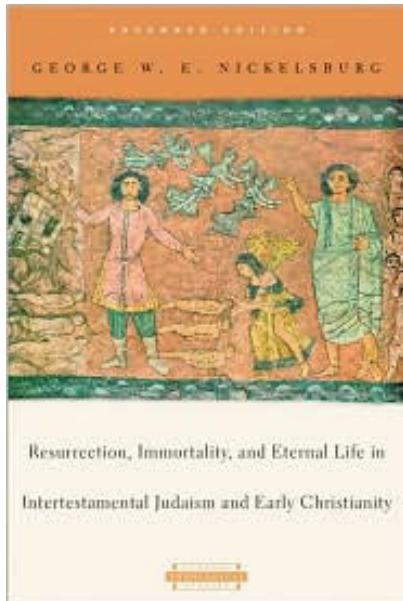


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Nickelsburg, George W. E.

***Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in
Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity***

Expanded edition

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This book is an expanded edition of George W. E. Nickelsburg's doctoral dissertation, which was first published in 1972. The aim of this book is to investigate the theme of the afterlife in intertestamental Judaism and early Christianity from three perspectives: resurrection, immortality, and eternal life. Attention is given to the origins of these beliefs and the dynamics involved in their theological development. Nickelsburg argues that the view within Second Temple Judaism in regards to the afterlife was not static but rather variegated (222). Resurrection was one of the views shared by Jews, as evident in a text such as 2 Maccabees, but certainly it was not the only one. Hellenistic Jewish texts such as Wisdom of Solomon indicate a leaning toward the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection of the body. The intertestamental period was theologically a brewing period for the doctrine of the afterlife. When Nickelsburg treats the question of resurrection, he also questions whether it is a reference to a raising of the spirit or the body. He concludes that, by the end of the intertestamental period and the beginning of the Christian movement, the belief in resurrection was clearly that of a bodily resurrection. One view that was not mentioned and that would have contributed to this study is that of death as the final end to one's existence. This view was held by some intertestamental Jews, as it appears to be attested in Sirach or Ecclesiasticus and was the notable belief of the Jewish

sect of the Sadducees, according to Josephus and the New Testament (Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8).

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part is a reproduction of Nickelsburg's dissertation as it was originally published, with some minor revisions such as corrections and modifying gender-specific language. The second part includes three later studies by the author in which he applied the findings of his dissertation to the New Testament. These studies address the subjects of "Resurrection in Early Christianity," "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative," and "The Son of Man" in the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, and the New Testament.

Part 1 consists of six chapters plus a two-part conclusion and an appendix. In chapters 1–3 Nickelsburg deals with the theme of religious persecution with separate subheadings. In chapter 1 he deals with apocalyptic texts that have religious persecution as their underlying theme. Among the texts, Nickelsburg analyzes Dan 12:1–3 and other canonical texts and the pseudepigraphic texts the Testament of Moses, Jubilees, and the Testament of Judah, with attention also being given to their date and provenance. While Nickelsburg treats Isa 26:19, an important resurrection text in the Hebrew Bible, he does so in only five pages; more could have been written on this text. Another important resurrection text in the Hebrew Bible that Nickelsburg could have expanded further on is Ezek 37 (the vision of the valley of dry bones), to which he devotes only one page (31). Nickelsburg all too quickly dismisses this important text by asserting that, rather than speaking of a resurrection of a people who were literally dead, it rather presents "a picture of the restoration of Israel" (31). While this is undoubtedly true, as borne out by the context of Ezek 37, it is nevertheless equally true that the use of the metaphor of resurrection itself presupposes an a priori belief and understanding of resurrection as a raising of that which is dead. The metaphorical statement "it is raining cats and dogs" presupposes the concrete literal reality of "rain," "cats," and "dogs"; otherwise, the metaphor loses its force. The metaphor is thus only intelligible and meaningful vis-à-vis the literal word that serves as its reference point.

Special attention is given to judgment scenes in the Hebrew Bible, with particular attention being given to the emergence of the resurrection tradition. In a text-critical note in one of the judgment scenes that Nickelsburg examines (Zech 3:1–10), the high priest Joshua appears before the angel of YHWH with Satan at Joshua's right hand as his accuser. A rebuke is addressed toward Satan: "And the LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!'" (Zech 3:2 NRSV). This is undoubtedly a difficult passage in that the angel of YHWH in Zech 3:1 is identified as YHWH himself in 3:2, an identification motif found throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 22:11–12; Exod 3:2–4). Both the MT and LXX support this reading. Strangely, Nickelsburg opts for the Syriac reading of Zech 3:2, where

the difficulty is smoothed out by adding the words “angel of” to Zech 3:2 so that the speaker who rebukes Satan is the angel of the YHWH and thus separate from YHWH himself (24 n. 11). Nickelsburg states that he accepts this reading because it makes better sense, but he does not argue or address the compelling textual support for the shorter and harder reading.

In chapter 2 Nickelsburg studies the theme of the persecution and exaltation of the righteous person. He examines the theme as it appears in Wis 2; 4–5, including a study of the *Gattung* in the story of the righteous man found in Wisdom, Gen 37–45 (the story of Joseph), the Story of Ahikar, the book of Esther, Dan 3 and 6, and Susanna. Other texts from canonical, apocryphal, and pseudepigraphic collections are also examined. Nickelsburg sees the theme of the persecution and exaltation of the righteous person as fundamental and formative for the development of the belief in resurrection. The theme at this point is focused on an individualistic context: it is the singular righteous person who is persecuted and consequently exalted.

In chapter 3 Nickelsburg carries this theme into a corporate setting with the persecution and vindication of the righteous as a group and examines texts from the Hebrew Bible that speak of the corporate resurrection of the faithful (e.g., Dan 12:2). In chapter 4 the theme of the oppression of the righteous poor is examined, with special attention given to 1 En. 94–104. In chapter 5 Nickelsburg investigates the theme of resurrection where it appears unrelated to the themes of persecution, oppression, and injustice. In chapter 6 an analysis is made of the Qumran materials and the “Two-Ways theology,” including an investigation into the view of the afterlife whether it incorporates resurrection, immortality, or eternal life. Nickelsburg is of the conviction that belief in bodily resurrection appears to be lacking in Qumran (185). He exercises some reductionism when he states, concerning the Qumran texts, that “Death [by persecution] is not a problem; hence resurrection is not required as a solution” (196). Belief in bodily resurrection does not necessitate death by persecution, although for some Jewish writers (2 Maccabees) it was a necessary corollary. Resurrection could have been seen, as it was later by Paul, to be the “redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23), and thus it was conceived of as a somatic soteriology in which the whole person would be restored.

The difficulty as in all studies of ancient literature is that the absence of evidence does not necessarily constitute evidence of absence; this is especially so when the texts are vague. The texts of Qumran continue to be a subject of debate, and even the identity of the faith community/communities of Qumran have recently become the subject of renewed debate among scholars. The affinities of the Qumran texts and the Fourth Gospel, particularly the dualism and the “now–not yet” tension, are striking, even though the latter is forthright in its belief in bodily resurrection (John 5:28–29; 20:26–29). Nickelsburg ends

with a conclusion in which he summarizes the preceding chapters. At times it appears as if Nickelsburg confuses resurrection with assumption or translation. When he deals with the text of Jub. 23, which speaks of the tortured bodies of the righteous resting in the earth while their spirits are assumed into heaven (213), he at times equates the two terms (216). He concludes from this that there was no belief in bodily resurrection by the writer(s) of this text. That is stating the obvious: assumption or translation is not the same as resurrection, which emphasized the raising of the body already attested earlier in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 26:19). The idea of the immortality of the soul (as seen in Plato's *Phaedo*) assured that all humans would have an existence of some form in the afterlife. Resurrection would not be the appropriate designation for such a belief. That this belief was starkly foreign to the Greek mind is evident in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* 647–648, where the god Apollo, speaking at the founding of the Areopagus, states, "Once a man has died and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection [*anastasis*]." In this text, *anastasis* is unmistakably a reference to the body.

Assumption or translation into heaven could also be bodily, as in the case of Enoch (Gen 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11), without necessitating death, but these would not be called resurrections. Nickelsburg ends part 1 with an appendix addressing some of the presuppositions found in Oscar Cullman's 1955 "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead." Nickelsburg provides a very good analysis of Cullman's work and the deficiencies inherent in his presuppositions about a monolithic Judaism in the first century.

In part 1 Nickelsburg deals with the New Testament. In chapter 7 he examines belief in the resurrection as found in the early creeds and hymns, the hypothetical Q document, the writings of Paul (including the Deutero-Pauline letters), the Gospels, Hebrews, and the book of Revelation. He also treats the theme of the persecuted and vindicated servant of the Lord as it is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. At this point Nickelsburg, when addressing the Gospel stories about the empty tomb, again appears to confuse resurrection with assumption. He states that these stories "presume a bodily resurrection or bodily assumption to heaven" (246). The postresurrection appearances of Jesus, however, according to Nickelsburg, seem to militate against the latter notion. He seems to strain the arguments concerning the appearances of Jesus by suggesting that the bodily nature of the postresurrection appearances seem to conflict with other accounts where the risen Jesus appears and disappears at will, his identity is mistaken, he is presumed to be a ghost, and so forth. What the Gospel writers seem to be communicating is that the risen Jesus is numerically identical but yet dissimilar; in short, the risen Jesus has a *changed* body. The somatic emphasis on the body of the risen Jesus in the Gospels has long been noted by scholarship. The early creed cited by Paul in 1 Cor 15:1–8 also reflects the tradition found in the Gospels, namely, that Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared. Nickelsburg

nevertheless acknowledges that the genesis of the Christian movement is necessarily tied to the very earliest traditions that encompassed belief in the resurrection of Jesus and his exaltation.

In chapter 8 Nickelsburg embarks on a study of the genre and function of the Markan passion narrative and canvasses this text to glean the themes of the persecution and vindication of the righteous as they are applied to Jesus. Nickelsburg also provides a brief approach to the hypothetical pre-Markan passion narrative with this same theme of persecution and exaltation of the righteous.

In chapter 9 Nickelsburg concludes by addressing the controversial “son of man” title and the function of “the son of man” as it appears in both Judaism and early Christianity. A review of the title is explored in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings, and how by the intertestamental period we have a composite figure in the preexistent son of man who absorbs the traits of the anointed one, chosen one, Davidic king, and Deutero-Isaiah’s servant of the Lord. The groundwork had already been laid for Christianity. Following this, Nickelsburg investigates the use of the “son of man” title in the New Testament and the historical problems of associating this title with Jesus. In the case of Jesus, a conflation takes place between two main figures from the Hebrew Bible—the transcendental and heavenly “one like a son of man” (Dan 7:13) and the suffering servant (Isa 52–53)—so that Jesus fulfils both roles.

A very good and comprehensive bibliography is supplied. While an index of ancient and biblical texts is included as well as an index of modern authors, it would have been helpful if a subject index was also provided to aid the reader in referencing materials in the book. This book is a valuable resource for students seeking to specialize in the area of the afterlife in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity.