

## THE RESURRECTION IN DANIEL 12:2

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The most explicit reference to the resurrection in the Old Testament is Daniel 12:2,<sup>1</sup> which is also the only passage in the OT which speaks explicitly of the resurrection of the wicked. *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.* This passage is commonly understood to restrict the resurrection to only some, rather than to speak of a universal resurrection.

Some interpreters think “many” means “all,” but others suggest that the author may have thought that there was no need for resurrection for those who lived fulfilled lives, in the Old Testament sense, and expected it only to even out accounts for the persecuted righteous and the apparently victorious persecutors.<sup>2</sup>

However, this raises the question as to what the future life would be like for those who are raised, in contrast to those who were not raised - some saints enter life with a body and some do not, or as in some interpretations there would be no future life for the dead saints, some have a future life and some do not! It also begs the question of whether all the wicked would be raised to face judgement or only those who have persecuted the saints. In the latter case, it presents a peculiarly lop-sided and selective form of justice; one which is at odds with the general thrust of the whole Biblical message.<sup>3</sup> The view of justice unavoidably inherent in this interpretation of Daniel as describing a limited resurrection for reward and punishment comes out clearly in Collins’ commentary.

Daniel does not envisage a universal resurrection. Only those rise who merit eternal reward or punishment. We are left to assume that the mass of humanity

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<sup>1</sup> Other texts which are understood by some expositors as referring to the resurrection include Isaiah 26: , Job 14:12, etc. However there are many who reject such an interpretation of these texts.

<sup>2</sup> Donald E Gowan. **Bridge between the Testaments. A reappraisal of Judaism from the exile to the birth of Christianity.** Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976, p. 482.

<sup>3</sup> See the comment by Duncan B Forrester that Western theology “seems to have largely abandoned serious addressing of questions of justice” and his discussion of the implications of this situation. “Political justice and Christian Theology.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 3 (1990) 5. It is certainly difficult to see how theologians can engage in serious discussion about the nature of justice when they can happily accept such patently unjust views as that propounded in their comments on Daniel 12:1-3.

is, as Kipling put it, neither good enough to merit heaven nor bad enough to merit hell.<sup>4</sup>

C F Keil considers that this passage does not refer to the resurrection of all the dead, since it refers to many or multitudes of the dead, not all of them, who shall arise. Keil interprets this to mean that

...the final salvation of the people shall not be limited to those still living at the end of the great tribulation, but shall also include those who have lost their lives during the period of the great tribulation.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, “as with the living, so with the dead, not all attain to salvation.”<sup>6</sup> If Keil is correct then Daniel 12:2-3 teaches that not all the dead will be raised. However, this passage clearly states that those resurrected will receive either everlasting life or shame and everlasting contempt. It would seem that a general resurrection of all the dead is in view, and that all will be judged, as it is not necessary for the wicked to be raised if all that this verse means is that they will be considered with contempt. It seems odd that Keil can say that those who rise are the ones who receive salvation, as opposed to those who do not rise, and who therefore do not receive salvation. For some of those who rise are not saved but condemned. It would be more accurate therefore to interpret Daniel 12:2-3 as a reference to the final general resurrection and judgement of all the dead together with those still alive at that time. Keil suggests that the *rabbîm* are the many, i.e., not all, and that *rabbîm* cannot mean all.

However, it is possible to interpret *rabbîm* as multitudes, i.e. a great quantity, rather than totality, and still maintain that it refers to all, although linguistically the word may not mean “all.” It means simply that a great number shall arise, i.e. not a few, and that this great number encompasses all the dead. The book of Daniel uses another term, *chamon* or multitude [10:6, 11:11-13], which could have been used in 12:2 as well, but instead of using this term which explicitly means a great number, but not everyone, the term chosen was *rabbîm* or many. It is understood then that this latter is an inclusive term in Daniel, while *chamon* is selective.

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<sup>4</sup> John J Collins. **Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees**. Old Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary, Vol. 15. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1981, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> C F Keil. **Daniel**. Keil-Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, vol. 9, p. 481.

<sup>6</sup> C F Keil. **Daniel**. Keil-Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, vol. 9, p. 482.

The critical view that the book of Daniel dates from the time of the Maccabean revolt is central to the issue of whether this passage speaks of a limited resurrection.

*Many of those who sleep* appears to imply a limited resurrection, and this is the view taken by those interpreters who think in terms of a setting in the Maccabean period. According to them it was essential that justice should be seen to be done, because in the general massacre good and bad alike perished. The resurrection is in that case “a flash of inspired insight,” as Porteous calls it, a way of making possible God’s vindication of the martyrs and His judgement on the opposition.<sup>7</sup>

The way in which this dating affects the interpretation of Daniel can be seen in the commentary by Robert Anderson.

The “many” of v. 2 places a strict limitation on the use to which this verse may be put. The author’s concern is not with all ages of mankind, but with two particular groupings within his own people. The events of the past decade or so had given rise to a cleavage within the Jewish people. On the one side were the faithful (1 Macc. 1:60-63), and on the other the apostates (1 Macc. 1:52). The criterion by which one was separated from the other was simple and straight-forward. The author’s contemporaries had a choice, obedience to the Torah or obedience to the decree of Antiochus IV (1 Macc. 1:41ff). Some would awake to “everlasting life” and others to “shame and everlasting contempt.” When v. 2 is examined closely, it can be seen that it leaves many questions unanswered. It speaks only of those who have died, presumably as a result of the “time of trouble” (v. 1). Nothing is said of the fate of the faithful of earlier times, nor is it possible to see in the brief mention of the lot of the apostates any clear reference to punishment. The extent of the resurrection is unclear; so, too, is its nature.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Joyce G Baldwin. **Daniel. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries.** Leicester: I.V.P., 1978, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> Robert A Anderson. **Signs and wonders: A commentary on the book of Daniel.** International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, p. 149.

In contrast to this interpretation, which indeed leaves many questions unanswered, that of John Calvin is remarkable for its lucidity and insight. While Calvin is not working within the critical atmosphere of contemporary scholarship, the attribution of Daniel to the Maccabean period would not be unknown to him. This was first proposed by Porphyry in the 3rd century, whose interpretation was explicitly refuted by Jerome in his commentary on Daniel,<sup>9</sup> with which Calvin was familiar. Calvin understands this verse as a reference to the general resurrection of all at the end of the age.

The word *many* seems here clearly put for all, and this is not to be considered as at all absurd, for the angel does not use the word in contrast with all or few, but only with one. Some of the Jews strain this expression to mean the restoration of the Church in this world under themselves, which is perfectly frivolous. In this case the following language would not be correct - *Some shall rise to life, and others to disgrace and everlasting contempt*. Hence if this concerned none but the Church of God, certainly none would rise to disgrace and condemnation. This shews the angel to be treating of the last resurrection, which is common to all, and allows of no exceptions... This passage is worthy of especial note, because the prophets do not contain any clearer testimony than this to the last resurrection, particularly as the angel distinctly asserts the future rising again of both the righteous and the wicked.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander di Lella reports in the Anchor Bible Commentary on Daniel that V Taylor interprets the use of *pollon* in Mark 14:24 as a Semiticism, referring to “all in contrast to one,” rather than “some but not all.” A-M Dubarle is also cited as interpreting Daniel 12:2 to mean a general resurrection because in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:12, as well as in Qumran documents, *rabbîm* or *harabbîm*, “the many,” means virtually the multitude, the community or totality. Di Lella concedes that this is a possible meaning, although not probable, since in Daniel 12:2 *rabbîm* is followed by *min*, which he says is most naturally understood as partitive. This partitive idea is not

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<sup>9</sup> **Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel.** Gleason L Archer, trans. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin. **Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel.** Trans. by T Myers. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948. Vol. 2, pp. 374-375.

found in the Syriac Peshitta and thus would support the idea of a general resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

Di Lella argues, however, that it is more plausible that the author is not concerned about the lot of all the dead, but only of the Jews, both those who resisted Antiochus IV and those who were traitors. The faithful Jews are the ones who rise either to everlasting life, while the traitors do not rise, but are everlasting objects of shame and contempt. This interpretation is the one di Lella thinks best, and is found in an article by Alfrink. What it means however is that Daniel 12:2 does not refer to the general resurrection, or even to the resurrection of the Jews who either resisted or submitted to Antiochus, to receive their reward. Rather, only the faithful Jews are raised, the traitors are not raised at all. Thus there is in this verse no reference to the resurrection of the wicked, nor even to the resurrection of all the righteous; rather it refers only to the resurrection of those Jews who were faithful in the face of the persecution by Antiochus. This interpretation by Alfrink is based on the parallel *'elleh... 'elleh* of vs. 2. Thus “these” faithful will rise, but “those” traitors will not.<sup>12</sup> But this destroys the parallelism of the Hebrew: Many will rise, these to life, those to shame. It does not say that many will rise to life, but some will not rise and be considered with shame and contempt; it refers to the two-fold fate of those who rise. A similar use of *'elleh... 'elleh* is found in Deuteronomy 28:12-13, where the tribes of Israel are divided into two groups; “these” to pronounce blessings, and “those” to pronounce curses, clearly an instance of one group divided into two for different duties; similarly, in Daniel 12 one group, those who sleep in the dust, are raised from the dead, and divided into two groups: one to enter into everlasting life, and one to enter into everlasting contempt. Another objection to the interpretation based on Daniel 12 is that it makes nonsense of the structure of the sentence:

*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,*

*some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

There is clearly a parallel structure here, dependent on the first clause, which describes the action – those asleep in the dust are raised – and the second clause which describes the different fates of those thus raised. Alfrink suggests that the first *'elleh*

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<sup>11</sup> Louis F Hartman and Alexander A di Lella. **The Book of Daniel**. Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday, 1978, p. 307.

<sup>12</sup> Louis F Hartman and Alexander A di Lella. **The Book of Daniel**. Anchor Bible. Garden City: Doubleday, 1978, pp. 307-308.

[these] refers to the *rabbîm miyoshene* [many who sleep] which places this demonstrative pronoun at a considerable distance from its referent, and then leaves the final clause dangling uselessly, without a verb or obvious meaning. I can only conclude that the Hebrew cannot support the interpretation placed on it by Alfrink, which appears to be based more on dogmatic and critical considerations than exegesis of the text. Thus in my judgement this critical approach to Daniel and the interpretations which it results in are without merit and lead to more problems than they solve. The dating of Daniel to the 2nd century BC, and the attempt to interpret it in the context of the Maccabean revolt are the sources of the confusion which is engendered in this interpretation of the passage and must therefore be abandoned. This passage is best understood as describing a resurrection of all the dead, some to everlasting life and others to punishment. The *many* therefore means *all* as Baldwin points out.

Hebrew *rabbîm*, many, tends to mean “all,” as in Deuteronomy 7:1, Isaiah 2:2, where “all nations” becomes “many peoples” in the parallel verse 3; and in Isaiah 52:14, 15; 53:11, 12, where this key-word occurs no less than five times, with an inclusive significance. As Jeremias points out, the Hebrew word *kol*, “all,” means either “totality” or “sum”; there is no word for “all” as a plural. For this *rabbîm* does duty, and so comes to mean “the great multitude,” “all”: cf. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth...” (NIV). The emphasis is not upon many as opposed to all, but rather on the numbers involved.<sup>13</sup>

I agree with this assessment of the Hebrew: the resurrection is definitely in view here, and it is a general resurrection not a limited one, whether limited to both righteous and wicked Jews from the time of Antiochus, or only the righteous Jews from that period. In his discussion of Daniel 12:1-3, M de Boer deals with the difference between a resurrection of the righteous only, and a resurrection of all the dead.

There is a significant difference between the two types of resurrection: a resurrection limited to the righteous means that resurrection is itself salvific since it entails the bestowal of “eternal life,” i.e., participation in the life of the new aeon. A resurrection

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<sup>13</sup> Joyce G Baldwin. **Daniel**. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Leicester: I.V.P., 1978, p. 204.

that encompasses both righteous and wicked is not in itself salvific, however, since resurrection then only serves the purpose of bringing both groups before the bar of the Judge.<sup>14</sup>

This seems to be the sense of Daniel 12, namely that all the dead are raised at the end of the age in order to face the judgement and to receive the appropriate reward for their deeds. It is thus the only passage in the OT which explicitly teaches the resurrection of all the dead, and specifically that the wicked will be raised in order to face the judgement. The resurrection of the wicked is not in view in any of the other passages in the OT which speak of the resurrection.

The ideas expressed in the passage from Daniel 12 lie behind the words of Jesus recorded in John 5:28-29, where the term *rabbîm* is replaced by *pantes*, thus indicating that it was understood to refer to all, not merely some, although the LXX has *polloi*, many, not *pantes*, all.

*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.*

Schep maintains that Daniel 12 refers only to some, and that this passage is not quoted by Jesus, although there are similarities. At most Jesus “*extended the scope* of the resurrection from the “many” of Daniel’s prophecy to the “all” of the New Testament revelation.”<sup>15</sup> But for the reasons mentioned above, namely that Daniel refers to the resurrection of a multitude (that is, the great number of the dead who are raised), rather than just the resurrection of many (out of all the dead), I would have to disagree with Schep, and maintain that Jesus here cites Daniel 12:2.

Sevenster is of the opinion that when the Scriptures speak of the resurrection of the non-believer, this does not refer to a resurrection in the flesh only, without the spirit, which is distinguished from the resurrection of the believer. There is no such distinction made in the Gospels, he says. Sevenster refers to John 5:28 as demonstrating that all who are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth and be judged, since all, and not just the believers, are subject to Christ as

<sup>14</sup> M C de Boer. **The defeat of death. Apocalyptic eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5.** Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 22. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988, pp. 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> J A Schep. **The nature of the resurrection body.** Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, p. 58.

Lord. Therefore not just some shall be raised to face the judgement, but all the dead. It is only in the judgement itself that there is a distinction made: some of those who have been raised are placed at the right hand, and will enter into life, while others are placed at the left hand and will be sent away into punishment.<sup>16</sup> Such a view is not widely held. For instance, in his commentary on John, Marsh takes the “resurrection to life” to mean something presently realised, and disagrees with the interpretation of Daniel 12 and John 5:29 which is accepted above.

Second, the saying [John 5:29] keeps within the boundaries of Jewish apocalyptic in referring to a double resurrection to life or to judgement based upon the doing of good or evil [Marsh cites Daniel 12:2]. Yet already John has made serious modifications to the traditional Jewish statement summarized here. The believer does not come into judgement (3:18, 5:24); and we must therefore interpret *those who have done good, to the resurrection of life* in terms of what has been stated in 3:21: *He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his works have been wrought in God*. The resurrection to life continues, or makes possible, the continuance of a life that has already in its earthly manifestations realized some unity with that of the Godhead...<sup>17</sup>

It is maintained here that in both Daniel 12:2 and John 5:29, the resurrection of all the dead to face judgement is in view. Anything less than this cannot do justice to the text, nor to the whole thrust of Biblical revelation, and is contingent on critical views of Daniel rather than exegetical concerns. It is also maintained that John 5:29 is a direct citation of Daniel 12:2 and that there is a coherence and continuity in the OT and NT concerning the resurrection.

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<sup>16</sup> J N Sevenster. *Leven en dood in de Evangeliën*. Amsterdam: Holland, 1952, pp. 123-124.

<sup>17</sup> John Marsh. *Saint John. The Pelican Gospel Commentaries*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, p. 265.