1



Cor 15). The resurrection is so important that it is mentioned explicitly in 17 of the books in the New Testament (Kreitzer 1993: 805-806). In the evangelistic sermons it is consistently given the place of primary importance (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15, 22-26; 10:40-41; 13:30-37; 17:31; [Dunn 1991: 183]). Although Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (cf. Hagner 1998: 103-106), it was something the disciples still did not expect (Lorenzen 1995: 119-122). They would only come to understand Jesus' words when they saw Him alive after the actual resurrection (John 3:21-22; [Osborne 1992: 676]).<sup>62</sup>

For those that believed in Jesus personal resurrection became a reality. "*The first Christians actually believed that Jesus' resurrection was (literally) the beginning of the general resurrection*" (Dunn 1991: 185)<sup>63</sup>. To them it became a present reality through the salvation obtained in Christ (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 130). Christ was just the "first-fruits" of the general resurrection that would now follow for all believers (Rom 8:23; [Dunn 1991: 185-186]). Resurrection is, however, an act of God. As the

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<sup>62</sup> There is currently an intense debate developing around the historical reality of the death and [more specifically] the resurrection of Jesus. Quite a few scholars, specifically from the Jesus Seminar (e.g. JD Crossan 2003: 29-57) doubt the scientific possibility of such an occurrence. Rudolf Bultmann (as referred by Dunn 1991: 184) only talks of "the rise of Easter faith". In this sense the resurrection becomes nothing more than an event of faith. Without becoming part of this long debate, which is not the intention of this thesis at all, it is necessary to state the foundation on which this thesis will be built. The Christian faith centres on the belief that Jesus died [physically] on the cross and was actually resurrected from death. Without that, Paul says, the Christian faith would actually be without any substance (1 Cor 15). The faith in the actual resurrection was enhanced by the eyewitness descriptions in the Bible (Matt 28:9-10, 11-15; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:13-35; John 20-21). Paul also emphasises knowledge of these eyewitness descriptions when he lists a number of people who have seen Jesus after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-8). Paul doesn't try to reason or prove the resurrection of Jesus, but takes it as an accepted fact on the grounds of the eyewitness testimonies, and only tries to draw attention to the implications it has for faith (Kreitzer 1993: 806). This is actually the earliest discussion with regard to resurrection attested in the New Testament, as the Gospels were only written later (Collins 1987: 207-209). Although no descriptive account is given about the act of the resurrection itself [the closest we get is the account of the angel and the guards found in Matt 27:62-28:10; cf. Gos. Pet 9:35-45], there was a common acceptance that it was brought about through a supernatural intervention by God in his sovereignty (Hagner 1998: 111; Osborne 1992: 679). However, the first disciples' belief in the miracle of an actual resurrection was so strong that they made all efforts to ensure that everybody grasped this reality that they experienced (Dunn 1991: 183-185). Extensive descriptions of the empty tomb (Matt 28:6, Luke 24:3), the earthquake that led to the opening of the grave that Sunday morning (Matt 28:1-4), the linen wrappings in which Jesus was buried lying aside inside the grave (John 20:5); the fact that Jesus ate with his disciples next to the sea of Galilee (John 21:12-14), etc. all wanted to emphasise to believers that Jesus was physically alive [Lorenzen 1995: 128; cf. also Davis {1993: 57} on the crucial points that prove the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a fact to be accepted in history – cf. Lapidé (1984) who proves the resurrection of Jesus from a Jewish belief in resurrection!!!]. Of course one must accept that this is an occurrence that is something out of the ordinary, and that it overrides all logical and scientific possibilities. It is something inexplicable to the human mind. But then, Paul himself stressed that there is no logic in the message of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-25). It only works through faith, and it is only through faith that our eyes are opened to the possibility of a supernatural intervention by God, including the resurrection of Christ (Davis 1998: 146-147; Du Rand 2001: 38).

<sup>63</sup> Italics as inserted by Dunn (1991: 185).

sovereign God in control of life and death He is the only One that could bring the dead back to life (Lorenzen 1995: 115)<sup>64</sup>.

Jesus taught a twofold resurrection that is in stall for the people of this world, whereby everybody will come to life in the *parousia*: the righteous will be rewarded for their faith on that day, while the unrighteous will be punished to eternal death. He then continues to exhort his disciples that they should resist the ways of the old life, lest they be cast into hell “where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43; cf. Matt 18:8; [Osborne 1992: 675]). In the end His resurrection from death signalled a new eschatological reality for this world: “that God, who created all that exists, will transform all that exists into a new creation where death will no longer be experienced” (Hagner 1998: 119).

The descent of Christ into ᾗδης was the result of a general notion in His days that everyone who dies, goes down to Sheol [cf. Chapter 2 on Sheol in the Old Testament]. Jesus did not go down to Sheol [as is proposed in the apocalyptic literature] to be punished for sins [i.e. the sins of the people], but to proclaim His victory to the inhabitants thereof (1 Pet 3:19-20). The actual significance thereof, according to Bauckham (1998a: 39), is that “the divine prerogative of releasing from the realm of death (cf. Wis Sol 16:13) now belongs to Christ”. With Jesus’ resurrection, the gates of ᾗδης were for the first time opened for someone to leave (Rev 1:18; [Bauckham 1998a: 39]).

Aside from this a lot more attention is given to Christ’s death and resurrection in the New Testament than to his descent to Sheol (cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20).<sup>65</sup> The descent to Sheol [i.e. of Jesus] was seemingly of very little significance to the authors of the New Testament.

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<sup>64</sup> In a very interesting move Kaiser and Lohse (1981: 117) sees Jesus’ resurrection not as a coming back from dead, but as Jesus pressing “his way through death to life.” It is a movement in faith, not to be caught up in historical facts (cf. Küng 1984: 108).

<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note that in the early church a belief evolved that gave a lot more attention and significance to the descent of Christ to ᾗδης. This was expressed in three main motifs for His descent: i) Christ preached the salvation to the saints in ᾗδης [cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20 where He actually preaches to the unrighteous]; ii) He led the saints out of ᾗδης with Him; iii) He defeated the powers of death and ᾗδης while in there (cf. OdesSol 42:11). Those that left ᾗδης with Him, then also ascended to heaven with Him (AscIsa 9:17) (Bauckham 1998a: 40-41).

## 2.2. The Johannine concept of ζωή αἰώνιος

### 2.2.1. What the ζωή αἰώνιος meant for John

The concept of ζωή αἰώνιος is very prominent in the Johannine literature (Smalley 1978: 203).<sup>66</sup> John himself sees this as the main purpose of the Gospel message Jesus proclaimed to his disciples (John 20:31). The word ζωή occurs 36 times in the Gospel of John (Johnson 1992: 470-471). ζωή αἰώνιος is found 17 times in this Gospel (Brown 1966: 506; cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 55). John also uses numerous related metaphors in his Gospel to describe eternal life: Living water (John 4:10); bread of life (John 6:35, 48); the Light of life (John 8:12); Jesus Himself **IS** life (John 11:25; 14:6), i.e. He is the Mediator or Giver thereof (Schottroff 1981: 267-269; Smalley 1978: 203, 219). He is the sustaining power of life, without which no life is possible (John 15:5; [Brown 1970: 678; Johnson 1992: 470]). Van der Watt (1986a: 239-240) has also shown the relationship between Father and Son in the Gospel of John to be the basis for the origin of eternal life (cf. Van der Watt 2003: 135). But there is more to this: this new life and this relationship place Jesus on the same level as the Father. As Giver of life Jesus should therefore be worshipped<sup>67</sup> on the same level as the Father (cf. John 5:21; [Van der Watt 1986a: 232-242]; cf. also John 1:1, 14).

Whenever John uses the word ζωή and ζωή αἰώνιος in his gospel he refers exclusively to the eternal life or eschatological life (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 879-889; Johnson 1992: 469). When he wants to refer to physical life he uses the word ψυχή (cf. John 13:37; 15:13). This life [i.e. ψυχή] is the life that ends in natural death, something that is not questioned at all by any of the New Testament writers.

Eternal life on the other hand reaches beyond the boundaries of time and space. It is equated to the life of God. God lives eternally, and is Himself the Life [ζωή αἰώνιος<sup>68</sup> (1 John 5:20), the God who is ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν... (Rev 1:4)], as does

<sup>66</sup> A comprehensive exegetical study of the understanding of life in the Johannine literature, specifically in the Gospel of John, has already been done by Van der Watt (1986a) and many others, and will therefore not be repeated here in detail. The ζωή αἰώνιος plays such an important role in John's Gospel that Van der Watt calls it "the basic soteriological concept" in the Gospel (1989b: 217).

<sup>67</sup> On the subject and meaning of the worship of Jesus, cf. Bauckham (1993a: 118-149) and Chapters 6 and 7 below.

<sup>68</sup> John does not use the concept ζωή αἰώνιος when reference is made to God in the Gospel, but only ζωή. Because of God's eternal status, eternity in terms of Him is just accepted as a fact by John (Van der Watt 1986a: 880). "This dimension of life is in any case true of God" (Van der Watt 1989b: 218-219).

Jesus [ἡ ζωὴ (John 14:6)]. He existed before time, and will exist even after time has expired (John 1:1). To have eternal life is to live κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι (1 Pet 4:6).

Jesus' coming to this world has the purpose of bringing this eternal life to man (John 5:26; 6:57; 20:31; 1 John 1:1-2). It is a life that has even conquered the power of death (John 11:25). Jesus makes this life "real" through his own life, his teachings, and his miracles: He is the "real" water of life (John 4:10-14); the "real" bread of life (John 6:27); etc. (Brown 1966: cxv). This "real" life also implies that the kingdom is more real than anticipated.

John's eschatology in general is the most realised of all the Gospels (cf. Cullmann 1967: 269). Salvation or condemnation already takes place in the present, according to the decision made for or against Christ (cf. John 3:18; 5:24; [Brown 1966: cxvii; Van der Watt 1986a: 241]). There is, however, also the judgment "at the last day". This strong judgmental theme is stressed quite clear in Jesus' warnings in the Gospel of John, where He stresses that He as the eschatological Judge will condemn the unrighteous "at the last day" (John 12:48; cf. John 14:2-3; [Osborne 1992: 677])<sup>69</sup>.

### 2.2.2. *Jesus' miracles of life*

The miracles [signs = σημεῖα] that Jesus performs express the basic idea that there is new life to be found in Him, and that this new life is already present (Smalley 1978: 87-88). John puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that this life is a gift that God has sent [through Jesus] to the world (John 5:26; 6:35, 48, 51; [Johnson 1992: 469; cf. Brown 1966: cxv]). Smalley (1978: 90-92) shows how Jesus' "I am"-sayings in the Gospel of John metaphorically emphasise the fact the He alone is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6)<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> This does not imply that John has no future eschatology. Physical death could still intervene. But in that case the physical death and resurrection of Jesus will result in Him going to the Father to prepare a place in heaven for the believers who die here, so that they can enter into a life where death will have no part to play any more (Brown 1966: cxviii). It is in the *Parousia* that the ζωὴ αἰώνιος becomes a final reality for the people of God. Eternal life culminates in a resurrection of the body into eternity in the presence of God.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Van der Watt (1986a: 781-782). Of course, there is also a strong connection to be made between Jesus' "I am"-sayings and God's "I am Who I am" in Exodus 3:14.

The miracles are signs of Jesus' power to also "give eternal life on this earth (realized eschatology) and as a promise that on the last day he will raise the dead (final eschatology)" (Brown 1966: 437). This is evident in Jesus' discourses with the people after the healing of the man in Bethesda (John 5) and before and after the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11), two passages that, according to Brown (1966: 437), are parallel to each other.

### 2.2.3. *ζωὴ αἰώνιος and the relationship with God*

The ζωὴ αἰώνιος that is received is more than just a change in temporal existence. Although the use of αἰώνιος on its own could be interpreted as having a temporal meaning, in combination with ζωή it rather refers to a certain quality of life (Van der Watt 1986a: 892). It is a quality of life that comes from above and corresponds qualitatively to the life God possesses (Van der Watt 2000: 202-203). Life according to the Gospel of John, and all Johannine literature for that matter, generally goes hand in hand with a relationship with God (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 288). To be part of this new quality of life a person needs to be reborn in Christ, i.e. born in the spirit, which implies that a person must first die off the old life spiritually before he or she can be reborn (John 3:3-5; [Van der Watt 1986a: 110; Coetzee 1990a: 51]). Quantity of life is determined by the divine quality thereof (Van der Watt 1986a: 894).

As a relationship, life goes hand in hand with knowing God (John 17:3). This is the only way man can participate in the realisation of God's kingdom. And the [only] way to know God is through his Son who has come to reveal Him to the world (John 1:18). He is the "Word of God" (John 1:1) who proclaims the Father, the only way to know the Father (John 14:9). Therefore his words reveal the essence of life to the people (Johnson 1992: 470). A person who "knows God" obeys His commandments (1 John 2:3, 29). "Knowing God" is more than theoretical knowledge. It is a life-receiving experience, being reborn in the new life of God. To be away from God, is to be dead (Link 1976: 480).

Whoever has this life cannot be destroyed any more (John 11:26; [Brown 1966: 507]). In the Gospel of John believers have already passed from death to life (John 5:24; 6:50; cf. 1 John 3:14; [Bultmann 1965: 18-19]). Because death breaks down any possibility of relating to the living God, death is not a possibility any more in the



realm of this new life (Van der Watt 2000: 203). This does not imply that physical death disappears from the scene. It is the soul that has died of the self and has been resurrected into eternal life that is now able to live even through the day of death unto the new resurrection in heaven.

In the eternal realm then “existence and relations within the divine sphere become a reality” (Van der Watt 2000: 203), thereby making physical death, although it still applies to everybody, irrelevant: “I am the resurrection and the life...Those who believe in me will live, even though they die” Jesus said to Martha at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:25). This sums up the Christological focus of John’s message of life and resurrection. Jesus’ own resurrection [for John] is not the centre, as He **IS** in any case the Resurrection [and the life]. And just as He, the Resurrection, has overcome death in a personal resurrection from death, so will the believers (Lincoln 1998: 143).

### *2.3. Pauline thought on life*

Paul’s theology centres very much on the crucifixion of Christ as THE way to the new life in Christ (1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:2; 15:3-8; [Barrett 1994: 204]). However, Paul also stresses that this new life can only be obtained if we “die with Christ” and is resurrected with Christ (Col 2:20). Paul is the first of the New Testament writers to give the radical expression that the new life is available already in the present, as the replacement of the old aeon by the new has already taken place in an event in history (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 866). This is only possible because Christ has already overcome death [and the old aeon] through his own death and resurrection, thereby bringing the “new creation” to man (1 Cor 15; 2 Tim 1:10; [Ridderbos 1977: 45-46]). Resurrection is thus a state that one can already experience rather than a single event (Harris 1998: 169).

Life [ζωή] for Paul goes hand in hand with a unique quality of life in faith and forgiveness (Scott 1993: 554). Because sin is the cause of death, the presupposition of ζωή is forgiveness of sin (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 436; Ridderbos 1977: 99). “Life is only possible in relation to the divine act of salvation accomplished in Christ” (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 868). It is therefore not man that lives any more [the old is dead]. It is Christ that lives in and through him or her (Rom 6:11; 8:10; 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 2:19).



However, Paul still makes room for the unrealised eschatology. There is an expected resurrection of the body after death (1 Cor 15:12-58). Furthermore, Paul expects “to be with Christ” after death. He even longs for that day to arrive (Phil 1:23). He is aware that the present age is not the completed new aeon. That still lies in the “end times” (1 Cor 10:11) or “the last times” (1 Tim 4:1). In view of this ambivalence Ridderbos (1977: 52-53) talks about a “mingling of the two ages” whereby Paul understands the advent of Christ as the “breaking through of the future aeon in the present” without making the slightest effort to balance things out for his readers.

Life and death are not just limited to physical existence. Just as Christ brings life now, sin brings death already into this life (cf. Rom 7:25; [Ridderbos 1977: 113]). Both life and death are entities that could be experienced already in the present, although the result of it all will only be consummated in the future aeon (cf. Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 136-137).

### **3. Death and the realm of Death in the New Testament**

#### *3.1. Death in the New Testament*

The words most commonly used in the New Testament for death [or dying or being dead] are θάνατος (119), ἀποθνήσκω (104), and ἀποκτείνω (74) (Bieder 1981: 320; Frankemölle 1980: 322). ἀποκτείνω more often denotes the physical end to a person’s life, especially depriving a person of such life or of any form of life (cf. Matt 14:5; 16:21; [Frankemölle 1980: 322; cf. also Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 92]). It is often used in prophetic judgments (Am 4:10; 9:1; Ezek 23:10; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 429]). In the New Testament it almost always refers to the violent killing of God’s messengers (Matt 14:5; Mark 12:5ff). It is strikingly significant in the passion predictions of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 429]). ἀποκτείνω is synonymous to θάνατος and θανατάω, which refers more often to death at the judgment. This comes specifically to the fore in the Book of Revelation, where death is often related to the punishment of God at the final judgment, i.e. eternal death (Bieder 1981: 324).

In the New Testament death is just as universally accepted as in the Old Testament (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 94). The mortality of man is still a nonnegotiable fact, and

God is still viewed as the only One possessing immortality (John 6:49; 1 Cor 15:53; 1 Tim 6:16; Heb 7:8; 9:27). Man will therefore still experience death in this world (Bultmann 1965: 14). It is only the final generation on earth [i.e. those living at the time of the *parousia*] that will not experience physical death. They will only experience the final judgment (Matt 16:28; [Gulley 1992: 111-II]).

The shift in thinking in the New Testament is specifically visible in two areas: the view on the origin of death, and secondly the view on life after death (Gulley 1992: 110-II). Although death will still befall everyone, it is not a normal thing. Death is not part of God's original plan for man, but is the result of sin that came into this world. The origin thereof is usually associated with The Fall (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21; cf. Gen 3:22 and footnote 34). Death is the judgment of God upon the sins of man (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 97). In a rather comprehensive discourse Paul focuses on the effects of sin, which brings death unto man (Rom 5:12-8:39), and which could only be undone through the gracious gift of life by God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Scott 1993: 555). Death is seen as God's punishment and judgment on this world for its sinful nature (Rom 1:32; 6:16, 21, 23; [Bultmann 1965: 15]). Paul also sometimes personifies Death as the King that reigns over this world, receiving his reigning power from *ἀμαρτία* (Rom 5:12-14, 17; [Schottroff 1981: 264]).

Secondly there is an entirely new outlook on death, viewed from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through his death Christ has overcome the powers of sin. Sin was nailed onto the cross together with Christ (Col 2:14). Then through his resurrection He overcame the reigning powers of Death and the realm of Death [θάδης]. Death has no power over the people of God (1 Cor 15:54-55; Heb 2:14; 2 Tim 1:10).<sup>71</sup> He is the "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14:9). The presumption is that the earthly death is not the end of everything. Whoever believes in Christ has a life in eternity to look forward to, a life where death will have no part to play, even if he or she experiences physical death. A believer is seemingly clothed in this life immediately after death (2 Cor 5:2-3). For them that do not believe, death is the deciding moment, but not the end. The eschatological judgment

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<sup>71</sup> In 75 places in the New Testament νεκρός is the object to either ἐγείρω or ἀνάστασις, showing that through Christ death is not the end any more, but is only a thoroughfare from one life [the earthly] to another [the heavenly life or eternal life] (Gulley 1992: 110-111-II).

still lies ahead, to which they will be resurrected for a short moment (Heb 9:27; cf. Rev 6:12-23; [Bultmann 1965: 17]).

Death could be experienced while still alive in the body (Rom 7:24). Eternal life [or eternal death] is intimately connected to a person's relationship with Christ (cf. John 3:3-8, 36). Just as one "receives" eternal life at salvation [John 3:36 – "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" GNB], one "has got" eternal death whilst you are not saved (Bultmann 1965: 17). Only those who stay in a close relationship with Christ can receive eternal life. It comes to them that "accept the true identity of Jesus" (Van der Watt 2002: 6), resulting in that person's life being totally transformed in accordance to Jesus' example (Rom 12:1-2). Death as the opposite of life means to be alienated from God. Sin alienates man from that what God has in store for him. It disturbs the relationship with God, and specifically with Christ, who is the Mediator of life (Van der Watt 2000: 211).

The difference between eternal death and physical death lies in the fact that a person who is spiritually dead can still hear. He or she can therefore be held accountable for the choices they make in life, or for the lack of choices they made for Jesus (Van der Watt 2000: 214).

In his discourse on resurrection (i.e. 1 Cor 15) Paul theologised on the position of the believer with regard to life and death. Death personified is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26) and this will happen at the last consummation when death will be swallowed up in the final victory of Christ (1 Cor 15:55-57; [Scott 1993: 554]). The believers will then be resurrected in the body into a new life with Christ. It is interesting to note that Paul seemingly contradicts himself on the timing of this resurrection. Whilst in 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 he talks about resurrection "when the trumpet sounds" [i.e. on the Day of the Lord], in Philippians 1:23 he is looking forward to his own death [i.e. physical death] so that he could be with Christ (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Cor 5:1-10).

### *3.2. The realm of the dead*

In the New Testament ᾅδης is generally used to denote the netherworld, the intermediate abode of the dead. The word ᾅδης is mentioned ten times in the New



Testament. Only four of these appear in the Synoptic Gospels (Lunde 1992: 310). It is used to translate the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל in the LXX, with the same frame of reference (Jeremias 1965: 146). It is a place to which one goes down and stands in contrast to the highest heavens (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15), and is therefore sometimes also referred to as the “bottomless pit” (ἄβυσσος - cf. Luke 8:31; Rom 10:7). In 1 Peter 3:19-20 it is even associated with a jail [ἐν φυλακῇ]. Sheol is also a place of darkness (cf. 1 En 103:7; [Lunde 1992: 310]). In the New Testament ᾗδης is only an interim place that takes up all the souls after death and then delivers them again at the Day of Judgment (cf. Rev 20:13-14; [Jeremias 1965: 148]). There is not finality to being in ᾗδης, in contrast to the Old Testament perceptions thereof [cf. Chapter 2].

In the New Testament ᾗδης is distinguished from the lake of fire, which constitutes the hell or the place one goes to after the final judgment (cf. Rev 20:15), and which is sometimes referred to as γέεννα in the Greek, a term that occurs eleven times in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt 5:22; 10:28; 23:15; [Lunde 1992: 310]). γέεννα replaces ᾗδης after the resurrection or judgment (cf. Rev 20:10; 19:20; Jeremias 1965: 148). This distinction is not explicit in the teachings of Jesus. He seemingly breaks with the traditional [Judaic and apocalyptic – cf. Chapter 3] view by only distinguishing between heaven as the destination for the righteous and hell as the place of punishment for the unrighteous [cf. again the parable of Lazarus]. There is, according to Jesus, no interim place where people await their trial and punishment or reward (Lunde 1992: 311)<sup>72</sup>.

The realm of the dead cannot get hold of the righteous people (Merrill 1997: 888). Although the righteous will still die, they won't end up in ᾗδης at all (Lewis 1992: 104-II - 105-II; Jeremias 1965: 148-149). The intrinsic implication of the parable of Lazarus and the dialogue with the thief on the cross is that the righteous will be united with Christ immediately after death in a new resurrection (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43 [Lunde 1992: 308]; cf. Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8)<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. “the resurrection of Jesus as a life-giving occurrence” [2.1.3 above] on Jesus' visit to the realm of the dead.

<sup>73</sup> In the Persian and Hellenistic world there was a movement towards the identification of two realms for the dead: a realm where the unrighteous will suffer punishment and torment, and a realm for the righteous people, which would be a place of happiness and bliss (Lewis 1992: 104-II; Jeremias 1965: 148). It is not clear if these realms are permanent destinations or just interim “waiting rooms” [cf.

#### 4. Conclusion: life vs. death in the New Testament

- i) Life [and death] in the New Testament still indicates physical life and death. Physical life could either be denoted with the term ζωή (cf. Luke 16:25) or with ψυχή (cf. Acts 27:10).
- ii) The ζωή αἰώνιος becomes an important concept in the New Testament [in contrast to its total absence from the Old Testament]. Life in this sense is interpreted eschatological. The New Testament writers conceived this life to be available already in the present. Who believes in Christ, already partakes in the new aeon. This is evident from the Gospels and from Paul.
- iii) But there is still an unrealised eschatology prevalent, as the fullness of this life will only be experienced in the future. There is thus an eschatological tension between the eternal life [or death] received in the present and the final consummation thereof at the *Parousia*. This future eschatology comes through in some of Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess 4:16-18; [Gulley 1992: 111-II]).
- iv) This new life [the new aeon] was brought to this world by Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Christ now become the deciding factors for participation in the eschatological life (Hagner 1998: 99). Jesus' own life, his miracles and his teaching, are all signs of the arrival of this new aeon.
- v) Obtaining this new life [the ζωή αἰώνιος] has ethical implications. The believer's life must be reframed in the present to come into line with the example set by Jesus (cf. Matt 16:24-28).
- vi) The belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian faith. It is his resurrection that has inaugurated the new life, the new aeon of God (1 Cor 15; [Lorenzen 1995: 115]). John's emphasis on the resurrection is based on the fact that Jesus is the Life and the Resurrection (John 11:25).
- vii) Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, death's powers over man have been broken. Jesus is now the "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14:9). Whoever believes in Christ, has this life (John 3:36). Death has no power over them (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55). This does not eliminate

physical death, but ensures that physical death is not the end anymore (Gulley 1992: 110-111·II).

- viii) ᾠδης is not mentioned often in the New Testament. In the New Testament it is distinguished from hell [γέεννα]. It is only an interim place where people go to after death, awaiting the Day of Judgment (Jeremias 1965: 148; Lunde 1992: 310). Jesus doesn't always make that distinction. He sometimes talks about ᾠδης as the place where the unrighteous go immediately after death, in a sense equating ᾠδης and γέεννα (cf. Luke 16:19-31), which shows a development from the view of the Old Testament.

It is important to note the developments and differences in view between the Old Testament and the New Testament, as John also viewed things from a Christological point of view. This change in interpretation is important for our understanding of Revelation as a book of the New Testament. However, we must emphasise again that this is still only part of the broad ecological framework being set up. Even though John was a New Testament writer, he was free to interpret things differently from other New Testament writers. The use of the concept of ζωή in the Gospel of John [as opposed to that of the Synoptic Gospel writers] is a good example of the freedom to reinterpret texts. This is even more evident in a unique book such as Revelation.