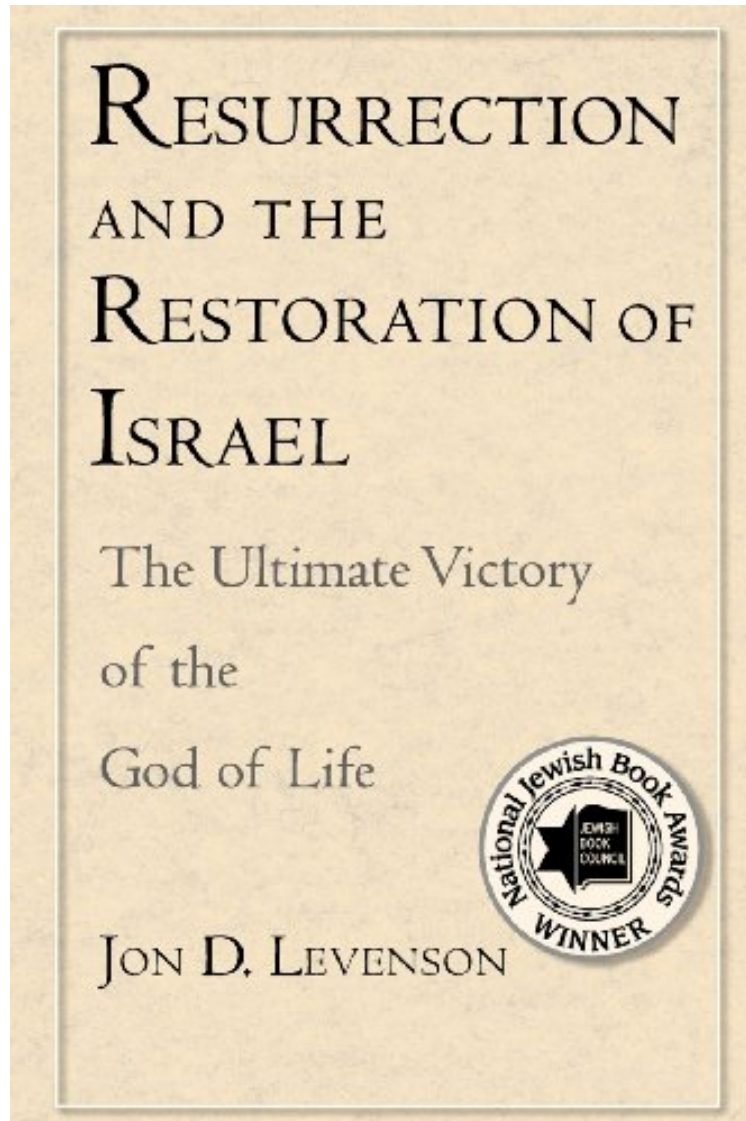


# Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life

*Jon D. Levenson*

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**Jon D. Levenson : Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life:

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author. Great biblical insight10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Understanding as the Jews didBy J. McCormackI have been reading various books in trying to comprehend original Jewish thoughts and ideas that are embedded in the entirety of scripture, and that is what original drew me to this title. The author is a professor of Jewish studies at Harvard (not sure if that is good or bad...lol) so he seems to be in the know for these things.As most scholars admit, the doctrine of what is commonly understood these days about the resurrection is something that came about relatively late in history, around the second temple era. The author looks back into earlier scripture in order to glean issues related to the doctrine, and paints a picture of resurrection that is so alien to the modern thought; but that is why I chose a book like this anyway."...the Israelite conception of death [is] different from others, especially ours. Whereas we think of a person who is gravely ill, under lethal assault, or sentenced to capital punishment as still alive, the Israelites were quite capable of seeing such an individual as dead." (pg 38)The Jewish ideas of death, life and resurrection were drastically different from our modern "empty graves" modern doctrine, and that is the meat of this book. What did they believe about life and death, and what was resurrection to them?"Deriving from the question of where we go after we die, the question is, in fact, misconceived when posed to the Hebrew Bible. For the Hebrew Bible displays very little interest in that question. It is much more likely to focus on the question of whether God's blessing (especially the blessing of children) was or was not realized in the decedent's life." (pg 78)The author examines the importance of children to carry on the "life" and memory of a person, and that in turn basically keeps them "alive" after they pass from physical life. Looking at how God's giving barren people children was in essence to bring them from a state of death, into a blessing of life.A lot of these ideas were very foreign to me, and I admit I had a hard time grasping them as I went. But I found that as I got deeper and deeper, they all started coming together and things were clicking."Death would remain universal, but not everyone who died would experience it as a plague." (pg 81)His study goes on to show that physical life and death were not an emphasis of concern for the ancient people; but that is was about how they lived when they lived. If they were within God's blessing, faithful to the covenant while alive, then they were blessed and considered "alive" - but if they were outside of those blessings, they were considered "dead" and in need of life.I was nicely surprised at the connection shown between the books of Hosea and Isaiah and how they play out in the eschatological promises to Israel."Probably the oldest attestation of this metaphor [of Israel as YHWH's wife] in Israelite literature is found in the first two chapters of the eighth-century prophet Hosea. Here, the wife is at first unfaithful and gives birth to children whose ominous names communicate the termination of the marital relationship of YHWH and Israel, Lo-ruhama ("Unloved," "Unpitied") and Lo-ammi ("Not-My-People"). But then the corresponding positive names replace the negative ones, the children rebuke their wayward mother, and she, after a painful period of retribution and reorientation, is restored. YHWH, in fact woos her tenderly anew, remarries her in righteousness, justice, goodness, and mercy - and this time for good. The result is that a covenant of cosmic peace comes into effect. In Hosea, the remarriage of YHWH and Israel signifies the redemption not just of the people Israel but of nature as well." (pg 148-149)The writings in Hosea are something I have been recently hearing more about in my studies, and the way they tie in to eschatology. He does a good job of showing how they see the idea of resurrection as being something other than the modern understanding."The sources in the Hebrew Bible, as we have already seen, have a definition of death and of life broader than ours. That is why they can see exile, for example, as death and repatriation as life, in a sense that seems contrived (to put it negatively) or artful (to put it positively) to us but probably did not seem so to the original authors and audiences. In part, this is because the ancient Israelites, altogether lacking the corporeal penchant of thought so powerful in modernity, did not conceive of death and life as purely and exclusively biological phenomena. ...death and life in the Hebrew Bible are often best seen as relational events and are for the selfsame reason inseparably from the personal circumstances of those described as living or as dead. To be alive in this frequent biblical sense of the word inevitably entailed more than merely existing in a certain physical state. It also entailed having one's being within a flourishing and continuing kin group that dwelt in a productive and secure association with its land. Consequently, to be widowed, bereaved of children, or in exile was necessarily to experience death....the death of spouse or children, infertility, exile, famine, and the like were perceived as the common lot from which the God of Israel miraculously and graciously offered redemption." (pg 154 - 155)Such very different and odd sounding views for sure, but exactly the kind of material I hoped and expected to find. Many scholars these days have started realizing and promoting the fact that the Bible as a whole is loaded with deep Hebrew themes and idioms, and in order to get a more full understanding of the idea and meaning behind much of it, we must study, understand and apply such a mindset to the scriptures to see what the original audience would have understood them to be saying to them.Failure to understand this concept is a recipe for disaster when it comes to interpreting issues. It is sad enough that most modern churches put little to no emphasis on even reading the Hebrew scriptures, so they fail to grasp the Greek scriptures even more; but those of us wanting to grasp these things more deeply, understanding the audience is especially pertinent. Fortunately, these types of books are coming out more and more from modern scholars, and maybe given another generation of two, will hopefully reshape the thinking on these subjects."For the Jewish expectation of a resurrection of the dead is always and inextricably associated with the restoration of the people Israel; it is not, in the first instance, focused on individual destiny. The question it answers is not, "Will I have life after death?" but rather, "Has God given up on his promises to his people?" (Pg 165)"The

question was not whether one died but whether one did so within God's favor or outside of it. And that is a question very far removed from the thinking of modern naturalism." (pg 170) I could go on quoting and quoting and quoting the parts of the book I highlighted as key points, but suffice it to say - this book was challenging, deep, and while I may not (at this time) agree with all of his conclusions, there is just so much in here that bolsters my understanding of God's Word, and that fulfilled my expectations when I picked up this book, that it was worth the read. I know I have only barely scraped the surface of what I did grasp from this first read, so I do expect to one day in the future read this again to glean more of an understanding.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. re-viewing the development of the doctrine of the resurrection

By W.N. Hixon

Jon D. Levenson's book sets out to undermine an assumption in biblical studies that the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is a late and rather awkward development in ancient Israelite belief--it is largely an imposition of foreign thought which has little connection to earlier Jewish tradition. He argues, in contrast, that the resurrection, as it appears finally and unambiguously in Daniel 12, is "both an innovation and a restatement of a tension that had pervaded the religion of Israel from the beginning" (216). The book had, in my mind, three great strengths. First and most important was Levenson's overall success in regards to his thesis. He does an excellent job of identifying a thread that runs throughout ancient Israel's faith, from its Canaanite origins to the Second Temple period, that testifies to the power of God over death and God's commitment to deliver the covenant people from this power--to give them life. In the first half of the book, this discussion is unfolded slowly, in the detail work (e.g., meticulous discussions of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible, or the Temple as a source of protection against death, an 'intimation of immortality'). The second half seemed to focus more on larger themes such as exile and return or "The Fact of Death and the Promise of Life", or on the use of resurrection-language in the Hebrew Bible prior to the emergence of belief in an eschatological resurrection (e.g. in Isaiah and Ezekiel). This is where the study really picked up for me. He often concludes chapters with a helpful review of the path we've followed so far, always eager to keep in view the points of contact throughout the scriptures leading towards Daniel 12. This is not a straight line; you cannot move directly from the birth of Isaac and the Aqedah, or Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones to the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, but you begin to see how "the reversal of a death-dealing nature" has been the substance of God's faithfulness to this people from the very beginning (218). In this way, the resurrection "reflects certain key features of the deep structure of theology of Israel" from long before the exile (180). Second is his constant insistence that we consider death and afterlife in the Hebrew Bible in its own terms, not according to the Christian and modern Jewish conceptions with which we are so familiar. The Hebrew Bible is not thinking in terms of heaven and hell, nor is it thinking in terms of the individual 'self' that moderns take for granted. Such reminders at times provide a much needed reorientation. Finally, Levenson also provides, especially in the beginning but in passing throughout, some theologically astute observations about the modern disinclination towards an eschatological saving work of God in history. There is more to the popular dismissal of the resurrection than historical-critical arguments, and the implications of this dismissal are more far-reaching than one might assume. In short, I think Levenson's task was, in the end, a success, and along the way he provides the reader with a number of fruitful insights, however slow-going the text may be at first.

This provocative volume explores the origins of the Jewish doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Jon D. Levenson argues that, contrary to a very widespread misconception, the ancient rabbis were keenly committed to the belief that at the end of time, God would restore the deserving dead to life. In fact, Levenson points out, the rabbis saw the Hebrew Bible itself as committed to that idea. The author meticulously traces the belief in resurrection backward from its undoubted attestations in rabbinic literature and in the Book of Daniel, showing where the belief stands in continuity with earlier Israelite culture and where it departs from that culture. Focusing on the biblical roots of resurrection, Levenson challenges the notion that it was a foreign import into Judaism, and in the process he develops a neglected continuity between Judaism and Christianity. His book will shake the thinking of scholars and lay readers alike, revising the way we understand the history of Jewish ideas about life, death, and the destiny of the Jewish people.

"Levenson draws out subtle connections and makes fine distinctions, never claiming more for his evidence than what it will bear... The prose of *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* is clear and often powerful, having absorbed much of the poetry and primal strength of the biblical passages it examines. Professor Levenson has written for an audience well beyond his fellow biblical scholars." Peter Steinfels, *New York Times*

About the Author

Jon D. Levenson is Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies, Harvard University. He is the author of *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*, and co-author of *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews*, both published by Yale University Press.