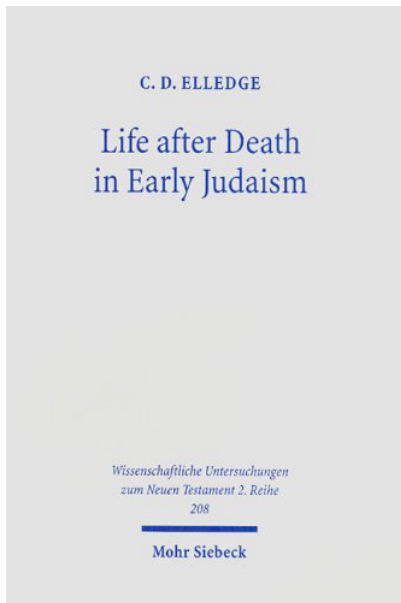


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Elledge, C. D.

Life after Death in Early Judaism: The Evidence of Josephus

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Daniel Maoz
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

The present work is an expanded revision of selections of a Ph.D. thesis titled “Resurrection and the End of History: The Resurrection Motif in Paul’s Preaching and Defense in the Acts of the Apostles” (Princeton, 2001). Following a brief introduction, the study addresses “Faith and the Future Life: Afterlife Traditions Beyond Josephus” (ch. 1); “Immortality in Josephus: Against Apion, The Jewish War, and the Jewish Antiquities” (ch. 2); “The Conception of Immortality in Josephus: Mythology, Philosophy, and the Noble Death” (ch. 3); “The Apologetical Functions of Immortality in Josephus” (ch. 4); and “Beyond Josephus: Resurrection, Immortality, and Apologetical Strategies in Other Writings” (ch. 5); as well as “Josephus and Hippolytus on Life after Death” (appendix 1) and “A Synopsis of Afterlife Passages in Josephus” (appendix 2).

Elledge presumes that the “well informed reader of Josephus” will already understand his works to be apologetic in nature so that no reading of any text will be received at a primary level of historical understanding. Thus, “his accounts of Jewish beliefs regarding life beyond death pretend to be empirical descriptions of what various groups and individuals in his own time actually thought and said; further study of these passages has demonstrated that they are, instead, heavily colored by Josephus’ rhetorical strategies as an apologist” (177). For similar reason, Elledge both “takes Josephus seriously as one who

was attempting to describe certain phenomena of Jewish piety as he observed them during his own time” and “reads these reports with suspicion and regards Josephus as an apologetic translator, who has transformed the original content of Jewish beliefs regarding the future life into a Hellenistic philosophical synthesis for his own rhetorical purposes” (3). Citing the inappropriateness of accepting Josephus’s reports on faith in the future life during the Second Temple period at face value, Elledge deems it equally unwise to dispose of them completely, given that Josephus’s descriptions of Jewish piety may well have inspired them (51–52).

In creating a “control set” against which to set Josephus’s accounts on the afterlife, the author examines several texts or collections of texts that had the potential to influence Josephus’s thought and expression, as well as contemporary and antecedent works that may have influenced those texts (indicated by italics in what follows): rabbinical writings (Targums; Mishnah; Talmud); post-70 C.E. apocalypses (4 Ezra; 2 Bar.); New Testament writings (1 En.; 4 Ezra; 2 Bar.; Dan; L.A.B.); the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (T. Sim.; T. Jud.; T. Zeb.; T. Ben.); the writings of Philo of Alexandria (Opif.; Migr.; Abr.; Spec.; Gig.; Post.; Sacr.; Leg.; Cher.; Vir.; Wis; 4 Macc); the Wisdom of Solomon (4 Macc; Philo; Ps.-Phoc.); the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS; 1QH; 1QM; 4QMessApoc [4Q521]; 4QPseudEzek [4Q385–388, 391]; 4QPseudDan [4Q245]; 4Q542; 4Q543–548; 1Q26; 4Q415–418, 4Q423; Hipp., Haer.; 2 Macc; 4 Ezra; 2 Bar.; 1 En.; Ezek; Dan); 2 Maccabees (4 Macc.; Dan [LXX]); the biblical book of Daniel (1 En.; Pss. Sol.; contra Hos, Ezek, Isa, Pss); and 1 Enoch (Jub.; Gen; Num; Deut; Job; Isa; Pss; Jonah; Dan.). Elledge concludes that, while Josephus chooses to exclude explicit reference to religious beliefs that would be foreign to Hellenistic philosophy and therefore to his Greek audience, including the topic of resurrection of the dead, the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo most closely approximate in their detail about immortality Josephus’s own expressed notions, as well as that of “cosmic immortalization in the apocalypses” (177).

In selecting passages from three works of Josephus that deal with the theme of immortality (excluding *Vita*) and by viewing them synoptically, Elledge notes that no single viewpoint on Jewish piety is represented, neither innovative thought (Eleazar’s speech at Masada) nor rhetorical creativity (Josephus). The author affirms that Josephus’s portraits of the various Jewish sectarian pieties included life beyond death in a genuine historical sense: in *Against Apion*, faith in life beyond death was sufficient motivation to die for the laws of Judaism; also, willingness to die for the laws found expression in earlier Jewish texts such as Daniel and 2 and 4 Maccabees, as played out during the Maccabean revolt (78–79).

Literary and cultural influences that may have affected Josephus’s unique crafting of statements referring to the afterlife include mythology, philosophy, and the noble death.

The human soul, described as a portion of G-d, “remains the foundational notion for the treatment of the future life” (128). Mythological terminology such as the Isles of the Blessed, Hades, and Lethe indicate that Josephus preserved traditional expressions for “cosmic zones inhabited by the dead” (100). Philosophical influences may have derived from Homer, Virgil, Aristophanes, Orphism and Bacchic mysticism, Pherecydes, Pythagoras and Pythagorean communities (Cicero, Ovid, Lucian, Porphyry, Proclus, and Macrobius), Plato, and Socrates. Elledge expresses particular interest in dramatic death scenes reminiscent of legends of Indic gymnosophists, particularly in various literary depictions of Kalanos presumably available to Josephus (Megasthenes, Nearchus, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Valerius Maximus, Philo, Plutarch).

Elledge offers three possible rhetorical means by which Josephus put forth a defense for immortality of the soul: idealizing Judaism (the heroization of piety); retributive providence (Josephus’s own concerns with theodicy); and appeal to the reader (the moralization of history). First, beginning with Josephus’s enigmatic treatment of Eleazar, the author provides creative resolution by means of rhetoric. Instead of criticizing the rebel leader and the rebellion he advanced, “Josephus has chosen instead to hail the heroism of those who fought on both sides of the conflict” (137). Second, if demonstration of nemesis were Josephus’s aim, it would concur “among other historical works from his own era that combine retribution within history and retribution beyond history in their presentation of events” (141). Third, the goal of reader-consolation accentuates justice’s certainty in the course of history’s tragedies, thus encouraging the reader to persevere amidst daily sufferings toward a hope even beyond death.

Josephus’s “apologetical translation strategy” may be observed in other writers’ treatment of the afterlife (4 Macc; Justin Martyr; Tertullian; Minucius Felix; Tatian; Theophilus of Antioch; Athenagoras of Athens), who “sought to translate supernatural ideas, such as the resurrection of the physical body, into the familiar Hellenistic concept of the soul’s immortality” (180), thus addressing the ancient’s essential difficulty with the concept of the resurrection of the dead: “what to do with a hope that defies all probable expectation of how the created order functions” (161), namely, deceased bodies, many decomposed beyond reconstruction, nonetheless reconstituted to life through divine power.

Reworked dissertations seldom offer such accessible scholarship to areas of investigation that centrally address both academic and popular interest and concern. What Elledge has done is commendable in both domains, for the present study methodically explores the diverse field of views of afterlife as expressed in polyvocalic cultural and literary Jewish and classical media of the Second Temple era. Further, he advances viable interpretive templates that explain rhetorical and apologetic intentions of Josephus, not only as

pertains to texts that address the topic of immortality. Finally, the author has provided the reader with a current, relevant Josephus scholarly bibliography.

A bibliography, primarily representing publications of 267 authors and editors from the second half of the last century, features 374 titles of scholarship relevant to the focus of this work. A short “Summary of the Research” and two indexes (ancient sources and modern authors) conclude the work.