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The Resurrection of the Messiah’s End-time People: Describing Paul’s Resurrection Discourse in Jewish Apocalyptic Terms

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Introduction

This article aims to describe Paul’s resurrection discourse in the context of Jewish apocalyptic tradition, paying attention to both similarities and differences. Several scholars from the late twentieth century have argued that Stoic cosmology and anthropology offer a promising *comparandum* for Paul’s discourse on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 (arguing that either Paul’s own view was similar to Stoicism or Paul was correcting some Corinthians influenced by Stoicism/Stoicized philosophy)¹. These proposals did not go unchallenged², although the general influence of Stoicism and Stoicized popular philosophy on Paul, especially his ethical discourse, should not be denied³. Jewish apocalyptic eschatology remains an immediate and important context for understanding how Paul as a first-century Jew envisioned resurrection⁴.

¹ A Stoic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 was proposed in the nineteenth century (e.g., O. PFLEIDERER, *Paulinism. A Contribution to the History of Primitive Christian Theology* [tr. E. PETERS [London 1877] 1:201), but this line of interpretation gained popularity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. For representatives of recent Stoic theories, see, D.B. MARTIN, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT 1995); J.R. ASHER, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15* (HUT 42; Tübingen 2000); T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul* (New York 2010). Slightly differently, A.V. Garcilazo believes Paul was arguing with some Corinthians who were influenced by Roman Stoicism and its dualism. A.V. GARCILAZO, *The Corinthian Dissenters and the Stoics* (New York, 2007).

² For a comprehensive critique of Stoic readings of Paul, see, V. RABENS, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul. Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life* (Minneapolis, MN 2013). For a specific criticism of Stoic readings of 1 Corinthians 15, see, J. WARE, “Paul’s Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36–54”, *JBL* 133 (2014) 809-835; D. JEONG, “1 Corinthians 15:35–58: An Assessment of Stoic Interpretation”, *KJCS* 109 (2018) 45-70; J.G. COOK, “1Cor 15,40–41: Paul and the Heavenly Bodies”, *ZNW* 113 (2022) 159-179.

³ T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY 2000).

⁴ Among many, two helpful works are mentioned: (1) Focusing on the apocalyptic eschatology of the Corinthian correspondence, M.C. DE BOER, *The Defeat of Death. Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*

Paul's letters presuppose an apocalyptic worldview⁵, but Jewish apocalyptic eschatology was not monolithic⁶. Thus, the question is not only whether Paul's notion of resurrection is a Jewish apocalyptic one, but also how one could carefully compare Paul's discourse with other apocalyptic writings. This close analysis is especially necessary because the idea of resurrection is multifaceted and, at times, ambiguous and contested⁷.

Interpreters who understand Paul's resurrection passages in light of Stoicism usually do so based on 1 Corinthians 15, not 1 Thessalonians 4. Both passages, however, should be utilized in order to unpack Paul's theological convictions about resurrection. While every Pauline passage is significantly shaped by its context, revealing tensions in many issues, 1 Thess 4,13-18 (doubtlessly written prior to the Corinthian correspondence) reveals Paul's basic eschatology regarding believers' fate, when compared to his more elaborated discourse in 1 Corinthians 15. Unlike in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does not primarily defend his position against dissenters in Thess 4,13-18. This implies that in 1 Thessalonians, Paul may have expressed his candid view of resurrection to his beloved community, which he calls "our hope, joy, crown of boasting, glory,

(Sheffield, 1988); (2) Focusing on the Thessalonian correspondence, J. KUCICKI, *Eschatology of the Thessalonian Correspondence. A Comparative Study of 1 Thess 4, 13–5, 11 and 2 Thess 2, 1–12 to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Bern 2014).

⁵ A. YARBRO COLLINS, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden 1996) 13. Even though Paul did not write apocalypses (in terms of genre), apocalyptic eschatology is an important aspect of Paul's thought. For understanding the literary *genre* apocalypse, I follow the well-known definition in J.J. COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (3rd edition; Grand Rapids, MI 2016) 5.

⁶ H.C.C. CAVALLIN, *Life After Death. Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in Cor 15, Part I, An Enquiry into the Jewish Background* (Lund 1974).

⁷ E. PUECH, *La croyance des Esséniens en la vie future. Immortalité, résurrection, vie éternelle?* Vol 1. (Paris 1993) 33. Regarding ancient terms (i.e., not concepts) related to resurrection, they primarily refer to bodily resurrection, rather than that of soul/spirit. J.G. COOK, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis* (WUNT 410; Tübingen 2018) 619-624. Still, what one means by *bodily* resurrection needs to be carefully examined (e.g., fleshly body? Or, some kind of spiritual body as Paul alludes to?). Whether to follow the notion of resurrection of the *flesh* (*carnis resurrectio*) was heavily contested from the second century onward. O. LEHTIPUU, "'Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God:' The Transformation of the Flesh in the Early Christian Debates Concerning Resurrection", *Metamorphoses. Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. T.K. SEIM – J. ØKLAND) (Berlin 2009) 147-168.

and joy” (1 Thess 2,19-20). Additionally, it is unlikely that a radical change in Paul’s eschatology happened within the short period of time between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. Thus, both passages can be used to better understand Paul’s beliefs in resurrection.

By examining 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 and comparing them with select passages from Jewish apocalyptic writings, I will demonstrate three points that show Paul’s apocalyptic description of resurrection is rooted in, but significantly distinctive from, his Jewish peers: (1) Paul’s asymmetrical discourse of resurrection that is reticent about the fate of the wicked people; (2) his combination of two traditions in Jewish apocalyptic thought; that is, the resurrection of the righteous (usually at the eschaton) and the heavenly ascent of a few special individuals in the body (the phenomenon itself not being necessarily eschatological) in a scenario regarding the return of the messiah; and (3) the ultimate union of transformed believers with the transformed messiah in heaven, rather than these believers joining the heavenly host of angels or living blessed lives on earth. Paul’s resurrection discourse can be understood within the variegated and dynamic forms of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology at the end of the Second Temple period, while displaying particular twists and developments due to his convictions about the messiah, his own revelatory/visionary experience, and new realities in his messiah-devoted communities.

There are a few methodological caveats. First, this project’s exploration of Jewish apocalyptic context does not mean that one should understand Paul’s discourse exclusively in the Jewish context, over against the Hellenistic/Greco-Roman one (e.g., Stoicism). Approaching Paul with rigidly dichotomized options (i.e., Paul being either entirely Jewish or Hellenistic/Greco-Roman, as if these “backgrounds” existed in isolation from each other) does

not do justice to the complicated realities of Paul and early Christians⁸. Second, this article seeks to *compare* Paul's apocalyptic discourse with patterns of thought in Jewish apocalyptic tradition during the Second Temple period. Therefore, it is not my primary goal to establish a precise chronological order of each Jewish source under consideration. My comparative approach, which puts less emphasis on the question of origins and instead pays attention to discernable patterns, is indebted to E.P. Sanders and J.Z. Smith⁹. Third, my three points of comparison (represented by subheadings) serve a heuristic function for this particular task, and I do not intend to make a definitive claim about Jewish apocalypticism *in toto*. In relation to that, my fourth caveat is that the significance of the messiah in Jewish tradition is not always connected to eschatological aspects of resurrection. I acknowledge that Jewish messianism is a broader subject than what is covered in this project¹⁰. Finally, this article's subheadings do not represent a preconceived model artificially imposed on the Jewish sources. They emerged from my comparative investigations into the sources prior to the composition of this article.

An Asymmetric Scenario of Resurrection

In Paul's eschatological unfolding in 1 Cor 15,20-28, which can be compared to the "historical

⁸ T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, KY 2001). Paul lived at the intersection of multiple cultural contexts. See, for example, D. JEONG, *Pauline Baptism among the Mysteries. Ritual Messages and the Promise of Initiation* (Berlin 2023), on how Paul the Jew ritually communicated the messages about the God of Israel and the Jewish messiah among his pagan audiences through baptism, which is analogous to initiation rituals in the Greco-Roman world.

⁹ E.P. SANDERS, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA 1977); J.Z. SMITH, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, IL 1990).

¹⁰ For example, see recent works on messiah language as a Jewish political idiom: M.V. NOVENSON, *Christ among the Messiahs. Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford 2012); idem. *The Grammar of Messianism. An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users* (Oxford 2017).

type” of apocalypse such as Daniel, Paul places an asymmetric emphasis on the destiny of believers (i.e., “those who belong to the messiah,” 15,23). As is widely accepted, divine judgment and/or eschatological destruction of the wicked is one of the most consistent motifs found in Jewish apocalypses ¹¹. The Book of Daniel (12,2) regards the resurrection of the wicked as a preliminary step to the punishment of the unrighteous (i.e., their eternal contempt). That is, the wicked are raised (along with the righteous) before receiving the ultimate punishment. In Daniel, resurrection basically has “a judicial function” ¹². Similarly, several passages in the Similitudes of Enoch (e.g., 1 Enoch 55,4; 56,5-8; 62,9-12) depicts the punishment of “the kings and the might ones” who oppressed God’s elect—this is a part of the eschatological scenario. Second Baruch 30,1-4 presents the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked. In 2 Baruch, not only individuals, but also oppressive nations will be under God’s judgment (13,7-11; 70,7-10). Fourth Ezra 7,32-35 also envisions a similar sequence (resurrection – divine judgment – contrasting recompenses for two groups [i.e., the righteous and the unrighteous]); in particular, those who will be judged and punished by the messiah in 4 Ezra 12,32-33 could be Roman emperors. Canonical Psalms, such as Psalms 73 and 74, also represent a version of two-way theology, i.e., vindication for the righteous and punishment for the wicked (although the notion of resurrection is not clearly in view). In 1 Corinthians 15, however, Paul’s description of the eschaton lacks what would happen to the wicked people or unbelievers in the future. In the other key Pauline passage, 1 Thess 4,13-18, Paul does not speak of judgment for the wicked, either ¹³, although one could find a few more allusions to it if one considers the whole of 1 and 2

¹¹ COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 7-8.

¹² G.W.E. NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* (expanded edition; Cambridge, MA 2006) 37.

¹³ A.J. MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 32B; New York 2000) 286.

Thessalonians ¹⁴.

Paul was aware of the tradition about divine judgment for the unrighteous people. One example of Paul's familiarity with this judgment tradition is Rom 1,18-32 (e.g., "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth," v. 18, NRSV), but it is not describing future events. Paul rather places the realization of God's wrath in the mythic past (in light of this passage's allusions to Genesis and the Wisdom of Solomon) and in the present (if one highlights the present tense of ἀποκαλύπτεται in v. 18). Yet, other passages do suggest that Paul had an eschatology for the wicked people, including God's final destruction of the unrighteous (1 Thess 1,10; cf. among the disputed Pauline, 2 Thess 1,8-9; 2,8.12) and/or God's universal judgment (Rom 14,10; 2 Cor 5,10). Also, Rom 2,5-11 clearly demonstrates the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked, which resonates with analogous passages in 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, 1 Enoch, and Daniel. Thus, it is possible, as PHEME PERKINS notes, that Paul and his audience (in Corinth or Thessalonica) were already familiar with "a larger apocalyptic scenario that incorporates a universal judgment," and if that is the case, Paul may have felt no need to rehearse it in detail ¹⁵. I do not deny the existence of judgment themes in Paul's letters ¹⁶. However, it is still striking that Paul does not spell out these ideas in his most detailed eschatological scenario on the topic of resurrection, i.e., 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. When Paul has opportunities to explain resurrection, Paul is silent about the fate of the wicked; rather, he focuses on the blessed status of "those in the messiah" for his Corinthian and Thessalonian audiences. The lack of

¹⁴ KUCICKI, *Eschatology*, 295, 317-18, 330.

¹⁵ P. PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI 2012) 183.

¹⁶ For detailed discussion, see, L.J. KREITZER, *Jesus and God in Paul's Eschatology* (Sheffield 1987) 93-129.

explicit remarks about the wicked and their resurrection in these best-known resurrection passages remains noteworthy ¹⁷.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does mention the messiah's conquest of enemies (1 Cor 15,24-25), culminating in the destruction of the final enemy, death (v. 26). The enemies that the messiah will conquer in 1 Corinthians 15 could be cosmic evil forces (abstractly), or as Wasserman suggests, gentile gods (concretely) ¹⁸. In 1 Corinthians 15, the initial moment on the eschatological clock was the messiah's resurrection. Since for Paul, it had already happened, the "apocalyptic event of the general resurrection" has begun ¹⁹. To be sure, the expectation of a dead-and-risen messiah was not commonly found in all of the diverse Jewish messianic discourses ²⁰, which makes Paul's point peculiar. Signaled by a battle cry (1 Thess 4,16) and the sound of a trumpet (1 Cor 15,52) ²¹—which frequently appears in various types of Jewish writings (e.g., Jdg 7,23; 1 Sam 13,4; 2 Kgs 3,21; 2 Macc 8,1; 1 Enoch 90,10)—the resurrection

¹⁷ It is true that 1 Thess 5,1-11 (esp. 5,3), which directly follows 1 Thess 4,13-18, references destruction for those proclaiming peace and security. Yet, this passage does not substantially alter my point. First, I consider 1 Thess 5,3 to be more of an implicit criticism of the empire (rather than of specific individuals in the community—either wicked prophets or false teachers). This view is based on the relatively non-polemical tone of 1 Thessalonians, compared with Galatians or 2 Corinthians, as well as based on imperial echoes in the phrase "peace and security" (see J.A.D. Weima, "Peace and Security' [1 Thess 5.3]: Prophetic Warning or Political Propaganda?" *NTS* 58 [2012] 331-359). Second, those who will experience the sudden destruction (5,3) are not described as "resurrected" from the dead. As I have argued in this subsection, Paul knows and mentions divine wrath, but he does not say that the wicked will be raised. Similarly, the divine destruction mentioned in 5,3 is not connected to the eschatological aspect of resurrection.

¹⁸ E. WASSERMAN, "Gentile Gods at the Eschaton: A Reconsideration of Paul's "Principalities and Powers" in 1 Corinthians 15", *JBL* 136 (2017) 727-746; E. WASSERMAN, *Apocalypse as Holy War: Divine Politics and Polemics in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT 2018).

¹⁹ A. YARBRO COLLINS, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: Early Christian", *ABD* 1:290.

²⁰ M. HENGEL, "Jesus, der Messias Israels. Zum Streit über das „messianische Sendungsbewußtsein“ Jesu", *Messiah and Christos. Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (ed. I. GRUENWALD – S. SHAKED – G.G. STROUMSA) (Tübingen 1992) 158; also, L.W. HURTADO, "Paul's Messianic Christology", *Paul the Jew*, 111-113.

²¹ In addition to the image of battle cry, one could also find resonance with the sounds of theophanic events in Jewish scripture (e.g., Exod 19,16; Ps 47,5). G.D. FEE, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 176.

of the dead believers will occur, marking the beginning of the eschatological battle against the pagan gods²². Whether the raised believers themselves would actively engage in the battle is not clearly stated²³; for Paul, probably, the messiah or God, rather than the resurrected believers, is the agent of this final cosmic conquest (yet, cf. Paul's use of military imagery for believers in 1 Thess 5,8). In light of other Pauline passages, particularly Romans 8, the eschatological struggle will bring a renewal of the entire created world²⁴. Paul does not give a clear explanation as to whether the eschatological battle and final restoration of creation will follow shortly after the resurrection of believers, or if there would be a long, intermediate period, as was sometimes expressed in the concept of the "messianic kingdom" elsewhere in Jewish and early Christian writings (e.g., for 1,000 years in Rev 21,4; for 400 years in 4 Ezra 7,26-29).

Whether one takes the enemies in Paul's eschatological scenario in 1 Corinthians 15 as cosmic forces or gentile gods, it is clear that divine punishment of the wicked *people*, including their resurrection (like in Daniel 12), does not appear in either 1 Corinthians 15 or 1 Thessalonians 4. In other words, it is unlikely that the eschatological conquest described in these passages primarily means the destruction of human enemies. While some have suggested that Paul's terminology, e.g., ἀρχή and ἐξουσία, in 1 Cor 15,25 implies Roman political authorities²⁵, the fact that these enemies do not clearly appear as the counterparts of believers in this passage

²² P. FREDRIKSEN, *Paul. The Pagans' Apostles* (New Haven, CT 2017) 92-93.

²³ A final battle between evil forces and God's people is a motif frequently found in apocalyptic literature as a part of a "general pattern of End-time events" (FREDRIKSEN, *Paul*, 27). A scenario of eschatological battle is also implied in the DSS, e.g., 1QH 14,34 (=6,34), where the resurrection of the dead is colored by the language of military mobilization.

²⁴ The last scene in 1 Cor 15,28, in which everything will be subordinated to God so that God may be "all in all," can be associated with the liberation of the whole creation from "bondage to decay" as described in Rom 8,21. By destroying the vicious circle of sin and death (1 Cor 15,55-56), the messiah will manumit every creature from slavery to "futility" (Rom 8,20), thereby putting everything completely under God's control (1 Cor 15,24-28).

²⁵ R.A. HORSLEY, *1 Corinthians* (ANTC; Nashville, TN 1998) 205; R.B. HAYS, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY 1997) 265.

weakens the inference that the destruction of the enemies here can be identified with the judgement of the oppressors or persecutors of God's people (that frequently appears in Jewish apocalyptic literature). In 1 Corinthians 15, God's enemies are *not raised* for their punishment; rather, they exist until the end and then will be put under the messiah's feet, or completely destroyed by the messiah (1 Cor 15,24-26)—a picture arising from Paul's messianic reading of Psalm 110,1 and probably Psalm 8,6 as well. Emphasis in 1 Cor 15,24-28 is placed on the messiah's supremacy over "all things" in the universe, including the suprahuman enemies. Also in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is not interested in the question of what would happen to those outside the messiah, likely due to the immediate rhetorical focus. As Puech puts it, Paul's message is that "la mort n'est redoutable que pour les méchants"²⁶, while he also points out that Paul never clearly envisions the fate of the *méchants* in this passage (in contrast to 2 Thessalonians). This lack of destruction for human enemies in Paul's resurrection discourse could be explained by aligning Paul's resurrection discourse with a certain strand/track of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, such as in the Book of the Watchers (e.g., 1 Enoch 21,1-10), where the focus is on the suprahuman powers and their destruction²⁷. Still, even in the Book of the Watchers, the wicked people are accountable and subject to destruction (1 Enoch 1,9), but Paul is reticent about it in his resurrection and final battle passages.

Paul draws on the apocalyptic tradition, including the images of resurrection and eschatological battle, but when teaching resurrection to his audiences, Paul provides an asymmetric eschatological picture focused on the fate of believers rather than describing the

²⁶ PUECH, *La croyance*, 265.

²⁷ DE BOER, *Defeat of Death*, 84-85, 183. According to him, there are two discernable "tracks" in Jewish apocalyptic eschatology: namely, cosmological apocalyptic eschatology and forensic apocalyptic eschatology, and Paul's view of resurrection belongs to the cosmological apocalyptic eschatology track, as is the Book of the Watchers.

dichotomized destinies of the righteous (rewarded) and the wicked (punished) universally found in Jewish apocalyptic tradition. It is risky to present a definitive answer from silence; yet, I believe that this suggests an important aspect of Paul's resurrection theology. Resurrection only occurs to those in the messiah. Unbelievers, the wicked, and the unrepentant will receive divine wrath (e.g., 1 Thess 1,10; Rom 2,5-11), but this does not involve, or is not called, resurrection. This is because for Paul, resurrection is by definition a full participation in the resurrected messiah's glory (which will be discussed in the third section of this paper). This asymmetrical picture of resurrection in the undisputed Pauline letters is especially striking, when compared to the remembered Paul in the Acts of the Apostles (e.g., 24,15), where Paul in the narrative clearly states that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked²⁸.

Resurrection and Heavenly Ascent

Jewish apocalyptic traditions contain diverse expectations about the dwelling place for the

²⁸ In the series of Paul's defenses in Acts (esp. 23,6-10), Paul seems to highlight shared beliefs between himself and the Pharisees (over against the Sadducees). In terms of resurrection theology, Paul's Pharisaic background would be worth further exploring. Paul is the only New Testament author who explicitly identifies himself as a Pharisee (Phil 3,5). In this regard, Paul's theology of resurrection might have originated from Pharisaism. However, one should also be aware of the difficulty in precisely reconstructing resurrection beliefs in first-century Pharisaism from NT passages (Acts 23,6-10; cf. Mark 12,18-17//Matt 22,22-23//Luke 20,27-33). Even the most explicit reference in Acts 23,6-10 is still an "*interpretatio Pharisaica* of the story of Paul" (H. LÖHR, "Luke-Acts as a Source for the History of the Pharisees", *The Pharisees* [ed. J. SIEVERS – A.-J. LEVINE] [Grands Rapids, MI 2021] 180). Another frequently cited piece of evidence from Josephus, regarding first-century Pharisees' afterlife beliefs (*J.W.* 2.119-166 and *Ant.* 18.11-25), does not specifically use the term resurrection to describe what the Pharisees believed (the Pharisaic vision of the afterlife in *J.W.* 2.163 rather sounds like reincarnation or metempsychosis). Therefore, even Claudia Setzer, who positively appreciates the convergence of all these biblical and non-biblical sources about first-century Pharisees, notes, "The sources do not reveal the content of [Pharisees'] resurrection belief, only that it was for reward and punishment" (C. SETZER, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* [Boston, MA 2004] 35). The last statement is telling—if this emphasis is indeed Pharisaic, then the absence of the connection between resurrection and punishment in the Paul of the undisputed letters (not of Acts) remains a particular point of divergence.

blessed, which is also an interesting avenue of comparison with Paul's passages. One such tradition believed the heavenly temple to be the home of the blessed. A seer could ascend to the temple without dying (2 Enoch 19,17), but the righteous dead could also ascend there (1 Enoch 62,13-16); additionally, in 1 Enoch 39,4-8, heaven is portrayed as the reserved place for the blessed righteous. The "garments of glory" in 1 Enoch 62,13-16 may mean the righteous "achieve an angelic state" in heaven, especially in the heavenly temple²⁹. In other words, those clothed in the garments of glory will join the heavenly liturgy of angels as either differentiated or undifferentiated³⁰. A heavenly dwelling for the righteous after resurrection is also implied in Dan 12,1-3³¹. This Danielic final resurrection is not for all people (universal resurrection). Not every individual will be raised, but rather two diametrically opposite groups, "the wise" and "the very bad"³². While the former will dwell in heaven eternally, the latter group, which is awakened but left in eternal disgrace and contempt, will not³³. In Daniel 12, it is not clear whether this heavenly ascent includes their bodies (*pace* Nickelsburg); for this interpretation one must import passages from Isaiah³⁴.

When compared to Daniel 12, where the righteous' heavenly dwelling is envisioned, Enochic literature exhibits more uncertainty about their final residence. For example, 1 Enoch 62,13-16, envisages the righteous' heavenly ascent, and 2 Enoch 19,17 shows Enoch clothed in

²⁹ M. HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York 1993) 60.

³⁰ This point will be revisited in the third section of this paper.

³¹ J.H. CHARLESWORTH, "Where Does the Concept of Resurrection Appear and How Do We Know That?", *Resurrection. The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine* (ed. J.H. CHARLESWORTH et al.) (New York 2006) 13.

³² COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 140; also, NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection*, 37.

³³ According to Levenson, "Daniel 12 envisions something more along the lines of the Christian hell" as the place reserved for the wicked. J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel. The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT 2006) 190. Yet, it is uncertain what the precise nature of the shame and contempt given to the wicked is and how this will be realized.

³⁴ NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection*, 38.

heavenly garments. In terms of their ascent, it is not explained whether they will dwell there in their bodies (the same uncertainty as found in Daniel 12). Yet, many passages in 1 Enoch offer a different picture. In these passages, the vindicated righteous will dwell *on earth* (a prolonged, blessed life) instead of in heaven. In 1 Enoch 51, which clearly talks about resurrection, the author declares that “the earth will rejoice, and the righteous will dwell on it and the chosen will go upon it” (51,5). In the Book of the Watchers (despite the less vivid portrayal of resurrection), a similar picture appears, the chosen “will inherit the earth” (1 Enoch 5,7; cf. Psalm 37,11; Matt 5,5), and the righteous and the pious “will live a long life on the earth” (25,6). The last part of the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 90) focuses on the “land of Israel” as the final place of transformation in which other “species” (i.e., nations) will be transformed into white cattle (90,38). The vision can be called “heaven on earth”, because “God has come down and lives among them”³⁵. In summary, 1 Enoch as a whole, from the oldest parts (e.g., Book of the Watchers) to the relatively later parts (e.g., Similitudes), juxtaposes the expectation of spatial transcendence from death with some type of earthly hope that encompasses a physical resurrection and a new life on earth, thereby retaining the tension between the two depictions, i.e., a blessed life on earth and in heaven.

At first, Paul seems to have a similar ambiguity between heaven/earth when imagining resurrection. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does not specify where the resurrected ones will be. The contrast between “the man of dust” and “the man of heaven” (15,48) may suggest that “those who are of heaven” will dwell in heaven, but this is not clearly stated. If one

³⁵ COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 88. The emphasis on a restored, blessed life on earth (also found in other works, such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs) may be reminiscence of the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isaiah 35, 65 etc.). This idea (“heaven on earth”) is similarly found in some Christian apocalyptic works, such as Rev 21,1-3. Paul, however, does not articulate it.

examines 1 Thessalonians 4, however, it appears that Paul does not believe the resurrected and transformed believers will dwell on earth. Admittedly, one could claim that 1 Thessalonians 4 also contains the same ambiguity. For example, will the believers in v. 17, who rendezvous with the Lord in the air (a middle place?), proceed to the upper region or come back to earth ³⁶? From the cultural connotations of Paul's language in 1 Thessalonians 4 (e.g., παρουσία, v. 15, and ἀπάντησις, v. 17), N.T. Wright contends that Paul presupposes here a custom of "imperial visitation". Leaders of the city escort the emperor "back into the city itself", after they meet him outside it ³⁷. Wright argues that this passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 does not refer to a literal ascent of believers, which he criticizes as a striking misunderstanding of both "popular fundamentalism and critical scholarship alike" ³⁸. After their encounter, the believers (both resurrected and living) will come back to earth with the Lord, according to his interpretation. Yet, his reading is not convincing. As Malherbe points out, "The Hellenistic processions were undertaken at the initiative of the welcomers, whereas here [in 1 Thess 4,13-18] they are snatched up, presumably by God" and "nothing is said about returning to earth" ³⁹. Plevnik also demonstrates that 1 Thessalonians 4 does not envisage believers returning to earth after their meeting with the messiah ⁴⁰. Paul does imagine that Jesus will return as a "conquering messiah" and "victorious warrior" ⁴¹, but Jesus's return does not resemble the meeting between an emperor or authority and civic leaders outside the city, and thus does not support the imperial visitation theory. The

³⁶ M.E. BORING, *I & II Thessalonians*. A Commentary (NTL; Louisville, KY 2015) 173.

³⁷ N.T. WRIGHT, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN 2003) 217-218.

³⁸ WRIGHT, *Resurrection*, 215.

³⁹ MALHERBE, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 277.

⁴⁰ J. PLEVNIK, "1 Thessalonians 4,17: The Bringing in of the Lord or the Bringing in of the Faithful?", *Biblica* 80 (1999) 537-546.

⁴¹ FREDRIKSEN, *Paul*, 78. Also, it can be noted that both the canonical Psalms (especially Psalm 2) and *Psalms of Solomon* (esp. ch. 17) show the idea of the conquering messiah.

messiah's return will inaugurate the eschatological battle (1 Cor 15,24-28). More importantly, talk of a "new earth" is absent in Paul (cf. new earth in 2 Pet 3,13 and Rev 21,1), and there is no claim that a new earth will be the dwelling place of those who belong to the messiah. All this evidence considered, Paul's basic conviction is that those who are raised and transformed, along with those who remain alive but will be transformed (cf. Phil 3,21), will stay with the messiah after they meet him in the air, rather than returning to the renewed earth⁴². How the renewal of all creation (Rom 8, 21; 1 Cor 15,28) affects this heavenly dwelling is not clear in Paul's letters—Paul comes short of systemizing these different aspects of the eschatological landscape.

At least, from 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, one could theorize the "resurrection followed by a heavenly transformation" pattern, which is similarly found in 1 Enoch 62 and 2 Baruch 50⁴³. Still, Paul's resurrection discourse is distinctive in his depiction of the nature of this ascent. While the pattern of the Lord's decent (from a much higher place) to meet with the righteous in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4 reveals his familiarity with the "géographie mythique" of Enochic literature⁴⁴, Paul takes it a step further. Paul envisages this ascent as bodily and collective, because this end-time scenario includes the ascent of those who already died and those who remain alive (the inclusion of two groups is also important in 1 Corinthians 15). When compared to Daniel, 1 Enoch, and 2 Baruch, Paul's combination of (1) bodily resurrection, (2) transformation, and (3) their bodily as well as collective ascent shows his distinctive edge in resurrection discourse⁴⁵. Paul's idea of believers' ascent into heaven in their

⁴² Kucicki is more cautious about making any definitive claim, but he seems to be inclined to this possibility (*Eschatology*, 288 n. 52).

⁴³ T.W. MARTIN, "Transfiguration. A Christian View of the Afterlife", *Sacred Texts & Sacred Figures. The Reception and Use of Inherited Traditions in Early Christian Literature* (ed. C.G. PARDEE – J.M. TRIPP (Turnhout, 2022) 55-57.

⁴⁴ PUECH, *La croyance*, 264.

⁴⁵ This whole idea could be called "transfiguration" (Troy Martin's neologism), which "not only raises but also

physical bodies and dwelling there with the messiah may have been stimulated by the combination of two types of apocalyptic tradition, i.e., the otherworldly journey and the historical types⁴⁶. This blend of heavenly and eschatological revelation has its precedent in Daniel⁴⁷. Yet, Paul's idea that believers, both dead and alive, will be universally snatched up into the heavenly sphere as part of an eschatological scenario seems unusual compared to other Jewish apocalyptic writings. Collins comments that "the elevation of the living is not excluded" in Daniel 12,1-3⁴⁸, but there is no clear evidence for this claim in that specific passage. Nor can the idea of both groups of the righteous (the living and the dead) being snatched up be clearly detected in 1 Enoch 50-51 and 102-104, both of which depict the resurrection or final transformation.

Paul's view is peculiar, but it is not incompatible with his cultural context—both Jewish and non-Jewish. The absence of a precisely corresponding concept in Jewish apocalyptic thought leads Charlesworth to place Paul's idea of resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4 in a unique category⁴⁹. Yet, both Jewish apocalyptic literature and Greco-Roman myths provide various examples of ideal or mythical individuals taken to heaven to live there permanently or to have a temporary, visionary tour of heaven. In both cases, heavenly ascent could include one's body or exclude it. In this regard, Paul's theory was not isolated; he developed his view of the eschatological ascent of believers in ways intelligible to his audiences. A few of examples (not an exhaustive list)

changes or transfigures that body into one capable of living forever in the heavens" (MARTIN, "Transfiguration", 75). However, I think Paul's idea of resurrection is not a distinctively *Christian* view of the afterlife, given its strong continuity with Jewish tradition, as well as the diversity of afterlife conceptions within early Christian writings (both of which Martin admits).

⁴⁶ Regarding these two types, see, COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 7-8.

⁴⁷ YARBRO COLLINS, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism", 290.

⁴⁸ J.J. COLLINS, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death", *CBQ* 36 (1974) 34.

⁴⁹ CHARLESWORTH, "Where Does the Concept of Resurrection Appear", 17.

appear in the table below.

	Permanent dwelling in heaven	Temporary journey to heaven
Out of one's physical body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heracles (Lucian, <i>Hermotimus</i> 7) - Myth of Er (Plato, <i>Republic</i> 10,614B) - The immortality of the soul after death (in Platonism and less strictly in Stoicism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enoch (1 Enoch 71,5) - Moses (Philo, <i>On Dreams</i> 1,36) - Epimenides (Diogenes Laertius 1,109-115), perhaps during his long sleep
In one's physical body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enoch and Elijah (Gen 5,25; 2 King 2,1-11; Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> 1,85-86 and 9,28) - Heracles (Apollodorus, <i>Library</i> 2,7,7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enoch (1 Enoch 14,8, 39,3, etc.) - Abraham (<i>Testament of Abraham</i> 8,2 [B]) - Abaris, Apollo's servant (Herodotus, <i>Histories</i> 4,36), perhaps flying throughout the world (rather than toward heaven)

The heavenly ascent of seers or heroes in their physical bodies was one of the traditions available to Paul and his audience, though perhaps this idea was less common than the survival of the soul. When Paul tells the Thessalonians about believers' heavenly ascent at the parousia, the Thessalonians, who were recently converted and still lived in the midst of pagan cultures, may have understood that teaching in light of mythical figures' ascent and dwelling in heaven. Probably the same reason was behind the controversy around resurrection among Paul's Corinthian audience, as Paul J. Brown and Gaetano Di Palma argue⁵⁰. The resurrection "deniers" in Corinth (1 Cor 15,12) likely influenced by Greco-Roman mythology, considered Jesus to be analogous to the deified and venerated heroes. Thus, they accepted Jesus's resurrection, while doubted believers' resurrection. Furthermore, in both Corinth and Thessalonica, if some were familiar with Jewish scripture and Jewish apocalyptic tradition (regardless of their ethnicity), they would be familiar with seers' ascent stories (Paul's report of his heavenly journey in 2 Corinthians 12 may presuppose his audience's pre-understandings of

⁵⁰ P.J. BROWN, *Bodily Resurrection and Ethics in 1 Cor 15* (WUNT 2/360; Tübingen 2014) 89-94. A similar understanding of resurrection deniers (who accepted Jesus's resurrection and denied believers' resurrection) is found in G. DI PALMA, *Cristo primizia dei morti e la risurrezione dei credenti. Studio su 1 Cor 15* (Bern 2014) 79-81. Thus, it is unlikely that the Corinthians denied resurrection because of their anthropological dualism and preference of the soul against the body (a view proposed in Sellin's meticulous study). G. SELLIN, *Der Streit um die Auferstehung der Toten. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung von 1 Korinther 15* (Göttingen 1986).

such accounts) and those of a few notable figures in the Hebrew Bible (Enoch and Elijah in particular; but several prophets [Isiah, Ezekiel, etc.] are also heavenly seers). Their knowledge of this Jewish tradition, along with analogous figures in the wider Greco-Roman world, could enable them to accept the possibility of special individuals' ascent. Yet, in all these traditions, a collective ascent is unknown. Paul's particularity in 1 Thess 4,13-18 lies in his combining the tradition of the bodily ascent (usually, of a small number of special figures) with his imminent eschatological expectation that covers all believers. For Paul, a Jew, the apocalyptic tradition of seers' ascent rather than pagan myths likely formed the immediate cultural context that facilitated his combination, while the reception of this discourse among his audiences took place in more complicated cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Paul's own experience of heavenly ascent would have influenced his eschatological vision, including his belief in the bodily ascent of all believers. In 2 Cor 12,1-10, Paul gives a cryptic summary of a person's visionary experience, and while he does not claim that this is an account of his own experience, it probably reflects Paul's own revelatory experience. This passage provides evidence that (1) Paul knew very well the two traditions of the heavenly journey (i.e., traveling with the body or without the body) of apocalyptic seers, and (2) could distinguish one from the other.

First, Paul's report in 2 Cor 12,1-4 shows that he had a revelatory experience in which he was "caught up to the third heaven" fourteen years prior to his composition of the letter. Paul lacks clarity about two things in detail: by using the third person throughout the account (except in v. 7), he is ambiguous about whether this is his own experience, and he equivocates about whether this happened "in the body" or "out of the body" (v. 2; cf. in v. 3, "without the body", which is not much different in meaning). Paul's third-person discourse is understandable within

the broader context—the theme of “boasting” in chaps. 10-12. Yet, what puzzles interpreters is that Paul mentions equivocally the nature of the experience (i.e., “in the body” or “out of/without the body”). It is true that visionary accounts are conventional ⁵¹, but, since this confusion is unusual even in heavenly ascent stories, this may signal Paul’s genuine experience ⁵², perhaps suggesting a state of mind analogous to ASC (altered state of consciousness) ⁵³. Despite interpretative difficulties, one thing is clear: 2 Cor 12,1-4 presupposes multiple notions of visionary experiences (in or out of the body) in antiquity. As Adela Collins points out, Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians 12 demonstrates “at least that [Paul] was aware of visionary lore which distinguished between two types of ascent” ⁵⁴.

Second, Paul was not confused about which type of ascent he experienced. One might object to this claim. For example, Barrett comments, “It is . . . clear that Paul was unable to distinguish between the two states, *in the body* and *out of the body*, or rather that he thought the distinction irrelevant or inapplicable” ⁵⁵. Ralph Martin notes, “[Paul] simply is not sure whether he went to the ‘third heaven’ in body or in spirit” ⁵⁶. More significantly, Jorunn Økland proposes that the repeated phrases in 12,2-3 reflect Paul’s anthropological dilemma. If Paul says that he was out of the body, he may lend justification to a “dispensation of the body, something of which Paul has earlier accused the Corinthians” (1 Corinthians 6 and 8), but if Paul admits that he was in the body, this runs counter to his previous affirmation that the earthly body cannot inherit the

⁵¹ HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 110. Yet, she also admits, “Conventional language . . . does not preclude actual visionary experience” (113).

⁵² P. GOODER, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12.1-10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London 2006) 181.

⁵³ C. SHANTZ, *Paul in Ecstasy. The Neurobiology of the Apostle’s Life and Thought* (Cambridge 2009).

⁵⁴ YARBRO COLLINS, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 13.

⁵⁵ Italics in original. C.K. BARRETT, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York 1973) 308.

⁵⁶ R.P. MARTIN, *2 Corinthians* (2nd edition; WBC 40; Grand Rapids, MI 2014) 594.

imperishable realm (1 Cor 15,50)⁵⁷. Thus, Økland comments, “2 Corinthians 12 presents us with the nice taxonomies and sorted worldviews of 1 Corinthians 15 starting to dissolve and collapse when confronted with Paul’s own boundary-breaking experience”⁵⁸. Økland’s proposal, however, does not account for both types of ascents (i.e., in the body or out of the body) being acceptable for Paul and the Corinthians. Temporary separation of one’s spirit and body in ecstasy or in some mysterious state, is also implied in 1 Cor 5,3-4⁵⁹. There is no compelling reason for presupposing such a dilemma for Paul or his audience. Thus, Paul’s uncertainty or confusion about his being outside or inside the body at the time of his revelatory experience in 2 Corinthians 12 should not be taken at face value. The seemingly confused tone in this passage goes hand in hand with Paul’s rhetorical pretense that this ecstatic experience is not his; Paul’s puzzling phrase about the body and the revelatory experience (12,2.3) is his rhetorical strategy against boasting or self-aggrandizement. Additionally, the repeated use of “body” in this account (vv. 1-4), as well as the emphasis on the body in his own physical affliction (vv. 7b-10), reveals Paul’s rhetorical focus on the body. As Oda Wischmeyer notes, “Paul himself, his body (*sōma*) and his flesh (*sárx*) become the place of this kind of revelation, not the third heaven and not the paradise”⁶⁰. Therefore, Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians 12 “holds open the possibility that [Paul’s] ascent was in the body”⁶¹. Of course, this is about how Paul in the first century perceived his ascent, not whether this is possible scientifically. The point here is that Paul

⁵⁷ J. ØKLAND, “Genealogies of the Self”, *Metamorphoses. Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. T.K. SEIM – J. ØKLAND) (Berlin 2009) 100.

⁵⁸ ØKLAND, “Genealogies of the Self”, 101.

⁵⁹ According to Hays, this remark should not be understood in “a weak, psychological sense”, but as Paul’s actual presence with the Corinthians “in some mysterious way”. HAYS, *First Corinthians*, 84.

⁶⁰ O. WISCHMEYER, “Ego-Documents on Religious Experiences in Paul’s Letters: 2 Corinthians 12 and Related Texts”, *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics* (ed. V. GASPARINI et al.) (Berlin 2020) 195.

⁶¹ V.P. FURNISH, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY 1984) 543.

probably knew that he experienced heavenly ascent in the body, but he equivocates it rhetorically in 2 Corinthians 12.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 12 sheds further light on 1 Thessalonians 4. Both 1 Thess 4,17 and 2 Cor 12,2.4 contain the same verb ἀρπάζειν (literally, to “carry off,” “snatch up,” “seize”) to describe the ascent initiated by God. This verb is used in Wisdom of Solomon 4,10-11 to describe the rapture of those who lived a God-pleasing life, and as Paula Gooder notes, “the use of the term implies that Paul’s ascent was *involuntary*”⁶². This verb opens the possibility that Paul conceived of his heavenly tour in the body (2 Corinthians 12) similarly to his expectation of what will happen to believers at the parousia of the messiah (1 Thessalonians 4). Yet, there is an important difference. Paul’s solo and pre-eschatological ascent in 2 Corinthians 12 could be understood as a “failed ascent” or at least an incomplete ascent, as Gooder demonstrates⁶³. In contrast, the believers’ collective ascent at the parousia will be a complete one. A more immediate explanation is that Paul’s allusion to the failed ascent in 2 Corinthians 12 strategically supports Paul’s polemic against some Corinthians, and emphasizes that what matters is not extraordinary experience, but the messiah’s power manifested in human weakness. Yet, the difference in completeness in 2 Corinthians 12 and 1 Thessalonians 4 also reveals Paul’s theology of ascent. Paul postpones the completion of the heavenly ascent to the point of the messiah’s parousia, which will occur not individually, but collectively. As mentioned earlier, special seers in Jewish apocalypses are depicted as ascending for the purpose of gaining secret knowledge⁶⁴, and in a few cases in Jewish literature, death and ascent are related for exceptional

⁶² Italics added. GOODER, *Only the Third Heaven?* 182.

⁶³ GOODER, *Only the Third Heaven?* 190-211.

⁶⁴ KUCICKI, *Eschatology*, 286-287.

individuals (e.g., Enoch and Elijah in the HB, or Abraham in the Testament of Abraham 3.12 and LAB 4.11). Still, it is rare that this ascent is collective and eschatological ⁶⁵. For Paul, those who belong to the messiah will *all* be snatched up to heaven together at the time of the messiah's return.

Paul's idea of a heavenly ascent for believers at the messiah's return in 1 Thess 4,13-18 is rooted in Jewish apocalyptic thought as a combination of the historical expectation about the coming of a new era and the otherworldly journey or spatial transference in one's body, while stories of heavenly dwelling were also available in the wider, non-Jewish, Greco-Roman world from which many of Paul's audience came ⁶⁶. Furthermore, this combination was possibly precipitated by Paul's own visionary experience. An analysis of 2 Corinthians 12, including the comparison of the language of involuntary and sudden rapture in 2 Corinthians 12 and 1 Thessalonians 4, shows how Paul reconfigures the notion of ascent in its temporality and scope. Paul believes that heavenly ascent is a special experience, as reflected in his polemical passage in 2 Corinthians 12, and he does not want to devalue it in a wholesale way. Yet, he suggests his full exaltation was somehow thwarted in the present. This ascent will be accomplished at the eschaton, when the messiah returns. This will include not only special individuals, but all those

⁶⁵ The Testament of Benjamin 10.6ff would be an exception, in that it includes the rising of tribal leaders and others at the eschaton (CAVALLIN, *Life After Death*, 53). Still, it is not entirely clear that this passage envisions the ascent of *all* to heaven.

⁶⁶ One might object that this claim mistakenly conflates two distinct concepts (heavenly rapture and eschatological apocalypticism). However, I have argued in this subsection that this very "conflation" (or better yet, "conceptual blending"—in Fauconnier and Turner's cognitive linguistic theory) is what makes Paul's apocalyptic vision peculiar. Not all apocalyptic writings explicitly address the end of history or resurrection (for example, 3 Baruch; stories of heavenly journeys and/or visions come to the fore), and conversely, some apocalyptic writings (notably, 4 Ezra) "reject[s] the tradition of heavenly ascent" (COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 8). Paul's eschatological apocalypticism, or apocalyptic eschatology, combines the tradition of select individuals' ascent and visionary experience (including his own experience alluded in 2 Corinthians 12) with the notion of the resurrection of the righteous/elect. This conceptual blending can explain peculiar descriptions of the believers' collective resurrection and ascent at the messiah's return (e.g., in 1 Thessalonians 4).

in the messiah, both the living and the dead. Those alive will be snatched up in their bodies with other believers who are raised from the dead.

Putting on Heavenly Garments and the Messiah-like Transformation

Paul's explicit remarks of transformation, found in 1 Cor 15,50-54 but absent in 1 Thess 4,13-18, is similar to the Jewish apocalyptic concept of putting on heavenly garments. Contrary to his previous discourse in 1 Cor 15,39-44a, with a taste of philosophical body taxonomy (vv. 39-41) and its application to the resurrection (vv. 42-44a)⁶⁷, Paul ceases philosophical speculation of the nature of one's resurrection body and takes a leap into his typological interpretation of Jewish Scripture (vv. 44b-49). Afterwards, he abruptly readopts an apocalyptic tone and addresses the need for a complete transformation of all (vv. 50-52). This transformation is described as "putting on imperishability" and "immortality" (v. 53; cf. 2 Cor 5,4). This picture does not easily support the Stoic theorists who interpret σῶμα πνευματικόν as a body made up entirely of the material *pneuma* in light of Stoic cosmology and anthropology⁶⁸. Rather than stripping off lower elements of the body (Dale Martin's interpretation) or changing the lower elements into *pneuma* altogether (Engberg-Pedersen's), Paul claims that the present earthly body will "put on" imperishability and immortality as a new garment, recalling his use of the garment metaphor when describing baptism (Gal 3,27).

This resonates with angelic garments appearing in Jewish apocalyptic works. In 1 Enoch 62,13-16, the righteous will put on "the garment of glory" and "the garment of life." Second

⁶⁷ ASHER, *Polarity and Change*, 100-110.

⁶⁸ See footnote 1.

Enoch 22,8 [A] states: “The Lord said to Michael, ‘Take Enoch, and extract (him) from the earthly clothing. And anoint him with the delightful oil, and put (him) into the clothes of glory”⁶⁹. Himmelfarb notes that here Enoch becomes an angel, and this process is “a heavenly version of priestly investiture”⁷⁰. Writings from Qumran show a similar understanding, though not all of them are strictly “apocalypses”. In 1QS 4,7-8, for example, the elect will be given the glorious garment. The Ascension of Isaiah, an apocalyptic work dating later than Paul, develops this understanding. Isaiah is told that he will “receive the robe . . . then [he] will be equal to the angels who (are) in the seventh heaven” (8,14-15). The heavenly bodies of saints are “stored up” in the seventh heaven and will be given to them at the coming of the Lord (4,16). Instead of their earthly bodies that are corruptible and mortal, they will put on glorious bodies, comparable to that of angels, and probably take part in heavenly liturgy. Paul’s language of “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15,44) can be understood in a similar way to the heavenly garments in this tradition.

A question remains. Does this mean that Paul imagines the resurrected believers will become (like) angels in the heavenly temple? Answering this question requires more research on angelic transformation in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. Doubtlessly, apocalyptic texts assume a very close relation between the righteous/holy people and the righteous/holy angels in heaven. The Qumran documents frequently speak of community members’ participation in angelic fellowship (e.g., 1QH^a 11,20-24; 19,13-17; 1QS 11,7-9). The apocalyptic authors of Daniel and 1 Enoch envision the exalted, glorious status of the righteous. Especially, 1 Enoch 104,1-6 and

⁶⁹ Yet it should also be noted that “the language in 2 Enoch 22,8 [A] at least implies that Enoch’s soul is extracted from his earthly body and only then puts on the clothes of glory”, as Adela Collins points out in personal communication. In contrast, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does not explicitly mention “taking off” the earthly clothing/body. See also Paul’s remarks in 2 Cor 5,4: “We wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed” (NRSV).

⁷⁰ HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 40.

Daniel 12,1-3 are considered evidence for the righteous/holy people's angelic transformation.

Daniel 12,3 reads: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." On the basis of the equation of the "stars" with "angels" found in various Jewish literature (e.g., Jgs 5,20; Job 38,4-7; Ps 89,5-7; especially, Dan 8,10; cf. 1 Enoch 90,21)⁷¹, it could be argued that the author means that the wise, i.e., "those who lead many to righteousness," will be transformed into angelic beings, who are like the stars. First Enoch 104,1-6, which seems to have a tradition in common with Dan 12,1-3⁷², may support this idea more clearly: "you [the righteous] will shine like the luminaries of heaven" (v. 2) and "you will be companions of the host of heaven [i.e., angels]" (v. 6).

Yet, although the concept of the angelic transformation fits within Jewish cultural traditions, this idea is usually expressed more *indirectly*, which in itself is an interesting phenomenon. The aforementioned passages in Daniel and 1 Enoch do not directly affirm that the wise or the righteous will become angels (the host of heaven). It is rather told in a figurative way that they will "shine like the stars" or "be companions of the angels". As Newsom points out, "it is difficult to judge the force of the preposition 'like' (*kē*)", and therefore, the righteous' astral immortality is uncertain⁷³. Beyond Daniel and 1 Enoch, one finds yet more evidence for angelic transformation. According to Charlesworth's survey, several Jewish and Christian documents present ideal characters in Israel's past (or Jesus in the case of Christian works) as angelic figures, not in a metaphorical sense but in a sense that "an apparent human being is actually an

⁷¹ HIMMELFARB, *Ascent to Heaven*, 50; COLLINS, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 113; M. THIESSEN, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York 2016) 140-147.

⁷² G.W.E. NICKELSBURG and J.C. VANDERKAM, *1 Enoch I. A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis, MN 2001) 528.

⁷³ C. NEWSOM, with B.W. BREED, *Daniel. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY 2014) 364.

angel or that he (or she) has been transformed into an angel”⁷⁴. However, these depictions are usually heterogeneous. Some of these works regard primordial existence as angelic (e.g., Adam in 2 Enoch 30)⁷⁵, and another group emphasizes that their present community is already participating in angelic fellowship (e.g., 1QH 3,21-23; 4,24f.; 6,13; 11,10-12; 1QS 11,7f.; 1QSa 2,3-11), rather than becoming angels in heaven⁷⁶. Second Baruch 50–51 (cf. 1 Enoch 104,4-6) displays a closer relation between the angelic transformation and the eschatological event. After the righteous are resurrected, not being changed “in their form” (2 Baruch 50,2), they will be changed into “the splendor of angels” (51,5). Yet, even that verse does not equate the righteous people with angels, but only compares them to the angels. Second Baruch 51,10 states that the righteous eventually will be “*like* the angels and be equal to the stars”. One could cite 4 Ezra as evidence for angelic transformation after resurrection. Troy Martin argues 4 Ezra presents a pattern of resurrection followed by heavenly transformation⁷⁷. According to him, 4 Ezra 7,32 speaks of resurrection and 7,97 envisions subsequent transformation. However, 4 Ezra 7,97 is not the next stage after the resurrection of the body; rather, 4 Ezra 7,75-101 represents an intermediate state of souls between death and resurrection/judgment. Thus, 4 Ezra is even less clear than 2 Baruch in terms of the resurrection-first & transformation-next pattern, not to mention angelic transformation.

Perhaps, 1 Enoch 51,4 (Knibb’s translation: “All will become angels in heaven. Their faces will shine with joy”) provides the strongest evidence for angelic transformation⁷⁸. Yet, the

⁷⁴ J.H. CHARLESWORTH, “The Portrayal of the Righteous as an Angel”, *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism. Profiles and Paradigms* (ed. J.J. COLLINS – G.W.E. NICKELSBURG (Chico, CA 1980) 135.

⁷⁵ CHARLESWORTH, “Portrayal”, 137.

⁷⁶ CHARLESWORTH, “Portrayal”, 136.

⁷⁷ MARTIN, “Transfiguration”, 56.

⁷⁸ M.A. KNIBB, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Vol. 2; Oxford 1978) 136.

verse is ambiguous due to text-critical issues, and it can be read very differently, as Nickelsburg and VanderKam demonstrate: “The faces of all the angels in heaven will be radiant with joy”⁷⁹. According to Nickelsburg and VanderKam, the idea itself (the righteous become angels) is not problematic, but “in [the immediate] context [of 1 Enoch 51] it makes little sense”⁸⁰. The antecedent of “all” in 51,4 cannot be easily identified as the righteous because of the present structure of the passage. Even if one concedes the righteous are the antecedent, the idea that all the righteous become angels clashes with the immediate context of chap. 51, in which the righteous are expected to dwell “on earth.” Thus, 1 Enoch 51,4 is better understood as expressing the view that the angels in heaven will rejoice in the final deliverance of the people (cf. T. Levi 18,5 and Luke 15,7.10)⁸¹.

The explicit remark that the righteous people will be literally transformed into angels in heaven is unusual (though not impossible) in the Jewish texts examined here, with the possible exception of one translation of 1 Enoch 51,4 due to a text-critical choice. This means that apocalyptic views regarding the relationship between the righteous and the angels are diverse and complicated. It should also be pointed out that heaven is not only occupied by angels. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, the divine council of Yahweh not merely consists of the angels (הַמְּלֹאכִיִּם), but also various other characters (including notable human beings) who are not called angels, as Ellen White demonstrates in her analysis of “Council of Yahweh texts” (1 Kings 22; Job 1–2; Isaiah 6; Zechariah 3; Daniel 7)⁸². In short, the proximity of the present righteous

⁷⁹ Knibb, probably having chosen the reading of *m, b*, thinks that the last part of v. 4 directly speaks to the transformation of the righteous into the angelic beings, whereas Nickelsburg and VanderKam do not think that is the case. See, G.W.E. NICKELSBURG and J.C. VANDERKAM, *1 Enoch 2. A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 37-82* (Minneapolis, MN 2012) 181. See also, E. ISAAC, “1 Enoch”, *OTP* Vol. 1, 37.

⁸⁰ NICKELSBURG and VANDERKAM, *1 Enoch 2*, 181.

⁸¹ NICKELSBURG and VANDERKAM, *1 Enoch 2*, 186.

⁸² E. WHITE, *Yahweh's Council. Its Structure and Membership* (Tübingen 2014) 105-137. For “tiers” within the

people (or the ideal figures from the past) to the angels in heaven was commonly conceived in Jewish apocalyptic literature, but the notion that the righteous will be transformed into angels in heaven is not so sweepingly found. In many cases, the concept of angelic transformation in a literal sense remains equivocal.

This tradition of heavenly transformation, along with its less strictly determined depictions of the elect in heaven (*vis-à-vis* already-existing angels), provided some “wiggle room” for Paul to develop his particular theory of transformation, while still making it intelligible to his contextual audiences. The concept of transcending one’s death by becoming “like” angels was common in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and Paul’s clothing imagery may indicate that Paul envisions believers’ transformation at the *parousia* as becoming like angels, similar to the authors of Enochic books and Daniel. Some Gospel passages claim this more directly⁸³. Yet, what Paul suggests is that believers will join the messiah himself, to whom they already belong (by implication, not joining the host of angels). The heavenly garment that the elect would receive has already been given at the time of the believers’ baptism into the messiah, thus, this is partly a social reality present in Paul’s community. In their self-understanding, the believers are “clothed with the messiah” (Gal 3,27, i.e., “the eschatological garment of glory, the body of glory, which they are to receive only at the eschaton”⁸⁴), and this comes with social implications as expressed in Gal 3,28. It is important to note that this garment, which believers

divine council, see pp. 138-144.

⁸³ Matt 22,30 and its parallels state that the resurrected righteous will be similar to angels at least in one aspect (i.e., regarding marriage/sexual practice). However, the resurrected are not unambiguously identified with the angels. Another example, Luke 16,22-23, shows that some people in that period distinguish the identity of the blessed dead from that of the angels who help them. The beggar Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom rather than becoming one of the angels.

⁸⁴ T. KUO-YU TSUI, “‘Baptised into His Death’ (Rom 6,3) and ‘Clothed with Christ’ (Gal 3,27): The Soteriological Meaning of Baptism in Light of Pauline Apocalyptic”, *ETL* 88 (2012) 414.

received proleptically, is specifically a messiah-like garment, not merely angelic garment; they were not baptized into and clothed with the angels, but the messiah. This difference impacts what will happen at the eschaton. When the messiah comes back, those who currently belong to the messiah will be with him (1 Thessalonians 4), and they will be transformed to be like him (2 Cor 3,18; Phil 3,21), not like the angels.

Several passages in Paul's letters demonstrate that Paul distinguishes the blessed status of believers from angels. Certainly, Paul's worldview, like that of other Jews of his time, includes the existence of heavenly beings, i.e., angels (e.g., 1 Cor 4,9; 6,3; 11,10; 13,1; 2 Cor 11,14; 12,7; Gal 1,8; 3,19; Rom 8,38). In his letters, angels are often described as superior to humans, whether evil or good. They are thought to be "the originators" or "mediators" of the Torah (Gal 3,19), which is also found in Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 14,136), other NT writings (e.g., Acts 7,38.53), and early Christian texts (e.g., Shepherd of Hermas 8,3,3)⁸⁵. As "guardians of order"⁸⁶, the angels assist believers in public worship⁸⁷, and this could be the reason for Paul's instruction that women cover their heads (1 Cor 11,10), presupposing some angelology in Jewish apocalyptic tradition⁸⁸. Paul also expects that the angels will also accompany the messiah at the parousia (1 Thess 3,13; cf. Mark 8,38//Matt 16,27; Mark 13,27//Matt 25,31), which shows the closeness of angels to this heavenly messiah. Paul calls angels ἅγιοι (holy ones) in 1 Thess 3,13, which corresponds to Paul's labeling of believers elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor 1,2; 6,1-2)—Paul often applies ἅγιοι to believers in his communities. His double usage of "holy ones" (human beings as

⁸⁵ H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, PA 1979) 168.

⁸⁶ HAYS, *First Corinthians*, 188.

⁸⁷ J.A. FITZMYER, *First Corinthians*, 418-419.

⁸⁸ MARTIN, *Corinthian Body*, 242-249; L.T. STUCKENBRUCK, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10)", *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4 (2001) 205-234.

well as angels) recalls the apocalyptic concept of 1 Enoch, which states the holy ones in heaven exist as counterparts to the holy ones on earth, and ultimately they will dwell together eventually (1 Enoch 38,1-6; 39,4-5; 43,1-4). In Daniel too, the term is used for both angels (e.g., Dan 4,10.14.20) and faithful Jews (7,18.21.22)⁸⁹. However, in all of the Pauline passages cited above, Paul does not blend the identity of those in the messiah with angels, despite his thinking and teaching that angels gather with believers in worship and both will be with the messiah. Nor does Paul explicitly state that the mingling and identification of human and heavenly holy ones will occur at the messiah's return. Paul's remark in 1 Cor 6,2-3 demonstrates that Paul thinks that human believers will eventually become superior to angels because of their association with the messiah. In resurrection, they will not be like angels (contrary to the Gospel passages in footnote 78), they will be better than angels.

Two objections might be offered. First, one can assume that whenever Paul talks about the believers' superiority to angels (e.g., 1 Cor 6,2-3), Paul speaks of bad/fallen angels⁹⁰. The believers will join the good angels, exerting their authority of judgment over the bad angels. However, is there any clear precedent for this (i.e., the mixed group of the good angels and those who have been transformed from humans into angels will judge the bad angels) in apocalyptic literature? First Enoch has some angels judging and punishing the Watchers who came down to earth (e.g., 1,9). Yet, it is uncertain that these holy ones (apparently heavenly beings) include human holy ones transformed into angels. In other passages in 1 Enoch, one finds references in which righteous humans are associated with the judgment of the wicked (e.g., 14,3; 27,3). Yet,

⁸⁹ G. BOCCACCINI, *Middle Judaism. Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis, MN 1991) 152.

⁹⁰ A.C. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI 2000) 431.

there is no explicit statement that this final judgment will be done by those transformed into angels. In 1 Cor 6,2-3, Paul points out that when the messiah comes, believers will be superior to angels precisely because of their association with the messiah; the inherent goodness/badness of angels is not the focus. Second, if Paul understands the messiah as a kind of angel, then this distinction between becoming (like) angels and becoming (like) the messiah would collapse. For example, Bart Ehrman suggests an expegetical reading of Gal 4,14 (ἀλλ' ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν), i.e., equating ἄγγελος θεοῦ with Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς. Based on this, Ehrman argues that Paul perceives the messiah as an angel⁹¹. Yet, Paul's letters do not usually place the messiah and angels in the same category (Rom 8,38-39; cf. 1 Cor 6,3 and Gal 3,19). This is not to deny any possibility of angelomorphic christology in the New Testament⁹², but Galatians 4,14 does not sufficiently support the identification between the messiah and angels in Paul's thought.

All this shows Paul's distinctive understanding of resurrection and transformation. The connection between messianology and resurrection is not common in Jewish apocalyptic literature (4 Ezra 7 would be an exception)⁹³. In Paul's discourse on resurrection, the Jewish apocalyptic notion of resurrection and heavenly transformation of the elect is messianologically reimagined. Paul and his messiah-believing audiences are the end-time people here and now (cf. 1 Cor 10,11). The heavenly ascent of believers means their messiah-like transformation and being with the messiah, instead of angelic transformation and participation in the fellowship of

⁹¹ B. EHRMAN, *How Jesus Became God*. The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee (New York 2014) 252-253.

⁹² Traditions about angels and other intermediary beings in Second Temple Judaism may have influenced the development of christology in early Christianity. For a comprehensive discussion, see, C. GIESCHEN, *Angelomorphic Christology*. Antecedents and Early Evidence (AGJU 42; Leiden, 1998).

⁹³ W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1Kor 15,1-16,24)* (EKK VII/4; Zürich 2001) 123.

angels⁹⁴. Paul identifies this messiah with the glory of God through the symbolic world he inherited and his experience of Christophany⁹⁵, and the glorification of the messiah becomes the model for believers' glorification⁹⁶. The blessed believers will be resurrected and snatched up, but their ultimate transformation is a continuation of their current identity. As Schweitzer notes, "The mystical body of Christ," in which "the Elect are closely bound up with one another and with the Messiah"⁹⁷, already begun in their baptism, and this will be fully manifested at the parousia. Both in the present and the future, the elect-in-the-messiah are and will be like the messiah.

Conclusion

Paul's resurrection discourse in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 is rooted in Jewish apocalyptic tradition, although Paul makes some modifications probably motivated by his theology (e.g., messianic interpretation), experience (e.g., his revelatory ascent, as well as his encounter with the messiah), and pastoral or apologetic reasons (e.g., contextualization for target congregations in his letter-writing). There are three distinctive features in Paul's resurrection discourse: (1) the asymmetrical description of resurrection, focusing on the fate of believers only; (2) the combination of two traditions, that is, the general resurrection at the end and the heavenly ascent in the body; and (3) believers' union with the messiah in heaven rather than joining the heavenly host of angels. Despite some differences, it is clear that Paul's own thinking

⁹⁴ NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection*, 235.

⁹⁵ C.C. NEWMAN, *Paul's Glory-Christology*. Tradition and Rhetoric (Leiden 1992) 241-247.

⁹⁶ A.F. SEGAL, "Paul's Thinking about Resurrection in its Jewish Context", *NTS* 44 (1998) 409, 412.

⁹⁷ A. SCHWEITZER, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. W. MONTGOMERY (Baltimore, MD 1998) 116.

revolves around imminent eschatological expectations, including new twists of Jewish solutions to the problems of the world (e.g., sin, death, oppression, etc.). What seems like philosophical speculation about one's bodily substance and its compatibility with certain cosmological convictions (in 1 Cor 15,35-44a) transitions to his reaffirmation of the apocalyptic mystery (vv. 44b-57). The core of this apocalyptic expectation was probably part of his initial teaching of resurrection for the Corinthians, similarly to what appears in 1 Thessalonians 4. The messiah's end-time people are those in the messiah in the present through baptism, and soon they will collectively participate in the glorious transformation by (involuntary) heavenly ascent in the body to be with the messiah, when the eschatological battle against cosmic forces/pagan deities and the renewal of all of creation are completed by the initiative of God and his messiah.

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