

## **II    *Pre-Christian Concepts***

An adequate consideration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ necessitates an understanding of its antecedents. Both in pagan lore and in Jewish Scripture the conflict of life and death has been a dominant theme. Even in prehistoric times the burial of tools and ornaments with the dead indicated hope of continued existence. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the clay tablets of Phoenicia and of Babylon, and the legends of the Greeks reflect the yearning for immortality expressed more poignantly in David's agonized cry over the death of his son: "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (II Sam. 12:23).

### **The Pagan Myths**

The ancients dreaded death, for it terminated joyous human activities and ushered its victim into the gloomy and mysterious realms of the underworld. Homer's description of the slaying of Hector illustrates their despair: ". . . the shadow of death came down upon him, and his soul flew forth of his limbs, and was gone to the house of Hades, wailing her fate, leaving her vigor and youth."<sup>1</sup>

Occasional gleams of hope appear in Greek mythology. One of the most dramatic tales concerns Alcestis, wife of King Admetus of Thessaly. He was doomed to death for offending the gods but was granted a reprieve by the intercession of Apollo, provided that he find someone to die in his place. Alcestis volunteered to be his substitute, and gladly surrendered herself to the wrath of the gods. Moved by pity, Hercules descended to Hades and rescued her.

A similar legend relates the story of Orpheus, the master of the lyre, whose wife Eurydice was poisoned by a snake bite. Disconsolate over her loss, Orpheus pursued her to Hades. There his music so charmed Pluto, the god of the nether world, that he agreed to release Eurydice on condition that Orpheus not look backward until they reached the surface of the earth. Approaching the gates of Hades, Orpheus stole a backward glance to assure himself that Eurydice was still following. Stretching out her arms to him in a piteous farewell, she vanished. Death remained the master of its prey.

Pluto himself, according to another myth, stole Persephone, the daughter of the goddess Demeter, and carried her to the underworld to be his queen. Because of her mother's protests, the gods intervened, and Pluto allowed her to return to earth eight months of the year on condition that she remain with him the other four months. The legend is a personification of the cycle of vegetation, which dies in the fall and reappears four months later in the spring.

Closely related to these myths were the mystery religions. One of the most popular was the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris. Osiris was the son of Seb, the earth god, and Nut, the sky goddess; Isis was his sister and consort. Under his tutelage men learned how to raise grain and grapes and emerged from a state of savagery into an agricultural civilization. His brother Set, the god of the underworld, conspired against him. Capturing Osiris by a trick, Set sealed him into a coffin which he cast into the Nile. The coffin floated down the river and was finally stranded on the shores of Phoenicia. Isis traced the body, which she carried back to Egypt; but Set, seizing it again, dismembered it and flung the severed parts into the Nile. Patiently Isis

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<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, XVII.

regathered the pieces and resuscitated the body, after which Osiris became lord of the underworld.

These grotesque tales were interpreted by analogy to mean that life can emerge unscathed from death, and the cults founded upon them promised to their worshipers a share in the immortality of the god. No elaborate theology was connected with the dramatic emotional re-enactments of the god's experience in which the initiate participated. The appeal of the cultic rites was enhanced by torchlight processions, lustrations, special vestments, sacrifices, vigils, and prayers. The accompanying element of secrecy intrigued curiosity and created the feeling of brotherhood between those who were initiated into the mysteries, and of superiority over those who were not.

Undoubtedly the legends revealed a vague longing for life beyond death, but they provided no historic basis for certainty, nor could their principal actors impart life to mortal suppliants. Wallis Budge, in commenting upon the Osiris legend, reinforces this viewpoint: ". . . the soul and the spirit of the righteous passed from the body and lived with the beatified [blessed] and the gods in heaven; but the physical body did not rise again, and it was believed never to leave the tomb. There were ignorant people in Egypt who, no doubt, believed in the resurrection of the corruptible body . . . but the Egyptians who followed the teaching of his sacred writings knew that such beliefs were not consistent with the views of their priests and of educated people in general."<sup>2</sup>

Although the cults long preceded the rise of Christianity, they cannot be considered a source for Christian doctrine. The conflicts and caprices of the gods reflect the imagination of a primitive people; the Christian message originates from the life of a historic person. There is no record of a hero like Osiris who was dismembered and subsequently restored by supernatural intervention, but the resurrection of Christ can be located definitely in space and time. Participation in the mysteries imposed no ethical obligation upon the worshiper, but Paul said, "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above . . ." (Col. 3:1). The differences between the current myths and the teaching of the New Testament were greater than any resemblances and preclude the idea that Christian theology evolved from a facile syncretism of pagan concepts and Jewish hopes. The popular nonphilosophical religion of the man in the street had little expectation of immortality and no definite idea of physical restoration.

Greek philosophy entertained no conception of a resurrection of the body. Socrates, whose argument for immortality has been preserved in the *Phaedo* of Plato, discussed at length the basis for believing in the survival of the human spirit. He argued that the soul, which gives life to the body, cannot die, else it would lose its inherent quality of life, and if it cannot die, it must be immortal.<sup>3</sup> The body is, therefore, not the true man, for it is subject to decay and death. Since the continuance of the soul demonstrates immortality, the resuscitation of the body would be unnecessary. The later Platonic philosophy developed the idea that the body was essentially a prison from which the soul longed to escape, in order to attain freedom from evil and from the restrictions of physical limitations. A resumption of physical existence would therefore be undesirable, since it would be only a return to earthbound slavery.

Neither the philosophy of Stoicism nor that of Epicureanism foreshadowed physical resurrection. Stoicism, being pantheistic, considered the individual a fragment of the World-Soul. His identity

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<sup>2</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, Ltd., 1900), p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Phaedo*, 80, 81, 106.

persisted only until death, or possibly to the end of time. At death or at the final conflagration he would be reabsorbed into the World-Soul. Death brought a welcome end to suffering, labor, and perplexity, which for the Stoic was an accepted means of withdrawing from the problems of life. "When the farce is ended, ring down the curtain" was his dictum.

Epicureanism, being materialistic, taught that all existence consisted of atoms which might temporarily be organized in a certain form but which would change their form later to become a different substance. If the structure of the body were dissolved by death, the individual would cease to exist. The disintegration of the flesh and the absorption of its elements into other chemical combinations or organisms would therefore be an insurmountable bar to believing in a resurrection. It is small wonder that when Paul spoke at Athens of the resurrection of the dead, the Stoics and Epicureans openly ridiculed him.

These concepts of the pagan world illustrate two trends, contradictory in a sense, and yet not inconsistent. Everywhere men were groping for some reality that would enable them to face death with equanimity. Whether they attached themselves to the emotional rituals of the cults or accepted the calmer reasoning of the philosophers, they were dissatisfied with the nebulous legends of their fathers and with the despairing cries of the poets, who regarded death as the end of everything good and pleasant. For this reason, they were more favorably disposed to accept the gospel of the resurrection, though they could not have originated it. At the same time, they had no tangible evidence of life beyond the grave and, by their own hopelessness and inability to find logical reasons for immortality, they were prejudiced against the Christian viewpoint.

Paganism was not the matrix of this doctrine, nor is there in its legends any analogous concept. The teaching of the New Testament came to the Graeco-Roman world with a message which had not previously been proclaimed in the temples of the gods or in the halls of the philosophers. What was its origin?

### **The Hebrew Scriptures and Apocrypha**

The natural source would be the Jewish Scriptures, since they were the acknowledged basis for early Christian preaching. In them the apostles had found warrant for proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah (Acts 17:1-3) and had used their prophecies specifically to undergird the declaration that He must rise from the dead. If there was a continuity of revelation between the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament, one might logically expect to find foreshadowings of this truth in the sacred writings of the previous age.

The first hint of the concept of future life is found in the words of Jacob, speaking of Joseph, whom he thought to be dead: "I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning" (Gen. 37:35). Jacob cherished no hope of Joseph's returning to him, nor did he anticipate his son's resurrection since he understood the disembodied state to be final. The Pentateuchal law contains no clear reference to life beyond the grave either in the Decalogue or in the religious and civil ordinances that accompany it. There are occasional allusions to the unseen world of Sheol, but it is comparatively unimportant to the theology of Israel prior to the Exile.

Two miracles of restoration to life were performed by Elijah and Elisha. The similarity of the cases is obvious: one concerned the son of the widow with whom Elijah had stayed during the years of famine (I Kings 17:17-24); the other, the son of the Shunammite woman who had often been Elisha's hostess (II Kings 4:8-37); both involved young boys and only sons; in both instances

the prophet was summoned by the mother; the resuscitation of each was accomplished by the prophet's direct intervention. The occurrences indicate the possibility of a return from death, though they involved no change of physical nature or powers. They were isolated miracles rather than precedents for reasoning. Nevertheless they indicate that bodily restoration took place and was acknowledged under the Old Testament dispensation, so that the miraculous renewal of life cannot be excluded from consideration.

In the books of poetry and prophecy there are a few veiled references. The second Psalm acknowledges the divine sonship of the Messiah. The sixteenth Psalm declared a personal confidence that the writer's soul would not be abandoned to the world of the dead (Sheol) nor his body to decay. Both of these were later applied to the Messianic status of Christ by the writers of the New Testament (Acts 4:25,26; 2:25-31). The prophecies of Hosea (6:2), Isaiah (26:19,20), and Ezekiel (37) are more general in scope and do not provide an adequate criterion for estimating the prevalence of this concept.

The prophecy of Daniel, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2), is, according to Schurer, the first plain expression of resurrection in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Coming at the beginning of the Exile, it marked a new trend of Jewish thought.

The captives of Israel residing in Babylon had been severed from their temple. Because their ritual had been interrupted and their national life disorganized, the devout followers of Jehovah were thrust back to a stronger individual faith. Community life centered in the family and synagogue rather than around a ritual and a temple. The question of individual immortality, stimulated possibly by the competition of other religions, may have evoked the divine assurance transmitted through the prophet.

Occasional references in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the inter-testamental period enable one to follow the progress of Jewish thought between the Testaments. One of the Maccabean martyrs said to his tormentors, "It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God to be raised up again by him: as for thee, thou shalt have no resurrection to life."

The mother of this martyr, who had witnessed his death, commented, "Doubtless the Creator of the world, who formed the generation of man, and found out the beginning of all things, will also of his own mercy give you breath and life again, as ye now regard not your own selves for his laws' sake" (II Macc. 7:13,14,23).

The same hope is expressed elsewhere: ". . . he was mindful of the resurrection, for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead" (II Macc. 13:43,44).

The quotations reflect a firm belief in the bodily resurrection of the individual, yet they do not predicate it specially of the Messiah. Other apocryphal works of the same era present a different viewpoint. *The Wisdom of Solomon*, written in the first century before Christ,<sup>5</sup> suggested that the body is only a temporary dwelling place for the soul, which is pre-existent (viii, 20) and which survives the death of the body (xv, 8). The *Book of Jubilees*, written probably one century

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4 Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, Division II, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 138.

5 *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 233,234.

previously, presupposed a continued existence of the soul apart from any resurrection (II, 24).<sup>6</sup> This accorded with the Greek view of the immortality of the soul, rather than with the late Jewish concept.

The writer of IV Maccabees agreed with the Hellenistic concept of an eternal and blessed life of pious souls in another world rather than in a corporeal resurrection (IV Macc. 13:16; 15:2; 17:5, 18).

Immortality is denied by the author of Ecclesiasticus, who declared that ". . . all things cannot be in man, because the son of man is not immortal" (17:31). Later, however, the same writer said, "The knowledge of the commandments of the Lord is the doctrine of life; and they that do things that please him shall receive the fruit of the tree of immortality" (19:19).

In the post-exilic period, following the Restoration, Hebrew thought concerning eschatology was evidently in flux. Realizing that national existence was precarious and that the older solidarity of worship and of destiny was dissolving, the people became increasingly interested in personal salvation. The confusion of eschatological teaching is well illustrated by the disagreement between the Sadducees, or priestly party, who denied a bodily resurrection, and the Pharisees, the popular orthodox party, who defended it (Acts 23:8). The doctrine had not been clearly defined or finally settled by the rabbis and remained indefinite in the minds of the laity.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the rather scanty evidence. First, there was sufficient teaching concerning a bodily resurrection to make the Christian doctrine plausible to Jewish hearers. There is no evidence that the rank and file of the populace in Jerusalem who first listened to the apostolic declaration rejected it on the grounds of inherent improbability or novelty. Second, the idea was not so essential a part of Jewish theology that it would be read into the phenomena of the life of Jesus or arbitrarily superimposed upon His teachings. His predictions of rising from the dead and His interpretation of the Old Testament were original with Him; they were not the echoes of current theology that He had absorbed and repeated unthinkingly.

Furthermore, the Old Testament nowhere specifically attributed bodily resurrection to the Messiah. The latent predictions in typology and prophecy were not sufficiently self-evident to enable Jewish theologians to create the doctrine. They were illuminated by the interpretations of Jesus, who correlated the witness of the Scriptures concerning Himself, explaining for His disciples what they had never discerned through their own reading. The resurrection of the body is, therefore, a concept fully developed only after the manifestation of Christ, who was Himself the pattern, and the exponent of its meaning.

An additional word must be said concerning the prophetic foreshadowings of the event. When they are expressed in language that implies a return from death, the primary application concerns the nation, not individuals. Hosea used the figure to prophesy revival after national repentance: "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him" (Hos. 6:1-2). This enigmatic prediction should be interpreted in the light of his further utterance, "When Ephraim spoke . . . he exalted himself in Israel: but when he offended in Baal, he died" (13:1). "Death" was symbolic of Israel's alienation from God, the source of all spiritual life; the return to God would be a restoration to life

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

comparable to a national resurrection.

Isaiah expressed the same principle in his prophecy: "Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead" (26:19). The context dealt with the sorrows and judgments of Judah, and with promise of restoration. The revivification of the nation was the model for the idea of resurrection.

Ezekiel's well-known description of the valley of dry bones provides another example (Ezek. 37). The prophet envisioned a valley full of bones, stripped of flesh and bleached in the sun. A more hopeless prospect for reanimation could scarcely be imagined. Nevertheless, God commanded him to prophesy that the bones should be revived, and as he did so, they were reclothed with flesh, "and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (37:10). The primary meaning of the vision was national restoration, not individual return from physical death. "Thus says the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves, O my people" (37:12-13).

The national application, however, must be viewed also from the perspective of God's total purpose for Israel. The nation was constituted expressly to provide a vehicle of revelation to the world at large, and to become the cradle for the Messiah. In Him the character and destiny of Israel would find its complete expression and fulfillment. The nation's common sufferings, joys, and triumphs would be epitomized in His experience, making its history one continuous prophecy of His significance for mankind.

The apparent ambiguity in the Old Testament prophecies was resolved by the interpretation supplied through the New Testament. If the Gospels afford a fair criterion of Jesus' teaching concerning Himself and the disciples' understanding of it, they certify that He was the key to the meaning of prophecy. Matthew repeatedly employed the phrase "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet" to define the prophetic precedent of an event in Jesus' life. Some of these explanations seem irrelevant until one realizes that they do not demand correspondence of event to event so much as event to principle. A pertinent illustration is found in Hosea 11:1, "I . . . called my son out of Egypt." Matthew asserts that the descent of Mary and Joseph into Egypt with the infant Jesus and their later settlement at Nazareth fulfilled the prophecy (Matt. 2:13-15). A careful examination of the context in Hosea reveals no connection with an individual but shows the text to be a figurative reminiscence of the Exodus. The rise of the nation from obscurity, God's acknowledgment of its sonship, its testing in the wilderness, its march to conquest, and its testimony to His goodness and power were paralleled in the life of Jesus. Insofar as His career recapitulates that of the nation, the Matthean interpretation is valid. In this way the latent prophecies can be explained, and the New Testament allusions become meaningful.

### **Interpretation of Old Testament Predictions**

When Jesus first informed the disciples that He would rise from the dead, they did not comprehend His meaning, but afterwards they recalled His words and "believed the scripture . . ." (John 2:22). Though John, who recorded the incident, did not identify any single Old Testament source, he implied that the disciples should have understood Jesus' words

immediately from their knowledge of the sacred canon. The New Testament presupposes that the Law and the Prophets contained predictions, obscure or unrecognized at first, but clarified later by the manifestation of Christ.

Jesus alluded to scriptural antecedents on several occasions. The first instance appears in Mark. "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priest, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (8:31). The verb translated "rise again" indicated that the resurrection was a necessary element of the pattern which the coming Messiah should follow.

Another episode confirms this conclusion. Following the Transfiguration, Jesus cautioned His disciples not to announce the event until He should have risen from the dead (Mark 9:9). The disciples debated the meaning of His words, then inquired why the scribes declared that Elijah's coming must precede the Messiah. Jesus replied that both Elijah and the Messiah would come, "as it is written" of them (Mark 9:12,13; Mal. 4:5).

Jesus repeated the prediction at the commencement of the last journey to Jerusalem. Mark (10:32-34) does not mention His allusion to the Scriptures, but the Lukan parallel says, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said" (Luke 18:31-34). By the inclusion of the phrase, "the things that are written," Jesus connected the events of His Passion with the Old Testament. Luke's threefold comment shows that the disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus' words until after the event had transpired.

The relation of the resurrection to the Old Testament was most clearly established through Jesus' conversation with two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behoved it not the Christ [Messiah] to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

At the later appearance to the disciples in the upper room, Jesus mentioned "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24:44), reiterating the pronouncement that the Messiah must "rise again from the dead the third day" (24:46). The Lord indicated that the teaching was not confined to one period or to one stratum of revelation. The validity of Messianic prophecy rests on the authority of Jesus Himself.

Jesus' exposition of Scripture laid the foundation for apostolic teaching. Although the Gospels seldom identify His choice of texts, the apostolic sermons in Acts and occasional references in the Epistles afford a few clues. Their treatment of the Old Testament undoubtedly reflects His comments on the sources upon which He usually founded His interpretation of Messianic prophecy. A few examples will illustrate the important types or predictions of the resurrection that are recognized in the New Testament.

### **The Protevangelium**

The germ of predictive prophecy from which subsequent revelation developed is the word that

God spoke to the tempter on the occasion of man's initial sin: ". . . I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The imagery depicts a gardener encountering a venomous snake, which he destroys by crushing its head, but not before the snake has sunk its fangs into his heel. The serpent is killed; the gardener achieves his victory at the cost of enduring the agony of the poison in his own body. In similar fashion "the seed of the woman" will triumph over death by voluntarily submitting to it, and will bring redemption and freedom to the race.

The theme of a "seed" embodying the Messianic promise persists throughout the Old Testament. The genealogy of Genesis 5 may be called "the highway of the seed" because it records the generations through which God preserved the hope of deliverance. To Abraham God promised descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens, who should retain permanent possession of the land (Gen. 15:1-5, 18). A later development was the covenant with David, which guaranteed the perpetuation of royal authority in "the seed of David" (II Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:3,4).

The metaphor of the "seed" by which the Old Testament described the nation of Israel or the posterity of David was applied to Christ by Paul. He interpreted "the seed of Abraham," a collective term, to mean the individual Christ (Gal. 3:16), in whom the Messianic purpose has been consummated. Before the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia he equated the "sure blessings of David," Isaiah's phrase for the Davidic covenant (Isa. 55:3), with the resurrection of Jesus: "And as concerning that he raised him [Jesus] up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he has spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David" (Acts 13:34). The enduring throne promised to David's Messianic Son presupposed superiority over the vicissitudes of fortune, including death.

### **The Sacrifice of Isaac**

Recounting the heroic acts of faith, the writer of Hebrews connected the sacrifice of Isaac with the idea of resurrection. "By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he who had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall your seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back" (Heb. 11:17-19).

A comparison with the original account in Genesis (22:1-19) reveals several surprising features. The promises which God had given to Abraham centered in Isaac and would normally find their fulfillment through his life. If Abraham's descendants were to be multiplied as the stars of heaven (15:5), Isaac would have to survive long enough to marry and to have children, for his death would effectually close the succession on which the perpetuation of the seed depended. The command seemed to be a contradiction, for how could God consistently make a promise and then remove all possibility of fulfillment? Abraham was forced into the dilemma of disobeying God's word to retain the fulfillment of the promise, or else of relinquishing faith in His truthfulness. The only solution for the impasse would be obedience, based on the belief that God would restore Isaac from the dead.

Another interesting aspect of this account is that Abraham seemed to have possessed the requisite faith. Accompanied by two servants to the mountain of Moriah, where the sacrifice had been appointed, Abraham and Isaac left them behind to make the slow ascent. Parting from them, Abraham said, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you" (22:5). These words could be interpreted as a subterfuge to



conceal Isaac's prospective fate from the servants, but a fuller consideration of the context indicates otherwise. Abraham was confident that Isaac would return with him, because he believed that even if he died, God would restore him. His perfect confidence in the character and promises of God despite the inexplicable paradox of His command is expressed in his words to Isaac, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering . . ." (22:8).

Through this experience God was endeavoring to disclose to Abraham in pictorial form the meaning of the coming incarnation and atonement. The whole episode reveals a father who loves his only son; a son who is of one mind with the father; a willingness to surrender life itself that the father's purpose may be accomplished; the potential completion of the entire act of sacrifice; and the restoration of the son to life that he may carry out the full measure of the father's plan. Abraham on Mount Moriah participated in a dramatic projection of Calvary and the resurrection. Perhaps Jesus was alluding to this episode when He said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day . . . and was glad" (John 8:56).

### **The Revelation to Moses**

When God called Moses from tending the sheep of Jethro in the wilderness, He revealed Himself by saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6). Jesus repeated the declaration in His debate with the Sadducees (Mark 12:18-27), who attempted to prove by a question based on the levirate law of marriage (Deut. 25:5-10) that a resurrection would be absurd. Citing the hypothetical case of a woman who had been married successively to seven brothers in order to preserve children in the family line, they asked whose wife she would be in the age to come. By inference they concluded that there could be no resurrection; otherwise the law of God would have created a situation essentially immoral. Jesus informed them that the future life would not include marriage, then quoted the text from Exodus to clinch His argument. If God is the God of the living, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must still be alive, and life after death is a reality.

Jesus interpreted the passage by the same method of inference that His opponents had used, and to their way of thinking His procedure was as legitimate as theirs. The important aspect is not the hermeneutic method by which He reached His conclusion, but the fact that He taught the possibility of resurrection on the basis of Old Testament revelation. His authority makes the conclusion valid.

### **The Exodus**

Another prophecy may be found in the national experience of Israel. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the mount of Transfiguration, they spoke of His "exodus" which He should accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). The term refers to His death, as a parallel in II Peter 1:15 indicates. It may, however, apply also to His Passion as a whole, in which case it would include the empty tomb and the ascension.

The Exodus of Israel was the redemption and resurrection of a nation (Exod. 12:1-41). Jacob and his sons had migrated into Egypt in time of famine. They settled in the land of Goshen, where their descendants remained until a king arose who enslaved them, making their lives miserable by repressive legislation and by forced labor. Finally God sent Moses, who united the people and instituted the Passover. In this feast the blood of a sacrificial lamb was sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts of each Israelite house. As the angel of death passed through the land of Egypt on

his grim errand, the Israelites who had complied with the Passover regulations were spared, and marched out of Egypt to begin a new life. From the slavery of oppression and from the condemnation of death they crossed the Red Sea into a new liberty.

For Jesus the resurrection was an exodus from bondage. Having shared with mankind the oppressive limitations imposed by the consequences of sin, He passed through the waters of death and emerged triumphant. As the Israelites under Moses' leadership gained their freedom from Egypt's tyranny, so believers in Christ participate in Christ's triumph. John of Damascus caught this imagery in his hymn:

Come, ye faithful, raise the strain  
Of triumphant gladness;  
God has brought His Israel  
Into joy from sadness.  
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke  
Israel's sons and daughters;  
Led them with unmoistened foot  
Through the Red Sea waters.

### **The Feast of the Firstfruits**

The feasts of the Old Testament celebrated important events in the life of Israel. They were intended to remind the people of God's dealing as He worked out the process of their national redemption. The Passover recalled the deliverance from bondage and death in Egypt. Fifty days after the Passover came the Feast of the Wave-loaves, later known as Pentecost, when the bread from the new grain harvest was presented to God. The Feast of the Firstfruits (Lev. 23:10,11) intervened between these two, on the first day after the Passover sabbath and three days after the sacrifice of the lamb, when a small sheaf of the first grain of the season was gathered and dedicated to God as a sample and pledge of the more abundant future harvest.

The Passover was a type of Christ, as Paul later affirmed, "For our passover also has been sacrificed, even Christ" (I Cor. 5:7). Similarly the Feast of the Firstfruits prefigures His resurrection, because He is called "the firstfruits of them that are asleep" (I Cor. 15:20). The life of the seed springing from the dark cold earth demonstrates a vitality that death cannot repress. The parallelism seems inescapable.

### **The Psalms**

Prophecies of Christ in the Psalms were mentioned by nearly all the writers of the New Testament. Paul, preaching in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, quoted the second Psalm, "And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, that God has fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:32-33).

Psalm 2 celebrates the elevation of a king to the throne of Israel, for he is seated upon the "holy hill" of Zion. The tributary kings of the Gentiles are on the verge of revolt, but God declares him to be His anointed and invests him with sovereignty over the nations. The Messianic character of this Psalm is established by Jesus' quotation in Matthew 22:41-45 to show that David called the Messiah "Lord."

The hinge of Paul's argument is the word "begotten," which he equated with the resurrection. One might naturally assume that it would refer to the birth of the Messiah, or that it would be a hint of the "eternal generation" of the Son who sprang from the being of the Father before all eternity. A careful examination of the Psalm will show, however, that the origin of the Son is not under discussion. "This day have I begotten thee" relates to the enthronement, not to birth. The Pauline interpretation is in keeping with the main thought, for the resurrection of Christ was God's seal of approval upon His ministry and was the beginning of His exaltation after the humiliation of Calvary. Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). "Begotten" implies the possession of the very life of God, which is not subject to death.

The sixteenth Psalm was applied to the resurrection by both Peter (Acts 2:25-31) and Paul (13:35-37). Written in a time of comparative prosperity, it records David's aspirations for the future.

I have set Jehovah always before me:  
Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.  
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices:  
My flesh also shall dwell in safety.  
For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol;  
Neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.  
Thou wilt show me the path of life:  
In thy presence is fulness of joy;  
In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Peter declared this Psalm to be a prediction of the Messiah because it could not apply strictly to David, whose tomb was a landmark in Jerusalem in the first century, and who had not been resurrected. His soul was still in Sheol, the abode of the spirits of the dead, and his flesh had gone down to corruption, literally, *the pit*, a term usually applied to the physical aspect of burial and dissolution. The "holy one" must therefore be David's heir and successor, the Messiah. The Psalm expresses personal faith, and the expectation of exaltation after death to the right hand of God.

A similar expression occurs in the forty-ninth Psalm.

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:  
For he will receive me (Ps. 49:15).

Psalm 49 is not usually considered Messianic and may state only the general hope of the writer for deliverance from death. It does, however, define more exactly the Old Testament concept of the resurrection by contrasting the impersonal power of Sheol, the abode of the dead, with the personal redemption which God effects in a believer by "receiving" him. The Psalmist anticipates Jesus' promise: "I . . . will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

Peter also quoted from Psalm 118, one of the Songs of Ascent, customarily sung by pilgrims who went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Gospels, by associating the Psalm with the triumphal entry (Luke 19:38; Ps. 118:26), assert its prophetic connection with Christ. Peter used

it to confirm the truth of the resurrection (Acts 4:10,11).

The stone which the builders rejected  
Is become the head of the corner (Ps. 118:22).

The imagery is borrowed from the construction of a building, perhaps from the erection of the Temple. The "cornerstone" may not have meant the inscribed block that modern buildings place at the corner of the foundation, but rather the keystone of the highest arch or the capstone of the dome. It would necessarily have an odd shape, which would be impossible to fit into any part of the structure except the one place for which it was designed. Christ was not accepted by the Jewish people because they could not fit Him into their theological system or into their political scheme. They rejected and crucified Him, but His resurrection made Him the keystone of their national destiny.

### **The Prophets**

In the writings of the prophets there are comparatively few significant references to life after death. One of the earliest and most striking is found in Hosea. "Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him" (Hos. 6:1-2). The prediction does not concern a personal experience, but national revival after chastening. Nevertheless, Matthew's comment on Hosea 11:1, ". . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my son" (Matt. 2:15), applies the prophet's words to Messiah. If Hosea equates the nation with the Messiah, then perhaps Hosea 6:1-2 is also an allusion to His death and resurrection. The relation, however, is remote, for the prophet used the concept of resurrection figuratively to describe restoration after repentance.

The clearest prophetic source for redemption is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. "He was cut off out of the land of the living . . . And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death . . . when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. . . . Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors . . ." (Isa. 53:8, 9, 10b, 12). The prophet, speaking of the Servant, presents contrasting pictures of suffering and triumph. The two cannot be simultaneous; one must follow the other. In the given sequence the triumph follows the suffering, thereby implying a resurrection.

Certain specific statements support this inference. "He shall see his seed" assumes that the dead person will live to see his descendants or successors. A parallel in the New Testament speaks of "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). "He shall prolong his days" implies that life will not be terminated by the sacrifice. "The pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand" declares that the resurrected Messiah will complete His divine commission.

The identity of the mysterious Servant is established by apostolic interpretation. To the Ethiopian eunuch, bewildered by Isaiah's veiled language, the evangelist Philip explained that the prophet was speaking of Jesus (Acts 8:28, 32-35). If He is the suffering Servant, He is also the Victor who will return from death to share His triumph with them.

The witness of the Old Testament, though shadowy and incomplete, presages a greater revelation in the person of the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of its types and the realization of its promises.

### **The Predictions of Jesus**

Some of Jesus' comments have already been discussed in connection with the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He taught that His Messianic career had been planned in the mind of God from eternity and that He was following the divine pattern as it had been revealed in the Scriptures. He was encouraged and directed at crucial intervals by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through whom He had been equipped for this task (Luke 4:18, quoting Isa. 61:1,2). The resurrection was an essential part of His life, and as Jesus' ministry progressed He spoke with increasing definiteness concerning it.

The initial prediction was connected with the cleansing of the Temple, which John assigned to the first visit to Jerusalem. Jesus began His Messianic mission by sternly expelling the merchants who had made His Father's house into a bazaar. The priests naturally asked by what right He should take command of the Temple courts, of which they were the official custodians. What sign could He produce to substantiate His authority? He answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

Because Jesus did not explain the cryptic utterance, His enemies gave it an obvious but wrong interpretation. They assumed that He was speaking of the unfinished stone and wood building which Herod had been erecting for the last forty-six years. John, the author and the disciple closest to Jesus, adds the footnote that He was speaking of the temple of His body (2:21). The multitude did not understand Jesus' remark, nor did the disciples until they recalled it later. He indicated that He was already anticipating the Passion and was looking forward to the culminating "sign" of His career.

Although the Synoptics do not connect the resurrection with the cleansing of the Temple, they mention it in another setting. Shortly after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, when Jesus' ministry was approaching a crisis, the Pharisees challenged Him for a sign. He replied, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40). In this declaration Jesus maintained the same emphasis of a "sign" by comparing Himself with Jonah. On his mission to Nineveh the prophet was swallowed by the sea-monster, and three days later was disgorged safely on dry land. His miraculous preservation accredited him with the Ninevites. Jesus claimed to be greater than Jonah, because His experience would transcend Jonah's and would be proof of a higher authority.

Jesus' most definite predictions are grouped near the time of the Transfiguration. Matthew and Mark give a series of four, of which Luke parallels only two, possibly because he was endeavoring to avoid repetition. The four occasions are not the same, however, nor are the accounts careless reiteration. Each presents a different aspect of the subject.

The first, stated in almost identical terms by the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22), follows immediately Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus had reached the peak of His popularity and the cross was inevitable. Before He could explain the impending

crisis to His followers, He must be sure of their acceptance of His claims and of their personal allegiance. When Simon Peter acknowledged Him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus was confident that they had enough spiritual maturity to receive further disclosures. Mark's comment, "And he spoke the saying openly" (Mark 8:32), indicates that whereas Jesus had previously given hints of His death and resurrection, He had not declared His intentions to the public.

The disciples were shocked and bewildered by Jesus' announcement. If one may judge from Peter's rebuke, they were so scandalized by the idea of suffering that they overlooked the allusion to the triumph. It was not lost to Jesus' thinking, however, as the next instance in the series shows.

About a week later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into a high mountain, where He was transfigured before them. To this select group He revealed His inherent glory which had been laid aside at the incarnation. As they descended from the mountain afterwards, He instructed them to "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). Mark (9:10) adds that "they kept the saying, questioning among themselves what the rising again from the dead should mean." The concept of resurrection could not have been foreign to the disciples, for it was in Jesus' day a common tenet of Judaism (cf. John 11:24). The aspect that puzzled them was Jesus' application of the principle to Himself, as if He would rise from the dead before the last general resurrection. From this context it is plain that the disciples did not foist this concept upon Jesus' career for the purpose of making Him a supernatural character. The prediction was not their invention, but His revelation, which they remembered only when the event had given it meaning.

The third discourse, recorded by Matthew and Mark (Matt. 17:22,23; Mark 9:30-32), does not vary greatly from the others, but the occasion is different. According to Mark's account, Jesus and His disciples were already passing through Galilee on their way to Jerusalem. The recorded reactions of the disciples seem to indicate that they were slowly becoming aware of Jesus' intentions. Matthew says that they were "exceeding sorry"; Mark explains that "they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask him." Like children who can feel emotional tension without being able to comprehend its causes or significance, the disciples sensed the gravity of the situation but had no clear idea of its full importance. They understood the meaning of His words, but not the meaning of the crisis.

The fourth reference appears in the narrative of the actual journey to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-33). Jesus spoke more explicitly than on the preceding occasions, but the disciples did not comprehend His purpose. James and John requested the foremost places of power in the kingdom, overlooking completely the prediction of imminent suffering (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). Jesus reminded them forcefully that He had not come to receive homage, but to give His life as a sacrifice. Mark mentions the emotional confusion and fear of the disciples: "they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid" (Mark 10:32). Luke stresses their intellectual obtuseness: "they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said" (Luke 18:34).

Jesus' final allusion, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matt. 26:32), was spoken just after leaving the upper room in Jerusalem. Although His impending betrayal and death weighed heavily upon Him, He anticipated the triumph. The undercurrent of His thinking was even more apparent in the discourses of John 14, 15, and 16, and in the prayer of

John 17, where He petitioned the Father for a return to His pre-incarnate glory.

This recurrent series of pronouncements reveals that from the commencement of His ministry Jesus made the resurrection His objective. To the public He spoke of it in veiled words; to the disciples He expressed Himself openly. The historical fact was inextricably woven into the fabric of Jesus' life and teaching. The doctrinal aspect was developed more fully when the witnesses had opportunity to meditate on the event and to formulate the implications into an organized theology.

In several of the foregoing instances, Jesus stressed the detail that He would rise from the dead *on the third day* (John 2:19; Matt. 12:40, 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, and parallels). One of these, "he must . . . the third day be raised up" (Matt. 16:21), implies that the prescribed interval of time was not accidental. According to Jesus' subsequent explanation to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:46) and the apostolic preaching (Acts 10:40; I Cor. 15:4), the three-day period was prophesied in the Scriptures.

Jesus' declaration created a hermeneutical puzzle, for there is no explicit statement in the Old Testament which connects His resurrection with a three-day period. There are, however, numerous allusions to "three days" or "the third day," which might be susceptible of figurative interpretation. The first of these belongs to the account of creation. "And God said, Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed and fruit-trees bearing fruit after their kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth: and it was so" (Gen. 1:11-13). The third day brought the first signs of life after the chaos and darkness from which the creation emerged.

The restoration of Isaac to his father took place on the third day after God had given the initial command that he should be offered as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:4). During that interval he was virtually dead to Abraham, and only after God had forbidden Abraham to slay him was Isaac truly alive in his father's sight.

When Pharaoh's private butler and baker were imprisoned, Joseph interpreted their dreams, promising release to the butler "within . . . three days" (Gen. 40:13). He was potentially under sentence of death but on the designated day was restored to his former position.

Joseph's brothers, upon their arrival in Egypt, were arrested on a charge of espionage and were remanded to prison. Undoubtedly they expected the worst, but after three days they were freed (Gen. 42:17, 18) and resumed their normal activities.

A somewhat different emphasis is given in Exodus 19:11. Moses announced to the people of Israel that they should prepare themselves to meet God, for He would manifest Himself "the third day" on Mount Sinai in the sight of the whole congregation. It became the day of revelation, when God's person and purposes were announced to His people, and when the objective of the deliverance from Egypt was disclosed. For Israel a new corporate life was beginning.

Among the allusions in the prophets there are only two texts which mention the third day. The promise of Hosea for revival (Hos. 6:2) is the sole instance which connects this time element with the concept of rising from the dead. The final use of this phrase, occurring in the prophecy of Jonah (Jon. 1:17), is an incident in his biography rather than a topic of his preaching. Aside from the fact that Jonah's obedience was reluctant, whereas Christ's was voluntary, there is a

strong parallel between the two. Both were sacrificed for the safety of others; both were three days in darkness; and both were restored to a broader and more effective work for God by a miracle which confirmed their divine commission. Jesus Himself made the application of the analogy and stressed the chronological element (Matt. 12:39,40).

Not one of these instances can be classed as a direct prediction of the Messiah. Since the New Testament rarely identifies the texts on which Jesus based His teaching, the interpreter cannot be certain of the precise sources. Nevertheless, the foregoing references must include at least the majority of those that are relevant.

The chief reason for laying emphasis on the three-day period may be found in the Jewish belief that the spirit did not finally leave the body until the fourth day, which marked the beginning of decomposition and ended the possibility of resuscitation. At the raising of Lazarus, Martha protested against opening the tomb because he had been dead four days, and disintegration would have commenced already (John 11:39). Peter, in the sermon at Pentecost, remarked that Jesus' flesh saw no corruption (Acts 2:32), possibly because the time of His interment had not exceeded the limit.

One hesitates to ascribe any mystical significance to the number three, lest he lapse into the realm of fantasy. On the other hand, there are certain connotations of this number in Scripture that may affect its meaning. Dr. Wilbur M. Smith has observed that the period of three days is connected frequently with the concept of darkness or punishment.<sup>7</sup> The plague of darkness in Egypt lasted three days (Exod. 10:22,23). David was disciplined by a pestilence of three days' duration for his sin in numbering the people (II Sam. 24:13). Paul, blinded by the heavenly vision on the road to Damascus, was confined to his lodgings for three days until he was healed (Acts 9:9). Sometimes it was an interval of testing, as in the case of the Gibeonites, with whom Israel made a treaty after waiting three days (Josh. 9:16). Restoration was also associated with this period of time. Hezekiah was healed of illness and was able to worship in the Temple on the third day (II Kings 20:5-8). Crisis, too, was involved, for Esther appeared before the Persian king to intercede for her people on the third day (Esther 5:1).

Similarly, the darkness of the grave, the testing of Jesus' promises and of the faith of the disciples, the restoration of the Crucified to a place of power and of influence, and the crisis of the struggle of life and death came to a climax in His resurrection on the third day. At the very time when defeat would normally become apparent because of the physical dissolution of His body, Jesus returned to life. His insistence upon this precise interval adds weight to His words, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again" (John 10:17).

There is no duplicate of this phenomenon in classic pagan literature, nor is there any comparable instance of its association with resurrection. Only in the Old and New Testaments is the third day consistently related to the concept of a return from death; it is original with the Biblical revelation. In contrast to other religious teachers, who would not have dared to assert that they would die, and rise on a given day, Jesus plainly declared His intentions and fulfilled them to the astonishment of all His followers.

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<sup>7</sup> Wilbur M. Smith, "The Third Day According to the Scriptures," *Sunday School Times*, March 24, 1928, pp. 187,188.